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Chapter One
CAPRICORN DANCER

1

From Andromeda the galaxy looked like just another fuzzy point of light dotting the infinite void of the cosmos. As he approached close enough he noticed its spiral shape with its arms of higher concentrations of stars. Located about two thirds out from the centre, in one of the spiral arms, was the small solar system that was his destination. Its young star had spawned ten planets and faithfully held them in perfect balance as it gave them its gravity, heat and light. In its life-sphere, that is the sphere of space around itself where water existed as liquid, solid and gas, the young star had formed its life-planet. Through it, he believed, the star expressed its consciousness and its spirit. How exquisitely beautiful the life-planet appeared to him floating out there with its dead moon for company. He thought that it looked almost like a carbon copy of his home planet, Rama.

What a contrast it was to what he had just rendezvoused with on the way there. The thirty miles long boulder encrusted ice block he checked out on the way wasn't streaming a comet tail yet, but it still looked menacing as hell. He knew that the tail would appear when it approached close enough to the star; around about the orbit sphere of the sixth planet of the solar system he was visiting.

As he approached the life-planet he admired its most striking feature, water. He flew towards the warmer southern hemisphere where he saw a very large island surrounded by expansive oceans. He slowly began his descent through the atmosphere. On the spur of the moment he chose to aim his intergalactic cruiser towards the most easterly point on the east coast of the island because he liked the way it jutted out into the great ocean.

2

A metallic-blue, 1963 Holden Premier turned right just after passing through the green tunnel formed by the two rows of giant Strangler Figs growing on either side of the Pacific Highway. The sign at the turnoff said *Byron Bay 6 km*. On its roof racks the Premier carried the precious cargo that

was meticulously created at the San Juan surfboard factory about twelve months before. In the boot was a two-man tent, a Lilo inflatable mattress, a sleeping bag, ground sheets, a box of cooking utensils, clothes and a box of food. Behind the wheel, alone, was Adam, driving in his bare feet, wearing his favourite pair of faded Levis and the San Juan T-shirt that his mates, the San Juan boys, gave him the last time he was up there.

It was *mid-November 1968*. The Holden cruised down the north-country road towards Byron Bay. Adam wouldn't stay there though. He knew of a much better place, a place shown to him by the San Juan boys on a previous trip. It was called Broken Head, to him the place where the most perfect waves broke and to this day he is unsure whether the surf sessions he had there, in his youth, were the very best he ever had in his life.

Back in '68, Broken Head was still a well-kept secret. Travelling surfers, in those days, headed straight for Byron to surf the Pass or Wategos. On a good day with a solid eight-foot swell there might have been fifty surfers out at the Pass. Just five miles to the south, in waves so hollow that their curl landed way out on the flat and peeled absolutely mechanically, there'd be nobody out, except maybe for the few who happened to be privy to the secret.

In those days, all there was at Broken was a small camping area. It was nestled in a clearing, in a tiny valley, which was surrounded by green hills that were covered by lush subtropical vegetation. There was a small kiosk there, so one didn't have to drive to Byron for the basics, and there was a shower, toilet and laundry there as well, for the campers. And there, right there, not more than a few hundred yards away, were waves from heaven.

A narrow dirt road was the only access into Broken. It was about two kilometres long and there might have only been three or four small shacks hidden in the bush along the way. Otherwise, Broken Head was surrounded by a sea of natural wilderness.

Adam parked his car in town. After paying his friends at the surf shop a visit, he stopped at the post office where he phoned his parents and told them of his safe arrival. He also thanked them, again, for the use of the car and the money they gave him to live on.

Stepping out of the phone booth, he paused, took a deep breath of clean north coast air and focused his attention on the ambience of his immediate surroundings. He was back, back where his spirit soared, back where he actually became aware of the colours, the perfumes and the textures. He just felt it, this feeling, and this thing inside, which only came alive when he was there.

The day was stinking hot and glaringly sunny and everything was surreal tranquil in Byron Bay as the 1963 Holden Premier rolled out of town and turned south, headed for the little campsite which would be his home for at least the next month.

3

The intergalactic visitor parked his silver ship under a cloud as he surveyed the scene below him. He could see a long peninsula, with a lighthouse on its point, surrounded by a small village. Then he spotted surfboards on top of some of the cars. The boards looked similar to the one he had strapped down in the back of his ship. He noticed the swell lines on the surface of the ocean and the way they wrapped around the long headland and then peeled off in the sandy bay on the lee side of the point. When he saw the riders shredding the wave faces, he smiled to himself contentedly, realising that he had come to the right place.

The space traveller was a twenty-one year old human being hailing from the planet Rama, from the Andromeda galaxy. He was six feet tall, lean and fit. He had a handsome face and wore his sun-bleached, russet-coloured hair shoulder length. His skin was olive and his eyes iridescent green. He was the three thousand, four hundred and seventy second generation of surfer born into a family of surfers whose ancient ancestor, Raman, brought the lifestyle back to their planet from one of his journeys of exploration to a distant star. He was biologically and anatomically identical to the humans living on Earth, except for one thing. He, like everyone else living on Rama, was a full telepath. As an extreme example of his mental ability, he could if he wished, with just a focussed thought, make any non-telepathic creature drop dead on the spot. Because of this ability, the Rama had no need of weapons.

4

The old man in the kiosk instinctively looked up from his morning newspaper as he heard the sound of car wheels over gravel. He noticed the blue Holden stop momentarily while its driver took a quick look at the surf. He then watched the car, with its surfboard strapped to its roof racks, slowly drive up to the kiosk and come to a stop. The old man had a quick glance at his bookings for that day. The page was empty.

‘You can pitch your tent anywhere you like, son.’

Adam scanned the pretty valley looking for a good spot to make his camp. He noticed a small space off to one side and up the back a little. It was on a bit of a rise so if it rained it would be drier than the rest of the campground. It was also more private with a shady tree nearby, as well as a handy picnic table and campfire. He set his tent so that when he lay in his bed he could see the moon rise out of the ocean at night and would be awakened by the rising sun in the mornings.

5

The silver disc hovered a few thousand feet above the long, deserted beach between Byron Bay and Broken Head. Its occupant, looking to set up camp, noticed a couple of kilometres of virgin coastal scrub paralleling the beach north of the pocket-sized broken headland. He devised a plan. He needed to choreograph an elaborate deception. It was the protocol, but he loved to do it anyway. It was sport for him and it gave him a sense of excitement.

The stars shone bright that night and the moon cast its silvery reflection on the dark ocean as the young man secretly unloaded a variety of camping gear, cooking gear, clothes, one surfboard, a guitar, various foodstuffs and other nondescript items from his silver space ship. He set up his camp on the edge of the scrub, on top of a twenty-foot sand dune, overlooking the beach, about one kilometre north of Broken Head. He sensed that there was not one living human soul within half a kilometre of him. He would know instantly if someone entered what he considered his personal space and he would know as well what that person was thinking and feeling. As a defence he could, if he felt that he needed to, use his telepathic ability to control the behaviour of the intruder, although that was, in general, not his style. He was at heart a gentle

and peaceful person. He much preferred immersion in a foreign culture through deception and cunning, and an excellent story. Above all, he liked to get close to someone and make a good friend without giving up his cover. If for some reason he *was* discovered, his training was uncompromising. He would telepathically erase all memory of the experience from the mind of the bewildered individual.

The young surfer from the Andromeda galaxy had set up his camp and assumed his disguise as a hermetic hippy surfer from California camping out in the bush. His last task before dawn was to remotely fly his ship about two miles out to sea and park it on the seabed. It would remain hidden there until his eventual departure.

6

As he lay in his tent that evening, Adam recalled something unusual that happened to him in town earlier that day. It was something a scruffy, barefoot old man said to him. The old guy was sitting under a tree, in the park, playing his guitar with his hat on the ground next to him. Adam dropped a dollar in the hat as he stopped to listen to the music. The old guy smiled and said, 'Thank you friend'. He then looked Adam straight in the eye. The look pierced deep into Adam's brain and he thought he saw a flash of lightning in the man's eyes.

'Capricorn dancer,' the man said.

'Yeah?' Adam replied.

'The main thing to understand ...' the man paused, looked up the street, looked back at Adam then carried on, 'the main thing to understand is that in this universe ...' another pause,

'Yeah?' Adam mumbled with a hint of befuddlement.

'In this universe ... there ain't no *justice*.'

The man retrieved the dollar from the hat. Adam thought that that was it, but all of a sudden the man spoke some more.

'And there ain't no *injustice* either.' The man let that hang for a while, then, finally, when he thought he had Adam's full attention, he slowly and deliberately delivered his treasure.

'There's only *Karma*.'

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Chapter Two

LUCKY BOY

1

Somewhere in the Vietnam jungle, two young Aussie diggers found themselves at the crossroads.

'Here it is, here it is, Bob. It's their tunnel.'

'Oh yeah mate ... shhh, be real quiet, Frank!'

'Think there's anyone down there?'

'Don't know an I don't care. Let's just do what they sent us here to do an fuck off. Give us the can.'

'Here you go, Bob. I'll get the light ready. ... Pour it down, quick mate, before somebody shows up ... that's it ... OK ... stand back.'

Bob poured twenty litres of petrol into the tunnel entrance.

'Burn, ya bastards,' Frank whispered as he dropped a lighted wick down the hole in the earth. He was peaking with excitement.

A jet of flame burst out of the hole.

Almost instantly the two soldiers heard the sound of screaming. Frank was first to notice.

'Jesus, Bob, it sounds like kids screamin, fuckin kids!'

And before Frank could say anything else, one by one, small Vietnamese children, none older than about nine or ten, came scrambling out of the hole, their bodies completely ablaze.

The diggers' first reaction was shock. This was closely followed by a profound panic. Bob was first to react.

'Fuck, Frank, what do we do?'

'Jesus, I dunno, Bob!'

'Shoot em, we should shoot em! To stop em screamin!'

'Get fucked, Bob! Get fucked!'

Frank then completely freaked out and urinated in his trousers as more burning screaming kids crawled out of the fiery tunnel entrance. He screamed *Fuuuuuuuuuuuuck* at the top of his voice, turned and ran away into the jungle. Bob threw down the petrol can, emptied his guts in a bloodcurdling shriek,

spun around and sprinted away after Frank. They both wept uncontrollably as they scrambled through the thick undergrowth, away from the hellish scene, tripping and crawling on all fours as they desperately tried to put distance between themselves and the agonising screams of the burning children.

And as they escaped from the horror, with their hearts exploding within their breasts, they realized that they were still just kids. They were just kids who'd been conned and sucked into a world not made for kids. And as time rolled on they became aware of the fact that there were some sounds they could never stop themselves from hearing no matter how far away from them they ran.

2

He was running as fast as he could. He tried so hard to make his legs go faster, but it felt like something was holding him back. The more he tried to speed up, the more he slowed down. This wasn't the first time that he experienced this problem. He could remember it happening before, but he couldn't remember when. He was running down a slight slope towards a sheer cliff and all he could see beyond the edge of the cliff was ocean. Instinctively he spread his arms wide, as if they were wings, and as he reached the edge he leapt, in slow motion, into wide-open space. His arms became his wings. He was flying, free, high above the earth. He felt as light as a feather, just gliding through the air as if he were made of air himself. Then, just as he began to feel a freedom that he had only ever dreamt about, a blindingly bright point of white light, like a laser, pierced his skull right between the eyes and began pulling him upward, ever upward, not just out of the sky, but out of the whole reality. He tried to hang onto it, but it was too strong. The cliff below, the ocean, the sky, all began to dissolve and all that remained in the end was a bright, white light.

He opened his eyes. He looked around. He was in a tent. He was in his tent and it was dawn. The morning sun was streaming in, shining on his face, playfully coaxing his eyes to open. It was all just a dream.

Adam lay there for a while, still enchanted by his dream of flight. He wondered how it was possible that dreams could be so real and whether it was possible that part of him actually went there, flying, while his body lay asleep.

3

Heaven hid itself at the end of a cul-de-sac, at the end of a side road, just past an old black stump, halfway along a snaking back road.

A pint of chocolate milk bought at the kiosk made a good start to the day. It was drunk on top of a grassy knoll overlooking the deserted beach. Adam always sat in the same spot because it was shaped like a comfortable lounge chair and it gave him a perfect overview of the long crescent of sand. As it was not much more than an hour after sunrise, the sun was still low in the sky, its crystalline reflection giving the water the exquisite appearance of an ocean of liquid fire.

A few months had passed since Adam turned twenty. He was two years too old to be waiting for his high school final exam results, but that wasn't because he was a slacker. It was the big migration from Slovenia with his parents, and his total inability to speak English when they arrived in Australia, that slowed his scholastics back a couple of years. His family settled amongst a community of their fellow countrymen in the western suburbs of Sydney. He was an only child and he learnt at an early age that he possessed the personality of a loner. He could just sit in his room and allow his thoughts to take him away and he would begin to feel gladness within himself and a sense of total contentment. He made a few mates, he loved and endured his parents, he studied, and thanks to his dad, who used to take the family to the beach on weekends, he surfed. As a result of all these circumstances, mentally speaking, he remained a few years younger than his chronological age. He was still enveloped in a cocoon of innocence. Some might call it naivety. So was it grace, chance, luck or destiny that found him sitting alone in heaven, hidden away from the rest of the world? Who knows? But if one were telepathic and looked at him, one would probably see straight through him, like looking through crystal clear water.

4

Adam was thinking about breakfast as he made his way back to his tent. As he paused at a rubbish bin to discard the empty milk container, he scanned the valley and noticed a tall, dark, longhaired hippy walking barefoot down the dirt track towards the kiosk. Walking playfully by his side was a golden

retriever. Suddenly, being gone almost before it arrived, Adam hallucinated a trancelike vision. For a brief moment he was looking at a Van Gogh. He saw the brush strokes, the richness of the colours in the morning sun and the natural freedom of the hippy and his dog walking down the ochre track. This image resonated with something dwelling deep within his soul as it permanently etched itself into his memory.

Adam, the hippy and the retriever all ended up at the kiosk, with the old man sitting behind the counter.

‘Top little day, boys. Surf any good for you boys today?’

‘Not today, sir,’ replied the hippy. ‘It’s a bit flat.’

The old man noticed the accent. ‘You a bloody yank, mate?’

‘Californian.’

‘Stayin long?’

‘Couldn’t really say.’

‘Nice dog,’ commented Adam.

‘Oh, that’s Flynn,’ said the old man, ‘but that’s not his real name, that’s just what all the locals call him. His real name’s Charlie, but he’ll answer to Flynn as well.’

‘How come he’s got two names?’ asked Adam patting the friendly dog on the head.

The old man smiled. ‘Well, he’s got a bit of a reputation with the bitches around here. He’s a real rootin legend. There’s not one bitch in this valley that hasn’t had at least one litter of pups by him.’

All three men grinned broadly and chuckled. The Californian then asked Adam, ‘You from around here?’

‘Er, not exactly, I’m up from Sydney. I’m camped just over there.’ Adam pointed towards his tent. ‘I’m here for the waves.’

‘Me too,’ replied the hippy. ‘Check out your camp?’

‘Sure, come on over.’

They walked towards Adam’s tent accompanied by Flynn.

‘Where you stayin?’ Adam asked. The hippy paused until they were out of the old man’s earshot then told Adam that he was camped in the scrub, up the

road a bit. 'There's a foot track that goes from the road into my camp, but it's hard to find.'

'What part of California you from?'

'Malibu.'

'Malibu! That's Mickey Dora country.'

'Oh yeah. *Da Cat's* a bona fide legend where I come from all right. You stayin here long?'

'About a month. I'm waiting for exam results.'

'So we'll see each other around.' He held his hand out to Adam. 'I'm Scott.'

Their eyes locked together as Adam shook his hand and introduced himself. Scott looked over Adam's shoulder at his surfboard. 'Check out your board?'

'Sure.'

As Scott handled Adam's surfboard, felt its balance and eyed down its fine lines, he saw a latent glow of soft white light emanating from it.

'This is a fine surfboard, Adam. It looks like a board that only a friend could make. Someone's heart went into this.'

'Really? Well I'm pretty good mates with the San Juan boys an they said that they made it for me special.'

'Yeah, I can see that,' Scott replied. 'Hey, ah, you ought to drop into my camp sometime. Come for a feed if you like. It'd be nice to have some company.'

As they continued to speak to each other, the two young men sensed an easy friendship developing. There seemed to be a common thread there, running between them, a connection that could best be described as the type of bond that only exists between two brothers.

Later on, as Adam watched Scott walking back up the dirt road with Flynn playfully dancing around him, he experienced another one of those Van Gogh hallucinations that seemed to be gone before it came.

The next day the surf was still off with the northeast wind blowing everything out. Adam cruised into town to look around and call his parents. His mother answered the phone. She was blabbering with excitement. Apparently the newspaper had reported on the most recent conscription lottery, the one

that included Adam's birth date. She cried with joy as she told her only son that he missed the cull. Adam wasn't as excited as he should have been, because he wasn't paying attention. He just never devoted much time to thinking about conscription and *'all that crap'*. She paid attention though. She knew what war was all about. She was Serbian and she lived in Belgrade when the Nazis blitzkrieged through. She had lived through the worst of war. She had seen humans behave worse than animals. She had seen what the survival instinct could do to a person.

She harboured a deep secret from Adam and his father. She married very young, before the war, and bore two beautiful children. When the Nazis came, they butchered her husband and kids. She escaped into the forests and joined the partisans and spent the rest of the war killing as many of those *'Nazi vermin'* as she could. Dozens of German boys took their last breath through the sights of her StG 44. Many times she had stared death right in the face and kept her defiance. She had endured every horror that hell could unleash on a human and despite it all, she kept her sanity and her courage. And the reason she survived with her mind and spirit intact was, she believed, the reason underlying the whole war experience. It was all about honour, keeping it or losing it. *'Lose your honour and you lose your mind and soul,'* she used to say. Life didn't matter.

She met, fell in love with and married Adam's father a few years after the war ended, while he was still a dental student in Ljubljana.

'Your father always said you were a lucky boy. You always seemed to scrape through. Every year, when you passed your exams, your father said you were so lucky because they obviously made a mistake with the marking. I know what he will say tonight, Adam. He will say what a lucky boy you are and that he just doesn't know where all this luck comes from. But he will be very happy for you, my darling, very, very happy.'

Adam wouldn't realise fully, for many years to come, just how lucky he really was.

There was a small clearing on the side of the dirt road. A foot-track wound its way from the clearing through the scrub to Scott's camp. It was early

evening as Adam negotiated the '63 Holden into the tight parking space. As he walked along the track he began to hear the sound of a melodic guitar. The music was unusual. It reminded him of Indian music, kind of like a sitar, but sounding like an acoustic guitar. He was walking towards it and just as he approached close enough to see the soft flickering light of a campfire, Flynn ran up and greeted him, happy and friendly as before, and escorted him into the camp.

The setting of Scott's camp was truly magical. It was completely hidden from the world, yet it was set up so as to give him a nearly 180-degree view of the deserted beach. Scott put down his guitar and warmly welcomed his guest. They sat down around the campfire on some logs that Scott dragged into position, while Flynn made himself comfortable on an intricately woven rug. Scott didn't have a tent. His shelter was made up of a number of thin, olive coloured tarpaulins. They were tied to the branches of the low Melaleuca trees that surrounded the camp. The whole set-up was simple but effective. Adam could see that in the event of rain or wind, Scott would remain sufficiently comfortable. His bed was a hammock suspended from two branches under the shelter. The other noticeable thing about the Californian's camp, Adam thought, was how neat and clean it was.

Scott poured out a cup of tea for them both. There were three pots on the fire.

'What's cooking?' Adam asked.

'Aha, you smell my cookin,' Scott said as he lifted the lids off the pots. 'Rice and vegetables for us and some meat for Flynn here.'

As he mentioned Flynn's name, the retriever lifted his head and gave a restrained joyful bark.

'I've never smelt rice and vegetables like these. They smell delicious. In fact I don't think that I can stop my mouth watering.'

'I think it's the herbs that I brought with me. They are an ancient native blend. They are said to be very healthy and legend has it that these herbs will make you live longer.'

As they began their dinner they watched in wonder as a tangerine moon slowly rose above the oceanic horizon. All three of them ate to their hearts'

content and there was much talk and laughter that night as the risen moon cast its silvery reflection on the dark glassy ocean beyond the beach and a million stars filled the spacious sky above. The warm glow of the campfire seemed like an outward reflection of the warm inner glow that the three of them were feeling that night and they somehow knew that this feeling was less about each of them individually, but was more about something much greater, much more related to a grander scheme, way beyond anyone's understanding. When one is where one is meant to be, one just feels it. It is like experiencing the snug shelter of home when there is a wild storm raging outside.

7

Earlier that day and about seven hundred kilometres to the south, a magnificent white-breasted sea eagle, *haliaeetus leucogaster*, soared high above the virgin Illawarra escarpment at the southern end of The Royal National Park, just south of Sydney. Its wingspan measured a full two metres. His species has dominated the airspace above the majestic coastal cliffs for longer than even the ancient black man could remember. Nature had shaped its body through countless generations, using the tools of random mutation and natural selection of design most adapted for survival. She occasionally accelerated the evolutionary process through famines or natural disasters and purposely caused nine tenths of the species to die off in order to select out the strongest and best survivors. Thus she brought into existence the next, more highly evolved version of one of her favourite creations. She rewarded strength, intelligence, wisdom, efficiency, courage, as well as a high level of sensitivity of the senses, particularly the eyesight, for hunting. The white-breasted sea eagle of south-eastern Australia possessed these qualities in abundance. It could spot a fish near the surface of the ocean from a thousand feet, swoop down and surgically pick it out of the water with its long talons without even getting one feather wet.

The noble bird flew close to the cliff's edge. Although it always preferred to soar without flapping its wings, it could not enjoy that luxury in this flight. The wind, so typical for that time of year, was from the northeast. It blew along the faces of the tall cliffs and as a result did not generate any significant ridge lift. For the eagle it meant more judicious flying. It had to fly lower, closer to the

rocks and pick off small bands of updraft above parts of the ridge that faced slightly more into the northerly breeze. There it turned into the wind and slowed its flight to near stall, gaining some precious altitude. It turned downwind periodically and gracefully executed a circle in the sky in order to maintain its position in the narrow lift funnel. It continued to circle and gain altitude until it sensed that it had reached the top of the lift. Having climbed a satisfying one or two hundred feet, it banked off the northeaster and flew at its most efficient downwind gliding speed, headed south towards a small, deep coastal valley. The valley represented the southern extremity of its dominion. To cross the valley to the big mountain on the other side meant risking an encounter with another dominant bird.

The coastal valley was surrounded by steep escarpment to the south, the west and northwest. The upper one to two hundred feet of the one-thousand-foot-high ridge was vertical rock face. The escarpment dramatically dropped in altitude on the north side of the valley, finishing up as a perfectly rounded six-hundred-foot hill that was completely devoid of trees. The eagle knew it as *no tree hill*. Two fresh-water creeks, one on the northern and one on the southern side of the valley, meandered their way down to one of the most picturesque beaches on the whole coast. When it rained heavily, the water drained off the high plain and over the edge of the vertical cliffs, creating dozens of spectacular waterfalls, transforming the valley into something one would only expect to experience in a mystical dream.

The sea eagle was on a search. It was searching for something that about seven days before had shaken it to the very core of its being. The memory remained crystal-clear in its mind. It happened on *no tree hill* and nothing like it had ever happened before in all the history of its species. The eagle instinctively sensed that its dominance of the airspace was about to be challenged. Its only reaction was unyielding defence. This bird knew no fear. Its tactic was to search and continue to search for the elusive new threat.

One week earlier, it could remember soaring high above *no tree hill*, half asleep in the silky-smooth air, when its attention suddenly focussed onto something bright and colourful appearing on the ground on the point of the hill. It looked like a pair of wings the like of which it had never seen before.

They were huge, spanning at least five of its wingspans. The eagle interpreted them as belonging to an enormous bird. The giant wings were incredibly colourful, deep blue with a yellow stripe running across them. The eagle thought that a bird that large obviously had no need for camouflage. The big bird seemed to be resting on the point of the hill holding its wings open for a very long time. The eagle thought to itself, *'What kind of bird stands on the ground with its wings open?'*

Technically the big bird hadn't yet violated the eagle's domain. That offence would occur if it took to flight.

The eagle instinctively began planning its attack. It would focus on the wingtips, diving upon them from above and behind, preferably out of the sun. It would surprise the intruder with its explosive attack and would tear into its wingtip flesh with its powerful talons. It repositioned itself high above and slightly behind the big bird. It hovered there for a long time, when finally, the big bird began to move towards the edge of the hill. The eagle tensed the muscles in its clawed feet and intensified its piercing stare. Suddenly the big bird was flying. The eagle pulled in its wings and began to dive, but half way through its dive it hesitated. The big bird was going straight down. It wasn't soaring, it was only gliding, and poorly at that. The eagle soared above as the big bird completed a semi-plummeting, forty-five degree glide, landing quite hard in a small clearing at the base of the hill.

The flight was over in a moment. The eagle felt the sense of victory rush through its heart. It was certain that it had frightened the big intruder into submission and forced it down out of its airspace. It circled above and observed the big bird fold up its wings, one at a time, and finally completely disappear. The eagle, although victorious, was nonetheless flustered by the experience and decided that it would continue to patrol its airspace more diligently in the future.

The white-breasted sea eagle of south-eastern Australia had completed its reconnaissance. Today there were no intruders. It had flown the length of its territory in unfavourable soaring conditions and it was beginning to pine for some *good air*. It was a majestic soaring bird and it had a need, from time to

time, for some truly *big air*. As it scanned the distant southern horizon, it suddenly realized that its wish was about to be granted.

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Chapter Three

INITIATION

1

Beach-by-beach, headland-by-headland, town-by-town, the powerful southerly cold front steamrolled up the east coast of Australia like a giant tsunami rolling unstopably towards the equator. In its wake came the gale and within twenty-four hours a solid ground swell. Within two days, the wind had eased and tended to blow from the south-westerly direction in the mornings, perfectly in harmony with the morning low tide. The stage was set in the sheltered corner behind Broken Head and as if the play had already been written and the actors already cast, the crisp early morning saw Adam and Scott converge towards what would be the first of many sensational surf sessions.

For days the corduroy swells rolled out of the vast South Pacific Ocean. They released their energy, in nature's perfection, along the many classic surfing points dotting the north coast of New South Wales. This phenomenon of nature kicked off a weeklong surfing *rage-a-thon* at legendary Meccas like Crescent, Scott's, Angourie, Lennox, Broken, Byron, and over the border to Snapper, Greenmount, Kirra, Burleigh and Currumbin, and way north to the mystical place of five points. Some of the locals there, perhaps the ones more spiritually inclined, possibly due to a diet of *blue meanies* that grew out of the cow manure out in the hinterland there, reckoned that it was the place where God put His right hand on the Earth and each finger became one of the perfect surfing points. In this holy place the long peninsula aims so far to the north that at sunset a surfer rides his wave directly into the setting sun, surfing by instinct alone because of the complete blinding of his vision by the golden orb and its reflection off the curving, curling glass before him.

Adam and Scott surfed so many waves for so many days that they began losing their sense of time.

'I can't remember yesterday.'

'I can barely remember the last *bloody* wave.'

They were losing awareness of past and future. The continual day-in, day-out, extreme heightening of their senses, the continual focal intensification of their concentrations, had caused their consciousnesses to gradually narrow into the present, until they were only aware of those things that were happening right now. This state, so rare and normally so difficult to attain, brought upon them a euphoria which would linger in their souls for the rest of their lives and would be rekindled every time they remembered those classic hollow days at beautiful Broken Head.

2

A few days later, the boys met up with a couple of gorgeous young ladies. The girls rolled into Broken Head in a pristine 1965 Volvo 122S. They drove down from a place called Fingal, a small beachside town located just south of the Tweed River. They were on a day outing, having a drive in the country taking in the Byron Bay area.

The driver's name was Susan. She actually came from Brisbane. Her dad, who was a judge, owned a holiday house right on the beach in Fingal and the family went there to escape the city at every opportunity. Sue was tall, slim and very blond. She had captivating bright-blue eyes, made bluer by her dark suntan. She always smiled at people and made conversation effortlessly. She carried an air of refinement about her, in an uncontrived sort of way, as if it existed in her genes. There was a hint of the English about her.

The passenger's name was Maria. She was Sue's best friend. She was also very tall and of a slightly fuller figure than Sue. Maria was from an Italian family. Maria's beauty could best be described as *sizzling*. Her long dark hair, her smooth olive skin, her large brown eyes, her full moist lips, her breasts, abundant and shapely, and her long, long legs literally took a boy's breath away. And even though she was Australian born, she spoke with an unmistakably Italian accent. Words flowed out of her mouth like warm honey, like they were flowing straight out of her heart. She spoke with a natural affection that can characteristically only be associated with the Mediterranean woman.

Although they didn't surf themselves, both girls shared the pleasure of watching artistic surfers *dancing the dance* on quality point waves. They sat on

a ridge, high above the break, and watched the boys disappearing and reappearing out of the liquid pipes below. When the surfing was over, they all met at the kiosk. After the introductions and some light chitchat, it was decided that they would have lunch together. They had delicious country-style sandwiches made by the old man's wife who fussed about the young foursome like a mother hen. The group sat around an old picnic table, under the shade of a low tree, overlooking the beach.

The girls were both eighteen years old and had, just like Adam, recently finished their high school exams. They also were waiting for their results.

They exchanged stories about their lives and interests well into the afternoon. Scott spoke about his fictitious life in California and his love of surfing and simplicity of life. As he executed his necessary deception, he felt his heart sing as he silently thanked his universe for forming herself into these beautiful people and into such a perfect place and time, just for him.

Before leaving, Sue invited the boys to come and visit them in Fingal and it was arranged that they would come in a few days, after the swell subsided.

3

The long, golden rays of the rising sun were just kissing the tops of the green hills to the west of Byron as the '63 Holden turned right onto Highway Number One. It had been three days since they met the girls and a phone call, made the day before, got the boys invited to Fingal for breakfast.

Sue's parents' holiday house was a smallish, low set, timber dwelling surrounded by invasive coastal scrub. There was a low dune separating it from the long, semi-deserted beach. There was a covered patio on the northern side where there was a round wooden table and garden chairs with beach towels draped over them. There were a few deck chairs scattered around, a couple of beach umbrellas, fishing gear leaning against a wall and a couple of open books lying face down on the page last read. The yard wasn't really being mowed, but the grass was short where the people were. There was a well-used barbecue at the end of the yard, adjacent to the beginning of the track that led to the beach. The bedrooms were untidy with the beds not made and clothes scattered everywhere. The kitchen was clean, but cluttered with pots, pans and utensils, making it look like it was in constant use. There was a large wooden bowl, full

of fresh fruit and there were two refrigerators standing side by side up against one wall. The freezer of one was full of fish, all caught by the family.

Sue's dad was a tall, middle-aged man with an almost permanent smile on his face. He was constantly doing something, whether it be fussing with firewood, making drinks, fiddling with fishing gear or helping in the kitchen. He maintained a constant light banter with anyone and everyone and seemed to be the mortar between all the bricks of his family.

Sue's mother was shorter in stature. She had lost her shapeliness, as so many middle-aged women, who are focussed on their families, do. She contrasted her husband with her softness and reservedness. There was an aura of beauty about her though, a loveliness, which shone from deep within her. There seemed to radiate a simple glow about her tranquil face, and her blue eyes shone brightly with a light that hinted at a knowledge of something mysterious and deeply secret.

The family welcomed the boys like old friends. Sue and Maria, both bubbling with excitement, made breakfast. They all sat around the garden table eating, drinking and getting to know each other. The conversation eventually drifted towards an outing.

The girls were keen to show Scott and Adam a special place they had discovered on one of their previous sojourns.

'The place is pretty secret,' Sue explained, 'mainly frequented by some of the local surfers.'

'That's how we found out about the place,' Maria continued. 'We met a young surfer on one of our drives up the coast and he told us about this magic place buried deep in the rainforest, with waterfalls, rock pools and a really scary natural rockslide. We've been there and it is truly unbelievable.'

'We'd love to take you there if you like,' Sue suggested in a voice that would have had the boys jumping into molten lava if they were asked to do so.

The plan for the rest of the day was set. The girls offered for them all to go in the Volvo.

They drove over the Tweed River Bridge and through Coolangatta where the boys checked out the surf at Greenmount Point. They then drove up the

coast to the old rickety bridge, which crossed Currumbin Creek. There they turned left and began driving inland, following the narrow, winding road into the deep, lushly vegetated Currumbin Valley.

Scott sat in the back, next to Maria, while Adam sat in the front with Sue driving. The day was stinking hot and intensely sunny. As they penetrated deeper into the valley, they marvelled at the absolute beauty of the place.

Eventually they drove up to a gate. They were at the end of the road, right up the farthest reaches of the valley. This part of the valley belonged to a farmer. On the other side of the fence, they could see an open meadow. In the very centre of the meadow and pretty much in the centre of the valley, grew a large flame tree, blooming full of radiant red flowers. It drew a comment from everyone as it looked so spectacular in the bright sunshine. Green slopes surrounded the meadow, rising into high densely vegetated hills. The end of the valley, with its farm, was totally isolated, with the road being the only way in and the only way out.

The girls stepped out of the car and walked through the wide gate and over to the farmhouse, which was surrounded by a white picket fence. A man, perhaps in his mid thirties, came out with a broad smile on his face as he greeted the girls. He immediately recognised them from the last time they were there. The girls chatted for a while and introduced the boys to the farmer. Then they parted and returned to the car.

The farmer swung open the main gate and ushered the Volvo through. They thanked him and drove along a dirt track to the far corner of the farm where they parked the car in a small clearing situated right at the edge of the thick, tropical rain forest.

5

A narrow foot-trail wound through the lush undergrowth towards the sound of cascading water. The boys followed the girls along the track. Scott walked behind the others and said nothing as he saw the bark of a tree, the grain of a boulder or the shape of leaves transform themselves into the face or the body of a young black man or woman, and then, as he looked again, the images were gone. Scott was very calm about these apparitions, as he knew what they represented and was used to such experiences. He knew, though,

that the place they were walking into was special and sacred, with a long and noble history. He also felt the powerful spirit that dwelt there, a spirit that to him felt more like that of a child than that of an adult.

The group came to a part of the track where there was a break in the thick vegetation. To the right and below them, they could see the creek with its waterfalls and pools and the steep drop in the terrain where the water slide was. The whole place echoed with the sound of rushing waters. The girls led the way down to a flat rock, adjacent to the slide, where they put down their towels.

‘What do you think?’ Sue asked.

‘Unbelievable! Wow!’ the boys answered almost in unison.

6

The rockslide, hidden deep in the green jungle, had been shaped by the running waters of the creek over millions of years. It had already been there, perfectly shaped for a million years before the arrival of its first human slider. The slide dropped about forty feet from top to bottom and could be divided into three parts. From the top, a slider eased himself into the current and sat in a saddle-like, U-shaped depression in the rock. He had to prop himself against the rocks either side, as the sliding surface was covered with an underwater moss, making it extremely slippery. As he sat there, hanging on, the current pressed hard against his back trying to dislodge his grip of the smooth rocks. Looking down the slide was frightening due to its steepness and the fact that he couldn’t see the tiny pool into which he would ultimately plummet. Once he committed and released his *death grip*, he rapidly accelerated as he slid over two dips. After the dips, the slide turned sharply to the right and became even steeper. Then it was straight down a chute that ended in a lip that launched the slider into space and into a twenty-foot freefall, until he finally splashed down into a tiny pool, maybe eight feet across and six feet deep. The pool was surrounded by hard-edged vertical rocky sides and had literally been bored into the stone by the waterfall at the bottom of the slide. The bed of the pool was covered with smooth loose rocks.

The upper portion of the slide was where composure was easily lost. Hitting the turn had the slider banked high on the vertical wall, more often

than not throwing him completely out of control. This meant that he hit the lip out of position and was launched into space spinning sideways, or backwards, or whichever way. The big fear at the slide was hitting the rocks at the bottom. It was clear to anyone that took the ride, that if they hit the side of the narrow pool with their head, it could easily be fatal. The word up and down the slide was, *keep your arms and legs in*.

As far as anyone knew, no one ever took the slide without seeing someone else do it first. As they watched others plummet uncontrollably into the microscopic pool, each with their hand, foot or head only inches from the rocks, their hearts filled with fear as every cell in their body said *no way*.

But they were there. They were at Mother Nature's initiation ground. She crafted it for her *chosen children*. The whole area was *holy ground*, saturated with magic.

When people arrived there and saw the slide, they were instantly and inescapably confronted with a choice whether to slide, or not to slide. They knew that they could get killed. Many mysteriously heard their mother's voices saying to them not to do anything dangerous. Yet they sensed that they were at a pivotal point in their lives. They became aware of the magnitude of the imminent decision they were about to make. They suddenly understood that to walk away from this initiation would mean walking away from other, future, lesser ones, and that each act of retreat would be another small increment of light being extinguished from their spirits, until they became like millions of other people who lived in constant fear of death and who were unaware of the fact that the types of lives they lived were in reality death itself.

