

YARROWEE

A Radical Life

BRIAN POLA

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‘Those who withdraw to the heights to fast and pray in silence are the pillars bearing the spiritual weight of what happens in history. Theirs is a freedom and ability which cannot be caged. Theirs is the first of all aristocracies, source and justification of all others and the last yet remaining to us.’ (Hans Urs von Balthasar in *A Theology of History*)

We spotted each other immediately at the Lounge. He stood thin and lean in black leather pants and black t-shirt. We gazed at each other through a haze of cigarette smoke and fog from the dry ice. Silver studs glinted in his eyebrows and ears. He leant against the bar. Classic. I edged over and waited for Immaculata to take a break. Immaculata was Ballarat gothic.

‘Not bad are they?’ I said in the sudden silence.

‘Immaculata?’ he replied. A smile played his pink lips. ‘Yeah, great. I don’t get to the Lounge much but if Garth’s on I come.’ Garth was the star of Immaculata.

‘Luke,’ he said, holding out his hand.

‘Whadaya drinkin’?’ I asked in ocker in case Luke was a homophobe. You never knew what to expect in paranoid provincial Ballarat.

‘Jim Beam and Coke. Thanks.’

‘Are you a student?’ I asked him, trying to catch the barman’s eye.

‘School. You?’

I could’ve answered working my arse off as a labourer but told him I lectured in history, close to true but I hadn’t lectured at a university for years. I preferred a quiet life on the dole and freedom at my

secluded cottage by the Yarrowee Creek.

‘A lecturer? Where?’ he asked with a raised slash of black eyebrow.

‘Just casual,’ I replied elusively, ‘so where d’ya go to school?’

‘Saint Patrick’s College.’

It was my old school but didn’t say so. Too many ghosts.

‘What subjects?’

‘Music, History and Latin.’

Latin I thought. Mmmm. Obviously not a complete slouch. Garth wandered through the crowd, smiled at Luke and came over. He was the full goth in black vinyl coat, heavy white make-up, mascara, lilac lips, dress rings and studs.

‘Enjoy the show?’ Garth asked Luke.

‘Great Garth.’ Luke blushed pink, shy before the popular Garth.

‘We’re off to Hot Gossip. Coming?’ Garth asked Luke. I wasn’t included.

Luke and I glanced in a way that suggested possibilities other than the popular dance bar in a converted bluestone cathedral in Dana Street. I allowed myself a glimmer of hope. Was Luke hedging his bets?

‘How come you know Garth?’ I asked as a retinue of Goth fans followed Garth out through the crowd.

‘Music. I play guitar. Goin’ to Hot Gossip?’

Crunch time.

‘Dunno. Might kick back at my place. We could have a smoke there if you like?’ I ventured.

‘Cool. Hot Gossip’s great but I’d like a smoke. Where d’ya live?’

‘Not far. Down by the Creek.’

Spidery mist clung to the streetlights as we made our way beside the Yarrowee. Luke talked about his part-time job as a stacker at Bi-Lo. He walked along the bluestone capping of the channel, arms outstretched as he balanced.

‘Don’t fall in,’ I told him.

‘Nah.’

‘It must have been amazing here before the gold miners came,’ I said.

‘1851,’ he said, surprising me. He jumped off the capping back to the track. ‘August. That’s when gold was discovered. Yeah, woulda bin great, all ferns and trees.’

Once a pristine stream, the Wathaurung people had gathered for corroborees along its banks for thousands of years. The Yarrowee was now a wide bluestone channel, a work of art in civil engineering but unappreciated, a dumping ground for supermarket trolleys, plastic bags and the detritus of Ballarat. Yarrowee was Wathaurung for everflowing water.

Moonlight guided our footsteps as we crunched the quartz gravel. Breaths steamed in chill night air. I searched for the overgrown track to my miner’s cottage.

‘Ya live alone?’ he asked nervously, suddenly anxious as I led the way through the trees. Wary of a set-up I thought. Natural enough.

‘Yep. No one else.’ My heart beat faster as I opened the rusty gate. We walked under the old

walnut tree to the back door. My heart started to pound.

‘This is it,’ I said. I pretended to be dismissive. I stoked up the embers and got the fire going.

‘Wow! Where’d ya get the old altar?’ he exclaimed. Luke ran his hands over the dark polished wood.

‘An old church near Nhill. It was going to the tip so I saved it. Cedar and oak. Not much call for old altars these days. What can I get you?’

In between joints, Jim Beam, Bob Dylan, The Eurythmics, Freddy Mercury and The Pet Shop Boys, Luke plied me with questions about my student life in the sixties and the anti-Vietnam war movement. I asked him about his family, school and music. Questions about family elicited a blush. He changed the subject.

‘I just wanna finish school and get out of Ballarat. Ballarat’s a shit hole.’

We got onto politics.

‘Wars are still happenin’ aren’t they?’ he said, ‘hundreds of thousands marched against the war in Iraq. I marched in Ballarat. So last century isn’t it? War?’ He questioned me with large walnut-brown eyes.

‘War is very twenty-first century as well,’ I said sardonically, ‘nothing changes. I marched against the Vietnam War. In the sixties there was a very strong secondary school students’ movement.’

‘Yeah? I wish there was one now. Ya should write a book about your student days,’ he suggested, ‘students wanna know about the sixties. It musta bin wild. We need to know about it. I study the six-

ties in Australian History, ya know, Vietnam and the hippies. Were ya a hippy?’

‘Yep. All those crazy days and nights. You’re right Luke, I’ll get around to it. I’ve kept a lot of diaries from those days.’

‘Yeah? Can I read ‘em?’ he asked with youthful earnesty.

I was surprised. Not the sort of thing today’s sixteen year old would’ve been into.

‘If ya like. I’m not into that part of my life anymore. Water under the bridge. I’m more interested in reading other people’s stories. I’ve just finished *Holding The Man* by Tim Conigrave, about a gay man in Melbourne who went to Xavier College. A true story. He died of AIDS.’

I took the plunge. I covered myself just in case.

‘What do you want to do when you when you leave school Luke?’

Luke studied me for a few seconds deadpan. His thin pale face slowly relaxed to a quiet grin.

‘I’m not gunna work in fuckin’ Bi-Lo all me life. Fuck that! I’m gunna write. Have ya written anythin’?’ he asked, ‘ya know, gay stuff?’

Bingo!

‘Some. Nothing published. About when I was a kid, student politics, drugs, prison.’

Luke looked down, nodded slowly then suddenly pierced me with big brown eyes.

‘Prison huh? You’re not a fuckin’ weirdo are ya?’

I chuckled.

‘No. It was during the Vietnam War. Student demonstrations.’

I thought of the stack of diaries and unpublished manuscripts at the bottom of a cupboard. Why not! Bi-Lo boy might be a good sounding board. I might even get back into it again.

‘I like readin’ people’s diaries,’ Luke said quietly, ‘is there sex in ‘em?’

‘Some. I’ll dig ‘em out. It’s getting late. D’ya wanna crash?’

‘Yep.’

*

Morning with coffee and a joint.

‘Still want to read my stuff?’

Luke’s thick black curls tangled over his forehead as he sipped his coffee.

‘Yep. My English teacher says I hafta read if I wanna improve my essays.’

During the week I delved into dusty diaries and stop/start manuscripts. Where to start? Sex seemed banal after the clumsy sex we’d had. Perhaps Luke’s other love, history. Better to start there. The sixties stuff would come out. I searched for the right diary, a beginning, a long forgotten manuscript. Sex, drugs, religion, politics, history. It was all there. Random vignettes can be deliciously poignant. Some diaries from University years were missing. Stolen. ASIO visited me in 1985. I had the diaries but I’d been unhelpful to the two young agents. Two days later the house in Fitzroy was turned over. The diaries were gone.

I dug through the bits and pieces. He probably

wouldn't turn up I tortured. Most didn't. I gambled he would. He was rough but bright, unusually so, loved reading and wanted to write. We might become friends.

But Luke was true to his word. When he called around the following Saturday I handed him a starter, just two pages, a tester. He wasn't in leather this time, just a long black overcoat, baggy denims, silversteel lanyards and a bright yellow hooded top from which curled those thick black locks.

'For you,' I said, feigning nonchalance.

'Cool. I'll read it now.' He slouched over to the tattered chesterfield and stretched out. I quietly rolled a joint, thought of how I'd written him in during the week and waited.

*

You said you were interested in the sixties. Who isn't? I was a teenager during the sixties. My life was a real jumble I can tell you! The sixties shaped my life. I started writing in 1965, the year I started at Saint Patrick's College as a boarder from Nhill. I was sixteen, the same as you.

The sixties was The Beatles; Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council; Saint Patrick's College in Ballarat; The Anarchists' Cookbook; The Autobiography of Malcolm X; Brother Kelty's lesson about Caesar crossing the Rubicon; my time in a Jesuit seminary and life as a student revolutionary at University. The sixties was Johnny's Green Room in Carlton, the one place where you could get

stoned on the marijuana haze and play billiards at four a.m. It was spaghetti Bolognese at Genevieve's for a few bucks; Kookaburra gas stoves in Carlton and the rambling terraces of the radical Australian Union of Students in Drummond Street. The sixties was La Mama and the Pram Factory; Melbourne University Union folk nights with Glen Tomasetti and Margaret Roadknight; Che Guevara wall posters; FC panel vans; acid trips; anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and being bashed by the police. Best of all, it was a free university education.

That was the sixties.

We are what history makes us Luke and you did say you liked history so I'll tell you a bit about myself.

My family goes back to the rip-roaring days of the Ballarat and Bendigo goldfields in the 1850s. There's a family legend that some of them were at the Eureka Stockade in 1854 but I'm not sure about that. Anyhow, that's why I bought this little miner's cottage fifteen years ago because from the highest part of the block I can see where the Eureka Stockade happened on the other side of the Yarrowee Valley. Also, the cottage catches the first morning sun when it peeps over Mount Pleasant. I fell in love with the old house. Also, I like the cool Ballarat climate, especially when rain mists the Yarrowee valley. I love the verdegris towers of the post office, the town hall, Craig's Hotel and the grand old railway station. Even the street names are straight from history: Inkerman, Balaclava, Sebastopol, Raglan, Malakoff, Redan were all battles in the Crimean War in the 1850s.

My great grandfather was William Frewen. He was transported to Van Dieman's Land from Ireland on the Neptune for the term of his natural life. That was in 1848, the 'year of revolutions' in Europe. 1848 was also the year of the Young Ireland Rebellion, another failed attempt at independence from England. Eliza, his wife-to-be and my great-grandmother, came out on the Stebonheath as an eighteen-year-old servant girl from Killaloe, County Clare, in 1850. My family kept very quiet about William. He was a 'skeleton in the cupboard' for over a hundred years. It wasn't the done thing to have the 'convict stain' in a family. In 1972 I asked my grandmother about William and Eliza. Grandma was ninety-six and bedridden in a Bendigo nursing home. She was tough as old boots and close to meeting her maker. I liked her. She didn't say anything for a while, just sucked her gums and fidgeted with her rosary beads.

'He was sent out,' she said quietly.

It took a while for the meaning to sink in. 'Sent out' meant sent out. Her father had been a convict.

Grandma nodded. 'He hated the British,' she added.

'Grandma, what about your mother?' I asked. More sucking and fidgeting. She frowned in concentration.

'They met on the ship,' she whispered. I thought she meant the voyage out to Australia. This mistake led me on many wild goose chases.

She was tiring. I stopped the questions. I had something to go on.

Dad and I spent years chasing up death, birth and marriage certificates. We struck gold after a visit to the State Library in Hobart. The Archivist came out with great grandfather William's convict record. We were able to track down a transcript of his 1848 trial and discovered he was a political exile. We also found his unmarked grave in the old Sandhurst Cemetery in Bendigo. We placed a plaque there.

So Luke, that's a bit about me. Hope you like it.

*

'Is that all you've done?' asked Luke looking up.

'It took me a while to even do that,' I said defensively.

'I wanna know more about ya.'

The impatience of the young I thought uneasily. I felt guilty. The brief history now seemed inadequate, not giving enough of myself, distant. But I'd wanted to start with it just to see his response, to test him. He was keen after all.

'A man has to know where he comes from Luke. It's important.'

'I guess so. Anyhow, there's something that doesn't make sense.' I raised an eyebrow.

'What?'

'Well,' he began, 'how come ya grandma said her parents met on the ship if they came out on separate ships at different times? I don't get it.'

Smart. He knew how to read, a lost art these days.

Those big nut brown eyes again. His black curls were drawn back and tied with a red ribbon. The

change accentuated his delicate cheekbones, pale skin and slash of continuous black eyebrow across the bridge of his nose. The silver pin through his eyebrow sparkled in the sunlight from the window.

‘Well,’ I began, ‘William was released from Port Arthur in July 1850. When gold was announced in August 1851 he crossed Bass Strait to Port Phillip. Young men used to hang around where the ships came in at Hobson’s Bay, especially when they knew a ship of poor migrant girls from Ireland was arriving. The men would offer to help the girls by carrying their bags and befriending them, going on board to help carry a trunk or case. Women were in very short supply and competition was fierce from young men for young women. Eliza arrived in Melbourne in December 1850 and that’s how William and Eliza met, on or at the ship. Three weeks later they were married in the newly built Saint Francis’ Church in Melbourne. Now it’s your turn Luke. I’d like to know more about you. Tell me something about your family. I don’t even know where you live.’

‘Me? Otway Street, Ballarat East. There isn’t much to tell. I just live at home with Mum. Mum and Dad split up years ago. I don’t know much about the history side except Dad came out as a migrant when he was a boy. Mum was born in Melbourne. We get along ok. I haven’t told her about you. D’ya think I should?’

‘That’s up to you Luke.’

‘I mean, I think she suspects something because I’ve been staying out Saturday nights but she never

asks. She knows I'm gay. She just wants me to be happy.'

'Are you Luke?'

'Yeah, guess so.' He looked doubtful.

'Happiness is very elusive Luke,' I assured him.

'I'm glad we met. What did ya do with yourself before we met?'

'What did I do before we met? What do you mean?'

'For sex,' he said pinking up.

'Back to that again are we? Like most things it's a long story.'

'Tell me! I won't be shocked,' he teased.

'Not now. How about that essay on the Vietnam War you're supposed to be working on?'

'Don't change the subject,' he insisted.'

'OK. I'll tell you but not right now. We'll do your essay first.'

*

I watched Luke in his long black overcoat stride down the track to the Yarrowee. He turned then disappeared along the verge towards Ballarat East. I wished I was as free and happy when I was his age. I went back to the cottage. There was so much I could've told him. I barely knew him but sensed the welding of souls. It was a start.

What had I done? Luke's question kicked around in my head. I remembered Leonard Cohen's words 'I've tried in my way to be free'. I'd certainly done that. I stretched out on the Chesterfield, old faithful,

and smiled as the lyrics to Pansy Division spiced my brain. My grin widened when I thought about the weekend, last weekend, this weekend, tonight, tomorrow or any night, all those young men, the waiting and the hunting.

I'd been going to the clubs more than usual. I spent more than the dole could afford at get-your-rocks-off clubs in nearby Melbourne. I was going to say 'gay' but the word doesn't mean anything to me. I didn't feel gay. Homosexual said it, perhaps queer said it, perhaps poofster said it, but not 'gay'. Words never reveal the whole truth. Only my imagination and fantasy reached that white-hot core. I pumped up the volume on Pansy Division:

I've thought about it for a long long time
About being attracted to my own kind
I'm ready to take those fantasies
And make them into something real
And finally do all the things
I've been dreaming of
I'm finally facing what it means when
another boy causes a lump in my jeans.

I thought of the Club tucked quietly into the Victorian working class, warehouse-industrial of Collingwood. The converted factory evokes Jean Genet's raunchy young men in *Querelle*, and the ambience of William Burroughs' *The Wild Boys*. The Club had the tang of the Marquis de Sade, Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, an acute sense of the ridiculous that Oscar Wilde, the great wit,

might have smirked over. The prospect of sex warms me as I climb cold concrete steps and enter dark red-lit rooms. It hadn't always been so available. I was there that night in the eighties when police smashed the place apart with sledgehammers.

'We're looking for drugs,' the cops said.

Aren't we all I thought?

My life was a sexual merry-go-round of fucking the cutest and tightest Melbourne had to offer. Wild and dangerous was how I liked it. I lived to fuck. I would stare at myself in the mirror of the washroom and steady my narcissism with Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. I thought of the lad I'd just had, the one from the posh school south of the Yarra, the smooth pale skin, the thin aestheticism of the poet, the full lips, ice-sapphire eyes and thick mass of tossed blond curls. An Adonis. Get it while you can brother, get it while you can.

I walked the upper deck of the fuck-house. I thought of the balance-sheet, my sex profit and loss statement. My last AIDS test was negative. Lucky. Condoms broke now and then. I try to count the lovers who've died and lose count. I think of my brother Bob dying in that quiet country hospital in Nhill, his last shot of morphine, the last suck of air. The four young men I lived with in Woolloomooloo in tinseltown Sydney were dead. I knew the score, the price, the roulette wheel of life. It went with the territory.

In Melbourne it was a waiting game for the 'right' young man to come along. I sat in my light-space on cheap wooden boxes that pass for seats or

stretch out in the steam room at a sauna. A few joints in the locker punctuate the waiting. I stay as long as I can keep my eyes open and then some. There was always somewhere to crash. If it got boring I'd adjourn to the sauna, have a spa bath or swim in a deserted lap-pool. I stayed till juice was spent. Dawn came with trains started rumbling over the vaulted bluestone chambers of Banana Alley, ferrying in the working poor to their glass-tower prisons. I catch the welfare super-saver at Spencer Street and head in the opposite direction and go country. I crash on the tattered chesterfield at the cottage where I imagine the night before and imagine the next time. There's always a next time because so much beautiful fucking couldn't possibly have an end. Big city sleaze contrasts with quite living in the country. In the tranquil cottage by the Yarrowee I read, one might almost say visit, Arthur Rimbaud, Jean Genet and William Burroughs. On rare occasions I tackle Suetonius, Catullus, Juvenal and Cicero, just the translations. I've forgotten more Latin than I ever learnt. Cicero wrote so well on old age and friendship.

On cold Ballarat days, the weather too miserable to venture outside, I curl up in front of the fire and read bits from the Mahabharata or meditate on the Egyptian philosopher Hermes' who wrote that in his Hermetic:

In the first Age there was but one religion, and all men were saintly: therefore they were not required to perform religious ceremonies. There were no

gods in the First Age, and there were no demons. The First Age was without disease; there was no lessening with the years; there was no hatred, or vanity, or evil thought whatsoever; no sorrow, no fear. In those times, men lived as long as they chose to live, and were without any fear of death.

I'm a bowerbird picking out glittering pieces to adorn my nest.

As I cruise the steamy rooms of Melbourne I dwell on my doctoral thesis about the Australian radical student movement of the 1960s. The research sharpened my intellectual skills and deepened my understanding of the radical Left in Australia, especially the contribution of writers such as Brian Fitzpatrick, Ian Turner, Patrick O'Brien, Jim Cairns and others almost forgotten in today's superficiality.

Doug White and Bob Bessant, my supervisors at LaTrobe University were pleased. 'You should publish,' they suggested.

That was in 1988 and all so long ago. I'd left my run too late. Academic research, though interesting me, didn't fire my engine. What really fired my engine was not intellectualising. It was something much more primal. Sex drove me. Sex shaped my life. It was my life.

When a cute young man caught my eye and returned a knowing linger the books were pushed aside. And there've been so many young men.

*

‘I like that,’ said Luke. An edgy pause. ‘Been to Melbourne lately?’ Luke stretched out on the old chesterfield. It was early Sunday morning after a heavy session at the Lounge. I sussed he meant had I been fucking around.

‘No Luke,’ I decided to lie without knowing why.

‘I haven’t been to any clubs in Melbourne,’ he confided, ‘but I’m gunna. I want ya to write more about that. Did I tell ya I’m in a new band? We’re playing at the Lounge. Cor Thirteen, that’s our band. Ya hafta come.’

‘Sure. Look forward to it.’

‘Mind if I ask ya somethin’?’

‘Be my guest.’

‘What was it like when ya were my age? Ya know, when ya were sixteen?’

‘A long time ago and just like yesterday.’

‘Don’t fuck around. What was it like when ya were my age?’

‘1966.’

‘1966!’ repeated Luke incredulously, ‘you’re ancient.’

‘1966,’ I repeated, feeling very ancient indeed.

‘Tell me about it.’

‘I’ll do better than that Luke. You can read about it.’

‘Cool. You had me hitting Google for all those names. Ya know, Arthur Rimbaud the queer French poet. Cute. William Burroughs the famous druggie writer. Oscar Wilde the writer guy sent to prison for being gay. Juvenal and Suetonius wrote about life in ancient Rome didn’t they?’

‘You’ve done your homework Luke. I wish I’d read more of that kind of literature when I was sixteen.’

Writing about the sixties meant ripping apart old scars. I wanted to rip those scars apart.

‘How’s your Latin Luke?’

‘Why? Not bad. Doctor Ryan said I was ok.’

I handed Luke some extra reading.

‘There’s a little Church Latin there. You said you wanted to know more about me.’

Luke put the folded sheets into his pocket.

‘Gotta go to Bi-Lo. See ya.’

*

1964.

My iridescent green and orange Malvern Star bicycle jolted over the potholes in Church Street, Nhill. I ached for the bowl of hot porridge plopping away in a pot on the old Metters wood-fired stove in Bell Street. In the warm skillion kitchen Mum and Dad would be having breakfast.

I was the oldest altar boy in Nhill at fifteen going on sixteen. Other boys my age had given it away as soon as they entered the local State High School but I’d kept at it. I liked serving at the altar. It was like being on stage, reciting the Latin in familiar, timeless cadence and mysterious certainty. The colourful vestments and arcane liturgy before the richly carved altar was a one-act play every morning. In the garnet-studded gold chalice, water and wine became the blood of Jesus. A small host became

Jesus' flesh. Father Linane drank and ate. It was cannibalistic. I loved the camp of my red soutane and white lace surplice. I watched Tom Linane robe for Mass.

Twice a week Mum came to wake me at six thirty hail, rain or shine. Bill and Geoff, my younger twin brothers, slept on. I slipped into my grey Nhill High School uniform. I went to my frosted Malvern Star and fast-pedalled up Bell Street, crossed Nelson Street and went up Church Street's buckshot gravel. Only Victoria Street, Nhill's main street, was tarred. At a rapid pedal it took six minutes to get to the back door of the Sacristy. In rain or fog it took a tad longer as I negotiated the potholes.

Father Tom Linane had already unlocked the door and gone back into his presbytery, a vast weatherboard place with a return cast-iron veranda. It was demolished in the sixties. 'Not good enough for a priest,' the powers that be said, and sank the Parish deep into debt with a brick veneer rabbit warren. I peeped into the sanctuary and spotted Sister Maxcentia and Sister Mary-Anna, the two sisters of Saint Joseph. They had dark brown habits, white wimples, thick black leather belts with shining brass crucifixes thrust in and heavy black rosary beads. I wondered how they coped on hot summer days in their little weatherboard convent next to the weatherboard school.

Two elderly spinsters, Miss Meredith the organist and Miss Eichner completed the congregation. I turned on the electric angels, two kitsch plastercasts on Romanesque pedestals in the corners of the

sanctuary. Each angel held a tall brass candelabra lit with tulip-globes. The angels were smashed and carted up to the Nhill tip in the puritanic aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

I returned to the sacristy and took a red soutane from the altarboys' cupboard. I put it on and buttoned up. I took the crisp-laced white surplice off its hanger and put it over the soutane. I was an altar boy. I lit the taper on the candle lighter and walked onto the sanctuary, left hand on my breast, genuflected to Jesus in the tabernacle, climbed the three steps to the altar and lit the six high candles. They were always hard to light because I couldn't see the wicks squashed into molten wax after they'd last been extinguished. It was a tricky job for a scrupulous perfectionist and I was exactly that. A perfectionist.

I returned to the sacristy and poured water into a small glass jug. I took a bowl and with a fresh white linen cloth over my arm placed them on the altar servers' table. I then removed the gold-embroidered altar cover, careful to fold each end towards the centre, the Tabernacle, the place where Jesus lived.

When I returned to the sacristy Father Tom Linane was rushing about in a swirl of black cassock as if the most momentous event in world history was about to be witnessed.

'Good morning Father,' I said.

'Good morning.' Linane never actually said my name. He was aloof.

Linane took a key from a half-secret place and opened a little door to the wine cupboard. He reached in and took out a brown bottle with a purple

label and gold lettering. I poured dark wine into a crystal cruet, put water into a second cruet, placed a silver spoon on a cut-glass tray and carried it into the sanctuary. I gingerly genuflected to Jesus even as the cruets threatened to upset and placed the tray on the altar servers' table. I returned to the sacristy and waited, watching as Linane set up the chalice, paten, pall, cover and burse which I then took onto the altar. I placed them in front of the Tabernacle where Jesus lived, bowed, and returned to the sacristy.

Linane began to vest. He took the amice, kissed its little red cross, placed it over his shoulders, laced it and mumbled prayers in Latin. This he did for each article, a kiss and the Latin. Over the amice went the white alb, tied around his waist with a tasselled cincture. He used special knots. He placed the stole around his neck and a maniple over his left arm. The chasuble, green, red, white, purple or black depending on the ecclesiastical calendar was thrown over his head in a dazzle of sequined colour. Theatre.

For benediction on Saturday nights there was the cope, a richly embroidered ankle length cape with IHS in gold sequins on the back. Linane swished around in it. I loved benediction with its gold monstrance studded with twelve faceted red garnets. I swang the heavy thurible. The sensual incense filled the sanctuary. I sang the Latin hymns, the Tantum Ergo and Adoremus. When the Redemptorists in black soutanes came up from their monastery in Ballarat to conduct a Mission, it was a weeklong affair of fire and brimstone. Everyone quaked in

fear. The Redemptorists were the stormtroopers. The collection plate overflowed with paper money. Coins were not expected. Benediction every evening was the dramatic highlight of a Mission. The angels' halo of electric light bulbs shone brightly. Glistening brass vases of roses and gladioli were placed in every possible spot. Wafting incense and mysterious Latin hinted miracles. The grand finale was the exposition of the blessed sacrament with the golden spiked monstrance. Jesus was inside it surrounded by twelve twinkling blood-red garnets. I was transported into adolescent sainthood. I swang the heavy thurible with its chains that always tangled as incense puffed out and filled the little church. Then, at just the right moment, Miss Meredith's ancient legs madly pumped air into groaning organ-bellows. She struck a chord. The congregation burst into the *Tantum Ergo*. The final hymn, *Faith of Our Fathers*, was a reminder to us all, an exhortation, to remember the Cold War and suffering Catholics persecuted by godless Communists behind the Iron Curtain in dark Eastern Europe. 'Our Fathers chained in prisons dark' threatened to raise the roof and burst the walls of the tiny brick church perched on the endless Wimmera plain.

In 2000, the magnificent Booroobool stone Redemptorist monastery in Ballarat was sold off to a Melbourne property developer for fancy apartments. The few priests were long gone. All empires rise and fall. For all that, it was the mundane that dominated my early sixties. My revolution was yet to burst.

A curt, silent nod from Linane was his signal for me to lead out to the Sanctuary, the holy of holies, hands joined palm to palm, held tightly to my breast. We genuflect to the Tabernacle where Jesus lives. I kneel on the lowest step.

‘In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti,’ intones Linane.

‘Amen,’ I reply.

‘Introibo ad altare Dei.’ I go unto the altar of God.

‘Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.’ The God of my gladness and joy.

‘Confiteor Deo omnipotenti,’ I intone as I bow my body to the floor. I confess to almighty God. ‘Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa’ I said, turning to Linane, striking my boy’s breast each time for each ‘through my fault’. I’m in the blackest state of mortal sin, damned countless times to the flames of hell forever and ever. Once every million years a bird wing-tips a great iron block and it takes eons to wear that block away. That’s how long my damnation in hell is to last. Sister Mary-Anna told me so it must be true. Sister was never wrong.

Linane ascends the three steps. ‘Lavabo inter innocents manus meas.’ I wash my hands in innocence. I sweat with fear at the travesty to come. Fear deepens as Linane makes his way through the Offertory and Consecration.

Linane bends over the altar. ‘Hoc est enim Corpus meum.’ For this is My Body. He raises the host. I ring the bells. ‘Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis mei.’ For this is the Chalice of My Blood. Linane

raises the chalice. I ring the bells.

‘Domine, non sum dignus.’ Lord, I am not worthy.

I know I have to go to Communion being the altar boy. Not to go is suicidal. It would be immediately noticed. It would be assumed I was in a state of mortal sin. I ascend the three steps. I hold the brass tray under my chin and put out my tongue. Once the host is on my tongue I am doubly damned because I’ve taken the sacred host into a black and damned soul. But it was all over anyhow. I was already damned a million times and the bird would never wear out the iron block.

Hypocrisy and sacrilege was my everyday life. I tried to solve it by asking to go to confession every day. One morning I asked once too often. Linane snapped.

‘Look! What is it with you? Have you got something wrong with you? Are you scrupulous?’ Linane demanded to know.

I didn’t know what ‘scrupulous’ meant but I knew what it felt like. It must be a disease. I must have a disease. Every time I thought of ‘it’ let alone ‘did it’, I was damned to hell. The spilt seed on the hot earth beneath the railway bridge after school.

I burst into tears in the sacristy. Linane was unmoved. Just as well. Another priest might have recognised an opportunity. Those that did are doing time.

In the black mustiness of the confessional at the back of the Church I told Linane.

‘I did impure actions Father.’

‘How many times?’

‘I don’t remember Father.’

‘Alone or with others?’

‘Alone Father.’

Sometimes it wasn’t alone. Sometimes it was with Lindsay in a backyard shed after school. I couldn’t summon the courage to blurt it out to Linane. ‘Doing it with others’ meant the breaking of a social as well as a religious taboo in red-blooded Australia and Nhill was very red-blooded.

‘Yes, well, say three Hail Mary’s and a good act of contrition. In absolvo...’

Years later the dark wooden confessional became redundant and I recognised my adolescent plight as persecution. It required revenge. It occurred one Saturday afternoon.

With Peter Brennan, a radical priest and Dad looking on, I took an axe to the wooden box. I wrecked it and burnt it in the churchyard. I gleefully watched as the flames soared.

Did some priests get off on all those innocent boys confessing their ‘self-abuse’? It must have been heaven for paedophiles, a kind of sublimated lovemaking. By the time I woke up to myself in the early 1970s, any aesthetic aspects the Catholic Church had were thrown out. The ancient, eternal Latin was gone. The hymns and liturgy were gone. The monstrance was no longer used. The ornate altar was smashed, the angels and statues went to the tip and the Italian marble holy water font was in four pieces being kicked around the yard by the schoolkids. The dogma, homophobia and sexism

remained. The best was jettisoned, the worst retained.

It was over. The sacred canopy was torn down. The Church that once had a grip of steel on me was let go. The idiocy of being damned forever for eating meat on Friday and the next Friday, by Papal edict, being able to eat a meat pie, revealed the Achilles heel. The Church became ridiculous. It came tumbling down.

Tom Linane, parish priest of Nhill, Jeparit, Kaniva and every hamlet in-between, had banned my parents from receiving the sacraments because they dared to send me to the secular High School after finishing at the Catholic primary school. Mum and Dad had to drive to Dimboola to receive communion. There was a bitter standoff between my parents and the Church. It reflected deep sectarian hatred and the influence of the Democratic Labor Party at parish level.

The DLP was formed in 1955 as a result of 'The Split' in the Australian Labor Party. It was initiated by the Catholic inspired industry based 'Groupers', 'The Movement', led by B.A. 'Bob' Santamaria and Archbishop Daniel Mannix who were vehemently anti-communist.

An interview between my father and the omnipotent Bishop James O'Collins in his bluestone Palace in Ballarat returned matters to normal. So determined was Linane to keep me out of the clutches of the secular High School that he offered to pay my fees at austere Saint Patrick's College in Ballarat. Dad rejected the offer. He would take nothing from

Linane. Had I gone to Saint Patrick's as a boarder in 1960 my Latin would have improved! But that would have to wait.

High School had rewards. It delivered a sound education. I strengthened my love of poetry, plays, literature, debating and acting. Milton Sibley my Maths teacher frightened me with the notion that god might not exist after all.

I'd look out the classroom window to watch speeding goods trains on their interstate run. I knew there were cities to be visited in a world much bigger than Nhill.

When Dad invited me out to the back veranda of the weatherboard house 'for a chat' I knew what it was about. I'd just turned sixteen. For Dad it was time for me to choose. It was either education or a job. My results at Nhill High School the previous year had been indifferent. I barely passed. My older brother Robert had left school and Nhill at sixteen to join the Navy and narrowly survived the Voyager disaster in 1964. My older sister Janette was training to be a nurse in Horsham. Dad himself had left school and his Serpentine farm at fourteen for rough living as a rouseabout on Riverina sheep stations during the Great Depression. He believed education was only useful if it put food in your belly, a roof over your head and clothes on your back. It wasn't an end in itself.

'What do you think about going to Saint Patrick's College next year?'

I didn't want to leave the surety of home. I was apprehensive. I decided to abandon myself.

‘I don’t know Dad. I’ll leave the decision up to you.’

‘Well, I think it might be best. You’ll be able to study better.’

So that was that.

Poor academic results the previous year were because of my neurotic ‘scruples’ and ‘coming out’ to myself as homosexual. ‘Coming out’ was not a term I knew then but that’s what I did. Even my two younger brothers were streets ahead in the girl-stakes. I tried to maintain a public and family profile of interest in girls but I was indisputably on the lookout for sexual opportunities with local boys. I imagined Mum and Dad knew. This was why the Spartan College in Ballarat conducted by the Christian Brothers was thought the best option, to ‘make a man of me’, to ‘straighten me out’. No one said as much but it was understood.

On a warm summer’s day in January 1965 Mum, Dad and I called in to Saint Patrick’s to see Brother Kely, Principal of Saint Patrick’s. I was nervous as we waited in the reception room of the monastery. I listened for footsteps as Kely came along the corridor and into the room. He was a man of few words. Subjects and fees were discussed and agreed.

There was a flurry of uniform buying at Myers and in Nhill a rush of shirt ironing and case-packing. The day came when Mum and Dad dropped me off at the iron gates of the College in Sturt Street, opposite the bluestone monolith of the Bishop’s Palace. I took in the imposing edifice of the chapel and Brothers’ monastery. All I could do was gulp

and swallow my tears. It was daunting. It was good-bye to boyhood. Days of rabbiting and chasing goannas in the sandhills were over. Then spirits lifted as a stunning looking senior boy took me in hand and showed me around. I was in!

Now, forty years on I watch as another young man, Luke, made his way along the Yarrowee on a sunny Sunday morning towards his home in Ballarat East. I wondered what he thought about the strange man he'd just visited in the miner's cottage by the Yarrowee Creek.

*

Luke glanced into the bluestone channel. The dun-coloured water ran the width of it to the bottom of the walls. It'd rained heavily last night after arriving at the cottage and the track was puddled and muddy. He was returning to where he knew his mother would be sitting in front of the TV as if she'd never left it. His thin, tall frame warmed to the late morning sun. He felt the fresh pages in his overcoat pocket, pages he'd read in the quiet of his bedroom where he'd glimpse the boyhood of his strange new friend. He liked reading about him and the paper money pressed into his hand at the back door, after the Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, a smoke, a glass of red, the sex and the talk. The talk. That's what he liked the most, and the reading, because the reading was like the talking.

He hoped I'd get him through.

*

Other students of history, sorry, ‘cultural studies’, occasionally come to the cottage to talk about the sixties and seventies, serious students researching the politics of student radicalism. One was James and when I gazed into his piercing emerald eyes my mind certainly wasn’t on his promising research essay in Australian History. I made a creditable display of romancing him about wild student days, radical politics, revolution, times of tumult and anarchy when blood raced, new order replaced old, red and black flags firing the blood of the people in a celebration fantasy of fighting and fucking with communards and anarchists, hot blood rising, juices urging to be wild and free. It was a requisite performance.

‘Smoke?’ I asked. I casually rolled a Drum with a tincture of marijuana.

‘You’d think I’d have given it away after all these years wouldn’t you?’ I said, teasing myself, trying to win a smile from the stern Adonis opposite.

James returned a guarded smile. A gold stud on his ear lobe glinted in the sun.

‘I don’t mind a little smoke occasionally,’ he said judiciously.

Monteverdi’s *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin* came quietly from the background. We listened to the Gregorian cadence in silence as I deftly completed a small joint, a racer, with the *savoir-faire* of a *bon vivant*.

‘Monteverdi. Sublime. I was surprised when

Doug White rang me about you. I haven't seen Doug since a reunion years ago. Doug knows the hedonistic psychology of the Australian Left or the 'New Left' as it was called in the sixties, inside and out. It's now the old Left, and a sorry state it's in. Doug edited *Arena*, the Marxist journal, for many years. He said you wanted to discuss research you're doing on the 1960s.'

'He told me you knew a lot about the sixties,' said James.

James' flattery connected, but deep down I had doubts about what I was reputed to know.

I wondered about the real causes of the student revolution that scorched its way through the sixties. There are many kinds of revolution, some overt and bloody, others subtler but nonetheless effective. I thought the student revolution the second kind. The effects of it in feminism, savvy youth, homosexual rights and the green movement were pervasive. The causes however, were complex.

I gently inhaled the sweet aroma of the joint, hesitated in a mid-air moment then offered it to James.

'Mind you James, the sixties weren't as free as one might imagine. Nor were the seventies. Homosexuality was completely illegal. Homosexual law reform really only took off in Australia after the murder of Dr. George Duncan in 1972. Duncan was thrown into the Torrens River in Adelaide by police in 1972. Don Dunstan the Premier then began a program of reform gradually taken up by other States. Homosexuality was still illegal in Tasmania as recently as 1997.'

James expressed surprise then visibly relaxed.

‘Thanks,’ he said as he took the joint. ‘Yeah, the seventies. Tell me about it,’ James encouraged not that I needed urging.

‘When A.I.D.S arrived, the sex revolution, if that’s what it was, was over. The global sex supermart. Up until then condoms were rarely used. There was always the problem of STD’s. Then AIDS struck in 1983 and changed everything. It might sound contradictory but I think the best part of the sixties was the seventies if I could put it that way. What would you like to drink James? A quick gin and tonic would be nice wouldn’t it?’

I busied making up the drinks as I chatted. ‘Mind you, the sex supermart was still open for business but there was now a completely different mind-set. I can pinpoint the day in 1983 when the dinner party invitations abruptly stopped, my coffee cup was given an extra wash and the toilet seat doubly wiped. With A.I.D.S. came a new genre of film, posters, plays, novels, and street theatre. It erupted. New health bureaucracies grew up. A new political activism rushed into everyday life. It was played out on the screen. The lives of my friends became heroic theatre. There were A.I.D.S. candlelight vigils. There was the A.I.D.S quilt. The names being added went on and on and still do. Friends’ names. I remember Brian McGahon for example.’

‘I always use a condom,’ James blurted, reddening suddenly.

I hesitated and smiled at his candour.

‘I’m the same too James. Safe sex only.’

Silence.

James looked relieved his faux pas was not left hanging to create an embarrassment.

We smiled and James changed the subject.

‘As far as the sixties goes I’m really interested in a postmodern interpretation, Michel Foucault mainly.’

‘Not another one!’ I said.

We laughed softly again.

‘Who was Brian McGahon,’ he asked.

I told James about the politically sensitive trip I’d taken to East Germany and Moscow with McGahon in 1973.

‘East Germany was a Communist country then,’ I explained, ‘Stalinist. The Stasi, the grey secret police were everywhere. Everything was so grey in East Berlin. The wall that divided Berlin and Germany came down in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and re-unification of Germany. McGahan was a member of the Communist Party of Australia. He later became a Sydney City Councillor. He died from AIDS some years ago. We were lovers.’

I assessed James’ attention. All eyes and ears.

‘We met in Singapore. I was the Australian Union of Students’ delegate to the International Festival of Youth and Students in East Berlin. I met McGahon on a stopover in Singapore. The totalitarian Government of Lee Kwan Yu had confiscated my passport. I was on a blacklist as a communist. It took all the efforts of Neil McLean, the President of AUS; Gregor Macaulay who ran AUS Travel and

Brian McGahon from the Communist Party to get me out of Singapore. I've never been back. Extracting me from Singapore was tricky because the Socialist Party of Australia wanted to stop me from attending the Festival. I was aligned with the Maoist Marxist-Leninists, the Peking line. The SPA was Moscow. I remember driving around inner-Sydney with Bob Pringle, Jack Munday and Brian McGahon armed with guns because of the internecine war between the three Communist Parties.'

'Dangerous times,' said James.

'They were. I was brought up strictly as a Roman Catholic and had a sheltered boyhood. Joining the Communist Party was a tortuous philosophical journey. Mark Taft signed me up in 1974 one hot summer's afternoon in a Carlton terrace in Faraday Street. The Taft and Aarons families were very influential in the Party ideologically and organisationally, particularly Bernie and Mark Taft; and Laurie, Mark and Brian Aarons. It was a long philosophical distance for me. In 1967 I was photographed with Cardinal Knox at Werribee Park as a seminarian. Six years later in 1973 I was standing with a communist North Vietnamese General at a State banquet in East Berlin toasting the Vietnamese people in their struggle against American imperialism, with the War still having two years to run.

It wasn't all politics and demonstrations. The camps at the Eureka Youth League at Yarra Glen Junction were really something. The cream of Melbourne radical youth. There weren't the commercial gay clubs around then. Radical politics was

an entree into homosexual life. It was like the 1920s in Europe, you know, the cabaret before fascism, when society was relatively free after the carnage of the First World War and before the Great Depression set in. The League had about three thousand members in the 1960s. Communists had to deal with National Civic Council infiltrators and the Australian version of McCarthyism. Menzies had tried to get rid of communists in his Communist Party Dissolution Bill but he failed. There was a real 'reds under the bed' panic in the three decades after the end of the Second World War in 1945. This was the Cold War. Marxism-Leninism was written into the EYL Constitution. Financial and administrative matters were dealt with by the Party. The C.I.C.D or Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament was very significant. There was a growing anti-nuclear movement in the fifties and sixties led by people such as Bertrand Russel in England, Albert Einstein in America and our own Mark Oliphant in Australia who had actually worked on the atom bomb as a physicist at Los Alamos.'

James busily keyed notes into his laptop.

I took him for a half hour whistle stop tour through the politics of the Vietnam War and the student protests, a tour de force. I explained the reasons behind the existence of three communist parties in Australia, how they were the result of ideological splits over Russia's invasion of Hungary in 1956, the crushing of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Mao's Cultural Revolution in China.

‘There was the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) led by Ted Hill, Norm Gallagher from the Builders’ Labourers and Ted Bull from the Waterside Workers. It was aligned with Peking. Then there was the Socialist Party of Australia aligned with Moscow. Then there was the Communist Party of Australia, the largest of the three, committed to an Australian revolution springing from the workers and students. The CPA dissolved itself in 1991. These Parties were led by the Old Left which was Stalinist and grey. The student movement of the sixties and seventies was called the New Left.’

‘But it never happened did it,’ said James, ‘the revolution I mean?’

‘Not in the violent sense of a physical overthrow of the capitalist oligarchy. No, it didn’t. Still, capitalism had to change and take stock of our ideas. It finished up being a rather quiet revolution. There was a significant raising of political consciousness. People generally became more sophisticated in their analysis of what was going on around them. The recent opposition to Australian involvement in Iraq and the colossal growth in environmental political activism is a result. As Eric Aarons said in 1995, communism in the old sense is dead but the ideals that motivate us live on.’

‘I’ve read your Doctorate thesis,’ said James, ‘it’s interesting but it’s not as good as talking about it.’

I blushed.

‘Did you really believe there would be an armed

rebellion in Australia,' he asked, 'it seems so unrealistic now.'

'It does now but not then. I remember being invited for target practice at a secret place in the bush with John Redenbach, a LaTrobe activist, in the early seventies. Redenbach, a Communist comrade, was a mysterious figure who established himself as the powerful 'head of security' in the LaTrobe student scene.

There was a real revolutionary spirit in the air in the period 1968 to 1972. Some of us either owned guns or had access to them. When Whitlam came to power in December 1972 the revolutionary wind was taken out of the sails.

'Did you? Have a gun I mean?'

'Yes. I had two. I always had a .22 rifle handy and I had a double barrel shotgun.'

James' mouth dropped. 'But you wouldn't have used them would you? I mean...'

'James,' I interrupted, 'you must remember we were being hunted down and jailed. We were being infiltrated and spied on. Australians were being killed in Vietnam as well as millions of innocent Vietnamese, all on the altar of almighty capitalism and American greed and paranoia. It was war James. We wanted an independent Australia governed by progressive revolutionaries. We wanted change. We were revolutionaries.'

James looked perplexed.

'Our revolution didn't quite work out that way though!' I chuckled, 'still, the ideals have carried over to today's generation, mainly through radical

teachers and progressively-minded parents.’

‘So the revolution is still happening?’ James probed carefully.

‘A sound, classic Marxist analysis James!’ I congratulated, ‘yes, it is. The dialectic continues. The natural dialectic is one of constant change. Che Guevara and Paolo Friere taught us that the real revolution is always happening because there is always a tension between labour and capital, between the owners and the dispossessed. There’s always something to fight, some great injustice or cause. We’re told today it’s international terrorism but that’s only a reflection of deeper causes. Today it’s the political economy of climate change, global warming, the energy crisis, water and the forests. They’re the big battles today. They’re the same battles as yesterday, the fight between labour and capital for scarce resources. Our survival as a species is at stake.’

James thought for a moment. ‘It’s a bigger cause than Vietnam in the sixties isn’t it?’

‘Yes. Today’s young people have a massive task ahead of them. The big clean-up.’

‘I’ll have to be careful to distinguish symptoms from causes in my essay,’ James reflected, ‘so, what did you do after University?’

‘When I left University I toyed with the idea of working at Sydney University with Dennis Altman, Gary Wotherspoon and Lex Watson, doing studies in gender theory, the politics of sexuality, queer studies, that kind of thing. I never got around to it. I used to run into Dennis, Lex and Gary at the Midnight Shift in Oxford Street and have a chat, a

much better way to study! I became a schoolteacher James. I've taught everywhere from Northcote Technical School to Scotch College. The classroom became my theatre. After University I couldn't get a job. The State Government wouldn't employ me because I was a communist. I had a prison record. The Church wouldn't have me because I was out as a homosexual. The universities were disinclined to offer a career. My first job after leaving prison was picking up sheep heads and cleaning out the shit, blood and guts at the Newmarket abattoir. I had a short stint on the wharves with the Painters and Dockers. They were really good blokes. Their Union doesn't exist now. It was cleaned up in the Costigan Royal Commission.'

James glanced up. 'There's a story there?' he said.

'Yes. I remember going on a truck that took meat out to a petfood factory in Broadmeadows. The meat was green with rot and the stench was terrible. At the factory we tipped it out for the boilers and red dye was put in to colour it up. If people only knew.'

I referred James to Overland, the leftist periodical for some articles. We moved the discussion to the writing of Patrick White, David Marr and Robert Dessaix' Night Letters. Then, to both our surprises it was time to draw the conversation to a close. James had to get back to Melbourne. I played my ace.

'Would you like to join me for lunch at the University Club in a few week's time?'

James seemed reluctant but caught, as I'd hoped

he would, a drift that stopped him from making excuses. He submitted to an expectancy, a conspiracy he couldn't quite put his finger on.

'That'd be nice. You've got my number.'

'I'd like to read your essay when you finish it James.'

'Sure.'

*

I return to halcyon days, time of hope in 1974 in Carlton, a terrace in Faraday Street where I lived with Ian MacDonald. 'Macca', was a young turk in the Socialist Left. Cheryl Buchanan, an aboriginal activist from the Deep North had a room in the house. There were exciting parties. Apparatchiks from the radical Australian Union of Students gathered at the house after meetings in the Union headquarters in Drummond Street.

Activists included Neil McLean, the charismatic President of the Union, Chris Sidoti, Richard Refshaughe from the University of Sydney and Simon Marginson from Melbourne University, the Union's brilliant research officer. As the wok cooked up and joints went around we listened to The Eagles and talked of a social revolution in the making in which we were the vanguard. Wes Arnott was the Union's first Environment Officer. Franz Timmerman and David Spratt edited National U, the Union's popular newspaper. Tom Hurley ran the Education Office. On the periphery radicalised students formed their politics and got valuable ground-

ing, hitting their straps in later careers such as Matt Peacock the ABC journalist. The Union protected political refugees such as Hishamuddin Rais from Malaysia and organised Asian Student Association conferences. The National Executive organised the Aquarius Festival at an unknown place called Nimbin. It was to become Australia's Woodstock in 1973, a watershed in Australian culture. Well-monied, politically-connected and radical, the Union was the envy of the conservative Liberal Party.

The aftershock of the radical student movement is felt today in numerous ways. Gerard Henderson, a former LaTrobe staffer and now at the conservative Sydney Institute still has radio tiffs with LaTrobe politics professor Robert Manne, a reformed liberal. Cognoscenti understand these disagreements travel back to deep ideological rifts thirty or forty years ago.

In the quiet of the cottage I listen to William Burroughs reading A Thanksgiving Prayer, Ah Pook the Destroyer, Love Your Enemies and Apocalypse. I tune into the Beat Generation writers, to William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, the generation of the 1950s, early 1960s. They were the literary foundation and true roots for the radicalism of the following decade. My interest in Burroughs emerged from an eagerly sought after copy of his homoerotic fantasy *The Wild Boys*. I first read Alan Ginsberg's *Howl* out of my brain on acid as I fucked my way through the student revolution, arms entwined with fellow undergraduates

frantic to ‘see what it was like’.

There had been an embarrassing awkwardness about my years at Catholic boarding school. At University I blossomed into what I narcissistically liked to believe was a good-looking youth, tall, slim, sky-blue eyes, golden locks and hung with a cock that had a life of its own. Genet’s *Querelle of Brest*, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, and *Funeral Rites* lay open on my student desk. Overdue essays were pushed to the side against a coffee stained copy of Peter Kropotkin’s *Anarchy*. There was hashish from across the world, Lebanese gold, Afghanistan Black and Columbian brown. The youth of the world were on LSD. Cocks were hard and sucked. Plate glass doors of university administration buildings succumbed to student revolutionaries. When Pentridge Prison finally opened its gates to receive me I gained raw lessons in the power of the State. I was out of control.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organization opened a file. It’s still open.

*

‘ASIO’s gotta a file on ya?’

I put my glass of Merlot down on the glass coffee table.

‘Yes Luke. They’ve got a file on everyone.’

‘Yeah? On me too? I haven’t done nuthin!’

‘You don’t have to. This is the information age.’

‘Have ya read it?’

‘I’ve read what may have been my file but it was

only extracts given to organizations such as the National Civic Council. No, not my proper file. ASIO won't let me have it. I'll dig out what I have for you one day but not now. It's getting late.'

'How'd ya get it? Isn't it a secret?'

'By accident. You've heard of George Pell haven't you Luke?'

Yeah. He's a bishop or somethin'. He's in the news. Wad about him?'

'A cardinal actually. Well, in 1975 I was sitting in his study at Saint Alipius in Ballarat East, not far from where you live. I was teaching at Saint Patrick's College, my first teaching job after I left University. George was Vicar-General for education, busily laying the foundation for the Australian Catholic University. He was well on his way to becoming a bishop and a cardinal. Anyhow, he handed me a sheet of paper given to him by John Parkin, a conservative local Catholic. It contained everything I'd ever done, politics, the Communist Party, trips to Moscow, drugs, character analysis, the way I spoke. They'd opened my mail, bugged my phone and followed me into Melbourne pubs where homosexuals met. It contained my employment record, family background, physical appearance, everything. I was shocked to see it all there. I asked George for a straight whisky which he got for me. I asked what he intended to do, he being Vicar-General of Education. His reaction surprised me.

'Nothing,' said George, 'except I do want to know if you are still a member of the Communist Party?'

‘I wasn’t. George was happy so that was that. I asked George for a copy of the sheet but he refused because I told him I might use it to sue. It would’ve torn the Ballarat Catholic establishment apart. Years later I was able to get a copy. Parkin gave copies to Bishop Mulkearns and the Headmaster at Saint Patrick’s, Brother Paul Nangle. Conservatives wanted me dismissed from Saint Patrick’s. When I asked Nangle about it he just fell about laughing. Nothing came of it but it was a vicious attempt to do me in. My homosexuality was apparently irrelevant. Perhaps that’s understandable given later revelations about what was going on in the Ballarat Diocese at that time.’

‘Whadaya mean?’ asked Luke.

‘There were allegations about Christian Brothers and sexual abuse of boys at Saint Alipius in Ballarat. It took twenty years before it reached the Courts. It was a scandal in Ballarat. Then there was the Ridsdale business.’

‘Who’s he?’

‘He’s in prison for having sex with boys.’

‘Oh,’ said Luke reddening. Silence. ‘James sounds nice,’ he said tangentially, an off-hand way to change the conversation.

‘Yes. He’s doing research in Australian history, the radical student movement in the sixties.’

Another silence.

‘Religion’s fucked you up a lot,’ Luke finally said, ‘I read what ya gave me. It’s all about sex isn’t it?’

‘It was for me Luke. Yes, the Church did fuck up

my life but I'm over it now. I should sue.' I laughed rather too harshly. I had thought about legal action, perhaps on psychological grounds, but couldn't be bothered. There didn't seem any point. I only have contempt for the homophobic hypocrites. My career in Catholic education has been less than meteoric.'

'Are ya sure you're over it?' he asked, 'I mean, I think ya still working that shit out. Keep writing. At school we don't talk about homosexuality. No one mentions it because everyone's scared they're going to be called a poof or a faggot. Homophobia is alive and well. Gays get a hard time.'

I paused before I put the question. 'Do you Luke? Get a hard time at school I mean?'

'Me? Nah. I keep meself to meself. I've got friends who are cool. I ignore the yobs.'

Pause.

'I wouldn't mind going to Melbourne one night. Whadaya think?' he suggested.

'Up to you Luke. You're too young to go to the places I go to though. Enjoy your innocence while you can. There's more to life than sex.'

'Can we go together?' ventured Luke.

Luke and I would eventually make our way to the clubs in Collingwood, the sauna at Banana Alley and swim in the neo-Roman lap-pool. I'd seen lads his age at the clubs often enough. Most Ballarat queer boys left for the City as soon as they could. In the meantime, before that rite of passage, I hoped to keep Luke entertained.

'Here, read this. You might find it amusing.'

*

I'd seen the lad pass by once too often. I decided to follow and have my wicked way with him. I cornered him in a cubicle.

I drove in deeply with a ferocity that surprised me. The nameless lad still had his jeans around his ankles by the time I returned to my favourite creaky box in the corner but I had a re-think and returned to the recently vacated cubicle.

The youth was just on his way out, stumbling into the unfamiliar dull red gloom.

'Coffee?' I suggested.

'Sure.' He was trying to study me as he clumsily buttoned up tight Levi's.

In the lounge we made ourselves coffee, found a quiet corner table and looked into each other's faces for the first time.

'Xavier.'

'You're absolutely gorgeous,' I said unhesitatingly. Not to say precisely that would have been a kind of betrayal. I was afraid of a faux pas.

He smiled, flushed pink, unphased.

'I used to watch it all the time, Absolutely Fabulous. Now it's Queer as Folk,' he said. We studied each other's eyes, me into dark green depths, Xavier into blue.

'I haven't seen you here before,' I said.

'I haven't been here before. I shouldn't even be here. I wasn't sure whether I'd be allowed in. The bloke on the door seemed cool though. I've been wanting to come here for ages. It's been a bit hard

because I'm at school. I've been to a few clubs like The Peel and The Exchange but I don't like all the booze and loudness. I don't like drinking much.'

I nodded. I rarely went anywhere except the Club and Banana Alley because there was an absence of loud dance music. I needed a clear head for why I frequented such places in the first place.

'What school do you go to?' I asked.

'Xavier. Xavier from Xavier.' A dimpled smile played.

'The Jesuits. The intellectual army of the Church. How is it?'

'Good. I like it. I don't have any problems. I'm out and there are quite a few others who are too. We don't take any stick from anyone.'

I talked about the Alan Hollinghurst book I was reading, *The Line of Beauty*. Xavier spoke about his studies.

'I haven't read any of his stuff. I'd like to. I'm so busy with schoolwork. We've been studying the Vietnam War and all the student protests against the War. It must have been exciting to live then.'

'Yep. Students have taken leading roles throughout history to stop wars and fight for social justice. It's natural. Youth is idealistic and romantic. Look at the huge numbers of students from secondary schools and universities who've been in peace rallies recently. It reminds me of the Victorian Secondary Students' Union in the seventies.'

'I didn't know one existed,' said Xavier, 'it's so quiet in Australia now even though there's so much shit going on. The Government is trying to destroy

students. I don't know why. We're the future! Students today only seem interested in business studies. It's all so boring.'

'Yeah, well, that's economic rationalism for you,' I said, forgetting Xavier may not have got this far in his studies.

'Our teacher told us about economic rationalism. Yeah. It's irrationalism when people don't matter.'

Xavier checked his watch.

'Christ! Is that the time! Mum'll kill me. I have to go.'

I moved into preservation mode.

'Let's exchange numbers.' I wasn't going to let slip the catch of the night.

I made my way into the movie lounge where Conan The Barbarian was enjoying another dust-off. I went upstairs, found an empty room, snibbed the door, dimmed the light and stretched out on the black vinyl bench. I thought about Xavier from Xavier, the long black hair I'd ran my hands through, the Church I'd left behind and the student movement I'd once been part of.

*

I ceased being a 'practising Catholic' in 1969. From then on I've viewed the Catholic Church from the outside, from a social justice perspective rather than a doctrinal or theological one. The big change came from studying the sociology of religion at LaTrobe University. I saw Catholicism in its socio-political context. University also introduced me to

Freud, Jung and Sartre. They taught me that fear of one's sexuality made one repress it and that the worst homophobes are the most deeply repressed of all.

Consequently, I wasn't surprised in the 1980s when conservatives such as George Pell and Pope John-Paul II loaded AIDS onto their ideological bandwagon to beat homosexuals over the head with. In the 1980s and 1990s Vatican thought police cast a 1950s cold shadow over sexual morality: no masturbation, no sex before marriage, no homosexuality, no contraception, no abortion. No social justice there.

The Catholic Church has been obsessed with sex for two millennia because it is an exquisite and effective form of control. Yet many of Jesus' disciples were married and many were women. After a long battle a celibate clergy was finally enforced in the Western Church in 1139, by which time celibacy had become a necessary part of the political economy of the Church. Celibacy became the necessary option because the off-spring of priests were quite rightly laying claim to Church property and homosexual priests required protection. Celibacy was a way out.

The homophobic Letters of Saint Paul provided a scriptural base for celibacy. In a psychoanalytic sense, the Letters are revealing more of Paul's sexuality than anyone else's. Jesus himself didn't say a word about homosexuality.

The Australian writer Morris West shortly before his death in the late 1990s wrote of a 'schism of

fear' in the Church. It is a schism between doctrinaire oppressors and those inspired by the essential teachings of Jesus. As a self-styled secular pantheist, I concern myself with this tense dialectic. I am daily reminded of it. When my brother Bob was cared for in the AIDS Ward at Fairfield Hospital by the saintly Sister Greta, a Josephite Catholic nun, her love was unconditional for my brother. She was a saint. This stands in stark contrast to the refusal of the Church to allow condom use as millions die of AIDS and the lie of celibacy contributes to the abuse of children.

*

I had to distance myself from the Church. I had to fight to find myself and in the process of becoming, my sexuality became my sublimated religion. My body became my place of worship. My life was pumping tight arse. In the cottage there's an old altar I saved from the Nhill rubbish tip. The wooden altar with its carved reredos and panelled tabernacle smells of incense long ago. As an altar boy I sweated before it on stinking hot summer days in soutane and surplice. The altar reminds me daily of that boy and that I will not again allow myself to be a victim of an ideology, a philosophy or a religion. I would read them, pick out a rare and precious jewel and spit out the rest.

*

After the Club I had breakfast at Tamani's in Lygon Street and read *The Age*. Around lunchtime I wandered through Newman College and entered the semiotic bowels of the Student Union. There wasn't anything happening in the shower change room. Upstairs, there were no interesting political meetings. The National Union of Students found it hard to attract a crowd these days. It was a shadow of its former self in the glory days of the Australian Union of Students in the early seventies.

I took an hour to walk back to Collingwood with a side trip to Charmaine's Ice-cream Parlour in Brunswick Street. On brick walls I read 'Culture is dead'; 'Anarchy rules. OK'; 'Lesbianism. Why settle for less?'; 'Queers bash back'. The slogans entertain me but the light on the hill no longer burns. That light belonged to a younger warrior heart. Today, the world is cold.

At the Club a young man drops his navy blue Yakka overalls to the black concrete. The working class lad from the industrial desert of Sunshine burst his silver onto his overalls. I shudder in working class solidarity up his arse, my place of manufacture, my sex factory. I speed like crazy. Amyl blows my brain as the lad from the wasteland pushes down on me in a frenzy.

'I'm Troy. I'm from Sunshine,' he gasps.

'I'll fuck you Sunshine,' I whisper in his ear.

On a high night in the City I could be Doctor Feelgood and Doctor Strangelove as I hurtle into ideological contradictions and cavort with Dionysian celebration.

‘Can we meet again?’ Troy seeks naively but I’m already into the factory gloom. His question trails into sexual ether.

I go to the City for sex. The Casino is a mug’s game, a tinsel palace for anxious paupers and the stupid rich. Parliaments are tribal zones for the unctuous and greedy. Cathedrals are for the panic-stricken. No, none of that for me. Flesh is my currency. It’s my version of economic rationalism. The City is the heart of the beast, a sexual stock exchange.

Universities, theatres, museums, galleries, cathedrals and libraries I deconstruct as relevant to my animal drive. Each to his own. I juggle them, play with them, gamble, win and lose. Early on, in my early twenties, I took a good hard look at what I was, where I wanted to go and how to get it. Then I went for it. Sex turned me as cold as the dollar, mean, calculating and hot. Very, very hot.

