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Treasure : an exploration in
the writing of the self

TREASURE: AN EXPLORATION IN THE WRITING OF THE SELF

Volume 1

IN SEARCH OF TREASURE — An exegesis

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours)



A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Communication, Language and Cultural Studies at Victoria University
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CANDIDATE’S CERTIFICATE

This work has never previously been submitted for a degree in any university and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Illustrative material (Figures 1-9) was executed by Megan Evans to the precise specification of the author.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

TO THE READER

What follows is the critical component (Vol. 1 of the thesis) which along with the auto/biographical-based novel *TREASURE* (Vol. 2) fulfils the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in Creative Writing at Victoria University of Technology. The title of the overall project is *TREASURE: An Exploration in the Writing of the Self*. The critical component addresses issues of feminist theorists seeking a 'new' space for women's auto/biographical writing, and includes a discussion of the novel *TREASURE*.

The preferred order of reading, and central weighting, of the two components is *TREASURE*—the novel (Vol.2) (80%), followed by 'In Search of *TREASURE*—An Exegesis' (Vol.1) (20%).

The project digresses from the conventional doctoral thesis and reflects the central underlying assumption in my research: women's writing has been relegated to boundaries and excluded from canonical literature; the underlying notion being, that women's writing is considered by male guardians of canonical literature to be inferior to that of their male counterparts. The conventional thesis format in itself reflects the institutionalising of literature (and learning) as well as the act of writing in the English language which excluded, and still often does exclude, many women from participating. In this sense, thesis writing as it has been practised can be seen to have placed constraints on women writers which have relegated them, as 'subjects', to the margins of writing and learning.

The adopted format of submitting both a creative and critical component for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy reflects the nature and fluidity of women's writing as it is practised in the present, and as it has been in the past: writing which has existed for centuries and which, with the exception of a handful of 'elite' women writers who have been raised to the status of art objects, has remained 'buried' in the poetics of a western literary tradition (Wolf:1984). In Christa Wolf's words

‘[t]here is and there can be no poetics which prevents the living experiences of countless perceiving subjects from being killed and buried in art objects’ (Wolf: 1984:142).

In exploring new ways of discussing some of the tensions between critical theory and creative writing I found myself increasingly drawn to theories beyond the traditional confines of the printed literary text: most of all to mathematics and graphics. As a result, many of the concepts discussed in this exegesis are more easily understood when translated into a purely visual dimension. These contribute to some sense of a new poetics.

Furthermore, just as Wolf justifies the unconventional but successful inclusion of her essays on the process of writing, in her novel *Cassandra* (1984), as ‘an aesthetic structure [that] would lie at the centre of my poetics if I had one’, so too, does *TREASURE: An Exploration in the Writing of the Self* reflect, for me, a poetics indeed if I have one.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Auto/biographical: Is used by Liz Stanley in *The auto/biographical I* (1992) to encompass the many ways in which a life can be written and also the ontological and epistemological links between them (p.2). In addition to Stanley's use of the term, I adopt it to express my view that there are no distinct boundaries between autobiography and biography, both of which contain elements of fiction; hence, my use of the term auto/biographical fiction.
- Autobiographical: Incorporated in the term autobiographical are feminist literary theorists' notions of self/life writing. Despite, theorists purporting to redirect the focus of women's self/life writing away from a central and centred male tradition, they still follow the self-referentiality of a predominantly male narrative model.
- Narrative (re)construction: Every written narrative is capable of spawning another written narrative which has at its centre an intention of its own, but always there will remain genealogical traces of the narrative from which it was spawned.
- Cultural site of knowledge: Is that which is reflected in the narrative and the role it plays in framing the reader's perspective and interpretation of textual selves. Furthermore, it provides the formulae for the construction of textualised lives.

Chapter 1: Framing the Map

Maps are of no interest to me. The only map that I needed was the night sky, my compass and the imaginary map in my mind. Maps, chartered and drawn, lead to places I don't want to go (*TREASURE*:37).¹

As a writer of an auto/biographical fiction, and like Cathy the central character in *TREASURE*, I did not need a map where x marked the spot. What I did have were snippets of memories scattered across a vast and varied landscape. As a creative writer, I set out to explore the spaces which exist between the memories, and found myself in, what Mrinal Pande calls, 'no-man's land, where narrative 'hover[s]...between fact and fantasy, where irony is the emperor, not cold logic' (1993: *Author's Preface*). It was in those spaces I found, 'I was in the vicinity of an imaginary [and creative] playground' where, by embracing the character Cathy, I was led on a journey in search for a self I believed, at one time, did exist (T:54). It was in those spaces I came to realise the power of narrative to spawn 'new' narratives; narratives, fed by a 'past based on memory that bobbed in and out of view' (T:54); narratives that began quite differently from those I had intentionally set out to construct. And so, suspended in a paradox between fact and fantasy, I came to acknowledge (and understand) the chasm that exists between the writer of an auto/biographical fiction and the writer of a theoretical text, both of whom explore notions of self through the process of written narrative but use different maps to do so. These hypothetical spaces are crucial, as I realised they are where 'other stories started to weave their way into what [I] already knew' (T:190). Furthermore, it is what happens in these hypothetical spaces that has a particular relevance to the theorising of women's autobiographical writing and yet, it is what many feminist literary theorists overlook. The following discussion explores some of the tensions between critical theory and creative writing by drawing on *TREASURE* and the writing process in a reflective way.

¹ *TREASURE* will, hereafter, be referred to as T.

Feminist literary theorists, from a creative writer's point-of-view, sometimes seemed like Cathy's mother when it came to discussing women's autobiographical writing:

no matter how she tried to convince Cathy that she would not regret taking the position in the mail room instead of the job on the dairy farm, Cathy knew differently (T:107).

In particular, four edited collections: *The Private Self* (1988), *Women's Autobiography* (1980), *The Female Autograph* (1984) and *Life/Lines* (1988), represent the differing perspectives of feminist literary theorists across a broad spectrum, and are what influenced my understanding of the theory and criticism surrounding women's autobiographical writing. In particular, they exemplify those theorists who purport to map a distinct corpus of autobiographical writing by women, from which the lives and experiences of women can be explicated: writing which has, in the past, been obscured by a predominantly male autobiographical canon. *TREASURE* is conscious of this canon which has explicated the lives and experiences of literary 'greats such as Percy Shelley, Charles Dickens and, undoubtedly Joseph Conrad...But what of Mary? Wife of Shelley [creator of Frankenstein]' (T:118).

The notion that a distinct body of women's autobiographical writing can be identified raises two fundamental questions. Firstly, how will this body of autobiographical writing differ from the already existing canon founded on a corpus of predominantly male autobiographical writing? Secondly, a more pressing question is, if the corpus is to include more than it would exclude, at what point, and by whose authority will feminist literary theorists consider reading the auto/biographical from women's fictional narratives? There is a central hesitation in much feminist literary theory concerning the reading of autobiography, 'the life' in the fiction. For example, at no time during her introduction to her collection, *The Private Self* (1988), does Benstock discuss the relevance of fiction and its relationship to 'fact' in the practice of women's writing

and 'search for selfhood'. Yet in her own contribution to the collection, Benstock discusses Virginia Woolf's work: 'Her fictional narratives [can] (all be termed "autobiographical" to some degree)' (1988:28); such is the complex relationship between autobiography and fiction in Virginia Woolf's work, and the work of many more women writers.

The underlying assumption in mapping a distinct body of women's auto/biographical writing with the intention to acquire and contain texts as territory is fraught with notions of imperialism and (almost) pre-determines what the answer to the above questions will be. Just as empires were mapped around the acquisition and containment of foreign territory it could be suggested that literary genres were also acquired and contained for imperialist institutional purposes: a perception Cathy makes when sighting Britain's 'mainland':

[g]reat white chalky cliffs, much smaller than I had imagined, that would one day erode and expose the city that revered the tales of pilgrims. So white, the whiteness touched the clouds that billowed, across the English channel and swathed foreign cities in a whiteness great writers have described with so much zeal (T:54).

In this metaphor, the new territorial claim for a distinct corpus of women's autobiographical writing by feminist literary theorists—such as Benstock, Stanton, Brodzki and Schenck, and Jelinek—signal the rise of one new empire within the borders of another².

The parallel I draw, between the acquisition and containment of foreign lands, and the acquisition and containment of literary genres, raises the notion of 'mapped spaces'. The notion of mapped spaces may be used to explore the possibilities, as well as the problems, of feminist literary theorists acquiring a space of their own, both in terms of a feminist literary (re)mapping and of

² See Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson 'The textuality of Empire' in *De-scribing the Empire* (1994), for a further discussion on how British conquests of foreign and unknown geographical spaces were textually mediated and incorporated into imperial discourse (pp.1-3).

autobiographical writing as a space where women's auto/biographical writing can be contained. It may be argued by feminist literary theorists, such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1992), that de/colonising the subject, and her writing, from male-imposed practices offers the subject the freedom to (re)claim the right to self-definition. But the presumption is that progress in women's writing can be on the one hand de/colonised and, on the other, recolonised and contained within a newly defined body of auto/biographical writing. To include women's letters, diaries and journal entries, as artifacts, in a defined corpus of women's autobiographical writing can be seen as a territorial gain. But the central question from a creative writer's perspective is, whether or not the act of acquiring and containing that writing in such a corpus, is any more liberating for the writer, herself, than her own active claiming of the space in the first place? Take, for example, the letters Cathy wrote, but never gave to her daughter:

The letters I had written on occasions when the sense of loss had been unbearable. The letters that I had sealed in envelopes and which had remained unopened with the intention of one day passing them on to her (T:120).

Years later, Cathy realises in handing them over to her daughter (whom she admits, she no longer feels any emotion toward) that the space she had claimed as her own, to explore her grief, would no longer be hers alone. Yet, the longer she holds onto the letters, the more Cathy worries about their potential readers:

I had imagined that the letters may indeed...be rescued by someone who would read and make of them what they wanted with no real understanding of why they were written in the first place (T:14).

Feminist literary theorists may have a valid argument that from letters, journals and diaries we, as readers, can read of the 'lives and experiences' of the woman writer. However, that argument falls flat when theorists are either unable, or unwilling, to separate 'fact' from fiction. Are the letters which are tucked into the novel that Cathy left 'in the chapel' (T:241) a 'fact', or a fiction? Or, is the reader

being 'framed'? There is an anxiety for the writer that her work will fall into the *wrong hands*!

To suggest that a distinct body of women's autobiographical writing can exist implies it will exist in a particular space; undoubtedly, from theorists' point of view, that space would be their own institutions where ultimately much more would be excluded than could be included: much like the model of canonical male counterparts. Liz Stanley, in *The auto/biographical I* (1992), makes this point in relation to four edited collections on women writing of the 'self'. Writing from a feminist cultural studies perspective but commenting on the problems encountered in the theorising of women's autobiographical writing, by feminist literary theorists, Stanley's argument is that the expressed pre-occupation with identifying a distinct corpus of autobiographical writing by women is undercut by their acceptance of male theorists such as Lacan and Derrida:

the combination of these different [male] theoretical influences unsettles and challenges, many of the assumptions and understandings that feminist [literary theorists] bring to a concern with autobiography (1992:89).

In other words, feminist literary theorists may be attempting to redirect the focus of women's autobiographical writing away from a central (and centred) male tradition:

There's a yacht, and there is an ocean. The Pacific ocean. Yes. It's the Pacific Ocean; not the Indian or the Atlantic but as far South as the Pacific Ocean stretches. It's the ocean that has no memory....And so, there's a boat and an ocean; a yacht becalmed....There is no land in sight (T:1-2).

But the life-lines they are purporting to map, I suggest, are nothing more than a fractal which 'is a curve or surface generated by a process of iteration'

(Petsinis:1998:55):³

³ As a framing metaphor, a *geometric fractal* can be seen to constitute the perimeter of the self-referential circular male narrative model. However, 'pictures and patterns often rely for their pleasing effect upon organisation of parts in a fractal manner, larger shapes subdividing into smaller shapes which further subdivide'; hence the term '*artistic fractal*' (Dixon:1987:170). (See

The yacht, I notice, now lies contentedly at rest one hundred and eighty degrees to where it first dropped anchor...(T:99).

Instead I let myself drift close, so close to the yacht which has now turned three hundred and sixty degrees since first dropping anchor (T:175).

These curves which follow closely the self-referential circularity of a predominantly male narrative: 'always, when I get to this part...I anticipate an ending. An ending different from what is written' (T:175). This circular metanarrative is built around a succession of theoretical texts which not only excludes more than it can possibly include but also prevents the development of an alternative model.

In this exegesis, I propose a model based on framing metaphors which would not only allow feminist literary theorists to visualise and thus recognise the space many currently work within, but would also offer a new space in which women's auto/biographical writing could be discussed. In order to do the above it is necessary to understand what I refer to as the process of narrative (re)construction which occurs in the hypothetical spaces. (See p:1 above.) A process, the child in *TREASURE* came to understand well:

The child, it seems, never remembered the exact circumstances or places where she heard the competing (and very different) versions of what happened to her sister (T:190).

To understand this process we need to, first, accept that every written narrative is capable of spawning another written narrative which has, at its centre, its own intention. Despite the many differing perspectives of feminist literary theorists, and from whatever end of the spectrum they argue their case, 'their' narratives

Appendix A.) So, too, can *TREASURE* be seen as 'one' narrative which is constructed through a series of *artistic fractals*.

Furthermore, in yacht racing, if a skipper knowingly breaks a rule she must sail 360°— *or pay the penalty*. Even though Cathy has claimed her own space—at sea— where she can explore notions of self, she is forced to recognise the self-referentiality of the male circular narrative model—*or pay the penalty*.

only arise from narratives which already exist, even if they are formed as a resistance narrative:

Come out [said Cathy's father] and I'll tell you a story about a Princess!
I don't like stories of Princesses [replied Cathy] they're dumb! (T:67).

While Somer Brodribb (1992), for example, at the opposite end of the spectrum to post-modern feminists such as Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Leigh Gilmour (1994), argues that theorists like Derrida and Lacan 'go beyond a strong misogyny' (p.x), Brodribb's own 'narrative' of opposition (and resistance) itself, rises from those post-modern feminists narratives and thus, indirectly from Derrida and Lacan's narratives. Despite all good intentions, feminist literary theorists are yet to realise that there can be no doors that open and shut in their castle and that the drawbridges are yet to be fully lowered:

Castles don't have doors, they have drawbridges [Cathy told her father]...If you're going to tell me a story, then get it right (T:67).

This is not a question of how many skins has an onion. The point is that it does not matter how many differing perspectives, feminist or otherwise, there may be that construct genres and sub-groups of auto/biographical writing. What is important, and hitherto overlooked, is that every narrative is capable of spawning another narrative, and no where is this process of narrative (re)construction more evident than in the written rather than oral narrative.

TREASURE is a novel which relies on narrative (re)construction. The stories, throughout *TREASURE*, (re)construct themselves through differing perspectives while retaining genealogical traces of the story from which it was spawned. Furthermore, the paperback novel Cathy finds in a hut, while journeying back to Wales is a published copy of the manuscript *TREASURE*; thus a 'new', and yet to be realised, narrative is constructed (T:139-140). The 'new' narrative (re)construction suggests how the novel, once published, might be received by readers:

But as I flicked through the pages picking up the threads as readers do, there was something far more sinister at the heart of the plot. No doubt the plot was interesting. There was no doubt about that. And no doubt I would one day find the place and time to read it. I mean really read it and make of it what I will (T:140).

But it also predicts a possible future path along which *TREASURE* will travel independent both of the writer and of the intention she may have had when she set out to write the novel. The narrative (re)construction process is independent of any writer's intention. That is, a writer, scholarly, creative or otherwise, will set out with an express intention to construct her narrative (and obviously a creative writer will take advantage of her "authorial cunning"⁴ as to how the narrative will be constructed). But as soon as the words 'materialise' whether on paper or screen they occupy a hypothetical space of their own where, as floating signifiers, they remain open to interpretation:

The words should now be resting comfortably between the covers but always the images slip from beneath the white sheets and the shadows are about to dance once more (T:1).

It is in this space the narrative takes on an intention of its own and it is in this space the narrative's intention circulates unperturbed about a past, present or future. It is the narrative intention which initiates the spawning of a 'new' narrative which will have its own intention but, always, there will be genealogical traces of the narrative from which it was spawned. It is this independent narrative (re)construction process to which I constantly refer in this exegesis, and which, I suggest, goes largely unacknowledged by feminist literary theorists in the theorising of women's autobiographical writing. If theorists were to recognise and accept the narrative (re)construction process, particularly in relation to women's auto/biographical writing, then their vision to (re)map an alternative space would be realised; a space which does not follow closely the self-

⁴ See Jane Bakerman 'The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison' (1977), for a fuller discussion on the craft of constructing a creative narrative (pp. 30-42).

referential circularity of a predominantly male narrative 'space'; a space which could not, metaphorically, be referred to as 'the master's house'⁵ (Lorde:1984:160).

If, as I claim, many feminist literary theorists are working within the master's house, and are yet to find the 'tools...[to] dismantle it' (1984:160), then what I propose is they need to take a closer, albeit an imaginary, look at how the walls of his house are constructed to restrict the narrative intention of the texts they contain. The house might be better described as a meta-mansion made up of numerous rooms in which, in each room, there is housed a text with its own narrative intention. (See Appendix B, Figure 1.) We cannot enter any room itself for it is after all, as I have suggested, a hypothetical space in which the narrative intention circulates. (See Appendix B, Figure 2.) It is this hypothetical space which might well be the chasm that exists between the writer of a theoretical text and the writer of a creative text. That is, neither writer can claim ownership of the narrative intention, but each can have, and often does have, differing perspectives of what the intention might be. Therefore, our view (framed from where we stand at the open door to each room) is limited and what we see are only glimpses of the narrative intention. It is from those first glimpses, a 'new' narrative is spawned and the process of narrative (re)construction occurs. The spawning of narratives, I suggest, must inevitably occur when interpretation intersects with notions of framing; after all, 'no interpretation can take place without framing' (MacLachlan and Reid:1994:85). Once again, in the act of framing for the purpose of interpretation, in respect to texts, there are parallels with acquiring and containing colonised lands, for one's own purposes. Take for example the following:

⁵Lorde first made the comment 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' at 'The Personal and Political Panel,' Second Sex Conference, New York, September 29, 1979. The comment was made in reference to the role of difference within the lives of women (Lorde:1984:160). However, I use the comment metaphorically, and in a general sense to describe the practice and space in which many feminist literary theorists work; a space which follows closely the self-referential circularity of a predominantly male narrative.

Narrative a:

Doctor B re-enters the room. Asks, what happened to the smile. You respond with another. And the writing? she asks. Cathy shrugs.

Maybe you could record pleasant thoughts. Thoughts that make you smile. Use the diary in whatever way you would like.

Maybe, I'll write a novel.

A novel? Sounds good. Any idea what the novel will be about?

A young girl gets herself lost in the forest and is eaten by wolves.

You're now playing games with the doctor. It's a change. Role reversals. That's what life is all about (T:90-91).

As the writer reads⁶ the (re)constructed narrative it is not important for 'you' to know what 'my' intention was when 'I' started to write. What is important, for the purpose of this exegesis, is to recognise the spaces which would occur between possible new narratives which could arise from Narrative a. You, or any other reader, will interpret and frame the narrative accordingly; as MacLachlan and Reid point out, the narrative is framed 'extratextually...[and is] both experiential and textually mediated' (1994:3). So, for example, having read and framed Narrative a, a 'new' narrative would be spawned, which you may undertake to write. Some examples of what these 'new' narratives might be;

- (b) that of a woman contemplating writing a novel;
- (c) a woman recovering from depression;
- (d) variants on Red Riding Hood;
- (e) a feminist literary-theoretical critique.

Here, let us stop looking at how the process of narrative (re)construction occurs and investigate some of the problems of linear description. The above, by using alphabet letters, suggests a linear progression from a pre-existing foundational text, (and notions of a linear progression of an empire acquiring colonies through time and across frontiers). But it is precisely this notion of foundations and prioritising that I am arguing against. That is, the apparent authoritative ordering

⁶ See Raman Selden, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction*, (1989) for a brief discussion of Roland Barthes' readerly/writerly texts (p.113).

a,b,c...is actually arbitrary and each of the narratives could just as well occupy another alphabet position. But regardless of how they may be (re)ordered there will always exist a 'space' between each narrative: a space in which another 'new' narrative (with an intention of its own) may be spawned. No matter how many 'new' narratives are spawned, each will retain a recognisable resemblance and its place in a regular sequence, and a fundamentally similar frequency to a,b,c,d and e.⁷ (See Appendix B, Figure 4; and Appendix C.)

The question of prioritising texts once more returns us to the notion of interpretation intersecting with notions of framing; that is, as MacLachlan and Reid point out 'no interpretation can take place without framing' (1994:85). What I further suggest is that, the narrative (re)construction process cannot be dismissed simply as a case of 'one's' interpretation. It may be as Cathy found, having spoken to Yvonne, that it is not so much a case of 'one's' interpretation but equally important, a case of one's perspective which is 'a mental view of the relative importance of the relationships or aspects of a subject or matter' (O.E.D:1993:2172):

Differing perspectives. Must be. Alice had a different perspective of my Mam and Dad. That's what it is. But was she right, or was she wrong? Could I believe what she told me (T:203).

As such, the perspectives of feminist literary theorists (who write from an 'authoritative' position) will influence their interpretation. A theorist needs to construct a solid argument, one which is supported by evidence, and which will give an illusionary impression that 'her' theoretical narrative covers the 'read'

⁷ The above, by using alphabet letters, suggests a linear progression from a pre-existing foundational text, (and notions of a linear progression of an empire acquiring colonies through time and across frontiers). But it is precisely this notion of foundations, prioritising and temporal progression that I am arguing against. For example in considering the range of references, from which the possible new narratives have been taken, can a pre-existing foundational text be identified? And, is there a linear progression? (a) Heather Nix's *TREASURE* (1999); (b) Kathy Neustadt's 'The Visits of the Writers Toni Morrison and Eudora Welty'(1980); (c) Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1st pub.1899); (d) Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* (1st pub. 1981); (e) Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *No Man's Land* (1989).

narrative(s). We can better visualise this coverage, as well as the narrative (re)construction process, if we read Narrative a, in conjunction with b,c,d and e as they are represented by a series of transparencies. (See Appendix C.) By doing so, not only can Narrative a, along with the 'new' Narratives b,c,d, and e be multi-framed but all narratives can be visually sighted.

What we can sight, is the following:

- That traces of Narrative a, can still be sighted (and cited) in each of the layered narratives b,c,d, and e.
- Narrative a's intention remains with Narrative a, even though traces can be cited in b,c,d, and e.
- The frames will vary in size, depending on the 'preferred' reading; that is, the frame of a reader who may read for pleasure will be smaller than that of the literary theorist who, may also read for pleasure, but has the added commitment of constructing a theoretical narrative.
- There is a 'sameness', yet 'difference' in the transparent space that surrounds each narrative.

Each narrative lies so closely up against the others that the full text of each is hardly discernible. Yet, and this is precisely the point of my argument, a space must exist between each layered narrative; a space where the narrative (re)construction process occurs; a space which frames the 'newly' spawned narrative; a space that, I insist, feminist literary theorists overlook.

Despite a new narrative being spawned which has an intention of its own, the theorist, feminist or otherwise, in an attempt to 'cover' it from an authoritative position is making a hypothetical claim to have contained the narrative intention for the purpose of theorising the text. The underlying assumption behind such a hypothetical claim, to have contained the 'read' narrative, is that a boundary can be, and is, drawn. Take for example, the editors of the above-cited collections on

women's autobiographical writing, Jelinek, Brodzki and Schencke, Stanton, and Benstock. Not only is there a reluctance by all editors to discuss the role fiction plays in auto/biography but also, as Stanley points out, they discuss autobiography and biography as separate genres thus erecting a particular boundary (1992:100). This, in relation to women's auto/biographical writing upholds the notion that there is, as Kim Worthington discusses in *Self as Narrative*, a self constituted through narrative which can be contained and 'read', and included (if appropriate) in a distinct body of literature (1996:153). This becomes even more problematic because of the gap that exists between the 'I' who, as a textual representation, is the teller and the 'I' who, as the reader, is told. Such is the gap between the constructed, third-person narrator in *TREASURE*, who has the capacity to 'order, consider, reconsider, backtrack, and give life to a story' (Modjeska:1990:94), and the reader:

Cathy's story has been interrupted. The narrator has revealed herself. Cathy could not have seen the memorial garden [as the narrator claims]. Not yet, anyway. She will in the future. Her story is framed within a particular time [a time, not available to the reader] (T:143).

In setting-up a boundary to contain what appears to theorists to be their own narrative intention, the notion of a textualised selfhood shatters both the continuity and the narrative intention of the text which the theorist reads. Christa Wolf's novel, *A Model Childhood* (1990), for example, may be theorised as an autobiography, but in doing so the *biographical* (and fictional) elements are overlooked, thus the notion that there is a self which is constituted through narrative, shatters the continuity and the narrative's intention. This shattering can effectively end any notion that, in general, readers read (and write) autobiographies and auto/biographical works of fiction because, as Stanley points out, 'in a myriad of ways these have reverberations for how we understand our own lives, experiences and times' (1992:100). Drusilla Modjeska's novel, *Poppy* (1990), is another example which may be read as a biography, autobiography, or a fiction. That is, it is marketed as both a biography, and a fiction:

Modjeska sets out to collect the evidence of her mother's life. But when the facts refuse to give up their secrets, she follows the threads of history and memory into imagination (*Poppy*:1990:Back cover).

However, in writing her mother's story, *Poppy* becomes Modjeska's (and her family's) own story. Furthermore, readers—including theorists—will 'read' what they want from the novel. But unlike a general reader, the theorist will consciously acquire and contain only what they want to support, the writing of their literary-theoretical position. One such theorist is Bronwen Levy who, in her essay 'Looking in Mirrors: Reflecting on *Poppy*', discusses it as a biography and fiction. (See p.17 below.) The irony is, that a feminist theorist draws attention to the 'self' as both a woman writer and as theorist: a 'self' which is constituted through 'her' own theoretical text; thus reproducing the self-referential circularity which is associated with a predominantly male narrative. It is therefore ironic that postmodernists can claim, on the one hand, that boundaries between autobiography, biography, and fiction have been blurred while many feminist literary theorists are, on the other hand, 'self-erecting' boundaries to contain an artist's narrative for their own purposes.

Hence the paradox which arises is that feminist literary theorists may purport to be (re)mapping a literary space where women can claim the right to self-definition through writing. But the boundary they erect, for the purpose of theorising that 'right', creates pockets of non-speaking subjects since the theorist believes it her right to represent her subject(s) textually. As such, the pockets of non-speaking subjects which are created could be interpreted as glaring transgressions which have the capacity to produce what Anna Gibbs refers to as 'new modes of (subjectless) individuation'. That is, she states,

transgression can be reconceived as an act of profanation which has the capacity to produce new modes of [subjectless] individuation. In this view, transgression becomes a source of renewal in and through writing (1995:135).

However, given the impetus behind feminist literary theorists' goal to reclaim the right to self-definition in and through the act of writing, is producing new modes of 'subjectless individuation'—or, as I go on to suggest, voices 'trapped' within the walls of the master's house—what these theorists want?

Chapter 2: *i* Marks the Spot

Headstones that started at the wall, at the back of the cemetery, from where I first noticed the view over the Dee estuary. And as I retraced the path, I had taken with Aunt D, down along the line of relatives I stopped at Taid's grave realising it marked a time shortly after the Evans children had stopped playing in the cemetery (T:250).

It is hoped that by seeking to (re)map a space in which women's auto/biographical writing can be discussed, not only will the apparent chasm that exists between the writer of a theoretical account and the writer of a creative work be narrowed, but also more women's writing may be included: writing from the 'lives of countless perceiving subjects' (Wolf:1984:142). Furthermore, a (re)mapped space would not only allow feminist literary theorists to build what Benstock refers to as, 'their' 'Pantheon...[without] duplicating the implicit patriarchal values that have insured...[women's] own burial in the march of literary history', but it would also lay the foundations for theorists to develop a 'separate critical practice...around which course descriptions, dissertations, scholarly journals, and academic careers construct themselves' (1987:12). Certainly, if Cathy had been allowed to write a popular fiction at high school, her choice of a career as a writer may not have been buried:

[T]he next day, [Mrs Barry]...ripped, what would have been your novel...Told you how immoral you were, writing such rubbish. She could have admitted that it was well written (for you knew it was) but that was of no concern to her (T:89).

Arguably, the self-referential circularity of a predominantly male narrative 'space' (the master's house) could be broken, allowing theorists the freedom to (re)map a space from women's own life-lines. But even if we were to break the circle, what would remain are the hypothetical rooms which have housed the texts within the master's house. Such rooms, as I have already suggested, could be described as being of a similar shape and dimension and would be representative of the texts which have, in the past, been obliged to fulfil particular conditions for the text to be deemed an autobiography or a biography.

In remapping these spaces, I have been increasingly drawn to areas of mathematics. (See Footnote³, p.6.) Just as there is no limit to how we might use framing metaphors (such as the master's house), there are no boundaries in mathematics. In breaking up the master's house, what would also remain recognisable are the fractals which, by following a relation of similarity, constituted the perimeter of the self-referential circularity of a predominantly male narrative model. (See Appendix B, Figure 3.)

What we can see from the above is that while there is a need to break away from the self-referential circular narrative model, and create a new space where women's autobiographical writing—including auto/biographical fictions—could be discussed, there would always be a recognisable sameness to that space; a sameness that, because of the very nature of how autobiography and biography are defined would reflect the established walls of the master's house. The walls of the master's house will remain as do genre boundaries, despite postmodernist claims that boundaries can be transgressed. (Stanley:1992:100). Drusilla Modjeska's novel, *Poppy* (1990) could be described broadly as a postmodern auto/biographical work of fiction and as such blurs boundaries. (See pp.13-14.) However, theorists, such as Bronwen Levy (1992), acquire and contain the novel for the purpose of discussing it as a biography and novel (despite *Poppy* being an auto/biographical fiction), thus assigning it to a room of 'their' own. As such, the transgressing of boundaries may have offered Modjeska, as a creative writer, a 'postmodern parodic representational strateg[y]...an effective way of working within...[while] challenging dominant patriarchal discourses' on autobiography and biography (Hutcheon:1989:167). But theorists in discussing any text as a biography or an autobiography (whether, or not it is also a fiction), shatter the continuity of the narrative's intention, effectively trapping other selves, constituted through narrative, between the walls of the room; selves from which we, as readers, can explicate the lives and experiences of (other) women within the text. It is a case, where many theorists (feminist or otherwise) choose to read the writing on the wall but do not take a closer look at the wall itself. Theorists, such as Gilbert and

Gubar (1989), may discuss the woman in the room with the yellow wall paper, but it was Charlotte Perkins Gilman who in 1890, by way of a self constituted through a creative narrative—*The Yellow Wallpaper*—recognised the non-speaking (and often forgotten) woman subject who is entrapped within the wall.

The goal for many feminist literary theorists, in identifying and establishing a corpus of women's autobiographical writing, is to claim the right to self-definition in and through the act of writing; just as Dr B encouraged Cathy to do when she gave her a new diary:

Still in the cellophane wrapper. No gift paper. Just the clear wrapper. You've looked at it several times. It has lain on top of your locker waiting for the seal to be broken and peeled away. You could then, if you want, record whatever it is you're supposed to (T:88).

Therefore, while there would remain a recognisable sameness to the space in which such writing would be discussed, there would also need to be a difference; a difference which would reflect the diversity of women's auto/biographical writing, regardless of whether or not it could be seen as belonging to a particular genre. Primarily, the space would, (or should) recognise writing by women that explicates the lives and experiences of women that can be recognised by the reader, and can analytically engage feminist literary theorists in their understanding of the writing practices of women. Furthermore, women's writing that challenges conventional writing practices is undoubtedly the ideal. *TREASURE*, for example, challenges conventional writing practices with its multiple points-of-view, constant deferral of tension, and non-chronological sequence of events. However, a new space would not exclude women's writing that is conventional in form or content; to exclude such writing from a distinct feminist auto/biographical canon would only be repeating history.

To reflect and accommodate such a diversity of women's writing the space would need to have an added, and variable, dimension where notions of selves, as constituted through narrative, are not shattered from either the continuity or the

narrative intention of the 'read' text. Not only would an added dimension lay the foundations for a separate critical practice, but out of necessity would continue to recognise the already established space in which autobiographical writing is discussed. Such a space, I propose, has the possibilities to broaden the perspective and interpretation of feminist literary theorists, as well as narrow the apparent chasm that exists between the writer of a theoretical critique and the writer of an auto/biographical fiction. One example of how, by adding another dimension, perspective and interpretation might be broadened may be 'visualised' if we are to once more return to the examples of possible new narratives discussed in chapter one. (See also Appendix C.) Each of these possible new narratives, I have shown, was spawned from the read Narrative a. I further suggested that while traces of Narrative a can be sighted (and cited) in Narrative b,c,d, and e, each narrative lies so closely up against one another the full text of Narrative a, is hardly discernible. If we were to widen the spaces between the narratives, adding more depth, then it would be possible to read more of the text in Narrative a. However, viewed side on, what become more apparent are the spaces which exist between each narrative (See Appendix B, Figure 4); spaces, I have suggested, where any notion of there being a textualised selfhood is shattered from both the continuity and the narrative intention of the text the theorist reads.

It is possible, I propose, to (re)map a space which would include a diverse corpus of women's auto/biographical writing if feminist literary theorists were to acknowledge the process of narrative reconstruction, and that every narrative has, at its centre, an intention of its own: *'Alice was right. There was a way to pass through the mirror'* (T:3). If theorists were to work at getting as close as possible to the centre of that narrative intention, and understand what the narrative intention is, then their perspective and interpretation of the read narrative would be broadened, thus creating a different space in which a separate literary critical practice could be established. But the question is, how might theorists understand what the narrative intention might be if, as I claim, it

cannot be contained, it circulates freely and remains open to one's interpretation and perspective? And, how would it be of benefit to theorists, and critics? It would appear that the answer to both questions would require a process of iteration which could be adopted broadly for the purpose of theorising and critiquing women's autobiographical writing, including auto/biographical fictions; a process which would provide a *closer* approximation to the solution of the two problems instead of relying on the perspective and interpretation of any 'one' theorist. Furthermore, a process should form the basis of a poetics which, in Christa Wolf's words would, 'prevent the living experiences of countless perceiving [women] subjects from being killed and buried in art objects' (Wolf: 1984:142).

Any process of iteration, to understand what the narrative's intention is (or how it might be used), would require an identifiable common denominator which could be broadly accepted by feminist literary theorists toward establishing a new literary critical practice. Such a common denominator would also need to reflect the sameness, yet difference, of the space in which it would operate. The answer, I claim, may be found in the parallel I draw between the dilemma experienced by mathematicians in the 1500s, and feminist literary theorists' goal to map a new space for women's autobiographical writing. Just when mathematicians had, as they believed by the early 1500s, fully established the 'real' number system—which was easily understood and accepted as occurring along a straight line—Bombelli, in 1572, worked out a way of describing

the square roots of negative numbers. He called them, *imaginary numbers*. What he did was to invent a number, which he wrote as *i*, to be the square root of -1This number could not be represented on the real number line — hence the term 'imaginary' (Lynch and Andrews:1993:363).

Not only did this extend the use of the already established numbers system, it also gave an added dimension to the space in which maths was used. The parallel is, just as mathematicians believed they had established a complete number system based along a line of foundational, and 'real', numbers, so too

was a canon of autobiography established based on a notion that there was a 'real' self which could be cited within a self-referential circular model which is built around foundational texts. Furthermore, just as Bombelli recognised the need to add another dimension to an already established number system, feminist literary theorists likewise have recognised the need to (re)map the space of autobiographical writing.

The lower case first person 'i' has been used by many creative writers, particularly by women—in their bid to reclaim the use of language and to also claim their right to self-definition through writing. Finola Moorhead, for example, uses 'i' in *Remember The Tarantella* (1987), so, too, does Andree Chedid in her novel *The Return to Beirut* (1989). Furthermore this form of 'i' has been used creatively, by writers, to explore notions of an imaginary 'i', time, and space. Tom Petsinis (1998) for example explores notions of space in his poem, 'i':

*Imagine, a square without width:
That's what i make of negatives.
(Naming the Number:1998:90)*

While, in his novel, *The French Mathematician* (1997), Petsinis adopts the 'i' as an imaginary being suspended in time.

What I propose is, that we too, for the purpose of discussing women's auto/biographical writing, should adopt an implied *i*. After all, if contemporary philosophers, theorists and critics (Barthes and Foucault) have claimed that the author is dead, and the autobiographical 'I' has all but been annihilated then what better common denominator to adopt, for the purpose of iteration, than an implied *i*? It does, after all, *imply* that notions of selves as constituted through narrative can be explored as an act of claiming the right to self-definition.

However, for the purpose of iteration, which would assist theorists in understanding what the narrative's intention is, we would need to identify what

the implied *i* is and how it could be of use to feminist literary theorists in discussing women's auto/biographical writing. The implied *i* can, I suggest, be identified as that which resists theorists' understanding of how selves can be constituted through narrative. In other words, what is it that theorists don't, or won't, take into account when they discuss notions of textualised selfhood? The answer is, I propose, the cultural site of knowledge which is reflected in the narrative and the role it plays in framing the theorists' perspective and interpretation of textual selfhood. The implied *i*, then, would reflect that cultural site of knowledge from which the narrative is spawned; a cultural site which, as Jerome Bruner notes,

provides the formulae for the construction of lives. And one of the principle instruments by which culture does so is through its narrative form, its genres, its modes of 'packaging' forms of life (1995:176).

Therefore, for the purpose of iteration, a process which would provide a *closer* approximation to the solution of the two problems instead of relying on the perspective and interpretation of any 'one' theorist, the implied *i* would be seen to be located at the centre of a narrative's intention. (See Appendix B, Figure 5.)

It is the implied *i* which 'speaks' of the life, the drama, the people and, often, it will remain with the reader long after the text has been read. This is not to suggest, however, that the implied *i* is the voice of the writer. The act of writing, after all, is a construction and the writer is consciously aware that it 'changes the way you produce and control your language...[writing is] another voice' (Card:1988:126). Nor is the implied *i* the voice of a narrator as we have come to expect in a work of fiction, although the choice of narrator is one of the more obviously constructed—and manipulated—elements a writer might use as an added and illusory effect to the narrative. (See p.8.) Take for example, the younger Cathy. As a first-person narrator Cathy has a strong, and convincing voice;

No Mrs Pritchard, you've got to come to Chapel, even me Mam's there tonight.

Oh is she just! I'd be a hypocrite if I went, and that I'm not. Everyone's welcome at Chapel, Reverend James says so. Even hypocrites. Hypocrites indeed! And what would you be knowing about hypocrites? Hymfrey Griffiths never misses Chapel and I heard me Mam telling me Dad that Humfrey is a hypocrite. He sleeps at Mrs Parry's when Mrs Griffiths gets too bruised from walking into doors (T:17).

And yet, while the implied *i* may not be an 'obviously' constructed narrator, it nevertheless, *narrates*, as it does in the above passage, conveying a sense of what chapel meant to both Mrs Pritchard and Cathy. Furthermore, who, or (more importantly), what *narrates* in letters, diary and journal entries? That is, if a 'self' is constituted through narrative then the cultural site of knowledge, which is reflected in the narrative's intention, is as much a part of the narrative as its 'self'. Not only would the implied *i*, as I have suggested, (re)present a cultural site of knowledge which is reflected in the narrative's intention, but it would also be the voice (implied as it is) of the narrative which has the capacity to 'order, consider, reconsider, backtrack, and give life to a story', just as we might expect from a narrator in a work of fiction (Modjeska:1990:94). Furthermore, not only is the implied *i* at the heart of the 'read' narrative's intention where it gives life to selves as constituted through narrative, but it also serves to extratextually mediate and (re)frame a reader's perspective.

The question of perspective and interpretation once more returns us to the notion of spaces: in particular, the space in which the narrative reconstruction process occurs. What contemporary literary theorists, feminist or otherwise, do not take into consideration is the *necessary* gap, between a 'new' narrative and the 'read' narrative from which it was spawned, where, aided by the implied *i* the reading and framing process occurs. It is a 'temporal and conceptual, [gap] between the I who is telling and the I who is told, even in the telling of oneself to oneself' (as we would expect, this occurs with diary and journal entries which would have been written with little intention of them being read by an 'other') (Worthington:1996:151). In suggesting, then, that there is even a gap between 'the telling of oneself to oneself', 'one' can assume there would be varying degrees of perspective and

interpretation, 'between the I which is telling and the I which is told'. For example, one would expect there would be a much more varied degree of perspective and interpretation in the gap between the 'I which is telling' and the 'I which is told' than in the gap that exists between the 'telling of oneself to oneself'. However, the gap is such that it remains a negotiable space; a space where the process of perspective and interpretation is fluid and open to questions of subjectivity and objectivity.

This is not to suggest that theorists fail to acknowledge the gap exists: only that they do not consider its relevance, or the role it plays in the narrative reconstruction process. That is, the theorist, in setting up a boundary to contain and present an authoritative account of a read narrative, not only shatters notions of textual selves from the continuity (and the narrative intention) of the read text, but also stifles the implied *I* which extratextually mediates the process of reading and framing. Furthermore, in erecting a boundary, any feminist theorist is, as I have suggested, drawing attention to the 'self' as woman writer and theorist: a self which is constituted through 'her' own theoretical text. It is, as Worthington states,

impossible for the 'actual me' [or her] to escape from...narrative (re)constructions: they are the condition of [our/her] meaningful being. This is the paradox of (re)cognized selfhood—we at once both write (as 'I') and are written as a character in (as 'me') our own narratives of personal identity. Although we desire to escape the limitations and partiality of our conceptual narrations, we depend on these for our very perception of who we are (1996:152).

By failing to acknowledge the implied *I* and the role it plays in the narrative reconstruction process, the theorist is not only limiting her 'own' perspective of 'her meaningful being' but is also placing unnecessary constraints on literature which could otherwise be included in a corpus of women's auto/biographical writing.

Chapter 3: Uncovering (new) Maps

Some might say it is madness to trust one's imagination but I had made up my mind that I would be guided by the child within me. The child I had come to know through reading the novel (T:151).

In seeking to (re)map a space, where women's auto/biographical writing would form the basis for a separate literary critical practice, feminist literary theorists must acknowledge that literary studies, as a discipline, needs to be extended. After all, life is 'both experiential and textually mediated' (MacLachlan and Reid:1994:3). In accepting that there is a narrative intention, at the heart of which there is an implied *i*, not only would feminist literary theorists no longer shatter notions of textualised selfhood from the continuity of the read text, but they would also be recognising the core of the narrative reconstruction process through which many women gain a sense of their own 'I'. The question is larger than the one raised by Benstock:

[do] we claim the centre for ourselves (taking up the modernist project) or do we redefine the limits of authority by which the centre constitutes itself (taking up the post-modernist project)?' (1987:12).

Benstock's question fails to consider the cultural site of knowledge. Whatever the project, it should give 'voice' to the 'life' which we seek to read, and understand.

I have proposed that the implied *i*, for a process of iteration, could be visualised as being at the centre of a narrative's intention⁸. An example of how we could best visualise the concept of the implied *i* existing at the heart of the narrative's intention is to, first, place a lower case *i* at the centre of the hypothetical space in which, as I have suggested, the narrative reconstruction process occurs; it is the

⁸This 'i' is distinct from the narrative first-person 'I', and its variation 'I', as used by creative writers such as Moorhead and Chedid. (See p.23-25.)

space in which the reader frames the 'read' text experientially and extratextually. (See Appendix B, Figure 5.) In doing so, what becomes problematic is our central focal point; is it the space within the 'room', or the *i*? Or, in relation to *TREASURE*, is it the sea in which the yacht is becalmed, or is it the yacht? (T:1-2). In both accounts, I suggest, each receives a similar degree of perspective which is 'a mental view of the relative importance of the relationships or aspects of a subject or matter' (O.E.D.:1993:2172). That is, one might argue it is the *i* (yacht) which is the central focal point, but the *i* (yacht) only becomes the central focal point because of the space (sea) surrounding it; a space which, in many cases still reflects a self-referential circular narrative model in which autobiography has been, and still is often, discussed; a space which feminist literary theorists acknowledge exists and are purporting to (re)map; a space which currently does not recognise that, at its centre, there is a narrative intention which reflects a cultural site of knowledge.

Further to my claim that it is in the hypothetical space that the reader frames the narrative both extratextually and experientially, I suggest that the space becomes territorially specific to the reader/writer/textual 'self'. That is, the reader's perspective may be framed within this space but it is also within this space the reader/writer/ textual 'self' may either align 'one self' with, or contest, the cultural site of knowledge which the implied *i* represents. Cathy certainly contested the eating habits of her guide and had no desire to share territorially specific space during his ritual. Instead, she chose to leave the barge:

He had brought along a selection of liver and kidneys, heart, ox tongue and tripe. Enough, as he put it, for both of us to share over the next three days. The ox tongue was potted, ready to slice and eat whenever the need arose. But the rest lay in individual plastic bags wallowing in its own blood that appeared to seep endlessly from the organ long after it had been separated from its host. The weather was kind to the clear-view bags of meat which lay stacked and labelled in the food locker. But the smell of it, slowly on the turn, slowly discolouring, sickened me...As evening fell I left the barge. I had no desire to stay aboard and participate...Instead I opted to sleep in a nearby hut dug into the hillside (T:139).

Therefore, the closer one reads and/or, writes to the narrative intention the more the immediate space surrounding it can be seen to be territorially specific. Take for example, Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1983) which has not only received many accolades but also the most severe criticism, overt hostility and public censure. Walker works to centre her main character in a specific cultural landscape—the harsh, segregated world of the deep South. Writing from a specific, and personal, perspective, Walker aligns herself with a particular cultural site of knowledge—the implied *i*—which is reflected in the narrative's intention. Thus, the immediate space surrounding the implied *i* can be seen to be territorially specific to Walker. Similar effects will be evident for the reader. That is, the degree to which the space immediately surrounding the narrative intention is territorial to the reader, and how closely the reader reads the intention, will depend on her/his own site of cultural knowledge. Take for example, two of the many letters Walker received, commenting on *The Color Purple* (1983), and which are included in her memoir *The Same River Twice* (1996). (See Appendix D.) Jeffrey Rowekamp (Letter a.) on reading *The Color Purple*, wrote to Walker expressing a highly charged, and lengthy, emotional response to the novel. There is little to suggest he had read 'close' to the narrative's intention. Therefore, I suggest, the space immediately surrounding the implied *i* is less territorially specific for Rowekamp than it was for the writer of letter b, Donna Johnson. Johnson's letter, on the other hand, indicates a much closer reading to the narrative's intention, suggesting the space surrounding the implied *i* would be territorially specific to her; '[the novel] has awakened in me a desire to know and understand the experiences of black women' (1996:232-235). Furthermore, Johnson discusses the *heart* and *soul* of the novel, unlike Rowekamp's discussion of his own heart and soul in which there are reflections of the self-referentiality of the male circular narrative model.

If, then, this is the case, one would expect feminist literary theorists, in their search for textual selves, to be also reading (and writing) 'close' to the narrative's intention; just as one would hope they would be reading more in line with

Johnson's response than Rowekamp's. That is, just as you cannot sift the flour from baked bread, you cannot sift selves—which are constituted through narrative—out of the textual (and cultural) landscape from which the narrative is harvested. Therefore, if feminist literary theorists explore notions of textualised selfhood—as writers of auto/biographical fictions do—then one would expect the perspective, and interpretation, of both to be similarly aligned. Thus, theorists too, could claim territorially specific space. After all, I have already drawn a number of parallels between the two; both 'creative' and 'theoretical' writers are not only engaged in the act of writing a self-generated text but both create textual selves in 'their' bid to explore notions of self as constituted through narrative. Yet, as I have claimed, there exists a chasm between the two. That is, on the one hand I am encouraged as a woman writer to reclaim my right to self-definition in and through the act of writing. But on the other hand, any notion of what that 'self' might be is reduced to a textual representation which 'is immersed in the processes and products of high culture' (Stanley:1992:101). This culture, Stanley states, 'can exclude the writing/recording of the lives of 'ordinary' women'(1992:101). It is not always the case of 'the theory and practice of women's auto/bio/graphical writing [being] defined in relation to each other' (Benstock:1988:4): the imaginary playground in which I, and other writers of auto/biographical fictions, seek out textual selves becomes the disciplined school playground of the literary theorist. But unlike those who take in the full view, just as Cathy '...[saw] it all from the cemetery' (T:241), literary theorists are more concerned with what lies buried within the text:

The kids from around here often play in the cemetery...Sometimes it's too wet to sit on the grass, so Peter plonks me down on one of the graves a little up from where they all play. One day he teased me by threatening to drop me in a newly dug grave. I screamed until he sat me on the grave next to it. He often teases me when we go to the cemetery:

There nuisance, watch out for those hungry little maggots they like fresh meat. ...I often sit there and think about what goes on in the ground, beneath where I sit (T:12-14).

Barbara Christian's fears, in 'The Race for Theory', 'that when theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitist', may be well-founded (1996:316). But this comment does not take into account that both the writer of a literary critique, and a writer of an auto/biographical fiction are, themselves, participants in the *practice* of exploring the writing of selves. A closer examination of the practice undertaken by both, in their bid to seek out selves, reveals that each is using different maps to claim new territory, thus creating a chasm. Whatever the map one chooses to follow, for the writer of an auto/biographical fiction, one is hard put, as Pande says,

to keep to a linear track in a landscape with tight secret places where fear or sorrow have melted the known tracks into a bubbling stream dribbling in thick drops that set as they fall (1993:Author's preface).

In writing *TREASURE*, an auto/biographical fiction, I went in search of a 'self' which I believed had at one time existed and which I constantly worked to locate through snippets of memory. I soon came to realise that the more I worked to 'centre' any understanding of what, or who, that self was the more it slipped away into a cultural landscape where, of its own volition, it revealed itself through a series of changing textual selves, as in the paperback novel Cathy found in the hut, the night she left the barge: 'there was something very real about the child's story...I smile to myself. Before. Before realising the voice was familiar. Yes, it was familiar' (T.140).

Nevertheless, it was those selves that spoke of the rich and varied landscapes through which I passed. Furthermore, the deeper I delved—fully aware of the ontological shakiness of the self—the more enigmatic those narrativised selves became. In seeking to find and centre a 'self' it was as if I was forever tearing away at the heart of the novel only to find that the heart had been torn away long before and all that was left were shadows cast across cultural landscapes:

I slid the novel (the heart of which had been ripped out) from where it lay...the following lines [were] underlined in a heavy hand. "They were dying slowly—it

was clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now...". It reminded me of the people I had watched, so carefully, as they moved around London. But neither were they black shadows, as those described in the novel, but enigmatic selves...(T:100).

The novel Cathy found on the train the night she returned from visiting her relatives was Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), which would be a contender for the most critiqued novel in literary history. *Heart of Darkness*, on the one hand, deals with the effects of economic, social and political exploitation on European and African societies while on the other, critics have acknowledged it to be a novel in which Conrad went, not only in search of the 'truth', but also in search of a 'self'; a self which had spent some time in the Congo.⁹ As a creative writer, seeking to centre his 'self', did Conrad also find shadows of a man which slipped away into a cultural landscape? Certainly, *Heart of Darkness* has, at its centre, a narrative intention which continues to spawn 'new' and varied narratives each with an intention of its own; each of which reflects an often *contestable* site of cultural knowledge, while retaining genealogical traces of the 'read' narrative—*Heart of Darkness*.

Had I, like Conrad, and many more writers of auto/biographical fictions, continually pushed at the heart of the narrative's intention in a bid to centre a 'self' only to find it slipped away into a cultural landscape? (See Appendix B, Figure 6.) Certainly it would explain the constraints a writer of a conventional autobiography, or biography, would need to continually contain their subject and prevent them from slipping away. But what of the writer of a literary theoretical critique—and 'their' practice? *TREASURE* is yet to be acquired and contained; 'read' and theorised. However, the following example of a literary theoretical perspective (which examines the textual making of selves) serves to show how, by acknowledging the narrative reconstruction process, we can better understand their practice. My claim is that many feminist literary theorists in acquiring and

⁹ See Jocelyn Baines, *A Critical Biography* (1960), Penguin, London; Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1974), University of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles; Suresh Raval,

containing women's narratives for their own purposes, and having to present an authoritative 'reading' which covers the narrative, draw only what they wish from the narrative intention. Thus, where, by adopting the creative process to explore notions of textual selfhood I continually pushed at the centre, the writer of a literary theoretical perspective can be seen to pull from the centre only what they need to constitute their own selves through narrative. (See Appendix B, Figure 7.)

The literary theoretical critique which I am acquiring, and containing, for the purpose of explaining the practice of theorists, is Richard Bowring's essay 'The Female Hand in Heian Japan: A First Reading', in Domna Stanton's collection *The Female Autograph* (1984). Bowring's intention was to analyse a group of texts written by women in Heian Japan during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The texts, he claims,

with the exception of the *Tale of Genji*, a highly complex and subtle fiction...form a distinguished group of female introspective writings. They are among the earliest examples of the attempt by women living in a male-dominated society to define the *self* [my emphasis] in textual terms' (1984:50).

Furthermore, Bowring's reading of the texts defines women as passive, where

one can speak metaphorically of woman seeing herself as a text to be read by man when he chances by. In the frustration of waiting, women begin to read, and moreover, write themselves. As man is always the reader and woman the read, she exists to generate male interest and can have no power of her own until read (1984:54).

Bowring's views would have him acknowledge that every narrative is capable of spawning a new narrative. But in acquiring and containing the read texts for his own purpose, and despite all good intentions, he is constituting his 'own' self, through his own theoretical narrative—just as Rowekamp constituted his 'own' self in the letter he wrote to Walker. (See p.35.)

The Art of Failure: Conrad's Fiction (1986), Allen and Unwin, Boston; Norman Page, *A Conrad Companion* (1986), St Martin's Press, New York.

Firstly, the narratives Bowring reads have been acquired and contained twice over. That is, Bowring can only 'read' the women's narratives because they have already been acquired, contained, and translated into English by a number of unacknowledged translators. In their "travels"¹⁰ the texts are once more acquired, contained, and appropriated by Bowring who, as a western literary critic reads, himself, as

the incarnation of a hero from a European picaresque narrative who initiates the trip, encounters obstacles en route, and always ends up being accommodated one way or the other by the host country (Liu:1996:4).

As such Bowring's reading of the texts 'points to translation as an important site of colonial control' (Liu:1996:5). There is an arrogant assumption, on Bowring's part that there is no gap between he, who, as his own textual representation is the I—the teller, and the I who, as the reader—is told. His reading of the women's narratives is from an authoritative western critic's perspective, informed by the belief that all concepts of 'self' readily adapt to western notions of selves as constituted through narrative. The gap, which I have suggested, where readers may (or may not) read close to the implied *i* thus claiming territorial specific space, is not acknowledged by Bowring. In acknowledging the gap he would have had to consider, from an authoritative view, *other* factors; factors such as recognising the implied *i* in each of the 'read' narratives. There is no consideration given to what Dissanayaki refers to as the 'power and cultural axiomatics...in the constitution of the self' (1996:198). Similarly, there is no consideration given to Massayuki Hamabata's findings, discussed in Sidonie Smith's essay 'Who's Talking/ Who's Talking Back?', where the

¹⁰ See Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) for a full discussion on his 'travelling theory'. Furthermore, Lydia H. Liu in her essay 'Translingual Practice', in *Narratives of Agency* (1996), states: 'not only does the concept of travelling theory tend to affirm the primacy of [Western] theory by endowing...[Said] with full-fledged, mobile subjectivity, but it neglects to account for the vehicle of translation' (p.4).

“patriarchal, patrilineal, primogenitural, and patrilocal” Japanese *ie* (or household) “is not made up of individuals but of positions.” As a result, its “existence, unlike that of a nuclear family’s or the extended family’s, is highly resistant to the unpredictability of individual characteristics and behavior.” Any concept of individualism recedes before the responsibilities attached to the familial positions subjects fill (Hambata as quoted by Smith:1993:397).

Furthermore, in not recognising the gap in which the narrative reconstruction process occurs, any ‘other’ notions of textualised selves there may be are shattered from both the continuity and the narrative intention of the ‘read’ texts. As such, selves, as constituted through narrative, are trapped within the walls of the room of the master’s house. It is a case, in Bowring’s words, where the women, he reads, ‘live indoors, behind screens that are there to be penetrated’ (1984:52). Bowring’s reading may support feminist literary theorists who are purporting to map a new and distinct space in which women’s autobiographical writing can be discussed. But Bowring’s post-mortem on ‘his subjects’

accurately reflects the perceived crisis of western culture and the bottomless anxieties of its most privileged subjects—the white male authors who had presumed to define it (Fox-Genovese:1987:162).

As a result, and despite acknowledging there will always be a recognisable sameness to the space in which women’s writing will be discussed, feminist literary theorists are inhibiting their chances of realising a different space in which a new literary critical practice can be adopted. Nina Pelikan-Straus, in quoting Spivak, states

[Spivak] might well question “the normative rigour of specialist mainstream scholarship through a dramatization of the autobiographical vulnerability”. But this becomes problematic when the feminist reader’s access to a text is inhibited because the concerns of the text represent a mainstream male experience associated with traditional western high art: texts that work to keep women ‘out of it’ and in a world of their own (‘The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’1987:137).

Chapter 4: Visual Citing

The chapter begins. I know how the story ends. But I want to read and reread what I already have read and what, in reality I know about the writer but my eyes are tired and I close them aware that the story will continue to unfurl, and waver, fanned and fed by the television that stands in the corner of the room with a space, time and loudness all of its own (T:1).

TREASURE, is more than an auto/biographical fiction, it is also psychobiography¹¹ for it deals with the psychology of a textualised selfhood, much of which is presented, to the reader, in a visual dimension. As the main character, Cathy provides, at all times, the central focal point of the impressionistic landscapes she inhabits. It is a novel in which Cathy draws on selected 'memories, housed in [imaginary] rooms'¹²:

Cathy has, in her mind, memories housed in rooms at each of their addresses where the Evans family lived. But for [her teacher] Ruby and [her sister] Margaret you have afforded them a house of their own. A place to house the memories of a time spent in, and out of the classroom; at their home in Reservoir; of holidays spent travelling interstate with them. Memories of how two women made a difference to the life of a migrant child (T:157).