Immersed in the magic space, they knew that to take the slide would fill them with euphoria for having overcome their fear. What they didn't know, though, was that through the mystery of her creation, nature had set up a mystical initiation. If they passed the test, they passed into another dimension, indiscernible from the old one yet completely different, which unfolded into a totally different future, a future full of high adventure and an awakening to the fact that there was no such thing as death, except for the death that existed in people who lived their lives devoid of any courage and barren of any honour.

And every slider that ever took the drop, later stood there looking at the whole set-up and marvelled at what nature had just done for them. And they knew that they first witnessed someone else go before them, and they gave a thought for that first slider, the one who nature chose to be her special son or daughter, who never saw anyone go before them. And they felt the spirit of that first slider's courage fill them and they took that spirit with them as they walked out of the jungle back down the valley towards the great ocean.

7

'When we were here last time,' explained Maria, 'there were three young kids here, spending the day sliding down the slide.'

'Whaaat?' exclaimed Adam, his voice breaking into falsetto and his arm pointing at the tiny pool. 'Down there?'

'Yeah! And there's something we haven't told you,' declared Sue with a big grin on her face. 'We've both been down it as well.'

'No way!' exclaimed both boys in unison.

'Who's going first?' Maria asked as the girls began undressing.

'I don't mind,' Sue replied.

A whimpering, 'Oh God,' was all that made it out of Adam's mouth. It was all a bit much for him, all at once. He hadn't even started coming to terms with the idea of potentially plummeting to his death in that microscopic pool when, arguably, the two most attractive girls he had ever seen in his life began undressing right in front of him. Well, down to their bikinis anyway.

Scott said nothing as he absorbed the set-up. He saw much more than his friends were ever capable of seeing. He also knew that the risk he was taking was far greater than the other three, because the average lifespan of a Rama was around nine hundred years and he had only lived twenty-one of them. He was pretty impressed with the go-for-it attitude of the girls, though. Adam, however, was another story.

The girls each had one go from half way, to get wet, and then climbed to the top. Sue went first. Like a child, totally oblivious to any danger, she flew down that slide, squealing all the way, finally neatly splashing down in the pool. Highly exhilarated, she scrambled out of the pool to watch Maria do the same thing. The boys were open-mouthed stunned.

‘The first time wasn’t so hard for us,’ Maria explained towelling her face, ‘because we got to watch those kids doing it.’

Sue was already at the top again, easing herself into the creek and readying herself for another big drop. Scott felt ready, but he held back. He wanted to give Adam the opportunity to go first. He knew that by going first, Adam would benefit more fully from this unique initiation. Adam felt his apprehension peaking, but he recognised the moment and he knew that there was no way that he was going to walk away from this challenge.

The boys both first slid from the halfway take-off. Then, one by one, with Adam going first, they both launched from the top. The four of them, all laughing and screaming, took turns at sliding well into the warm afternoon. The sounds of their joy intermingled with the sounds of the rushing waters as the spirit of the first slider merged with their own spirits.

Adam never guessed that at that moment his life was changed forever. He had blundered off the main highway of life and wandered down a rarely travelled, narrow winding track. It was a track full of mystery and adventure, hidden from the sight of ordinary people, people who were never given the choice to take the magic slide, and if they had, they would have fearfully declined the offer.

Later in the afternoon, after they had all had their fill of sliding, they went exploring up the creek, where they all went swimming. As the boys floated in the crystal water of a natural rock pool, surrounded by tropical vegetation, with rays of the sun’s light breaking through the gaps between the leaves, the girls swam over to them, Sue to Adam and Maria to Scott, put their arms around their shoulders and began to give them long, passionate kisses on their lips, their cheeks and their eyes. And everything started to spin for those boys as their universes formed themselves into those beautiful girls and loved and hugged and kissed them there, in that sacred place, where so many wonderful, magic things happened.

The four of them remembered the weeks they all spent together for the rest of their lives. They remembered the time like it was a dream, where everything was perfect. A dream from their youth, filled with friendship and adventure, completely oblivious to the frantic world around them, lost in a

living fantasy. Like four comets, whose gigantic elliptical orbits brought them all together only once in their lives through the mystery of predestined mathematical chance.

8

As Christmas Day approached, they all, except for Scott of course, were drawn back to their families. Jesus went by another name on Rama.

Adam rewarded his parents with a pass. His dad said it was like a dog scraping through a hollow log.

Sue blitzed her exams and entered The University of Queensland School of Medicine. She continued to maintain contact with Adam, through correspondence, but that eventually stopped. At university she met a smart young medicine student who was a couple of years older than her. Adam never heard from her again.

Maria wasn't such an academic, but it didn't matter so much for her. She travelled back to Italy, to visit old relatives, where she met Gino, the handsome and talented young film director who cast her in a tragedy about two young lovers, who, through a misunderstanding, lost each other, not to be reunited until their old age. Maria's beauty packed out the theatres throughout Europe, ensuring Gino, Maria, and Carlo and Sophia, their children, a long happy life of affluence and *la dolce vita*.

9

Flynn felt the feeling of solitude that had come upon Scott, following the departure of his friends. He stuck much closer to him during those first few days of loneliness, keeping him company and doing funny things to make him laugh. One of his favourite party tricks was chasing his tail. They took long walks together, way up the deserted beach. Flynn found a stick and brought it to him and then darted about playfully, coaxing him to throw it for him.

As they walked along, completely immersed in the sound of the surf, Scott recalled the sound of the rushing waters of Currumbin Creek and the perfect day he had there. He knew, he had always known, that all things in life were temporary. He understood that he must accept gain and loss in a stable and detached sort of way. He remembered the words of his *teacher*.

'A serene wisdom neither rejoices nor sorrows if fortune is good or ill.'

But he was young and he had a long way to go to achieve that kind of wisdom, because far away from his camp, up the deserted beach, far away from human sight, he fell to his knees in the sand, covered his face in his cupped hands and allowed himself to cry for a while for the loss of his friends.

10

That evening, as Andromeda rose in the north-eastern sky, Scott, whose real name was *Albion*, sat down on a comfortable sand dune, straightened his back like a ruler, closed his eyes and began to breathe his special breath. He silenced his brain and slipped into a deep trance. Through his telepathic *mind threads*, he connected with his parents and his little sister, whose name was *Ambriel*, across two million light years. He knew instantly of their feelings for him and they of his for them. He let them know that he had befriended a very nice young man. He let them know, as well, that his name was Adam and that he thought Adam was someone everyone would like very much.

He also made contact with his best friend, *Arju*, a Rama boy of his own age, who he had known since birth. Arju, who was also a surfer, telepathically took Albion to a planet he was visiting. The reality of a large inland sea, at the centre of which was a huge volcanic island, manifested around Albion in full three dimensional colour and sound. Like clockwork, every day, at the same time, the volcano rumbled to life and began to shake with a violent earthquake. The shaking generated swells in the inland sea, which radiated out from the volcano in circles, to break along the shores around the perimeter of the land-bound sea. The whole coastline was dotted with artificial reefs and points, for surfing, some of them thousands of years old. Then Albion saw his friend standing on a beach, carrying his surfboard under his arm, beckoning him to join him. In return, he sent realities of classic Broken Head and Currumbin Creek and the beautiful friends he made.

The following night, while everyone slept, a dark figure moved about on the beach. Suddenly, in the darkness, a large smooth object appeared on the surface of the ocean, like a whale. The object then rose about five feet into the air, not making a sound. It floated towards Albion's camp where it parked itself hovering about one foot above the ground.

Flynn lay quietly as he sensed Albion's imminent departure. Albion busied himself packing away his camp and tidying up after himself. He spoke to the dog for a long time and gave him plenty of hugs before entering his ship. He also gave the dog a special herb-filled biscuit he prepared for him and said,

'Live long, Flynn.'

The silver disc rose vertically in complete silence. When it rose to the edge of the atmosphere, Albion locked his navigating telescope onto a small spot of light in the vast blackness. This time his aiming point was The Andromeda Galaxy, his home galaxy, and at the *speed of light squared*, the young man, who used to be known as Scott on a little water planet he just visited, would be home faster than it took a '63 Holden to drive from Broken Head to Currumbin Creek.

Back on Rama, he would catch up with his family, before taking off again to that planet with the inland sea and the volcano, to join up with Arju for more high adventure.

But wherever Albion went, he carried within his heart a small portion of the shining spirits of his Earth friends, Flynn, Adam, Susan and the beautiful Maria.

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Chapter Four
THE HAND OF GOD

1

The immaculately restored, jade coloured VW Kombi rolled into the Noosa National Park car park. It was *April 20, 2005*, around about lunchtime and about four hours before low tide. As Adam slowly rolled around to his favourite parking spot, he recognised all the cars belonging to his friends, the hard core of the local surfing community. Even though the surf was pumping, the points were not so crowded as to make it uncomfortable, because it was a Wednesday. With the exception of the dawn patrols, weekdays were, as a rule, incarceration days for the *schoolies* and *tradies* who, when they were out, had the irritating habit of turning the points into *dog-eat-dog gladiator pits*.

April was the middle of the surfing season. During that time of year the south-easterly trades blew consistently offshore across the five surfing points that made up the peninsula that is Noosa Heads, the place where God Himself set His hand upon the Earth and transformed His five fingers into perfect surfing points. That time of year also brought powerful even swells that were generated by large storms raging in the Coral Sea, directly to the northeast of Noosa.

After waxing up, Adam locked his van, hid the keys, picked up his nine-foot *Tony Dragan* and water bottle and began the long trek along a narrow foot trail into the National Park. He always felt like he stepped into another reality when he walked into the park. He felt like he magically passed through some kind of invisible wormhole into another world where there were no houses, roads or cars to remind him of civilization. All that was there were trees, rocks, beaches, waves and sky, and it seemed to him that this place hadn't changed at all in the whole forty years since the first time he visited there on a holiday with his father. This place, this *Holy* place, was sacred and it mysteriously, inexplicably seemed timeless and eternal to him. '*God just has to be a surfer,*' he often thought to himself.

2

As he walked along the track, Adam remembered that first visit with his dad, back in 1965. He remembered it now as the most joyous two weeks he ever spent with his father. It was one of those father and son trips done in their metallic-blue 1963 Holden Premier, their first car. He remembered his loving parents, who were gone now, and how the three of them migrated, in 1959, from post-war communist Yugoslavia, with not much more than the contents of three suitcases to their names. Adam was eleven years old at the time.

Australia in the early sixties was young, free and far away from everywhere. Adam's parents, like typical migrants, got stuck into work. A memory stood out of his dad coming home on a Friday evening with a hugely bulging wallet and a glowing grin on his face. He used to point his index finger at his wallet in his back pocket and declare, 'They could shoot me here!'

Those were happy memories. They owned their first house within four years and bought the Premier that year as well. This was significant because their beloved car took them exploring, and exploring was adventure, and adventure, Adam always believed, was what life was all about.

3

It was almost a kilometre walk to Teatree, the fourth finger of God's hand out along the Noosa peninsula. The track meandered firstly along a cliff edge and then through a tea tree forest before winding down into Teatree Bay.

The day was scorching hot and glaringly bright. Teatree Bay looked like a turquoise jewel glistening in the lush South Pacific sunshine. He had seen this sight at least a thousand times before and still, each time he saw it, it always felt like the first time.

His plan for the afternoon was to first surf the waves at Teatree, then later, when the tide was lower, he intended to walk further along the track, around Dolphin Point and into the fifth and outermost bay on the peninsula, named Granite Bay, the place where God placed His little finger.

Adam negotiated the round boulders and rocks leading down to the beach like a tightrope walker. He lay the *Dragan* down on the sand, sat down beside it and absorbed the sight of perfect hollow lines breaking around Teatree Point. He marvelled at their beautiful form. Their surface was as

smooth as glass. As they approached the shallow water, the light offshore breeze held them up momentarily, then, almost as in a celebration for having fulfilled the purpose of their long journey across the great southern ocean, they pitched their curl way out in front of themselves and peeled off tubularly along the edge of the shallow underwater shelf. As they broke, a plume of white spray blew back over the water behind them.

4

Adam took a drink from his water bottle and thought how amazingly lucky he was just to be there. It had been five years since he retired from his profession as a dentist and moved to Noosa. Five years of surfing some of the most perfect waves on the planet.

As he sat there by the shore, episodes from his life flashed through his mind. He remembered how different it was when he was a young man, way back in 1975. Back then he worked as a dentist, in the heart of Sydney. His dental surgery was situated on the tenth floor of an older building, named *Culwulla Chambers*. Although he was only very young, twenty-seven years old, he was already showing signs of achieving great success in his chosen profession. He treated politicians, actors, rock stars, judges, bank managers, business moguls and a menagerie of colourful people who all loved his approach to dentistry. They all looked forward to their visits. They knew that they would get impeccable dentistry, but it was the way it was delivered that really attracted them all. Part of it was the ambience of his surgery, 1950s art deco, most classic, part was his choice of music, which always soothed the pain, part was his positive personality, which always lifted their spirits, and part was the Nitrous Oxide and his excellent technique of delivery.

He had bought the practice eighteen months before, quite impulsively. The previous owner suddenly, and unexpectedly, was forced to sell. The sale went through in a matter of days, for twelve thousand dollars, a bargain and well within the means of a young dentist just four months out of university.

One thing that stood out in his memory of that time was the ever-present smell of incense that permeated the whole building. He remembered how his curiosity got the better of him one day and how he followed his nose to the *Adyar Bookshop*, situated on the first floor, and how, mysteriously, like destiny,

he bought what turned out to become the most cherished book in his life. It was a copy of *The Bhagavad Gita*, the Penguin publication translated from the original Sanskrit by Juan Mascaro.

5

Adam refocussed on the waves. He took one last drink from his water bottle and slid into the warm, tropical water. He loved paddling his surfboard, watching its nose cut through the glass, feeling the power of his arms propelling him along and looking through the crystal-clear water at the rocky bottom, at a school of fish or the occasional turtle or stingray.

Half way out to the point, he paused and stopped his paddle. There was no one near him. He sat up and took a long absorbing look at his surroundings. He was in the middle of a sheltered, crescent-shaped bay. To the east was the headland, which projected out to the point. The headland was covered with a variety of lush, subtropical vegetation, including Eucalyptus gum trees, Tea trees and Pandanus palms. The shoreline changed from a rugged rocky point to a line of smoothly rounded boulders extending all the way back to the little picturesque beach at the southern end of the bay. All that was visible were things created by nature.

He perceived that he was looking at his universe expressing herself for him. She was gushing love, embracing him, sometimes like a mother, sometimes like a lover. She was always embracing him and it seemed to him that she couldn't find enough ways to express her love to him. Teatree Bay was one of her jewels. It was a place where she secretly made love to him and filled him with ecstasy and wonder.

Out on the point, he sat up on his board adjacent to the half dozen or so other surfers in the line-up. Eventually a clean five-foot swell came his way. He turned and casually paddled into the rising wall of water that was now lifting him skyward. He rose to his feet in rhythm with the wave and eyed down the steep wall in front of him. He let the *Dragan* gain speed by dropping to the bottom of the now hollowing wave. The wave began to pitch over as he banked hard off the bottom and began, with speed now, to point his board down the hollow line of morphing vertical liquid. He crouched slightly, aiming as high up the wall as he could, as the wave began to completely turn itself outside in. He

was in perfect trim, with his longboard planing frictionlessly on top of the fluid curve, as the clean curl pitched over his head. Instinctively, just at this most intense and critical moment, he relaxed and adopted a stylish stance of total resignation to fate as he allowed himself to be completely covered by the tube.

6

It was a Saturday morning, in the *winter of '77*. Adam sat alone in his dental surgery. The front door of the surgery was locked. He was sitting on his operator's stool facing the back wall with his eyes focussed on a dot that he had drawn there a couple of years before. He was sitting there, unmoving, frozen like a statue. Beside him, lying open on top of a small bench, was his beloved *Bhagavad Gita*. In his left hand was a rubber mask, which was used to administer Nitrous Oxide. He was holding the mask over his nose in such a way so that if he should fall into unconsciousness his left arm would drop down taking the mask with it. That would cause him to wake up again.

He had found the ideal settings of the machine over many months of experimentation. He found his best natural total flow rate of gasses to be six litres per minute. This allowed him to practise deep, rhythmical yoga breathing and stay in harmony with the machine. He found the best combination of gasses to be 2.5 litres per minute of Oxygen and 3.5 litres per minute of Nitrous Oxide, with the air vent in the mask completely closed. These levels, which he found to be most efficient for his purpose, were not what he considered high, but amazingly, they were the levels that produced the most powerful effect.

7

First he remembered seeing a single point. Then it began to be surrounded by a white circle of light. The circle of light then began to approach him, turning into a tube of white light at the end of which was the dot on the wall onto which he was focussed. It was like looking through the inside of an open ended fluorescent tube. Gradually he felt himself begin to accelerate towards the dot, down the tube of white light. He kept accelerating, faster and faster, scarier and scarier. But he was not going to move. That was his discipline, to remain perfectly still no matter what happened. He felt like he was being accelerated to infinite velocity, flying through the tube of light towards the dot, which didn't seem to be getting any closer. Gradually, as he

kept accelerating faster and faster, he emerged from the tube of light and found himself suspended way out in deepest space. His first awareness was that he now had spherical vision. He saw everything, in all directions. He saw that there was nothing near him, although trillions upon trillions of shining white stars surrounded him. Gradually the white tube, out of which he emerged, began to morph into what appeared to him like a wave, a huge wave. As all this was occurring, he felt an understanding about what was happening to him, and this had the effect of calming him. The mammoth wave rose up behind him. It was as tall as a ten-storey building. He stood there as the gigantic wave formed itself behind him and then pitched over into a colossal cosmic tube. In front of him, a wall of water, hundreds of feet high, stretched out into infinity. As the wall approached him, it curved out over his head, forming itself into the most perfect *barrel* that imagination could possibly create. And as he stood there, motionless, racing along, perfectly slotted in his cosmic tube, he heard a howl of joy emanate from someplace deep within him, *aaawooooo*, and the last thing he remembered was that he beckoned with his right arm behind him, making upward motions, thinking in his mind, *'make it bigger, make it bigger'*.

That morning, a young dentist, who loved to surf, found out that his universe had no limits, and that she had no limits in how many ways she could communicate with him and in how many ways she could express her love to him.

8

After chasing him frantically for fifty yards with its barrel, the Teatree wave relented momentarily. Adam came flying out of the tube like a shell out of a cannon. Completely composed, he aimed his surfboard, skittering and chattering across the surface of the water, out and up to the top of the shoulder of the wave, then, using some of the excess speed he had generated, he banked back into a long, carving, roundhouse cutback, sending out a huge plume of spray. This allowed the wave to catch up to him again. He transitioned smoothly into a powerful bottom turn then lined up his board down the vertical face and waited for the now accelerating barrel to cover him up again. Deep inside the spinning vortex, he crouched motionless with his eyes fixed on

his trajectory, and as time stopped and became eternity, he rode that cosmic tube once again.

He was there where she wanted him. He was there in the place she made for him. There, where she focussed her energy for him and shaped herself into his body, the Earth, the headland, the bay and the wave, all just for him, all just for this moment, which she then turned into eternity, just for him.

9

After surfing Teatree for about an hour, Adam glided into the beach, picked up his water bottle from its spot amongst the roots of a Pandanus palm and headed off along the track towards Dolphin Point and the larger surf of Granite Bay.

.....

Chapter Five

THE PRIMAL DREAM

1

'Can you imagine how chaotic life would be without infinity? Can you imagine what the universe would be like without it? I don't think it's possible. I don't think there can be a reality without infinity. Anythin finite must have borders an boundaries. An when you have boundaries, you have to have somethin outside of em. An there goes your finite universe. Imagine you're flyin along in your space ship an you all of a sudden hit a bloody wall. Oh sorry, you've hit the end of the universe. Do not continue. Go back the other way. You see? What infinity does is it removes the wall, an everythin outside the wall; cause there *is* no outside. An eternity is the same thing on another axis. Oh sorry, time's up. Go back. See how they're totally essential to existence? An they're totally not understood. They don't want to understand em, that's why they came up with the bullshit big bang. They just can't cope with somethin existin without it havin begun. They can't deal with that. An they can't deal with somethin existin forever, without an end. Mate, you just can't put a boundary around your mind, period. An that's where the universe exists. That's the reality. But the ultimate reality is this, only truth is real, only truth exists, an the lie, the big bullshit lie *can't* exist, it doesn't exist ... actually, it does, but only as an idea.

'I've seen jokers kid emselves right out of their own minds and take thousands of gullible drongos with em. Mate, the most bullshit lie juxtaposes itself right next to the most profound truth, like the sweetest meat is right next to the bone. So if you're lookin for the biggest bullshitters in the world, go look for em in their bloody gyp temples of truth. They shut out the whole universe an call it unholy an they create their own reality inside an say that their bloody lie, that they made up for their own power, is the ultimate truth an all you've gotta do is believe it an you'll be OK. But they can't prove any of it.

'My step-daddy used to say this thing to me when I was just an ankle biter, he used to say, *sonny boy*, he used to call me sonny boy, *sonny boy, don't*

believe nothin you ain't found out for yourself. But that was ages ago. I've got me own sayin now. Imperfections only exist in ideas and perfections in realities.'

Zeke struggled to get his damaged body out of his lounge chair. He placed a couple more pieces of wood into the fireplace as he asked Adam if he'd like another *Milo*. It was *July 1978* and the night outside of Zeke's cosy little hut whistled with the icy-cold gusts of a winter southwester.

Zeke lived on top of a high plain, about a mile back from the edge of a towering escarpment. Directly to the east of his place was a deep coastal valley within which nestled the small beachside hamlet of Stanwell Park. His tiny hut was situated on a couple of acres of land that Zeke somehow managed to procure during his mysterious past. The hut only had two rooms, the guestroom and his bedroom. His bedroom was a total secret. No one ever got to go in there. The guestroom, which doubled as a kitchen, had an old ratty three-person lounge, a lounge chair that did not match the lounge, which was Zeke's personal chair and no one else ever sat in that, a small wooden coffee table and a giant bean bag that kind of drifted around the room, but generally stayed close to the fireplace in the winter time. Zeke didn't own a TV because he reckoned that he wasn't put on this Earth to spend his life watching *shit in a box*. He reckoned he'd take the *full colour, sensurround, 3D TV* that nature offered up any day of the week. A TV was never missed, especially when there were visitors around. And even if there had been one there, it would have come a pathetic last to the legendary conversations and great music that saturated that little hut most nights of the week.

Visiting Zeke was always a trip. In the back of his place he had a large veggie garden. Amongst the vegetables he grew what he reckoned was *the meanest Mullumbimby Madness this side of the black stump*. It grew like crazy in a half a tonne of chicken manure, right in the middle of the garden.

Zeke wasn't what you'd call a woodcarver, but the pipe he carved out of an old piece of walnut was a work of art, and the matching *mull bowl* he carved to go with it, if it could speak, would tell stories of nights when princes and kings sat around the fireplace, smoking, drinking and laughing as they spun yarns of daring exploits, which transformed an eternal dream into present day

reality. This dream, this *primal dream*, this glorious unreachable dream of all humanity since the beginning of time, was the dream of *flight like a bird*.

‘So you’re not a big fan of churches, Zeke?’ asked Adam, attempting to kick-start another volley of Zeke-style philosophy.

‘Mate, when I think about it, those bastards started gettin into me way back in school. The bloody government had no right to send me to the indoctrination classes where some dill, who reckoned he knew it all, told a bunch of little kids that they were all goin to hell if they didn’t believe in what he was sayin, and the joker couldn’t prove a word of it. Churches mate; they think that they can serve up truth like McDonalds serves up hamburgers. Fast n easy, nothin to do, just open your mouth and shovel it in. But the truth they’re feedin ya is somethin they been fed by others, who’ve been fed by others before em, an it’s Big Macs all the way mate. It’s *fast truth* for the masses, no effort, no danger, no thinkin, just bloody gullible believin. Mate, there’s only one truth worth believin in this life, an that’s the truth you find out for yourself. The world is chock full of people who can’t even be bothered makin their own bloody breakfast. Can you imagine any of *them* searchin for the truth? What for? Who wants to know anyway? An this apathy creates a vacuum, which gets filled with someone else’s truth, fast truth, no effort an no risk.

‘The most important thing a bloke’s gotta do in this life is try n figure out the bloody truth for himself, without books. That’s the only fair dinkum salvation goin on this planet, *mate!* Feel like another puff?’

‘Is the Pope a Catholic?’

Reloading his pipe, Zeke could never have guessed, in a million years, that his mild-mannered, attentive friend was secretly already much further down that rabbit hole than he could ever have imagined. Adam was one of only a handful of people alive on the planet at the time that was actually crossing the un-crossable abyss. Young Adam, whose heart yearned for the freedom that only a personal knowledge of the ultimate truth could bring. Books or other peoples’ sworn testaments just didn’t do it for Adam. A man had to find out for himself.

‘Can I put on Moondance, Zeke?’

‘Anythin you like, mate.’

Adam carefully slid the thirty-three LP out of its jacket and cleaned the dust off with the special record cleaning cloth. He placed it on Zeke's turntable and manually lowered the stylus to the beginning of track five, the last track on side one. As he sat back down on the lounge and took the loaded pipe from Zeke, his emotions rose as Van Morrison's poetry filled the smoky air.

Adam felt that these evenings with Zeke, the things that he held onto, the things he let go of, his ultra secret things, his work and his sport, were all part of his drive to discover the truth about existence. He knew that there was danger in his quest, but he had already decided that this journey was worth everything he had in his life, including life itself. He knew deep down that if a man didn't feel totally committed to the quest, he would fail. He knew that to stop half way, having been witness to only a fraction of the hidden truth, to turn back due to fear, would mean a fate far worse than death. It would mean a life of insanity, caught floundering between two realities. Something he once read stuck in his mind. It said that at the beginning of a journey such as his, the world was the world, half way through, the world wasn't the world anymore, but at the end of the journey, if one kept going and didn't chicken out, the world would be the world again, but seen in a new light.

Adam was, at that time, somewhere between the beginning and the end of his quest and he couldn't speak a word of it to anyone.

2

'If you buy *that*, you not only can't park it in front of our house, you can't park it in our street.'

'You'll have to park it where nobody can see it.'

It was *January 1969*, on a hot Sunday afternoon, up the Parramatta Road. Adam and his parents were cruising the car yards, shopping for a car for him. They were really proud of their son for matriculating into university, even though his father never said so. In fact he was so sure that Adam would fail his high school exams that he promised him a new car if he got through.

They were standing in front of an immaculate, orange, VW Kombi camper van, which was fitted out with a set of roof racks, a sound system, driving lights, chrome widies, a fridge and a hot stainless steel exhaust that gave the Kombi a deep throaty burble. Adam drooled all over the van. It was perfect for

his trips away. He imagined himself in the Kombi, lost up the coast with Susan by his side. The movie of this wonderful vision played in his mind, until his mother's voice shredded the film into confetti.

'No one in our family ever owned a *truck*! Do you see anyone else in our street driving a *truck*?'

Then his dad weighed in, carrying a mangled scowl on his face.

'We couldn't embarrass ourselves with this *monstrosity*. You would have to park it around the corner, in the next street, so no one could see it.'

And before Adam could even react, his mother pointed to a brand new, shining red, convertible Datsun 2000 roadster, sitting gleaming in the bright sunshine at the opposite end of the car sales yard and said,

'Why don't you get a nice car like that?'

Adam was dumbstruck. His brain made a brief, valiant attempt to construct a solid defence for his preference, but his mouth seemed to have other ideas, because all that came out of it, even to Adam's surprise, was,

'OK.'

3

As the music played and its sound mixed with the crackles of the fireplace, Adam looked closely at the features of Zeke's rearranged face. He had no left eye as it had been dug out of its socket by a tree branch, and there was a line running from the upper left down to the lower right side of his face, which was a scar caused by the knifelike slicing effect of stainless steel wire. In the subdued light of the fire, Adam could clearly make out the S shape of Zeke's spine and the unusual angles at which all his four limbs projected. When Zeke moved, it was obvious that it was with pain; a pain that Zeke would have to endure for the rest of his life. Both men grew quieter as the smoke calmed their minds. Adam became absorbed with the finer details of the guestroom. He loved the look of the walls, which were panelled with rough sawn boards. They gave the room a cosy, earthy ambience. The walls were decorated with photos and objects from Zeke's eccentric past.

Zeke was the eccentric's eccentric. He was a designer and inventor. His designs were always radical and verging on the bizarre. His mind was intense and he always searched for the edge of the envelope. Adam guessed that that

was the place where he found the kind of stimulation that he craved. But as Zeke found out the hard way, the edge of the envelope could be a dangerous place. It was a fine line that separated the things that worked from the things that didn't work, and to Zeke's ultimate misfortune, that line was sometimes a tad blurred.

Like a shrine to his body of work, the ramshackle old shed stood in the south-western corner of Zeke's patch of land. Occasionally, when he visited, Adam found Zeke in the shed busy at his workbench working on some project or other. The rest of an evening like that was usually spent in the shed surrounded by dozens of Zeke's weird and wonderful inventions. At the back of the shed, standing like two sentinels on either side of the workbench, were two giant speaker boxes, each about six feet tall. The rumour going around was that Zeke purchased them off a rock band he knew, for a couple of pounds of his legendary smoke.

On some nights, Jimi might as well have been there in Zeke's shed as *Electric Ladyland* blasted out of those huge speakers and radiated out into the night. And the volume didn't matter because this was still Australia and there were still places where a man could spread his wings and let his spirit soar. And the nearest neighbour, who lived miles away, might have thought that he heard the sounds of Jimi Hendrix guitar come and go with the light gusts of the summer evening breezes, cooling him as he sat on his back veranda, sucking on his stubby, trying to comprehend the distance between himself and all those bright little stars shining away in the vast blackness beyond.

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Chapter Six

TELEPATHY

1

The Datsun 2000 was an awesome car; especially back in '69 when there were still not many powerful cars on the road. It had a top speed of 120 miles per hour and could burn off all of its contemporary rivals such as MGs, Triumphs and Alfas. Adam asked his dad if he could throw the optional hardtop into the deal. His dad agreed but insisted that the old '63 Premier had to go as a deposit.

January and February 1969 passed slowly. Adam lost contact with his high school mates because his parents bought a big new house on the other side of Sydney. He didn't return back north because the 2000 was just too impractical for a long surfing trip and the Holden was gone, replaced by a totally unsuitable metallic green, convertible, 1966 Cadillac Coupe DeVille that his dad absolutely fell in love with.

Adam surfed the northern beaches of Sydney, but they were a poor substitute for what he had experienced only two months before. He went on long drives around Sydney with the top down and the music blaring. It was a time between two stages in his life and as is common in transitional periods like that, it felt like passing through a vacuum.

On one of those drives he discovered a true driver's road. One day, as he drove south headed for the spectacular coast south of Sydney, he decided to take the left turn into the Royal National Park. It was early morning and there was no traffic. The road, winding through the Park for about twenty miles, was highlighted with uncountable bends, hairpins, bridges, a causeway and many short straights. The road focussed his attention and caused his heart rate to rise. At the end of it he came blasting out of the rainforest and was suddenly confronted with the expansive panorama of the whole Illawarra Coast. From there, the road skirted the edge of the tall coastal cliffs. Adam drove for another mile, or so, until he came to a lookout on the point of an open hill. The view from the hill was absolutely breathtaking, big ocean on the left, big escarpment stretching south over the horizon on the right, and big sky above. He parked

the 2000 in the small car park at the lookout. As he stepped out of his car, completely overawed by the spectacular view, he spotted a small sign that read, *Bald Hill – Elevation, 600 Feet ASL*. As he sat on the grass on the point of the hill, soaking up the sweeping panorama, he noticed a large sea eagle soaring majestically in the light south-easterly breeze.

2

Adam's high school pass managed to scrape him into the Sydney University Dental School. One of his preferred pastimes at uni was sitting for hours with his friends at their favourite sunny table at *The Courtyard Café*. The jumpers and jackets came off and many coffees were drunk over talk of lectures, current events and the hot gossip going around at the time.

Out of that whole first winter at uni, one conversation stood out in Adam's memory. He didn't know why he should have remembered the things one in his group said. The student's name was Lloyd. He was studying genetics and was as sharp as a tack. His studies got him thinking about the atom bomb.

'You remember Hiroshima? I don't know if they had any clues, but Hiroshima initiated the greatest genetic experiment in the history of this planet.'

Lloyd was one of those people who were miraculously endowed with seemingly superhuman intelligence. His time at uni was effortless. He passed all his exams with high distinctions, but no one ever saw him study. He was tall, wiry and somewhat scruffy. His hair was long, past his shoulders, and he had a preference for old fraying jeans, American T-shirts and jumpers with holes in them. His only items of clothing that shone with polished newness were his *Miller* cowboy boots, the special ones with the snakeskin inlays. Lloyd's family were old money, hailing all the way back, his father reckoned, to the *bloody crusades*. Amongst other things, they owned a sprawling cotton farm out near Warren in western New South Wales. During his holidays, Lloyd took off to the farm, 'to help out with its management', he reckoned. But the farm hands had their own ideas about the real reason behind Lloyd's apparent zeal for farming. They reckoned that he was only there for the 'grouse Warren sheilas'.

'The theory goes like this,' Lloyd continued. 'Every time an atomic bomb is dropped on a species, the same phenomenon occurs. The effect of that

phenomenon may result in a profound genetic watershed. This may ultimately prove to be extremely beneficial for the future survival of that species as it may trigger a quantum leap in its evolution.'

Some around the table just paused and looked at Lloyd with a kind of questioning stare, while others laughed and shook their heads.

'Now hear me out,' he persisted. 'Think about it logically.'

Everyone silenced.

'The bomb drops. Ground zero is death. Then, as you move out from ground zero, in bands, different, lesser things happen, until you get to the magic band where no one dies, but where everyone is affected by the radiation, not so much as to suffer burns, but enough to cause a tsunami of genetic mutations many millions of times more numerous than would ever occur naturally. Most of these mutations manifest themselves in the next generation. Some take two or even three generations to appear. Each mutation is a biological experiment. A new organism is created, accidentally, by chance, and is then put to the test of survival in the surrounding environment, which includes survival against competition from other living organisms.'

Jaws were beginning to hang limp. Lloyd, however, was on a roll.

'And this is what happens. Out of all those mutations, only two things *can* happen. The mutated organisms will either be better survivors, or they will be worse survivors. Those are the only two possibilities for a new genetic mutation. So what happens? Most will be severely distorted and disfigured and will be totally unsuitable for survival or reproduction. They will all die off. In fact, all unfavourable mutations will ultimately die out, even if it takes a few generations. Out of the millions and millions of mutations, there might only be one, or maybe two, with the magic genetic code to create the super survivor, the dominant being. Amongst us humans, this dominant being will hyper-thrive and will successfully breed the next generation of dominants like him. So you see, it starts with a bomb and ends with a tribe of supermen, and women, having superkids.'

The group of friends sitting around the table in the sunny courtyard were open-mouthed stunned. But this kind of theory was what they were there for and as usual Lloyd delivered in spades. It didn't matter if the theory made

sense or not, or whether it followed provable logic, what mattered to the group was that a theory was thrown up in the air and given life. Then, like one of Lloyd's mutations, the theory had to pass the test of survival. More coffees were ordered as the circle of students contemplated the powerful idea that Lloyd had just postulated. Then one of them, the ravishing Eva, asked the next logical question.

'Tell me Lloydie, what kind of mutations did you have in mind, you know, to dominate the rest of humanity?'

'Eva, my fantasy, I see you in the day while my eyes are open and I ask myself, self, if you were given a choice to gaze upon the sun or to gaze upon the face of the beautiful Eva for the rest of your life, which would you choose? And I say to myself, self, what is the sun in the presence of the radiance of the beautiful Eva? Give me Eva and extinguish the sun. I have no need of its dim, flickering light. Ahhhh, Eva, I see her in the darkness of my night, and it is Eva that is the light of my dreams, the light of my hopes and the light in my heart.'

Everybody laughed while Eva blushed. There were at least a hundred boys at the uni who dreamt about Eva, but none of them could steal her heart like Lloyd could. He continued.

'There is one main, obvious quality of a man which may lead to his ultimate dominance over other men, and that is superior intelligence. However, I now believe that there may be another even more powerful quality a man may possess, which would make him completely untouchable. That quality is telepathy. It is the ability to read thoughts and emotions. It is the ability to see right through people and know their true feelings and intentions. It is the ability to communicate with another telepathic person through thought alone. Perhaps it may not even be thought as we understand it. It may be something else. How could anyone fight that? It would be impossible. And who knows, this dominant super human might just be the one who brings about the downfall of the nation that was responsible for creating him in the first place.'

3

One of Adam's favourite places at uni was the *Fisher Library* music room. Adam liked to book an album there and listen to it through the quality headphones they provided. Scattered amongst the listening chairs were a few

low-set coffee tables on top of which usually lay a selection of magazines. Adam picked up a *Popular Science* magazine and began to browse through it.