Yet, every so often I would call into Saint Patrick’s Cathedral to take in a Missa Solemnis. Sitting in thin orange light thrown through the clerestory glass I smelt the amyl nitrate on my hands. Remnant midnight blue and lightning gold flash with fading Ecstasy as my mind frolics with angelic choirboys.

I went for promiscuity. Didn’t we all in 1969? The dog chasing its tail. The rapacious, chardonnay swilling chattering classes failed to charm. I went for rough trade.

I didn’t waste time while the moral majority debated my rights. Church and State were a conspir-

acy of repressive tolerance, a mischievous and purposeful oppression.

Equal rights for homosexuals became a national human rights issue for the Australian Government and the United Nations. I admire homosexual rights activists such as Bob Brown and Rodney Croome from Tasmania. Brown successfully stood for the Greens in the Australian Senate. Michael Kelly from the Rainbow Sash Movement fights homophobia in the Catholic Church. Jamie Gardiner, David Menadue, Adam Carr and others continue the battle for social justice. Graham Willett at Melbourne University has established a renowned research base on the history of homosexuality in Australia. I worked with teachers and students to fight homophobia in the profession and with unionists such as John Lewis in the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association and the Technical Teachers' Union of Victoria.

I fought the good fight.

Encased in the bluestone mausoleum of Daniel Mannix' Saint Patrick's Cathedral my wild night lingers. After Mass, a reasonable rendition of Josquin des Pres' Missa Pange Lingua, I return to the Club. The more I wanted the more I had and there was always more in a city I'd sexualised, a city that alienated yet drew me in.

I sit in the gloom and fumble for the dimmer to check the time for the next train to Ballarat. Two hours. I find my favourite wooden box and wait bemused, thinking about whether to go to Banana Alley or Wet on Wellington for a sauna, have sex in

the steam and misty, red glow and watch porn. There'd always be a train to Ballarat.

In solitary moments with no one to seduce I take myself into a room. I turn the dimmer to full and check the hard, black, vinyl bench to make sure it's clean after the last punters have finished. I leave the door partly open for the chancing eye of a cowboy climbing the stairs, his grey eyes twinkling with expectation.

You'll do! Hi ho Silver! Jason to his mates, we ride screaming into the sunrise and spray pearl jam across orange pink Melbourne dawn.

*

Luke hoped to score after school.

He took a walk the long way around the Lake by the toilets. He parked himself next to a possibility. There didn't seem to be any action, just a pair of black db's.

He thought the occupant was lingering. He decided to look over the top of the dividing wall. This was a delicate art, standing on the bowl, making sure there weren't any straights standing at the urinal, no passers-by to see him through the outside grill. He carefully peered over the dividing wall. Should the opposite incumbent be looking up there was always a heart leap. Reaction could be anything from an invitation to visit, a smack in the mouth from a basher or a set up and bust by the police. It was a razor's edge of uncertainty, fear and expectation. It was sex on a knife-edge.

He took a peep.

The occupant was a young guy about his own age. Luke quickly checked him out then got down. He wasn't sure. He looked under the wall. He couldn't see much because of the lad's overcoat. He wondered what to do. To leave his cubicle was not a lightly taken move. Another person could claim it. He decided to risk it. He left the cubicle. He gently pushed the next door open. There was no objection from the occupant. Luke entered and closed the door. The country lad was pulling a rock hard cock for all he was worth. Luke was hard as a shovel handle. He knelt down at the altar. On the piss he pissed on concrete he sucked for sacred wine and tickled the lad's pink nipples. Nothing virtual here. Two ecstatic gods. Half boys, half men, poured by god, stomachs and chests tight, white and hairless in cold grey light, form aesthetic, the rustic youths took turns to kneel.

'Is there somewhere we can go?' asked Luke.

'I'm being picked up in half an hour. I live out of town,' said the youth. They silently burst onto the cream-tiled wall.

They went outside. Luke led the way to the blue-stone doorstep of the Pavilion and sat in the sheltered doorway. He retrieved a crumpled packet of Drum from baggie denims and began a rollie.

'D'ya smoke?' Luke asked.

His mate registered weed.

'Love it,' he said. Luke rolled a racer. His new-found mate told him he was 'here all the time' but Luke'd never seen him before.

‘I’m in a band. We played at the Lounge last night,’ he said to impress, ‘d’ya wanna meet again?’

‘Sure.’

But they wouldn’t and they said goodbye.

He strolled back to Ballarat East along the Yarrowee. He had to get some shut-eye because he had to front at Bi-Lo. But his curiosity got the better of him and in darkness shot with dawn and scarcely before he knew what he was doing he was walking along the bank of the bluestone channel. The towers of Ballarat receded behind him and water trickled beside him in the Yarrowee. He took the track leading up to the cottage, went around the back and knocked. Nothing. Must be in Melbourne. He went around to the front bedroom window and tapped on the pane. He waited. The blind shifted. Yes!

*

‘Joe Orton the playwright got off in public toilet blocks in London,’ I said, ‘Jean Genet cruised the cemeteries, public toilets and streets of Paris. He used to book into seedy hotels near railway stations and pick up. Oscar Wilde dandied the streets of Naples for rent boys. It’s part of the homosexual underlife Luke, part of being different, not mainstream. The danger’s always there, bashers, undercover cops, thieves, muggers, users and ...’

‘So why didn’t ya come to the Lounge? It was great. We played. Ya said you’d come.’

‘I clean forgot Luke. I’ve been in Melbourne.

There'll be another time won't there?'

'Yeah. I was looking out for you. I was disappointed. I wasn't gunna come here tonight.' He thought of the lad he'd just had but his groin ached for more as the sun crept over Mount Pleasant.

*

I'd spent days trawling Melbourne's flesh dens. There was that secret spot in the basement behind the big oil drums where I'd have a joint and float into nirvana. I was my own Indian mystic as all around youths frantically fucked each other.

'James rang,' I told Luke quietly, 'remember him? He wants to do a follow up interview. I suggested he come up next weekend.'

'What?' asked Luke half asleep.

'James. He wants to come up next weekend. He's researching student politics in Australia. He lives in Ormond College.'

'What's he like?' asked Luke.

'Well, he's got green eyes. Not bad looking. He's got gold-rimmed spectacles and he's very bright.'

'How old is he?'

'He's doing first year at University so he'd be eighteen now.'

'Cool.' Luke inadvertently reminded me how ancient I was. Payback.

In the candlelight I noticed he had a new red glass stud in his left earlobe. The facets glittered in the yellow light. I captured the moment.

*

The weekend came up quickly. Warm sunlight streamed through the lounge room window. Luke glanced at me from where he was sitting in front of my computer. James plied me with questions. I tried to include Luke in the conversation.

‘Political instability can add an edge to sexual adventure. It’s like an aphrodisiac,’ said James.

Luke gave me a stare.

‘No doubt about it,’ I replied. ‘Russia after the October 1917 Revolution is a good example. So is the May 1968 student uprising in Paris. The best sex is during political chaos, when youthful spirit fights for justice, freedom and truth. Danger and revolution are aphrodisiacs.’ I returned Luke’s stare. ‘Even your name Luke comes from lux which is Latin for light.’

‘That’s first year Latin,’ said Luke testily.

I crawled into my box. Luke loved etymology. He glared at James and returned to the computer, a satisfied smile on his face. A little victory. I sensed he might be jealous of James and me. Was he attracted to James? Was it more than intellectual rapport?

Luke sat engrossed at the screen. He read that ‘straights’ didn’t exist, that such a sexual entity didn’t exist at all. He read that all men secretly want to fuck their male mates and that women sought the comfort of women. He read that ‘straights’ themselves were finally discovering the excitement of dark, secret places and covert adventures at night.

He read that homosexuals spread new trends in fashion, language, theatre, literature and thought.

He was a hot boy in a cold world as he cruised queer websites. The crimson corridors and steamy sex of Melbourne were close yet out of reach. He sat on the bluestone step of the Pavilion waiting for a personals.com to roll up. He entered the sanctuary. Pearl jam shot onto the tiles, silver flew and country boy shot his load.

*

‘Let’s do it,’ said James.

‘Yes, we should make a start,’ I said. It was cold and wet outside. ‘James, I don’t want you to get the impression I was a major student leader. I wasn’t. I was second rung. I was an ordinary country lad caught up in historical circumstances.’

‘But you became well known didn’t you?’ James queried, ‘I mean there’s a mythology built around you, a legend...’

‘I guess that’s true, but there were hundreds of us who were well-known as student activists, radicals, draft resisters, communists and anarchists. Many of us were in the media at that time. I remember Professor Wolfsohn telling me ‘you’re only trouble Brian is you don’t have enough flags and banners around you. You could be more successful. Colour and propaganda, colour and propaganda! A populist democrat must have them. All political leaders know how to use propaganda.’

‘Who was Wolfsohn?’ James asked.

‘Hugo Wolfsohn. Professor of Politics at LaTrobe University in the seventies. On reflection, I think Hugo was being ironic. He was teasing me. He was very anti-totalitarian. He wrote a book called *The Ideology Makers* which was influential.’

‘I’ll check it out,’ said James.

James thought for a moment. ‘People like Albert Langer, Harry van Moorst, Michael Hamel-Green and Michael Hyde, they were well known?’

‘You’ve been reading up James. Yes, they were the significant ones. As I said, there were hundreds, even thousands of us. The Melbourne student scene was very radical and popular in the late sixties, early seventies.’

‘Do you ever wonder what happened to them all?’ James asked.

‘I do. Many are in politics and academia, professors, Government ministers and bureaucrats. Many went into teaching and union work. John Cummins became a leading organiser with the radical Builders’ Labourers’ Federation and Brian Boyd became Secretary of the Trades Hall Council. Some disappeared into mindless suburbia. Some have died. I’ve made a little list for you.’

On it were Grant Evans, Demos Krouskos, David and Jan Mueller, Robert Watts, Maggie Grant, Gail Rockman, Ross Laird, Peter Dowling, Tom Brennan, Judy Blood, Mary Stewart, Anita Warne, Phillipa and Jan Schapper and John Herouvim.

‘It’s not an exclusive list,’ I advised, ‘we were New Leftists. Many became teachers, academics and bureaucrats.’

‘Can’t say I’m familiar with any of them,’ said James scanning, ‘but what about you Brian, what became of you?’ James asked, getting to the nub of it.

‘I never had a stellar career James. We all had our patrons and acolytes but I wasn’t passionately ambitious. Still, I was determined to go with a bang not a whimper, to rage against the dying of the light, to burn out not fade away as Dylan Thomas said. However we spend our lives it’s still a William Blake wasteland in a dark satanic mill. What else is there James? Birth, copulation and death? Isn’t that all there is? Isn’t that how the song goes? Is that all there is?’

James looked at me confusedly, unsure how to respond to my introspection.

‘That’s a depressing outcome for you isn’t it?’ he suggested eventually.

‘Don’t get me wrong James. I had a wonderful life as a student, a charmed life.’ I smiled conspiratorially at James who quickly blushed and returned to his laptop. I glanced over at androgynous Luke who’d stumbled on the work of Alan Watts, the famous American Zen philosopher so significant in the spiritual consciousness of an earlier generation of students. No doubt about it I thought to myself, there are compensations for the queer unemployed on a cold, wet day in Ballarat.

‘Watts was an inspiration to us at university Luke,’ I offered. Luke nodded.

‘Let’s take a break,’ I said to them both, ‘let’s listen to some William Burroughs.’

Let the love spurt out of you like a firehose of molasses.

Give him the kiss of life.

Stick your tongue down his throat.

Taste what he's been eating

and bless his digestion.

Ooze down into his intestines

and help him along with his food.

Let him know that you revere his rectum

as part of an ineffable whole.

Make him understand that he'll stand in naked awe of his genitals as part of the master plan.

Life in all its rich variety do not falter.

Let your love enter into him, unto him

and penetrate him with a divine lubricant.

XKY and lanolin will feel like sandpaper.

It's the most mucilaginous, slimiest, ooziest

lubricant ever was or shall be. Amen.

'No mucking about there,' Luke smirked.

'It's from Dead City Radio 1990,' I explained, 'his best-known books were The Naked Lunch and The Wild Boys. They're on the shelves here.'

Luke made a mental note to check my books. He'd use Burroughs in his next text analysis to stir up his English teacher, a young guy nervously floundering in front of the senior boys at Saint Patrick's.

James grinned mischievously. 'Would you like to hear about my first night out at The Exchange in South Yarra?' he said.

‘Go for it James,’ said Luke, eager for stories about Melbourne.

‘Well, I was in my final year at Scotch. One night a few of us were at The Exchange and I was invited back to this party at a flat in South Yarra. Half a dozen Bundies later, a line of speed and a few joints then the real party began. We began playing Strip Jack Naked. There were four guys and yours truly stripped to our boxers. The first to lose his boxers had to take it. That was the deal. Wouldn’t you know, it was me. Well, to tell the truth I don’t know for sure ‘cause I was pretty out of it by that stage. Anyhow I lost, so I had to spread eagle across the kitchen table. I told them to take it easy but it was pretty rough. They just kept on fucking me.’

‘I bet ya were sore afterwards,’ said Luke grinning.

James paused. ‘I half enjoyed it I must admit.’

‘I’ll bet,’ said Luke saliverring.

A pause before James broke the silence. ‘We’re not going to get much work done now. Let’s get a fresh start in the morning. I wouldn’t mind crashing. I’m tired.’

‘Crash in my room,’ Luke told him.

*

Alone, I lay back on the chesterfield listening to R.E.M. staring at the booklined room, a connoisseur’s collection of sixties and seventies left-liberal lit. It was all there, Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilisation*; *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed* by Paulo

Friere; Noam Chomsky's American Power And The New Mandarins; Theodore Roszak's The Making Of A Counter Culture; The Power Elite by C.Wright Mills; Wilhelm Reich's The Mass Psychology Of Fascism and The Sexual Revolution; Angela Davis' If They Come In The Morning; Seize The Time by Bobby Seale; the ground-breaking A New Britannia by Humphrey McQueen from The University of Sydney thirty years ago. The texts were required reading for an aspiring student of Australian and Western political culture. Many continue to be influential and self-fulfilling such as Alvin Toffler's Future Shock, yet today's students might not have heard of them. Now it's all Michael Foucault, postmodernism, deconstruction and cultural studies and yes, I.T. and E-Commerce. The academic literature that was new and fresh forty years ago is today scarcely studied in depth. It gathers dust on thousands of ageing babyboomers' bookshelves, to be thrown out with unwanted, unpublished manuscripts and wished-for masterpieces after the inevitable happens and we drop off the deep end.

1969. It was just like yesterday. I had my existential catharsis as a first year undergraduate in a cell-like room in newly built Robyn Boyd's Menzies College at Latrobe University. I was fresh from the Chirnside mansion that was the Jesuit Seminary at Werribee Park. A shading grey of apostasy swam before me as I rationalised my way from fundamentalist Roman Catholicism to agnosticism to atheistic libertarianism. I had midnight nightmares.

I saw my boy's face. Peaches and cream my mother and father used to call me. I see the torture scabs of teenage years and the sex-cross of Church and State.

At University, armies of the night knocked on the doors of a thousand friends. It was the death-knock of the Special Branch as politicians secretly fucked and paid for silence lest they be outed from plush leather legislatures as they vote down a same-sex rights bill.

I wasn't one for the Party machine or a Church pew on Sunday. The Pope condemned us as a Cardinal sucked off a Swiss Guard in the Vatican archives. There's been two thousand years of hypocrisy, homosexual oppression and theological and doctrinal deceit. Twisted biblical texts and distorted minds prejudice the young as purple bishops abuse power. But truth will out.

And it has come out I tell myself as I lie on my battered old chesterfield in 2008. Organised religion has screwed the people and a person can only be screwed just so much then snap! If religion was opium that might have been a saving grace but that wasn't quite what Karl Marx had in mind when he wrote religion was the opiate of the masses. My opium was Luke and James in the spare room in a little miner's cottage by the Yarrowee Creek. I exalt as the pagan pair shove hot cock down the throat of religious persecution and Luke and James are canonised saints.

Their road would be easier than mine. My homosexuality, whilst not uncommon in Australian aca-

demic, Church or political circles, was not exactly welcomed. It hadn't helped me climb 'the ladder of opportunity', though on reflection I doubt I ever seriously wanted to.

Homophobia, I discovered by brutal experience, was alive and well in whatever circles one mixed. Quite a few did climb the ladder of success despite or because of the odds. Dennis Altman for example, who'd done work at Cornell and lectured in Politics at Sydney. I knew Altman in the seventies in the heady days of the Australian Union of Students. We parted with an autographed copy of his *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* in my hand. I was too much of a loose cannon for the intricacies of academic politics; too ill-disciplined for the strictures of academic publishing.

I watched bemused as comrades from student revolution years worked their way into safe Labor seats. They became comfortable and well off. Jim Bacon became Premier of Tasmania, a surprise to the Left and a greater surprise to the Right. Bacon's links to radical Worker-Student Alliance days at The Bakery in Prahran and the Builders' Labourers Federation, itself linked to the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) through Norm Gallagher, was all grist for the mill in tabloids. My closest political colleague at University was Ian Macdonald who eventually entered the New South Wales Parliament. He was a founding member of Students for a Democratic Society in the late sixties, together with John Landau from Sydney University. Another contemporary was Chris Sidoti who came

to head the Commission for Human Rights. Geoff Walsh, who'd been a Maoist with me at LaTrobe University, became Federal Secretary of The Australian Labor Party. He'd been an ILO official in Geneva. Politicians, academics and bureaucrats. Brilliant careers. Who would have thought it in 1969 as we paraded in tight denim, Afro hairstyles and Mao badges and spouted from Mao's Little Red Book at occupations of the Administration Building at University?

I told James about them. It was for the record. I explained that there was a price to be paid for not being a team player and that my life was rough and tempestuous. I was an outsider. It was my nature. I had to run my own game. It wasn't an orthodox game. It was more like the game played by Hal Porter in his *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*. A lone wolf.

Student days had peers marking me for a political career. I was radical, perhaps charismatic, or so I'd been told. I was a rousing speaker at student rallies on Australian campuses and down at the Melbourne docks when things got rough in 1970. Immodesty aside, I sensed I had stature that inspired confidence, a blond haystack of hair, gazing skyblue eyes and a cutting rhetoric. Ambitious rivals set me as someone to watch. I was a player. Little did I know the twists that play would take.

My role as a student leader brought me to the attention of the security and intelligence agencies. Others more prominent such as Albert Langer, Harry Van Moorst, Michael Hyde, Michael Hamel-

Green, Jim Bacon and his radical sister Wendy were among hundreds that comprised an emerging radicalised intelligentsia. We urged a socio-political revolution that re-shaped Australian political consciousness.

We were players in the biggest game of all. Government agencies bugged our phones and bedrooms, intercepted mail, planted tabloid scandal, interrogated and gaoled us and excluded us from Australian Universities in an effort to stop the unstoppable.

James' weekend visit caused me to look back on those tumultuous years. 1972 was a high point. It heralded the fall of the Conservatives and the advent of the reformist Whitlam Government that fell apart three years later on November 11, 1975. 1972 also marked the end of the so-called 'student revolution'.

*

Late next morning James emerged from Luke's bedroom. It was another hour before James was showered and sat bright eyed before me with a mug of black coffee and reading *The Age*. The paper carried a feature on the woes of the Federal Labor Party and its inability to fashion a vision that captured the imagination of the Australian electorate.

'Beasley was so conservative,' said James, 'they need someone like Keating.'

'Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard make a good team,' I said, 'electable. Let me tell you a story about the ALP. In 1975, Neil McLean, the President

of the Australian Union of Students, visited Canberra with Jose Ramos Horta from East Timor's Fretelin to get support for the fledgling Timorese government. Bill Hayden, the Foreign Minister was away, and Reg Morrison was Acting. We sat there listening as Morrison yelled at his flunkies from an inner sanctum.

'Not those bloody radical students again,' Morrison yelled. Neil and I looked at each other. Morrison didn't want to know us. Why? Because the radical Australian Union of Students had served its purpose. We were the vanguard against the defeated Conservative Government of Billy McMahon in December 1972. Now that Labor was in power, the 'we're in government now' attitude took over. Twenty-five years of appeasement and slaughter in East Timor followed. The Whitlam Government was not a radical or revolutionary Government. It wasn't a socialist Government. It was barely a social democrat Government.'

'Once in power, the vision and promise of 'the revolution' evaporated. It was ironic. I was naïve enough to believe that being in government would be the beginning of the revolution. Instead, there was just substantial reform. Education became 'free'. It's unbelievable today to think that tertiary education was 'free' thirty years ago. Medibank, as it was then called, was a major improvement in health for the poor. There were major policy initiatives in decentralisation, the environment, aboriginal land rights and the arts. There was a more independent foreign policy. Washington didn't like that.'

James nodded sagely as long white fingers tapped the keys of his laptop. I surged on.

‘The Whitlam Government represented a social democrat style of change. In the main it was just tinkering. There was no substantial change to the fundamental structures and institutions of Australian society. Being young, romantic and idealistic I expected too much. Many of the policy initiatives were driven by the radical Australian Union of Students. It’s understandable why Whitlam didn’t seize the day and declare a republic on the 11 November 1975 when John Kerr dismissed him. A revolutionary would have. Whitlam was not a revolutionary. He was a Parliamentarian. It was the revolution that never happened.’

James sipped coffee and meditatively rolled a Drum.

‘Australia will never have a revolution like China or Russia or the United States,’ he said.

‘Just as well,’ I added, ‘thirty years of maturity has mellowed my fervour after the rage of 1975. No one would wish to have a bloody revolution. It isn’t worth it.’

‘A Mahatma Gandhi style would be more successful, more long lasting,’ James reflected, ‘passive resistance, wear the bastards down. Demoralise the rich. Destroy their pride and profits. The British had to get out of India in 1948. They had no answer to Gandhi.’

James was young, intelligent and had plenty of time. More than I had anyhow. He was a friend for Luke.

‘How do you really feel about that tumultuous period of the sixties and early seventies?’ James asked. He was persistent.

‘All those comrades?’ I smiled.

‘All those comrades,’ he repeated.

I remember those hazy, crazy days at Australian Union of Students’ conferences beneath the chandeliers in the old ballroom at The George Hotel in Fitzroy Street, St. Kilda. The marijuana smoke hung in the air as the Vietnam War raged. The Black Panthers appeared and Dennis Walker and Roberta Sykes (‘Bobbi’ as I knew her) were vocal and radical. Mick Conway’s Captain Matchbox Whoopie Band kept us entertained and the band’s violin player Inge da Costa became a friend.

‘We were all idealistic then James. There was hope for the world. We were the future. Today’s generation might think we screwed up badly but human history is full of disappointed hopes and unexpected triumphs. As history progresses, the 1960s might have a decreased significance. After all, it was only three or four decades ago. How will cultural theorists look at the sixties in say, two hundred years time? I wonder. Will it be the same way we look at the Enlightenment of the 1700s? We don’t know. We’re still too close. It’s difficult to put the 1960s into an accurate historic context. Time is a great leveller. Perhaps the era we’re living in right now, the early twenty-first century will prove to be more significant. There’s a great movement for peace internationally, for community and neighbourhood action and radical action on the environ-

ment. The twenty first century is the big one. It's your century James, yours and Luke's. I have faith in your generation. As for former comrades, well, we've all gone our separate ways.'

James nodded. 'Others will make judgements?' suggested James.

'Others always make judgements,' I affirmed, 'I don't have any illusions about what will be made of me. Death brings the vultures. I'd rather my life wasn't twisted into something it isn't. That's where you come in. Luke too.'

'To prevent that from happening?'

'Exactly.'

'Back to work?' James suggested.

'Back to work.'

*

There've been two rivers in my life, one sexual, one political. Sex won. These two rivers are the food of my imagination. They turn the water-wheel of my life. At times the rivers seem far apart, alone in severe intent, strict, cold, uncompromising, leading connected yet separate lives. At other times, sex and politics heave and thrash as one.

When sex temporarily exhausts its juices I turn to the political where a power play of accounting takes place.

Part of this accounting is the realisation that some of my 'comrades' of years ago turned out to be self-admitted undercover operatives for the Australian Security Intelligence Organization. Others, such as

Andrew Campbell, worked for Prime Minister Fraser in the Office of National Assessments. In the early 1980s in a welter of national publicity, he spilt the beans on the entire political intelligence farce that posed as 'national security'. He verified that the Organization, in contrast to official public denial, maintains a file on every Australian. He did the decent thing, resigned and resumed an academic career with a Doctorate on B.A. Santamaria.

'I was initially surprised there were spies and informants,' I told James, 'but the Left was riddled with them. They were in the heart of academe in what we liked to imagine as the Australian Left Establishment.'

'Andrew and I used to share the tropic madness of some drug or other in crazy Carlton in the seventies. At least Andrew came in from the cold. Others, known only to a few, still haven't come in from the cold. They still operate. Ghosts from University years re-appear in clammy midnight nightmares. I learnt the hard way about the methods of informants and undercover operatives.'

'They were part of the political reality of our times James, part of the under-belly. As a neophyte Maoist and Marxist-Leninist, I scarcely suspected the colossal capacity of corporate capitalism to continually re-invent itself. I was surprised by the sudden demise of the student rebellion when Whitlam came to power in 1972. The radical movement was gobbled up by the python of corporate capitalism. The gorgeous 'youth rebellion' worked its way through the acid gut and dropped out of the anus of history.'

James laughed at the metaphor. ‘You were rooted in secrecy,’ he quipped.

I chuckled. ‘That was the title of a book by Joan Coxsedge and Ken Coldicutt: *Rooted In Secrecy*, about the Kerr coup in 1975. Jean Genet understood betrayal,’ I added, ‘so did Burgess, Philby, Maclean and Blunt.’

‘I’ve read Genet,’ said James, ‘I’ve never heard of the others. Who were they?’

‘They were British spies during the Cold War.’ It never ceased to amaze me how the passing of time thinned the knowledge of history in succeeding generations of students.

‘They all went to Cambridge in the thirties. A film called *Another Country* was made about it,’ I said.

‘Tell me about 1972. It seems an important year.’

‘Whatever happened to the revolution? We were all so caught up in the furnace of what we told each other was ‘the revolution’. 1972. I was 23. I was on the run for most of that year. There was a warrant out for my arrest. The University and the State Government of Sir Henry Bolte laid charges against me. ‘Hangman Bolte’ as he was better known.’

‘Certain incidents from 1972 jump out at me. I remember one frosty morning in May 1972. Ian MacDonald and I were in ‘the cage’ at the City Watch-house. We’d spent the night in the same cell. ‘The cage’ was a concave expanse of steel-ribbed reinforced mesh open to the elements where the ensnared paced the concrete. It was an aviary for jailbirds. It was fucking freezing. Our breath

steamed in the chill autumn air as Ian and I stared incredulously at an old Greek alcoholic trying to stuff a filthy handkerchief down his throat to stop himself from dry-retching.’

‘Ian had been arrested under the National Service Act. He was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and conscription. Ian and I were Marxists. We spent a lot of time discussing the elusive blueprint for ‘the revolution’.

‘The sooner begun the sooner done. Remember Lenin,’ I exhorted Ian. I had the ideological fervour of a recent convert. The Greek man gagged and vomited on the concrete.

‘I’m getting out of here,’ Ian told me, ‘I’m going conscientious objection. I can do more to help on the outside.’ I focused my eyes on the cigarette-buffed concrete. Ian won his case and was released. You can’t have a parliamentary career in prison.’

‘How did you feel when Ian left?’ asked James.

‘Ian and I were very different people. Ian wanted to be a politician. He came from a tough and poor background. I had a tough upbringing too but I was more of a romantic. I wasn’t interested in a conventional political career. I wasn’t as driven as Ian. I was the martyr and he was the politician and that’s what he became, a politician.’

‘But you both belonged to the Labor Party for a while?’ James asked.

‘We did, but my membership was discontinuous. Ian was in for the long haul. I joined the Communist Party for a time. Ian was always the professional political party operator. I wasn’t. I’m not a member

of any Party now. There was a time when I was a member of the socialist faction of the Labor Party. In those days, the early seventies, the Victorian socialist-left faction was forever on the backfoot. It was unable to reconcile itself to the pragmatic conservatism of the Centre of the Party, the likes of Simon Crean, Gareth Evans and Bob Hawke. The Socialist Left was rather dour in the seventies. It had a grey neo-Stalinism about it. I left the ALP for the Communist Party in 1974. The ALP is very pragmatic today, with Labor Governments in all States. The Left, what remains of it anyway, is itself conservative and uninspiring. The ALP Left consists of hopelessly splintered, greedy, unwelcoming, ambitious cliques. Anyhow, Ian stuck at it. That's why he's a Cabinet Minister.'

'So for me it was all too little too slow. I turned my idea of revolution back to the people. I jettisoned the flim flam of Party politics. 'The Revolution' became what I thought, said and did in everyday life. An ALP politician once told me he represented 'ordinary' Australians, as if once becoming a politician, one becomes extraordinary or special. I never bought that. As a romantic idealist I'd skidded from the straightjacket of a Jesuit seminary into the political mayhem of those on the political make. I wasn't ready for it and in the end I wasn't cut out for it.'

'You saw through the path to power and glory bit?' queried James.

'Yep. That's how Frank Hardy put it in *Power Without Glory*, a stepping stone to nowhere.'

‘Perhaps you were too unrealistic in your hopes,’ James suggested.

‘I wonder,’ I sighed, ‘I guess I was unrealistic, even just plain naïve and stupid. Many former comrades now sit on the leather of State and Federal legislatures counting their way to the richest superannuation scheme in the nation.’

‘Politics is just a career, like being a doctor or a lawyer,’ said James. He spoke from today’s generation where politics was business and business was politics. ‘Maybe it’s just sour grapes. Maybe you just didn’t have the balls, you know, the killer instinct.’

‘Maybe,’ I replied, taken aback, ‘let’s take a break,’ I suggested. I put the kettle on for two black coffees and rolled a little joint.

‘It’s quite eerie how the wheel comes full circle,’ I said. ‘When I was at LaTrobe University there was a young woman there called Christine Hardy. Christine was a supporter of the National Civic Council and the Democratic Labor Party, both conservative Catholic outfits. Christine supported the University when it put me in prison. She supported the Santamaria position of involvement in the Vietnam War.’

‘She was able to join the Labor Party when the Democratic Labor Party unions were re-affiliated in 1986. This marked the end of the 1955 ALP Split. Christine then became a Minister in the Bracks Government. Ironic. At a Community Cabinet meeting in Ballarat a few years ago I made myself known to Christine to remind her of ‘the good old

days' at LaTrobe. Suddenly, half a dozen minders spirited her away. I was an unwanted embarrassment. On other occasions, A.S.I.O. have suddenly turned up on my doorstep, under orders from a Labor Attorney-General. They asked me to inform on people I knew. The ALP factions hate each other's guts. How could I belong to a Party that imprisons its members and spies on them? No thanks.'

'Are you sure you're not just bitter and twisted?' asked James, taking the racer I passed into his hand.

'I don't waste time on bitterness and anger James. I follow a Buddhist philosophy. I don't waste my energy on negative emotions. You can see that in the way I live. I live very simply. What philosophy do you hold to James?'

James looked into me with his blue eyes. 'I'm not sure I hold to any particular belief system.'

How postmodern I thought. I directed my youthful protégé towards anarchism and recommended several texts from the wall of books, jewels from the treasure chest.

'Anarchism is the only truly liveable political philosophy James. Take these with you. Give them back when we meet up in Melbourne.'

I placed Alexander Berkman's Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist and Edward Luttwak's Coup d'etat: a Practical Handbook, on the oak desk. The desk was strewn with papers, journals, leftover joints and empty glasses, reminders of Luke's and my late night discursive sojourns in the history of ideas.

In the quietness of the midnight hour, after James

caught the train back to baronial Ormond College, I nostalgically loved my sometime comrades. I see them now as I saw them then, as comrades in arms. In the seventies we did play a leading part in tearing down prejudice, racism, homophobia and sexism. We helped to build the green movement. No doubt about it. We had changed the world.

Comrades such as Chris Joyce from Macquarie, Adrian Shackley from Armidale, Ian Yates from Adelaide, Dick Shearman from Queensland and others, such as Ron Theile and Jeff Hayler from Sydney and Darce Cassidy from Monash. On the Union's National Executive we worked with people such as Phillip Toyne from the Australian Conservation Foundation and Bruce McGuinness from the indigenous community. We raised the national consciousness. What had happened to them all? I hoped life had been good to them.

I have nostalgia for these lost friendships, a whimsy for what might have been. There are no friends in politics, just opportunities. I remember the campaigns, the mistakes and victories, such as learning from the failed Save Lake Pedder campaign then the victorious Save the Franklin River in Tasmania. The radical student movement was successful. It remains successful. That's why the Conservatives were so determined to smash the Australian Union of Students. It was the birthing ground for feminism, environmentalism, indigenous land rights and sexuality rights. Ours wasn't a violent revolution. It was, as Dr. Jim Cairns wrote, a 'quiet revolution'.

An effect of radical alternative culture in the sixties and seventies is today seen in the popularity of books such as Clive Hamilton's *Growth Fetish*. Hamilton points out that Australians increasingly reject the greedy meism of the past twenty years. We are downsizing. We're abandoning the unhappy ship of consumerist, shop-till-you-drop capitalism. We're becoming quality-of-life and spiritually oriented. Hardly surprising as babyboomers age and glimpse the grave.

*

'Good afternoon Luke.' I looked up from my writing at a dishevelled Luke as he made his way into the lounge room.

'James gone?' he asked sleepily.

'He left about an hour ago. We had a useful discussion. Good sleep?'

'Yeah sort of, a bit rough.'

That figures I thought, after all the dope James and you smoked last night.

'Have some cereal.'

Luke rustled about as I put finishing touches to an esoteric piece about a politician and a King's Cross rent boy. There was another with James spread-eagled over a kitchen table. I rounded off a third yarn about a good time at the Club jamming an index finger up a drunken young spunk, a jerk-off in grey-pink light, an audience of alabaster bodies quivering in silhouette. Luke sat down beside me with a bowl of Coco-pops.

‘Any more stories for me to read?’ he asked.

I printed them off.

‘I’ve got another one Luke, a playful fantasy about you.’

‘Yeah?’ he said between mouthfuls of Cocomops, ‘print it off too.’

‘It’s different to the others Luke. I wrote it just for you.’

*

My vision for Luke was drawn from Narcissus, Adonis and Ganymede. It was a starstuff dream from cosmic consciousness.

Forests of phalli sprang before him. Sucking mouths on splashes of silver streaked across his sky. Rivers swirled with ejaculate. Oceans of life cracked and crashed. Volcanoes spewed orange and yellow. The natural order of things swam into and out of his consciousness.

He dreamt the earth was a screaming fireball. Greenblue fire-licks leapt and tongues soared into the sweet, tight, arse of his universe.

Boys on slicks of fire, thousands of light years long, flung off into his lightspace. Cocks spurted silver light into the face of god. He had a John Lennon vision. Imagine. Strawberry Fields Forever.

His hot seed spread and whirled with the earth-mother.

He besought the stars by day and night to fling him into starlight, to carry lover-boy to him on a tongue of fire, to receive and pollinate him, to send

him off as horny as hell, a new zealot to preach to the uncertain.

‘Lock up! Lock up!’ he screamed in the night sky, ‘you lovers of hatred, you anal retentive, gutless wonders, for the iceman cometh as cold as the blackest hole in deepest space and the great boyfuck awaits my screaming love-tool.

He raged and strode with ravishing stride from hole to sacred hole.

He ejaculated for joy, an avenging angel going from house to house in the universal suburb of civilisation.

And when his hurly burly was done, his battle lost and won, Luke the boy-god decreed his pleasure dome, ripped away his earthly mask and stood stark in cosmic nakedness. He was spawned in God’s cosmic mirror and howled with joy as he lived the cosmic dreamfuck of life.

He saw society as a gigantic brothel of arms dealers, pimps, junkies and murderers as the masses paid off mortgages that do not exist in the endless silence and nothingness of eternity.

He saw himself as a sex-ball of hot, salty semen hurtling through the black anus of space. He breathed the steamy air of a male whorehouse on a sweltering Sydney night. He was a rent-boy slouched on a red leather couch in Canberra as a Roman senator quietly paid him off. He was a poor country farm-boy hustling sweet, tight, virgin arse to big, rich, fat law-makers who fucked him stupid again and again, spread-eagled over the hard leather of legislature.

‘Boy-god,’ he prayed, ‘send your starlight into the darkest, deepest mystery of men’s hearts for their souls and minds are sold at auction to the lowest bidder.’

*

Luke stared at me. ‘Ya musta had too much too smoke when ya wrote that one,’ he quipped.

‘No Luke,’ I grinned, ‘I was very clear, translucent actually.’

Luke left for work at Bi-lo so I got stuck into the jungle of a garden that threatened to hide the cottage. The weeds finally beat me. The double block of land made me consider selling up and moving back to the City. In the end I preferred living in the country and travelling to the City. It gave a sense of visiting the clubs and saunas just an hour away. Besides, I partied more in the City than many who actually lived in the City. I didn’t have to live there to be there. All I had to do was lock up Il Monastero and catch the welfare super saver. A brisk walk along the Yarrowee embankment and before I knew it the conductor was punching my ticket. I settled down, closed my eyes and dreamt of Mr Right as the train rushed along Werribee Gorge.

Melbourne wasn’t my only city. I’d lived in Sydney, Australia’s poof capital, though some say this title has passed to Melbourne. I lived in Woolloomooloo for a few years in the eighties, a five-minute walk to the Opera House, the Botanical Gardens, the Harbour Bridge, all the clubs and pubs,

King's Cross and the magnificent Harbour itself.

Drug dealers lived next door, which was handy. There was a gaggle of lawyers on the other side and a doctor across the street. I basked in balmy Sydney days, strolled over to Farm Cove near the Opera House to pick up Swedish and German youths backpacking Australia, took them back to my Woolloomooloo attic with its view of King's Cross and had them as blue and pink flashing neon bathed our bodies.

People don't call Sydney the 'tart of the Pacific' for nothing. I wandered the Cross talking with rent boys at El Alamein Fountain and The Wall, precarious fun of a kind, the faces of users and working boys lined with desperation beyond their years. A quick trick for a quick fix. Every day was shorts, navy blue Bowie singlet and suntan lotion. I was my own Narcissus, Ganymede and Adonis.

*

At Farm Cove, just below Lady Macquarie's Chair, I looked over the Harbour towards Fort Denison. My roving eyes rested on a back-packer, very blond, tall, boyish, looking out towards the Fort. He walked around Lady Macquarie's Chair, a green expanse at the head of Farm Cove. I followed, pretending to read the inscription on the rockface of the Chair. English, Swedish or German I wondered. I searched for an opener.

'Hi. Where are you from?' I asked.

The golden youth flashed a star-quality smile,

sparkled blue eyes and flashed white teeth. His arse transfixed me, round, muscular tight mounds inside loose white slacks.

We began talking.

He was German. He'd been in Australia for a few months studying English. He'd just finished school in Munich, was staying with friends in Sydney and was off to Palm Beach tomorrow. Eighteen.

Time was short if I was to have him. I had to attend a dinner at Dory's Restaurant in Rose Bay at 8.00, a family affair I couldn't get out of. It was already 7.00. I still had to go to Woolloomooloo to shower and change. Time to the max.

We sat on the grass in the Botanic Gardens looking towards the Bridge and the Opera House. We talked politics, literature and film. We wandered over to discuss Aboriginal land rights with a group of Kooris.

His name was Klaus.

Klaus also had commitments that night. He had to go all the way to Epping to off-load his rucksack and change clothes.

'I want to ask you a question,' Klaus asked awkwardly. 'Are you ... are you ... gay or straight? I'm not, I mean, I'm straight, I don't really know. What are you?'

'Bisexual' I answered unswervingly, thinking bisexual was the best option in the circumstances if Klaus wasn't sure about either of our sexualities. I took a punt.

Decisions had to be made.

'I'll give you a call at 11.00 tonight,' Klaus told me. I gave Klaus my number then ran back to

Woolloomooloo. At the Rose Bay dinner I made excuses at dessert to a surprised table of family and friends. I taxied home.

Charlie my housemate reported that Klaus rang a minute ago and would ring back. I waited. Stomach churned. Off went the phone.

'I'm at Martin Place. It's crazy here,' said Klaus laughing. I told him to get a taxi to 8 Bourke Street, Woolloomooloo.

'Woolly what?'

'Wool-oo-moo-loo. Eight o's,' I explained.

Fifteen minutes later the phone rang.

'I can't get a taxi. I'm at Circular Quay.'

'I'll meet you at the Quay, at the 24 hour restaurant near the Opera House.'

I sprinted the few minutes to the Quay. I looked up and down through the tourist throng. There he was, sitting down at the railing by himself looking out over the harbour. Waiting.

We walked along Macquarie Street. It was fairy-lights and colours, the very way I felt. There was more politics and film talk about the television school in Munich he hoped to attend. I noticed Klaus' shoes. Conservative and expensive. He seemed really straight. I feared I'd made a mistake. We ambled under the Morton Bay fig trees in Hyde Park, lit up in rainbow-lights one sees in touristy cities everywhere. We went to Oxford Street and did the gay golden mile. The Exchange Hotel was pumping and hot. My Lennon glasses fogged up. First the downstairs bar then upstairs. We gave it half an hour then walked to Darlinghurst Road.

Klaus wanted a high-class straight disco. All I knew were gay ones: Patches, The Albury and Midnight Shift. At King's Cross, past the rent boys along the 'wailing wall', the Cross was the way the Cross always is on a Friday night. Packed, manic, rubbish everywhere, spruikers, dealers, working girls off their faces frantic for the next trick, the next fix. Rent boys looking for an angle.

We had a cappuccino at the outdoor restaurant at El Alamein Fountain. We talked of Hermann Hesse and of Klaus' German farmer friends in Horsham, Victoria, close to my own family in Nhill. We chatted about Grampians bush walks and the aged Austin car he wanted to drive around Australia. He questioned what was and is the 'typical Australia'. Did such a thing exist in this, the most urbanised, queerest of countries?

It was 3.00 a.m. In a few hours Klaus would get a train to Epping.

Time to play the game.

We stepped down the sandstone Butler Stairs to Woolloomooloo through orange floodlight. It was quiet. Shoes padded softly on the brown stone in the stillness before dawn.

Coffee in the lounge room.

'I'm tired Klaus,' I made out, 'do you want to share the double bed in the front room? There's nothing else.'

Klaus opted for the couch.

'I can't sleep close to someone,' he countered.

We stripped to underwear. I noted Klaus' cute boxer shorts and his bulge. I turned off the light.

I had no intention of sleeping. Minutes passed in darkness. I had to think of something. I couldn't ask if he was asleep. He lay there, silhouette in form, face down, scrumptious arse in white boxers. The lithe, smooth-skinned Teutonic beauty drove me to desperation.

Without speech, only one way remained.

I sat on the side of the bed and began to wank, slowly, audibly. If he was awake he'd hear.

Minutes passed. Klaus seemed, must really be, but maybe not, asleep. Time eternal. I hungered and fantasised as he stretched out in sleep.

Suddenly he looked up and stared at me. He checked his watch, got up and went into the bathroom.

Out he came. Klaus the Goth was stripped nude.

'You've got me going now,' he said, sitting on the couch, legs apart and rising.

I knelt between his legs. I had the Teutonic warrior. Hot seed came in seconds. Powerful muscles pumped shots thick and salty into my mouth. It was all over in half a minute. The seduction had taken half a day and most of a night.

But it was worth it. It always is.

Klaus began to dress.

'I want to go,' Klaus said.

He stood on the footpath in the thin pink flush of Sydney dawn.

'Now I will just fade away,' he said cryptically.

He offered me his hand. 'Goodbye,' he said as he turned towards Woolloomooloo Bay. He never looked back. He strode across deserted Bourke

Street past the Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel towards Circular Quay. I leant against the door and watched as he disappeared around the corner.

*

The little terrace in Woolloomooloo was to be sold. AIDS ravaged the household. Three of the four who lived there with me had the disease. Heroin was causing financial problems. My thirteen-year-old niece Roxanne who worked the Cross had twice cleaned out the house of everything except the kitchen sink. The clincher came when my brother Bob, in the final stages of the disease, could no longer work to meet the payments on the house. It was a long way from his roaring days in the late seventies when he ran the gay Signal Bar in Little Burton Street. Bob paid off the cops with a fistful of notes on Friday nights. The fuckrooms out back were chockers with the handsomest boys in Sydney.

No more smoking beneath the banyan tree Bob.

After the sale of the house I returned to Melbourne. I taught at Scotch College for a few months then returned to my Doctorate. Bob went to Nhill where Mum and Dad cared for him. In his last months I too returned to Nhill.

Bob and I used to make it to Mardi Gras every year. We stood on the veranda roof of the Oxford Hotel having a lovely time on speed, ecstasy, MDA, or whatever drug was around. We were caught in a halo of display and parade. The party later at the showgrounds and the orgies in the horse stalls

creamed off the night. It lasted until dawn. But the party was over now.

I was distraught after Bob died. I taught at the High School in Nhill until the end of the year then resigned. I needed a change and a challenge. I could've lived anywhere in the world. I thought about Europe, America and rustic Tasmania. I considered Bendigo with its magnificent Victorian architecture and Sacred Heart Cathedral. In the end I chose peace and quiet. I bought the little cottage by the Yarrowee Creek. Ballarat was close to Melbourne but far enough from the Melbourne scene. I didn't want to be a scene queen in the gay ghetto. I still had a lot of living to do. An occasional night at the clubs in Collingwood, the sauna at Banana Alley or a visit to St. Kilda was all I desired. The steamy, seedy times at Woolloomooloo and King's Cross were over. The charms of Melbourne and provincial Ballarat took over.

*

'The world's a beat,' I advised Luke, 'but you have to be careful.'

'I do it sometimes,' Luke admitted quietly, 'the beat I mean.'

I looked at him in mock surprise.

'Do you Luke? It's dangerous.'

'Yeah, I know. It's a hassle but I like it.'

'I know what you mean,' I said, 'young guys don't do the beats as much as they used to in the sixties and seventies. Too many bashers, cops and

weirdos. You've got all the commercial venues now, the Peel, The Market, the Exchange and the Internet.'

'I wanna get to Melbourne,' said Luke.

'It's great if you're young and beautiful,' I said, 'lonely if you aren't.'

The fickle scene of glam queens in Commercial Road and Chapel Street was unbearable. I preferred the nameless sex and vapour of clubs in Collingwood or the sauna at Banana Alley under massive bluestone vaults with trains rumbling overhead.

'I've tried the Internet,' said Luke, 'ya can't trust it. Too much crap and oldies. I want the real thing.'

'We'll go to Melbourne one night,' I promised him, 'by the way, I'm an oldie.'

Luke brightened. 'You're different. You're a friend. Melbourne here I come!'

'Let's see how you go at school first,' I said, 'maybe at the end of the year.' I stalled him. He was still sixteen though almost seventeen.

*

The Colleges of the University of Melbourne are wonderful in autumn. The Gothic-revival of Trinity, Ormond and Queen's stood stark as Luke and I walked across the fallen leaves in Princes Park. The day was cool and breaths misted in the air. Oaks and elms still held most of their leaves as they turned to russet. We stopped outside Ormond to admire its Victorian Scottish baronial splendour. I told Luke it

was the setting for Helen Garner's *The First Stone*, the book about the feminist scandal that rocked the University. Beneath the Gothic sandstone portico of Ormond we waited for James.

'Well, it's still a few minutes to twelve,' said Luke nervously.

The clock on Ormond steeple struck midday as James appeared.

'I've been in the Baillieu Library. Have a good trip?' We hugged.

'Yep,' said Luke.

But we'd cut it fine, already 11.30 when we'd arrived at Southern Cross Station. We just managed to catch a tram up Bourke Street in time for another up Swanston Street to the University. Luke took a day off school. I reasoned he'd learn more from a trip to the University than in the classroom. Luke OK'd it with his Mum as a precaution.

'It's only a few minutes walk to the University Club,' I told them, 'it's tucked away in the 1850s part of the University behind the Law Building.'

As we entered the Law cloister a passing undergraduate's walnut flecked eyes met mine. The world really is a beat I smiled to myself. The Club entrance was a grandiose mix of architectural influences.

'Romanesque? Baroque? Neo-Gothic? A bit of everything isn't it?' I questioned as we climbed the bluestone steps.

'May I help you sir?' an attendant asked with a smile and Felix on his nametag.

I showed Felix my associate membership card.

‘We’ll be having lunch later. Is the library free?’

‘I’ll check.’

Luke stared into Felix’ eyes and was rewarded with oceans of deep brown and a smile to die for.

The bar and lounge were busy with lunchtime academics and apparatchiks rushing drinks before lunch. We followed Felix into a quieter lounge where members relaxed in leather club chairs and read *The Age*, *The Australian* and *Campus Review*.

On the far side was a set of closed double wooden doors. Luke studied Felix’ long legs and tight arse as he led us across the lounge, opened panelled doors inwards and stood aside. It was a handsome room. At one end stood an ornate mantle-piece, a florid affair of black marquina marble topped by a mirrored over-mantle. A Hans Heysen hung majestically on one wall.

‘Well! This calls for a celebration,’ I said, ‘what are you drinking gentlemen?’

‘Gin and tonic would be refreshing,’ said James exploratively.

‘And you Luke? The same?’ Luke smiled a shy yes. He’d never been in such rich surroundings. He looked awestruck. He thought of the little rented miner’s cottage he and his Mum shared in povertyville Ballarat East.

‘Felix, would you be able to fix that for us?’

Felix nodded and left the room. We took in Felix from the rear, his tight bouncing muscular rumps and long brown hair.

‘Delicious isn’t he?’ said James, amused at Luke’s gaze. It was a statement posed as question.

‘I’ve seen him at the Beaurepaire Pool. We’ve spoken a few times. He’s a student, though very part time I think. Doing year twelve at University High School. He works here part-time. He’s seventeen. In with a chance Luke?’

Luke lapped up James’ succinct account of Felix’ situation. I managed a jaded smirk.

I took a disc from the inside pocket of my jacket. ‘This is for you James. What you do with it is entirely up to you as far as your research goes. It’s some additional notes on what happened when I was at university in the sixties and seventies. Some of it’s sensitive. There’s a book in it somewhere. It might be better if you published it after I’m gone.’ I laughed a little falsely. I felt nervous. ‘I hope that’s a long time coming,’ I added, ‘but life hangs by a thread.’

Felix arrived with drinks. His long straight hair fell over his forehead as he leant forward. Liquid brown eyes met Luke’s deep brown depths. I spotted an understanding. James and I looked at each other and grinned.

James cleared his throat.

‘So how are your studies going Felix?’ James asked, deciding to do Luke a favour and break the ice, ‘just part-time, you said?’

‘Fine. I want to go to university next year. We’ll see.’

Felix lingered, going from one leg to the other in disarming self-consciousness.

‘This job would help you Felix,’ I added, keeping it going.

‘Sure. It’s only a few hours three days a week at lunchtime when they’re busy. I’m usually out of here by three. It’s handy.’ A small silence. ‘Well, I’d better get back. It’s busy today.’

Left to each other we sipped our drinks. The ticking mantle clock punctuated the silence.

‘Beautiful young man isn’t he?’ I said uttering the obvious, ‘I see you’re in with a chance Luke.’

Luke blushed and smiled awkwardly.

‘Maybe. He finishes at three,’ Luke said, ‘perhaps I could ... assist... with his studies.’

We laughed, swilled the drinks and made our way to the dining room. A few looked up from newspapers at the tall, pale Luke and at James, with his dazzling blue eyes and tossed blond curls.

I’d taken the precaution of reserving a particular table set by itself beside a stain-glassed window in a small alcove. It afforded a view of everyone and privacy.

We decided on Chablis from The Hermitage, a small winery in the Pyrenees Ranges near Avoca. I wasn’t hungry and asked for a Greek salad. Luke went for a whole flounder. James settled for a light omelette. He had the end of semester dinner in Ormond that evening.

James and Luke chatted about their studies as I listened and sipped the wine.

‘Tell me about your family Luke,’ asked James. I pricked up my ears. Maybe James could get something out of Luke I couldn’t.

On the rare occasions relatives visited in Ballarat East, Luke experienced the ritualistic getting out of

the family history from a battered olive green school-case in a bedroom cupboard. His history was mainly oral history. Maybe it was the Chablis but Luke opened up a little and shifted uncomfortably.

‘Well, Mum says it was the Great Famine, in the 1840s she said. Her great grandfather was sent out as a boy to a place called Point Puer in Tasmania, a boys’ prison near Port Arthur. He married an Irish convict girl. Mum says they went to the diggings in Bendigo. That’s how the family started.’

I was surprised at Luke’s revelation. ‘Why didn’t you tell me Luke? You have convict ancestry, something to be proud of these days. We can follow it up and find out more if you like. Your ancestors and mine might even have known each other.’

Luke looked pleased. I made a mental note to praise him more often. He shone with the slightest compliment.

‘What about you James?’ I asked, ‘do you have any skeletons in the cupboard?’

‘Well, perhaps not as exotic but interesting in a way,’ said James. ‘My grandparents came from Belfast after the First World War. They were Protestant. Dad said his parents wanted to start a new life away from ‘the troubles’ in Belfast. There was the failed Easter uprising in Dublin in 1916 and a lot of bad feeling after the British hanged the rebels. After the War ended in 1918 they emigrated to Melbourne. Dad teaches Irish History here, just part-time these days.’

‘Interesting,’ I said, ‘well, I told you about my great grandfather who was sent out as a convict. I

haven't told you about my mother though. Her family were on the Ballarat and Ararat goldfields in the 1850s. They were McCookes, McEwens and Rutherfords from County Tyrone, Ireland, and Inverness in Scotland. Very Protestant. Mum told me that grandfather McEwen was on the Ballarat diggings in 1854 at the Eureka Stockade. I've checked John Moloney's Eureka Stockade and other references to try and find out if he actually was there on December 3, 1854 but there's no mention. They all came out to Australia with nothing. Mum's family were the first to settle Warracknabeal at Whitton Swamp in the 1860s when the Wimmera was just being opened up.'

We talked about the Eureka Stockade, that far-away Sunday morning, the hopelessly out-numbered diggers not expecting an attack, the red soldiers climbing through the rough stockade, the shooting, bayoneting and butchering.

'That was only six years after 1848, the year of revolutions in Europe,' said James, 'the Young Irishmen also had an unsuccessful rebellion in 1848.'

'That's how my great grandfather got sent out,' I said, 'after that Rebellion, exiled for the term of his natural life.'

'It's a fascinating phrase that,' said James, 'to be sent out! It's like being sent down from Oxford or being dishonourably discharged. How closely was he involved in the Rebellion? What's his story?'

'He was more a victim of the Rebellion,' I explained. William Frewen was a farm labourer in

Limerick by the Shannon River. One day in 1848 a bloke called Ryan bailed the family up and Ryan demanded shelter because he was on the run. He'd killed a farmer after being thrown off his land for not paying the rent. This was in the middle of the Irish Famine when thousands were being evicted and people were starving to death. Ryan hid on top of a bedstead in William's house. A few hours later the police arrived and overcame Ryan. Ryan was hung and William was transported for life for harboring.'

'A victim of circumstances,' said James, 'like my family.'

'Our great-grandparents might evena known each other when they were convicts in Tasmania,' said Luke.

'They might have,' I said, 'in Van Dieman's Land as it was then.'

'Eerie how strands of history weave in and out,' said James, 'that's why I love history. You take off one layer and there's another and another.'

The onion theory. Our meal arrived.

I played with my Greek salad. Luke hopped into his flounder, which reminded me of the sea. James cut into his omelette. I failed to make a genuine start on the variegated salad. I ate a stuffed olive instead and poured more wine into our glasses. Luke felt light-headed as he drew away a fork load of white flesh from the bones. He smiled at James and me. I was content to sip the crisp chilled Chablis and watch Luke enjoy his day.

'There's a bit of Ireland in each of us then,' I

said, 'though I've never been there. I will one day.' James and Luke ate as I spoke. 'After the English Civil War in the 1640s when Charles the First was beheaded, Oliver Cromwell's Protestant Army invaded Ireland. Cromwell's soldiers were granted thousands of acres of Catholic land in Limerick near the River Shannon where my family lived. Dispossession was at the heart of later Rebellions in 1798 and 1848.'

'We're all products of historical circumstance,' said James between mouthfuls, 'one way or another, we're the star stuff of history.'

Luke liked the phrase.

'Shooting stars trapped in time,' he advanced proudly.

'Well, time is nothing but an invention,' James pointed out closely, 'we are shooting stars and time doesn't exist.'

Yet time did slip away as Luke toyed with whether he was still 'in love' with James.

The bared skeleton of the flounder and squeezed slice of lemon were all that remained on Luke's plate. I'd only eaten a little of the salad but a second bottle of Chablis was almost empty.

It was well after three by the time we finished short blacks.

We made our way to the lobby where Felix stood in white shirt and black cotton trousers slashed by a midnight blue cummerbund. He smiled.

'See you again I hope Doctor Pola,' he said with a grinning tease.

I smiled at Felix' use of my title.

‘I hope so. You must be finished work soon?’

‘About to finish actually,’ he said glancing at Luke, eyes meeting.

Luke played for time. He pretended interest in tarnished brass wall-plaques commemorating benefactors of the University and names of students who’d made the supreme sacrifice in The Great War. He’d just got to the Ryans of whom there were two when he turned to look into the excited fresh face and brown eyes of Felix.

My sensory radar activated.

‘We have to be in Collingwood at five,’ I reminded. There was a growing bulge in the crotch of Felix’ trousers.

‘I live in Fitzroy. It’s practically next door,’ said Felix, ‘call in.’

I made a play of checking my watch. Just past three. Time enough.

Felix gave Luke his address.

There was a special reason why I was pressed for time. During the week I’d taken the plunge and phoned Xavier.

‘Talk about a blast from the past!’ Xavier exclaimed, ‘I thought about ringing but I figured if you really wanted to you’d ring me.’

*

Luke, James and I walked to James’ room in Ormond. He put on the jug for instant coffee.

‘No milk I’m afraid,’ he said. He shifted papers and books off chairs so we could sit.

‘I’ve been working on an essay about Australia in South East Asia. Do you think we’ll ever be involved in something like Vietnam again, you know, with conscription?’

‘It’s possible,’ I said, ‘Australia’s readiness to say yes sir to America is a given, just as we said yes sir to Britain in the First World War. I hope we’re never in a situation again where youth are conscripted to fight in immoral wars. Australia seems to be playing a more constructive role in Asia and the Pacific these days.’

‘Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and Timor?’ said James, ‘well, we’ve a vested interest in having stable governments to our North. It’s part of white Australia’s underlying xenophobia.’

Good on ya James I thought, ever the realist.

‘You were conscripted weren’t you?’ he asked me.

‘Yep. Just eighteen when they called me up for Vietnam. They drew my birthday out of a Tattersalls’ barrel. My lucky day! It didn’t worry me at first because I was a student at Corpus Christi College Seminary. Students were exempted. It only surfaced as a problem two years later when I was involved in demonstrations against the War and was excluded from LaTrobe University. As a non-student I was ordered to attend a medical. I refused, so I was charged with failure to attend a medical.’

‘I conscientiously objected to the War, particularly to conscription and compulsory participation in the slaughter of the Vietnamese. In the Australian Union of Students, Ralph Bleechmore from

Adelaide influenced a lot of us because he had actually served in Vietnam and came back and spoke against the War. That was in 1970.'

'At LaTrobe, the Chancellor of the University was Sir Archibald Glenn. He headed up ICI, a chemical company involved in the supply of napalm and Agent Orange defoliant for Vietnam. In the minds of students the University was indirectly involved in genocide. Most students were against the War. I was a Maoist.'

'What's a Maoist?' Luke asked, 'why were you were excluded from the University?'

Here I go I thought, now's my chance.

'I wonder myself now Luke if I knew what a Maoist was in 1970. I imagined I knew. A Maoist supported the Communist Party of China whose Chairman was Mao Tse-tung. China supported the National Liberation Front of North Vietnam which was Communist. The Vietnamese were fighting a war of liberation against the United States and countries like Australia. Members of the LaTrobe University Council were viewed as supporting Australian involvement in Vietnam. As a result there were occupations of the University administration building in the late sixties and early seventies. University Council meetings were blockaded. Council blockades were very confrontational. Councillors tried to leave and couldn't. The Vice-chancellor called police onto campus. This further angered students. Universities were regarded as academic sanctuaries back then, you know, the Oxford/Cambridge ideal. Demonstrations were hap-

pening on most Australian campuses and trouble had been brewing on campuses as early as 1965, particularly at Monash. By 1968 revolution was in the air. It was a worldwide youth rebellion against war in general and the repressive, paranoid culture of the Cold War which can be traced back to 1945.'

I paused to sip my coffee.

'Go on!' said Luke, 'what happened?'

'It got rough Luke. The demonstrations at LaTrobe affected the day-to-day administration of the University. ASIO and the Commonwealth Police appeared on campus. The Victorian Special Branch, Premier Henry Bolte's political police, rounded up students and interrogated them. I was president of the Student Council and addressed student meetings and participated in occupations. Bolte wanted me out. The University Council wanted me out. The University and the Government issued a warrant for my arrest. I was on the run for about six months in 1972. Life was a succession of safe houses and crouching low in cars going into and out of the University. I hid in the Victorian Alps for a few weeks in a friend's shack up at Walhalla, quite the political renegade. I hid at Montsalvat, the artists' place at Eltham. Eventually I went home to Nhill for a break. Four State Special Branch police picked me up one quiet Sunday morning as Mum and Dad were getting ready for Church. I was sent to Pentridge Prison.'

'What was Pentridge like?' asked Luke wide-eyed.

'Well, that's another story Luke. We're going to have to get going. We'll get a taxi.'

James phoned for a taxi on his mobile.

‘We’ll have time to call in on Felix won’t we?’ asked Luke, ‘he said he’d be home at four. What was Pentridge like?’