Furthermore, it is to the imaginary rooms that Cathy goes when circumstances are not quite as they should be. Such is the case when, having relinquished her newly-born daughter for adoption, she transposes her grief into a purely visual dimension:

I thought of a poem I had read months earlier. It was by a bloke writing about the death of his baby. Alone, the baby was climbing a stairway to heaven. Why is it always an image of a stairway to heaven? Why not a bloody escalator? It'd be a lot bloody quicker and easier. I...turned over wondering why hospital trolleys were so bloody narrow. In my mind I...tried to prevent the baby from

¹¹ In 'Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also draws on the term 'psycho-biographies for the constitution of the sexed subject which would be outside of psychoanalysis or counter-psychoanalysis' (1990:9).

¹² See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984) for a broader discussion on rooms as mental constructs where memory and imagination can be visited at any time. Also, Jack Dann's novel, *The Memory Cathedral: A Secret History of Leonardo da Vinci*.

climbing upward but the stairs were wet with tears and it slipped back down a stair or two bumping its knees...It was at that moment I realised that maybe it mightn't be such a bad idea after all to let the baby — my baby — go to the top of the stairs. I rolled over onto my back and watched, in my imagination, as she made her way safely to the top knowing that it was there [the imaginary room] that I could go, whenever I needed (T:248).

Not only do the imaginary rooms act as a place of repose for Cathy, but the concept also allows for a difficult and personal experience to be conveyed to the reader in a 'shared' visual dimension.

That shared visual dimension is extended to the reader through the use of television programs. The reader may recognise (and remember) many of the television programs mentioned in *TREASURE*. But it is an understanding of who Cathy is, in relation to the past, which is often explored through television programs she remembers having watched as a child, adolescent and adult. (See Appendix E.) Roger Bromley, in *Lost Narratives*, states that the images which shape our memory of the past define its 'reality', [and] the issue of who decides what is remembered is crucial' (1988:2). As a writer, television as a cultural site of knowledge is as important to me as it was to Cathy as a child: 'I wish *Prudence Kitten* was on the telly every day instead of just on Tuesdays. I like *Andy Pandy*, and *Rag, Tag, and Bobtail* but *Prudence Kitten* is the best' (T:29); 'I even said I'd be his Maid Marion but he said he didn't feel like having a Maid Marion this time and she would have to stay home in the castle' (T:66). In this way, 'images of the past...[were] deployed, manipulated and appropriated for...[my own] interests' as a creative writer (Bromley:1988:15).

In writing *TREASURE*, television not only served as a framing metaphor, but its programs were deployed as cultural sites of memory recall and acted to mediate between then/now. Those (television) images of the past, as Bromley states,

undergo...a process of material *popularization*, [and are]...subject to reorganization and reconstruction, and [are] constantly reworked in the imagery of contemporary concerns (1988:15).

It is in retrospect, but in a contemporary light, that I was able to examine selected memories in relation to the prevailing ideologies of a particular time in history:

Little Weed. I'd almost forgotten about her. Forgotten how, as a child, she had popped up on the television screen every weekday afternoon. Of course I remembered Bill and Ben the flowerpot men. The puppets, who lived in the potting shed at the bottom of the garden and who fumbled and garbled their way through many adventure. Interrupted only by Little Weed whose job it was to warn them of their misdoings. Little Weed who could not move from where she grew. Who spoke with such a gentle voice I remember having had to listen ever so careful to hear what she had to say. Little Weed whose flower-head, I now realise, resembled that of a daisy and not a weed. How could I have forgotten such a beautiful little weed? But at least the series, having been filmed so many years ago, could now be [examined] (T:218).

The many television programs on which I drew, in the writing of *TREASURE*, not only gave me the opportunity to position the snippets of memory I had in relation to a particular time, but they also allowed me to recall slices of a 'life' in a purely visual dimension. A self, as it were, became constituted through a visual narrative.

So too, are many of the concepts, discussed in this exegesis, more easily understood when translated into a purely visual dimension. Being able to 'see' the master's house, the fragmented rooms, the hypothetical space in which the narrative intention circulates, makes a difficult abstract concept more concrete and therefore more readily understood. To understand these concepts in a purely visual dimension is, I suggest, a process of visual citing. My claim is further supported by *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) which defines visual as 'a mental view of the relative importance of the relationships or aspects of a subject or matter' (p.2172), and cite, to 'quote...as an authority in support of a position' (p.407), thus enhancing notions of visual citing. What you, as the reader, have been asked to do is to visually cite the concepts I have put forward in this exegesis. Furthermore, visual citing is a concept that many writers adopt when they deploy framing metaphors. After all, it is an act where the reader's perspective is framed to give a *preferred* reading. Bowring's framing of the texts written by women in Heian Japan, gives a preferred reading; women 'live

indoors, behind screens that are there to be penetrated' (1984:52); or, they see themselves (according to Bowring)

as a text to be read by man as he chances by....As man is always the reader and woman the read, she exists to generate male interest and can have no power of her own until read. Indoors, forever waiting, she can become a force only when seen and opened, for without the male reader the female text is barren (1994:54).

Bowring not only *frames* the woman as writer, but his preferred reading is *framed* by a white male author who as a privileged subject, exhibits the anxieties of a western culture.

What the above example demonstrates is the power (and advantage) a theorist has in framing a 'subject'. But its use to make a difficult abstract concept more readily understood cannot be underestimated. Take for example Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. One does not have to be a Deleuzian disciple to understand the fundamental concept of rhizomes: 'make rhizomes, not roots, never plant!' (1983:24). In discussing the book as an assemblage of 'variously formed matters'(1983:3), the authors delineate their notions of the 'cultural book' and the burden it carries, claiming it is

already a tracing of itself, a tracing of the previous book by the same author, a tracing of other books however different they may be, an endless tracing of established concepts and words, a tracing of the world present, past, and future (1983:24).

They visually cite, their cultural book as having evolved from the 'world-tree'; '[t]he tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree' (1983:5). Thus, Deleuze and Guattari describe the first type of book as the root-book. The second figure of the book, they describe, is 'the radicle-system, or fascicular' root-book (1983:5). That is, the principal root of the tree has been aborted and 'an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development' but (and this is exactly their point) 'the root's unity [still] subsists, as past or yet to come, as possible' (1983:5). The

authors, therefore, suggest a possible new growth should be visualised as arising from 'rhizomes'; a rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles' (1983:6). The reader's perspective is framed by tracing the 'origins' of the (cultural) book's development from the 'tree' (above the ground) to its multiplicity—and continuing unity—in the roots (below the ground), the authors suggesting new growth evolving from rhizomes: 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order' (1983:7). Hence, the concept of framed metaphors aids the understanding of what is a difficult abstract concept.

TREASURE can be 'viewed' as being rhizomorphic. That is, both the content and the structure of its many and varied narratives assume, as a rhizome does, 'very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension[s] in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers...[yet] any point...can be connected to anything other'(1983:7). As such, *TREASURE* can be seen as a productive move away from a fixed, and patriarchal order, of which the world tree is metaphor. It is the ocean that offers Cathy her freedom and seclusion where that 'fixed order' remains (albeit temporarily) tightly locked away in Davey Jones' locker (T: 37,94). However, her fear of trees (and their roots) which are a reflection of her oppression within the order is a constant reminder of her connectedness to the 'other' (T:135,142,143,146). It is, as Deleuze and Guattari admit, any point of a rhizome that can be [and must be] connected to the world 'tree' (1983:7). Nevertheless, throughout the novel the newly spawned narratives, and differing perspectives extend outwardly and independently, resisting fixed notions of linearity and in doing so, expose the temporal and conceptual gap which must exist between the narrator who, as the I, is the teller and you the reader who is the told (Worthington:1996:151).

Furthermore, *TREASURE* does not rely on sentiment, or plot, alone. It relies on its rhizomorphic structure where, at any point, it can be connected (and visually cited) to 'anything other' (1983:7), such as the many connections it makes with historical events. Cathy on day-leave from the clinic coincides with the

availability of colour television in Australia (T:74); she remembers the first time she is discharged from the clinic because it was also the day Gough Whitlam was 'discharged' as Australia's Prime Minister (T:75); she and her family are the first emigrants to leave Plymouth since the *Mayflower* sailed for the American colonies (T:96); the armed soldiers who come aboard the ship are a reflection on the Suez Canal crisis (T:94-95). There are also the many connections *TREASURE* makes with television shows, movies, and popular music. The chapters, in spite of their apparent ordering (and, thus, illusionary linearity) can be re-ordered while retaining a connectedness to the novel as a whole. For example, chapters 'One-Eighteen' can be read apart from chapters '1-18', and despite the differing perspective, the same story is told. Yet, read as a whole, there is a connectedness between one chapter, and, another.

One autobiographical¹³ fiction which fulfils the notion of visual citing in a literal sense is Raymond Federman's *The Voice in the Closet* (1979). Discussed by Worthington, in *Self as Narrative*, for its 'unfamiliar typography and intrusive spaciness' she explains the text as

alternating twenty pages of visual text with twenty pages of verbal text. The first page of the visual text features a single vertical line on an otherwise empty page; on each successive page a new line is added at right angles, so that by the fourth page a...[frame] has been formed. The procedure is repeated over the next four pages, within the area delimited by the borders of this square, resulting in the formation of another...[frame] within the first. This process is continued to the end of the book, at which point five...[frames] within...[frames] occupy the previously empty paginal space. The words which constitute the verbal text flow across each alternate page...(1996:150).

Federman explores the possibilities of how his 'life' story (which includes his childhood escape from a Nazi death camp) can be narrativised. He describes the 'split [which] exists between the actual me wandering voiceless in a temporary landscape'—(the visual text), '...and the virtual being' he invents only to discover '[he] dissolves in verbal articulations'—(the verbal text), (Federman: as quoted by

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Worthington:151). Federman may be asking readers to see “him” ‘wandering voiceless in a temporary landscape’. But by framing the landscape through a series of frames-within-frames, he is acknowledging (and visually citing) that verbal articulations are ‘framed’ by a shared language. Furthermore, the visual effect of the frames-within-frames is, that of a self (constituted through, what he considers, his own narrative intention) wandering (or slipping) further away into the ‘framed landscapes between which there are noticeable spaces where the ‘I’ who is the teller, and the I who is told—discovers that he ‘dissolves into verbal articulations’ (Federman: as quoted by Worthington:151).

A parallel can be drawn between Federman’s *The Voice in the Closet* and what I have proposed in this exegesis: that every narrative has an intention of its own, at the heart of which there is an implied *i*. The implied *i*, I have suggested, reflects a cultural site of knowledge. Federman may describe ‘himself’ as a virtual being wandering voiceless in temporary landscapes. But as a writer of an autobiographical fiction, what he is experiencing is the narrative reconstruction process. That is, in continually working (unsuccessfully) to locate ‘his’ textualised selfhood, he is acknowledging, albeit unconsciously, that the narrative has its own intention at the heart of which, there is an implied *i*. The implied *i* as I have argued reflects a cultural site of knowledge—his Jewish childhood spent in a Nazi death camp. Unable to contain the narrative’s intention or adequately frame a textualised self for his own purpose, the writer continues to push at the centre of the narrative’s intention, the space around which becomes territorially specific to Federman.

It is the space surrounding the narrative intention which becomes crucial for the writer of an auto/biographical fiction who constantly works to explore notions of ‘self’ as constituted through narrative in quite a different manner from the theorist. Thus, from this develops the apparent chasm that exists between the writer of a theoretical narrative and the writer of a creative narrative. The chasm may be seen to be ‘an interpretative division between those who take autobiography as a factual document’ (despite notions that there is no single truth or centred self),

'and those who view it as much more closely, and less damningly aligned with fiction' (Gilmore:1994:25). But it is, without a doubt, equally a case of perspective.

Gillian Hanscombe's *Dorothy Richardson: and the Development of Feminist Consciousness* (1982) and Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915/1979) are excellent examples of where perspective, and the 'interpretative division', between both writers is narrowed. *Pilgrimage* can, in a contemporary light, be seen to be an auto/biographical fiction where 'art and life' merge and the writer continually worked to locate herself as 'subject' at the centre of the narrative's intention. Hanscombe, in what she describes to be a 'sub-literary manifesto' (1982:17) on the life Dorothy Richardson, offers a critique of *Pilgrimage*.

Hanscombe (albeit unconsciously) recognises Richardson as having adopted a process of 'continuous reiteration of what for Richardson were fundamental and almost self-evident precepts' (1982:26). It could, therefore, be suggested that not only did Richardson in writing *Pilgrimage* recognise the implied *i* (which reflects a cultural site of knowledge), but Hanscombe recognises it also:

If, therefore, the material is circular rather than linear in its configuration, then its central point, from which all attempts at discovery radiate and to which they return, is Richardson's conviction of the 'otherness' of a woman's consciousness. There is, in other words, a central point rather than a starting point; there is expansion and dissolution (1982:28).

It is as if Hanscombe visually cited an implied *i*, at the centre of *Pilgrimage*'s narrative intention, in support of the intention of the 'newly' spawned narrative *Dorothy Richardson*. As such, the immediate space surrounding *Pilgrimage*'s narrative intention was not only territorially specific to Richardson, but to Hanscombe also; it is a case where the implied *i* served to extratextually mediate and frame both Richardson's and Hanscombe's perspective. More importantly, the necessary gap between the 'I' who is the teller (Richardson) and the 'I' which is told (Hanscombe) exists yet Hanscombe does not shatter notions of textual selves from either the continuity, or the narrative intention of the text.

In Conclusion

I stood, for a while by the door, watching them knitting. Not the usual garment one would expect grown women to be constructing but a scarf that, because of the different plys of wool used, spiralled as it continued to grow. I wanted to ask how long was the scarf going to be but I was mesmerised by the many colours (T:20).

What I have proposed in this exegesis is a model, based on framing metaphors, that would allow feminist literary theorists to revise the space in which women's auto/biographical writing is discussed. The 'new' space, I have suggested, needs to include, rather than exclude, much more women's writing, from which the reader can explicate 'the living experiences of countless perceiving subjects' (Wolf:1984:142). More importantly, feminist literary theorists need to acknowledge the tensions that often exist between critical theory and creative writing, particularly in the writing of an auto/biographical fiction.

The assumption that there can be a distinct body of women's auto/biographical writing cannot be based on the notion of pre-existing foundational texts which work to 'censor' women's auto/biographical writing. Instead, a space in which such writing is discussed should include an added dimension where the colourful threads of many more women's narratives can be unraveled (See Appendix: B Figure 8). The space should be 'circular rather than linear in its configuration...a central point rather than a starting point...expansion and dissolution' (Hanscombe:1982:28; and see Appendix B, Figure 9).

I wanted to ask how long would it be before they imaginatively perceive a new space in which women's writing is discussed, but I am already mesmerised by the many colours (*In Search of TREASURE—An exegesis*: p.45).

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'and those who view it as much more closely, and less damningly aligned with fiction' (Gilmore:1994:25). But it is, without a doubt, equally a case of perspective.

Gillian Hanscombe's *Dorothy Richardson: and the Development of Feminist Consciousness* (1982) and Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915/1979) are excellent examples of where perspective, and the 'interpretative division', between both writers is narrowed. *Pilgrimage* can, in a contemporary light, be seen to be an auto/biographical fiction where 'art and life' merge and the writer continually worked to locate herself as 'subject' at the centre of the narrative's intention. Hanscombe, in what she describes to be a 'sub-literary manifesto' (1982:17) on the life Dorothy Richardson, offers a critique of *Pilgrimage*.

Hanscombe (albeit unconsciously) recognises Richardson as having adopted a process of 'continuous reiteration of what for Richardson were fundamental and almost self-evident precepts' (1982:26). It could, therefore, be suggested that not only did Richardson in writing *Pilgrimage* recognise the implied *i* (which reflects a cultural site of knowledge), but Hanscombe recognises it also:

If, therefore, the material is circular rather than linear in its configuration, then its central point, from which all attempts at discovery radiate and to which they return, is Richardson's conviction of the 'otherness' of a woman's consciousness. There is, in other words, a central point rather than a starting point; there is expansion and dissolution (1982:28).

It is as if Hanscombe visually cited an implied *i*, at the centre of *Pilgrimage*'s narrative intention, in support of the intention of the 'newly' spawned narrative *Dorothy Richardson*. As such, the immediate space surrounding *Pilgrimage*'s narrative intention was not only territorially specific to Richardson, but to Hanscombe also; it is a case where the implied *i* served to extratextually mediate and frame both Richardson's and Hanscombe's perspective. More importantly, the necessary gap between the 'I' who is the teller (Richardson) and the 'I' which is told (Hanscombe) exists yet Hanscombe does not shatter notions of textual selves from either the continuity, or the narrative intention of the text.

In Conclusion

I stood, for a while by the door, watching them knitting. Not the usual garment one would expect grown women to be constructing but a scarf that, because of the different plys of wool used, spiralled as it continued to grow. I wanted to ask how long was the scarf going to be but I was mesmerised by the many colours (T:20).

What I have proposed in this exegesis is a model, based on framing metaphors, that would allow feminist literary theorists to revise the space in which women's auto/biographical writing is discussed. The 'new' space, I have suggested, needs to include, rather than exclude, much more women's writing, from which the reader can explicate 'the living experiences of countless perceiving subjects' (Wolf:1984:142). More importantly, feminist literary theorists need to acknowledge the tensions that often exist between critical theory and creative writing, particularly in the writing of an auto/biographical fiction.

The assumption that there can be a distinct body of women's auto/biographical writing cannot be based on the notion of pre-existing foundational texts which work to 'censor' women's auto/biographical writing. Instead, a space in which such writing is discussed should include an added dimension where the colourful threads of many more women's narratives can be unraveled (See Appendix: B Figure 8). The space should be 'circular rather than linear in its configuration...a central point rather than a starting point...expansion and dissolution' (Hanscombe:1982:28; and see Appendix B, Figure 9).

I wanted to ask how long would it be before they imaginatively perceive a new space in which women's writing is discussed, but I am already mesmerised by the many colours (*In Search of TREASURE—An exegesis*: p.45).

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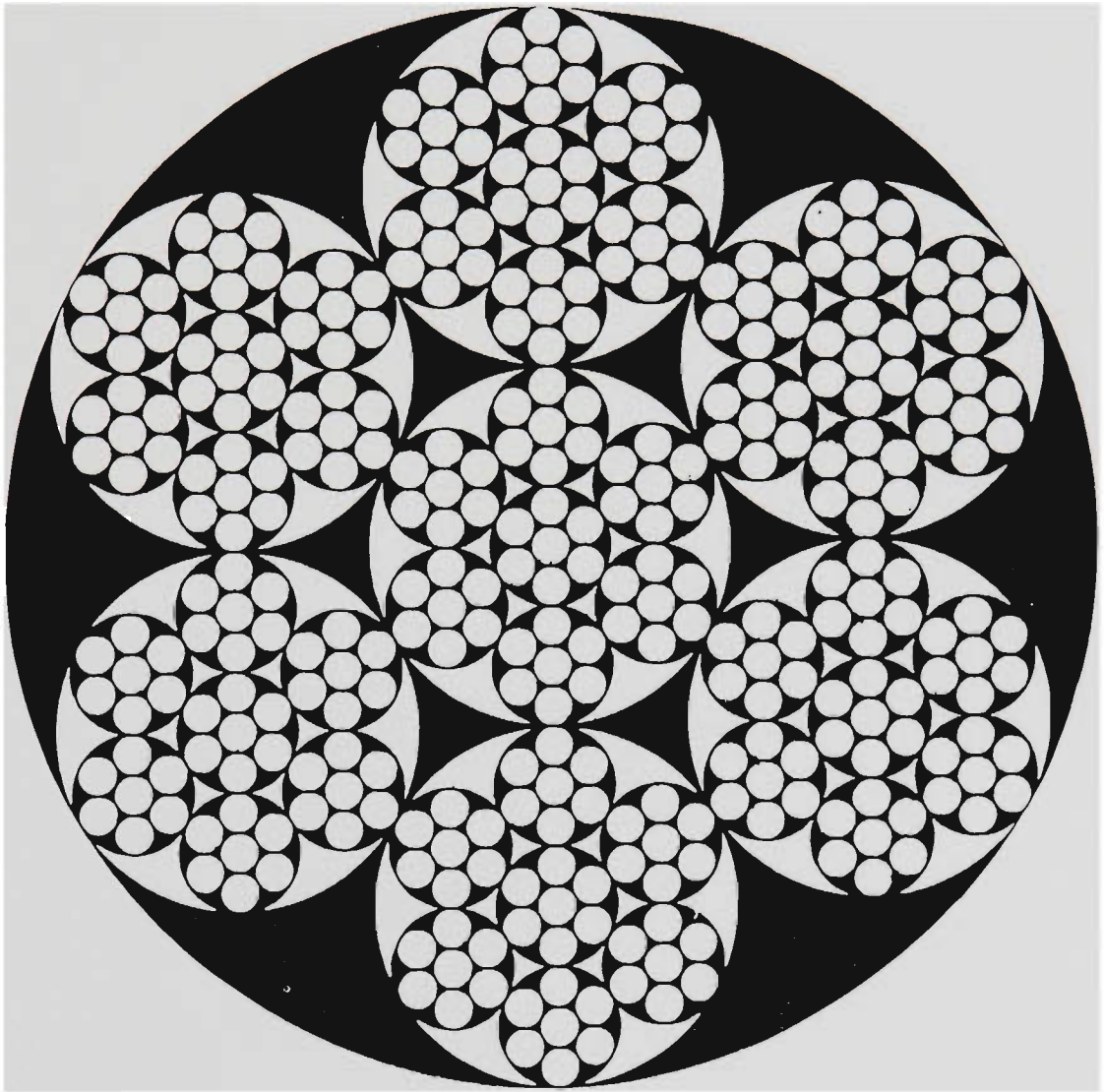
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Appendices

Appendix A

.



Artistic Fractals: *Nested Circles*

Dixon, Robert (1987) *Mathographics*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Appendix B

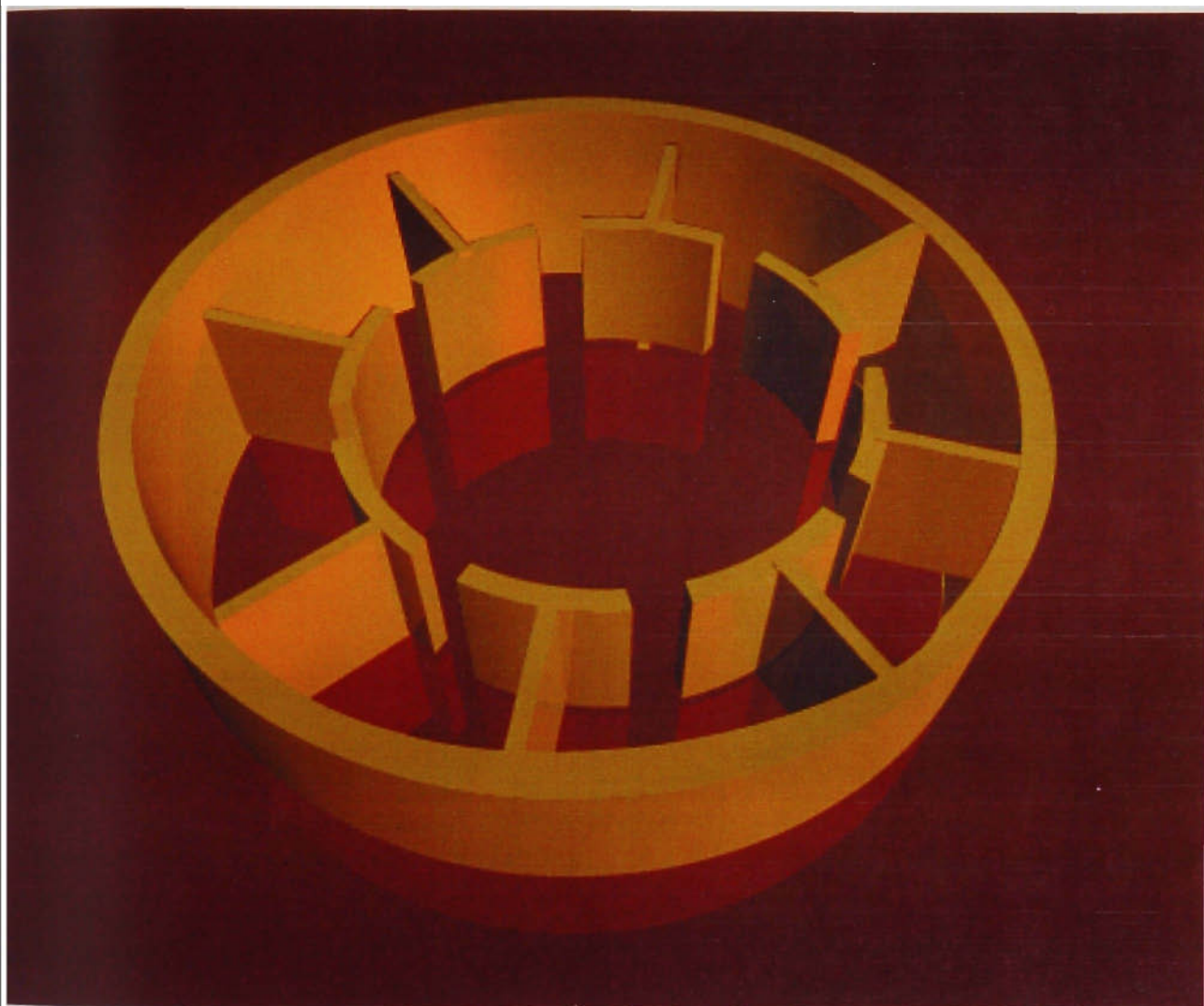


Figure 1. The master's house: representing the self-circularity of a predominantly male narrative space; a meta-mansion made up of numerous rooms in which, in each room, there is housed a text with its own narrative intention.



Figure 2. The master's house: (aerial view)
The hypothetical space in which the narrative
intention circulates.



Figure 3. Breaking up the master's house: Rooms retain a recognisable 'sameness' in the fractals that remain; a curve or surface which has been generated by a process of iteration, and which, by following a relation of similarity, constituted the perimeter of the self-referential circular model. Each fractal can also be seen to illustrate *self-similarity*; any part of the curve is a scaled down version of the whole curve.

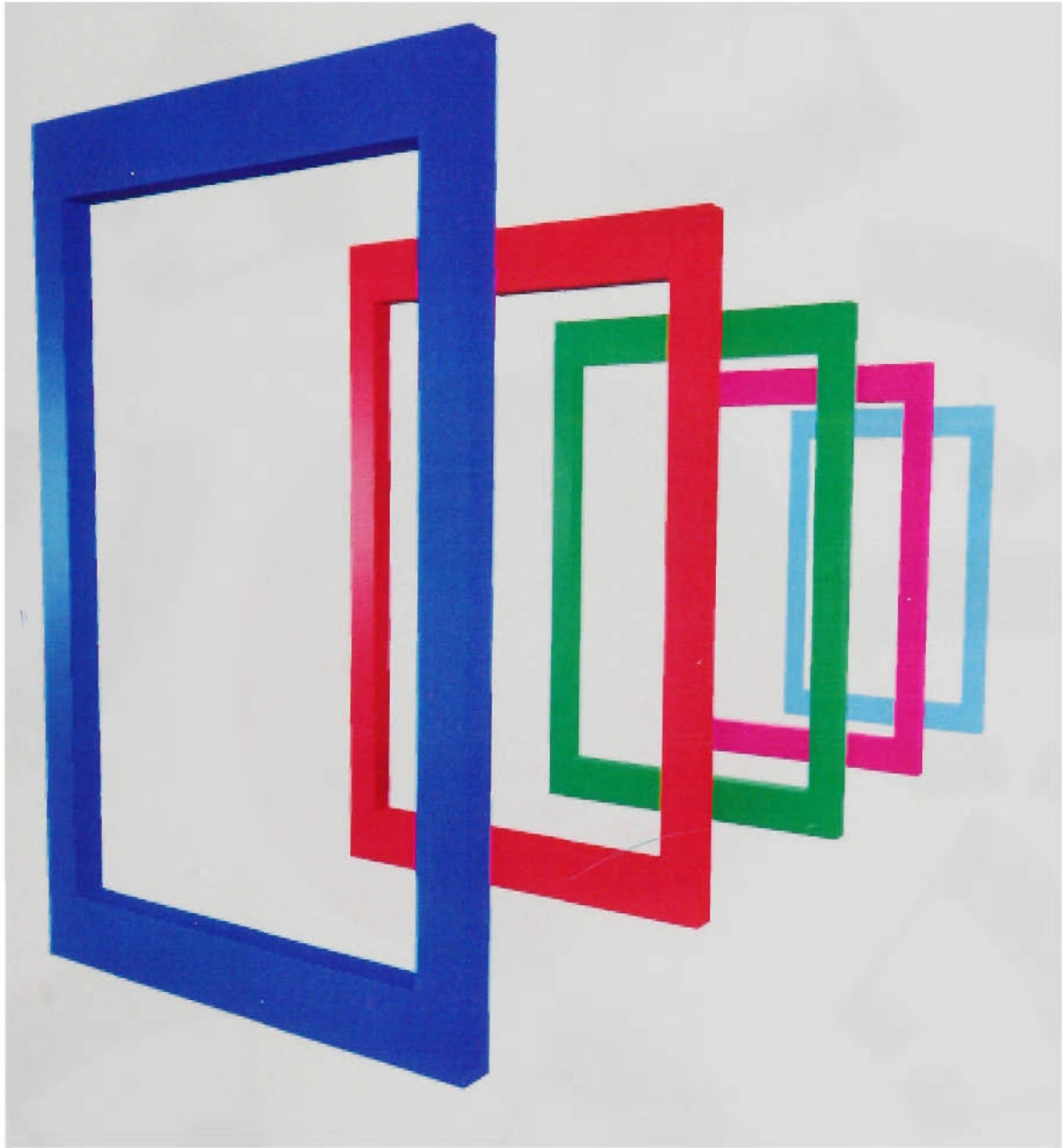


Figure 4. 'Framed' narratives; viewed side on, what becomes more apparent are the spaces which exist between each narrative.



Figure 5 (aerial view) The now separated rooms of the master's house. The implied *i* would be located at the center of the narrative intention which circulates in the hypothetical space.

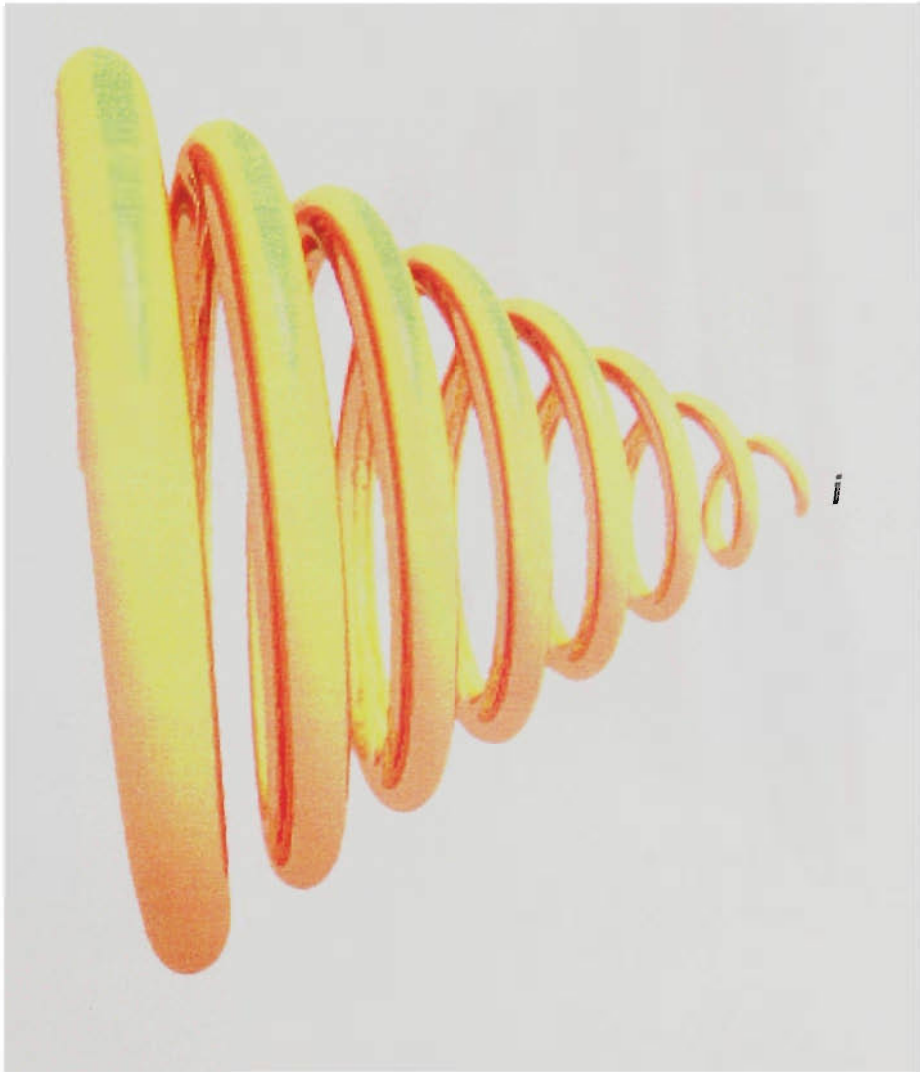


Figure 6. The hypothetical space in which the narrative's intention circulates; viewed side-on. It is my claim that the writer of an auto/biographical fiction continually *pushes* at the centre of the narrative's intention only to find that any notion of 'self' they might have continually slips away into a cultural landscape.



Figure 7. The hypothetical space in which the narrative's intention circulates; viewed side-on. It is my claim that the writer of a literary theoretical *pulls* from the center, only what they need to constitute their own selve(s) through narrative. In doing so, notions of 'other' textualised selve(s) are shattered from the continuity of the text.

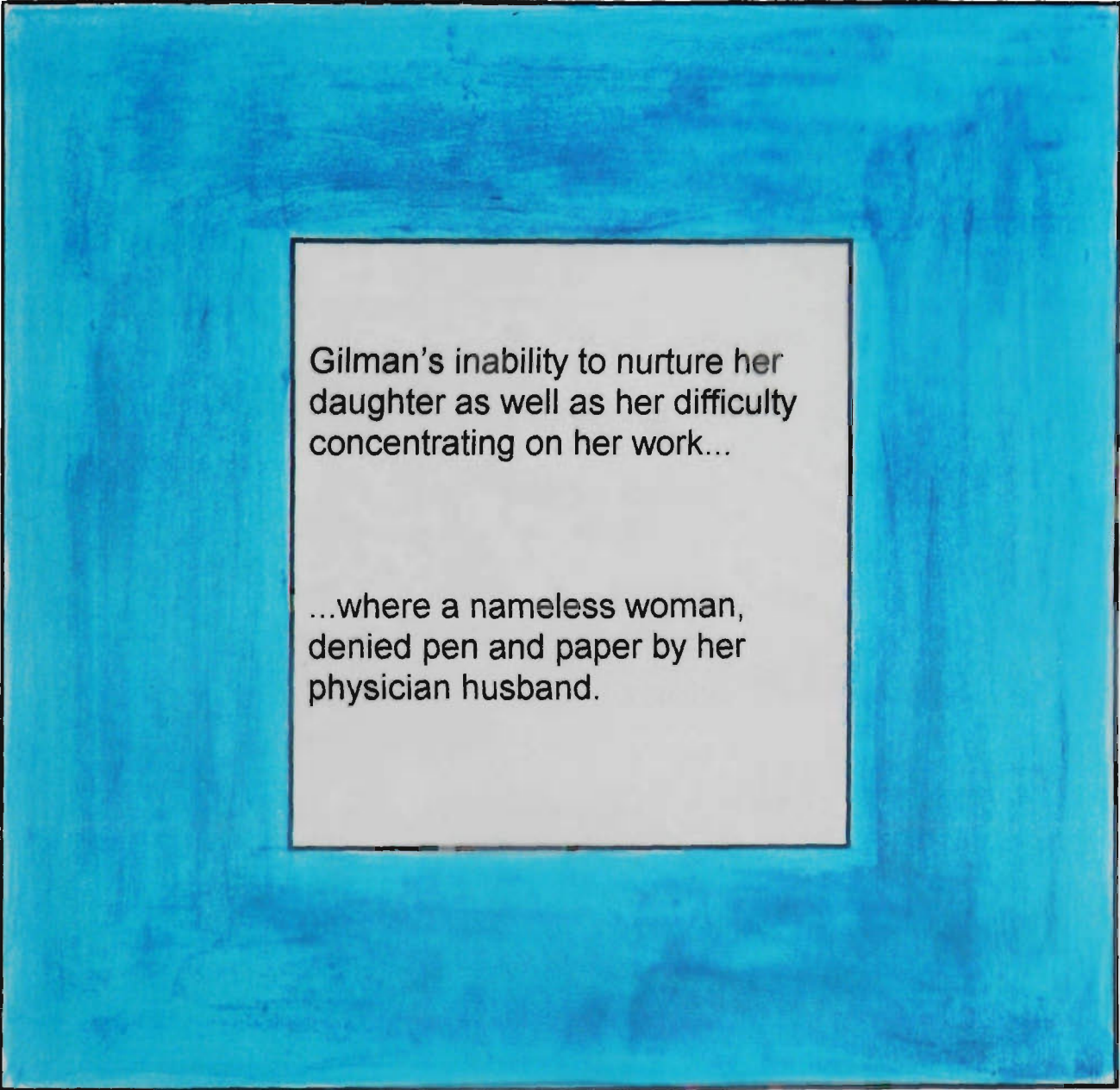


Figure 8. A space with an added dimension.



Figure 9. The New space.

Appendix C

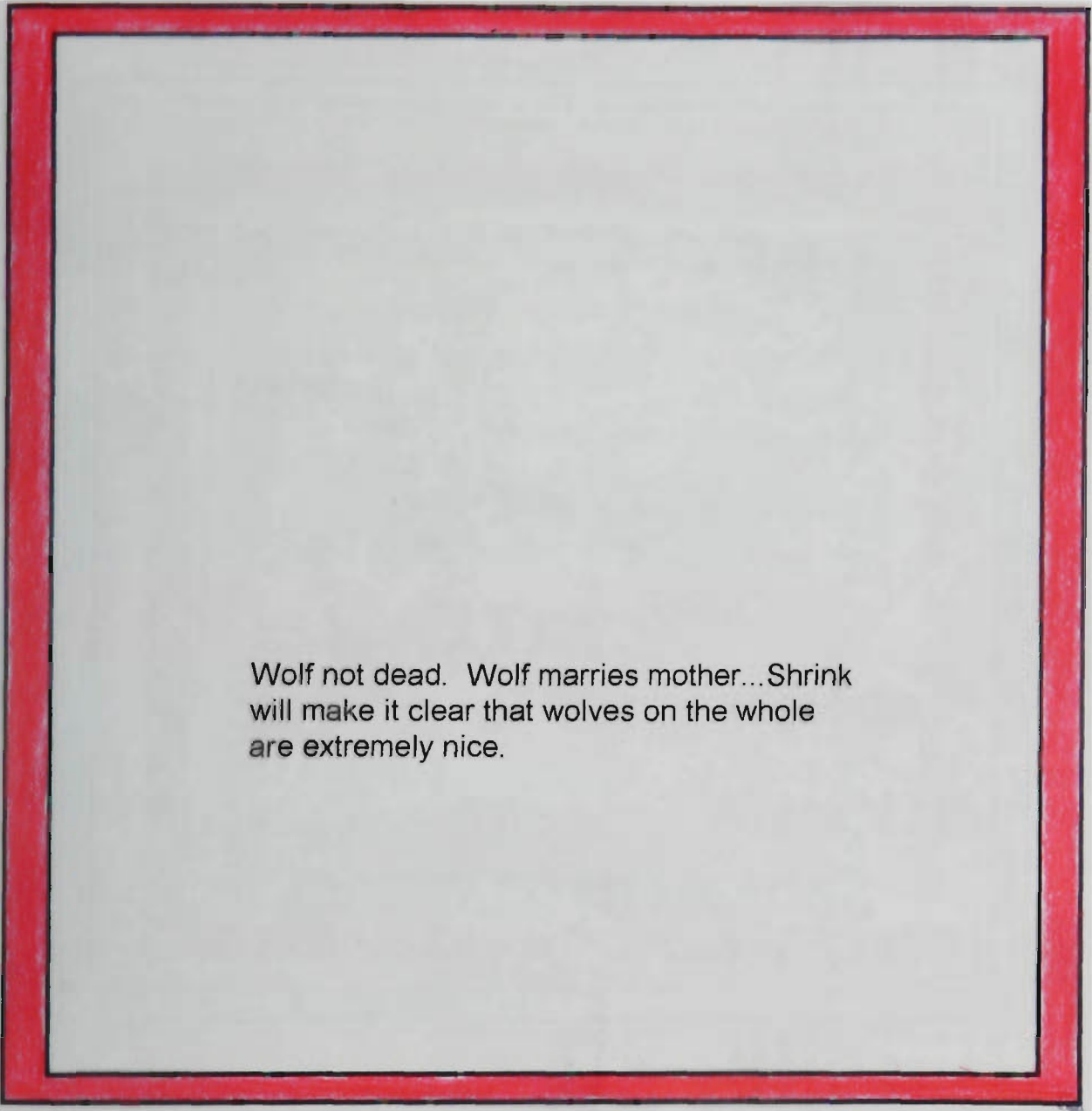


Gilman's inability to nurture her daughter as well as her difficulty concentrating on her work...

...where a nameless woman, denied pen and paper by her physician husband.

Narrative e. A feminist literary-theoretical critique.


Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan (1989)
No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer In the Twentieth Century Vol 2: Sexchanges, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.



Wolf not dead. Wolf marries mother... Shrink
will make it clear that wolves on the whole
are extremely nice.

Narrative d. Variants on Red Riding Hood

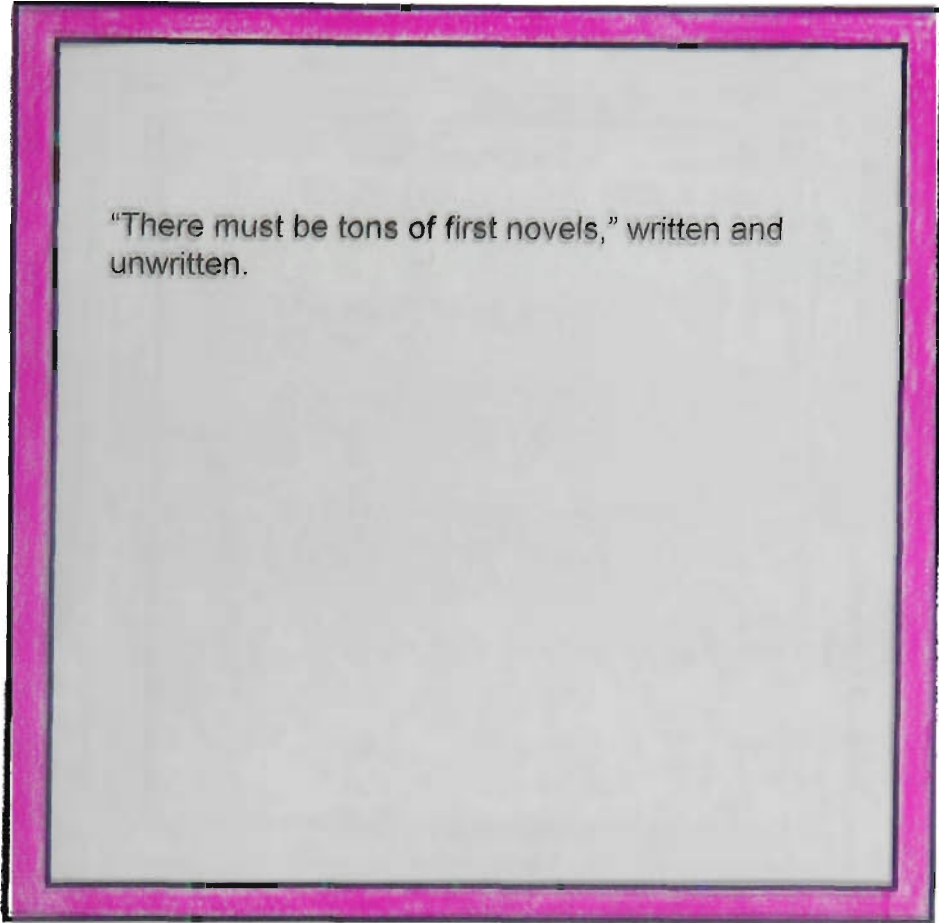
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Australia, (1st pub. 1981).



I think sometimes that if I were only well enough
to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas
and rest me.

Narrative c. A woman recovering from
depression.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins (1973) *The Yellow
Wallpaper*, Afterword by Elaine R. Hedges,
The Feminist Press, New York, (1st pub. 1899).



"There must be tons of first novels," written and unwritten.

Narrative b. A woman contemplating writing a novel.

Neustadt, Kathy (1980) 'The Visits of the Writers Toni Morrison and Eudora Welty' in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, Taylor-Guthrie, Danille (ed) (1994), University Press of Mississippi, Jackson.

Maybe I'll write a novel.

*A novel? Sounds good. Any idea
what the novel will be about?*

*A young girl gets herself lost in the
forest and is eaten by wolves.*

Narrative a.

Heather Nix: *TREASURE* (1999) (unpublished
manuscript)

Appendix D

Letter a: Written by Jeffrey P. Rowekamp to Alice Walker—*The Same River Twice* (1996:pp.238-239).

Brighton, Mass.
April 13, 1985

Dear Ms. Walker,

I am writing to you out of thanks. I just finished reading your book, *The Color Purple*, and I feel like my chest is about to burst. I almost cried. It made so much sense to me; made me think about my life and the real meaning of love.

My girlfriend and I just broke up. I can't begin to say how much I hurt inside. I feel as if I've lost a part of myself. Sometimes I feel angry; sometimes sad, and other times I'm not sure how I feel. This was my first relationship so I have nothing to compare it to. I lived with this woman for two years I'm not even sure if I loved her. I feel as if I'm a silly little boy who found a substitute for his mother. I was so dependent on her.

All of my feelings became even more mixed-up when she told me that she was coming to the realization that she was gay and was involved with a woman already. I didn't know what to think. I had always thought I wasn't prejudiced against anyone. I couldn't accept what she told me. Although we had other problems with our relationship as well, I felt rejected simply because I was male. Other problems we could work out, but I couldn't change the fact that I was a man. I began to doubt my own sexuality. Was it possible for me as a man to love a woman the way she wanted to be loved. All around me I saw men who treated women in their lives as objects. Was I guilty of that too?

Also adding to the difficulty of separation was the fact that we were living together and still continue to do so because our lease isn't over yet. It has been this way for over a month now. Every now and then I would see her at home. (We are trying to work it out so that only one of us is at home at a time. The other person stays at a friend's house.) I would be okay for awhile and then I would get angry, jealous, and sad at the same time. The experiences left me emotionally drained. She still loved me. I didn't know how to respond.

Then she borrowed your book from her friend. She thought I should read it. I wasn't sure. "Was it depressing?" I asked.

"A little," she replied. "A lot of people told me they liked the book though. A friend of mine gave it to her husband. It changed him."

I wanted to believe it could change me. I decided to read it despite my discomfort with the main character who falls in love with another woman.

The first time I picked up the book, I read it halfway through. I felt such empathy with Celie that her affair didn't bother me at all. My girlfriend was home the next day when I finished the book. I choked on my tears. All my life I wanted to be loved and to love in return, but my love had too many restrictions—on myself and on those around me. Love is not restrictive; love frees. Love gives, it doesn't demand, it accepts. From reading your book I learned that all love is good. I learned that I still loved my friend. I could love her and accept her as she is. Thank you so much for teaching me this.

sincerely,

Jeffrey P. Rowekamp

Letter b: Written by Donna F. Johnson to Alice Walker—*The Same River Twice* (1996:pp.232-235).

March 21, 1986

Dear Alice,

I was, and continue to be, profoundly affected by your novel, *The Color Purple*. In my own circle, the novel was very well received by women of all ages—even Catholic nuns!—and caused a lot of grief to men (Grief=anger.) You have awakened in me a desire to know and understand the experiences of black women. I have read several other of your works since *The Color Purple*, and was particularly taken with "*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*." Like many women, I think, I have identified with you and welcomed you as a spokesperson for the experience of women. So, first and foremost, I write to thank you for your work and express my appreciation of it. I hope you continue to write for many years to come.

My second reason for writing is because, contrary to public opinion, I was disappointed in Spielberg's interpretation of *The Color Purple*—and I feel you are a good person to say that to. The question I keep asking myself is, "I wonder what Alice Walker thinks of the film"—despite what's been reported in various magazines, I still wonder what you think.

You see, in my opinion, the "heart" of the novel was left out of the film. Perhaps people have different opinions on what the heart of the novel is. I feel it is the deep relationship between Celie and Shug—and this, I feel, was given only superficial treatment on the screen. I admit such a relationship is difficult to portray in film—but then my question is, why attempt the film at all, if it has to be at the expense of the soul of the book? Spielberg gave us a nice story of poor black folk—but he didn't give us Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

It seems to me that Celie found her redemption and healing largely in the intense love relationship with Shug in which they were "erotically bound." I feel one of the central messages of the book was the breaking down of barriers. In this patriarchal and heterosexist society, where most of women's personal, social political and economic relations are defined by the ideology that woman is for man and takes her identity from man, Celie was aroused to full power through her relationship with another woman. Fairly radical. This you poignantly and sensitively portrayed in your novel, Spielberg, on the other hand, gives us a "nice" friendship with a hint of sexual involvement which was thrust upon us without preparation—so much so that a ripple of disappointment/horror goes through the audience of "Oh my God—they're queer." This does not do the relationship justice. Many people feel the relationship was well presented on the screen—I wonder if they infused the relationship with the depth they experienced in reading the book.

My second major criticism of the film is that it was far too palatable and tidy. The first time I saw the film I was uneasy with it. I couldn't put my finger on it, but it had something to do with the use of music. The second viewing left me feeling manipulated. Did you see *Gremlins*?—that violent little gem shrouded in gaiety? Spielberg is a technical wizard, but, in my opinion, a master at bringing patriarchal values to the screen. In *Gremlins* he gives us horror laced with light, circus-like music—so he has us laughing, for example, while a handicapped elderly woman in a wheelchair is brutally murdered by the evil gremlins. I find this manipulative and irresponsible. (Great values to instill in our children.)

Similarly, in *The Color Purple* we are uncomfortable in spots—but Spielberg does not leave us uncomfortable for long. For example—when Celie moves in to Mister's house—she's hit on the head with a rock (laughter in audience). She cleans his rat-infested pigsty of a house: whimsical music follows, and a scene from "Joy Dish-washing Detergent"—then Mr. comes and puts his dirty feet on the table—laughter—. What was the purpose of the "barroom brawl" at Harpo's? Totally unnecessary. Or the dragged-out comedy scene where Sophie's employer can't get the car out of reverse? It is moments like these where I feel the novel was trivialized. Spielberg

jerks his audience around from tears to laughter, manipulating for the effect he wants, and finally sending us out of the theatre feeling that all is right and well. The book was not so tidy.

Perhaps my criticisms of Steven Spielberg I should be writing to him—.

As I re-read this letter I am asking myself, “why are you bothering to send a list of criticisms off to Alice Walker? You’ve been disappointed with a lot of movies, and never done this before—And there are a great number of movies out there that are downright destructive to the human psyche —*Rambo*, for example...”

I suppose it has something to do with the fact that, as I said before, I identify with you and love your work. In a way I suppose I feel sort of an “investment” in *The Color Purple*.

Who knows. At any rate, I submit my criticisms of the movie—and my deepest praise for your work.

Thanks for listening.

Donna F. Johnson
CARLETON PLACE, Ontario.

P.S. What do you think of the film?!

Appendix E

Television Programs and Films

Watch With Mother: Andy Pandy (1950-57), BBC-tv.

Watch With Mother: Rag, Tag, and Bobtail (1950-1980), BBC-tv.

Watch With Mother: The Flowerpot Men (1952-54), BBC-tv.

Watch With Mother: Prudence Kitten (1950-59), BBC-tv.

Emergency—Ward 10 (1957-67), BBC-tv.

The Buccaneers (1956-57), Sapphire Films.

Treasure Island (1950), RKO/Walt Disney.

The Railway Children (1958), BBC-tv.

It Could Be You (1960), GTV-9, Melbourne.

Divorce Court (1967), NLT Productions.

Homicide (1967), Crawford Productions.

The Avengers (1961-69), ABC TV.

Home and Beauty (1962), ATN-7, Sydney.

Till Death Us Do Part (1966-68;1972;1974-75), BBC-1.

You Can't See Round Corners (1967), ATN-7, Sydney.

Bandstand (1959), GTV-9, Sydney.

Humphrey Bear (1967), GTV-9, Adelaide.

A Summer Place (1959), Warner.

The Shawshank Redemption (1994), Rank/Castle.

***TREASURE: AN EXPLORATION IN THE WRITING OF
THE SELF***

Volume 2

***TREASURE* — An auto/biographical novel**

Heather Nix

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the Department of Communication, Language and Cultural Studies at
Victoria University of Technology**

February 2000

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CHAPTERS

Not Numbered: The Present

1—18: 1975-1955

One—Eighteen: 1955-1975

She never knew her daughter's name

The chapter begins. I know how the story ends. But I want to read and reread what I already have read and what, in reality, I know about the writer but my eyes are tired and I close them aware that the story will continue to unfurl, and waver, fanned and fed by the television that stands in the corner of the room with a space, time and loudness all of its own. The words should now be resting comfortably between the covers but always the images slip from between the white sheets and the shadows are about to dance once more.

There's a yacht, and there is an ocean.

The Pacific Ocean. Yes. It's the Pacific Ocean; not the Indian or the Atlantic but as far south as the Pacific Ocean stretches. It's the ocean that has no memory. Or, at least that's what the old Mexican woman said: *The Pacific can never leave our shore for it has no memory of where it came from.*

It's written in the book. But I recall a scene where a father and child, immigrants heading for Australia, are leaning over the bow of an ocean liner. Watching the waves roll away from the hull, toward the horizon, she asks her father where were the waves going. He tells her that they're going back to wherever it is they came from in the first place. She wonders where that place might be and whether that is the same reason they left Wales.

Stories can be confusing but sooner or later we learn the truth. The child did when as an adult she saw a movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, on television. The central character escaped from prison and headed to a coastal village in Mexico. Before escaping he told an inmate that the Mexicans believe the Pacific has no memory. And, so she had learnt that the old Mexican woman had been right in the first place.

I turn slightly in my chair knowing it's all at the tip of my fingers.

And so, there's a boat and an ocean; a yacht becalmed, somewhere in the South Pacific. It's 1975. A sultry summer evening. There is no land in sight. The ocean, flat, with its dark depths, slowly moves toward the horizon where, along with the setting sun, the two will rest safely covered by the night light of a watchful moon. I'm now moving slowly in, on the forty-foot sloop. Its lowered mainsail lies idle across the boom. The halyard hanging limp from the mast swings slowly casting a shadowy stick figure over the deck. There is a woman, slightly built, lying heaped and motionless on the yacht's transom. At first, I hear only the lapping of the sea caressing the hull. Then the woman moves, twists sideways, starts to cough, props herself up on her elbows. Close-up, I can see her clothes are sea-sodden and her spirit has drowned.

Someone stirs inside the cabin. It's the skipper of the yacht; a woman whose face I needn't see for I have seen it before. From inside the cabin I'm looking past the skipper, standing in the doorway, and I hear her say:

Salt water has that effect.

The woman lying on the deck doesn't respond. The skipper continues: Salt water makes your lungs thirsty for air. It doesn't matter who I am, for my story is a book yet to be read. You'll speak when you're ready. But in the meantime, you need a name. Cathy. I'll call you Cathy. It's a good name; a bewitching name; a name that survives time. There's Catherine the Great, Cathy and Heathcliff and yes, there's even a Sir Catherine. She didn't look much like a first knight the night she scrambled, half drowned, aboard this yacht. She too, coughed and spluttered and took her time before taking cover. She was with me for some time until one day, just as I thought I knew who she was, she slipped quietly overboard returning to wherever it was she'd come from in the first place. What she left behind, besides the memories, was a novel; her novel.

It was the myth of the old Mexican woman that led me to do what I did the night I stole away from the clinic. I knew what it was I had to do despite the doctor's concern that I was yet to make a full recovery — yet to come to terms with a past I so often chose to forget. Memories of my past had been there all the time; locked away safely in some attic; watched over by demons I heard at night when I lay quite still and unable to move. Over the years, and the many times I had visited the clinic, I was shown how to move through the rooms and make my way to the attic door, take hold of the doorknob and cautiously open the door. One by one the demons left, leaving me standing among my dreams piled high in the centre of the room. I now knew it was time for me to leave — to be guided by memories — and search for whatever, or whoever, it was I was looking for. I looked in the mirror and I liked what I saw. Happiness was now only an arm's length away. Alice was right. There was a way to pass through the mirror. Ahead of me I sent my heart knowing, now, I would have to follow...

There had been another story. It had come to you as a name: Wendy. There might well have been another name; a title preceding it or a surname that followed. But it was the christian name that you heard, filtered and distant, which rang a bell. Or was it something you were listening to? A television, maybe, in another room, or even a radio. You listened again and again, as a mother would, expecting a response from a child who had been called out of hiding. But the child did not appear.

And so it was in February 1975 you sat crouched and silent in the corner of the room (or was it a mouse hole you'd crept into) clutching the shadow of a white-coated woman who appeared and disappeared at her own will. A quick glimpse of the name card, attached to the top of the bed, was a reminder of who you were. But she (who refused to lie on the bed, and instead chose the floor) may as well have been a stranger, awaiting the day when her shadow would be put back where it belonged and the window could once more be flung open.

On the morning of the day you were admitted, Mr King had knocked on your door — as he had done, every fortnight throughout the summer (not for payment of course, for he was genuinely happy to see that you and the little one were all right) but he did expect a thank you and, if you had the time and inclination, a bit of a chat. He secretly admired a woman with your courage having the guts to set up home out in the bush and with a kid too; or at least that's what he'd been heard to say in the pub one evening. Cutting firebreaks was a commitment when you owned a farm and what difference did it make cutting one more around a property of less than two acres. But it was Mrs King, with a voice loud enough to be heard all over town, who had harped on and on about that place next door; a shack not fit

for a pig to live in. A pig and her progeny. A pig and her piglet in need of fattening — God only knows what she feeds the child.