In the midst of the haunting desert sounds of America's *Horse With No Name*, Adam's eyes fixated themselves on a picture of a man suspended about twenty feet in the air, hanging from a delta shaped wing structure that looked like a double sail and was called a *hang glider*. The man in the picture appeared to be gliding down a grassy slope of a small hill. He hung in a simple harness, with his legs dangling free. It appeared to Adam, and this is what immediately caught his attention, that the man flying in the picture must have foot launched that glider and that he would have had to have landed it on his feet as well. 'That's how the birds do it,' he thought. There was no undercarriage, or wheels, for landing, that Adam could see. He read the article titled, *Flying low and slow*. The article described the principles behind the construction of this simple, lightweight new aircraft. It went into some of the history of the design, mentioning a Francis Rogallo who, working for the US government, designed it as a potential re-entry vehicle for the NASA space program. NASA actually rejected the design, however a young Australian, named John Dickerson, in 1963, first fashioned an airframe that incorporated the triangular control frame and utilised wire bracing to distribute the load to the Rogallo airfoil.

Once Dickerson's version of Rogallo's airfoil design became understood, the human natural instinct took over and young minds re-focussed, even more intently, on that magnificent ancient dream of *flight like a bird*.

Adam xeroxed the article and took it home with him. Events that unfolded in his life in the next few years gradually revealed what a profound and life changing effect that short, obscure article ultimately had on him.

4

During those early years at university, Adam belonged to the Sydney University Boardriders Club. The president of the club was a cheerful, energetic social work student, named Ken. They made Adam vice president because no one else wanted the job, but as it turned out the position was totally superfluous and involved no work whatsoever. It suited Adam right down to the ground. The club had meetings and social get-togethers and occasionally attempted to run a contest. Everyone was pretty laid back about everything

and nothing much ever got done, but the feeling was good and they liked it when they all got together.

Within a year, Ken stumbled into a brand new sport and, as destiny would have it, brought Adam along trailing in his wake for the ride of his life.

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Chapter Seven
BEYOND FANTASY

1

The year was 1971. It was the beginning of third term of Adam's third year of dentistry. Up to now, his course was comprised mostly of lectures and lab sessions, all held within the historic grounds of Sydney University. This term, however, was the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the young dental students. It was time to go clinical. They were torn away from the kaleidoscopic environment of the university, which was full of life, energy, political incorrectness and religious irreverence, and were transplanted into the cloistered, inbred corridors and torture chambers of The Dental Hospital, the skinny pink building located right next to Central Railway Station, in the heart of Sydney.

2

The back of *The Cross* wasn't one of the city's cleanest areas. There were many dark alleys and mysterious dead ends lurking in wait, like a transit station, where passengers changed trains, having come from a happy, sunny place, where they somehow lost their sense of compassion for their fellow beings, and boarded another train, the destination of which was an altogether different, much darker, more death-like place. And return tickets were as rare as a last swig of cheap whiskey out of a bottle found lying in the gutter of one of those filthy, stinking black alleys, just off the bright lights and constant traffic.

3

The grey figure, bent over and staggering, stumbled out of the main street into the welcoming blackness of the deep, dark alley. His hair was long and straggled. He wore an old coat, which covered his torn jumper and urine stained trousers. In his right hand was a half empty bottle of *Old Timer*, wrapped in a paper bag. To look at him, he appeared as a man without a face. There was just blackness where his face should have been because there was no more light to spare in the whole universe to shine on that place. If one *could* have seen it, one would have seen it covered in dried blood, scabs and scars,

from the injuries he had sustained due to his numerous falls while intoxicated. He staggered forward, deeper into the darkness.

He used to have a drinking mate whose name was Frank. They used to be diggers together. *Fought for our fuckin cunt-ry, we did; fuck it!* They went right back together, right back to Vietnam, where they met up. They were the best mates you could ever have. They stood side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder. They covered each other and looked after each other. They fought like tigers together, *for our fuckin cunt-ry*. The time they had in the houses, *fair dinkum mate, she was a pearler, she was. When we got back, we stayed best mates, an because that mongrel war wouldn't stop replayin itself in our heads, we got into some serious piss together an felt like we outsmarted that bastard for good. It was party time again. All right, so we got a bit wild and ratty, an we did end up in the street, but the grog fixed all that. Then Frank started complainin again, about how the fuckin war kept comin back, the burnin, screamin kids. He used to wake up next to me, usually behind some pile of garbage, soaked in a cold sweat, screamin at the top of his lungs. He used to talk about seein devils an rats crawlin all over him, an wakin up after dreamin that a pack of savage dogs, all fuckin wild an frothin, were rippin his face right offa him.*

A few nights ago, we were standin there, up near the top of William Street, just down from the big Coke sign. We were flyin. Ol Timer was pumpin hundred proof through our veins. The colours of all the neon lights were meltin and blendin together. We leaned against each other to stop ourselves from fallin over. A big semi was roarin up William Street, when somethin weird happened. All the swirlin lights just froze in one place, an all the noise just switched off. It was as if there was a bubble around us an everythin outside just froze. Our eyes met, an as if by some divine miracle, we both instantly sobered up, and I heard Frank say,

'See ya next time round, mate. Gotta go.'

An before I even knew what happened, me best mate stepped out into William Street, right into the path of that twenty tonne semi.

As he ventured deeper into the blackness of the alley, he stopped suddenly. He was having trouble standing in one place. He took another good suck of the whiskey bottle. It seemed to him that it had got mighty *unusual quiet* all of a sudden. As he stood there, rocking from side to side, he thought

that he could see an outline of a man emerge faintly out of the darkness. This sent a shiver of fear through him. The bottle of Old Timer slipped out of his hand and smashed on the ground. Out of the darkest blackness of Bob's universe, a deep, baritone voice began to sing in a Southern Baptist Gospel style.

*'You gotta go to the lonesome valley,
You gotta go there on your own,
You gotta ask The Lord's forgiveness,
It's the only way ta get back home.'*

He couldn't believe his ears when he heard the music, and he couldn't believe his eyes when tears started to flow out of them, and he couldn't believe his legs when they collapsed onto their knees, and he couldn't believe his hands when they came together to pray, and he couldn't believe his mouth when it uttered the words,

'Dear God, I'm so ... so sorry'.

4

The clinical part of the dental course was divided into several distinct disciplines. Each occupied its own section of the hospital. There was a department solely dedicated to the extraction of teeth. Everyone just called it *Exo*.

The inevitable first day in the *Exo Clinic* finally arrived. That first day was meant to be an introduction to the course, which would ultimately teach the students how to precisely, and with the minimum of trauma, extract rotten teeth out of terrified patients.

All the students filed into the *Exo Clinic* like little lambs. There were half a dozen dental chairs in the room, all set out in a row. There were half a dozen staff dentists, with half a dozen assistants helping them, busy working in the wide open mouths of half a dozen disadvantaged victims. There were the sounds of moaning and groaning, and of people saying, *open wider*, and the clanking of surgical instruments and extracted teeth on metal trays.

The students divided into six groups. Each group formed a tight semi-circle around each dental chair. Adam usually preferred to hover around the perimeter of a demonstration group, looking over the shoulders of the others.

The dentist Adam's group was observing was a small Indian man. The patient was an older man, obviously worn down by a life that had exposed him to its more abrasive side. Adam's first reaction was discomfort at the dentist's debasing chair-side manner. When he spoke to the patient, he spoke to him in that time-honoured, degrading, monotone voice, which definitively differentiates the *public servant* from the rest of the human species. He barely looked in the patient's mouth, turned to the nurse, and declared, 'All teeth needing to come out!'

The old man's eyes glazed over with fear as the little dark dentist approached him with a huge syringe and a six-pack of *Xylocaine* cartridges. As the dentist stabbed away, the students all winced and cringed, but did not make a sound, unlike the victim in the chair, who wouldn't stop screaming and kicking his legs.

'Come on, come on, it's not *that* bad!' retorted the dentist as he buried another needle deep into the poor man's gum. After a while, the man's eyes just fixed themselves on a point in space as his face became totally expressionless. Understandable, considering that he must have been numb from the neck up.

There were eight teeth standing, like sentinels, in the man's lower jaw. They had survived a misspent youth, a war, a marriage, a divorce, a property settlement, and finally a one-day-at-a-time, subsistence, scavenger existence. But they had met their match in the pint-sized dentist with the Indian accent.

Those teeth came flying out of the old guy's mouth so fast, that they almost made a drum roll sound as they hit the metal tray. Sure the molars slowed the dentist down a tad, but you wouldn't have wanted to blink your eyes because you would have missed him bury his knee in the patient's chest, take a vice-like grip of his lower jaw and with a loud crack of what sounded like breaking bone, that mongrel last tooth was out.

All the students' eyes bulged clear out of their sockets as the dentist triumphantly held the healthy-looking molar high in the air for all to see. Adam thought that he could see a large piece of mandible stuck to one of the roots,

but he wasn't going to say anything. '*Maybe that's how they're meant to come out,*' he thought.

The patient drifted in and out of consciousness as the dentist yelled out, 'Sutures!'

Up to that point, Adam hadn't actually seen the surgical site because the students standing in front of him obscured his vision. As the nurse came over with the suture tray, he manoeuvred himself into a better position. He was horrified when he saw the size of the wound in the patient's lower jaw. There was blood everywhere. As the dentist started suturing the huge gash, Adam collapsed to the floor like a rag doll. Everyone turned around to see what the thud sound was. They left him on the floor, but turned him on his side. He regained consciousness after about a minute. They sat him up on a chair and gave him some soft drink. He was a bit dazed, but not hurt. The nurse laughed and said, 'We get one every year.'

5

Around about that time, Adam bumped into Ken, who he hadn't seen for most of that year. It was one of those one in a million chance encounters. It happened in late spring, at one of Adam's favourite haunts, *The Watson's Bay Hotel*. He loved to meet friends there and sit in the sun in the beer garden, with nothing but the most picturesque harbour in the world to look at.

He heard a voice calling his name. 'Hey, Adam!' He thought he recognised it and called back, 'Ken?'

As it turned out, the two friends both sat with different groups, so they decided to exchange phone numbers and catch up with each other at another time. Ken briefly mentioned a new sport, something about hang gliding and how it was *the best thing you could ever imagine*. He also said that he was mates with the guys that made the hang gliders. Adam told Ken about the article he read about the sport. They agreed to get together on the weekend.

Next Saturday morning, as Adam washed his car in the driveway, Ken rolled up in his modified, sky blue, VW Bug. Adam heard the hot exhaust note from way down the street. There was a long, thin object strapped to the Bug's roof racks. Ken stopped opposite the driveway, stuck his head out of the car window and asked,

‘You wanna come for a drive to Kurnell?’

6

The blue Bug roared down the Pacific Highway, over the Harbour Bridge, through the city and past Botany Bay, headed for the vast, high dunes of Kurnell.

They turned off the road and followed a sandy track deep into the desert-like environment. They were weaving between twenty to eighty feet high sand dunes. As they rounded a bend, a huge dune appeared right in front of them. It was about one hundred and fifty feet high, and standing right on top of it were two men holding down a hang glider.

‘Steve and Arnold are here,’ Ken commented. ‘They’re probably testing the new *200*. Arnold is Steve’s little brother. He wouldn’t be more than fourteen, the gutsy little runt.’

It was early afternoon and a solid twenty-five knot northeaster was blowing in, straight off the ocean.

Kurnell attracted the flying pioneers, not only because of the high dunes, but also due to its proximity to the sea. The wind blew smoothly there because it came in straight off the water with nothing to get in its way to make it turbulent.

Adam stood next to Ken, totally transfixed. He felt like he was hallucinating, like he was observing the distant future manifesting itself through some kind of cosmic portal, right there in front of him.

Steve was harnessed in the kite and was holding it in the wind, feeling the lift, while Arnold was holding him down by the front wires. Adam could tell that the wind was really strong on top of the big dune because he could see a plume of sand blowing off the back of it. He could see that the brothers really had to wrestle with the hang glider to keep it under control.

Suddenly Arnold scrambled out of the way allowing Steve to lean forcefully through the control bar and run into the wind. The previously flapping sail now filled with air, forming itself into the twin conical shapes originally envisaged by the inventor, Francis Rogallo.

With only two steps and a powerful lunge into the wind, Steve was airborne. Initially, the kite lifted wildly in the strong lift, rising perhaps twenty

feet above the top of the dune. Adam and Ken were frozen in a trancelike gape. Steve's control inputs and reactions to gusts were relaxed and composed. He hung vertically in his harness with his legs crossed to emphasise his competence. After the initial lift, the hang glider began to descend down the front of the dune, gliding about thirty feet above the sand. The glide angle was roughly the same as the slope of the dune, around thirty degrees, making the glide angle of the flight about three to one. Steve glided gracefully for the whole one hundred and fifty feet, then, with a spectacular flare, landed on both feet at the same time, without taking a step. Young Arnold arrived seconds later, having run down the hill after his older brother.

That was the first time Adam ever saw a man fly. He was so amazed that he was momentarily totally lost for words.

As Steve stepped out of his harness, Adam noticed his physical features. He wasn't tall, about five feet six, and he was light and muscular, especially around the shoulders. He wore a pair of old, worn-out jeans and a faded, black T-shirt with the words *Ultra Light Flight Systems* silk-screened on the front and back of it. His feet were bare and he wore his dark hair very long. His face possessed strong, classical features, strange to look at. Adam hallucinated brief glimpses of an eagle's face from within it. He just let that slide. He was learning. Once, when he dared look deeply into Steve's eyes, for the briefest of moments, he saw a steady gaze piercing straight through him, straight through everything, firmly fixed and focussed into the distant future. In that nanosecond, Adam hallucinated the image in Steve's mind. He saw man flying huge air, in highly advanced, supremely efficient, ultra-light, foot-launchable super-wings. He let that hallucination slide as well, but a thought crossed his mind about how these strange flashes of insight began a few years before, not long after he returned back home from his trip up north, and the visit to the rockslide.

Ken introduced Adam to the brothers. The boys then listened-in as Steve and Arnold analysed the most recent alteration to the tune of their latest prototype.

'How did it feel?' Arnold asked.

‘Perfect. I think we’ve definitely got the centre of gravity right now, and the extra reflex in the keel is giving a much more positive pitch-up feel in the bar. Wanna go?’

‘You bet!’

As Steve and Arnold carried their glider back up the big dune, for Arnold to have a flight, Ken unloaded his more primitive wing off the Bug. He had ideas of launching from the big dune that day, but he first wanted to have a few shorter, warm-up glides off a smaller dune, right next to the big one. In the meantime, Adam was in heaven. The sun was shining, the sky was blue and the wind was blowing. There was the ocean right there, and people, who he was friends with, were flying, like birds, all around him. He couldn’t have dreamt anything this good. Except this was no dream, it was real.

It only took one flight by Ken for Adam to see that he was quite an accomplished pilot as well. After a number of flights from the small dune, Ken began launching from the big one with the other two. Adam got in the groove and became useful as a carrier and launch assistant. As he held the front wires of Ken’s kite, helping him to launch, he was amazed by the powerful lift generated by the sail. As Ken yelled, ‘OK’, Adam released the wires, moved out of the way and watched Ken lift off into the strong wind.

As the boys continued flying that day, they began landing further and further out from the hill. With each flight they honed their launch and glide techniques, constantly improving the efficiency of their glides. By the end of the day they were achieving glide ratios of nearly five to one, sometimes landing almost thirty yards out in front of the dune.

After his best flight of the day, Ken turned to Adam and said, ‘Feeling ready for a go?’

For a moment, Adam’s head spun and his whole body flushed with fear. He remembered other times in the past when he felt this way, and like in the past, he just blindly ignored all the overwhelming feelings and replied sheepishly, ‘Pretty ready, I think.’

‘Come on then,’ said Ken, springing into action. ‘You can start by feeling the glider in the wind, at the bottom of the small dune.’

He helped Adam into the simple harness, which was made out of seat belt webbing, and clipped him into the *hang loop* hanging from the top of the control bar, which was called the *A-frame*. He then taught him how to hold the hang glider and point it into the wind.

'Feel it lifting?' he asked.

'Yeah.'

'Now start walking into the wind with it. ... Don't let the nose up too much.'

'Wow, it wants to lift me off the ground!'

'Come, let's try from a few feet up the slope.'

'OK.'

'Now make sure you correct it if it starts going left or right. Don't just freeze up.'

'OK.'

'This is high enough. Now, this time, just run a little and feel the lift.'

'OK.'

'Alright, run, and push the bar out a bit.'

Adam did as he was instructed. The glider almost lifted him off the ground.

'That's as close as you can get to flying without actually doing it,' Ken said. 'How did it feel?'

'Unbelievable! I could actually feel the glider trying to lift me off the ground. I could feel the balance in the wing and how I could control it. Can I go from a bit higher?'

They climbed a few feet higher up the dune. Ken talked Adam through his first flight.

'Run, run hard, that's it, pull in, now push out, yes, yes, yes, that's it, into the wind, into the wind, perfect, woohoo, now flare, flare, yeehaaa! You did it! Wow, how did *that* feel?'

Adam went completely mental.

'Awooo! I can't believe it. I just remember running and watching the ground fall away from me, and I remember my feet dangling, and I remember thinking, bloody hell I'm high, how am I gonna get down? And it was easy

controlling the kite. And the landing ... how high was I? It felt like ten or fifteen feet.'

'At your highest point,' Ken laughed, 'I reckon you were about three feet off the ground, but that's good, real good.'

Adam looked at Ken and expressed his gratitude.

'Thanks Kenny, I'll never forget this flight, and I'll never forget this day, *never*.'

'No one ever forgets their first flight, mate. You did well, very well, and I reckon that you're ready to go higher.'

Adam's first flight spanned a distance of thirty feet from take off to touchdown. He launched from about ten feet up the slope of the smaller dune. The most significant thing about this achievement was that he launched with his feet, he landed on his feet, and he flew free, completely untethered, and that was what the birds did.

Ken was a good teacher. He put plenty of energy into his tutelage, carrying the glider up the hill for Adam and running excitedly back down underneath him, yelling out instructions and positively affirming his efforts. He made sure that Adam got plenty of flights that day. With each flight, they climbed another foot higher up the slope, and with each flight, Adam flew higher, further and more perfectly than the one before.

After about twenty flights, they were standing on top of the thirty-foot dune. It was getting late in the afternoon and the sun was beginning to cast long shadows across the now reddening dunes. This was to be the last flight of the day.

This time, Adam was going for a strong launch and a long, high flight. Kenny released his hold of the front wires and jumped out of the way. Adam leaned forward through the A-frame in order to keep the nose of the glider down and thus achieve a more powerful penetration into the strong wind. As he reached the edge of the slope, he pushed the control bar out and let the hang glider lift high into the air. He shot at least ten feet above the top of the dune where he quite skilfully stabilised the wing into an efficient glide angle. He was at least twice as high as he had ever been before, maybe thirty feet above the ground. His eyes bulged and his breathing stopped momentarily as he realised

that to lose control now could result in serious injury. But his teacher was good, and he had prepared Adam well for this, his highest flight.

About fifteen feet above the ground, Adam gently pulled the base bar towards his body. The glider sped up into a shallow dive. A couple of feet above the sand, he eased the bar out, levelling out the glide and, after a short delay, allowing for ground-effect, he pushed the control bar out progressively and, with feeling, flared the glider into a perfect, no-step, stand-up landing.

The four boys all got together for a beer and some dinner that night. There was much discussion about that day's flying, and glider design, and the giant hill down the coast at Stanwell Park, called Bald Hill.

'No one's ever flown off that big bastard,' Steve said.

'It's huge, four times higher than the big dune,' Arnold added.

Steve said that he was planning to go there as soon as he was happy with the new wing. He said that he would have to wait for a southeaster to have his first go, '*Because Bald Hill has a south face that faces the beach.*' Adam recalled being there a couple of years before, on one of his drives. Steve described the place to Ken, saying that a pilot would find himself five hundred feet above the ground in a matter of seconds after launch. No one had ever been anywhere near that high, ever before. Steve said that the beach was long and easy to land on, and if you couldn't make that, there was an open paddock at the base of the hill.

A couple of deals went down that night as well. Ken ordered one of the new 200s, while Adam offered to take Ken's glider off his hands. Everyone was happy and as they ordered another three beers, and a Coke for Arnold, they all laughed as they exchanged each other's recollections of their respective flights, using exaggerated gestures of their arms and hands.

7

As Adam laid his head on his pillow that night, his mind spun in a state of ecstatic disbelief that the day had actually happened. Was he going to sleep or was he waking up from a dream. The thing was that his dreams didn't measure up to what he had just lived through. He lay there looking at the ceiling, unable to sleep. Thoughts raced through his mind at a frantic rate. He thought that he was beginning to recognise a pattern in his life. Every so often, life took him

through a reality beyond belief, beyond fantasy. Things were happening to him that no one could have dreamed about. And as his mind re-lived that last flight and compared it to other classic days, like the days at Broken Head where he surfed perfection with Scott, he slipped into a deep sleep and dreamed that he had curled up in the bosom of a huge mother who introduced herself to him as his universe. And she let him know, in the innermost heart of his being, that she loved him more than any words, ever written, could possibly describe.

8

Unbeknownst to anyone, except a large sea eagle that lived on the rugged cliffs just to the north of Stanwell Park, there *had* been someone else who had already jumped off Bald Hill in a hang glider, years before. He was the first and he did it in his own, primitive, home-built wing. It was blue with a yellow stripe and it didn't fly very well. The pilot's name was Zeke and the experience, which he felt he barely survived, put him off hang gliding right up until the time when he saw those first, bold fliers showing up on Bald Hill. Watching them pioneering the expansive new airspace inspired Zeke to return to designing, constructing and test flying his radical and unusual wings.

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Chapter Eight

'WHAT THE ...'

1

By the *end of 1973*, Adam had graduated, not without pain, and achieved the credible title of *Bachelor of Dental Surgery*. He found employment almost immediately, but only lasted there for three months, becoming disillusioned quickly, realising that he was very much his own man who needed to do his own thing.

One day, not more than four months after graduation, and only one week after he quit his first job, Adam received an invitation to a private dental function. There he met a fifty-year-old dentist who owned a well-established practice in the heart of Sydney. The dentist's father, who owned a medical equipment importing company, had suddenly and unexpectedly died and it had fallen upon the dentist to take over the management of the company. He was looking for someone to take his dental surgery off his hands and he was prepared to sell it at any price to get rid of it fast. One might have been much smarter than Adam, and one might have scored a much higher and more commendable pass in university, but one still had to be lucky to get on in the world.

The dental surgery was located on the tenth floor of *Culwulla Chambers*, an older building near the intersection of King and Castlereagh Streets. It was well equipped and operating at peak capacity. Adam only had to sit in the chair and take over the controls.

A friendly and very competent young nurse, named Michelle, was running the surgery for the dentist. She helped Adam ease into the practice. She made a perfect interface between Adam and the patients as she knew them all well and they all relied on her to organise their dental affairs. Michelle was worth her weight in gold.

About eighteen months before Adam purchased the practice, construction commenced on the new *MLC Centre* building, which was designed by the famed Australian architect, Harry Seidler. The technically advanced construction grew

out of a deep hole in the ground, right across King Street, right outside of Adam's surgery window.

Michelle gave Adam a fairly comprehensive brief on the functioning and day-to-day goings on of the practice. There weren't many things she omitted, however there was this one small detail that Adam found out about almost immediately after commencing his new job.

There he was, drilling away at some patient's decay with Michelle assisting him, when they heard a knock on the window. Adam looked up and nearly fell off his stool as he saw a young, scruffy man levitating outside of it, grinning from ear to ear. They were ten storeys up. What was this guy doing there?

'Oh, I'm sorry doctor, that's David,' Michelle explained calmly. 'I think he's brought me my lunch. Excuse me for a moment.'

The patient just stared, goggle eyed, unable to comment because his mouth was full of dental equipment. Michelle stepped to the window, opened it, leaned way out of it, gave David a big juicy kiss on the lips and thanked him for the delivery. Adam still hadn't worked out what was going on and thought he was really seeing things when the young man literally floated away from the window into open space. Michelle waved the levitating man goodbye, closed the window, placed her lunch on the desk, sat back down on the assistant's stool, picked up the high-speed suction, looked at Adam and said,

'Terribly sorry doctor ... ready.'

It turned out that David was *Dave the dogman* who worked on the giant crane on the MLC Centre construction site across the street. His job was swinging on the end of the long cable and signalling the crane driver high up in the control booth. A few months before Adam arrived on the scene, Dave swung by the surgery window and noticed Michelle working inside. He thought that she looked like a pretty good sort, so he signalled the crane driver to swing him over to the window.

'How ya goin? You work here? I'm Dave.'

With those romantic first lines, a new friendship sparked itself into existence. The very next day, Dave swung by the window with a beautiful bunch of flowers and handed them to her. Since then, he swung by many times

during the day, waving hello through the window as he did so. At lunch times, he brought her her lunch and collected his daily kiss. He called it his *pucker for the tucker*. Dave became a legend amongst his work mates because of his remarkable achievement. Michelle, being a hopeless romantic, only saw a diamond in the rough in Dave and was totally swept off her feet by his novel approach. 'Like something out of a story book,' she thought. Adam too was most delighted when Michelle finally told him the full story. He laughed and laughed.

A few years later, Dave and Michelle got married. A couple of decades after that, Adam bumped into Michelle in the street. They sat down at a café and had coffee. Michelle told Adam of her happy marriage, of her two beautiful children and how her life with David was as perfect as the way they met each other.

2

One of the first things Adam did, after purchasing his practice, was enrol in a three-day *relative analgesia* course for post-graduates. He got talked into it by some of his dental colleagues who were all attending the same course.

Relative analgesia, *R.A.* for short, was rapidly gaining in popularity, both among the practitioners and their patients. It offered an unprecedented comfort to the patient during the usually traumatic dental procedures. It involved the administration of a controlled, variable mix of Nitrous Oxide, Oxygen and air through a rubber mask placed over the nose.

Nitrous Oxide was also known as *laughing gas*. Adam learned that the gas was completely non-toxic and that it was highly soluble in blood, rapidly dissolving into and out of the bloodstream. It was ingested by breathing and completely eliminated by breathing. No one had any idea of the mechanism by which it worked, but it was generally believed that the gas didn't combine with anything in the body, and that it didn't require any enzymes for it to be eliminated from the body. That virtually made it the perfect drug. It needed to be combined with Oxygen, though, or the patient would die of asphyxiation. Mixed correctly for the individual patient, a state of *relative analgesia* could be induced and sustained for an extended period of time.

Part of the three-day course was for the post-graduates to administer the gas to each other. This gave them practise in the administration of the drug, as well as an appreciation for what the patient was experiencing.

Some of the post-graduate students weren't exactly saints when it came to drugs. Many of them found relief from alcohol in pot smoking. It was Ed, *the head*, a medicine student Adam used to know back at uni, who coined the phrase, *organ rotation*. He used to say,

'First you cain your liver with grog, then you give it a rest and cain your lungs with dope. Then, when you start coughing your guts out, you revert back to liver damage again.'

Ed was actually a really good bloke. After he graduated, he went to New Guinea to do volunteer work. One night, as he was walking back to his room, he unfortunately got whacked over the back of his head with a cricket bat, for his wallet. Tragically, he never woke up.

3

For the first few months after Adam graduated, while he had that job he didn't like, he continued to live at home because the job was very close to his parents' house. Maybe that was part of the reason for his discontentment. After purchasing his surgery in the city, he felt that he needed to make a move, closer to his work, further from his parents.

'Who will wash your clothes?' pleaded his mother. 'Who will cook your food?'

'Ahh, leave him alone,' growled his father. 'He's mister big shot now. He doesn't need his family anymore.'

'But who is going to look after my baby?'

'He'll be back; he'll be back with his tail between his legs. It's no picnic out there, sonny boy!'

Adam knew it was time. He loved his mum and dad, but he craved independence. He found a most unlikely place to live. It was a small bed-sitter, with a tiny kitchen and bathroom, located at the end of *Elizabeth Bay Road*.

Elizabeth Bay is a quiet, harbour-side suburb of Sydney. It is located just behind the more colourful and busy King's Cross. Adam chose this place due to its proximity to his work. He could walk it in thirty minutes or he could catch a

bus into town right from his front door. His tiny unit was situated on the fourth floor of a building named *Ercildoune*, which just happened to be another one of Harry Seidler's creations. The back wall of the tiny apartment was all window. Looking out of the window he had a panoramic view of *Rushcutters Bay* with all its yachts tied up in the *Cruising Yacht Club* marina. The rent was low and there was undercover parking for his car. He was also close to some of his old university friends who lived in the nearby Eastern Suburbs.

Adam could never have foreseen it happening, but he had blundered into one of the finest urban lifestyles in Australia. There truly was nothing quite like living really close to the water of Sydney Harbour. There were so many pleasant places to go, so many nice parks and cafes, and the water always seemed to calm everything down. It made Adam feel like he was a hundred miles away from the city, even though he was right in the middle of it. That was one of the magic things about Sydney that people loved so much. His heart was always lifted by the morning light of a crisp autumn day when the air was clear and the city somehow felt more tranquil. He could take a few deep breaths and shake out the stress, and it truly wasn't hard to feel some gladness about life on days like that.

On some mornings, Adam left early for his walk to work and on the way stopped and sat down for coffee and toast, or sometimes, on the cooler mornings, bacon and eggs, at either *The Fountain Café* or *The Bourbon and Beef*, right in the middle of King's Cross. He liked to sit in the sun and watch the people around the fountain. It was funny how different The Cross seemed to him, now that he was a local. He figured that it was all about perception. He found the place to be friendly and full of interesting, colourful people. He mainly walked through it during the day, but even at night, when all the establishments were in full business-mode, it all seemed OK to him. He figured it was all about what you were there for and what you wanted to look at. Locals were there because they lived there, so they saw something completely different than the customers.

There seemed to be an invisible line delineating Elizabeth Bay from King's Cross, and the difference between the two was like day from night. The serene, tree-lined streets of Elizabeth Bay could have been ten miles away from

the twenty-four hour frenzy of The Cross, but they weren't, they were only about one hundred yards down the street, just past the invisible line.

4

After the *relative analgesia* course, Adam bought a machine and installed it into his surgery. He gradually introduced his patients to the new technique. He learned early that some of them had a natural need to retain control. This worked against them when attempting a smooth transition into *R.A.*, because it was all about letting go. For some of his patients, this was an impossible thing to do. For others, they just lay back, closed their eyes and let Adam send them off into cloudland. He watched his patients closely, and carefully adjusted the flow meters, sending some deeper than others, depending on their nature. He asked Michelle to make a note of each patient's gas flow settings and their musical preferences. He had installed a fine sound system into the surgery and, whenever possible, played something appropriate for his patient's taste. He found that the music had a profound enhancing effect on the quality of the patients' analgesia and they just loved it.

Occasionally, one or two friends popped into the surgery at around five o'clock, to visit Adam after work. Almost always, they ended up staying back. Adam put on a favourite cassette and turned up the volume. He locked the front door and switched on the machine. They all sat around in a circle passing the mask to each other, often completely hysterical with uncontrollable laughter. They called them *gas parties*. It was so new and so much fun, and much healthier than smoking or drinking. Sometimes they got so rocky and hysterical that they fell off their stools onto the floor. That just set everyone off laughing even harder. The big joke was that they couldn't feel anything when they fell down because they were so numb all over. In the end they decided to start their gas parties sitting on the floor because they figured that they couldn't fall any further from there.

5

Early one cool morning, *mid-September 1974*, Adam set off for his walk to work. He took his usual route. He always tended to look straight ahead when he walked, but on this occasion something caught the corner of his eye as he passed one of the narrow alleys that exist in the area. He noticed a man,

dressed in a long coat, apparently trying to help another man who was lying on the ground. Adam stopped and, with a raised voice, called out to the man in the coat.

‘Are you OK?’

A raspy voice echoed back out of the alley.

‘I’m OK, but this kid’s ratshit.’

Adam turned into the alley and walked over to look. He bent down next to the man in the coat, who noticeably reeked of body odour, and proceeded to check the pulse of the boy sprawled out unconscious on the ground.

‘Ee’s white as a ghost. I think that ee might ave karked it.’

‘No, I don’t think so,’ Adam replied. ‘This kid’s still kicking.’

‘Look at im. So young an so lost. Ee’s gotta be a junkie.’ The man looked around the alley. ‘Check all the bloody needles.’

Adam replied with some urgency. ‘He’s got to get to a hospital, *fast!* What’s your name?’

‘Bob. Me name’s Bob.’

‘You’re a good bloke Bob. Stay here with the boy and I’ll get a cab. We’ll take him to the hospital.’

Adam raced out of the alley into the street. He stepped in front of the first cab he saw and waved it down. It had a passenger. The cabbie was about to start a tirade of abuse at Adam, but he never got the chance.

‘A boy is dying. You can save his life. He’s in there.’ Adam pointed into the alley. ‘I’ll give you fifty bucks if you help us take him to St. Vincent’s.’

He took a fifty-dollar note from his wallet and held it out to the driver who sat there temporarily stunned. Finally it was the passenger, an elegantly dressed, well-spoken, middle-aged lady that spoke first.

‘Take my taxi, sir. I can easily hail another one. Driver, how much do I owe you?’

‘Thank you ma’am,’ interjected Adam, ‘but I’ll be happy to cover the fare. Time is crucial here.’

The lady quickly exited the cab while the driver pocketed the fifty bucks. He then turned his cab around and backed it down the alley. Bob was still there talking to the unconscious boy.

'How's he look, Bob?'

'Like death warmed up, mate. Never got your name.'

'It's Adam. Let's put him in the back of the cab.'

It was awkward for the two men to place the boy in the cab in the narrow alley. They wanted to be quick, but they didn't want to hurt him in the process. The cabbie just sat there like this was just another job.

'I'll give you another twenty bucks, on top of the fare, if the kid gets to the hospital alive. Speed is everything here, driver.'

The cabbie squealed his tyres and raced out of the alley and through The Cross like a man possessed. He sat on his horn the whole way, drove on the wrong side of the road, went straight through a red light and once drove over the footpath. He was going to get that twenty bucks.

The five minutes it took to get to the hospital seemed like an eternity. Every obstacle, every delay tortured the two men who were fighting for the young boy's life. They swung open the taxi door and dragged the limp body out themselves. They carried it into the casualty department together, with Adam supporting the boy under the armpits and Bob holding him up by the knees. A nurse came over almost immediately. Initially there were no words exchanged because none were necessary. All the communication happened in a nanosecond through eye contact alone. She recognised in their eyes the pleading for the unconscious boy's life. Adam spoke first.

'I think it's heroin overdose. There were all these needles.'

A doctor appeared in seconds and they took the boy away to do what they probably did a dozen times every day.

A few minutes later, the taxi driver showed up.

'Did the kid make it?'

'We don't know yet,' Adam replied.

About five minutes later, the nurse came back out. Adam asked her if the heroin boy made it. She said that he did, but only just.

'He may not be so lucky the next time,' she said matter-of-factly as she turned and walked away.

Adam reached into his wallet and pulled out another fifty. He handed it to the cabby, looked gratefully into his eyes and said, 'That's for the footpath and the red light, mate.'

The cabby pocketed the money and, as he turned to walk out of the hospital, replied, 'Any time you wanna save somebody else, mate, look me up. It's been a pleasure doin business with you.'

Adam turned to Bob, who sat down in a corner as far away from everybody as possible.

'Hey Bob, how about some breakfast. I'm starving. All this saving lives has really given me an appetite.'

Bob just looked at the floor and didn't say anything. Adam paused for a moment. He recognised that his normal state of cheerfulness wasn't quite appropriate around Bob right at that time. So he toned it down somewhat. He sat down next to Bob and spoke to him more quietly.

'That was some ride.' ... He paused ... 'You know, when I spotted you, I was actually going for breakfast at The Fountain.' ... Another pause. Adam was feeling his way ... 'Come on Bob, a coffee for the kid, on me. What do you say?' Adam patiently coaxed Bob to come with him, until he finally agreed.

6

They sat down at *The Fountain Café*. Adam made sure it was a warm, sunny spot. He ordered coffee and toast with jam and honey and then he ordered more coffee and bacon and eggs and even waffles for dessert. Bob ate like he hadn't eaten for a week. When Adam was sure that Bob wasn't going to run away, he got up to make a phone call to Michelle.

'Good morning Michelle, how is the *best* nurse in the world?'

'Where are you doctor? You're fifteen minutes late for your first appointment. The patient has been here for nearly half an hour.'

'That's what I'm ringing up about, *oh great nurse*.'

'What's with all the buttering up? You're not going to ...'

'You won't believe what happened to me this morning, but I'll have to tell you about it this afternoon. Ahh, Michelle, oh great one, I think that I'm going to have to scratch the morning. Is that OK?'

After the call, Adam sat back down with Bob, who was still furiously shovelling food into his mouth, kicked back in his chair and started to relax. He was free till two o'clock. He took a sip of his coffee and took in the sights. He began to make light conversation.

'I love looking at all the people around the fountain.'

'I'm usually one of the people around the fountain lookin at all the people stuffin their faces in these cafes,' Bob replied.

'Huh, it's funny that I've never noticed you.'

'It's cause I'm a blender. I blend in, an become invisible.'

'Gee,' replied Adam feigning amazement, 'I wouldn't mind being invisible sometimes.'

'I learnt it in Vietnam. It kept me alive.'

Adam's face instantly took on a more serious appearance. His gaze focussed on Bob who was still busy with his meal. He enquired,

'Really? You were in Vietnam? How long for?'

'Three years. But I've been back for three years now.' Bob looked over at Adam's plate of waffles. 'You want that waffle?'