‘Fucking spooky at two a.m. when they took me there under heavy escort, all floodlights, bluestone, razorwire and screws with guns. I was scared.’

‘Did ya get raped?’

I gaped at Luke then stared out the taxi window. We arrived at Felix’ place, a single fronted brick terrace in Ivan Street, Fitzroy.

*

Felix’ room was a double mattress on the floor, a sound system, clothes, books everywhere and three wall posters, classic shots of Che Guevara, Marilyn Monroe and James Dean.

‘A bit basic,’ Felix apologized. A silence suggested I make myself scarce.

‘I’m going for a walk,’ I said, ‘see you in an hour.’

I smiled to myself as I walked around blocks of terrace houses. I imagined Felix lighting a candle, pulling down the blind and stripping in pale yellow light. Felix might lie face down, long brown hair spread over the pillow.

I imagined Luke’s slow, careful entering and a flinch from Felix as Luke sank in. They’d lie for a moment then Luke would get to work. After juices were spent would come the silent afterglow.

Luke would hear me shut the front gate. I could almost hear them.

‘I have to go Felix,’ Luke would say.

‘I know,’ said Felix. A few seconds expectant silence. ‘Do you want to meet again?’

‘Here’s my number,’ said Luke, ‘come up to Ballarat.’

‘Cool. I’ve hardly ever been out of Melbourne.’

They parted at the front door with a hug and Felix closed the door behind us.

It was a quarter to five in Kerr Street, Fitzroy, just off Smith Street, Collingwood. We turned into Smith, avoided the eyes of heroin dealers, went into a side street and entered the hole-in-the-wall doorway of the Club. It’d just opened. We were the only ones there. We fixed a coffee and sat in the movie lounge where Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte enjoyed a re-run. The classic psychodrama always captured my curiosity. I adored Bette Davis melodramatics.

I went for another coffee. I could see someone at the entrance grill and made out Xavier’s top half bent over his signing in. I sat on a bar stool, lit a small joint and faced the security door which clicked and opened. The tallness of him surprised me, stark in black T-shirt, tight black trousers and silver-buckle belt.

‘I nearly didn’t make it,’ he said in a rush, ‘the tram into the City was so slow.’

‘There’s someone I’d like you to meet Xavier. Grab yourself a coffee first.’

*

‘We’re reading a novel about the Vietnam War,’

said Xavier, 'In the Lake of the Woods. It's about this guy involved in the My Lai massacre in 1968. The guy couldn't get over the slaughterhouse, how Lieutenant Calley and his men herded all the villagers up and shot hundreds of them, raping kids, butchering old men and women...'

Xavier and Luke were discussing their studies.

'All war is filthy,' Luke cut in.

They both lay naked in thin pink light.

Xavier realised the lateness. He carefully extracted himself from Luke's arms and quietly dressed.

'I have to go. I'll ring you during the week. OK? I'd like to come up to Ballarat sometime.'

Luke smiled and nodded. Xavier leant down, kissed him and left.

The night slipped away. Luke was very relaxed, very relaxed, and just a little out of it. The line we'd had when we arrived kicked in. I wondered whether to go to the Subway Sauna at Banana Alley under the railway viaduct with its shaking bluestone. I checked the time at the front desk. Just after 4.00 a.m. Maybe later. Luke was still having a good time.

On the second floor at the far end of the converted factory was a line of small cubicles. Each had a glory hole and peephole. It was the queer version of Nelson Algren's *A Walk On The Wild Side* set in the brothels of New Orleans. Luke leant against the wall of a long narrow passage. In the shadows he watched the passing parade drift by through cigarette haze and pale yellow light. He was intrigued and nervous.

A youth leant against the opposite wall a few

metres away. Straight black hair, pale face, red check shirt over jeans, an urban cowboy. Luke mentally undressed him and imagined the firmness and tightness. He went into a booth and stared fixedly at him.

The young man took the few steps into the booth and Luke closed and snibbed the door. Hard as rocks they unbuckled belts and pushed jeans to the floor. Luke went down on the cowboy. He tore open a play-safe pack, gave the condom to the quivering youth, ripped open a packet of lube, lubed up and faced the wall. The lad stepped behind and slid quickly and deeply into him. Luke's head banged against the wall with every shove. He fantasised at the sweetness of it all, the idea of being spiked by a man. He shuddered and blew against the wall.

It was close to closing time. There was a rattle of trams and hum of early traffic. Not many punters around now. The manic rush was over. I watched Whatever Happened To Baby Jane. Luke was nowhere to be seen. I wafted in the vapid crimson gloom of the Club. I looked up at each click of the security door. I didn't want to miss out on a cutie from south of the River or some innocent rough trade from the suburbs. I was meant for this marathon. I noticed a young guy, blue-checked flannel work-shirt tucked into tight, blue jeans. He was pale with thick, black curls, pretty, a little pissed but not too pissed.

We went into a room.

'Got a cigarette?' the lad asked.

'Sorry. Just smoked my last joint.'

I unfastened the lad's belt, pushed tight Levi's to the floor and dropped his Donald Duck boxers. He was stiff as a board. I'd done it thousands of times, put a condom on for an uncertain youth, lubed up, turned and bent over the black, vinyl mattress as I dwelt on the infinite and eternal. Rough.

By the time we'd finished the intercom was announcing closing time.

Time to return to the Yarrowee. I emerged from the caverns. I spotted Luke having a black coffee as he chatted to Jason the barman. Luke gave me a nod. I waited till he finished then collected my leather bomber jacket.

'Have a good time Luke?' I asked as we descended the concrete steps and emerged into early morning Collingwood. I needn't have asked. I knew he'd had a good time by the smirk on his face. We caught a tram in Smith Street to Spencer Street.

I watched the receding blue glass towers of the City as the train climbed into the central highlands. The air turned cooler, crisper, as farmland opened. I smelt the reek of amyl nitrate on my hands and a momentary lover's animal scent on my clothes. I wryly paraded the deep shafting I'd been given and lover-boy's shudder of pearljam. I was a master. Luke dozed off opposite in a dream of his own with Felix, Xavier and who knows who else and the bells of Ormond College.

I'd been going to the Club since it opened. In the early eighties it was only on one level, a dark, cramped lounge with a cheap, particleboard maze. The passageways I walked became as familiar as

country tracks I'd known as a boy in the Wimmera bush. In the early days a potbelly stove kept us warm on winter nights.

The Club was now on three levels. It was a labyrinth to newcomers. On the central floor was a reception lounge with never-ending cheap coffee and soft drinks. Play-safe kits with an Ansell condom and sachet of Wet Stuff were free. Amyl nitrate was available but so expensive I couldn't afford it. I could live without it, the very air so pungent with amyl on a good night it simply wasn't necessary to own the little brown bottle. Beg, borrow or steal it, index finger blocking one nostril, bottle under the other, long sniff, rush of blood and thumping heart. A mind blow for hot sex.

Through a mirrored passage lurked a cavernous video lounge. I couldn't remember how many times I'd watched Conan the Barbarian, Whatever Happened to Baby Jane and Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte. Olive-green engine room shades cast yellow, ambient light over deep red cushions and cheap pine armchairs.

At the rear of the lounge through an inconspicuous door led to upstairs and the basement. What went on within these levels was what the Club was all about.

On the upper level were small rooms. Each had a black vinyl covered bench. It served its purpose. It was a fuck bench, 'a workbench' I told Luke who laughed. I'd often tried to catch some sleep on one but never did. A snatched minute. Sleep was not their function. Black-rubber tiled floors made for

easy cleaning up of spent condoms. There was a paper towel dispenser. Ashtrays on a small shelf in the corner were glued down. There was a lockable ranch-style door. Light-dimmers allowed imagination to play fantasy with the unimaginable.

There were smaller cubicles on this upper level, rooms the size of a telephone box. Each had a glory hole, peep hole and hinged partitions allowing voyeurs to look along entire rows of booths to check out the action. Cocks were poked through holes for waiting mouths and the nameless and faceless were screwed stupid by the nameless and faceless. There were barred cells hung with slings and chains where hungry old queens spread their legs waiting for a fuck from anyone and everyone. It was sideshow alley, a carnival of tragedy queens and teenage adoni. There were oldies with beer guts protruding over outrageous leather leggings, huge worn arses bare to the invited and everyone was. Youths, slim, handsome, tanned, blond, tall, gym-toned in tight Levi's, black leather belts, silver-studded, unbuttoned Target red-checked shirts, navy Jack Bowie singlets, they all paraded their flesh. It was a pantheon of sassy arse waiting for Mister Right. It was liquorice all-sorts seven nights a week until dawn broke the spell. And it did. Rarely was a relationship found there. It was a sex palace. A sex dungeon. A prison. The Marquise de Sade would understand. Jean Genet would approve. Arthur Rimbaud might smile.

In the basement, oil drums and tractor tyres created orgy areas in the gloom for those who couldn't

pass muster in the thin red and yellow light upstairs. Many were the naive first-timers who'd wandered downstairs, overloaded with alcohol and Ecstasy, pressed against an oil drum and clawed by half a dozen of Melbourne's desperate queens. I knew all about the basement, often launching myself downstairs in pursuit of some out of his mind youth and having the lad in the blackness to weak whispers 'I'm too pissed'. They were never too pissed, never too stoned.

The seductive never-ending music of Jean Michel Jarre and Peter Gabriel created mood and excitement.

The Club and Banana Alley were my bedrooms. My chronological paradigm was B.S. and A.S. Before Sex and After Sex, my life a perpetual appraisal of this psychosexual dichotomy.

*

As the train sped along the lip of Werribee Gorge I drifted into boyhood snapshots. I washed my hands in innocence and I was an altar boy again on a parish bush picnic on the shores of Lake Hindmarsh as a congregation of Catholics knelt on timeless sands reciting the rosary. I was eleven and even then suspected how ridiculous it all was. It was insane.

In bloodred soutane and snow-white surplice I knelt in the sanctuary. Jesus lived in the Tabernacle. I raced the frost home in the fog on my luminous green and orange Malvern Star to John Bull porridge on the wood-fired stove in the skillion kitchen

of the small weatherboard house on the plain. On Saturdays I set rabbit traps in the sand hills, chased gargantuan goannas and had escapades from fat, brown snakes in the scrub. Innocent then and lost between now and then.

I was hooked a long time ago.

I was fourteen. At the Saturday afternoon football game I was allowed into the dressing shed. I was 'just a kid'. Wide-eyed with delight I ogled the Nhill First Eighteen, their thick swaying cocks, muscular thighs, eucalypt whiff-tang to snorting nostrils and rub downs on creaking benches. Danny O'Byrne came out of the shower. He was young for the Nhill First Eighteen, just seventeen. He was nude as he walked from shower to locker. He glanced at me. Eyes met. He smiled.

'D'ya wanna come to my place after school?' god asked one day at school.

We both knew why.

'Yeah. OK.'

We walked to Danny's house after school.

'D'ya wanna have a look?' he asked.

'Yeah.'

Danny the god dropped his school pants.

'Suck it,' Danny commanded. I knelt before Jesus and sucked the Eucharist.

'Suck harder,' Jesus commanded. Danny came salty and sticky.

I think of sex as I watch him play football on Saturdays. He was killed in Vietnam. I was packed off to Saint Patrick's College.

Summers came and went, very hot ones, even by

Australian standards. 'Nocturnal emissions' in the sleep out and afternoons at the swimming pool where I furtively checked genitalia in the dressing shed. I walked home along the Adelaide-Melbourne railway line. Heat shimmered off hot steel as I jumped from sleeper to sleeper. A railway bridge crossed a dry channel that rarely fed the Nhill swamp. Under the bridge to the cool beneath, a check for snakes as I hid away. Eternal damnation seared desire, hot silver shot as electric blue diamonds sharded into psychedelia.

I asked the impatient, unsympathetic priest for confession several times a day. I was damned. As an altar boy I had to go to Communion. Not to go in front of the congregation was to admit to sin. Everyone was watching.

'Have you got something wrong with you? Are you scrupulous or something?' asked the irritable priest.

Had I caught some dreadful disease? I must be mad. I burst into tears before the uncomprehending priest. Mere liturgy was no solace. Rubied chalice, satin vestments, gold monstrance studded with emeralds, silver thurible billowing incense at Benediction, all meaningless glitter over the stinking cess-pit of life.

'I'm mad. Let me not be mad sweet heaven,' I was to read in King Lear in Brother Nangle's Literature class in '66. I did not know that the Church itself was the mad one in this game of power. Notions of hypocrisy and manipulation were too complex for my innocence to understand.

Now, making up for lost youth, each lad I have is lovemaking to lost soul. There've been thousands of lovers. My arms are out-stretched as I plead for redemption that never arrives. I wonder if Jesus was queer. He never said he wasn't.

The human spectacle saunters before me in the steam room at Banana Alley. The carnal carnival is ethereal yet palpable, touchable yet unreachable. The core of my existence is irredeemable, hopeless and helpless. No amount of lovers, however beautiful, fill my void in this most secular and material of worlds. Good ex-Catholic that I am, I'm careful to blame myself. The Dantean inferno of boyhood could not be quenched. The fiery, brutal dogma of Christian Brothers and Redemptorists withered my Catholic spirituality long, long ago. I do not blame the brothers and priests. I see them as victims. Sensitive, intelligent and aesthetic, I was grist to the mill. The ideology was too old, too powerful, too deceitful for a clean fight.

University brought resolution.

Eventually I simply walked away and made my own world. Today, the world of endless newcomers and first-timers lure and invite seduction. I know every corner, every angle, every sideshow alley of the sex labyrinth, a shadow man as I gird my loins for the caravanserai of youth.

*

'Nice sleep Luke?' I ask as I shake him awake and the train pulls into Ballarat Station.

‘Yeah, yeah,’ he mumbled grumpily, ‘here already?’ He was dishevelled and dark under the eyes. I smiled to myself.

We walked along Lydiard Street to Sturt Street, through the grounds of the old prison now part of the University and out along the Flat of the Yarrowee Creek, flowing strongly after overnight rain.

‘Maybe one night we could go down in your old panel van,’ suggested Luke.

I didn’t like taking the van. It was unreliable. More than once I’d almost killed myself falling asleep at the wheel after a night out at Banana Alley. I remember the speedy youth I’d had on the mattress in the back in a dark, bluestone Collingwood alley.

‘Maybe,’ I said.

*

It was a Saturday. I was in my old EZ Holden panelvan on the Western Highway listening to Morris West the Australian novelist. He was saying that the Roman Catholic Church was in a state of schism, a schism between Curia indifference and popular anger. West said there was no *caritas*, charity, left in the Church. Without charity there is no love. Morris spoke of Jesus.

As I headed along the Bacchus Marsh by-pass I spotted a hitchhiker.

‘Religion is fucked,’ said Paul, a Sociology student, ‘it doesn’t want to know. You name it, abortion, contraception, homosexuality, masturbation,

celibacy, women priests. The Church doesn't want to know.'

My favourite topics. 'Yeah,' I began, 'the Church has had a problem with sex ever since it began manipulating gender and sexuality around 400 A.D. Early theologians and bishops were consolidating the political and ideological power of the Church and killing off the Gnostics. Before that there were women priests and married priests. In 1139 celibacy began to be enforced by a homosexually dominated Curia in the Vatican intent on legitimating its sexuality. It was a cloak of celibacy. It was a different story for 'the faithful' though. Only in the 1970s did the Church finally acknowledge that homosexuality wasn't a psychological disease. The Church still teaches that it's morally and intrinsically evil.'

Paul picked up. 'No wonder gay kids at schools commit suicide. I'm learning about the causes of youth suicide in this sociology of youth unit I'm doing. Homophobic bullying is a big factor in youth suicide.'

I'd seen the ugly fall-out in schools after a boy hanged or shot himself, the recriminations, the wringing of hands, then everything went back to normal and the 'religious education' course remained unchanged, toeing the homophobic line. Then a year later the next one died.

'You horny?' Paul suddenly asks after a telling silence.

'Always,' I said. I looked for a park on a shady track.

'I'm fascinated by Church history,' said Paul,

dropping blue jeans as if it was an everyday event and maybe it was, ‘the manufacture of morality to maintain ideological hegemony.’

A live one here I thought as I went to work.

We finished up in a Collingwood alley discussing the profligacy of five hundred years of medieval and Renaissance Popes.

*

‘Whadaya grinnin’ about,’ Luke asked, glancing at me quickly as we neared the turn-off to the cottage.

‘Nothing in particular Luke,’ I lied, ‘yeah, well, maybe we’ll go to Melbourne in the old HZ van one night.’

Luke brightened.

It was July and cold. Another Sunday morning in the country.

‘So you enjoyed your night out at the Club Luke?’

‘Great but I’m fucked. I wouldn’t wanna do it every night. The speed’s wearing off. I just wanna crash.’

‘It takes days to recover Luke,’ I advised, ‘now and then is OK.’

On a sojourn a few weekends previous I’d had a nameless one through a hole in a wall, good-looking, body-built, pretty in a thuggish way, big cock, leather. It was never enough. As soon as the little death was over a new volcano built up. A few days would go by and bingo, I was off to the City.

‘Is there more to it Luke, a stranger every week, a fuck in the gloom?’ I questioned my young protégé. ‘Sometimes I wish God would zap me and I’d become a monastic in the cloister, singing Latin in Gregorian plainsong. I should settle down with a regular fuck. I guess I enjoy independence more than commitment.’

Luke was insouciant as he shrugged off my disenchantment.

‘We’re sort of together,’ he said, ‘enjoy it while ya can. I won’t be here forever.’

I had a pang of guilt about taking Luke’s friendship for granted.

In the comfort of the cottage kitchen Luke told me how he was thinking about quitting school.

‘I mean, I’ve learnt more with James and you in twenty four hours than a whole year at school.’

‘That’s different Luke. School’s important for different reasons.’

*

I thought of homosexual students I’d taught who’d suicided, the queer and persecuted ones in schools, how stuff got in the way like death, how a knock might come at the door. I told Luke about one quiet evening at the cottage when Kerry Langer rang to tell me that Max Silver, a mutual friend, had suicided. Kerry found my name in Max’ address book.

‘He threw himself in front of a train at Footscray Station,’ I told Luke.’

Luke stared.

‘A ‘jumper’ is what white faced train drivers call them.’

‘But what made him do it?’ Luke asked.

‘I dunno. Max was nineteen when I met him at the Club. We became lovers. Max was already a successful writer. He lived on the edge in a Collingwood flat. He’d published and had talent. He stayed with me at the cottage for a few days. He wrote From Melbourne to Sydney by Bicycle and Notes On City Life and a play. He had a cute boy-ish Rimbaud face.’

Luke was silent.

‘All I’m saying Luke is that school’s important if you’re going to be strong. You have to learn how to handle the heavy emotional stuff. Life is fucking hard.’

‘Were you in love with Max,’ asked Luke quietly.

‘Yes, very much.’ I slowly rolled a small joint. ‘I still am. It broke my heart when he died. Still, I guess I’ve been in love with lots of guys.’

‘Tell me,’ said Luke.

‘Well, there was this other young guy called Andrew. I met him at Banana Alley. The cops in Sydney rang one night to say he’d drowned himself at Bondi Beach. He wanted to be my boyfriend but I didn’t want the commitment. So many friends have topped themselves.’

I couldn’t inure myself against the abrupt departure of friends and lovers, their memory, beauty and vulnerability. They’d been so much part of the won-

derment of living. I didn't want Luke to be a casualty.

'I'll help you get through school Luke,' I reassured.

'Yeah, well, I know it's important. I need to stand up to stuff. But they're such arseholes some of the guys. Anyhow, how's your writing going? I like what ya givin' me. It helps me. I like readin' about meself.'

I smiled. 'Still tapping away. I wrote this a few days ago.' I reached over to the old Cutler roll-top and selected a sheet of paper.

'Read it out,' Luke said.' Luke knew I enjoyed reading to him. It was seduction with words, a caress without sex yet sex was there, sublimated, thought about, not acted on.

'OK. Here goes.' I passed the joint to Luke and cleared my throat.

*

'I'd like us to go to Ireland and hang around Trinity College Dublin and talk with students of politics and religion and how to get the Brits out.

We'd talk of Bill Yeats, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Bernard Shaw and settle into Gaelic music in packed Dublin bars and sip creamy Guinness with a weather-eye on a youth nearby to bugged the night with till dawn in an upstairs room. We'd drink our fill and spend our juice.

We'd make our way across counties westward emerald green, perhaps by bicycle, along cobbled

laneways and little pubs, a Guinness here and there. A country lad now and then we'd go down on and work up in some tumbledown ancient barn with hay, horses and fluttering pigeons. We'd have each other there on yellow hay on a wild, west coast day and shoot our thick, country cream then say fond goodbye to sapphire eyes, thick gold curls and red-lipped mouths.

Then we'd pilgrimage our way to Castleconnell in Limerick to stone cottages from where constables took our families during the Revolutionary Rebellion of 1848, the Famine years. Taken they were from homely warm cottage hearths and native soil for the term of their natural lives to wild Van Diemen's Land across vast unknown seas to fuck knows what and for what we don't know. Young rebels they were in that desperate, failed Rebellion. So yes, it's a Guinness or two we'll be having in a Castleconnell pub.'

'I like that,' said Luke, 'maybe we'll go there one day. Well, I've got to crash.'

'Sure.'

History and sex. They go well together. Time, however spent, was all spent and they weren't making any more of it.

*

The phone rang. It was the Ballarat police. They told me about my panel van, burnt out at Black Hill Reserve north of Ballarat.

'Local homophobes? Joyriders? I can't be sure Luke.'

‘Maybe it was some of the young toughs ya have in ya bedroom,’ he suggested pointedly.

‘It’s a lesson Luke. Maybe it’s a warning.’

*

My double-barrel shotgun hadn’t seen serious work since duck-shooting on the Nhill Swamp. It had a dust-off in the seventies when I blasted my books off a shelf in Faraday Street Carlton in a fit of existential nihilism. Swelled with melodrama I loaded two cartridges, left the barrel broken and placed it under my bed. Just in case.

‘Gettin’ a bit paranoid aren’t ya?’ said Luke.

‘I don’t think so. No one knows what’s around the corner. Life can very easily come unstuck. Which reminds me Luke, how’s your schoolwork?’

‘OK. I’ve been through a rough patch but it’s my last year. I stirred up the religion class the other day talking about the sex abuse stuff that’s been going on in the Church. It went on in Ballarat. The Church persecutes homosexuals while millions of dollars in compensation are paid out to buggered schoolboys. It’s all kept quiet. Talk about damage control.’

I smiled at Luke. He was learning.

‘Life can easily come unstuck Luke. No one’s above the law.’

‘We won’t be going to the fleshpits in the van now will we!’ he said.

‘Looks like the train, the welfare shuttle,’ I smiled.

After the panel van incident I walked into

Ballarat along the Yarrowee. I was in the peach of health, a spring in my step towards caffe latte at L'Espresso.

*

I had a dinner to go to at LaTrobe University. I'd visit James at Ormond and finish up at the Club or Banana Alley for a night of sex till dawn. Since the car went up in flames I was extra careful at the cottage. Luke called in and often stayed overnight in the spare room. There were emails to and from James. I was ready to emerge. Some asshole had scared the shit out of me but I wasn't about to crawl up and die. Temperamentally monastic for short bursts only, I read, wrote, thought and waited, then spurted out.

Friday morning I leisurely got my act together. It was a script I knew by heart.

I washed the powder blue Levis and navy blue singlet, placed the leather airforce jacket on the back of a kangaroo chair, selected a thick, black, studded, leather belt and polished my Blundstone leather work boots with Joseph Lyddy's Dubbin.

I had a number two haircut all over from the girls at the local cuttery in Bridge Street. Clean-shaven, tanned, blue-eyed, lean and tall, I pocketed a packet of Drum, Tally-ho papers, Redhead matches and some marijuana. I knew how to roll a cigarette laconically leaning against a darkened doorway and strike a match to show myself to a lad nearby.

Snowed with talc, doused with Jensen, sprayed

with Faberge, flicked with Givency and sprinkled with Lagerfeld, I grabbed my battered Adidas sportsbag, locked up the cottage and took the quiet walk along the Yarrowee Creek to the railway station to catch el cheapo to the City.

The University Dinner was the usual affair, they in dinner suits, me in denim and leather. It was my statement of political identity, a pose lost in these corporate times, an anachronism really, but I enjoyed the irony and self-satire. The talk was University politics, feminist politics, sexuality politics and Party politics and well, politics. Guests were the middle range powerful seeking to further themselves. I didn't see myself as powerful, just known and tolerated, not embraced.

I left early. The vintage Portuguese port was being brought out as I said goodnight to the Chancellor of the University. I made the half-hour trip to Ormond College along Waterdale Road through working class Heidelberg. It was the same road where years ago in 1971 I'd been bashed unconscious by the police on an anti-Vietnam war demonstration when police drew guns on students. Ormond loomed baronial and floodlit as the taxi drove in. James greeted me grumpily, busy preparing a tutorial paper on student political activism with me as a case study.

'How was the dinner?' he asked. 'Coffee?' He mellowed and chatted as he rummaged around. 'I'd like to tape your interview. Do you mind? Start where you like.'

'Free to ramble am I?' I said.

‘Free to ramble.’

‘How’s Luke?’

‘Fine.’

In a grungy room in Ormond I entered lightspace and tripped to the past. It was the first of several ‘sessions’. I remain grateful to James for work he later put into editing. There were lots of stops and starts.

*

‘When can I read it?’

Luke was staying over. It was early hours on a Saturday morning when Luke’s quiet knock rapped on my bedroom window after his gig at the Lounge in Camp Street. I stoked up the fire in the lounge room, rolled him a little joint and was telling him about the work I was doing with James.

‘Now if you like,’ I told him, ‘James gave me a draft copy. It seems like an illusion now, all that talking. Life’s an illusion so Hindus and Buddhists say,’ I said philosophically.

‘D’ya know the origin of the word ‘illusion’?’ Luke asked.

I did. ‘No Luke, tell me.’

Luke grinned triumphantly. ‘It comes from the Latin *ludere*. It means to play and dance.’

‘Your Latin pays dividends,’ I said dryly.

‘So, let’s see how well ya dance then,’ he said, ‘let me read it.’

*

The most memorable year at LaTrobe University was 1972. This was the year the University and State Government sent me to Pentridge Prison. The previous three years had been a heady lead up. Looking back, perhaps my whole life was a preparation for imprisonment.

Pentridge was a place where curiously there seemed no time. Days, weeks and months misted into indefinability, a spatial miasma that made chronological measurement meaningless. Pentridge became a state of mind within, a lightspace created by the State but not of the State. In prison, Irving Goffman's *Asylum* reminded me that reality, in which is included 'madness', is defined by the walls of the institution itself. Reality becomes relative, adjustable, an illusion. The setting can be a madhouse, seminary, prison, university, a family or something as banal as the local tennis club.

'Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage,' Richard Lovelace wrote.

Reality was both graspable and unreachable. The bluestone and steel was so crushingly there. Pentridge wasn't my real prison. It was society itself. Wilhelm Reich wrote that 'in order to break out of prison, one must first confess to living in a prison.' I'd done that.

*

I stretch out on my prison bed. It's night and I look up at the bars. Black rectangles frame ink-blue sky with sprinkles of pale stars like a Leunig cartoon.

I mull over books I've been reading, three or four books at the same time to avoid boredom. My prison sentence is indefinite, at the Government's pleasure. I spend my time reading. I read Tolstoy's War and Peace and Vladimir Lenin's What Is To Be Done, in case there's some strategy in the political madness I can use against the State and University. Hermanne Hesse is my favourite, in particular, Narziss and Goldmund. The destroyed monastery on the front cover reminds me of the destruction of my religion, the burnt shell within and without. I'm both Goldmund the philanderer and Narziss the monastic. The two characters represent a search for spiritual peace and secular justice I might have to die for. The other Hesse novel, the anti-Nazi one, Magister Ludi, The Glass Bead Game, with its master player Joseph Knecht, is also a favourite. Knecht could be me, a man struggling to relate ideals to a disinterested world. I still read Demian occasionally.

I keep myself busy. I write articles: Homosexuality in Prison and The Coming Revolution and other articles are smuggled out to be published in Rabelais, the Latrobe University student newspaper.

Was I prepared to die for 'the revolution'? Yes. That's the way with fanatics and fresh converts. In the flash of the moment I was ready to die for it. I believed all prisoners were political prisoners one way or another and that politics grew out of the barrel of a gun. My position was clear long before four burly plainclothes detectives from the Victorian Special Branch came to collect me on a sunny Sunday morning in Nhill.

It was a long drive to the City. They must have left Melbourne before dawn to be in Nhill a little after nine a.m. They planned it well. The four men in grey suits with shoulder holsters were straight out of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*.

'There's some men here to see you,' Dad told me in characteristic understatement. Dad stood at my bedroom door, Sunday missal in hand ready for Mass. Mum was in the kitchen. I thought of making a run for it out the back door but by the time I'd stumbled into the kitchen the detectives had it covered. It was over. There was no formal 'you are under arrest'. One simply said 'You know why we're here.'

I knew alright.

'Will he have time for some breakfast?' Mum asked them.

The officers glanced at each other awkwardly. They wanted to get back to Melbourne.

'OK.'

Mum bustled about in her country way. Dad's hand shook on his Sunday Missal. In tense silence bacon and eggs spattered in the pan, the toaster popped and jug boiled. Silence as I ate.

'I'll pack a bag for you,' Mum said eventually. By the time I drained the last of the coffee the police were itching to be off for the five hour drive to Melbourne. We didn't talk the entire trip. I was scared they'd take a sideroad and belt the shit out of me. We stopped at Craig's Hotel in Ballarat for lunch. I asked to be excused from the grand Prince's Dining Room to go to the toilet. A detective stood

outside the toilet door. I took a furtive look out the louvered window and cast my eye at an outside down-pipe to the ground below. No. Too risky. I didn't want a shot in the back. I returned to lunch.

My mind was full of revolution. I was a young man of twenty-three, the fiery student rebel, just like my Irish convict great grandfather.

I arrived at University when I'd just turned twenty. In my first year, 1969, I tortured over the existence of God and the divinity of Jesus. I finally realised that god was three letters of the alphabet and Jesus was as divine as you or I. This realisation caused me to throw off the dogma of the Catholic Church. I tipped over the edge into existential crisis. No doubt about it. I was open for business.

Student revolutionaries opened their arms to me and I to them. I was at once an anarchist, communist and bohemian. 'I'm a revolutionary anarcho-communist,' I announced to all as I stripped and danced naked at wild student parties.

I was a late starter. My genesis sprang from the Civil Rights Movement of Martin Luther King; the radical chic of Andy Warhol's Manhattan; Mario Savio and the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in California; the Summer of Love in San Francisco in 1967 and the student revolt in Paris in 1968. In 1967 I still had two years to go before shedding my straight jacket.

When I finally arrived I entertained the entire spectrum of radical philosophies. My guests were wild sex, crazy drugs, provocative music and dramatic politics. I met new and wonderful friends

such as Suzie Bryce who took me to Stoneygrad, a house by the Yarra at Warrandyte built by Danila Vassilieff the Russian painter. Suzie introduced me to Pat Mackie who had led the Mount Isa strike in the sixties. There were parties at Dunmoochin with Cliff Pugh and Alastair Knox, lazy hours at Montsalvat and talks at Neil Douglas' place at Kangaroo Ground.

I read Ernest Hemingway on revolution. Hemingway wrote in *The Gambler*, *the Nun and the Radio* that revolution was both catharsis and ecstasy. I became a dedicated revolutionary, a Marxist-Leninist and Maoist, with a taste for anarchism and adventurism.

When the University and State Government finally put me away, my prison cell became a monastery cell, not dissimilar to the monastery cell at Corpus Christi Seminary in the old Chirside mansion at Werribee Park in 1967. Two sides of the same coin. The thick, bluestone walls of Pentridge may have been paper for the way my spirit soared, the way the spirit of any young man should soar if he has heart and soul. At 23 I was too old to be excused by the State yet young and naive enough to believe I was a committed anarcho-communist. I accused my father of being a 'capitalist pig' but he was just a small businessman who'd started with nothing, raised five kids and worked his guts out to become moderately successful. I was arrogant.

A red and gold Mao badge shone on my small wooden cell table. It was my altar. I meditated on Mao, Lenin and Bakunin just as I'd once meditated

on Thomas Aquinas and Emmanuel Kant with the Jesuits.

Mao-Tse-tung said the capitalist state was only a paper tiger. Should I work for an armed rebellion or simply wait for a mass uprising of the industrial proletariat? Mao said politics grows out of the barrel of a gun. Contradictions, contradictions! Well, I had plenty of time to wrestle with contradictions in Pentridge. My historiography was tutored by outstanding teachers at LaTrobe: Inga Clendinnen, Fiona Mackie, Lyn Richards, Joe Camilleri, Barry Jones, John Carroll, John Hirst and Greg Denning. They provided academic rigour, the dialectic and methodology to do battle with 'contradictions'. Of them, it is Clendinnen whom I remember best. Almost forty years after she taught me about the clash between Europe and the Aztecs, she continues to inspire with cut-through analysis of the 'history wars'. Inga taught that memory alone cannot tell us our history but it can tell us how we feel. This book is what I feel about my life. It is not definitive history.

University life in 1969 for a strictly brought up Catholic just turned twenty was wonderfully exciting. A cavalcade of people, the flags, the political speeches, marijuana hazed meetings, violent May Day demonstrations, the police, sex behind the barricades and political intrigue, all stood in stark contrast to the conservative straightness of Saint Patrick's College and Corpus Christi College Seminary. I was a tiny part of a mass student movement in Australia and the Western world. Underpinning our rebellion was the struggle against

conservative State and Australian governments. We fought against the ideological and racist war in Asia and conscription into the army. Our enemy was the greedy, amoral bastard who profited behind an opaque glass tower in a panelled boardroom.

Isn't it ever the same? Of course it is, even more so today. In the wash-up mighty capitalism won. Today, looking out James' window towards Prince's Park, I wonder just how 'radical' we really were? Perhaps not as radical as we'd liked to have been or needed to be to make a substantial difference. Not as 'radical' as we liked to imagine ourselves. A lot was gained, still is being gained, but the 'revolution' was not as substantial as we romantics hoped for.

My comrades and friends were University activists, politicians, communist Union leaders, radical academics, artists and Koori activists such as Ambrose Golden-Brown. Delegates and participants at the Australian Union of Students' Councils at The George Hotel, St. Kilda today read like a who's who of Australian life, people such as Gary Foley, Stuart Morris, Chris Sidoti, Dennis Walker and Meredith Bergmann.

Some I knew well, most just to say hello to, conversations here and there at student meetings and demonstrations. There was a war to fight. Political involvement was not a social game. The enemy was not mere edifice. The enemy was built into the ideological hegemony of Australian society, its culture and way of life. It was Australian society we sought to change. The political manifestation of the enemy

was ironically called the Liberal Party, with its public school tie and squatter grazier/Melbourne Club culture. The economic manifestation was Australian industry. It supplied the war machine for the racist war in Vietnam. Wedded to this were The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO); the Joint Intelligence Organization (JIO); Defence Signals Directorate (DSI); the Commonwealth Police and State-based Special Branches. They all held files on us.

The Roman Catholic Church and its National Civic Council led by B.A. Santamaria also had its own ideologically driven, paranoid barrow to push. In News Weekly, the NCC print propaganda arm, my photo appeared over the caption 'Communist'. A few years before, I'd had my photo taken with Cardinal Knox at Corpus Christi College seminary. Former seminarians and 'lapsed' Catholics made excellent revolutionaries. We were fertile soil.

The cult figures of the hour were Ho Chi Minh (leader of the National Liberation Front of North Vietnam) and Che Guevara (murdered by the C.I.A.); North American Black Panther activists such as Angela Davis, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Abbie Hoffman, Eldridge Cleaver and Stokeley Carmichael; and radical North American anti-war activists Jerry Rubin, Timothy Leary, the Berrigan brothers and Daniel Ellsberg (who spilt the beans on President Nixon over the Watergate scandal). Their posters were on the walls of thousands of student rooms across Australia and the world, from Oxford and Cambridge college rooms to Columbia and

Berkeley to Sydney and Melbourne, Glebe and Carlton terraces, Paris and Manhattan attics. From Europe, the neo-Marxist writing of Ernest Mandel, Régis Debray and Daniel Cohn-Bendit inspired us. From America, the writing of Noam Chomsky, Herbert Marcuse and Norman Mailer. In 1970, Richard Neville's *Playpower* presented the gospel of 'work' as the prime evil of society.

In 1970, Charles Reich in *The Greening of America* wrote that:

There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture and it will change the political culture as its final act. It promises a higher reason, a more human community and its ultimate creation will be a new and enduring wholeness and beauty. This is the revolution of the new generation. Their protest and rebellion are not a passing fad. It is a consistent philosophy that is both necessary and inevitable and in time will include not only youth but all of us

In the early twenty-first century, we're still waiting.

In 1970, secret meetings were held of the radical Students for a Democratic Society in Palmerston Street, Carlton. No one knew the precise membership of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) and its Worker-Student Alliance, so secret were its meetings, so paranoid the security. I was under the impression I was a member but was blind-

folded and taken to clandestine gatherings in anonymous rooms in nameless suburbs. After all, anyone could wear denim, have a red and gold Mao badge and spout from Mao's Little Red Book yet still be an informer, spy, agent provocateur working for ASIO and a traitor. And, of course, as in all revolutions, more than a few were on ASIO's payroll.

Ours was global revolution. It involved changing the political and social consciousness of present and future generations. Every generation supplants the previous generation. It's always been so. This time it was different. A unique confluence of historical circumstances converged to make our generation's will to power more significant. There was an economic boom in Western nations. There was low unemployment and low interest rates. There was necessity for reconstruction after the Second World War. There was a 'baby boom' following the end of the War. There was great expansion of tertiary education necessitated by demand for intellectually trained technicians and professionals.

A determination for radical change arose from the new intelligentsia emerging from recently built 'cream brick' universities. A cultural divide split our generation from authoritarian institutional structures such as the Catholic Church, the 'nuclear family' and conservative established political Parties.

This was not a youth rebellion of mere generational will to power. At rock bottom we were determined to overthrow the institutions and ideologues manipulating us. We believed Australians were good people corruptly led, the old slaughtering their

young. We sought to change that. We wanted to overturn 'the system'.

Friends backpacked through Indonesia, India and Thailand. They returned with a realisation that the great religions had one god and that Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad were the messengers. This was a new world consciousness, a world-faith of peace and understanding.

I read of the persecution of Gnostic Christians in the first centuries of Christianity. I learnt about the persecution of the Cathars in 1307 and the Knights Templar by the Roman Catholic Church in 1312 because these Orders' unsurprising 'secret' was that Mary Magdelene and Jesus were lovers, lived in France after the 'crucifixion' and had children. This knowledge is the Holy Grail. Religion is all about the manipulation of knowledge by the powerful.

I read my Krishnamurti, Bhagavad Gita and Rudolph Steiner from the Theosophical Bookshop. I dived into Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao, annotated Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, beatified Nietzsche and familiarised myself with Hegel, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Thus Spake Zarathustra I read in a tiny kitchen in Walhalla in the Victorian Alps. I mused with Engels' On the History of Early Christianity. I brought the anarchist Bakunin into my thirsting soul. I wondered at the irony of Stalin's The Withering Away of the State. Proudhon on What is Property and Rosa Luxemburg's Reform or Revolution, were grain for the mill. Neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse' Eros and Civilisation and Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit's Obsolete Communism:

The Left-Wing Alternative, lay open on my prison table. I read and re-read books bought at the International Bookshop in Elizabeth Street where Ian MacDonald and I called in on Saturdays to browse for hours.

The shop is long-since closed. There's no call today for that kind of literature in the deconstructionist, meaningless-theory days of the twenty-first century. It's all business management, e-commerce and accountancy these days. So boring.

I learnt how the corporate state operated. How independent thinkers such as the American Marxist C. Wright Mills were pilloried and isolated by reactionary academics and nervous universities too scared to pursue the very truth they purported to seek. The university as a place of free and independent enquiry in the Henry Newman tradition became a major battleground. We lost that battle. As ageing leftists retire to their superannuation, today's generation of 'sessional' academics are the new slaves in corporatised Australian universities.

I decided against a 'career'. I had no wish to be swallowed up in such a system. I wouldn't be a sycophant. Mine remains the life-long role of the grass-roots romantic revolutionary. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund would eventually see the light. There are signs that they are. In the past, serious money was to be made keeping poor nations in a state of crippling debt. Today, cancellation of debt is seen as excellent public relations, a foundation stone for even greater profit in the future.

Four decades after the ‘youth rebellion’ there are new battles for a dedicated homo-anarchist: Burroughs-Wellcome and other drug companies over doubtful AIDS drugs; governments that ignore the AIDS crisis; fundamentalist religions that dismiss AIDS as ‘Satan’s revenge’. The fight continues to educate the young ‘straight’ and the young ‘queer’.

The canvas is global. Today’s battle is to re-green the planet and stop fossil fuels poisoning the air. It’s about the global fight for water. It’s about carbon trading and the terrible harvest of the Industrial Revolution. Only radical, revolutionary change in how we live our lives can fix the problems we’ve created.

There are perennials. When I sat with comrades around the table at the Australian Union of Students in Drummond Street in the seventies, AUS Executive Members listened as Arnold Roth from the Australian Union of Jewish Students, Michael Danby and Ali Kazak (from the Palestinians), argued about recognising the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian problem has not been resolved. It will be.

The Australian Aborigines still have to be recognised as an equal partner. When Prime Minister Rudd said ‘sorry’ in 2008 it was as if a great weight had been lifted from the national psyche. It was a new beginning. A fresh start as partners.

In 1788, Australia was a dumping ground for political prisoners. Today, Australia still has political prisoners, the asylum seekers. We face

encroachment on civil liberties as Governments enact sweeping police powers in the face of 'the war on terror'. In the 1960s, it was also about civil liberties. The script doesn't change. Just the players.

The superstructure will not fall over-night.

*

Prison in 1972 seemed a natural place for me. It was a philosophical home. There were thousands like me around the world, Irish, Palestinians, Indonesians, Russians, Chinese, Americans, Africans, and South Americans. Prison had an aesthetic, spiritual, mystical quality. I had an indefinite sentence. This meant I could still be there. In another country I might have been. A cell as permanent home filled me with dread. Physically I was wasting away. I'd come to prison weighing over eleven stone. In a few months I was down to seven. I was slowly starving to death.

I cold-sweat as the hate-twisted face of a warder comes into focus. He calmly, coldly, told me he intended to shoot me. 'I'm waiting for an opportunity' he told me. Thirty-five years later I still wake up shivering with nightmares about H Division warders. I lie in my cell. There's a jangle of the keys, the panic, the order to stand and strip, the bust, the fear of rape. I try to shut that away. I try to be positive, not to panic. That's what they wanted. To break me.

I had comrades and friends in prison, political prisoners who were draft resisters and political

activists.

‘All prisoners are political prisoners.’ Angela Davis’ statement rang in my head. Comrades are a few cells away, political activists such as Fergus Robinson, Barry York, Ken McClelland, Bobby Scates and Albert Langer. The black of anarchism and red of communism are my colours.

The line up against me on the LaTrobe University Council was formidable. It’s worthwhile to consider a small sample from that Council, the better to understand the great divide. David Myers, Vice-Chancellor, was an internationally respected civil engineer and graduate of New College, Oxford. Sir Archibald Glenn, Chancellor, was Chairman of I.C.I and Chairman of the Scotch College Board. Sir John Buchan was President of the Liberal Party. Sir Keith Aickin was a Q.C. and Director of B.H.P. Sir Bernard Callinan was a Director of B.P. as was Sir John Norgard. All had interlocking directorships with Australia’s major corporations. All belonged to Clubs such as The Melbourne Club, The Naval and Military Club and Athaeneum Club. The Registrar, Major-General Thomas Taylor, was a graduate of Royal Military College, Sandhurst and former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Australian Army. Of course, all of these credentials are laudable. These were very successful, very powerful men. However, face to face with committed Marxist-Leninists conscripted to fight a filthy war in Vietnam, the University exploded.

Today, national magazines and newspapers still do an occasional article on the ‘student radicals’.

Articles mention the three Australian Communist Parties that no longer exist. People ask ‘whatever happened to the revolution?’ There is fascination in the public mind with this period of Australian history. It is being documented. Stories are being told. Histories are being written. Stuart McIntyre has completed a History of the Communist Party of Australia. Michael Hyde has written Hey Joe, a novel about this period. Websites abound. Archives are being established.

*

I stared through the bars, thinking about my convict ancestor, another political prisoner, sent out to Van Diemen’s Land in 1848 from that pretty stone cottage in green Limerick.

‘It’s in the blood!’ I laughed to myself. I reached for my packet of Drum in the dark, roll a cigarette and light up, the red glow a beacon, a light on the hill, the revolution to come. I wished I had some marijuana to settle me down, to help forget what had happened. But I couldn’t forget.

It came a few days after the trouble with Steve.

I smile as I think of Steve. He was sent back to Dartmoor Prison, England.

Steve Raymond alias Edward Byrne was a member of the IRA. He was close to the political and para-military leadership. When Steve quietly mentioned that Sean MacStiofain, Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, was a personal friend, I knew to tread carefully. We met in the yard in D Division

Pentridge, the yard where those who had not yet faced trial were put: murderers, rapists, thieves, politicals, bashers, frauds. You name it; 'the yard' had it. A chance ask for a cigarette, a form of prison currency and we got talking.

The British nabbed Raymond just outside Londonderry, Northern Ireland, when police discovered two bodies stuffed into the boot of his car. He went down as an accessory to murder. Because of his connections he was placed in isolated Dartmoor Prison in England rather than The Maze, Northern Ireland. The Maze was custom-built for the IRA. The 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of Catholics by the British on January 30, 1972 had further militarised the IRA. A wave of bombings terrorised England and Northern Ireland. The campaign reached a high point in 1981 with a hunger strike by IRA prisoners and the deaths of Bobby Sands and ten other prisoners. Steve told me his story as we walked the yard, how he'd managed a compassionate one-day release from Dartmoor to attend the funeral of a non-existent grandmother. He fled. He posed as a journalist for the Sunday Times and made his way to Singapore using an alias. The British Embassy cottoned onto him. Interpol decided to follow him out of Singapore because of extradition problems and he was allowed entry into Australia, a branch office of Britain. Landing in Melbourne, he was immediately arrested and taken to Pentridge Prison.

Steve was a mine of information about Irish student politics gleaned from studies at Trinity

College, Dublin, where he'd completed a Master's in mathematics. We paced the yard together every day talking Irish politics. The D Division yard was very cold in winter. There was no heating in the open yard. It was surrounded by bluestone walls capped with razor wire. The crowded Division had one open shower with cold water. Word came through from the Boys' Yard over the wall about a sit-down strike in D Division to try to get some heating in the Yard. Steve and I discussed tactics.

Lunchtime came. We'd had what passed for lunch, a fatty banger and sloppy dollop of spud washed down with black tea. Then several hundred prisoners just sat there in silence in D Division Hall. We refused to return to the yards. Time passed. No one spoke. No one put himself on the line. With good reason. Recently, a vanload of strikers transported from Bendigo Prison to Pentridge ran a gauntlet of screws who bashed them with baseball bats as they came off the van. We saw their handiwork.

Screws gathered and glared, batons out.

It only needed one dog to break the strike.

The first to get up was an old lag. Doubtless he'd seen it all before and considered his chances of retribution. Ignoring the hundreds of eyes boring into him, he quietly walked out into the Sentence Yard.

The strike began to break. Next to rise were the Sentence Yard men. They had most to lose, up for classification into various divisions. A bad mark for a pretty young man could mean being stuck in a four-out with three rapists. The boys themselves,

initiators of the sit-down, started to leave for their yard, scared shitless for themselves. A night in a six-out cell with five long-termers could easily be arranged and meant only one thing for a good-looking boy. The last to get up were the Remands. Many were first-timers who'd not yet faced trial. They weakened before glowering screws itching to go in for the bash. Eventually, out of several hundred strikers, only two remained. Steve and me.

We stood up to face the screws. The Chief of Division, Mr Baker, backed up by four officers, approached. I nervously rolled a cigarette. The Chief knocked it out of my hand. I braced for a bashing. It did not come. We spoke to the Chief civilly about the need for heating in the freezing Yard. The Chief was remarkably amiable, sure of his potential power. He said he'd see what he could do. True to his word, next day a kerosene heater the size of an oil drum appeared in the yard. We'd won. Steve and I were the heroes of the Yards.

But it wasn't as simple as that. It never is. Payback was coming. Prison, if it has any redeeming features at all, knows how to wait, how to sweat it out, to bide time.

Night slipped away. It was three days after the strike. I lay on my mattress in the silence. Thin light from a full moon and security lights came through the bars. I rolled another cigarette. Steve had been quickly extradited back to England the day after the strike. The Prison didn't want trouble on the scale Steve Raymond could organise. I was on my own. I was transferred from other political prisoners who

were in A Division. I missed Steve, our daily political talks and his wild yarns about the IRA.

But he would re-appear.

In 1983, sitting in the staff-room at Saint Joseph's, North Fitzroy, my eye was caught by a brief newspaper item naming Steve Raymond as an IRA participant in a million dollar gold bullion heist at Heathrow. I smiled to myself as I returned to the classroom.

The screws transferred me to solitary confinement in D Division. My cell door opened onto the gallows. Every morning, the first thing I saw when the screw crashed the door open for muster was the gallows, where the last political prisoner to be hanged in the State, Ronald Ryan, was dropped in 1967. He was strung up by Hangman Bolte, Premier of Victoria, who had a law and order election to win. Bolte initiated my imprisonment in partnership with the University. Bolte put pressure on the Vice-Chancellor David Myers to get 'those student rat-bags' under control. Ronald Ryan's rope burn was on the crossbeam.

Three days after the successful strike I appeared in the Supreme Court. Peter Faris represented me and Ken Marks Q.C. Faris was a young Queen's Counsel and among the State's most brilliant. I was one in a line of prisoners hand-cuffed together and transported to the Court. There'd been several trips to the Supreme Court all to no avail. There was no trial. There never would be. There rarely is for a political prisoner. Political prisoners just waste and rot away. Some make it such as Nelson Mandela.

Most don't. Today I admire the courage of Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma as she faces up to the Junta. I had not been charged with an offence so I could never be tried. I was in contempt of the Supreme Court. I was an indefinite, to be released at the whim of the State and Sir Henry Bolte.

If I as political prisoner begged forgiveness, if I apologised, if I 'purged' my contempt, then maybe a Supreme Court Judge, with an ear close to the Premier's mouth, with a wink and a nudge from the University, might recommend a release. But this was hypothetical. There could be no apology, no 'purging'. It was the State itself that needed to be purged. To crawl to the State, to the vindictive man who was Premier, to the industrialists and reactionary academics who dominated the University Council, may not mean release at all. All principle would be lost.

The previous year, 1971, I was excluded from the University for participating in a blockade of the University Council. I was President of the Student Council. At Proctorial Board hearings the University imposed hefty fines. The Student Council decided to pay the fines. This enraged University Councillors and right-wing students. The University 'froze' Student Council bank accounts. Further occupations of the Administration Building followed. I continued to be smuggled onto campus to address student meetings. The University and State Government successfully applied for an Injunction to stop me from entering the campus. Continued occupations and blockades ensued. The

University and the Government applied for a warrant for my arrest. As I saw it, it was a student rights issue and the right to democratically express opposition to the War. Since Vietnam was an immoral war there could be no back-down. From the University and Government point of view, my comrades and I were disrupting the administration of the University. Something had to give.

My Supreme Court appearance was another failed attempt by the conservative establishment to elicit a backdown. It was back to Pentridge Prison.

Up until the strike I'd had a cell of my own. I liked that. I read, meditated and wrote. I was the monastic, the isolate, the lone wolf.

Returning from the Supreme Court I was placed in a six-out with five other prisoners. We played poker.

'Lights out!'

A minute would pass before the night screw pulled the master switch.

'Anyone interested in having a bit?' one asks. We look quickly at each other then down at our cards. The last hand.

'No,' we all say singly, going around the ring. I was suspicious. I hadn't liked the situation from the start when I was placed in the cell.

They were all about my age, late teens, early twenties. One was sixteen. In different circumstances I'd have gone for him. He had cute punk-spike hair and thick pouty cock-sucking lips, tight little arse and criminal ways. A teenage thug.

The cell was suddenly plunged into darkness. We

clumsied our way to our bunks, three-tiered on each side of the cell.

I nodded off, tired out by the day at the Supreme Court. I woke suddenly. I was held down.

‘Shut-up fuck-head!’ someone spat in my ear. ‘You hear? You shut the fuck up!’

I struggled in the darkness. Useless. A gag was stuffed into my mouth. It was almost impossible to breathe. My jeans were pushed down, legs parted and held there. One got himself between my legs.

He found it hard to get his way. I sensed the teenage thug. Then he found what he was looking for. His shove shot bluefire stars through my brain. The young crim went at it savage and fast then the grunt as he came. No lubricant or courtesy of a glob of spit. They took it in turns, all five, urging their sap with fuck-talk.

‘I’ll fuckin’ show you, you fuckin’ faggot poof!’

‘He fuckin’ loves it. He’s fuckin’ lovin’ it!’

Seed ran down my legs. I was their woman, their hole in an all-male world with my white, slim body and long, gold locks.

They told me if I yelled or reported I’d be ‘dead meat’. I wiped myself down with a towel in the blackness. In the morning I could barely get off my bunk. I struggled to dress. The five ignored me. I caught a snigger between them. I could barely walk. I tortured down the steel Division gangway into the yard to get morning porridge. I was lucky. There was no infection.

A prisoner in the know told me the gang-bang was a set-up. It was payback from the screws for the

strike. 'There's more to come,' he told me.

It arrived in the Remand Yard one icy grey morning after porridge and black tea.

To keep me on the straight and narrow a screw ordered my long, blond locks to be cut. I was an indefinite, not a convicted criminal, not obliged by regulation to have my hair cut. In the grey prison morning my hair was to be cut in front of several hundred prisoners.

I protested to the officer.

'It's an order,' the officer told the trusty prisoner barber.

I sat on the three-legged stool. I thought of the dunking-stool supposed witches were lashed to. If they drowned they weren't witches. If they survived it was the devil's work so they must be witches after all. I couldn't win.

I sat on the three-legged barber's stool as prisoners from three yards looked on. Theatre. Lamb to the slaughter.

Again I protested, this time to the prisoner barber, a murderer 'trusty'. The prisoner held a pair of scissors to my throat.

'I'll slit ya fuckin' throat if you don't shut up,' he hissed in my ear. Executioners have a job to do. He was 'only obeying orders'. Now where had I heard that before?

I broke into a cold sweat and bowed my head. I thought of Nazi concentration camps.

The prisoner savaged my golden hair. It fell to the ground. I was cut so close to the scalp it looked as if I'd been shaved. A true con. The screws

laughed. Everyone laughed.

The State was making its point. It was breaking my spirit.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University, David Myers, consistent in a determination not to allow the tide of world history and issues of life and death to affect his position, came one afternoon to plead with me to apologise to the Supreme Court and sign myself out of prison. It was a rush trip to Pentridge for him. He was on his way to the airport to a Commonwealth Universities Conference in London to discuss, of all things, student protests.

‘That’s all that’s needed. Your signature. Then the University can speak to the Premier and the Supreme Court,’ Myers pleaded.

So simple. So artless. I explained to him the impossibility of seeking forgiveness for something I had not done. Myers left the prison depressed. The Vice-Chancellor may have comprehended my political and ideological conviction but did not realise how vulnerable and wavering I really was. Other members of the University Council also came to visit. The Master of Ormond College, Davis McCaughey turned up one day. We had a long discussion about political prisoners. McCaughey knew all about political prisoners, himself an émigré from ‘the troubles’ of Belfast, Northern Ireland. A clutch of directors from B.H.P. who served on the University Council, their steel arming the soldiers in Vietnam, also came in, accompanied by a brace of Labor politicians desperate to be relevant. One morning Ted Hill arrived, Secretary of the

Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). My mother and father also visited, their plea unspoken rather than stated. They told me I was 'being used' by the communists and opportunists. I never believed I was. I knew all along what I was doing and why I was doing it. My parents did not understand the political complexities. Unlike the movers and shakers in this War, theirs was an innocent naiveté, not educated ignorance. My father told a Herald reporter: 'He's old enough to know what he's doing'. I loved Dad for saying that. Still, their visit was the hardest of all to bear. It shook my conviction to the core. They did not understand the political battleground. All they saw was the beautiful altar boy fresh from Mass, now a con with shorn head, baggy grey prison clothes and a raped, starving body. Love has no place in the political battleground. When crates from the Massey-Ferguson factory in Sunshine were delivered to the family business in Nhill, workers had painted 'free all political prisoners' on them. It was all politics.

Months passed and I made new acquaintances. There was young Donny Thompson, an armed robber who provided me with extra food. Donny wasn't too bright but was physically powerful, a gym fanatic. Everyone was in awe of his physical prowess. I dared to say hello to him. From that day on he protected me. All Donny wanted was someone to talk to. No one had ever actually listened to Donny's story. Everyone has a story. Donny died in a stupid gunfight soon after being released. There was Stanley Charles Wyatt, the backyard abortion-

ist, a prominent informant against State police officers Ford and Matthews during the 1970 Kaye Inquiry into police corruption, which led to the imprisonment of corrupt Victorian police. Kaye also headed up the LaTrobe University Proctorial Board. The later Beech Inquiry in 1975 led to abortion law reform in Victoria. One of the bravest men I met around this time was Dr Bertram Wainer the abortion law reform campaigner. On the other side of the coin was Jim, a backyard abortionist with whom I shared a cell one day in the dungeon beneath the Supreme Court. I was with him when he had the death sentence pronounced on him for the murder of a woman who'd died after one of his botched abortions. The face of a man who has just had the sentence of death passed on him is a face never forgotten. There were no winners.

There was baby-faced little Pete Gardiner the heroin dealer. He gave me my first and last hit of heroin in a crummy room in Faraday Street, Carlton. I never got into it. I was in love with him and helped him when he skipped bail, on the run yet again as he roared off on his sexy, throbbing black Harley.

And of course there were the lawyers. Peter Faris Q.C. led the charge, going back to the Star Chamber to prove that imprisonment without trial was a cruel and unusual punishment. Hours were spent in pubs with lawyers, politicians and activists before my arrest. We discussed strategies. We jokingly discussed the feasibility of blowing the Esso-B.H.P. pipeline, whether to put LSD into the coffee urn of University Councillors or cut the telephone wires to

the University. It was only beer talk and not taken seriously. But other things were. A Supreme Court Judge's car was torched and a security guard box at the University was bombed.

Years later, Faris became head of the National Crime Authority. Only briefly. He was the innocent victim of a set up outside a massage parlour in Adelaide and obliged to quit. The system has its ways and means for those too keen in the fight against the organised drug trade. Faris was and still is, a prominent fighter against that grim trade.

Some of the progressive lawyers involved in the LaTrobe struggle became Supreme Court judges, such as Phillip Cummins, who triumphed in the defence of students after the violent Waterdale Road demonstrations in 1971. Stuart Morris, a progressive student from AUS days is today a Supreme Court judge. Phillip Dunn Q.C. assisted. On the other side, the prosecution, were the likes of John Winnecke, a conservative's conservative and son of Sir Henry Winnecke, a former Governor of the State of Victoria. Winnecke delighted in prosecuting radical students on behalf of the University at its Proctorial Board hearings. It made his reputation. The police and the State took exquisite pleasure in it.

In Pentridge Prison itself, only Father John Brosnan the chaplain was someone whom I could completely trust. He represented the priest I never became. He became a close friend. I used to visit him often for a yarn at his little flat in Fitzroy. He could recite Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson

without end. I invited him to address the senior boys at Saint Patrick's College where I taught for a few years. The boys said it was the best lot of yarns they'd heard. His book, *A Knockabout Priest*, is a good read.

The media were muzzled regarding my imprisonment. Newspapers coming into the prison had political articles about the imprisonment cut out. There were few enough articles in any case because the Official Secrets Act was invoked to stop the media from referring to the imprisonment at all. This was the D Notice, which forbade reference in the media to matters of 'national security'. The Vietnam War was as much about propaganda, 'spin', as genocide. It was as much about disinformation as profiteering. It was about the makers of ideology who would, if they could, win the minds of the people. There was the forthcoming Federal election in December 1972. With closeted 'Billy' McMahon as Prime Minister facing the formidable Gough Whitlam, the Liberal Party was against the wall.

I knew this as I lay in my cell. I played the role of the political martyr. Hero to some, scourge to others. I believed I was striking into the heart of the political structure that manipulated the nation's youth into and out of wars. The system had been at this filthy game since white settlement in 1788, the hidden genocidal war against the Aborigines, the First World War and the racist war in Vietnam. The Second World War had to be fought. Sometimes people have to fight to protect themselves in self-defence. That was a 'just War'.

I knew I was correct. I knew I might have to die for it. That's the way it is with loners and outsiders.

The previous summer, after Christmas in 1971, I went to Wee Waa in New South Wales to work as a weed chipper in the cotton fields. The Kooris had done a Freedom Ride through New South Wales in the sixties. I wanted to see for myself what the real situation was. I saw how Aborigines lived in their rusty tin shacks along blue-green algae rivers. I saw them rounded up like cattle and taken to the Wee Waa lock-up. I worked for one dollar an hour alongside the Aborigines, chipping the weeds away from the precious cotton plants. I watched aeroplanes spray poisonous chemicals over the Namoi valley and over myself. The white foreman would park his utility and water bags at one end of the kilometre-long field so chippers had to work their way towards a drink. Once there, it was a very quick drink from the cool water bag. Then the foreman drove to the opposite end and waited for the chippers to arrive. I chipped for two months, getting to know the Aboriginal workers, listening to their songs, drinking in the Wee Waa pub, seeing the covert and overt racism, seeing them get carted away in police wagons while paralytic whites escaped attention.

Then the floods came washing down the Namoi River spilling over the plains of cotton. Chippers were no longer required. After two months work I had to wire home for cash to get out of town, the pay was so pitiful.