Not the spirit you'd hoped to have found in a country town but then again it had only been a few short months. Time tells. Or at least it would have if you'd had the time. Time (and money) to do what you wanted to do. Instead, on the morning of February 17 1975, when Mr King knocked and entered the kitchen, he found Alex sitting as happy as a pig in shit (as he told the police later) at the kitchen table his eyes glued to the telly, and the mother sitting in her own shit curled up in the corner of the kitchen.

Cripes! I thought you were dead.

A closer inspection and a slight shake of your arm told him you'd dropped off the planet. Alex had told him, quite confidently, that you were off with the fairies and not to worry cos she'll come back, as she always does. Mr King called his wife, who fearing the worst, dropped what she was doing (topping up the bottle of phenyl from a four gallon drum) and hurried over. If she'd said it once she'd said it a thousand times over and over — drugs! Hippies.

But of course the Missus was wrong.

Obviously, by the tone of his voice this gave him immense pleasure for everyone who knows Mrs King can tell you she's rarely wrong. The place isn't fit for a pig or her progeny. Isn't that what she'd been telling everyone? Now she had the evidence: there laid out on the table for everyone to see: curdled milk (which the child indicated he often ate) and shoots of some sort. Call the police his wife had said. They'll know what to do. They're used to these drug things although God help us it hasn't happened around here before she moved in.

I didn't want to ring the cops but you know how pushy the Missus can be.

He'd much preferred to hunt around for a relly's phone number. The police arrived. They asked Alex did he know who they were (just so they didn't frighten him like), to which he replied Mr Plod and, to his offsider who'd been caught off guard and was not in his uniform, he's Big Ears.

We all thought it was pretty funny. Except, of course, the missus.

Your place was clean; no drugs, or sign of any magic mushrooms having been cooked recently (as Mrs King had pointed out, the stove was so clean you could tell she never cooked a meal in her life). Mr P, that is Sergeant Kev Watson, called the ambulance and alerted doctors at the base hospital that the patient's lights were on, but nobody was home. All the time this was going on you didn't move, or blink an eyelid. Only when they tried to lay you out flat on the floor did you respond with a wail and locked your hands tighter around your knees. Nothing mattered from then on. Can't have mattered. You can't recall being transported between hospitals.

Nice that he came, all that way, to visit you in the clinic; could quite as well have been talking to the wall. You might have responded. But you didn't. Still, enough must have been said for you to recall what you did, of that visit.

I'll shut the door on me way out.

It's her father's death, Cathy's mother told everyone who entered the room as if to exonerate her from her part in the plot.

She went all funny like after he died. Funny. You know. Not funny ha ha — but funny.

That is what she said, and that is what she meant. She had a way with words, your Mam. Yet it all sounded so contrived. As it did that afternoon, three days later, when she had been bailed up in your room by the hospital clerk. Alex was a demanding child.

And I'm not as young as I was.

The clerk had agreed while tapping her pen impatiently on the end of the bed. She had been waiting for a next-of-kin to claim responsibility, and to provide her with necessary information. Your Mam might just as well have said she'd lost the ticket and couldn't claim her baggage. Instead, as your mother, she'd hunted around in her mind (for you knew she never searched in her heart) for all the right reasons why it had taken her three days to come forward.

It's Alex. Her son. I've had to pick up the broken pieces. But she needn't worry. I'll raise him as if he were me own.

You needn't have heard her say that, that afternoon. She repeatedly has said it time after time. For God only knows (as she put it) how Alex would turn out left in your hands. Not that she wasn't a good mother she'd say knowing that would reflect on her own self as a mother. But it was, as she told everyone, your father's death that sent you funny.

Can't you lot find a way of making her stay in bed? You know. Tie her down or something.

Waiting. You half expected to hear her tell the clerk how you had left a good family home (and not to mention the reliable job in the bottle factory) just so you could take Alex and live miles from anywhere. But she didn't. Instead, she simply stated, that Cathy had a damn good bed waiting for her at home. There were moments when she and the clerk muttered quietly, too quiet for you to hear what they were saying. The shifting of your Mam's weight on the mattress smothered words, making them inaudible. Her foot, rocking nervously back and forth — so close to your face. Higher. Higher. Pleading to be pushed higher. The rush of cool air brushes your face and you turn just enough to see him below, shrink and disappear. He's darted behind the tree. You know that. He'll reappear. Just you wait and see. Watch the puddle. Little Jenny Wren can't get her shoes muddied. There's no mud on your Mam's shoe; no clay; wet and clinging. Months had passed since he'd died. She'd had time to wash it all away. Clay; grave fodder. You'd noticed it (and named it as such) as people arrived back at the house. It had sucked at the shoes of those who had stood in the pouring rain listening to a Baptist Minister (who'd proved quite difficult to find at a time when the Church had become united); United nil, Manchester one. He liked the footy and you liked to sing: *Manchester For Ever*. You never went to the footy, of course; you were too little; unable to stand. Neither did you go to the funeral. You were no longer a child when he died. But, as it happened, were on crutches once again. The funeral.

Too difficult. Too muddy. Sitting by the window you had watched and wished that your tears were mingling with the rain drops and the tears of your family; maybe the rain would have washed away the anguish you felt. Look at that. Her good funeral shoes. Ruined. Your Mam had kicked them off at the door. Carrying them ceremoniously through the house, she headed for the laundry, followed by a small procession. They passed by, where you sat nodding dolefully, adding that it had been a nice service. Susan, the last one in, carried a scant few flowers. Where did they come from? Wreaths left at the grave? Maybe someone had given them to her. You know. Her being the elder daughter. No one said. You didn't ask. You didn't want to know that someone had thought about offering her flowers and not you. Better you stick your head in the clay: Water to clay, clay to clay, Amen.

She'll get over it. She always does. Resilient. That's what me daughter is.

She shuffled around in her handbag and gave the clerk an envelope. Photos (she explained), of Alex, suggested by Doctor B.

I'll leave them there wrapped up like. Doctor B would know when would be the right time to give them to her. I would meself. But I don't want to upset her like. God! Look at the time.

Photos don't tell the truth. They capture a moment, a staged moment when people put on a face. You'd wished they had captured the unhappy moments, the tears, as well as the good times. The family as it was — warts and all. Is there such a family album? There wasn't even an album in Cathy's house. A cardboard box (large enough to bury your dead cat but Mam had snatched it away just as the corpse was about to be laid out). You're not having that box! Just put it in the hole and throw the soil on top. Time has passed. So have many cats. The box, with its layers of memories, still sits (as far as you know) on the top of the wardrobe. Mam had gone very quiet. She'd stopped her sobbing. You were concerned. After all it had been weeks since he had died and she was, at last grieving. Peter had dragged his mother back from the cemetery where he had found her lying on the ground pleading with God to take her too (funny how we find God when we need

him). Your ear was pressed against the bedroom door. Yes, she had stopped sobbing. Taking care not to startle her (for she may have fallen asleep) you peeped into what was now her bedroom. From where you stood, she sat with her back to the door, the box of photos beside her. As if a child caught in the act, she hid what it was she had in her hand and asked to be left alone. Which you did. But it was you who were alone when, on Christmas day, you found the cut out faces of your father lying at the bottom of the incinerator. How could you have let Mam do what she did? Susan has never let you forget. You can't undo what happened back then but you worry that one day his face will fade from your memory.

No use in talking about it; never mind thinking about it; it happened and that's that. No use in crying over spilt milk; God will forgive you when you say your prayers tonight. He forgives all little girls and boys. That's what your Aunt D would have said and she said nothing she didn't believe to be the truth. And God was the truth. Cathy had learned that at an early age. Whatever that age was, she's not sure. Only sure that Aunt took her tiny hands and cocooned them inside her own. Now, turn your hands toward heaven, close your eyes and say what it is you want to say to God. Now don't peek! But you did peek. Out of the corner of your eye; not only did she have her eyes closed but her lips were moving. It was proof enough, for you at the time, that there was a God. And so the story goes (she still tells it to this day) having finished praying herself, she'd asked why she hadn't heard her niece saying her prayers. I was waiting for you to finish, little Cathy had replied. God can't be that good. He can't listen to both of us at the same time. She still laughs. You want to smile.

One

Oh God, dear God, I know you're not perfect — me Dad ses no one is, but why couldn't you have let me be born with straight legs like everyone else. I know there are times when I'm able to walk, but I hate the many months of the year that I'm not able to walk and get about. The plaster casts are heavy and they itch a lot. I know I mustn't complain; I try not to God, but I just want to be like the other kids. Thank you God for giving me a good brain; me Dad ses that's more important and I must be grateful to you God. I am. Amen

I hate me Mam. I hate me brother. But I love me Dad. Me Mam ses I sulk like a little baby and that I'm spoilt. I'm not a little baby though I'm four years old. When I'm naughty she puts me to bed upstairs. I don't mind though, our house has only three rooms and so usually I find someone else (there) that I can annoy and get on their nerves, instead of me Mam's.

When I want to be alone and have some peace, I hide here under the kitchen table. It's the only table in the whole house. Nobody else has thought about hiding under here as yet; I don't know why. There's plenty of room under here to just sit and think and look at things that no one else would normally see. Me brother Peter hates eating peas so he rubs them into the wood under the table. Mam only ever cooks green sloppy peas, so they stick real well. There's this green mushie looking goo building up, getting thicker and thicker. I fell asleep under the table the other afternoon and dreamt that the green goo had grown so thick it covered me head. I stayed asleep and allowed it to creep up through me nose until it started oozing out of me ears and eyes. I couldn't breathe and woke up with a terrible fright. I now like to keep a close watch on the pea green goo just to make sure it doesn't get out of control.

When I've nothing better to do and I'm waiting for the telly to come on at four o'clock, I sit under the table and pick away at the flaking green peas. Me Mam caught me the other day and thumped me across the ear for making a mess; I yelped like Mrs Morgan's Pekingese. She doesn't like housework. I've also been keeping my eye on a crust I threw under the sideboard two weeks ago. I don't like crusts and now I know why. It, too, is growing a thick green fuzz.

I always make sure I'm not under the table at tea time. Susan kicks Peter. Peter kicks Susan. Worst of all I might end up with peas in me hair; Peter doesn't care where he sticks things. Susan is older than me and Peter. She sleeps around the corner at Nain and Taid's. There's no room in this house, since I happened to come along. I sleep in a bed with me brother Peter. I sometimes wet the bed and then get to go and sleep with me Mam and Dad for the night.

I love Taid and Nain. I wish I got to sleep at their house, all the time. Nain's blind but she's very clever. She plays the piano and weaves baskets and things from cane. Taid ses I'm clever. Me Mam ses I'm too clever for me own good and it's going to get me in all sorts of trouble. That, me temper, and my big mouth. I'm doing sums that me brother Peter is doing and he's four years older than me. Taid ses it's fine being bright. He ses what God didn't give me in looks he gave me in brains and that's far more important than being pretty. Taid ses when God created me he must've been in a hurry and put my legs on the wrong way round but he ses the doctors are working through God and one day soon my legs will be just like everyone else's. Taid likes to cuddle me a lot. I let him because it makes him feel that he is loved; but I'm too big for that sort of thing — or so me Mam ses. She also ses I'm a day dreamer. But I don't always just sit and think; sometimes I sit and watch the kids playing.

The kids from around here often play in the cemetery. It has the only grass within two hours walking distance from where we live. There are nice lawns in the cemetery with a small stream that divides the Baptists from the foreigners (everyone's a foreigner if they weren't born in Wales), of course we always play on

the Baptists' side; never blaspheme within earshot of the graves and under no circumstances is anyone ever allowed to dance on the graves. The latter came about because Elsie Ogden was caught the other day doing *Knees up Mother Brown*, on Walter Pugh's grave. It wasn't really all her fault. I heard her sister Betsy dare her to do it. When Mr Pugh was alive, I once saw him put his hands up Betsy's dress and it looked as if she had been crying.

Most of the time I get to go to the cemetery too. Peter has to piggy back me all the way. He hates having to take me with them. Him and Mam always row over me:

Why do I have to take her? She's a nuisance, it's not as if she can play or do anything!

Oh for God's sake Peter, take her with you, she's getting on my nerves.

At times it pays to be a pest — even if I do get on me Mam's nerves. I hear everything that goes on in this house. Me Taid ses it's a pity God spent so much time on me hearing and not me legs. He ses I hear too many things I'm not supposed to hear. Me Mam ses I'm just a nosey parker.

Sometimes it's too wet to sit on the grass, so Peter plonks me down on one of the graves a little up from where they all play. One day he teased me by threatening to drop me in a newly dug grave. I screamed until he sat me on the grave next to it. He often teases me when we go to the cemetery:

There, nuisance, watch out for those hungry little maggots, they like fresh meat.

I try not to scream, because there are times he gets angry and hits me; even worse, he sometimes threatens to leave me there all night. I know he wouldn't dare go home without me, nevertheless I often sit there and think about what goes on in the ground, beneath where I sit. What I hate the most though is being sat on black, shiny graves. One day I turned quickly and got a terrible fright when I saw my own reflection in the headstone. My first thought was that it was a spirit! I

haven't told anyone, because I know if Peter finds out he'll make a point of sitting me on the black graves in the future.

I love it when my sister leaves whatever the game is that they are all playing and sits and makes daisy chains with me. We make yards and yards of them and she winds them all around me. She ses I look like a real little princess. I always wear them home. I like to dangle them in front of Peter's nose; just like you'd dangle a carrot in front of a donkey, as I jump up and down on his back yelling at him to 'giddy-up.' He tries to drop me over the top of his head but I hang on real tight. Me Mam always meets us at the door and tears the daisies off and throws them in the bin; she ses they smell like cat's pee.

Of course, we're not allowed to play in the cemetery when there is to be a funeral. Neither are we allowed to play in our street when the hearse pulls into view. Me Taid ses it's disrespect to the dead. Everyone has to go inside and draw the curtains until someone yells out that the coast is clear and then the houses pour the kids back out onto the streets. Most of the time though, I have to stay in and play on me own.

We all go to Chapel, except me Mam of course. She's not a Baptist, but a foreigner born in London. She came to Wales with my Dad after the second war; Mam ses that's been nine years too long. I like Chapel because everyone there's nice and we all get washed and dressed up to go. Sometimes we stay and have supper there. I like Mrs Sutton's jelly cakes. The red jelly wobbles; a lot like Mrs Price's bum.

Last Christmas, I was in the nativity play at Chapel. It was my first Christmas I didn't have my legs in plaster. I wanted to be an angel and have wings. Angels are important. I learnt all about them in Sunday School, but Reverend Oliver said I had to be a shepherd because I didn't have blonde hair and I didn't look Godly enough. I didn't want to be a shepherd. I hurried home and asked me Dad to make them let me be an angel but he said:

How can you possibly be an angel when you're already one. You're my special angel!

But I can't fly!

You will one day. Mark my words.

But I still want to be an angel. I really do. Please make Reverend Oliver make me an angel. Please!

Listen, stop your crying this very minute and listen. You must let the little girls who have been chosen be angels because that's the only chance they will have to be angels; and you wouldn't want to be selfish now, would you?

No. (Pause) Christ! Angels are not blonde or Godly!

And don't blaspheme!

But I wasn't! I was just praying aloud.

I didn't like dressing up as a shepherd. Me brother's woolly dressing gown was far too big. I wasn't allowed to wear anything underneath except me vest and knickers, and the wool made me skin itch. Mam bought me a new silk cord to tie around me waist:

But it's a red one. Mrs Lewis ses it has to be gold.

It's me that's paying for it! So it's a red one you're getting. The red ones are on special at Pugh's corner store.

On the night of the play, I got dressed in me Mam's bedroom in front of the big mirror. I remember having looked at myself and wondered, whether or not the real shepherds had to have their sleeves rolled back three times. Nain had lent me a real diamond brooch with forty-four real diamonds, in the shape of a star. She told me to pin it on my headdress so she could imagine that she could see me. Me Mam yelled to me to hurry up; even she was going to Chapel that night:

I want to get there early. Don't expect me to step inside though, I'll watch from the door and mind you behave yourself or else I'll thump you.

We'd only just got to the Chapel, when I remembered I hadn't got Nain's brooch. I had to have it so Nain could see me. When me Mam's back was turned,

I hurried out and headed back home. It was pitch dark outside and in some places the snow was deep enough to fall into my wellies while at other times I would trip and fall into the snow. Down by the gas works I stopped for a moment thinking I had heard thunder; but it wasn't thunder it was only the storage tanks contracting in the cold night. I wouldn't have been afraid though, if it had of been thunder, because Taid had already explained to me that thunder was only dragons fighting in a land far away. You're fibbing, I told him. There are no dragons.

Oh! So there's no dragons are there? Then how do you explain the dragon on the Welsh flag? We Welsh wouldn't put such a creature on our flag if it didn't exist.

Taid had told me that hundreds of years ago, brave knights each had a dragon of their very own to protect them in battles; and that when the knights all died, the dragons slowly became invisible so as not to frighten anyone and spent the rest of their immortal lives protecting children. I liked the idea of having me own invisible dragon. I also thought it was fitting to give me self a title too — Sir Catherine of the square table!

On my way back to Chapel that night, I bumped into Mrs Pritchard:

Mrs Pritchard, you're going the wrong way.

Oh, and how is it you know which way I'm going?

That's not the way to Chapel. Everyone's there tonight to see me in the nativity play. I'm a shepherd.

A shepherd are you just? A very wet and cold shepherd at that. No, it's not Chapel that I'm going to. It's the cemetery that I'm heading for. I've got some flowers to put on my boys' graves.

But it's night time.

Night...day, the dead know no difference, neither do I. What kind of God is it who takes a woman's husband and two boys from her?

No Mrs Pritchard, you've got to come to Chapel, even me Mam's there tonight.

Oh is she just! I'd be a hypocrite if I went, and that I'm not.

Everyone's welcome at Chapel, Reverend Oliver says so. Even hypocrites.

Hypocrites indeed! And what would you be knowing about hypocrites?

Humfrey Griffiths never misses Chapel and I heard me Mam telling me Dad that Humfrey is a hypocrite. He sleeps at Mrs Parry's when Mrs Griffiths gets too bruised from walking into the doors.

God love you Catherine Evans! Such innocence.

Well, come on, we'll have to hurry. I don't want to miss the start.

I held her hand tight so she didn't get lost. Chapel was full that night. Mam was standing at the front of the crowd that were huddled in the vestry. Where have you been, she whispered and gave me a gentle thump across the ear. I didn't take any notice as I was too busy trying to get through the crowd. They'd already sung the first verse of *Away In A Manger* when suddenly everyone stopped singing. Mrs Price's foot must have dropped off the organ pedal or something. I started down the aisle then realised that Mrs Pritchard was still attached. I stopped at where Humfrey Griffiths was sitting and pushed her in on the end of the pew. Everyone laughed; I didn't hear the Reverend's joke. Then there was silence as everyone watched me make my way to the manger; what an entrance it was! I should have thought of it in the first place. Reverend Oliver was smiling:

It's nice to see that our shepherd has returned tonight, with one of our flock.

I realised I'd forgotten to take my wellies off as I squelched my way in behind the three wise men, pushed aside the real lambs that had wee'd on the floor right on the spot I knew the angels were to kneel on later, and I stood perfectly still. I looked around me while Mrs Price fumbled with the music sheets on the organ. I noticed that Pugh's corner store had done well that week selling red silk cords; beside me an angel tried to straighten a crumpled wing that I had accidentally grappled with, when taking my place. I looked out into the congregation and felt proud that so many people had turned out to see me. I saw Nain sitting three rows from the back; I wondered if she knew I was there. I shouted as quietly as I could:

Hello Nain! I'm here now!

The stars in the bright sky...

There were no stars in the sky the night I set sail, alone, and headed toward Port Phillip Heads. The night was black and merciless. I rode atop the shaggy white manes of waves that roared and thrashed threatening to devour. I kept the light at the heads, distant and definite, in sight knowing once out in the ocean it would be another story.

He'd called out my name, so sure of his own senses but not so sure of the sense of a woman who heaved at the oars of a dinghy, that should have lain bottom-up, tucked away, safely on a rack in a shed. It was earlier in the evening as I made my way out to where the Nareen lay, tossing and turning on its mooring. Captain Cat; Captain Cat whose surname had never been revealed but who nevertheless was known all over the world. Captain Cat, whose beard stayed as fresh, white and as crisp as a winter's frost; Captain Cat, who lacked nothing except a fixed address knelt at the bow of the yawl, the Nellie, and adjusted the buffers before retiring for the night where, alone in the cabin, he would dream of the dead. Nellie, restless, and eager to rollick in the sea, pushed and pulled at the groaning pier. Is that you? he repeated. Surely, you're not contemplating... His words blew away with the wind and he, as if an apparition, disappeared within a mist of salt and spray.

I threw what few belongings I had into the cockpit, clambered aboard, and set the dinghy adrift. The mainsail, reefed and bound, once unfurled ran quickly to the top of the mast shaking itself dry. Night time was the right time; a time when no one, except the wind and the sea, (and of course, Captain Cat who was so blind he didn't miss a thing) saw me sail away. Only when I had gone and left the past behind would I be noticed.

It had come as no surprise to find I was helped by two women sitting in the visitor's waiting room at the clinic. I stood, for a while by the door, watching them knitting. Not the usual garment one would expect grown women to be constructing but a scarf that, because of the different plys of wool used, spiralled as it continued to grow. I wanted to ask how long was the scarf going to be but I was mesmerised by the many colours. Without saying a word one woman, paused momentarily from knitting, crossed to where I stood, turned the knob anti-clockwise and opened the door. I signed no documents to say that I was about to take charge of my own life.

2

You're waiting for the child in Cathy to re-emerge. To find her voice and scream as she did when her mother held her head under the cold water tap. Cold water quietens the hysterical child. Makes her act rationally. Cathy's mother never preached what she practised. There was nothing wrong with quietening the child — the way she did and, it only took seconds. May as well have been minutes. You need to breathe to scream. You can breathe now. But your body shakes uncontrollably. The nurse's hand on the back of your neck doesn't allow you to cower too low. The water's cold. Punishment for not speaking; for urinating on the floor when the toilet is only steps away from where you sit day after day.

You want warm water then ask for it!

Grab the hose. Take it from her. Scream and tell her no more; as you did, as an adult, when your mother had solved your own son's screaming. Then, (seventeen years too late for your sake but not too late for his), you screamed hysterically telling her never ever to do that to him again. You can do it now. The time when you will take control isn't too far away, but for the moment you allow her to mistreat you. Someone else is entering the room. The nurse who smiles and encourages you to eat. The water warms. Mustn't be caught in the act.

Dr B wants the patient in day clothes.

Heavens above! Does she suggest how we are to accomplish that?

Naked and left to drip-dry, she leaves you sitting in a cane chair. She leaves the room. You are warned not to move. From where you sit, it's a new landscape. Alex's photo, no other, sits on the locker. He looks happy there. Is he happy there? No one has told you. There have been phone calls; love sent down the line and passed on by a third person. Somehow, it's never the same; third person never is. Susan might be on her way back from England. Why she suddenly had

to return to England, soon after your father's death, you don't know. Then again she had made several journeys back home, as she called it. Settling seemed to be a problem for her. There is no indication that she might be coming back this time. But it might be the case and you held this thought. Peter. Peter knows what this is all about. He stays away.

The bed no longer interrupts the view you had from the floor. Stark white and sterile, you're adamant you won't be sleeping under its blankets. It is, after all, a hospital bed. People die in hospital beds. How many had died in this one? How many people had visited this room before you; held hands; stuck cards on walls with sticky tape that held tight long after the cards disappeared; sat and ate the lollies, the chocolates; checked the medical charts at the end of the bed; sat on the bed swinging their legs because everyone knows hospital beds are far too bloody high off the ground. You could tick none of the above. But you're just one, of many patients, who have come and gone. Maybe, if you did lie on the bed and were more obliging, things may be different. But you'll die if you do. You know these things. Die if you get into that bed because that's where people die. In hospital beds. It's inevitable. Those at home don't want you to die in your own bed. You look out at the tree tops that reach up to your window.

Your Dad had been most obliging when he died in hospital the year before. Or was it the year before that? It seems so long ago. Must have been 1974. Yes, the year after; no matter. It was a blessing he did die in hospital and not at home. Admit it. Many a time, in your head, you had run through the plan of what you would do if you had found him dead in bed. Ring the doctor; get Alex out of the house first? Send him to a neighbour? Ring the undertaker? No one had instructed you on what to do. Frantic thoughts before you calmed yourself by simply saying: He won't die at home. And of course, at night you would pray to God that he wouldn't and he didn't. Later, after his death others voiced the same sentiment that it was better he died in hospital and not at home but you still take it upon yourself to ask would he have preferred to die in his own bed? You never

asked him and now you will never know. It never seemed quite the right question you would ask a person. The child Cathy would have asked, and probably would've replied, as she had done so often as a child: How else am I supposed to know the answers if I don't ask questions? She was inquisitive; bold.

Besides, you'd all gotten used to his going in and out of hospital and that last stay had been no different. You'd expected him to come home; drugs are wonderful nowadays. The visit the day before had convinced you of this. Slowly hobbling along on your crutches you'd hoped you wouldn't have to lug your plastered leg in too often. With a bit of luck you thought, he might be home tomorrow. The circulation in your toes wasn't too good and they had a habit of going blue not without a warning; first they'd start tingling before their colour would darken, an urgent sign your leg needed to be elevated. And so you'd quickly made yourself comfortable in a chair putting your leg up on the bed. Your Dad had asked how your leg was. And, just as you had expected, he said you shouldn't have come in. But you could see he enjoyed having you all there — even though he seemed to tire very quickly.

Next day, he was dead and that was that as your mother put it each time she related the incident. She had visited him every day after work. It wasn't too far down the road. One moment I was sitting there talking to him sitting up in bed, and the next minute he was gone. Just gave a little cough and all this blood just came up out of nowhere. She might well have been an actress the way she told it, and so the final scene floated uneasily in your mind leaving you wondering what may have been left out. But then, a couple of weeks after the funeral, an adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's novel, *The Rainbow*, had been on the telly and the Lord of the Estate, and President of the colliery, died a similar death. Reclining back on a mountain of white feathered pillows, his monogram in the left corner and his children holding both of his hands he made a gurgling noise, tilted his head forward and hemorrhaged. Far more majestic (and dramatic you suspect) than that of your father's last minutes but then again it was Hollywood and they were all just acting.

But between your Mam's description and the film, you'd arrived at a reasonably correct version of his death at the hospital. And, as your Mam repeatedly said, that was that. These days he's only mentioned in a general sense. Your Dad used to do this, or that.

Nevertheless, your argument is, at least he is mentioned from time to time. Your baby never is. The baby who had been born on the morning of November 4, 1971. Your baby. The words trail off to nowhere; might as well be Neverland. Your baby, that no one else knew you were carrying until the morning it was born but when she was born and carried off down the corridor, she did indeed scream in protest at having been kept silent for so long. But the screaming had faded as doors closed and all you were left with was the sadness. Stripped naked, covered only by a laundered cotton blanket, you lay on the hospital trolley in the corridor. Mrs Evans would've gone to work leaving her sick husband to fend for himself. Peter would've headed straight to the pub with his mate Colin (it was never too early to get a drink). But you don't know (even to this day) that's what they did. What difference did it make anyway? Instead, you had rolled over on the trolley and thought about tomorrow and what that tomorrow might bring for Cathy Evans. And, of course, her son Alex.

Ah! We're learning.

She kneels at your feet and feeds your legs into the overalls. Dad didn't like you wearing overalls. He'd said they weren't very lady like. A strange comment. Were you ever lady like, as he put it. Perhaps that's why he'd started saying it. Perhaps he thought I might start behaving more like a lady. You're convinced he never understood why you preferred being out in the paddocks with your horse instead of — instead of what? You never knew what you were supposed to be doing. Instead of what? Going to the pictures on a Saturday: What rubbish are you going to see this time? Maybe an afternoon disco: Those places are full of long haired druggies. Luna Park on a Sunday: There's men there who lead you away. Going to a friend's house to mess around, as you would put it: Your room

needs tidying up and I wouldn't mind some help with the garden. It was easier to hang around the paddock with the horse or, do what you did on a couple of occasions, lie. Somehow it was never the same and often proved a nightmare working out ways to get home without being found out. It all seems such a long time ago. When you were a teenager with little responsibility. That was so many years ago.

Besides you were better off out of the house or at least that's how you had felt for the eighteen months preceding his death. You'd found the front door confronting. It had remained so until the house was sold, recently. Time taken to unlatch the back gate and use the back door was time worth spent. And so you had avoided using the front door and avoided telling your Dad what had happened in the house on that day in February 1971. The day you won't talk about. Better off not talking about it. There was also the question of the parents' bedroom immediately on the right as you entered the house. The room where your Dad had lain pretending to be asleep so as to avoid making conversation with you. Neither you nor he was able to look one another in the eye. But some things heal with time and slowly, after his death, it wasn't too difficult to enter his room and stare at the empty bed. Cathy's Mam slowly started to pack his clothes and belongings into one large box. She even talked about getting rid of the bed. A new bed; a single bed (then maybe she wouldn't feel so alone at night). Of course she never said this. She never told anyone how she felt. Besides, she never did get rid of the bed.

The men at the bottle factory wore overalls. Women weren't allowed. Just a few months more and there would be enough money to buy a place in the country. Make a new start. Just you and Alex. The men watched the women climb the steel staircase to the canteen at meal times. Watched from below as you walked across the grid. It was easier to miss out on eating and stand in the factory yard with the smokers. A fit punishment for an accomplice. Cathy had learnt from an early age how to roll her Dad a fag; it had given her a sense of accomplishment.

An ounce of tobacco was far cheaper than a pack of fags and you got a few extra. Death is something we all accomplish sooner or later; but you were an accomplice. That's how you felt and no one could have convinced you otherwise. Ask Aunt D. She has told you that he'd started smoking long before you were born.

Some people are better than others when it comes to reading faces. Doctor B would come, as she did, each day and take your medical record from the foot of the bed. She would speak without expecting a reply. Only when she'd finished reading your progress (or in your case lack of progress) did she crouch down to your level. She no longer shone lights in your eyes or clicked her fingers looking for a reaction. She simply looked and quietly spoke a word or two. A word of reassurance? Yes. That's what it was. Must have been. She must have constantly re-assured you that you were going to be all right. No need to hurry things take your time. Yes, you remember her saying this to you. So, how delighted she must have been when, she entered your room that particular morning and found you sitting in a chair dressed. What did she say, or do, to give you that impression? She stroked your cheek with the back of her finger. Yes, that's what it was. So tender was her touch as it wiped away a single tear.

So Alex was right.

She spoke quietly as if on the verge of a major breakthrough.

Your little boy told me you often went away with the fairies but you always come back.

You looked at her hands. You looked for the needle and thread.

What was it that moved you from that chair that morning? She must have asked whether you'd like to go outside. Or, was it the warmth of the sun on the back of your neck? The doctor encouraged you to stand so it was highly probable that she suggested standing first.

That's right. No need to hurry. Find your feet.

Soon it was her arm around your shoulder supporting and edging you to leave the room. Please. Hold me a little longer. It's what Cathy wanted to say,

once out in the courtyard. But couldn't, or wouldn't. Doctor B with her hands clasped firmly sat opposite, her knees almost touching yours. There were offers to talk. If you wished to do so. Instead you turned away.

Stay for a while and enjoy the sun. I'll come back in a little while and take you back.

Your head is getting a little red. We'd better find some shade. But he wasn't going to budge till the race was over. He'd said it was a good view. Giving in, you sat on the grass beside him. Was it the view he really wanted or did he feel he hadn't the energy to move? Still a day out in the sun would have to be better than lying in bed all day. Alex appeared holding spent betting tickets he'd picked up; he enjoyed the picnic races. See Pa! Now the man can give me lots of money. Both of you smiled. The smiles waned quickly. Defeated.

Still the day must have done him good. Been gallivanting around again, a neighbour had called as you helped him from the passenger seat. She was aware of the situation as she put it. Tried to make light of the situation but made matters worse. She remarked how good he looked adding (in a jovial way, of course) that she was beginning to think he was malingering. Before you know it they'll be calling you back to work. I'll be called, he replied. But it won't be back to work. He died a month later. No one had called. Being brave, keeping his illness to himself had led his mates at work to believe he wasn't that sick and. Oh dear! If only we'd known (Jack Bates told you weeks after the funeral when you caught him off guard shopping with his wife). Me and some of the blokes would've come and seen him. Jack had indicated to his wife that they should be getting along but she spoke affectionately of Cathy's Dad. And Cathy liked what she was hearing. Walking away, you knew you should have told his mates. But you didn't. He asked you not to.

By that stage he was too bitter to have it any other way. You should have done lots of things, told him lots of things before he died. You'd wanted to tell him

that it wasn't all your fault. But you weren't sure whether it was or not. There had been plenty of time to set things right, but now it's too late.

Two

If God created the world in seven days, then why did he call it Bagilt? Why couldn't he have come up with a much nicer name? I'd much prefer to live in the village of Much Purring, like Prudence Kitten does on telly, instead of plain old Bagilt. Nelson is Prudence's husband. He's a Ship's Cat, and sails all over the world in big ships. I wish *Prudence Kitten* was on the telly every day instead of just on Tuesdays. I like *Andy Pandy*, and *Rag, Tag, and Bobtail* but *Prudence Kitten* is the best. Nothing ever happens here. I have a cat though. Her name is Pansy. I called her Pansy after one of Prudence's sisters. There were plenty of names I could have chose. There's Primrose, Poppy, Peedah, Paddy, Paul, and The Twins. The Twins don't have names they're just called, The Twins. I chose Pansy though because my cat has lots of colours. One day I'm going to have a lot of cats and name them all after Prudence's brothers and sisters. Me Mam ses I'm mad and one cat's quite sufficient for anyone. But I'm going to ask me Dad if I can have another cat as soon as he comes home from hospital. He's very poorly and Mam ses he isn't allowed to come home and live with us in case we catch whatever it is he's got.

I sometimes have pet goldfish, but they don't live long. Me Mam ses its because I've always got my hands in the water stirring them up. We also had a dog for a couple of days but Constable Thomas took it away. Me and Pansy are the best of friends. She sits a little way across the room from where I lie and we stare at each other to see who is the first to blink. Sometimes I blink before her but most of the time she gives in before me. I can tell when she's starting to weaken. Her tail starts twitching from side to side then she arches her neck, stretches and strolls over to me. Sometimes she just snuggles in beside me and goes to sleep. Other times I grab her before she can escape and dress her up in my doll's

clothes. I even managed to get a pair of woolly knickers on her once; I cut a hole in the back of them and pulled her tail through. She turned and pounced on my hand biting my finger. She took off and jumped through the parlour window out onto the footpath. Good job the window was open or she might have hurt herself. Shortly after, Mrs Hughes poked her head in through the window:

These doll's clothes wouldn't happen to belong to you, would they Catherine Evans?

Aye, they're mine Mrs Hughes. How did Pansy take them off?

I removed them from the poor creature before she hung herself on something!

Thank you Mrs Hughes. Just throw them over on the table.

Your Mam not home then?

No. She's working. Taid's looking after me but he's just gone down to Dave the bookie to put a bet on. We're going to win lots of pennies today.

Betting is it now?

Taid's been teaching me to read the form guide for Tottenham dogs. I'm getting real good at picking winners. I've got ten pennies in me money box now.

Huh! More money than your poor Mam's got at this time I bet. How's your Dad?

All right. Mam's going to see him this weekend. Would you like to come in and I'll read you a story?

No my little pigeon. I'm just on down to the Co-Op. So how long are you in plaster for this time?

Same as before. But I've only got three more months to go.

Mrs Hughes said I should tell Taid that form guides are no reading matter for six-year-old girls. I reminded her I had just turned six and Taid also read me Captain Cat who is as blind as a bat. Anyway, she said she'd bring me some books the next time she passed by.

Everyone brings me books to read. Mam used to make Peter and Susan read to me. She ses it's the only time I shut up. But neither of them liked reading to me only when they didn't have something better to do. Susan and Peter taught me to read real quick. Every time I learnt some new words they'd give me a spoonful of treacle. Now and then, I'd get a jelly bean or some sherbet that they'd bought from Mrs Simpson's sweet shop. Mrs Simpson's dead now. Some other lady runs it but everyone still calls it Mrs Simpson's sweet shop. Me Taid ses its because when he was little all the children would go from shop to shop on New Year's day wishing everyone a Happy New Year and asking for a Christmas Box. The children would call out Nghlennig i, Nghlennig i, Blywyddyn Newydd Dda i Chwi. Of all the shopkeepers in Bagilt, Mrs Simpson was the most generous.

It's important to be nice to people. Dad ses people remember you when you die for all the good you do while you're alive. That's why whenever anyone stops to talk to me through the window I ask them if they'd like me to read to them. Most of the time though, they say they haven't got the time and instead they tell me their stories. Mrs Lowe tells the best stories. She said she knew Betsey Davies the washer woman who used to help out with the Monday wash. Betsey used to chew tobacco just like chewing gum. Mrs Lowe said that every now and then Betsey would stop, spit into the wash tub as she rubbed away at the clothes on the dolly board. Before the war, Mrs Lowe's father bought old Samuel Roberts' hearse when it wouldn't go any more. He got it for ten shillings! She ses her Dad turned it into a chicken coop for newly-hatched day-old chicks. Not only did it shelter the chicks from the weather but he could keep a good close watch on them through the glass sides. Not one chick died, she ses! What once carried the dead, she said, gave life to so many of God's creatures.

Sometimes though, I hear things I'm not supposed to hear. I'm sure it was Mrs Davies the fish shop talking, but I'm not sure who it was, she was talking to. She spoke a bit too quiet. Me hearing's not as good as it used to be. Anyway, Mrs Davies was saying she and her Winston (whimpy whining Winston as the kids call

him), were on the way down to the Cob to pick samplers. They were just about to walk through the railway duct when they saw two people kissing at the other end. Who do you think was in there, she said to the other woman, but Humfrey Griffiths and, (I thought I heard her say Jean Parry, but then they must've realised they were standing outside the open window). I heard her say ears, and all went quiet. I'm sure she said it was Jean Parry but it couldn't have been because Jean is Mrs Parry's daughter and she's too young to be kissing old Humfrey Griffiths. If it was Jean, then maybe he'd taken her down the Cob to collect cockles, or to fish for flukes or something. I'll have to remember to ask Mrs Parry when I see her, just how old Jean is.

I'm glad the parlour window opens on to the footpath. If there was a garden and fence outside our front door then people would pass by and I wouldn't have anyone stop and talk to me. Worse still, I mightn't be alive! Well at least that's what our neighbour Olwyn Evans (no relation) said after she heard that a log had rolled off the fire when I was left here on me own. Me Mam got really angry and told her there was no chance of that happening and she was nothing but a nosy parker. Me Mam was right of course, just as she always is. The log had fallen on to the hearth and was sending out lots of smoke. It was snowing outside so the parlour window was only open an inch or so for some fresh air. I called out thinking someone might happen to be passing. Hello! Is anyone there?

All of a sudden, a face peered in at the window I thought it was Father Christmas himself because it was only a couple of days before Christmas. Instead it was only John the slebbith. No one around Bagilt likes him because he doesn't have a home and sleeps in the entry, or in unlocked sheds. Me Dad ses he's harmless enough and once he had lived in a house near Bryn-rhosyn. Me Dad ses he fell off the wagon and that's why no one would rent him a house. Opening the window further John asked:

Is something the matter? It's a bit smoky in here, isn't it?

Aye. The log's rolled onto the hearth and I'm getting smoked out.

He climbed in through the window (even though I'd told him the front door was unlocked) and put the log back on the fire. He really did look like Father Christmas except he had a dirty old coat on and a felt hat. His beard was so thick and white with snow I could only see his nose, eyes and lips. He looked very tired and not at all merry. I wondered what was in the sack that he carried. I wanted to ask him but I know me Mam would say that it would be very rude to do so.

So there you are then. The log's back on the fire. The smoke will clear in a minute or so. You on your own then?

Me Mam's gone down to the post office. She's left me some birthday cake. Would you like some? I can even read you a story if you want. I've got plenty of stories. Did you hurt yourself when you fell off the wagon?

Very much so! But I didn't end up looking as if I'd been in the wars like you. I'll just have a bit of a warm and then I'll be on my way.

I wish I were a tramp. I'd walk everywhere. Have you walked all over the world?

At times it feels as if I have. But no my pet, the farthest I've been is Holywell. What do you do with yourself all day?

Lots of things. Look, I've got this little toy cannon. It belongs to my brother. He's got soldiers which he stands in rows and fires at them. See, you put bits of matchsticks in here and you can fire it at things. It can knock soldiers down.

So where are the soldiers then?

Peter won't let me play with them. But it doesn't matter though. See my doll over there on the floor, well, I fire at her except she wasn't knocked down. That's where she happened to land when I threw her. I aim for the eyes but I'm not a very good shot. I sometimes crayon and I read a lot of books. I've got homework Mrs Price the school teacher gives me. I like watching telly when it comes on at four o'clock Have you seen *Prudence Kitten*?

Where would I be plugging a television into?

The poor thing I thought. Fancy not having a telly. Anyway, I told him all about Prudence and how she lived in the village of Much Purring. Everyone's happy there I told him. The little kittens get up to all sorts of mischief and the mother cats never shout at them.

Nelson is the father cat. He's always away at sea but now and then he comes home and they have a big party. When my Dad comes home from hospital, we're going to have a party.

What's wrong with your Dad then?

He's got TB which means he coughs a lot. See...I've started making these welcome home signs. And, see my teddy. Well, my Dad made that for me in hospital. Don't you like having a wash?

John told me he didn't participate in such an activity during the colder months of the year. I told him I didn't like washing either and if I lived in Much Purring I would only have to have a cat's lick every now and then. Me Mam ses that's all I have when I'm left to wash myself. I don't like her washing me; sometimes I can't hold my breath long enough and I swallow water. The only time I like water is when I have my plaster casts off and I sit alone in the bath to soak. I like picking the flaky bits of skin off under the water. Afterwards Mam rubs me down with olive oil which makes my skin nice and soft again.

Anyway, John kept me company for a long time that morning. I shared my birthday cake with him and even offered him a drink of my milk, but he said he'd wait till the Boot and Ship opened at noon. Finally, curiosity got the better of me:

Have you got a dog in that sack?

What sack you talking about?

The one you've put behind Dad's chair over there.

Oh that sack!

I'm sure if I hadn't reminded him then he may have forgotten all about it.

Why would you think I carry around a dog in a sack?

I told John about the time me Dad had bought a dog from a man down at the Boot and Ship and it was in a sack. It was a black whippet with three white socks. Dad was going to race it and make a lot of money on it. But when Taid saw it he said it looked like Pete Simon's dog except Pete's dog had four white socks. Next day, Dad hurried in with the dog under his arm and told me to look after it. He'd only just finished tucking it under my blanket when in came Constable Thomas. He asked Dad a lot of questions and finally Dad took the dog out from under the blanket so Constable Thomas could get a better look at it. See, said my Dad. It couldn't possibly be Pete Simon's dog. Constable Thomas bent down to take a closer look. Dad gave me a funny look behind the bobby's back. I wasn't sure what he was going on about. I looked at my hands and suddenly realised what was wrong. I had to warn Constable Thomas. Constable Thomas I ses. Be careful, Socks (as we had named him), has stood in some black paint and it's not quite dry.

John laughed but for what reason I'm not sure. I was upset I told him. I wanted to keep the dog and the constable took it away. He must have been laughing very loud because at that very moment in came Mrs Owens followed by Constable Thomas. They were very angry with John for coming into the house through the window and demanded that he leave straight away. John picked up his hat and started to shuffle out. I called out:

John! You've forgotten your sack!

Constable Thomas asked what sack might that be.

I haven't got a sack!

Yes. You have you know the one behind Dad's chair!

Poor old John he must have hurt his head when he fell off the wagon. I wonder where Taid could have got to? He's been gone for some time.

As sure as the tide turns, so did time. The nights grew longer and the Pacific, as blue as amethyst, rolled away in my wake and I awoke one morning and found the sea the colour of emeralds, agitated and dulled, awash in a lime white sea. At least that's how it appeared in the light of day but it may have been the passing glimpse of the scales on the tail of mermaids, mined in my dreams, returning once more to knock on the door of Davey Jones' locker.

Coastlines came and went as sketches on the horizon. Maps are of no interest to me. The only map that I needed was the night sky, my compass and the imaginary map in my mind. Maps, chartered and drawn, lead to places I don't want to go. Besides, there isn't a blank space left on any map that hasn't already been explored. Instead, I chose to imagine what the places might be called, or, what names they were known by before ships of foreigners landed on their shores to conquer and contain. I had no wish to visit these shores only the shores from where I, and generations before me, came.

It's important to know where it is you came from. That's why I needed to find her and tell her of her origins. But back at the clinic, they believed I hadn't yet fully recovered and I may not be prepared to face the truth. Truth is only what one makes it out to be, I'd replied, before deciding to leave the clinic on my own accord. It was my duty to set the record straight. Then, whatever she did with the knowledge, of who she was, would be up to her. I'd done my homework. I knew where to find her.

Hours (or was it days) had passed since I'd left the clinic. I'd lost time standing in front of the polished mahogany door to her apartment. The door wasn't as high and as ponderous as I had first imagined it may be. The face in the door,

gnarled and knotted with secrets of the past, gracefully swung to one side and there before me was, what I hoped, the realisation of a dream.

I could tell, by the way she greeted me, that I was less than she had anticipated. She was much more than I expected. I wanted to stuff my hands in my pockets; to scrunch the lining in the palm of my hand, but the packet of letters, flat and bound, chose to remain tightly held behind my back. I stood, still, in the shadow of a bookcase and watched her move toward the window. The dust between us was far from settled when she drew the curtains, shutting out the darkness that had led me to her door. She turned and looked directly at me: 'Well', she said before pausing. 'You have reason to believe I am who you think I am. So, what now?'

3

One day sand appeared in the middle of the courtyard. It must have been there all along but you'd only noticed it that day. Where there's sand there are usually shells. You know this from the visits to the beach with Alex but you have no inclination to search. Alex likes the beach. Likes looking for shells. Likes birthday cakes. You're puzzled that there should be sand in the courtyard of the clinic. Puzzled also that the chair in which you have been sat has been strategically placed on the edge of the pavers that flag the sand. It's a strange sensation sitting on stable ground, while the soles of your bare feet itch to dig deep in the sand. To feel gritty grains between your toes, is what you want. But you daren't. Someone may be watching. That's it. The solution to the puzzle. There were no mirrors in your room, from behind which you could be observed. Only a pool of sand where responses could be measured by the ripples of movement. Determined to disappoint anyone observing, you remain in freeze frame.

She, the doctor, must have been disappointed. After all, she had believed you were responding. But now three weeks later she hadn't seen any improvement. You knew different. There was a flicker of light deep inside, a glimmer of hope, that one day you might be the person you once were. Such a thought rose in the morning with the sun but travelled no further than the shadows that quickly appeared and veiled your room in sadness. To think that you might one day, be the same person you once were, was ridiculous. Time takes care of that. No one can recapture what was and if you were honest with yourself, you wouldn't want to either. Happy times are what you want to cling to. Times when things were as they should have been. Not as they happened to have turned out to be. Maybe you were imagining that the doctor was disappointed in your progress. Hardly likely though, since you knew too well what disappointment

looked like. Your father's disappointment in you had, as you saw it, contributed to his death. You might as well have placed a clamp around your father's heart causing it to finally cave in. It did cave in, on that day in August. And, as irrational as it seemed to you at the time that disappointment could cause someone's death, you nevertheless convinced yourself that's what caused his death. Not the cancer.

After all, he had still spoken with pride of his son who had built a yacht. A yacht that was moved ever so carefully from the shed, where it had come together, and shipped down to the ocean. A yacht Peter had envisioned (and did) would take him, and his friends, on many adventures. Maybe your Dad had imagined he might have gone too. The chance to do something he would have liked to have done with his son. You're only surmising that this might have been the case but you're basing that on the fact there had been no time, up until him finishing work because of his illness, to pursue any dreams he had of his own. Work. Weekdays. Weekends. He had a mortgage. A mortgage to buy a first home at the age of forty-eight had, at first, been daunting until slowly he (and his wife) had gotten used to the idea. To the idea of working long hours to pay the house off just so he could have an easy retirement. But like everyone else who doesn't know what's around the corner he ran into the big C, one day, slowly waiting to suffocate him and his dream. There would be no regrets, as he had put it. The home would be there for his wife and children. And grandchildren of course.

Now there were two. Two people, two women. Sitting. One is speaking:

Valerie wishes to be remembered to you.

The sun ducks behind the clouds. Two grandchildren (not including your daughter) who, for a short time preceding his death, had lived in the same house. Susan had returned to Australia. Returned from England where she had met the man, married and now had a daughter of her own. Happy to be back but unaware that her father had been so ill. It might have seemed insensitive that she could be so happy when faced with the inevitable death of her father. But the stories that

made up the period she was away were yet to be interwoven with what had been going on at home. It would take years for you, and her, to come to terms with the differing perspectives and what had gone on during that time she spent overseas. Until then, there was no other way but to let matters lie. To carry on with what was necessary and for Susan and her husband it was necessary for them to look for a home to buy so they too could plan for an easy retirement.

But the cancer (which had now spread from his lungs and touched the brain), might as well have been a sore on his face causing his soul to fester and, on occasions, rupture when he looked in the mirror and saw the angry shell of a man who couldn't find the courage to admit he was afraid of dying. Anger that spilled over and often, as it seemed, always scalded Susan and no one else. He must have asked himself why he acted, the way he did, to a daughter he had wanted to spare the pain of his illness. Dad hadn't wanted her to know just how sick he was, and your Mam had agreed. Their daughter was doing what she had always wanted to. Work on passenger ships. And then, out of the blue.

It's getting cold. Maybe we had better go inside.

The letter arrived to say she had married and was staying in England, followed by another letter saying she was expecting. Good news. News that brought light and knowledge that life goes on. By the time your mother did question whether to tell her daughter the truth, complications had set in. High blood pressure made travelling too risky for her.

But in the meantime you remain seated. Back then, you had come to understand why he had acted so aggressively from time to time. Susan had yet to return. She hadn't been there when he had acted irrationally toward you, and your mother. One day, it became clear, why he did so. Leaving him in the care of a nurse in the outpatients clinic, you had knocked on the door of his doctor. Obviously used to women knocking on his door and bursting into tears, he sat you down and explained that the cancer in his lung had now spread to his brain. Paranoia sets in. People collaborate. They talk behind your back. Make plans of

what they will do when you finally die. Wonder how they will cope and if they should ask what it is you want done with your body. The doctor explained. You should have explained to Susan. To Peter. But you didn't. There was too much going on in your own mind. And, be honest, didn't you resent your sister, when finally, having arrived home with her baby daughter not too long after you having given your own up for adoption? Why should she have been so happy? But why shouldn't she have been? Later, much later from now you will forgive yourself for having felt such animosity, but will she ever forgive you? You'd like to have felt and acted differently but at the time it was too difficult and now it's too late.

You're left alone.

Just as it was too late to give up the fags when, three years prior to his death, you and he sat before a Professor at the cancer institute and with enough empathy for all, he handed down the sentence. Looks like I'd better give the fags up, he'd told the Professor. Sitting beside him (as you had done through the weeks of treatment) always there as moral support boosting his morale and telling him he could lick the disease. You've licked TB you kept saying. Reminding him of the many months he had spent at the sanatorium. You're still around aren't you. Well then, what are you worrying about. Medical technology is a lot more advanced than it was back in the fifties, back when you spent months in a sanatorium. You remember what you said so clearly, as if it were only yesterday. But you remember because you had constantly repeated your words to shore up his morale. Your morale. Your mother's morale. The Professor had replied, compassionately, that if he enjoyed his cigarettes then he could continue do so. What he wanted to say was, it's too bloody late to think about giving them away. You read between the lines. And, when the Professor (poised on the edge of his chair) fumbled with a paper clip and explained that sometimes one may live for years, but quickly added, or, as might be the case with you Mr Evans, it may only be a matter of months. You remember this. You remember because of the certainty in the tone of his voice and the emphasis that it might only be months and

also because of the look on your Dad's face that never disappeared. But still you appeared optimistic as you held onto his arm and you both limped away from the clinic in search of a corner to silently lick the wounds that would never heal. Better off not talking about it.

Talking about cancer hadn't been a problem, the year before that day in the cancer institute. But then of course it was only a word. A word that struck fear in most, but still only a word. Your Dad was convinced he had it then. But you and your Mam had told him he was being ridiculous and he wouldn't look so healthy if he did have cancer. But nevertheless he believed he did have the big C and no one was going to convince him otherwise. Naturally, you'd thought the worst when you had received the call from the hospital saying he had been brought in to casualty, from work. And when later you, Alex and your Mam sat beside his bed and watched as he struggled to speak, you reassured him that he was going to be all right. Relax. It's only a collapsed lung. Nothing serious. But of course, deep down, you immediately thought the worst. He recovered quickly. Not something a person with cancer could have done, you told yourself. And so, soon you were telling him it was ridiculous to think he had cancer. But the lung, recognising it was diseased continued to collapse over several months until, having had a final biopsy, your Dad heard what he had wanted to hear all along. A small tumour (but still a tumour) snuggling close to where the windpipe entered the lung which, on occasions, suffocated his lung.

The first collapse is the one you remember most clearly. That time you sat, beside his bed, and watched him gasp for air. You were to remember this when, three months on, you too gasped for air under the weight of another's body. That someone who had stumbled through the front door and forced you onto the bathroom floor. That other person you refused (and still do refuse) to name. Instead, you kept quiet. You don't speak. Maybe you were sure, then, that the time would come when you could say his name out aloud. But that is yet to happen. Maybe one day you will write a novel and the temptation will be to name him, but

instead you will resist. Until then, you justify your decision to remain silent, to remain where you sit, not wanting to cause anyone any more distress. Disappointment. You blame yourself. Might have even provoked what happened. Situations you might have prevented. It will take years to figure out what you need to understand. And accept. The patient needs time.

Three

One day I'm going to be on the telly. I'm going to be a patient on *Emergency—Ward 10*. Taid told me to write and ask them if I could be a patient on the telly. He ses I'd be good for the show, I'd liven them all up and they'd really know they had a patient if I was there. I never miss it when it's on. I reckon I could be a better patient than any of those on the telly. They're all too quiet. Especially of a night. All the nurses ever do on the telly is sit around looking wide awake and talking about kissing doctors and all that stuff. The nurses I've known of a night in hospital always say they're sick and tired of running back and forth. So I wrote them a letter saying I was very experienced and I knew exactly what a patient had to do and could I please be on *Emergency—Ward 10*. They haven't written back yet. Me Mam ses I should keep on writing to them. She ses I know how to pester a nest-of-rats to death and I'll probably end up getting my own way as I usually do. Taid made sure this time, I've put the right address on the envelope.

Me Dad came home recently from hospital but he said he was in a different hospital to the one I go to. He was in a hospital where no one could visit him except me Mam. He could move around during the day and do things like make leather pencil cases and teddy bears. I thought he'd be happy to be home but most of the time he just sits in his chair and pretends to listen to me. He reckons he'd be better off dead not being able to work or enjoy a smoke. Mam ses it's her that would be better off dead instead of having to listen to him and put up with me all day long. Taid ses we're all going to go to heaven one day and no one's going to be angry or sick. Nain died. I'm not too sure now how long ago it was. Olwyn Evans came in and looked after me while everyone went to the funeral. Mrs Price came too. It was like a party. They each brought something nice to eat. They

took it in turns to keep watch out of the corner of the curtain for the funeral to pass by on the way to the cemetery. I wasn't allowed to look.

Strange ain't it! Here we all thought her son would go first and he's out of the sanatorium two days and his mother dies.

Look out here it comes!

Here let me see! Aw...look at that! Robert's done his wife well. The lilies!

They must have cost a pretty penny! Shame she's not alive to see it all!

Don't be daft! She's blind!

No, I said to them both. Nain's not blind any more, she's dead. Taid ses he's going to take me to put flowers on her grave at the cemetery as soon as I'm able to. No one looked very happy that night. Taid came around and cooked me a boiled egg and some chips to dip in the egg. No one wanted to eat. The Chapel ladies had put on a good spread after the funeral. Mam brought me home a jelly cake. She told Mrs Price she was sorry to see the old dear gone regardless of the differences between them both. Susan now gets to take care of Taid. I wish I could live with him instead of having to live here.

Anyway, if I don't get on telly I'm going to be a nurse when I grow up. Peter sometimes wants to play doctors and nurses but he doesn't know how to play it properly. I prefer to play shops instead. I watch everything they do to me when I'm in hospital except when I'm asleep, of course. I know when I'm about to be sent off to hospital again! Everyone's extra nice to me. Especially Peter. The last time, he let me play with his guns the day before. Taid gave Mam a shilling to buy me something nice. Mam bought me a little rubber bird in a plastic cage from the market in Chester. If you pressed the rubber plunger the bird flapped her wings and sang. Me Dad said it didn't sing half as nice as I did and I shouldn't wear the bird's voice out. He calls me his little jenny wren. Taid ses Dad calls me that because jenny wrens are mother birds who sing away, happily all day long. I knew it was off to hospital the very next morning. Mam had me hospital bag packed and had stood it by the front door.

Am I going to hospital?

Just for a little while.

I glared at her. She looked away. Peter stared at me from behind her. I clutched Peter's guns. If I had to go then the guns were going too.

I hate bloody hospital!

We all do, but you've got to go and that's that!

Tears leaked from the corner of my eyes. I knew I wasn't allowed to cry.

It's not fair.

Life isn't fair. But if you want to walk like everyone else then you've got no say in the matter.

Peter gave me a big hug. You'll be all right he said. I'll look after the guns till you come home. I clutched the guns and pushed them under me bum. He said he'd let me wear his sheriff's badge, the one he got from Hoppalong Cassidy! I drew a gun out fast and hit him across the head. He screamed. Mam went potty!

For God's sake Peter, let her take the bloody guns! Anything for peace!

But no caps!

Peter sulked.

Can I take the bow and arrows too? I chirped. I promise I won't fire it in the hospital! Mam stormed off up stairs. Peter grabbed the sheriff's badge off me and swore he was going to break all of my toys while I was away. I know he won't because me Dad will go mad.