'Please Bob, be my guest. I can get more.'

Adam pushed his plate of waffles across the table looking directly into Bob's lowered eyes. Thoughts flashed through his mind about the time he phoned his mother from Byron Bay when she told him, crying tears of joy, that he had missed out on being conscripted.

'Were you conscripted?'

'Yeah!'

'I've heard that you blokes did it pretty tough over there.'

'Tough ain't the word, mate.'

Bob gave a deep sigh as he made the last statement. Adam began to sense an aura of deep chronic pain surrounding the dishevelled man sitting opposite him. He noticed that Bob avoided all eye contact, constantly looking down at either his plate or the ground around the café table. He was permanently subdued, like a man who had had all his spirit beaten out of him. Adam felt his heart reach out to Bob.

'I am truly sorry to hear that.'

Bob felt something he hadn't felt for a very long time. Kindness. It might have been that, or perhaps it was the first proper meal he'd had in months, or maybe it was because he sensed that Adam was the simple kind of soul that wouldn't prejudge him, whatever it was, it opened something up in Bob's heart and he began to tell his story.

'I had a best mate in Vietnam. His name was Frank. He saved me life once. He put a bullet through the head of one of them little yeller bastards just before he got the chance to put one in me. I never had a mate as good as Frank an I never will again. We wouldn've survived if it weren't for each other. Trouble was, the place an the war made us lose our sense of what was right an what was wrong.' Bob paused and had a sip of coffee. Adam noticed Bob's hand shaking as he brought the cup to his lips. Bob continued. 'The war made ya lose your sense of what was real ... an what was important. There was so much killin goin on ... so much butcherin. Me an Frank, we got caught up in some situations. We did stuff ... stuff that was ... God ... stuff that was ... bloody inhuman. I d'know mate, I d'know if I ougt'a tell ya the stuff we done, but mate,' Bob shook his head from side to side, 'it weren't good.' He paused to breathe, then continued. 'An once ya done stuff like that ... an ya know there was no way of knowin ... once ya done stuff like that, it buries itself inside yer head, an ... an ya can't get rid of it. It's like ya went to hell an played games with the fuckin devil, an ya thought it was all a bit of a wild time, but ... but the fuckin devil was fuckin with ya all the time an makin a fuckin home for hisself right inside yer fuckin head.'

Adam noticed that Bob was having trouble breathing.

'You OK, Bob?'

'I'll be OK, mate. Just need a sec.'

There was a pause while Bob regathered himself. Then he continued.

'When we got back, we were both bad ... an nobody gave a rat's arse about us. We couldn't sleep. We kept seein the burnin kids ... '

Adam could see that Bob was getting very upset. He didn't really know what to say, but his mouth just started talking.

'It's OK, Bob, it's OK. Remember? Remember?' Bob looked up. Tears were streaming down his face as he looked into Adam's eyes for the first time since

they met. 'You saved a boy's life today. That's one for you, and screw the devil. Stick it right up him, mate. He's done his worst to you and you're still standing. The pendulum has started to swing the other way, Bob, I'm sure of it, I'm positive, cause look, you saved a young life today. That cancels out one of the ones you might have taken. And tomorrow, Bob, or the day after, you'll save another one, and that will make it two, and eventually you'll save enough to cancel them all out and that mongrel devil, mate, you can bury that tormenting son of a bitch forever.'

'I don't know, Adam, your talk is the best thing I've heard for years, but mate ... mate ... me an Frank, we burnt kids *alive*, mate.'

Adam tried to conceal his shock at what Bob had just revealed to him. Bob continued.

'I know it's shockin just to hear it. Imagine havin to live with it ... shit mate ... anyway ... the only way we could handle it was to get pissed an stay pissed. But even that weren't enough for Frank. A couple o years ago, he walked out in front of a big truck, just down there,' Bob pointed down the main street of King's Cross, 'just down from the big Coke sign, an got splattered all over bloody William Street. I've been alone ever since.'

Adam needed to compose himself. He sat there in the sun and didn't say anything for a long time. He guessed that it was more important for Bob to just confess his transgressions. There was no call for a judgement, or even a comment. A silent interlude seemed most appropriate. After a long pause,

'Would you like another coffee, Bob? I'm going to have one.'

'Yes please Adam, that would be most appreciated, thank you.'

As they sat there in the warming sun, not saying anything, just relaxing and sipping their coffees, Adam thought how easily the roles could have been reversed. It all hinged on the roll of a dice, or a marble, or something. He wondered how Vietnam would have affected him. He might have reacted the same as Bob, or even worse. He looked at Bob and saw that now Bob was looking straight back at him, right into his eyes, and for a fraction of a second Adam hallucinated that he was looking into a mirror, at himself, living the other potential destiny, which would have unfolded had his birthday been chosen in the conscription lottery all those years ago.

'I might go an see the kid tomorrow,' Bob mumbled between sips of coffee. 'Reckon they'd let me see im?'

'Can't see why not.'

'I've been goin down the mission lately. They been helping me ta dry out a bit. They're pretty good down there. They got good hearts an they don't want nothin. I thought maybe the kid might wanna come down there with me. There's other junkies there an they help em stay alive. I want im ta stay alive, Adam. What you said, about savin a life makin up for takin a life, ya reckon that works?'

Adam thought about it for a while, then replied, 'I reckon it does. It *has* to.' They both thought about it some more, then Adam asked, 'More waffles?'

'Mate, I couldn't eat another crumb. Ya mind tellin me what ya do?'

'I'm a dentist.'

For the first time since they met, Bob smiled, showing a set of teeth, which could best be described as Bob's version of Stonehenge. Adam only now really noticed all the scars and past injuries traversing Bob's face. He understood that they were typical of a chronic alcoholic. He glanced around the café and caught the eye of the waitress and asked for the check. He looked inside his wallet. There were two hundred dollars left in it. He pulled out his Visa card and handed it to the waitress. He then pulled out the two hundred dollars and one of his business cards and handed them over to Bob. He spoke warmly to him.

'Bob, it's been good to meet you. Thousands of people would have walked past that kid and let him die. I'm ashamed to admit it, but God knows that I might have done the same. I would be honoured if you could ring my secretary; the number is on this card. I'd like to fix your teeth, for free. Think of it as your country saying thanks for what you've been through.'

'Jees thanks mate, but dead set, you bastards scare the shit outa me.'

Both men rose from the café table. They looked directly into each other's eyes as they shook hands and parted company. Adam headed down towards William Street, while Bob thought he might rent a room for a night, clean himself up a bit and maybe buy a new, second hand pair of pants and a shirt at the op-shop. He thought about buying a bottle of *Old Timer* to celebrate his

good fortune, but after some consideration he decided to go down to the mission to see what the good pastor thought about the idea.

7

Adam leisurely strolled down William Street towards the city. He was in no hurry. His first appointment wasn't until two. He cruised through Hyde Park and paused at the big chessboard. There was always a game in progress, surrounded by a crowd watching the combatants animatedly waging their war. He wondered, as he watched the game, why countries couldn't resolve their differences with chess instead of guns. Instead of armies of child soldiers, they could send their chess champions into battle.

He looked around the park. It was a sunny spring morning and it had warmed up enough for him to take off his jacket. He was still early, so he decided to take a seat on one of the park benches. In the distance he could hear the sounds of the traffic and construction sites, and the occasional siren racing through the busy streets. But all that noise was being pushed back by the serene tranquillity of the park. It had the ability to wash the stress right out of his body, if he let it. He thought that sometimes he could actually feel the tension seeping out of him if he just sat there and closed his eyes and focused on the ambience of the park.

He was young and strong. His life moved at a rapid pace. It always had. University was frantic, with 8.00am lectures and so much study. Now he was in the city, in charge of his own business, and still only twenty-six years old.

As he thought about the afternoon to come, a gleam appeared in his eyes and a smile on his face. He remembered a girl who told him that she was going to drop into the surgery at five o'clock that afternoon. Her name was Nancy. He had known her for a while now and they were becoming quite good friends. He visualised her in his mind. She was tall and skinny with fire red hair that was cut short and very sexy. Her exquisite form was wrapped in perfect Celtic skin. When she walked, *'God help me,'* Adam thought, *'that's not a walk, that's a dance.'* He smiled again as he closed his eyes and imagined her walk. He thought that she moved like *spaghetti in the wind.*

Nancy worked in the city, in a record shop that Adam used to frequent. She always wore way-out clothes. Her favourite colours were maroon and olive

green. She loved to wear lots of beads and bangles, which made all her movements audible. Whenever Adam thought of her, he thought of wild Nancy, the girl so full of life that just being with her felt like being at a party.

It turned out that they had a friend in common. His name was Robbie, the wealthiest guy Adam ever knew. Robbie lived in his parents' house, right down at the end of Wunulla Road, right on the point of Point Piper. That's how Adam and Nancy got to be friends. They remembered each other from the record shop, when they met at one of Robbie's parties.

'I didn't know you knew Robbie.'

'I didn't know you knew him either.'

Nancy had many male friends who would have quite willingly thrown themselves across a puddle of mud for her, but she never dated any of them. She met them in different places, or she visited them. She never spoke about her men and she never let any of them ever think, even for a second, that they somehow *had* her.

And so it was with Adam, who philosophically accepted her as a friend and felt mighty lucky just to get to share time with her.

Nancy was one *cool chick*.

She arrived early and sat down in the waiting room. Michelle greeted her.

'Hi Nancy. Doctor won't be long. Cup of tea?'

'Hi Michelle. Doesn't matter how many times I've been here, I can't get over the style of this waiting room. How are you? It's fine about the tea. I'll just read and let you and Adam finish your work.'

Michelle returned to assisting Adam while Nancy enjoyed immersing herself in the detail of the *art deco*.

Before long, they were finished for the day. Michelle knew what was going to happen after she left. Adam didn't conceal anything from her. She was as loyal and true as anyone could be, and even though her conservative upbringing meant that she had never had any contact with any kind of drug taking activity, she behaved as if everything that was going on was perfectly normal. Her working life had been transformed with the arrival of Adam. Every day at work was now exciting and she looked forward to being there. There was now music all day, all new music that she'd never heard before, and her

new boss was so refreshingly young and full of life, such a contrast to *the miserable, boring, old cadaver* that she had to work for before.

‘Will I lock the door on the way out, doctor?’

‘Yes please Michelle, and Michelle . . .’

‘Yes doctor?’

‘Thank you for this morning. You are a true gem. You have a nice night. See you in the morning.’

‘Night doctor, night Nancy.’

‘Good night Michelle,’ Nancy replied.

Michelle stepped out of the waiting room and locked the front door behind her.

Nancy rose from her chair, walked up to Adam, placed her long, slender arms over his shoulders and gave him a long, juicy kiss, right on the lips. He knew that that was Nancy just being good friends. She reached into her ethnic shoulder bag and produced an audiocassette.

‘Tonight Adam, while you are blowing *my* mind, I’m going to blow every neurone and synapse out of yours.’

Adam’s eyebrows shot towards the ceiling in anticipation as he glanced at the cassette in Nancy’s hand.

‘Don’t look at it,’ she said, hiding the cassette behind her back. ‘I want it to be a surprise. It’s a new album. I recorded it for you at work. It arrived this week. I don’t want to say anymore.’ She reached into her bag. ‘I’ve got a couple of joints. Do you want to blow a joint?’

‘Oh, no thanks. I get so off-my-face on the gas as it is. Maybe later, when I take you to dinner. How about I make us a nice cup of tea first?’

‘Great.’ She looked around. ‘I just love this place, and listen, I’m taking *you* to dinner tonight, OK?’

‘Gee, a joint *and* dinner. How lucky am I?’

Adam made the tea, while Nancy inserted the cassette in the player.

‘This music’s got to be played loud, Adam.’

‘So what’s so new about that? All your music’s got to be played loud.’

'Oh Adam, I can't wait for you to hear this. It is *soooo* classic. We should start it just as we're getting stoned. Wait till you hear the words, just wait. You won't believe the first line on the album. You'll think it was written just for us.'

Adam knew that Nancy liked her tea black, but not strong, with one sugar. When he brought it out she was already stretched out comfortably in the patient's chair. She'd figured out the controls and liked to set it up just right for herself.

They'd had some great gas parties before, some by themselves and some with Robbie. Nancy took a sip of her tea as Adam switched on the machine. They looked into each other's eyes, deeply and warmly. They knew that they shared a secret. They had a drug no one else had. They were doing stuff no one else did. They were going places no one else went. They felt like they were doing trips that people weren't going to do for, maybe centuries. They felt like they weren't just looking into the future, they *were* the future.

'I'll tell you when to switch on the cassette.'

'OK.'

Adam pulled the mask off the hoses and handed one hose to Nancy. He set the gas flows at seven litres per minute Nitrous, and three litres per minute Oxygen. They put the hoses in their mouths and, while still looking into each other's eyes, began to breathe the magic gas. Nancy waited a minute, then said, 'OK, turn it on *now*.'

As they drifted into the marshmallow mind-space of the gas, Adam heard the speakers slowly come to life. First he heard what sounded like a heartbeat, then the sound of a clock, then someone saying something about being mad, then the sounds of cash registers and a woman screaming, then the sounds rose to a climax only to gush out of the speakers in a beautiful slide guitar wailing a slow existentialist anthem, then the words, the words Nancy was talking about. She raised her hand, as if conducting the band, as the ethereal voices sang,

'Breathe, breathe in the air ...'

They were some of the first people in Australia to hear the futuristic, classic album, *Dark Side Of The Moon*, by the English band *Pink Floyd*. The album wasn't due for general release for another week.

'This sounds like Pink Floyd,' Adam commented.

'Yes, it is.'

'It reminds me of *Echoes*.'

'Me too.'

'I'll never forget those classic lyrics: *Two strangers passing on the street, perchance two separate glances meet, and I am you, and what I see is me.*'

'Absolute genius,' Nancy affirmed.

Adam suddenly remembered his encounter with Bob, that morning. He thought out aloud.

'Now I remember looking into Bob's eyes and seeing myself. God, that's what they were singing about, a person's empathy with another person, and how we're all connected.'

'You're not listening, Adam,' she interjected, 'and you're not breathing.'

'Oh yeah, I forgot.'

Adam took a couple of long, deep breaths to take himself back, deeper into the mind-void, and as the music played, Nancy asked,

'Can you hear the echo? What is that?'

'I don't know,' he replied, 'I think it's the gas.' After more breathing he asked her, 'Do you think that Pink Floyd might have tripped on this gas?'

'I think it's quite possible,' she said. 'They only needed to be friends with a dentist. Actually, I'm starting to think that it's quite likely. Just listen to the words. Roger Waters wrote all the words, I think. Maybe it was just him. He couldn't have got that insight on any other drug, and who doesn't go to the dentist? Don't you imagine that such a cool guy wouldn't have an occasional blast with his dentist?'

'Now *you're* not breathing,' he reminded her.

'Oh yeah.'

'It's like they're singing about us ... ' He paused as an idea came into his mind. The idea verbalised itself as it arrived. 'Oh, oh ... I just got this concept. Imagine if we all live in our own universe, separate from everyone else's, and we're in the centre of her. And she's alive. And she communicates with us. And she wants to communicate *more* with us. She wants to speak to us in her own

language. And everything that is, for us, including Pink Floyd, is part of her and part of her way of speaking to us ... Nancy? Hey, who's out of it now?'

Nancy closed her eyes and allowed herself to slide deeper into the mysterious, echoing, beating space of the gas. She felt herself separate from her body and drift, as pure consciousness, in a place which, so far, she had been unable to define.

She heard Adam's words and the music, but they were becoming distant, with a distinct echo. She was drifting away from them, consciously and voluntarily. She wasn't really listening anymore.

Adam continued his monologue.

'Maybe there's a connection between us all. Doesn't matter where we live or the time we live in. Maybe that's why we feel so attuned to this music. Maybe we all really exist outside our universes, where there is no time and space, like it's all the same place and two strangers can pass in the street and look into each other's eyes and recognise each other ... hey Nancy? I better breathe some more ... I think ... I think ... I think I definitely feel an empaa ... with aaa ... with aaa ... what's their aaa ... Pinkaaa ... '

Adam began drifting deeper into the gas. He was sitting on his operator's stool, facing in the opposite direction to Nancy, facing the back wall of the surgery. It had been an intense day. The music coming out of the speakers began drifting into the distance, with a distinct echo, when suddenly the whole wall on Adam's left side literally melted away revealing a huge lecture theatre full of people watching them. No, not watching, but studying. It appeared as though the surgery was a stage and that Nancy and he were some kind of guinea pigs being studied in some kind of experiment. The enormous theatre had rows upon rows of seats sloping up towards the back. There were about two to three hundred people watching them. It was so totally real. Total, clear, full colour, full sound reality. He could hear the ambient sounds of the theatre, including the sound of the occasional cough.

Adam suddenly became startled by the experience and turned toward the audience. Just as he did that the wall re-materialised in front of him, concealing the lecture theatre and its audience behind it. It was not unlike the curtain coming down on the stage.

'What the ...?' he exclaimed.

He pulled the hose out of his mouth and threw it on the floor. He sat there, momentarily frozen motionless as his brain desperately searched for an explanation to the reality expanding experience he just had. He whispered to himself,

'What was that? What the bloody hell was that?'

He noticed that the music had stopped. He realised that he must have been gone for over an hour because the whole cassette had played through. He had completely lost all sense of time. He looked at Nancy. She was gone, but not asleep, because she was still holding the hose in her mouth, breathing the gas in a smooth, controlled fashion. Adam gradually brought down the Nitrous level, slowly bringing Nancy back to the reality of the surgery.

He stroked her hair affectionately as he waited for her to return. She opened her eyes and gazed into distant space. After a few minutes of silent contemplation, she spoke.

'Boy, was I a long way away that time. How long has it been?'

'Over an hour.'

She lay in the chair looking at the ceiling and began to philosophise.

'You know, and I never thought that I'd be the one to say it, but I think I'm starting to believe that there is a part of me that can live without my body. I know it sounds crazy ... but ... but ... do you realise the implications of that? ... When we die I mean. Could it be? ... I'm only going by my own experience here with you. This is profoundly changing the way I think about things.'

'You won't believe what just happened to me,' he whispered.

'Really? What?'

Adam still felt somewhat disturbed.

'Look, how about I tell you later, over dinner,' he suggested. 'I've had enough of this place. Let's pack up and take off.'

'Oh come on Adam, you always get my curiosity going and then you don't tell me. Come on ... OK, OK, I guess that I'm pretty hungry as well. Don't let me forget anything. I'll clean the cups.'

She paused for a moment, moved close to him, placed her arms around his waist and whispered,

'Look, don't take this the wrong way or anything, but I do love you, you know.'

'I love you too you crazy girl, I love you too. Times like these I'm so glad I met you.'

'Me too. Hey, let's hit *The Gelato Bar*, down at Bondi, for some schnitzels. I just love their schnitzels. And then we can get a gelato and go for a walk on the beach. What do you reckon? Where are you parked?'

'I walked to work today.'

'You *walked*?'

'Yeah, but we can take a bus to my place and pick up my car.'

'Great. Hey, we could smoke those joints in Hyde Park, on the way.'

'Mmm. Is it good stuff?'

She gave him a smug look.

'Is the Pope a Catholic?'

'Sounds good, you wild woman you. Wait till I tell you about my trip. Hey, we mustn't forget your tape.'

'No we mustn't, dear Adam. Except it's *your* tape now.'

'Gee, thanks. We can play it in the car.'

As they tidied up, she remembered something.

'Adam ...'

'Yeah?'

'Did you know that today is the equinox?'

'You don't say?'

.....

Chapter Nine

TIMOTHY LEARY FISH

1

The September night was becoming quite cool, causing Adam and Nancy to walk close to one another, embraced in each other's arms, keeping each other warm. They walked along the hard sand next to the water. The lights of Bondi Beach surrounded them on three sides. From their feet, the blackness of the ocean extended out towards an invisible horizon, which merged seamlessly with the infinity of outer space.

'It was incredible, Nancy. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. I wasn't just floating around like usual. This *thing* happened, this reality change. It was as if I somehow accidentally witnessed a reality existing just behind our normal reality. And there were all these people there, all studying us. It's as if we were in some kind of experiment. I cannot describe how real it was. Totally, completely real. That's what made it so amazing. It was the reality of it. I freaked out you know, threw the hose on the floor and panicked. As soon as I did that, it all disappeared.'

Even though there was no one near them, Nancy spoke in a hushed, secretive voice.

'It's making me think about things as well. I doubt that I will ever perceive life in the same way again. I went so far away, I couldn't tell you, and I did it because I wanted to.' She paused, thought for a while, and then continued. 'I think I might buy some books. Or maybe it's better that I don't. Maybe other people's ideas would just confuse me right now. I know one thing, Adam, I know that I feel an almost obsessive need to explore some more.'

'I can definitely relate to that,' he replied. 'My curiosity is off the scale as well. I think we've stumbled onto something unbelievable here, something that I don't think anyone knows anything about.' He whispered, 'We can't tell anyone.'

'You're right. Got to stay cool. I would never jeopardise your work. This is our secret ... has to be.'

'I don't think we can even tell Robbie.'

‘No we can’t. He’s on a different wavelength. Nobody can know.’

As they walked along the edge of the limitless ocean, solid reality on their left, the black mysterious void on their right, they both sensed that it was as if they were walking on the very edge of the known universe. They recognised the risk, but as they walked along, in silence now, embraced in each other’s arms, they had already decided, in their own hearts and minds, that they were going to take that dangerous step into the infinite unknown.

‘I want to know the truth, Adam. I *need* to know the truth.’

‘So do I, Nancy, so do I.’

2

Nancy never became interested in any of Adam’s hang gliding activities. She never actually ventured out of the city. She was a city girl through and through. Drives in the country, well, she called them *depression sessions*. She’d tell Adam; ‘Look me up when you get back.’ So she never saw any part of that aspect of Adam’s life.

In between all his busy activity, Adam managed to continue to dabble in his hang gliding at Kurnell. Reluctantly he decided to trade in the Datsun 2000 for a white, pre-loved Valiant Charger. He needed to do it so that he could transport his hang glider around. An enthusiast, who did a little work on the suspension and fitted wide wheels and tyres, properly filling out the guards and giving the car a solid purposeful stance, had previously owned the Charger. All Adam had to do was buy a decent set of roof racks and he was set.

He’d been flying Ken’s old glider for the last three years and still hadn’t ventured out of the Kurnell sand dunes. He went there alone most of the time and hung out with whoever was there. There were always a few learners there, climbing up and down the dunes.

Ken, by this time, had followed Steve and Arnold down to Stanwell Park and become one of the leading pilots in the country. Adam, on the other hand, had become *king of the big hill* at Kurnell. He had flown off it more times than anyone alive and in the process had fully mastered takeoffs, glides and landings in the whole spectrum of wind conditions.

Adam got to see plenty of Steve and Arnold though. Their factory was located right on the way to Kurnell, in Brighton-le-Sands, and Adam loved to

drop in for a chat. Steve and Arnold were also still regular visitors to the Kurnell dunes as that was where they tested their new experimental designs before taking them down to Stanwell Park.

So even though Adam hadn't been as regular as his compatriots, he maintained his finger on the pulse of the rapidly evolving sport through the two brothers.

He remembered a flying story they told him one late afternoon at the factory. It was the tale of Steve's first flight off Bald Hill. Up to that day they thought that no one had flown off that huge hill, but as they were setting up, Zeke showed up, introduced himself and offered to give them a hand. It was during the preparation for Steve's first flight that Zeke told them about his own flight nearly four years before. They weren't sure whether to believe him, but later on that day when they dropped in on him and saw the actual kite and heard his description of his one and only flight, they became believers. And to make it even crazier, Zeke never had any practise flights anywhere else. It was a miracle that he lived because he flew a completely untried wing off a six-hundred foot hill, and it was the first flight of his life. Zeke just kept saying that *'there was nothin around to get bearins off.'*

After talking about Zeke, Steve began relating the story of his first flight off Bald Hill.

'We thoroughly tested the 200 at Kurnell and really felt ready for the high glide off Bald Hill. We didn't want a day that was too strong because all I wanted to do was just a straight glide to the beach. I didn't really want to get the kick on takeoff from a strong lift band. We'd discussed at length the potential dangers of such a high glide. The main danger, as we saw it, was stalling, because I'd be so high up that I couldn't tell how fast I was flying, because I'd have no reference to the ground. The other danger was not making the beach, or worse, landing in the ocean. The back up plan, if it looked like I wasn't going to make the beach, was to circle around and land in the small open paddock right at the base of the hill. The one Zeke landed in.

'On the day we went down, it was perfect. The wind was only blowing about fifteen knots straight out of the southeast and was smooth as silk. We set up and I got ready to go. The hill looked incredibly high to me, and that beach

looked too far away. I clipped my harness into the karabiner and lifted the glider off the ground. The wind was so smooth and steady it literally picked the glider up for me, just like in the dunes, except it wasn't as strong. I stood on the edge of the hill for ages, ground flying the wing and feeling out the wind. I can tell you now that I was shit scared and everything in me was saying, don't do this. Arnold held the front wires for me while Zeke held a side wire. There were only a couple of other people there, probably tourists.

'My heart was going like a base drum as I psyched myself for the launch. Then I just ran. The kite lifted me off the hill in three steps and I was flying. The Earth literally fell away from me and in a matter of seconds there was six hundred feet between the ground and me. My first thought was how good everything felt, no different from the dunes, just heaps higher. I flew a bit faster than I would normally because I definitely didn't want to stall. When I looked back at the hill I noticed that I was still level with the top. I realised that I was still flying in the lift band. I was actually tempted to turn and fly along the south face for a while and try to stay in the lift and maybe soar for a bit, but then I thought better of that and decided to stick to the original plan and fly straight to the beach, which now seemed within easy gliding distance.

'The glide was going so well that I actually started to relax and take in the scenery. Just as I thought to myself how perfectly everything was going, I felt something snap in my right wingtip. The glider lurched to the right. I had to throw my weight to the left in order to bring it back to straight and level flight. I had no idea what happened. My first thought was; *shit, something broke*. I kept looking over at the right wing to see if I could make out what went wrong, when it happened again. This time, though, I saw it. It was a huge bloody eagle having a go at my wingtip. This time he slammed in even harder. He must have dived straight into it. The kite lurched to the right again. This time the eagle didn't fly away. The mongrel hooked himself into the sail with his talons and started ripping up the sailcloth with his bloody beak.

'I saw him looking at me, straight in the eyes. I've got to tell you, he looked pretty upset. I had to fight to keep the glider flying straight. Then I heard an almighty ripping sound. The bloody eagle had ripped the sail. By this time I was too busy fighting for survival to think about fear. The eagle was

trying to bring me down, and he was succeeding. The hang glider had developed a powerful right turn. I was full weight over to the left but I couldn't make the glider fly straight anymore, and that mongrel eagle was still ripping and tearing at the wingtip, and screaming his head off. He just wouldn't let go. Then I thought I noticed some panic in the eagle as well. It looked like now *he* couldn't let go. *Serves you right you big bastard*, I screamed at the eagle, *we're going down together.*'

Arnold kicked in with his perspective.

'Me and Zeke, we were just standing there not believing what we were seeing. It was obvious that Steve was going down. He'd go into a spiral 360, then he'd get a bit of control and fly out a little, then he'd lose control and do another diving, spiralling 360 with that eagle furiously flapping his wings and ripping away at the sail, which was flapping loose in the wind.'

Steve took over again.

'By then I knew that I was going to go down spiralling. It's unbelievable how many thoughts you can process in a fraction of a second during a life or death emergency. I knew that the beach was no longer an option. My only chance of surviving the imminent impact seemed to be the water. So every bit of control I had was directed at taking me out over the ocean. Then it happened. I heard another tear in the sail. It tore all the way from the trailing edge to the leading edge. It wouldn't have been more than two hundred feet above the deck when the glider went into a helicopter spin. The centrifugal force ripped the control bar out of my hands and I swung around that glider like a rag doll. The eagle, with his talons entangled in the shredded sail, was going down with me, screaming and kicking and flapping his huge wings in an attempt to free himself. I couldn't make out anything other than the eagle. The whole world looked like one giant whirlpool spinning frantically around us.

'We both spiralled into about three feet of water, about thirty feet from the shore. The impact was massive, but here I am to talk about it. I stood up in waist-deep water, without a scratch, and unclipped my harness. We were so lucky there wasn't any surf. The glider was partially submerged. Then I noticed the eagle. He came all the way down with me and ended up stuck under the sail, under the water. All I could see was a bit of his wing sticking out of the

water. I realised straight away that he was drowning under there and that he had no hope of getting out on his own. I quickly waded over to where he was and raised the shredded glider wingtip up above the surface. He still had plenty of fight left in him and I had to watch out for his beak. Once I knew that he wasn't going to drown, I kept my distance and had a go at dragging the broken hang glider out of the water. You wouldn't believe how heavy a sail gets with tons of water on top of it. There was no way that I was going to move that bloody hang glider, but at least I was keeping the eagle's head above the surface. It was around about then that Arnold and Zeke showed up. They must have broken all speed records driving down the hill because they got there unbelievably fast.'

Arnold took over the story.

'We honestly thought Steve was dead. We saw the impact from the top of the hill and it looked like something no one could have walked away from. Zeke drove down the hill like a maniac, and when we got down to the beach ... I can't tell you my relief. I had actually, for a few minutes, thought that I had lost my brother. I never want to feel that again. I was so happy to see him alive ... ' Arnold paused for a moment as he dealt with a surge of emotion. Then he continued. 'Anyway, there he was, holding up the shredded wingtip with the eagle still stuck to it, looking a bit like a drowned rat, but still with a lot of fight left in him. He was frantically flapping his wings, still trying to get loose. Steve was saying; *Careful, he's stuck to the sail. He nearly drowned. I pulled him out of the water in the nick of time. We might have to try to cut him away before we try to drag the glider out of the water. Watch out, watch out, he'll have a go at you.*

'We all stood around the eagle, looking at him, and he was looking at us. His right leg was tangled. Then I noticed his left leg. It was bleeding and two talons were broken. Even though the water had washed most of it off, we could still see the eagle's bloodstains on the shredded sailcloth. Then Zeke suggested that we just concentrate on keeping the bird from drowning and hurting himself further, and let him tire himself out a bit more and just calm down.

'Steve always carries a pocketknife on him. He says that if he ever lands in the water, it could save his life one day. He took out the knife and started manoeuvring around the eagle, looking for an opportunity to cut him free from

the sail. A few people had showed up on the beach by then. Then all of a sudden, like he sensed that the bunch of us didn't want to hurt him, the eagle completely calmed. He was now looking directly into Steve's eyes. He was breathing hard and we thought that we could hear his heart beating.

'Steve approached the eagle cautiously. The big bird didn't move. It allowed Steve to carefully take its right leg into his hands and cut away the sail from it. The bird was free. All three of us took a number of swift steps backwards, thinking that the bird might have a go at one of us. But the eagle just stayed there, kind of resting on top of the sail. Then the most amazing thing happened. Steve, I don't know what got into him, he gave me the knife and then just waded over to the eagle. He put his forearm under his feet and supported him with his other hand. The eagle just let him do it like he was Steve's pet or something. Anyway, we all waded out of the water onto the beach with Steve carrying this huge, bleeding eagle. There were about ten people gathered there by now, standing in a semicircle, keeping their distance just in case the eagle decided to go crazy or something. It was just Steve and the eagle. Steve held him up in the wind as the eagle displayed his massive wingspan. Then Steve started to run directly into the wind holding that noble bird as high as he could. It gave one flap of its huge wings and magnificently lifted into the sky.

'For a moment there was nothing but silence on that beach. Everyone was too blown away. Then the people that showed up gave Steve a big cheer. The eagle did a few circles over the crash site before he returned to his cliffs, to lick its wounds we reckoned.

'We dragged the glider out of the water and found the two broken talons still stuck in the sail. Steve pulled them out and put them on a couple of lengths of leather. He hung one around his neck and he gave me the other one and here it is hanging around my neck.'

Adam had a look at Arnold's eagle claw. It was huge. Steve finished the story.

'I never washed the eagle's blood off my jacket. I'm always going to keep it like it is. I went back to Stanwell the very next week and had four big flights off the hill. In the fourth one, I soared for half an hour, got three hundred feet

above the top of the hill and even did a 360. I spotted that eagle when I was flying and I know that he saw me, but it looked like he'd had enough cause he left me alone this time. Actually, on my soaring flight, he flew up to my right wing and flew alongside of me for some time. Maybe he was trying to figure out how I managed to heal my tip so fast.'

Everyone in the factory just loved that story and even though it had been told over and over dozens of times, no one ever tired of hearing it again. Then Arnold asked Adam,

'When are we going to see you down at Stanwell?'

'I don't know. Do you think I'm ready?'

'You're ready ten times over judging by the way you fly those dunes. You've got the takeoffs and landings wired and that is the most dangerous part. The glide is the easy part. Think of it being the same as flying Kurnell, except the glides are longer. You just keep flying straight until you hit the beach.'

'Do you think it's going to be on next weekend?'

'Could be. They're predicting a new southerly change during the week.'

'Then I'll come down this Saturday, if it's on. What about my old hang glider? Do you think it's good enough for Stanwell?'

'You're heaps better off flying something you're really used to, for your first few flights. Then you might want to get a new wing.'

3

As it turned out, the forecast southerly never arrived. So Adam called Nancy on Saturday morning and asked what plans she had for the day. It was near the end of September and the day was warm, with a northwester blowing hot air straight out of the outback. The northwest wind usually preceded a southerly change in that part of the world.

'Let's have a blast in the surgery and then maybe we can have lunch in Centennial Park. I can bring a blanket and some sandwiches and a couple of joints and we can sit down by the lake there.'

'You make it sound so nice, Nancy.'

'How's pick me up in an hour sound?'

'I'll be there.'

They repeated the same routine. Adam made the tea and Nancy chose the music. He switched on the machine. This time he set his mind on not panicking, should something happen again.

He mostly expected to see the lecture theatre again. He figured that that was the reality hidden behind his living day-to-day reality. It was as if life was a play and the actors were unaware of the existence of an audience, because they had never seen it. Then all of a sudden, one day, the theatre lights came on and the actors, for the first time, saw the audience and realized that it had been there watching them all the time. He thought that he was being studied by a bunch of people who lived in some kind of parallel universe and that he somehow accidentally broke through the veil concealing this hidden truth.

They started breathing the magic gas and began to drift off into their deep, dreamlike, waking sleeps. This time there was no conversation. They both floated off into their respective different directions.

They were gone for about an hour and a half when Adam re-awoke to the reality of the surgery. Nancy was still gone, calm and obviously enjoying the trip. Adam brought the gas down and began to stroke her hair as she opened her eyes and took the rubber hose out of her mouth. For a while they just looked at each other. Neither of them wanted to be the first to shatter the silence. They just stared at each other with their mouths agape. The music cassette had stopped long ago. The light was dim. They left the lights off and the only light in the room was that which found its way through the narrow gaps between the partially closed venetians. Eventually Nancy spoke first, very quietly.

'I watched a sunrise ... no ... actually I watched two sunrises. I watched one through an intricate lattice, like in some kind of Middle Eastern church, and I watched the other one, I don't know, like I was sitting on the edge of a giant cliff, overlooking the ocean, and I watched the sun come up on the horizon. Oh Adam, I can't possibly describe how beautiful and real they were. I felt so calm. I didn't think anything. It was almost as if someone was controlling my brain, stopping it from thinking. And where did the light come from? It's nearly dark in here and I was looking at the bright light of the sunrise. I can't believe how real it was, I mean total reality Adam, not a dream or a vision or like a movie,

but total, full-colour, three dimensional, full-sound, absolutely being-there reality. Words can't describe it. And how does the light get into our heads? I have never had anything like ... I couldn't have ever imagined ... your theatre thing ... it sounds like ... I'm so blown away ... Jesus ... Jesus ...'

Nancy began to cry. She bent over in the dental chair and put her face in her hands.

'I'm sorry Lord. I'm so, so sorry. I don't deserve ... thank you Lord ... thank you ... Jesus thank you ... I just don't deserve anything ... nothing ... I'm no good ... I'm nothing ... no good.'

Adam hugged her and began to cry as well. He thought he understood. She looked up into his tearful face and said,

'You know, when I was a little girl, I loved Jesus and baby Jesus, and I asked Him into my heart, and I really meant it with all my heart, you know, like kids do. And I felt Him come in, I swear I did, and I cried when it happened just like I'm crying now. And I knew that He was there living in my heart all the time and there's only one kind of crying when Jesus is around. It's like melting ... like nothing you'll ever understand unless ... unless He's touched you ... and Adam, that's how I'm feeling right now.' She looked around the small surgery. 'He's here with us. He's loving us both.' They both cried for a while, then she said, 'Look at you, you silly man.' She smiled through her tears and hugged him in return. 'Got a Kleenex? Wow, we might walk away from Him, but He sure as hell never walks away from us. God gave me a gift today, Adam. There is nothing for me to believe in anymore because I *know* He's real. ... I *know* it!' She wiped her tears, 'Oh God, I must look a sight.'

He gazed at her exquisite face, entranced, and whispered, 'No, you look absolutely beautiful. ... Those sunrises must have been amazing. Maybe they had a meaning. The dawning of a new day, maybe?'