Three Indonesian students from the University of Armidale and a teenage white boy lived with me in

an un-lined corrugated-iron shack perched on a flat river plain in the middle of no-where. The Indonesian students showed me a photo of them screwing a white student at the University. They wanted to get it on with me. The sun had burnt my skin deep brown. My long, blond hair was almost white, held back with a bright red bandana. My body was slim and very fit, no excess fat, so hard the daily regime of the chipper, up at dawn, in the field all day. The Indonesian boys were beautifully hung, black uncut Muslims. Their cocks swayed as they came out of the cold shower opposite the room I shared with the young white boy.

Would have been different now I reflect, as I lay on my prison mattress, I would've taken up their offer. Prison taught me that sex is where you find it. In prison sex there are no walls. Grab it while you can.

I paced the cell. Five steps for, five steps back.

*

One evening after lock-up came 'a development'. When something happens in prison it's called 'a development'.

I was sitting in my cell reading a book about the student rebellion at Monash University, *It Is Right To Rebel*, by Michael Hyde. It's the classic account of the Maoist ideology behind the political activism on Australian campuses. I kept notes for the time when I'd write. Mine was a waiting game, a very small player in shaping the structure and thought of

Australian society. All I had to do was stay where I was and do what I was doing.

I checked the time. Almost nine. A jangle of keys in the door just before lights out. Just like last time when I was strip-searched. I panicked. I put the book down, jumped to my feet and readied for a strip search or a bashing. I'd been expecting it.

A warder stood in the doorway.

'Court in the morning,' a screw said curtly and banged the door in my face.

On 'the outside' wheels were moving. Amnesty International was taking an interest in my case. There was concern from the liberal-wing of conservative State Government politicians. They felt it was time to release me, despite the fact that I'd not, in that delightful phrase, 'purged contempt', as if life was some kind of political enema. My attitude was unchanged. Why admit to something I had not done? I had faithfully carried out my duties as President of the Student Council of the University. I'd protected the right of students to self-determination. It was the State and University that acquiesced to violence with their obsequious attitude to the war in Vietnam. The sword of righteousness was white hot in my hand. I was the happy warrior and, as my ASIO file stated, 'not a thug'. Thanks for that.

But I was an embarrassment to liberal democracy.

Norm Gallagher's Builders' Labourers' Federation had stopped all construction work on the LaTrobe campus. Ted Bull, Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation, was interrupting

work on the Melbourne docks. We had support from Ian MacDonald's uncle Ken Carr who ran seventeen rebel unions. 'Fellow travellers' and I had become an obstacle to the State economy.

Call it principle, call it sacrifice, call it pride or plain stubbornness, I stood before Justice McInerney of the Supreme Court the next day. I was to be released. Conditions would apply. The State and University tried to save face.

The State promised release if I signed a contract to refrain from violence. I refused.

'Society has been satisfied,' Judge McInerney said from his panelled bench with the over-head canopy, 'you have served your debt to society.'

But what was my debt? What kind of society was it? Who and what was being satisfied?

I was taken back to Pentridge.

'Student control of student affairs' was the cry as hundreds of flag waving, chanting students and union leaders marched down Sydney Road to Pentridge and hammered on the doors of the A Division outer gates. Comrades such as Jean McLean, Joan Coxedge, Ted Bull, Bill Hartley, Ted Hill, Mary Stewart, Sandy Doull and Ian MacDonald led the march. I saw from the first tier of A Division the massive steel gates buckle and almost give way. Warders broke open the armoury, took out rifles, slipped in cartridges and placed themselves between the cellblock and the wavering gates in case the pressure of the crowd brought the gates down. It would have been blood bath.

'I'm going to shoot you,' the screw told me,

standing there with his loaded gun.

A few days later Peter Faris visited again.

‘Your release is imminent,’ Faris reported, ‘you’ll be called to Court again on Monday.’

That was four days away. A day is a long time in prison.

*

Saturday afternoon. There were only two screws on duty in J Division, the Boys’ Division. All prisoners were allowed into the hall in J Division to watch the Saturday movie. Hello Dolly with Barbara Streisland. Not my cup of tea. I recognised some of boys who’d raped me. I avoided their gaze.

I spotted a newcomer. A thin, pale boy on his own. Others stared at the new boy.

Most of the boys and the two screws were at the Saturday movie. Some preferred to just hang around, read or play table tennis. Three boys approached the new boy. They whispered something in his ear. He went very pale. They all went up to the deserted end of the second tier and into a cell. The door quickly closed behind them. Prison civilisation is barbaric.

In the end I was strangely reluctant to leave Pentridge Prison. It was like leaving a monastery. I stood in the foggy grey dawn. I looked at the faces of the prisoners. My last roll call. The officer with alcohol on his breath yelled out our numbers.

‘Two Seven One Eight.’

‘Sir!’

Release came only after I and two other political prisoners, Fergus Robinson and Barry York, told the State and the University to also refrain from acts of violence, such as the violence of imprisoning its own students. The University agreed. It was a victory of sorts, a face-saving exercise for everyone. It highlighted inherent contradictions regarding the moral high ground. Who, if anyone, has the right to stand on it?

I said good-bye to prisoners who had become friends. I packed the Lenin, Hesse and Tolstoy and returned to the University in quiet triumph. Students looked at me strangely. They knew I'd been through an experience they could only imagine. I involved myself in politics but I was more detached, more careful and circumspect. A few months later the Whitlam Government was elected. I re-emerged into active student political life. I was again elected President of the Student Council. This gave me a seat at the Council of the University. I sat face to face with the industrialists, academics and politicians who'd sent me to prison. This was a delicious savour. It was clearly uncomfortable for them. I knew what they were. They knew that I knew. There wasn't a damn thing they could do about it. The Chancellor, Sir Archibald Glenn, was obliged to resign for 'personal reasons'. A new Chancellor, the amiable, quietly brilliant Justice Reginald Smithers, became the new Chancellor. The Hangman Premier was gone. A more liberal Premier, Dick Hamer, replaced him. 'Times were a'changin'.

Recently, the South African anti-apartheid fight-

er Albie Sachs came to Australia. He told us a story about the South African Truth Commission. The army officer who ordered Albie's car blown up approached the Commission for an amnesty. With apartheid gone and Nelson Mandela President, Albie was now a judge of the High Court. The bomb had blown Albie's arm off. Now he was being asked to forgive the man who'd tried to kill him. He did. He forgave him. That's what I did too. I forgave them. I'll never forget. Scars never disappear.

I was offered a place in the Sociology Honours course in 1973. I knocked it back. I chose to do a teaching Diploma. Perhaps this was a mistake but one makes choices. I became involved in progressive reform at the University. The discipline code of the University was improved. There was increased student representation on University Boards, Committees and Council. I enjoyed inviting political luminaries of the day such as 'Diamond' Jim McClelland to campus. Friends left University to organise in the unions. John Cummins went to the Builders' Labourers Federation; Fergus Robinson went to the Vehicle Builders' Union; Ian MacDonald went to the Australian Union of Students. Hundreds of new progressive teachers joined the teacher Unions.

Around this time I got to know Professor of Sociology at LaTrobe, Claudio Veliz from Chile. He was politically connected to the then recently assassinated President of Chile, Salvador Allende. Veliz' capacity to adapt to sudden political change amazed me. He was an expert on Latin American

guerrilla movements. Some thought him a CIA man. The Left gave him a hard time after the assassination of Salvador Allende because although Veliz had helped Allende to write his platform he failed to condemn the Pinochet regime. The regime murdered thousands of young men and women, dropped students out of planes and tortured students to death in the Santiago soccer stadium.

I wrote a small book about the link between the CIA and the Pinochet coup for the Australian Union of Students. Costa Gravas directed a gripping film about Chile called Missing.

I became heavily involved in the political life of the Australian Union of Students and was elected to its National Executive. Life became a volatile cocktail of radical politics, parties in Carlton, academic studies and a sexuality that exploded. A cause celebre, an elected student leader made political prisoner by a University, I enjoyed local hero status. The scar of prison rape never healed. Melbourne was just coming out of its homosexual closet in 1974. I lived at 152 Faraday Street with Ian MacDonald and Cheryl Buchanan a prominent aboriginal activist. I frequented Carlton bars where homosexuals gathered. I made out with queer political activists around the country. I went on trips to Sydney to Capriccio's, Patches and The Albury, the gay bars on Oxford Street when Sydney sleaze was run by Abe Saffron and Dawn O'Donnell. I read Dennis Altman's pioneering *Homosexual Liberation*. I was heavily into acid, marijuana and speed. I stood for President of the AUS dramatically and unsuccessful-

fully. I had a nervous collapse. I bombed out and resigned from the Student Council. I put it all in the good hands of LaTrobe students Sandy Doull, Peter Saulwick, Drew Hilton and Ed Lagzdin. Everyone thought I'd 'lost the plot'. A.S.I.O. took note.

I left Carlton. I went school teaching. I did two years at Saint Patrick's College and some lecturing in politics at the local University. I missed the excitement of politics but did not seriously seek a way back. By the late 70s I tired of teaching and after a year at Braemar College, Woodend (the former Clyde School for Girls) I resigned. I headed for Europe.

The 'revolution' that was 'just around the corner' partly had partly arrived with the election of the Whitlam Government in December 1972. The nation learned new ways of thinking, ways that sprang from the creative radical student movement. Australians learned from the environment movement, feminism, gay liberation and the push for land-rights for indigenous Australians. The New Left was now 'the establishment'. Education, radical theatre and Australian literature experienced a spring of new ideas that changed forever the lives of Australians. Donald Horne had written of *The Lucky Country* but this was the birth of a new fortune. A new sophistication removed the Australian political and cultural cringe. In *A New Britannia*, Humphrey McQueen gave Australians a fresh understanding of their history. Unions such as the Builders' Labourers' Federation with Norm Gallagher and John Cummins placed a ban on the

demolition of the Regent Theatre, the Melbourne City Swimming Baths and the Victoria Market. Jack Munday and Bob Pringle from the Building Construction Workers' Union imposed a 'Green Ban' on destruction of The Rocks in Sydney. We were beginning to value our story.

The changes would not, however, be radical enough to save the reformist Whitlam Government. The conservative establishment that had been democratically deposed was stolid and resentful. Now in Opposition, it behaved as if its guru 'Ming the Merciless' Menzies was still Prime Minister. It could not bring itself to accept the legitimacy of a Government that sprang from factory workers, unionists, socialists, communists, anarchists, bohemians, queers, artists and idealist radicals. Like my own political act, the new Government did not last long in the flickering political limelight.

The Whitlam Government was dismissed in a Constitutional coup on 11 November 1975. It was engineered by the Commander-in-Chief Sir John Kerr and the Central Intelligence Agency. Bill Hartley, a political associate, had assisted discussions in the Federal Government regarding a large loan from the Middle East, three billion dollars, to 'buy back the farm'. It became known as the 'Loans Affair'. The conservatives thought it 'funny money', not British, IMF or true blue. Certainly there were shady characters around it, such as Tirath Khemlani, but the conservative media, particularly Rupert Murdoch's stable, puffed it up into a major issue. 'The loans affair' was the prime factor behind

the dismissal. After Kerr dismissed Whitlam, it was Bob Hawke, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, who told everyone to 'cool it'. Hawke had his own agenda to be Prime Minister. It was a lost chance for the people. A revolutionary moment was offered by history to declare a Republic only to be washed down the political sewer. The film *The Falcon and the Snowman*, with its portrayal of CIA man Christopher Boyce, spilt the beans on the story. Boyce is still doing life in the United States.

At the December 1975 election I couldn't believe how Australians allowed themselves to be hoodwinked into electing Fraser. It marked the end of a great experiment and the disintegration of the New Left. The halcyon days were over. The conservatives came to power again. It was time to retreat. Comrades and friends thought I'd dropped out. In following decades, State and Federal Governments were made and unmade. Blue-suited men came and went. People felt cheated and disappointed. Political fortunes waxed and waned. Occasionally I put in an appearance at a political meeting or Party conference. I was curious and careful to keep in touch but on the periphery. I never became a big player.

I represented the State Government of John Cain, Premier of Victoria, on the Council of LaTrobe University in the 1980s. I liked Cain because he was independent. We sat next to each other at University Council meetings. The old reactionaries on the Council were now either dead or retired. Cain and I were able to get progressive policies through, par-

ticularly affirmative action policies for women with the help of Christina Bell, daughter of well-known Australian Jazz artist Graham Bell. In 1982 I assisted the accession of Cain to the leadership of the State Opposition by organising a petition with a friend, Graham Proctor, for a spill of Party Parliamentary positions to tip out the ineffective Frank Willis and put in the more electable Cain. The Socialist Left of the Party was furious with me but it was done. The blood was on the floor. It was more important that the Conservatives in Victoria were thrown out than to have the possibility of another three years in the wilderness. Payback to the Liberal Party. Cain was elected Premier. Cain appointed me to the University Council.

The third piece of a triumvirate was set in place by urging the appointment of Richard McGarvie to the Chancellorship of the University. McGarvie and Cain were political mates from the Independent faction of the Party. This small but influential faction included Barry Jones and John Button.

There was no material reward. Most of my life I've been unemployed. I remain so. I was always a back-room boy.

Richard McGarvie became Governor of the State of Victoria. John Cain eventually bowed out, innocent victim of billions lost in financial disasters. Cain was not himself to blame. There was a naiveté in his State Government for which it paid an ultimate price.

Still, I was a rising star. I had it all: political power, a smart terrace house in Fitzroy, an outra-

geous homosexuality, lots of drugs, influential friends.

I'd been staying at my brother Bob's house in Woolloomooloo. I was due for a break. I decided on Bali for a holiday. I pocketed a large foil of MDA from our stash. I was ten minutes out of Denpasar airport when I realised I'd done something very stupid. I'd forgotten about the airport check! As the plane began its descent into Bali I rushed to the toilet and snorted the lot. It was a massive hit. By the time I was checking in I was totally off my tree. I didn't even know my own name. I was in the queue for the passport and narcotics check. My eyes pleaded for help and found a friendly Aussie backpacker. She sussed my situation and guided me through the machine guns and sniffer dogs. My teeth were grinding for days. A close shave.

In 1988 I finished my Doctorate on the Australian radical student movement. The following year the Hawke Government brought in the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. This destroyed the free education established by Whitlam that gave me a Commonwealth Scholarship. I haven't studied at University since.

I prefer the quiet life of country Victoria. The sun-kissed plains of Nhill and the cottage in Ballarat give me peace of mind. The City always beckons to play the games of the City. I'm tempted and say no thanks.

It was 1986 when I finally threw it all up in the air. I had a secure job at Saint Joseph's College in North Fitzroy, a terrace house in Fitzroy I was pay-

ing off, a seat on the LaTrobe University Council and was influential in the Labor Party. After much internal toing and froing I decided to cut loose, leave Melbourne and live in Sydney. I settled in Woolloomooloo with my brother Bob.

I rang Chancellor Richard McGarvie to tell him I was getting out. We arranged to meet one evening in his salubrious book-lined rooms at the Supreme Court. Deep down below in the cells I'd once been in handcuffs.

'The writing's on the wall for the Government,' I told Richard. I was referring to the State Labor Government of John Cain. It was coming unstuck. McGarvie turned grey. He didn't want to hear that. He wished me luck as we said goodbye. He looked sad. I'm not one for funerals but attended Richard's in 2003 at St Paul's. A fine Australian.

Of course, in the end as they say, its numbers that count and the numbers weren't there. I didn't have the drive to be a professional politician. I didn't chase a Seat. There was no political career. Neither did being openly homosexual sit well with straight-jacketed union leaders and political power brokers in the Australian political system. I wasn't one of the boys. I was too hot to handle and a loose cannon.

The academic career I desired did not arrive either. Universities are conservative institutions, today less likely than ever to take a gamble with someone who questioned. In any case, I had not published and, as they say, publish or perish. There was a whisper that I had never really recovered from imprisonment and the drugs, that I was unstable and difficult. In the end,

all that remained was school teaching but I didn't stick at that either. Once a year I return to the University for a Life Members' Dinner. It's the only contact I have with a former life.

Ironically in the 1990s State Labor Parties did put up openly homosexual candidates but only where there were influential queer populations, such as Darlinghurst and Prahran. Being 'queer' wasn't a vote winner. No Seats were won.

A quiet disillusionment crept into life from years on the dole. I formed the view that a society that tolerated a million unemployed was not a civilised society. Living in the middle of techno-barbarism drove me further from the pig-trough of capitalism. I ceased to be ambitious. There had to be another way. I found part of the answer in Europe where I came to a deeper well, a pristine water from which I drew a different, subtler life. In Rome, Paris, London and New York, on the smell of an oily rag, I began to write. My ASIO file was updated to read 'No formal political allegiance. Teacher. Maintains Leftist contacts. Active homosexual. Recreational drug user. A communist.'

*

'Have to change the tape,' said James. It was the third of our 'sessions' as James called them. With James I felt I was on the couch with a psychoanalyst.

'Actually that might be enough for tonight,' I told him, 'I'll head off. We'll continue another time,

maybe in Ballarat if you like.'

'OK. You're an interesting case study. Do you want a copy?'

'Yes. Luke might like to read it.'

James and I had an intellectual relationship. Sexual tension existed but self-discipline intervened. In any case, James was just nineteen. I was old enough to be his grandfather. Besides, like myself, James preferred young men the age of Luke and Xavier. As an object of desire I wasn't on his radar.

'Do you want a taxi?' he asked.

'No, I'd like to walk. It'll do me good.' James walked me down to the front of the College.

I strolled down Ormond Drive and around Queen's and Newman. I crossed Swanston Street to Faraday Street, passed Genevieve's where Johnny's Green Room used to be, over Lygon Street and down past 152 Faraday where we apparatchiks from the Australian Union of Students once plotted and planned the overthrow of governments.

Everything was fresh and exciting in 1974 when we used to go to the early Williamson plays in the Pram Factory and LaMama, sowed wild oats and began anarchic careers.

I crossed Rathdowne, entered the Carlton Gardens and walked beneath the canopy of elms. Over Nicholson Street I entered the damp, grey, narrow streets of Fitzroy's bluestone and brick warehouses and terraces lining dim-lit streets. Nightmist hung in the air around tangerine quartz-halogen streetlights. Over Brunswick Street past the old

Fitzroy Town Hall into side streets and bluestone alleyways to Smith Street, Collingwood. I took a left by the Grace Darling Hotel.

The entrance was right on the street. Over a doorway a single light bulb cast a patch of yellow. I climbed the concrete steps, opened a door and paid 'Jason'. They were all called 'Jason' or 'Adam'. I knew the staff, their sexual predilections, what they wanted and how they got it. A security door unlocked. I went inside. The door locked behind me. I belonged here. It was anonymous. I couldn't be hurt. I could get wasted.

It was around two. I took my time because there was plenty of time. The night was young in this game. No need to rush. The basic instant coffee would be the first of many. I checked what movies were on. Re-runs of forgettables. I went down to the basement to check out oil-drum alley. Nothing doing. Then upstairs to canvass the corridors. Quiet. I entered a fuckroom, locked the door, turned the dimmer low, placed myself in a lotus position on the black vinyl bench, rolled a joint and meditatively smoked.

I asked myself what road had I really been on all those years ago during the student rebellion? What road was I going down now? A churning wistfulness swept through me, a sense of irretrievable loss, of failure even. I began to cry. I couldn't stop. I don't cry much but when I do it's buckets. I wasn't crying for myself. I was crying for all of us, for all the friendships lost, for all the flotsam and jetsam along the way, the destroyed, murdered, raped and

ripped apart.

I settled down. I thought of Luke, of stories he told me at the cottage as we ruminated in the small hours over a joint in front of the fire.

*

‘It was a hot Saturday afternoon,’ Luke related, ‘I was on me way to catch the last train to Melbourne. I wanted a night out in Melbourne on me own.

I calls into the toilets. A young guy brushes by. He’s fast. If there’s anythin’ about he’d find it. Nothin’. He left then I left.

A young redhead in shorts and t-shirt rushes in, followed up by the young guy.

I was edgy. I only had minutes to catch the last train. I couldn’t resist. I went back in spur of the moment like.

The redhead and the guy are at the urinal. The situation looks cool. The guy goes into a cubicle and motions to the redhead to join him. The cute redhead looks at me and stays put. I goes beside him and watch him jerk off, pearljam from his thick pink cock onto the stainless steel. He zips up and leaves. I just caught the train.’

Luke chuckled and searched my face for a reaction.

‘There’s more,’ he said.

‘There’s always more isn’t there Luke?’

‘More vignettes Luke?’

‘Vig what?’ Luke asked.

‘Vignettes. You know, little stories.’

‘Oh yeah, I was gunna tell ya about after-school in Victoria Park. D’ya wanna hear?’

‘Love to Luke.’ Luke didn’t open up much but when he did it was a deluge and like many working class young men he knew how to spin a yarn.

‘Well, there was this spunky who liked to fuck behind the oak trees. He pulled a knife on me when we first met. I freaked but we got talking. He was cool, just scared. Then there’s this guy from College who takes it up the arse on the old mullock hill. He asked me to fuck him ...’

‘I didn’t know you were such a slut,’ I interrupted. Luke shrugged.

‘I don’t do stuff like that much. I get meets on gay.com.’

‘Cool hand Luke huh? You’re out of my league Luke.’

Luke was spider to the fly and his world was a global beat. Seventeen and from the rough side of the tracks in Ballarat East. Sex was a neon juke-box lighting his life. It made his existence bearable, warmth to cold nights, momentary lovers for lost soul.

‘Tell me about your night in the city.’

‘I planned it well,’ he said proudly, ‘when Cor Thirteen wasn’t playing. I went to the sauna.’

‘Banana Alley?’ I visualised the bluestone railway viaduct that fed Flinders Street Station.

‘Yep.’

‘I hope you practised safe...’

‘Yep, safety first,’ he said quickly.

‘Any more stories Luke?’

He thought for a moment.

‘I remember another afternoon in Victoria Park. I was just walkin’ along when a car of young guys drove by. I thought they might be undercover cops or bashers. They returned a few minutes later and parked close by. Two of ‘em got out. One started pissing against a tree. Bashers I thought, but one looked sort of cute. I tried to see if the one pissing was a flasher like, I wasn’t sure. I thought of walking off but decided on the risk. Stupid huh? Couldn’t help myself but.’

‘Yeah, I know what you mean!’ I said, ‘go on.’

‘Got any oil?’ one asks me. ‘Oil?’ I said, ‘no, I haven’t got any oil.’ Only later I realised it was a... whadaya call it, yeah, euphemism, a lubricant for sex. ‘Whadaya doin’ ‘ere?’ the guy asks me. He was kinda cute in a thuggish way, thin build, gold earring, pale, a few teeth missin’. ‘Nuthin’ I tell him. ‘Ya lost?’ he asks me. ‘Not really,’ I tell him. I was tryin’ to figure him out. ‘D’ya want it up the arse?’ he says to me. Well, I get the message! ‘What’s that?’ I ask him, pretending I hadn’t heard like. ‘Ya heard,’ the almost cute one says aggressive like. Fuck! A gang of basher rapists! I back off and make a run for it. The guy kicks out at me. Just misses me. The other one takes a swing at me. Just misses. I ran like hell. ‘Don’t come here again!’ the semi-cute homophobe fuck yells at me. Close shave huh?’

‘Be careful Luke. You don’t want to get bashed.’

‘Nah. I’m OK. I’m too quick for those arseholes.’

‘I hope so Luke.’ Luke’s tales of the criminal underclass of Ballarat alarmed and sourced my

imagination.

‘D’ya know a guy called Adam?’ Luke asked me as he leant back on the chesterfield.

‘I’ve known a few ‘Adams’ Luke. More than a few come to think of it. What about him?’

‘Well, this guy, he said his name was Adam. Anyhow, I invited him back to Mum’s house in Ballarat East. Mum’d gone on one of her trips to Melbourne to visit her sister. The house was mine for three whole days. Heaven. Anyhow, he rips me off. I was real disappointed, angry like. I knew he was up for small-time dealing but hadn’t had him down as a cheap thief. He grabbed my quarter of choof when I was a few metres away in the shower, you know, afterwards like. He was gone like the wind.’

‘Where’d you meet him Luke? What were you doing with that much dope anyway? Serves you right.’

‘I was puttin’ it into little foils to sell. I invited him back to my place after meeting him outside Safeway. Mum was in Melbourne. We listened to R.E.M. and Nirvana. He seemed OK. He’d been in Sydney he told me. The police’d been following him around in Geelong and Ballarat so he had to clear out. That should’ve been enough to warn me. Anyhow, I wanted him. All he could talk about was dope, Bob Marley, Kurt Cobain, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. ‘I’m taking a shower’ I tell him. I was out in five minutes but Adam was long gone with my stash. Pity. I thought something might come of it. He was different to you. He wasn’t anything in

the brain stakes. He left school at fifteen. Nothing up top but in the cot we were made for each other. Body to die for. But the dope won.'

'A lesson learned Luke?'

'Maybe, but wait, I'm not finished.'

I sat back. 'There's more?' I mocked.

'Yeah. A few months after the thief I was walkin' around the Lake. I see Adam near the Gardens and he recognises me. Well! The crim returns! He rushes into the toilets so I waits for him to come out, as he must eventually. When he creeps out I notice he isn't the Adam of a few months ago. He's totally off his face for a start. I watch him from the carpark. I wondered whether to walk away from the loser. I pretend to leave and hide behind a tree. Adam was hanging around like a prostitute. I couldn't resist so I make my way over. 'Hi Adam,' I says. He was so out of it he couldn't answer. 'Whereya been?' I asks.'

Luke's Ballarat East bogan chat brought out the actor in him. I'd been trying to teach him to improve his English, with some success, but it was exquisite when he reverted to his native slang.

'Well, Adam's eyes hazily recognise me but the dope episode wasn't high on his agenda, right? He glazed over. He said he'd been in prison. His face was this sickly grey yellow. He didn't look well at all. I felt a bit sorry for him, my little thief. 'Got a cigarette?' he asks me. 'No' I says. He doesn't believe me. He looks down at my pockets. 'Got a dollar then?' he asks me. Well, I just laugh at him. I went back to a seat at the bus stop to watch him. A

few minutes later he meets up with some young guys in a beat-up Datsun. They haggle and he gets into the back seat and they drive off. That's the last I saw of him. Could be dead by now. What a loser.'

'Interesting story Luke,' I said, 'straight out of a Jean Genet novel.'

'John who? Oh yeah, the French dude. Yeah.' Luke glanced at me with a raised slash of black eyebrow. I notice he's added more silver rings to his ears.

'Jean Genet the French homosexual. An existentialist. I've got some of his books here if you want to read him. Your rings look nice Luke.'

Luke flushed. He always did when I complimented him. 'I hope I don't get like Adam,' he said. We sat in silence.

That was exactly what I did fear, that Luke might become another Adam, a loser. And what of Luke's friendship with me? I provided security and experience he couldn't find elsewhere but Luke could go either way. When I was his age I knew nothing about the streets. Luke was a graduate. I was determined to encourage and help him. There were friends like James and Xavier. I would drag him out of the depressing social milieu of Ballarat's criminal underclass.

'I'm better having friends like you,' he said eventually.

'And James and Xavier,' I added.

'Yep.'

*

When James played back the tape he was more than pleased. He was delighted. It was a good interview, a basis for a solid seminar paper, perhaps more, maybe even a short film with the new digital he'd been able to get his father to pay for. After dinner in the Hall he returned to his room. He lay on his bed thinking about me, my young friend Luke and the having of him. The Ormond bells chimed eight. Time to get out of College for a break. He quickly put on baggy jeans and favourite mohair pullover he'd had since Scotch. He caught the St. Kilda tram in Swanston Street. His parents lived in St. Kilda in a rundown old mansion in Grey Street but that wasn't where he was headed. He was off to Point Ormond where he'd been going since he was fourteen. He used to tell his parents he was going for a walk but he was off to where the twisted, tortured trees hugged the dunes of Port Phillip Bay.

He crossed the bridge over Elwood Canal to Point Ormond where the lights of Melbourne cast orange over Port Phillip Bay and entered the dense scrub along the dunes to walk the sandy tracks where hundreds roamed for sex on balmy starry summer nights.

He finished the few joints he'd rolled back at the College. A rangy, willing youth drew him into the shrubbery. They scarcely had their jeans down before James was jamming it up the youth's arse. The lad told him to 'take it easy' but James ruthlessly played a long stroke and deep shaft. He looked at

the going in and coming out in full moon light as his stomach slapped hard, white buttocks bent over a tree trunk in the wild, briny sea air and tang of eucalypt.

He blew in a fantasy, a flash of Luke in a Ballarat cottage by the Yarrowee Creek and a gang-bang in Pentridge Prison. James' sex was anonymous, insatiable, desultory, without end, the sooner ended the sooner begun.

He wandered back through St. Kilda where street girls plied their trade along Grey Street for the straight scene and gutter-crawlers cruised beneath the rainbow neon. James' kind went into the darkness to the bush on the sand dunes. It was all prostitution of a kind he thought, whether for money or time. We all give it and take it. The difference is of style only, tropes of culture, illusion, nothing of substance. The conservative Protestant world he'd come from disagreed. It said the world he lived in was different to the one they inhabited, qualitatively and morally different. Some took it a step further and called his world, his life-style, what he did with other males, disgusting. But they'd never know what it's like to pump hard over a twisted tree on the sand dunes.

'Poo-jabber' he saw on a toilet wall, but he knew in his groin the tagger didn't know the half of it. He spotted a University tram and ran for it. Most people don't even know they're alive, he thought, squashed by media trivia, mortgages and mechanical existences at the end of which they vaguely glimpse, on a death-bed, the question, well, what the

fuck was that all about? They die never knowing. No, he lived his life to the full. If Scotch taught him one thing it was to stake his claim and mark his territory. His connection with Ballarat was part of that territory.

He thought of that weekend a few years ago when he'd booked into a cheap rooming house in Barkly Street to see 'what it was like to be poor'. He smoked dope with a Swedish backpacker who fucked him stupid. He felt like a prostitute then and liked it. He liked himself spread across that squeaking bed in Barkly Street around the corner from his parents' house.

The tram ground to a halt outside the University. He took the short walk along Tin Alley, the back of Newman and around the Oval to Ormond College. He'd take a break soon, get away from College, visit Ballarat.

*

Luke listened to the tape James brought up from Melbourne as the three of us shared a joint and a cask of Bertoli's Cabernet Merlot in the lounge room in front of the fire.

Luke kept glancing at me, making me feel odd as I sat listening to myself. I hoped the more Luke understood of my meandering life the closer we'd become.

I was a little jealous of the growing intimacy between James and Luke but kept it to myself. After all, there's no fool like an old fool. Not having an

on-going sexual relationship with either of them kept me pristine, that of mentor and cultural guru. I was insulated and protected by intervening generations. I assumed they were having outrageous sex with each other. I dared to ask James about it at an appropriate moment when we were 'sessioning' at Ormond. He'd demurred and reddened.

Luke's academic apprenticeship at Saint Patrick's began to ask questions of himself and to provide some answers. He wondered about me, his magister ludi, the master player at the cottage. He also hoped James' emerald eyes, golden curls and athletic body would be his. It seemed tacitly understood between the three of us that this would be. Luke's plan was to divert me from James. He saw me as his. I was all he had. I was his passport out of crummy Ballarat.

James would launch the public text to my life. I was the rough wood he would polish. During quiet evenings I wondered who was the spectator and the watched and how true it is that it takes one to know one. Was I really was the master? Older yes but not wiser. And as for rat-cunning I was a babe in the woods. James and Luke picked up faster and sooner than mine ever did.

'I'm going to be famous one day,' said Luke.

'I'm sure you will be Luke,' I reassured.

Luke didn't possess the self-assurance of James his loverboy from the University, but he was savvy about the rough-trade of life and had James sleeping beside him in the spare room when the sun crept over Mount Pleasant, where soft light glinted mir-

rors and golden silk lions shone on Indian wall-hangings.

*

I had work to do. I excluded nothing and deconstructed everything. It went beyond the ‘sessions’ with James. My text danced in my imagination, in my ever-changing illusory reality. I haunted Hares and Hyenas Bookshop, Readings, the Theosophical and university bookshops. I quietly read up on radical separatism, queer theory and the exciting green political activism sweeping the world. I wasn’t interested in past glories of forty years ago. I let it go. James would sort that out.

I sought the shock of the new.

Not that I bought many books. I don’t have a departmental budget. I don’t enter public debate, write papers for the smart-arse academic conference circuit or write refereed articles for obscure journals that no one reads. I wasn’t on the box as an ‘expert’ or an attender of ‘writers’ festivals’. I was on my own.

I didn’t feel a need to do any of these things. I had nothing to prove. There was no job to protect, no position to uphold, no ladder to climb. No. My job was to be a teacher to young men like Luke, James and Xavier. That was my role. I was happy with that. I left them alone. I did not exploit them. My role was much more important. The price was high. I’d never be emeritus professor. I would not be a paid slave in a septic of ambition, sinecure and the dreaded contract.

I'd got what I wanted out of university many years ago. Most of the better minds I'd studied with had fled the postmodern corporate university altogether and pursued independent careers, preferring relative poverty to the factory treadmill. Nevertheless, I did maintain rough contact with what was going on in universities. Radical years taught me that enemies were best kept closer than friends, the better to keep an eye on them.

Perhaps there'd be a reckoning one day, a time to re-enter public debate and address the tricksters and cardsharps. In the mean-time I read, taught and kept keen my tools of trade. I would not to be found wanting should I come around again on the karmic wheel. I did my homework, just as I did at Saint Patrick's in the freezing boarders' study hall all those years ago. The alternative was vacuous nihilism. I refused to succumb.

Having read Nietzsche and had an obligatory Sartrean cathartic experience with existentialism, I was careful to have purpose, reason and meaning in my life. Perhaps that's why one of my favourite books is Sartre's little known *When The Chips Are Down*. When all is said and done, the only obligation is to face down the inevitable with a laugh and get on with it.

And I did. I talked with Luke and James about the new wave of student activism. Together we accessed websites on West Papuans, Palestinians, Timorese, Tibetans and the starving billions. As soon as the two of them stumbled out of bed for their morning coffee and joint, the talk would begin.

I shrugged over their lovemaking and quietly left by the kitchen door for walks along the Yarrowee. I took myself along the green verge in early morning mist. Green was the colour of hope. In H.G.Wells' *The Soul of a Bishop*, a goodly Bishop near the end of life suddenly realises he does not believe in God after all and suffers a 'crisis of faith', dying a tormented and damned man. There'd be no last minute recriminations or deathbed conversions for me. I made my way along the slippery bank of the Creek, crossed the bluestone bridge and thought of the guardian angel helping children cross deep ravines. I was my own guardian angel.

*

'The people of West Papua haven't even had a say in their own country!' said Luke as he scrolled down the website for the Free Papua Movement. The three of us had already surfed the Irish Republican Army, Free Tibet, the Palestine Liberation Organization and a new site on Timor called One Island, One Nation.

'No,' said James preparing to be expansive, 'they were told to join Indonesia in 1963 by the United Nations. The whole island should be one country instead of having a dotted line down the middle. The same with East Timor. The whole island should be an independent country. The same with Ireland too...'

'And Israel was an artificial creation in 1948 when they left out the Palestinians,' Luke cut in, 'no wonder the Palestinians are angry.'

‘I’m going to work on that stuff after I graduate,’ said James, ‘maybe in foreign affairs or international relations.’ Yes James, I thought, I can just imagine you floating right to the top in foreign affairs.

‘I’m gunna make contact with these groups online,’ said Luke, ‘they have meetings. We could both go James.’

I half-listened as the young men talked and I read the Melbourne University Newsletter James had brought with him. There was to be a seminar at the University on ‘Feminism and Patriarchy: Where To Now?’ I rarely ventured to such gatherings but occasionally made an exception.

‘Sorry to interrupt you two,’ I said, ‘James, what do you think about this seminar on feminism and patriarchy? Sounds interesting. Would you like to come along? It’s on Wednesday.’

‘Maybe,’ said James noncommittal, ‘I’ve got a lot on.’

He’s trying to think of a way to get Luke along to one of those political meetings, I thought. I looked at them both glued to the screen.

‘I’d like to go,’ said Luke, eyes not leaving the screen or the warmth of James’ leg against his, ‘but I’ve got a stack of work to do. Even that one day when I went to Melbourne with you I had heaps to catch up on.’

‘It’s best you be at school Luke,’ I said, ‘this is your important year. We might catch up in Melbourne James?’

‘Maybe,’ said James remotely. He was drawing the line. They both were.

*

In the end I went to Melbourne University alone. The pensioner's special sped through the farmland as I wondered about social structure based on gender. Why was it that patriarchy was so entrenched, even legitimate, after forty years of radical feminism?

Well, maybe that won't even be questioned I thought. The chat will doubtless be about Germaine Greer's latest book *The Boy*. I cheered the success of Greer's excursion into cultural notions of sexuality and gender.

I'd scarcely entered the auditorium at the University when I spotted Caroline Jamieson, now Associate Professor in Women's Studies. I'd studied with her in the seventies. I have an abiding memory of her being bashed by the police at an anti-Springbok demonstration in 1973, after which she got up from the ground and hurled such a tirade of abuse at the police even they took a step back. Today she stood in pinstripe business suit chatting to a stunning young man. I made a beeline to the pair. Her cheeky grin of recognition suggested a tease.

'Well look who's here!' she exclaimed, 'what's brought you out of the woodwork?' She was as ever, triumphantly a woman.

'Hi Caroline,' I mustered, bashful before her allure, 'I've always had an interest in gender studies from the masculinist view. You know deconstructing the male is my speciality.'

She laughed. ‘You’re speaking literally as well as culturally I know,’ she said with a lift of the brow. She was classically beautiful and by rumour continued to charm the pants off much younger men. Age certainly had not wearied her.

‘I’m so pleased you came,’ she said, taking me by the elbow, ‘you know, I’m getting worried that some feminists are making the same mistakes as thousands of years of patriarchy by advocating a culture based on gender. It’s the same oppressive power structure except it’s female. What do you think? I’m sorry, this is Jesse.’

I enjoyed a leading question. It stretched the imagination. I considered in Pinteresque silence before leaving the launch pad.

‘Hi Jesse.’ We shook hands. The flesh-to-flesh shuddered my groin as eyes met, melted, and I prepared to walk on eggshells.

‘I agree Caroline. If western civilisation is to abandon patriarchy it must not be replaced by a matriarchy either. But there’s a long way to go before that happens. A strategic consensus on the battlefield might be a more productive approach. The feminist agenda today is more neo-conservative than radical. It’s certainly not radical in the radical Left tradition. Political correctness has stymied debate. That worries me. Camille Paglia in *Sex, Politics and American Culture*, one of your own, shows that feminists are now very diverse in gender theory. A move towards inclusivism rather than exclusivism is the way to go.’ I tried to be even-handed.

Caroline was momentarily silent then sprang.

‘You assume that separatism means exclusivism,’ she countered, the earnest academic. Attendees pricked an ear. ‘Well-known feminist writers such as Naomi Wolf and Susan Sontag are very inclusive these days. So is Susan Faludi.’

‘Sure,’ I said, ‘and who can forget Wolf’s pioneering *The Beauty Myth*? All I’m saying is that our planet, and it is our planet, cannot afford a divided response if it’s to survive. We can’t afford responses that methodologically, systematically, omit half the world’s population.’

A murmur hummed around.

‘Look!’ I said, deciding on full flight, ‘whatever perspective one holds, deconstructing gender and the feminist debate have only been partners since the late sixties. The debate is still young, but its history is as vast as the human story itself. There’s no need for exclusivism. The ideological machinery of the gender wars does not have to be re-made. It’s been there for thousands of years. It’s a loveless debate anyway. Besides, there are new forces much larger than Western feminism now coming into play, new and radical approaches to ecology and economics that will bring women and men of all sexualities and genders into revolutionary new understandings about human beings and our future.’

‘What new understandings?’ ventured Jesse blushing into the discussion.

‘I see,’ Caroline cut in, ignoring Jesse, ‘I must say your attitude that we despise you if you agree and hate you if you don’t holds no currency in my view.’ Caroline turned cold.

‘You know perfectly well that’s not what I meant Caroline,’ I said, ‘the trouble is that your gender debate is built on the ashes of post-patriarchy, on a lust for power by one gender over the other, rather than empowerment with. Why construct a new oppression? Lets get to the root of the problem rather than build a new superstructure. Let’s discuss the fundamentals of epistemology, phenomenology, psychology, existentialism and postmodernism, rather than fight over the distribution of power according to gender. I’ve no time for it. I’ve no time for the gender point-scoring, the put-down, the separatism and ball-crushers who put men down in order to entrench their own positions.’

Sharks circled.

‘The fashion for the male cringe is the ugly duckling of academe,’ countered Caroline hotly, ‘it might blossom one day but it seems very insincere to me. Anyhow, women are questioning the uses to which the feminist debate is being put. It’s time there was a considered response from the masculine gender. Men’s studies are the next big thing. You should get on board Brian, that’s if they’ll let you in!’ A titter ran around.

Caroline was sprinting. ‘Feminists such as Camille Paglia, Feludi and Germaine Greer are pushing it along. Not all women are happy with the way things are going. Many radical, independent women see the next logical step as gender-free discourse, where gender and sexuality are irrelevant. Independent thinkers such as Doris Lessing say it’s time men freed themselves from their shackles.’

‘Fantastic!’ I said, ‘and then the gender debate bandwagon will at last have no wheels. It will be the vision that becomes important, not the ideologically combative.’

‘More metaphysical and spiritual,’ Jesse chimed in, green eyes catching mine.

‘Exactly Jesse,’ I said, seizing an opportunity to bring him in, ‘sexualities and genders will only be harmonious if they are spiritually harmonious. We need a spiritual revolution.’

Nods all around, even from a cohort of radical feminist separatists, a good sign surely.

Caroline smiled good-naturedly. ‘Are you aware of the work of Professor David Tacey at your old University at LaTrobe?’

I was. I’d just finished Tacey’s impressive *Remaking Men: The revolution in masculinity*.

‘Yes Caroline. I’m not a hermit.’

‘You should get out more Brian. Staying for my paper?’

‘I’ll stay. My isolation goes with the territory I’ve mapped for myself,’ I said, ‘we’re only instruments Caroline, not originators.’ This cryptic left a few unreconstructed-Marxist atheists wondering. I left them to ponder. I’d said my bit.

‘Quite a performance there,’ said Jesse as we watched Caroline make her way to the podium.

I smiled wanly. It was flattery.

‘I try to be constructive in the face of so much deconstruction Jesse. History will absolve me,’ I grinned.

'I've heard that before,' said Jesse, smiling a panel of perfect white teeth.

'Fidel Castro,' I confirmed. We connected.

Caroline's paper was enthusiastically received but discussion flagged. To liven things up I took the plunge. I readied myself to be cut in half.

'Human kind,' I said, 'might be viewed as one gender, a kind of sliding scale. Does cultural history and antiquity shed any light on this approach to gender theory?'

Caroline looked thoughtful then smiled wickedly. 'Delighted to see you out and about Brian. You've been absent too long. It's an intriguing question. From a humanist perspective and physiology aside, I believe we can be viewed as a variant of one gender. Anthropology illumines this for us. Contemporary students of cultural studies might do well to develop this to resolve outstanding items on the feminist agenda.'

She was careful, pointed and tactful. So Caroline.

Jesse wanted to keep in contact. I gave him my 'card', a photostated piece of paper.

'I'm off to Collingwood Jesse.'

'What's happening in Collingwood?'

'The Club,' I said testily. Was Jesse a candidate?

'The Club!' said Jesse, 'I go there sometimes. How are you getting there?'

'I'll walk,' I said, hoping for company.

'Do you mind if I come along?' he asked tentatively.

I added a notch to my rod. Intellectualising gender made me hanker for real flesh.

It was a long walk from Parkville to Collingwood but I enjoyed walking in the City at night. The University seminar seemed a long way off. We arrived at the Club an hour later refreshed and expectant. We skirted past the front bar, through the movie lounge and went straight upstairs to cruise.

‘Perhaps it’ll be more entertaining here,’ said Jesse mischievously, shyness gone.

‘It usually is,’ I said. I craved a good night’s work.

*

Two first-timers were celebrating their final year of College with a night on the town. Jesse and I passed by. Four pairs of eyes met. We dallied.

‘Do you want to share a joint?’ I asked the pair. Eyes consulted.

‘Yeah. OK.’

I opened the door to a cubicle and checked out their Chapel Street baggies. We sat on the vinyl bench and chatted as I rolled a joint. Complicity birthed.

‘I’m Tristan.’

‘I’m Michael.’

‘Have you ever had amyl?’ Jesse asked.

‘What’s that?’ they ask in unison.

‘Try some,’ said Jesse, passing Michael the small brown bottle he’d picked up the previous week, left behind by a transitory lover, ‘just a small sniff.’

Both had a sniff. I reached for Michael’s crotch, which was bulging. Tristan began to unbutton his Armani denim baggies.

‘Do you like being fucked?’ I asked Michael as coolly as asking for the time.

‘Sometimes,’ Michael said, uncertain and lazily into my ice-blue eyes.

I didn’t muck about. One man’s uncertainty is another’s opportunity. I stripped and put on a condom. Michael and Tristan understood the reason for it all, shedding shirts, baggies and boxers.

Michael crouched on his knees and gasped as I jammed into him. Tristan faced the wall as Jesse, tall and lithe, came up behind him.

The College boys were gone. Jesse and I dozed fitfully. I woke to the music of Peter Gabriel and lay awake in opaque light thinking of Michael and Tristan. I was hungry for more. I got up and leant against the open doorway, smoking a rollie between thumb and finger workman style. Jesse roused and went for a coffee.

A lad with a luminous green marijuana leaf emblazoned on a black T-shirt arrived on the top floor and did a few circuits. He was off his face but cute. I invited him in with a nod. The lad’s body was smooth, hairless and white, tightly muscled with a celebration of tats on his chest and arms. Crewcut. A crescent of gold rings glittered on his ears. He looked very fit. Working class from the suburbs. The lad’s hard buttocks, pale pink in the luminous red light slapped against my stomach as I worked his tight, exquisite arse. I did him hard.

He had no name. He did not speak. It was bump out time by the time we shot our loads. The nameless one was swallowed into Collingwood dawn.

‘Better than theorising about gender,’ I quipped to Jesse as we said goodbye at the Smith Street tram stop outside the Grace Darling Hotel.

On the tram into Southern Cross Station I checked the personals in Melbourne Star Observer. Blessed are they who hope for nothing for they shall not be disappointed. I folded it away and looked out the window. Copper tipped towers, cathedral grey spires, dark green parks, the Exhibition Building, Parliament House, restaurants, cafes and browsing bookshops. Melbourne was a city I loved to visit: a wanton soup in Victoria Street, Richmond; a night-walk in quiet streets and bluestone lanes to the promise of a friend’s couch in East Melbourne. A stroll through night’s mellow mist past the sleeping gave a sense of difference, of comforting isolation. In these moments I captured stories and wished pages in my head were already written down, scared to lose them. A lonely pain scars the page as imagination works faster than hands. It burns my soul. I had the spark but had not struck the fire.

Of a Sunday I might drop into Saint Paul’s or Saint Patrick’s for Mozart’s Missa Brevis in D Major.

I played for street sleaze in a different cathedral when I sat with Joe, a homeless youth in Fitzroy Street St. Kilda. We hung out at the Prince of Wales bar. The front window looked over Fitzroy Street. We’d have a few pots and watch parading spunks trade their wares. St. Kilda was the fast lane, queer, cosmopolitan, libertarian and druggy. By Port Phillip Bay we’d snort the evening sea breeze in the

Catani Gardens. It reminded of Woolloomooloo and Farm Cove in Sydney, that languorous feeling of easiness and beauty, seediness and corruption.

The word 'pure' has its etymology in the Latin word *puer*, Latin for 'boy'? Purity is a soft, balmy evening in Bali as I recover from an Ecstasy overdose. Purity is a sultry night in King's Cross fucking the arse off a farm-boy from western New South Wales. Purity is the southern boy from New Orleans who hussled me in a Manhattan rent-bar. To the pure all things are pure. Nothing is pure to the impure.

Winters of discontent are past. Summer by the sea was coming. Clear sailing. I'll write and fuck. I'll live in Plato's Academy, grow hyacinths in my wild cottage garden, a Parthenon by the Yarrowee.

As the train pulled out of Spencer Street I remembered a Latin sentence, one of the few I learnt by heart in the Jesuit Seminary at Werribee Park in my lost sixties. It was a favoured maxim of the Knights Templar: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare, fratres in unum*. How good it is to live together with our brothers.

What, since then, had I learnt of love? At sweet eighteen the seminary handed me the cold love of the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis:

Love is circumspect, humble and righteous. It is neither cowardly, nor light, nor concerned with vanities, but sober, chaste, firm, tranquil, attentive in watching over the senses. He who is not ready to suffer all things in order to do the will of his Well-beloved, does not know what it is to love.

The clubs were loveless, empty and shallow.

As the train fled Sunshine and rushed over flat basalt plains into the highlands I sentimentally hoped Luke would stay around. At least he was constant.

At the grandiose 1862 Ballarat Station I glance up at the octagonal skylight of green glass supported by four fluted cast-iron pillars with lotus-petal capitals, entered Lydiard Street and its Victorian streetscape to the University then struck out along the Yarrowee. I reflected on studies I'd done in the early years of the student uprising and unemployment when no one considered me for a job because of my radical reputation.

Yet it'd all paid off in a way that was ironic. In the early eighties at Latrobe, when Professor John Scott, Chancellor Richard McGarvie and Professor Guiseppe Carseniga decided to establish a Centre for Peace Studies, I was delighted to be invited to its meetings. I delivered discussion papers, discussed fine points with academics and senior bureaucrats and participated in seminars on global politics. My doctorate on the radical student movement enabled a contribution that sprang from common sense practicality and a sense of community. I salvaged what I could from 'the revolution' and became an armchair revolutionary, a position clearly appreciated by fellow armchair Marxist-Leninists peppering the Melbourne Left Establishment. I'd sown the seeds. I reaped the harvest. I didn't have to do much, just sit back and let a hundred flowers bloom. I didn't have to be one to be one. That suited me just fine. I could take it or leave it. In the end, I left it.

For years I carefully gathered material for a his-

tory of the radical student movement in Australia. It was quite a collection. Rare student leaflets; minutes of meetings of radical gay, feminist and environmental groups; notes taken at meetings of Students for a Democratic Society; interviews with draft resisters; notes on ASIO informers; reflections on radical organizations such as the Maoist Worker-Student Alliance and the Prisoners' Action Group; notes taken at meetings of the Communist Party of Australia; jottings from meetings of the National Executive of the Australian Union of Students. A unique and rich record of the political battlefield of the late sixties, early seventies.

That battlefield reached a crescendo in 1983 when Peter Costello, Michael Kroger and Malcolm Fraser finally succeeded in destroying the radical AUS. Julia Gillard was on the rise to be its President. She was Left, not radical but brilliant and good-looking. Still is. The Voluntary Student Union legislation destroyed the old AUS. The National Union of Students that replaced it was a shadow of the glory days of the early seventies. Times change. Economic rationalism arrived.

The Federal government in 2005 put the finishing touches to it all with compulsory voluntary student unionism. The Conservatives were paranoid about a healthy, democratic student union critique. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1990 and the end of the Cold War did nothing to dull paranoid reaction to radical, alternative points of view. So much for pluralist democracy.

Time is so short. I carefully pieced together James' work and stories I'd written for Luke. It was warts and all. I discussed the work with Anne Beggs whom I'd known and respected for years, Eureka Professor of History at the University of Ballarat. We had coffee in the University cafeteria where undergraduate students looked so young. There was a buzz as news about my being on campus did the rounds amongst academics and students. It wasn't the buzz of an earlier incarnation at LaTrobe so I was chuffed when students shyly approached to say hi, wanting to meet a 'real' radical. What was it like being on the run from the police? Was I still an anarcho-communist? What was Pentridge like? Did you drop acid?

What had this lover of Narcissus, Endymion, Ganymede and Adonis done since those years? The talk, the gossip, the innuendo crossed the generations and now the wheel had come full circle. I'd not been inactive, not wasted the years, forever conscious of Saint Augustine's frightening question: 'And how did you use your talents?'

Gone were the salad days of the Social Club at AUS Council in the George Hotel, St. Kilda. In 1970 my job was to collect money from delegates, go into Princes Street, Carlton, collect a great bag of dope and distribute it to Council delegates who today head up departments in State Public Prosecutors' Offices, sit on Supreme Court benches and are hard-working Ministers of the Crown. Four of the Union's activists, Lindsay Tanner, Julia Gillard, Anthony Albanese and Michael Danby entered Federal Parliament.

The Australian Union of Students wasn't a social party. It was hard work. Pioneering work was done. Koori activists such as Gary Foley, Denis Walker, Bruce McGuinness and Cheryl Buchanan worked tirelessly to raise the nation's political consciousness. There were visits by guerrilla leaders such as Jose Ramos Horta from East Timor. South African anti-apartheid fighters, Palestine Liberation Organization representatives, native Americans and political refugees from Chile, Malaysia, Indonesia and African nations. They delivered to the Union a powerful sense of world solidarity and universal struggle.

In the autumn of life as histories are written, what is the judgement of today's generation, the generation of James, Luke and Xavier? Would my generation be seen as sucking the blood out of it all, greedy babyboomers who had it all? That would be half right. Would they see us as helping to build a better planet? I hope so. After all, the genesis of Greenpeace, The Tasmanian Wilderness Society, Save The Whale, Save the Franklin, Friends of the Earth and alerts on 'climate change' is the activism that began forty years ago.

*

Luke shut down his computer at Saint Patrick's College. Time for a break. He wished he had a joint to smoke but knew he'd call in at the cottage on his way home from school. New words picked up from me were appearing in his essays: economic mone-

tarism, corporatisation, rationalisation, globalisation, privatisation, existentialism and postmodernism. Teachers were astonished at his turn around.

He thought of the life I'd had, about university in the sixties and early seventies when everything was new and exciting, the drugs, the sex; the anti-Vietnam War movement; on the run from the police; violent demonstrations; radical gays and lesbians fighting for homosexuality to be decriminalised; the anti-racist Freedom Ride and Aboriginal Tent Embassy; sit-ins at Pine Gap and demonstrations to save native forests and waterways. It was all still happening he knew, but it must have been so wild when it was fresh and new. He felt a pang of envy. This new millennium seemed tame by comparison. Boys graduating ahead of him opted for business management, I.T., e-commerce and being good corporate citizens. There's no fire in students today he concluded, it's just not there. The bell went for home.

He walked past the College Chapel and Brothers' monastery, admired resplendent banks of dahlias on each side of the path and looked up at the Doric pillars and arcades of the monastery. As he passed through the cast-iron gates onto Sturt Street he promised himself he'd be different. He'd be a political activist when he went to university next year. University offered possibilities. He'd be at home in the cloister of university life. He imagined and romanticised it from what I'd painted for him. He travelled with the literature from my bookshelves. I'd enlightened his queerness. Literature and univer-

sity would be a ticket out of homophobic Ballarat. His schoolboy thoughts found early understanding in the writing of Foucault, Sartre, Freud, Jung, Jean Genet and William Burroughs. It was not to be found on his Year Twelve reading list. He was halfway through my copy of Edmund White's brilliant biography of Jean Genet. He was in the top few in English. Teachers and classmates were taken aback by his forwardness, wary of his sharp tongue and withering comments. He took salacious delight in the knowledge of his new power.

He glanced towards the Bishop's Palace on the opposite side of Sturt Street, a massive bluestone mansion behind the trees and thought of the run-down renter his mum and he lived in on the wrong side of town in Ballarat East. He planned his detour. He swaggered down Sturt Street in his navy blue suit past Saint Patrick's Cathedral then turned south by the old University towards the Creek. He was short of money. He was on a chance as he took that familiar meander to the cottage by the Yarrowee.

He wondered whether he should ring first on his mobile. He rubbed his fingers over the cam-phone in his pocket he could see I was home, a billow of grey smoke drifting from the chimney.

*

'Why don't ya get a job in a university or something?'

'I would have liked to work in a university Luke but there's no hope of that now. I've left my run too

late. They've taken away the liberal arts and the classics. Competition for the crumbs is mean and desperate. I'm not a career man. Maybe I'm just lazy.'

'You're lucky,' said Luke, 'you don't even have to work. I have to work at Bi-lo.'

Luke sat in the leather club chair by the open fire listening to Josquin's *Missa Pange Lingua* smoking the joint I'd rolled him. I looked out the window at crimson rosellas, wattlebirds and eastern spinebills flitting about in the garden.

'We all have to work one way or the other Luke. You're right though. I've been lucky. I made money doing up old houses in Fitzroy and Woolloomooloo. I did it my way as they say. Universities aren't happy places these days. The barbarian irrationalists in Canberra have turned universities into places for training bean-counters. Classical civilisations, antiquity and philosophical movements aren't seen as important. They produce uncritical beings, scared for themselves, full of fear, afraid to live. They've got people bluffed.'

'The War on Terror ya mean?' Luke asked, eyes also caught by a pair of crimson rosellas nibbling at grass seeds on the lawn.

I laughed. 'You're quick today Luke. The War on Terror has been going on since Greece and Rome. People think it dates from the World Trade Centre attack on September 11, 2001. Rulers want people to remain ignorant.'

'Yeah, I know, that's the way they like it, you know, the politicians and that, to stop people from

thinking, controlling our thoughts like,' said Luke.

Luke was getting to the heart of it. I put another block of redgum on the fire.

'Why've ya got that big picture of Jesus on the wall?' he asked, looking at a large framed print I'd picked up at an auction, 'I mean, you don't believe in that stuff do ya?'

'No Luke. It's a reminder of what I've lost and what could have been. It's reassuring in a way. Jesus looks after me. It's a reminder of a past life.'

'A bag of crap if ya ask me,' said Luke dismissively.

Luke silently watched me roll another racer. 'I've been going down to Melbourne on weekends,' he said eventually, 'to the sauna at Banana Alley and the Club in Collingwood.'

'You should've just come down here Luke,' I said with a pang of envy for the lucky men who'd had Luke in dark places.

Luke was silent.

'I really like ya but I want to have sex with people my own age. You're a friend. I wanted some fun so I went to Melbourne.'

'That's OK Luke. I know. Anyhow, we did have sex once, the first night we met. Remember?'

The faintest smile hinted at his mouth and he blushed. 'Yeah, but we were pissed. It doesn't count. I don't even remember.'

'I do. Well, you prefer James and Xavier and the Melbourne scene. I understand. I might go to the City myself next weekend. Ballarat's been quiet.'

I stole a glance at Luke who looked away. I made

tea, boiling water over Bi-lo tea-bags. I thought of the first time we met in the smoky sleaze of the Lounge. I'd ached to have him there and then right over the bar. He'd come back to the cottage where we talked about the radical sixties, listened to Dylan and Marley and I finally had him. I thought of the hundreds I'd tossed in the darkness of particleboard alleys and steam-rooms and wished they'd start all over again but they were gone forever into my incompleteness where the building-blocks of my promiscuity, disjointed thoughts, chaotic desires and lust tumbled about in anarchy.

'You're like the girl in the red dancing shoes,' said Luke, 'ya can't stop. Why don't ya get on the meat mart on the Net for live-cam porn? It might save ya trips to the City. I live on-line now.'

'It's easier to get a few minutes fun in Melbourne Luke. Anyhow, it's only a release and I wouldn't know how to get into a chat-room.'

Luke turned on a smug smirk. 'That's one thing I've got on ya. Ya don't know how to turn the computer on. You're a silly old thing. How's the writing goin'?'

I didn't answer. Thee old Sessions clock struck seven, the whistle blew on the last train to Melbourne and the old Holden HZ panel van was no more. There'd be no sex tonight.

'I might head off,' said Luke standing up at last, 'I'll call in on Mum.'

'OK,' I said coolly.

*

Luke walked along the Yarrowee in the semi-darkness towards Ballarat East to a lonely bedroom and a pre-loved computer that only half-worked. Mum wasn't around. He felt sorry for the old guy he'd just left. Must be hard being old he thought. There was nothing doing at gay.com. He wasn't rostered at Bi-lo. His room was depressing. He couldn't stand it. He left the dilapidated renter and walked back along the Yarrowee, back to the cottage where cosy rooms smelt of lemongrass oil, where there was a smoke and a glass of red, books and talk.

*

I looked up from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and saw myself as the ageing Aschenbach and Luke the delectable Tadzio. I gazed into the open fire and watched the yellow licks. Perhaps it was time to return to university life, get politically involved again, revitalise the Australian student movement and stick a pin in the backside of sleepy Australia. No, Luke, James and Xavier carry that banner now. A tap tap came at the back door.

'Back again Luke?'

'Yeah. D'ya mind if I stay here tonight?' he asked with a lop-sided grin that never failed to floor me when he decided to turn it on.

'Course not. I was just doing some reading.'

'They didn't need me at Bi-lo and Mum wasn't home. She must be in Melbourne again.'

Before the blazing fire we listened to Joan Baez.

I was happy and in story-telling mood.

‘I’ll tell you about a guy I knew a few years ago,’ I began, warming to cask Merlot and scent of lemongrass oil. Luke stretched out his long legs on the old chesterfield and smoked a joint.

‘Well, this guy John rang me one day. I’d got to know him at university. He wanted me to check out a property he was thinking of buying at Walpeup. Ever heard of Walpeup Luke?’

‘Nah. Where’s that?’

‘It’s a small town in the Mallee, a few hundred kilometres from Ballarat. Well, I tried to talk John out of it. I told him no one would visit him up there. It was the dead heart of the drought stricken mulga. ‘I’ll be at the Club tomorrow,’ I told him, ‘you can pick me up there.’ I hoped he wouldn’t show. After an ordinary night at the Club I tumbled into Collingwood morning trying to think of a way out of the trip. True to his word, John was waiting outside waving from his trusty rusty Holden Kingswood. A breakfast of bacon and eggs from John’s ninety-year young Nan put all argument to rest. We set off for the Mallee where tourists rarely go. Most tourists don’t even make it to Melbourne. They prefer the delights of Sydney Harbour, the tropical north and evocative Tasmania.