It's not that I really mind being in hospital. There's always other kids to talk to. I just don't like going to sleep. Then there's the nurses. Some are nice and others complain I eat too slow and try to make me eat faster. It's hard to eat when you're lying down. I like being in hospital best when it's special days such as Easter and Christmas. Last Easter they had this huge big Easter egg. It sat on a table in the middle of the ward surrounded by lots of little yellow toy chicks. It wasn't supposed to be broken up and eaten until the Sunday but Jamie Potts (who only had his arm in plaster and could walk around the ward) kept picking at the

outside of the egg when no one was looking. If you keep on picking at it, I ses to him, there'll be none left for us. He said he wasn't getting very far because the chocolate was too hard and he couldn't break it. I said he should find something to hit it with at the bottom and then no one would notice a little bit of it gone because it really was too big! He thought that was a good idea and said why hadn't he thought of it. I reminded him that he wasn't as brainy as me. I told him to go and look for something to hit the egg with. He hadn't been gone long when he came back and said the only thing he could find heavy enough to break the chocolate was a vase (which would probably break), or a bedpan which we both reckoned couldn't be used because we wouldn't know who'd been sitting on it. Then I remembered Peter's guns. Matron reckoned guns are not for little girls. The nurses had wrapped them up in the holster and put them at the back of my locker.

In the bottom of my locker you'll find me brother's guns I ses to him. I'll ask the nurse for a bedpan and when she leaves the ward, you can use the handle of the gun to smash the egg. Me plan worked well until Yvonne Roberts in the bed opposite blabbed! We were going to share the chocolate with her but she reckons it was wrong to smash the egg before Sunday. She said if we did the Easter Bunny wouldn't visit us. Who needs the Easter Bunny I ses when we've got all that chocolate. I told her I'd shoot her between the eyes if she blabbed on us, but that didn't stop her. Just as Jamie was about to tap the egg real hard like, Yvonne screamed her head off.

Nurse...nurse! They're going to smash the egg open and eat all the chocolate. And she said she's going to shoot me!

Don't be daft! How could I shoot you? I haven't got any caps.

The nurse was really angry and made Jamie go back to bed. She said if me or Jamie misbehaved again we'd both be given a big spoonful of syrup of figs on Easter Sunday and neither of us would have time to enjoy eating chocolate. The guns were taken away and put in the clothes' cupboard until me Mam came in and took them home.

The Matron's a dragon. Well, at least, that's what I heard one of the nurses call her; that or old tin pants. She's really horrible to everyone. The nurses are always being told to straighten their cuffs...straighten their hats...change their aprons...change their stockings because they've got a hole in them. Matron isn't very nice to us either. She's always straightening our beds when she comes around and puts all our toys away in the lockers. She really goes potty if you've dropped something on the floor. One day she went right off at me because I'd dropped a pencil.

Don't you know that someone could well fall on this pencil young lady.

How am I supposed to pick it up when I'm tied to this bed I said. She put the pencil in the drawer so I couldn't reach it and marched off to the next bed, where she shouted for a nurse to come and comb Jemima's hair because she reckoned it looked like a nest-of-rats had been living in it. It's hard not to drop your pencils. Colouring and reading are the only things I can do lying here. They make me wear these restraints on the top parts of my arms which are tied to the bed, so I can't turn over or try to stand up. Neither can I scratch when I've got an itch or rub my eyes.

Hospital isn't all that bad though. It's only the first night I really hate. There are lots of noises and the nurses get really impatient with me. If only they would just sit and read me a story until I fell asleep I'd be all right except they say they're too busy. There's only two nurses on of a night time and all they do all night is walk about making cups of tea and disappearing in and out of the bed pan room. Sometimes they talk and laugh so loud they wake one of the babies who starts crying. It isn't like that on *Emergency—Ward 10*. The nurse sits at her desk at the end of the ward and writes things down under a little light. That is, except the time Nurse Carol fell in love with Doctor Carey and she kept going in and out of the linen room. They were once caught kissing (yuk) and Nurse Carol was sent off the ward immediately by the Matron (who was very much like our real Matron) but Doctor Carey was allowed to stay. I guess he was more important.

I only once remember seeing a doctor on the ward of a night. That too, was the last time I was in hospital. I was lying there in the dark real quiet like wondering whether or not to call out for a drink but I thought the nurse might go potty if I called her again. I saw Dr Brown hurry quietly into the bed pan room and he must have frightened the nurse because she screamed. There was this dreadful crash from the bed pan room, she hurried out and slammed the door. I reckoned this was good time to ask for a drink.

Nurse! Can I have a drink please?

She brought me one, really quick but she gave it to me in a beaker and hurried off. I usually have a little teapot drinker with a top on it. It's very difficult to drink from a beaker lying down and I spilt the lot all over me.

Nurse! I've spilt my drink! (pause) Nurse! Is anyone there?

Both nurses came hurrying into the ward laughing their heads off! I've spilt me drink I said to them. They didn't take any notice of me but set about changing the sheets. They were too busy talking about Doctor Layton, as they called him but they didn't talk proper like because I was listening.

Old t-i-n- p-a-n-t-s will have a seizure when she hears of this.

He deserved it!

Both were laughing so much they nearly rolled me out of bed.

I'm fed up with his g-r-o-p-i-n-g all the time.

It was just unfortunate that you happened to have a s-h-i-t-t-y b-e-d-p-a-n in your hand at the time.

Oh yuk I ses! Their mouths fell open. You weren't supposed to hear that they said. I'm good at spelling I ses. There! It's time you went to sleep, they said. But I'm going to sleep tomorrow for a long, long, time! They weren't listening they just walked off.

The next day I felt sick in the tummy. The sister and the nurse came to give me a needle. But I don't want to go to sleep I told them

But you'll wake up with a nice clean plaster.

But I mightn't wake up. Pansy was sick and me Mam had to take her to the cat hospital and they gave her a needle to put her to sleep and she didn't wake up. She didn't come home again.

It didn't make any difference. The sister still gave me a needle but she held my hand for a little while and promised me that when I woke up, she'd be there.

When I did wake up after the operation, the sister was there still holding my hand just like she said she'd be. She stroked my head several times and I remember her saying, your mummy will be in to see you tomorrow. I never saw that sister again she must have gone to another ward. Maybe it was all a dream. Me Mam didn't come the next day but she did come the next day after that. It was Easter Sunday. I didn't think she was coming because visiting time was nearly over. I heard Jamie's parents say they'd be chucked out soon. Then I spotted Mam coming down the corridor...alone. Dad wasn't with her but I was glad at least Mam had come.

Are you on your own?

No your other visitors are outside the window. There, I'll turn the bed a little so you can see them.

Peter and Susan were standing at the window grinning and pulling faces at me. No kids are allowed into the ward. Mam opened the window so they could talk to me.

Where's Dad? Is he sick or something?

No. He's here.

With that Dad popped his head in the window.

And how's me little jenny wren then?

What are you doing out there, I ses to him. I can hardly bring this into the ward can I, he said holding up a ginger kitten.

Here, a little bird told me you were missing Pansy, so Mam and me thought we'd better get you a kitten.

She wasn't a very little kitten but Dad ses she's old enough not to want to need much looking after. I was ever so excited! I wanted to hold her. Dad let me hold her. She was lovely! She had blue eyes and meowed when I looked at her. Dad said she couldn't stay of course, but he'd look after her until I came home. I'll call her Primrose I said. Just then Matron stormed into the ward carrying her big bell. She looked around her and wondered why my Dad was hanging in through the window. She marched on over just in time to see me pass Primrose back to Dad. Thank you very much she said grabbing Primrose by the scruff of the neck. This is a hospital she said. A hospital is no place for animals she said. I told her me Dad was taking Primrose home. He certainly will be, she said ringing her bell signalling visiting time was over. Primrose, frightened by the bell, lashed out and sank her claws into the matron's hips. Matron flinched, carefully removed Primrose's claws and handed her back to Dad. Cats! She said storming off out of the ward. It's all right I ses to Dad and Mam. Primrose wouldn't have hurt her because Matron wears tin pants!

After they'd gone, I sorted through the bag of sweets and things Mam had left. I tucked the little jar of dolly mixtures between my pillow and its cover, just like my Dad had shown me before when I was in hospital. If I didn't hide them the nurses would take them away. I usually managed to keep sweets hidden for a few days, so long as I remembered to take them out when they made my bed.

Me Mam had also brought me a little chocolate rabbit in gold paper. Yvonne's Mam had rung to say they couldn't come and Yvonne had been crying. There's plenty of times I don't have visitors, I ses to her. You get used to it. I gave her my chocolate bunny because I know that's what Taid would've liked me to do. She said she was going to be my very best friend for ever and ever.

I'd never given eternity much thought before reaching the equator. I had, up until that point thought only of time as water seeping through the hull of a leaky boat the weight of which dragged me further and further back in time. I had had no desire to arm wrestle with time. Especially when I knew I would lose. It might have been when I looked at the face of the compass or, upon reflection, what loneliness and desperation really was that I toyed with the idea of cheating time. I was in the vicinity of an imaginary playground. This was the noted point in which I could knock time over in whatever direction I wanted to. Eternity until that moment had meant little to me. After all, it's only an eight-letter word which suggests the past, present, and the future can be rolled into one. I spent the present contemplating which I would prefer; a future yet to be realised or a past based on memory that bobbed in and out of view. I floated in the present, paralysed and frightened by the realisation that there could never be a for ever and ever no matter how many amens you placed at the end.

And, even the white cliffs I finally sighted twelve days later marking the end of my journey (or was it the beginning), would not last for ever and ever. Great white, chalky cliffs, much smaller than I had imagined, that would one day erode and expose the city that still revered the tales of pilgrims. So white, the whiteness touched the clouds that billowed, across the English Channel and swathed foreign cities in a whiteness great writers have described with so much zeal. But there was I, a pilgrim in my own right, wanting to seek a truth, I knew, did not exist. Einstein once wrote, If the answers were as simple as the questions, then you would hear God thinking. I was yet to hear God thinking. Always, there were questions but never any satisfactory answers.

Seeking the truth as I had tried to do that night in her apartment was far more difficult than I could have imagined. I had visited her with the intent of giving up the lie I had lived with for so long, but instead I left having created many more. I should have taken charge of the conversation with her. Instead, she

beckoned for me to sit at a small table where she sat, at a direct angle, opposite. We started to talk. Small talk. Talk which, I had hoped would have eroded the bitterness that shaped her lips but instead maintained a certain restraint I could only envy. She hedged and I ducked, each of us wanting the truth but afraid of what we might hear. Afraid that the truth, whatever that was, would be more than she or I could handle. And throughout our conversation (and the drinking of tea) the packet of letters, concealed beneath the table in the palm of my hand sweated and threatened to fall to the floor and disclose their presence.

You were moved to another room. Feeling unsettled, you wanted to ask why. There was no security in moving from place to place. Mam had told you that. The shift to another room made you notice what possessions had been accumulated. Belongings you hadn't chosen for yourself but others had chosen for you. Now displaced from where they had lain, untouched for weeks (or was it months), and thrown in a heap on the bed, you noticed the bear. Dad's bear. The bear he had made for you so many years before now lay swamped beneath a pile of books. Reaching out from where you sat you attempted to take his paw and pull him from beneath the titles. A change of mind. The books would have tumbled to the floor. The clatter an indication that the precarious had been disturbed. Besides, you might have harmed him. Just as you had hurt your Dad.

So many books. You must like reading.

She knew you liked reading. It was she who had asked your Mam to bring in a book or two in the hope you would read. Mam did. Not one or two but as many as she could fit into her canvas shopping bag each time she visited (I wasn't sure what you wanted so I brought a few). A few soon became the lot and you wondered whether or not you would ever return home. Home?

At least there's a bookcase in this room. Someone will be along shortly to help you settle in.

Doctor B squats on the edge of the bed. You have no trouble looking her in the face now. She means well. Wants to help. You want that. That's her job as a doctor. A psychiatrist. Not a shrink as your Mam calls her. You want to grow. To speak.

We think you will like this room better. There's more to look at from the window.

You see so much more sitting so high up from the road. Climbing up into the front seat is difficult. But worth it. Alex loved trucks. His favourite is the truck

Colin sent him for his birthday. That Birthday was when it happened. Two candles, then. Birthday cakes draped in seaweed and decorated with shells. Colin had lied. Always. Your brother listened to him. They were mates. The truck resembled the one Alex and you rode in months before Mr Evans collapsed at work shortly before Christmas 1970. There were many trucks you hitched a ride in, to anywhere. But that particular truck was to take you back to your parents' home. There had been no choice. Only an ultimatum from Mrs Evans. Followed by a promise that you didn't have to return to your husband. Just return.

Hitching rides was easier than you had anticipated. Truckies arrive at their own conclusions. They saw a woman and child (or was it two children) walking along the edge. Happy for the company on long drives. Travelling the highways, was no place for a woman with a kid. It seemed, to them, well-meaning advice and may have suggested that a woman's place is with her husband. That's what they would've said if they had known you were still married. Divorce was still a little way off then. You missed your family. That was easy to admit. But you liked the distance. And the chance to make your own decisions. Stop here. Stop there. Plenty of itinerant work. Move on. Got to move on.

We'd better get a move on here. It'll soon be lunch time.

The nurse. You've seen her around the courtyard. Heard her speaking to other patients. Seems nice enough. Interested. You follow her movements around the room quickly glancing away when she turns to face you.

Cute bear. Someone make it for you?

Dad.

Silence. She looks in astonishment. Carries on trying not to look too amazed. She's been told of your silence. You're unsure how the word slipped out. Obviously you must've wanted to speak at that moment. Or was it because you were reminded of an age of innocence? She gives you the bear. You hold it on your lap. You're too big to sit on his lap. But you often did. And did so until. You can't remember when you stopped sitting on your Dad's lap. But you

remember doing so. You can feel his arms wrapped around your shoulders. Smell the tobacco smoke on his clothes. See the nicotine stained fingertips and (if you listen carefully) you can hear him call you his little jenny wren. Must've been ten. Yes. Ten years of age.

You recall how confident you were at that age. Far more so than you were at an age when you became a wife. His wife. Patrick wasn't kind to his wife and son. Alex was Alex. Alex hadn't very long turned one. Children become mischievous at that age. Touching things they shouldn't. And it was easy to touch things when you lived in two small rooms. Even easier to pick the flowers in the backyard of Patrick's parents' home. Parents who could barely tolerate a small grandson wading clumsily through the manicured flower beds. Why can't you keep an eye on him. He's your child. Patrick was never that mischievous. Mrs Kennedy's words. Not her husband's. He was different. Different from Patrick and his mother. The problem was Patrick's father rarely spoke. And when he did it was not to his wife. There was a sadness in his eyes when, on that morning in September 1970, he asked you to give his son time to adjust. Adjust to being a husband and father. A strange request from a man who willingly held the back gate open while you squeezed past with camping gear and took to the road.

Your little boy?

A nod is your answer. You expect her to ask how old he is. But she doesn't instead the nurse places the photo on the locker and continues to stack the books away. A photo falls from the pages and slides inconspicuously under the bed, unnoticed by her. You can see it's one taken by... By whom? You can't remember. It's a photo of you, him and Alex. At the registry office the day you married him. Early 1970. Tuesday. Peter arrived ten minutes after the ceremony. The wedding before yours had been cut short. The bride had looked upset as she left through the door you were all about to be ushered through. You and he (by the look on his face) felt stilted. Would've preferred to have been jilted. Both, almost overcome by the air of relief from both families that at last he was marrying you. Alex. Alex, innocent in his white suit, clung to the skirt of your

blue suit. Pulled, (as any infant would), at the ribbons which fell from the bouquet of flowers Susan had made. Many years from now you would still remember the flowers and how much time and love she had put in to making the bouquet. Soon she would sail away leaving you to be mother when all along it had been her role to play the mother. So many times you'd pouted and complained of having to be the baby instead of the mother (or, if worst came to worst you would've settled for playing Peter's wife). And as you stood in the registry office you suddenly realised that not only were you a mother but a wife also. What would never change is you would always be the baby sister.

I guess you'll be looking forward to going home.

Not everyone wants to return home. Patrick had wanted to remain in Vietnam where he was fighting his own personal war. He thought he'd sorted the situation out with the priest, back home, before he left. But the letters had begun to arrive. Followed by the request he marry her. You. As soon as his first tour of duty was over. Before Alex got any older. The idea of marriage had angered him and he found little consolation in knowing he could (and would) do a second tour of duty in Vietnam. There was plenty of what he wanted most, there. War had been kind to him. Or, at least that's what he wanted to believe. Either way, he got to choose the adventure.

Four

Ho there you swabs! Take that there swine Peter and lash him to the mainsail! When the moon sets we'll have ourselves a keelhauling. That's how the pirates talk on *The Buccaneers* and *Treasure Island*.

There was this thing on the telly the other night showing you where *Treasure Island* was made. I've always liked *Treasure Island*. Dad said both programs have been around for a while now and what's shown on telly these days are only repeats. Anyway, *Treasure Island* was made on this really big island called Australia. I reckon it's really good how they make these TV shows for telly. It's very clever how they get the pirates to act in front of cameras and all that. Aren't they afraid of being caught by the King's men I asked me Dad. But he ses, the King would have given them all a temporary pardon just so they could make the documentary. But as I ses to my Dad, the King's always playing tricks on them! In *The Buccaneers* he promises Captain Dan Tempest that he and his men will be safe if they do a job in the name of the King and then he leads Dan and his men into traps. Long John Silver knows better though. He's much wiser than Captain Tempest. You can't fool old Long John! Me Dad ses no, I don't understand; telly is all make believe and that all happened in the days of King George the First. Have I seen King George the First? I asked Dad. What does he look like? Me Dad sighed and said maybe I'd seen him in films on telly.

Me Mam ses things have changed quite a bit since King George the First. She ses Queen Elizabeth wouldn't have pulled any rotten tricks like King George the First did. I knew Mam was right. All I've ever seen Queen Elizabeth do is ride in her carriage and wave her hand, except once I saw her on telly at home in her garden with her dogs. Even if I hadn't have seen her on telly before I'd still know what she looks like. I still have me china mug the Queen gave me when she was coronated. I was only two then but me Mam kept me mug for me. She said she was going to put it away until I was real old like. But a little while ago, I

screamed so much because Peter and Susan were allowed to use theirs. In the end Mam gave me the mug and ses, oh well if you smash it you smash it and that's the end of it. But I've still got mine! Susan's broke when Mam was washing up and Peter's broke when I accidentally squashed it with a book. I really didn't mean to break it! I was only trying to kill a bee on the handle of the mug. Peter went potty! It could have stung me on me tongue I ses to them! Then me tongue would have swelled up and I wouldn't have been able to talk! I did say he could use mine but he always wants to use it when I'm about to have a drink myself. The picture on the mug of the Queen wearing her crown is fading now. But you can still see what she looks like except for her hair. Once, I didn't realise what I was doing and I scratched the hair off her head and now the crown looks as if its hanging above her head instead of on it. Me Mam thumped me! Good job too, I might have scratched the rest of her out too. Taid laughed. He said she was the Queen of England not the queen of Wales. I asked Taid who was the queen of Wales? He said we didn't need one in Wales because we had more brains than the English and we'd all have more money if it wasn't for the Queen of England.

I'm not sure, but I think that's why we're going to Australia to get away from the Queen and then we'll have more money. Everyone's got lots of money in Australia! Well, at least that's what I heard Mrs Parry say in the Co-op the other day. Susan had told me that Taid was going to buy us all something special. I knew he'd buy it from the Co-op so I thought I'd better go and make sure there was something there that I wanted. Mrs Lowe was buying butter when Taid came in. He was talking to Mrs Parry. They didn't see me sitting on the floor in the corner reading the books. Mrs Lowe told Taid that her niece Muriel and her husband went to Australia and they couldn't get back quick enough. Mrs Bates the shopkeeper made a queer noise in her throat and everyone stopped talking. Taid looked over the top of the cabbages and rhubarb at where I was sitting.

Oh! So it's a free read you're after then?

No, I said, I've been looking to see if there were any books on, oh look at this one it's a pop-up Roy Rogers annual. Isn't it great! She's doing no harm shouted Mrs Bates.

So long as she's got clean hands.

Then Mrs Bates said Australia! Australia! That's all everyone's talking about round here. I don't, I thought. I try very hard not to talk about it to anyone! Mam tells me not to go telling everyone our business, Taid doesn't want to hear anything, Susan ses we're not going and Peter reckons we'll all die on the boat before we get there. The kids round here reckon there's no water in Australia which suits me fine because I reckon we all wash too much anyway. They're only jealous it's not them that's going on holiday. Taid said it was Digger's fault. He and Dad had spent some time in the desert together. I did ask them what's the desert but Taid and the women just kept on talking. Taid told the women that he was sure Dad had lost his brains in the war. Maybe that's why me Mam does all the talking at home. Then Mrs Bates said:

Mark my words, she never did want to come and live here.

The door opened. Everyone stopped talking. I looked around the side of the vegie counter. It was me Mam standing in the doorway.

It's Catherine I'm after.

I could tell by the tone of her voice that she was in a bad mood.

I'm here, I said popping out as quick as I could. I just had the time to mention to Taid that there was a new Primrose and Prudence book out and if I had the money to buy it I would, before Mam dragged me out of the shop.

I was only looking for a book on Kangaroos. But I didn't let on to Taid either.

How am I going to fit all me stuff into that one box, I said to her when we got home. She said that was the idea of sorting through all the stuff and deciding what I was going to take. But I want it all, I said to her. If I hadn't of wanted it in the first place then I wouldn't have kept it. I looked at the small tea chest. Primrose wouldn't have had much room in it.

Why can't I have a treasure chest like you and Dad?

Because that was mine I brought up from London with me.

But it's a pirate chest. This one isn't.

Start sorting or I'll throw the whole bloody lot away.

Mam walked off in a huff. I looked at all the stuff she'd dragged out of the cupboards. Boxes had been upturned. I knew she had rummaged through them. The tea chest had Ceylon stamped all over it. Maybe we're not going to Australia after all.

The first time I'd heard about going to Australia was when we went to the Chester infirmary to see my doctor. Me Mam said we're trying to emigrate to Australia, Doctor. He said it was a wise choice and that doctors over there would have sorted me problem out by now. Me Mam then said that the immigration department were finding it difficult to accept us because of me and me Dad. I wondered whether that was because we were Welsh and Mam, Susan and Peter were English. But later I found out it was because they only wanted healthy people in Australia and me and me Dad had spent too much time in hospital. I wrote them a letter telling them they were wrong and Dad and me were healthy. They must've taken notice because soon after Dad got a letter saying our application was at that stage provisional to medical reports, however they did not consider it would be a problem. I asked Taid what provisional meant. He said it meant something that was temporary not fixed. When I told him about the letter saying we could go to Australia he didn't look very happy. Taid said there's nothing temporary about going to Australia; once you're there, you're there for life. No! I ses to Taid. You're wrong! Mrs Lowe's niece Muriel came home. I told Dad what Taid had said but he only told me not to go telling Taid everything. He said Taid would soon get over it, although he's not very happy just now.

No one seems too happy around here at the moment. Even me Dad. He went ever so potty the other day. I'd never seen him that mad before. I was out back cramming some rubbish in the bin. I didn't hear him come out of the lav. Before I knew it he'd slapped me across the bum, picked me up under his arm and took me inside. How could you do that to your sister's things, he said.

That was very naughty.

But it's *my* tea chest. I've got to get all my stuff in it yet.

Dad didn't answer. He shut me in the bedroom and went clobbering off down the stairs. Besides, I shouted hoping he'd hear. How was I to know they were her records. Pat bloody Boone! Who cares anyway.

Mam came in later and had one of her little talks with me. She asked, how I would like it if someone threw my things in the bin. I wouldn't, I told her dragging me box of stuff from under the bed. See, I ses. Someone had thrown all this in the rubbish without asking me.

Now what would you want to keep all that rubbish for.

I'm taking it to Australia and no one is going to stop me!

She got up and left in a huff as she always did.

And don't go telling Susan about her records either. We'll see if we can replace them when we get to the other end.

I was sitting there on the bed nursing me box of stuff when Taid came in. Hello he said. Can I come in? I didn't answer him. I wasn't going to talk to him at all but he said he hadn't been too keen on Pat Boone himself or Cliff Richard, come to think of it. Then, he said:

What have you got in that box of yours?

Without saying a word I passed him the tobacco tin he'd given me to put my teeth in for the tooth fairy.

Surely you don't want to take an old tin with you to Australia?

Smell it, I said. See it smells just like you. Taid laughed and opened the tin.

Oh so you're going to grow an oak tree when you get to Australia.

No, I replied. Don't be daft! They're cups and saucers from our house up Tin Tuch. Indeed, he said looking puzzled. He didn't understand. Taid had never been to our house. It was a secret.

Only me and Dad knew about our house. The last time he took me there we sat on the low bough that lay close to the top of the bank. We watched a fox sitting in the field across the lane. The fox just sat and stared as if he was waiting for us to leave. Do you think this tree could be his home too? I asked

Dad. Maybe, he replied. I got down out of the parlour and went around to the cupboard in the bottom of the trunk. I think it might be! I shouted. It smells a bit in here. I crouched inside the trunk. Do you think someone else will make this, their house when we're gone? Stop your yapping and make us a cup of tea, replied Dad his voice sounding from somewhere above my head. I found the largest two acorns and separated them from their little caps. There, I said. Hold the cup on the saucer while I pour the tea.

It was no good telling Taid about it. He wouldn't have understood. He'd think me and Dad were daft or something. Taid put his arm around my shoulder and gave me a little squeeze. I can tell you're in no mood to talk so I'll leave you alone, he said. I sat there sulking waiting for me Mam to come back and tell me I could take me stuff to Australia. She didn't come. After a little while I looked at the bits and pieces in the box. I took out the two conkers. One had been split open showing where the string passed through its centre. The other, large and hard was still as good as the day Peter had used it to split Winston's open. Can I have a piece of your string? He'd asked me on the morning of the battle. I said he could have some if he let me have the winning conker. Not only did I get the winning nut but I also picked up Winston's split one too. That was such a long time ago now; who wants to keep old conkers anyway. One by one I took a closer look at all the things in the box and decided that it probably wasn't worth all the misery I was going through. I hid the tobacco tin inside the bag of doll's clothes and pushed them down deep into the tea chest. I emptied what remained into the bin. You'd think that would have made some people happy, but it didn't.

Now I'm trying to make the best of things just as I keep promising me Mam I'd do. But all me toys and books are now packed away in the tea chest and Dad has nailed the lid down tight. They brought me a scrap book to paste things in. There, me Dad said. That should keep you quiet for a while. Does that mean I can't sing any more, I asked. Sing what you like, he said just don't go singing when Susan's around.

I've been looking for pictures of Australia. I've got a few I found in magazines. I went around to Taid's the other day to show him all the stuff I'd collected but he wasn't interested. On me way home I ran into Reverend Oliver. He said he had saved me a label from a can of pineapple that came all the way from Australia. He said maybe I'd grow pineapples one day! No! I told him. They're grown on farms and only men pick them. I saw it all on the telly. That's another reason why we're going to Australia. There's a job for every man! Sons have futures! Reverend Oliver laughed. I showed him an ad I'd cut out of the paper. See, I ses pointing to the chubby little boy in the picture: *His Future is in Your Hands! Take Him to Australia!* Reverend Oliver said that he was sure I'd have a future also in Australia.

After I'd left Reverend Oliver I was passing the entry when Peter and his friends came running out carrying their bows and arrows. They were all off to the woods to play Robin Hood. I asked if I could go too. He said no and I had to go home straight away because Mam had something special for me. I knew he was fibbing. I pleaded with him to let me go too. I even said I'd be his Maid Marion but he said he didn't feel like having a Maid Marion this time and she would have to stay at home in the castle. Peter only ever wants me around when he hasn't got his friends with him. He made me so mad! You won't have bloody time to play Robin Hood when you get to Australia, I ses to him. You'll be too bloody busy working for your future! Olwyn Evans popped her head out of the window and cursed me for having such a foul mouth. She said she was going to tell me Mam. Peter laughed and ran after the others.

It's not bloody fair I screamed slamming our front door. Why can't I go to the bloody woods too? Mam continued doing what she was doing in the kitchen. She said I wasn't allowed to go to the woods because I trip over too much and I'd only end up in hospital and that's the last thing she wanted on her plate before we get to Australia. So I had to stay home. Mam did offer to let me make biscuits but I said no because I knew Peter and his friends would come back from Sherwood Forest and guts the bloody the lot. I went and sat under the table to sulk. Soon after, Dad came home.

Are you crying because you're happy or sad?

Don't be daft! I'm thoroughly miserable! They wouldn't let me go to the woods with them.

Come out and I'll tell you a story about a Princess!

I don't like stories of Princesses they're dumb!

Well, I'm sorry but I'm too tired to cope with all that pirate talk! So it looks as if I'll have to tell myself a story!

I hate it when he does that! He ses he's going to tell himself a story and I think *God* he's going to look real ridiculous sitting in his chair talking to himself, so I always end up going over and listening.

Once upon a time a nasty Knight crept into the Princess's bedroom while she slept and carried her off. The King hearing his daughter scream, ran to the door of the castle.

Castles don't have doors, they have drawbridges I said. If you're going to tell me a story, then get it right.

All right, but will you listen? The King got to the drawbridge just in time to see the Princess being carried off on the nasty Knight's horse. He glanced down and noticed her tears lay frozen where they had fallen upon the snow. The King gathered up the tears in a silver goblet and took them inside the castle and vowed he would never cry himself until one day his tears and hers would fall together and they would never be separated again.

Didn't they melt?

Castles are very cold places. Besides they didn't have any heating.

But they would've melted eventually!

Anyhow! Spring came and the snow thawed. Dismayed that the Princess's tears had melted...

See! I told yer they would've melted!

Dad's eyes began to boggle. I knew he was getting angry.

Will you just let me finish telling the story? As I was saying, the King noticed the tears had melted and so he went to the door...I mean drawbridge of the castle and emptied them onto the snow where he had last seen the Princess.

Instead of disappearing into the earth, the puddle of tears ran down the road, across the hills, over the stream until it came to rest at the feet of the Princess who was sitting miserably in an overgrown garden pining for her family. The King, having followed the tears, hugged the Princess and both cried tears of happiness...

And they both lived happily ever after, I added. I told him I didn't like that story and the Princess was dumb. She should've found her own way home instead of sitting waiting for someone to find her. I told Dad if he wants me to listen to any more of his stories then he'd better think of some decent pirate stories.

He took me and Peter to the market in Holywell the other day. Mam said it would be our last chance. I like watching the pigs with their numbers stamped on their backs. They're a lot cleaner than the pigs in Horace's sties. I like animals best. I've got a couple of pictures of kangaroos but I haven't been able to find any other pictures of Australian animals. Maybe there are no other animals. I said to me Mam, maybe there are no cats in Australia! She laughed. As if we should be so lucky, she said. I asked me Dad and he said Australian cats are bigger and better than any other cats anywhere else in the world; they were so big you had to feed them half a cow at mealtime. But, I ses, will we be able to afford to buy cows to feed a cat? Me Dad ses we'll be able to buy anything in Australia. Can I have a horse too? I asked seeing he was in such a good mood. He ses, you can have anything you want my little jenny wren!

We didn't stay too long at the market. It got very cold. Pete Simon was there. Haven't you got a coat, he asked. It's being cleaned I told him. So it looks fit to go away in. Olwyn Evans was with him. She said we wouldn't need coats in Australia. It never gets cold. What about Christmas I asked. What about the snow? There isn't any, they all said. It wasn't long before Christmas. Soon it would be snowing. I hadn't thought about it before. I'd been too busy singing, *We're all Going on a Summer Holiday* to think about the snow and Christmas. Later that day when I got home I asked me Mam if it were true that there was no snow in Australia. Aye, she said won't it be grand. But what about

Father Christmas, I asked. All she said was he'd find us no matter where we went. I asked me Dad. He said Father Christmas visited you on the beach in Australia. Don't be daft I told him. I sat waiting for Peter. Peter, I ses when he did come home. Did you know Father Christmas visits you on the beach in Australia? And the fairies fly out from the north pole, he laughed. Grow up he said. There is no Father Christmas. Neither is there a tooth fairy nor an Easter Bunny. Peter said I was soft in the head to believe in all that and Father Christmas was really Dad. Dad wouldn't lie to me. Besides he was in hospital last Christmas and still Father Christmas came to our house.

I knew Peter was only teasing me. I'll wait out back and lasso him as he comes out of the lav one night. I nearly got him the other day. I hid behind the bedroom door and waited for him to come to bed. But he'd spotted me through the space in the door and tied me up instead. I hate it when he does things like that to me. I'm getting better at lassoing.

Me Mam doesn't like me lassoing people here in Bagilt because she reckons I'll end up strangling someone and besides girls don't do those sorts of things. But I told her that I knew what I was doing and I was practising, so when I got a horse I could lasso the cows and a few kangaroos on the side. Besides, I said to her, if girls weren't suppose to do those sorts of things why had Roy Rogers let me win one of his lariats in his competition? Mam doesn't bother answering me half of the time.

Things will be different in Australia. Mrs Thomas told me that Mam might not have to work so hard when she gets to Australia and she could stay home and look after us. I'll miss Taid looking after me. I'm going to write to him every day when I get to Australia. I know he's got lots of photos of us all, but I wanted to give him something special; something no one else would have possibly thought of. What's this then? Taid asked, taking the jar I held out to him. It's me tears! I cried them the other night when everyone was asleep. It wasn't easy you know, thinking of things that would make me cry. What am I supposed to do with them? Taid asked. Dad told me a story the other day about a King who found his Princess by following her tears. I know that's all make believe and I'm

not soft in the head either. But I thought if I put my tears in a jar then you could think of me when you're lonely. Then, when I come home from Australia you can throw them away because you won't be lonely then!

Taid turned away mumbling that tears are tears and once they fall they're gone forever. But Taid I ses, there are different tears. There are happy tears and sad tears. Aye! he said but tears of happiness disappear a lot quicker than tears of sadness. I wish he wasn't so sad about us going. I was just about to give him a big hug and me Dad walked in. Come on he ses, your Mam wants you home. I was collecting me wellies from the coal cupboard under the stairs when I heard Taid say to Dad that he was taking us to the end of the earth. Dad told him that he would never get the chance to go to Australia again because he was getting too old I guess that's why Taid can't come to Australia. Don't worry I ses to Taid, we'll come and visit you on holidays!

Gravesend seemed an appropriate place to start. Particularly when you know that what you're looking for, no longer exists. I thought of all those selves whose souls lay buried beneath the slurry of the Thames. It wasn't hard to imagine the rotting corpses that had been brought down the river on barges, years before, when the rats ran the cats and dogs out of London. That first night, having tied up at the dock, as I lay in my bunk listening to the stifled and hollow wails of the plagued dead I wondered what it was about the Thames that had captured the imagination of so many. A river I had imagined to be as grand as the ships that had spilled from its mouth fell short of my expectations. My journey along the estuary had made me think of what it must be like to be inside the bowel of an aged and feeble lion suffering from a turbulent bout of diarrhoea. Once inside its flood gates, the Thames narrowed and wound, as if it were the intestine of the country it nourished, and continued to taper until it became no more than a burp in the English countryside.

I lost no time in setting the relatives to work. Relatives I had heard about from my mother, but whom I had never met. Circumstances. I knew I would find them thirty miles up river and it was they who would be able to tell me things I did not know. Could not know. And regardless of how unreliable their memory of my family may have been, it was a place to start. Forty years, or more, away from your birth country is a long time. Especially when you find yourself sitting in the home of relatives you recall only, from letters, as being eternally young. Letters have that effect. There they sat. Older than I had expected but wiser than I could have anticipated. Time dissolved between them and me and before too long the conversation turned to we. The time we all went to Swallow Falls. A dejected I, as I am forced to admit (for the first time but not the last) that I have no recollection of the time they visited the Evans' in Wales. He was my mother's brother but his recollection of events was far better than my mother's. We only choose to remember what we want and as I was about to learn, there were

events in my mother's life (as there had been in mine) that she had chosen to try to forget.

It had been the photo, overexposed, that had moved me to leave their home. The darkness, into which I needed to hurry if I were to catch the last train back to the docks. She took it from a bundle of photos which had no relevance to my life, past or present. At first glance I took it to be a feeble sketch on a dark background but realised on closer examination someone had penciled over the sepia silhouette giving it the appearance that it had been drawn on photo-size card. The woman was smallish (or was it the torch she held in her hand that gave that impression), and as remarkable as it had first appeared, she had been carelessly blindfolded with the lead of a pencil. She was, however, no less grander than how she appeared in matt finish. Do you know who she is? My Aunt had asked, but gave me no answer. Instead, she implored me to write and tell her when I had figured it out.

I needed to hurry to the station but found myself standing close to the English box thorn hedge that had been pruned and shaped to my uncle's liking. I unashamedly eavesdropped hoping to find maybe a hidden truth to the conversation which had taken place. A conversation filled with generalities but no substance. Cathy, in my Aunt's words, had always been a little monkey. I guess I still was, doubling back to the sitting room window knowing I may well miss my train. Something which was said, before the conversation had been deliberately steered in another direction, had bothered me. They had spoken of a young Cathy and how she had often got her own way. But, as my Uncle added, under the circumstances, it was to be expected. There was that word again. Circumstances shape our lives. The conversation had turned, as quick as the tide does on the Thames and I had been left, temporarily, high and dry. Once out in the night, my imagination floated once more and I returned to the window hoping to hear what it was I wanted to hear.

I never did hear what I had hoped to hear that night at her apartment. It seemed as if we had only discussed the possibilities of whether or not she could have been my daughter. The answer, both she and I sought, was there staring

directly at us. But still, we avoided what was best left unsaid. Instead we scraped the surface of the past knowing that beneath there were many more colours that had been painted over, none of which either of us was willing to strip away. I needed her to say she had no doubt about the birth certificate I had placed on the table. I wanted her to say she had doubts that the hospital hadn't made a mistake in registering the birth, as she claimed. But she, like me, could not face the truth. Vulnerability feeds lies. It was I, who finally wanting to catch hold of the slimmest thread, asked: If I were your mother, what is it you would like to say to her?

So much colour. Autumn. You want to ask Valerie to stop the car. Walk, maybe, through the park. Wade through the masses of fallen leaves. It's a change from the factories you overlook from your hospital room. Cathy can now speak. On occasions, that is, when she chooses to speak. Chooses too, to feed herself. See Cathy put her own clothes on. She's come a long way. Cathy has earned a weekend at home away from the clinic. At this rate of progress you might even return home for good. But for the time being you have to be content with a short break. You decide not to ask Valerie to stop the car. After all, she's been good enough to come and fetch you.

It's a shame your Mam never learnt to drive.

Your neighbour has said it twice since driving out of the hospital car park. Keeping tabs on the conversation you note the times she speaks of her own children. Far more often, of course, than she mentions Alex. She does, though, seem genuinely pleased that you're spending some time at home. She wants to know more. More about what's behind your breakdown as she calls it. Wants to know, but dare not ask. Instead she constantly offers her confidence if you should want to talk about anything. Anything. In the meantime, she talks about everything.

To think, tomorrow night we go colour. It's amazing what technology can do nowadays. We like watching the telly in our house. Phil, I said, why not lash out and get a colour television. Right you are, he said. Mind you, they're pretty pricey. Still can't miss the big switch, can we? Why not pop in tomorrow night join us if you want? Bring Alex. And your Mum of course.

No mention of Peter. Maybe she knows more than she's letting on. It's 1975. You will remember the year telly went colour. Just as you'll start to remember certain events in your life as coinciding with television programs you watched at the time. Later in the year (November the eleventh 1975 to be exact) you will be discharged from the clinic believing that it will be the last you will see

of Doctor B. You'll remember the date because you will be watching the news and see Gough Whitlam stand on the steps of parliament house and read the statement of his discharge. And you will be discharged also on that same date. But for the time being it's September 1975. There's a conspicuous silence in the car. And then:

Tell me, did you ever get your divorce from Alex's father?

You're not surprised she has asked this. You knew, long before you went to live in the country that the neighbours were wondering what was going on. It's none of their business, is what your Mam kept saying back then, and still does today. Nobody's business what happens in the Evans family. All they needed to know, in 1969, was you had a son. And, (as your mother had added quickly having told the neighbours soon after the birth), we haven't decided yet whether or not she and Patrick will marry. Of course, the neighbours were delighted when, eventually, you did do the right thing. Mrs Bunning even made the suit you were married in.

Nevertheless, neighbors like Valerie didn't give up too easily and offering to pick you up from the clinic had now given her the opportunity (or so she thought) to fill in the gaps. Much, over the last few years, had been left to the imagination of the neighbours. Imagination wasn't such a bad thing. You had found strength in your imagination on several occasions. Particularly at the time Alex was born and your parents had decided that he should be given up for adoption. Ten agonising days (not only for you, you've since found out, but for your parents also) passed before there was a reprieve and the decision, they realised, had to be your own. Your imagination had spiralled during those ten days. A baby (yet to be named Alex) was lying somewhere in the hospital and you had wondered whether or not he was aware of what was going on. Your decision, to keep your son, was the right decision. But at that time you were yet to realise it would be one you would never regret. You were unsure then, how things would work out. Only, when years later, having given up your daughter for adoption would you be able to weigh up the grief of doing so with the happiness you have with Alex. Circumstances. Must move on.

We're hardly moving. Suppose you'll be looking forward to sleeping in your own bed tonight? Your Mam will be glad to have you home. Even if it is only for a couple of nights.

Glad? Yes. She had visited on a regular basis. You were pleased she did even though she didn't stay too long and she'd made it clear the travelling was getting her down. Mrs Evans had had her fill of visiting hospitals in the past. Visiting real hospitals (as she called them) was bad enough but you knew she didn't quite feel the same visiting the psych clinic. I feel as if I'm being watched she'd said on several occasions. Afraid of being seen had also been her excuse why she had convinced your Dad in 1969 not to let you spend the latter weeks of your confinement in a hostel for unmarried mothers. Never know, she'd said, who sees you come and go from those sort of places. Besides, she believed you belonged at home. Just as she insists you do now. But back then things had been different. You were expected to lie low. Stay indoors. No one was to suspect you were pregnant.

Staying inside was something you disliked. Still do. Rather be out in the fresh air. On one occasion, when you had seen the neighbours drive off, you had left the house and walked over the paddocks to where your horse was kept. Riding was what you missed the most. You even rode bareback, that day, down to the river. Played it safe, as you recall. Took it slowly. The baby was fully formed at eight months. Or, so you had read in the book the doctor had given you. Little did you know (until after he was born) you had been seen by the neighbours who never suspected you were pregnant. Neither had your parents suspected you were pregnant until, when at six months, the master plan had come unstuck. She must have gone through your jeans pockets. Or, maybe the letter had fallen out, as your mother had claimed. You will never know. What does it matter. It will have been for the best. You'll see. Today, you're still surprised they hadn't suspected something was wrong long before finding the letter and the bus ticket. Morning sickness that seemed it would never end, eventually passed and was replaced with a feeling of constant tiredness. Still, the prospect of travelling hundreds of miles then, hadn't been an issue. Neither

had it been an issue for Patrick. Months passed before you could no longer deny that the pregnancy would continue, and you turned in desperation to a close friend at work. It was she and her husband (a close mate of Patrick's) who convinced him he had a responsibility to you. A room in a house, close to boot camp, was the best Patrick could offer. Would offer. There he would be able to keep an eye on you. Make sure you didn't renege on his deal (or tell anyone else) to look after you until the minute the kid was born, with the proviso he wouldn't be responsible after the event. Besides he had a war to get on with. Unfortunately, he would have left the country before the birth.

Shame really he turned out like that. Vietnam ruined so many young men.

What about me? Is what you want to say. Should say. But you don't. You've heard it all before and besides, you know the truth. Truth is, Patrick was ruined long before he signed up to go to Vietnam. No sense of responsibility and so immature. Of course, this is an older you reflecting on someone you knew in the past and who to this day, hasn't been seen since the day you took to the road. What you do know is, Patrick's claim to fame with your Mam and Dad back in 1968, was he was going to Vietnam because he valued freedom and life. Your parents can be excused for thinking Patrick was being patriotic after all, their own son was facing the prospect of being conscripted at a time when patriotism had peaked. And they, like others, were yet to find out you were pregnant. Yet to go berserk. What Patrick wanted to really say (but didn't have the guts) was he had enlisted because he valued his own freedom and what sort of a life would he have saddled with a woman and kid. You know this to be the truth because he had said so himself the night you told him you were pregnant. The name has changed several times since that night. But it's still there. The motel he had taken you to (for a good time as he thought). You had only agreed to go believing it would be an appropriate place to tell him. The pub you so often frequented, or in the front seat of the car didn't seem to have the same appeal. And, besides, you felt that having overcome the initial shock he would be over the moon and the two of you would spend the evening making wild passionate love. That's how it was on the telly. Instead it was just, over. Over, so you'd

thought, after he'd dumped you outside your house but not before saying goodbye and good luck.

Five

Maybe we'll become *Railway Children* when we get to Australia! I wouldn't mind changing me name to Phyllis. Well, maybe not Phyllis but Phil would be all right. Susan's bossy enough to be Roberta and Peter's daft enough to be Peter. He wouldn't even have to change his name. I was just about to ask Peter what he thought about the idea when Mam yelled at us both to come down off the bridge.

Your clothes will get all sooty if a train happens to pass by.

We're watching for Taid!

She said something to Dad. He didn't answer, but turned and walked slowly toward the end of the platform. As he passed under where we stood I just happened to move me foot showering him with a fine gravel. Some of it landed in the brim of his Trilby. It didn't seem to bother him though. He just kept on walking to the end of the platform where he propped against the fence and lit a fag.

I looked back at where Susan sat outside the station master's office. She looked thoroughly miserable. Mam stood behind her fiddling with a bow that had worked itself loose on the journey to the station. Dave the Bookie had brought us down in his little Morris van. We all couldn't fit in, so he had to make two trips. Mam and Dad stayed behind to lock-up and give Olwyn Evans next door the key and the telly. All our other furniture had gone to needy people at Chapel. Susan moaned all the way to the station. Good-bye Field Terrace she ses. We'll never pass by the Co-op, ever again! She went on and on. I don't know why she doesn't want to go to Australia. Then, we passed Mrs Simpson's sweet shop and off she went again! We should've got some bulls eyes...we'll never ever taste them again! There are shops in Australia, I told her. Besides, I added, I reckon the bulls eyes will be bigger and better than anything we've ever tasted. I thought I'd shut her up, when up pipes Peter.

There are no sweet shops in Australia! Mrs Lowe told me that!

Then off she went again. I can't understand why everyone's so miserable. Me and Mam's not. I've only ever been on one holiday, I ses to Susan and Peter as we rode in the back of the van. She said, if I mentioned that one more time, she'd clout me across the bloody ear. But it's true! I only ever have been on one holiday. Although Susan ses I'm always going on holidays. She reckons I go on holiday every time I go to hospital. Oh yeh...sure! What fun can I have in hospital, I'd asked her. But, she insisted that it was like a holiday because I got to stay away from home, everyone sent me presents and that's why I'm so spoilt. You always get your own way, she said. I can't help it if everyone wants to give me things, can I? I mean, what would she have done? Sent them all back? Not bloody likely! I'll tell you that, right here and now. Besides, I thought, as I sat cramped up against the back of the driver's seat, she always gets more than me. Taid spoils her. She gets to go to dancing lessons, piano lessons and she goes everywhere with Taid. One day I'm going to have dancing lessons and learn to play the piano and I'm going to learn how to put rags in me own hair! I'll never have a haircut ever again. Mam reckons my hair always looks like a nest of rats and I'm not allowed to grow it long, until I learn how to take care of it myself. She's fed up with me screaming every time she tries to comb it. Nain used to say Susan had lovely strong hair. Nain used to like running her fingers through her ringlets. That's when the bow in her hair worked itself loose. I just happened to be touching one of her ringlets when she screamed. I flung me arm back hitting Dave the Bookie on the head just as he happened to hit the kerb of the footpath! It's no wonder I don't see him driving his little van around Bagilt much. I mean, someone could've been killed. Someone might have been squashed against the wall, then they'd have to paint it to hide the blood and innards! I'm telling Dad on you, ses Peter from the front seat. Susan turned and pinched me on the cheek. I called her a bitch and Dave the Bookie ses, God help Australia for having you Cathy Evans as an immigrant!

Anyway, at least now, it had shut Susan up from moaning about this and that. There she sat slumped forward, holding her head in her hands. Mam was singing away to herself as she retied the bow in Susan's hair. She was happy to

be leaving Wales. Soon she would be seeing her brothers, who live in London. We're going to stay in London for a couple of days before we go down to Southampton to catch the boat to Australia. Dad ses he's going to take us to see where the Queen lives in London.

They're changing guards at Buckingham Palace, Christopher Robin goes down with Alice...

Shut up, why don't you!

Peter yelled at me to stop singing. Besides the train's late, I said. Peter just kept on staring across the railway yards.

You can't see Taid's house from here, Peter. It's hidden behind the gas works. I don't think Taid's coming.

I knew Taid would've been out of bed ages ago. He'd be sitting in front of the fire drinking his cup of tea. Maybe he's put too much whisky in it and he's fallen back to sleep. Like the other night, I was allowed to sleep the night at Taid's and next morning I made him a cup of tea. Oh!, he said sipping it from his saucer. You've forgotten something. What's that? Then I remembered. In the cupboard, just behind the curtain was Taid's bottle of whisky. There, I ses to him pouring a little into his tea. That'll keep the cold out, won't it Taid? Taid laughed. Aye! It will at that, he ses. The smell was yuk! Me Mam's right you know. She reckons the smell of whisky in hot tea is enough to rot your socks off.

Maybe there's been a real live accident!

Don't talk out the back of your head!

Maybe the bridge over the viaduct's collapsed and the train's come off its rails! Maybe there's bodies all over the place. Maybe the police are having to pick up people's legs and arms and put them in a sack!

Peter said I was thick and things like that don't happen. Of course they do, I said. I've seen it all on telly. What would he know anyway. There's been this big crack in the front of the viaduct for donkey's years now. I've seen it myself. Maybe the bridge has collapsed at long last. The track would be blocked for days and then we wouldn't be able to go to London and then we'd miss the boat. Unless of course, Dave the Bookie could take us! We'd have to go back

home and make do with the mattresses on the floor again. Pansy could come back from Taid's for a couple more days and Olwyn Evans would have to give us back our telly for a bit longer. I wonder what it'd be like to be in a train crash. Peter told me to go and cheer up Susan. I agreed but only after he promised to shout and tell me when he spotted the train.

I don't think we'll be going to Australia, I ses to Mam and Susan. There's no sign of the train yet. She said it wasn't the train that was late, but we were early. Susan said, Taid isn't going to turn up. They're both wrong of course, but I daren't tell them that. I saw the signal go down for the train a long time ago and the station master doesn't do that unless the train is just about due. And, as for Taid, of course he'll come. He hasn't said goodbye yet. Well, at least I don't think he has. I don't remember him saying goodbye. Unless of course, me mind's going on me. No! Taid will come I'm sure of it. He came and saw us off when we went on holiday. I remember that and I was only little then. That was a good holiday. We stayed in this little caravan near the beach and it rained every day! But I didn't let the rain worry me, though. We all played games and I sang every song I knew, over and over again. There were times of course, between showers, when we could go down to the beach. Dad had to carry me because there were so many pebbles and I kept on falling over. Peter said if I cleared him a spot he'd build a speedboat in the sand and I could ride in the back seat. So, I sat there patiently chucking the pebbles as far as I could. People kept on walking in front of me and several times I just missed hitting someone. Anyway, it was worth all the hard work. Peter made this terrific boat. He even had a windscreen and Mam gave us the round box the cheese triangles had come in, so we could have a steering wheel. Susan and Dad didn't play though because they were too busy collecting cockles and winkles.

I really did enjoy that holiday, except for the train ride home. We'd been on the train for hours and hours, even though me Dad kept on telling me we'd only been on the train for thirty minutes. Be patient, he kept on saying. Be patient! It was longer than thirty minutes, I can tell you that. I know! Because I'd

sang at least twenty songs. I was just about to get to the end of Ten Men Went to Mold, Went to Mold and Meadow, when Mam looked at Dad:

If you don't, then I will!

There's only one more man left.

The woman sitting opposite, smiled at me. She must have liked me singing, so I surprised the lot of them and started all over again. One hundred men went to Mold, when me Dad said, enough is enough. All right, I told him. How about ten green bottles? You'll sit quiet for the rest of the journey he ses, or I'll put you up in the luggage rack. Well, I ask you. How was I suppose to know he meant it! Besides, the lady sitting opposite was laughing. So, I did as I was told until she said: You've got a lovely voice! Do you like singing? Yes, I told her. I'm going to sing in the Chapel choir! Then Peter piped up:

There are no girls in the Chapel choir!

You sing in the Chapel choir and Mam ses you're an old woman at times. Girlie, girlie, Peter girlie!

Mam went potty at us both, for squabbling. I looked at the lady.

Have you been on holiday?

Aye, to London.

London Bridge is falling down falling down...

That's it, said me Dad, his eyes boggling. I forgot! I pleaded. I didn't mean to sing, honestly! But it was too late. He lifted me above his head and laid me across the luggage rack. I promise I'll never sing again I screamed but they all ignored me. It was really scary looking down on top of them. I thought for sure I was going to throw up all over them. It would've served them all right, if I had of. Finally, Mam told him to get me down before my screaming drove her potty. Taid was at the station to meet us. I told him what Dad had done. He called Dad a daft bugger for frightening me like that. For pity sake, Dad replied. We were only on the train for forty minutes and she just about drove us all mad. Taid would never have done something like that to me. He would've sang songs with me.

I asked Susan if she wanted to play, what's the time Mr Wolf, while we waited for the train. But she didn't want to. Besides, she said, you can't run. Doesn't matter, I told her. It's better than sitting on top of a suitcase looking real glum. She didn't budge. So, I started to play on me own.

The grand old duke of york he had ten thousand men he marched them up to the top of the hill and he marched them down again...

Mam! Make her stop. She looks ridiculous parading up and down like that.

Mam was just about to say something when Dad called out.

Train's coming!

Peter didn't move.

Bombs hit indiscriminately. But they leave their mark forever. At least they had, around London. Craters, where they landed, had been quickly filled and red brick buildings appeared overnight, or that's how the residents of war-time London remembered it. No amount of pollution would fully disguise the mutations which radiated and left areas which resembled those often unexplainable patterns left in fields. The people, crouching in the shelters, didn't see the bombs fall. Only heard the familiar tune of their whistling, seconds before they hit. Only felt the thump of their hearts, and the tremor of the ground. And, only then, when the whistling had stopped and sirens woke the sleeping babies, did some bother to scurry out of their holes. Many, waited underground in anticipation of those bombs that sometimes fell, and lay like giant eggs, on their nests of rubble knowing that the game would be to determine whether the egg was fertile or not. It was a family game. Everyone a player. At least that's how my uncle had explained it. In the end it was either a coin which was tossed, or the rays of daylight appearing at the entrance to the shelter which determined the next move.

My uncle had been a winner. The north wall of the house was his own personal war gallery. The wall of the house, which was enshrined with shrapnel, and which glistened even brighter each time he polished the story. Four standard roses, each in memory of a relative lost, stood guard between the wall and the English box thorn hedge. The hedge which he had originally grown to ward off souvenir hunters, now harboured an eavesdropper.

Eavesdropping is an art. I thought I had it down pat. After all, I'm a writer of fiction and writing a novel is a little like eavesdropping. Both are acts, that require you to take what you have heard, what it is you know, and weave it into a coherent whole. Both, are inspired by the imagination. I guess that's why I reacted the way I did, that night, while I eavesdropped under the window sill.

The window sill where I felt the mortar crumbling and I imagined what might happen if a piece of shrapnel became dislodged from the brickwork above and hit me on the head. How would I explain my presence outside the sitting room window when I should have been on my way to the station. ...her baby. The words lay, cocooned and suspended between my aunt, uncle, and me. It was my aunt who had spoken. Jolted the cocoon, from under the eaves. Brought the word 'baby' to my attention. It was my uncle who suggested she should let it rest in peace. And, it was I who watched as the words were swept away with the tea cups, and disappeared to the kitchen. Had she been referring to my baby? Did they know what had happened, so many years before? Couldn't have known. I didn't know myself.

I leant heavily against the wall of the house, unable to move. Just as I'd imagined my daughter had done, the night I left her apartment. I'd heard the gentle thud of her body against the door as it closed, quickly behind me. I'd walked away wanting to believe she would have no regrets in having denied that I was her mother but I knew she, like me, would share that burden for the rest of our lives. There would always be regrets. Nothing, but regrets. Just as I now regret not having stolen the photo she had on her mantelpiece. The photo of her as a child and a woman who had rightly earned the title of mother, but who knew nothing of the pain I had lived with. I could have easily cut the face of the woman from the photo, and still held on to the innocence of the child. But, the short time I had spent in her apartment, had only reminded me that there would always be a hole left, unfulfilled. Instead, I choose to remember the child as a voice - the very essence of dreams.

Somewhere in that novel, it's written: *We live, as we dream - alone.* What Cathy had realised, on finding her daughter, was that she had lived on dreams alone. Dreams of recapturing something which had been lost forever. So many years, drowning in dreams, when all along she should have been searching for herself. Salt swells the tongue. But you will find your voice again.

The skipper, pauses, changes direction. Faces east. The woman combs back her hair with her hands. Cathy's novel, wet and wordy, concealed beneath her thigh falls to the deck. Falls open on page two hundred and thirty-five. Yes. I can now see the page. The pages will dry and yellow prematurely concealing the age of the novel and of the woman who wrote it. And, I am reminded of the yellow stains that impinge upon the tiny flowers that cover the walls of the room where I sit. Is this the incontinence I have heard comes with age?

A new diary. Still in the cellophane wrapper. No gift paper. Just the clear wrapper. You've looked at it several times. It has lain on top of your locker waiting for the seal to be broken and peeled away. You could then, if you want, record whatever it is you're supposed to. What it is she wants, or hopes you will write about you're not quite sure. Only sure that she came to your room with the diary soon after your last session with her. The session where, at long last, you spoke about what happened back in February 1971. Alex was two, back then. That day, was his birthday. No details of course, just the bare facts. Out of the blue, you blurted it out. A single phrase. No need to elaborate. No need to talk about the rape. Yet. That will come, or so she says. The conversation between you and Doctor B had been focused on your relationship with your mother. Nothing about. About what happened back then. And then you said it. You heard yourself say it. You looked at her for a response. Only silence. Seconds of silence before she moved her chair closer to where you were sitting, took your hands in hers, and re-assured you that you had taken a step in the right direction.