They sat there for a while, staring through the venetians, lost in thought. Nancy finally asked,

'What happened to you?'

He looked down at the floor and shook his head, 'You won't believe this but I think that I saw a little angel. She was only a baby, a little girl. She was as real as you sitting there. I guess I've never told anyone this, but I had a sister

once, named Vesna. She died when I was only four. She was only two years old when she died. I can still see my mum and dad coming out of the hospital, crying, and it was so long ago and I can still see them. If she hadn't died I would have had a sister and I wouldn't have been so alone all my life.'

'Please go on.'

'OK. I saw this little angel, like a tiny little cherub, and I kind of knew that she wasn't supposed to show herself to me. Don't ask me how I knew, I just knew. Anyway, she broke the rules and she showed herself to me. She kind of sneaked in from the right side of my vision. She was holding a long spear and she was flying around with these tiny little wings. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm just telling you what I saw.'

'Go on, go on.'

'I can't tell you how real she was, 3D and completely there. Not like some kind of vision, no, nothing like that. Absolutely, totally 3D, full colour, right there, real as life, there, right in front of my face. Anyway, she had this long spear, or a lance, or whatever those things are called, and I remember seeing this cardboard cut-out of a demon, a really ugly, evil looking demon, and then, I swear, I saw her run that spear right through that cardboard cut-out. She was flying as she did it and she did it with such power and domination. It sounds crazy, doesn't it?'

'Na na na, nothing's crazy in this game, Adam. So what happened then?'

'Well, she sneaked away real quick, kind of like she didn't want her boss to notice that she showed herself to me. Without saying anything she let me know that she was my guardian angel. I think I saw my sister. How crazy's that?'

'I don't know what's crazy anymore. I know war is crazy. I know thousands of kids killing thousands of other kids for ideas that decompose like corpses in a trench is infinitely more crazy than seeing your own guardian angel. It's a stupid world, Adam, but you know, I believe in your sister. It was the power of her love for you that broke through. How lucky are you?'

He sighed, 'Ohhhh ... these gas trips are starting to get really intense.'

'Thanks for letting me be involved, Adam. These trips, especially today, are filling a big empty space, answering a big question and, I feel, setting me on

the road towards my lifelong contentment, and you know, I think it's God doing it. I think He's showing us just enough to get rid of our doubts. God, kind of, must know that we're not the type of people to believe what other people say. He must know that we've got to find out for ourselves and He's figured out a way of doing it. I'm raving, aren't I?

She warmly clasped Adam's hand in both of hers and held it for a while. 'Getting hungry?' she asked. 'I know *I* am. Tripping always gives me a raging appetite. Why don't we take off to Centennial Park and have that lunch I made for us.'

They locked the surgery and rode the lift to the ground floor. Exiting the lift, Nancy commented on the noticeable smell of burning incense pervading the building. As they stepped out into Castlereagh Street, into a warm sunny day, Adam reminded himself to find out where that incense smell was coming from.

They drove out of the city along Oxford Street, past Taylor Square and through the bohemian stretch of Paddington. They turned right into Centennial Park and drove around to one of their favourite spots by a small lake. The lake was fairly much in the middle of the park. They liked it because there was a secluded spot there, by the water, where they could relax in private and smoke without anyone noticing. Nancy laid out the blanket and set out the lunch. As they sat there, eating and drinking, they both noticed a small fish jump high out of the water.

'Did you see that fish, Adam? Did you see how high out of the water it jumped?'

'Yeah. Why do you reckon they do that?'

'I don't know. I wonder if they think they've discovered another dimension, another universe?'

'Oh really? You think fish can think like that?'

'Well, consider it. They're stuck in the same pool all their lives and then one of them decides to take a flying leap through the mirror ceiling and for a second it sees this whole other reality that it had no idea even existed. And when it lands back in the water it goes, *what the bloody hell was that?*'

'Imagine it trying to tell all the other fish about what it saw. They'd all think it was crazy.'

Nancy laughed out loud.

'What?' Adam queried. 'What's so funny?'

'I've just thought of a great name for the fish.'

'Really?'

'Yeah ... *Timothy Leary Fish.*'

'Timothy Leary Fish?'

'Yeah.'

Adam burst out laughing.

'That's brilliant, that's so brilliant. And all the other fish think poor Timothy is nuts. But we know better.'

'Do you think we should blow that other joint now?'

'Can't see why not.'

As the two best friends sat together, chatting, laughing and passing the smoke to each other, a cool, southerly breeze stirred the treetops. Adam looked skyward and commented,

'It's the southerly change. It sure took its time getting here. I don't think it's going to be nice here for much longer.'

'Why don't we go to my place,' she suggested.

4

Adam's body tensed as another wave of fear flushed through it. He knew that the southerly change meant flying Stanwell Park the next day. No one was going to make him do it. He set his own challenge and he knew that he would have to face it tomorrow. He would remain afraid until he'd either jumped off that huge hill, or given up on the idea. He knew that he wouldn't be able to live with himself if he *chickened out*, so there was only one option. There was always, ever, only one option.

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Chapter Ten

MITCHELL'S MOUNTAIN

1

Adam blasted straight past the Royal National Park turnoff. He was taking the main highway this time, as it was more direct and faster. His mind was focussed. There was a determination there now. There needed to be because he was afraid. He noticed that he was gripping the wheel unusually tightly and that his palms were sweating. He maintained a constant frozen stare through the windscreen, fighting with his thoughts. He wasn't going to let his brain get the better of him. Not today. Today that mousy whimpering mass of linguini in his head was getting shut down. Closed for the day. But the stubborn little brain wouldn't go quietly, wouldn't stifle.

'What if something breaks? What if I crash or land in the ocean and get tangled under the sail, under the water, and drown.'

'Shut up,' he screamed.

He came to a turnoff. The sign read, *Stanwell Park 5km*. He turned left off the highway and cruised down the road towards Bald Hill.

His old hang glider was strapped on the roof. It had served him well at Kurnell. It wasn't very efficient, but it was stable and extremely forgiving. He had truly mastered it in the dunes. He was actually becoming somewhat of a hero to the beginners there, giving them plenty of his time helping out and teaching them the basics. Everyone did that in those days, as there were no instructors. You learned how to fly the same way you learnt how to surf, with the help of your friends.

Driving further down towards the coast he noticed a small shack on the right, set way back off the road. He assumed that was where Zeke lived. A short distance past the shack the road began to descend and wind its way down through a forest of tall eucalypts. He began to see glimpses of the ocean through the gaps between the long trunks of the trees. He thought he saw a flash of colour. He veered off the road a couple of times as he strained to see the view. Then suddenly, it all opened up. He saw a hang glider, then another one, and then another three. They were all soaring the south face of Bald Hill.

They were all above the top of the hill, some as high as three hundred feet. Adam was stunned by the majesty of the scene. He felt like he had arrived in another world, another time, a place where everyone flew like the birds.

As he drove out of the trees, the spectacular panorama of the Illawarra Coast exploded in front of him. He pulled off the road a few hundred yards short of the main car park on the point, stepped out of the Charger and just stood there completely mesmerised. He looked down the road where he could see all the cars parked and all the hang gliders set up on the hill. The scene looked to him like something from another planet. He watched a glider launch into the lift and rise. He watched others turning, circling, diving and swooping, filling the sky with their vivid colours. He needed a few moments to adjust to this new reality. He was just about to get back into his car when he heard a voice yell out,

‘Hey Adam!’

He looked around but couldn’t see anyone.

‘Heeeeeey Adam, up here!’

He looked up and spotted a guy in a hang glider waving to him. The pilot was about one hundred feet above him. Adam waved and watched the pilot pull his glider into a shallow dive, away from the ridge, into the valley, then bank it hard right, come around in a spectacular 360 degree downwind turn and end up pointing into the wind, hovering about fifteen feet above his head.

‘Its Arnold, it’s bloody Arnold, The Kid,’ he thought, *‘and he’s flying prone in one of the new prone belts.’*

Arnold looked so smooth and stylish. He looked totally relaxed and masterful in the air. Adam was completely overawed. He never imagined, ever, in all his time flying, that it could ever be so big, so magnificent and so absolutely free. He heard *The Kid* yell out,

‘See ya on the hill, Adam.’

‘OK, Arnold.’

Adam watched Arnold pull in the base bar and penetrate his wing through the solid twenty-knot southerly wind. He flew out over the valley, level with the top of the hill, where he executed a high bank 180-degree turn. Adam watched in disbelief as Arnold flew straight back, directly downwind,

approaching the hill at nearly fifty miles per hour. He appeared totally casual as he seemingly headed for a massive impact. Adam observed nervously as Arnold neared the edge of the hill where he got a noticeably hefty kick-up from the strong lift band, which abruptly lifted him about twenty feet up and over the edge of the hill. At the same time, he rotated his glider back into the wind. Adam noticed that Arnold had to make a couple of exaggerated, reflex corrections to compensate for the turbulence he had to fly through. Suddenly all the apparent velocity stopped as he ended up hovering about ten feet above the open flat space just behind the point of the hill. Steve must have known what Arnold was doing because he was waiting for him there with his arms outstretched, ready to grab Arnold's front wires. For a few moments, Arnold just hovered there, in the wind, playing with the power, then, when he was ready, he pulled the bar towards himself and, as lightly as a feather, brought his glider down into the safe hands of his brother. His feet wouldn't have broken an eggshell as they made their delicate contact with the ground.

'He landed on top of the bloody hill,' Adam thought to himself. *'He didn't even have to go to the beach.'*

Adam got back into his car and drove down to the point.

As well as Arnold and Steve, Adam saw Ken's car there. Ken was flying, apparently testing his new prone belt. Adam met other members of the inner circle that day. There was Glenn and young Tim and he also met Zeke that day. Everyone was there. He watched them flying, unable to believe the high level of skill they had developed in such a short time. And they were all landing back on top of the hill, meaning that they could fly all day, enjoying multiple flights without ever having to pack up and re-setup their gliders.

The big talk on the hill amongst all the pilots was; who was going to be the first to make it over to Mitchell's Mountain.

It was a good mile across the Stanwell Valley and there was no lift all the way over. The gliders they were flying, although probably the most advanced in the world at that time, were nonetheless still relatively inefficient, lucky to squeeze out a six to one glide ratio with a good pilot in the harness.

They all stood in a group, on the point, gazing across the wide gap to Mitchell's, exchanging ideas as to how one of them could make it over. It wasn't

only mandatory to fly across the gap, but the successful pilot had to soar up the east face of Mitchell's and rise above the top. At one thousand feet, Mitchell's was four hundred feet higher than Bald Hill. The guys knew that whoever made it up the face over there was going to get huge altitude, maybe fourteen hundred feet. None of them had ever flown that high. They knew that flying back from that height would be a *piece of cake* and the successful pilot would probably make it back six, or maybe even seven hundred feet above the top of Bald Hill.

Nature had set the challenge and there it was, staring them right in their collective faces, beckoning them to have a go.

Adam was there, right in the midst of them all. He was listening to the chatter, but was not part of it. He hadn't earned that honour yet. He had an insight into the moment, though, an awareness all his own. He thought,

'How magnificent, how historic. These guys are contemplating the challenge of the ages and nobody even knows about it. There will be no gold medal waiting for the first pilot across the gap. No one will write about it in any history books. It won't even make the evening news. It will happen secretly. I wonder why?'

Steve began analysing the dangers of a committed attempt at crossing over to Mitchell's.

'The biggest danger is going down in the ocean. Whoever has a serious go will be lucky to get across level with the lower cliffs on the other side. There's going to have to be enough lift down there to not only stay up, but to start climbing.'

Steve was pointing across the valley at the two-hundred-foot high, vertical, lower cliffs that skirted around the east side of the base of Mitchell's Mountain. The whole group was focused on the spot where they thought they would intercept the lower cliffs at the end of their long glides across the valley. Steve continued,

'Well, you won't be able to get into that lift unless you fly far enough south along those lower cliffs. So far in fact, that should you not make it up, you won't be able to glide back to the beach from there, so you'll go in the drink. At the very best, you'll lose your glider. At worst, you'll lose your life.'

Steve commanded the most respect on the hill. When he spoke, everyone listened. He was erasing any illusions from anyone's mind about what was involved in making it up Mitchell's. He went on,

'There is no point trying it in a southerly, or even southeasterly. Too much headwind flying across and no lift on the cliffs. It's going to have to be an easterly wind, a strong one, at least twenty-five knots. That's the only type of wind that's going to give enough height on this side to get across, not be too head-windy to kill your glide angle and to give enough lift off the lower cliffs on the other side. Well, a wind like that is going to kick up a huge swell. So whoever has a serious go at it and doesn't make it, is going to get destroyed in the ocean, for sure.'

Adam could see how the lower cliffs on the other side curved back towards the beach. That meant that the wind wouldn't be hitting that part of the cliffs square on, meaning that there would be no lift there. A pilot would have to fly at least another four hundred yards along the cliffs, with no lift and nowhere to land, to get to the part of the cliffs that faced more directly into the wind. Then, as Steve was trying to explain to everyone, by the time a pilot had reached the potentially lifting part of the cliffs, he was committed, too far from the beach to make it back for a safe landing. Steve continued,

'Assuming that you make it up on the lower cliffs, you still have to cross the road, the power lines and the railway. Those are high-tension power lines over that railway. Then you have to claw your way up eight hundred feet of Mitchell's east face, hoping that you don't cop a rotor off the lower cliffs that might slam you into a rocky outcrop or hang you up in a hundred and fifty foot gum tree where you'll probably die of thirst before anyone can get to you. Actually, they'll probably just leave you there, thinking that the bloody fool doesn't deserve saving.'

Everyone turned in unison as they heard the sound of a deep belly laugh.

'You're a cheerful bastard today, Steve. I can't see the big deal. It's just a matter of jumpin off the bloody hill an goin for it. You know that too much thinkin's never done nobody no good.'

Steve replied in jest, as they were really good friends,

'Too much thinking was never one of your problems, Zeke.'

Everybody had a nervous laugh. They all knew, as well, that both men were partially right. Then Zeke said,

‘If anybody gets over ... well ... they can just keep on goin for another bloody fifty miles if they want, all the way down to Jamberoo Valley and then, maybe, all the way back. That’s the real deal here.’

Everyone just stayed silent trying to imagine such a monumental flight. Zeke had already imagined it and flown it, in his own mind, many times before.

Ken walked up to Adam and asked him,

‘Want a hand with your glider?’

‘You think it’s any good?’ Adam replied rather nervously.

‘It’s perfect, especially for your first glide. Come on, I’ll help you set up.’

Good old Ken was there again, forging the way, helping out and giving confidence, not to mention keeping Adam safe from harm. Adam was as nervous as he’d ever been in his life. He walked to the edge of the hill and felt the wind, then he walked to the toilet, then he checked his glider and gear and then walked to the edge of the hill again, after which he took another trip to the toilet. He kept repeating this ritual until Ken literally stopped him and said,

‘OK Adam, it’s just the same as the big dune at Kurnell. Just do everything the same and fly straight down to the beach. I’ll drive down to get you.’

Adam clipped his harness into the hang loop and picked up his glider with Ken assisting on the front wires. Arnold spotted them from a distance and ran over to assist with a side wire. Ken spoke calmly to Adam.

‘Don’t rush it. Just feel the wind for a while. Feel the gusts and the lulls. It’s fairly strong today, so you want to launch in a lull. On a light day, you wait for a gust. Let the bar out a bit. That’s it. Don’t worry, we’ve got you.’

Adam’s feet dangled in the air as his glider flew in the wind, only being held down by Ken and Arnold’s secure hands.

‘We can actually *air launch* you. You won’t have to run. When you launch, you’re going to go up. Don’t worry about it. Just fly straight towards the beach and fly a bit faster than normal. There’s no need to panic when you go up, no need to dive out of it, just let it lift you, fly a bit faster and fly straight. When you fly out of the lift, you’ll start gliding down to the beach. You’ll make it with

heaps of height today. Just keep flying down the beach until you touch down. I'll see you down there, OK?'

Arnold kicked in with,

'You'll never forget this one, Adam.'

Both Ken and Arnold altered their hold of Adam's glider. They both grabbed one front wire and one side wire in readiness to give Adam an *air launch*. Adam's feet dangled off the ground as Ken asked,

'Ready?'

'Yeah, feels pretty good actually. I've got nice control.'

'OK, pull the bar in a bit and we'll start walking you to the edge of the hill, that's it, we're going to throw you off ... ready?'

'Ready? I'm flying already. Launch me!'

The boys walked forward into the wind, still holding Adam's flying wing down. As they reached the edge of the hill, they gave him an almighty push and flung him into open space.

The glider was old and its sail had a few wrinkles. The trailing edge fluttered because the sailcloth had stretched over time and there were no battens to support and smooth it out. But it was the only glider Adam had ever flown. For him, it flew perfectly. It was stable and predictable. He knew its reactions and its limitations. He had explored the old glider's full envelope of performance and it fitted him like an old pair of shoes.

Adam was launched off the hill like a model airplane. He didn't run off, he was thrown off. The ground fell away beneath him as his glider rose upward in the strong lift. He gained a hundred feet in a matter of seconds, but did not panic. He just let the glider cruise and headed in the direction of the beach. He gained another hundred feet before he levelled out and began to descend. It struck him, momentarily, that he wasn't learning how to fly; he was finding out that he knew how to do it all along. In a moment, he felt his flying instincts, which had been sleeping deep within his soul, being awakened. As he glided towards the beach, which was still seven hundred feet below him, he thought that he could remember something like this from a distant past. The feeling grew, like an old memory coming back. He began to feel like he knew this place, this space, and that he knew what to do and how to fly, as if he'd been here

before, as if he'd flown here before. Then he began to hallucinate. Later he would think it might have had something to do with all the gas he'd been breathing. The waterslide never crossed his mind at all.

He began to feel strange. Everything faded to light. His head began to feel odd, like it was changing shape, like it had changed shape into a bird's head. He felt it, and it was smiling. He was smiling. He felt the corners of its mouth smiling. He completely lost his awareness of the fact that he was controlling a hang glider in flight. Then the most amazing thing happened. He heard the whole sky speak to him in a loving woman's voice.

Adam, it's enough to just be.

In a nanosecond he understood that he was just a visitor in this world. That there would be things he would like and things he would not like. He understood that the world was sacred and in perfect balance. That creation and destruction, beauty and ugliness, health and disease, birth and death, war and peace, light and darkness and heaven and hell, all was as it was meant to be. If he tried to change it, he would ruin it. If he tried to possess it, he would lose it. He would let others try to fix it and try to own it. He would let others torture themselves in it. For the first time in his life he understood acceptance. With no thought whatsoever, he realized that this life and this world were but a blink of the eye in another, much, much longer life.

Like a fading memory, he heard the sky speak again.

Do nothing, accept everything and emerge from the tapestry.

The last words were very faint and he wasn't absolutely sure about them.

As he silently glided through the smooth air, the feeling of having a bird's head on his shoulders began to leave him. It felt to him like he was coming out of a trance as he focussed onto the long beach looming up beneath him.

There was nothing new in the task that faced him next. He had accomplished it hundreds of times before, at the dunes. He sped up into a shallow dive, crossed the northern creek with eighty feet to spare, levelled out

a few feet above the sand, let his excess speed wash off and finally pushed out for a perfect landing.

He was still sitting under the sail, looking vague, as Ken arrived to help him carry his glider into the park.

'Imperfection is just a part of the whole perfection.'

'What?'

'How can we know beauty as beauty, unless there is ugliness?'

'What are you on about, Adam?'

'A man must first be lost before he can understand the joy of being found.'

'Adam, are you OK?'

'Happiness has its roots in misery.'

'Hello, hello, anybody home? That was a great flight, Adam. It looked perfect from the hill.'

Adam looked into Ken's face with a distinct glaze in his eyes. All he could say was,

'Wow!'

'What was that beauty ugliness crap you were on about?'

'Wow! ... I'm good, Kenny, I'm good.' He looked back at the hill, 'Wow!'

'You looked a bit weird for a while. I thought maybe you hit your head.'

'No ... I'm fine ... Wow! How high was I?'

Ken began to laugh.

'Skyed-out mate, skyed-out eight hundred feet at least. It was perfect, perfect.'

'I'm blown away, Kenny.'

'I can see that, mate, I can see that.'

The two friends sat together in the sand, allowing some time for Adam to come down from his rush. After a suitable interlude, Ken suggested,

'You ready to pack up and get back up the hill? You should have another go today to reinforce your experience.'

'Yeah, let's do that. I feel much more confident now. I want to have another go.'

As the boys packed up the glider in the picturesque park in the centre of the valley, Adam wished that Nancy were there. She was the only person in the

whole world that he could talk to about his strange insights. He knew, though, that he would have to be patient. That conversation was going to have to wait for another time.

2

When they arrived back up on top of the hill, the flying was in full swing. Adam decided to wait for a while before setting up again, while Ken went to his kite, which was lying flat on the ground. It was possible to *drop* one's wing by unclipping the front wires and folding back the A-frame. It only took a second and it placed the wing safely flat on the ground and out of the wind.

Ken asked Adam to hold his front wires for him while he set himself up. When he was ready, he *moon-walked* to the edge of the hill, with his glider partially flying him. He didn't require launch assistance because he was now a master pilot. Adam watched as his old friend stood on the very edge of land, six hundred feet above the South Pacific Ocean, controlling the angle of attack of his flying machine, precisely preventing it from taking off or squashing him into the ground. Then, without taking a step, he bent his knees and sprang into the air. As he did this, he eased out the bar. It looked like he jumped into the air and just kept going. They were all doing no-step takeoffs that day, making Adam think that they looked like some kind of advanced beings from another planet, or maybe even gods, come to this Earth in secret to enjoy one of their favourite activities.

Adam sat on the ground and absorbed himself in the spectacle before him. He noticed that there was a kind of unofficial competition going on. The contest was for the airspace right in front of the point of the hill. All the hot pilots flew mainly in an aerobatic style. Like moths flying around a light globe, they fought it out for the airspace nearest to the point of the hill. To *hog the hill*, which was what they called it, they had to literally make each pass within feet of the ground. It was all about intimidation, about being more dangerous than the next pilot, about earning the right to be there. And being there meant being centre-stage, because that was what that airspace represented. Everyone knew it and all the ace pilots competed for it, all day, every day.

Adam noticed Zeke setting up a little further along the hill. He decided to go over and talk to him.

'Hey Zeke.'

'Hi. You're Adam, aren't ya?'

'Yep. Hey that's a pretty different looking hang glider you've got there. I hear you design and build your own.'

'You hear right, mate. This one's number five.'

'It looks so thin.'

'That's because it's got a high aspect ratio.'

'And that's good?'

'Mate, this machine can outglide everythin in the air. It can literally fly circles around Steve's kites.'

'Why doesn't Steve make one like yours?'

'Cause it's too radical. He knows nobody'd buy one. That's why they're movin so slow. Too bloody slow for me, mate.'

Adam walked around Zeke's glider and gave it a close inspection. It definitely didn't look like one of Steve's works of art. It was a rough job. There were nuts and bolts hanging out everywhere, the wires weren't neatly trimmed and the sail was stitched up very roughly. Adam even thought he could see patches of an old sail sewn into this one. The only thing that was amazing was its plan shape. It had a very short keel, making it look like something from the distant future. It positively made all the other gliders look prehistoric.

'Have you flown it?'

'Yeah, four times.'

'How did it go?'

'Well, the first time I flew it, it scared the shit out of me. It had no bar pressure. It just wanted to dive me into the ground. An when I turned it, it just wanted to keep turnin, goin into a steeper and steeper bank. If I'd let it, it would have gone into an unrecoverable spiral dive.'

'Jees, Zeke, how did you fix all those problems?'

'I moved the *CG* back an gave it more reflex. That took care of the divin. Then I let out the side wires, givin it more dihedral. That stabilised it in the turns. It flies as sweet as, now.' Zeke looked up for a moment. 'I think the wind is swingin around to the east. If it stays strong ...'

He stopped short of completing his sentence as if he didn't want anyone to know what he was thinking. But Adam noticed when Zeke's gaze focussed across the valley onto the top of Mitchell's Mountain. Adam sensed that Zeke's main motivation in life, at that moment, was to be the first across to Mitchell's. Zeke would do whatever was necessary to achieve that goal. Adam guessed that the glider Zeke had built was not designed for the typical aerobatic hill-hogging style of flight, but for efficient, long-distance, cross-country gliding, to carry him across to Mitchell's. They both knew that there was only one prize in this challenge. Being the first. There were no other prizes.

Adam did notice that the wind was gradually swinging to the east and, if anything, even picking up in strength. He also noticed that there was only one pilot on that hill paying the right kind of attention to it.

On the hill, Steve was *the man*. On the ground he was wise and composed. In the air, however, he was radical and dangerous, pulling off moves that seemed superhuman. To watch him fly, you would swear it wasn't the same guy you just spoke to on the ground.

Zeke, on the other hand, created the impression of a man constantly balancing on the razor edge of sanity. His long blond hair stuck out wildly and waved around spectacularly in the strong winds that blew on his favourite hill. His clothes were old and coarse. His leathery skin was lined and weathered, like that of a much older person who had spent most of his life in the harsh outdoors. He was tall and when he spoke, it was with a strong baritone voice. The colour of his speech was always *defiance*, not towards any individual, but towards the whole world, which he perceived as constantly threatening his freedom. For some strange reason he reminded Adam of a wolf, wild and free. He could see it in his bright-blue eyes, which burned with a ferocious intensity. People who didn't know him very well were actually afraid to make eye contact with him. They thought that he either looked crazy, or evil, and they stayed away from him. And that's precisely what he wanted.

Zeke and Steve were pretty good friends, although Steve's true inner feelings about Zeke could best be described as complicated. For sure, Steve loved the big man and thought that he understood him better than most. One couldn't say that he felt threatened by him. No. It was clear who was the

dominant pilot. But Steve just couldn't understand why he felt a deep uneasiness inside. Zeke was doing something to him, something subtle and stealthy. Somehow he was worming into his mind and causing havoc. Steve tried to focus on his job, testing, adjusting, modifying, but hard as he tried, he couldn't stop himself wondering what Zeke was up to. Others could pass Zeke off as just a nut case, but Steve was too cautious for that. He sensed something about Zeke, something that would affect him in the future. He couldn't get rid of the feeling. He managed to hide it from everyone, including Arnold, but one time when he made eye contact with those fiery eyes of Zeke's, across fifty yards of hill, he knew in an instant that Zeke knew, because he recognised it in the subtle smile that appeared on Zeke's face.

By now, the wind had swung completely to the east and substantially increased in strength, gusting up to thirty knots at times. Adam was reconsidering his second flight, thinking that he would prefer more mellow conditions for his level of skill. All the hot pilots were in the air, on the east face now, absolutely raging in the big lift. The east face generated much more lift than the south face as it was higher and part of it was vertical cliff face. This caused the pilots to gain much more altitude. Some of them were achieving up to one thousand feet above sea level.

Everyone's main focus was still on the point, on who could *hog the hill* for longest. They would take off, rip up the sky for ten minutes, and then land back on top again. They would then *hang* on the point, posing and looking around to see if there were any pretty girls worth chatting up.

Adam sipped on a Coke as he watched, in awe, as Steve's wild aerobatics attracted all the attention of the crowd on the hill. His concentration was broken by Zeke's deep voice.

'Giz a hand off, Adam?'

'Sure, Zeke. Can't wait to see your ship fly, mate.'

Zeke clipped into his strange hang glider, with Adam holding his front wires. He looked skyward, lifted his wing and said,

'OK, check ya later.'

'Have a good one, mate.'

Adam stepped out of the way and watched as Zeke just stood there momentarily, ground handling and feeling his glider in the strong wind. Then, with total control, he bent his knees slightly, eased the bar out and sprang gently into the air. Due to the strength of the wind, he was able to climb out absolutely vertically from his takeoff point. He rose up and up and up, his wide span lifting him effortlessly skyward. The futuristic wing easily lifted him through the whole gaggle of kites in the air. He rose straight through one thousand feet above sea level. Even though he had no instruments, he knew when he was at one thousand feet because he could line himself up with the top of Mitchell's on the other side of the valley. As he rose rapidly beyond his previous highest-ever altitude, he watched the whole world recede away beneath him. His long blond hair blew in the wind as his horizons expanded to include Wollongong, fifty kilometres to the south, over his right shoulder, and Sydney, eighty kilometres to the north, over his left. Occasionally he executed a wide, lazy 360, during which he could see the low line of The Blue Mountains on the westerly horizon, nearly one hundred kilometres away. Mitchell's was starting to look smaller and smaller as he patiently milked every foot of lift out of the easterly wind. Like a huge soaring eagle, his wing hovered at least five hundred feet above the next highest glider. He knew that it was now or never. A wind like this might not come again for another year or maybe even two. Mitchell's looked so small and so close, a seemingly easy glide across the valley. But he was aware of the illusion and he knew that he would be lucky to make it over above the lower cliffs.

At this time, Adam was still the only person on the hill aware of what was happening. He saw Zeke's glider, a thousand feet above him, as nothing more than a small speck in the sky. Steve hadn't noticed Zeke's climb-out, because he was preoccupied with his own aerobatic exploits. When he eventually landed, Adam came over to him and told him what he thought Zeke was up to. Steve showed real surprise and, in an agitated manner, asked Adam to hold his glider for a moment. He stepped out of his harness and looked up, searching for the unmistakable shape of Zeke's wing.

'He's crazy! He'll kill himself! You bastard, Zeke. Look at him, he's not going anywhere, he's just hanging there, looking down, waiting for me to fly up and take him on. You mongrel, Zeke, why are you doing this today. Shit!'

Adam couldn't believe his ears. How did Steve know that Zeke was waiting for him up there? Nobody else could have known something like that. It was true though. Zeke had spotted Steve's glider while he was still climbing out and like one of those cunning hawks that hunted little rodents around Bald Hill, he locked onto it and waited to see if a decisive move would come from Steve. Zeke watched him land and saw him looking up at him from one thousand feet below. At that moment, Zeke knew that Steve knew. Adam made a comment.

'He could go now, Steve, and be the first across, completely unchallenged. Why would he wait and risk not being the first?'

'Because he's Zeke, that's why,' answered Steve, 'and because he's crazy ... and ... and ... because he has honour. It's all so much bullshit though.'

Steve climbed back into his harness and asked Adam to help him off, and, 'Can you tell Arnold what's going on when he lands.' He then looked skyward, took a deep breath and sighed, 'It's as good a day as any, I suppose.'

Steve asked Adam to step out of the way and launched off the hill. All this time Zeke hovered one thousand feet above, waiting for a sign from Steve, and he got one. Steve turned away from the gaggle and flew a short distance north along the easterly ridge to the part where it became vertical rock face in the shape of a bowl. There the lift was most powerful and would take Steve up the quickest and the highest. It took him about ten minutes to climb out to Zeke's altitude. He actually struggled to gain the last hundred feet and was never to know that Zeke graciously sacrificed about fifty feet of his own altitude so that Steve could fly up to his right wingtip.

When the two friends were level with one another, Steve spoke first.

'It's true, Zeke, you *are* nuts.'

'Compared to who? You go first, eh?'

'This is total bullshit, you know, but OK, OK, I'll go. Hey ...'

'Yeah?'

'Thanks for waiting.'

'I wasn't waitin, I was enjoyin the view.'

'Hey Zeke.'

'Yeah?'

'I've been meaning to ask you. What *is* that pile of shit you are flying? Did you get your mama to stitch it up for you?'

A huge grin appeared on Zeke's face. This was what he had been waiting for. A spirited contest, winner takes all. He always felt, frustratingly, that Steve was going too slowly with glider design and that this was his way of showing him. Wing design and its evolution were as much a passion to him as being first across the valley.

Steve set off first, closely followed by Zeke on his left wingtip. With no instruments, they started their long glides at about sixteen hundred feet above sea level. They were flying crosswind, which allowed them to make reasonable headway.

By now, the word had got around on the hill. Each pilot that landed parked his glider and joined the group standing on the point. Everyone was totally transfixed by the events unfolding high over the Stanwell Valley.

Both pilots straightened their bodies and pointed their toes in order to minimise their parasitic drag. They were flying wingtip to wingtip. They were both searching for their most efficient gliding speed. Too fast or too slow meant an excess loss of precious altitude. They both looked at each other comparing each other's progress, then they locked onto an imaginary arrival point on the other side of the valley. That was how they were able to judge their glide. If the chosen aiming point was going down, they were gliding better than expected, if it was going up, they weren't going to make it.

Initially their gliding performance was fairly equal, but that was chiefly due to the fact that they were still flying in some residual lift off the southern face of Bald Hill. It soon became apparent, however, that Zeke's glider flew more efficiently. Zeke began to pull away, ahead of Steve, and when Steve tried to keep up, he began to lose altitude. Slowly Zeke crept ahead and there was nothing that Steve could do about it.

Gradually, one by one, all the pilots landed back on the hill. Everyone was now totally focussed on the two gliders, high above the valley, flying boldly into unknown airspace.

By the time they were half way across, Zeke had lost at least five hundred feet. He was roughly level with the top of Mitchell's. Steve was about thirty yards behind him and about fifty feet lower. Both pilots could see that it was going to be close, but what was becoming plainly obvious was that Zeke's glider was clearly outperforming Steve's. Steve estimated that he was going to arrive at the lower cliffs at least one hundred feet below Zeke, but he figured that thirty knots of wind should generate sufficient lift down there to get him back up. He thought that he'd had much more experience at flying in those conditions than Zeke. Also, Zeke was going to reach those cliffs first, meaning that he would mark out the lift for him and show him how much further along the dangerous cliffs he would have to fly before he encountered the lift zone. All these thoughts raced through Steve's mind as he tried to formulate the best strategy to use.

On the hill, everyone was silent. They all knew what was at stake. They understood the danger, which was only made more extreme due to the fact that there were two of them pushing each other. Eventually, Arnold spoke first.

'Zeke's got a weapon there. Look at the way it glides.'

That started them all going.

'They're getting close to the cliffs.'

'Looks like Zeke's gonna have about a hundred feet to spare.'

'Steve's really gonna have to scratch to get up.'

'Yeah, but he's a heaps better pilot.'

Zeke zeroed in on his aiming point, the first part of the lower cliffs, beginning at the southern part of the beach. He arrived there eighty feet above the top. At that point, he had already achieved more than anyone else. Now he had to fly into cross-headwind, along those cliffs, out to sea and away from the safety of the beach.

Steve, on the other hand, had changed direction and flown out to sea well before he got to the cliffs. He figured that that was his only chance of getting up. His adjusted flight path actually shortened the distance between them, with Steve gliding over the cliff edge only fifty feet behind Zeke and about twenty above the top.

Zeke was still thirty feet higher than Steve and they were both going down roughly at the same rate as they punched into headwind, away from the beach and towards the point of no return.

Just two hundred feet below them were huge, jagged boulders, being smashed by a savage eight-foot swell. The spray of the wild surf was being picked up by the strong wind and blown up the face of the cliffs, spraying the two daring pilots from beneath. It took immense willpower for them to keep going, and it was really Zeke's willpower, because he was in front, leading, and to Steve's disbelief, forging ahead and still going down. Steve knew that he couldn't turn around first. Nothing in his makeup would allow him to do that. He watched Zeke and followed, still going down and totally committed. The thought crossed his mind whether Zeke was really mad and whether he was following a madman into oblivion.

Back on the hill,

'Look what they're doing, they're both mad!'

'They're goin down.'

'There's no way they're getting up from there.'

'If they don't turn around right now, they're in the drink.'

'Look, they're still goin down.'

'There's no lift on those cliffs.'

Zeke passed the point of no return with absolutely no hesitation, level with the top of the cliff. Twenty seconds later, Steve passed the same spot about twenty feet lower. Their destinies were now sealed. There was nothing more to think about, there was only to fly as efficiently as possible, in a place and in a way that no man in history had ever flown before.

They were both below the top of the cliff when they flew out of sight of those standing on Bald Hill. All the pilots missed seeing Zeke hit lift at precisely the point Steve predicted. Everyone missed how, at first, he only maintained his altitude, but then, gradually, as he kept flying further south, with his right wingtip only feet from the vertical rock wall, inch by inch, he desperately scratched back up to be level with the cliff top, with every foot he gained taking him into incrementally stronger lift. They missed the look on Steve's face when he realised that he wasn't going to get up. They missed the way their eyes met

in recognition of each other's courage, and they missed Steve's gallant salute to Zeke as he turned out to ditch in the sea, in order to land away from certain destruction on the deadly boulders, now only one hundred feet below him.

'There's one of them, which one is it?'

'One of them made it, I think it's Zeke, yeah, look at the colour of the kite, it's Zeke!'

'Where's Steve?'

'You think he's gone down?'

The blood drained out of Arnold's face as he became overcome with fear for the safety of his brother. He couldn't decide what to do. There was no point in driving around the cliffs because there was no road-access to that part of the coast. He realised that Steve was on his own.

Zeke had lifted a good fifty feet above the lower cliffs as he watched Steve splash down in the ocean. No one knew that he was poised to dive his glider into the water right next to his friend, should he not pop up within about fifteen seconds. His plan was to fly to his rescue.