Our trip took five hours through towns boasting little more than a wheat silo feudal sentinel on sandy plains of thin wheat. This was land that should never have been cleared, fragile land, but pioneers cleared it out of ignorance, trapped in European misconceptions about this new southern land.

John's Nan had baked scrumptious sausage rolls for us. We devoured them as we made our way through the little towns. We downed pots of cold beer in pubs built in more optimistic years with intricate cast iron verandas a respite from the heat.

The property John had his eye on turned out to be sixteen hectares of saltbush. There was a dam with poisonous blue-green algae and a condemnable asbestos cement-sheet house set on parched, red, rabbit-infested, treeless country. The flies were incessant, vicious really. They beat around our faces in an onslaught.

'At least you've found out what you don't want,' I told John, a queer boy from St.Kilda who knew zilch about the bush. A babe in the woods.

In country towns youths smiled and laughed openly, seemed trusting, oblivious to ulterior design. A local sporting hunk serving petrol to us at the Mobil was freely ogled. Farm lads in the pubs, check-flannel shirts cut at the shoulders were the real thing, not some fashion item in a glitz homo bar in Melbourne or Sydney. There was a cheery wave from a motorist who couldn't know us from a bar of soap. After all, what was there to fear from anyone hundreds of kilometres from the nearest poofster nightclub? It was potential redneck territory. We didn't give ourselves away. This was a two Aussie mates odyssey into the Australian bush situation.'

'Not a Deliverance scenario then?' Luke asked.

'No. The best line came from a sunburnt woman at the servo in Walpeup.

'Where'ya from?' she asked.

‘Ballarat,’ I said.

‘Ballarat! Oh, it’s so cold and wet down there,’ the sunburnt, amply bosomed woman said as the sun belted down pitilessly on drought-stricken farmland that hadn’t seen a decent rain for years. It was all so hopelessly desolate.’

‘Actually,’ said Luke, ‘I think Ballarat has a good climate. If I was gunna move anywhere I’d move to Tasmania.’

‘I fancy Tasmania too Luke. At least it rains there. We should visit there one day. The Mallee should be left to return to nature. Anyhow, John and I revelled in the quaintness of little towns like St. Arnaud with its old country café where we bought excellent hamburgers and ate outside as local youths cavorted on the hot asphalt footpath. We’d left Melbourne in the early morning and arrived back in Melbourne several breakdowns later just after midnight. Absolutely fucked out. Quite a trip.’

‘You’d only do it once,’ said Luke. ‘So what did John do? I haven’t met him.’

‘He finished up buying a few hectares of bush just out of Ballarat. He’s happy there. I see him now and then. Anyhow, John dropped me off in St. Kilda so I went to the beat at Elwood. Just on dawn a lad appeared very cute and fresh in the half-light. I hid behind some bushes to see if he’d do a return trip. He did. He stood a few metres away. I went into a hidden clearing and he followed. Sunrise shone burnt-gold on our bodies. I’d been from the City to the bush and back and got rewarded for my travels. I hummed Go West from the Village People and

Summer In The City With The Boys So Pretty on the tram back to Spencer Street Station.'

Luke chuckled. 'That's a good story,' he said, 'I'm a bit tired. D'ya mind if I crash?'

The old cottage was eerie when Luke left next morning. I waved him off at the gate. In the cottage Luke remained in lightspace. His smell was on my skin. He'd asked for more stories. One was about Nhill, my hometown.

*

It was time again. The long road back to Nhill a few days before Christmas. This particular Christmas would be different because it was without my father.

I drove westwards through the little towns, the land drier and trees more sparse. I thought of the journey taken way back in 1957 jammed onto the single seat of an olive green FJ Holden ute with Dad and my three brothers, Robert, Geoff and Bill. It was our big shift from industrial Sunshine to Nhill. Sunshine was a booming suburb then with the H.V.McKay factory in full production. The sixties were yet to come and the Second War was recent history.

I was eight years old. I can just remember the slow drive up Sturt Street, Ballarat on a misty night in May. Ballarat was an intact Victorian city then. The 1868 Commonwealth Bank at Lydiard Street was still there. Grand old Morsheads in Bridge Street still had a few years to stand before demoli-

tion. The mindless destruction of Ballarat's heritage was yet to come.

Dad and Mum decided to get out of Sunshine to start an agricultural machinery business in Nhill. They wanted to get out of the city and live in a little town to bring up their five kids. Mum and Dad worked hard and made a success of the business, their lives shaped by two World Wars, the Great Depression and tough living on Mallee farms.

When Dad was in his eighties I took him on a reunion to Sydney to see his mates from the Second World War years. Dad never spoke much about his war experiences. One day in the back shed I found some photos of beheaded Australian soldiers and I asked him about them. The beheaded Australians were some of his mates. He told me how he'd fought on parts of the Kokoda Trail, Lae, Biak and Borneo. One night he woke to find two Japanese soldiers in his tent about to kill him. It was fifty years before he could talk about it. Even then, that's all he said.

At the reunion we had a ride on the ferry across magnificent Sydney Harbour. There was a night at the Opera House and a drive over the Harbour Bridge. Mum noticed how quiet the reunion was, how Dad and the old men didn't say much. I caught a sadness on Dad's face. It was the first and last reunion. The old men sensed it.

At eighty-six he'd had a good innings but longevity was in the family, many living into their nineties. We sat with him at the Nhill Hospital, held his hand and gave the morphine a boost when he

began to moan. I smile at the last lucid conversation we had, frustrated that nothing more could be done for leukemia. Dad simply said ‘Well, what do you do, what do you do?’ There was nothing anyone could do. In the end, we’re all so helpless.

The small Catholic church in Nhill was packed to overflowing for the funeral. Bob Pola was well known and widely respected in the Wimmera. I wrote a eulogy to read it at the lectern because I knew if I was left to my own devices emotion would take over. I made sure the solemn requiem Mass had clouds of incense, selected the hymns and arranged to have the coffin carried out on the shoulders of grown-up grandchildren. As I followed it out of the little brick church I thought of Dad, the penniless sixteen year boy from a dusty Serpentine farm in the Mallee who tramped with his swag from shed to shed looking for work as tarboy, wool- scourer, sweeper, anything, on Riverina runs during the Great Depression. He’d done it hard.

And now it was time for the annual family do in Nhill.

*

People joke about Nhill as if it’s ‘nil’. ‘Nhill’ is a Wotjobaluk word.

On 4 January 1845, George Frederick Belcher and Dugald Macpherson rode into a Wotjobaluk camp on the banks of the Nhill Swamp. The indigenes told them the name of the place was ‘Nhill’. They believed that early morning mists rising from

the vast lagoon were the spirits of their ancestors. 'Nhill' means 'abode of spirits'. I read the original diaries of Belcher and Macperson at the LaTrobe Library in Melbourne describing that first meeting, the 'clash of civilisations' Professor Samuel Huntington has written of.

I think of William Baoak of the Warungeri people. In 1823 when he was born there was no Melbourne. Victoria was unsettled. He died in 1908 when Melbourne was known as the 'Paris of the Antipodes' and traditional hunting grounds were fenced farms. What a compass of history.

On the edge of the Nhill Swamp in 1995 I stood as descendants of Wotjobaluk people and European pioneers met under what was left of three vandalised Corroboree eucalypts. A plaque was unveiled for the 150th anniversary of that first meeting.

'Better to plant a few redgums,' I commented to Mum. She smiled. She'd been brought up in the Mallee. She knew the price paid for the clearing of the precious bush, the dust storms, the declining rainfall and waterless swamps.

'Imagine it Mum, the scene a hundred and fifty years ago, no town of Nhill, just woodland and grassland and all the animals, birds and plants and the water, clear, fresh, abundant with life and the entire region jewelled with lakes.'

'Well it's all gone now,' said Mum matter of factly, brought up in Sealake, a small town in the Mallee, a misnomer if ever there was one. We laughed about a wedding we once went to in

Sealake when we got bogged in sand-drifts covering the road during a duststorm. Thick red dust blew everywhere when we opened the window of the Sealake pub.

‘You should write a book Mum,’ I said, both knowing she never would. She was a story teller not a story writer. She told of the swaggies, refugees from the Great Depression in Melbourne, who tramped hundreds of miles and knocked on the back door of the McCooke family farmhouse at Sheephills for the ‘missus’ to see if there was any woodchopping and a bite to eat. She told of paddocks alive with rabbits before myxomatosis, plagues of mice, droughts, strapping up the buggy at dawn to attend a tiny school miles away in the middle of nowhere and a kerosene lamp on a calico covered table in a hot weatherboard farmhouse in the middle of an afternoon sky black with a mallee dust-storm.

‘But they were good times then,’ she’d say at last, ‘we all used to help each other then. Not like today.’

We yarned about the big floods of 1956 and 1957 marking the end of a fifty-year drought. Fifty years later they reckon we’re in the middle of another fifty-year drought. I prize a photograph of Dad, Mum and I taken at Outlet Creek where it runs into Lake Albacutya. In 1990, Lake Hindmarsh filled and Outlet Creek flowed for the first time in decades, almost reaching Lake Albacutya. It was a rare event. Australians must learn to think of Australia in Aboriginal ways.

Farm dams and fallowed paddocks now claim the

run-off that once flowed into gullies that fed the wetlands. The land has been cleared of its gums, banksias, buloke and bottlebrush, further reducing the rainfall. It's wheat and sheep country now. Wetlands, pristine for thousands of years, hadn't been full for years. It was no longer Wotjobaluk country, no longer John Shaw Neilson country, yet it always would be because it always had been:

My wealth it was the glow that lives forever in
the young,
'Twas on the brown water, in the green leaves
it hung...
My riches all went into dreams that never
yet came home,
They touched upon the wild cherries and
the slabs of honeycomb,
They were not of the desolate brood that men
can sell or buy,
Down in that poor country no pauper was I.
(John Shaw Neilson: The Poor, Poor Country)

At Christmas each year I walk the dry channels of the swamp and listen to the spirits of ancestors older than time. There's a timeless peace there, the metaphysical peace that comes from pushing Western culture away. I embrace the spirit-wind rustling the great red gums beneath blue father-sky and brown mother-earth and soar with wedge-tailed eagles. I laugh with the kookaburras and gasp at the blaze of red-rump parrots. A stone's throw away, my bones

will be laid in the cemetery plot next to my father, mother and brother.

*

After the Christmas doings the closeness of Melbourne draws me like a moth to a light. Luke spent more time at my place, reading mostly and chatting to James and Xavier on the Internet. The four of us organised to meet early on New Year's Eve at Banana Alley. James got hold of some sniff and we each had a line at Banana Alley. We relaxed for a few hours in the sauna, the spa, the steam room and the movie lounge.

We lived at Banana Alley and the Club for two days. There seemed no beginning or end to it all, an endless cycle of marijuana, Ram Gold amyl nitrate, sex and snatches of sleep.

It was New Year's Eve. In the locker room Luke dressed in torn Levi's and a ripped white T-shirt. James had black leather pants and vest, chains and a bottle of Ram Gold in his pocket. Xavier had denim baggies with crossed shoulder straps. I was in army pants, navy bowie singlet and Blundstones. The sniff kicked in as we left in a taxi for Collingwood. We had a few pots at the Laird and the Glasshouse then went onto The Peel. After a quiet bacardi and coke we slipped up to the Club a few blocks away. New Year turned as we climbed the concrete steps.

Jason at the bar handed us flutes of champers. The place was chockers. James and Luke went off together. Xavier stuck uncertainly with me for a

while until he spotted a boy he'd known at school.

I took myself and the champers into the dim lit lounge, drained it off and went upstairs. A young man in a dinner-suit wandered in very unsteady and sat on a wooden box. I approached.

'Partying?' I asked.

He looked up surprised and smiled weakly.

'What? No, my sister's wedding.'

'Been here before?' I ventured.

'No. First time. What do you do here?'

'I'll show you if you like?' I replied, imagining the virgin body beneath the suit.

'Yeah. OK.'

'Follow me.'

He followed me into a room and I locked the door.

'I'm Dallas,' he said, disarmingly offering me his hand. Unusual. Handshakes were an unnecessary formality at the Club.

I took Dallas' hand and placed my other hand on the bulge in his black sateen pants.

'Unusual name Dallas. Is it from the TV soapie?' I asked as I worked him up.

'No. It's where my father comes from, Dallas, Texas. Look, I've never done anything like this before.'

'That's OK,' I reassured, 'I'll show you. Take your clothes off.'

I watched as Dallas the groomsman at his sister's wedding undressed to a slim, hairless, white body, hairless except for a small mass of black pubic curls. He had the body of a young man, a

Ganymede, a Hyacinth, a Narcissus, a David. Perfect. I felt like Caligula fucking the groom at his sister's wedding.

*

Luke lay on his back on a black vinyl bench.

'Sit on top James,' he told him. James obligingly sat on Luke's stomach, facing him, legs astride and reached for a condom and lube.

'Slowly,' James said, 'this is my first time.'

'Bullshit,' said Luke.

'No, true,' said James, 'I've never been fucked.'

'Liar! What about when ya got raped ya faggot? Ya told us about it remember?'

'Why does it hurt so much?' James asked.

Luke knew what it was like to be fucked for the first time. 'It always hurts the first time,' he smirked sadistically.

*

After the wedding-boy virgin nothing came my way until dawn. I filled in time watching movies as the drug mellowed. In the video lounge I spotted a youth sitting in a far corner with a fire-glow of thick red curls. There was intense competition from a man a seat away who eyed off the red-head like a piranha.

I stood on the mezzanine to watch the action. I waited for someone to make a move. The young man didn't seem interested in the man beside him

who eventually gave up and went upstairs to try his luck. I deftly stepped from the mezzanine and seated myself in the vacant seat beside Mister Dreamboat. I slowly rolled a cigarette. Joe Cool.

‘Got a light?’ I asked, my favourite opener.

He handed me a black lighter.

We sat in silence pretending to watch the movie, a re-run of Whatever Happened to Baby Jane.

‘Been out and about?’ I asked nonchalantly.

‘Went to a party in Brunswick then The Market.’

Silent seconds searching for a chance.

‘Wanna come upstairs?’ I suggested.

‘What’s up there?’ the lad questioned.

You’ll find out soon enough I thought, if I can get you up there. I replied with a question.

‘You haven’t been here before?’

‘Just once. I didn’t go upstairs. Yeah. OK.’

So far so good.

The youth followed me upstairs to a room and I closed the door behind us. I reached for him in his loose black jeans then went on my knees before Adonis. I undid his black belt, pushed his jeans down muscular, white, hairless legs and plunged onto heaven.

‘Thanks for that,’ said the boy quickly pulling his jeans up.

‘ThankYOU,’ I said.

By the time I’d tidied myself up the youth was no-where to be seen, vanished into the gloom as they all did.

*

New Year festivities were over. It was summer, the silly season, the Midsumma festival. The Sydney Mardi Gras was a few weeks away. The world knew about the Sydney Mardi Gras. Boy George once turned up at my house in Woolloomooloo. I wouldn't be making it to Sydney Mardi Gras this year. Sydney's glory days were the seventies and eighties. Melbourne now had a better scene. Midsumma would be enough. There was a street parade in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, my old stamping ground. There'd be music, theatre, carousing and whoring. I'd score a line from James. No good trying to get drugs on the night. A night out took planning and foresight. I took over a room in a St. Kilda flat left vacant after a friend found the dykes in the adjoining flat couldn't accept that she was, horror of horrors, a heterosexual. I liked the 1920s run-down block in Wellington Street. It housed young musicians, students and assorted bohemians. Nick Cave and Paul Kelly had early days here. It was a few minutes to the centre of St. Kilda and a long way from the quietness of neo-Gothic provincial Ballarat. I enjoyed the quietness by the Yarrowee, but spent more time in the Melbourne's fleshpots, clubs, pubs and saunas than many who actually lived in the City. I needed the stimulation, the pulse of the *caffè latte* sidewalk café. I wanted to live in the middle of it, sleep beside it, walk out the front door and there it was.

I lived briefly in Manhattan, San Francisco, Rome, Athens and London in the seventies and eighties but it was only a taste. When London win-

ter began to close in I scented the wattle and eucalypt back home. I haven't been 'overseas' for decades. I imagined living the high life of the cosmic famous such as Gore Vidal who lived in Naples but I wasn't in that league. I contented myself idolising Vidal's cowboy in Myra Breckenridge and Julian the apostate in Julian. I got horny over a spunky cowboy doing the beat at the Forum in Rome. I imagined a Manhattan lifestyle but it was just fantasy and wondered whether I really wanted it anyway. City fleshpots were nearby if I wanted them. I had my academy by the Yarrowee and my visitors. It was time to go back there now, to the country, to the fruit trees and lavender, the currawongs and kookaburras. I found Luke, James and Xavier in the movie lounge watching *Gone With The Wind*.

'I'm heading off guys,' I said, 'what're you doing?'

'Come up to Ballarat James,' said Luke, 'you too Xavier. We can chill out.'

'Fine by me,' I said. Xavier nodded aye.

'Let's go. We'll get something to eat first,' I suggested.' I was starving after the antics. By the time we'd finished croissants and coffee at Anton's L'Espresso in Brunswick Street it was time to get the first to Ballarat.

'Have you ever read Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*?' James asked me between long silences on the train.

'I have,' I said, 'I liberated a copy from the Scotch College Library when I was teaching there in

the eighties. The part about the boys' prison at Point Puer in the 1840s on the Tasman Peninsula was fascinating and the section about the prison on Sarah Island on the west coast was great. My great grandfather was a convict at Port Arthur.'

'I've just started it,' said James, 'my people came out from Northern Ireland after the First World War. My family doesn't have any convict history. It's recommended reading for my Australian history research essay. You'd enjoy it Luke.'

But Luke was sound asleep beside him, his head lolling on James' shoulder.

'We should visit Tasmania sometime,' I suggested to James, 'you'd love it. Luke and Xavier could come.'

'I just want to get to Ballarat and chill out,' said James.

I sought to keep the talk alive.

'A great source of history for the period is Thomas Keneally's *The Great Shame*. You can borrow my copy at the cottage James. It's about the 1840s famine and the absentee English landlords such as Lord Lucan and Lord Raglan who were officers at the tragic charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War. Fascinating.'

'I read somewhere that a third of Ireland's population died in the famine when the potato crop failed,' said James, 'could that be right? It seems a lot.'

'A third died, a third emigrated, a third survived,' I said, 'Ireland really only recovered in the 1990s with the computer industry.'

‘The Celtic Tiger’, said James.

When lust was spent alienation found me. I was in the company of friends and there was the solace of history. There was the weatherboard cottage by the Yarrowee to retreat to when the going got too much in the city hothouse, just the place to bring city boys wanting a taste of the rustic. I was delighted James and Xavier were coming up. I looked out the carriage window at the fleeting western suburbs. There was work to do in the rambling garden at the cottage. I got off when I worked in the sun. I imagined I was a labourer. There was brick paving to be done. I’d get stuck into the runaway garden. Reef suntan oil would turn my skin gold. Spade and axe would tone my muscles. It was part of that actor leaning against a wall in some dim-lit place in the city as I sought the next punter to enter my life, one more to join the cast of thousands before and thousands to come as the land travelled through drought, flood and fire and queers geared up for summer festivals.

‘I feel as if I’m still at the Club,’ said Xavier, rousing from a fitful sleep, seeing himself on a black vinyl bench in a room dimly lit, ‘my head bangs like a jackhammer.’ His Ecstasy, Bacardi and champers hadn’t mixed well.

*

Xavier had spotted the boy he wanted and had fun in a subterranean, metaphysical way by strategically placing himself against an open doorway to a

room and waiting for the boy to come around. He edged out a distraction from a drooling queen. Bang! He was in. There was something tangible and magnetic about the youth he'd only seen briefly on the Glenferrie Road tram before and after school. As the tram rocked along he'd secretly glanced at the boy, the ascetic face, electric blue eyes and haystack of golden curls and roughed out how to chat him up. There'd been no acknowledgement on the tram, not even a look. One day Xavier thought, one day, somehow, somewhere. And there he was at the Club.

Golden boy passed by ignoring him and went downstairs to the lounge. Time and immediacy were of the essence. He followed him out of particleboard alley to the lounge where his quarry got himself a coffee, went over to a red sofa and began reading MSO. Xavier casually went and sat on the opposite sofa pretending to study Tom of Finland prints on the wall, stealing furtive glances at the boy who unexpectedly looked into his eyes and smiled so slightly it was almost imperceptible. Suddenly the Tom of Finland prints had no importance. Time waits for no one, especially and poignantly for the young.

Xavier's queerness had always been with him. He'd started clubbing a few years ago at under age pink-light disco nights, just on his own to have a look he told himself. There were plenty of pretty boys his own age. Later in the evening the place began to fill with older clientele. He stayed. He leant against a wall beside a sixties neon-ribbed

jukebox. One night he decided to go to The Peel in Collingwood and that other club he'd heard about just up from The Peel. After the delights of The Peel and its Bull Pen upstairs, closer to dawn than midnight, he walked the few blocks to the Club. The single bare lightbulb over the door was inconspicuous, understated, so different to the glitz of the Market and Exchange in Prahran, so different to The Peel. He couldn't help but be drawn in. This was where he belonged.

*

As the train kissed the lip of Werribee Gorge I brooded on the wrong side of my fifties. In this game you're over the hill at twenty-five. I looked at Xavier dozing opposite and remembered when I'd first seen him, about a year ago, a ramrod young prince sipping a drink. I'd ogled as he launched himself onto The Peel dance floor. I'd thought to get on the floor later, knowing I wouldn't. I completed a visual panorama of the scene before settling again on Xavier. I wondered whether I stood a chance. I figured I didn't, not with a lad as pretty as that anyhow. I drained my bourbon, did a quick round of the Bull Pen upstairs, had a few clumsy, unsolicited gropes then went off to the Club.

*

The driver applied the brakes on the long descent from Woodman's Hill into Ballarat Station and

came to a sharp stop. Xavier started, looked around and James nudged Luke awake. On the platform Luke asked Xavier if he'd heard of his band Cor Thirteen.

'What's that?' asked Xavier.

'Cor Thirteen. It's the name of my band. Check it out. We play at the Lounge.'

I occasionally frequented the Lounge. I wondered where the name of Luke's band came from.

'I do a few gigs,' Luke expanded, playing the shy performer, 'we've got a way to go technically but we've got potential. Could lead to something. Could go solo. I write stuff for myself as well as sing. Here's hoping huh?' He flushed pink.

Trying to impress James and Xavier I thought. Well, he's on his way, James and Xavier are on theirs and I'm on mine. I was a 'bubblin' all over.

'Having the money to do the things I want is a problem,' Luke rattled on, 'I live with Mum but Social Security isn't enough. I work at Bi-lo just casual.'

'You're the classic case of the struggling artist,' I told him.

'Forget the struggling artist bit,' said James, 'that belongs to the twentieth century, the romantic artist in the garret bit. Marketing, that's the key. We'll market you Luke! We'll sell you to the world!'

'We'll brand you Luke!' Xavier came in.

'Let's brand Luke!' James and Xavier chimed. They grabbed his shoulders and laughed as they pushed him along the platform.

Luke's mother and father had separated years

ago. His mother was given custody and his father's visits thinned out. Luke told me he was 'somewhere in Queensland' and the last time he'd seen him was a quick visit to a Collingwood and Essendon match at Windy Hill. Luke had a sense of being unwanted. It left him with a hollow numbness and he craved to be loved and to love. Most of all he missed a father because he'd never really had one. He was drawn to men older than himself, men old enough to be his father. He spent time with his mates in Cor Thirteen, played basketball and did school as any boy did, but there was a tangent to Luke's life he kept to himself. At sixteen he was a punter.

I initially thought I was the master calling the shots but I was wrong. I forgot I was dealing with someone from a generation that saw the so-called sexual liberation of the 1960s as ancient history, mere lessons to be learned, the primary one being that sex can be put to artful, gainful advantage and Luke was an excellent student of human nature. He had to be to survive Saint Patrick's, one of the toughest boys' schools in the country. He was a survivor.

We gazed up at the green stained-glass cupola in the foyer of the Station.

'Make a great rave house,' James joked as we made our way into the crisp morning air of Ballarat.

'When was it built?' Xavier asked, looking up at the colonnaded portico and Station tower.

'In different stages,' I explained, 'from 1862 to when it was finished in 1889. Rail was king. Great architecture.'

Opposite the Station was the arabesque turreted Provincial Hotel erected in 1909. Fallen on hard times, its irreplaceable stained glass was sold off to Melbourne antique dealers. In the 1960s, Ballarat's cast-iron verandas and wonderful old trams were flogged to San Francisco and New Orleans. We turned left into Lydiard Street. I named and dated the buildings. Reid's Coffee Palace, 1886. The Art Gallery, 1887. The Alexandria Tea Rooms, 1875. The Old Colonists' Hall and Mining Exchange, 1887; the grand George Hotel across the way with its double cast-iron balconies and balustraded parapet.

We came to a stop at Post Office corner. The historic intersection at Sturt Street was almost architecturally intact. On the opposite corner stood the 1864 Bank of Australasia. To the southwest, an exotic Venetian Gothic topped by a castellated stone tower once capped by a ribbed copper dome but now open and careless to the elements. Ballarat was magically captured in Fullwood's painting of Sturt Street in 1887 at the height of the building boom. After that, with the crash of 1891, it was downhill.

'Magnificent isn't it?' I commented, looking up at recessed loggias, arcades of trefoiled arches, deep cornicing and balustraded parapets.

'What the fuck is that thing?' Xavier exclaimed suddenly.

Dead ahead, on the final corner, the integrity of the precinct was stabbed in the back. On the southeastern corner stood a 1960s box. The original Bank building, a marvellous 1868 three storeyed pilastered affair in the Victorian style designed by

Leonard Terry had been demolished in 1965.

‘They wrecked it the same year I started as a boarder at Saint Patrick’s College,’ I said, ‘everyone knew the demolition was a mistake but the Ballarat City Council approved it.’

‘Barbarians! I bet they regret it now,’ said Xavier who’d learnt to appreciate Victorian architecture at Xavier College where the central building was an 1880s former mansion.

‘I’m not sure they do regret it,’ I said, ‘our civic leaders only pay lip service to heritage. They’re in the hands of rapacious developers. A group of us are trying to get it re-built,’ I explained, ‘but we’re not getting any support from the Council. No vision there. A dead zone at Town Hall. It’s an on-going campaign to save Ballarat from destruction.’

Luke nodded and smiled as I pointed out buildings, statues and plaques. He’d heard it all before, me on my hobbyhorse, often in despair at the destruction of Ballarat’s heritage. I did voluntary work with Heritage Watch but it was a losing battle against ‘developers’.

We crossed Sturt Street. A marble statue of Robbie Burns graced the greened median. From an octagonal bluestone base sprang a cast iron fountain to the glory of the 1861 Burke and Wills expedition. Both explorers perished en route but the fountain celebrated the failure, as Australians are wont to do with failure, Gallipoli and Ned Kelly. In the bluestone pool stood a Corinthian column on which sat a festooned Grecian urn and four gas-lit glass orbs. Outside the Town Hall I pointed to the inevitable,

outrageously oversized statue of Queen Victoria for whom homosexuality, apparently, was simply impossible to imagine. In Lydiard Street we passed Her Majesty's Theatre, Craig's Royal Hotel with its octagonal tower and the polychrome brick of the Wesleyan Church. We walked under the bluestone-visoried arch of the former Ballarat prison, now a part of the University, crossed the courtyard and turned onto a hillside path down to the Yarrowee Creek. Along the Creek embankment we sucked in the fresh air and revelled in the warmth of early morning sun from a clear blue sky beneath the gums and wattles.

It was great to be out of the City.

A narrow grassed path left the track. Luke led the way towards the cottage he knew so well. The old house invited welcome and warmth with its tumble-down sheds and overgrown garden. Luke gave Xavier a quick tour of brightly coloured Gould prints of Australian parrots, Indian wall hangings and Catholic iconography I'd saved from rubbish heaps. James sat at the Baltic pine kitchen table and talked about making a short film about the radical student movement in the sixties. I organised coffee and rolled a joint.

'Sounds great James. There was a film about LaTrobe University radical students in the early seventies called Beginnings, made by Rod Bishop and Gordon Glenn. Rod was head of the National Film and Television School and Gordon was the son of the former Chancellor Sir Archibald. Gordon is now a successful film producer and director.

Beginnings caused a stir because it showed how to make a Molotov cocktail. Another student at Latrobe at that time was Terry Moran who now heads up the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. He might be worth an interview. George Pell, the Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney, might have an interesting perspective. In 1967 he was ahead of me in the Seminary and about to head off to Propaganda Fide in Rome but in the 1970s we had several conversations in Ballarat. We went in opposite directions of course. I see in Quadrant magazine George now welcomes the re-birth of the Latin Mass. Trying to claim back lost territory by re-capturing a bit of the old magic! And there's Ian Macdonald of course, my mate from LaTrobe during the radical days. He'd be worth a try.'

'Thanks,' said James making mental note. Luke and Xavier reappeared looking flushed.

The four of us silently sipped strong blacks and passed a joint in that languid camaraderie of morning after a night out.

'Let's crash,' Luke said at last.

No one asked whom was sleeping with whom. It was understood.

Luke's room was at the end of the passage. A Hindu creation story in red and black silk covered the wall behind the bed and oversized pictures of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin dominated the opposite wall. Doona covers were crimson and sheets were purple. Sky blue sateen and cream lace curtained the front window. There was a roomy leather armchair. A high Dutch colonial dresser

with a swivel mirror reflected the bed. From the ceiling hung a black tasselled tiffany shade sparkling rainbow glass beads. I knew the room but would not be entering.

Luke lit the lavender candle for Xavier and James.

I went to my bedroom and crashed.

*

Late the following morning we sat talking around the big kitchen table.

‘What’ve you been reading?’ James asked me.

It was a question friends often asked and just as often I didn’t know what to reply because my reading was so eclectic. I’d just finished a re-read of The Essential Alan Watts.

‘He was big time in the sixties and seventies. Everyone was reading him. R.D Laing was popular too. Watts was deeply influenced by Eastern philosophy and enjoyed quoting from Albert Camus and Carl Jung.’

‘Such as?’ asked James testing me.

‘Caught me on the hop there James! Well, Jung once said life is a disease with a very bad prognosis. It lingers on for years and invariably ends with death.’

James chuckled. ‘That’s dark.’

‘Watts believed death was the origin of life which leads to reincarnation.’

‘Who was Camus?’ Luke asked.

I was just about to jump in when Xavier said ‘I

know! I know! Albert Camus. We studied The Plague in English Lit. He was an exis, exis... what was it?’

‘Existentialist,’ James helped, ‘Camus was part of the French scene after the Second World War around Montmartre, the Left Bank, with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Bouvoir...’

‘...and Jean Genet,’ I came in, ‘you know, Querelle of Brest. Have you seen the film?’

‘I have,’ said James.

‘I haven’t,’ said Luke

‘I’ve got it here. We can watch it.’

Xavier looked thoughtful. ‘Changing the subject a little, well, you know how during the gold rush days, the 1850s, there was a lot more men than women and with all the ex-convicts, well, I was wondering, would there have been a queer scene around?’

Silence greeted Xavier’s non segue.

‘There were lots of brothels,’ I said eventually, ‘in Main Street and Rodier Street in Ballarat East. That’s documented. But I don’t know about a queer scene.’

‘There must have been!’ asserted Xavier. James and Luke nodded. ‘It’s not something that would’ve been documented, sort of secret and hidden.’

‘There’s references to ‘unnatural acts’ and ‘buggery’ in Ballarat Police and Magistrates’ records,’ I said, trying to remember, ‘and there’s love letters between male convicts in A History of Homosexuality in Australia. Robert Hughes’ Fatal Shore refers to it. Why do you ask Xavier?’

‘Well, I read some history of the Ballarat gold fields. The closest it gets is a bit about the brothels but there’s nothing specific. I would’ve thought homosexuality was absolutely rampant. Why doesn’t all the tourist stuff about Sovereign Hill mention it? It’s all so, so...I don’t know.’

‘Aseptic might be the word you’re looking for,’ said James.

‘Innocuous might be another,’ said Luke surprising us.

‘Anaemic,’ James added, ‘it’s all designed for the squeaky clean happy touristy families. It’s all sanitised. Like the holocaust museum, it’s as if the hundreds of thousands of homosexuals gassed in the Nazi concentration camps never happened.’

‘We should set up a male brothel at Sovereign Hill!’ said Xavier, ‘that’d make it more authentic!’

‘It’s selective history James,’ I said after chuckles subsided, ‘if they control what you think they control what you do.’

‘Who’re they?’ Luke asked.

‘That’s the never-ending question Luke,’ I said.

‘Big Brother,’ said James, ‘1984.’

*

In the afternoon we walked along the Creek to the Station and Xavier where James caught the last train to Melbourne. Hugs all around.

Luke virtually lived at the cottage at times. He’d disappear for a few days then suddenly show up in the early hours of a Friday or Saturday after a night

out at the Lounge where Cor Thirteen occasionally landed a gig.

‘I’m not gettin’ anywhere with my music,’ he told me, ‘my fantasies of being a rock star are just that, fantasies.’ We sat eating pizza at the long kitchen table. It was Luke’s seventeenth birthday. ‘My grades are falling back too.’

‘Too much of a good thing?’ I suggested.

‘Maybe. I hope I don’t bomb out.’

I could see the druggy loser subculture Luke was falling into. I was part of that culture one step removed. Luke might become a problem. I’d seen it happen to many young homosexuals. Getting out of Woolloomooloo and Fitzroy was my own desperate gasp for air. I saved myself. I thought about letting him stay at the cottage on a permanent basis but felt more comfortable with the visiting arrangement. It was early days. I didn’t want to upset our mentor relationship. I played my ace.

‘What about going to Saint Patrick’s College as a boarder?’ I suggested after a long sigh from Luke that Harold Pinter would’ve been proud of.

Luke’s face had to be seen to be believed.

‘You’ve got to be joking! A boarder! Why? And who’d pay for it? Mum hasn’t got any money.’ Luke stared incredulously at me with big brown eyes. His angel face changed to a smile as I patiently explained the commonsense of it.

‘You could study there with the boarders at Saint Patrick’s during the week and you’ll study better. At weekends you could be at Mum’s or come here. She’ll be pleased you’re going to knuckle down.’

You do want to go to university don't you? What do you think? The money side is tight but the fees are reasonable for weekly boarders. I can help. I've got a little super to dip into. You can help me in the garden and around the house on weekends. It'll bring out the best in you. It's no good the way you're going is it?

'Well I definitely want to go to university. Let's see,' he said dreamily, 'I think Mum would be rapt so there's no problem there. It'll help her get out of Ballarat and move to Melbourne with her sister. So you're going to pay for it?' I nodded. 'I'll go to Saint Patrick's on one condition,' he said.

'Name it.'

'Well, you know the name of my band, Cor Thirteen? Well, you have to tell me what it means. The name. You never did come and see it you asshole so the least you can do is figure out what it means.'

'What does Cor Thirteen mean?'

'Yeah.' Luke proceeded to remind me of the night we'd first met at the Lounge, my invitation back to the cottage, the drunken sex. 'You owe me,' he said.

'Providing I'm allowed a clue,' I traded.

'OK. One clue,' agreed Luke, 'here it is. The clue is Paul.'

I didn't know any Pauls. It took me longer than my ego would prefer to admit to connect Paul and Cor Thirteen to become a Bible reference, the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen. I took a Bible down and found the reference.

‘Read it,’ Luke commanded.

‘Love does not come to an end. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. Now we are seeing a dim reflection as through a glass darkly; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.’

‘I think that’s where Patrick White got flaws in the glass from,’ I said after a silence. You know, Patrick White’s autobiography.’

Luke looked confused. I explained the literary reference to the Australian novelist and Nobel Laureate.

‘Well Luke, Saint Patrick’s it is and you can spend weekends at the cottage,’ I reassured. We stayed up late planning and listened to Nirvana and R.E.M. Luke rang his Mum and told her what was happening.

‘She wants to talk to you,’ said Luke, handing me the phone. I turned Nirvana down.

Jesus don’t want me for a sunbeam.

Don’t expect me to die.

Don’t expect me to cry.

Don’t expect me to die for thee.

Jesus don’t want me for a sunbeam.

I never got around to actually meeting Luke’s

Mum Lynette. We chatted for a while and in the end she simply said ‘well, he’s old enough to make up his own mind. If Luke’s happy I’m happy.’ She agreed to phone the College being Luke’s legal guardian and there was an interview for her with the boarding master. That was it.

‘I’m in,’ Luke told me a few days later, a distant lop-sided smile playing at the corners of his mouth, ‘I’m a boarder! Fuck! What have I done!’

*

Brother Patrick Shannon was overjoyed when Saint Patrick’s College won the Head of the Lake. The College needed victories and this one was special for two reasons. First, because it was back-to-back, having won last year as well, and that after a long drought of defeats; second, because it was one in the face of the critics, the finger-pointers, the accusers and the envious and those were not few in number.

Patrick Shannon was a good man. He’d kept his vows. He anxiously wrestled with allegations about sexual abuse against the Brothers and wished the public agony of scandal would end for the sake of the Order he loved and the good work it did amongst Catholic youth. Meantime, he got on with the job of running one of the finest boys’ schools in Australia. He thrived on the challenge. Each day was a day of history and adventure in the life of his monastery school. The Order was determined a Brother would continue to run the College but able Brothers were difficult to find and gazing from the

Headmaster's window across carefully tended lawns and brilliant splashes of pink, red and mauve azaleas, he reluctantly accepted that most of the teaching and administration was being done by lay teachers these days. Still, he was very much in charge, respected and liked by everyone including the Bishop. This was a relief because the Diocese itself faced similar allegations and might be up for hefty compensation. He wondered whether it was true that even the Bishop's Palace, the great blue-stone mansion over the road, was to be sold to pay for the compensation. The Ridsdale affair had been a catastrophe.

How things change yet remain the same he mused as he recalled allegations of abuse at boys' orphanages in Western Australia. The brutality at Bindoon had been particularly unflattering to the Brothers and the aftermath was still being felt.

But Saint Patrick's had not fared so badly. The Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks, was an old boy as was the Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell and Sir Frank Little, a former archbishop of Melbourne. The College had produced a swag of politicians, senior bureaucrats and academics such as Raimond Gaita. Leading Ballarat burghers were old boys, especially in real estate, which was handy from time to time.

The day's mail lay open on the oak desk beside him. He'd turn to it when he finished his coffee. He had his first black coffee at sunrise every morning on the monastery balcony when no one had yet stirred, watching over the historic town of Ballarat

as it woke, the town of Eureka Stockade fame. As the sky turned pink and gold over Mount Warrenheip which he could just glimpse if he stood on his toes, he nibbled a small hash cookie, having given up smoking years ago. He reminded himself to get in more cookies from Max, an old boy who was very discreet.

Every morning he attended Mass in the College Chapel. Early Mass reminded him of when he was a student at the College in the sixties. In those days, swathed in the grey mists of Ballarat dawn, Brothers in black capes walked cold cloisters reciting their Latin Office on the way to Mass. Those days were long gone. The beautiful Latin Mass and Gregorian Chant were no more. The Church had thrown out the baby with the bath water and now there simply weren't the Brothers anymore. He was the youngest in the monastery at fifty-six and three fellow monks were nearing retirement. In a few years the Monastery itself would become part of the boys' boarding school, something unimaginable in the sixties. Occasionally, when the College was still sleeping, in a flux of romantic nostalgia and intending spirituality, Shannon put his cape around his shoulders, picked up his breviary and walked the cold stone cloister alone, imagining himself at a great European monastery. But he wasn't. He regretted that.

It's all such a long time ago he said to the azaleas. He snapped out of his reverie, nibbled the last of his cookie and gulped his coffee. If people only knew.

He turned to the day's outward correspondence and made quick, clear instructions for Eileen, his invaluable secretary. The mail didn't present any problems. The Superior-General, Brother Justin Kelty, was coming out from Rome in three weeks and would stay at the College for a few days. The visit would be more of a delight than dutiful hospitality. He knew the urbane, erudite Superior-General well. It would be an excellent opportunity to discuss the internal politics of the Order over some of that 1997 Pyrenees Burgundy he reserved for such occasions. Shannon kept an excellent cellar. The Superior-General would have an Honorary Doctorate of Letters conferred on him by the Australian Catholic University during his stay and Cardinal Pell and the Premier would be in attendance. He rubbed his hands together.

The application to board a senior student was also pleasing, especially the cheque up front. So many parents defaulted these days. Young Luke would board four days a week and could be useful in the College Band.

*

It was Saturday night at the Club. Luke had insisted on a night out in clubland before the start of Semester so we caught the super saver to the City. The trip worked in well with another 'session', 'the last one' James promised, at Ormond.

'I emailed Xavier,' Luke told me as the train pulled out of Ballarat, 'he's meeting us at the Club.'

‘You should enjoy yourself tonight then,’ I smirked. Luke blushed crimson.

A dirty weekend was just what Luke needed.

*

Luke noticed a young man sitting on a box at the Club. The guy was laughing to himself and he thought the guy was some kind of nutter. Curious, he sat next to him. There was just room for two. They began talking about the inanity of it all and why the hell people didn’t talk to each other anymore. Luke invited him to a room for a joint, one of several he’d scammed from me at the cottage.

Jarred was sixteen from wild Tasmania. He wasn’t so big as to be painful yet big enough to be pleasurable. Luke worked in Jarred’s spike and watched between his legs as Jarred drove in with a final thrust as they blew. Get it while he told himself, a line from me he’d taken to heart.

‘You’re only young once,’ Luke skited later to Xavier who studied him quizzically. Xavier secretly regretted Luke’s diversions at the Club and thought Luke made himself a little too available. Still, a night at the Club was fun.

‘It’s good you’re going to board Luke. You’ve got to get a reasonable enter score to get into university.’

‘I’ve gotta get through this year Xavier. This is my last fling before school starts on Monday, no more burning the candle at both ends. He’s payin’ for it. Did I tell ya?’

‘Yeah? Generous of him.’ Xavier wondered at the precise nature of the relationship between Luke and me but kept his mouth shut. He wanted Luke like crazy that night so best to let sleeping dogs lie he thought sagely.

‘He’s very good to you Luke. What does your Mum think?’

‘Mum’s cool. Boarding let’s her off the hook. She wants to get back to Melbourne. It suits her.’

James and I joined them. We got passouts and went to Brunswick Street for souvlakis, Charmaine’s for ice-creams and finished up at the Grub Street Bookshop for a quick browse.

*

Luke brought his gear to the cottage. There wasn’t much, just a big green army canvas bag, a backpack and a guitar.

‘I can’t believe I’m going to board at Saint Patrick’s. I’ve got butterflies. Rather fetching don’t you think?’ he asked me, sporting his new year twelve jumper. I was amused as Luke camped it up. I thought of how I must have looked all those years ago back in the sixties, the navy blue suit, white shirt, tie and a cap. I set the alarm for seven to make sure Luke had plenty of time for a good breakfast. I hid the dope so he wouldn’t be tempted to an early morning joint.

Morning.

‘I’ll walk into Sturt Street with you. You can get the bus up Sturt Street to the College.’

‘You don’t have to. I can manage.’

‘An early morning walk along the Creek might do us both good,’ I suggested, ‘I have to get some milk anyhow.’

We could have been father and son as we made our way along Yarrowee Creek, under the bluestone arch of the University, down Lydiard Street to the Sturt Street bus-stop. It was a fine autumn day and gold leaves from elm trees fluttered into mossed bluestone gutters. Luke was being looked after and had Xavier and James to mess around with. I caught his contentment.

I watched him board the bus. I felt a paternal pang. Luke was about to blossom. My own life was in the sear, the yellow leaf, the words Macbeth spoke at the end of it all. Today it’s all computers, text messages and business management. I was irrelevant. In the cold terror of the third millennium Luke’s bus belched a cloud of diesel fumes and disappeared up Sturt Street.

I did some figuring. Maybe my school days weren’t so dissimilar. Yes, digital technology had changed lifestyles but basic realities had not changed. There was still war, just as my generation had the Vietnam War. Today’s generation had the shame and lies of Iraq. The daily grind was just the same as it ever was for the working poor, the same mad, blind scramble for prestige, wealth and power. The form and medium had changed, not the substance or essence. Human nature had not changed. The nation’s Governments did not inspire but had they ever? There was a growing climate of fear but

the populace is always fearful. It's nature's way after all. I understood why today's young people were so cynical. After all, a police state breeds cynicism.

At the cottage I showered and dressed, fixed myself a snack of scrambled eggs on toast, brewed coffee, stretched out on the chesterfield and rolled a small joint. I checked my mail. There was a message from Peter Cochrane, a radical friend from student days at LaTrobe now lecturing in History at Sydney. There was increasing traffic between radical friends from the sixties, friends I hadn't seen since days together as undergraduates in what was then the New Left. The 'Old Left' now I guess. There was a message from Ken Mansell at Daylesford, a sixties activist from Monash University, reminding me about a National Day of Action. I exchanged quick emails, discussed the Middle East, the politics of terrorism, globalisation and the cancellation of world debt. We reminded each other of mutual friends such as Dave Nadel, Alison Smith and others from student union days in the late sixties. What had become of them? Many had done well, politicians, lawyers, judges, academics, public servants, union leaders, diplomats and bankers. One somehow never spoke about those who hadn't 'made it'. Ken and I exhorted each other how important it was to 'write the book'.

Strange, ironic even, how contemporaries from radical student days now ran the country. Judy Maddigan was now President of the Legislative Council of Victoria. In the early seventies at LaTrobe University she was part of the right-wing

push against the Maoists, Communists and anarchists.

The Australian Labor Party was now so conservative. I blush to think I used to be a member. Mark Latham's Diaries told the truth. That's why the old hacks in Beazley's Shadow Cabinet hated Latham so much. The truth hurt. Barry Jones had come out of the woodwork to can the ALP's personal fiefdoms. Non-aligned, I was isolated and powerless. I wasn't a Party man. I couldn't play their game. I'll never join another political party.

'I think it's got to do with the way we were educated,' I said to Peter Cochrane at Sydney, 'the survival skills we picked up at school and university are useful today. We can stand alone and be independent. We learnt when to hold our fire, when to attack, when to retreat, when to keep our mouths shut, to bide one's time. Life is the study of the art of war. Marxism, Leninism and Maoism taught us more than we imagined.'

'In the end we came through, each in our own way,' Peter assured, 'you've done it your way, living the quite life there in Ballarat. I'm envious. Sydney's just a rat race. It's mean. Real mean.'

'So's Melbourne,' I said, 'that's why I got out. Sydney and Melbourne have certain attractions though.' We laughed.

'We never really escape. Do you remember what Yevgeny Yevtushenko the Russian poet said?'

'What?' I asked.

'A tear which evaporated somewhere in Paraguay will fall as a snowflake onto the cheek of

an Eskimo. It doesn't matter where we live. It's what we do with it that matters.'

'As long as I can get Radio National, Phillip Adams Late Night Live and Classic FM,' I said.

I stretched out on the chesterfield. If 'success' was what I'd achieved it was due less to kudos as a student revolutionary than to much earlier influences, influences such as simple schoolboy lessons drawn from closeness to nature. I was still that nature-boy rabbiting in the sandhills, chasing goannas on hot days at Lake Hindmarsh, dodging fat brown snakes in the scrub. I'd soaked up different, more sophisticated experiences in later life. I'd read *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, but the Australian bush was where I learnt to love and how to survive. It grounded me, so that today, when I listen to thinkers such as Jeffrey Sachs, Peter Singer and Richard Dawkins, people who tell it like it is, I don't lose sight of the main game, that fundamental love for humanity and creation.

*

In 1965 I'd enrolled at Saint Patrick's as a pimply, gangling, neurotic youth of sixteen. Boarding school came as a shock. The regime was harsh. Boys were thrashed.

Mass was three mornings a week which meant rising at six. I had to learn to 'get along' in a dormitory of sixty boys. There was no sex. Surreptitious meandering under the blankets was our own business done in solitude and loneliness. Good Brother

O'Brien kept silent vigil over all. Friendships were made. Forty years on a few of us occasionally meet up for a reunion. Jim Derum remains a good friend, as do Gregory Mannix, Frank Hoban, Xavier Maher and Damien Thrum.

Intellectually I came into my own at Saint Patrick's. We were fortunate in having several passable teachers. One was Brother Justin Kelty the Headmaster who could dish out a solid thrashing as my friend Xavier Maher knows. Kelty was not without talent as a teacher and brought Roman History alive. I also learnt Latin, the language of science, law, parliaments, nomenclature, literature itself and the Roman Catholic Church. It was no surprise when Kelty was made Superior-General of the Order. The idea of a Royal Commission into the Order, called for recently by the English Catholic periodical *The Tablet*, was in 1965 utterly inconceivable yet it was precisely in those years when the abuses occurred. The abuses at Christian Brothers' orphanages such as Bindoon in Western Australia were as yet unheard of.

'I didn't like Rome much,' Kelty told me in the 1980s during one of our discussions at Treacy College in Parkville, 'the class-room is where it happens,' he told me, 'that's where I was happiest.'

An Honorary Doctorate conferred on Kelty was, all things considered, deserved.

*

It was a chilly Ballarat night in 1966. I was get-

ting into my pyjamas and dressing gown to go to the dormitory and Brother O'Brien's vigilance, a boy told me Kelty wanted to see me. I was scared shitless. I took the deserted walk along the cloister to the Monastery. It was eerie, silent and dimly lit. I knocked on Kelty's door.

'Come in.'

Kelty sat behind a large wooden desk scattered with papers. I stood there in my dressing gown, the vulnerable youth.

'Sit down,' said Kelty crisply. I sat and drew my dressing gown around me. In the shadowland of my homosexuality I suspected how seducible I really was. I knew I was homosexual. What did Kelty want? We sat in silence.

'Do you think your brother Geoff is happy at Saint Patrick's?' Kelty asked eventually.

It wasn't a question I was expecting. My two younger twin brothers, Bill and Geoff were fellow boarders. Had they done something wrong? Had I done something wrong? Was I in for a thrashing? I knew Geoff wasn't happy. He had what we now know as dyslexia and was getting belted every day for not knowing his spelling. One day he came to me in tears. I told his teachers it wasn't Geoff's fault and that thrashing him was unfair. Word got back to Kelty. The Brothers also confiscated letters to Geoff from a girlfriend. He was miserable. Letters from girls were not permitted and could mean 'an occasion of sin'.

Homoeroticism vicarious and secret was, in effect, compulsory.

Kelty and I sat in silence. Each second was like an hour. I was being silently reproved by Kelty for daring to complain. I was being given the silent treatment. Saint Patrick's was a take it or leave it place.

Kelty wasn't about to give in. He sat behind his desk for minutes waiting for me to respond. It became embarrassing. I shifted uneasily. What did Kelty want?

'He's finding it difficult Brother,' I said at last.

Kelty was silent and thoughtful.

'Yes, well, we'll try and do something about that. You may leave.'

Kelty was a Church politician. He was, not so strangely, the teacher and mentor from whom I drew some of my own pedagogy as a teacher. In 1966, a class of forty seventeen year olds silently studied their History of Rome by M. Cary, D.Litt. (Oxon). We listened expectantly for the sound of Kelty's step and swish of soutane. The 'D.Litt.(Oxon.)' impressed me. We entered the world of Cicero and the momentous outcome of Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon River. I understand how Kelty preferred the excitement of Rome two thousand years ago to the vicissitudes of the Rome he contended with in the twentieth century, when abuse scandals around the world engulfed him and he tried to keep a lid on it all.

Brother Paul Nangle was another Brother who had formative influence. Nangle taught English Literature. He had a sense of humour but was a strict disciplinarian. When occasion necessitated, as it

often did, he was ruthless with the strap. In a single class we could sing *Soul Of My Saviour*, laugh nervously at a joke and a sixteen year old get six of the best. There was always tension. This was, after all, the artful methodology of the Christian Brother, incisively portrayed in the successful stageplay *The Christian Brother*. We learnt the soliloquies of *Macbeth* by rote. We stood and recited. I still remember them. Out, out brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

In 1975 I was well-known as a radical activist. I was *persona non grata* in conservative Catholic circles. That year Nangle gave me my first job when he was Headmaster at Saint Patrick's.

I excelled in the close learning of *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and the bawdiness of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Arthur Miller's *Death of A Salesman* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* brought me face to face with my alienation from society and the emptiness of materialism. I did not realise it at the time but the foundation stone was laid for embracement of Marxism and radical activism at University. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* brought insight into the psychology of parental and political power, whetting my appetite for future studies of Freud and Jung. Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* was a trip into Gothic Victorian fantasy, a total immersion into a boy's world. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* taught the

supercilious contrivance of 'society'. So did H.G.Wells' A History of Mr. Polly and Shaw's Arms and the Man. The prose and poetry of Judith Wright opened my mind to Australian literature. This kind of pedagogy and reading doesn't happen in today's classroom.

Schoolboy studies prepared me for the political sociology and radical literature I was about to devour at University and literally, a lifetime of pleasure.

Intellectual progress was tempered at Saint Patrick's with severe punishments for slip ups. Failure to complete homework or breaking the silence of the classroom meant a thrashing from an outraged Brother.

In the Minor Seminary one evening the pangs of hunger stirred. I had a craving for chips. I asked Brother Parton if I could go down to Steve's chippery in Sturt Street. No. So after everyone had settled down for the night I slipped out the window, bought some chips at Steve's and ate them on the way back. Brother Parton was lying in wait. 'You'll go to Mass in the morning.' This was my punishment, an odd one I thought a trainee priest being punished with an extra Mass. The Mass was supposed to be a celebration. Still, it did mean a six o'clock rise in a Ballarat winter. Come morning, Brother came in to get me up. I refused to get out of bed. Back he came with a birch cane and started whipping into me, ineffectually because of the blankets. He was very angry. I got out of bed, grabbed his cane and snapped it in half. Parton stood open-

mouthed for an instant then stormed out. I was in trouble. To prevent matters deteriorating I got dressed and went to Mass. I was the only boy in the Chapel. The Brothers sat in stalls at the back saying their Office. Eyes bored into me.

The outlet for pent up sex was sport. 'Sport' meant cricket, rowing and tennis in summer and Australian Rules football and athletics in winter. Saint Patrick's excelled in sport year after year, constantly carrying off Ballarat Public School trophies, shields and premierships. In rowing, the College was less successful. Rowing was the coveted domain of the more exclusive and expensive Ballarat College and Ballarat Grammar. Even so, on the shallow expanse of Lake Wendouree, the gorgeous gods of Saint Patrick's College, its poor Irish Catholic boys, occasionally triumphed at Head of the Lake. In this world I was untalented and unnoticed, a dutiful and mediocre participant. All I could do, was more than happy to do, was admire the Adoni.

Roman Catholicism was the reason for Saint Patrick's existence. Prior to 1965 there was no Government assistance for Catholic schools. Menzies cleverly provided grants from 1965, which secured the 1966 election for him. Up until then, Catholic education was self-funded and poverty stricken.

I enjoyed the medieval, feudal liturgy and fiefdom of the Church. Once a month Bishop James O'Collins would leave his impressive bluestone Bishop's Palace to preside at Missa Solemnis in the

austere College Chapel. O'Collins robed in full episcopal regalia: purple cassock, white lace soutane, tassels, buckled shoes, gaiters and glittering mitre. In his white-gloved and garnet-ringed hand he clasped a gold crosier. His Lordship and six senior altar boys would process down the nave to the marble altar accompanied by the choir's Magnificat. The procession was headed by an acolyte swinging a shining brass thurible puffing sweet euphoric clouds of incense throughout the Chapel. Roman Catholic liturgy certainly had something going for it in 1965. It elicited a spiritual and erotic high, completely lost in the lowbrow 'modernism' of contemporary Catholicism.

A last gasp of the 'Princes of the Church' in Victoria was the completion, at great financial endurance to the Catholics of Bendigo, of Bishop Stewart's Sacred Heart Cathedral, the last neo-Gothic cathedral built in Australia. It's more a tourist attraction today than a place of worship.

I would study the altar boys as they went about their tasks in the sanctuary. I imagined their svelte, lithe bodies beneath red soutane and white surplice as they bowed to say the Confiteor. There was a deep bow to the Bishop before the thurible was drawn open on its chains. A boy held a boat of incense for O'Collins to spoon yet more incense onto burning charcoal. More bows. I studied the face of a beatific youth pouring water over the Bishop's hands. A boy crueted purple wine into a chalice. Another server put in a few drops of water. Water into wine. Not so strange really. The 'mys-

tery'. The 'miracle'. At communion I fell in love with the boy who held the silver tray as he progressed along the marble rail to finally place the tray under my chin. I stuck out my tongue. I was so close to his body. I knelt to receive Jesus who lived in the Tabernacle on the altar. He was in my body. The choir burst into Panis Angelicus. I knew my sexuality then and secretly celebrated it. I studied classmates covertly and fell in love, one here, one there. Morning sun streamed our faces with rainbows of colour shot through stained glass in the sanctuary. It was then I truly believed. In contrived modesty I cast down my eyes and read Saint Joseph's Missal, painstakingly following the Latin without looking at the English translation just for pleasure.

I wondered whether young Luke would have similar pleasures. The College had recently re-introduced Latin. It hadn't been taught there for forty years, a victim of post-modern deconstruction. The Church, gutted and demystified, unwanted and irrelevant, brought in an elderly teacher of Latin from cold retirement.

*

In 1965 on bitterly cold Ballarat mornings I passed by Brothers saying their Office as they made their way to Chapel. They were chill-blained Ballarat winters. Fog clung in the corridors. Brothers in black soutanes evoked medieval abbeys, that severe Irish monasticism lost forever in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

The ritual of Catholicism is gone. The repressive dogma remains.

I did well in my studies, well enough to win the English Literature prize. There was a ‘no appearance your worship’ at sport. I preferred to run alone around Lake Wendouree and Victoria Park after school.

A highlight came in my final year when I won the College Oratory. I delivered a speech on Speech Night to the assembled College, parents, staff, Bishop O’Collins and Malcolm Fraser, then Minister for Science and Education. It was about freedom being a myth when boys my age were being conscripted to die in Vietnam and weren’t even allowed to vote. I became a conscientious objector at Saint Patrick’s in 1965 when I refused to join the Cadets. I was following Jesus’ teachings. The Church, the Bishops and Bob Santamaria taught the opposite, that young Australian men had to go and kill young Asian men ‘to protect Australia from invasion’.

Full of doubt I decided to go on to Corpus Christi College the following year, the Seminary conducted by the Jesuits in the Scottish mansion built by the Chirnside family beside the meandering gorge of the Werribee River. I was very wobbly about my ‘calling’. By the end of the first year, as I lay on my Seminary bed listening to a song called A Puppet On A String, I knew that continuing in the Seminary would mean continuing to be a puppet on a string. And there was another song too, Are You going to San Francisco? ‘There’s gonna be a love-in there,’

sang Scott Mackenzie, 'I'm gunna wear some flowers in my hair?'

It was time to get out. I was eighteen. It was 1968. Revolution was in the air.

*

Forty years on I listen in bemused silence as Luke rattles off his doings at Saint Patrick's. He was pleased with his first day back. He'd stowed his gear at the boarding house and made himself known to his fellow boarders.

'Friendly lot,' he told me, 'and time goes quickly. I've plenty of work to catch up on and I study late. I keep in contact with Xavier in Melbourne to discuss History and English essays and gossip. I thought there'd be more religion but there isn't much. The Chapel's hardly ever used and full-time boarders go to Mass in the Cathedral in Sturt Street on Saturdays.'

Luke was only a weekday boarder. On Friday's after school he jammed with Cor Thirteen. Saturdays he sometimes fronted with Cor Thirteen at the Lounge. He gave Bi-lo away.

'I'm givin' Bi-lo away,' he informed me peremptorily one evening, 'I haven't got time for it anymore.'

*

When school broke for weekends Luke caught the bus outside the College to go downtown. He'd

get off at the Cathedral for a quiet cafe latte at L' Espresso, his favourite coffee haunt just down from the Cathedral. He'd sit al fresco to eye off passing trade as College, Grammar and Saint Patrick's boys made their una passeggiata down fashionable Sturt Street. One afternoon, just as he was about to head off to practise for Saturday's gig, a hunk from his year walked past, a boy he only knew as Damien. They nodded recognition. Luke had a sudden collapse of motivation for practise. He had plans for Damien.

Ballarat and provincial cities are not noted for opportunities for casual pick-ups but occasionally a gem appears. Damien's good looks shocked Luke as eyes met. Tall, with a haystack of blond hair, sky-blue eyes, peaches and cream skin and full pink lips, Damien paused uncertainly before him.

'Hi. You're Damien,' Luke stammered.

'You're Luke.'

Quick glances, quiet smiles. It was on.

'Let's go to my place,' suggested Luke.

'Where do you live?' asked Damien.

'Down by Yarrowee Creek. Not far.'

'Anyone else there?' he asked defensively.

'Maybe but he won't bother us,' said Luke reassuringly, hoping I'd be on one of my long walks along the further reaches of the Yarrowee.

In complicit silence they walked quickly along the bluestone channel of the Yarrowee. Only when the channel opened out onto wide green verges did they really relax to each other, merging into one dream-time, one lightspace, wondering, hoping and hungry.

I was home as it turned out, stretched out on the chesterfield as if I'd never left it. I sussed the situation immediately and after an awkward intro from Luke I manufactured a quiet walk along the Yarrowee to the supermarket.

I imagined Luke and Damien listening to Nirvana as they went at it on the lounge room floor, the yearned for being done for, fantasy made real, ethereal yet tangible, familiar juices, springtime sap rising, spirit to emptiness within. Luke, worldly wise before his time would take the peach, suck the juices over his palate then with a hug at the kitchen door and whispers of future meetings Damien would leave. I spotted him, a spring in his step, heading up the hill to the escarpment as I returned from my walk.

I grinned at Luke who blushed crimson. Damien re-surfaced now and then.

On weekends Luke spent a good deal of time alone. He'd get up before dawn, quietly rustle a coffee, meditate at the kitchen table for half an hour, maybe make a joint up from a little I'd absentmindedly left in the bowl the previous night. In a drift of coffee and marijuana he'd watch through the window as pinkgold came over the mountains. I'd hear him boot up the computer to email James and Xavier, access sites, maybe read stories I'd sent him or try writing some of his own.