You might like to do some writing, she'd said placing the diary down on the locker. Cathy wanted the doctor to tell her what she was expected to write about. But she left the room saying only that she would return tomorrow. Tomorrow was now today and you expect her to call by later. No harm in looking at the diary. You pick at the corner of the cellophane finding it tears easily. The pages are blank. Diaries usually have the day, month and year printed at the top of the page. Maybe, Doctor B wants you to figure that one out for yourself. It's Susan's birthday this week. It must be June. And it's Tuesday. It's a start but you have no inclination to write anything in the diary. Diaries leave records for everyone to read. If not sooner, then later when you're no longer around. No matter what you write they'll look for their own meaning. Just as your English

teacher did at high school when she caught you writing something you shouldn't have been. If Cathy hadn't have been so consumed in what it was she was writing that day, then Mrs Barry wouldn't have expected anything out of the ordinary. So unusual for you to be so attentive to what you were doing, she claimed. You hadn't heard her creep along the aisle. Only the ruler as it hit the desk. An essay for the Loyal Order of the Rechabites on the evils of drinking alcohol. You could have argued. Argued that it would be highly unlikely you would become an alcoholic since you'd already been so drunk once, you'd promised yourself you'd never drink again. But Cathy was impertinent. Mrs Barry had said it so many times before. It was easier to keep quiet than have to go to Miss Applegate's office and appear remorseful.

Water off a duck's back. That's what she said the next day, when she ripped, what would have been your novel. No use in talking to Cathy Evans. Cathy never listened. But she talked, anyway. And talked. Told you how immoral you were, writing such rubbish. She could have admitted that it was well written (for you knew it was) but that was of no concern to her. An eleven year old doesn't know about these things. Shouldn't know about them. *Return to Summer Place*. Such a title. And, the goings on among your characters. It was the goings on that disturbed Mrs Barry the most. You needed to explain that your novel was going to be the sequel to *Summer Place* the film you'd seen on the telly the weekend before. You needed to tell her that you were going to sell it for a thousand dollars, move to Hollywood where you'd write the film script, meet Sandra Dee in person and ask her if her curly hair was really a perm like your Mam had said it was. But you didn't. Mrs Barry would've only said I shouldn't have been allowed to watch such filth in the first place.

You're smiling! How wonderful.

Yes. You're smiling. But then again, a much younger Cathy was always smiling. The doctor is called. She leaves the room. What made you smile? Remembering, what was only one of many confrontations with Mrs Barry? Or, Sandra Dee? Memory and imagination. That's what it's all about. You could write all of this down. But someone, maybe years from now, might read what

you've written. Judge Cathy Evans unfairly. Rita's Mam did. My Mum won't let us watch *Number 96* she said every Friday morning. You remember how eager she was to find out what happened in the last episode the night before. How she'd wait at the school gate and usher you aside, pleading with you to keep your voice down. After all, you never knew who may be listening. My Mum would have a fit if she knew you were telling me all this she'd giggle. You never did understand why she wasn't allowed to watch the show. The show on telly that caused so much controversy yet was still being screened years later when you were expecting Alex. Never could understand what morals were all about and why some thought you were lacking. As the writer I can see the connection. See the contradiction. But you never could. Could never figure out why, when you were expecting for the first time, you knew it was wrong to go along with Patrick's idea to have an abortion. There's a woman me mate knows, he'd said before you had hung up in his ear. The office, where you worked, was no place to discuss the issue. An abortion was an issue only for Patrick. Not for you. You'd seen a documentary on the telly. Backyard abortions. A woman, trying to make her way home, alone, on a tram after having herself fixed up as the abortionist had put it. Cats get fixed up. That's all you can remember. No recollection of the procedure shown in the documentary. Must have been enough to frighten you (or, had you closed your eyes?). Years later you'll be glad you didn't listen to him. Not go with him, as he had wanted you to. Instead, avoiding Patrick at the time was easier. Easier than trying to come to terms with the pregnancy. Doctor B re-enters the room. Asks, what happened to the smile. You respond with another. And the writing? she asks. Cathy shrugs.

Maybe you could record pleasant thoughts. Thoughts that make you smile. Use the diary in whatever way you would like.

Maybe, I'll write a novel.

A novel? Sounds good. Any idea what the novel will be about?

A young girl gets herself lost in the forest and is eaten by wolves.

You're now playing games with the doctor. It's a change. Role reversals. That's what life is all about. You've played lots of games. Played games, back

in 1968, with your parents, and Patrick. Made up excuses why you couldn't go out with Patrick, when all along you knew if you did go he'd rush you off to a mate of a mate's house whose wife practised abortions. Pretended to be asleep when he had called by, in the evenings and your parents kept encouraging you to go out with such a nice boy. Couldn't, or wouldn't, understand why you no longer wanted to see Patrick. Couldn't understand (for they were yet to learn you were pregnant) why at sixteen you were always tired and went to bed so early. Doctor B seems pleased with your progress. You can tell. She's recording her observations. It's one of the few days she's had something to write about. And now, you have, too. So, she says putting the chart back on the end of the bed and her pen in her coat pocket:

Where has the inspiration to write a novel come from?

Sandra Dee.

Doctor B is puzzled. She waits, expecting you to elaborate. Seconds, before she realises that is all you are going to feed her. For now, that is. You're not lying. Flooding back, is the passion with which you remember your first attempt at writing a novel. Sandra Dee and. Can't remember his name. Doesn't matter. Sandra Dee was everything you wanted to be and her character, in *Summer Place*, did everything you wanted to do. But, at sixteen, the script you'd been given wasn't quite like hers, and you were yet to learn how to write your own. Yet to learn how to hop off the lily pad without getting your feet wet. No need for this frog to retrieve the golden ball. The princes usually caught it long before it hit the water. And, when at last you did tumble and plop into the water, you were taken in hand by a sorcerer disguised as a prince. Cathy quickly learnt that princes lie. The books had got it wrong.

Movies weren't too different either. Your first time, that night with Patrick, wasn't quite how you expected it to be. Somehow, the front seat of a Holden utility parked kerbside in a street, on a still winter's night, didn't measure up to Sandra Dee's secret liaison with what's his name at a lonely spot high above the cliffs. There had been no roar of the sea crashing on rocks as it had been for Sandra Dee, and how you imagined it would've been for you too. Only the sound

of a fart that slipped as Patrick removed his jocks. This is the one sound you remember. Little else. Still, when it was all said and done, the only thing that mattered at the time was your parents approved of him. Thought he was a nice boy.

Six

Hell can't be far away. It's getting hotter and hotter everyday. Me Mam reckons she's melting and Dad reckons he has felt too ill with the heat to finish the book he'd borrowed from the ship's library. It's a pity he's not going to finish it. I was looking forward to finding out what happened to the convicts when they sailed through Hell's Gate. I guess I'll just have to wait and find out for myself. I'm not scared of going to hell. It's a change from always being told I'm going to end up in heaven. Besides, I'm getting fed up with being kept under house arrest as the Captain calls it. But me Dad says it's necessary because they don't want a repeat episode of what happened the other day. The Captain laughed when he saw me bound to the deck chair.

Under house arrest are you?

Me Dad's gone to the toilet.

Well, I supposed that's one way of knowing where you are.

I tried to get him to loosen the scarf that held me by the waist to the chair. You can loosen it from the back I told him, but he just laughed and said he's no good at undoing knots. Instead, he gave me a little compass like the one I lost at the bottom of the pool. He said that when I saw the needle point north west we weren't too far off the coast of Australia. I've turned the compass around and around and the needle points in all directions. How am I suppose to know what direction we're going? I'd rather wait till I hear someone shout out land ahoy like they do on the telly. Mind you, I can't see how they're going to spot land before everyone else when there isn't a mast with a lookout at the top. It's just one more thing I can't understand. Nothing has made much sense since we left Wales. I've been on a boat train that stopped alongside the ship and didn't, as I had expected, float on water. I've seen fish that fly above the water and I've met King Neptune who left his kingdom and joined us aboard for a party.

King Neptune lives under the sea at the Equator. He came aboard, along with his mermaids, to see if we were all worthy of crossing the Equator. Susan

said they were only people dressed up and there is no such thing as mermaids, King Neptune was only a myth and the ceremony was only an excuse for a party. But I know differently. Susan, like everyone, is wrong. Except, of course, they don't believe me. King Neptune had a list of people aboard who were charged with wrong-doings and he set up a court beside the pool to decide if they were guilty or not. Those who were guilty got dunked in the swimming pool. One woman was charged and put on trial for trying to get into Davey Jones' locker where only sailors go after they die. It would have been a good day except for the mishap, as my Dad calls it. Mam said I'm so clumsy I'll end up in heaven before long.

It has been more than two months since we left Wales. Susan doesn't cry so much any more. She misses her friends back home. Dad often looks as if he's been crying but he says the salt air is irritating his eyes. It's not as if Susan hasn't made any new friends on the ship. I hardly ever see her and when I do she's always with some girls trailing after one of the crew. Most of the time it's the ship's doctor whose name is Georgio. Susan reckons he's better looking than Mario Lanza and he sings too. If you ask me they all look the same. Seen one Italian and you've seen the lot. She's filled three autograph books already. Some write in English but most write in Italian which I think is pretty stupid. Why would you want to collect autographs for souvenirs when you can't even understand what they write? I mean they could be writing anything. And it's no good asking them what they've written because, as me Mam says, they'll tell you anything. That's why I'm teaching myself Italian so none of them can put anything over me. I can already say ciao and signorina. Mam also gave me the Omo box when it was empty. Although it looks like the Omo we bought in Wales, the writing is in Italian. So before you know it, I'll be able to say Omo for a brighter wash. Then there's pagri: Or, is that an Arab word I picked up from the soldier in Port Said?

He and some other soldiers with guns came aboard to make sure no one left the ship before it passed through the Suez canal. That was before I nearly drowned. They watched us like hawks. Me Mam asked one of the soldiers why

on earth would any of us want to jump ship in such a dirty hole? He didn't answer her so she kept on giving him heaps about how rotten dirty he was and how the Arabs are always fighting. He took no notice of her and I wondered whether he was as good as the soldiers I'd seen at the Tower Of London. I'd tried to get their attention but none of them had batted an eyelid. No matter what I did, or what faces I pulled, they took no notice. I was just about to stamp on the toes of one of them and me Dad pulled me away. Anyway, Ahab the Arab (as Peter called him) ignored everything that was said to him, that is he did until we were alone. Mam had gone looking for Dad. I knew he was on the other side of the ship buying Mam some turkish delight from the merchants who came alongside selling things. I was trying to work out how his tea towel was wrapped around his head when suddenly he looked down and cried out boo in my face. He scared the living daylights out of me. But I didn't cry. He was very friendly.

Why don't you go and play?

Oh, so you do understand English. How old do you have to be to join your army?

Sometime around thirteen.

I looked around for Peter. He's never around when you want him. Mam doesn't seem to worry about him. She says she knows where to find him at mealtimes and that's all that matters. Mind you, he missed out on dinner the day after we left Port Said. He'd gutsched the turkish delight and was sick all over the place. If that had been me I would have got yelled at. But all Mam said was, no wonder he threw up eating foreign muck.

It was a change him being ill, considering we had all been sea sick and he hadn't. Peter had thought it pretty funny that everyone was sea sick and not him. I'd woke shortly after midnight soon after leaving Plymouth and I threw up all over the bunk. Not only did the steward have to change my bed but Dad's as well. I told him it wasn't a good idea choosing a bunk below someone. Anyway, the steward said that we would be all right once we got into the Bay of Biscay because the sea is calmer there. I was only repeating what he had said, a week later, to Mam as she threw up over the side when she screamed at me to shut

up. How was I supposed to know we'd sailed through the Bay of Biscay six days before? Besides, she should have listened to me in the first place. I told her not to drink so much water and Coca Cola was much better. The next day she found out that the water from the tap in the cabin was not to be drunk and drinking water was available from a tap down the corridor. From then on she too, stuck to Coca Cola and next to no time she found her sea stomach.

Now, if only I could find me sea legs I'd be fine too. I'm still a bit wobbly but things could be worse. At least I didn't have to have my legs in plaster for the trip. The doctor back home said the hospital in Melbourne would take care of everything soon after we arrive. My legs have never been so brown. I mustn't get my face too brown though. Taid mightn't recognise me in any photos we send back. That's why I've made myself a pagri from a tea towel I scrounged from the kitchen and when I'm sitting in the sun I turn it around so the sun doesn't get on my face. Peter said I look ridiculous and why can't I just wear a knotted hanky on my head like all the rest of them. Mam wants to know why was it necessary for us to travel to Australia on an Italian ship when England has ships of their own? She doesn't understand that there are so many of us being shipped out to Australia, that there aren't enough ships. You'd think she'd understand having seen just how many of us got on this boat at Plymouth. She herself had said we were just like sheep being herded up the gangway. All I could think of was, where were they going to stack us all?

I was even more worried when it was time to set sail. The boat was tipping to one side from everyone wanting to wave good-bye. It didn't matter that you didn't have anyone to see you off. Everyone waved anyway. There were bands playing, and even I had a handful of streamers. Besides, we were the first emigrants to sail from Plymouth since the *Mayflower* left for the colonies.

Mind you, I would much preferred to have sailed on the *Mayflower* than the *Fairsky*. Susan had shown me a picture of it in an encyclopedia and it looked just like a pirates' ship. Me aunt and uncle from London had intended to come and see us off at Southhampton. But two days before we were to sail, Susan and our cousin read in the *Evening News* that the *Fairsky* had a broken propeller

and its next journey to Australia would be postponed. The ship was taken to Plymouth for repairs and so, in the end, we sailed from there instead.

It didn't matter though because we got to see a lot more of London and visit more of Mam's relatives. Most of them had never met me before and they may never get the chance to meet me again because my Dad ses I'm going to end up in heaven sooner than I think. Mam reckons that unlike a cat which has nine lives, I only have one and I'll end up killing myself if I'm not more careful.

Everyone thought I had died a couple of weeks ago. I'd crept through the crowd gathered around the pool to get a closer look at the tail of the mermaid who sat on the edge of the pool. The sea was so rough that day the water in the pool was swishing and swashing from one side to the other. I only wanted to feel her scales when my hand slipped from beneath me and in I went. Everyone was busy watching a man being helped out of the pool after he had been dunked by King Neptune and no one saw me slip into the water. Susan thought they were going to be burying me at sea and even Peter said he was happy to see me open my eyes. I didn't know I had nearly drowned. First, I knew about it was when I felt someone poking their fingers down the back of my throat to make me throw up and I heard people cheering. I told them all I wouldn't have drowned because the little girl saved me. Dad said I was having delusions, but I wasn't. I seem to remember lying on the bottom of the pool when I saw her sitting in the corner smiling. She swam over and lifted me toward the surface. The man who had jumped in to look for me said he didn't see any other child except me and my body, limp as it was, was slowly rising to the surface. He said in all the years he's been at sea he has never seen anything like it before. Anyway, they all think I'm cracked. But I know I saw her. She looked just like me. Taid always said everyone has a double somewhere in the world. Mam just threw her arms up in the air and said she hoped to God, not.

Her past lay in a hollow dream.

A hollow, scattered with remnants of memory waiting to be arranged and orchestrated. There's a lull in the story (or is it a break in the film for which no apology is made). Sense and sensibility. That's what it's all about. Nicotine stained, my thumb presses hard against the page but the words — as black as they might appear — spill out from under my thumb and my thoughts swim once more toward the yacht. Toward the yacht where the skipper lies gazing down into the ocean hoping to catch a glimpse of the mermaids as they harvest the barnacles from the hull. The yacht, I notice, now lies contentedly at rest one hundred and eighty degrees to where it first dropped anchor. And I listen for the skipper to speak.

Cathy couldn't see the woman she really was, any more than you or I. Drawn by the morsels of childhood memories sweetly wrapped in glittering foil, she was yet to discover that each, when unwrapped, was nothing more than a stale, sticky toffee that stuck to her palate. But dreams are easier to relinquish when there is another to take its place.

Loneliness is a lengthy word, even longer when you're surrounded by it. I thought of the rat, a foreign species, that had been sighted trying to reboard a ship and until it was detained all sea-going vessels were halted. And so I found myself trapped in a city choked by its people who thought themselves lucky if a pigeon crapped on them. I thought of the rat trying to get back to where it had originally come from and whether it was as surely disappointed with London as I was. The difference was, this was where I had originally come from, or at least I was pretty close. Wales was less than two hundred miles and I couldn't help but wonder, if this city was so closely bound to my birthplace, what lay in store. Had I been so wrong, believing for so many years, that I could return and pick up what was, after all, only memories from my childhood. No wonder Virginia Woolf kept

so many diaries for there was very little else to do but write in a city where people were so unwilling to speak to one another.

I was reminded of something which I had read on the train the night I journeyed back from my aunt's. In the carriage, where I might well have sat alone, someone had left behind a school bag. There was no monogram as I had imagined every school child in Britain having (much like the adventurous school chums I had spent so much time reading about), just a plain vinyl bag packed so full the zipper refused to close on a book that protruded. I slid the novel (the heart of which had been ripped out) from where it lay. There was little else to read, do or see for London is, I had decided, blacker than any place on earth. The pencilled jottings of a child, at first, seemed to be more interesting than what was left of the novel. But then, the following lines underlined in a heavy hand. "They were dying slowly — it was clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now...". It reminded me of the people I had watched, so carefully, as they moved around London. But neither were they black shadows, as those described in the novel, but enigmatic selves all laden with the burden that comes with living in London. A city, and no doubt a country, which had grown dependent on a practice of supply and demand in the trade of people. And I thought of the doll's house which I had left vacant when, as a child, I and its occupants, sailed for Australia. I wondered if its new occupants had travelled half way around the world to Britain, a country that assumed as part of its politics that assimilation was the answer.

Assimilation a word that promised so much but failed to erase the memory of those left behind. Failed to erase the feeling, that I have, when as a child I had little say in the matter of what country I should wish to grow up in. Yet it is a word I have to admit I only became aware of around the time my daughter was born. A time when I realised that she, like me, would never fully understand where it is she belonged or know her origins. And, when all is said and done there is little difference between the politics of assimilation, and those of adoption.

The woman whose apartment I had visited before leaving Australia had denied that she was my daughter but I knew differently. I had watched her

standing with her back to me, staring at the heavily draped window. I had wanted to take her from the doll's house in which she lived and put her back where she rightfully should have belonged but I knew neither she, nor I really had a choice. Time had taken away that choice of recapturing what had already passed. All that remained were the letters. Letters I had decided not to surrender to her. Letters that I might have sent, years before, if I had known where she lived.

The clinic was abuzz with gossip. News had spread that a certain member of the nursing staff was dating a particular doctor. No one mentioned her name or if they did, they did so among themselves and out of the earshot of patients. There were plenty of innuendos.

It's not the first time she's got her claws into a doctor.

You're joking. I didn't think she was like that.

Plenty of morsels for those not in the know to feed on. Cathy neither cared nor bothered to pursue the matter. She had her own ideas about who the couple were. After all she had been a patient now for four months. There was a time Cathy would have asked. But now she is content to listen. What others did, or said about anyone else was of no interest to you (even though you were quite sure the incident would come in handy one day when you wrote the novel). But for the time being she was content to let the gossip tickle her nose and the words, like larvae, hatched and grew into maggots that ate hungrily away at her memory.

1967. You were yet to have sex for the first time. Yet to make out in the front seat of the car parked alongside a hotel in Essendon. Still the girls in the office where you worked believed differently. After all you were dating a friend of the supervisor and her husband. E.H., as you affectionately remember her, had let it slip that you were dating her husband's mate Patrick. Patrick's reputation, had well and truly been established, by proxy so to speak, during lunchtime conversations in the mail room of the department store where you first worked. Conversations that not only fueled the ongoing saga of Patrick's love life but also your inquisitiveness. His reputation could excite and disgust the women who hung on to every word until lunchtime was over and everyone returned to their work.

The conversations continued in the clinic. The staff went about their work. Continuing to weave the stories, from what little they knew.

Ask Marilyn. Ask her how so and so acts out on a date. She'll tell you how she carries on. She may be a good nurse but from what I hear she's better at...

Here I'll finish making this bed if you want to go and start the medications.

Ask so-and-so. Yes. 1967. During lunchbreak. Patrick's ongoing saga took a different turn when, on that day, your name was dropped as a point of reference. Ask Cathy. She knows what he's like. It's E.H's voice you recall. You can no longer remember what it was you were supposed to make valid, only that it was at that time your name, and your story, became a part of Patrick's story. Word was out that you and he were an item. No longer did the girls in the mailroom scorn your stories of permissive behavior and dismiss them as being nothing more than idle fantasies (for that is all they were), they started to take more interest in what you had to say and do. The stories you had created, in a bid to be recognised, in a bid to gain acceptance, took on another dimension. A dimension that made them all the more real.

But, so far, you had done very little. You and he were yet to consummate the relationship. You had been out on a couple of dates with Patrick but it was always in the company of E.H. and her husband. The time when he and you were to be left alone, the moment you would find out for yourself what sex was all about, was yet to happen. Still, there was no harm in letting everyone believe what it was you wanted them to believe. No harm in letting them believe, contrary to opinion, men found you sexually attractive. It made a change from being seen as a dog, a frog, or even the fugly duckling. After all, the game was all about having a man of your own and you, like all the other girls in the office, wanted to join in and play.

Your new-found reputation had clipped the ego of the only two males in the office. Egos that soared with the girls in the office who constantly preened themselves and vied for their attention. The odds were in their favour. Eighteen girls. So many fish in a pond eagerly waiting to be caught. And you hadn't been thrown a line. They, (the boys as they were called) lowered their head when they walked past your desk. They didn't need to take a second look and ask

themselves what the man, with the searing reputation, saw in you. You must have been an easy lay. That's what they were thinking. You knew it was. And you wanted to believe, and did believe, that they were disappointed at not having given you a second look. But as the narrator, reflecting on a past now coloured with life experience I am forced to admit that such coyness, rarely found in men, was more than probable, embarrassment. The two males, like everyone else, in the office knew why Patrick was attracted to you.

But Patrick had looked at you, looked you over-and-over like no man had ever done before and the feeling that it was you he wanted and no one else, had been overwhelming. You liked being at the centre of someone's desire. For the first time you felt what it was like to be wanted and naively believed that you were in control of the situation. Only with hindsight can you now see how transparent you must have been at that time. Your actions, or your lack of action, spoke louder than words. The wolf knew how to play with the lamb. Knew, that if he played the game your way the offering would be sweet, tender and much to his liking.

Cathy was yet to understand that it was not her looks, or her personality, that Patrick so highly prized. It would take time before she realised she had been chosen, above others, for a particular use. But at the time she was enjoying the attention he, and the girls in the office, paid her. Should have known, for Vicki had told her, that men were wolves dressed in the fleece of sheep. Only when, for the first time, Patrick had used her cunt as a repository to gratify his own needs and was sorely disappointed to find she wasn't a virgin did she fully understand where she lay in the relationship.

But you had convinced yourself that Patrick was attracted to the 'new' you. The you, you had consciously worked on to transform from a plain fugly Jane into the little raver your Dad had been heard to have described you to family friends. The time had arrived when the thought of your own father describing you as someone sexually attractive excited and frightened you. Excited because you had always been Dad's girl and you had believed his exaltations could be no higher than what they already were. To hear him comment, openly to friends, on

your newly copper-coloured cropped hair, mini skirts that barely covered your backside and platform shoes that made your long legs look even longer, gave you all the confidence you needed. But his admiration came at a price. A price you realised you would have to pay if your relationship with him was to remain intact. You couldn't take the risk. Father's have desires too. Cathy had learnt that from Vicki. Vicki's father desired her. Vicki had told Cathy her father liked her tits. Liked her tight cunt because it was unlike her mother's which had been stretched with repeated childbirths. Cathy was well versed now in father/daughter relationships. She didn't ever want her relationship with her father to change from what it had been. Didn't want their relationship to turn out like the one between Vicki and her father. She knew she had to take precautions. No longer could she hug her father, confide in him, kiss him goodnight, look directly into his eyes. Cathy wanted what she had had with her father to remain how it had been over the years. And so, she practised at balancing, innocence and the childish, with the worldly and desirable.

Besides, Cathy was so pathetically thin, yet was to be endowed with the figure of a mature woman. The latest fashionable look suited her down to the ground. Your weekly pay of twenty-five dollars didn't go far in buying many clothes but what you did buy was put to good use. Unlike the knee length blue floral number with the high neck (not to mention the pair of flat-heeled shoes that had been bought for you to start work in). Your new wardrobe included shirred elastic-top dresses, fine Swiss cotton flounced blouses, a white fake-fur coat which you wore with thigh length soft leather boots, that hooked, along with your stockings, to your suspender belt.

The look suited you. Or, at least that is what some said. Susan didn't like the look. She must have been embarrassed. That's why she chose to stand away from you in the lift when it was going home time. The time of day when the girls from the mail room and those who worked in accounts across the way, made their way down to the ground floor before dispersing through the doors of the department store. So much chatter and giggling from the juniors. Unlike the senior staff from accounts who were as boring as the positions each held. But

again you're only surmising about what Susan thought. And why she chose to keep her distance. Why she, and you, didn't meet at lunchtimes. Meet after work. Take in an occasional movie. Probably because there was an age gap between you and her. More likely, it was because you had such different personalities. You want her to know just how much she did mean to you at the time. How much you respected her and wanted to be just like her. But you can't tell her now because you're not sure if that is how you felt at that time. 1967. You were so rebellious. So disappointed that going out to work still meant that you had to toe the line. Do as your parents wanted. Conform to what was expected of a sixteen-year-old girl.

Dad's little girl was now a working girl. And with the title of working girl Cathy had believed she was about to attain financial and psychological independence. But on returning home from the office she had quickly come to despise, and having worked for only two days, she could not contain her emotions. Her disappointment spilled over onto the garage floor creating a hazard that needed to be contained quickly. Efficiently. The garage had seemed like a good place to go. Darkness, from the rays of a setting sun. Cathy's anger, and despair, would be less intense (or so she thought) choked by the stifling stagnant air in the family's garage. But her limbs reacted, if not her voice, and she had kicked at the door so hard the pain in her toes aroused an involuntary cry that immediately subsided and left Cathy whimpering.

Mrs Evans didn't have to hazard a guess as to why the garage door had been slammed. She could read her daughter like a book. And, as she had predicted the book had once more been flung in rage. Cathy knew her mother would follow her out into the garage which only added to her frustration. She knew with every mouthful of food she had eaten over dinner, that evening, the foundations for a confrontation between the two were being laid. But Mrs Evans didn't know how to knock down the wall that grew between her and her daughter. Only knew, as Cathy did, that she could temporarily halt construction. Stop your grizzling. She was there. Framed by the light in the door. Cathy's guardian who, like Cathy herself, was no angel no matter how hard she tried. And no

matter how she tried to convince Cathy that she would not regret taking the position in the mail room instead of the job on the dairy farm, Cathy knew differently. Well, at least, she thought she did at the time. It wasn't just a job on a dairy farm. The farm, and its spaces, heralded the dawning of independence. A home away from home. But Mrs Evans was concerned for Cathy's physical and psychological well-being. Susan had told her, and you, of a job on offer in the mailroom. Too good to be true. One you stood a chance of getting because of your sister's good-standing in her own position there. A job for Cathy that wouldn't be too physically demanding and one where Cathy could be carefully watched. After all, Cathy's tram had recently run off the rails and she needed to be put back on track.

Seven

I was only thinking to myself a while ago that I might write to *It Could Be You!* and ask Tommy if he could reunite us all with Taid. He could have lived with us here on the hostel. We would've all been on telly! Then, when they draw back the curtain Dad would have run over and hugged Taid. At the time, I mentioned it to Susan. She thought it was a good idea except we had only been in Australia two months and she reckoned we hadn't been separated from Taid long enough and the telly company would not have paid to bring him out from Wales. I'd forgotten we'd only been here a little while. It seems as if we've been here for years and years. Anyway it doesn't matter any more. Taid died. Dad's cousin, Muriel had written to say Taid had died five days prior to her writing. They had buried him with Nain.

We would've had to move to a bigger hut anyhow. E34 isn't big enough to swing a cat. There's barely enough room for Susan, Peter and me in our bedroom and Mam and Dad's bed takes up most of their room. Pansy wouldn't have liked it here. There's people everywhere! You're not supposed to have pets, but Mrs Shipsey had a cat for a long time before some teddy boys hit it on the head and killed it. Besides I don't think Taid would've liked eating in the canteen. He preferred to cook for himself. Me Dad doesn't like eating in the canteen either. He reckons we have to line up like cattle and people eat like pigs. Sometimes he doesn't even finish his meal. He just gets up and walks out. The smell from the abattoirs next to the hostel puts him off his food. I'm getting used to the smell. It's worse on hot days. Anyway, I always know where to find Dad. He sits under the trees at the entrance to the hostel. The first time I noticed him sitting there I thought he was waving to the cars passing by but I soon realised he was doing nothing more than shooing the flies away. He said he'd never seen so many flies in his life. He's right too. I've had to learn to keep me mouth closed more often.

Your Mam know you're here?

Yeh! Honestly, she does. Here, let me roll you a fag.

I'm getting quite good at rolling fags. Dad never used to roll his own but he can't buy Woodbynes in this hell hole as he calls it. So, he's taken up rolling his own just like Taid did.

Maybe one day soon I can write to Tommy and ask him if he'd bring Olwyn Evans and Mrs Price and Mrs Lowe out here for a holiday. We'd all like that. Especially me. I miss talking to them all and I miss the cakes they used to make me. Nobody cooks in this place because there are no kitchens in the huts. The ladies around here are nice but they mainly all meet in the laundry. That's where Mam spends most of her time yapping. That is when she isn't in someone's hut over the way, having cups of tea. I usually know where she is and how long she's gone for. Sometimes she tries to sneak in quietly. But I always hear her coming.

Just making sure you're not up to any mischief.

And what mischief is it, I'd be getting in to?

I know she doesn't believe me. She's so suspicious of me being left alone. As if I haven't got nothing better to do than rummage through drawers. What have you been looking for in here? she'd say. God! I ask you. As if I didn't know better. It's no good arguing with her either. It's better to fib and say you were looking for a pen or something just to shut her up. Even that doesn't work all the time. Most of the time she just gives me one of her looks, does what she came in to do, and leaves.

Call out if you need me. I'm only across the way!

I can't understand why she gets so fussed about me looking in drawers. There's not much in them anyway. Mainly clothes and papers. I do know that's where the guarantee for the telly is kept along with the book that tells me what knobs to turn if the picture isn't clear. It's nearly paid for too. There's only three more coupons left in the repayment book and the telly is ours for life! Mam said we could have done without a telly and she was fed up trying to keep up the payments. But me Dad put his foot down for once and said we had to have one. He said, they'd both agreed when they left Wales, that the little money they had

would buy the bare necessities when they got to Australia. Trouble was, Mam's idea of a bare necessity was a car and so she wanted to save the money, so when Dad got a job he could learn to drive. We could go places if we had a car, she'd say:

We wouldn't be stuck in this stinking hole.

But Dad argued it wasn't necessary to have a car and a telly would benefit us all. So, they bought a telly along with a kerosene heater, even though it's so bloody hot here I don't think it will ever get cold, and an electric jug to make cups of tea with so we didn't have to go to the canteen all the time.

I'm glad me Dad got his own way. But it wasn't before they had a dreadful row. I heard Mrs Shipsey tell Mam to take care or else her and Dad would end up in the divorce court. That's why I don't think Mam likes me watching *Divorce Court* on the telly.

You're not watching that rubbish again are you? Here, eat your dinner.

You mean, me lunch!

Lunch, dinner, whatever. Why don't you watch *It Could Be You!* Instead of this rubbish? Here, I'll swap channels. And get on with your schoolwork as soon as that's over. I'm only over at Sandra's if you need me.

She never gives me a chance to ask why she doesn't like me watching *Divorce Court*. I've tried telling her how educational it is. I've never been inside a court room before and I like watching the men in their wigs yell at the women until they make them cry. I've even tried to reassure her that she needn't worry about ending up in the divorce court. You need a house and money before you can get divorced and seeing we haven't either, then there's no chance of you getting a divorce, I told her. After all, if there isn't anything to split up, then there wouldn't be anything to argue over, would there? Honestly, I don't know why I bother. She always ignores me.

And as for my schoolwork. I've finished all of this week's and the next. It's not my fault! They don't send me enough. Mam's only supposed to give me each day's lessons, but usually she just hands me the parcel when it arrives every fortnight and I do the rest. It's really easy stuff and so I've usually finished

it in a couple of days. At least back in Wales Mrs. Roberts used to keep sending stuff home for me with Peter. No matter. Soon I'm going to be able to go to school. Well, at least that's what my Dad says. But he told me that before I left Wales and I'm still unable to go. In Wales there were too many stairs and steps at Peter's school. Here, the school is too far and I still have difficulty walking. Mam's been given a wheelchair so she can take me to the canteen for meals. She's even offered to take me to and from school but the teachers were not too keen to have me there because there wasn't enough room between the desks for the wheelchair. So, until I can at least get up and down a step or two, I have to stay here on me own doing correspondence school. I only ever get to see the teacher when he comes and visits me every three weeks. It's pretty boring until the kids come home from school. Mam will only let me go outside in my wheelchair when she or someone else is around to keep an eye on me. Dad blamed her the last time I went missing. But I wasn't missing. I knew where I was. The policeman said I wasn't to abscond again or else!

There are some days when Dad gets home early from looking for work. But most of the time he leaves first thing in the morning and doesn't get back till late. When we first arrived, he'd go off with the other men from here on the hostel. But one by one they all got jobs. All but Dad. All Dad gets is sore feet from walking between factories. I did happen to suggest he should buy a horse but he said he didn't have the money for a bus fare never mind a bloody horse. I don't know why he doesn't ask the men in the abattoir if he could borrow one of theirs. They only ride them now and again when they want to move the sheep. And even then, it's their dogs that do most of the work. They're a lazy lot of buggars. They just sit there whistling. I've told Dad I could show him how to ride, because I've been watching them.

Dad has learnt to take some shortcuts across the fields — or the paddocks as they call them here. Sometimes he walks all the way to Footscray and back. Peter and Susan work in Footscray. Susan works in a shop and Peter is learning how to build boats. Maybe one day he'll sail away for ever and we won't see him again. He should've gone to school for another ten months but

Mam argued with the headmaster and said she wasn't going to pay for a uniform and books for such a short time. He's daft anyway and I agree with Mam that it would be a waste of money sending him to school. Anyway, Peter was down by the river when he saw someone had advertised for an apprentice boat builder. Dad said Peter was just lucky being in the right place at the right time. That's just what I keep on telling Dad! One day he's going to be in the right place at the right time and someone will give him a job. He just hasn't been lucky enough yet. Dad ses it's because he's had TB. He said the bosses turn him away as soon as they find out. Me Mam says he's bloody mad for telling them in the first place. But me Dad says it's wrong to tell lies. Taid never lied. Well, at least I know he nearly, never ever told lies. But there was the time he made me tell him where I had hid the lamb I'd taken on the night of the Chapel's Christmas play. Taid had promised, that if I gave Horace the farmer his lamb back, he would get me a lamb of me own, one day. But he never did. Mam gets really angry with Dad. Dad says we should never have left Wales. Nothing's gone right since Taid died.

I didn't really want Horace's lamb, or any other lamb. It was a dumb idea in the first place. Besides they grow up to be daft looking. I should know! I sat over by the fence long enough watching them before I woke up to myself. Sheep would have to be the dumbest animals in the world. I don't waste my time with them any more. They all look the same, alive or dead. Not even their bloody skins hanging out on the racks to dry worry me any more. I used to think that if I sat there long enough I'd see the men shearing them like I've seen them do on the telly but they don't bother! Peter said it was a slaughterhouse not a shearing shed:

You dumb sheila. They kill 'em, skin 'em and we eat them!

That was earlier in the piece. Me and Susan don't eat lamb any more if we can get away with it. Sometimes Mam makes me eat it. One Sunday, not too long ago, she went potty in the canteen. Peter started it! We were watching the woman behind the counter carving the lamb. It had just come out of the oven and there was a big red number stamped on its skin. Peter said he'd seen

number five running round the paddock the day before. Susan told him to shut up. It made her feel sick. You could see she was nearly in tears. But I wasn't going to let anyone make me cry. Peter's making Susan feel sick, I told Mam as she and Dad returned to the table with our meals.

I only said I'd seen a sheep with number five on its back running round the paddock yesterday. I was only joking.

Dad dropped his plate down on the table with a clatter and left the canteen. Susan followed. I was just about to tell Peter off when Mam sat down, glared at us both and told us to eat! I left the meat till last. It's not that I want to dawdle, it's just that I can't swallow it. Besides, while Mam had gone off to get me some more gravy, Billy and Michael Gallagher sat down with their Dad at the next table. Billy stabbed at his meat and started baa...ing like a sheep. His Dad told him to cut it out and eat, but he'd wait until I looked his way and off he'd go again. They're teasing me about the accident, I whispered to Mam as she sat back down. Take no notice, she said. What do you expect from the bloody Irish! Billy didn't stop though. I really was trying to ignore them when Michael announced aloud, that his lamb was still bleeding! I was so angry I picked up the pepper shaker and threw it at him. It wasn't my fault the lid wasn't on tight and pepper flew all over Mr Gallagher's dinner, making them all sneeze. Mam went potty, cuffed me across the head, grabbed my wheelchair and stormed out of the canteen. She paid out on me all the way back to the hut.

You really take the cake Catherine Evans! I've had about as much as I can take! Trouble is, you're so damn spoilt. Your father spoils you rotten and then leaves it to me to pick up the pieces. That's it, from now on he can take care of you. I've had enough. You're nothing but bloody trouble. You'll end up in naughty girls school!

But Mam! They were teasing me! They were the ones that were making trouble. They're always teasing me. They say it was my fault what happened to the baby lamb. But it wasn't! I didn't murder it!

Oh for God's sake! The bloody lamb died and that's that. Stop being so bloody dramatic. And stop your bloody crying or else I'll give you something to cry over!

She was so mad that afternoon she forgot about her promise never to take me down the path that led between our hut and the fence of the abattoir. Up until then, we'd always taken the long way around to the canteen. We had avoided the shorter way. Now, it made me feel real sick. I tried not to cry but I couldn't help myself. Mam made me go to bed for the rest of the day. There was no sign of Dad or Susan. Peter came in much later. He said he was sorry for what had happened.

Here, I've smuggled you some pudding out of the canteen. Don't let on to Mam. I'll take the dish and spoon back tomorrow.

I wasn't hungry at the time, but later that night when the lights went out I sat in the dark and ate the pudding. Mam and Dad weren't talking. Neither was Susan. I knew everyone was still awake. My Dad swatted the odd mozzie or two, Mam knocked the wall with her knee each time she turned in bed and Susan let out the occasional sob. And Peter? Carefully Peter stepped down from the top bunk and slipped in beside me. I'm sorry, he whispered before falling asleep. I lay awake for some time listening to the sheep in the paddock next door. I made up my mind from then on I was never going to talk to a sheep ever again, never mind eat them! Mam could make as much noise as she wanted. She couldn't make me eat it! I promised myself I'd throw up if she did. On our way back from the canteen I'd noticed they had replaced the old fence with a new one. If they'd fixed it in the first place then the sheep wouldn't have got out. Then I wouldn't have got blamed for making the hole bigger. Besides, how did I know the sheep would follow each other. I only wanted the baby lamb to escape. I mean, what would I have done with all the others? The lamb didn't belong there. I'd told me Dad but he wasn't interested. I'd shouted to the men working in the abattoirs but they ignored me. I told the manager of the hostel and he said he'd take care of it. But at the end of the day, the little lamb was still there. He needs a home, I thought. No one's going to want him for dinner. He's too

skinny. I knew me Dad would let me keep him once I got him out and took him back to the hut. But even though I coaxed him to the hole in the fence, his mother kept shooing him back among the other sheep. I would have kept on trying except I could hear Mam yelling her lungs out. I'd been out of sight for a little too long. I hurried back. I didn't mean to forget to push the wire back over the hole. Next morning the sheep were everywhere. Everyone thought it was a laugh, except for Mrs Gallagher who had taken the trouble to plant some flowers under her window. The sheep had eaten them all! Two men on horses rounded them up into a truck and drove them back around into the abattoir. I thought the lamb must have gone too, until I saw him lying quite still beside the fence. He really did look very poorly. I felt his heart. It was still beating. A tiny drop of blood had hardened, covering his nostril. He looked as if he was smiling at me. I was just about to pick him up when one of the men returned on his horse. Look, I said. The little lamb is hurt.

I'll take care of him as soon as I wire this hole in the fence.

You will be able to fix him up, won't you?

Yeh. Sure, sure I will. Now go on home and leave me get on with it.

I wasn't going to go, but Susan arrived to take me to breakfast. *Oh!* she said. It's a baby lamb. It's been trampled on I told her. I could tell she was going to cry but I reassured her the man was going to fix it up. We'd only just got to the end of the path, where it turns away from the fence, when we heard a thud. We both turned, just in time to see the man swing the lamb by its back legs and hit it hard against the fence post. Susan flew into a terrible rage and ran at the man kicking him as hard as she could. The man threw the lamb over the front of his saddle, mounted and rode off. As he passed, I noticed the lamb's head was back to front. Susan was kneeling down crying. When Dad arrived to see what had happened to us both, he wasn't sure which one of us to go to first. Someone should call the police, he said. Someone should give him a hiding. But no one did anything. I tried to phone the police later that day but I lost my tuppence dialling the wrong number. I didn't have any more money. *Let it be!* said me Mam when I asked her for two more pennies. But I couldn't let it be. I knew if

Taid were there, he would have helped me. Then I remembered seeing the police station from the bus. It's then I got the idea to go there myself. I didn't think it would take so long. I'd just about run out of energy when two policemen drove up beside me.

So, you're our absconder!

I was just on me way to see you!

Everyone on the hostel laughed when they saw me arriving in the police car. Mam and Dad hardly spoke to each other.

That evening Dad found me sitting at the gates under the trees. I didn't want to talk to him.

How about rolling your old Dad a fag? So, you're not talking? Here, you'd better have me hanky. I can see you've got dust in your eyes. You weren't to blame. Sheep! They're the dumbest animals in the world.

Am I going to die?

You've been watching too many cowboys! They don't hang sheep rustlers in Australia.

I know that I told him. I wasn't that daft! I heard Mam and the other women talking in the laundry. They said I was breaking my heart over the little lamb. Taid died of a broken heart. I read Muriel's letter. It was in the drawer. I didn't intend reading it, but no one would talk to me about how Taid had died. Muriel said, Taid had died of a broken heart because we left Wales. Dad reckoned I had got it all mixed up and Taid had died of a stroke. I asked him what a stroke was? But he said I wouldn't understand, took out his packet of tobacco and rolled himself a fag.

I awoke, a little after midnight, and asked (as Captain Cat did) who's there? The drowned who had danced in my dreams were gone and I was left weighted by the beams that held the roof, so close, above where I lay. And from the window of my room at the Ships Inn, at Marlow thirty miles upstream from London, I gazed up the river Thames to where it curved sleekly and disappeared leaving the town seemingly in a heart of darkness. It may have been the lack of moonlight, or the tales that were told at the Inn the night before, that set such a sombre mood. Either way, I thought of the spirit of the man from the wreck which had given the town its name. The man who for the past four hundred years, it's said, yearns to be returned to the sea where he once lay at rest beneath the ship's timbers. Timbers that had been floated in a procession along the Thames to a point where they were resurrected as a hostel for thirsty travellers. The town of Marlow which, as the guidebook states, inspired the imagination of greats such as Percy Shelley, Charles Dickens and, undoubtedly, Joseph Conrad whose boat-borne character Marlow was allowed so many seafaring adventures in his novels. But what of Mary? Wife of Shelley. The Shelleys who lived a few doors up from the Ship's inn. Had she, like me, once been at the Inn when the tale was told of the skeleton found stretched and fastened, by the neck, with a cutlass to the wreck's mid beam? Was it here she saw, for the first time, her tender and articulate Frankenstein?

The clanking of chains. Marlow, as the day breaks and the gates of a lock slowly grind closed. Barges, two in all, buffered by the narrow banks of a lock waited patiently to spill into the Thames. Patience, I have very little. Returning barges to where holiday-makers had hired them from, had at first seemed an appropriate job for a skipper like myself. But I found the waiting intolerable. Still, it was to provide me with a reasonable income, and an occasional night's lodgings while I waited for barges to arrive. I also thought of the job as a means

of remaining inconspicuous while I made my way back to Wales for I had read that locks, charted and uncharted, link the present with the past.

The future, in London, had for a while looked a little grim. I had little money left and with my own yacht still quarantined I needed to find work. There was little to choose from in the columns of the Daily News. Maybe that's why I was so easily distracted when I noticed a report of a lone woman sailor lost at sea. Last sighted three hundred miles off the coast of Fremantle she hadn't been seen for three months. She had, unbeknown to her, been under surveillance and was at one stage thought to have headed back to Australia but had then disappeared somewhere in the Pacific. The report said the woman had recovered imperfectly after leaving a psychiatric clinic. All hopes of finding her were lost.

I needed to disappear. Leave London. There was every chance my aunt and uncle would read the report and the search would begin once more. An opportune time to take up the position on the barges where I could make my way carefully through the heart of England while going unnoticed. In reading the report I had, it seemed, seen Cathy for the first time. A woman who was capable of making her own decisions, despite the consequences she knew she would, inevitably, pay. A lone woman who went in search, for her self, of a past she believed still existed. Nowhere in the report was her name mentioned. But I knew her to be Cathy. Knew her to be myself.

Just as I knew the woman I had found, before leaving Australia, was my daughter. It didn't matter that her surname was different from mine or that her adoptive parents had given her a christian name of their own. No longer did it worry me, either, that I had never known her name. She was my daughter and, as my mother would have said, that was that. Yet I had to ask myself why it was I had chosen not to give her the letters? The letters that I had written on occasions when the sense of loss had been unbearable. The letters that I had sealed in envelopes and which had remained unopened with the intention of one day passing them on to her. So that, one day, she might be able to comprehend that loss. Understand. And, maybe, forgive.

Doctor B now has you in her sights. She isn't about to give up on you as others have done. Eight forty-five in the morning. The doctor suggests she and you go to her office.

It's a little more private.

Cathy doesn't have a problem with going to her office. She trusts the doctor. Unlike. Never mind. What does it matter? You've paid the price. You're even encouraged to call the doctor by her first name Wendy. But old habits die hard and Cathy recalls how she was made to respect her elders. Particularly, when she was at school. Still, she is no longer at school. Cathy remembers, sometimes, to thank God that her school days are over. Doctor B's office is different. A touch of the oriental. Relaxing. You have the choice to sit wherever, and in whatever position, you wish. There are several comfortable chairs.

I thought we might talk about the rape.

Confrontation. You're startled. Never expected the doctor to be so forward. It has been at least three weeks since you told her about the rape. Your rape. She has been patient with the patient who has been in the clinic now for months. Cathy now talks when she wants to. The doctor is waiting for you to elaborate. Waiting for the patient to show some interest in discussing the incident. But having said what you did, at the time, has made you feel a whole lot better and the rush to elaborate on the incident was no longer an issue. Now, Doctor B obviously wants more. Everyone, sooner or later, wants more.

I think we need to talk about what happened. Your son, Alex, was it his father who raped you?

You react with a laugh which immediately drowns in a flood of tears.

No! Heavens no.

Cathy contains her emotions. Fascinated that the doctor believes she has pieced the puzzle together. Frustrated, that she has come up with the wrong

equation. There is a deliberate silence between you and her. The ball of string is unravelling. Revealing the knots. The doctor's fingers will work the knots out in time.

Vicki, my friend — she's dead now. She too, was raped.

That's it. Tell it through the third person. It will be easier that way. Always is easier when it's not you who is directly implicated. Transference. That's what it's all about. Your story becomes someone else's and vice versa. Cathy thinks about the effect Vicki has had on her life. Maybe more so, since what happened to her, happened to you, years later. Different characters; same story. A short-lived, but evergreen friendship that grew, between you and her, at Green Groves.

It's not what the doctor wants to hear but you need to tell it how it was. Make sense, if ever you can, of the experience. 1966. Time spent in a reformatory. Time spent being taught to conform. Time trying to understand, and come to terms with the text-book morality and mentality of the legal system, and your own life experience. The court had found you to be in moral danger. Sexually permissive because a medical examination had revealed Cathy was no longer a virgin. And the law stated (in no uncertain terms) that a young girl, out of wedlock, whose hymen is no longer intact must be sexually permissive. Moral danger, also. Because, you'd repeatedly 'wagged' school and as a last resort, had run away from home. It was your parents' responsibility to make sure you attended school. The law said so. There was a heavy fine for parents who did not uphold the law, many of whom like Cathy's parents, had no alternative but allow the courts to declare the child to be in moral danger and hope the child's time in a reformatory was short.

The court didn't want to hear that at the age of fourteen, you were yet to experience sexual intercourse; why it was you wagged school. They weren't interested in examining the faultlines underlying the cause of the eruption in the first place. Weren't interested in the knowledge you had gained hiding out, during school hours, in the Melbourne Museum and Art Gallery. It was of no interest to the judge to learn how much information you had consumed reading

the cards of tagged artifacts. Only interested in the psychologist's report that you had found the displays of the bare-breasted native women and their way of life interesting and Ruben's scantily dressed women more so. All of which according to the court constituted deviant behavior. And then, of course, there was the secondary matter of the willful harm you had caused a teacher. But the incident, was to remain just that — a secondary incident — and no further correspondence was to be entered into.

The police woman had promised differently. Well, at least, no exact promises but she did assure you that matters would be looked into. Close to midnight. 1965. Five days and six nights on the run, she, and another policeman heard you sobbing beneath some bushes. The Botanical Gardens, St Kilda, such a long way from home when there is little else to see in the darkness but fragments of broken bottles slowly digging their own graves in the soil. When there was little else to smell but urine soaked earth that would dissipate in your dreams and you would wake to mornings so crisp, so sharp, even you thought it possible to cut the past from the present. But the past remains. As it does for everyone. And the events that led to your running away had stuck, as cotton wool might stick to an open wound which refused to heal.

Expelled from school, you had no choice but to run away. Although, it was argued, you had the choice of attending another high school. All of the choices were made to look as if they were yours. Obviously, she must attend a school until she is old enough to legally seek employment.

Eight

Bandstand, frankfurts and bread and butter pudding. How I hate Sundays. Especially when five o'clock comes around. That's when the misery starts. *Bandstand* and the *Bee Gees*. And every Sunday Nurse Jones tries to get me to stop crying by telling me that the *Bee Gees* are also from England. Well, I tell them, they ought to go back to bloody England. They've got horrible voices. Besides, I have to keep reminding everyone I'm not from England, I'm from Wales. It's not fair. Most of us patients all like watching *Disneyland*. Even Mary-Ann, as young as she is, laughs and claps her hands at Goofy and Mickey but the nurses always want to watch *Bandstand*. There's no telly in the nurses home so they like to watch it here. Even those not on duty come along to watch it. And if having to watch that isn't bad enough we get frankfurts and tomato sauce for tea. I mean fancy giving us frankfurts and bloody tomato sauce in hospital. It reminds me of blood and guts. Well at least it does since Thomas told us all, soon after I arrived, about the cat that got squashed on the road just outside the gates. He's going to collect up its bones when it has all rotted away. It's not until we get our pudding I start to shut up. I'm too busy then picking out the sultanas. They look too much like sheep poos.

I was hoping the cooks from the hostel kitchen would send a cake down with me Mam and Dad. But Dad said I can't expect one every week. It's been three weeks since the last one I said. And it was five weeks before that one. I mark it all down on my calendar Susan bought me. See she said, I've marked down May 1 1960 that's around the time the doctor said you might be coming home. Four months is a lot of squares when you look at it on a calendar. Still, I've only got another nine weeks to go and I'll be back on the hostel. Anyway, Dad says he'll ask the kitchen if they'd make a cake for next Sunday. A big one I told him with lots of cream and jam inside. All of us kids here look forward to getting a cake. I get tired of waiting for Sunday to come around. Even marking

off the days a bit earlier doesn't help, Sunday still only comes around once a week.

On the other hand, I guess I'm lucky I get visitors. I never see anyone visit Mary-Ann except of course Susan and me Dad. They usually pop in to see her on the way out. Dad said she looked really poorly last week and it's a shame she's got bad lungs at her age. Mam can't understand why she's down here in an orthopaedic hospital when it's her chest that's bad. I don't mind sharing my Dad with her for ten minutes. I'm not selfish and she is only two years old. Besides, ten to five is usually when Peter shows up to say hello before the sister rings the bell to say visiting time's over. It's all right for him. He's too busy having a good time in the grounds gutsing himself on chips and lollies from the kiosk. This isn't a hospital, he says. It's more like a holiday camp. You've even got your own beach. What good is a beach when both your legs are in plaster. I can't exactly bury myself in the sand, or go for a swim, I tell him. I get screamed at if I move off the blanket they sit me on. I get told off if I get sand on the blanket and I get into worse trouble if the sister finds I've smuggled sand back into the ward. I like archery. I'm getting really good at hitting the target. It's not easy shooting from a wheelchair. Being able to go to Brownies is pretty good too. We're not a very active group because none of us can walk but Brown Owl says what we lack in mobility we make up for in voice and we can be heard throughout the hospital grounds. I would have preferred to be an elf instead of a sprite but I can't have me own way all the time.

I don't think it's fair though, that we only get to see *Disneyland* once every now and again. I just don't understand why. Worst of all, when I do show an interest in music the nurses put a stop to it. Take last Sunday for example, a promise is a promise and I had promised Mam I wasn't going to cry after they all left but no sooner had she walked out of the door and on went the telly and there was Brian bloody Henderson. I pulled my wobble board out from where I'd hidden it under the mattress and had hardly begun singing *Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport* when Nurse Stephens clomped her way across the room.

I thought your Dad was supposed to have taken the wobble board home?

He would have but it wouldn't have fit in his new car.

I could tell she didn't believe me by the way she lifted me out of my wheel chair and plonked me on the bed but not before she slid the wobble board back under the mattress and took away my wheelchair so I couldn't escape. I'm not even allowed to sing along.

They don't seem to understand how valuable my wobble board is. Rolf Harris signed it himself when he came down here to entertain us. He gave us all wobble boards. There was a terrible din when we all played them together. The boards mysteriously started to disappear but I've got my own suspicions of what happened to them.

Susan and Peter would have got one too if they had visited that day. It was held on a Sunday because that's the day most families visit but Dad still hadn't found a good cheap car. Mam reckons it wasn't right that a kid's hospital was so far from Melbourne with no public transport on a weekend. As difficult as it was, because of work and all that, every Wednesday she would catch the train to Frankston and then hop on the bus to the hospital here at Mt Eliza. She wouldn't be here long before she had to catch the bus back to the railway station. That's why Dad said it was ridiculous and he was going to buy a car so they could all visit me on a Sunday. I haven't had a ride in it yet. It's a light and dark blue Holden and it's called Betsy. Susan said Dad called the car that when he was trying to coax it up steep hills. Peter reckons it chugs and chugs on hills and last Sunday they nearly all had to get out and push it up the hill just outside Frankston. Two o'clock is visiting time on a Sunday but it seems they make a day of it. Peter let it slip the other week that they had stopped off at Seaford for a swim and were going to stop on the way home for fish and chips. I haven't had fish and chips since I've been here. I wouldn't even mind eating the left overs. Cold chips would beat frankfurts any day.

I hate Sundays. I want to go home. What I miss the most is sitting on my Dad's knee before going to bed. The nurses tuck me in but it's not the same. And I hate it when the lights go out. It might be dark enough to sleep but there are too many noises. Then again, I would rather be here than the old children's

hospital. It's so dark and dingy and the first time I had an operation there they put me in a cot with the sides up because there were no beds. Even though I was only there for a short stay I never got to leave the ward except to be wheeled off to the operating room and that was no fun either. I guess that's why they have this hospital so patients like me who have to stay in hospital for a long time can do things they would if they were home. I even get to go to church. I can see it from my window and the chaplain waves to me every morning. I usually don't miss a thing from this window. Although, I might have missed Mary-Ann's Mam and Dad coming to take her home. I've never seen them before so I wouldn't know what they looked like but I know everyone else's parents so I'm sure I would recognise a couple of strangers.

I recognised Burt's new mate. They're the ambulance men who drive patients down from the old children's hospital. Alf was Burt's driver but he tripped jumping out of the back of the ambulance and hurt his back. Burt said Alf would be out of action for quite some time. The first time I spoke to Burt I didn't think I was going to like him. I had been sitting on the bench outside the almoner's room. Mam was inside talking to her. Leave the door open a little bit, I asked her so I wouldn't be afraid of sitting there alone. I heard her and Mam discussing how much it was going to cost for my stay down at Mt Eliza. That's why we still live on the hostel. Most of our friends have found houses to rent but we can't afford to pay rent until I'm finished with the operations and then there's the car Dad has to pay-off. The doctor promises that after I get out of hospital this time I will be able to walk all right and go to school, and I shouldn't need any operations for some years. Anyway, there I was trying hard not to listen because Mam reckons I'm a nosey parker, and all of a sudden I was grabbed on the shoulder. I had the fright of my life. I turned around and there was Burt, except I didn't know he was Burt then. Cathy Evans he bellowed. Aye I said. Aye? and what does Aye mean? Yes, I explained quite forgetting I was no longer in Wales. So you're my other passenger today. I didn't really like the idea of spending two hours in an ambulance with him but I soon got to like him. Not only did he know

a lot of jokes but he even stopped at Aspendale and bought me and the other kid an icy pole.

Now I wave to him every Monday and Wednesday when he arrives with patients. If he isn't in a hurry he comes in and has a chat with us. He must have been feeling poorly this morning. Either that or he didn't like having to work on a Sunday. He wasn't smiling and he didn't wave. Then again he might have been worried about Mary-Ann. I know I was worried sick about her, ever since I saw her last night. I'd gone in to give her one of my jelly tots and she was lying still in the oxygen tent she has to sleep in. Her eyes were open but she didn't make a sound. Worse still, she didn't gobble up the jelly tot I put in her mouth. She was ever so cold. So cold, I pulled the blankets up and tucked them in around her back. But she still didn't move. Then Nurse Stephens came in and removed me quickly from her room. They closed the door to her room and we didn't see a nurse for ages and ages. Then this morning Burt and his mate arrived and I saw them go straight into Mary-Ann's room. They didn't wave or anything. I lay across the bottom of the bed trying to get a better look down the corridor but the sister came along and closed the ward doors so I couldn't see what was going on outside Mary-Ann's room. I asked Nurse Stephens if Mary-Ann was feeling better and I was quite surprised when she said Mary-Ann was going home. She seemed real poorly last night. Of course, I thought, that's why Burt had to work on a Sunday. Mary-Ann's parents probably haven't got a car and he was taking her home in the ambulance, but I was wrong. All Burt and his mate took was a basket on wheels. I guess they must have had to pick up the washing.