Meanwhile, Steve was stuck under his sail, trapped underwater in his harness. However, the ocean was Steve's domain. He was extremely fit and he'd been held down under huge waves, while surfing, more times than he could remember. Holding his breath, cool as a cucumber, he took out his pocketknife, opened it and reached up for his hang loop. The razor-sharp blade cut the loop in one slash and set him free from the now slowly sinking hang glider.

Zeke counted to fourteen when he saw Steve's head pop up above the surface.

Arnold watched the behaviour of Zeke's kite as an indication to the welfare of his brother. He knew two things. He knew that his brother was a master waterman who would never panic in the ocean, under any circumstance, and he also knew that Zeke would never let Steve drown without first risking his own life trying to save him. So Arnold knew that if Zeke continued to soar, Steve was OK. And that's exactly what happened. When he saw that Zeke had continued to climb higher and higher above the lower cliffs, he announced to the concerned group gathered on the hill,

'Steve's OK.'

‘How do you know that?’

‘I just know, but I suspect that we’ve lost a glider.’

The lift was so strong on the other side of the valley that Zeke didn’t have to do anything other than point his glider into the wind to keep climbing up the east face of the mighty Mitchell’s Mountain. He kept one eye on Steve, who had discarded his harness, shoes and jacket, to make it easier for him to swim back to the beach. When he was sure that Steve was OK, he began concentrating on his flight, quietly chuckling to himself. The higher he got, the faster he went up. There was a big cheer on the hill as he was effortlessly lifted past the vertical rock face near the top of the big mountain. He knew nothing about that though, because he was lost in a new world.

It was late afternoon and the sun was shining out of the western sky. Its light, as was so typical around the Stanwell valley, was filtered by the heavy atmosphere, causing it to enhance the colours of everything it shone upon. The rays could be plainly seen because they refracted off the sea spray that hung in the air all along the escarpment. Due to these conditions, the whole last part of Zeke’s flight was in the shadow of the mountain. The desperate scratch along the lower cliffs and the rapid climb up the face were all executed in relative darkness. It could have symbolised man’s existence up to that point in history. Man was shackled to the Earth, unable to experience the freedom of birdlike flight. Adam could see it, watching from Bald Hill. As Zeke topped the big mountain, he and his glider became bathed in golden light, making them glow as if they were on fire.

All the pilots watched in awe as Zeke became a glowing speck in the sky. They’d not only never seen a hang glider on the other side of the valley, they had never seen anyone, nor had any one ever been, so high, ever before.

‘He must be eighteen hundred feet, easy.’

‘It must look great from up there.’

‘Hey, is that Steve getting out of the water down on the southern end of the beach?’

‘Hey Arnold, there’s Steve.’

‘I better get down there and take him some dry clothes. What a day, what an insane day.’

'I'll come down in my car as well, Arnold.'

'OK, see you down there, Adam.'

3

All the good pilots top-landed all day. At the end of the day, however, they all, one by one, glided down into the green park in the centre of the idyllic valley.

Although the escarpment cast long shadows in the afternoon sun, the park stayed bathed in warm sunlight the longest. The spot where they all parked their wings and congregated was magically always the place where the sun shed its last rays of the day. Adam noticed the aesthetic of that mystical moment when the whole valley was in shadow, yet the group of pioneers and their colourful wings glowed iridescent, literally being lit by nature's very own spotlight.

When the easterly wind blew, it blew straight in off the ocean, meaning that the pilots could land in the park instead of out on the beach. One at a time, they came gliding deep into the valley, watched by the whole crew relaxing on the grass. Some just did a simple, but graceful, approach, flying efficiently, extending their glides as long as possible, while others flew out over the valley with plenty of altitude and executed a spectacular aerobatic display, performing stalls, dives and over-the-top wingovers, often entering their last manoeuvre dangerously close to the ground. They would then come out of that, glide inches above the grass for fifty yards, then push out for an extreme nose-up flare, rise maybe ten or fifteen feet into the air, then tail-slide down backwards, landing perfectly, but often heavily, on their feet and the back of their keel. Occasionally they broke their keel showing off like that.

4

Adam sat with Arnold and Steve, who had dried off by now and changed into dry clothes. He didn't show it on the outside, but he was totally exhilarated. He couldn't describe to anyone how much he enjoyed the duel with Zeke. As he sat there quietly, as was his nature, he realised that he felt more alive at that moment than ever before. It wasn't just blood pumping through his arteries, it was pure life. It didn't matter to him, at all, that he was defeated, or that he went down in the raging ocean, or even that he lost his glider. What

mattered was that Zeke waited for him and chose to share that once only experience with him. He was waiting for Zeke to land. He wanted to be the first to congratulate him, and he wanted to help pack up his glider.

After everyone had landed and parked their wings out of the way, Zeke glided in, flying directly downwind from at least a mile out to sea. He flew straight over everyone's head and after a shallow dive and a lazy, semi-stalling, 180-degree turn back into the wind, he brought his victorious airship in for a perfect landing, right in the middle of all his friends, lit by the last rays of golden sunlight of that most magnificent and most memorable day.

As a tranquil twilight descended on the park and the street light came on, they all sat in a group talking about the exploits of the day, having beers, passing joints and laughing.

No one noticed in the dim light, that perched on a small rocky outcrop, on the edge of the low cliff, just on the other side of the small lagoon of the northern creek, was an enormous wild eagle, listening to the chatter and laughter, and sharing in the feelings, and wishing that he could dare to fly in amongst them and be one of them as well.

.....

Chapter Eleven

GITA

1

A man and his young son were walking in a park, in the centre of a beautiful valley. They stopped in front of a large palm tree. The father asked his son, while pointing at the tree,

‘If I said to you, this is a tree, or if I said to you, this is a cow, which is the truth?’

‘Why daddy, the tree is the truth.’

‘Why is the cow not the truth? Don’t cows exist as well?’

‘They do daddy, but not here and not now.’

‘And if a man stood before you and insisted that this tree was a cow, what would you think?’

‘I would think that the man was blind, daddy.’

‘Why would you come to that conclusion?’

‘Because daddy, the unreal never is and the real never is not.’

‘Hmm, I think I have much to learn from you, my son.’

2

Five days had passed since Adam’s big day at Stanwell Park. During the week his curiosity had finally got the better of him and he managed to find the source of the incense smell in his building. It was wafting out of a bookshop located on the first floor and literally filling the whole eleven floors of the building with its perfume. Had someone been watching, they would have seen that it looked altogether like the book chose Adam, not the other way around. He wasn’t even looking when he pulled it out of the shelves from amongst hundreds of others.

After work, on Friday night, he called Nancy.

‘Hey Nancy, how’s it going?’

‘You know, Adam, if you hadn’t called me just then, I was just about to pick up the phone. I found something that might surprise you.’

‘I found something as well. Can I come over? I’ll bring it with me.’

‘We both have a surprise, how nice. Come for dinner.’

3

Nancy lived in quite a special place. It was a small, converted boathouse, right down on the water, in the back of one of the big mansions, in Wunulla Road, Point Piper. The owners wanted someone to live in it because they spent so much time away from the house and they thought it would be wise if they got someone to move into the unused boathouse to keep an eye on the place. So they renovated it and made it comfortably self-sufficient. When they advertised it, they didn't mention the rent because they first wanted to interview the applicant. Their strategy was; if they didn't like the person they would ask a prohibitive rent and get rid of them that way. Well, when they first met Nancy, they were initially slightly taken aback by her way-out appearance, but after speaking with her for a while, they gradually began taking quite a liking to her. In fact, they got on so well with her in the end that they had her stay for dinner, during which they offered her the cosy boathouse for the most ridiculously low rent. They actually considered renting her the place for free, because they certainly didn't need the money, but they thought that they better charge her something so as not to offend her.

Before the renovation, the boathouse had a large, double wooden door on its north side, the side that faced Rose Bay. A wooden slipway sloped into the water and in the old days they used to winch small boats up the slipway into the boathouse. The new owners weren't interested in boating so, as part of their renovation, they built a small, covered wooden deck on top of the slipway, which could be accessed through a new aluminium sliding door. Nancy usually kept the door wide open, as she loved the tranquil sounds and salty smells of the bay. There was a tiny bathroom and kitchen at the rear of the boathouse, with the main portion doubling as a living and bedroom. She had a small, round wooden table on the deck with three chairs around it. She ate her meals there on most days, even on the rainy days, as long as it wasn't too windy. Nancy also had access to the family pool, which was hardly ever used by anyone else.

Although she knew many people, she tended to socialise with very few of them. She had an inherent dislike of groups. Her favourite social gathering was being with just one person. She couldn't stomach the superficial encounters so typically experienced at parties and other gatherings of people. She usually just

had enough and quietly slipped out without bothering to say good-bye to anyone, feeling the pressure of humanity disperse from her as she walked away into the silent, welcoming night.

She used to wonder about herself and her aversion to groups. She wasn't sure if it was normal, but she knew what she liked, what she loved. She just loved being with one friend with whom she could have a close, deep, meaningful conversation. She loved how her affection grew for her friend as they shared their secrets with each other.

She wanted to progress in her understanding of her life, of life itself, and felt that her time was too precious to be wasted on *superficial, one-dimensional clones*.

Her two main visitors, at that stage of her life, were Adam and Robbie. She met Robbie because he either came by her place paddling a canoe or, on the windy days, he came flying past on his sixteen-foot Hobie Cat. He spotted her one day, pottering inside the boathouse. After that, he regularly came past, figuring that sooner or later she would notice him and hopefully say hello.

One sunny, windy, Saturday morning, he saw her sitting on her deck, relaxing. She couldn't fail but notice the crazy guy sailing his catamaran past her place all morning, hanging high off one hull, first coming this way, then that, and when he saw her watching, he gave her a big wave and what else could she do, she gave him a wave in response. He demonstrated his absolute mastery over his boat by the way he sailed it perfectly up to the slipway beneath her boathouse.

'Hi, my name's Robbie. I live just around the point.'

Robbie was a wealthy playboy and young man about town. His redeeming feature was that he valued a good friend. That was why Nancy found him interesting right from the beginning.

Before long, she joined him for sails on the harbour. She hadn't sailed before and it became Robbie's pleasure to teach her. She initially found the speed of the sleek catamaran somewhat intimidating, and sensing this he sailed the cat in a more conservative fashion until she became a more skilful sailor. After a half dozen sails, or so, he started lifting a hull out of the water. Ultimately that became Nancy's favourite thing. She laughed and screamed and

claimed that she felt like she was flying as she hung her slender body way out from the upwind hull. Robbie was even further hung out on his trapeze. They sailed all over Sydney Harbour, exploring every nook and cranny, often sailing onto one of the deserted little beaches that dot the many bays and inlets. There they had lunch that was meticulously prepared by Robbie and brought in a special waterproof hamper, which he strapped to the mast of the boat.

On one memorable day, during a huge swell, he sailed them north towards Manly. When he saw the giant swells rolling in through the heads, he sailed the fast cat out to sea, tacked around out there and came screaming back into the harbour, surfing down the front of the massive, unbroken swells.

They must have ridden at least twenty giant waves that day. For Nancy, it was something she could have never imagined doing, yet she did it, and seemingly without fear. Later, thinking about it, she realised that it was Robbie's sailing skill and his confident, decisive nature that made her completely forget to be afraid, even though they were sailing in waves as big as houses.

When the wind was due west, Robbie liked to sail under the Harbour Bridge, from one pylon across the water to the other, sailing as slow as possible, with one hull high out of the water all the way across. Nancy loved that trick. There was a certain surrealism about the moment, because when they looked up, the sky was a broad, dark mass of steel, and the whole space echoed with the sounds of man and his machines. As they sailed across the harbour under the steel colossus, balanced precariously on a fine edge, she sometimes felt that what they were doing was high art, *'like a dance, like Christo.'*

Robbie kept his boat in his back yard. There was a boathouse there as well. His dad had that converted into an elegant sunroom. Robbie's house was one of the most exclusive residences in Sydney. It was absolutely spectacular. The view from the magnificent house was straight down the harbour towards the city. It was like a painting, with the city skyline on the left, the Harbour Bridge in the centre and the white sails of the Opera House billowing between them. The zillion-dollar view was rounded off with a big sky and an expansive body of water, which was surrounded by abundant native bushland. To add a

little seasoning to the visual feast, there was a constant parade of sails and every other type of floating craft imaginable, there were sun crystals shimmering on the water in the afternoons, and occasionally, there would be a southerly squall rampaging furiously up the harbour. One tended to forget to use a clock, but instead told the time by the passing of the Manly ferries. And to go with one's first dry martini or, depending on one's drug preference, one's first joint, this masterpiece, masquerading as a view, transformed itself completely into a night spectacular, with all the lights of the city shining under the dark, starry sky like a set of a Stanley Kubrick movie. And during the part of the year when the full moon set behind the Harbour Bridge, Robbie often sat on the end of his jetty and marvelled at how the surface of the water shimmered like mercury.

On the harbour side of the sunroom, Robbie built a new jetty, which projected about six metres out towards the water. At the end of the jetty he built a wooden, sloping slipway, designed to fit his Hobie Cat. He kept the catamaran at the top of the slipway, on the flat part of the jetty. At the beginning, when he first acquired the cat, he sailed up to the jetty, got off and dragged the boat up the sloping ramp. After a year or so, he started sailing the boat directly up the slipway, cautiously at first, but full speed in the end. At full speed, the cat slid all the way up the ramp and neatly parked itself on its spot on the flat part of the jetty. Anyone that saw him do it was left slack-jawed because of the extremely tight fit onto the ramp. Robbie measured ten inches clearance between the hulls and the two eighteen-inch-thick, wooden piers either side of the lower part of the ramp. Sailing up to the jetty, with him up on one hull, doing about twenty knots, aiming at a gap that looked too narrow for the boat, *scared the crap* out of Nancy every time she had to *risk her neck* with him doing his *lunatic party trick*. But she didn't mind stepping off the boat directly onto Robbie's terrace. He got it right every time, except once with Nancy. The wind was particularly strong on that day and it blew across the jetty. He threaded the needle between the thick posts all right, and they flew up the ramp OK, right up to the top, but just when it looked like another perfect job of parking the boat, a gust of wind hit the mainsail. It didn't give Robbie enough time to let out the mainsheet so, in effect, they were still sailing. But

instead of the boat going forward into the sunroom, it started sliding sideways, towards the side of the jetty. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. The cat slid slowly sideways until one hull dropped off the edge.

‘Grab a hold of something, Nancy, I think we’re going in.’

‘You grab a hold of something, I’m getting off.’

As the boat slowly toppled over the side of the jetty, Nancy casually stepped off. She watched in amazement as Robbie waved goodbye, as he disappeared over the edge with his boat and splashed down some ten feet below in waist-deep water.

4

Nancy was making chicken risotto for Adam’s visit. She loved to cook dinner while her guest sat there with her, either opening a nice Merlot, or rolling a perfect joint, or both. She played the best music that Adam had ever heard through a giant pair of *Altec Stonehenge Three* speakers that totally dominated the tiny boathouse. The speakers generated a rich, deep, woody bass, even at low volume, and wholly produced the clearest, crispest sound imaginable. She got onto them through a music industry associate of hers who put her onto a guy in Kent HiFi, which was, during the seventies, the Mecca of music equipment shops for all discerning, practising audiophiles in the greater Sydney basin.

Between the speakers, on the floor, were two long rows of record albums. Nancy had collected over five hundred albums, most of them gifts from music company reps, although tonight she was going to focus on one album, the one she wanted Adam to hear.

After dinner, they sat outside on her deck, he reading the back of the record jacket of Van Morrison’s *Astral Weeks*, while she flipped through the pages of Adam’s new *Bhagavad Gita*.

‘It would take some time to really get into this book.’

‘There is a section in it that talks about yoga meditation. It goes into the breathing and mind thing, and it talks about the existence of things that *can not be seen with mortal eyes and divine sight.*’

‘Van Morrison makes me think of me. He’s singing about *my* life. He makes me feel like there is someone else that is going through the same trip as

me. His songs are about things that most people don't even think are real. He inspires me to not be afraid. He makes me feel that extreme experiences are normal, in the scheme of things.'

Adam looked out over the bay.

'Is that a ferry?'

'Yeah, that's the Watson's Bay ferry. They run till late. Some nights they put coloured lights all over it making it look just like a Christmas tree.'

'Wow, look at the stars. It's hard to imagine that we're looking at infinite space, that we actually exist in infinite space. You know, the closest galaxy to ours is the Andromeda Galaxy. That's just the closest, and do you want to know how far away it is?'

'No ... yes ... how far?'

'Two million light years. That's two ... *million* ... light years. That means that the galaxy we're looking at, through our telescopes, is the one that existed two million years ago. It's massive, the universe is absolutely massive.'

'Or ... '

'Or what?'

'Or maybe it's actually not so massive at all. It might be that we are just so incredibly small.'

'Alpha Centauri, our neighbouring star, is 4.2 light years away. That's 4.2 years of history already recorded in light, transmitted and on its way at the speed of light, but not yet received by us. We're seeing what happened over four years ago. It's all old news, and the bigger the telescope, the older the news.'

'Aren't they looking back in time the further out they look?'

'Maybe, but it's still old news. Like reading last years newspaper. Like watching a Charlie Chaplin movie. None of the stuff they're looking at exists anymore. It's long gone. There's something else there now.'

'You mean that what we are looking at, all the stars I mean, all this,' she pointed at the sky, 'isn't really there?'

'Sorry to disappoint you, but it's all just an old movie.'

'So ... what's real?'

'Things we can't see because their light hasn't got here yet.'

'Would you care to roll?'

'Sure.'

Adam began rolling another joint while Nancy pondered the big mystery. After a while she came up with a conclusion.

'So therefore, the closer we get to us, the closer we get to what's real, to the truth.'

'Yeah, because we're getting closer to right now.'

'So our heart, being the centre of the centre, must be the domain of absolute reality, the domain of absolute truth, the place of the absolute right now, the only place that is actually ... it must be like a point ... the only place that is actually absolutely real.'

'To, er, us ... to our consciousness.'

'To our consciousness?'

'Yeah. It's different in each of us. That's how we get to be individual conscious living things, with er, with our individual point of view, with our own individual, er, truth, I guess.'

'Of course,' she replied. 'So whose truth is real then?'

'If you analyse it logically, everybody's truth is real, because everybody's reality is real to them, to their consciousness.'

'So I am my own perfect example of the absolute truth.'

'Yeah. Do you feel like a cup of tea?'

'Oh, that's a good idea. I'll make it.'

Nancy slipped into the kitchen and boiled the water for the tea. When she came back out with the cups she sat down and continued the conversation.

'How did you meet Robbie?'

'Some of my uni friends knew him. Have you got a light?'

'Sure, here you are. One sugar?'

'Please.'

'I love nights like these. Careful, it's hot. The sky is such an amazing thing, Adam. I remember one night, a couple of years ago, at a *Midnight Blues* concert, I went there with Melissa, a really good friend of mine ... well, we dropped a trip each and I swear, I got 360 degree vision, and the sky was the most spectacular thing, you couldn't ever imagine it, it's so hard to describe.'

'I've only ever had acid once,' Adam replied, 'only half a dot.'

'How was it?' she enquired.

'Actually, it ended up being one of the most memorable days of my life. It's a bit of a story. Would you like to hear it?'

'Love to.'

'OK. I was away on a trip, up the north coast, with Robbie as it turned out, in his new Range Rover. We took tents and sleeping bags. Robbie drove up deserted beaches at night and we made camps on top of sand dunes, miles away from any people. I remember one night on Tallows beach, just south of Byron, we'd been in town drinking at the pub, when Robbie drove down onto the beach, in total darkness, looking for our tents, he drove the Range Rover straight into the ocean. Suddenly, all we could see out of the windscreen, in the headlights, was surf. Robbie just planted the accelerator and turned the wheel, and Nancy, I don't know how he did it, but he managed to drive that amazing car right out of the ocean, laughing his head off the whole time.'

'Yeah, Robbie's a scream. He likes to be a bit of a wild boy, but it's what makes him fun.'

'Well, I told Robbie about this incredible natural waterslide, up the back of Currumbin Valley, and we decided to include it into our itinerary. I had never dropped acid before, but Robbie assured me that his stuff was amazing and he suggested that we both share one drop. Actually it was just a tiny piece of blotting paper. Robbie cut it in half with a pair of scissors and we both swallowed our halves parked under a tree, just past the turnoff, up the Currumbin Creek road. I can't remember what the music was that he put on, I think it might have been Pink Floyd; I just remember it being perfect for the occasion. The acid kind of sneaked up on me. I began to feel a bit of a rush, a bit of speed, a bit like too much coffee, a little scary cause I didn't know at what intensity it was going to level off. The initial fear spoilt the first half of the drive for me. Robbie was having no such problems though. He wouldn't stop raving about how beautiful the valley was and singing, that's right, that Pink Floyd song, *Money*, it came on, I think he likes that song, well, he's singing away and I'm starting to relax a bit and notice how all the colours were getting brighter

and how I was noticing all the sounds much more. All my senses seemed to be going into overdrive.'

'I know, it's such amazing stuff.'

'Yeah, but risky. There's no escape if you've taken too much. You've got to take the ride. It's definitely not for the easily frightened.'

'Yeah. I think that it's going to be one of the main causes of schizophrenia in the future.'

'That's for sure. Tripping on LSD can be like throwing your brain into a blender. Anyway, by the time we got there, I was tripping off my face, but feeling great, like an excited kid. We were both like a couple of excited kids. We parked the Range Rover at the beginning of the walking track and I guided us into the jungle towards the sound of the rushing waters. I can't describe how I was feeling at the time, my heart felt huge, I had this big feeling, like a house with no roof on it, anyway, we eventually got to the water slide. I showed it to Robbie and he just went kind of quiet. I think the fear got to him. The place can do that to you. He said he'd watch me go down first. Well, he watched me all right. I started sliding down the slide, first one go, then another and another. I couldn't stop myself. Later on, I figured that I must have got an LSD induced attack of the braves. It was stupid really. I got myself into some kind of frenzy. I'd slide down, climb out of the small pool at the bottom, scramble up the rocks back to the top and slide down again. I felt like a kid. I couldn't stop laughing, and everything was so intensely colourful, and the sound of the water and birdlife, and everything sounded like we were in a huge cathedral or something. Intensity, that's the word, my senses were absorbing everything with an intensity I had never ever experienced before. My eyes must have been bulging and every time I scrambled back up the rocks past Robbie, I'd go, come on Robbie, it's heaps of fun, have a go, but he just sat there, feeling quite contented to just watch.'

'That would be me, Adam, I'd just watch.'

'After about forty slides in a row, I stopped and sat down next to Robbie who looked pretty blissed out. He didn't feel challenged by the slide at all. I told him about the pools up the creek and we set off to explore them. The next two things that happened, Nancy, are what really stuck in my mind. The day was

hot and steamy. We were deep in the rainforest with trees one hundred and fifty feet high making a thick canopy above us. Underneath were palms, ferns and thick long vines hanging off the trees. There were exotic multi-coloured birds all around, flying and singing, and the whole cathedral echoed with the sound of rushing water. In the creek bed we were like in a green tunnel in the jungle. We followed the rocky terrain up the creek until we got to the first pool where we had a swim. The water was beautifully clear and cool. There was a small waterfall cascading into the top end of the pool and we sat under it and let it wash over us for ages. It was really incredible under that waterfall, I can't tell you. Anyway, Robbie really enjoyed the swim, we both did. After having cooled off enough, we proceeded on up the creek looking for the second pool. As we carefully negotiated the slippery boulders along the edge of the creek, we began to hear the sound of children playing. As we quietly approached the source of the laughter, we were both stopped completely in our tracks by the vision that presented itself before us. There was the most beautiful natural rock pool, bigger than the first and more, I don't know, inviting. Just perfect. And swimming, no, frolicking in the pool were four beautiful kids, about ten or twelve years old, they were quite tiny actually, maybe three feet tall. There were two girls and two boys and they were all naked, splashing around and, and their bodies were brown, like dark suntans, and they all had really long, very light blond hair hanging half way down their backs. We stood there motionless, literally frozen by the magical vision. One of the boys climbed about twenty feet up an overhanging tree and jumped into the pool from up there and, as Robbie and I stood there in plain sight of the kids, it was as if we were invisible. Have you ever had that experience, Nancy, where you thought that you were invisible because you were in some place where absolutely nobody looked at you? It's like you're invisible. Well that's how it was with those kids. They just didn't seem to see us. We stood there, maybe for five minutes, not moving an inch or making a sound. We just stared at the scene, becoming more and more unsure if those absolutely perfect young creatures were real or some kind of apparition. After a while, we quietly backed away and made our way back down the creek and back to the Range Rover. Then the second magic thing happened. There, where the track came out of the jungle

into the small clearing, where we parked the car, what seemed like waiting for us were these two young surfer guys. They were sitting on the grass in the shade of a low tree and they had a huge watermelon and a machete. And as we arrived, one of them cut the watermelon in half and said to us, *just in time*. We couldn't believe our luck. We were hot and thirsty and those two really cool, cheerful young guys wanted to share their watermelon with us. It was sweet and it was cool, I can't tell you how good it tasted, Nancy, something you never forget.'

'That was an amazing acid trip, Adam, really amazing. Acid's different to the gas, isn't it?'

'Oh yeah. On acid you're punching your energy through all your senses, hyper connecting with the world, cranking up all the dials, but on the gas you focus all your energy into bypassing all your senses, shutting them down. It's a near unconsciousness experience, a totally different trip, and you can switch off any time you want with the gas if the trip gets a bit too scary, but with acid you're strapped in for the whole ride. There's no getting off if it all goes psycho.'

'I've heard that some people come out of it screaming.'

'Personally speaking, I would prefer to avoid such extreme experiences, seeing that basically I am still your run of the mill, average, everyday coward.'

'I don't think you are a coward, Adam. Acid is a gamble every time you do it, no doubt.'

Adam's gaze drifted over the water.

'You have such an absorbing view of the lights along the shore of the bay ... the way they reflect off the water. ... How come you always have such good dope?'

'Hmm, I guess it's the dealer you know. It's funny how all that works, the picking it up, I mean. You make a call and you say something else, but he knows what you're really talking about, and he says, *yeah, come on over*, and you go over and it's all about the pickup, the dope for the cash that's in your pocket. You go to his home and act cool, trying to reassure him that you're cool and that he's got nothing to worry about with you, because it's a trust thing between you and your dealer, and you kind of act as though you are friends

and catch up on a bit of news. He usually lights up a joint to smoke over the deal. You're kind of friends, but you only ever go there when you want a deal, and every time you're there it ends with, *and what would you like?* And you say, *the usual, thanks*, and it ends as a business deal. Maybe that's what it actually is, just a very personal business deal where the customer gets special, personal attention, not really right for a friendship. The really cool ones, they're so cool, they've always got the best heads and they always act so laid back, discrete, you know that no one else knows. Would you like to roll another one?'

'Sure.'

'There's one thing about my dealer that stands out in my mind. Whenever we part, he says, *God bless*, to me. No one else I know ever says that. And you know, every time he says it to me, I actually feel something ... like, like I've been ...'

Adam laughed, 'Blessed by your dope dealer?'

She smiled, 'No. It's just that he's the only person that I hear it from and that, I guess, kind of makes it special, which is silly really, because essentially he's a crook, but an honourable crook.'

Adam's attention focussed onto the ferry in the bay.

'What a job.'

'What job?'

'The ferry driver. Do they call them drivers?'

'The helm, I think they call them the helm.'

'Imagine going to work every morning, out there.'

'Yeah, helming around the harbour all day.'

'Look how perfectly he docked with the jetty.'

'That must be the last job they give you before you go to heaven.'

'Here he goes, he's undocking. Look how peacefully it glides through the water.'

'There's a story behind every story. Imagine the people whose lives were enriched by being involved with that boat.'

'Like the people who built it?'

'Yeah. And even the people who cut the trees and sawed them into suitable planks and ... thicker bits of wood.'

‘And don’t forget the young deckhand, how all his Christmases have come at once. He’s out on the harbour all day, tying and untying the ferry at the various wharves ... ‘

‘Not a care in the world, except for his hair. And he’s an efficient user of time, never missing an opportunity to express his basic urges to a pretty young girl passing through his rather expansive personal space.’

‘Should we light this joint?’ he asked.

‘Sure,’ she answered.

Adam gave the smoke to Nancy and lit it for her. She thanked him, then asked,

‘Were you born in Sydney?’

‘Oh no, I was born in Yugoslavia, Slovenia actually, the capital, Ljubljana, way back in ‘48. My family emigrated here in ‘59.’

‘Wow!’

‘I can still remember how all our possessions fitted into three suitcases and how all three of us slept on canvas camp beds, all in one room, and how mum cooked our meals in two saucepans on an upturned two-bar heater.’

‘Gosh, you’ve never spoken about your arrival to Australia before. It’s fascinating. Your parents must be something.’

‘Yeah, I guess it must have taken a big leap of faith *and* a good dose of communism aversion.’

‘It was a big deal.’

‘Yeah, especially when you consider that they couldn’t speak very much English. The first year was the toughest. Mum talked dad into starting a *black* dental surgery. It was amazing. He started working as a dentist in a tiny first-floor room in the heart of Cabramatta. All he had was a kitchen chair, a reading light, a pedal drill and a bucket for the patients to spit into. And because he was the only Yugoslav dentist in town and half of Cabramatta was Yugoslav, he was busy right from the beginning. The money rolled in and he quickly updated his surgery. The Dental Board required immigrant dentists, from the continent, to pass a special exam before they could become registered, so dad started studying for that. He actually attended the same hospital that I would study in twelve years later. After a year, he got his Sydney Uni diploma and away he

went. And the whole time that he was studying, he was working illegally and building up his practice. You've gotta watch those wily wogs.'

'You sure do.'

'You do?'

'Yeah, the way they sneakily weasel their way into your heart.'

Adam was sitting on one of the veranda chairs, turned out towards the bay. Nancy shuffled over and sat on the floor between his legs and invited him to massage her shoulders and run his fingers through her hair.

'Weasel eh?' he said.

'Yeah. Do you want to see? Here, I'll show you.'

She, ever so slowly, unbuttoned her shirt and, little by little, exposed her small, white, perfectly formed breasts.

'See?' she whispered softly.

Adam felt his heart begin to beat more intensely. Instinctively, he slid his right hand down across her chest and tenderly caressed her left breast.

'Is this where your heart is?'

'Pretty close.'

She tilted her head back and rested it in his lap. Seeing those red, succulent lips of hers beckoning towards him, he bent down and kissed them. He had never kissed lips so warm before. They were almost hot. She closed her eyes and immersed herself in the tender softness of his mouth as she caressed his lips with hers. He had never kissed lips so soft or so delicate. He gently stroked her torso, lightly running his hand over both breasts. He paused at each one and muttered something like, 'I think this spot needs a little extra attention,' and tenderly explored her perfect shape. When he felt her nipples, he felt them swell and become firm between his searching fingertips. Like a cat, she arched her slender back and slipped her shirt off her shoulders, allowing him to more freely explore her fine, long torso.

'Stay.'

'Tonight?'

'Yes.'

He kissed her lips again and said,

'Do I ever tell you that I love you, much?'

‘Yes you do, and then you tell me, don’t take this the wrong way.’

‘That’s because you started that. Do you remember? You’d hug me or kiss me and then say, don’t take this the wrong way.’

‘I love you too, Adam, in a probationary sort of way ... no, I’m kidding, I truly do love you. I love your heart, you’ve got a good heart, and mmmmm.’

She squirmed around to face him, knelt on her knees, slid her hands under his T-shirt and gave him a tight squeeze and a long, slow, passionate kiss. After what seemed to him like an eternity lost in the blissful warmth of her lips, she rose to her feet and suggested they go inside and sit on her bed.

‘I want to play *Song Of The Wind* for you,’ she said, ‘I love this track.’

Adam made himself comfortable on the bed, totally captivated by Nancy’s beautifully sleek, half-clad body. She placed Santana’s *Caravanserai* album on the turntable and, before playing the track, switched on her bedside lamp. She gave him another juicy kiss and then lowered the stylus onto the vinyl. As the music slowly faded in, her whole personality took on a magical transformation. Suddenly, Adam could see a wild cat, like a Cheetah, flexing and squirming to the music. As he watched her dance in circles in front of him, she unfastened a button on the side of her skirt, allowing it to fall on the floor, revealing her long, lean, white legs. She danced in circles around her skirt, swaying in front of Adam, who was by now ready to blow a valve as her sensuality completely entranced him. Without breaking the rhythm of her dance, she slipped off her brief panties and let them fall to the floor as well. Completely naked, she closed her eyes and danced to the beat, holding her arms up, turning and arching her back, with the warm light of the bedside lamp softly highlighting all her exquisite features. Dancing free and uninhibited, she lovingly displayed herself to him. He could feel his heart thumping away in his breast as his eyes, intoxicated with her slender, white, almost glowing beauty, drank in the colour and bouquet of her fine wine. As the song ended, she spun her body around and let it fall into his arms. They gazed deeply into each other’s eyes for what seemed like an eternity, then, almost simultaneously, they softly whispered to each other,

‘Look, don’t take this the wrong way, but I think I love you.’

Next morning, they awoke in each other's embrace. The morning sun was streaming in through the open door, warming their bodies. She turned away from him, towards the sun, and wrapped him around her body like a blanket. They lay there like that, glued together, without saying a word, until she turned her head and closed her eyes, beckoning for him to kiss her. Eventually she rose out of bed first, saying,

'You relax while I make some coffee.'

She put on *Astral Weeks* and began making the coffee. She swayed to the music, then sashayed over to him and kissed his lips, followed by a little spin and then a glide back to the kitchen, all without a stitch of clothing.

'Aren't you cold?' he asked.

'No. I want you to enjoy me.'

'Oh, I think it's working,' he replied, nodding his head.

'Good.'

'Do you want me to do anything?'

'No ... yes ... never forget me.'

'Oh, I don't think there's much chance of that.'

'You'd be surprised.'

'You'll always live in my heart, Nancy, you're part of it.'

She looked outside.

'What a glorious day, and it's Saturday. Why don't we take the ferry into town.'

'What a great idea. We could have lunch down at the Quay and then we could go to the surgery.'

'Or we could go to the surgery first, after taking the ferry into town, and then after, we could take another ferry to Watson's Bay and have lunch and a beer there.'

'We could have a late lunch and catch the afternoon sun. I love that beer garden. It's so magical there in the afternoon sun.'

She brought the coffees to the bed, placed them down on the bedside table and lay down on the bed next to him.

'You know what's magical for me?'

'No, what?'

‘What’s really magical for me is when I feel your hands caressing my body. I can feel the way they search the surface of my skin. They remind me of bees around a flower when they hover around my ... ah ... around my ...’

‘You mean where the sun shines?’

‘I love it when you touch me there.’

Adam knelt up on the bed beside her and began softly running his hands up and down her long, thin body. She began to squirm and flex, expressing her pure pleasure at his touch. Her breathing deepened as she spread her arms across both pillows and opened her legs wide, inviting him to caress her warm, yearning wetness.

Later, as he gently eased his body over hers, she tenderly whispered into his ear,

‘I know where the sun shines.’

It was a moment of as perfect a love as he had ever experienced. No one had ever made him feel like they truly loved him as much as she did. No one had ever given their love to him so freely. No one had ever offered their body to him as lovingly as she did.

They loved each other, there on her comfortable bed, bathed in sunlight, surrounded by the sounds of soft music and the tinkles of the halyards hitting the masts of the gently rocking yachts, moored in the bay outside.

5

Later that morning, they stood together on the bow of the ferry for the whole trip into the city. They waved back to the people standing in front of the new Opera House and enjoyed a gelato on the pier at Circular Quay before heading uptown to Adam’s surgery.

‘I’m going to try to concentrate on my breath today.’

‘I’m just going to try to let go more completely and focus on the centre.’

If one were a fly on the wall, watching them, one would have seen two people sitting quietly, with their eyes closed, breathing gas through hoses stuck in their mouths. The room was dark, except for a series of thin, parallel bands of light streaming in through the narrow gaps of the venetians. There was not a sound because before going into their *meditations* they decided on silence so

they could listen to the *inner rhythm* that became subtly audible under the influence of the gas.

Adam's plan was to breathe in-harmony with this rhythm. He thought to himself, *'I'll focus my mind on my breath; get it right, smooth and steady.'* As he started breathing and listening to the inner beat, an image of a long, heavy pendulum came into his mind. His in-breath became the pendulum swinging towards him and his out-breath became the pendulum swinging away from him. He intensified his concentration like never before.

She lay comfortably in the patient's chair, trying to completely let go. She gradually narrowed her focus onto what she imagined to be the centre of her consciousness. *'An infinitely small point,'* she thought to herself. Then, when she thought that she was there, in the centre, in the infinitely small *right now*, she sent out a prayer to the great infinity, the great eternity.

'Dear Lord, I am faith in You.'