'Ya gotta do what ya gotta do,' Luke told me one evening as we sat in the flickerlight of an open fire, incense smoking before a glowing bronze Buddha as Eaglehawk merlot and a smoke took hold, 'ya

gotta do what ya gotta do,' he repeated.

'What are you on about Luke?' I asked.

'I've gotta tell my own story.'

I smiled sagely.

'I mean it!' he half-shouted, 'I'm gunna do it!'

*

The new fervour in Luke's life surprised me as youth often does to a middle aged man. His zeal took odd turns. There'd been his involvement in a campaign to save an ornate marble altar in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat after the Church proposed the altar be dismantled to make way for a walk-in baptismal pool. Very evangelical, but the banality of it shocked Ballarat culturati and cognoscenti.

'Why are they going to destroy that beautiful old altar?' Luke asked one evening.

He spoke out against the destruction in his religion class at school, to the chagrin of his religion teacher who blindly supported the proposal.

'I wasn't aware you knew of its existence,' I told him.

'Yeah. We all went to Mass there one day when student leaders were being invested. It's that big table thing at the back in the dark.'

'You put it so succinctly Luke. That 'big table thing' was once the Holy of Holies where miracles were daily performed. Now it's a dump to hide chairs behind.'

'But why?' Luke exclaimed, 'it's so beautiful.'

‘More than that Luke, it’s priceless. They aren’t making that kind of thing anymore. Carved in Italy from Carrara marble in the 1880s. They’re having a meeting about it. Come along.’

I plunged into Second Vatican Council documents on cultural preservation and liturgy and was well-armed when we rolled up to the meeting. Nuns, brothers, priests, the bishop and hundreds of parishioners were gathered. The Righetti family, aficionados of the Latin Mass, were present, having driven in especially from Smeaton House, their Georgian mansion built by Captain Hepburn in 1848. Support from the Catholic Establishment was critical. The Righetts, Luke and I tried to distribute leaflets at the Hall entrance but were ordered off ‘Church property’ by modernist Church apparatchiks onto the public footpath.

‘Never thought I’d see the day when I was ordered off Church grounds,’ exclaimed Bernard Righetti. At an angry and bitter meeting of hundreds in O’Collins Hall we publicly opposed the destruction.

My strategy was to use the Church’ own teaching against itself.

‘The Eucharist,’ I told the gathering, ‘if one truly believes in transubstantiation according to Vatican teaching, must occupy the most conspicuous place in the Church. The most conspicuous place is the altar. Modernist vandalism has no place in a Church that values its sacred and religious heritage. The altar must be reserved for the Eucharist. It must not be destroyed.’

Not that I had the slightest interest in the absurd, arcane physics of ‘transubstantiation’. I just wanted to save the altar. Letters went to and fro from the Papal Nuncio in Canberra, Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome and Cardinal George Pell. Fine points of liturgy and doctrine tickled the hierarchy. The Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks, Saint Patrick’s College ‘old boy’, suggested there might be reluctance to forward hundreds of thousands of dollars in State Government restoration funds for the Cathedral should the altar be destroyed. The dollars won. They usually do. Luke was ecstatic. He’d learnt a lesson in the use of power and influence. It was odd fighting for an old altar in a Church that left me cold and disinterested. Perhaps we had God on our side after all, whatever God was. The Righetti family threw open the doors of grand Smeaton House for a celebration party.

*

I took a cue from Luke and immersed myself in research, writing, reading and an occasional night at the Club in Melbourne. I liked to read recent homosexual historical fiction, such as *Two Boys At Swim* by Jamie O’Neill, a novel based on the Easter Rising in Dublin 1916. I returned to re-read favourites. I was the Narziss and Goldmund of Hermanne Hesse’ story of the monk Narziss and his roving profligate Goldmund. The cottage by the Yarrowee was university and monastery. I thought Luke similar, the student at the monastery school

and his metamorphosis into a hot young blade and guitarist on Saturday nights at the Bridge Mall Hotel. Our friendship deepened. Platonic homoeroticism kept it simple. It allowed for intellectuality to play. I felt safe and Luke was content. We both had interests in Melbourne where Cor Thirteen had an occasional gig at Punter's Hotel in Fitzroy. The clubs were a ten minute walk away in Collingwood where we finished up, or later still at the sauna under the bluestone vaults of Banana Alley as trains rumbled overhead into and out of Flinder's Street Station.

With surreptitious pleasure I watched Luke from the back of dingy dives as my sublimated lover-boy strutted his stuff in stovepipe black pants and shirt, black belt, rainbow switch-lights and phallic guitar. Alternative neo-hippie types hung out sipping cut-price pots and smoked joints outback. Nights began with poetry upstairs. Student poets performed rhymes goaded by Raimondo, the 'outside world' far removed from this sub-terranean culture. That Australia was at war against terrorism seemed a long way off in a smoke-filled bar where Garth's Immaculata, techno-goth in black leather, mascara and eye-liner played to a mixed crowd of students, alcoholics, musicians, druggies and artists of androgenous sexuality.

September 11, 2001 came as a shock. Luke and I staggered home after a heavy night.

'Ya reap what ya sow,' he said.

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'You fuckin' know. You're an old leftie.

America, Israel, oil, the Palestinians! No wonder Muslims hate America.'

'That's no reason to kill thousands of innocent people Luke!'

'I'm not sayin' that ya stupid arsehole. Ya know what I'm sayin'. There are reasons. America just doesn't get it! America doesn't understand why the world hates it. It murders millions in Vietnam and thousands in Iraq and expects the world to say thankyou. I mean hello hello! And Australia says yes. We're the client state, that's Australia. It used to be the British bossing us, now it's Americans. Why doesn't Australia grow up?'

We stumbled into the lounge and sank onto the old chesterfield. 'And did ya know Americans are gunna use the Northern Territory for bombing practice?'

'I thought they'd been doing that for years Luke.'

I smiled at Luke's frustration. He went right off with a few Bourbons.

'Australians are too timid and unimaginative to embrace the Greens,' said Luke.

'Ah, 'tis a young country surely, that country out there,' I said too casually for Luke.

'It fuckin' matters!' he exclaimed, 'it fuckin' matters! What the fuck's wrong with ya! Ya goin' soft in your old age!'

'Age gives historical perspective Luke. What's happening now has happened before. The World Wars, Vietnam...'

'Well, fuck historical perspective! It's all happening now! Now! Roll a fuckin' joint and do some-

thin' useful. I support The Greens. At least they've got policies are half radical like disarmament, no nukes, independence and environment stuff.'

Well done Luke, I thought. I'd done my best to steer him towards a radical position. I'd introduced him to Sartre, Jung and Foucault. I'd deconstructed his shallow belief system. He was ripe for it. Youthful outrage was where he was at. Time was near when I'd put something more sophisticated in its place. So far so good.

'You're right Luke. The environment is a critical issue. Australia could be a great country if it wasn't so full of fear. Greed has wrecked the environment. Look at our rivers.'

'Shutup and finish rollin' that joint. D'ya wanna suck me off?'

Sartre, Jung and Foucault might not have been necessary. Actions spoke louder than words.

Luke had shocked me with the totally unexpected.

*

James rang about a lecture Professor Makepeace O'Flaherty was to deliver at the Celtic Club about the Irish diaspora in Australia. It was refreshing to hear James' voice.

'Unusual name isn't it? Makepeace O'Flaherty?' James asked.

'I knew Makepeace O'Flaherty in the seventies James. We met at a Commonwealth Police raid at The University of Melbourne in 1973 when students occu-

pied the administration building. It was a high point of the student rebellion on Australian University campuses. O'Flaherty pursued an academic career and landed a job in Modern History at Oxford.'

'Well, it'll provide useful background for me,' James ran on. 'By the way, I discovered that during the English Civil War a distant grandfather of mine many times removed was Chancellor of Oxford University and President of Magdalen College. His family invaded Ireland in 1651 with Cromwell's army. That's how the family got started in Ireland. Amazing isn't it!'

'Not really James,' I said dryly, 'and it's not the sort of thing to skite about.' Everything shines when you're young I thought.

'What do you mean?'

'Look deeper James. Your distant relatives probably murdered and raped mine,' I quipped, 'what was their name?'

James laughed. 'Frewen. Yeah well, it's all just history now...'

My jaw dropped. 'How do you spell it?'

James spelt it.

'You're kidding!' I said, 'my great-grandfather was a Frewen. He was sent out from Ireland to Port Arthur in 1848. He was a Young Irishman. We must be related way, way back. It's not a common name. Where did your family settle in Ireland?'

'Limerick, a place called Castleconnell just outside Limerick City. Thomas Frewen was a captain in Cromwell's army in 1651 when it laid siege to Limerick. Lots of death and destruction. Thomas

got thousands of acres of Catholic land. Lived like a lord. Well, not quite a lord. He was only a baronet.'

I knew about the siege, the land grab and the next two hundred years of the family's grand decline into landless Catholic Irish peasantry. The final disgrace came when William was sent out to Van Dieman's Land.

'We're related James, very distant though. Anything else you know?'

'A bit. Frewen was heavily mixed up in the English Civil War. He supported Charles the First and sold off the Magdalen College plate to raise money for Charles. He hid Charles in the College when Charles was on the run from Cromwell's army. Frewen had Magdalen College Chapel built but Cromwell trashed it. After Charles was beheaded Frewen changed sides and finished up as Archbishop of York. That's where he's buried, at York Minster.'

'The family split during the Civil War?' I questioned.

'Divided loyalties,' said James, 'King or Parliament. It'd be great to visit York and go over to Ireland.'

'We should all go,' I enthused, 'the four of us, Luke, Xavier, you and me. I've been to York Minster and Yorkshire is wonderful. I gawked around Castle Howard where *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh's novel, was set. And the Bronte sisters, *Wuthering Heights*, and...anyhow, forget all that, what about this Makepeace O'Flaherty thing? Is it worthwhile?'

‘One way to find out,’ said James. I made contact with the archivist at Magdalen College. Guess what! She suggested I visit the College.’

‘I’m impressed James. Do it!’

‘I spoke to Makepeace O’Flaherty at a seminar last week and mentioned you. He said he’s come across your name in *The Journal of Australian Studies*.’

‘I pop up from time to time James, though it would have been years ago. I’ve given the academic game away.’ I suddenly remembered the O’Flaherty case, how he’d had to resign his lectureship because of some scandal and now lived in Melbourne in leafy, childless Parkville.

‘Perhaps the three of us could have lunch at the University Club?’ James suggested.

I pondered, unsure of James’ motives, then remembered how I was once a young academic on the make, eager to climb the ladder. James wanted me as an ornament, someone to show off, melt the ice, oil the wheels. Mention of Cambridge and Oxford appealed. It was an angle.

‘That’d be nice James. You can arrange it. I scarcely know the guy. Arrange it for four. Try for Friday. I’ll bring Luke along.’

I suggested to Luke he take a day off school. His studies were going surprisingly well at Saint Patrick’s and an outing would do him good. A reward. Luke sought to make an occasion of it and arranged to catch up with Xavier afterwards.

On Friday morning we caught the welfare saver to Spencer Street and a tram up to the University.

Felix' face lit up when we entered the University Club.

'You're here for James and Makepeace,' he smiled, 'they're in the Library.'

We gleaned he'd been accepted for first year Law/Arts. James arrived with Makepeace, a ruddy-faced man in his sixties, portly, with a thick head of long silver hair tied in a ponytail. What could this once tenured Oxford don have possibly done to have himself banished to the antipodes? An answer suggested when Makepeace opened his mouth. Out came a queenie academic singsong. O'Flaherty didn't seem to remember our having met decades ago. I didn't remind him.

Luke found the conversation totally out of his depth. He barely said a word. O'Flaherty was a postmodern theorist with a brain overloaded with Nietzsche, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. I had difficulty understanding the ins and outs. A puzzled glaze over James' face told the same story. I found postmodernism liberating but empty, a metaphysical vacuum.

'I find postmodern theorising meaningless,' I eventually said over lunch, 'academics use postmodernism to blossom personal careers in the theory of everything and nothing. So much of it is gobbledegook deconstructed to such an extent intellectual comprehension is impossible. Maybe that's the whole point, I don't know. For me language only has meaning when I apply it to being homosexual.'

‘Perhaps you’re right,’ said Makepeace, ‘theorising can be exhausting. Allow me to tell you a little story,’ he twinkled.

Makepeace adjusted his sing-song to storytelling. The three of us waited expectantly.

‘Well, take the case of Arthur Rimbaud, the famous and notorious French poet. Academics generally believe that soldiers in Paris raped Arthur when he was sixteen in 1870. Rimbaud had fled to Paris to meet lover-to-be Paul Verlaine where they became part of the Paris Commune. Arthur was arrested for not having a train ticket and spent a week in prison. A unit of soldiers did the terrible deed. Prussia was invading France at the time and the Communist Commune was developing in Paris. Paris was in turmoil. Have you ever seen a picture of Rimbaud? Very pretty. His poetry has never been equalled for brilliance. Academics today enjoy deconstructing this juicy vignette into dry-as-chips psychoanalysis to explain Rimbaud’s later rejection of the literary queer life he lived with Verlaine. This takes the enchantment and sexual fantasy out of the story. So yes, I do have empathy with your position Brian.’

There were so many weird tangents to what Makepeace had just said I was stunned into silence. I sussed why he was ‘invited not to return’ to Oxford.

I looked at Luke to study his reaction to the Rimbaud story. He busily studied his plate. I could only admire O’Flaherty’s propensity in linking Rimbaud, homosexual rape and post-modern theory.

But Makepeace wasn't done.

'What I'm saying is that it's the original story, the poetry of it all that's important. The simple enjoyment of it. The rest, the critique, the deconstruction, drains the life-blood out of it. A good yarn finishes up a crashing bore. No thanks! Academics today construct paradigms and run with them in incestuous, self-congratulatory academic journals. Sadly, ability has little to do with it. Bed-hopping somewhat more. Advancement of careers at the expense of more brilliant minds perpetually waiting in the wings is an occupational hazard in academic life.'

Makepeace peered at the delectable Luke over the top of rimless spectacles and took a sip of Jamieson's Run. 'Of course, it can all bring one undone so very easily,' he added obliquely. He put his glass down and scanned the three of us.

James raised a quizzical eyebrow to Luke and I after Makepeace lowered his gaze to his fillet mignon. We all jumped when Makepeace suddenly looked up. I rushed in and covered with a change of sail.

'You've doubtless heard of Professor Keith Windschuttle who wrote *The Killing of History* a few years ago,' I asked. 'It took a swipe at deconstruction, postmodernism and culturally oriented approaches to history.'

'The history wars!' said James eagerly, wishing to acquit himself well, 'Professor Henry Reynolds from Tasmania said there were major massacres of the Aborigines and Windshuttle denied it. They're still arguing...'

‘Fascinating isn’t it,’ Makepeace chimed, ‘how history has now become story, myth and legend. That’s the essence of postmodern theory of course, to bring us back to the void where we began. We’re asked to believe there’s no such thing as history, that it’s all just interpretation and value judgements.’

I wasn’t going to be left out.

‘A former lecturer of mine, Inga Clendinnen, has written a brilliant book about the ‘defeat’ of the Aztecs. Clendinnen poses the question: how can we condemn the Aztecs for ripping out hearts for the sun-god when the very touchstone of Catholicism is itself a blood sacrifice?’

‘Exactly,’ said Makepeace, ‘this is why history has been turned into cultural relativism. Keith got into hot water over his assertion there was no genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines. Genocide can take many forms. Reynolds asserts there was a conscious killing of Aborigines. It’s how one interprets the facts. The truth is in the shadows, somewhere in-between.’

‘So is this the end of history?’ I asked, ‘The Beginning of the End as Ayn Rand suggested in the heady 1970s?’ I struggled to be relevant.

‘It’s the beginning of the beginning,’ said Makepeace, ‘it’s through a glass darkly now but soon we’ll see. It’s certainly not the end of history or ideology. There’s a battle going on for hearts and minds. There’s going to be a lot of re-writing history during the next few years. It’s important these two fine young men are a part of it,’ he added, smil-

ing genially at Luke and James. James returned weakly. Luke blushed. I squirmed uncomfortably for them both. Makepeace worked us like a Sunday roast.

What was Luke thinking?

Luke realised that nothing was for certain. He doubted it all. His rigorous, sheltered world of Saint Patrick's could not withstand the scrutiny of this ancient professor with the posh voice using words he didn't understand. Perhaps he'd never know anything for certain but he did know he was learning fast and that was quite enough for now. Happy is he who penetrates the mystery of things he remembered reading somewhere.

I sought a diversion.

'I once worked as a weed-chipper,' I began, 'in the cotton fields near Wee Waa in New South Wales. I met an aboriginal man there called Jack. He told me that since European culture in Australia was only two hundred years old and his culture had been here for 100,000 years then we couldn't judge our success. We must suspend judgement. 'Let's wait and see if your culture survives as long as mine,' Jack told me. He told me Aboriginal culture was superior to European culture. What do you think Makepeace?'

Makepeace sat back and thought. 'It's all relative of course but when I look at what Australia has become and what it could have been, I think your friend Jack has a point. It might take 100,000 years to fix the damage.'

'Imagine if Australia was invaded by beings from

space,’ James added, ‘that’s what it must have been like for Aborigines and Aztecs. I wonder how we’d go then?’

‘Yes,’ said Makepeace comfortably, ‘we wouldn’t be so cocksure about our culture then would we!’

On this sobering note we finished our coffee and said goodbye to the redoubtable and, in the end, rather likeable Makepeace. There were unkept promises to keep in touch. James walked Luke and I over to Ormond College. I wondered about Western culture, whether I’d again experience belief in a philosophy, ideology or idea with the certainty I once had, all those years ago on the barricades. No matter how liberating a belief, it was but a construction, an imagination, just another paradigm, nothing more. I wanted to believe in something again, but one never gets what one wants, not completely. Still, they do say be careful what you wish for because you might get it!

‘True freedom lies beyond the intellectual,’ James said as if reading my mind. We rounded University Oval and went through the back entrance to Ormond. ‘Freedom is beyond the imagination, beyond deconstruction, beyond the wreckage. It’s somewhere in post-consciousness. It’s metaphysical. You have to empty your mind before you can experience it.’

‘What the fuck are ya talkin’ about?’ said Luke, annoyed at being frozen out.

‘Do you think you have?’ I asked James and ignoring Luke, ‘emptied your mind I mean?’

‘Beyond the theory and semantics? Delicious

thought,’ said James, ‘they’re just words of course, you know, poststructural, deconstruction, structural, postmodern, modernism, positivism, antipositivism. It’s all a big wank!’

‘You can say that again!’ said Luke, ‘a big wank!’

‘The word is dead!’ I exclaimed, ‘language is meaningless! Construct your own paradigm and go for it. That’s Makepeace’ message. Honestly, all I ever seriously think about these days is pumping tight arse.’ General laughter.

‘That’s what old Makepeace wanted to do,’ said Luke, ‘fuck my arse. Did ya see the way he was looking at me? I was embarrassed.’

‘He lives in a dreamfuck,’ James said, ‘Makepeace’ life is a paradox of mirrors, ever-changing perceptions, parallel universes, wormholes...’

‘...cakeholes and arseholes,’ Luke cut in.

‘We’re all part of the same sewerage system,’ I chuckled as we walked the corridor to James’ room, ‘hermeneutics is dead.’ Luke and James collapsed on the bed. I fell into James’ battered old armchair.

‘Hermen what?’ Luke asked.

‘Hermeneutics Luke. It’s the science of the study of meaning. It’s a little bit like epistemology, which is the study of knowledge...’

‘Hepissedawhat?’ Luke exclaimed, ‘why don’t ya say what ya fuckin’ mean,’ Luke cut in, being more relevant than he realised.

‘That’d be a start,’ said James. ‘Let’s talk about something else.’

I asked James what films he liked.

‘Oh, Tarantino, Greenaway,’ said James, ‘life is pulp fiction isn’t it? We’re all natural born killers, animals, reptiles at the bottom of our brain, predators.’

‘We’ve been watchin’ Stanley Kubrick,’ said Luke.

James nodded. ‘Which ones?’

‘Doctor Strangelove, 2001, Clockwork Orange, The Shining... Luke reeled off the classics. We laughed about General Ripper’s ‘precious bodily fluids’ in Strangelove.

‘I’ve yet to introduce Luke to John Waters,’ I added.

James laughed. ‘Waters is hilarious. Flesh was so funny with Divine. I like Werner Herzog. Another world. I enjoyed his Fitzcaraldo.’

Searching silence broke out. I sensed Luke and James wanted to be alone.

‘I wouldn’t mind doing some research in the Library,’ I half lied. I made my excuses.

I floated in erotic lightspace to the Baillieu Library where I gazed out of an upstairs Baillieu window to the honey-sandstone of the Law Building. I saw my future, a chaos of possibilities in a garden of ideas writing on dank, misty autumn days at the cottage, a tumble of imaginings tossing around in lightspace.

I was pleased with an hour’s research in the Library, a collection of references for a piece about the Young Irelanders of 1848. I’d write it up at the cottage. I didn’t like crowded libraries where, as I glanced around, too many distractions titillated. It

might seem I had the best of both worlds, James and Luke, mindful of the fucking of the country lad beneath the Scottish-gothic spires of Ormond, the bells of Ormond chiming, juices spent as they leant back into the pillows sharing a joint.

*

It was well after midnight when Luke and I arrived at the Club.

‘Have a nice time Luke,’ I teased as we climbed the stairs.

Luke pinked up. Enough said.

We found Xavier in the movie lounge watching *Gone With The Wind*. I left them to do some rounds of my own. Three’s a crowd. I watched from the mezzanine as Xavier and Luke spoke to a young man, late teens, cute, tall and lean in tight Levis and navy blue Bowie singlet. After a waiting instant the three darted upstairs. I followed just out of sight. A door closed behind them. I went into a room alongside, closed the door and peeped through a glory hole.

‘I’m Adam,’ said the lad.

The three sat on the bench. Luke lit a joint.

‘I’ve never done it before,’ said Adam nervously.

‘That’s OK,’ said Luke, ‘nothing to it.’

They finished the joint and stripped off, Adam alabaster white, lithe, tightly muscled with an arse of pure sculpture.

‘On your knees,’ instructed Luke who liked to fuck from the rear.

‘I don’t know about this. What if it hurts?’ said Adam in a moment of crisis. He stood up.

‘Just get down on your knees,’ Luke told him again, ‘I’m not going to hurt you. Crouch down and spread your legs.’ Luke rolled on a condom. Xavier produced a bottle of amyl nitrate, taking a sniff before passing it under Adam’s nostrils.

‘What’s that,’ he asked.

‘Just take a little sniff,’ said Xavier quietly. Adam took a sniff then Xavier passed it to Luke. A whiff passed through the glory-hole as Luke suddenly pushed into Adam who gasped. Luke paused in mid-air, waited for the shock to pass then went in deep.

In my fifties, sex increasingly occupies an aesthetic, even spiritual sphere, the physical act almost irrelevant but not totally, the sex surreal. Luke, Xavier and Adam lay on the bench talking and smoking. I quietly left and waited for them on my wooden box. I thought about post-modern sexuality, how feminism, queer literature and deconstruction carved a swathe in how sexuality was studied. I reassessed the work of Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey and Sher Hite. The paradigm of my homosexual world and the heterosexual paradigm of the ‘society’ I strangely lived in crumbled and tumbled into each other. They mediated between themselves across cultural boundaries to create an entirely new paradigm. This new paradigm exploded stereotypic notions of western civilisation’s oldest and most powerful institutions: Christianity, the family and the hetero-patriarchal nature of capitalism itself.

Back at the cottage I pursued this titillating insight with stoic discipline and rigorous methodology. I played the quiet ascetic. I'd learnt to be rigorous in tough schools with the Christian Brothers and Jesuits. A University and Government had locked me away in Pentridge Prison. I was thankful for it all, thankful in the same way Jean Genet was for his life as a petty criminal and jailbird. Out of it came his literature. Life is perverse. Experience is always the best teacher. It made me sharp.

*

Emails between James and I flowed thick and fast after I told him about the visit from an archivist at LaTrobe University.

'The University wants to establish an archive of student life in the sixties and seventies,' I explained, 'they knew I had a lot of old pamphlets and letters so they contacted me.'

'Be careful what you hand over,' said James, 'make sure you go through it first.'

'I have. It was a surprise. Letters from all sorts of people.'

'Just be careful. Don't hand over stuff that can be used against you. The University did you over once before.'

'Once bitten twice shy James. It's time I laid it out. It's better than gathering dust at the cottage.'

'It's easy to be misrepresented,' James persisted, 'I've been reading your doctorate. You do have enemies.'

I laughed. 'I think most of them are dead or superannuated now.'

'Don't be so sure. You're versed in the history of ideas and cultural movements. That's dangerous in a climate of fear. History has a nasty way of repeating itself, especially in the name of ideology...'

'A great deal I should imagine James,' I cut in.

'You betcha!' said James, 'hundreds of thousands of homosexuals butchered in Nazi concentration camps, that's what! The oppression of millions of homosexual Christians, the ostracisation and economic deprivation of millions of homosexuals in everyday life. Look at your own life! What if your 'social detonator' as you put it explodes in your face? A Pandora's Box might open to a new kind of repression. You're seen as dangerous.'

'I hope so James,' I parried, 'ideas aren't useful unless they're dangerous! I'd like to think I'm dangerous. Unless an idea is dangerous it's useless. It must present the possibility for change. You're getting paranoid James.'

In the towers of Ormond James chuckled good-naturedly.

'Sometimes it's better to run with the pack,' he said finally.

'Like you James?' I teased. I sensed a blush at the Ormond end.

'Each casts his light on the world,' said James evenly, 'each is his own saint, the actor in his own play.'

'How could it be otherwise James?' I reassured, 'we're each our own competitor, flesh of our own paradigm.'

‘That’s right. Not all of us can play the effete aesthete bit,’ said James a tad sarcastically, ‘some of us have to make a living.’ James had his dig. I hadn’t had a ‘proper’ job for years. James missing the point. I believed Oscar Wilde who said one’s life is a work of art and ‘a job’ is best avoided. In this I was successful.

‘So how’s Luke?’ James asked changing tack, ‘back at school?’

‘Yep. Studying hard. Been playing up in Melbourne a bit.’ A pause.

‘Yeah. Is it OK if I come up this weekend?’

*

I became reclusive at the cottage. I did feel I was onto something. I was inspired by the work of Robert Bly, the North American writer who placed masculine studies on the academic map. Another book, *The God of Ecstasy* by Arthur Evans, provided a historiography of the pagan classic Dionysos (also called Bacchus). I synthesised the new with the old, fusing pagan classicism with the praxis of my personalised paradigm. It was epic. It stretched from ancient Athens to a miner’s cottage by the Yarrowee Creek. I plunged into Plato, Cicero, Leonardo da Vinci, Casanova’s Enlightenment, Charles Darwin, Kinsey, Marx, Freud and Jung. A rainbow panoply of philosophers hurtled me into sexualised metaphysics. Topsy-turvy imagination teetered on the edge of reason. There was only one rule: there were no rules. Why settle for less? To

lighten up I visited Jean Genet, William Burroughs and Alan Hollinghurst. I was in love with the word and the idea.

Luke turned up on Fridays when we'd chew the cud. I asked him Robert Bly's question: 'Why do men, and it usually is men, obediently go off to die in other men's wars?'

'Because they're ordered to,' replied Luke, 'they have to. It's just a job. Like Iraq.'

I studied the rainbows shooting through the glass beads on the tiffany light shade. 'Do you think it's as banal as that Luke? It's more than that. I think it's about blood and sex. In another culture it could be Aztecs ripping hearts out so the sun god shines on the corn crops. It's a blood sacrifice. It's about dominance and submission. It's not just a job Luke. It's an addiction, a psychosis, a kind of cannibalism. Bread and wine into flesh and blood. It's about sex.'

'You're sick,' said Luke, 'whadaya talkin' about! I've never thought about it like that. Religion's fucked. It's intellectually and morally bankrupt. Stop torturing yourself. The Catholic Church supported the war in Vietnam. Blood sacrifice pure and simple. I'm a pagan.'

'Good for you Luke. Well now, how's Saint Patrick's?'

Luke brightened. 'I'm on top of it. I surprised myself with Latin. I did little translations of Juvenal and Suetonius to get the juicy parts. In English Literature we're doing Chaucer's Prologue to The Canterbury Tales. I want to read your copy of Boccacio's Decameron.'

How visceral I thought, entirely natural for a seventeen year old. Even now, in my fifties, I still juggled the ephemera of sex. In the final analysis it all got down to mastering the self, the ego. Only then can the surreal, the illusion, the metaphysical to take over in a kind of Buddhist progression. Luke hadn't discovered that yet. He would in his own way, in his own lightspace. Most do. One way or the other.

'It's up to me isn't it?' Luke asked after a moment's reflection, 'no one else. That's right isn't it?'

'Right on brother,' I said, 'right on. Carpe Diem!' We gave each other fives.

Luke would metamorphose into that skyboy beyond the merely intellectual, beyond the merely sexual. He'd ride the glittering starstream of his own catharsis. He'd return with gifts from the gods just as I had in my own youth as an urban anarchist. He'd be re-born, transfigured in stellar fire and be given to all the queer ones. Luke's energy was pure and ancient. It was the energy that stripped obscurantism from teetering structures. Luke would taste success.

'Seize the day!' said Luke, 'I have to. In the long-run I'm dead. I eat and I'm going to be eaten, worms to worms. We're bags of worms. We only get one chance in this life.'

'Maybe that's how we reincarnate Luke, from the worms in our gut. Maybe that's how we resurrect and metamorphose.'

'Parts of me used to be parts of you then,' said Luke.

‘It gives cannibalism a new meaning. I’m getting a bit old for reincarnation,’ I quipped, ‘been there done that.’ I was being facetious.

‘You’re only as old as ya feel,’ said Luke, brown eyes widening. ‘You’re being ...whadaya call it, yeah, facetious. Ya still wanna do sex. Ya not too old for that are ya! Nah! You’re not jealous of James, Xavier and me are ya?’

‘No. I still have a good time. You’ve got James coming up this weekend.’

Luke blushed. I scrambled for something to say, something beyond the physical, beyond Luke’s beauty, a fresh journey of ideas for him. I watched his young rake’s progress. I entertained the puzzle of his sex. I secured his friendship and respect. Perhaps I’d even have him at an appropriate time, maybe even now, the lad splayed for the taking on the chesterfield. No, not now. Later. When our work was done, when he’d finished his final year at Saint Patrick’s. That’s when he’d be open for business.

‘How’s ya magnus opus going?’ he asked.

‘Steady.’

‘Please sir, I want some more,’ he teased with a Dicken’s ‘Oliver’ impersonation, ‘whadaya gunna call it?’

‘Don’t know yet. Suggest a title.’

Luke’s brow furrowed. He’d read enough to know enough.

‘Let’s see, how about ‘radical lives’? No. How about ‘making history’? No, I know, how about ‘here’s to the revolution?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘they’re all too pretentious. How about ‘Bi-lo boy’?’

Luke gaped. ‘You wouldn’t dare!’

*

A genesis came one wintry evening at the cottage, one of those gothically cold squally nights Ballarat is renowned for. James had managed to catch the last train out of Spencer Street, arriving at the cottage in a taxi. The three of us had just settled down when a knock came at the back door. I was surprised to see Daniel from the old boot factory standing there wet from the rain, fresh cheeks flushed carnation pink. Daniel was studying first year painting at the University when I first met him at an opening at the Art Gallery. I’d taken a liking to the good-looking, willowy lad and given him my address with a ‘call in anytime’ as one does, not expecting him to.

‘It’s freezing out there!’ he said, shaking glistening rainwater off his coat. I ushered him in. ‘I hope you don’t mind me calling in unannounced.’ He smiled at James and Luke.

‘I’m James,’ said James introducing himself.

‘Luke.’

‘Daniel.’ Pleasantries passed. ‘The place I’m in is fantastic!’ he said turning to me, ‘the old boot factory near the railway viaduct at the Station. Sensational! So industrial!’

I knew the place from years ago. The old Ballarat boot factory had been turned into studios rented to

aspiring artists for a nominal amount.

The three apprentices began a long boozy, smoky session began around the kitchen table. I prepared a spirelli carbonara for dinner.

James came up with a pointer.

‘Your political battles provide a lesson for you,’ he said to me, ‘a nuts and bolts approach. If you’re thinking about trying something new, adopt a radical social action perspective, like that radical President of Venezuela, Chavez, who the C.I.A want to knock off.’

James drew from my memoirs, the recollections of the pencilling prisoner, the student revolutionary-anarchist and self-styled Marxist-Leninist Maoist. He knew how it had once fired me up and saw no reason why it couldn’t do so again. He failed to see that forty years of life experience had flowed by since then for his sometime revolutionary.

‘Another chance to put wheels on the cart?’ I proffered cynically, ‘that’s rare. Not everyone gets a second chance.’

James galloped on. ‘No stupid! You’re not given another chance. You have to take it. The revolution in human consciousness that should have come with the radicalism of the 1960s has missed the boat. The system has eaten it up. Deconstruction stymied the revolution. It took the meaning out of everything. Drugs, booze and greed didn’t help. All we’ve got left is nihilism and alienation. We’re ready for something new! Deconstruction has had its day. It’s finished. It’s time to build. This third millennium needs a new foundation stone, a corner-stone. We

need a neo-pagan world to spring from the ashes of postmodern deconstruction, a universal philosophy that makes practical, hard common sense. Something to grab hold of.'

We stared at James. We hadn't seen him so fired up.

'What do you have in mind exactly?' I asked carefully.

Luke began rolling a joint from my precious supply. I filled glasses with Eaglehawk Merlot liberated from the tabernacle on the old altar.

'I'm thinking about it,' said James caught on the hop, brows concentrated. 'I mean, Michel Foucault taught us how society uses terms like 'perversion', 'madness', 'unnatural', 'sick', 'deviant'. They're weapons used by the powerful to imprison us. We have to unmask those terms, terms such as 'justice', 'normal', and 'human nature'. Like in Queer As Folk where queers take on the Christian Right. We have to turn the tables! Upset their fuckin' apple cart! We have to become revolutionaries!' James was really stoked.

*

The following morning James, Luke and Daniel slept in. I rose early to make porridge and coffee. I thought over what James said. Meaning itself had to be changed. My eyes glistened at how a major prop of Western culture, homophobia, could be turned upside down.

In a wave of new understanding, human sexuality would become the rite of passage rather than

burnouts on Sturt Street or getting shit-faced at Schoolies' Week on the North Coast. Sexual expression would be based on mutual, non-exploitative relationships and friendship, not lust, exploitation and fixed legalisms. Acts of Parliament and entire libraries of mumbo jumbo would be junked. Law would be stood on its head. New understanding of our animal nature would usher a cultural shift towards classicism and new paganism.

This became my practicum, my paradigm, my prototype. It was pervasive yet simplicity itself. I thought about the next step as I lay on the chesterfield and three lads banged away in the spare room. Their banging made me think of the City.

James emerged from Luke's room en route to the bathroom.

'Penny for your thoughts,' he said passing by.

'My brain's working overtime about what you said last night. I might head off to the City.'

'I know where you're going,' said James grinning, 'you're off to the flesh pits. Well, off you go then. Daniel, Luke and I won't be lonely.'

'I know that James,' I said caustically. James could be cold-hearted. 'There's an Irish Union Dinner at the Celtic Club I might go to and I could do some research at the State Library. I'll give Xavier a call to see if he wants to come to the dinner.' I struggled to impress James that I too could have a good time.

'Have fun,' said James as he closed the bathroom door.

'Prick,' I muttered.

*

To the City's grey bluestone warehouse territory I went, to dark satanic mills swathed in night mist and the dull, red light of smoke-filled fuck-rooms.

I arranged to meet Xavier outside the Celtic Club. Steamworks Sauna was just around the corner in Lonsdale Street and Subway Sauna was down the road at Banana Alley. I resisted these temptations. I watched straight couples enter the Celtic. I realised I'd probably be the only one to have a same-gender guest. I searched down the street, eventually spotting the tall form of Xavier hurrying along Queen Street. At short notice he was able to borrow a dinner suit from a friend.

'Not late am I?' he said rushing up, 'Mum was a bit suspicious but she settled down when she saw me in the suit. Great isn't it!'

'Very handsome Xavier. Most impressive.'

The guest speaker was Mairtin O'Fainin, the Republic of Ireland's ambassador to Australia. He delivered an inspiring address on the likely unification of Ireland now that the Stormont Parliament had been reconvened, a rare Tony Blair initiative. After dinner when the gathering was breaking up and people mingled we were introduced to him and partner Sinead. I confessed I'd never been to Ireland then told them about my convict great grandfather, the Young Irishman of 1848.

'Not an unusual story,' said O'Fainin, 'I studied the political history of Ireland at Trinity College, in particular the Rebellion of 1848. Fascinating peri-

od.' O'Fainin's clear grey eyes brightened as he spoke. 'There's a book you should read about the rising of 1848 called Jail Journal by John Mitchel, the famous Dublin editor of The Nation. He was exiled to Van Dieman's Land. Your great grandfather might get a mention.'

'I doubt it,' I said, 'he was only a farm labourer.'

'My last name is Mitchel,' said Xavier suddenly, 'Dad's talked about some ancestor of his who was transported to Australia. I wonder if it's the same person?'

'Remote but possible,' said O'Fainin, 'if he is you've got a famous ancestor.'

Xavier took mental note.

'Well, if you do make that trip to Ireland make sure you give me a call at the embassy in Canberra before you go. Sinead and I are often in Dublin.' The affable Mairtin handed me a gilt edged card. Sinead, strikingly elegant in green taffeta studded with hundreds of pearl droplets, took his arm and smiled at us.

'I've got to get him home otherwise he'll talk Irish history all night,' she said, 'and do contact us if you go. We're returning to Ireland in a few months.' Off they went arm in arm.

Xavier couldn't stop himself from whispering in my ear. 'Well, a real ambassador! That's a first for me. Wait till I tell Mum!'

'Time to head off Xavier. Is there a time you have to be home by? We can go clubbing if you like?'

'Mum said to phone. I'll tell her about the dinner.'

She doesn't mind if I stay out so long as I tell her where I am.'

Xavier spoke into his mobile as we walked to Collingwood from the Celtic Club to work off the meal.

'She's cool,' said Xavier slipping his mobile into his pocket. 'So, do you think you'll get to Dublin?' he asked, 'it seems important to you.'

'I'll get there Xavier. Yes, it's important for all sorts of reasons. Do you know anything more about your father's ancestor? Mitchel?'

'He came out on a ship called the Neptune before the gold rush started. Sometime in 1850 Dad said. Why?'

'Nothing, except it's possible your ancestor and mine might have come out on the same voyage. Unlikely but possible. We'll find out.'

The ageing rake and Xavier the young profligate needed what they hoped for. The Club provided tickets to that mad world, an invitation to the labyrinth, two pagans in sexualised lightspace. Climbing the steps I thought of the winding library in *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco. We plunged into the cabalistic Club in search of the profane.

Xavier rolled a joint from a little plastic bag I gave him. I made two black coffees. Revived and relaxed we stalked the dim corridors, past the barred cages, dangling chains, oil drums, pillory and the dungeon. Eyes turned as we went by in our dinner suits. Being gang-banged in Pentridge Prison swam in my brain as I sucked the memory of a thousand

lovers, part of my youth, my wild days. The student revolutionary burning inside would never die. Death would pass on that torch. My cosmic paradigm was safe in the loving arms of universal human consciousness.

Xavier was beside me. He too lay in a dreamland of ideas, the drug of his intellect. I imagined him plunging a hot knife into the soft under-belly of the social construction of reality. Sex was his making-stuff, flux for a future brilliantly his, halcyon days fed on ambrosia.

‘Do you remember those lines you said to me at that Life Members’ Dinner?’ he asked.

I had to think. The LaTrobe Union dinner, when Xavier told me about his Literature class doing Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex.

‘Sure. They were lines from Euripides’ Bakkhai.’
I trawled my memory cells:

How varied are the god’s displays of power:
What we often don’t expect,
That they bring to pass.
And what we look for most,
That goes unfulfilled.
And for the least expected things,
A god will find a way.

‘They’re beautiful,’ said Xavier.

‘Yes. Not as beautiful as the Yarrowee Creek when it’s running a banker.’

‘The Yarrowee?’

‘Yep. Words never capture nature.’

‘You silly romantic,’ said Xavier smiling. We stumbled into Collingwood amethyst dawn and had orange juice, croissants and coffee at La Cossette in Smith Street.

‘I’ll do some research at the State Library before heading back,’ I said, spreading butter and marmalade on a croissant.

‘I’m going to have to split,’ said Xavier, ‘it’s been great but I’ve got to sleep. I wouldn’t mind coming to the cottage sometime. Be great to catch up with Luke again. I’ll give you a call.’

Meeting the O’Fainins spurred me on. At the State Library I looked up Jail Journal by John Mitchel. There was a copy. I gave the reference to an attendant who returned in a few minutes with the rare book. I found a quiet corner in the reading room beneath the magnificent expanse of the cupola, a kind of Hadrian’s Pantheon, and found what I was looking for. Off I went to the Grub Street Bookshop in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy to see if I could locate a copy to buy. I got lucky. When Xavier rang during the week, I told him the interesting connection between the two of us.

‘Xavier, you were right about John Mitchel. He was a Young Irelander exiled for the term of his natural life in 1848 for publishing anti-British material in Dublin. He was sent out on a ship called the Neptune. My great-grandfather was on the same ship. Your relative was a very famous Irishman. It was like Mairtin O’Fainin told us.’

‘I’d like to read it. I might come up next weekend. Is that OK? My work’s up to date. I’m cruising.

Term hols start next weekend.'

'I'll pick you up at the Station.'

*

'Impressive isn't it?' I said.

'Sure is. Check out the old verandas,' said Xavier.

We were driving down Lydiard Street and I was giving Xavier a Captain Cook of Ballarat.

'I was reading what James Froude, a celebrated English historian said about Ballarat when he visited in 1885. He expected to find a slum of gold fossickers' hovels but was instead impressed by the opulent buildings. 'It surprised and charmed me,' Froude said. Froude was Professor of Modern History at Oxford.'

'Imagine what it must have been like back then,' said Xavier, 'it must have been so grand.'

'Ballarat was once considered the Capital of Victoria. It was the boom-time of the 1880s, marvellous Melbourne and marvellous Ballarat. Melbourne had a port so it won out. Then came The Crash around 1891. Ballarat never really recovered but continued to produce leaders and artists. Alfred Deakin was the Member for Ballarat and he had three terms as Prime Minister. Two of his successors, James Scullin and Robert Menzies, were schoolboys here. Richard Mahoney lived here.'

'Who's he?' Xavier asked.

'Mahoney? He was the main character in Henry Handel Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard

Mahoney. Mahoney was based on her father. She wrote *The Getting Of Wisdom*. Poets lived here too, Bernard O'Dowd and Adam Lindsay Gordon. Anthony Trollope visited in the 1870s. He was surprised when he found a little bit of Paris in the antipodes. Mark Twain visited in 1896, saying Ballarat had all the essentials of a metropolis.'

'A metropolis! Hardly!' Xavier scoffed. 'I've heard of some of those people. What does Ballarat mean?' he asked.

'It's an aboriginal word from the Wathaurung people. It means elbow-place or place to rest.'

'It must have been incredible before the miners came,' said Xavier, 'unspoilt.'

'The peace was broken well before 1851. In the 1830s the Yuille brothers and others came with their sheep and squatted here. Gold changed all that again in 1851.'

I was about to do a grand circuit around Sturt Street and Lake Wendouree when Xavier said he'd had enough 'old stuff'. He wanted to get to the cottage.

'I want to look at that book you told me about and I'm hangin' out for a smoke.'

As we passed Her Majesty's Theatre I couldn't resist telling Xavier that Dame Nellie Melba had sung there.

'Is Luke home?' he asked impatiently as we rounded the Yarrowee escarpment that overlooked Mount Buninyong, Mount Warrenheip and the old Eureka.

'He was when I left to pick you up.' I glanced at

the two mountains on the other side of the valley. 'Eugene von Guerard painted that scene in 1854 Xavier. His painting's in the Ballarat Gallery. We should visit the Gallery.'

'What?' said Xavier distractedly.

'That!' I said, nodding towards the two mountains, but Xavier's thoughts were elsewhere. There was so much to show him in the Art Gallery alone, the paintings of the Lindsay family, depictions of colonial Australia by Eugene von Guerard, Nicholas Chevalier and Louis Buvelot, but it was all too much too soon. I had to steady up. Mustn't overload his young mind. Once a teacher always a teacher I guess.

That evening Xavier poured over the early edition of John Mitchel's Jail Journal. I showed him a copy of my great-grandfather's conditional pardon, the faded copperplate showing the date of his arrival in Van Dieman's Land as 1850 and the ship as the Neptune. Dates were compared.

'Mitchell and Frewen definitely came out together,' I said.

'John Mitchel was my great-grandfather,' said Xavier scanning the pages, 'dad knows that for sure and Mitchel describes the whole journey in 1850 to Van Diemen's Land. There were three hundred Irish convicts on board. Mitchel being a gentleman was provided with a small space above deck.'

'Mine was just another Irish lag,' I said, 'below deck with 299 other male convicts with the stink, shit, urine, rats and cockroaches.'

Xavier chuckled. 'What was he sent out for?'

Xavier asked looking up, ‘your great grandfather.’

‘His crime? He was exiled in 1848 for harbouring a fugitive in his farmhouse by the Shannon River in Limerick. The fugitive had been thrown off his land and killed the owner in revenge. He was on the run. One morning in 1847 he held the Frewen family up with a blunderbuss at their farmhouse. He demanded shelter and hid on top of a bedstead. That’s where the police found him. He was hung. Frewen was transported for life. Whether they were Young Irishmen I don’t know but I guess that’s where their sympathies would be. Mitchel and Frewen were both sent to Bermuda and imprisoned on the Dromedary, a rotting hulk. After a year working in the stone quarries they were transported to the Cape of Good Hope.’

Xavier resumed reading. ‘Mitchel says the Neptune sailed from England for Bermuda on 15 February 1849, an aging vessel of seven hundred tons under Captain Henderson, a red headed Scotsman. Doctor Dees was the surgeon on board, a requirement after the high death rate of earlier convict fleets to Australia. After discharging the fresh load of convicts with the exception of Mitchel, the three hundred male Irish convicts from Bermuda were brought on board.’

‘Mitchel was a red hot political,’ I added, ‘he was separated and isolated. What you’ve got there is a record of your great-grandfather’s voyage to Australia, written by the man himself. Not everyone’s got that.’

‘Xavier read excitedly. ‘The Neptune set sail

from Bermuda for the Cape at 4.00 p.m. 22 April 1849. Making good sail we anchored off Pernambuco, Brazil on 20 July, to take on fresh supplies. On 12 August we set sail for the long stretch to the Cape Colony. On September 19 the Neptune dropped anchor in Simon's Bay, Cape of Good Hope, to an antagonistic reception. The Anti-Convict Association refused to allow the convicts to land. Shopkeepers in Simonstown refused to provision the ship. Shopkeepers were run out of business as free settlers enforced a standoff. Shops were boarded up to prevent looting. There was a whiff of rebellion in the Colony as the Colonial Governor waited on instructions from Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary in London. The correspondence took five months, during which time the Neptune and its three hundred convicts sat it out, living off fish caught in the Bay and any provisions able to be secretly boated in from profiteers on shore.'

'Oops, here we go, said Xavier, 'Mitchel writes about depraved and unspeakable activities committed by older convicts on the bodies of young boys below deck.'

Luke half-listened as he checked the Free Papua Movement website. He took a few moments to imagine 'unspeakable activities' below deck as month after month the Neptune sweltered through a hot African summer.

'That must have been nice for some of them,' he said sardonically.

Xavier ploughed on. 'Grey's instructions finally arrived. On 19 February 1850, ten months after

leaving Bermuda, the Neptune set sail for Van Diemen's Land, the last place on earth that would take its suffering cargo. There was compensation for hardship endured. Convicts were granted a conditional pardon on landing in Van Diemen's Land. The men were thus in high spirits and freshly provisioned from a relieved Simonstown populace. The Neptune ran with strong westerlies at 46 degrees Latitude, making over 200 miles a day. On 6 April 1850 the ragged blue mountains of the west coast of Van Diemen's Land were sighted and Neptune tacked around the many promontories to the entrance of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. The following day at 2.00 p.m., Neptune dropped anchor in the Derwent River, a quarter-mile from the quays of Hobart-town, such was the notoriety of its cargo even in this convict ridden outpost.' Xavier looked up from The Journal. 'Wow! Quite a story! There's a film in it!' he exclaimed.

'Well,' I said, 'it was over for the time being for your Mitchel, but not for my great-grandfather. It's noted on this copy of his conditional pardon he was 'a most malicious man and troublesome'. He was sent to Port Arthur, the infamous prison on the Tasman Peninsula, to work in the Cascades Gang to mill timber for three months. On the 13 July 1850 he was finally granted his conditional pardon, condition being that he never returned to Ireland, just like John Mitchel your great-grandfather.'

'I wish I knew something about my family,' said Luke looking at us after finding what he wanted on Indonesian and OPM military activities in West

Papua. 'All I know is he was sent out as a migrant boy in the 1950s. As for Mum's side, all she's told me is both her parents are dead.'

'We might be able to find out more Luke,' I said, 'there are ways and means. Xavier, did you know that John Mitchel had a family in Tasmania before he escaped to America? His escape was very dramatic.'

'I'm reading that bit now,' he said.

'What happened to your one?' Luke asked me distractedly, 'Frewen?'

'Gold changed everything for him Luke. In August 1851 news of gold at a place called Ballarat filtered through to Hobart. Anyone who could grabbed a place on a boat to cross Bass Strait for the Ballarat goldfields. They fled convictism on a chance for riches. It was on the docks at Williamstown where he met his wife to be, an eighteen year old servant girl, Eliza Cosgrove from County Clare.'

Xavier nestled into the chesterfield to read more about his great-grandfather. He read that Mitchel left a young family behind in Tasmania after escaping to America to a hero's welcome in New York where he wrote his famous Journal. Head bent over the Journal, Xavier brushed away thick black curls when they fell over his eyes.

'Anyhow,' Luke asked, 'how was the dinner you both went to in Melbourne? You haven't told me about it.'

'What? Oh, just the usual affair. You enjoyed it didn't you Xavier?' Xavier nodded abstractedly

without looking up, deep into the history of the Young Irelander rebellion of 1848, the history that made him and what he imagined himself to be, a romantic, different, a fighter.

‘It was a long night Luke,’ I said, ‘we finished up at the Club. In the morning I hunted around for the book. I was stuffed by the time I got back here.’

‘Yeah, I noticed,’ said Luke with a wicked grin, ‘ya crashed as soon as ya got back. Must’ve been a real good night.’ Xavier however, refused to be drawn.

In the ether that connects us all, that which Luke imagined became real, that Xavier and I had become close. He wondered how close and decided not to let the hand that fed him drift off to Xavier. Luke would play his ace. I put on J.S. Bach’s Mass in B Minor and returned to the chesterfield none the wiser.

I remembered that morning, the morning after the night with Xavier, the regular clack of the train wheels lulling me as depressing western suburbs merged into undulating farmland. The industrial suburb of Sunshine was where I’d spent the first seven years of my life and where Dad worked at the Sunshine Harvester factory from which the suburb earned its name. It was a rough and tumble boyhood in the 1950s with a Josephite nun, a vicious strap in her hand in front of a hundred kids in a derelict hall. It sourced a promise not to return to that part of Melbourne ever again. I’d kept that promise. The western suburbs were places on the way to somewhere else, a twilight zone to the highlands, the

Wimmera and the city itself. The night's shenanigans overtook me and I nodded off despite the attractiveness of a dark-haired youth sitting opposite. I rocketed into a kaleidoscopic sensate of colour as from Stanley Kubrick's 2001:A Space Odyssey, slipping into sleep as the train climbed into the highlands.

*

'Been doin' any writin'?' Luke asked, finishing checks of sites for the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Irish Republican Army, the radical governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Peru and very deep green ecology sites.

'A bit Luke. Have you? How's your reading going?'

'While ya were in sin city enjoying yourself I found a story of yours. It was about me sometime in the future. Not half bad but.'

Strange how working class boys put 'but' at the end of a sentence I thought. I remembered the story, a piece I'd left coffee-stained and abandoned on my desk, a futuristic fantasy about Luke.

'Here it is!' said Luke. 'I'll read it.'

'Be my guest Luke.'

'Ahem!' said Luke, 'here goes.' Luke pushed back his hair and glanced at me to make sure I was listening. He needn't have.

*

2040.

I was in lightspace. I wondered what Luke was up to. Probably sipping caffè latte in one of those quaint coffee houses near Trinity College, Dublin. In the cottage by the Yarrowee I put another log on the fire. It was winter in Ballarat.

It was an age when movers and shakers were no longer presidents or prime ministers. Luke's thought was the thought of eleven billion human beings. Nano technology had revolutionised global communication.

Staggering. Only a few had the capacity to think for themselves. The enslavement of human consciousness was pervasive. 'Freedom' seemed a small price to pay for the 'War On Terror' and environmental survival. I was permitted to possess a remnant twentieth century romantic yearning for the chaos of the late twentieth century. I was one of Luke's 'special guests'. In 2040, everyone believed they had free will, but the belief was a delusion, the belief itself part of the program. There was an exception: those who actually did the programming. These were an elite. They formed a tight network. Luke was part of the inner circle.

Twentieth century notions that technology would liberate humankind had been put to rest. Like the telephone, automobile and dishwasher of the twentieth century, it was OK if you had them but most didn't. In 2040, all were affected but few could effect in return.

Still, much had been achieved I reflected. I gazed at the flames in the fireplace. The truth about Jesus

and the Roman Catholic Church had caused a sensation. Christendom was reshaped. Atomic energy had been safely harnessed and solar was in general use. Pollution and green house gases were only studied by students of history. Planetary and interstellar colonisation was a reality. Mother earth was a true garden, pristine and luxuriant. The Australian desert decreased before regenerated forests, verdant grassland and biodiversified farmland. Queerness was the preferred sexuality. Unauthorised heterosexual reproduction was frowned on and strictly controlled. Artificial insemination and cloning were mainstream. Homosexual couples reproduced themselves as a matter of course. Most importantly, Virus-X had wiped out most viruses, though the war against microbes and neo-mutant viruses meant constant monitoring.

To say it hadn't been easy would be an understatement. The Limits To Growth, the 1970s book that alerted my generation was been dusted off. There'd been trade wars, the collapse of the international monetary system, stock-market crashes, global battles over intellectual property, water wars, ethnic wars and cultural squabbles. From the ashes of deconstruction had come new hope, a new vision that swept aside old-style slick, greasy, professional political party operators. An enlightened spectrum of leaders revolutionised human consciousness.

There was a revival of paganism. The soul-less, spiritless nature of late twentieth century existence came to a natural end. Orthodox religions were dead in the water. There was a revival of pre-Christian

religions. Shangri-la was re-discovered. Western civilisation drew on the Dionysian rites of classical Greece. The final nail in the coffin came for homophobia, that vicious mass-neurosis of the Roman Catholic Church and the West. The Bacchanalia and Dionysia became major events on the world calendar.

To see men and women enjoying sex in all its forms and sexualities was a precious achievement. Eat my body and drink my blood had new and vital meaning. Homosexual rites to Hebe the Greek goddess of youth were performed on the altar of Gianlorenzo Bernini in the Vatican, cast through lightspace into human consciousness to the music of Palestrina, Monteverdi and good old Johann Sebastian Bach.

Luke hadn't done badly out of it. After years as a kept boy he emerged from his Ballarat cocoon. He'd been well educated at Saint Patrick's and was now visiting Trinity College in Dublin. He'd enjoyed being a working-boy and he still was, currently bedding a cute undergraduate at Trinity after work at the University's Global Security Centre. It was cosy nights indeed with Sebastian. Of course, there'd been the occasional blemish. Wanting to get on in life, he'd once fucked a Professor of Modern History, a forgettable but necessary experience, the name of the recipient escaping him but the Visiting Fellowship well worth the trouble.

'Talk about shafting post-modernist interpretations of history! We're doing it literally!' Luke and Sebastian chuckled in bed.

The laughter was too much a secretive Assessment Officer in Canberra. ‘Fucking poo-jabbers!’ Redden cursed to himself, ‘they’re taking over. They’re controlling what we think!’ The grey neo-Nazi upgraded a file on Luke and opened one for Sebastian.

‘How marvellous we thought it all was,’ grinned Luke, ‘way back then.’

‘What was?’ Sebastian asked.

‘You know, when the Internet and the World Wide Web were the buzz. We’ve come a long way since then.’

‘The remarkable thing,’ said Sebastian turning onto his stomach, ‘is that in lightspace you don’t even have to be there to be there. Now it’s just one big consciousness.’

‘A unified field,’ added Luke, ‘where the real is abstracted and the abstracted is solidified. Lightspace has delivered a post-literate era, a society of spectacle and pageant where the idea becomes the image and the real is imaginary.’

‘Hegel would have been surprised,’ suggested Sebastian.

‘Why?’ asked Luke.

‘For Hegel, ideas were embodied in time and space,’ Sebastian explained, ‘lightspace has turned this conception on its head. Everything is now open-ended and fleeting. It’s a celebration of chaos.’

Young Sebastian was impressive thought Luke, a real go-getter. The student was passing the master.

‘Time and history have collapsed,’ said Luke.

‘We’ve become a phenomenology,’ said

Sebastian, ‘a realisation of that postmodern dream where human beings create reality itself.’

‘Lightspace is the new marketplace without substance,’ said Sebastian, ‘experience alone is the exchangeable commodity. Experience is the starstuff for our immortality. We’re fulfilling the dictates of our own DNA. We’ve created an intelligence that’s become its own evolutionary successor, animate yet inanimate, souled and soulless, unable to be formulated in concepts let alone words.’

He’s not doing nanogenetics for nothing Luke thought privately.

Sebastian was no slouch when it came to modern history either, and went on to suggest to Luke that lightspace was the final act of the Enlightenment that had plucked humanity from the jaws of the apocalypse. He quoted a few lines from T.S.Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

Eliot’s words revealed the grey intangible to Luke. His roving arms closed around the scrumptious Sebastian.

Luke was now in his fifties. I was almost ninety. Luke never failed to call into the cottage when he was in town. We took quiet walks by the Yarrowee. He’d taken early retirement from the Office of

National Assessments, glad to get out of Canberra. Representative democracy was in its last gasp, just a sentimental semblance. The people were powerless and meant to be powerless. Real government was exerted through contrived popular consciousness, a myopia induced by the National Education System. The Office had finally encouraged him to take a package.

Luke and Sebastian merged in a chaos of stellar colour and were gone. At ninety, my groin stirred for a younger Luke leaning against a bar in a smoky Ballarat pub decades ago. I remembered Dylan Thomas:

Do not go gentle into that goodnight.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

*

'That's it,' said Luke looking up. Xavier had nodded off on the chesterfield, Jail Journal still open on his lap. 'Well, fuck me!' exclaimed Luke, 'that's the last time I read a story for him!'

'You read it so well Luke,' I reassured. Luke returned to the screen pretending to check out some Robert Mapplethorpe photos in Art House.

'Why did ya write that story?' he asked, 'it's weird. There's stuff I don't get.'

'Like what?' I asked.

'Well, Hegel and lightspace for one thing.'

'It's just a story Luke. Hegel was a nineteenth century philosopher. Lightspace is just another

name for a state of consciousness. I made it all up.’

‘It’s nothing like you’ve done, nothing like I’ve read. Nice though, I liked it but.’

‘As I said Luke, I wanted to say something about you, what I hoped for you, to be successful, to make something of yourself. You might only get one bite of the cherry so make the most of it. The story explores how things might be, wishful thinking if you like. I’m doing what James said, taking a radical perspective. I’m pleased you liked it.’

He produced a lopsided smile and blushed.

‘I still wanna hear about when ya were young in the sixties,’ he said.

Xavier’s Jail Journal began to drop to the floor. Luke dived and retrieved it just before it hit.

‘Wakey, wakey,’ Luke said, jostling Xavier’s black curls.

*

The turn of the millennium came and went and the world’s computers failed to explode. A thousand years ago in 999, wags portended a Second Coming, earthquakes and the Last Judgement. The masses were petrified.

This time around, some imagined themselves smarter than their ancestors. A lot of advertising played on the big 2000 and the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. Cosmologists and astrologers had a field day. Politicians were full of rhetoric and bombast about the third millennium, particularly as there was a Federal election around the corner. Nothing like

fear and loathing to bolster the reactionary vote.

For me it was special. Xavier was coming up from Newman College to stay. He'd done well getting into Law/Arts at Melbourne plus a residential scholarship to Newman.

James had almost finished his degree. He was toying with Honours in Australian History and getting very involved in the Australian Union of Students.

Luke was footloose and fancy-free. He'd done well under the circumstances. He'd done it the hard way, the pick-up at the Lounge, meets with gay.com personals on cold Ballarat nights at the bluestone step. He was given what he needed and got what he wanted. He stayed over off and on, when he wasn't at friends' places or in Melbourne sowing his wild oats. His time had come.

Things hadn't gone badly for me either. There was a time when I'd been so desperate for work I was almost forced to sell the cottage, flogging myself to low bidders just to keep bread on the table. I can still see the glaze come over their eyes as I asked for a few hours of tutoring from the feminist mafia at the University. An unbeatable combine of ageism, sexism, homophobia and intellectual cringe was stacked against me. A blessing really. It left me free. But it was all in the past now. The knock-backs of years ago are no more. I was cruisin'.

*

Luke lay in his cottage room looking out the window at the garden. He thought about Xavier, James and me. There was so much to talk about but couldn't verbalise. It seemed odd to him that I'd rather talk to James than himself. He fronted me about it. I passed the buck. I told him to talk to James. I was tired of going over old ground. I'd moved on.

Luke worked himself into James' orbit by using his best asset, his body. They learnt to relate intellectually, with interest in the same politics: Free Papua Movement, Northern Ireland, The Greens, the Palestinians, Timor and student politics. On it went.