I was now on the other side. The other side of the Thames. A quiet spot high above the town of Marlow from where I watched the multitudes descend on the township as they do at weekends. Buzzing like flies round a rotting corpse, they were in and out of cafes and book shops, pubs and curio shops. The trouble with towns, as old as Marlow, is they were never meant to cope with such a frenzy. They hitched rides, as did tourists, aboard the park-n-ride buses which ferried them from where their vehicles were left on the outskirts of town. It might have solved the problem of traffic and pollution, but it certainly didn't solve the problem of crowds. Watching from where I sat I realised that I would rather be aboard a barge slithering through the undergrowth, passing under bridges, than a fly soaring over the top.

I had got the job. No question as to my ability. But I needed a guide. For a short time, that is. Someone to show me the ropes. The law of the locks. After which I knew I would manage on my own. The manager of the company agreed and suggested I enquire at the Ships Inn. I might well have had a parrot on my shoulder and an eye patch as I sat there waiting for a nod from the woman who discreetly alerted me to any possible crew who entered the Inn. Crew that she considered approachable. Someone, who would set me on my journey back to Wales. Back to where it was I had come from.

He seemed like a man I could trust not to ask questions and someone I could work with. A quiet disposition who knew the locks and knew I could pay little for his expertise. Money wasn't an issue. Only a problem, that he rarely got the chance these days to move along the canals. Would be happy to accompany me as far as Shrewsbury where he would alight and stay some time at his sister's. Looking forward, he was, to a steak-and-kidney pudding as only she could make. Even, offered to provide his own food which he indicated he would

happily share. All of this, he offered but not for two days. Unfinished business. Until then I waited, anxious to leave the town of Marlow. I had no idea what lay ahead. No idea what I would see. And I wondered, as I crept closer to the North of Wales, whether I would recognise any places I may have visited as a child but could no longer conjure in my mind. Places I had been to with my family but would now be visiting alone.

I had wanted to ask my daughter about places she may have visited. Wanted to know if our paths might have crossed at one time or another. Whether or not she and I might have brushed shoulders in a crowd somewhere. Sat close by, maybe, on a train or tram. Laughed (and cried) perhaps while watching the same movie. But any thought, I may have had, to ask her had been swept swiftly away that day in her apartment. Swept away in a torrent of fear — of being rejected — leaving each of us and I to shore up our own banks and close the barrier on what might have been a flood of emotions. Instead it was easier to accept her denial, that I was her mother, and what I had hoped for in meeting her was not going to happen.

The tram ride into town is everything you expected. Everything you wanted it to be. They, at the clinic, were hesitant to let you go. But you needed to step out and experience a slice of life. Doctor B, having thought long and hard about it had given you the go ahead. Cathy was now recognising, and accepting, that there was a world beyond the clinic. That alone was a good sign. Occasional weekends spent at home were proving to be of no benefit to her. Despite the advice of Doctor B and with all good intentions Cathy's family believed they knew her better. Believed, as they did, that all she needed was tender love and care. TLC, as Cathy had heard her mother tell a neighbour, cures everything. Even alleviates guilt or at least that's how Cathy had summed up her mother's intentions. The times Cathy wanted to make her own decisions despite the outcome. The occasional visits home and the restrictions, which her mother claimed were for her own good, had served as a reminder to Cathy of the past and of the bitter struggles with her mother. Everything her mother had ever done (as she claimed) was for Cathy. It was her mother's favourite catchcry which always managed to elicit the right response, and promise, from Cathy that she was sorry for whatever it was she had done or thought of doing. She knew now, her mother must have been wondering where she had gone wrong when all along her intentions to love and care for you were honourable. The time, when Mrs Evans would feel competent enough to hug her daughter and tell her how much she loved her, was yet to happen. It will happen. Years from now, Cathy will learn and accept, that her mother's lack of action her inability to express affection — is a generational misgiving. Years from now her mother would hug her daughter and tell her how much she loves her. But at the moment, Cathy is working with Doctor B and is hopeful of making a full recovery. A jolting ride on a tram to town, might be just what the patient needs.

Cathy smiles at the young boy sitting opposite. A conversation starts between him, his mother and Cathy. It's not long to Christmas. The child is looking forward to visiting the rooftop Christmas carnival, and the decorated windows at Ausmussin's department store. Yes, you too enjoyed the windows. As a child, as an employer at Ausmussin's, and as a mother. Where's Alex. He should be with you now, on the tram. The time will come when the two of you are reunited. Until then, be patient. Everything takes time. Some things happen more quickly than others. Rooftop. Patience. Carnivals. Tickets to trip. Back in time.

High school 1965. Cathy is sitting on top of B Block. The block where boys were taught sheetmetal, and woodwork. She hadn't intended to climb on the rooftop. Anger made her do the most remarkable things. Her intention, at first, was to disappear quickly. Get out of sight. And what better place to hide than on the roof. She knew that it wouldn't be long before people would be running around looking for her. No one would think of looking upwards. The grounds were empty. The students yet to change rooms. It was easy to scale the wrought iron columns that held the verandah. Cathy climbed on to the corrugated roof without any problems. Even giggled at the thought of being so mischievous. But her anger subsided and the seriousness of the situation, kicked in. What she had done in class. The scenarios of what might follow skipped like pebbles hurtling across the surface of a lake, some falling shorter than others. The principal would summon her to his office. At the max, the school would inform her parents of the incident. Her father would, as he so often did, tell his daughter she's a bugger of a girl and she would be the death of him. Then he would open his arms. Mrs Evans would tell her daughter to grow up and not act so childish. Cathy was fed up with having to grow up. The process was proving far more painful than she could have imagined. Then, things began to happen. And, as it happened, the situation grew into a carnival spectacular.

He appeared first. At the south end of C Block. Quickly closing the door, he reappeared moments later at the North entrance before disappearing once again. A trap door spider. Young, agile, virile — defensive. Sure, that his prey

had escaped but convinced she couldn't have got too far. Cathy knew what he was thinking. She had got to know him well over the past two years. The venetian blind, in the office opposite to where Cathy sat, started to open slowly signalling that the principal's secretary had arrived at work. But no sooner had the blinds rotated three-hundred and sixty degrees than they were hoisted, fully open, by a startled Miss Dunstan who couldn't quite believe what she saw.

Spiders. All flavours. Ice cream and raspberry. Spiders, once, your favourite drink. You're surprised to see them on the list of beverages at *Ausmussin's*.

Raspberry and ice cream spider please.

Nuts?

She, serving behind the counter, is asking whether or not you want nuts. Cathy, pauses before responding with a polite, no.

But she had responded differently, when in 1965 Mr Ian Joseph Robinson, teacher of maths, science, and Cathy's form teacher since she had started high school, attempted to climb up to where she sat on the roof. He soon retreated, having confirmed that it was indeed a piece of metal (one of many disposed of, over the years, by the boys who took sheet-metal class) she held in her hand and not a knife as Miss Dunstan had first thought. Still, it was probably just as sharp. Just as dangerous. Just as threatening. His plea, to Cathy, to come down, had been met with a barrage of abuse. Cathy was surprised to hear herself scream, and make threats she had no intention of carrying out. Surprised too, that her body trembled the way it did. Surprised, but delighted at having caused such a commotion. People would have to listen; have to ask questions; have to look into the matter. After all, she was only a child. Only fourteen.

A child with such a bright future. That's what her school report had stated at the conclusion of her first year at high school. Well, it didn't say child but student. Still the point, as the narrator, I want to get across is that Cathy was still a child and she did have a bright future ahead. Her grades were well above the average student. So, when Cathy decided the following year to take passive action, and deliberately fail her exams, she did so for a reason. Surely, staff at

the school, and her parents, would have to ask why her grades dropped off; why the loss of motivation. But no one did. The principal was yet to analyse the staff reports on exam results. Yet to notify Cathy's parents. Yet to set up a time to meet with Cathy. Her mother, on reading the school report she found in her school bag, had simply told her daughter that she would have to pull her socks up and try harder; her father, as he had done so many times before, declared she didn't have to be too brainy so long as she could read, write and add up, Cathy would get on in the world.

The only person, other than Cathy, who appeared to be affected by her refusing to work and cooperate was Mr Ian Joseph Robinson. He knew what was going on. Knew why she was on strike, as she called it. He knew that she had declared war. Cathy's deliberate attempt to unnerve her enemy had worked. Had worked so brilliantly. Robbo, as the students called him, had lost it completely on that particular day in 1965. He knew why his brightest student sat, daydreaming, refusing to participate in class exercises. Knew that this was Cathy's way of saying she would no longer perform for him — or anyone else. Cathy secretly enjoyed watching her tormentor go to pieces. She could see the anger in the way he glared at her. So too, did other students in the class notice how he clenched his teeth when he spoke to her and how blatantly close he stood to Cathy Evans. And Cathy herself knew Robbo was close to slapping her across the face. But Robbo never did slap Cathy's face. Instead he threw what happened to be handy at the time. And what was handy, was the blackboard duster. Usually reserved for the boys, Robbo unable to tolerate such insolence from a girl who now sat throughout his class silent and gazing out of the window, lost control and launched the missile in the direction of where she sat.

You no longer resist remembering. He can't hurt you any more. Cathy watches the children. She listens to their squeals. Hears their laughter and she takes comfort in seeing that childhood is alive and thriving on the rooftop of *Ausmussin's* department store. And as she leaves, and heads up Bourke Street, she chokes back the tears and silently asks God to keep all children safe from harm. The teacher is dead. He is dead. You repeat it several times as you

hurry toward Spring Street. Toward the Fitzroy Gardens. It's been a long day. Doctor B will be wondering where you are. You could take a quick cut across the park. Yes, Robbo is dead. You know he is.

You had read of his death in the local paper. Must have been — when? 1971. Yes soon after Alex was born. Appears he committed suicide. People were left wondering why. You had a good idea why. Even had the inclination to take your story to the newspapers (as you believed others may, too) but you had decided to let the incident lie. Let his body, and his soul, rot. That is what you wanted to happen. But there were, and still are, instances when you are reminded of what did happen between you and Mr Ian Joseph Robinson. His body may well have rotted but his soul lives, or so it seems to Cathy, in the roots of trees. Huge trees. Just like the trees in the park. The park you want to cross but decide not to. Trees so large the roots refuse to stay buried, snake their way across the surface of the ground before disappearing. She knows they wait for her to stumble. To fall. To cry, over what she herself cannot explain.

NINE

Fancy having a stable and no bloody horse. I got really excited when I saw there was a stable at the back of this house. It didn't matter that it only had two bedrooms, I told Mam, I'd sleep in the stable with the horse. If it was good enough for Jesus, I said, then it was good enough for me. But Mam just rolled her eyes and said it was the cleanest house they'd seen so far. I knew, right there and then, we would end up renting it. Mind you, she made it quite clear when we moved in, that I wasn't going to be allowed to move into the stable. She wants me sleeping in the house where she can keep an eye on me. Still, I do get to spend a lot of time out here. I like hiding up here in the loft. I've even got it all worked out where I'm going to put everything when I do get a horse. Dad says he'll buy me one as soon as his numbers come up at the races but we've lived here now for eight months and still there's no sign of a horse.

Still, I suppose living here is better than living on the hostel. At least we have a kitchen now and Dad can make us rice pudding. We really missed his rice puddings while we were on the hostel. Even David from down the road reckons it's worth dropping in at our house on pudding nights. We got to know David and his family while we lived on the hostel. They, too, had immigrated from Wales but unlike us who had trouble finding a house to rent they found one quite easily. The church helped them find their house. That's why I took up going to church, on the off chance I'd get the same help finding a horse. But the only sign I've been given so far is an old bridle Mr Barrett gave me. He reckons it must be as old as he is and he thinks it may have belonged to someone who worked in the dairy that once backed onto our house. Never the less, I carry it around with me just to let everyone know I'm serious about wanting a horse. Maybe, I should change churches. There's plenty to choose from round here. I might have better luck. The Catholic one across the road does all right for itself. Well at least that's what me Mam says. She reckons the catholics have more

money than you can poke a stick at. I asked our neighbour Mrs McGrath if she were rich, being Catholic and all that, and if that's why she has seven children. She shrieked (an Irish habit according to Mam) and said she doesn't need riches only the blessing of the Holy father and that's why she's got seven children. Still St Augustine's must be doing all right for itself, they've just had new carpet put down. It's more than I can say for St Kinnord's where I go. The church is nowhere near as large as St Augustine's and it could do with a bit of a spruce up. But the hall, where we have Sunday school and the Girl's Friendly Society meet on a Thursday night, well that's something else.

There is, however, a spot behind the hall that would be just perfect for tying up a horse. I keep telling Mam, it's too far too walk and I need transport but she doesn't listen. Either she says ride your bike or worse still, don't go. I have to go. Besides, church is a good place to practice singing the high notes. And, then there are all those kids I help in Africa. If it weren't for us girls, at GFS, who sewed the knitted patches into blankets, the kids in Africa would freeze to death. Mind you, I didn't think it got cold enough in Africa for them to need blankets. Anyway, it doesn't matter, I enjoy going to GFS. I usually meet David's sisters, Susan and Elizabeth, on the corner of Waverley Street and we walk up the hill together.

The three of us are going to sing at St Paul's Cathedral in the Christmas pageant. We're representing Essendon GFS. It's no wonder we three got picked, we're all very good singers. It's probably because of all the practice we get at Clarinda Park. We meet most nights after school and sing to our hearts' content. Susan is the boss and usually tells us what we're doing wrong. Elizabeth usually ends up storming off in a huff because she doesn't want to do what Susan says. I wish I went to school with them but it's too far for me to walk and there's no bus that goes in that direction. Instead I have to catch a bus up to the school near the footy ground.

I hate the school I go to. I wouldn't be allowed to ride a horse to school even if I had one. They won't even let you ride a three wheel bike to school. Mr White got really angry when he spotted me trying to park my bike in the bike

rack. He said I wasn't to ride it to school ever again. I tried to explain that it was only because I had missed the bus that I did ride it. But he said you could only ride two wheel bikes to school. It's not my fault I told him that I wasn't allowed to have a proper bike. I mean, I'm ten years old, does he think I like riding a three wheel bike at my age? He had no idea, until I told him just how long it took me to ride to school that morning. I can't help it if me Mam and Dad won't let me have one. Mam said I'd end up breaking my neck if I got a two wheel bike. Dad said, it's because I haven't long had the operations on my legs and one day I would have the balance to ride a proper bike. It would be a lot easier if they just got me a horse.

I can't understand why I have to go to that school. I would rather stay at home and have correspondence school like I had on the hostel. I hate having a man teacher. I hate him. I hate him. That's why I refuse to go to school some mornings. If I didn't have Mr White I might not put up such a fight. Susan said she's getting fed up with having to drag me to the bus stop in the mornings. One morning she was late getting to work herself. I was in such a bad mood, I ran out into the street in my nightie, screaming, and lay on the road. I would have rather been run over by the bus than get on it. Mam went berserk, as usual and said if she can't trust me to go to school in the mornings, while she's at work, then I won't be allowed to go to GFS. I hate Mr White. He always picks on me. No one, but me, knows what he's really like. No one.

The British, it seems, have an obsession with offal. And the man who was to be my guide was no different. He had brought along a selection of liver and kidneys, heart, ox tongue and tripe. Enough, as he put it, for both of us to share over the next three days. The ox tongue was potted, ready to slice and eat whenever the need arose. But the rest lay in individual plastic bags wallowing in its own blood that appeared to seep endlessly from the organ long after it had been separated from its host. The weather was kind to the clear-view bags of meat which lay stacked and labelled in the food locker. But the smell of it, slowly on the turn, slowly discolouring, sickened me. He sat toward the bow eating his lightly cooked salted tripe which swam in a shallow plate of vinegar. The smell wafted upwind. I thought of my father and how he would eat tripe, raw, saturated in vinegar. And how, throughout his life he had teased me about not wanting to try it. No sense of adventure, he used to say

As evening fell I left the barge. I had no desire to stay aboard and participate in what my guide described as his Friday night ritual of eating fried kidneys. Instead I opted to sleep in a nearby hut dug into the hillside close to the canal. There were no windows. Only an opening where, centuries before, a door once hung and as I imagined might have protected those inside from marauding tribes. Apart from the debris, a sign of more recent times, it was easy to imagine how the cavern would have appeared so long ago. Or, maybe it was the soft glow from the lamp, that I had lit, which rekindled shadows from the past. It was there, in the hut that night I first took notice of the book. A paperback novel. There were of course other books among the debris, but not like this one. It was in a state of disrepair. Published some years before. The cover was missing but this was unmistakably the writer's own copy, signed personally and although illegible, was visible under the title. It was a novel of a young girl in

search of. Of what? The page was torn. Buried treasure? Maybe. It might have been a girl's own adventure story. But as I flicked through the pages picking up threads as readers do, there was something far more sinister at the heart of the plot. No doubt the plot was interesting. There was no doubt about that. And no doubt I would one day find the place and time to read it. I mean really read it and make of it what I will. But there was something very real about the child's story. It might have been because of the pencilled jottings of a child throughout the pages of the novel. It must have been a child for it was the hand and voice of a child behind the pen. Page 15, 'Angels are not blonde and godly'. I smile to myself. Before. Before realising the voice was familiar. Yes, it was familiar. It reminded me of. I wasn't sure who it reminded me of. A link with the past? Maybe. My memory was unreliable. They had told me so, many times at the clinic. Or was it my mind playing tricks on me? I had noticed, in the novel, there was a handful of Welsh words I was able to identify as having learned as a small child. Words of a language that should have been my own but had been lost long before my parents had left Wales for Australia. Neither do I remember my grandparents or aunt speaking Welsh other than reciting the Lord's prayer in Chapel. The one prayer, in Welsh, mandatory for all (except my mother of course) that for many was the only thread of something which had been lost so long ago.

And so too are the letters the last thread I have with my daughter. The unspoken conversations. Threads one day, to be woven into a complete quilt, comforting the loss she and I have experienced, now lay abandoned at the bottom of my bag. I knew I had to destroy the letters, but doing so had proved more difficult than I could have imagined. I had considered burying them at sea, casting each ceremoniously onto a wave. But words, once written, have a habit of floating and I had imagined that the letters may indeed bob up conveniently and be rescued by someone who would read and make of them what they wanted with no real understanding of why they were written in the first place. The thought of the letters falling into the wrong hands had, as I believed at that time, been enough reason to throw them into the bottom of my bag. Yet to

destroy them, completely — to tear or burn them — would be an admission that the emotions that had ebbed and flowed over the years had since disappeared. Feelings that at the time had been very real no longer mattered. I was afraid that as a woman and a mother to boot, with no proof of ever having felt such emotions, I would be judged harshly. Judged as being devoid of what it is that supposedly makes a woman a mother. A mother who, despite the circumstances, was supposed to feel the way she did about a child she had given up at birth.

Mrs Evans visited Cathy this evening. Brought her up to date with all the gossip. Not that you were interested. Never really are. Cathy's Mam doesn't question where her daughter's thoughts are. Only sees that her daughter's thoughts are miles away. But that isn't unusual. Always daydreaming. That is what she would have told Doctor B if she'd bumped into her. But Mrs Evans had left by the time the doctor, who had worked back late that night, called by Cathy's room before leaving the clinic. Maybe it was intuition that she did stop by. Cathy now believed in the doctor. Was, according to Cathy, the only person who did understand her. Doctor B knew more about the patient's past, than anyone else. So, she wasn't too concerned when she found Cathy lying in a foetal position on the bed.

Wouldn't you feel more comfortable in your pyjamas?

There's no need to get undressed.

She remains in the doorway. Neither does the doctor attempt to turn on the light. No need for light (not that Cathy has noticed her room has grown quite dark). Her memory is casting enough light onto the horizon as she seeks to capture and contain her fears that are quickly founding on the rocks. She knows she has to rescue what ever it is she can, or she will drown. But it's not the ocean Cathy is in fear of drowning in, but the forest of oaks and its sea of swirling roots.

Are you all right?

There are forests of trees even in the ocean.

Yes. I suppose there are. Kelp forests maybe. Is that what you mean?

She wanted to tell her about the trees in the dream she had the night before. Of how the roots of the trees, in the forest beneath the ocean, grabbed at her ankles as she tried to climb out onto the rocks.

There was blood under my nails.

Blood?

Blood. Skin. There had been no autopsy. No investigation. No closer look at what had happened. For you, that is. For Robbo. Naturally. There was an autopsy. After all he had died of unnatural causes. How unnatural can sticking your head in a gas oven be? Drowning would definitely have been a better way. Much cleaner. You're wandering from what it is you're supposed to be, or at least trying your best, to focus on.

There is the garden. The memorial garden at the high school, established in 1987 by students. Established with the funds from the estate of the late Mrs Ian Joseph Robinson:

Established in 1987
In Memory of
Mr Ian Joseph Robinson,
1942 - 1971

and the students he so greatly treasure...

Treasure? Surely, it was meant to read, treasured. Past tense. Yes, that's it. The 'd' is lying on its back somewhere in the grass. That must be it. He *is* dead. But you found yourself unable to move from the spot. And when you did turn, you turned a little too quickly. Lost your balance and fell over the root of the tree that had exposed itself from under the bitumen. The tree you remember, as a student, your class had planted soon after the school had opened in 1964. The tree that had since been reclaimed by students and was at the centre of the memorial garden. You wanted to. To do what? Many things. But wait. There lies the problem. Staring you right in the face. The plaque. With its dates. Not of his birth, or death. But the date the garden was established.

Yes. Of course. Cathy's story has been interrupted. The narrator has revealed herself. Cathy could not have seen the memorial garden. Not yet, anyway. She will in the future. Her story is framed within a particular time. 1975. She exists in a separate space. As the narrator, I need to concentrate on the period Cathy spent at the clinic. I need to focus on that particular time in her life. That evening, when she lay on her bed and struggled to understand the significance of the dream.

Cathy asks Doctor B why do people choose to ignore what's happening under their very noses. You were sure your father had guessed what was going on. What Robbo was up to. The doctor asks what makes you sure he knew? But you knew. Cathy is quite adamant about it (even though she will come to understand her father was unaware of what was happening). After all, it was your father who opened the door when you returned home and it was he who thanked Robbo for bringing you home. It was your father (and mother) who noticed how, after the incident, you changed. How you sulked. How you became obsessed with scrubbing your hands.

Doctor B has questions she wants to ask. You know she has. Instead, she offers possible answers. Robbo was your teacher. And to your parents' generation he was authority. And a knowledgeable one at that. He offered to give their daughter extra tuition. Yes. Cathy's heard it all before. She was a very bright student she could be the best maths student in the school, with a little more coaching. Robbo even offered to drive you home and for someone who was unable to walk too great a distance and who didn't live on a regular bus route it seemed the sensible solution. Answers, all of which you know are reasonable. But Doctor B is unaware of how angry you are that no one stopped him. Angry too, because you believe (and still do) you were an accomplice. Must have been. After all, why didn't you stop him earlier.

It was because of him I couldn't go to my father's funeral.

The teacher died years before your father?

Yes. But.

Doctor B has the answers. She has the facts written down. A record of your past. Facts, arrived at from the story Cathy, herself, has told. Cathy knows the doctor will remind her that the weather was inclement on the day of the funeral. Remind Cathy that her leg was in plaster. But what the doctor needs to know is how the cemetery had, in the second year of high school, become a stop-off on the way home for Cathy and Robbo. Yes. The cemetery. So close to your home, you are sure that if you had screamed loud enough your father would have heard you. But there had been no cause to scream. That is, until

the last visit. The last time you stopped off at the cemetery and his game got out of hand. The time spent in his office had been a lead up. Where you were being taught the rules of the game, but not the tactics that made him the master and you his student. Cathy knew it was wrong to play the game. The game that, she is honest enough to admit, sometimes gave her pleasure. Wrong to touch herself never mind allow the teacher to do so. But her honesty was to be her downfall. How others would judge, and convict her, of being permissive. After all he only touches, is what you told a close friend at that time. Telling your friend. But that was before the ball went out of bounds and you realised for the first time there was no umpire to call the shots; only Robbo.

There's no need to undress.

No of course not. Sleep in your clothes if that's what you want.

Pyjamas. Doctor B isn't keeping up with the story. She doesn't understand. There's no need to undress. That's what he said when they got to the cemetery. When he had convinced her that it was too hot inside the car. That they would be cooler sitting on the grass. The grassed area between the graves. Narrow. Sheltered. Concealed. Where he suggested, having told her there was much more to learn, that she lie on her back. When the thought of him removing her clothes filled her with fear and trepidation. Until, that is, when he told her there was no need to get undressed and she, for a moment, was relieved to learn she wasn't about to be raped. But rape was a word that had been bandied around the school ground, defined in dictionaries, deliberated in courtrooms and reported in the newspapers. Cathy thought she knew it all. All. Except.

The teacher had quickly dropped to his knees. Pinning Cathy's upper arms firmly to the ground. She tried not to listen to what he was saying. Tried hard too, to bite his knee caps, scratch his bare skin. Even started to shout. Until. Until only her arms below the elbow twisted and flailed in the air. Until her hands lashed sideward and latched on to. On to what? This is the moment, in Cathy's story, she is confronted with her fear of the roots of trees. She's reflecting on what it was, in the cemetery that day, she was grasping in her

hands. A glance sideways reveals she is clawing at the exposed roots of a tree. An oak tree, a little away from where she lay. Whose roots, she will notice when he has finished with her, snake across the ground and disappear under the crypt beside where she lay. A crypt from which an angel looks down upon her and Cathy realises angels are made of stone. Even if they do cry.

Ten

Trust me to end up in the casualty department of the hospital the day of a party. It may have been only an end of the year lunch in the cookery room but I was looking forward to it. Looking forward to watching the boys from my class eat the special curry I had made just for them. Well, not all of them. I would have made sure Cyril didn't eat it. He doesn't deserve to get the shits. But now I'm not to know who ended up eating it. Bugger Shirley Temple. If I hadn't have been singing *Animal Crackers* and tap dancing in the school kitchen I wouldn't have dislocated my knee and ended up in hospital. If only I hadn't watched Shirley Temple last Saturday morning then I might not have been mucking about when I was. Still, the others thought it was pretty funny until I fell, then all hell broke loose. Sally thought I was bunging it all on until Mrs Carroll came along and insisted I, stopped acting the mick and, get on with mixing my roux. I let out an almighty scream as I turned quickly onto my back. My twisted leg said it all. There was this deathly silence as everyone realised I wasn't joking. It was dislocated, I told Mrs Carroll. It's happened before I said, directing them to call an ambulance. I was glad the ambulance men had brought along the cylinder of gas. There have been times they haven't had any on board. Not that I was in a lot of pain but I knew it would look a whole lot more dramatic if they wheeled me out with a face mask on.

The trouble is, no one takes me seriously anymore. No one, that is, except Cyril. Then again he's not like the other boys. He and I are very much alike in some ways but unlike him, I hate being teased because I'm a brain. Cyril reckons I should just ignore them all, as he does, and that there's nothing wrong with being clever but I'd much rather be popular and have some fun. I hate being left out of everything. I'm not allowed to play sport, go out at weekends and sometimes even Mr Robinson makes me stay in after school for what he calls, extra tutoring. I mean to say, if I wanted to stay behind after school I would pick

on a Prefect and get detention like some of the others do. At least then I would have a good excuse not to have to go straight home from school. I could hang out at the milk bar down the road, with the other kids, until Dad could pick me up on his way home from work.

If only I hadn't done what I did on the night of the school play, then I might be taken more seriously. But now no one will recognise my full potential as a serious actress. Mind you, I wouldn't have acted the mick if I'd been given a decent part in the play but Partridge was adamant I couldn't play the role of Juliet. She said Roberta Ellis was made for the role and there were other roles more suitable for me. She may look the part, I told Partridge, but Roberta couldn't act her way out of a paper bag. Of course I argued till I was blue in the face but Partridge had all the answers. But what it all boiled down to was, Roberta Ellis was far more attractive than me. It wasn't a question of, to be or not to be beautiful, I said to Partridge, I was born plain fugly. Well at least that's what all the boys call me, except Cyril of course. He reckons I've got certain qualities. Quality, I like that word. I may not have a lot going for me when it comes to looks but I have quality and that's what matters. So, I said to Partridge after she refused to let me audition for the role of Juliet, what about Romeo? What about Romeo? She gasped, exasperated at the possibility of spending another hour or so arguing the point with me. Can I audition for the role of Romeo I asked. I wasn't trying to be funny or anything like that. I was serious. After all, I was skinny, had very short hair and it didn't matter how I sounded because most of the boy's voices hadn't yet changed. And, I added, there isn't one decent looking boy in the whole form. But Partridge shook her head and said there were other good roles I could play. Well, if her idea of a decent role is playing a tree, then I'd hate to think what isn't. If playing one of three trees outside Juliet's bedroom window wasn't bad enough, we were talking trees. A chorus of trees as Partridge called us. A chorus reflecting the unrequited love between Romeo and Juliet. Fine, I thought, if that is what she wants okay but why should we be hidden from the audience. Partridge didn't like my suggestion to improvise, without the tree, even though we had spent hours in drama classes

waving our arms around pretending to be trees gracefully wafting in the breeze. Nor did she like it when I asked whether the idea of a chorus would best be suited to a Greek tragedy which Romeo and Juliet was not.

So, a tree I was and a good one at that. I even kept Romeo covered as he stealthily made his way to Juliet's bedroom window in the dead of night. After all, no one was supposed to see him so when he moved, I moved too. I didn't think the audience would notice my subtle moves but as Partridge, and several others, pointed it out to me at the end of the scene trees have roots which does not allow them to move from the spot where they're planted. I've since heard she deliberately created the tree role to keep me, and a couple of others, out of mischief.

I really don't care anymore that Partridge doesn't recognise my full potential as an actress. As soon as I finish high school I'm going to be an actress. I'm a natural born actress. You only have to ask Paula my close friend. She can't believe how I've sucked in the kids in our form. I have them all believing I'm going out with an older man. I prefer older men, they're more mature, I tell them. That's why I don't bother hanging around the boys in our form, I say. By the time I'm through telling them all what I got up to at the weekend with my man they're all convinced he exists. All, that is, except my close friend Paula. She reckons I'm the biggest bullshit artist out. Besides, she knows what my parents are like and there's no way I would be allowed out at weekends to go where I say I go. Still, she keeps her mouth shut. That's one good thing, with Paula, you can tell her anything and she wouldn't tell a soul. Speaking of which, it's well after four, I'm expecting her to turn up here at the hospital shortly to bring me up-to-date with how the party went. I hope she remembered not to eat the curry I made.

No one can ever be sure how long a journey will take. Or, what might happen along the way to delay where it is you're going. Neither could anyone explain why a lock wall, bricked more than a century before, chose to collapse the day before we were to arrive in Shrewsbury. Barges unable to turn or move in any direction lined the narrow canal. Bow to stern, they snaked their way back along the canal where they had no alternative but to wait for the wall of the lock to be repaired. A little to the right of the canal, on much higher ground, the River Severn flowed oblivious to the stream of barges, knocking at the gates of the lock, waiting to be lifted and set afloat upon its waters. There was no alternative but to wait. Wait, not only to reach Shrewsbury but to get rid of my guide. I was increasingly becoming agitated with his presence, whether on board, or on shore. I had become an object of his fascination. He had said so himself. Said so, after having unsuccessfully tried to find out more about my past. Said so, after I had side-stepped obvious flirtatious comments and chosen, instead, my own company. I failed to convince him that he was free to leave at any time and that I was capable of managing the last leg of the journey on my own. But he reassured me that he had no intentions of abandoning ship. Besides he enjoyed the company, as he put it. Not my company, that I was sure of, for I attempted to stay as far away from him as possible. But he had made friends with the occupants from other barges. The circle of ashen ground, where they lit their nightly camp fire widened as the days passed. Night after night, as I lay in my bunk, I listened to the stories told, often repeated but never with quite the same detail. It didn't matter that with each telling the story changed, it was the companionship that mattered fanned on by the sparks from the camp fire. But I chose to drift alone, casting their voices off into the night as I sought the peace that hopefully one day would come with sleep.

First light and I would sit alone on deck, with no wish to wake the sleepers from their sleep, drinking in the morning dew laced with the smell of damp charred smoldering ashes. I watched the fog lift revealing the viaduct that spanned the canal and the river and through its arches the distant Black Mountains of south Wales reminded me of where it was I was going. The bridge, like the one that often appeared in my dreams, is unsafe. But unlike the viaduct whose ruins are a tribute to centuries gone, the bridge in my dreams is a reminder of a future yet to be realised. A bridge I must soon cross before it crumbles and buries me alive. It wasn't a troll beneath my bridge who prevented me from crossing but a man. A man whose face I can't see in the dark. A man who asks too high a price to let me cross to the other side.

In the meantime, my imagination was the lifebelt that saved me from drowning in a sea of disappointment. The sea that, in my dreams, raged below the bridge. A sea that threatened to swallow me in disappointment from never finding what it was I was looking for, or for not having the courage to push aside the man on the bridge. So buoyant was my imagination that I floated on the voice of the child whose story I had found concealed in the novel. The voice that was unmistakably the voice of a child. The voice that became so familiar, I soon came to claim it as that of my own and I clung for all life to an innocence, I could only presume once existed and was that of my own childhood. Besides, the events she wrote of were not unlike the snippets of memories I had of my childhood in Wales. A childhood anchored securely in a place among a community of family and neighbours. There was a father and mother, a brother and sister, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours and, of course, the Chapel. No Welsh story is complete without a chapel. And I came to realise that what I had found in reading the novel was what I was hoping to find on returning to Wales. Some might say it is madness to trust one's imagination but I had made up my mind that I would be guided by the child within me. The child I had come to know through reading the novel. The novel that I now kept tucked safely away in my bag along with the photo my Aunt had given me and, of course, the letters.

Thick letters, thin letters, big and small envelopes of different colours each evoking a vague memory of the time it might have been written. I was tempted to open one, or two. Read the contents and post examine the emotions behind each, but I chose not to. I knew that most had been written at a particular milestone in my daughter's life. The letter, for example, I wrote shortly after her eighteenth birthday. I had wanted to let her know that I too, as I suspect her adoptive mother did, lay awake at nights worrying whether she would arrive home safely. But unlike the mother she knew, who slept soundly once hearing her daughter's car turn into the driveway, I had lain awake waiting to be captured by the dawn and have my anguish snuffed.

Cynthia, the woman in the next room has a niece who can sing like an angel. Or at least that's what Cynthia tells everyone in the clinic. No one disputes Cynthia's claim for they haven't yet heard the child sing. That is about to change when Cynthia announces that eight-year-old Alice will be singing at the carol service. It was Father James' suggestion. Not only would it be appropriate to have a child sing, but it would benefit Cynthia. A memorial mass, so to speak, for Cynthia's babe who died shortly after birth. The mother is slowly recovering from a state of depression. Recovering because people have convinced her that there will be other babies. And, Cynthia, must get on with her life.

Don't forget, you're coming to the carol service? My niece, Alice, is so excited.

Yes. Of course. I'm looking forward to it.

What Cathy wants to say is she would rather not go. Christmas means very little to her. Has done for many years now. Then again she may be remembering Christmas through the eyes of a child when she really believed there was a Father Christmas. Really believed in the nativity. The story of the birth of Jesus. And, of course, angels. Nevertheless, she will let Cynthia lead her to the chapel and together they will sit, among the crowd and think of the daughters each will never know.

This child, from Wales, has the voice of an angel. It's the late Miss Ross. Your school teacher at primary school. 1962. Lloyd Street Primary School Strathmore. The last of many primary schools you attended before going to High school. The one primary school you actually enjoyed attending. Miss Ross, with her dyed red hair and milk-white complexion is standing near the door of the classroom talking to the district inspector of schools. The pupils are on their best behavior knowing that he will spend some time in their classroom, appraise Miss Ross' teaching methods, before moving along to next classroom. The pupils have been coached (and, unnecessarily warned) to be on their best behaviour

even though there is very little doubt about the reputation of their teacher. Only praise for Miss Ross whose pupils willingly work to please, and earn the respect of their teacher. Your teacher. And it's you, she is discussing with the inspector while you all work studiously. Cathy is a part of the program. She is to sing a solo. *Ave Maria*. And, according to Miss Ross she sings it like no other student could. Such control for a ten-year-old. So talented. Her parents should consider singing lessons.

Mr Evans quietly reassured his daughter that she was so good, he could hire her out to sing at weddings, funerals, even the pub at the junction might be interested. Cathy cried. She knew he, like the rest of the family, thought it a joke when she had come home from school excited and claiming she needed singing lessons. Indeed, she did need singing lessons, Mrs Evans was in no doubt about that. Neither was Peter or Susan. At least she would learn another song, if nothing else. Everyone, including the neighbours had had enough of *Ave Marie* — and her singing. But the truth was, there simply wasn't enough money for singing lessons. It was easier for her parents to make light of the situation than to have to tell their daughter they could not afford singing lessons. The other older children in the family had come to terms with what their parents could, and could not, afford them. But at ten years of age Cathy only knew her worth in terms of what she did not have.

I've been thinking maybe we should pack up. Move to another suburb.

Cynthia's husband has made the suggestion. He waits for a response from his wife. You're eavesdropping and you know it. Your Mam would say you're being nosey. As always. But you saw it then, as you do today, as borrowing. Borrowing the stories of others to construct your own unwritten stories. Stories, of friends and family, you would have liked to have been your own. Stories that filled the gaps in your own life and satisfied Cathy's needs. A need to feel that she wasn't too different from everyone else. Ridiculous, some might say. But she was aware that the children she went to school with, in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne, were different. Cathy, as a child, had seen for herself the houses in which they lived. Met the mothers who stayed at home to

nurture and care for their children. Heard first hand, of the tennis lessons, the dancing lessons, the music lessons the children were afforded. Had, constantly compared her clothes to the clothes of her schoolgirl friends. And, as it was in 1962 — despite the successs of the operations on her legs — she was still unable to participate in the sports and games; activities which were as much a part of the school as the students themselves. Even the claim to fame of being the only child who had read every book in the fiction section of the school library, made her different. Stories were, as Cathy found out, her way of closing the gap between 'them' and her.

But there was nothing imaginary about Ruby and Margaret Ross. Two sisters who lived solely for each other and, of course, Ruby's students. The students came and went over the years, but most had at sometime returned to visit the women. Ruby had the heart of an angel if not the voice of one. Articulate and raspy, raspy, is how you remember her voice. Made so, as you suspect was the case, by the constant use of analgesic powders she swallowed to ease the pain of her disease. Whatever was wrong with her, you never really knew (or you don't remember). But she was sick. Very sick. Not that she ever let it interfere with her teaching or the attention she paid her students. And nor would she allow the education board to use her illness to force her to retire before she had to. And so the little packets of Bex analgesic, that lay neatly in a row on her desk, were her means of staving off her illness and forced retirement. The little packets of white powder she would unfold ceremoniously throughout the day pouring the contents at the back of her throat. Tapping the packet gently as she did so, as one would when emptying the crumbs from a packet of chips, before swilling it down with a glass of fresh water. And always, she wiped the rim of the glass with a clean handkerchief. A handkerchief monogrammed by Ruby's red dark lipstick. A routine that lasted for the remaining three years before she reached an age she had no choice but to retire.

Ruby died in 1971, followed shortly by the death of her sister. At the hospital you told Ruby, or Miss Ross as she was always called, just how much she had meant to you. And you were sorry her pupil hadn't quite turned out to be

the person she would have liked you to be. She responded with a request for a song. A request you were forced to decline knowing your voice would quiver and break with emotion. Besides, you knew at the time, she would have recognised your voice had dropped over the nine years. She would have said (as she did), it's a pity you never had formal training. And as I write Cathy's story, Cathy smiles to herself knowing that the renditions of *Hello Dolly* at High school had taken their toll on your vocal range. Still, impersonating Louis Armstrong in the corridors at high school while you waited to get to your locker, had always been a star turn that got you plenty of laughs (and cries to put a sock in it). But you don't discuss your antics at high school, with Miss Ross, or what happened after you left. Only discussed, as you sat at her bedside, the two years you spent at Lloyd Street Primary. She had never known a family like the Evans' who had shifted house so many times in such a short space of time. There were, as you pointed out, good reasons why you moved: too small a house, no room to park the car; rent too high. Yes. Always the rent was too high. Never enough money for singing lessons. And don't forget the time your parents had to leave the house in Glenbervie because of you. Yes You. Cathy Evans. The pill-of-a-kid who forgot to lock the door on 'Mouse Mansion'. Not even Cathy Evans, she chuckled that day at the hospital, should have been allowed to keep a hundred or so mice. Actually, it was one hundred and thirty mice: the pupil corrects her teacher. The teacher had, at the time of the mass escape, suggested the family get a cat. It had seemed a sensible suggestion. Far more sensible than the family having to move house once more because they were over run with mice. Might have been the answer if not for the fact Cathy already owned three cats. Three cats who didn't dine on mice — they dined with them. An anecdote that screened the pain of having to part from her hospital room that afternoon.

Cathy has selected memories, housed in rooms, at each of the addresses where the Evans family lived. But for Ruby and Margaret you have afforded them a house of their own. A place to house the memories she has of Margaret and Ruby Ross. Memories of the time spent in, and out of the classroom; at their

home in Reservoir; of holidays spent travelling interstate with them. Memories of how two women made a difference to the life of a migrant child.

Eleven

Great. That's all I need. The bloody fire brigade. As if the police and ambulance aren't enough they go and call the fire brigade. I mean, what are they supposed to do? I can just see a fireman climbing up, putting me under his arm and carrying me back down. And, Doctor James. Fancy calling him. He's as useless as tits on a bull. Why did you climb up on the roof? He asked, standing at a safe distance in case I decided to pelt him with bits of metal. They consider me to be dangerous. I heard them talking. Dangerous and a threat to myself, they said.

I wish I'd grabbed me sardine sandwiches out of my locker before I climbed up here. Mind you, it was my turn to pinch a bike from the bike shed and go and get the get the fish and chips today. Chips sure beat sardine sandwiches. Looks like we all missed out. Shame really, there would have been eleven orders today. I look forward to the commission I get for nicking off to the fish shop. Another few months and I might have had enough to go to the Happy Hoofs ranch for a weekend. Peta did her dough last week. She stacked the bike she'd borrowed and was caught wheeling it back through the side gate. Three dollars it cost her for a new wheel. Then again she was lucky to have got off as easily as she did. She could have got suspended if it weren't for the kid who owned it saying he gave Peta permission to take it. It's a pity Mrs Simpson was on yard duty at the time. Any other teacher might not have noticed that Peta's lunch pass was a fake but Mrs Simpson isn't known as hawk eyes for nothing.

It was Mrs Simpson who spotted the blood on Caroline's ear. It was only a tiny drop. You have to expect a drop or two when you pierce ears the way we do. But even a drop of blood turns some people off having them done. Still, Peta and I don't care, we still average one or two customers a week. Mrs Simpson was horrified when she learned that it was us who were piercing ears. She said that she expected differently from me and as a third year student I

should be setting a better example for the younger students. I wanted to tell her that there were plenty of others doing that already and I was fed up with being seen as the goody-goody but I didn't. She wouldn't have understood. Nobody can understand what its like to feel so different to the rest. I'm the only kid, I know of, whose mother goes to work. Even Peta's Mum stays home. Her mum told me, one morning when I called for Peta, that mothers should be at home while their children are young. I think she was mad because I arrive at their place every morning and wait for Peta. Getting a lift with our next door neighbour when he goes to work at seven thirty in the morning is the only way I can get to school. I told Peta's mam that Mam and Dad leave at five in the morning. Most of the time she's okay about me being there and some mornings I even have a second breakfast with them. The trouble is she often blames me for Peta's poor results and her getting into trouble. I know she tells people it's mixing with the likes of me that gets her daughter into trouble. Little does she know that it's usually her daughter that gets me into strife. Sure, I come up with the brilliant ideas to make money, and they are brilliant until someone dobbs on us, but Peta never knocks back the chance to make some money.

Peta must be wondering what's going on. She looked really concerned as I brushed past the desk, she was sitting in, and hurried out of the room. She even attempted to follow me but Robbo bellowed at her to stay where she was. I swear he will never bellow, or come near me, ever again. Maybe, I shouldn't have hit him but he deserved it. If only I had gone home, instead of climbing up here, I wouldn't be in the shit I'm in now. I could have nicked in, grabbed my bridle and gone riding. Mind you I'm getting a bit fed up with having to ride Thomo's horse along the creek bed. Knowing my luck, though, if I rode her anywhere else someone would dobb on me. It's not as if I'm doing any harm. Thomo rarely goes near the paddock, it takes him all his effort just to walk to the roadside mailbox. In fact, I reckon if I was to ask him if I could ride his mare he would say go ahead. But then again, if he said no, then he would be wise to what I was up to and I would have no horse to ride. Another couple of months and I'll have enough money to buy my own horse.

Of all the dumb, stupid things I've done this takes the cake. I'll probably get hauled off to jail. I'm not even sure why I'm still up here. I thought, at first, it would be a good place to hide. I thought after I had cooled off I would climb down unnoticed and leave the school grounds. I didn't expect it to turn into a circus. Why I believed no one would see me, I'll never know. After all, I stand out like a sore thumb. I'm as clumsy as a bag of shit, as Peter puts it, and you don't get the reputation of being the school clown for nothing. I don't know why I got so upset, a couple of weeks ago, at the thought of not being able to go to department classes like most of the other girls. Mam was right, not only couldn't we afford it but it would have been a waste of money.

I could have taken a train from Shrewsbury but I chose to hitch a ride instead. I wanted to look out for familiar signposts. I liked reading signs. Just as I had done so, when I had decided, quite suddenly, to leave the canals and take to the road. Leave the barge and forfeit the pay owing to me. There were plenty of tell tale signs that trouble was brewing among the natives so to speak. Thugs in the area had been blamed for vandalising the wall of the lock. Local newspapers had claimed the reason for doing so was to rob the barges when the owners took leave. There had been signs that the thugs would retaliate. And, retaliate they did only hours after I had left.

Now it was signposts of places that I might recognise that interested me. Signposts that would lead me back to Bagilt. After all, familiarity feeds memory. But the only sign that rang a rhyme, was to Banbury. Twelve miles to Banbury Cross to see a white lady ride a white horse. The rhyme takes on new meaning. No longer a rhyme that had travelled with me to Australia at the age of eight but a place, a real place, where no doubt the rhyme originated. Banbury. So close to where it was I was going yet I had no recollection of ever having been there. I would have remembered, if at all because of the rhyme. No rhyme or reason why I hadn't recognised any familiar sites while passing through Shrewsbury. Surely, I had as a child visited this area. After all, Bagilt wasn't too far away. Not nearly as far as what some would travel daily to work, back in Melbourne.

Then I spotted it. A small shop on the corner of an intersection. The excitement welled, so too the tears, as I read the elegantly painted sign that filled the window. 'The Butty Box'. Somehow, sandwiches — or sangers as some Aussies would call them — were never the same as butties. Chip butties. Jam butties. Cheese butties, egg butties, and my favourite — sugar butties. The word may have slowly disappeared soon after arriving in Australia but the taste for Taid's chip butties never did. Never will.

Nor will I forget the feeling I had when, shortly before I alighted from the truck and took off on my own, I recognised the sign to Wrexham. Memories of a child pretending to be asleep on the sofa, anticipating the return of my father later that night and contemplating the reception he would get from my mother. Wrexham dog track. Where money was won, but mostly lost. Nights wondering if she might accept his story he had to tell about the dog that slipped on the home straight. The dog that would have won — should have won — but didn't. It was all part of the game. The game I, too, played. Waiting for his return. Waiting, for him to carry me up the stairs and tuck me safely into bed.

And so it was with mixed emotions I recalled those nights, knowing how much he enjoyed going to the races but how for days after, along with my mother, I would recount the loss. Yes, a child tossing up whether or not she should ask her mother if she might have a penny to spend at the co-op already knowing what the answer will be. Damn the dog that slipped on the home bend, damn the truck driver choosing to stop when he did and point me in the direction of Mold. Another minute or so and I might have scrounged a penny from Mam. Might have almost tasted the sherbert. The sherbert that had made my tongue tingle so many years before.

Four men went to mow, went to mow the meadow, one man, two men, three men, four, went to mow the meadow. So close was Mold to Bagilt, I could almost hear Johnny Davis singing in the bath. That is, I might, if Johnny Davis were still alive. Might have if I had ever heard him sing in the first place. Then again it was my Dad who had, on numerous occasions told me about the story of Johnny Davis having such a powerful voice his singing could be heard from miles away. Still, stories have a purpose and the purpose of the J.D. story was to put a stop to me continually asking, as I did, how long would it be before we were back in Bagilt.

But unlike the stories that were passed down by my father, I knew there would be none passed down to my daughter. It might have been the reason why I found giving up the letters so difficult. After all, they were my stories. Stories I had wanted to pass down to her. One day I might make use of their content, and

the letters will become a part of a larger story I have to tell. Just as the child's story, penciled between the pages of the novel I was reading, had become a part of a larger story. Not only did I find myself being carried along by the child's voice, a voice through which I recalled my childhood, but I had also taken an interest in her stories. Stories, she had heard her mother tell others, of how her baby sister had died. And I wondered whether the stories, her mother had told, had been the means through which she could conceal the pain of losing her baby, just as I had concealed my own grief in the letters I had written — but never sent. Then again she, unlike me, surely would have experienced the finality which comes with death.

The closer Cathy got to where it is she had come from, the more concerned she was that she might not find what she expected. Not find the person she imagined she was, or the life she was once a part of. Afraid too, that the voice of the child she had claimed as her own might dissolve and she would be nothing more than a name without substance.

The woman on the yacht needs to speak for she is ahead of the skipper. She needs to remind the skipper that Cathy is not afraid that she might not find the self she believes exists, but afraid she will find a woman with more substance than she imagined. The woman knows but, still, she hesitates. Still, she refuses to intervene and tell the skipper she's heard it all before and that she knows what happens in the end. She chooses, instead, to remain silent.

The baby was stiff. Stiff in its crib. On a bed of straw. Why a bed of straw when Mary, Joseph, the Three Wise Men and a couple of shepherds all wore clothes? This is what you ask Doctor B the morning after the carol service.

Couldn't they have lined the crib with items of clothing?

Maybe they did. But what is it about the baby Jesus that troubles you?

It's only a doll. You know that. A doll taking the place of the baby Jesus. But it wasn't a doll when you had accidentally touched it. Touched its arm, when you bent down to pick something up that had dropped out of Alex's pocket. There hadn't been a problem taking your son up to the crib. Letting him have a closer look, at the end of the service. No trouble at all. That is, until you touched the baby's arm. Mary-Ann. Cold. Stiff. Lying in her cot at the hospital. Yes. She had died. She was dead that day you went into her room. Dead. Gone. No longer alive. Just as Mr Evans was no longer alive. But at the age of eight you were yet to understand what death was about. Yet to understand that the death of Mary-Ann would stay with you for many years. Always will be. You will remember her death as having been the first time you felt the body of a dead person. A dead child.

Doctor B pursues the question once more. Why were you so disturbed at the sight of the baby Jesus? Her concern is beginning to show by the tone of her voice. Anxious to pursue the question to the end. End of what? What story does she want to hear? How Baby Jesus was really Mary-Ann. How the boy child that died to save Christianity turned out to be a girl child who was given away to save. Save who? Stop. Nothing is making sense. Mary-Ann died. And that was that, as your Mam would have said. But didn't. Nobody had explained that your little friend had died. Or, why she had died. No one, except you at the time, ever mentioned her name ever again.

The death of Mary-Ann still distresses you after all these years?

I don't think so. It was such a long time ago.

A long time since Cathy's hand was so small it didn't quite go around the wooden hand rail. The hand rail, that stretched around the wall of the operating theatre is still there. Cathy saw it. Touched it. Shivered with fear when, after thirty years, she returned to the hospital at Frankston and walked through the buildings. The buildings that now house geriatric patients. No longer an orthopaedic hospital for children. No longer an operating room but a storeroom. A storeroom divided into two rooms. The prep room with its handrail along the wall. The handrail you would hang onto with grim death until the orderly pried your fingers away and wheeled you in to the next room. The next room. Yes. I, as the writer, should be focusing on the time Cathy spent in Doctor B's room the morning after the carol service in 1975. Not twenty years later when Cathy revisited the hospital. Cathy is yet to return to the hospital. Yet to discover that the handrail fits comfortably in her hand. Yet to cringe at the tell-tale traces of ether asleep in the woodwork. But there are doors opening now. Doors that have remained locked, now have keys. Waiting to be turned.

It might well have been my baby in that crib.

Your son?

My daughter.

Doctor B is silent. Silent about your daughter she has only just learned, exists. But unlike anyone else that knows, it is the doctor who will listen. Listen while you tell her about the adoption and she will respond by telling you it would have been difficult for you to raise two children alone. Listen, while you tell her about the birth, about how no one had guessed you were pregnant for the second time. And so soon after the birth of Alex. You will tell her about the grief that remains undiminished. Doctor B will, in her mind, piece together the facts as she knows them, and make of it what she can. But it will be some time before you reveal who it is you're protecting.

For the time being Doctor B doesn't seem to be interested in pursuing the who. Only the what. What the connection is, after eighteen years, between the death of Mary-Ann and the birth of your daughter.

It's obvious isn't it? My daughter is dead. Dead like Mary-Ann.

Your daughter died after she was adopted?

Of course not! She died...

Stop. Cathy is forced to admit she has been living with a lie. A lie she constructed that enabled her to get on with her life. A lie which from time-to-time needs to be reconstructed because the truth has a habit of forcing itself upon you. Far easier, she tells Doctor B, believing she died at birth than knowing her baby lived and probably is still alive today. Far easier to accept the finality that comes from holding (or touching) the hand of a dead child, than remembering the warmth of her own baby's hand as it slipped out of her palm into the hands of another.

But how did you feel when Mary-Ann died? When you realised she had gone?

Alone.

Cathy felt alone. Even though she was surrounded by people. Those people were not her family. Not her immediate family, or her extended family and friends who were left back in Wales. Seeing your family once in a while wasn't enough. Wasn't enough for an eight-year-old who would rather have had more hugs than the injections she was given. Still the injections had the required effect. Quietened the child who cried at nights and disturbed other patients. Quietened the child who was required to sleep so the staff could get on with their work. And even knowing then, that it was not your Mam and Dad's fault they couldn't visit more often didn't alleviate the pain of being alone. Only visiting Mary-Ann in her room alleviated the loneliness. Cathy saw loneliness in a different light; the light of her little friend who rarely cried, rarely had visitors and who was never without a smile. Even when she lay, dead, in her cot, it seemed she managed a smile. And Cathy had wondered why it was, such a small child could be so brave when she herself was often being told how much of a sook she was.

What I can't understand is, why in the hell didn't they visit me in hospital after the birth of my daughter. I needed them!

Anger. So much anger. The anger spills over. Doctor B is there to wipe it up. There to help Cathy understand that her parents and Peter were more than likely trying to come to terms with the incident. The shock of not knowing you were pregnant. Only finding out hours before the birth. And of course, Susan was overseas. Cathy knows Susan would have been the one most likely to have visited her. But she didn't know. Peter knew. Peter should have visited.

Twelve

Why is it when you're really trying to do your best to brighten up the day, someone has to come along and stuff it up. All I was doing was singing, *It's my birthday and I'll cry if I want to...cry if I want to...cry if I want to...* when along came Miss Raymond and told me to shut up. No please, no thank you, just shut it up! I probably should have lowered it an octave or two. But it really wasn't all that bad. The problem in this place is, no one has a sense of humour.

Me Dad reckons I'm going to end up in jail one day and me being here in a reformatory is my last chance. Last chance at what ? I'd asked, not intending to be cheeky but he never got the chance to answer. Me Mam cuffed me across the head before going hysterical. I had thought, at the time, it was a fair question. I needed to know what it was I was being given a last chance at and what would happen if I stuffed up this time.

We'd all been watching *Homicide*. It was the night before I was to be brought here. No one was talking to each other. Mam was really worried about what the neighbours would say about me being 'away' and me Dad hadn't said much since the day I went to court. Anyway, Sergeant Bronson in *Homicide* was in court attempting to get a murderer extradited back to Melbourne. The judge was a real grouch. I only happened to say, that the judge reminded me of the one I had, when Susan burst into tears and left the room, Peter shouted at me for being a selfish little bitch in upsetting them all and me Dad, well, it was then he said I'd end up in a real jail one day.

If this is anything like being in jail, then it's not too bad. It's not too different from being in hospital. Okay, I might not be able to flit here and there or watch what I want to watch on telly. And yes, I would rather watch *The Avengers* instead of listening to that silly bitch on *Home and Beauty*.

To prevent steel wool from rusting, squeeze as dry as possible each time you use it and stand it on an old upturned aluminium saucepan lid. That way, you'll prevent any rust.

I mean what fun is it learning how to save steel wool? It's much more fun watching Emma Peel and Steed get out of tight situations. There's no place Emma Peel and Steed can't get out of. If I was home right now we'd all be watching *Till Death us Do Part*. It's me Dad's favourite show and Mam let's him choose whatever he wants to watch on Friday nights. I'm hoping they come and see me tomorrow. It's my birthday. I know Mam has been avoiding coming here. Susan said Mam bursts into tears every time she talks about coming to see me. I know the kitchen will make me a cake and yes, I'll have fifteen candles and everyone will sing happy birthday. But it won't be the same if I don't get to see me Dad. It wouldn't even worry me if Mam came and brought me clothes for a present. I can hear her right now:

I know you can't wear these now, but when you get out...when you make a fresh start...when we're a family again.

Oh yeh! And there's the you'll be a different person line she keeps pushing in all her letters. I guess she got that idea from the judge. He said I've got to stay here until the court is satisfied I've made some progress and I would no longer be a moral danger to myself. The social worker explained, that means, I have to learn to behave myself, do as I'm told by my parents and adults and become more socially adjusted. She said, that by running away and refusing to go to school I had placed myself in moral danger. But that's why I won't go to school, I told her. I wasn't in any moral or physical danger before starting high school. I was never in any *real* trouble before then, even though me Mam told the judge I'd always been a problem child. It was hopeless trying to tell this woman anything. She just kept saying I would have to change my attitude if I wanted to go back home. That's what they mean, when they say I'll be a different person.