As she thought that, she found herself sitting on top of a large, wooden wagon being pulled by a team of ten horses. They were rolling across a green clearing. She turned her head when she heard the sound of galloping hooves. She saw a rider, young and strong, approaching at some speed. His clothes appeared to be from a long-gone age. As he rode up to the wagon, he beamed a smile at her, took a leather pouch, which represented all his worldly wealth, from his saddle and, not breaking out of his gallop, threw the pouch into the back of the wagon, then rode ahead, and this was the strange part, she knew he rode ahead to join the King's army. The wagon she was riding on was the war wagon that followed behind the army. It contained all the common wealth of the whole army, which fought for and gave their complete allegiance to their warrior king. As she watched the rider gallop into the distance, she noticed the brilliance of the sunny day, the blueness of the sky and the greenness of the grass and trees in the far distance. As she breathed in, she could feel the coolness in the air. Her awareness then drifted to the sounds and bumps of the wagon and its hard-working team of horses. Just as she began to distinguish the sound of the wheels, something began happening to her vision. It was as if a laser was piercing into her sphere of reality. Suddenly the centre of her vision began to disintegrate and behind it was nothing but intense white light. The

reality of the wagon slowly completely melted away and was replaced by uniform, intense white light, as bright as an electric welder. It was as if her vision had become spherical and all she could see in all directions was intense white light.

She tightened up in the chair and pulled the hose out of her mouth. She opened her eyes, gasping for air, with a look of startled panic. She calmed down quickly as she saw Adam, sitting there on his stool with a straight back, looking like he was gone to the world. As she came more fully back to the surgery, she noticed how her T-shirt was soaked from perspiration. She relaxed back into the chair.

‘Wow,’ she whispered to herself, ‘love *is* light ... and light *is* life.’

Not long after, Adam stirred to life and opened his eyes. Initially, he just stared blankly into the wall with his mouth open, holding the hose in his lowered hand. He appeared stunned, totally blown away. After a long pause, he slowly turned toward Nancy, who was now looking at him slightly concerned, and calmly asked her,

‘Are you all right?’

‘Yes thanks, but you looked a bit suspect for a while there.’

‘I’m OK.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yeah. How was it?’

‘It was ... it was ... indescribable. But I want to hear what happened to you first.’

After a short pause, Adam asked,

‘Well, do you want me to start at the beginning, or at the good bit?’

‘At the beginning, I want to hear everything.’

‘OK then. I started today with the idea of focussing on my breathing. I closed my eyes and everything was dark. As the gas took effect, I heard the beat.’

‘I know, I hear it too. What is that?’

‘I don’t know. It could be coming from us ... or ...’

‘Or what?’

'Or it could be coming from ... how shall I put this ... from our universe, that being everything that surrounds us.'

'I only hear it on the gas. Do you think it's there all the time?'

'Probably. The gas most likely attunes us to it, although it could be something else.'

'Something else?'

'Yeah. It could be the rhythm of another dimension. Like going to the sea to take a swim and hearing the sound of the surf before you dive into the water.'

'Oh, that's so beautiful, Adam. What a perfect analogy.'

'Thank you. Anyway, as I was concentrating on keeping my breathing in time with the beat, I got this idea to visualise a giant pendulum and breathe as smoothly as it swung, which isn't as easy as you might think, and the next thing I remember is looking up at a cloudy, smoky sky, through a circle. As I looked around, I saw that I was lying, squashed up, in the bottom of a big wicker basket. I clambered onto my knees and looked over the top, and Nancy, you won't believe this, but the basket I was in was strapped to the back of a huge white bird, with what seemed like a fifty-foot wingspan. It was enormous and brilliant white all over. The bird was flying high, maybe three or four thousand feet, and I could hear the wind passing over its massive wings, and it was carrying *me* on its back.'

'And this was real?'

'As real as us sitting here ... realer.'

'Wow, what a wonderful experience, like in a magic fairy tale. Oh Adam, this is so exciting.'

'I looked around and literally froze with trepidation when I saw the most frightening sight I'd ever seen in my whole life. We were flying over a giant canyon, I don't know, maybe as big as a thousand Grand Canyons, maybe ten times deeper, as big as a small state ... and the whole place was on fire.'

'On fire?'

'Yeah, it was like a giant hole in the Earth. All the rocks were glowing red hot for as far as I could see and there was boiling lava everywhere. There were explosions, and cracks and hisses, and huge sides of cliffs were splashing down

into the lava pools. The sky was full of smoke and there was a strong stench of sulphur in the air. I got frightened because I couldn't see anywhere that we could land. Then I looked over at the bird's face and I swear to you Nancy, that bird was smiling, and oddly enough, he reminds me of this other bird experience I had recently, but that's another story. I then knew that this bird was flying me over this unbelievably huge, molten canyon.'

'It's like he was trying to show it to you. Why else would he fly over it? You were meant to see it. Wow!'

'Really? You think so? I can still hear the sounds, the cracks and hisses and explosions echoing around the canyon, and I can still see the place, red hot and molten. It was hostile ... like hell.'

'Look how clearly you remember it. It's amazing how, after it has happened, you remember it as if you'd actually gone there. But you've been sitting in this room the whole time.'

'Part of me went. I think the *me* part, not my body, but I remember myself there *with* my body. It's weird, but it is how it is, and that's how it is.'

'Yeah, that's how it is, not how we thought, not how everybody thinks. Just think, Adam, you've flown on the back of a huge bird, and you heard the sound of its wings?'

'Yeah, swooooooosh, swooooooosh.'

'And you saw his face? Birds can't smile, can they?'

'I saw his face and I felt his smile, really amazing, like my face was his face. A calming, reassuring feeling came over me, like his feelings became my feelings. It's just so indescribable. Are you feeling hungry?'

'A little. What time is it?'

'About one o'clock, I think.'

'Can I describe my trip on the way down to the Quay?'

'Sure.'

Nancy paused and took a long look at the dark surgery surrounding them.

'It's so dark and silent and small, like a tiny, dark hole somewhere in the middle of the universe, and it's such a contrast to the places we go, and yet, it's the most magic of all spaces, like the inside of an egg and we're the little chicks breaking out through the shell.'

'You think my surgery is magic?'

'Yes Adam, very magic, but it's only because it's filled with your spirit. It's everywhere and it's hidden from the whole world, secret and mysterious.'

Adam momentarily lost himself in her pretty face.

'Did I ever tell you how irresistible your lips are?'

'Really?'

He leaned over and tenderly kissed her.

'My friend.'

'My best friend.'

They both slowly tidied everything up, stepped out of the surgery, rode the old rickety lift down ten floors and strolled off down Castlereagh Street towards Circular Quay.

'The city has a much more subdued, uncongested ambience on Saturday afternoons.'

'More fun to walk through with a handsome man.'

'Where you gonna find one of them?'

'I know, I don't know.'

As they strolled down the long, sunlit canyon towards the harbour, with their arms around each other, she told him about her trip, going into great detail describing the rider and his magnificent steed and marvelling at the intense light in her head, which ultimately made her panic. She concluded,

'We only need to know that God is real, that is enough. *Know that I Am*. After that, there is nothing to believe in anymore, nothing to read, nothing to hope for, because you know, because you've seen it for yourself. It's so exciting, Adam, and a bit scary. I wouldn't like to be doing this on my own. I don't know how I'd handle it not having anyone to talk to about it.'

'Just think about it, Nancy, we can fly through space forever and not reach the edge of our universe, or we can sit perfectly still, not moving a millimetre, and go beyond the edge, beyond the infinity of our universe and enter another one, more than likely just one of an infinite number of others.'

Half an hour later, down on the wharf at Circular Quay.

'Hey, here comes the ferry. I'm really looking forward to being on the water. I really feel like getting off the land.'

'Will you hug me all the way?'

'Like a grizzly bear.'

The ferry leisurely cruised around all the bays of the Eastern Suburbs, finally gracefully gliding through the flotilla of moored yachts dotting Watson's Bay and delicately docking with the old wooden wharf.

The day was warm and sunny, and there was a pleasant breeze wafting from the northeast. The sky was bright blue and cloudless and the air was full of seagulls flying around and squawking, competing with each other for morsels of food thrown to them by the many tourists enjoying the tranquil ambience of the bay. The beer garden was full of young people, drinking, laughing, eating and soaking up the afternoon sun. As if by magic, a couple sitting right down the front, overlooking the tiny beach, rose to leave just as Adam and Nancy arrived. Nancy sat down while Adam bought the beers.

They sat there for the rest of the afternoon, relaxing in the cool shade of a beach umbrella, checking everyone out through their trendy sunglasses, talking about the day, eating lunch, drinking beer and sneaking in the occasional discrete peck on the lips.

'How that sun reflects off the harbour.'

Nancy just kept looking at Adam.

'What?'

'You are my sun,' she said to him lovingly.

'Nancy.'

'You are my sun, my moon *and* my stars.'

'Even the stars?'

'Yep!'

'I just had a thought. There must be only one infinity.'

'Hmm, I think I'll call it Adam.'

'Naaah! That would be like starting a new religion, and God knows we've got enough of them already.' He looked into her sunglasses. 'Did I mention how attractive you look right now?'

Her attention suddenly became distracted.

'Look Adam, look how those people came in a speedboat. Who needs cars?'

'That's one of those old-style, wooden boats, like they used to have in, I don't know, the thirties or something, with a big inboard engine.'

'Look how they just drove it up the beach and now they're coming in for a beer. Would you like another beer?'

'I wouldn't mind, but let me get it.'

'No, you relax. I'll get it. Schooner?'

'Middy thanks. The schooners warm up too much before I can drink em.'

.....

Chapter Twelve

THE DOGFIGHT

1

'Excuse me, doctor.'

'Yes, Michelle?'

'There is a man in the waiting room who says he knows you. His face looks very swollen.'

'Even *The Pope* would have to wait five minutes, Michelle.'

'I'll ask him to sit down.'

'Won't be long, we just have to check the occlusion on Mrs. Condon's nice new crown and we'll be done. How is Mrs. Condon anyway?'

'Hine glocor. I huh your gusic.'

'That's nice. OK, fine, bite down on this paper please. That's it ... very good. It looks OK. How does it feel? Have a bit of a bite and grind ... that's the way. Does it feel high?'

'I can't feel anything.'

'Perfect. I'll give you a mirror.'

'Doctor, you can't even tell. That's truly wonderful. They told me about you. Thank you. I feel like a new person. You can't imagine how embarrassing it was opening my mouth with that big stump hanging out of it like that.'

'It's patients like you, Mrs. Condon, that give me the willpower to get up in the morning.'

'Oh, thank you, doctor.'

'You should be fine now for a good twelve months. If you like, we can send you a reminder for your next check-up.'

'Please.'

'Till then, keep well, Mrs. Condon.'

'Thank you, doctor, good bye.'

Michelle attended to Mrs. Condon, while Adam washed his hands and then stepped out into the waiting room.

'Bob?'

'Doc. It's a wonder you recognise me with me face the way it is.'

'Your face? Try half of your head. Are you in pain?'

'That's the funny thing, doc, it used to hurt, but it don't hurt no more.'

Bob drew Adam's attention to a teenage boy sitting in the chair in the corner.

'This is Tommy.'

The boy smiled at Adam when Adam looked at him.

'You look vaguely familiar to me.' Adam commented.

'He's the kid we took to the hospital, remember, doc?'

'How could I forget. Hi Tommy, you look great; you both look great, except for your head, Bob. Come in, both of you. The elephant man has got nothing on you, Bob.'

'Who?'

'Here, sit here Bob; you sit over there Tommy.' Adam looked at them for a moment, briefly recollecting the first time he saw them. He noticed something different about them. There was a happiness radiating from them now. *'Well, what do you know,'* he thought. He then focused on Bob's face. 'Your right side is swollen up like a watermelon. How long has it been like this?'

'It blew up yesterday afternoon. That's when the pain stopped.'

'Give me a look. Aha, it's your fifteen, or what's left of it. God Bob, it looks like a war zone in here ... oh ... sorry mate, I forgot ...'

'She's right, doc.'

'It's just floating in pus. I think it's drained into the sinus. That's why the pain stopped. The abscess has drained into the sinus.'

'Just rip it out, doc, an don't spare the flesh.'

'Hey thanks, Bob, I just love ripping out a bit of flesh in the mornings.'

Tommy was grinning from ear to ear.

'You gonna give me a shot, doc?'

'Well, that depends.'

'Depends on what?'

'Depends on whether I think you need one.'

'I need one, doc. I'm no hero in these places. I hate dentists. Nothin personal.'

'Hey, I hate dentists too. What's there to like? This tooth is just floating. It's as dead as a doornail. I don't think you're going to need a needle. Can you feel this?'

'No.'

'How about this?'

'No.'

'Hang on.'

Adam stealthily picked up a pair of shiny, chrome forceps from a sterile drawer and brought them up to Bob's mouth from beneath, so Bob couldn't see them. He placed them around the offending tooth and gently pulled it out of what felt like custard. As he pulled it he said,

'How about this?'

'No, nothin, doc.'

Adam held the rotten tooth right in front of Bob's face.

'Look what I found.'

'Is that it? Did you get it out?'

Even Tommy weighed in with a comment.

'That was unbelievable, doc.'

Adam smiled and took a bow.

'Thank you, thank you one and all.'

'I can't believe that it's out. Hell, I could have done that myself and saved you the trouble, doc.'

'I dare say you could have pulled it out with your fingers, but this is no trouble for me. It's nice to see you. I was wondering what happened to you guys. Saline rinse, thanks nurse. Do you mind having a rinse, Bob, here, Michelle will help you. Gee, the last time I saw you Tommy, you looked ...'

'Ratshit I bet.'

'You swung your foot at the bucket, boy, and Bob here pulled it out of the way in the nick of time.'

'He said that if it weren't for you, doc, I'd be dead.'

'Are you allergic to penicillin, Bob?'

'No doc, they pumped heaps of that shit into me in Vietnam.'

'Would you mind writing me up a script for Amoxil, please Michelle.'

'Certainly, doctor.'

'So I guess you went back to the hospital, Bob.'

'Yeah, I dropped in the next mornin an they let me stay with him. I was there when he woke up.'

'He scared the shit out of me, doc.'

'Really? I can see why. That melon would scare anybody. Just kidding, Bob.'

'No doc, when I woke up, he was sittin there next to me bed, this ugly lookin guy that I never seen before. The first thing he said to me was that I died an went to hell an that he was the devil come to claim me soul. Then he said that there was no hell like knowin that you've wasted your life.'

'Bob, did you really do that?'

'Yeah doc. I wanted to really scare him an make him wake up to himself.'

'There was just him an me in this small room, an it was real quiet, an I couldn't remember anythin ... an he got me, doc, got me good an proper. I actually thought that he was the devil.'

Bob started laughing.

'The kid started cryin an beggin me to give him another chance an let him go back.'

'Then Bob goes to me, *I can't bring you back from the dead, that's the other bloke's trick. You backed the wrong horse, son.* He had me goin for, I dunno, ages. I was actually believin that I was dealin for me soul with the devil.'

'In the end, he's shittin himself so much that he calls out to Jesus to save him, *please save me Lord*, an I pretend like, you know, don't, don't, an then, a bit rooted from fightin for his soul, he goes off to sleep for another six hours. You know, he wasn't lettin go of his soul without a fight. Then he wakes up for about thirty seconds an he opens his eyes an sees me, an I goes, I'm still here, boy, an his eyes just look at me in a kind of shock an then he goes off to sleep again. He didn't wake up for another twenty-four hours, but when he did, he was heaps better.'

'Bob never told me the truth till I got out of hospital. When I woke up, he was still there, sittin next to me bed. I freaked out cause I thought he was still the devil, but he told me that I must have dreamed the whole devil thing. When

I told him that the devil looked just like him he goes how there's no way that the devil'd be so good lookin. Then he told me his name an what happened an about you an how if it wasn't for you I'd be dead now.'

Adam looked Tommy squarely in the eyes.

'Listen Tommy, I wouldn't have even noticed you if it wasn't for the fact that I spotted Bob standing over you in that alley. Bob's the one that saved you, and that's the truth.'

'Can I tell you something, doc?'

'Sure.'

'I can still remember every second of me time in hell, an I still remember every word I spoke with the devil, an I know that it was Bob bein hisself, havin a bit of fun an, I guess, tryin to help me in his own way, but there was somethin else goin on as well. I remember freakin out at the devil an callin out to Jesus to save me, an the next thing that happens, it's kinda like I got 360 degree vision, I see this lion, directly behind me, real as real can be, an it steps forward, right through me, right through me heart, with these powerful, bold steps, an it's carryin three shields, an I can just see it step through me with these shields an go at the devil an completely blow him out of existence. I started cryin, an this gentle rain started fallin, an these two nice ladies in these long dresses showed up an kinda calmed me down an were nice to me, like your mum would be. I know it sounds crazy, doc, but it was so real. Nobody could imagine what I saw. Anyway, it's changed me big time ... an forever.'

'Yeah doc, he's been comin down the mission every day an talking to pastor Ted heaps. There's somethin about that bloke. It's like he knows how to get you excited about livin.'

'I know, Bob. He got me to learn *the joy of work*. That's what he calls it, an he said that *the freer the work, the bigger the joy*.'

'An he got us into this tricky situation. He got me to agree to not take a drink if Tommy stayed off the smack; an he got Tommy to agree to not get into the smack if I stayed off the piss. So we're now holdin out for each other. I know if I take a drink, the kid'll cave in. He's so young.'

'An I know, doc, that if I cave in, Bob'll go down the gurgler as well. So I'm hangin in for him. We're hangin in pretty much for each other, an we go an do

work for the pastor around the place. There's all these really old people that live by emselves an me an Bob, we go around an see em. An you know, he was right about the joy an about findin things in places you never expected.'

'And you've both got a place?'

'Yeah. Pastor Ted got us a small place back-o-the-Cross.'

'Yeah, with a bathroom an a tiny kitchen.'

'He reckons he'll figure out some proper work for us.'

'When God is ready. He always says, *when God is ready*, so ya don't have ta worry about it cause God's on the job.'

'Bob, will you please let me fix your mouth. I reckon I'd have to see you about five or six times. How about it?'

'I don't wanna put you out, doc. You don't owe nothin to me.'

'Hey what about pastor Ted? You know what he said. Will you allow me some joy in life, Bob, and please let me fix your teeth? You too Tommy. Anyway, it's been way too long since I've had a really good, smokin, drillin session. Oh come on guys, give a poor dentist a bit of fun. Have a heart.'

Bob and Tommy both grinned,

'That's it, I'm definitely not comin.'

'Me either.'

'Excuse me, doctor.'

'Yes, Michelle?'

'Your next patient is here.'

'Thank you, Michelle. Would you mind booking these two? Give them a couple of weeks, I'd say. Let the wound heal. Give me a quick look into your mouth Tommy, yeah, I think an hour each. You better take your pills, Bob. Four a day, before meals.'

'Thanks, doc. See ya.'

'See ya, doc. Nice meetin ya.'

'Two weeks; and I'll have my drill warmed up.'

2

The days passed into weeks and months, and spring turned into summer, the high season for hang gliding at Stanwell Park. The core group of pilots continued to expand the envelope of birdlike flight. Steve brought out a new

hang glider, designed for better glide and better lift, and even though he thought that the new wing would not be as suitable for aerobatics as the old one, it turned out that the extra performance only enhanced aerobatics because the pilots could attain a higher top speed in dives and carry that speed better through the manoeuvres. Of course, the primary reason for the new design was to fly the pilots across the Stanwell valley to Mitchell's and beyond. And even though it was still a struggle, filled with danger, they slowly, one by one, triumphantly conquered the challenging task. Steve was first of the group to emulate Zeke's bold achievement. He did it in the prototype version of the new wing, and it was after that magnificent flight that he decided to put it into production. Glenn and Arnold were next, some four weeks later. They made it over together, both flying the new ship. That summer, the entire group, except for Adam, made it across. It would take Adam another year to accomplish that feat.

The main activity in the air was still aerobatics in front of the hill. If there were ever some pretty girls watching, the *aero show* typically kicked up a testosterone notch, or two. Perhaps it was for that reason, or for some other reason, maybe just human nature, that one day Glenn and Ken dreamed up the idea to have a *dogfight*. The idea hatched itself one sunny, Sunday afternoon in the pleasant environs of the Newport Arms Hotel over a steady stream of middies.

'We could tie some streamers off the wing tips.'

'Yeah, and the keel.'

'And the first to cut all three streamers would be the victor.'

'The victor. It sounds so gladiatorial.'

'I thought more like jousting.'

'Piece of cake, let's do it.'

'Let's. Your shout, isn't it?'

The next time the conditions were suitable down at Stanwell, they both showed up with many rolls of paper streamers. They taped the streamers to the protruding tube ends of the keel and leading edges. They figured about thirty five feet should be enough to make it safe. On the ground, the long, colourful streamers snaked and flapped in the wind, making for quite a

spectacle. Any pilots still airborne quickly landed when they spotted the activity on the hill. They all gathered on either side of the two *battle wings* and just stood there watching, occasionally muttering something like,

‘This is real aerial combat. It’s like the birds do it. I’ve seen them. They fight by trying to take out a wing or tail feather in order to weaken their opponent’s flying ability, and this is the same. It’s dogfighting with physical contact. That means getting real close to get the streamers and that is very, very dangerous.’

‘How ya gonna cut a guy’s streamers?’

‘You’ve obviously got to get above your opponent. You can’t do anything if you haven’t got the altitude.’

‘Except run.’

‘What if he’s diving at you from above? You couldn’t even see him.’

Ken and Glenn had discussed tactics at length and they both agreed that the primary task was to climb above your opponent. That initially made it a soaring contest.

The lift band along the ridge was rarely constant and uniform. There were zones of weaker and stronger lift. Sometimes these lift zones shifted during the day, or completely switched off. It took many flying hours, in a variety of conditions, for a pilot to begin to develop an instinct for the lift. Being able to locate the good lift was one thing, but being able to utilise it was altogether another. To be able to climb the highest and to do it fastest, or to be the last still capable of soaring on a marginal day, those were the qualities of a master pilot.

It was decided that since the first part of the dogfight was a race for altitude, Glenn and Ken should both launch off the hill simultaneously and side by side. That way everything would be even and fair. The wind was strong, about twenty five knots, a bit gusty and coming in from the southeast, making the point and the south face the flyable part of the ridge.

They both launched aggressively with every eye that could see them focussed on their spectacular streamered wings. Glenn turned left and Ken right, both aiming towards pockets of stronger lift along different parts of the ridge. Glenn climbed out on the point, flying in efficient circles in a narrow lift

funnel, while Ken chandelled up about a hundred yards further down the ridge, deeper in the valley. There wasn't much in it in the climb-out. Both pilots rose together, watching each other like hawks and avoiding engagement until one of them felt they had a height advantage.

It was the middle of the day and the gusty southerly wind felt cool without a jacket. The sky, with its patchwork of cotton-ball clouds, looked vibrant and energised and complemented perfectly the bright colours of the wings and streamers of the two protagonists.

They both circled and hovered in their respective columns of lift, neither gaining an advantage, until suddenly, Ken's glider bumped upwards in a small bubble of warm air. Within ten seconds, and after a couple of tight turns, Ken was looking down on Glenn, who was now fifty feet below him. Glenn immediately started to fly out towards the beach attempting to outrun his opponent. He knew that Ken's altitude would give him the first pass at the streamers. He also figured that if Ken missed, or only cut one or two streamers, he would have lost enough height in that manoeuvre to fly himself into a disadvantage. So Glenn was flying away defensively, but he was also flying himself into a counter-attack position. This was a move he had thought out while simulating aerial combat in his mind in preparation for the dogfight. Ken pulled the bar back and dove towards Glenn's inviting streamers. Just as he neared the trailing edge of Glenn's streamers, he banked into a left turn, still diving, and lined up to cut all the streamers with his base bar. Glenn, reacting to Ken's move, banked to the right sending his wake into the path of Ken's glider. Ken, who was committed and continued to fly in the same arc, suddenly felt his sail momentarily collapse and his glider literally fall about twenty feet as it flew through the hole in the air made by Glenn's glider. As he fell, his base bar clipped the last two feet of Glenn's left streamer and ripped it about ten feet out from the wingtip. As Ken recovered from his temporary sail deflation, triumphantly trailing part of Glenn's left streamer from his base bar, Glenn banked around in an efficient 360-degree turn to end up on Ken's tail and now fifty feet above him. There wasn't much time to think. For a moment Ken wasn't sure where Glenn was, and while he wasn't reacting, Glenn swooped into a mentally pre-rehearsed manoeuvre in which he pulled into a much

steeper dive, gaining substantial speed, diving below the level of Ken's glider, pulling up underneath the streamers, cutting two of them on the way up and then banking away back towards the hill in an efficient climbing left turn before Ken even knew what happened.

Glenn had worked out earlier that the wake from an opponent's glider would trail behind the wing just above the streamers. So cutting the streamers from above meant having to fly through the hole in the air that was the wake. Glenn knew that there would be a momentary loss of control, with the occasional total sail deflation, if his wing passed through this wake. He assessed that losing control so close to the other glider was such an undesirable consequence of a diving attack from above, that he worked out an offensive move in which he would cut the streamers from below, then, retaining a smooth flow, would immediately turn back at the hill in order to be first back in the stronger lift. This approach avoided having to fly through the wake.

The strategy worked perfectly. When Ken finally spotted Glenn again, Glenn was already back up to Ken's altitude, he too trailing streamers from his wires, like victory pennants.

In the meantime, back on the hill,

'That was just awesome!'

'Glenn's got two streamers.'

'I've never seen anything like this. This is so ... so ...'

'It's bullshit, that's what it is, total bullshit.'

'I wonder what they're gonna do now?'

'Look, they're pretty even height again.'

As it turned out, Glenn was more patient in the air, waiting for a good opportunity to cut the last of Ken's streamers, the right one. Ken drifted towards Glenn, threatening, and Glenn backed off. Then they flew a circle around each other, literally chasing each other's tails. This stalemate continued for some time with neither pilot being able to gain an advantage.

'What are they doing up there?'

'They're just flying around in circles.'

'Now I know why they call them dogfights.'

‘They’re stalking each other, looking for a weakness in each other’s defence.’

‘They look like two dragons circling each other, with all those streamers flying off them.’

Finally, Glenn got it into his head that the only way he was going to break this impasse was to coax Ken into attempting an attack, missing, and losing his altitude in the process. He pulled the bar in and began flying out from the ridge. Seeing this, Ken sped up and flew in a shallow dive towards Glenn’s streamers. Glenn, watching Ken’s flightpath, actually banked slightly to the right, towards him, with the intent of drawing him in even more. Deceived by this tactic, Ken accelerated towards Glenn’s remaining two streamers. Glenn quickly rolled his glider in the opposite direction, out of the shallow right turn, into a more aggressive left turn that he intended to continue around in a 360. His rapid change of direction completely fooled Ken whose left side wire ultimately only just managed to collect the end of Glenn’s right streamer. Ken was only partially successful. He got another streamer, but in the process he squandered his precious altitude. As Glenn came around to point back into the wind, he could see that Ken was now about eighty feet below and right in front of him. Without a break in the flow of his flight, not giving Ken time to react, Glenn came out of his 360 and immediately pulled into a steep dive aiming for a spot about thirty feet behind Ken’s last remaining streamer. He pulled out of the dive about twenty feet below the streamer and, with the luxury of abundant airspeed, cut that last streamer with his left wingtip, right at the apex of a graceful, ninety-degree wingover.

Everyone on the hill went nuts with applause. Ken, realising that he had been defeated, flew straight around and landed back on the hill. Glenn, on the other hand, being victorious, flew around in a wide circle over the valley, with his vanquished opponent’s streamers trailing off his hang glider. He then staged a victory flypast, coolly skimming just a few feet above the heads of everyone on the hill.

3

Summer drifted into autumn and one year rolled into another. There might have been a whole world outside, but no one noticed. The pilots lived in

a reality of their own, a reality that only manifested itself with the arrival of the south wind, a wind that powered an ancient dream, a dream in which everyone flew like the birds.

It was possible to find it, accidentally, maybe on a Sunday drive. Some who found it, the ones with a more mystical outlook on life, may have perceived it as a reality from a higher plane that somehow got drawn in by the strong pull of Earth's allure. Other, perhaps even wiser, individuals may have seen it as merely the stream of life negotiating the twists and bends of a riverbed that was more ancient than thought itself.

4

The road twisted and wound its way through The Royal National Park like a snake in heat. It was a perfect road for a spirited drive. Not so good for a big, powerful car, but more suited to a small, lightweight, nimble roadster, preferably convertible, so she could see all the trees. She could speed up on the short straights, but that seemed pointless because it proved nothing. It was more about the way she flowed through the bends, perfect entry and perfect exit, maintaining a smooth, rhythmical flow. Snick into third, smooth power up to fourth, minimum brake, flowing, perfect entry speed into the next bend, decelerating, snick, slide her back down to third, smooth power through the bend, finely balanced near the edge of adhesion of the sticky Pirellis.

She could be lost in the road, totally absorbed in it, for a solid, unbroken half hour. She called it, *driving at natural road speed*. It meant driving comfortably fast, disregarding all speed restrictions, except the ones imposed by the road itself. And there weren't many better roads to do it on than the one snaking secretly through The Royal National Park, just south of Sydney.

At the end of this perfect road she came blasting out of the forest, like out of some kind of cosmic time tunnel, and materialised into the most overwhelmingly beautiful world, sometime in the future, where people flew around in the sky like birds, on fine, lightweight, colourful wings. And totally blown away, she asked herself the obvious question.

'Is this place for real?'

And she looked at it, really looked at it, and the more that she looked at it, the more surreal it became.

5

The perfect morning tranquillity of The National Park was rudely shattered by the distant, throaty roar of a thoroughbred Italian sports car. The two black crows, standing in the middle of the road, seemed almost too casual as they hopped away from their feast of roadkill, at the last second, letting the blood-red Alfa Spider miss them by only inches as it roared by.

Her name was Aureole. She was the youngest of five and the most beautiful daughter of Yusuf, the Lebanese trader who made a fortune acting as middleman and liaison in an indeterminable number of deals between Beirut, London, Paris, New York and Sydney. Things like electronics, weapons, medicines and drugs, for *whatever you want*. He was a connecting hub providing a desperately needed service in war-torn Beirut. He could find anything for you, for a price. He was a cactus flourishing in the parched desert environment of chronic civil war, getting rich because he kept his head while everyone else was losing theirs. Then when things went really crazy, in '75, he packed up his family and flew them all to Paris. No one ever knew the extent of Yusuf's wealth, except for Yusuf. Over the years he managed to bank most of his money outside of Lebanon, much of it in Australian banks, through an Australian Lebanese friend of his, named Harry. Harry was making millions of dollars importing literally tons of kef and hashish into Australia, all of it coming out of Lebanon through one of Yusuf's discrete connections. After tying up a few last loose ends, Yusuf flew the family from Paris to London, where they rendezvoused with the *QE2* for a leisurely cruise half way around the world to Sydney, where one of Yusuf's Australian government connections had organised residency visas for them all, naturally enough for the appropriate price for such a specialised service. Yusuf bought a large Mediterranean-style villa overlooking the tranquil waters of trendy Double Bay. All the girls enrolled in university, while Yusuf and his elegant wife, Miriam, could be seen sipping coffee and people-watching almost any weekday morning at any one of a number of fine cafes in downtown Double Bay.

The most precious things in Yusuf and Miriam's life were their five beautiful daughters. And out of the five, the most worrisome of them all was their youngest and brightest, the adventurous, free-spirited Aureole. Aureole's

life had taken a dramatic turn for the better in the last twelve months. Her life in Beirut was becoming a nightmare. She actually had to negotiate between stray bullets and bombs on her way to and from school. She belonged to a Christian Lebanese family and the war was being waged between opposing Christian and Muslim factions. Then, as if by magic, she was suddenly and unexpectedly lifted out of Beirut and transported to the other side of the world.

She was nineteen, independent, with her own cheque account and dream Alfa Romeo Spider. She was comfortably multilingual, speaking fluent Arabic and French and a wonderful novice English, which she spoke with a seductively broad French accent. She was studying journalism at Sydney University.

Now that she had settled down and her spirit could enjoy the trivial and mundane again, she doubled up on her two new passions; that of exploring her exciting new country and driving her hot new sports car. She had driven the National Park road a couple of times before. She loved it. It was the perfect road for her car. It was narrow and bumpy in places and sometimes there was a broken branch on the road around a blind bend requiring reflex braking or steering. There were dips and climbs out of deep gorges and there was a hairpin she wanted to get right this time. Last time, she remembered that she shifted down too early coming into the hairpin, breaking the rhythm of the drive. This time she left it in third as she braked hard, deep into the bend, then changed down in perfect time with the transfer of her right foot off the brake onto the accelerator.

'Ahh, that was better,' she thought to herself as she powered up the hill through a snaking series of esses, revving it out in second gear and chirping the tires as she engaged the clutch into third.

6

'Ouch!'

'What?'

'There, getting out of the red Alfa.'

'Je ... sus!'

'Aooow, the pain!'

'What is she?'

'She looks Middle Eastern. Check out that face.'

'She reminds me of, you know, that sculpture of Nefertiti, the Egyptian queen.'

'Yeah. She is a goddess.'

'Look how she holds her head up like she's royalty.'

'Check that jacket.'

'And the driving gloves.'

'Waaa, and the red jeans. Is that leather?'

'And her skin. What is that? Coffee?'

'With just a dash of cream.'

'And how's the jewellery?'

'Hey, she's looking this way.'

'Looks like she's noticed me, buddy. Didn't I hear your mama calling?'

'Sounded more like your mama to me.'

'Jees, she's coming over.'

'Check out the walk.'

'Ohh, ohh, I can't take this ...'

'Handle it, handle it!'

Moments earlier, Aureole stood next to her Spider and scanned the hill. She wanted to talk to someone about this *new flying* and chose the two *good looking guys* who were both checking her out and who looked like they were part of the local flying scene. So she casually sashayed down towards them and asked them directly,

'Hello, are you pilots?'

'Why ah ... yes.'

She looked out to sea at the hang gliders and declared,

'I cannot believe what I am seeing. Is like a dream.'

The boys both hypnotically replied,

'I can't believe what I'm seeing either.'

'Me either.'

'I drive this road two times before, but I did not see any flying.'

'It probably wasn't on.'

'She won't understand that!'

'Pardon, but I understand very well. What you call it, the air, it was not OK?'

'Hey that's pretty good, but it's the wind, not the air.'

'Ah yes, the wind. It has to be more ... strong?'

'Not just strong, but it has to blow from the south.'

Glenn raised his arm and pointed down the coast towards Wollongong. As she turned her head to the south, he just kept looking at her exquisite face. He marvelled at her aristocratic profile, which was dominated by her unmistakably Arab nose, her soft, full mouth and her fine, smooth, dark skin. Ken was staring as well. He was mesmerised by the way her thick, dark hair, blowing in the wind, made her look like a heroic goddess.

'Is truly beautiful. Is not easy, yes?'

'Is not easy, no. Much practise.'

'You can speak normal English to me. I have very good understanding. I am not so good speaking.'

Glenn's jaw dropped as Ken came out with a surprising,

'Ohhh, au contraire mademoiselle, you speak beautiful English.'

'Merci monsieur, you are too kind, because I know it is not the truth. And you, you speak French?'

'Ah, no, I'm sorry. That was about it. Was it good?'

'Ooooo yes, it was *very* good. So you come here to fly?'

'Yes, Stanwell Park is one of the best places to fly.'

'In the whole world,' Glenn added.

'Really? Well, we have very big mountains in Lebanon also, more big than here and not far from the sea.'

'Are you from Lebanon?'

'Yes I am from Lebanon and now I live in Australia, but Lebanon is the most beautiful country in the world. I love it like my mother.'

'Isn't there a war going on over there?'

'Yes, it is tragic. The poor people suffer so much. The Muslims are crazy. They want everyone to be like them, and the young men, like you, they are all hot-blooded and they kill each other, and their mothers cannot stop them anymore.'

'Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. My name is Ken and this is my ... ah ... *friend*, Glenn.'

'It is my pleasure to meet you. My name is Aureole. I would love to fly like that. It must be so free.'

'It is ... and you can.'

'Yeah, you can go two-up.'

'Two-up?'

'Yeah. One of us could take you up.'

'This is possible?'

'Sure, anytime.'

'Even today?'

'Sure, it's perfect today.'

'How do you do it?'

'You just clip into the glider next to the pilot.'

'And when he says run, you run like crazy.'

'Ahh, I can run like crazy. I was champion runner in Lebanon, in five thousand metres.'

'Five thousand metres. That explains a few things,' observed Glenn eyeing down her athletic physique.

'That's it then, you can fly with one of us.'

'Yeah, either one of us can fly you. The question is, who do you want to fly with?'

'You must choose, Aureole.'

She looked at the gliders in the air, then at both of them.

'This is crazy. Is it safe?'

'Ahh, safe schmafe,' joked Glenn. 'If we die, Aureole, we die together ... and ...'

'He's kidding, Aureole,' interjected Ken. 'What is the matter with you Glenn? Are you nuts? It's very safe. We do it all the time.'

Aureole could see the confidence in these guys and sensed that giving her a two-up flight was a walk in the park for them while being a life's peak experience for her. She began feeling a fear, a new kind of fear, one that she chose, not one that was imposed upon her. She thought to herself, '*this is the*

fear of freedom, a fear I can stop by deciding not to fly.' She remembered her fear of war, in Beirut, and how it was a twenty-four hour, seven days a week sensation, which she could never stop. She wanted to fly, but,

'I want to fly and I am afraid, but I cannot choose between you Glenn or you Ken. You must choose, not me.'

'Oh no, how are we gonna do this?' Ken asked.