On a quiet Saturday evening in Ormond College after dinner in the Hall, James took Luke up to his room.

'So you want to know more about him Luke?' said James. 'Well, he's told me a lot. It wasn't all government spooks and spies though some of it was. He used to come here for recording sessions. He wasn't a big player. His claim to fame came when he was turned into a political martyr. He was betrayed by one of his friends and sent to prison.'

'Who?' asked Luke.

'He knows but won't say. I suspect the person's still around and high up. He said it was a 'friend'. He wouldn't say who. As I said, it wasn't all spooks and spies but it was a very paranoid time. It was in the middle of the Cold War. In a sense everyone was a spy because it was such a politically repressive period. People had loose tongues. He gave me a copy of his A.S.I.O. file, that part of it A.S.I.O. let

him have anyhow. Interesting reading. A real knife job. Here, read it. Someone should sit down and do a definitive study on the Australian Union of Students in that decade 1965 to 1975. Fascinating. After 1975 Peter Costello, Michael Kroger and Malcolm Fraser began their campaign to destroy the AUS. By 1983 they'd only partly succeeded. It became the National Union of Students but it wasn't the same. The radical edge had gone. Everyone's got a story to tell, everyone, and the story of the radical student movement in Australia is a big story. By the way Luke, I'm thinking of running for office in the Union. What do you think?'

'Cool. I can rustle up some votes. Xavier can help at Melbourne Uni.'

'Counting on it. It's a start. Anyhow, here's some of what I've got. James brought up my file.'

'Clubbing later?' asked Luke, settling in front of the screen.

'Sure. Why not.' James began rolling a small joint for the fucking to come.

Luke began to read. He was in. They were both in.

*

Mine was and remains a student life.

The naïve idealism that travels with student life found me unprepared for the intricacies and deceptions of political radicalism. When I was a radical student activist at LaTrobe everyone was a potential spy. The Maoists were paranoid. As a Maoist one of

my tasks was to spot ASIO agents on campus. The Joint Intelligence Service, Commonwealth Police and A.S.I.O had access to University files through University administrative staff. Academics were not trusted. Even close friends, one's most fervent comrades, were suspect. In fact, as agent provocateurs, the most fervent and closest were the least trustworthy of all. This was the political reality on Australian university campuses for radical student activists.

I wrote a doctoral thesis about it. It was academic, stylised and indifferent to commercial publication. During my research I gathered government intelligence by careful reading of the media and meeting up with comrades and friends from student years. We'd once been radicals with red and gold Mao badges, tight Levis, denim jackets and Afro hair. We'd spouted from Mao's Little Red Book. I collected research papers on the history of student political movements in Europe, the United States, Asia, South America, Africa and Australia. I had early profiles of people prominent today in political and academic life. Only yesterday I was watching the news and Meredith Burgmann appeared, President of the Legislative Council in New South Wales. In 1971 she played a major organising role in the anti-Springbok demonstrations against apartheid in South Africa. Another woman active at the time was Anne Curthoys, now Manning Clark Professor of Australian History at the ANU. Anne wrote *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers*, about the journey Charles Perkins and

a busload of twenty-nine Koori and white students took around rural New South Wales in 1965 when much of rural Australia was not dissimilar to the Deep South of the United States. Many women activists had their political start in the student movement. Lisa Neville, a President of the National Union, entered the Victorian Parliament and in 2006 joined the Ministry of Steve Bracks. Two other National Union activists, Gayle Tierney and Elaine Carbines, entered the Victorian Parliament in 2006. Student politics and Australian Parliaments is a well-worn path. Judy Maddigan, who became Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, was one with whom LaTrobe Maoists used to do battle. She was in the Democratic Club, a right-wing Catholic front.

Injection of former student radicals into Parliaments had initiated social justice legislation for women, indigenous Australians and sexual minorities. Progress was slow because the electorate was conservative. In the early 1970s we used to call Queensland the Deep North because of discrimination against indigenous Australians and homosexuals during the Bjelke-Petersen years. Strong organizations developed such as C.A.M.P (Campaign Against Moral Persecution), Society Five and Gay Liberation. For Aborigines, land rights legislation improved their position but serious problems remained such as alcoholism, assault, petrol-sniffing, alienation, health and education. In this regard we're still at the beginning of the beginning. The mid sixties mark the beginning of a new activism by

a fresh and numerically large cohort of baby-boomers entering tertiary institutions. Radical literature appeared such as Alex Haley's *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Existentialism was the rage. The anti-Vietnam War movement geared up with groups such as Save Our Sons, Students for a Democratic Society, The Draft Resisters' Union and the Maoist Worker-Student Alliance. Activists such as Brian Laver at Queensland, Albert and Kerry Langer at Monash and Harry van Moorst at Melbourne made names for themselves. Students splashed President Johnson's car with paint when LBJ attended Harold Holt's memorial service. Theories abounded about Holt. Was he spirited away in a Russian submarine? Assassinated by the C.I.A. because of Holt's opposition to the Pine Gap Tracking Station? What sort of country was it where its Prime Minister simply disappeared?

The sixties came about because of what came before the sixties. The end of the Second World War brought demobilisation and 'happy families'. There was a reaction against discredited McCarthyist witch-hunts in America and the anti-Communist hysteria of the Menzies years. The result was the baby boomers, my generation, the bulk in our late teens when National Service for the Vietnam War was introduced in 1964. The fifties and sixties were also a period of economic boom with historically low unemployment. Jobs weren't hard to find. It was also a deeply conservative time under Prime Minister Menzies. There was a lot of anti-communist propaganda.

When I turned sixteen in 1965 I was packed off to Saint Patrick's College. I was a tall, thin, blond, blue-eyed, scared boy from Nhill but I was starting to wake up, politically aware though unsophisticated. I followed the Algerian crisis in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and studied the lead up to the Vietnam War. I read about the Mau Mau action in Africa as decolonisation took its course.

The rather frightening possibility that God did not exist came as a revelation, coinciding with my blossoming into pimples.

Life at Saint Patrick's was severe. We wore caps and the strap was wielded regularly. By 'regularly' I mean scarcely a class went by without some kid getting six of the best. We never knew who was going to be next. Once I had to front up before a stressed out, sex-deprived Christian Brother in front of a class of gorgeous sixteen year olds. I hadn't learnt the definition of Gross Domestic Product. Saint Patrick's took those the Jesuits at Xavier College couldn't handle. Christian Brothers had a reputation for 'straightening out' a wayward boy. The Brothers struck fear into me. Ron Blair's *The Christian Brother* and the film *The Devil's Playground* evoked the atmosphere. I suppose if I hadn't gone to Saint Patrick's this would have been a different story. I don't have regrets. I wouldn't change a thing. Disappointments? Sure. We all have those.

Overt homosexuality was put on hold. Nocturnal lonely wanks under the sheets in the dormitory were as far as I got. I was caught in the trap of the Church

and unable to enjoy forbidden pleasures. We suspected a few Brothers were doing it with some of the boys but it was a case of magnum silencium. It never happened to me.

Oratory contests which were keenly fought. Mary Delahunty was a contemporary orator at Mary's Mount. One year I won the contest. The word, written and spoken, the rhetoric of it, became my lover. I might be half-good at something. I might put into practice the College motto *Sacere Et Docere, To Do And To Teach*.

Saint Patrick's had its savagery. There was vicarious sado-sexual thrill and indignation watching the thrashing of a classmate by a crazed Brother for not knowing a Latin declension. It was a kind of theatre, a drama of days, a jumbled pageant of mortal fear, laughter and terror. An inspired spirituality visited in the chapel as monks recited morning office and dawn struck stained glass. Was it a call? Was I being called?

In 1965 I refused to be part of the College Cadets. I announced to the powers-that-be that Cadets was linked to the war machine in Vietnam. At sixteen I became a committed conscientious objector. The first conscripts were shot in Vietnam the following year in 1966. I considered it ritual slaughter. My opposition to the Vietnam War was based on Christian principles. It was an unjust and racist war. I had a conscientious objection to murder, militarism and racism. I put into practice what Jesus taught. My politics was driven by a sense of right and wrong. That's why I never became a politician.

The Catholic Church in Australia had a tradition of objection to conscription for immoral wars. At the volatile time of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin, Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne successfully fought Prime Minister Billy Hughes in a Referendum over conscription for the Great War of 1914-1918. The Irish Mannix did not want the conscription of Catholic Irish Australian youth to serve the interests of the British Empire. It was a War that cost Australia 60,000 dead for a population of less than five million people. By the 1960s, the Catholic Church was so paranoid about godless Communism that to support anything Left of the Liberal Party and the Catholic Democratic Labor Party had become a damnable offence.

I learnt lessons from history and applied them to everyday life. My education taught me how to live by Gospel values. The phrase at the time was 'peaceful coexistence'. At the same time, some priests, Bob Santamaria's National Civic Council and the Democratic Labor Party preached that atheistic Communism had to be stopped. There were 'reds under the beds'. The Church hierarchy, initially at least, was pro-Vietnam War. In addition, racist outfits such as Eric Butler's The League of Rights warned of 'yellow hordes' to the North. The powerful Returned Services League (R.S.L.) supported the War. The Vietnam War divided the nation and divided families.

In 1968 I had a year in the seminary at Corpus Christi College. It was conducted by the Jesuits. I was eighteen, searching for a life, virgin and awk-

ward. In 1968 the world was turned on its head. Paris had a student revolution that almost toppled the Government of Charles de Gaulle. It was the year of the Democratic Convention in Chicago when a pig's head was presented on a platter as candidate for the Presidency of the United States of America. There were student riots on campuses around the world. The Vietnam War was in full swing. There was an inability of parents to understand why their children were in rebellion. After all, hadn't they given us everything? Didn't we have everything?

The radical music of the 1960s, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, the Doors, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell cheered a different kind of progress. It was culturally and spiritually transforming. Make love not war was more than a slogan. We meant it.

I left the Seminary after one year, left the Jesuit professors to their Latin, Rhetoric and Gregorian Chant. I turned my back on the apologetics of B.A.Santamaria, Cardinal Knox and the hatred of the Democratic Labor Party. I left the glorious Werribee Park Italianate mansion, the monstrosity and the thurible, left it all far behind but not forgotten. The Seminary itself closed its doors a few years later, the great cloisters of Werribee Park too expensive to maintain for the few candidates applying. The ecclesiastical market place was found wanting, a victim of secular materialism.

Another door opened, the door to a world I thirsted for.

*

Luke turned from the screen and reflectively toked on a joint as James lay on the bed reading a new book on Irish history.

‘I didn’t know he spent time in a Seminary!’ said Luke quietly.

‘Yep. No wonder he finished up a radical,’ said James, ‘all that sexual repression had to blow up sometime.’

‘Yeah. Maybe he never knew what he really wanted,’ Luke reflected.

‘More a case of not knowing where he was going,’ said James with an edge. Luke smiled to himself and returned to James’ computer, to the wild days of flower power, LSD and the student rebellion.

‘That was Paul Gauguin’s last question before he died,’ added James.

‘What was? Who’s he?’

James delighted to dangle new jewels before Luke who invariably reached for them.

‘Gauguin the French impressionist artist. ‘Where are we going?’ was his death-bed question. He spent most of his life in the Pacific Islands and knew Vincent Van Gogh and Arthur Rimbaud in Paris.’

‘Good question, where are you going? It’s the ultimate existential question. I wish I knew where I was going,’ Luke said.

‘By the way Luke,’ said James glancing up from his book, ‘didn’t you say your father was a migrant boy sent out to Australia in the fifties? There’s a site

you can access called the Child Migrant Scheme. It lists the names of those who were sent out. Check it out.'

'I will.' Luke blushed crimson at the bulge in James' jeans and determined to have him. He bookmarked Pola, accessed an alphabetical list of names from the Child Migrant Scheme and ran down to a David Matthews, his father's name. Was it one and the same? This 'Matthews' had been at a place called Bindoon in Western Australia so he linked to Bindoon and a site called Broken Rites showing sepia group photos taken in the 1960s. He checked the names underneath. Unmistakeable. He was looking at the boy's face of his father.

'I don't fuckin' believe it! There's my dad!'

James started. 'Where? Let's see.' James stood at Luke's side, hand on his shoulder as they studied the photo.

'That's him alright, no mistake. I haven't seen him for years but I know what he looks like.'

'Days past revisit us in strange ways,' said James, 'this is real history Luke. Have you heard the story of Boys' Town, Bindoon, in Western Australia?'

'No.'

'It's still sensitive, a secret garden for cultural studies students. Check out the history of Bindoon where your dad was.'

But Luke was well ahead. 'Wow! There are case histories here. Listen.

*

‘We built Bindoon ourselves. Boystown they called it, quarried out by pick and shovel from the red plains by hundreds of us boys. Bindoon was a very remote place, isolated, run with an iron fist by the Christian Brothers. The place was a law unto itself. We built this incredible monument of stone and brick in the middle of no-where. We got belted a lot. A few brothers used boys for sex. It was a happy hunting ground for a few of them. The fame of Bindoon is now infamy. There were four orphanages: Bindoon, Clontarf, Castledare and Tardun. I left as soon as I could when I turned sixteen. Most of the Brothers treated me well enough but two of them had it in for me. One Brother used to make me go to his room at night. I think he’s dead now. A good thing too.’

*

‘Unreal!’ exclaimed Luke.

‘Such evocative names aren’t they?’ said James, ‘thoughts of Ireland, the Western Australian desert, dark institutions and secret buggery.’

‘So this place was for real right? I mean, it existed?’ asked Luke, scarcely believing what he was reading.

‘Sure did,’ said James, ‘well Luke, you’ve found your father.’

Luke stared into James’ emerald depths.

*

Bindoon's 17,000 acres was willed to the Brothers in 1936 when there was only a modest farmhouse on the property. The real building years for Bindoon came after the Second World War when hundreds of orphan boys were shipped out from England and Ireland. Brothers and disadvantaged boys, mainly from Perth, had been resident on the property before and during the War but under canvas and primitive conditions.

In 1947 the first of hundreds of English and Irish boys arrived, orphans of war and poverty. Brother Paul Keaney led a team of Brothers and several hundred boys on a massive building project. The result was spectacular, a monastery of grand proportions constructed of hand-quarried stone and solid brick. In the 1950s, Boystown was regarded as an Australian success story.

The Child Migrant Scheme finished in 1966.

In the 1990s, former residents of Brothers' orphanages in Western Australia named forty-four Brothers in statements. Allegations included sexual and physical assaults dating from 1940-1970. Some of the Brothers concerned had died, some had left the Order, a handful were still living. The Catholic Church in that State had close ties with Labor Party and Liberal Party politicians. The State Attorney-General in 1995 refused to prosecute Brothers on grounds of 'insufficient evidence' and the Statute of Limitations. The evidence however was glaring in many a Statutory Declaration collated by organizations such as Voices, Broken Rites and former residents. What these individuals and organizations

lacked was political power in the Western Australian and Australian Governments.

‘This is no William Burrough’s hallucination of the wild boys,’ said James, ‘the place must have been incredible.’

‘Wild,’ said Luke, ‘it sort of explains Dad a lot, I mean, why he’s a boozier and left Mum and me.’

‘Lord Acton: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely,’ said James.

‘It’s like ... like something from the Marquis de Sade,’ said Luke, recalling exploratory dives into the Marquis’ work at the cottage.

‘There’s a climate of secrecy and suspicion about the whole thing,’ said James, ‘an inclination to deny and cover-up. The Order has apologised though.’

‘It’s best to clear the air,’ said Luke, ‘I mean, a vow of celibacy is a vow of celibacy. Boys like my dad trusted those guys. The deal was to keep their pants on.’

‘I could never take vows,’ said James, ‘I couldn’t keep them. I think that’s why our mutual friend left the Seminary.’

‘Sex?’ Luke asked.

‘Sure. It dominates his life.’

‘Tell me about it,’ said Luke, groin whirling to James’ hand on his shoulder. ‘Well, there’s only one thing for it. I’m going to make contact with Bindoon somehow. I’ll visit Bindoon.’

‘There’d be too many sad ghosts,’ said James, ‘can’t you contact your father somehow and ask him about it? What about through your Mum?’

‘Mum doesn’t know anything. As for Dad, well,

I could but I'd rather not. I remember Dad sayin' he came out as a migrant when he was ten. He's in his sixties now. He's lost the battle of the bottle. The dates fit and that sure looks like him. No, I'm doin' this my way. There's no hurry. The best way to exorcise a ghost is face to face. Be cold about it. Draw energy from anger, don't put energy into it.'

'That's a good one Luke,' said James, 'I like that one. Revenge is a dish best served cold someone said.'

*

Late afternoon. Luke was expected. I looked up from my writing at the sound of crunching gravel on the footpath. The kitchen door opened and in he came with a toss of black curls, white cheeks flushed pink from the cold outside.

'Bloody Ballarat! It's freezing out there. Whadaya up to?'

'A quiet day Luke. I'm reading something I wrote when I was a young man working in the bush. How was Melbourne?'

'Awesome. James and I met up. Hey, get this, I found my dad on the Internet! You won't believe what I found. Make a coffee and roll a joint while I tell ya. I'm hangin' out.'

I knew already. James had phoned. But I wanted to hear it gush from Luke like an orgasm and 'I found my dad on the Internet' had a certain zing. Luke tumbled it all out and I half-listened as I made coffee and rolled a number.

‘I wanna go visit Bindoon one day,’ he finally said, followed by silence as he sucked the last out of the joint and stubbed it, ‘so, whadaya been readin?’

‘When I was your age I worked at a wheat silo at Tarranginnie west of Nhill.’

‘Let’s see,’ said Luke.

*

The wheat boy.

A wheat boy works under blazing sun and summer-blue sky. He rakes the sea of yellow wheat into the grate where conveyers haul it up to the silo high above him. The boy has light blue eyes and a deep brown tan. He’s sixteen.

He’s playing out the role of a wheat boy. Cogito ergo sum. Cogito ergo non sum. I think therefore I am. I think therefore I’m not. He apologises to Descartes. There’s a critical edge to what he does, between what he prefers to do and the wonder why he didn’t. That’s the way it is with him.

He imagines he’s a labourer yet knows he isn’t really a labourer. He thinks too much. Labourers aren’t supposed to think. But surely labourers think thoughts too? Sure they do. Didn’t everyone? What’s the difference between one person’s thought and another’s? A labourer isn’t mindless.

The wheat boy labours at Wimmera wheat silos at Taranginnie, Kiata and Nhill. He sweeps the grate after trucks dump their loads. He shunts and loads railway wagons. Summer heat shimmers off hot steel. He’s tall, lean, golden-blond and, yes, sweet

sixteen in tattered jeans and sleeveless red flannel shirt.

What does it all mean he asks himself?

A hot young farmer's son drives a wheat truck on to the grate. He's brown and sinewy. The farmer's son pulls a lever in the truck. A hydraulic piston moans. The tray lifts. Wheat pours out. It overflows onto the feet of the wheat boy like a seduction. The boy thinks about getting off with the farm boy. He checks him out. In the morning he has a secret fantasy in the sleep-out, body bathed in summer red-gold sunrise.

The silo fills. The boy augers golden grain into wagons on a railway siding. He learns how to cover and tie down heavy green tarpaulins. He learns how to release the brakes of filled and covered wagons. Crash! it goes as it couples into the next one. He connects the hydraulic brake-hose. Phallic. He grasps a hot steel crow-bar, walks up the line to an empty wagon, jams the bar under a wheel and levers the wagon along the rail. He swings the auger over to the wagon. He starts the auger motor. It roars to life. The silver prick auger spills golden seed into the open mouth of the wagon. Farm boys stand around him, watching as gold seed spurts into the wagon. He watches the boys but it's out of the question. He can't touch the untouchable. The shimmering phallus spills its seed.

I think therefore I am. His blue eyes are wide open. His body aches and hopes under shimmering sapphire sky. Blond hair blows in a hot summer breeze.

'Full!' someone yells. The wheat boy cuts the

engine to idle, swings the auger out, tarps and ties down then shunts the heavy wagon. Crash!

‘Next one!’ yells the wheat boy.

*

Luke looked at me strangely. ‘Bit of a wank isn’t it?’ he said, pouring the last of the coffee into his cup. Luke could be withering.

‘I was only sixteen when I wrote it,’ I said saving face.

‘That figures. Your boyhood rustic fantasy huh? Wishful thinking? Right now I just want coffee and another joint.’

Luke was moody. Was it late adolescent hormones or was it coming to terms with finding his father on the loveless Internet? I was just getting Luke around to opening up about his father when a knock came at the door. Daniel’s friendly face appeared. I was relieved by the detour.

Luke skited to Daniel about Melbourne adventures. I adjourned to the kitchen to do a curry for an evening meal. Luke loosened up over dinner and chatted about driving to Western Australia. By the time we’d got to ‘Havana’s bananas’ for dessert we were exploring the pervasiveness of dreams and Carl Jung’s interpretations. We talked about ‘light-space’ and tried to define it. Was it a mix of imagination and technology? Was it the speed of light and human consciousness plain and simple? Was it the speed of our lives? But we got in too deep and confused ourselves.

We competed to see who could tell the best story. Daniel was appointed judge and jury. Luke told the story about Jesus I'd once told him. I told a story set in future cyberspace where everyone was queer, travelled through lightspace and met up with themselves at the other end.

'Well, I think the Jesus story is the best one,' Daniel finally decided, combing fingers through thick blond hair, fresh face blushing.

'Why?' I asked, 'didn't you like my story?' I pretended to pout.

Daniel demurred. 'I did but my decision stands,' he said good-naturedly.

I remember a soft summer morning with Luke in my arms when I told him the Jesus story. Luke had come a long way since days at the Lounge when he could scarcely put a sentence together. I'd taught him well. I glanced at him, his slash of black eyebrow, liquid brown eyes and glittering studs.

'OK,' said Luke, 'well, the probable reality is that Jesus survived the crucifixion because the Roman guards thought he was dead. His breathing and pulse were very low, a deep mystical trance. He'd lived with Yogis in India for years so he simply transcended his suffering. Yogis can do that. When he was in the tomb his friends helped to revive him.'

'Was Jesus divine?' Daniel asked.

'We're all divine,' said Luke, 'whadaya think?' Luke asked me.

'No more than you or I,' I said, 'most religions claim divinity for their Gods. Yogis, avatars, saints,

faith healers, they all have aspects of the divine. We all have a spark of divinity we're given when we're conceived. It's returned when we die. It's our soul. Jesus is special as a teacher, prophet, guru, martyr, yogi, revolutionary or whatever one wishes to make of him. He was a man like us. His ideas changed European and Western civilisation.'

'How do you know he lived in India?' Daniel asked dreamily. He was spending his late teens in the old boot factory near the Ballarat Station where he experimented painting mystical beings on broad canvases, smoked dope with artist friends from nearby Camp Street and played with the 'in crowd' at The Phoenix Cafe.

'You see,' I said, 'the last time we hear of Jesus is when he's presented in the temple when he's twelve. The next time we hear of him is when he's thirty, eighteen years later, when he starts his three years in Palestine as a preacher. Where was he in the mean-time? All we're told is he 'grew in wisdom and understanding.' So, where did he do this growing? Nazareth? Maybe, but there's evidence he was in India. It's in a book called *Jesus Lived In India*, by Holger Kersten. Some say Jesus and Mary Magdalene later fled to France and had a family there. Some say he had royal blood from the House of David and that's how the royal European kingdoms started. It's in a book called *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*, a bestseller in the 1980s.'

'A bit like that Da Vinci Code book?' suggested Daniel.

'Part of the same story,' I continued, 'it's all very

cabalistic. A few years ago I was given a book called *Autobiography Of A Yogi*, written by Yogananda. It provides insights into the life of Jesus, especially the historical Jesus in India. The possibility is an acceptable one: that Jesus spent many years in India learning with the yogis. Why not? No one suggests he did anything else. Who was Jesus? A Buddhist? A Hindu? A Jew? All three?’

I reminded myself to get hold of a new book by John Carroll at LaTrobe University called *The Existential Jesus*.’

‘Are you a Christian?’ Daniel asked me.

‘Not in the conventional sense. Now I’ll ask you a question Daniel. What was the major new religion spreading from India two thousand years ago.’

Daniel thought. ‘Buddhism?’

‘Got it in one Daniel,’ I said.

‘And the thing is Daniel,’ Luke cut in, ‘if you read the Gospels and Jesus stories and his philosophy, it’s basically Buddhist, the same stuff Siddhartha and his followers started teaching five hundred years before Jesus was born.’

‘So you’re a Buddhist then?’ Daniel asked Luke.

‘Philosophically yes,’ said Luke, ‘I’m not religious though. I grow spiritually. That’s not religion. I can’t stand organised religion. Buddhism isn’t a religion, it’s a philosophy. If Jesus saw Roman Catholicism today he’d be appalled.’

‘I don’t go to Mass,’ I added, ‘unless it’s a Latin Mass with plenty of incense and altar boys. I love stained glass and Gothic cathedrals and listen to Thomas Tallis, Palestrina and Monteverdi. I prac-

tice my faith in my own way.'

'It's interesting when you think about it,' said Luke, 'Jesus was only on the cross for three hours. Usually it took days before they died. So he's in this deep comatose state scarcely breathing, unconscious, in nirvana like a yogi. He gets a spear in his side and the Romans think he's dead. He's taken down and put in the tomb. He slowly recovers with help from friends who bring healing ointments. It makes sense. I mean, it may not have happened that way. He really may have died and his 'resurrection' was cooked up later. In the end it doesn't matter. The possibility alone is fascinating.'

'Well, it's possible,' said Daniel, 'it'd be great to go on the Jesus trail one day, you know, to India?'

'Then Paris, London, Rome, New York, Dublin, Prague, St. Petersburg...' Luke added, 'a grand tour.'

'Me too,' said Daniel. 'You've travelled Brian?' Daniel asked me.

'Some. I'd like to go back to places I went to years ago, the ones you mentioned, Rome, Paris, New York, London. They're the great cities.'

'Well, if Jesus did it so can we,' said Daniel with a grin.

*

Dr. Frank Mobbs (M.A.Oxon.) an old friend from the 70s was back in Ballarat. Luke and I decided to go to his free lecture on The Da Vinci Code. Older certainly but hearty, Frank's position seemed

to be that Jesus did not marry Mary Magdalene. On the other hand, as Luke and I reflected on the walk back from Mansfield House after the lecture, Frank hadn't proved that they didn't marry. In any case, maybe they simply had a family without marrying. People do.

'It's irrelevant,' said Luke, 'I mean, it's as believable as a dead man coming back to life. That's hard to believe. You're either dead or alive.'

'That's what the 'resurrection' was Luke,' I said, 'Jesus didn't die. Mary and Jesus fled Jerusalem as political refugees and lived in Europe and India.'

'He certainly got around,' said Luke.

'None of it matters,' I said, 'the message is the same.'

'What message?' Luke asked.

'Love,' I said, 'love. That's Jesus' message.'

*

I lay awake thinking during the night. I'm an insomniac. Daniel was in Luke's room. The cottage was quiet and dark and the Sessions clock struck three. I quietly crept out of bed and made my way into the study with its shelves of books. I turned on the reading lamp, stoked up the embers and put some wood on the fire. I retrieved a notebook I hadn't shown anyone, not even Luke, brief stories written in the seventies when I travelled Europe and America.

*

Manhattan! The plane touched down at Newark. It was raining hard at four a.m. and cold. A crowded bus ride through the New Jersey Turnpike landed me at the Port Authority Terminal in Manhattan. I was shocked by a sea of bodies, homeless people trying to catch some sleep anywhere they could find a space. I bought telephone tokens and called Sloane House. There was a vacancy. Sloane House wasn't far but I hailed a taxi because I didn't fancy walking around the area in the early hours. A guy took my bag and headed off with it. I thought he was the driver. Two burly coppers suddenly grabbed the guy, handcuffed him and returned my bag without a word. I got into the taxi. I was red with embarrassment. He must have seen me coming I thought. I'd been in New York for an hour and already I'd been robbed! What a neophyte! I had to smarten up my act. A red and blue neon sign said 'Sloane House' just off Central Park. Armed guards were everywhere.

I had a week. I did Greenwich Village Fair, cruised Christopher Street and Central Park and visited Lennon's Strawberry Fields and the Dakota. I drove around Manhattan in a friend's Cadillac, visited the galleries, gazed at Monet's 'water lilies' and saw *Sunday In The Park With George* at the Broadway Theatre.

I attended a different kind of theatre on 42nd Street. To get to the Adonis I took the subway to 42nd Street. The Adonis was an art-deco cinema with continuous homo porn. Hundreds of youths and men cruised, jacked-off, fucked in dark corners

and sucked each other off in balconies and stalls.

I set eyes on Richard Toscano in the foyer. He was tall, dark straight hair, very cute and eighteen. We went inside and sat next to each other. After some smooching and fondling we went to his student room at the City University of New York where he was studying Art History.

Through Richard I met Wayne Peterson, Professor of Art History at the University. We discussed hot topics such as the cult of the body and sexual rites of passage for young men. Wayne was shortly to go to Cambridge University, England, for post-doctoral research on homo-erotica in Renaissance art. He was nuts about Caravaggio.

‘Western society is deeply sexually repressed,’ he told us, ‘only by returning to paganism and classicism and not being fixated on legalisms and definitions will there be a new flowering of art.’

‘I can’t see that happening in Western civilisation for a while,’ I told him, ‘not while the masses are in denial. It’s like a mass sexual psychosis.’

‘It’ll resolve itself. We’re heading into global consciousness. There’s no stopping it.’

It was then I thought of ‘lightspace’. Was it a legitimate concept?

Art history was only one of Wayne’s two claims to fame. The second was shakier. He doubled as a consultant to major galleries on art intelligence traffic. This involved explaining the intricacies of art theory to dealers at Christie’s, Sotheby’s and the Galleries. He had a masterly grasp of cultural shifts affecting provenance. It was all about auction prices

and profiteering. Cultivating Richard and me was part of his work. I daresay a file opened, but ASIO and the CIA already knew of my presence in the heart of the beast so what was one more file. I was an open book as far as Wayne was concerned and Richard gave me what I wanted so I was content.

Richard and I called into the Chelsea Hotel where he was friendly with a musician. The Chelsea had been the occasional home of Brendan Behan, Arthur Miller, Ezra Pound, Sid Vicious and luminaries. I gawked about doing the literary tourist thing. We took in the industrial architecture of Brooklyn Bridge, had coffee at The Pierre, selected a ruby ear-stud for Richard at Morano's and shopped at the Bergdorf Goodman. Manhattan was stretch limos, bellboys, magnetic men with steel-grey hair, rich queens and multi-million dollar apartments. What a City!

On the night I saw Sunday in The Park With George, a play based on the life of George Searat the French Impressionist, I left Broadway neon for darker, dangerous streets off Broadway. I was edgy about walking around alone at night but thrilled to be out in the deserted, seedy part of Manhattan after midnight. I took a few wrong turns before spotting a bare pink bulb over a doorway to The Ansonia Bath and Health Club near 74th Street.

The Ansonia was a run-down joint of a place tucked into a side street. I thought of Bette Midler who got her start at nearby St. Mark's Baths.

I got my security locker, showered and towelled off. It was quiet, not many around as I sat near a

green, pink and blue neon jukebox throwing rainbows across a giant olympic pool.

Two teenage hustlers appeared, one black, one white. I watched as the black boy fucked the white boy. It was quite a performance, lit by a steamy rose glow from bare red bulbs as the black youth pumped harder, faster, and Leonard Cohen sang from the jukebox.

‘Have you had anyone tonight?’ white Chris glanced over at me.

‘No.’

‘What I wouldn’t do for forty dollars,’ he said.

I’d no intention of coughing up forty dollars but really wanted to get it up.

‘I’m out of cigarettes,’ said white Chris, ‘you wouldn’t have one would you?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘but I can buy some at the machine. I’ll have to go to my locker.’

White Chris came with me to my locker.

‘You want to fuck me right?’ he asked me.

‘Sure.’

‘I’m not into hustling full-time. I still go to school. Get the cigarettes and come back.’

I returned with cigarettes and watched as black Chris again gave it hard to his mate.

‘I’m dying for a cigarette,’ said white Chris. I offered the pack. He took one and I lit it for him, the yellow flame from my chrome lighter shining on his pale Rimbaud face.

‘You can fuck me now,’ he said.

The black boy moved away. My turn at the pump-station. For a cigarette.

*

‘What’re ya doin?’

I looked up to find Daniel standing in the doorway en route to the bathroom, a towel around his waist.

‘Hi. Just reading.’

Returning from the bathroom Daniel sat on the opposite corner of the chesterfield.

‘Can I see some?’ he asked.

‘Sure,’ I said, ‘here, read this one. You’re interested in travel stories aren’t you?’ I handed him ‘New York’. ‘Roll yourself a number.’ I returned to reading. It was cosy and quiet with the ticking of the old Sessions clock and open fire. I sneaked a glance at Daniel in his towel, his thin, hairless white body, little pink nipples, thin face, peaches and cream skin, full pink lips and haystack of blond curls. I remembered San Francisco.

*

San Francisco! Did the bars on Castro: The Phoenix, Badlands, Twin Peaks, the joints on Polk Street, The Giraffe, PS, QT’s. Hustlers everywhere. I booked into The New Leland Hotel where my front double bedroom overlooked the action on Polk. Rooms rented by the hour. I stayed a week. Teenage rent boys play computer games in the Hotel foyer. They check me out and I check in.

Winston the manager took a liking to me and rings my room.

‘We’re having a party. Room 19, upstairs from you.’

Up I go. I recognise three rent boys from the foyer. Pansy Division plays and before I knew it I’d had a line of coke.

Winston introduces me to three young men, Joe, Billy and Liam. I take in their slim bodies, tight tattered jeans and farm-boy fresh faces. Joe has a green Mohawk. Billy has long, thick blond hair and a cherry-red bandana. Liam has gold earrings, pins through his brows and a skinhead. The wild boys.

A strong Bourbon and Coke and another line. Winston says ‘let’s strip’.

I’m off my face as we set about it on the kingsize bed.

*

‘Finished that one,’ said Daniel. I passed him ‘San Francisco’.

*

Rome! Stazione Termini around midnight. Two boys approach with come hither looks.

‘We go down there?’ one motions to me in uncertain English.

We walked to the freight yards at the back of the station to deserted derelict carriages and climb into one. There’s a whiff of danger but I can’t help myself. One of the boys sits on my stomach. I was pinned down. A security guard interrupts outside

but everything is 'cool' the boys say as the other boy starts to go through my pockets. The two were off in no time at all, many thousand lira richer. I count myself lucky. They could've slit my throat.

The next night I see both of them outside the Stazione hanging around a park bench with friends. They're all from Naples. There's a tough gypsy in charge.

'I ladri,' I call the two in front of everyone, 'I ladri.' Thieves.

'You have anyone you like,' says the big gypsy to me, trying to cool it. One of the thieves reaches for a knife. The big gypsy waves him down. The other thief does a runner. I chase him through the backstreets of Rome and corner him at a cheap hotel. We talk in Italian.

'I soldi per favore. I soldi,' I said, hoping to get some money back. The thief shakes his head.

'Mi dispiace,' he said, 'mi dispiace. No i soldi.' The thief looks defenceless, no longer the thief of the previous night. I reach for the bulge hanging loose in his jeans.

'What's your name? Nome?' I ask.

'Domenico.'

'Quanti anni fa?' I ask, not sure of my Italian.

Domenico puzzles for a moment then holds up fingers, ten and six.

'Sedici,' he says. A rough curl of black hair falls over his brow.

Domenico hardens as I rub him up. I unbuckle his belt and drop his jeans. Salty Napoli pearljam shoots. I got my money's worth.

‘Buonanotte Domenico. Arrivederci.’

I left the run-down hotel. I wandered the Roman Forum watching orgies play out in the ruins of ancient empire, washed in summer moonlight as dawn rose over the Seven Hills.

*

Merry Olde England. I took the train from London to Cambridge to meet Wayne Peterson who showed me around the ancient Colleges. We discussed sexual psychology, art and literature. I stayed in Cambridge for two days, listened to King’s College Choir, perved on undergraduates and had a trip with Wayne to magnificent Ely Cathedral.

‘I’ve learnt so much from paganism,’ Wayne said, ‘when sex between younger and older people wasn’t subject to the legal arbitrariness that it is today. Even during the medieval period and the Renaissance there were few restrictions. I blame the Industrial Revolution. The exploitation of youth in filthy overcrowded cities and Christian wowsersism in Victorian times resulted in the age of consent legislation we’re stuck with today. You’ve heard about Germaine Greer’s latest *The Boy?* A fine read. Germaine’s been very influential here at Cambridge.’

I liked the portly and ebullient Peterson with his swept back steel grey hair and clipped way of speaking. As a teenager his American family had lived in Sydney for four years where he attended

Saint Ignatius College, Riverview. Perhaps the Jesuits taught him his clarity.

‘We like to fool ourselves we live in an enlightened society when it comes to sex. We don’t. It’s just the opposite,’ he said. ‘It’s worse today than it was two thousand or even five hundred years ago. You only have to read Roman writers such as Juvenal, Petronius and Suetonius. Read the lives of Hadrian, Julius Caesar and Augustus or go back to Plato, Socrates and the Greek Pantheon.’

‘Or Boccaccio’s Decameron,’ I added.

‘Exactly. You know, as an old boy of Riverview I get their Newsletter. Well, some time ago a contemporary of mine Michael Kirby, now an Australian High Court Judge, gave an inspiring and enlightened address to senior boys at Riverview about having the courage to fight homophobia. It’s a credit to the Jesuits that they see homophobia as a form of persecution. They fight it.’

‘I couldn’t see that happening at my old school Saint Patrick’s in Ballarat,’ I said. I remembered my stint there and stories Luke told me. ‘It’s a real problem where I come from. There’s a high rate of youth suicide amongst rural homosexual youth.’

‘You know what Emile Zola said about the Church don’t you?’

‘No, what?’

‘Civilisation will not attain its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest. It gets back to my original point. We should have lived two thousand ago in Athens or Rome.’

Back in London I caught the train to Hampstead

Heath. The Heath went all the time. I met 'Joe' one late evening after almost giving up tramping around. Just as I was about to leave, 'Joe' came up and asked would I meet him there at midnight. Sure. I went to the local pub to kill time. I thought he wouldn't show. I went back though. There he was, mid-teens, faded tat jeans, Jimi Hendrix T-shirt leaning against a tree, full moonlight shining on his face.

'Fuck me,' he told me.

'Been fucked before?' I ask.

'No.'

*

'You've certainly been around,' said Daniel laughing quietly as he finished Merry Olde England. 'It's 'queer lit, almost porn. Make a good porn film.'

'Think so Daniel?' I replied, 'you're right, it's more for performance than a read.'

'I could star in it,' Daniel grinned wickedly falling into line.

'You could,' I said.

*

Luke and I were chewing the fat one winter's evening at the cottage over Kentucky Bourbon and hash bongs after a session with Immaculata and Cor Thirteen at the Lounge.

'Cor Thirteen,' said Luke, 'did ya like us?'

'I did, I did,' I affirmed for the umpteenth time,

in my heart preferring Renaissance and Baroque liturgical but aware of Luke's need to be reassured.

'You have an easy life,' Luke told me, 'you've got it made.'

'Maybe. I've got my problems.' I looked at book-lined walls. Thousands of books by other people and mine a long time coming. I thought of Arthur Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet and William Burroughs.

'Maybe the best's been written, you know, the great ones. Weren't they enough Luke?'

'You know that's bullshit,' said Luke, 'it's never enough, you know that, so don't talk shit. You're a prisoner waiting to break out. You've got to get off your arse.'

'Stick my hot red poker in the fire with the rest of them huh?' I said dryly, 'throw caution to the wind. Past Caring, that's what Henry Lawson said.'

'If you do finally get around to doing something beyond sex and intellectual wanking,' said Luke, 'make sure it's no holds barred. It's the only way. Fuck the airport novel trip.'

'Do it my way huh?'

Luke understood me. It was a hard understanding, almost chill. It couldn't be any other way. Not with my history and his precarious life.

'Fuck the system!' Luke exploded, 'no one gives a fuck! Society's fucked! It's all I'll fuck you, you'll fuck me. No-one's gunna tell me who to fuck. No-one should tell ya what to write!'

I sat gaping. 'I know where you're comin' from Luke.'

‘Do ya? I fuckin’ hope so. No one else does. Why do we put up with it? I’ll tell ya. It’s what we’re conditioned to expect. We’re told what we want. We want to be fucked over. We’re just dying to be fucked over in every possible way.’

‘You’re the fucking expert!’ I said quickly unable to stop myself. I tried to lighten the conversation.

Luke glared and shrugged. ‘We get fucked over every single minute of our shitty day. We take it up the arse because we like it up the arse.’

‘You’re right Luke. We’re so shit scared we can’t get away from our own stench. We’re too scared to move, to question, to fight. We’re fucked by the State. Fucked by the Internet. Fucked by the corporation. Fucked by the Church. Fucked by fear. We’re even told who to fuck.’

‘I’ll fuck who I fuckin’ well like!’ said Luke for emphasis.

‘Go fuck yourself,’ I said lightly. Life’s a pageant of sex. A thousand lovers. Thousands of crazy diamonds.’

‘That’s more like it Brian. Our cups runneth over,’ said Luke, ‘here, have another bong bitch.’ Luke filled the cone.

I decided to re-visit a theme. ‘Luke, you remember that story I told you about the Kriya Yoga guy who gave me *Autobiography Of A Yogi*?’

‘By Yogananda? Yeah, what about it? Not getting’ religious are ya?’ he arched.

‘Can’t get it out of my head. It reversed my thinking on Jesus. Another book, *The Holy Science*, by

Sri Yukteswar threw more light on it. So did the writing of Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine priest who lived on an ashram in India. You listening Luke?’

‘Sorry. Go on.’ Luke finished a cone then checked mail from the West Papua Movement, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Irish Republican Army and a new site on the Free West Timor Movement. It was a ritual several times a day.

‘Think of it Luke. After the crucifixion he and Mary Magdalene went to France then to India where they’re buried. This puts an entirely new context on the cunningly constructed history of Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. The implications are mind-boggling. It could split Christianity and the Church wide open.’

‘Great!’ said Luke, ‘good move! I don’t give a monkey’s arse-hole. Religion’s fucked! Ya just don’t get it do ya? It doesn’t matter! The Church has had it. You’ve got to create your own lightspace dream. That’s your word isn’t it? Lightspace? That’s why I told Daniel the story in the first place, to get him motivated. Stop being a victim of ya past for fuck’s sake!’

‘It’s not as simple as that Luke. I get a lot out of the Christian mystics, you know, like Bede Griffiths. He wrote a book called *A New Vision of Reality*. He was well educated, Oxford, and threw it all in for an ashram in India. Another famous Catholic mystic was Thomas Merton, a Cistercian, a Trappist actually.’

‘A what!’ Luke pounced, ‘a Trappist!’ Luke sniggered.

‘Trappists Luke. They practice silence and meditation. Merton’s very famous. He wrote a lot. His best book is his autobiography The Seven Storey Mountain. He was very interested in Eastern philosophy.’

Luke looked thoughtful. ‘Make a great film, the Jesus in India thing. Why don’t we all do it! Make a movie!’

‘I suspect it’s either already been done or about to be,’ I said.

‘Hey! Speakin’ of films, I was talkin’ to James. He says he’s gunna make a documentary about ya. He says you’re in books in libraries. All that radical shit. He told me about the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in the sixties when the student movement was just beginning, you know, Mario Savio, Joan Baez, Bobby Dylan, Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. Flowers in ya hair and all that. That right?’

I nodded. ‘They’re famous activists, poets and singers Luke. The worldwide student movement was like a state of consciousness. We all felt united. It was youthful exuberance that got down to grass roots. Even in staid old Melbourne alternative schools sprang up such as Preshill, the ERA School and St Kilda Community School. We wanted to change the world.’

‘Ya did! Ya did!’ said Luke, ‘but it’s all run out of puff. Bono and Bob Geldof are doin’ their bit to cancel world debt but fundamentals haven’t changed. Ya hafta teach young people. Ya should be writing about the history, things like the civil rights

movement in the United States, the Black Panther Party and Students for a Democratic Society and that other way out group, yeah, the Weathermen who kidnapped what's her name...yeah, Patty Hearst. The history of it. Ya hafta inspire young people. Do it before ya fall off the perch! Tell me about the Australian radical students, aboriginal rights and the Anti-Vietnam War protests. Drop this Jesus stuff. Stop sittin' playing the armchair revolutionary. At least I'm tryin' ta do somethin'. I don't just talk about it. I'm out there.'

'You probably know more about it now than I do Luke,' I said, cut a little. His aggression put me on the defensive when he got close to the bone. Sometimes I bit.

'It was forty years ago Luke. All those guys are now rich, fat Americans. They sold out decades ago. It was just youthful exuberance. Join the real world. You're just a virtual revolutionary sitting there in front of your screen. We're both hypocrites Luke.'

Luke stared at me in silence with his mouth open for a full five seconds.

'Like I said Brian, why bother with a Church that's persecuted homosexuals for two thousand years? Give it a miss for fuck's sake! You're wasting your talents.'

Luke's exhortations had an opposite effect to what he intended. He was young and tactless. Instead of being inspired I sank into depression. For several days I sat on the chesterfield smoking dope and drinking cheap cask Merlot. A notice in the obituary section of The Age forced me back to life.

Makepeace O'Flaherty was dead.

'I'll have to go to his funeral Luke.'

'Ya didn't know him that well did ya?'

'No. I do remember what he was like in the sixties and early seventies in Melbourne. He was a guru to us all. He had charisma. He had such an unusual name. I don't know anyone who has a Christian name 'Makepeace'. I heard he was related to William Makepeace Thackeray the English writer no one reads anymore. I remember an incredible speech O'Flaherty gave at a student seminar on the cult of the body. I've got a copy it somewhere. I'll dig it out. Would you like to come Luke? It's at Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne. You haven't been there have you?'

'No. Dead bods aren't my thing. Yeah, OK. I'll come. I can hook up with James and Xavier. A funeral might be a good existential experience!'

*

And it was. There we all were, the four of us, in the organ transept of Saint Patrick's bright eyed and ready for the ethereal.

O'Flaherty's funeral was a display of ecclesiastical theatricality. Makepeace, a cultural Roman Catholic and theological agnostic, left specific instructions to Peter Zetlin his executor to have the Cathedral choir sing a Requiem Mass in Latin. He even teed up Bishop Ryan with whom he'd been a friend as schoolboys at Xavier College. The Bishop and he had remained friends despite or because of

deep political and doctrinal differences. Both loved the liturgical high camp culture of the Roman Church and a drop of the best red.

The Cathedral was sprinkled with a who's who of Australian academe, politics, writers, artists and former boyfriends. The choir sang old favourites, traditional hymns Makepeace had grown up with such as Be Thou My Vision and the stirring Mormon hymn, How Can I Keep From Singing. Tears were under strict management but the great Fincham Cathedral organ was overpowering. Salty tears trickled down my cheeks for the pathos of the human condition and the inanity of it all.

My life goes on in endless song above earth's lamentation.

I hear the real though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I'm clinging.

It sounds an echo in my soul, how can I keep from singing?

What though the tempest round me blows, I know the truth it liveth.

What though the darkness round me close, songs in the night it giveth.

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I'm clinging.

Since love is lord of heaven and earth how can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes, the cloud grows thin. I see the sky
above it.

And day by day my pathway smooths, since first
I learned to love it.

The love of all makes fresh my heart, a fountain
ever springing.

It's waters flow through heaven and earth.

How can I keep from singing?

There was a wake at Walter Burley Griffin's Newman College. A screen was rigged up to show flickering footage of O'Flaherty marching arm in arm down Bourke Street with Dr. Jim Cairns, labor politicians, student and union leaders such as Ted Bull from the wharfies and Normie Gallagher from the Builders' Labourers. There was even film of student demonstrators singing Solidarity Forever as they bashed on the gates of Pentridge Prison and rare film of the 1971 Waterdale Road demonstrations near LaTrobe University where Makepeace himself had been arrested. It was a trip into bygone days when the world was young and hope was in the air. The Doors, Iron Butterfly, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and The Grateful Dead belted out as friends from yesteryear met up again.

'We'll miss Makepeace,' I said to Luke, James and Xavier, 'we'll not see the likes again.'

'New leaders are made and unmade all the time,' said James, 'that's what history's made of, new people, new ideas. Everything changes, rots away and is born anew.'

'Yeah, but everyone's so selfish and superficial

these days James,' I said, 'everyone's so on the make. We've forgotten how to give, how to lead and how to love. The greedy Hawke years, the compromised Keating years and amoral Howard years have bled the people dry. There's no trust or goodwill now. The nation is spiritually exhausted. It's a desert.'

'We're working to change it,' said Luke.

'Who's for the sauna?' said Xavier.

'Let's wash away our sins,' said James.

*

In recovery mode at the cottage Luke and I got around to the old perennial.

'There's this other book Luke, Christopher Isherwood's *My Disciple My Guru*. You've heard of Lisa Minelli and the film *Cabaret*?'

Luke nodded. 'Studied it at Saint Patrick's. What about it?'

'Isherwood was the English teacher in Berlin in 1931 of *Cabaret* fame. He lived in California. He was a devotee of Vedanta, a Hindu philosophy. Isherwood was homosexual. He knew all about this Jesus in India thing.'

'Back to that again are ya?' said Luke, 'yeah, maybe there's something in it. Don't go doin' the Catholic Church any favours. Ya don't owe it any. Did ya know that the National Civic Council, Archbishop Mannix and Bob Santamaria's vicious little outfit, persecuted Makepeace for opposing the war in Vietnam, being a communist and queer?'

I nodded. I'd known for years The Church persecuted those who thought differently, the Gnostic mystics, Copernicus, Galileo, Hans Kung. Us. The list was endless. It was all about control.

'Have ya heard of the Illuminati?' Luke asked. He'd read of the Illuminati when brushing up on Church history in his last year at Saint Patrick's. It's best to know the enemy well he thought. He was sharp as a tack. His Catholic education created contradiction and irony. He had a rich harvest.

'They're a secret society. I've heard of them. Why?'

'It means the enlightened ones. They were Gnostics. The Church hated them. They were free thinkers. They're still around.'

I was delighted. Conspiracy theories often seduce student intellectuals. Luke was losing his innocence.

'Ya could do with some enlightenment yaself Brian,' he told me, 'free yaself up like, a night at the clubs, sniff some snow and fuck yaself stupid. Give Xavier a ring. He's a good time boy,' he added facetiously. 'Get him to come up to the cottage. I'll look after him! Ha Ha! Ya should be writin' anyhow. Isn't that how ya sublimate sex?'

I looked into the brown eyes of the young man opposite. He knew me too well. He was teaching me now. I pursed my lips and held my tongue. He was right. Today's students needed inspiration. LaTrobe, my old University, had recently invited me to speak about my life and times. I demurred and turned them down. I owed the University nothing.

James told me of a publishing company that might be interested in a biography. I put it off. I created diversions. I referred them to James.

‘I don’t understand ya,’ Luke told me, ‘just do it.’

‘You do it Luke. I don’t want the limelight.’

‘It’s not about the limelight you silly dill,’ he said, ‘it’s about posterity. You owe it.’

I owe nothing!’ I retorted. I knew what held me back. It wasn’t all that sixties student revolutionary stuff. That was well-known and documented. No. It was recent stuff. I had sensitive material on today’s movers and shakers. But it needed work.

‘I’ll look at it Luke.’

‘Don’t look too long or you’ll be fuckin’ dead!’

I’d do it for those without power, without money, without hope. I’d do it for the dispossessed, for the great divide in this, the once ‘lucky country’.

‘I’ve bin doin’ some writin’meself,’ said Luke, ‘d’ya wanna hear it?’

‘Sure.’

‘It’s my pie in the sky list.’ Luke looked up from the number he was rolling and rummaged in his backpack.

*

‘A world community will emerge after the war between Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Jews, Palestinians and Christians will live together in one nation. Lines on maps in the Middle East will be re-drawn. The world community will turn and face the United States of America, demand it account for

itself and shame America into getting its act together.

The island of Timor will become one nation. So will the island of New Guinea. China and India will be dominant. China will give Tibet religious freedom and the Dalai Lama will return. Burma will be free. Ireland will be united.

Marijuana will be decriminalised. There'll be flax and hemp industries for oil, paper, cargo pants and fuel. Plastic bags will be so last century.

Universities will be dismantled because virtual reality will be the new reality.

The international monetary system will self-destruct. There'll be a restructure of the global monetary system. World debt will be abolished just as Keynes proposed at the Bretton-Woods Conference in 1944. We'll start from square one again.

Homosexuality will be celebrated.

There'll be a crisis of belief as deconstruction goes through a final catharsis. Language will have no meaning because meaning will have no language. Personal identity will be a tiny chip inserted under the skin at birth. We'll metamorphose to new homes in inter-galactic lightspace. We'll...'

'Isn't that where we are already?' I interrupted.

'Whadaya mean?' he asked, annoyed at having his dreams cut off at the pass.

'Inter-galactic space. We're in the middle of it right now. We always have been.'

'Never thought of it that way. Yeah.'

'As for language having no meaning, well, it ceased to have meaning years ago. Your wish list has already happened Luke.'

He grinned. ‘Not as stupid as ya look are ya!’ he said, ‘you’re thinkin’. ‘D’ya think it’s a bit discursive, ya know, rambling?’ Luke often trotted out new words. This week it was ‘discursive’.

‘No,’ I lied. Luke smiled to himself and returned to rolling the joint.

‘I was looking for that lecture Makepeace gave years ago,’ I said. ‘Melbourne University are interested in a seminar on Makepeace’ contribution to cultural studies. I thought I’d re-deliver Makepeace’ lecture. LaTrobe University want a retrospective on the radical student days. What do you think?’

‘Your call,’ said Luke.

‘Here it is! Makepeace’ speech! Want to hear it?’

‘Not just now.’ Luke took a deep toke and put on his headphones for Rufus Wainwright’s latest. .

I settled into the leather.

*

I’m delighted to share my ideas about where I come from and where I’m going.

My bread and butter has always been in the Arts and the Humanities. Interest in them arose from my interest in the human body. For homosexuals the body has special poignancy. A fascination with the culture of Greece and Rome and my own Catholic boyhood made the body iconoclastic. I was hooked.

Adolescence and fanatical obedience as a Roman Catholic combined to inflict immense psychological damage. That which I loved was that which I came to spurn. This experience wakened my interest in

the human body as an objective study. Simplistically then, but more complex later, this interest blossomed at University when I began to read writers such as Jean Genet, William Burroughs, Arthur Rimbaud, Edmund White, Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde.

I unwrapped my body from its religious cocoon. I turned my body into theatre. I put it to work. I adopted the Dionysian cult of the phallic. The hermetic world of Catholicism was gone. A new paradigm presented itself to me. The boy became a man. I struck a rich seam in a deep lode. My body became the focus of my identity, the abode of my life-force and my spirit. I was my own spaceship.

My search for identity hinged on how others perceived my body through speech, gestures, athleticism, acting and work. I used others as a looking-glass into my construction of reality.

I was affirmed in my identity as homosexual and sold my body to the world. All selling is prostitution and like all forms of prostitution my market was huge. The product was perfect, classic, subtle, subliminal. Narcissism was my religion.

Artists understood well before social scientists that the body is not just a material organism or mass of biota. It is a metamorphic vehicle. As a microcosm of the universe and a universe in itself, the body is a unique conscious metaphysical construct. In it lives, in each of us, the living, breathing spirit of all creation.

The seed of this creation, not surprisingly, is Hellenic and pagan and lies in the classic perception

of the male. It is captured by Michelangelo in his David and the mythology of Aphrodite and Hebe. The industrial revolution, photography, video and digital technology have all done their bit to turn this iconoclastic idolatry into mass-market culture. Hellenism, Rome, the Renaissance, Christianity, numerous persecutions and schools of art have all been factors in turning the body into a social construction, a perception, an image, an interpretation and a market-place. Or, as capitalism would have it, a product.

The study of the body as metaphoric vehicle has irresistible appeal because the body is code to the question: who am I? Society answers this question with a system of signs our bodies recognise. It does not surprise that semiotics has once again become so fashionable.

Evolution and survival depends on extension of human intelligence rather than on mere physical ability. Nevertheless, there is nostalgia for a more 'natural' existence. There is a yearning to be close to the earth, to be as one with tribal and peasant peoples. This is seen today in the phallic, primal rock guitarist and thump of nightclub music.

There'll always be a place for the narcissistic hedonist and its natural opposite, the stoic aesthete. Continued study of paganism is assured. Careers will be made.

My life is devoted to the 'cult' of the body. I enjoy wallowing in pagan fantasy. True, absence of a strict theoretical architecture in my paradigm displeases those committed to developing tight-arsed

theories. That's just too bad. I don't waste time developing belief systems to satisfy everyone. I leave that up to you, the social scientists, cultural studies theorists, social engineers and planners. All I do is sow the seed.

Nevertheless, I've been forced to impose discipline upon myself. I'm driven by a credo that I will find what I'm looking for and probably when I least expect it, a kind of serendipity. This approach has genesis in Friedrich Nietzsche who observed that 'What can be thought must certainly be fiction', a delightful approach. After all, is not truth stranger than fiction?

My direction for the future is a cavalcade of eclectic insights, insights all the more revealing for not having a theoretical grid.

Quis custodiet custodes? Who shall guard the guardians? Let no one stand sentry on your freedom. Be your own guard. Let freedom be your catchcry. Let freedom reign!

Richard Lovelace the English poet observed that stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage. In other words, never assume that you are not operating in a straight jacket. Don't fool yourself you are free. Julian Huxley pointed out that the brain does not create thought, it is merely an instrument that thought finds useful. Your body is metamorphosing continually and you are not what you were an instant ago. Thankyou.

*

‘Brilliant to the last!’ I declared to Luke who glanced at me through a cloud of smoke, ‘I’ll deliver it at the seminar.’

‘Your moment in the sun,’ said Luke, ‘and while ya on top have that trip to Ireland ya keep talkin’ about. Take a break. I am. I’m gunna visit Bindoon this vac if I get the money together.’

‘You’re right. I’ve been putting it off for years. All those blond, blue-eyed Irish boys. I’ll have a few days in Italy too.’

‘Now you’re talkin’, said Luke, ‘ah, it’s a Guinness you’ll be having in a Dublin pub to be sure. Do it.’ He thought of heaven by the Yarrowee when he’d have the cottage to himself. There’d be visits from Xavier and James. He’d recently moved in after his Mum moved back to Melbourne.

‘I might catch up with Wayne Peterson again. I think he finished up at Magdalen College in Oxford. Not sure. It’s been years. That’s Makepeace’ old College.’

‘Oscar Wilde’s too,’ said Luke, ‘who’s Wayne?’

‘Wayne Peterson? He’s an art historian I met years ago in New York. I had a few days with him in Cambridge years ago. We’ve lost contact but I’ll chase him up if he’s still around. He’s an ephephophile.’

‘A what?’

‘Look it up. The computer’s got a dictionary.’

Luke clicked from liberation movement sites, deep-green environment action and sex chatrooms to the dictionary.

‘That figures,’ he said with a wry grin.

*

A pea-soup fog lifted and morning had almost gone by the time the train pulled into Oxford. Magdalen had Wayne listed as a Fellow and I'd messaged. I felt guilty about making contact after so many years.

I stood waiting for the Porter at Magdalen to phone through. Minutes later Wayne appeared, twenty years older, portly and puffing. We shook hands then thought better of it and hugged. I needn't have worried. He seemed genuinely glad to see me.

'You remember Richard Toscano don't you?' he asked. My remembering was the key and all was forgiven. 'Richard's big in the New York art scene now. We see each other occasionally. I'm almost retired but busier than ever. What're your plans?'

'I want to visit Ireland. I'm only in England for a few days.'

'Excellent. I'll arrange a student-room for you.'

I told him I'd like to visit the Chapel because James had a distant relative from the English Civil War who'd been President of Magdalen and had the Chapel built.

'Really?' said Wayne raising an eyebrow, on guard for the ancient network so critical in 'getting on' in Oxford Colleges. 'What's his name?'

'Frewen.'

'Frewen? Unusual name. Seen it somewhere,' said Peterson thoughtfully, 'sounds old Saxon. Anyhow, let's get you settled first. You're my guest

at High Table. We've got a few hours. I'll grab the key from the Porter.'

'Sorry it's a bit spartan,' he said opening the door but the small room was fine by me. I dumped my bag. We did a circuit around the cloistered quad to the Chapel. It didn't take long to find the modest marble wall plaque.

'He was Chancellor of Oxford too,' said Wayne, 'but he's not buried here. What happened to him?'

'James told me the story. After the Civil War he became Archbishop of York. He's buried in York Minster.' I took a photo for James and sat on a pew for a few minutes musing over the remote family connection between James' family and my convict Irish branch. Wayne introduced me to the elderly College archivist in the Library, Thomas, who handed me a small, tattered, leather-bound, gold-tooled book.

'It's the best source for the College during the 1640s,' he told me in a voice shaky with age.

I found a quiet spot. It took a while to adjust to the calligraphy and old spelling but I was able to read about the College handing over College silver plate to Charles the First who'd taken shelter in the College when he was on the run from Oliver Cromwell's army. Charles had to flee the College and Cromwell sacked Frewen's newly built Chapel in retaliation. I took quick notes for James.

'A bloody period indeed,' Wayne said as we sat at High Table. We discussed the legacy of Makepeace O'Flaherty and Richard Toscano's career and didn't venture into Wayne's main inter-

est much at all, the art history of homoerotica. Instead, Wayne wanted to know all about my Australian friends. I told him about Luke.

‘You’re lucky to have someone. Richard and I don’t get to see each other much. College life is sexless in the current paranoid climate. All knives and daggers. I yearn for the good old days.’

He seemed old and lonely. I suggested he visit Australia.

‘Serious omission. I’ve not been to the antipodes. One day.’ For all the rich history and learning of Magdalen, I was glad to have what I had by the Yarrowee.