I'd like to know just how different they think I'm going to be. If it means I'll become a different person by learning to say, yes miss, no miss, going to bed at

regular hours, getting up at regular hours, eating at regular hours, showering at regular hours, then yes, I guess I will be a different person. Mind you, I'm looking forward to seeing just how well, being a different and regular person, works in our house. Me Mam will have to give up shift work so we can eat at a regular time. The telly will have to be turned off at a regular hour so I can get to sleep and a sign will have to go on the bathroom door warning everyone the bathroom must be vacant so this regular person can have her shower on time

Anyway, I'm not going to get upset if I don't get any visitors tomorrow. But I will be if Vicki doesn't get out of the hospital in time. I'm worried that she'll start the crying bit all over again. That's all she used to do when she first arrived. She kept me awake night after night. She would cry herself to sleep and then sob on and off all night. At first I thought it was because she was so young and she hadn't been away from home before. For a while, I wished I had the room to myself again. But once I got to know her, I really got to like her. Now I like her so much, I miss her. I even understand now why she cries so much. At night when the lights go off, I crawl in beside and hold her tight. She likes me to stroke her head until she falls asleep. There are times during the day she seems a lot happier. She says, I make her laugh. That's good, I tell her. Now I know I'll get some sleep.

I know she's been in pain for some time. When she first arrived I noticed she was given tablets which she always dropped down the sink. I knew something was wrong the first morning we showered. The partitions between each cubicle were low enough to see one another. She stood, stooped under the water her arms wrapped around her body as if she were afraid she'd fall apart. What's wrong I'd asked, but she had told me to fuck off and it wasn't any of my business. I would have done just that. Except, two weeks later I noticed she still had her period. I wondered whether or not she had had the same experience I had. The police had taken me to a doctor who later spoke in court. It's my job, he told me. To give you a good physical examination. Just to make sure you haven't picked up anything on your escapades, he said indicating that I was to lie back and drop my legs to the side of the table. I flinched and felt my body go

rigid as his fingers entered and moved around inside me. So, you're not a virgin, he said removing his now bloodied fingers from my fanny. I didn't answer. I couldn't answer. Later in court, the judge looked at the medical report and murmured loud enough for everyone to hear that my hymen was no longer intact. Who have you had intercourse with? he asked looking above his glasses. No one, I told him honestly.

The medical report shows you are not a virgin and I am asking you, who has had intercourse with you or to put it another way who have you allowed to have sex with you?

No one, honestly. I've never had sex with anyone. The only thing I've had up me is the doctors fingers when he examined me and I bled for some time after.

I could tell they all had their doubts. But what else could I say? The judge remained unconvinced.

Anyway, that's why when I saw that Vicki was in pain I wondered if she'd had a similar, if not, worse experience with the doctor and she was too afraid to say. Furthermore, I had noticed tiny blood stains on her bra. Finally, I asked her outright, making it clear that if she didn't tell me I'd go to see Miss Raymond. She started crying again.

Go tell them! They already know what's wrong. I had a baby two weeks ago. Something is wrong with my boobs. They're as sore as all hell.

I wanted to say she was too young! I wanted to ask where the baby was now but I couldn't. Instead I listened to how she believed the pills that they were giving her, supposedly to dry her milk up, were really to make sure she never had a baby again. What makes you think that? I asked.

My mother said I'm a slut and God would make sure I never have a baby again.

I left her alone, crying. When I returned that evening she was in bed, facing the wall. I knelt beside her bed and said I was sorry but I didn't quite understand. She unbuttoned her nightie and carefully undid her bra. Her breasts looked solid, unnatural. Her nipples were cracked. Sore. I noticed the pus

stains on her bra. I climbed in beside her and snuggled down beneath the bed clothes. Looking directly into her eyes I asked what I needed to know.

Where's your baby?

I'm not allowed to keep him. He's been put up for adoption. Legally, I'm too young to be a mother.

Vicki then cried as she had done before.

There was so much I wanted to ask her. I'd never known someone who had had a baby without being married. Not to mention someone who was so young. I wanted to ask, where her boyfriend was? Who he was? How old was he? What did he think about her having a baby? But I remembered the time I had quizzed our neighbour Mrs Lynch about why she was so fat. I'd only got half through what I wanted to ask, when she burst into tears. Susan said I was totally insensitive and cuffed me across the head. She's getting more and more like my Mam every day. You should apologise, she said. I finally agreed, but added, I thought Mam was right, Mrs Lynch was far too fat and she's bound to have a heart attack. So, I put off asking Vicki questions. Instead, I reassured her I didn't think she was a slut. Neither did I think she was too young to be a mother. If you're old enough to get your period, then you're old enough to have a baby. That's what I'd once read in a book, I told her. So how could you be too young to be a mother?

I spent the following few days getting to know her. She seemed to cry less which meant I got more sleep at night. We spent as much time as possible lying on the grass talking about anything and everything except that which would have started her bawling all over again. I like picking daisies, as Susan had done for me when we were younger. Except I don't make daisy chains. I have more fun putting them in Vicki's hair or in her button holes. Sometimes when she's barefoot, I stick them between her toes. If we're not outside in our free time, then usually we're in our room reading to one another. Most of the books are from the library room. I wasn't allowed to have my own books. They said, my books are too old for me and they were giving me the wrong ideas about life. Well...maybe not in those exact words, but they meant the same thing. Instead, I re-read the

Famous Five, the *Secret Seven*, *Mr Gallino's Circus* and all of the *Jill's Stable* books. Sometimes I read *Pride and Prejudice* aloud to Vicki. But when I do, I change the story. I even sent Mr Collins to jail once. We were laughing so much, Miss Raymond came along and you guessed it! She told us to shut it up! No please. No thank you. Just shut it up!

Most of our day is taken up with lessons. Typing, shorthand, sewing, knitting, composition. Then there's domestic studies, which I'm not too good at.

Stand behind the broom child, when you're sweeping the floor. You'll have all the bits over your feet!

On one occasion, the broom slipped between my legs and it seemed Miss Raymond thought I was having a go at her.

So, it's a witch, I am Cathy Evans. I wouldn't want to disappoint you. Go and clean out the pantry!

I didn't really mind doing pantry duty. At least I got to sing QUIETLY to myself. I used to think mothercraft classes were a hoot. That's until Vicki arrived. She'd been excused from them by Miss Cathcart who is in charge of this place. But when she was away one day, Miss Raymond dragged Vicki into class. There! she said, gritting her teeth and thrusting the baby size doll against Vicki's chest.

You're griping you want to be a mother. Then let's see how well you do at playing mothers.

Vicki started to cry. I reached out to snatch the doll from her. Vicki held it tight. Her tears rolled off its plastic body into the palm of my hand. I took a hold of the doll and threw it across the room. We were both sent back to our room which really didn't bother me, but Vicki cried for the rest of the day and half the night. Finally, she turned over to face the wall and fell asleep which meant I could get some sleep myself. Instead, I lay awake thinking what it would be like to have a baby. I ran my hand over her stomach. I wondered what it would feel like to have something alive, live for many months inside you, then one day out it pops and it's a separate human being. Vicki stirred. She turned over and was once more facing me. I needed to kiss her, to let her know I was trying to

understand. She awoke startled and was about to scream when she realised it was only me. I'm sorry, I said. I didn't mean to frighten you. She started to cry.

I thought you were my father. He always wakes me with a kiss before fucking me.

She went straight back to sleep, while I lay awake and cried.

I hope she's back from hospital in time for tomorrow's party. Miss Cathcart told me, Vicki had a mild infection and she'd be back before I knew it. On the one hand, I want my Dad here tomorrow. But if Vicki's back, seeing me and him together might upset her. I can understand why she couldn't tell the court her father fucked her.

Make sure you tell me when you start getting periods! You hear? I need to know!

I was afraid to tell him, she told me the morning after I had kissed her.

I wondered what else he had in store for me. Instead, he belted shit out of me because I fell pregnant.

I can understand why she didn't want to stand up in court and tell what had happened. But I can't understand why her Mam didn't defend Vicki when one night she awoke, left their bed and found her husband standing naked beside her daughter's bed.

Then again, who am I to ask questions?

A journey over, or had it just begun?

Always, when I get to this last part, I put down the book and anticipate an ending. An ending different from what is written. An ending that best reflects the life I have lived and not that of a character in a novel. But having read the novel, many times over, I am unable to deny the narrator their ending. Instead I let myself drift close, so close to the yacht that has now turned three hundred and sixty degrees on its anchor. So close, I can no longer see the skipper, only the woman as she slips quietly overboard in search of where it is she thinks she belongs.

It was the woman from the pub, the sixth pub along the mile that stretched the length of Bagilt, who told me how it had happened. How, at first, the factories in nearby Flint had moved closer to the larger industrial cities north of England. Followed by the people of Bagilt. Except of course for a handful of die-hards who were to see their time out, along with William Jones the stonemason. William Jones who, for generations, had sculpted headstones fit for kings and queens. Or at least that's what the sign said over the front gate. The front gate which now rested off its hinges among the weeds whose flowering heads were as frail as the stonemason himself.

Skirting Bagilt a double lane highway now ran where trains once chugged their way between larger cities, stopping at the station which had since been demolished. No longer could I have crossed the footbridge from where I might have seen Field Terrace. Might have seen the Gas works. Or, the Cob. The Cob that stretched along the Dee. But there were the buildings. Buildings, I recognised with the keenness of a child's eye. A child whose memory led her quickly along the streets, snapping up what was familiar, in fear that it might suddenly all disappear. As it had, disappeared, in 1959.

It was the Boot and Ship, with all its ales, that gave me cause to slow down. Cause to stop opposite in anticipation. Cause to recall the times I had

waited, and watched, to see who was drinking at the pub when they should have gone straight home from work. Nosey parker. My Mam is calling me. Calling from our home up New Brighton Road. A grand name for an old road. A road I remember as being much wider, much longer and much busier than it was back in the 50s. There was no` sign of pinnied women scrubbing the stone steps, gossiping in the doorways, cooking in the kitchens. No children playing ball against Selina's wall, skipping rope or playing dollies on the footpath. No sign of Peter and Graham, Alice, or Winston. Only a woman, who sat at her open door lapping up the autumn sun, waiting for. For what? Not for little Cathy, who had once lived next door, to walk by. The Evans', she remembered, had emigrated more than forty years ago. Or was it fifty years? Or sixty? It didn't matter that she couldn't remember but it did matter that she could recall stories of my Mam, Dad, and Peter. But what of Susan, or myself?

And what of those, who I had imagined would have been there to welcome me home. Those who should have recognised Cathy Evans. After all, I was born in the house in New Brighton Road. It is where I, and my family had once, belonged. Surrounded by those who knew the Evans' well. I needed to hear stories. Stories told by those who remembered me. Remembered me at a time, I knew, where it was I belonged.

I was now beginning to understand why it was important for the child in the novel to retell what it was she knew about her sister. What she had learned from the stories her mother told of how she lost a baby daughter during the war years. It hadn't mattered that the stories had differed, and up until page 236 the child was yet to learn the truth about how her sister had died. Nor did it matter that the child would never hear her sister's voice. What mattered, to the child, was for as long as she retold her mother's stories her sister's existence, as short as it was, would always be remembered.

Christmas is over and that's that for another year. That's what Mrs Evans would have said, and did say, two days before the New Year. Every year since she and her family arrived in Australia in 1960, Mrs Evans had by the New Year, cleared away the decorations, and any trace that Christmas had been was either packed away or thrown away. Christmas 1975. The first spent without your father. The first time Alex didn't have his Pa. When everyone, including you, was thankful for the presence of a child. After all, Christmas isn't Christmas without children. And Christmas was, for you, the time spent with your son. His presence alleviating the loss of your Dad and the absence of your daughter.

So, how was Christmas?

Doctor B is bright and chirpy. As always. And, as always you're feeling flat and would like to remain silent. But you know you won't remain silent. Not when the doctor is present. Instead you start to prattle on about the increased number of smokers in the courtyard of the clinic. Of how you can tolerate smoking, but not the butts. Not the butts left on the ground. Prattle on, knowing the shallowness of the conversation between you and her will move to greater depths. It's a nice day outside. You want to wade in the shallows, not dive in the deep. Talk about anything, or anyone, that has no real bearing on you.

I received a letter from a friend I haven't seen in years. She and her husband live in Wales.

Yes. Jane and John Morris. You will talk about them and how you haven't heard from them since they returned to Wales. The Christmas card, with the letter enclosed, had arrived unexpectedly. It was a pleasant surprise. Just as it had been the day the invitation to their wedding had arrived two years ago. For you and Alex. And your Mam and Dad. After all, Jane and her parents, two brothers and sister, were like family. Alex was three years old. Three, going on twenty three. That's how someone at the wedding described him. It may have

been your Dad who said it. It doesn't matter who said it. You would have agreed. And so would have half the guests at the wedding who got to know. You are stopped in midstream. Doctor B reminds you of the agreement you and she have. An agreement to keep Alex out of this story. Besides, she tells you she's more interested in hearing about Susan's family and their relationship to yours.

The Shaws. Migrants also. Yes. Summer evenings at Altona beach. It's shallow there. Safe to wade. It's Peter who swims in deeper water. It's safe for Cathy to recall those memories. Memories of hot nights. Nights so hot, the recently arrived migrants thought they would melt if they stayed inside the huts they lived in. Nissan huts, numbered and set neatly in rows constructed once for soldiers now housed the migrants from Europe. Migrant Hostels. Call them what you like. Boot Camps. That's what they were. Your Dad had said so. He knew. Knew what Boot Camps were. Bad enough, he claimed, that men were housed under tin roofs — but women and children. Not to mention the extreme heat. Extreme. Even for the Italian migrants who had seen more sun than their British counterparts. The nearby beaches of Altona and Williamstown were a sea of bodies reddening under the setting sun.

Susan's Dad, Fred, would walk with his kids to the beach.

Two miles. Far too far for Cathy to walk. Much easier for Cathy's Mam and Dad to bundle their troop aboard a bus. Before they bought a car that is. And an esky. To keep the picnic tea and drinks cold. Cathy could always tell if Fred and the kids were at the beach. She looked for the white balding head bobbing on the water way out beyond where no one else dared to swim for fear of sharks. Fred's head was easier to spot than his children who thrashed about in shallower water with the umpteen hundred or so beach dwellers.

Summer of 1960. And 1961. Yes. Two summers spent at the Brooklyn migrant hostel. Two Summers spent trying to shed a whiteness, and flopping around in rubber thongs. Two years spent, learning how to be an Aussie. The years where you learnt to replace many words you already knew, with new words. New words that took time to get used to. There was no excuse for you not knowing them. After all, when in Australia, do as the Aussies do: 'There's

nothing wrong with Aussie icy-poles, they'd lick your lolly-ices any day'; 'Sweeties! You mean lollies don't yer mate?' Nain and Taid! Don't you mean your Nanna and Pop? 'Ishmael Neried! Crikey mate that's a mouthful. We'll call you Neil.' And Neil it was, from there on. Neil to everyone, except Cathy's mother and Fred. Fred, who indeed for years, tossed with the idea of shortening his own family name from Ollerenshaw to Shaw and finally did in 1968. Nothing wrong in doing so. Less of a mouthful. As it was for those who named your Dad, Neil. But you'll always remember your Dad as Ishmael Neried just as Fred's son, David, will remember his family name as Ollerenshaw. You'll always remember Nain as Nain. Taid as Taid. There is no word that will ever replace the memories you have of them. But what about Andrew?

I can't remember Andrew.

Andrew Shaw?

Yes, of course you remember Elizabeth, David and Jane, but not Andrew. Maybe he was yet to be born. You remember him when the Shaws lived at Scott Street, Essendon. But not on the hostel. If he had been born he would have only been a small baby. Very small. Lying in a crib, you suspect. In a crib of straw. Maybe, you've packed him away for the time being. Packed any recollection you have of him away in your mind. There's no reason why you shouldn't remember Andrew.

Maybe, Andrew wasn't important enough to you to remember.

As I passed by the Chapel this morning I noticed they've packed Baby Jesus away.

Baby Jesus had a mother. Just as Andrew did in 1965. Yes, of course. Again you have no recollections of Sheila Shaw. It was always Fred. And, of course, his daughters and son David. You remember Fred's children. Jane and Elizabeth became your best friends. And David. Yes. David was always there. But you're also forced at this moment to admit that you only remember Jane and Elizabeth after your family and theirs had moved from the hostel. Moved to Essendon. Scott Street. The home you had wished had been your home. For the Evans family. Not the Shaws. The home so large you never ever got to

know all of the rooms. The house with its rambling garden and shambling out-houses. Shambling. A new word. A word you might have got away with using as a child. The potting shed, always in the process of falling down around the girls who made it their den. The den where boys (with the exception of Andrew) were never allowed to enter. Andrew, yes a baby whose temper matched his ginger hair. A baby who often got his own way when it came to playing with the three girls. The girls and their den. Secrets. Cathy wonders if the den is still shambling. If, other children are keeping their own secrets locked away in a shed at the bottom of their own garden. Locked away. Yes. That's it. Must be it. Memories of the Shaw family, during the time spent on the hostel, must be locked away.

But why is it you're remembering Fred Shaw at this particular time?

The water is cold. So cold, it takes Cathy's breath away. The cold water will quieten the hysterical child. But you're no longer a child. And, no longer hysterical. The water is rising. Memories are flooding back. And forth. Of Fred. Fred Shaw. On the Hostel 1960. December 1960. He and his family are eating their Christmas dinner at a nearby table. The first Christmas in Australia. A time when the temperature soared, matched only by your father's ill-tempered disposition supposedly, as he had claimed, because of the extreme heat but more likely because it was the first Christmas without his father. The first Christmas without Taid. The first Christmas since he had died. The first time you noticed Fred sitting close by and somehow, life in Australia didn't quite seem so lonely. Kind, calm, gentle Fred. Some memories never change.

Thirteen

Sillybitch! She should have trusted her own instincts, not what everyone else was telling her to do. From now on I'm going to trust my own instincts no matter what anyone else reckons I should do. I guess I now understand why me Dad likes the occasional flutter on the neddies. Taid used to say, life's a gamble. Win or lose you give it a go. I should have stood my ground and taken the job on the farm. At least I wouldn't have been surrounded by people reminding me how lucky I was. That's why I like hiding out here among the prickly bushes. Hiding out is probably the wrong word. If people really cared to look for me they could find me. Besides I'm not really hiding. I'm seeking self peace and understanding. I'm attempting to come to terms with why, when everyone tells me I'm so lucky, I don't feel so lucky.

I'm really lucky to have got a job, so everyone tells me. Why, it was only the other day I heard Mrs Parsons tell Mam, for what must have been the umpteenth time, how lucky I was.

How lucky is Catherine, eh! Getting a good job like that. Especially with her background being the way it is.

Little fool! She doesn't know just how lucky she is. Came home the other night, in tears she was. Reckons her feet were sore and no one wanted to have anything to do with her. Yes, she had a few blisters and that, but she would have had a lot more if I'd let her go and work on that dairy farm, like she wanted to do.

Yeh! I really am lucky. And so long as everyone keeps reminding me, everything will be hunky dory. I leave the house at seven in the morning and return twelve hours later. Except for the time I spend travelling, I get to spend the whole day in Melbourne's largest department store. It's even got air conditioning so I don't need to breathe fresh air. What's more, there are no windows on any of the floors I visit during the day so I don't even have to worry if it's sunny or not outside. And, so long as I keep on doing my job properly, as my

supervisor keeps reminding me, I get to keep it for ever! Isn't that something. Mrs Ablett's been with the company, she tells me, for forty five years. I guess this is what they call, having a future is all about.

I'm even lucky enough to have my sister working across from the mail room where I sit and sort the letters before delivering them to the offices on all twelve floors. Eight deliveries a day. A regular modern day pony express, I am, without the pony. First stop are the offices of the directors. Usually it's dead quiet on the twelfth floor. Sometimes I don't even see the secretaries. More often than not, they're behind closed doors. And when they are there, not only do they never speak, but their typewriters sound much quieter than those elsewhere in the building. So, you can gather how surprised I was the other day when one director hurried out of his office and gave me a letter.

Oh! Good. Just in time. Enjoying your work?

Yes Sir, I answered politely as I crossed my fingers quickly behind my back. A legal lie, as my Mam would say. I mean, what else could I say? No sir! But considering I haven't long been out of a reformatory, I'm really lucky to be working here? Good! Good! he replied shaking his head before going on to tell me all about his Miss Reagan.

Miss Reagan here, started in the mail room and look where she is now!

That's all I needed. Not only was I lucky, but now I had something to aspire to. I looked at the woman tapping away at her typewriter not missing a beat. Her head had remained cocked to one side throughout the entire conversation. She looked like a parrot waiting to be fed. I felt sick. I remembered I had skipped breakfast. My feet ached. I wanted to lean against the corner of the desk and give them a bit of a rub, but the look on his face reminded me, his shit didn't stink and my feet certainly would have. Instead, I left quickly, headed down to the cafeteria and bought an egg and bacon roll which I hid beneath the mail and ate between floors.

Is it any wonder then, when at weekends, I like to get away from everyone? Although I know me Mam tells everyone I've gone off in a huff, I still prefer being here alone. When I lie on my back, I can see the sky arching its way

across the top of the bush. The hours pass quickly. Sometimes I read. Sometimes I think. Sometimes I watch. One time I was busy watching some rabbits feed in the clearing only yards from where I am now. Among them was a white rabbit who had defected from someone's backyard. I'm sure they would have stayed longer except they were frightened off by Ron Jacobs and Alison Tate. I knew Alison from high school but I didn't know she was seeing Ron. I could only hope neither spotted me here under the bush. I mean, I couldn't exactly pop out from under the bush could I? Everyone round here reckons I'm weird enough as it is.

They sat close together on the grass talking and laughing. Vicki and I had done the same, many times. Ron watched himself unbutton her blouse. She was wearing a bra similar to the one I saw in the lingerie department the other lunch time. I wasn't going to buy it. I'd circled the stand several times before finally touching it. It felt nice. It looked a lot different from the white cotton one I was wearing at the time. Susan had bought it for me soon after I started work. Here! she had said, throwing it down on the bed.

Wear this!

I told her she could stick her fucking bra. I wasn't going to wear it no matter who was talking about me. It found its way into my drawer until eventually I tried it on. It felt bloody awful. It didn't fit. Either it was the wrong shape or my tits were severely deformed. I threw it under the bed where I threw everything else. It wasn't until two weeks later when Mrs Ablett, my supervisor took me to one side and gave me, what she called, a much needed mother-to-daughter talk, I realised I'd have to fish it out that night and wear it. Anyway, this bra hanging on the stand was black and looked altogether different from the bra I was wearing which I learnt from browsing that lunch time was a training bra. How fucking ridiculous! I mean, what training do you need to put a bra on? I was wondering how you calculate the size when a saleswoman in black came and asked if I wanted any assistance. No, I said I'm just looking. Pretty isn't it? she said, as she tidied the pants on the same stand. I could see she wasn't going to

leave me alone. I could tell she was going to go on and on and on. Then, quite unintentionally I took the bra, thrust it under her nose and said I'll take it.

Are you sure you wouldn't like to try it on? It may not be the correct size.

I shook my head, paid her and walked off. That night, in the bathroom, with the door safely locked I tried it on. I wondered whether it was too small. My tits seemed to want to fall out even though it felt more comfortable than the one I wore. I didn't think anyone would notice but later that evening Peter pinned me against the wall in the hallway. New bra, eh Sis? he quietly whispered as he grabbed my tits so hard I let out a yell.

Cathy!

Me Mam's voice boomed from the other side of the wall. She always sided with him.

If you left him alone. He wouldn't tease you!

Anyway, here I was this day watching Ron, do Alison over. Her bra was down around her waist. Ron looked as if he was trying to cram one of her tits into his mouth. Alison seemed to be enjoying it. I wondered if there might be something wrong with me and that's why I reacted the way I did when Peter touched me. Ron quickly lost interest in Alison's tits and before long was fucking her so hard I wondered how she could possibly be enjoying it. In no time he had finished with her. He stood up and did his jeans up. Alison had rolled onto her front. She now lay quite still and silent. I wondered if that's what you're supposed to do. I thought of Vicki. Had she lain quite still like that after her father had fucked her? Or, had she moved and that's why her father had belted her? Ron stood over Alison. He nudged her with the toe of his boot.

Come on! Mike and Steve will be wondering just how long it takes to have one root.

Alison quickly got to her feet and followed Ron, rearranging her clothes as she did so.

After having seen how quick Ron did Alison over, I now understand what the girls at work mean when they talk about having quickies in the backs of their boyfriend's cars. As she passed by, where I lay, I could smell the perfume she

was wearing. Why do we have to smell *nice*? I used to think you only wore perfume to attract boys but Mrs Ablett in her mother-to-daughter talk, suggested I get some *nice* perfume.

Look love...I don't quite know how to say this...but it's like this. Some of the girls are complaining...you know...personal hygiene and all that.

I must have looked quite at a loss. Finally she said it straight. Seems I had B.O, or body odor, as she put it.

You really should be using a deodorant. And why not get yourself a nice perfume? Take my word, you'll drive the boys wild.

So that's it. That's why I had been given the cold shoulder. That's why, when half the office pissed off to the disco at lunch time, I never got asked. I didn't care anyway. I preferred buying the records and listening to them in bed. At the time I wondered, if smelling nice was so important, why hadn't anyone ever given me perfume for my birthday or Christmas? Then, I realised, only people who love you give you perfume as gifts. I've seen the ads on the telly, particularly at Christmas time. But one lunch time I saw a woman buying perfume for herself. She told the sales assistant that she never wore any other brand but the one she bought. I ended up buying a less expensive one and decided to wear it home on the tram that night. I kept looking around, half expecting to see the boys I was suppose to drive wild. But by the time I reached Niddrie I felt so conspicuous, I decided not to wear it ever again.

It didn't go to waste though I gave it to Vicki when I last saw her. Her mother was in Melbourne visiting friends. She was allowed to stay with me for the day. I had hoped she would have been allowed to stay for the night but neither of us are allowed to be away from the care of our parents of a night time.

So what are we going to do all day?

Dunno. We could get a milkshake and go and hog the telephone box.

Being a new suburb there's little you can do round here. Hogging the only telephone box within miles of this estate is the favourite pastime. Trouble is, it's not as much fun if you're on your own. It's more difficult to make out you're having long conversations if you're on your own. Vicki had never hogged a

telephone box before. Her parents had the telephone on at home. Ron and his mates from Gatt Street were standing outside the milk bar. They stood between us and the telephone box. Vicki and I ducked up the lane behind the shop and slipped into the telephone box. Ron spotted us.

Hey it's the mole from down the road and some other sheila.

Quickly, I undid the belt from my jeans threaded it through the door handle and tied it beneath the telephone. I hadn't seen Vicki laugh so much. So what now? She asked.

Who are we going to call?

No one I replied. We'll just see how long we can hole up in here. Come on, I said to her. Start making out you're calling someone. Ron and his mob surrounded the box.

Come on you moles, get out! We need to use it.

Go piss somewhere else, why don't you?

Yeh! Fuck off can't you see we're talking to our boyfriends.

Yeh...yeh for sure. Who'd wanna do either of you over?

Same guy who did you over Steve the other night behind the shop.

You're a gonna! Screamed Steve.

Yeh...yeh. You and whose army I screamed back. Don't worry, I said to Vicki. They're all talk and no action. Besides, when the time comes, I have a sure way of getting us out of here. Taking it in turns we both invented conversations while the dial tone purred sweetly in our ear. Vicki sat on the shelf and wrapped her legs around my waist. I snuggled in close on the pretence I was listening to her fictitious lover. Eventually, when we were fed up with the game, I called the police and informed them that we were bailed up in a phone box by some local thugs. Shortly after, a divvy van arrived and gave us a lift back home.

That evening, as Vicki was leaving, I gave her the perfume. I hugged her tight. I would've liked to have kissed her, but daren't. See you soon, I said as she got into her mother's car. She didn't look back. Two weeks passed and I hadn't heard from her. I had been thinking about giving her a call when finally a

letter arrived. She sounded as if she'd got her life together. Although I remained unconvinced, when she said her father no longer fucked her and she was glad her baby had gone to a loving home. On her visit, we hadn't talked about her father, or the baby. But I could tell, she hadn't got over giving her baby up for adoption. I had the feeling something was wrong. If there was, I would leave home and go to her. Somehow, we would work things out. We'd talked a lot about how one day we'd get a farm and open a riding school. Trouble was, at the time of receiving the letter, that day was still a long way off. I decided there and then that I needed to speak to her. That evening, when Ron and his mates were nowhere in sight, I called her from the corner telephone box. Her mother answered. She sounded drowsy. This is Cathy, I said. Could I speak to Vicki please? The phone went dead. I called again. It took her a little while to answer. I knew she was ignoring me. Mrs Haas! Please, can I speak to Vicki. She didn't say anything, neither did she hang up. I thought I could hear her sobbing. Finally, she spoke.

Vicki's dead. She committed suicide ten days ago.

I couldn't respond. Finally she hung up. I sat on the floor of the telephone box trying hard to understand what I had just been told, while at the same time, hoping no one would come along. Finally, I returned home. The money or the box? Jack Dyer shouted. That evening when at last I was asked why I was bawling and I blurted out the story, my Mam reminded me just how lucky I was to be alive and pointed out, how sick in the head Vicki must have been to take her own life.

It was Vicki's tears, I now felt on the back of my hand. I never realised until this moment how dry it is under these bushes which grow so strong and green on the outside. How, on the inside, the branches are bare of leaves. How hollow the bush is, at its very core. And how the soil is nothing more than dust. Dust that's so dry that a tear shivers for several seconds before dissolving leaving no trace that it has fallen. Somedays I wait here until it starts to get dark, hoping my Dad will come to fetch me. I wish he would come and tell me how thoroughly miserable he is when I'm like this then I would have an excuse to go

back home. But nobody comes. Let her sulk, me Mam says as he sits there saying nothing, doing nothing. If she wants to sulk, she says. Then let her go!

Go direct to chapel. Do not pass go, do not collect one hundred pounds. And go direct, I did. Direct to the chapel at Greenfield. The chapel where I believed the past could be resurrected. Or, at least the chapel's records could be. Records that would have listed the names of those who participated, voluntary or otherwise, in Chapel business. I had gone there believing that the names on record might have evoked memories. Certainly I had hoped to find Aunt D's name for not only had she played the organ every week, but she had also taken a strong interest in Chapel matters. So too, had I expected to find mention of Peter and others listed as choirboys, past and present. Then there would have been the lists of baptisms. My name. My mother and father's name. And the names of, which I have forgotten, my godparents. But what I hadn't counted on, was not finding the Chapel. The Chapel had disappeared, along with its parishioners. Instead I came across a mosque. A mosque, close to where the Chapel had once stood. A mosque for Muslims, but no longer was there a chapel for the baptists of Bagilt. And what of the records?

The old timer, sitting near what was left of the Greenfield wharf, had suggested I take a wander through the heritage park. It ran the length of Greenfield valley. Just as the Holywell stream did. The stream that, had for hundreds of years had fuelled many a thriving industry, now turned the imagination of tourists. There were buildings, he said, that I could wander through. But I found no documents in any of the empty buildings that had been relocated from their original sites. Buildings that had been built, in the countryside surrounding Bagilt, at the turn of the century. Instead I wound my way through the valley, toward Holywell, passing by the ruins of factories overgrown with vines that grappled to reclaim the blotches on the landscape.

I thought about how I, too, wanted to be reclaimed. Reclaimed by anyone who had once known me. Known me, at a time, when I remember having had such a strong sense of who I was. When I was Cathy Evans and my world

revolved around me and no one else. I wanted people to tell me stories of what I was like as a child. Whatever I might learn, from whoever, may not be a lot but at least then I could claim to have been a blotch on their memory.

But spending time in the valley made me realise what time giveth, it also taketh. The eight years I had spent in Bagilt as a child had, it seems, all but disappeared. Sure there was Aunt D (who I was yet to visit), but I was beginning to realise the child's voice I had claimed as my own, a voice which best reflected the character of the child I believed I was, was only a construct of my imagination. A construct which enabled me to navigate the tides of memory. A construct that had kept me afloat, for so long, was quickly deflating. And as I stood beside the Holywell stream, that ran through a valley of which I have no memory, I felt myself drowning. Drowning in doubt about what it was I remembered about Bagilt. Remembered about my family, and of my childhood. But always there are images. Images, in my mind, around which I can spin stories. Stories or truths?

It's what the child, whose own story I was reading, had asked herself. Stories or truths? And although learning the truth, about how her sister had died, meant a lot to her she wasn't quite sure if it was the truth she wanted or the stories her mother told. Stories that would come to an abrupt halt once the truth was revealed. The first time she remembers her mother telling the story was while they waited at a bus stop. Her mother told the story directly to a second person. And just like the man who listened to her mother's story, the child had hung onto every word, believing, as he appeared to believe, that her sister had died in a bombing raid over London in 1943. And that is what she believed until other stories started to weave their way into what she already knew. The child, it seems, never remembered the exact circumstances or places where she heard the competing (and very different) versions of what happened to her sister. Only remembered that it was her mother who told the stories and no one else. Only remembered the day when she came across her sister's birth certificate and she began to realise the difference between factual truths and emotional truths. The certificate was proof enough that her sister had indeed been born. But it could

shed no light on a sister she never knew, or of how she had died. That truth, the child had decided, was concealed in the stories the mother continued to spin; cocoons from which memories, of a sister she had never known, had metamorphised.

The blue swallow never returned. It disappeared years ago. Disappeared from the top of the biscuit factory. Tic Toc biscuits. Yes. And Ginger nuts. They were your father's favourites. There are children playing nearby. On the beach. You want to tell them about the blue swallow that was atop the biscuit factory directly across the road. The blue swallow that greeted so many migrants as they arrived at Station Pier, Port Melbourne. Cathy remembers how, when the ship docked, her heart had soared to see the bird. A familiar bird that nested every spring under the eaves of Taid's house. It wouldn't be too long before Cathy discovered the Swallow migrated to Africa, not Australia. But unlike the swallow, that flew home in spring, she would not.

The ships that once carried the immigrants, no longer berthed at Station Pier. Very few ships, passenger or otherwise, do nowadays. Flying is faster. Cheaper. Still, for years after arriving in Australia, Cathy and her Mam and Dad visited Station Pier. Watched the ships arrive from Europe and unload their cargo of immigrants. But now it is Cathy who sits, alone on the pier. She watches the people make their way, briskly, to the very end of the pier. Watches, as they stand and stare out to sea. What are they looking for? Hoping for? A ship to return, maybe? Cathy watches the visitors on the pier this day and wonders how many were, themselves, immigrants.

The Shaws were among the few immigrants to fly to Australia. What a strange feeling that must have been. Being aware that you've travelled so far from your homeland in such a few hours. At least the six weeks spent aboard the *Fairsky* must have given everyone an idea of just how far Australia was from Britain. Must have seemed, to everyone on board, that they were sailing to the end of the earth. Certainly seemed that way for Cathy. 1960, the year Cathy navigated her way across continents tapping the face of her compass and mapping her progress daily by adding a coloured pin to an increasing line that

stretched across wide open spaces of sea. Pins that had barely touched the edge of foreign countries before heading out to open water. Countries she knew very little about except what she was told and what she saw on the flat map. The world was flat and that was that. Well, at least, it was for Cathy Evans.

The children on the beach are teasing the waves. Daring the waves to nip at their ankles as they run squealing from the water, turning just in time to see their footprints drain back into the ocean. Something in the water is moving. It slowly makes its way out of the depths, arms spread, shrouded with pelts of leathery black kelp. Its moans are drowned by children screaming. Children laughing. Children rushing, limbs flailing in all directions, fell the tall creature sending it sprawling into the water. And as they and the creature stagger from the water you watch as the shroud, discarded, drifts with the outgoing tide. Drifts to wherever it is its supposed to go before it is sucked:

down salt deep into the Davy dark...

Davy dark. Davey Jones' locker where everything and every sailor rests in peace beneath the sea. Dylan Thomas may have rung the bell waking the sleepers from their sleep but it was his Captain Cat who at night nuzzled down with Dancing William, Tom-Fred the Donkeyman, Jonah Jarvis, Alfred Pomeroy Jones and Curly Bevan, long drowned but not to be forgotten. But it was Cathy Evans who has seen the drowned. Seen the girl, younger than herself, as Cathy sank to the bottom of the pool on board the *Fairsky*. And there is no doubt (at least not in your mind) that it was she who raised your body to the surface. Gave Cathy back to the living. To her family. To her Taid whom she wrote to, after the event, lamenting on how lucky it was Davey Jones didn't keep girls locked up or else the fish would have nibbled her down to her wishbone.

Wishbones. You're yet to find the bone in your body that grants you a wish. You smile. Remembering what it was Cathy had said the Christmas before you left England. The Christmas spent in London with your Mother's relatives. The Christmas you remember as having spent so much time trying to make your father smile. And smile he did when, having counted the seventeen wishbones that hung around the picture rail of your Aunt's lounge, you

announced that if you were a chicken—or a turkey—you would wish that everyone would eat beef for Christmas. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Lots of gravy. Lots of vegetables. Three chickens that Christmas. Three wishbones, but only one would be hung on the picture rail bringing the total up to eighteen. Seven more Christmases and Auntie I's and Uncle L's house would be paid off. Paid off, so they could move. Move, to a house near the sea.

Fourteen

God! I'm getting really pissed off having to go to bed at this time of the evening. But I know he's going to show up, sooner or later. Jill reckons he's hell bent on taking me to this woman's house. I heard him talking to Warren, she said. I really didn't want to miss *Number 96*! Arnie Feather walks in on Vera and Tom in bed together. I saw it on the promo. Me Dad ses it's a lot of trash. But me, Mam and Susan enjoy it, which, come to think of it, is probably the only thing we do enjoy together. Maybe if I strain me ears, I'll be able to hear it. That's of course if I don't doze off. That's all I seem to do these days. Dozed off on the tram the other night coming home from work. Susan thought I was just playing possum until I started snoring. She upped and sat somewhere else causing my head to fall into the lap of this woman. I might be wrong. Maybe he won't turn up tonight. I really don't care a fig! He's not going to get his own way this time.

I'm going to bed I announced soon after finishing dinner. It's only seven-thirty, Susan said. I think she's getting suspicious. No sooner had I closed the bedroom door when Mam started.

I can't understand why she doesn't want to see Patrick! Tired at her age. It's ridiculous. She's still moping over that girl dying, and all that business.

I don't know why she bothers saying anything at all. Dad doesn't. He just keeps on watching the telly. Susan sits there biting her nails complaining she never gets asked out. You don't deserve some one as nice as Patrick, she keeps telling me. Yeh you're right, I reply. You should be going out with him instead, I tell her. One night out with him and she'd know she's been out with a bloke.

I can't understand it. It wasn't that long ago I'd have to be home by eight. Now it seems the later I'm out, the more serious they think he is about me. Mind you, I'm never any later than eleven. Mam didn't even seem to mind when Mrs Parsons told her she saw us kissing behind the hedge in the front yard. All she

said was, Ay! Isn't young love grand? How Mrs Parson's could have mistaken her George, and Mrs Barns from across the road, I'll never know.

That'll be right! Trust bloody Peter to take a shower this time of the night. Now I can't hear what's going on in the lounge. Don't matter I suppose. By now Mam will be on to the Patrick's such a nice boy, bit. Nice neat hair, and all that shit. Not like that long haired git she sees at the weekend. She doesn't understand! Marty has long hair because he's a guitarist. I mean, he'd look a real square if he had short back and sides. Besides, all the girls I know reckon he's so cool.

Just like he was the day I met him face to face. I just happened to pop in to *Sixth Street* one lunch time. I'd heard they were rehearsing there, that week. This day, I was going in as he was coming out. I didn't recognise him at first without his flares and shirt. Anyway, as I brushed past him the bottom fell out of me carry bag and out fell the bridle I'd just bought from the saddle department. As I went to pick it up he put his foot in the throat latch and fell backward. Oops! Better than a lasso, I muttered. I thought he'd be angry but he laughed. I never thought I'd fall over a bridle in a disco, he replied. A little while later he returned. I was standing in the corner near the counter. He offered me a smoke. I told him I didn't smoke.

I thought everyone smoked nowadays.

Not me, I said. I have a horse to support. He costs me a fortune. Marty shouted me a coffee instead and told me about his three horses back in Sydney.

If only I could stop yawning. For Christ sake! Why does Peter always have to tap the wall while having a shower? What the hell does he do in there for thirty minutes! If Patrick hasn't shown up by nine, I'll know I'm in the clear. If I'm still awake, maybe I'll get up and watch Number 96. Then again, I'm sure I'll be given the third degree — It's funny how Patrick hasn't called by the last few nights. Do you think he might be sick or something? Perhaps he's had to work late tonight. Mam will just go on and on as she always does. On second thoughts, maybe I'll just stay in bed. I mean, why can't she see what's going on? Surely she's not so blind she doesn't notice that I often come home half pissed.

But then again, she'd have to ask herself why such a nice boy allowed me to drink in the first place. Instead, she's more interested in whether or not I've met his family. No! I reply for the umpteenth time.

No matter. They'd have to be nice people to have a son like him. And he's so good with kids. I can understand why he likes his job.

Christ! He sells ice cream. Mr Whippy! Jill ses he likes his job because he can sleep-in, in the morning. Her husband Warren reckons its because he can pick up young chics. Offers them a free ride round the block, he says. Whips 'em in, whips it out and hands them a soft serve as they climb out the back door. What really pisses me off, is why they didn't tell me all this before I started going out with him? After all, Warren went to school with him.

Jill could have said, Warren's got this mate who wants to take you out, but I ought to warn you. But did she? No. Instead, she said, you're always crapping on about the guys you go out with are dull, well Warren's got this mate. Surely, her working with me every day and her being older and all that, she could have seen that I was all talk. I'd never had a boyfriend before. That's all everyone seems to talk about in the office — boyfriends, husbands or kids! I had to establish a reputation somehow. The problem was, I did too good a job. People were inviting me and whoever, out. They hadn't bothered to ask before. I had no choice but to tell them I'd given whoever the flick because he was such a dead arse! I didn't mean to make it look as if I was easy! And I made up so many excuses why I couldn't double-date with Jill and her husband. But one evening there was a knock on the door and there they all stood — Jill, Warren and Patrick.

Peter! Stop knocking on the fucking wall!

Cathy! Do you mind! We're trying to watch the telly! I thought you were tired!

I swear, another couple of months and I'll have enough money to skip this place and all the shit. Maybe I'll hitchhike around Australia. If Mam hadn't have pushed me into that first date, I wouldn't be in this bloody mess. Don't be silly! She ses. Go out! Enjoy yourself. Its about time you started dating, instead of

spending all your time with that horse of yours. It wasn't the horse she was upset about, it was Marty! She didn't like the idea of him coming up each weekend to ride. She reckoned there was something suspicious about a guy who paid for a taxi to come all this way out of town to ride a horse. She didn't understand that he just loved riding. I can borrow a horse from the place where I keep mine, I told him the day we met. I always ride alone, so you won't be bothered.

Everything would've worked out. No one, need have known. But I just couldn't help myself. I mean here I was loaning a horse to Martin White lead guitarist of the Apaches. My reputation would have soared! I'd be a legend! But he expressly asked me not to let anyone know because he rarely got the chance to any privacy. So for three weeks I kept my mouth shut. Not a word did I mutter. Then, he said to me on the last weekend before he returned to Sydney:

If there is anything I can do for you in the future let me know.

Well, what could I say! I couldn't let him just disappear without anyone having seen us together. No one would have believed me. So, I asked him there and then.

Do you think we could ride by the milk bar, later? That's where everyone hangs out and I want to see their mouths drop when they see me with you.

He laughed and agreed. Trouble was, not only were all the locals outside the shop but me Mam was getting in the car. She would have given me a hell of a serving if she hadn't dropped a bottle of milk. It distracted her long enough, to make a get away.

There! I'm finished in the bathroom. Happy now!

Rack off Peter! I'm trying to sleep. He makes me sick barging in here all the time. I wish I had my own bedroom then I could put a lock on the door. One night I shoved the bed behind the door so he couldn't annoy me. Trouble was, I fell asleep and Susan ended up throwing a tantrum because she couldn't get in. Why would you want to go and do a daft thing like that? Mam said. There's no privacy in this place. It's a good job that pop git's gone back to Sydney, she said handing me a letter which had been opened, quite by mistake of course.

You would've ended up in all sorts of trouble. All those gits think of is booze, drugs and sex.

What would she know? She hadn't believed me when I had said Marty had never touched me. Peter had told Mam and Dad, the afternoon of our last ride together, that Marty was a poof. How would you know! I'd hollered above Mam's wailing and carrying on because I'd been meeting a drug and sex maniac behind her back. Peter reckons a mate of his was a roadie for the Apaches and Marty's lover boy often travelled with them. So! I had yelled at the time. What's wrong with that! Mam screamed a little louder, claiming that I had no morals. And, she added, after all she had done for me, she may as well be dead.

She'll really freak when she learns what I've been up to with Saint Pat! I've tried telling her in my own way that he's a real asshole, but she doesn't take any notice. She's dead set on me ending up with him. If only she could have been there the first night he screwed me in the back of his car. Right outside the pub we were. Here have another swig at this, he'd said, pressing a can of gin and bitter lemon to my lips. The windows were fogged up. It reminded me of the still cold nights on the ship coming out to Australia. As he grunted, groaned and thrust, I reached over his shoulder and scribbled on the window. Ahoy there, I'd started to write when a surly voice called out — Police!

Step out of the car please. How old are you?

Patrick answered:

Seventeen Constable.

I asked her not you.

Fifteen, but I'm very mature for my age, everyone says so.

Decent girls of your age should be at home in bed at this time of the night. And, as for you, young man, next time you want to get your rocks off then park in a less conspicuous place.

Shit! That sounds like his car.

Eh, Sis! Lover boy's here!

They can all fuck off. I don't have to see him ever again. I should never have told him or Jill. She said, if I didn't tell him, then she would. After all, he

has a responsibility. I've got a surprise, he said earlier that evening before taking me to a motel for the evening. Not nearly as big as the one I have for you, I muttered knowing he wasn't going to like what I had to say. He'd screamed at me, saying I should have had more fucking brains. You don't need brains to get pregnant I'd reminded him before he turned and thumped me across the side of the head. What can I say, he quietly mumbled having driven me home without saying a word.

What can I say, except good-bye and good luck.

Jill had soon changed her mind when she saw me at work the following Monday. What's more, she knew what he had in store for me. He thinks you'll go him for maintenance, she said. He told Warren there's this woman who can fix things up.

Oh, I'm sorry she's not feeling well Mrs Evans. Not to worry. Tell her I'll be back. There's a woman I want her to meet.

There were no Catholics in Bagilt or Holywell. Well at least there were none, that I knew of, back in 1959. Everyone I knew, and I thought I knew everyone, were Baptist. There was no other religion. No other church. But there it was. The truth staring me right in the face. St Winefride's. Church of the holy well whose water, it's said, cures all. All except those Catholics who were laid to rest in the adjoining cemetery. A church which had withstood the test of time, and the memory of its parishioners for more than six hundred years. Yet, I don't ever remember having seen it. Don't remember having passed it on our way to Holywell. I must have seen it from aboard the bus as it chugged its way up the hill. And what about the times Dad carried me, on his shoulders, up the hill to Holywell? Two miles there and two miles home. There must have been more important things to see at the time. More important things to remember then, as there are now. Maybe that's why I found myself hurrying away from the church having spent over an hour talking to the man.

The only man (or person come to think of it) who passed by where I stood at the church gate. The man I had watched walk, slowly, up the hill toward me. After having spent ten minutes or so, commenting on the church and its significance to the area, I decided he was not unlike myself. He may have been a little older. More knowledgeable, than I, about Holywell and its surrounds. But as we talked we both recognised from our slight accents that we were both foreigners in a place where we had once belonged. Australia 1959. Canada 1969. Ten years had made a difference. Ten more years to store away memories of the place where you were born, and of the people you knew. It wasn't until after he and I had exchanged stories of sailing off to the colonies that he introduced himself. Emlyn Roberts. Emlyn Roberts, school principal who, having left Wales alone in 1969, had returned to his country to visit his dying mother. He didn't remember Cathy Evans, or Peter. Only Susan Evans who, like him, had attended the same secondary school. Basingwerk Secondary

Modern School. The school, from which had emerged several notable Welsh men. Singers, musicians, actors not to mention more learned men. Learned men who, like himself, chose to leave the country in search of broadening his knowledge. And broaden his knowledge, he did. So much so, that having returned many years later, he had forgotten his own language. A language he had learned at Basingwerk Secondary Modern School. A language I would have liked to have learned, but never got the chance. Just as Alice Price hadn't got the chance to finish her secondary education. Now there was a name he mentioned, that you remembered. Alice Price, who lived two doors up, from 3 New Brighton Road. Alice Price who spent as much time away from school, as I did. With no man in the family, it had been her duty to take care of her sisters while her mother went out to work. Well, at least that's how I remember my mother having explained their circumstances. Circumstances. But circumstances change and, as the notable Emlyn Roberts had pointed out, Alice Price's duties now included working in a chemist in High Street.

High Street, Holywell. It was there I found myself hurrying toward. It was there I found myself standing in the middle of the street. A street where once you hedged your way in and out of the traffic to cross the road, was now a mall. A mall with very few people even on the busiest days. A no-through thoroughfare which would have now gladly welcomed the return of vehicles, despite the choking pollution, if only to lift the commercial profits. High Street, less than a mile long that once boasted two daily newspapers, ten pubs and shops of all descriptions, now lay waiting for the return of? Some shops were still recognisable. Still had the names of the original owners above the door. I looked for Sefton the Chemist's shop. I looked for Alice working behind the counter and found her developing photographs with the help of a laser printer. She was thrilled, as she put it, to have the chance to talk to me. Of course she remembered Cathy Evans. Remembered what a quiet and timid little girl she was. Filled me in on what little she remembered about her neighbours before they emigrated to Australia, and what had happened to the Price family over the years. Remembered too, how my Mam liked to walk. Long walks along the

lanes of Bagilt, always with a dozen or so children in tow. It didn't matter whose children they were, she took them all. But what of my Dad? It was Alice's Mam who would remember more about Ishmael. More, explained Alice, because it was she who grew up with Ishmael. She who, along with a young Ishmael and their friends, stood around the piano of an evening singing from the hymn books left behind by a, once, strong salvation army contingent.

Differing perspectives. Must be. Alice had a different perspective of my Mam and Dad. That's what it is. But was she right, or was she wrong? Could I believe what she told me? After all, I had doubted this woman who had warned me not to visit the town hall, further up High Street. It's changed she said. No longer the place I would have remembered. The town hall, with its fine clock tower. I had admired it for some time before entering the chemist shop. Better off avoiding it, she'd said as I left Sefton's. But avoiding it, I could not. Susan had performed there. On the stage. With the rest of the dancers from the music school where she learnt to dance and play the piano, paid for by Aunt D and Taid. I wanted to see the stage. Feel the need when, as a child, I too had wanted to stand on that stage. I never did learn to dance, or play the piano. But this was to be my opportunity to stand on the stage. Well at least I thought it was until I passed under the archway and stood before the oaken door. The door didn't swing aside and reveal what I had expected. It didn't even open. Hadn't opened for years. Instead it stood alone as a monument to a building that once was. Just as the front of the town hall, with its clock tower, turned out to be a facade which hid several shops. Would all of my childhood memories turn out to be as hollow as the town hall? And what of the bold and cheeky Cathy Evans I remembered? And what about my Mam? I don't remember her ever taking me for a walk, not to mention other children. I was beginning to wonder whether or not memories were nothing more than a series of competing stories.

And for the first time I was beginning to understand why the child in the novel had never directly asked her mother what had happened to her sister. She may not have really wanted to learn the truth, as she had so insisted she needed

to. She, as young as she was, might well have learned from experience that discovering the truth doesn't necessarily fill the void in one's life.

I would rather be sailing. That's what the sticker claims. The sticker, a souvenir, of your outing to Port Melbourne. The woman at the yacht club had encouraged you to enter the yard. Browse, have a chat, she suggested. And so it was, two days later when Doctor B entered your room and saw the sticker stuck across the door of your locker she struck up the conversation about your fascination for the sea.

I think I might learn how to sail.

What a marvelous idea. It's an excellent sport.

Sport. Doctor B is, once again, on the wrong track. You have no intentions of taking it up as a sport. Cathy couldn't think of anything more boring than sailing around the bay in a dinghy. She has bigger plans. Plans she will keep under wraps, for the time being. Maybe she will never tell Doctor B of her intentions. Instead, Cathy steers the conversation away from wanting to learn how to sail. The two talk about Station Pier, watching the yachts sail off the beach, reminisce about Swallow's biscuits. The conversation is sweet until Doctor B tacks and the topic takes another direction.

Goodbyes. Goodbyes is what it's all about. The many times you visited Station Pier to see your sister off. Off on another journey. You are asked how you felt about your sister working on passenger liners. Did you envy her? You reply, as most would, who wouldn't envy someone with a job that took you to so many countries. But what about the goodbyes. Those goodbyes didn't affect you. Those? You stop. Contemplate what you have just told Doctor B. It hadn't been too difficult waving farewell to Susan. You knew she would return. And, return she did. But what of the other goodbyes? What about the time you sailed from Plymouth? Exciting. Yes, Cathy remembers leaving Plymouth. As the boat pulled away from the pier. Watching the faces in the crowd on the pier below. People laughing, shouting to one another, crying. Yes. Cathy saw many people

crying. Even recalls how she had caught her Dad wipe away a tear, quickly before he reassured his daughter that one day they would return. But there had been no goodbyes, at the pier. It was all said and done at Aunt I's before the Evans' travelled to Plymouth to board the ship. London, too far from Plymouth to make the departure more difficult than what it must have been for your parents.

It must have been so exciting, for you, sailing to Australia. Such an adventure.

Exciting? You're not sure whether it's the appropriate word. Probably was, then, for an eight-year-old. But now you think back. How it must have felt for a little girl to go to sleep not knowing what to expect when she woke next morning. A home that, for six weeks, moved. But the adventure had started when you reached London. Never before had Cathy seen so many people. So much traffic. She remembers the thrill of travelling in a London cab. Driving around and around the roundabout outside Buckingham palace. How she caught glimpses of the palace as the cab negotiated the traffic before heading off in the direction of Aunt I's. And Piccadilly Circus where Cathy recalls, the disappointment of learning it wasn't a circus, even though her Mam repeatedly said London was one bloody big circus. Yes, London had been a distraction.

Have you ever been back to London?

No. But I will return one day.

Doctor B is being tactful. She knows you are yet to return to Britain. Return to Wales. Port tack. Toward home. The doctor steers you back home. Back to a conversation about your brother. The yacht he built. The yacht he and his friends sail. The yacht so large he could sail back to Wales. She asks if that is where you get your fascination of the sea from. Fascination? You were unaware of this, so-called, fascination. But still, the doctor has observed you now for many months. The sea is, to her, an obvious motif that has cropped up in many of your conversations. A motif for what, you're not quite sure. In fact, at the time this conversation took place, you are unaware of what a motif is. Except of course that it may be something one might stitch on a piece of clothing. Any other version of what a motif is, is purely academic. You are yet to delve into

academia. Yet to learn the power of motifs. Yet to read the sea as a motif for rebirth. Once more the writer is interfering with the flow of Cathy's story. Readers don't want to know about all that crap. The sea is the sea and, as your mother would say, that's that.

Do you like sailing with Peter and his friends?

Liking, and wanting to sail is a different matter. I used to like sailing with them but I was never asked to go that often.

Never asked, because as you suspect they thought you were always in the way. A nuisance. After all, you feel you have always been a nuisance. To everyone. Trouble. Besides, you felt it wasn't worth getting into a row about whether, or not, you could go sailing. Alex was still very young. The time would come when he too, would take up sailing and go off with the boys. But that is where the problem lay. Always, the adventures were for the boys. Not for Cathy. Instead, it was easier to avoid the rows over who would look after your son. Easier, not to ask if you could go too, than knowing what it was like to be excluded. Yes, easier to avoid confrontation, rejection. And avoiding confrontation is what Cathy does best. She learned from an early age to be tactful. At least, that's what her father had called it.

Early 1959. The Evans' have learned that they have been accepted as part of the migrant scheme to populate Australia. So too, has Mr Evans' father and sister, learned of the impending departure. They aren't impressed. Why would anyone want to up and leave their homeland? Cathy feels she is the meat in the sandwich. She is the one who doesn't want to see either her parents, or her Taid and Aunt upset. She finds it hard to understand the notion of permanent separation. Separation, as such, is reserved only for deaths. After all, if she and her family can travel to Australia then surely they can travel home again. But still at that time she doesn't wish to cause any more conflict, or hurt, to either side. She is fed up with the adults rowing over what is best for the children when no one has stopped to ask the children what it is they want. Fed up also, at having to dodge Taid's questions and be tactful, so as not to cause him any pain. Questions, as to how the process of immigrating is going? What's happening?

Has a sailing date been set? Fed up, knowing she deliberately manipulates the truth when she tells him she doesn't think it will ever happen, when deep down she knew the time to leave was creeping closer.

Well at least that's how she remembers it. Taid would never have lied to her. He had said, so many times, that he would never lie to her. And, there were numerous times she had doubted his word, particularly when he told stories. She had doubted the existence of Captain Cat being any thing other than a character, from Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, despite the fact Taid read it often and with so much passion. Doubted, Captain Cat really had danced with the drowned. That is, she had doubted him until she wrote, from aboard the *Fairsky*, and told Taid how she had seen the drowned. Might have even danced with the drowned if she had, had the time. No, Taid had never lied to her.

But she had lied. That is why Cathy had no trouble hopping aboard the train, ahead of her family, when they left Bagilt. The quicker they left the better. Taid might have turned up at the last minute. She may have had to tell Taid she was sorry for fibbing. May have had to say goodbye. She was, at that time, yet to learn the importance of goodbyes.

Fifteen

That's all I need. Just when I'm about to watch *You Can't See Around Corners*, a visit from this lot. Cups of tea, yackety yak, and advice on how I should be caring for Alex. Hopefully, they won't go to the back gate and see him asleep in his pram. Shit. I don't think I locked the wire door?

You hoo! It's only us. She's not home.

The front door's open. Besides, where would she have gone?

They're whispering. Gossiping about me, I suppose. On me own doorstep too. They've got a bloody nerve. After I caught them out the last time, too. Surprised them, I did. Oh! Mrs Brunning had said as I popped out from behind the front door. Been in the sun I asked them both noticing they had gone scarlet. She's far too young, they'd said. She couldn't possibly be responsible enough to look after a baby. What worries me, said Mrs Jacobs, is both her parents are at work. I mean what's that supposed to mean? That I can't survive on me own and I'm going to brain the kid or something. Anyway, I made the mistake of asking them in last time. Three hours later, they left. Nothing better to do I suppose, except cook, clean and watch *Days of our Lives*. They think because I'm too young to drive and there's no buses to this estate, I'm going to freak out and do something I'll regret for the rest of my life. Well, that's how Mrs Brunning put it. She said: We know what isolation can do to you stuck on this estate. That's why they all get together for coffee, they tell me. But what have I got in common with them? Except of course our kids were all born within six weeks of one another. I'm not married. I haven't got any money and what they have to talk about is dead bloody boring.