*

I was on a side street off O’Connell Street Dublin and couldn’t resist dropping into a bar called O’Flaherty’s for a quick pint of Guinness to toast Makepeace in his absence. The bar was quiet and dim. The proprietor, a cheery middle aged man, perhaps an O’Flaherty himself, looked up from *The Irish Times*.

‘Good morning sir. And what’ll it be then?’

I waited for the thick creamy brew to pour and settle. I searched into the far reaches of the bar to catch the watery blue eyes and melting smile of a young man sitting on a stool at the far end. I took my pint over and we got talking as people do in a pub. Nathaniel was an out of work lad doing very part-time studies in Modern Irish History at Trinity and was eighteen. One thing led to another so I sug-

gested that since I didn't know Dublin he might like to be my guide. He thought it over for a moment then slowly nodded and smiled.

'I'm visiting Ireland for the first time,' I explained, 'and want to get to the west coast, to Castleconnell in Limerick where my great grandfather was transported in 1848.'

'So that's where your people came from then?' Nathaniel asked, 'and what would your great grandfather's name be then?'

'Frewen.'

Nathaniel dwelt on the name. 'How would you spell it?'

I spelt it.

'Not a common name,' he said, 'it doesn't sound Irish. Have you got information about him? You'll need it.' A teasing twinkle played his blue eyes. 'It's easy to be fucked around with Irish ancestry,' he added.

I caught his drift. I'd heard stories about people returning to Ireland searching for family histories. They'd stumble into a bar and get talking, only to find their ancestors had been part of Cromwell's invasion in 1651 that had raped, pillaged and oppressed the Irish for centuries. That's how my family came to be in Ireland in the first place, in Cromwell's invading army. I had to be careful. Many's the one to finish up in the gutter with a bloody nose after an ignorant statement in an Irish pub. A man must know where he comes from before he knows where he's going.

I told Nathaniel the story of the Young Irishman

Rebellion of 1848 and how it was spurred by hatred for the English during the Great Famine. But Nathaniel was also well read about the period, better read, in fact, than I was.

‘What was your great grandfather’s role in it? Tell me the story. You wouldn’t want another pint would you?’ he asked.

‘No problem. Well, it was 1847 and William was a poor tenant farmer at Castleconnell by the Shannon River. One morning he was confronted by a man on the run from the police. He’d killed a farmer who’d thrown him off his tenancy.’

‘The evictions,’ said Nathaniel, ‘a shocking time it was.’

‘Well, he bailed William up and took refuge in William’s house for a few hours before the police turned up. The runner was executed. Great-grandfather William was found guilty of harbouring a fugitive and transported to Van Diemen’s Land for the term of his natural life. That was in 1848.’

‘So you’re returning as his great grandson to where it all happened? So there’s a trial then?’

‘I guess so. Why?’

‘Well, I think we should go to Dublin City Library and look it up in the old newspapers. We’ve got the year, 1848, so it’s just a matter of finding it.’

‘Let’s go,’ I said, ‘after we finish this one.’

‘1848, the year of revolutions,’ said Nathaniel as we walked, ‘the year Karl Marx published the Manifesto of the Communist Party.’

At Dublin City Library we went through The Limerick Chronicle and struck gold with a full

report of William's trial in 1848. We downloaded, printed and adjourned to O'Flaherty's...

William Frewen was placed at the bar, indicted for harbouring in his house at Newgarden, Castleconnell, County Limerick, William Ryan, a culprit sentenced to death for the murder of John Kelly.

The Chief Justice, addressing the prisoner, said: 'You have been found guilty of an offence which might be considered in a great degree the source of all the calamities and outrages which disgrace the country. As this is the first case of the kind that has been tried in this county, we might be inclined to deal leniently with you; but you have been found guilty of harbouring a man of so desperate a character, that as an example to others the court is bound to sentence you to transportation for the term of your natural life. This conviction we believe to be of more importance than any other at Commission in Ireland, for a salutary example of law and morals is now established in a light that cannot be misunderstood.'

On Monday at 12 o'clock, a troop of the Royal Dragoons, and two companies of the 92nd Highlanders were marched to the area before the Limerick County Court-House, by order of Colonel Sir Charles O'Donnell, in command of the district, assisted by Lieut.Col. Doyle, Adjutant General, for the purpose of escorting after sentence the convicts sentenced to transportation at the Special Commission. Of these criminals, twenty-five were

placed on jaunting cars, two in each, one handcuffed to the other, and guarded by two policemen on every vehicle, with carbines primed and loaded. Amongst the number was William Frewen, to be transported for life as accessory to murder. A vast crowd collected to behold the imposing cavalcade, which set off immediately for Dublin, accompanied by the Cavalry, and followed outside Clare Street by numerous friends and relatives of the convicts, who vainly strove to maintain the aspect of composure at the abrupt separation, but grief will have its way, and the mother, wife and sister were heard to lament the fate of their relatives.

‘Fascinating to be sure,’ said Nathaniel, ‘that’s real history. Not to return to Ireland for the term of his natural life! Well, I’m sure there were thousands like him. There you have it in black and white. Well, I think we should drink to your William. We’ll have another pint then, one for old William.’

It was more than a few pints by the time Nathaniel suggested we go upstairs to his room.

‘I didn’t know you were staying here,’ I said, ‘isn’t it expensive?’

‘Ordinarily yes, but I help out behind the bar and out the back. I play the banjo most nights when it gets busy. Danny’s the owner, he’s cool. We’ve got...how shall I put it...an arrangement.’

Nathaniel led the way upstairs to his barely furnished room and flopped onto the bed.

‘I’m pissed,’ I said. I sat on the only chair and that one was rickety.

‘You’re not used to the Guinness. You’ll be OK. I know just the thing. A cold shower. Now how more Catholic than that can you get! Go on! Go on! It’s down the corridor. Here’s a clean towel.’

I was in and out in five minutes, a new man. When I returned Nathaniel was in a black Chinese silk dressing gown embroidered with red, green and yellow dragons.

This was much better than austere Oxford.

*

Next morning we headed off for the rugged west coast. I settled into the soft leather upholstery of a Mercedes I impulsively hired at Nathaniel’s suggestion. It launched me into debit but I was unable to resist his plea.

‘I’ve always wanted to drive a Mercedes,’ Nathaniel enthused as he cleared the western outskirts of Dublin City for the west coast. I looked out at emerald fields, stone fences and white cottages. It was the Ireland of my dreaming, the Ireland of the thousand lovers that went into my making.

‘There’s much sport spent in the making of us,’ said Nathaniel uncannily reading my mind.

I smiled at him. ‘It’s the land of my ancestors Nathaniel. It’s not the land I come from. It’s not my home.’

My dreaming was under timeless blue sky that cupped the brown land of the Wimmera plains. It was the hot summer of an Australian boyhood and the poetry of John Shaw Neilson. It was great red

gums, the Wotjobaluk people and their spirits rising misty over Nhill water at sunrise.

‘What are you thinking? Share a thought lover boy,’ said Nathaniel.

The green fields, stone walls and spring daffodils ran along the road. I thought of last night in his room after the last drinkers had left. The pub door was bolted and Nathaniel had carefully placed his banjo back in its case. ‘Coming upstairs?’ he asked. I followed like a lamb.

‘Just thinking Nathaniel,’ I said, ‘all those men and women over hundreds of years, the Celts, the Vikings, the Saxons, the Puritans. I mean, we’re only here by a chance in infinity. Strange isn’t it, the chaos of human juxtaposition, yet connections are made and we’re born. It’s a triumph against the odds.’

‘Just enjoy yourself,’ he said, ‘just soak it up.’

My pleasure was silence. Fading lovers wavered in lightspace. I wanted to speak but smiled instead at Nathaniel’s naked youth in an upstairs room at O’Flaherty’s pub. I had a massive rush as Nathaniel suddenly planted the accelerator to pass a cattle truck.

The powerful Mercedes sped beside the Shannon towards Castleconnell. Wrong turns and a few questions to local farmers found a country lane. Amongst the ramshackles we sought a run down stone cottage. A cow bolted across the track. Nathaniel braked suddenly.

‘Fuckin’ cow!’ he cursed.

I had a lifetime in a moment.

Castleconnell was close. I could feel it. Stone walls of derelict cottages stood stark against the green. A man herded his cows.

‘I’ll ask him,’ said Nathaniel, lowering the driver’s window and waiting for the man and his cows to come by.

‘Would you know where Castleconnell is?’

‘Castleconnell you say? Yes, keep going,’ said the brown as a berry face.

‘We’re looking for a little place just near Castleconnell called Newgarden.’

‘But this is Newgarden. What name would you be looking for then?’ the querulous farmer asked.

‘Frewen.’

‘Frewen you say. Well, there used to be a lot of them around here. I can’t say that I know of any now. Years ago, right over there,’ he said pointing to stone walls and dilapidated outbuildings at the end of a cobbled lane. He prodded the green turf with a stick, wanting to be getting his cows along. ‘The man who’d know would be old Willie Frewen. He owns the place. He’d be the last of them around these parts. The only other ones are in the cemetery.’ The farmer allowed himself a lop-sided, barely perceptible smile that vanished almost as soon as I caught it. ‘There used to be a lot of them but they’ve died out. Fell on hard times they did. Willie lives next to the pub in Castleconnell. You would’ve passed it coming through. Well, I’d best be getting on with it.’

Willie wasn’t hard to find propped on a stool in the Castleconnell pub, an alert, wizened man in late

middle age.

‘No one’s lived in the old cottages for years. They were left to me, what was left of them. They were destroyed during the Famine in the 1840s, the evictions you know. The cows have been there ever since. I’m too old to bother with it now.’ He paused. ‘So, we’re related then.’

I nodded. Silence fell. Willie took a long drink, licked the cream off his grey moustache and peered at me closely.

‘Tell Willie the story,’ said Nathaniel breaking the quiet.

‘Let’s have another pint all around then,’ I offered. Over Limerick’s finest we visited General Ireton’s siege of the City of Limerick in 1651, the Frewen land grab, the Famine of the 1840s and the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848.

Four days in Ireland came to an end. Back in Dublin we reluctantly parted with the Mercedes, had Irish stew and a few pints at O’Flaherty’s. We both sat looking at each other waiting for goodbye.

*

It’d been twenty years since I’d been to Italy, far too long an absence for a man who’d promised to visit once a year. I wanted to re-visit familiar places, the Vatican apartments, Forum, Pantheon, Appian Way, the Gate of Saint Sebastian, Saint John Lateran and Borghese Gardens. I managed a lot in four days. I’d love to live in Rome and wondered why I didn’t. I could sell the cottage and ‘do it’ as

Luke kept telling me. I took the train to the North via Milan, skirted Lake Como and took a bus to Bormio, a little village in the Alps where Lorenza Pola met me. Lorenza was the last Pola in the village from which Dad's father emigrated to Australia in the 1860s. We had a happy day visiting relatives. My Italian was terribly rusty but 'abbastanza'.

*

Luke girded his loins and entered the dim, virtual world of the Club. He'd decided to call into the Club after coming to Melbourne with Xavier and James who'd spent the weekend at the cottage. He'd found the cottage lonely after a few days exhilaration playing music as loud as he liked. He'd invited James and Xavier up. James still lived in Ormond. 'It has its benefits,' he said with a sly smile. He was doing Honours with a thesis on the Australian radical student movement in the sixties. I was his 'case study'. Xavier was well into his first year of Arts/Law and happy at Newman College. They often invited each other to each other's Colleges for evening meals where Luke was also an occasional visitor.

The three decided on an Abba night at the Peel but by two o'clock Luke had had enough of Super Trooper, Dancing Queen and gropings in the bullpen upstairs.

'I'm headin' to the Club,' he told them.

'See you there later,' said Xavier cheerily, looking sharp in a red t-shirt cut at the shoulders, baggie

denims and blue fireman's braces. James, tall and muscled after a gruelling gym program, shuffled smoothly around the dance floor, gold-rimmed spectacles glinting in strobes and lasers.

It was near closing time at the Club and quiet as Luke meditatively smoked a joint in the basement behind the oil drums. He thought of me in Europe and yearned to travel. One day he told himself he'd have London, New York, Paris, Rome, Berlin and Dublin at his doorstep. He'd go to India and follow the journey Jesus took through the ancient cities. He'd live the life he dreamt. He'd climb that mountain, stand on its glittering summit, survey the arid desert of a former life and be with the god-head. He smiled at the sex he had with James and Xavier. He was at the beginning of his beginning. He knew he had what I no longer had. Time.

Someone was coming down the concrete steps to the basement and in the dimness a boy's black eyes met his. Luke took his time with the boy as he slowly fucked the Latino boy with the black eyes over an oil drum.

The boy was gone. He quietly leant against the drum and lit another joint. He had no great nostrum to resolve all the world's problems on the websites he monitored. There was no end to the protests and rallies he went to in Melbourne for West Papuans and Palestinians. Resolution lay in the transformation of the human spirit, a new spiritual consciousness. Perhaps it'll never happen he thought. A quiet fear, the panic of personal failure, washed over him but left as quickly as it came. I'm doin' my bit he

told himself in the darkness. I'm not givin' up.

He had the fired passion of eighteen years, a revolutionary at the barricades of cyberspace. He'd burn out, not fade away. He was a lightspace rebel. He stubbed the spent joint and stumbled upstairs to the front bar and was in the middle of fetching a coffee when Xavier and James turned up. The night was young. He was young.

*

He walked up the long slope from the Yarrowee beneath shading elms towards the cottage. He fumbled for the brass keys I'd given him, opened the back door to its silence and put on the jug for a quiet cup of Earl Grey.

It'd been a long night. He sat himself at the kitchen table, sipped his tea, rolled a joint, lit up and took a deep toke. A great night he chuckled to himself, all that fucking. Tiredness washed over him. Time to crash.

He rose late and studied his hard-on as he showed. I'll save it he decided, thinking of the mad general in Kubrick's Doctor Strangelove who saved his 'precious bodily fluids'. Lonesome wanks weren't his style. Vaughan Williams' Lark Ascending played full blast as he settled into strong black coffee. He relaxed with Robert Hughes' The Fatal Shore, the graphic account of convict days of Tasmania I'd recommended he read. For lighter entertainment, Alan Hollinghurst's The Swimming Pool Library. His latest one, The Line of Beauty lay

waiting. Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys*, set during the Dublin rising of 1916 looked enticing. There were DVDs of Pasolini, Bertolucci, Spike Lee and Visconti.

In Hughes' pages he visited Hell's Gates on the west coast of Tasmania, convict ruins on Sarah Island with tiger snakes and the lash and was carried to Point Puer by blue-sky boys on slicks of fire. He wondered about the curious nature of those lives in the 1820s in wild Tasmania. He thought of his own life, its elusive ecstasy, its solace just beyond purchase. In the cottage quiet he wondered where he was in life. He stared at his unfinished essay on environmental management he'd been working on as a very part time first year student at University.

In late afternoon he took a long walk along the Yarrowee up to Lake Wendouree to call in on Jennifer, a mutual friend. He couldn't stay long or get too stoned because he had to front with Cor Thirteen at the Lounge that night.

'I'd like to be a mystic,' he said to Jennifer as they sat at the kitchen table.

'It's not something that has a career path Luke,' said the savvy youth-worker.

'Perhaps in another life, in a medieval monastery maybe, a Jesuit or a Benedictine.'

'Priests aren't mystics Luke, they're property managers!' she said with a toss of her head, 'besides, I thought you were anti-religion.'

'I am. I hate religion. I'm spiritual.'

*

He woke up on the chesterfield with Cor Thirteen banging in his head. His mates in the band were straight and his invite to come back to the cottage had no ulterior motive, just a chance for everyone to chill out after the gig. After they'd gone he smoked the last of a joint, made a cup of lemon herbal tea and turned on the computer. When he checked the time again pink clouds tinted Mount Pleasant. He bombed out on the leather.

He'd written about a teenager, perhaps himself, searching for meaning in an alien world, a world that did not satisfy the ascetic queer in him.

In the blue room of the cottage he lay on the chesterfield and fancied over what it would be like to be an eighteen-year-old contemplative in a medieval monastery. He listened to New Dimensions, a radio program out of San Francisco, a program about Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk. San Francisco! He'd like to be there, at the New Leland Hotel on Polk Street, San Francisco, the hotel I'd told him about, where cute boys pretended to play gaudy pinball machines as they touted for trade. I'm a priest of sleaze he thought. He lay quiet and still. He removed toxic thoughts and negativities and merged with the Brahman. He imagined himself enlightened. Reality is manufactured, an illusion, nothing more nothing less, literally nothing, a dream that comes and is gone. He was concentrated energy, a quantum speed of light shot into his Yarrowee dreaming.

I will not age. I will not die.

But he knew he would die one day. He knew that

many young men think they know it all, that they spend the rest of their lives finding out they don't.

He knew he had to make that journey.

*

'Your stuff's attracting interest,' I said to Luke. It was my first night back. I was trying to sort an incredible mix-up of mail accrued from three weeks away.

'I've got someone at every University in Australia,' said Luke, 'a lot of it's community politics, mainly local environment action. There's overseas as well, from West Papua, the Middle East, Africa, South America, West Timor. The Australian Union of Students acts as a clearinghouse. The Union's a lot more radical now. It's been reorganised.'

'Isn't James running for President this year?' I asked.

'Yep. He wants me to help run his campaign. Whadaya think?'

'Couldn't think of a better person. Make sure you record your involvement Luke, you might want to write about it.'

They'd both be shining beacons, lights on the hill for a new generation of student revolutionaries. The masses had stirred in the aftermath of legislation enforcing voluntary union membership. The Conservatives, Peter Costello, Michael Kroger, Tony Abbott, John Howard and Brendan Nelson had done their best to destroy the Union. They'd

been at it since the Union's glory days in the seventies when I was on the Union Executive. It had taken thirty years to finally ram the Bill through the Senate. But the Conservatives' joy backfired.

The political hegemony of the Conservatives began to crumble. It was the beginning of the end for the entrenched Australian party political structure. It had ceased to serve the people. Independent radical politicians were emerging in parliaments. Homes, workplaces and local neighbourhoods became active. Young people, old people, all people, had had enough of the pigs at the trough. Old-timers recalled the revolutionary spirit and times of the late sixties and early seventies. It was time again.

'This is what it was like in the sixties,' I said as I read *Intelligence*, a newsletter Luke and his student friends put out.

'There's nasty stuff,' I added, 'neo-Nazi traffic. I suspect ASIO reads your newsletter Luke.'

'Surely not!' Luke mocked. 'We know we're monitored, downloaded and hacked. We'd be disappointed if they didn't. It's the clever dicks hiring first-rate hackers, they're the problem. We hafta best 'em. We've got excellent vetting when we need it. If we go to prison we'll become a cause celebre.'

'Not something I'd wish on you Luke. Perhaps I taught you too well.'

'Ready?' said Luke, a cheeky grin on his dial, 'one, two, three...'

The Internationale.

'The people's flag is deepest red. It is a shroud for martyred dead. So wave the scarlet standard

high. Beneath the flag we'll live or die. Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer we'll keep the red flag flying here.'

We laughed and gave each other fives.

*

Parliaments were stormed and Ministers besieged by angry crowds of students as anarchy whiffed the air. ASIO received an injection of funds and dusted off its files as batons bashed on skulls, horses reared and young blood spilt and stained the wattle.

The great doors of the establishment crashed open and student revolutionaries fucked on Speakers' Chairs in gilded chambers as the great minds of the nation contended in chaos. Red and black were the colours and lightning blue the revelation as wonderboys and wondergirls on golden stars became angel warriors for the revolution.

Political instability bedevilled what had been one of the world's most stable democracies. The voting public were disenchanted with Australia's corrupted political parties. A groundswell of grassroot agitation against the established political hegemony tapped the deep lode of Australian anti-authoritarianism. That one seemingly unshakeable pillar of Australian life, the stability of its political institutions, was challenged in the greatest political market-place of all, the streets of Australian cities. Demonstrations attracted the disenfranchised, unemployed, debt-ridden students, disaffected youth and a struggling, frightened, disillusioned

middle class. Even the boring rich, who did not, could not yet sought to, finally understood the deep passing cancer of their own unhappiness. The oligarchy split apart like a ruptured watermelon.

The Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency quietly let the Australian Intelligence and Security Organization and The Office of National Assessments know they were not happy. Apple carts were being upset. Corporate boardrooms were uneasy. Vested interests were questioned. It was a crisis of legitimacy.

‘We’re sure you know what to do. Be discreet. No cock-ups.’

Operatives shuddered to remember Christopher Boyce was still doing time over the trouble with the former Governor-general of Australia, John Kerr. Boyce had intercepted traffic between Kerr and the CIA during the overthrow of the Australian Government way back in 1975. The story had been captured in the film *The Falcon And The Snowman*. The Agencies didn’t want slip-ups. Friends were hard to find in a friendless world.

Luke and I quietly watched the traffic.

‘They’re trying to dig up dirt on James. They’re putting it on the Union website,’ said Luke, ‘check this out.’

‘Rumour Mill: Is it true a certain contender for the top job and long-time Ormond College hack has his fingers in the pie at the University of Melbourne Student Union?’

‘Getting nasty,’ I said, ‘well, two can play that game. Who writes this?’

‘One of the Union’s research officers in Canberra. That’s where the national office of the Union is. The heavies don’t want James to get in even though he’s got the numbers at the next annual conference. His name’s Adam Nicholson. He’s queer but very right wing. He hates James. He doesn’t support liberation movements or deepgreen politics. He says students should pay full fees in the marketplace. He’s promoting some dickhead from Queensland for President so he can run him behind the scenes.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘what’s the goss on Nicholson?’

Luke thought for a moment. ‘Well, I did hear he was into under-age boys. A friend of James at Sydney University saw him at the Wall in Sydney last year chatting up a very young rentboy. There’s stories about him like that.’

‘OK,’ I said, ‘a little snippet in Intelligence might do the trick. Make it vague so you don’t get sued, something like ‘Who’s been a silly little boy then? A certain National Union research officer seen lately near a certain Wall chatting up little boys. Careful, careful...’ I think your Adam Nicholson will get the message.’

Luke typed away.

‘By the way Luke, when all of this student politics is over would you like to go to Western Australia? You said you wanted to. I’ve always wanted to drive over the Nullarbor. We could visit Bindoon where your father was and that Benedictine monastery at New Norcia. Did you ever track your Dad down?’

‘No, Mum had an old number but it was out. She thought he might even be dead. She doesn’t know. Yeah, cool, I’d love to go west.’

*

Jack Redden was amused to be contacted by the Special Operations Unit of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization. He’d been a ‘sleeper’ for thirty years and lived comfortably enough in a caravan park on the banks of the Murray River as he slowly went crazy. He hadn’t been active since the salad days of the Maoists at LaTrobe and Worker Student Alliance days of Albert Langer and Michael Hyde at Monash. He was particularly proud of the role he’d played in tracking down Ken White over the Molotov cocktail attack on Honeywell in St. Kilda. Redden had tagged Maoist ratbags, filed reports to ASIO, dobbed them in to local police and carefully monitored who was who at the anti-Springbok protests in 1971. Halcyon days to be sure. In the end though it was the bottle and dope that won. He was pensioned off.

In my case he’d tipped off the Victorian Special Branch to go to Nhill in 1972 where I’d been visiting my parents. I’d been dropping a lot of LSD. I needed to get away. There was a good chance I’d be nabbed. I was sick of being on the run. I needed a break. That’s when I got caught.

‘Put him away good and proper,’ Redden muttered humourlessly to himself, ‘so long ago and just like yesterday.’

And now he was being reactivated. There was no uncertainty about the message. The Unit had a list of names at the centre of a conspiracy with potential to spark revolutionary change to the Australian political landscape.

‘There’s lots of fellow travellers,’ Redden’s senior in Canberra briefed, ‘but we just want to knock out the engine-room. Kill the mother, the children starve. Know what I mean? It’s about stopping the Australian Union of Students takeover. We can only give you temporary reactivation because of your, well, situation, but you’ve got solid background knowledge. They’re only to be frightened, not eliminated, just enough to get the message. Is that clear Jack?’

Discretion was critical. There were to be no repeats of the Hilton Hotel bomb fiasco in Sydney in the 1980s. Jack remembered that one. The furore when word got around that ASIO planted bombs meant to be found before they detonated. There was a communication breakdown and bombs blew away two garbage collectors. ASIO tried unsuccessfully to blame it on the Ananda Marga religious group but everyone knew the truth. It was Jack’s last hurrah. He retired early to a caravan park by the Murray where he could discreetly score his weekly ounce of dope. This one should be a laugh.

‘Just one thing Jack. We don’t want to know.’

A sense of fun pushed Redden to ring my number. He pretended to be someone asking for a donation to the National Heart Foundation. He knew that voice, the voice he’d last heard at a mass student

meeting in 1972. Unmistakeable. I'd urged hundreds of chanting students into the University administration building and stopped the University from functioning for three days. The University and Hangman Bolte the Premier had to act. Redden was in Myers' office when the Premier rang.

'He's not even supposed to be on the bloody campus!' Bolte screamed into Myers' ear. 'We're applying for a warrant for his arrest. We're putting a stop to these red ragers. You can't control them so we're going to do it.'

'They're very difficult Premier. Whatever you think best...'

Enraged, Bolte slammed down the receiver.

Redden's viscera stirred at the memory. He had an erection for the first time in years. He slipped his mobile into his pocket.

*

Travelling to Western Australia nestled with me since the story of Bindoon broke in the media. I needed a break and so did Luke. It'd be time out for both of us. My mentor role for Luke was over and he was at last getting serious about studying environmental management. Setting off in a panel van had strong iconic appeal, a classic rite of passage, go west young man in a Holden panel van, quintessentially Australian. The National Student Conference was over and James was elected in a close run ballot with mud flying in all directions. Blood was on the floor. It wasn't James' blood. The

candidates' speech won it for him. It was a stunning performance to delegates in Union Hall at Melbourne University. A standing ovation. Luke and Xavier jumped to their feet.

'It was fantastic,' Luke told me, 'everyone was cheering.'

I smiled. 'I remember when I stood for election in 1974. It wasn't me they cheered, it was 'Macca' Macdonald. I got done like a Sunday roast. It was my last hurrah in student politics. I'm happy for James,' I told Luke, 'he'll make a fine student leader.'

'He wants me to be the Union's Environment Research Officer. What do you think?'

'Go for it Luke. It's your big chance to do something about all those causes you keep on about. James and Xavier haven't been up to Ballarat for a while?'

'No, they're flat out. If I get this job in the Union I'll be based in the Secretariat in Canberra with James.'

'It'll be great experience for you.' The fledgling was leaving the nest.

'There's a copy of James' speech on the Union site,' said Luke, 'check it out.'

'I'll do that Luke.' I remembered a glittering evening thirty years ago as I climbed the marble staircase at the George Hotel, St. Kilda. Gary Foley, Dennis Walker, Bobbi Sykes and Bruce McGuinness were coming down the stairs. 'Who's just got out of prison then?' Gary said to me, laughing at my Pentridge Prison Special Cut. As

Germaine Greer said in *Whitefella Jump Up*, the aborigines have been trying to civilise us for two hundred years and Gary taught me to laugh at myself.

I opened James' speech.

*

'I propose a new Australian Union of Students.

The Voluntary Student Union legislation means that the National Union of Students is no longer viable. It must be reorganised. It's time to rebuild a radical and progressive Australian Union. The name, Australian Union of Students, is the name of a Union which came to an end in 1984. This radical Union had radical policies for women, the environment, education, homosexuals, social justice and equal opportunity. I want to recapture that radical spirit, the spirit of Save the Franklin River, the fight for homosexual rights and equal access to education. I call on students to form a new Australian Union of Students. We'll start from scratch. It's been done before. It's time to do it again. We'll be the vanguard of a new student movement. Today's students are poor and debt-ridden. It's time to fight for a fair deal, a new deal. It's time to fight for all Australian students, irrespective of race, creed, sexuality and gender.

The AUS in the early seventies led the way for peace in Vietnam. A new Union will today lead the way for an independent Australia free from the shackles of the United States.

Our fight has a powerful history. The first Universities, the sandstone universities, came together in 1937 to form the first student Union. This Union fought against fascism, book censorship and the White Australia Policy. This Union became the Australian Union of Students in 1971. It led the fight against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War and conscription. It led the campaign for land rights for Australia's indigenous peoples. It pioneered the green, women's and queer movements. The AUS folded in 1984 after a bitter campaign by the Australian Liberal Students' Federation to destroy it. The Fraser Federal Government bankrolled that campaign.

A hallmark of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1974 was free education. This was destroyed by the Hawke ALP Government in 1988. This was due to not having a strong organised national voice. The National Union of Students was formed in 1987.

Today this Union has seventy member campuses and 650,000 members. On 28 April 2005, tens of thousands of these members marched to protest against the student union legislation of the Conservative Government. The Government wants to destroy the progressive voice of Australian students. The Conservative Governments of Fraser and Howard have long sought to bring the Union down.

When the old AUS ended in 1984 it marked the end of an era. In the following three years without a union, the Hawke Government abolished free education and introduced fees. The new National Union of Students formed in 1987 suffered tough financial

times. It had less than half the revenue of the old AUS. After a long battle against the Howard Government and its Ministers Costello, Nelson and Abbott, voluntary student unionism became law. We have to start again. This is the reality. My job will be to rebuild a strong Australian student union for all Australian students. Let's have a new Australian Union of Students!'

*

James slew them with that one I thought. I closed the page and wondered how he'd perform in today's climate of the politics of fear and terrorist paranoia. Would he be strong enough in an Australia where 'the economy' was so narrowly defined? Would he be able to convince students they weren't commodities, economic units, products and market targets? He had a tough job ahead of him but if anyone could do it he could. He had Luke and Xavier to help him. They'd rattle the can. Ideological battles are what it's all about. History is about the battle of ideas.

*

Luke and I intended to visit two places, Bindoon and the Benedictine monastery at New Norcia. It was part of that thirst for monastic existence I've always had, my thwarted rampant sexuality and the homophobia of the Catholic Church. For Luke, it held the shadow of his father's past.

'I'm buying another panel van,' I told Luke over

cereal one morning, ‘just a HZ Holden like the last one that got torched. It’ll get us across to the West. We can sleep in the back. I think I’ve found a possibility in The Ballarat Courier.’

‘The back of the van huh?’ said Luke staring blankly at me, the full impact of our trip beginning to dawn.

‘Yep,’ I said looking at him stare for stare. Luke returned to his Coco-Pops and played it with his spoon.

‘Promise you won’t pounce on me,’ he said forcing himself to stop a grin.

‘Don’t be silly Luke, you’re old enough to take care of yourself.’ And he was. His life had picked with his political success. At the Rainbow Festival in Daylesford the previous week he’d fucked himself stupid in that exquisite rush that arrives when youth scents the prescience of power. I knew I wouldn’t have to do anything. He’d make the moves.

The van I bought had a few dents but the engine was sound and didn’t burn oil. I had it checked out by the RACV before handing over eight hundred dollars to the hoon I bought it from. The RACV declared it roadworthy but advised me to take a spare fanbelt, top and bottom radiator hoses, head gasket, two good spare tyres, water and oil, ‘just in case’. Luke helped me drag out a spare mattress from the shed.

‘Seen a bit of work this one,’ Luke teased as we pushed it into the back of the van.

I contacted a Brother O’Connor at Bindoon and a

Father Spinoza at New Norcia. Both monasteries received visitors, accustomed to putting the welcome mat out for those seeking retreat from the secular, frenetic life of the ‘outside world’.

‘I’ll take the laptop to keep in touch with James and Xavier,’ said Luke.

‘Who’ll look after the cottage?’ I worried.

‘What about Daniel?’ Luke suggested, ‘he’s still over at the old factory. He’ll look after it. And James and Xavier might take a few days off.’

‘I’ll have a few friends around before we head off,’ I said.

‘Cool. I’ll invite Daniel.’

I’d made good friends in Ballarat over the years: Raymond D’Arcy, Michael Nichols, Ian Charleson, Paul Auchettel, Andrew Elksnis, Michael Ford and Alison Smith. I wanted thank them.

*

And so it was. Luke, the panel van and me.

South of the vast Nullarbor Plain in Western Australia along the Great Australian Bight between Esperance and Albany are some of the most magnificent limestone cliffs in the world. I turned off the main highway along a dirt track and followed the edge of the cliff. We were metres from a sheer drop a hundred metres below where The Great Southern Ocean crashed onto glistening black rocks.

‘Check out the view Luke,’ I said. Luke looked up from his laptop.

‘Fuck!’

I wondered whether the lean, bronzed stud we'd chatted up in the Esperance Hotel the previous night would be at The Rock, a solitary outcrop of stone jutting from the flat cliff-top. The Rock loomed ahead. A swirl of dust billowed ahead. A vehicle was approaching. The track was badly corrugated. The old van shuddered as I veered. Either the oncoming vehicle or I would have to give way.

'The prick's going hell for leather,' I said, 'the mad bastard's headed straight for us! Fuckin' hell!'

I braked but too late. Luke's half made joint and laptop flew up in the air as the van jumped the track. The utility flew past, giving way at the last instant. It disappeared into the never-never in a cloud of dust.

I had no-where to go. The van jumped the track and finished metres from the edge of the cliff. The dark blue Great Southern Ocean swirled below. We sat frozen with shock.

'You OK Luke?'

'Think so,' said Luke softly, 'what a stupid fuck!'

We got out and sat on The Rock. Blue sky met blue Great Southern Ocean. A fiery orange sun sank on the horizon where the two blues met. I sat transfixed as evening descended, blues darkened, shifted and merged, closed and opened. The setting sun tinged blue clouds with gold.

'They look like angels don't they?' said Luke breaking the silence.

'I was just thinking that Luke,' I said. Blue-gold cloud angels played magenta into our souls as we gazed into the face of what might have been god.

‘I think I’m still in shock,’ said Luke, ‘I’m shaking.’

‘You’re just cold. I put my arm around his shoulders.’ But was somewhere else listening to a different voice, a ‘different drummer’.

‘You are needed Luke. You have been in training for this assignment for lifetimes. Your past has been a preparation. All you need to know is within. We have come to awaken the knowledge that is already within you. Go now to where you are going.’

He came out of it when he felt something touching his face. Gentle flicks from the wings of large brown desert moths brushed his skin. Returning to the world of three dimensions he knew he’d never be the same again.

‘Wow! That was totally weird,’ he said.

‘What was Luke?’ I looked at him. His face was shining. ‘You look as if you’ve had a vision.’

‘I have.’

Cold desert night air nipped our flesh. Luke got to his feet in the starlit blackness.

The undercarriage hadn’t been damaged and we got on our way. The crazy yobbo banked into memory as just another red-necked hoon.

It took three more days to get to Bindoon because we did King’s Park beat in Perth. We shared a willing youth over a park bench under starlit theatre. Rough sex in hot summer air.

‘I’m Ricardo. Rick to me mates. Where’ya from?’

‘Victoria,’ said Luke, ‘we’re going to Bindoon and New Norcia.’

‘I wanna visit New Norcia,’ said Rick, ‘a guy told me about it. It’s not far from Bindoon on the Northern Highway.’

Luke and I looked at each other then at Rick. I toyed with offering Rick a lift but it was Luke who grasped the nettle.

‘Why don’t ya come with us?’ Luke suggested, ‘whadaya think Brian?’

I couldn’t say no. We’d just fucked him.

We picked up his bag at the refuge Ricardo was staying at and got onto the Northern highway. We listened to Rufus Wainwright, Emmy Lou Harris and Nina Simone. I wondered whether we’d done the right thing in telling Rick we were off to Bindoon and New Norcia but I lusted over his delicious little arse so that was that. I wasn’t one to shut the door by closing off an account, Rick’s bare legs warm against mine as we left Perth behind.

I wanted peace and quiet at Bindoon. I had a shaky strategy to tip the scales. I’d built a database of radical true believers for a sustainable, new world. An alliance was already gathering and not only in Australia. In England, Tony Benn, James Lovelock and Richard Dawkins sowed the seed for revolutionary change in a series of startling lectures at Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics. In America the economy was shaky. At any time the Saudis and Chinese could pull foreign reserves held in American bonds and go for Euros. A friend worked in the Royal Saudi Bank. A mate from university days worked as a foreign exchange dealer in Peking. Massive loan defaults in the

American sub-prime market were called in. Time to pull the plug. Americans emerged from post-Bush disillusionment and fear. They demanded radical solutions, inspired by Shelby Spong, Al Gore and Barack Obama. In Australia, academics such as Tim Flannery inspired young readers with *The Weathermakers*. Peter Garrett and Bob Brown spoke out in Parliament. Writers such as Richard Flanagan provided withering critique. Peter Carey, David Malouf and Tim Winton raised consciousness.

Change was possible. The three of us stood on the grand pillared portico of the Brothers' monastery at Bindoon shaded by giant date palms. I sensed a karmic wheel come full circle.

Luke spent most of his time on his laptop emailing James, Xavier and contacting friends. My wobbly strategy formed up, a virtual gathering of radical progressive forces within the student and union movements to inspire the young and not so young. Armed with hope and a radical political agenda we could sweep to power.

'I'm coming back here after I visit New Norcia,' said Rick. I didn't ask Rick too much about why he was getting the bus to New Norcia but had gathered in asides from Luke that he had an 'arrangement' with one of the monks.

'So this is where Dad spent his boyhood,' Luke whispered. We looked over the date palms, spiky black silhouettes against tangerine sunset. His eyes welled with tears. We put our arms around each other's shoulders.

‘I shoulda given this to you earlier,’ he said, ‘but I’ve been busy on a student/worker alliance program. Daniel said somethin’ about a guy hangin’ around the cottage. There’s a number ya hafta ring.’

I stubbed out a spent joint, took Luke’s offered mobile and keyed the number on the crumpled piece of notepaper. Rings. ‘Next time you’re a dead man.’

‘What the fuck!’ I muttered. I pressed redial.

‘Next time you’re a dead man.’

Recorded. Maybe Daniel or Luke got the number wrong.

‘What’s up?’ Luke asked.

‘Some weird guy. You sure you got the number right? Maybe Daniel got it wrong.’

I lay awake in the van thinking about it then sat bolt upright. Luke grunted in deep sleep. If that number’s right, if there is a ‘next time’, what was the first time? Memory of almost dropping into the Great Southern Ocean bounced back. I broke into the coldest sweat since being fucked senseless in Pentridge Prison.

I got hold of Directory Assistance.

‘Sorry sir, that number’s been disconnected.’

I dialled again. Sure enough. Hope of originating the message faded. I had a long shot. I rang Chris Grelli in Sydney, a friend from Woolloomooloo days who worked in Directory Assistance. It took a while to track him down.

‘Talk about a blast from the past,’ said Chris, ‘look mate, that number’s been disconnected but only two hours ago according to my screen. Classified. National security. Not my territory mate.’

Can't trace it. It's locked. Not getting up to your old tricks are you?' he laughed.

'Not as far as I know,' I said, 'must be a joke or a nutter. Maybe I'm going nuts.'

There was no mistake and I wasn't going nuts. The eye-candy in the Esperance pub we'd arranged to meet at The Rock wasn't imagination either and there was some weirdo stalking Daniel at the cottage. Someone was trying to frighten the shit out of us. I phoned Daniel at the cottage. No answer.

'When was the last time you heard from Daniel?'

'Yesterday. Why?'

'Just checking. What about James?'

'The same. Yesterday afternoon. Daniel said that guy's still hangin' around. What's wrong?'

'Someone's trying to scare us. We'll start for Ballarat in the morning Luke.'

'Fine. Been great but.'

We'd stayed at Bindoon and New Norcia longer than planned. It was a convenient bolthole to play grand engineer and muckraker. My data consisted of an address list and a warehouse of material gleaned over years of judicious reading of The Financial Review, Who's Who, sifted hot gossip from roaming Internet blogs and invaluable bits and pieces dropped by hundreds of lovers in languorous talk after sex and a call in of past favours. Priceless.

'You can have the pleasure Luke,' I said, 'here's the address list. This is what's to be sent.' Luke was in his element and worked faster than I could follow. A mobile and email was my limit.

'Fuck! Where'd ya get all this stuff?' said Luke.

Luke sank back on the mattress in the van parked under the ancient oak tree in the courtyard of the Benedictine monastery at New Norcia. He thought of the task the angels had given him. He remembered the Great Southern Ocean when blue light streaked with gold carried him into lightspace. I stared at him. His hands shook with electromagnetic force. Sent.

I rolled a fat joint.

‘I’ve been wanting to send that stuff for years,’ I said, ‘it was the right time.’

Did Upton Sinclair feel like this when *The Jungle* hit the streets, his novel about disgusting conditions in the Chicago meat industry? Did Bernstein and Woodward have the same feeling with Watergate? Perhaps Rachel Carson had the same reaction after publishing *Silent Spring* in 1962, when she hit the filthy chemical industry, questioned humanity’s faith in ‘technological progress’ and set the stage for the environment movement?

I came to my senses. My contribution was miniscule. But in days and weeks to come national media cranked up, editors checked, double-checked and rang lawyers ‘just to make sure’. Untouchables were tipped off. Scales tipped, scandal whiffed, questions were asked in Parliaments, words were said in boardrooms and councils. What about commissions for politicians securing military contracts from the United States? What about Halliburton and Blackwater? What about Afghanistan heroin? Who made paid the Iraqi official? Why did politicians duck for cover and not seek pre-selection ‘for fami-

ly reasons'. Boy-sex scandals smashed tabloid and broadsheet records. Would the Government fall at the next Federal election? Who was under-cover for the CIA?

People rushed to judgement.

I thought of Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830) who'd founded Illuminati. His secret mission was to free humanity from oppression and delusion. I did my bit.

From judgements would spring civilised notions of decency, compassion and respect. Spirituality and community revived. There'd be a cleansing, a washing over, a new beginning as veils lifted. The sleeping libraries of our minds would open to multi-dimensional worlds, other universes and rainbows of alternative realities. Icons would tumble, new ones arise. Were we operating on the right paradigm? Was love my intention? Do I have integrity? Am I fucking the right person? The right gender? Am I embracing the feminine within? All potentials existed. We'd been duped. Ugly reality evaporated. The world community willed it. Static flesh and bones no longer stalked the earth. Avatars vibrated with energy. They wandered the nations. A new language drew us into the living light. Our energy became a single pulsating organism.

'Matter is simply light that has been trapped,' I suggested to Father Spinoza over Sunday roast in the Monastery dining hall. Matter, this reality of ours, ceases to exist as the only reality when we realise the true nature of matter and light.'

Father Spinoza smiled indulgently.

‘More lamb Luke?’ he asked, slicing off succulent slices with a huge carving knife and passing them to Luke. The learned priest took his time before answering.

‘We each have our own way of getting there,’ smiled the good monk, ‘for each of us there is a key. For me, life is only a dream, an illusion.’

Luke and I looked across the table at each other. What we had going was no illusion. Not in the back of the panel van anyhow! The quiet monastery cloisters of Bindoon and New Norcia provided a stage. The panel van our dressing room.

‘I hope everything’s OK with Daniel at the cottage,’ I worried to Luke.

‘I’ve left messages,’ Luke whispered.

I was reluctant to leave the monasteries. Decades ago I’d been strangely reluctant to leave the seminary at Werribee Park and Pentridge Prison. Perhaps there’s a Freudian explanation. I had a peaceful monasticism by the Yarrowee to return to. Luke understood why a father he’d scarcely known secreted himself in isolation and booze. He was shown old black and white photos by Brother O’Connor at Bindoon, boys in khaki shorts and bare feet, torsos bare to the sun as they laboured on the great stone edifice of the orphanage. It was the late 1950s. O’Connor gave him a photo of his father taken in the early 1960s.

‘I’m sorry Luke, sorry for what happened all those years ago,’ O’Connor told him.

Our work was done.

‘I’ll miss it,’ said Luke, ‘the Brothers and the

boys, the vineyards, the wheat fields, the gardens.’

‘It’s been a good harvest,’ I assured.

When we pulled up in the red-dusted van at Bindoon the Brothers had taken us in as their own. We ate with them in the Brothers’ monastery and slept in the van. On the third day, as the evening meal was coming to an end, a senior boarder apologised for disturbing us. Brother O’Connor went to the door then came over to me.

‘There’s someone to see you.’

I was nervous. A stranger turning up without warning at one of the most isolated monasteries on the planet was, well, unusual. I descended the dark jarrah stairway to the stained glass entrance hall to a pleasant surprise. In the centre of the tiled hallway stood Rick, dusty from a long walk up Monastery Road. Late sunlight through stained glass played on his yellow hair. He’d made it to New Norcia, stayed for a day and got bored, the monk he’d arranged to see too limited in his range of amusements.

I introduced Rick to O’Connor who suggested he help with a light farm work in return for a few days stay. Rick would make his way down to the cows in the mornings and herd them to sheds for milking. Luke and I were also out and about in crisp sunrise air. We took meditative strolls by the sheds where cow bails creaked to our shafting. ‘Exorcising the ghosts’ Luke called it.

In the van Luke and I discussed what to do with Rick. It was Luke who suggested we take him back east.

‘He’s not doin’ anything with his life. He could

be useful around the cottage. Besides, I'm gunna be away a lot now. Let's tell him.'

Rick's eyes lit up like spotlights.

*

On the long drive back east we listened to Pansy Division over and over again:

You drive me rough like a pick-up truck.

It's a never-never-ending non-stop boy-fuck.

We talked literature most of the way, at least Luke and I did, Rick contenting himself with being chief number roller, dirty joke teller and cd changer.

'So what's on the list so far Luke?' I asked as we neared Eucla.

Luke checked his laptop. 'Well, there's Aldous Huxley's *The Doors Of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*; Timothy Leary's *Confessions Of A Hope Fiend*; Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*; Christopher Isherwood's *My Guru And His Disciple*; George Orwell's *1984* and *Brave New World* ...'

'Goes on forever doesn't it,' I said, 'and we haven't even started on today's writers.' I wanted to mention the novels of Jack London, particularly *Martin Eden* which I'd read at Bindoon. London was a rough American seafarer with a keen passion for the underdog and *Martin Eden* was autobiographical, about London's struggle to be a writer.

And so the hours passed. Luke phoned Daniel daily. The same car still cruised the cottage but

Daniel didn't seem too freaked out. Whoever it was wasn't making any effort to disguise himself. Daniel had the registration. We had an overnight stay at Nhill where my mother was in her ninety-second year. Luke, Rick and I took an early morning walk down to the Nhill Swamp to see the mists rise. We sat with the spirits of the Wotjobaluk people. After five days of driving and sleeping in the faithful panel van we entered The Avenue near Burrumbeet. We sighted the Arch of Victory straddling the highway on the western outskirts of Ballarat. 'A gateway to a new beginning,' Luke announced as we passed under the Arch.

'What's that thing?' Rick asked.

'The Arch of Victory', said Luke, 'it commemorates those who got killed in the Great War, 1914 to 1918.'

'More like the Arch of Death' said Rick.

'It was slaughter,' said Luke, 'Gallipolli, the Western Front.'

'Australia had sixty thousand killed in that War when we only had a population of about five million,' I said.

Rick stuck his head between the bucket seats from the back of the van.

'Fuck!' he said, 'fuck! Imagine if something like that happened today! Let's see, that's the same as, um...what's our population, twenty one million, that's about two hundred and forty thousand today.'

The new boy on the block wasn't stupid.

'The old school,' said Luke glancing at the red brick pillared edifice of Saint Patrick's College

Monastery and cream brick Chapel, ‘can’t wait to see Daniel.’ A surge swelled.

‘It’s a new start,’ said Rick.

I wondered if Rick understood the importance of his statement. Youth really is wasted on the young. Then again, the delicious seduction of experience is yet to come and that brings wisdom. There’s allure in this, the teaching of it, the turning around, the becoming a man, the rite of passage. I felt renewed.

‘Speaking of new starts, our friend Jennifer wants me to be a donor for her,’ I said. Luke looked at me with his mouth gaping.

‘A sperm donor you mean?’ he asked.

‘Yeah. What do you think?’

‘You’d have children to look after,’ he said doubtfully. As an afterthought he added ‘still, I suppose we’d have a real family then.’

‘That depends on what you mean by a real family,’ I reminded him, ‘the etymology of family is just a gathering of friends. In any case, I think Jennifer might be wanting to bring up the child. I’d be a support, a dad when required. But yes, I know what you mean.’

Snatched by a sweating smithy and struck on the cold, black anvil of matter, new life would be fashioned from red-hot ploughshares. Timeworn analogies were apposite. Sparks would fly for new life. I’d found the light or it’d found me. I embraced a new dimension, entered a Garden of Eden and, hopefully, paradise itself.

We drove down historic Sturt Street. I caught the working poor rushing hither and thither, faces pale

and gaunt in the street. An unstoppable love for the human family welled up, the love deep within us all.

‘It’s Ricky in the sky with diamonds today,’ Rick said obliquely.

‘Whadaya mean?’ Luke asked. I remembered Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds from The Beatles.

‘My birthday today. Seventeen.’

‘Happy Birthday!’ Luke and I said in unison.

‘Ya shoulda said Rick!’ said Luke, ‘we’ll celebrate tonight. We’ve got that case of Coonawarra Chardonnay in the boot. We’ll party Rick.’

‘We’ll have a night clubbing in Melbourne,’ I said. I knew full well I’d walk the quartz halogen streetlights of the City again, past Parliament House and Saint Patrick’s Cathedral on dank, worn blue-stone footpaths in Fitzroy and Collingwood. I turned the van onto the curving track along Yarrowee Creek to the cottage.

‘I feel a bit like Jesus,’ Luke confided, ‘when he started out for India when he was a teenager and became a Yogi. I’m startin’ out. Why don’t people tell the truth?’

‘They’re afraid to,’ I said, ‘they’re afraid to take the journey of a lifetime. They’re afraid to live the dream-fuck of their lives.’

‘Whadaya talkin’ about?’ asked Rick. Time enough Rick.

Luke’s question about truth reminded me of the Woods Royal Commission into police corruption in New South Wales in the 1990s. The truth will out. It’s revelations forced the New South Wales Government to equalise the age of consent at six-

teen, irrespective of sexuality. Moral fundamentalists had tried to set Michael Kirby up, the Supreme Court Judge, but had come undone.

‘We’re here!’

I turned into the driveway, parked under the old walnut tree, tumbled out and made for the back door. The kitchen was empty. A whiff of marijuana smoke drew us into the lounge. Daniel was stretched out on the chesterfield in a halo of smoke.

‘Hi guys! Am I glad to see you!’

‘Everything OK?’ I asked.

‘There’s weird shit going on. The place is being watched. This guy keeps driving past and gawking. One time the phone rang. He told me he was looking at me. I go to the window and there he is on his mobile in his fuckin’ black Mercedes looking at me. It’s freaky. Shouldn’t we ring the police?’

I laughed. ‘No point Daniel. They are the police. Thanks for keeping an eye on things.’

Daniel glanced at Rick.

‘And who’s this gorgeous one then?’

Ricky was introduced. Rick shuffling his feet self-consciously.

‘Two A.S.I.O. guys came around yesterday,’ said Daniel as if it happened every day.

‘What the fuck!’ I exclaimed, ‘why didn’t you say so in the first place! What did they want? What happened?’

‘There was a knock on the door. They flashed ID and said they were from A.S.I.O. They asked if you were home. Cool as you please. They started asking personal questions about you and me, Luke and

James. They weren't rough or anything. One was rather cute actually. They were pretty cool but I was shitting myself. They said they might call back. I didn't know what to do. I didn't phone or email because you said you were going to arrive today. Another thing. While you were away someone threw a rock through the front window. Frightened the shit out of me. You'll have to fix it.'

I thought for a moment. Maybe I should ring the police. But I knew there'd be no joy there.

'Let's see if they show up again or get more rocks through the window.'

'I'll talk to James and Xavier,' said Luke.

While Luke was busy Daniel, Rick and I sat at the kitchen table sipping beers and smoking joints.

'What's the score Luke,' I asked Luke.

'The Union Secretariat in Canberra was raided this morning. They've taken the computers. James wants me in Canberra. I'll get the train to Melbourne in the morning and fly up.'

*

Luke lay on a bench in a dark room at the Club. It was a few months after the A.S.I.O raids. It was close to 8.00 a.m. and closing time. He'd got himself together after the moment, the quick fuck of the lad's arse. Their hot silver shot into early morning. He was floating in lightspace.

They had black coffee downstairs.

'Craig,' said the good-looking lad, 'where ya from?'

‘Ballarat but I work in Canberra.’

‘D’ya live by yourself?’

‘No, with a friend. He’s here tonight.’

Craig reflectively rolled a Drum. ‘I’d like to live in the country,’ he said lighting up.

‘I like it,’ said Luke, ‘it has its moments but. Wanna come up sometime?’

‘Cool. I’d like that.’

They exchanged numbers.

James, Rick and I were in the movie lounge waiting to catch the first to Ballarat. James would come up for a few quiet days at the cottage. He was exhausted. Heading up the national Union was a tough game. His life was changed, the twist and turn of it. He and Luke had spent the last few months on a tour of Australian campuses. Victoria was last, the homeport.

We caught the first train out. As we sped through the western suburbs Luke afforded himself a tired smile. He’d recently been sounded out by Seamus Shannon from his old school Saint Patrick’s. They’d literally ran into each other in Sturt Street near the Cathedral, Seamus on his way out from Mass and Luke in Sturt Street on a weekend away from Canberra. Luke told him about his new job as Union research officer.

‘You’re doing good work Luke. I’m giving my job away in twelve months. I’m retiring, or more exactly, I’m being retired.’

‘What’re you smiling at,’ I asked Luke.

‘I ran into Seamus Shannon the other day. Hope ya don’t mind but I invited him around for a coffee.’

He's a nice old bloke. He probably won't come though.'

*

Seamus Shannon rarely accepted invitations out. He surprised himself by accepting Luke's. He toyed with it for days. Life can be cold if unaccompanied.

Luke, Rick, Daniel, James and I were treating ourselves to an evening of literature, stories, music, history, politics and laughter. We sipped chilled Coonawarra Chardonnay and smoked. Two lesbian friends, Jennifer and her partner Geraldine arrived in tight black leather, studs, tats and gelled hair. Others were invited and yet to arrive, including John Semmens, a restorer of antique reed-organs who'd worked on my 1867 Mason and Hamlin. I travelled the history of the cottage, the trail of events that led to my being here, the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848, convictism, the gold rush and the events of 1854 at Eureka.

'They're mining again right underneath us,' I told everyone, 'a kilometre under the old tunnels. They reckon there's as much gold again as they got out in the nineteenth century.'

Daniel talked about his painting; Luke about his job as the Union's environment research officer in Canberra; James about ASIO and Canberra politics; Xavier about life at Newman College and Rick about rough times as a rent-boy in Perth. Rick, it had been decided in a process of osmosis, would finish his schooling at Saint Patrick's. He was bright

enough and was at least half-pleased at the idea. He'd take a spare room at Daniel's in the old boot factory.

When jumped when a knock came at the front door. Rarely did anyone knock at the front door. I wasn't expecting Seamus Shannon but there he stood. I panicked about his reaction to our little gathering and the marijuana smoke. I introduced him around. He sat down at the big farmhouse table and beamed genially at us. There was an awkward silence until I brought him into the conversation.

'Luke told me you were retiring Seamus.'

'Yes. I'll be returning to Ireland, back to the Abbey. The search is on for a suitable layperson to lead Saint Patrick's. There aren't any Brothers in the Order able to take on such a responsible position. They're too old or otherwise committed.'

The conversation paused as Seamus bypassed an intake of marijuana offered by Luke who had a wicked grin on his face. Luke sported a pillar-box red beanie with 'anarchy' in big black letters.

'No thanks, I don't smoke,' Seamus said cool as a cucumber, passing the joint on to Rick. The little cookie he'd nibbled as he drove down Sturt Street had kicked in nicely.

'Now don't be telling the boys I've been getting stoned will you Rick!' he smiled. Everyone laughed. The ice broke.

'No,' Rick said reddening, in awe of Seamus and liking him too much to betray a trust.

'It's something to think about Luke,' Seamus continued, returning the talk to his impending retire-

ment. Marijuana smoke and wine loosened his tongue. 'You're doing great work in student politics but you'll tire of that world. You might offer your talents at Saint Patrick's. You'd inspire young men to stretch themselves intellectually.'

Luke blushed and smiled. 'I'm into deep green Union politics Seamus. It's exciting in Canberra. It's only for this year. Plus I wanna travel while I'm young. And I still have to finish my degree.'

'Of course,' said Seamus, 'it's either the cloister or the battlefield isn't it. It's difficult to know which is which. Politics can be a cloister. School can be a battlefield.'

Silence as the import of Seamus' observation sank in.

James cut it. 'Luke'll make his choices Seamus, just as you've done as a monk. I hear what you're saying. It's a battlefield whether it's Canberra or the classroom. Luke's a true believer, aren't you Luke?'

'A true believer,' said Luke solemnly. Luke was James' right-hand man.

We chatted about famous old boys of the College such as Raimond Gaita and his book *Romulus My Father*. Cardinal George Pell was mentioned to general disapproval for his refusal to give active homosexuals communion. Seamus nodded and furrowed his brow.

'In a more enlightened time the Church will recognise its errors,' he said, 'we live in barbarous times. I must say the new Pope Benedict seems to be more understanding of human sexuality than the previous Pope. Time will tell. A Ballarat boy recent-

ly took his own life.’

I knew of the case. The boy was the victim of homophobic bullying.

‘What’s been done about homophobia at the College Seamus,’ I asked him.

‘A constant battle. It rips the community apart. I’ve addressed the school about tolerance and homophobia. I told the boys we’re all equally loved by God. I laid the law down. I told the boys homophobia and bullying won’t be tolerated. I told the staff to pick up their game.’

The evening and chardonnay flowed and conversation went all over the place. A recent lecture by Chris Patten about the rise of China and India; the decline of the United States; the Middle East crisis and the recent death of the Maharishi Yogi aged 91.

‘The United States is headed for a big shock,’ said James, ‘it’s unsustainable.’

‘Americans could learn a lot from the Maharishi,’ said Seamus, ‘he was the guru for The Beatles when they visited him in the Himalayas in 1968. The Yogi taught world peace and enlightenment. The Beatles were never the same after that.’

The shaky position of the United States and its self-serving wars steered talk to the films of Michael Moore. Film got us onto Stanley Kubrick, Tarantino, Fellini and an exciting new film about the Knights Templar and the Holy Grail. I was just about to bring in the work of Umberto Eco and *The Name Of The Rose* when Luke cut in.

‘All empires fall,’ he said, ‘Greece, Egypt, Rome, Britain...’

‘Well, on that note I really must be on my way,’ said Seamus, ‘or my own empire might fall. It’s been a delight.’

I stood with Seamus outside the kitchen door and caught sadness in his brilliant blue eyes.

‘Stay a while longer Seamus.’

‘I would but there’s boarders to consider and I’ve got the Ballarat Festival starting tomorrow night at the Cathedral. They’re doing Antoine Brumel’s Missa Et Ecce Terrae Motus, Frescabaldi and Palestrina. Newman College Choir is singing Dixit Dominus. I can’t miss it. You should come along.’ Seamus brightened.

‘I’ll see how I finish up tonight,’ I replied.

‘You’re a lucky man to have such friends,’ Seamus said. We shook hands and he was gone into the night. I watched red tail-lights disappear around Yarrowee Road and imagined his lonely drive around the Flat where Wathaurung people once held corroborees. He’d turn into Sturt Street and go up the hill past the steepled cathedral and towers of the City to his lonely monastery opposite the Bishop’s Palace. He was right. I’m a lucky man. I closed the door against the night.

The party geared up a notch.

Mist turned to rain. A black late model Mercedes cruised over Woodman’s Hill. Its two grey suited occupants looked down on the twinkling lights of silvered, gothic Ballarat far below in the Yarrowee Valley.

I sat back on the chesterfield. I studied the young men and women around me. I smiled at this band of brothers and sisters. We were winning. The little sabotage Luke and I set in train at Bindoon and New Norcia sapped the credibility of the Government. The re-vamped Australian Union of Students under James' leadership was becoming powerful. Past Union Presidents such as Felix Eldridge and Julia Gillard laid groundwork. Gillard would come to lead a new Government. A new generation would find its soul. It would not make the self-indulgent mistakes of superannuating baby-boomers. The new generation had learnt hard and bitter lessons about cynicism, greed and careerism. It was prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good. They were ready to lay themselves on the line, to pay the price for the survival of planet Earth. Their work was grass-roots, sourced in the deep green politics, food cooperatives, farmers' markets, local neighbourhoods and local politics. They were back-to-the-earth people. The Yarrowee community was one of these communities springing up all over Australia.

Strange the way time and circumstance plays their twists, how James and I sprang from the same family centuries ago, how Xavier's Irish origins had a famous nationalist who'd been a convict with my great grandfather, how Luke and I were oddly connected through the same Catholic Order.

*

I drifted into lightspace down memory lane, a young man again, rushing into an urgent meeting of the National Executive of the Australian Union of Students in 1972. I'd been plastered over the front page of the Melbourne Herald: Latrobe Students Freed.

I sat with friends and comrades around the table at the Union office in Drummond Street, Carlton. Neil McLean was at the head of the table. The Conservative Government was about to fall. Whitlam was about to take power. Excitement was palpable. Brothers and sisters were in a fever as they prepared to join with the new Government in a wave of education, social, urban and green reform. The Vietnam War was over for Australia. Men and women were coming home and the nation freed its political prisoners.

The spirit of those days is long gone. The cosmic wheel has come full circle. The Dionysian decade 1965-1975 is a matter of history. Some say it was a unique conjunction of the planets that made this psychospiritual revolution. Some say Hadrian's lover Antinous lives with us, our new god. Some say the ancient Mayan calendar predicts 2012 as the year when humanity will at last cross the rainbow bridge to a new world faith.

Today, forty years on from the 1960s, I am full of hope. I watch as new, young hands take the reins. James, Luke and their friends now deliberate at the table. They are idealistic and visionary. It's as it should be. I pleasure in their radical lives. I draw a line under my own. I look to the future, another

chance, another lightspace, that special path.
Different players, different times.

Tomorrow the old cottage will be deserted of
friends. The old Sessions clock on the mantelpiece
strikes the hour. A knock at the door. Life is full of
surprises.