Maybe she's out walking. Come on, we'll keep an eye out for her from my place.

Nosey bitches. I've put up with this for two months. I suppose they mean well. But it's their condescending attitude I don't like. Just because they're older. Married. Their life is in order as my Mam keeps reminding me. Too bloody

ordered, if you ask me. Mind you, I would've liked to have been a fly on the wall a couple months back after me Mam had told them she was a grandmother. Them and another woman from down the road had congregated around Mrs Brunning's letterbox. It's only two doors down from here and I could hear them clearly from where I was crouched behind the side fence.

I have some news to tell you all. I'm a grandmother.

There was this silence I was tempted to pop-up and catch the look on their faces but I would've got a hell of a serving from Mam, if I had have. The silence was enough. Ay, Mam continued:

Three weeks ago. I have a grandson.

One by one they all congratulated her before Mrs Brunning remarked that, Peter would make a good father.

Oh it's not Peter she replied. It's Cathy! Again there was this silence.

I know she's very young, but these things happen. We're not yet sure whether we'll let her get married.

Then I heard Mrs Brunning say that it couldn't be me. She said she'd seen me riding my horse only a month ago and there was no way I could have been so far gone. Mam said she didn't realise I had been riding and it must have been while she was at work. But she added:

We all know what a little fool Cathy can be.

Again there was silence before all three women broke out with the congratulations bit all over again. They continued talking about how they were all going to offer me support. Surprisingly, Mam didn't mention Patrick which would have really cheesed them off not knowing who the father was. I reckon it's because she doesn't want to talk about Vietnam. Peter's just turned eighteen. Mam said he might get called up in the next ballot draw. Dad's fuming. He reckons it isn't fair getting called up just because your birth date gets pulled out of a barrel. Besides he says, if one goes, they should all go. Not that Dad wants to see anyone go to Vietnam. He'd seen enough fighting in Africa to last him a life time. Besides, even though Peter can be a real sod at times I know he could never really hurt anyone. Never mind kill someone.

Anyway, it's a change not having to listen to Mam go on and on about Saint Pat fighting the Viet Cong. She's soon changed her tune. Cathy, she said knocking on the bedroom door some months back.

Cathy! You really should come and speak to Patrick, he's off to Vietnam.

I pretended I was asleep. I thought at first it was a ploy to get me out of the house. Then I realised I was four months pregnant and it was too late for an abortion. He hadn't called by for nigh on five weeks. I thought I'd seen the last of him. What's more, Mam had stopped asking about him. No longer did anyone question why I went to bed so early or why I dozed off all the time. Never the less, I didn't want to speak to him ever again. She's fast asleep I heard her tell Patrick as she closed the lounge door. He replied that it was a shame because he would have liked to have had a drink with me before setting off to training camp. I was tempted to pop out of bed. But I didn't. Next morning, before she left for work, she went on and on.

Remember this my girl! He didn't have to join up. Patrick's chosen to go.

He'd told them that the reason he had joined up was because he valued freedom and life and Australia was under threat. On the tram going to work I could think of nothing else.

Any minute now, Mam will be ringing. She usually does in her lunch hour. I don't know why she bothers. It's always the same old thing.

How's my little darling? Are you sure you're keeping him cool? Is he getting plenty of liquids? It's very warm you know. Babies need to drink a lot. Is he getting plenty of rest? You're not handling him too much are you? He needs plenty of rest. Never mind about asking does he get any rest. What about me? All this kid seems to do is sleep all day and is awake half the night. Everyone comes home from work and dotes on him. They can't do enough for him. But come bedtime! Well that's another story. They all seem to turn a deaf ear when he wakes squawking for a bottle. Susan's the lucky one. She has a room of her own out the back. I had hoped me and Alex would get to live out there. But Mam reckons Alex should be close-by, so we can hear him when he wakes. If

the truth were known, she and Dad are afraid I'll take off with Alex. Disappear into the sunset, as he put it five months ago, when they found out I was pregnant.

I hadn't very long got home from work and was trying to stay awake long enough to eat my tea. Mam was in a real bad mood. Dad looked as if he'd been crying. Finally, Mam went into the lounge and turned off the telly. I knew right there and then this was serious. Susan asked, what was wrong. Nothing, Mam answered curtly, which means something is very wrong. Why are you in such a bad mood? Susan persisted. Then Mam burst into tears and ses:

I think Cathy has something to tell us.

I took a deep breath knowing the shit had hit the fan at last. I'm six months pregnant, I blurted too tired to really care less. Susan went potty. All she could say at first, was, you can't be six months you don't even look pregnant. She reckons I was a little fool and I'd stuffed my life up for good. Peter lurked in the hall listening without commenting and Dad, well, he rambled on about how disappointed he was with me and now he knew I was bad and would end up in jail for good.

Here, you might as well have this. You can phone him tomorrow and tell him not to expect you. You're not going anywhere.

She threw Patrick's letter down on the table. She'd found it in my jeans pocket. I knew I should have thrown it away except it had details of the bus I needed to catch to get to Ingleburn. Jill and Warren had hassled him until he'd agreed to look after me until I'd had the baby, and then I was on my own. You seem convinced it's my kid, he'd written. Even though you weren't a virgin when I went out with you. He'd organised a room for me with a local family who lived near the army camp. In return for the room and board, I would have been expected to do light chores. He'd included the bus fare along with the address of the family I was to stay with.

Everyone, including Peter had sat around the table staring, yet saying nothing. I can't eat any more, I said getting up from the table. Grab your cardie, Mam whimpered.

We're going to pay his parents a visit.

An hour later we were standing on the doorstep of Patrick's parents home explaining that they were soon to become grandparents. Mr Kennedy was reasonably calm about it all but Mrs K, well, you would swear she and Mam came from the same mould. Except, of course, she was Catholic. I was grilled about my association, as she put it, with her son until finally we were dismissed from the property with the understanding that they would speak with Patrick and Father O'Malley. You can rest assured, I added as I stepped off the porch, even though Patrick wanted to get rid of it, I wouldn't have gone ahead with it. There was this gasp before the door was shut and the light went out.

Jill just about pissed herself laughing when I told her about Mrs K. We were on our way to a horse show at Bon Beach. I hadn't been allowed to leave the house all week. Mam had phoned Mrs Ablett and had explained my predicament. I was given the week off so I could sort myself out. Jill had called by on the Friday night offering to take me out the next day. She'd seen a horse show advertised in the saddle department and thought I might like to get out of the house for a few hours. Surprisingly, Mam thought it was a good idea. Enjoy yourself, she said as we drove off the next morning.

By lunch time, it had started to rain and I was wondering why the fuck we were there. It was obvious Jill was bored and I kept dozing off. I suggested we leave and go home. After hedging around, she came clean.

We can't go home yet. Your Mum wanted you out of the house. Your parents are meeting with the Kennedys, Patrick and Father O'Malley. A decision has to be made about you and the baby.

At the time I was too upset to be angry. Instead Jill and I talked about what it was I wanted. Your Mum is only trying to do what's best for you, she kept saying. As we drove home that afternoon I could only imagine what was going on at home. Even, more mind boggling was the conversation the priest had with Patrick. As we turned into our street I broke into a cold sweat. I thought I was going to throw up. It looks as if they've left, Jill said, as we turned into the drive. I hurried on inside.

Mam and Dad were watching telly and acted as if nothing had gone on. Then I noticed the good cups and saucers piled on the sink. What the fuck do you think you're doing, I screamed. It's me that's having this bloody baby. Not the Catholic church.

You've been telling us for weeks you didn't ever want to see Patrick again. We were only doing what we thought best for you.

So, now that it's too late, you've decided to listen to me. Great fucking timing! I barricaded myself in the bedroom and threatened not to come out until they brought this priest guy back so I could give him a piece of my mind. It was nearly forty-eight hours before I got sprung climbing back in through the bedroom window. Seems, Mrs Parsons had spotted me having a pee behind her philodendron and had tipped them off. Mam made out she had known all along and that's why they'd left the back door open of a night so I could raid the fridge. She said that they'd decided to let me get on with it. She would've had to show her face sooner or later, she'd told Mrs Parsons. Better her face than her backside, Mrs Parsons had replied. It'll probably die on me now! That's when Mam and Dad made the decision to build Susan a room of her own out the back. Mind you, she hadn't complained of having to sleep in the lounge for a couple of nights.

I tell Alex that I'm always going to listen to him. Even if I'm hanging by one foot from a ten story building, I tell him I'll listen to whatever he has to say. I think he understands me. His little legs go forty to the dozen, when I talk to him.

God! Just as I thought. He's awake. Another feed, another nappy. At least I've got him, to speak to. I don't get to speak to too many people nowadays. I often get calls from two of the girls I worked with. Seems I'm a legend in the mailroom after having this baby and all that. Sometimes I get really pissed off with their bragging about what they did over the weekend and all that crap. But usually I'm glad to speak to them. They're away at the moment. On a cruise to Fiji. Wherever they are, I hope they've both got food poisoning and are sitting on the lav somewhere too afraid to move in case they shit themselves. God! How I hate jealousy. I shouldn't be so bitchy. I needn't talk to them at all.

There are times, I'm tempted not to answer the phone at all. But then, I remind myself it might be Mam checking up on me. She'd get in a right panic if I didn't answer. That's why they got the phone on in the first place.

Now you needn't feel afraid when the time comes for you to go to hospital, she'd said the day the phone was connected. Great, I'd thought. All I have to do is call a taxi and hope I don't make the six o'clock news for having given birth in the back of a taxi. God, wouldn't mine and Patrick's mother freak! I'd rather go and stay at that hostel, I'd told them. It's closer to the hospital. But Dad had said I wasn't going anywhere. Mam reckoned that sending me to one of those places would be like airing our dirty washing in public. This was my home and they'd care for me. So there I was stuck at home, miles from the hospital, with the phone number of a taxi. I wasn't even suppose to leave the house in case neighbors saw the predicament I was in.

I should've spoke up when the social worker at the hospital asked me what did I want. I should have said then, that I wanted to go to the hostel, over the road. The hostel the girl out in the waiting room had told me all about, while Mam was trying to get through to her boss on the phone. She'd told me, that it wasn't too bad over the road. You were expected to do some work, she'd said. But when it came time to have your baby, one of the nuns brought you over and stayed with you. Not only that, after you left the hospital you were allowed to return to the hostel until you had decided what you wanted to do. Anyway, it was my fault I didn't just speak up and tell the social worker I didn't want to stay at home. Instead, I'd sat there and shrugged. I dunno, I'd finally replied. Truth is, I hadn't given it all much thought. Mam and Dad had made it perfectly clear — no baby! Besides, Mam was doing all the talking. She went on and on about how she and Dad had considered adopting the baby themselves except they'd be seventy when it was twenty. So it's best if the baby is put up for adoption, she told the social worker. Cathy would then be able to start all over again.

That's all I thought about, when, three months later, at eight in the morning, Dad dropped me off at the emergency entrance of the hospital. Twelve hours later I'm still curled up in agony waiting for the great moment when this kid

would pop out and be out of my life for good. Mam had called to ask, whether or not it was all over. I had guessed it was her, the nurse was speaking to on the phone. You can come in and stay with your daughter, I heard her tell Mam. Shortly after, the nurse came and told me that Mam had called. She sends her love, she said giving my hand a gentle squeeze. It was the same nurse who held my hand shortly after, when at two in the morning, Alex was born. It was the same nurse who took him from the doctor and placed him in a room next door. It's best this way, she'd said. It's easier to give your babe up, if you don't see him.

I felt as if I'd been deserted by everyone. Particularly at night. I even missed the baby kicking shit out of me. I packed the shifts with everyone around me. Particularly the women in the same ward. I was fed up with listening to them all crapping on about their kids. I didn't have anything to say, to anyone. That is, until four days later my Mam and Susan arrived bearing a blue teddy.

Here, you might like to give this to your son.

Well go on, she'd said thrusting it once more under my nose.

Your Dad and I now realise, that it has to be your decision. If you want to keep him then you can live at home until things work out.

I broke my silence. I dunno, I replied. Truth is, I knew immediately what I wanted to do. I felt all excited inside. But why should I have given them any satisfaction. Instead, I told them that I'd think about it. You're joking, Susan remarked.

He's absolutely beautiful. We've already had a cuddle.

Little Weed. I'd almost forgotten about her. Forgotten how, as a child, she had popped up on the television screen every weekday afternoon. Of course I remembered Bill and Ben the flowerpot men. The puppets, who lived in the potting shed at the bottom of a garden and who fumbled and garbled their way through many adventure. Interrupted only by Little Weed whose job it was to warn them of their misdoings. Little Weed who could not move from where she grew. Who spoke with such a gentle voice I remember having had to listen ever so carefully to hear what it was she had to say. Little Weed whose flower-head, I now realise, resembled that of a daisy and not a weed. How could I have forgotten such a beautiful little weed? But at least the series, having been filmed so many years ago, could now be replayed. Replayed, at a time, when I was sitting in Aunt D's lounge room while she made tea.

Making tea, is what Aunt D is all about these days. Making tea for her many visitors, most of whom live at the same address. A suitable address, for pensioners, tucked away at the end of a court. It didn't matter that she had moved from the house where she and my father, and their father, had been born. The house that was around the corner from where we had lived in Bagilt. It only mattered, now, that she was comfortable. Hot water, central heating, and a carer within the complex on whom she could call if she needed assistance, is all that mattered these days. But it did matter, to me, that she had relinquished everything that had belonged in the house. Or at least everything I remembered as belonging in the house. Especially the piano. I had expected her to have kept the piano. After all, she could still play. Did play, on occasions when she visited a chapel nearby. So, the piano was too large for the flat she now occupied, but what about the stool? Not the piano stool with its space beneath the seat where the sheets of music was kept, but the little wooden stool with its woven wicker seat. The wicker topped, wooden stool that blind Nain had woven. Woven to keep her mind active and her fingers nimble. The stool, I used to sit on while

resting my head in her lap. I didn't ask where it had gone. Dare not ask, for fear of learning that someone else might now have the stool. Someone else might be sitting on the stool resting their head on someone's lap. Still, there is the clock. The small grandfather clock given to Taid on the day he retired from the textile mills. I don't remember the clock. Only remember Taid taking its splendid key and winding it every Monday morning.

There had been no one home the Monday morning I arrived at her flat. No one winding the clock that day. It was Mrs E from the flat downstairs who told me Aunt D was away until the next day. Mrs E (who was no relation to Mr E the old school master from Bagilt school) who, on the following day, let me into the foyer so I could wait for Aunt D to return. I spotted Aunt D walking slowly back from the supermarket. I recognised her from where I waited on the landing of her second floor flat. I watched as she tottered up the path, unlocked the door and entered the building. I listened to the clip, clip, of the heels of her shoes as she ascended the stairs. Such a familiar sound. Leather soles and heels. Nothing but the best for Aunt D's feet.

Reunions. That moment when people meet, having been apart for so long, and time frantically orbits the past, present, and future until conversations slow and all that is said from there on tumbles once more into space. That is, all which is not important. All, that one does not wish to retain. Over the years I had forgotten just how much Aunt D meant to me. How much I loved this gentle naive woman. But then again, I only really knew her as a child. Letters and photos were no substitute for a child, over the years, who longed to be near to her Aunt D. But now, Aunt D was there to fill in the spaces. Many a space in my memory of what life was like, for me, as a child. A child growing up in the Evans household. I could rely on Aunt D to tell me how it was. After all, she had never left the north of Wales. Never left, the Greenfield valley where her life had revolved around the chapel, around the people who had become her family. People who had, in a sense, replaced the loss she felt after her brother had migrated to Australia. Then again, nothing or no one, had replaced the loss of his children. And so, Aunt D had held on to every snippet of what she

remembered about the children. Over the years, photos and letters might well have told one story but she had many more stories to tell. Stories of visits to Rhyl. Afternoon teas on the prom. Donkey rides along the sands. Loggerhead Park in autumn. The steep and hilly road, which led to the park, behind Mold. Streams in which we cooled our feet. Cod and chips, wrapped in newspaper, eaten while we sat on the stone wall waiting for the coach to take us back to Bagilt. Aunt D had given me what I needed most. A chance to recall my childhood. A childhood which, unbeknown to me, had been safely stashed away in the lining of clouds. Clouds that had, over the years, consumed what happy memories I had of my childhood in Bagilt.

I never discussed with Aunt D what it was I remembered most about those eight years in Bagilt. Never discussed my fear, as a child, that my father would never recover from his sickness. And how I had worried about how my mother would cope taking care of us. Or, how I felt each time I was left at the hospital. Never discussed the rows that had gone on behind her and Taid's back. Rows between my parents about leaving Bagilt. Travelling to Australia. Never discussed with Aunt D, or anyone, how I had grown up believing the move to Australia had been solely for my benefit. After all, I remember the doctor telling my mother that she would never regret taking me to Australia. That, doctors there would rectify the problems I had with my feet. But Aunt D did tell me about what she and her brother had, before he died, discussed in letters. Of, how her brother had never regretted moving to Australia. And how proud he was of all his children. Especially, of how his darling Cathy never complained about anything and, as Aunt D pointed out, from what she read between the lines there seemed to be plenty of everything going on in young Cathy's life. And as she talked about her brother I thought about whether or not I, like the child in the novel, would one day use Aunt D's stories to construct my own story.

Doctor B left the room in a hurry. Left before you got the chance to ask — no tell her — you want to leave the clinic for good. You're left contemplating the question, and the possible answers she may give. As far as you're concerned you are ready to leave. But Doctor B left the room in a hurry before you got the chance to say what it is you wanted to say. There was little explanation, only that she would return in fifteen minutes. Whatever the reason, she appeared to be quite disturbed. Maybe she was disturbed to find you, naked, sitting under the bed. But then again, there may be no connection between you, or her having to leave the room. You will explain, when she returns, that it was all in the name of research. Researching the novel you're currently writing. You wanted to know what it was like when you were first admitted to the clinic months ago. The time you remained silent.

No longer will you be silent. Cathy will take charge of her own life. She has, up until now, resisted looking at her medical records which are sometimes left by the doctor. Left, where Cathy is capable of browsing through their contents without being interrupted. That is, she has resisted up until the present time. Doctor B has left your medical history on the chair near the door. Cathy has a right to look at the notes. After all, they are about her. She takes what has become quite a hefty folder and opens it out on the bed. It comes as quite a surprise to find her history is arranged under sub-headings, not unlike chapters in a book. Cathy knows that if one were to read each section, one would be able to piece together the story of her life. But unlike the novel she is writing, where she has control over the content, Cathy realises that she has had no control over the contents of this folder. An immediate concern, arises. What will become of the folder after she leaves? After she has finished with Doctor B?

Records serve a purpose. An important purpose in most cases. But when there is no longer a purpose, then what? Cathy recalls how she found her high school records, upturned on the floor, of a general store room. A storeroom where numerous records had been turfed while renovations within the school had taken place. There had been no attempt to rehouse the records since the renovations had been completed. The storeroom, as Cathy recalls, was once a part of C block. She sat, reading the records, half expecting someone to come looking for her. But no one did. The hour, or so, Cathy spent in the storeroom made her realise the importance of destroying records that were no longer needed. Someone might read them. Make what they wanted of the contents. She had found nothing that she already didn't know in her own file. The sudden loss of interest in study, reflected by the sudden drop in grades must have puzzled many, but not Cathy. She sifted through the files. Found names, most of which were familiar. She was intrigued to read the personal information. The occupations of parents. Family sickness, and diseases. Recorded instances where parents were called in, to speak to the principal. She saw no harm in reading what she read that afternoon but realised, in the wrong hands, such information could be misused. There had been no trouble in gaining access to the records. As part of her research, she'd explained to the receptionist. Research into the reliability of one's memory. She remembered being a bright student. But how bright? How conscientious? The receptionist, having given Cathy the key, pointed her in the direction of the store room and asked no more questions. Nor did the woman ask any questions, when Cathy handed back the key and left the school with her records tucked safely in her pocket. Safe, that is, until she got far enough down the road where she tore them up and threw them into the wind.

And so, what of these medical records? So very personal. So very revealing. But then, psychiatric records are always more revealing. More intriguing to many. You contemplate destroying the records but decide that time is yet to come. No use upsetting the harmony of things as they are. Doctor B

has returned. You are unaware that she has been standing at the door until she speaks:

Have you found anything you would like to talk about?

No. I was just looking.

Cathy cross examines her as to where she had disappeared to so suddenly. The doctor is happy to answer her questions even though her leaving the room had no bearing on Cathy's case. Cathy turns the word, case, around in her mind. An opportune moment to tell the doctor she would like to pack her case and leave the clinic. She temporarily shuts the case, to be discharged.

Records shouldn't be left lying around you know.

No, you're right. Still no harm done.

You don't give her time to ask what it is you would like to talk about today. There's plenty to talk about. Susan's records for example. Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, Buddy Holly and Tommy Steele. How, you left the records lying around and they were destroyed. This is what you want to talk about. You want to know why it is, when you had the chance to tell the story how it really was, you chose instead to make up a story which you have included in the novel you're writing. How, when you had the chance to tell Susan what really happened to her precious records, you made up some stupid story about a child squashing the records into a rubbish bin shortly before leaving Wales. They were accidentally destroyed long after the Evans' arrived in Australia. Susan had added to the collection by that time. Cathy thought there would be no harm in borrowing them, one Saturday afternoon, to play at her friend's place. She had spent some time telling her friend about how, in Wales, Susan had taken her to the pictures to see her idols star in their own films. How much she had enjoyed going to the pictures with her big sister. Cathy saw no harm in borrowing the records. But vinyl records soften in the sun and by the time you had driven the ten miles, they had been damaged beyond repair. It wasn't for the want of trying to have them restored. You tried so hard to find someone who might be able to restore the wobble in their voices. Susan's records were very much a part of her past, they should never have been destroyed.

Sixteen

I was just getting used to this trucking round the country bit. It's a pity I've got to go back but I have no choice. Still, there's no reason why I can't do a bit more travelling around later. Mind you this truckie isn't as talkative as some of the others. Sure he's asked the usual questions. Where are yer from? Where are yer going? Isn't it hard hitchhiking around with a kid in tow? But other than that, he's said nothing. I'm not sure which is worse, the real talky types, the ones who don't have a lot to say or, worse still, those who feel they have a voice and sing all the time. If I hear one more Slim Dusty song I'll go bananas.

So I guess it's kind of a change to find a driver who hasn't much to say. Alex sleeps well in the trucks. Some even suggest I put him to sleep in the cab but he prefers to curl up on the seat between me and the driver and rest his head on my knee. I reckon I could write a book on these blokes and the lives they lead. Mostly they talk about their families. One driver, the other day, told me his wife preferred him to be on the road. She didn't see him for weeks sometimes. She could run the house and control the kids while he wasn't there. But as soon as he arrived home, the kids would be fair dinkum little bastards. Shirl, was his wife's name. That's right. I remember now. He'd met her at a dance and she'd run off with him the very next day.

I even met up with one driver, twice. Called Alex, the little tacker. Pass the little tacker up and stow your gear in the back there, he'd said. Even reckons Alex had grown a couple of inches since he last saw us. We could have travelled with him for a couple of days, but I only travel in daylight hours. It's not fair on my kid I'd told him. I was given an update on what was going on in the country town he lived in. Who was on with who. Whose kid had left to go to Melbourne. It didn't matter that I didn't know any of the people he was talking about. It was a bit like reading someone else's postcard when all along you wished someone would send you one. He had asked, whether or not I had been in touch with my folks at home? I told him I still called home every fortnight. Let them know I was

all right and all that shit. He'd then asked if I had thought about making my way to one of those commune places.

Yer know, one of those hippie places. At least there, you'd have company and the little tacker would have other kids to play with.

I knew he meant well but I had reassured him I prefer to be on my own. He'd scoffed at that idea.

Nah! You need to find yourself a hubby, marry and settle down. Have another couple of kids.

I didn't tell him that I was already married. I don't really know why. Maybe I was afraid he'd tell me to go back home, where I belonged. Maybe I hadn't mentioned it because I'd never felt married. Sit down, Mam had said, shortly after Alex's first birthday.

Your Dad and I have some news for you. We had a phone call this morning from the Kennedys.

She paused. I held my breath. Dad fidgeted in his chair.

We all think it would be a good idea if you and Patrick got married.

I was speechless. I mean, Patrick had made it clear from the start he hadn't wanted to marry me. Months had passed and I hadn't heard a word from him. Obviously, his parents had kept up the pressure for him to do, what they considered, was the right thing. I'm not going to marry that prick, I said. Mam, naturally, flew into hysterics saying, I had no choice and, if I thought I was going to live at home, for ever, I was mistaken.

Alex needs a father. Besides, Patrick had a financial obligation.

I couldn't agree more, I'd thought at the time, even though I would have been reluctant to take any money from him. Anyway, two months later, after several meetings with his parents and a letter from Patrick himself, there I was, all set to get married the very next day. It was a Thursday evening. He and I were sitting alone in the lounge room, talking about everything except our trip to the registry office the next day. The house was unusually quiet. I pictured Mam and Susan, in the kitchen, straining their ears to hear what we were saying to one another, while Dad would've been out the front having a fag.

I supposed I'd better get used to being a father.

Yeh, I'd replied unable to take my eyes off the two piece, blue silk suit, Mrs Brunning had made for me. Very demure! Me Mam had exclaimed, when she'd first seen it. I didn't know what to say to him:

I like the stamp you put on the letter from Vietnam. I collect stamps.

As far as I was concerned, he'd said everything in the letter. He'd made it perfectly clear that he was being pressured into marrying me. Reckoned, in the letter, his Mum couldn't hold her head up in church. It's what both our families want, he'd written, so I guess it's the best thing to do. I'm staying in the army though, he'd added, underlining his words several times. So don't think I'm always going to be around.

So where do you two want to get off? We'll be in Narrabri in half an hour. Or, if you like I can take you on to Coonabarabran, but it'll be dark by the time we get there.

No. It's all right. I like to pitch me tent before dark.

He nods and shifts into low gear. I don't tell him that I rather like staying at caravan parks. You meet some interesting people. Not that I stay for very long. I sometimes have to camp on the side of the road. It depends where I get dropped off. But I try to make it to a caravan park every second night. Alex needs bathing and I always have clothes to wash. There are times, I'm glad to move on. Like when I stayed at Moree, a few weeks back. We'd been dropped off at lunchtime. So I bought a couple of pies and sat in the park in the centre of town. I must have nodded off. I suddenly awoke to the sound of Alex's voice. He was pouring, himself and some other kid, a drink. Found yourself a mate to play with, I said. He's Max, Alex explained. He's four. I have been keeping an eye on them both, said Max's mother, having walked over from where she'd been sitting. I hope Max isn't bothering you. Well, three hours later I was walking off down past the shops toward this small estate of houses. The woman, Brenda, had invited us to stay with her and Max for the night. I was going to look for the caravan park, I'd told her. But she'd insisted we stay with them. I'd seen some dumps in my travels but this place really took the cake. There was only one

window which hadn't been smashed. Can't you get glass up here, I'd asked. But she said it wasn't worth replacing it as it was bound to end up broken again. I shrugged it off. Everyone to their own, I'd thought. Besides, Alex was having a great time poking his head through the holes in the wall. Max shouted for him to come and play boats in the laundry trough which sat comfortably on the floor. Brenda had then asked if we ate potatoes and beetroot. God! Potatoes and beetroot! How Susan hated school dinners on Wednesdays. I smiled. We eat anything, I'd replied, grateful for her hospitality. Shortly before sunrise, the next morning, I awoke to the sound of a car throwing wheelies on the road outside. A guy was slogging off loudly, at Brenda, calling her a mole and telling her to get her arse outside before he fucking came in and brained her one. Brenda had by this time raced into where Alex and I had been asleep. Quick, she said grabbing me by the hand. She led us all through the fence at the back of the property. There, we hid inside an old truck and listened as the guy stood in the middle of her backyard yelling and screaming for her to come out. I still had Alex tucked safely under my arm. His heart was racing, but he'd remained silent. I'd looked across at Max who, unconcerned by the whole ordeal, had once more fallen asleep. Neither of us, had said a word but eventually dozed off. Next day, Brenda apologised for the night before.

It's my husband. He gets drinking and comes and hassles us. It doesn't happen all the time.

He doesn't live here?

Heavens no. I kicked him out of the house ages ago. I'm not that stupid!

I'd left, soon after, deciding I would call by the police station. I'm here to report a violent incident, I'd said to the Senior Sergeant. He got out his report book, took up his pen and was poised to write. Name and address, he'd asked quite casually. My name or the woman's name I stayed with, I'd asked suddenly realising I only knew her as Brenda and I wasn't even sure of the address. It's a house down on that estate, just past the hardware store, on the right, I explained. He stopped, downed the pen and shut the book. The blacks take care of their own business, he snapped. But her husband's tearing the house apart, I'd

exclaimed. It might be her and her son next time! It became obvious he wasn't going to do anything about it. Finally, I had no choice but to leave. Christ! Justice! And me Dad had wondered why I hadn't wanted to go to the police when Patrick had hit me.

We'd been living in a sleepout in Patrick's parent's backyard. I hated it. Here I'd been, stuck in two rooms, alone most of the time, with a young kid. It wasn't Alex's fault he got into mischief. He'd just learnt to walk. Anyway, this particular night, Patrick lost his cool. He'd only been back in Australia for two months and was on a fortnight's leave. He hated being tied down, as he called it. Most of the time he stayed out drinking with his mates. This night, he'd come home early pissed off that he'd forgotten to get some money out of the bank. I'd been watching *Starsky and Hutch* and I hadn't noticed what Alex was up to. Patrick went crazy, when he found Alex gnawing away on one of his Rolling Stones records. He thumped me hard across the jaw, before screaming that he'd be going back to Vietnam.

Women, over there, know their place. And they're cheaper.

I picked Alex up and left. His father was outside, sitting on the back door step. Vietnam's been hard for him, he said quietly. You're going to have to give him time. I called my Dad. Please, I'd asked. Come and pick us up. I don't want to stay any longer. I could hear me Mam in the background. What's she done now to provoke him? she asked. Dad ignored her. Instead he'd told me to call the police if Patrick had hurt me. I did. Patrick was excused. Look love, said the police woman. These blokes have a lot on their minds. The next morning, his parents drove him back to camp. I packed some clothes, took some camping gear from his garage and left.

You'd better start waking your son up. We're coming into Narrabri now. I'll drop you off the other side of town. You'll find a good camping ground down by the river.

Thanks. He stares straight ahead not saying another word. He reminded me a bit of my Dad. How he often sat in his chair, leaning to one side, resting his head in his hand, staring at the telly, saying nothing. Dad you're not listening,

I used to say as a kid shaking the sleeve of his pullover. Hmm. Yes my little Jenny Wren. What is it? You weren't listening, I used to say. I was away with the fairies, he'd reply. But I'm back now. I wonder if he's sitting in front of the telly now. I wonder whether he's away with the fairies? Dreaming of what, only, he and God knows. Maybe he's in bed. Cathy you have to come home, Mam had screamed over the phone. No Mam, I'd started to say when she'd interrupted. Your Dad's very sick. He's got lung cancer. I was stunned. I didn't know what to say. Then, having composed herself, she issued me the ultimatum I was to come home or else she would take out a court order to get custody of Alex. I'll be home for Christmas, I'd replied before hanging up.

A taxi to Penn-y-bal. How grand. A taxi, whose driver tipped his hat before driving away promising to return in the next hour. A taxi here and a taxi back down the hill to Aunt D's. What would Dad have thought of that? He might have thought it a little extravagant. Chances are, he would have frowned at the cost but he would have agreed if it meant it was the only way you could get to the top. And it was, the only way to get to the top, for you and Aunt D. It wasn't the mile or so, there and back, that stopped you both from walking but the incline. A road so steep, he used to say, you needed to have the legs of a mountain goat. But his legs were long and strong and looked nothing like the legs on the goats that grazed, outside the farmhouse, on top of the hill. Well at least they did graze there back in 1959. It was of no surprise to find there were no goats grazing, or sheep dotting the moors beyond. There was a sheepdog which barked out of boredom, on our arrival before it lay down on its sack soaking up the autumn breeze. But it came as quite a surprise to find that there was a monument at the end of the road. A monument to the men who fought in the war. First or second war was of little interest to me. My interest was only in trying to recall the monument. Trying to recall if, ever, Dad and I had climbed the eleven steps to the top. A lookout from where we both would have stood, with our backs to Holywell nestled deep in the valley, and gazed over the moors that stretched as far as the eye could see. A lookout where I now stood beside Aunt D. Where she pointed, in the opposite direction to where we had come, and explained the advent of a motorway which snaked its way across the moors.

Maybe it was seeing the motorway which got me thinking about leaving Holywell. Or it might have been the letter which had arrived earlier that morning. A letter from Susan. Not that I was worried that she could have written and told Aunt D of my disappearance. No one in my family would want to worry Aunt D. Nor would they suspect I had arrived in Wales. But I knew, as I watched the taxi make its way slowly up the hill, that it was time I thought about leaving Holywell.

After all, I had returned, believing Wales is where I rightfully belonged. I had followed a succession of sentimental memories which led me down a long, and no-through lane. Sure there were recognisable landmarks. But unlike landmarks withstanding the test of time, memory lasts only as long as one's capacity (or wish) to remember allows. And as I waited, atop Penn-y-bal, I contemplated how much time and energy I had wasted in constructing a memorial to an unrecoverable past. It was time, I realised, to continue.

There would be no regrets having returned to Wales. Only regrets that I had not done so earlier. I might then have realised what I could have had, instead of wanting what it was I once had. I might have recognised the importance of relationships. Spent more time getting to know my mother and sister. But it wasn't until Aunt D laid the photos out before me that I realised I knew little of the women who meant so much to me. It was one evening, six weeks after I had arrived, and I had nearly completed the novel. The photo, my Aunt had given me, was resting between the pages. It hadn't occurred to me that Aunt D might recognise the child. After all, my mother's relations and my father's had never met. Aunt D, recognising it was a photo I used as a bookmark, asked whether the photo was of Susan or myself before realising the photo was too old to be either. During the minute she took to leave the room, and return, I looked at the photo. There had been no doubt that it was of a relative but I had no idea as to who the blindfolded child was. Aunt D set down on the table four more photos, rearranging them around the one I had until she heaved a sigh of relief indicating that she was happy with their order. There were five in all. There was, indeed, a family resemblance despite the child being blindfolded. But what I noticed most, was the intergenerational spaces of silence that separated each. All were women who mattered to me, were a part of who I was, and yet I had never really known any of them. It was some time before I spoke. But when I did I confidently identified my grandmother (who had died long before I was born), myself, my two sisters, and my mother. It had to be my mother. The blindfolded child was, without a doubt, her. Her, as a child. I had never seen a photo of her before she became Mrs Evans. The wife of Ishmael. I knew nothing of her past

before she came to Wales in 1945, other than she was from a large family, and had lived in London. And Jennifer? The sister who had died in infancy from pneumonia — one fact I had learned, only recently, from Aunt D. Aunt D, and only Aunt D, had kept a photo. A photo, she explained, a poor substitute for never having seen the child but after all, it was during the war. And Susan. What of Susan? I had never really known Susan. Never been close, to one another, as sisters should. There should have been a sixth photo. Of my daughter. Then again, I had never even known her name, so what use would a photo have been?

Aunt D had copies made of the photos. Photos which I placed, along with the one my aunt gave me, between the pages of the novel. I envied the child in the novel for having had so many stories to tell. It didn't matter that the stories might not have been true. What mattered was she, like her mother, had told stories.

There are no windows which open in the clinic. Cathy wonders how it is she is supposed to fly away. She knows where to find her shadow but what use is having a shadow if you can't fly. Doctor B needs to know. Needs to know her intentions to leave the clinic. But for the present Cathy needs to have the answers before she reveals her plans. Answers, such as where will she live when she leaves? The obvious answer would be with her mother and son. But her mother lives in that house. The house where. It's not the answer. There has to be an answer, but for the time being Cathy has none. Nor does she know what role she will take in the future in raising her son. Her mother has commandeered that role. It's a role Cathy wants to reclaim desperately. But her mother has never made it clear whether she is willing to relinquish the role, or if she will offer Cathy the support she needs. Her mother is a strong willed woman. A battler, some might say. Cathy dwells on how difficult it must have been for her Mam to care for three young children during those many months your father spent in a sanatorium in Wales. How she managed to pay the mortgage, years later, when her husband was once more unable to work. Surely now, at her time in life, she would be glad to hand over the responsibility of your son to you. But Cathy is unsure that's the case. Nor, is she sure of what support, if any, friends will offer. Or, who those friends might be. Always, there are uncertainties.

There were plenty of friends and family, as she recalls, when they lived in Wales. Friends, who helped her Mam care for the Evans' kids while she worked, or when she visited her husband at weekends. And then there was Taid. And, Aunt D. Always, they were there. You want to be a little girl again and live in a land where you never have to grow up. A land where you can choose your own adventure.

Seventeen

Mummy! You're not listening. Look what I've made.

That is a lovely sand castle.

I'm wrong of course as I often am these days. It's a cake, he tells me. Just like the one he had the other day for his birthday. It's yet to be decorated and have the candles added. He has very little sense of time. His birthday was five weeks ago but everything happened — the other day. It was only the other day he left my side and went where no woman would want to go — the men's toilets. The company Peter worked for was having their Christmas breakup. We were at the zoo sitting on a blanket which clearly marked out our boundaries from the families who did likewise. Mam had spent most of the afternoon working to contain the mess of spent gift wrappings, orange peels, soft drink cans, and tea bags wrung so dry they didn't leave the slightest blotch on the pale blue blanket. What remained on top of the blanket could be removed with a minimum of fuss. Alex, tired of being told not to fire his ping-pong gun at neighbouring picnickers, turned, took careful aim at Mam and fired hitting her right in the throat. That's enough she said sternly. I was just about to defend the kid by saying it was a ridiculous gift to give a kid of his age when Peter strides over with Stan and his nephew. Come on he ses to Alex taking him by the hand. Let's go and exercise your wally-wally doodle. Mam come too? Alex asked, half expecting me to follow. Stan laughed. You're Mam hasn't got a wally-wally doodle mate. Only we men have. Thank Christ! He muttered as he and Peter swaggered away leading both tots in the direction of the men's toilets. Dad lay on the blanket, his eyes closed but very much aware of everything that was going on around him. His face was as white as the bread Mam had used to make the sandwiches. The sandwich, remained untouched on the plate which had been handed him, corners turning up to toward the sun. It seemed as if it were only the other day when Dad was well and strong enough to hold Alex above his head. A time when Alex squealed with delight. A time when nothing would have stopped him

from playing with his grandson. A time I have captured on a photograph but that is all it is — a photograph. I once thought it would be grand to have no sense of time having passed. But now, I'm not so sure. I want time to fly. I want the months to come and go quickly. I don't wish to remember his second birthday.

Here, Helen had said. Don't get upset. I'll do that. I'd just torn open a bag of hundreds-and-thousands sending them scattering in all directions. Everything else had been made the night before while Alex had watched and waited patiently knowing he would eventually be allowed to lick the spoon coated in cake mix. But there was an art in making Fairy bread. It needs to be made shortly before it's to be eaten, to use fresh bread, and butter so soft it won't tear the bread. But that afternoon I had neither the patience or the inclination. Making fairy bread was the furthest thing from my mind. Not enough sleep? Someone had asked. You don't look at all well.

It's a shame your Dad's in hospital.

I really didn't care what they said, or, who was saying it. Nothing seemed to matter. I wanted them all to piss off home and take their kids with them. But then, I'd looked at Alex sitting on the floor opening his presents and realised, it was his day not mine. Every now and then he'd call out for me to take a look at what he'd been given. Mum, he said. Look, a truck! I'll take it to show Pa! What a good idea, I'd answered, trying to smile. I was glad he hadn't been affected by the goings-on that morning.

If only Dad had been home. It might not have happened. Not in the house. So, how long's your Dad expected to be in hospital this time? Betty had asked, handing me a plate of cakes to put on the table. We're not sure, I'd replied. I very nearly said, that I didn't think he'd be coming home this time, but I didn't. I didn't want to think about what it would be like being left, alone, in the house with Alex, day-after-day. I watched as the children ate, wondering whether I was going to be able to cope with singing Happy Birthday.

Now, five weeks on and Dad's still not home. The doctor says he's responding to the antibiotics at last and should be home in a few more days. There are times, for his own sake, I wish he would die. But at least if he were

home, I wouldn't feel as if I've got to get out of the house every day. Then, maybe, I'd snap out of whatever it is that's making me feel so lethargic.

See! I've put the seaweed round the cake now all I've got to do is put candles on it.

How many candles? I ask him. One, two, he replies with a grin, before running off down to the water's edge with his bucket. He goes no further than the edge. Always, he keeps a safe distance. Keeping a safe distance is so hard to do at times. Maybe if I'd seen the writing on the wall, it might never have happened. Colin wants to come up for Alex's birthday, Peter had said just two days before. He'll call in after work. Tell him not to bother, I'd replied. Peter had responded by slamming the fridge door. He doesn't understand. I don't like his mate. He's a creep not to mention he's almost old enough to be my father. But Peter hadn't let up for weeks. He seemed to be obsessed with finding me another husband. I'd reminded him that I wasn't yet divorced even though it was only a matter of time. We'll take care of it all, Patrick's mother had said, delighted she was going to be rid of me once and for all. Patrick can get on with his life, she'd muttered getting into the car. She and Patrick's father had called by on Boxing Day. Just thought we'd drop the little man in a gift, she'd said. It was all a front. They'd really called by to say they'd spoken with Patrick. Despite what she thought about divorce, she felt we had no other choice seeing I was determined not to want the marriage to work. We all make mistakes, my Mam had said, meaning me and Patrick of course. Neither mother mentioned it might have been a mistake, to pressure us into marrying, in the first place.

Mummy! Look! I'm icing the cake.

That wasn't a very smart thing to do.

I catch a glimpse of the water, poured from his bucket, as it dissipates leaving a crater in what was his cake. It was such a lovely cake, I say. He laughs before kicking the mound sending sand flying. The seaweed locks itself between his toes. He rolls around on the sand laughing — a snared fish — safe in knowing he is able to free himself when he wishes to do so. Yuk! He gasps, quickly standing to attention.

I've got sand in me mouth.

Here, take a drink.

Instead, he swirls the liquid from cheek to cheek, leans forward and spits as far as he can. That's not very nice, I say knowing well, he'll repeat the procedure. I look at his small body. His face and chest bear the marks of a warrior, or at least that's what I'd told him earlier, when I had painted him with white paint made from rubbing two shells together. There, I'd said dabbing a series of lines and dots across the bridge of his nose before following the lines of his ribs. Now you're a warrior.

Now me do you?

I refused. Not today. Mummy doesn't want to be a warrior. Instead, I'd watched, as he sat back on his heels grinding away at the shell, stopping only to add a little of his spit, until a small pool of white paint appeared. See! He'd said proudly.

I make paint too. Now there's paint for you too.

No! I'd repeated quite firmly. I had wanted to tell him — if not him, then someone — the war had been fought and I had lost. Instead, I remained silent. As I had, on the morning of his birthday.

You timed that well, I'd said to Peter as he tripped clumsily through the back door. Mam's just gone to work. He'd been out drinking with his mates the night before and had only just turned up home. Sssh! I'd said, as he stumbled through the door ranting about how his mates were talking behind his back. You're a fucking good lay, I hear. Mates? I asked, guessing he'd overheard Colin big noting himself in the pub. Don't you mean Colin? I corrected him. He's never touched me and he's not likely to either. You're a fucking tease, he slurred in my ear as he forced me backward into the bathroom and down onto the floor. I'd been forced to bend my legs as he closed the door making sure he didn't make too much noise. Gazing up at the towel which hung from the rail above where I lay, I'd thought about reaching up and pulling it down, stuffing it between my head and the wall. Instead, I'd gazed at a stain on the towel which I hadn't realised, until that moment, existed. How had I not noticed it? I'd wondered

whether Alex was now awake, lying in his cot with only the wall between us, listening to the muffled thud, thud, thud, of my head against the wall as my body moved back and forth under the weight of his body. Instead, I did nothing. I said nothing. It all happened so quickly and it all happened, just — the other day.

Where are you going?

For a swim. I run to the water, stagger deeper until I'm able to dive for cover. But I didn't like being under the water, I'd cried. I heard horrible noises. Now, now my little Jenny Wren, he'd said carrying me away from the ship's pool:

What you heard are only sea goblins, gobbling up the sounds from above the water. Where else do you think sounds end up?

I surface, to Alex's screams. Once more, I say nothing.

I could see it all from the cemetery. The cemetery at the top of New Brighton Road. A narrow road that ended at the cemetery gates beyond which, there rose a gentle hill covered in soft green lawn. The wall, at the top end of the cemetery, was still there. The wall, Peter, Susan and their friends use to climb to cross into Bates' field. The wall, far too high for little Cathy to climb, where I could now sit and see it all. The view. How could I not have remembered the view from the cemetery. Undulating hills of rooftops and chimneys drowning in the Dee estuary, across from which I could see the Mersey. Liverpool, so close, I might have heard the Beatles singing. Might have heard, if we had lived in Bagilt, in the sixties. But now I am left, with what wisps it is I remember of my past, to contemplate a future.

The future, that's what it's all about. All about, for anyone. Even the chapel in the cemetery has a future. The chapel with its capacity to stack, high, far more coffins in it than people standing shoulder to shoulder. The chapel that had, over four hundred years, deteriorated until it was restored. Restored, and resilient it will remain, where it belongs. And it is in the chapel, along with the tributes left by others, I have left the novel along with the photos and the letters intended for my daughter. An appropriate place to leave, what has after all, passed. Left, for anyone who should want to read the contents and make of them what they will. Make from them, more stories to tell the children who live close by. Stories are, after all, what we are all about.

I had given it a great deal of thought. A great deal of thought, while I stood outside the house where I was born. The house, whose upstairs window I could now clearly see from the cemetery. At the time, I had contemplated knocking on the door hoping I might get asked inside. But I knew I would find no tapestries hanging on the walls depicting the stories of those who had once lived

there. Neither did I really want to know who lived there now. What I wanted to do, I resisted. Resisted, the need to carve my name on the wall of the house. A name that, I knew, had long been forgotten by many.

It was the dream. You shouldn't have told Doctor B about the dream you had a few nights ago. But you did. The dream led to confrontation. Led to you disclosing what it is you want to do. You were on a journey. Yes, aboard a bus full of happy children. Alex, too, was on the bus. But it wasn't Alex you were sitting with. Where you sat, at the front of the bus, there was a handful of adults. None of whom moved, spoke, or reacted to the children's noise. The bus stopped in front of a school and the children pushed past, got off the bus and ran into the school yard. Alex was still aboard. You went to the back of the bus where he sat, smiled and reassured him everything was going to be all right. You and he hugged, before he alighted from the bus and followed the other children. The bus resumed its journey. A journey that ended at the cemetery. The doctor looked concerned. You could tell by the tone of her voice she was concerned. Concerned she explained that you have been so subdued lately. Particularly when you were making so much progress. The doctor has it wrong. Cathy has been making plans for the future. Positive plans. She is going to leave the clinic. Learn to sail. Sail alone, back to Wales.

But the doctor disagreed. Cathy needs to deal with the past before there can be a future. Obviously, the patient has made considerable progress. She was after all, on the road to recovery. But, as the doctor pointed out that morning, there were issues which needed to be confronted. Issues, which Cathy had skirted around. The doctor has no doubts that Cathy could leave the clinic soon. But. Always, there's a but. And the but was, that Cathy could expect to be re-admitted in the coming years. She will experience recurring depression. Depression that no one can predict but the dream, such as the one Cathy experienced, was an indication of just how wretched she really felt. Cathy's future, will depend on how she learns to handle the past.

Eighteen

Hey Cathy! Where is your mind, eh? This bottle, look there's green shit in the bottom. You think we wanna lose our job eh? The steriliser has no eyes. You have.

I want to tell Mario to fuck off but I know I'd lose my job. I'm not used to this bottle scanning shit. Besides, someone is supposed to relieve me every hour or at least that's what the union bloke told me. The ultra violet lights are bad for your eyes, he said. The foreman didn't agree when I finally got up enough nerve to say something the other evening before I started work. There was this note tagged on to me time card telling me to report to Mario's office immediately. He made me wait. He tidied up papers on his desk, poured himself a cup of coffee, sat back in his chair and threw his legs up on the table. I'd half expected him to behave like this. The other women had warned me that this was the way he intimidated them. You know, said Sophie telling me about one of her many visits to his office. He wanna make you shake, worry about whether he gonna fire you or not. I hadn't commented at the time. It had been my first day on the job. But since that day, a fortnight ago, I'd watched Mario carefully. If push came to shove no bloke, wog or otherwise, was ever going to intimidate me. Finally, having taking several sips of his coffee, he asked why I was wearing jeans under my uniform. My legs get cold, I'd replied half expecting him to tell me to take them off. If I could have some overalls, like the blokes wear, I added. He laughed. Mario reckoned the day we women worked as hard as men we could have overalls. He had then gone on about how many dirty bottles had passed by me unnoticed and didn't I realise that the plant could be shut down if someone got ill — or worse die from contaminated soft drink. You need to be awake, he'd said before going on and on about how I needed to spend more time in bed during the day. It's all right for him, I told Sophie later that evening. He hasn't got a kid to look after. I'm lucky to get an hour's kip in the afternoon.

Sophie laughed and said the only thing he has to look after is his dick and one day it'll either drop off with too much use or someone will chop it off. Mario must have overheard Sophie. He got up from where he was sitting with his mates and stormed out of the canteen in a huff. Sophie cracked up laughing.

Anyway, I'm glad I'm only here for the summer. I don't know how the women can put up with the noise and all the shit that goes on here, day-after-day. If it weren't for Sophie I'd go crazy. I don't find myself laughing too often these days and Dad is so ill. Even though I know he loves Alex he gets annoyed when he starts whining and carrying on. I try to keep him quiet but after all he is only a toddler. Between looking after him and Dad, as well as the house, and working in this place from five till midnight, I'm stuffed. Susan is in England. She doesn't know what's going on. Yes, she knows Dad is still sick but she's not aware of just how sick he really is. One day soon, I'm going to buy me and Alex a house of our own and then he can make as much noise as he likes. It won't be a mansion, with a marble entry, like Sophie has. I'm not that mad to want to work for the rest of me life to pay it off. A place in the country would be all right. Alex will be going to school by then and I could get work locally.

Dad hardly speaks to me these days. Not that he ever was a talker. It's just that he treats me differently nowadays. He doesn't let me forget just how disappointed he is with me. His eyes say it all. He shook his head and said nothing, at first, the morning they found out I was pregnant for the second time. There has to be one rotten apple in every barrel and you're it, he said burying his head in his hands. At first I thought it was because it had all been such a sudden shock to them. I'd awoken shortly after midnight and realised that I was going into labour. At first I simply turned over and tried to go back to sleep hoping that it was all a dream. But the moment I had hoped would never happen, was happening. Finally, I had no choice. Mam had just got up to get ready for work. She was making a cup of tea for Dad, as she always did. I know you're going to be really pissed off, I muttered entering the kitchen, but I'm pregnant and I think I'm in labour. Before she could say anything, Dad had arrived on the scene. Stunned, she looked at him. She's having another baby, she said quietly. Then,

to make matters worse, Colin arrived on the scene wanting Peter to give him a lift to work. I'm sure Peter would have heard what was going on but he remained in his room. Mam told Peter he'd better move quick and drop me off at the hospital before taking Colin to work. Whose baby is it this time? she asked. Does it matter? I answered, watching my Dad wipe away tears.

Cathy! Rosa will run your line down. You can go over to post-mix clean up. I want us all to leave here on time tonight.

Shit! No overtime. Mario must really hate you girl, Sophie had remarked on our way out to the car park the other night. I sniggered before hiding my orange hands in the pockets of my uniform. It had been the third night in a row Mario had sent me to clean the syrup vats. It's not that I minded the cleaning. I needed the overtime. But I was getting fed up with going home feeling as if I'd been dipped in a vat of sugar. This is why I don't allow you to drink cordial, I constantly tell Alex showing him my stained hands which underwent a colour change day-by-day. He thinks it's a joke. Particularly one morning when he noticed my feet were as green as my hands. I spilt the slops in my gumboots I'd explained feeling as if I should launch into a chorus of *It's not easy being Green*.

One advantage of having to clean the vats is I get out of doing quality control. What it is they can learn, from noting down objects and substances left in the glass bottles, I'll never know. You can never tell what you're going to find next. Recently I found a large nicotine stained human tooth stuck in the bottom of a bottle. Worse still, there was the new-born mice. Pink, with no fur, their bulging eyes almost as big as their heads, they reminded me of an aborted foetus in a bottle I'd once seen in a science museum. The bottle steriliser had failed to abort the mice from the bottle. I'd snatched the bottle off the production line, unaware at the time they were baby mice, and placed it in the bin for inspection. At the end of my shift when I discovered, and noted down in the quality control log book, that the bottle contained new born mice I felt quite ill. It reminded me of how less than a year before, having realised that I was pregnant for the second time, I'd contemplated an abortion but soon found I had neither the money nor the guts to hunt around for one. It was far easier to deny I was

pregnant and hope I'd get hit by a truck in the meantime. Since finding the mice I now deliberately throw bottles, containing foreign objects, straight into the broken glass bin avoiding the need to analyse and note down their contents. There are times it's easier to ignore what's under your very nose.

Work this one out for yourself, Mam said tossing my bag on to the back seat of Peter's car, adding that she couldn't cope with another baby in the house. One's quite enough. She'd said the same, some years earlier, when I'd brought a stray dog home. One dog's enough. But it's Peter's dog! I'd cried before leading Lady away down the road to a vacant house. I'll walk and feed you each night, I whispered in her ear before tying her on a long lead inside a run down garden shed. No one need know you're here. She looked too sick to want to bark. Dad had said it looked as if she had recently had puppies and that's why she was probably dumped. Two weeks later I came home and found her lying on our driveway dead. She'd got loose and had been hit by a car. I was so angry. I didn't speak to anyone for days neither did I eat the box of chocolates Dad bought me. They didn't even give me a chance to bury her. Mam phoned the council and within minutes a man, with a utility drove up, picked her up by the back legs, slung her in the back and sped off.

Peter drove through the traffic like a madman possessed. He said nothing. Colin mumbled on about how busy they were at work before just happening to mention he'd heard a rumour that I was seeing a married man on the side. Peter remained silent. He said nothing, to me, as he handed my bag over to the sister in the emergency department and quickly disappeared in the direction of the car park.

Everything happened so quickly. A clerk, armed with a clipboard, eager to complete an admission form followed quickly on our heels as I was wheeled of to the delivery room. She managed to slip in a question or two before being told she would have to wait because this baby had no intentions of waiting. The cold sweat slavered with the intensity of each contraction. The ill-tempered doctor, obviously annoyed with the non-scheduled delivery, sighed with disbelief when told I had not seen a doctor throughout the entire pregnancy. He started to

comment on how irresponsible I was when suddenly the baby appeared as quickly as it had been conceived. She was taken off down the corridor bellowing and kicking at having been kept hidden for so long and seemingly angry at me for having kept silent. The noise ceased as a door, somewhere further along the corridor, slammed shut. She was gone.

An hour later, having been told by the clerk how difficult it was to find a bed in a case such as mine, I lay on a trolley in a corridor waiting. From a room across from where I lay I listened to the theme from *Humphrey Bear*. I knew that Alex would be sitting crossed-leg in front of the television at home. Through the open door I watched as Humphrey made several attempts to climb a ladder unaware that Miss Patsy was watching. He fell to the ground, stood up and brushed himself down. Miss Patsy laughed before telling him that he should never climb a ladder unless a grown-up was there to hold it steady. I thought of a poem I had read months earlier. It was by a bloke writing about the death of his baby. Alone, the baby was climbing a stairway to heaven. Why is it always an image of a stairway to heaven? Why not a bloody escalator? It'd be a lot bloody quicker and easier. I had turned over wondering why hospital trolleys were so bloody narrow. In my mind I had tried to prevent the baby from climbing upward but the stairs were wet with tears and it slipped back down a stair or two bumping its knees. Other babies had started crying. Babies who were neither alone or behind shut doors. It was at that moment I'd realised that maybe it mightn't be such a bad idea after all to let the baby — my baby — go to the top of the stairs. I rolled onto my back and watched, in my imagination, as she made her way safely to the top knowing that it was there that I could go, whenever I needed.

Entering my father's room is not a choice I have these days as he depends on me while Mam is at work. I often wonder whether he has locked me in an imaginary room of his own, choosing only to remember what he wants to. Instead, Dad has channelled what little energy and affection he has left into Peter and Alex's life. Things had been exactly as they ought to have been when, after seven days, I returned home from the hospital in a taxi. The house was silent

Dad was asleep. Alex sat glued to the television, the volume so low he could barely hear a word, turning only to give me a quick glance and to ask whether I had enjoyed my holiday. Peter sat with his head buried in the newspaper nodding at the kettle saying only that it had just boiled if I wanted a coffee. Later that day, Mam returned home from work choosing as Peter, Dad and myself had done, never to mention the baby. It didn't seem to matter that I had left her at the hospital unnamed. Maybe that's why her presence in the house is so strongly felt.

My father once said, you can't argue with the dead. I'm not sure why he said it, or when. But he was right. The proof was right there before me. In the cemetery. Proof that I had come from a long line of descendants. Headstones, bearing the name of Evans. Aunt D had spent some time, shortly after I had arrived, explaining each and every one as far back as 1824. Time, in the cemetery could be measured by the rows of headstones. Headstones that started at the wall, at the back of the cemetery, from where I first noticed the view over the Dee estuary. And as I retraced the path, I had taken with Aunt D, down along the line of relatives I stopped at Taid's grave realising it marked a time shortly after the Evans children had stopped playing in the cemetery. Had he, shortly before his death, sat in the cemetery and imagined we children playing? Sat on a nearby grave, as I have, and imagined Susan making daisy chains while the boys played cricket?

Yet, I am no longer disturbed by all that was or, all that can be. No longer am I afraid of the child whose face it is I see smiling back at me from a now dulled headstone. No longer afraid to leave her behind and return to where it is I want to belong. After all, the choice to leave is now mine, and no one else's.

We don't all get the chance to find what it is we are looking for, or, where we belong — least of all the chance to dance with the drowned.