'Why don't you be gracious and let *me* take her up first.' Glenn suggested.

'Not even in your dreams, buddy.'

Aureole could see the open rivalry developing between the two young pilots, but she was used to this. It happened to her all the time and she just let it happen and resolve itself. She didn't go out with boys much, though. It was difficult because of her Lebanese culture. Her father could get very passionate about such things, so she kept them very secret. If he knew that she was contemplating flying in a hang glider with a strange young Australian man, she thought, *'he would probably just kill me. Why waste words.'*

'We could have a dogfight,' muttered Ken, half joking.

'Hmm, a joust for the fair damsel.'

'You will not fight like dogs?'

'No Aureole, it's a flying contest.'

'But not just any contest.'

'It's the ultimate contest.'

'And now, finally, for the ultimate prize.'

'To share, alone, Aureole's joy in her first flight.'

Aureole was struggling to keep up with the conversation.

'You guys. What have I found?' She looked around, concerned. 'Where has God brought me? What crazy destiny is this?'

The boys couldn't believe their luck. Their faces beamed as they taped paper streamers to their gliders. Aureole hovered around them, asking them all kinds of questions about flying and their reasons for doing it. All Ken and Glenn could think about, though, was being alone with Aureole, one thousand feet above the world, feeling her slender body pressing tightly against his, watching her slide into ecstasy as she experienced the total freedom of high-altitude

hang glider flight and having her fall more in love with him with every dive and turn. 'Ahhhhhhhh.'

Neither of them felt that they ever had a better reason for winning a dogfight. As they prepared themselves for their *sky duel*, their sharp minds focussed on the prevailing conditions. How strong was the wind? Which exact direction was it blowing from? Were there gusts and lulls? Which part of the ridge was generating the most lift?

During this time, Adam had been flying out over the valley, really beginning to feel at home in his new glider, which was custom made for him by Steve and Arnold. He made a wide downwind approach towards the landing zone on top of the hill. The pilots on the hill all watched him bring his ship in smoothly and touch down gently, taking a few running steps to stop. He parked his glider and meandered over to where Ken and Glenn were preparing for their duel.

'Are you guys having a dogfight?'

'Yep, and the winner gets to give Aureole a two-up.'

'Aureole?'

'Oh, pardon Aureole. Adam, this is Aureole. Aureole, this is Adam, an old friend of mine. We go right back to our university days.'

Aureole shook Adam's hand.

'Hello Adam. It is nice to meet you. You are a beautiful pilot. I love your landing. It was like a dance, like a ballet.'

'Hello Aureole. Please don't stop talking.'

'Adam, I am very frightened.'

'What, about going two-up?'

'Yes, about jumping out there.' She pointed out to sea.

'Don't be frightened at all. These guys are the best.'

Adam was barely containing his composure face-to-face with such devastating beauty. While she hovered around Ken's glider, he moseyed over to Glenn and quietly whispered to him,

'Where did you find *her*?'

'Mate, she just showed up on the hill in that red Alfa Spider over there.'

'How *hot* is she? Are those leather pants?'

‘Mate, anywhere within fifty feet of her and I feel like somebody plugged me into 240 volts. It’s incredible. You can’t imagine how bad I need to win this, and I bet Ken feels the same way. It’s crazy, like I’m totally obsessed.’

‘I don’t blame you. Look at her. Hey, don’t do anything stupid up there, OK?’

‘Yeah yeah. I just know I never wanted to win anything so bad in my whole life.’

‘Well, just take it easy, mate, after all, she’s just a chick.’ Adam looked over at her. ‘Who am I kidding? Look at her. Good luck, buddy.’

They all stood in a circle, between the streamered kites.

‘I guess it’s now or never, Kenny.’

Ken hammed it up a bit.

‘It’s victory, or death, for the fair Aureole.’

They all laughed and Aureole said that she wasn’t worth it. The boys both reassured her that she was, shook hands with each other and clipped their karabiners into the hang loops of their gliders.

Aureole and Adam stood side by side as they watched the combatants’ spectacular gliders launch simultaneously into the air. Adam immediately noticed how much more purposeful than usual their manoeuvres were. They flew much closer to each other this time, both fighting for lift in the same airspace, right in front of the point, right in front of Aureole. They made a couple of very close passes to each other, and at the point of closest approach, the two smitten pilots both looked into each others’ eyes and saw nothing but a mirror image of their own blind obsession. Adam noticed that Aureole gasped every time they came close. She was totally absorbed in the battle. She felt something special about this moment. There were two brave young boys vying for the privilege to be her *Peter Pan*, her magic man, who would fly away with her and make her deepest childhood fantasy come true.

They watched the two duelling pilots circle, swoop and dive, attacking each other’ streamers. Their flying was much more frantic and impatient this time.

‘They are scaring me, Adam.’

‘Don’t worry, Aureole, they know what they’re doing. They do this all the time.’

Ken got the first streamer in a brilliant, but dangerously close dive. Then Glenn executed a steep, attacking dive and missed, losing one hundred feet in the process, allowing Ken to stalk and strike and take out another streamer. Two streamers down, Glenn decided to back off and disengage from the close-quarter nature of the contest. He flew west along the south face, deeper into the valley, searching for another column of lift.

‘Ken is winning, no?’

‘Yeah, two to nothing.’

‘I like Ken, he is so charming.’

‘I like him too, but not for that reason. He’s one of my oldest friends. He taught me how to fly.’

Ken circled in the lift, on the point, spectacularly trailing Glenn’s streamers off his wires. He was gaining altitude steadily, watching Glenn’s progress further down the ridge. Then, suddenly, as if by magic, a rare warm-air bubble, a small, punchy, coastal thermal let go off the ground from a sunny, hot pocket in the valley below, pretty much directly upwind of Glenn. The thermal belted his right wing, tipping his glider away from the ridge. Glenn aggressively shifted his weight to the right, leaning all his weight onto his right wing, causing it to *hook* into the small thermal. His glider dramatically banked to the right and began to fly in a tight, erratic circle. Ken couldn’t believe his eyes as he watched his rival rapidly spiral his glider skyward. In a matter of thirty seconds, Glenn found himself with a massive two-hundred-foot altitude advantage over Ken. As Glenn topped out in the small thermal, Ken, not being sure what the best defensive tactic was in this situation, continued to make flat circles in front of the point. Glenn began to stealthily crab towards Ken, and when Ken was in that part of his 360 where his vision of Glenn was obscured by his wing, Glenn pulled into an almost free-falling, vertical dive, aiming for a point further around Ken’s 360, further along the flight path Glenn imagined Ken would take. Without any real time to weigh up the potential consequences, Glenn chose to attack all three streamers in one pass, diving in over the top of Ken’s glider, coming in from twelve o’clock high and intersecting Ken’s

streamers as he came around in his 360 towards him. He had completely forgotten all the reasons he had avoided attacks from above in the past. He just saw his chance and went for it. His dive was so steep, so fast and so committed to Ken maintaining his circular flightpath that he was helplessly unable to react sufficiently when Ken suddenly banked out of his 360 and flew his hang glider directly into the path of the plummeting projectile above him.

Aureole's scream pierced the air as Glenn's base bar connected with Ken's king post. The impact cut Ken's top, right side-wire clean through.

The upper side-wire is there in the event of the hang glider flipping upside down. It prevents the glider from folding up in such an inversion. It has no other function. The significant thing about a hang glider inversion is that the pilot ends up sitting on top of the upside-down sail. That in itself is not necessarily such a bad thing, as long as the wing doesn't collapse. Many pilots have successfully righted their inverted wings. If an upper side-wire, or the king post, is broken however, and the glider flips over, the glider folds up, and it folds up around the pilot, completely trapping him inside the sail. As the broken hang glider plummets towards the earth at free-fall speed, the air pressure on the outside of the flapping, collapsed sail is so great that the doomed, cocooned pilot can not even move a muscle as he waits for the inevitable impact.

So losing his upper side-wire would not have affected Ken's ability to fly, except for the fact that Glenn's momentum punched him right through that initial impact and slammed him into the top of Ken's sail just behind the nose-plate. This second impact caused Ken's glider to rotate nose-down and flip upside down. Glenn's glider just kept flying straight through both impacts. He pulled out of his dive just in time to see Ken's kite fold up and drop out of the sky like a stone. The folded-up sail, with Ken trapped within it, flapped like a flag as it plummeted towards the earth, spectacularly trailing a mass of colourful streamers behind it.

Adam screamed Ken's name at the top of his voice.

Aureole went hysterical, screaming, 'No, no, no, please God, noooo ...'

Glenn, seeing what happened, watching Ken's broken wing accelerating towards the huge boulders eight hundred feet below, instantly pushed his

control bar fully forward, pitched his glider into a full stall, snapped into a near vertical spiralling dive and started chasing his good friend down the front of the rocky escarpment.

Adam, Aureole and everyone else on the hill first lost sight of Ken, who looked like he was doing a hundred miles per hour as he disappeared beyond the edge of the cliff. They then lost sight of Glenn, his glider screaming through the air in his desperate pursuit of Ken. Five hundred feet below, young Tim was startled by Ken's freefalling hang glider as it whistled past him, missing him by no more than twenty feet.

High up above the point of the hill, Arnold, who was watching the whole crisis unfold beneath him, instinctively pulled into a steep dive and powered down through all the other airborne hang gliders, following Glenn, trying to get down to Ken as fast as possible, to help him.

All the pilots in the air witnessed Ken's horrific impact into the boulders below. His mangled glider ended up wedged between three giant boulders, right in the surf zone.

Steve, who was high up in the back of the valley, was watching the drama from half a mile away. He thought he saw someone fall out of the sky and he could see all the gliders circling around one spot and two gliders diving vertically towards the ocean. He saw that something was wrong and speedily flew back to the hill.

Tim had been playing in the treetops, only three hundred feet above the ocean, when Ken shot past him. On seeing him impact in the rocks, he immediately flew out to sea in a shallow dive, turned directly back at the rocky shore, pulled into a high-speed dive, levelled out a few feet above the choppy surface of the water and, just as he reached the rocks, pushed the bar out into a perfect, high flare, landing awkwardly, but OK, between two boulders, not far from Ken.

Seconds later, Glenn ditched his glider in the ocean, just outside the surf break and right in front of Ken's crash. He even had a technique for that. He flew into the water at speed, so when the base bar of his A-frame hit the water, it caused the glider to nose-in hard and flip over on its back. Glenn ended up sitting high and dry on top of his upturned sail. He was able to unclip from his

hang loop and discard his harness before the glider started sinking. He began to swim towards Ken's glider, which he could now see was being completely destroyed by the six-foot swell slamming against the jagged shoreline. He couldn't see Ken anywhere and he wasn't sure how he was going to negotiate the heavy surf. All he knew was that Ken was possibly still alive and that he had to get to him as fast as he could.

Around about then, Arnold swooped in from above choosing to do one of his patented *fly on the wall* landings on a patch of low scrub growing out of a crack in the vertical rock face, just above the boulder line. He softly mused it into the bushes, right above Ken, his glider staying put as it entangled itself in the gnarly branches. He had to cut his loop with his knife in order to extricate himself from his suspended hang glider.

The air was opaque with sea spray and the roaring noise of the surf, smashing on the rocks, was made twice as deafening as it echoed back off the vertical rock wall of the escarpment.

On the hill, Aureole was crying uncontrollably, saying,

'Why did I come here today? Why did God let me do this? Please, please Mary, mother of God, please let him be alive.'

Adam was partially in shock and looked as white as a ghost. He turned to her and said,

'I'm going down, Aureole, to try to help.'

'I want to come too. I can help.'

'My car, I think. Don't cry, he's probably all right. Maybe he landed in the water.'

Just as they drove out of the car park, Steve ran over.

'What happened?'

'Ken went down just north of the point. Glenn and Arnold flew down after him. You want to come with us?'

'No, I'll take our car. See you down there. Anybody call an ambulance?'

'I don't think so.'

'I'll do it down at the shop. See you down there.'

'See ya.'

Adam blasted down the hill in his Charger with Aureole hanging on for dear life in the passenger seat. She was ceaselessly praying to God, begging Him to spare Ken's life.

Tim was first to get to Ken's mangled glider. It was jammed tight in-between the huge boulders and was being pounded by the crashing waves. Arnold arrived soon after.

'I can't see him, Arnold, he must be wrapped up in the sail.'

Arnold looked at the torn, broken wing, disappearing and reappearing between the powerful surges of water, and shook his head. He saw Ken's impact from the air and he could see the damage. He sadly declared,

'He's history. Nobody could have survived that. Careful Tim, you don't want to fall in cause you'll never get back out.'

Their attention then turned to Glenn swimming in the ocean.

'You think he's trying to get to Ken?'

"Jees look, he's swimming straight in. That wave's gonna get him. Look out Glenn, stay out, you'll get smashed.'

Both boys started yelling at Glenn to back away and swim to the beach. They couldn't see any way that Glenn could help Ken now. But Glenn was in delayed shock. His normal thought processes had been completely short-circuited. He was experiencing powerful surges of sadness and guilt, feeling responsible for the horrible accident. He was acting on instinct. He just pretended that he was body-surfing and caught the first wave that picked him up. He got powerfully smashed right onto Ken's mangled glider. He felt his body slamming and scraping against the rocks, but he didn't feel any pain. As the water surged back out, he grabbed a hold of a piece of aluminium tube and held on. The water washed away for a moment allowing him to scramble a little further up the wreck, with the two boys standing on two boulders above him, watching. He began frantically feeling through the sail for Ken until the next wave came and smashed him hard against the rocks again. He hung on for dear life as the water surged over his battered body. As the wave receded, he spotted a gap in the sail. He crawled over, pulled back the sail and had a look. Tim and Arnold could see him recoil in shock from the sight that confronted him.

Arnold yelled out,

‘How is he?’

Glenn, desperately hanging onto the sail, answered back dramatically,

‘He’s dead! His head’s all smashed in.’

The three young men all paused for a moment. Glenn just lay on top of Ken’s body, protecting it, clutching the sail, with the waves crashing down onto him. None of them saw each other’s tears as they all stared into nothingness, all turned in different directions. They still all felt, at that moment, that their good friend was somehow still alive, still with them, still smiling and kidding around and challenging them to take it to the next level. It was hard for them to let go of him. They could still see his smiling face shining in the sun. They each, kind of, expected him to crawl out of that sail at any moment and say something typical like, *fooled ya*. But that moment never came. Kenny was gone, gone forever. Arnold was first to take rational stock of the situation. He was wearing a pair of strong flying overalls. He took them off and screamed out,

‘Hey Glenn, you can’t do anything now. Here, grab the overalls and we’ll pull you out.’

Glenn clung onto the sail for another couple of waves. The two boys could see that he was saying a few last, private words to one of his best ever friends, as he lay spread-eagled on top of his entangled body. Then he turned his head and with perfect time with the wash, being lifted up by a wave, lunged towards the dangling overalls and grabbed them. By then, Tim had scrambled across to Arnold’s rock and together they pulled Glenn out of the water. He was covered in bleeding bruises and scratches. They finally all settled down and sat together on the same giant boulder, directly above Ken, completely oblivious of the surf spray drenching them, all silent, all totally lost for words in their bewilderment of their great personal loss.

The doors of the Charger flew open as Adam and Aureole skidded into the car park next to the beach. Aureole left her jacket and jewellery in the car and began to run across the beach behind Adam. It was a five-hundred yard run, across soft sand, from the car to the beginning of the rocks that lined the shoreline beneath the hill. Then it was another two hundred and fifty yards

scrambling across rocks and boulders to get to Ken's glider. Aureole ran up to Adam and asked him,

'Where do you think he is?'

Adam pointed straight ahead and said,

'He's somewhere in there.'

She looked straight ahead and, accelerating into a sprint, took off and reached the rocks one hundred yards ahead of Adam. When she got to the rocks, she started climbing like a monkey, rapidly traversing the impossible terrain.

She was wearing a pair of special driving shoes made by Adidas, which also functioned superbly as climbing shoes, allowing her to efficiently transfer her abundant athletic ability to the ground. She also still wore her very expensive, soft-leather pair of Gucci driving gloves, which now allowed her to grab onto rocks freely without damaging her delicate hands. Her skin-tight pair of red-leather, Fiorucci jeans allowed her to slide and crawl over the rough boulders without scratching herself.

After a couple of hundred yards, she clambered onto a huge boulder and had a look ahead. There they were. She saw them, Glenn and the other two pilots, all sitting together on a rock. She called out to them. They turned their heads and on seeing her, waved to her. They watched in disbelief as she made giant leaps across the boulders, using her long, athletic arms and legs to rapidly make her way towards them. Breathless, she finally jumped onto their rock and hesitantly asked,

'How is Ken?'

She knew immediately, by their silence, that Ken was gone. She burst into tears and knelt down behind Glenn and put her arms around him, and hugging him tightly with her whole body, she whispered into his ear between sobs,

'Thank God you are safe.'

Then, looking around, she saw Ken's wrecked hang glider below her, and Arnolds hang glider hanging in a bush above her, and Tim's kite with its keel sticking out of the rocks and she began to comprehend what these boys had been prepared to do for their friend. She turned towards Arnold and Tim and hugged them both and introduced herself to them. Adam arrived soon after,

followed by Steve. They sat there, totally at a loss as to what to do, until a man called to them from above. He had abseiled down a rope, down eight hundred feet of vertical cliff.

‘Is anyone hurt?’

‘He’s dead!’ Steve called out.

‘Please repeat. Did you say dead?’

‘Yeah, he’s trapped in the sail.’

‘Copy.’

The hanging man then spoke into a radio.

‘Yeah, it’s a hang glider. He’s crashed into the rocks at the base of the cliff. The witnesses confirm the victim deceased. I think we’ll need to call in the chopper to get him out. He seems to be tangled up and jammed in between some rocks. I think the surf’s gonna be our biggest problem. I’m goin down. Can you lower down four ropes and a stretcher, and Al, can you come down here and help me out ... over.’

It was nearly dark by the time they managed to extricate Ken’s body out of the rocks with the aid of the precariously closely hovering helicopter. They all made their way back to the car park in torchlight, skilfully guided by the competent men from the Rescue Squad.

Many of the other pilots came down and helped Tim and Arnold pack up and carry their gliders back to the car park.

Back on the hill, now in total darkness except for the solitary streetlight, Glenn, Adam and Aureole exchanged phone numbers. She sadly insisted,

‘I want to go to the funeral. I want to see the people who knew him. That way I will know him better.’ She began to cry again. ‘I can’t ... I can’t talk anymore. I will see you both at the funeral. I will call you.’

Aureole drove home worrying about how she would explain her late arrival to her father, but it turned out OK in the end. She told him everything, except the part about her going two-up, and because of that strategic omission, her dad was very sympathetic and proud of his daughter for showing such concern for her fellow human being. She told him that she wanted to go to the funeral and in the end, after all the worry; he could not see a reason to offer any objection.

Glenn drove himself to the hospital where he got some of the worst of his injuries cleaned up and dressed. Then he had to go to the police station and answer some questions. It was a long, awkward night for him.

After everyone had left and he finally said his last good-bye, Adam sat down alone, on the point of the hill, and just stared into the black, infinite void surrounding him.

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Chapter Thirteen

THE SPEED OF LIGHT SQUARED

1

Adam and Nancy had been best friends for nearly two years. During that period, Adam had bought a brand new two-bedroom unit. It was situated on the seventh floor of a new block of units in Ocean Street, on top of the hill, about a mile back from Bondi Beach. It had a large balcony with an open panoramic view of all of Bondi, with the beach in the distance. He managed to purchase the unit with the aid of a twenty thousand dollar deposit, which was a gift from his loving parents, and a substantial loan from the bank. As it turned out, Adam had a good eye for desirable property and this stood him in good stead a few years later when, during a property boom, he made a handy profit on the sale of his unit.

Although Adam and Nancy saw each other regularly and often spent the night at each other's place, they never contemplated moving in with each other. They loved their independence and the general feel of their relationship. They were more like two friends who really loved each other, than lovers. Or maybe they were just lovers. It's a fine line. One thing was for sure though, their relationship excluded expectations. Adam just never adopted the attitude that Nancy was exclusively his. To him she was still the independent girl who could do what she wanted and see who she wanted, no questions asked. He was grateful just for her presence in his life. He felt that to expect anything would just drive her away. So they bypassed the quagmire of expectations and stayed friends and basically took life day by day. They both shared one common, sweet feeling though, and that was a constant, subtle, underlying craving to be with one another.

Over time, Nancy told Adam about her tragic past. She told him how, when she was sixteen, her mum left her dad and took her with her. Her dad became so distraught that he threw himself under a train at Central Station. Her mum got a new boyfriend who got drunk all the time. One night they got into a huge fight and, in a fit of anger, he accidentally killed her with a half empty bottle of port. Nancy ran away and moved in with her friend Melissa

who was renting a little gardener's cottage, situated in a corner of a large estate, about half way up the Vaucluse S bends. The two girls got on like a house on fire and it didn't take long for Nancy, with her looks and personality, to get a job in a city record shop. She loved it there. She loved everything about the work. After about a year, she found that little boathouse in Point Piper and moved in on her own.

2

Adam and Nancy continued to experiment with Nitrous Oxide with rarely a week going by without them having a *serious session*. They each approached the task with a focus. It was becoming something like a personal discipline for them. He had found a connection between his breathing and his experiences and he strived to make his breathing more perfect. He had figured out that the desired state to be in was perfect stillness. After another typically long session, he removed the hose from his mouth and whispered,

'That was Scott!'

There was no reply. He wasn't seeking one. He made the statement to himself in typical astonishment.

Half an hour later, reclining in the patient's chair, with a cup of hot tea that Adam made for her, Nancy was still trying to make sense of the big mystery.

'You know Adam, a more fundamental question is, does the universe have to have meaning? And anyway, what is the meaning of meaning? If it does, then life goes on, but if it doesn't, then this is all there is. There is nothing else. Say you write a book, the most fundamental question has to be, what is the point? When you're dead, you won't remember any of it anyhow, and all the people who read it will die and any knowledge gained from your book will have died as well. In the end, even the Earth will cease to exist, so everything that ever happened on it will be rendered meaningless. And that could be OK, I suppose everything could still work the same, but there just wouldn't be much point to any of it. Then there is the case for meaning. In a universe that had meaning, everything that happened, great and horrible deeds, heroic adventures, everything would be remembered forever. Pervading everything in a universe like that there would have to be something there as part of it, something that

lasts forever, is everywhere and is undetectable, even to itself, because it is like an invisible fog. What do you reckon, Adam?

‘What? ... Who me? ... Oh ... sorry Nancy, I was lost in thought. What did you say?’

There was a protracted silence in the darkened, locked dental surgery. It was *August 1976*, on a cold, wet, windy Saturday morning. Outside, in the glossy canyons, anonymous grey figures sprinted from awning to awning, wrestling with their upturned umbrellas and leaping like startled hares over the wide puddles, which formed around the drains that were blocked by a plethora of carelessly discarded litter. Occasionally, Adam and Nancy could hear the wind whistle around the old wooden window frames, causing a subtle movement in the discoloured venetians, followed by the feeling, on their skin, of an icy draught cutting through the warmth of the room.

‘You seem so far away.’ Nancy observed.

‘I know ... I am. I met this guy, back in ’68 I think, that’s right; it was after my Higher School Certificate exams. I went away, up north. I stayed at a little place called Broken Head, just south of Byron. I camped there for a whole month and while I was there I met this really friendly guy from California. We surfed together and to this day I haven’t experienced surfing days like that. They seem like a dream now.’

‘Like one of our gas trips?’

‘Well yeah, kind of. Definitely on a higher plane ... mystical. If you don’t surf, even if you do, I don’t think that you could appreciate the aesthetic ...’ Adam struggled to find the word, ‘... the ecstatic of those perfect days ... but that’s actually another story. I’m sidetracking myself here.’

‘How often plain old everyday reality can manifest itself as pure heaven, don’t you think, Adam?’

‘Just as often as it manifests as pure hell, I imagine. You know, when I’m flying my hang glider ...’

‘I still don’t know how you can do that.’

‘When I’m flying, the air around me is either going up or going down. It’s called lift and sink. Well, if you want to keep flying, you have to manoeuvre around strategically and search out the lift, and when you have found it, you

have to try to stay in it as long as possible. So you do circles or figure eights and stay in the lifting air, and as a consequence you gain in altitude. If you hit sink, you fly straight and get out of there as fast as possible. Here's my point. The world is like the air. The lift represents heaven and the sink represents hell. They are both there all the time, equal in quantity, quality and intensity, just opposite to each other, perfectly balancing each other out, and life, I mean our lives ... do you know what I mean, Nancy?'

'Yeah, this is brilliant, Adam, it's, it's ...'

'Nah, not really. Anyway, living is negotiating the world's heaven-hell ... I don't know ... life space. Like air space, but it's life space. It all depends on how good a pilot we are. How good we are at life. How well we've got it all worked out. In hang gliding, the lousy pilots just keep bombing out. They never really figure it out.'

'I guess the bomb-out in life is death.'

'Yeah, like seeing your last ray of Earthlight stuck to the end of a needle in some stinking alley. But that's probably the most extreme example. I think there are varying degrees of failure as well. In the end, it all relates to how much time we spend in sink, in the hell part.'

'But Adam, everyone dies in the end. Does that mean that we all blunder into hell in the end?'

'Well no, not really. Taking flying as an analogy again, at the end of the day, when the sun goes down, the whole sky shuts down. All the lift and sink just stops and the air becomes like velvet and everyone still flying gradually glides to the earth in the most unimaginably beautiful tranquillity. At the end of the day it's as if heaven and hell just shut down and there is nothing but peace, and you've got to be still flying to experience that. The reality is that the lift and sink is the engine that makes it possible for us to soar and heaven and hell is the engine that makes it possible for us to live. But it's all perfectly balanced and all perfect. Part of the hell is thinking that there is something wrong with the world. It would be like thinking that there is something wrong with the air because there is sink in it. They want it all going up, all the time. Well, that's impossible. People who think like that are on their way to bombing out early.'

Nancy glanced through the venetians.

'It seems that perfect balance is a prerequisite for existence. ... Look at that misery outside. There is no point in doing anything. Could I have another cup of tea, please?'

'Sure.'

'You started telling me about a guy from California.'

Adam began speaking from the tiny back room, his voice raised slightly above the tinkles of the teaspoon mixing the sugar with the tea.

'It's the trip I had today. It was so different. I saw Scott, The Californian I met all those years ago at Broken Head. I saw him walking down a narrow foot-trail, kind of across a small, open meadow. He was barefoot, wearing a pair of blue jeans and a T-shirt. It was a bright sunny day. I remember marvelling at the richness of all the colours and the easy natural setting. It reminded me of the ambience of life at Broken Head when I was there. As I saw Scott, and this is the weird part, it's as if he saw me at the same time, because he looked straight at me and gave me a huge smile and then he waved to me like he saw me. That's never happened before.'

'Wow!'

'Yeah, and he wasn't alone. With him, walking by his side, was the most beautiful girl. She had long brown hair, like him, and she spotted me as well and gave me a wave like she knew me. All of a sudden I felt a surge of emotion in my heart, not just emotion, this sounds really corny, but it felt like love, like affection, deep and strong ... really ... I don't know ... and it was coming from them to me. It was absolutely wonderful. You can't imagine it.'

'I feel I get this from you, Adam, all the time.'

'Oh Nancy, you're so in my heart, but this was something totally different ... totally. The girl, she might have been thirteen or fourteen, so stunningly gorgeous, she was wearing this one-piece skin-tight outfit. It looked kind of metallic, actually, come to think of it, it looked like it was made of fish scales, and as she moved, parts of it changed colour, like every colour of the rainbow. I've never seen anything like it.'

Adam passed Nancy her tea. She thanked him for it then fell into silence hanging on his every word.

'I didn't move. I didn't even think. It's what I've been practicing all the time. To do or to think anything stops the trip, I know that much and I think they knew it as well. There just seemed to be an exchange of pure emotion and we could see each other. It was like ... it was like ...'

'Telepathy?'

'Yeah, telepathy.'

Adam half-dreamily stared into nothingness as he relived his unique experience to Nancy, who was, as usual, totally enchanted by his story. After a short pause he took a sip of his tea then asked,

'I wonder where Scott is right now?'

3

Adam parked his Charger behind Zeke's hut. The sun had just set allowing the evening chill to descend over the high plateau like a huge blanket. He had been flying all day in the cold, gusty southerly wind, which was so typical of early September. A warm, orange light shone through the small, square windows and grey smoke was streaming from the old sandstone chimney. As Adam stepped out of his car into the icy, purple twilight, he heard the mellow harmonies of America's *Ventura Highway* seeping out of the hut. He knocked on the heavy, wooden door. After a brief pause, he heard the clanking of the latch. As the door opened, Adam felt a burst of warm air, which was promptly followed by Zeke who appeared from behind the door and gave Adam a broad, welcoming smile.

'You good for a visit, Zeke?'

'Anytime mate. Come in an get out of the cold.'

'Boy, you've really got the fireplace going.'

'Yeah, it's still the best way to get rid of all the deadwood off me place.'

'I didn't see you on the hill today.'

'Naah, didn't feel like flyin. I've got somethin goin in the workshop. Hey, I was just gonna go out an dig somethin up. You wanna come with me?'

'Sure. You better put on your parka, don't you think, it's freezing out there.'

'I'll have to get me shovel out of the shed. Come on.'

‘Think you’ll need a torch? It’s getting dark. So what have you got to dig up? There isn’t a sinister side to Zeke, is there? It’s not some dead body, is it? I’d really prefer not to have to deal with that sort of thing tonight.’

Zeke gave a low baritone chuckle as he looked Adam right in the eyes. Adam always thought Zeke’s eyes looked so defiantly untamed, full of blue light, making him think of distant lightning bolts and thunder, and Vikings raping and pillaging. But he could always look into his eyes easily because he felt totally embraced by his friendship. To almost everybody else, Zeke was a psychotic enigma, a crazy hermit who looked like a savage wild animal, unkempt and untidy, and most likely capable of anything.

They stepped outside into the cold. Adam marvelled at the clarity of the evening sky as Zeke grabbed his shovel from the shed.

‘You wanna follow me with that torch, mate?’

They walked about thirty feet through Zeke’s vegetable garden towards a thick post sticking about six feet out of the ground. Adam watched Zeke stand himself up against the post and line himself up with an old, rotten tree stump, just visible in the dim light, about twenty yards to the east. He began stepping out towards it, using his enormous old leather boots as measuring lengths.

‘One, two, three, four ... eleven, twelve, thirteen. OK Adam, this is the spot. You wanna shine the torch on this spot?’

Adam shone the torch onto the spot Zeke pointed out and watched him spin on his heel, making a round mark in the ground.

‘This is the spot. This is where I dig.’

‘Jees Zeke, this is freaking me out a bit. I half expect to see an arm or a leg come sticking out of the ground. I just came over for a friendly visit, you know.’

Zeke chuckled away as he buried his shovel in the soft, sandy soil.

To the non-existent observer they would have looked like two shadowy figures in the darkness, devoid of colour, like in one of those old English, black and white movies about sly, hunched over old men who stole dead bodies from the local cemetery for the university in the village, earning perhaps a shilling per body, payable on delivery.

As Zeke zealously dug the hole in the chosen spot, Adam's eyes bulged almost completely out of their sockets in expectant trepidation. Then suddenly, they heard the sound of the shovel hitting something metal.

'I think we've found it.'

'Oh, that's good, Zeke, I think.'

Zeke dug around the object and eventually pried it out of the hole.

'What is that? It looks like an old paint tin.'

'That's because it *is* an old paint tin.' Zeke replied, now continuously chuckling to himself. He pushed the dug-up dirt back into the now empty hole and brushed the tin as clean as he could. Adam's job was to shine the torch.

'It's never boring coming to visit you, Zeke.'

Zeke just kept chuckling away, seeming to be extremely pleased with himself. He put his shovel back into the shed, came back out and stopped for a moment. Holding his treasure under his arm, he looked up into the crisp, clear, night sky, which was perfectly dissected by the trillions of stars of the Milky Way, and declared,

'Now that's a big hole, eh Adam?'

Adam had no answer for that one. His mind was too distracted by the tin and its possible contents.

'Let's get out of this cold. Come, I'll make us a hot Milo.'

'Capital idea, Zeke, I certainly concur with that notion.'

'Oh, you concur?'

'Yes, I concur.'

The two friends were feeling their spirits lifting. They naturally engendered happiness in each other. They were so different, yet to both of them there seemed to be a deep commonality of spirit, simple and uncontrived.

They hadn't invented a word cosy enough to describe the feeling one felt inside Zeke's hut in the middle of a winter's night. Watching him tend to his fire was like watching an artist at work. The hot Milos just kept coming, the music kept playing and the conversations were as unbridled as the spirits that shared them. And in the dim, flickering light of the fireplace, their stories brought memorable adventures from the past back to life. On some nights, philosophy, glorious, magnificent philosophy paid them a visit and dwelt there amongst

them and soared with them, high and far, as high and as far as the wings of their minds could possibly take them.

The paint tin stood on the old, wooden coffee table like mysterious salvage. Adam couldn't take his eyes off it. Zeke, sensing his friend's obviously agonising curiosity, only prolonged the torment by avoiding any conversation about it. He made the sweet, hot drinks and placed them on the coffee table either side of the tin. He finally sat down and began to speak.

'Nature, mate, nature ...'

He paused and took a sip of his drink. Adam was hanging on his last word and just wanted to blurt out, *yeah, yeah, what about nature?* But he held his tongue and let Zeke take the conversation at his own naturally lethargic pace.

'In the end ... in the end, mate ...'

'Yeah?'

'It all turns to shit.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah. ... And out of shit ...'

'Yeah?'

'Out of shit, mate ...'

Zeke paused again and took another sip of Milo. He then leaned forward and picked up the metal poker with which he manipulated the logs in the fire.

'Out of stinkin shit, mate ...'

'Yeah?'

'Comes gold.'

'Gold?'

'Yeah mate.'

Zeke leaned forward and took an old screwdriver off a shelf and picked up the paint tin. With a snap of his wrist he pried the lid open.

'Illawarra Gold, mate. Check this out.'

Adam's nose told him what was in the tin way before he laid his eyes on the plumpest, stickiest heads he'd ever seen.

'It's the pick of last summer's crop, only the best heads, nothin average.'

Adam laughed out loud,

'Boy, you sure had me going for a while there, Zeke. Wow, I can smell how strong they are from here.'

'Go ahead, stick your finger in the tin.'

Adam stuck his finger in the tin and pulled it out with half a dozen sticky heads glued to it.

'You won't need much of this stuff. I've got some good baccy to go with it as well. It's the only way to smoke it, mate.'

'You're something else, Zeke.'

'Ain't I just.'

Zeke took his pipe and a small wooden bowl from the shelf and began mixing minute amounts of the sticky, green stuff with some of his own home-grown tobacco.

'We'll just ease into it, eh mate?'

'I'm all for easing into it, Zeke. I don't want to end up on the bathroom floor thinking that I'm going to have a heart attack.'

They both laughed.

'Yeah, I've been there too, mate, a few times. Gotta go easy with this stuff.'

The two friends kicked back in front of the open fireplace, passed the pipe to each other and engaged themselves in casual conversation.

'Don't you ever get lonely living by yourself without any neighbours around, Zeke?'

'I don't get lonely, mate, I just get stoned.'

After a few more pipes,

'What do you mean gravity is particles raining down on us, pressing us to the Earth? Matter sucks, doesn't it?'

'Naah. Trillions upon trillions of super small particles are rainin down on us all the time an they're pushin us against the Earth.'

'I just don't get it, Zeke. Where did you hear this theory?'

'It ain't no theory, it's fact, an I didn't hear it from nobody. I figured it out all by myself.'

'Do you want to run it past me one more time, slowly, from the beginning, please. I'm not so smart, you know.'

'Oh, you're plenty smart enough. OK, now imagine empty space, no planets, no stars, no dust, nothin, just space. You got that?'

'Yeah, I'm with you so far. Nothingness.'

'This empty space is filled with gravity, like a field, but it's imperceptible.'

'Oh, you're losing me now.'

'Stay with me, it'll start to make sense. It's actually very simple. You've heard of neutrinos?'

'Yeah?'

'Neutrinos are really small, they travel at the speed of light, they have no charge and they pass through everythin. Well, they're powder puffs compared to gravitons. Now, you've heard of photons?'

'Yeah.'

'Well, imagine that the size of gravitons is so small that they are like light shining on photons.'

'Light shining on photons?'

'They can't even measure the mass of neutrinos, which are giants compared to gravitons.'

Zeke started packing another pipe as he continued explaining his theory.

'Gravitons exist on a scale so small that they can basically be considered to be in another dimension, but they also exist in this dimension. Actually, in this discussion we are travelling along the axis of the fourth dimension, the bigness-smallness axis. That's infinite as well, like all dimensions. Basically, if you could keep shrinkin, you could keep shrinkin forever. The universe is designed to accommodate that. The same goes for expandin. Bigness an smallness are the fourth dimension, an it's infinite.'

'Whoah, my poor brain.'

'It's all right mate, just remember that gravitons are virtually infinitely smaller than neutrinos or photons, but they pack a punch because of their speed, an as a result, their momentum. They travel at the speed of light squared.'

'The speed of light squared? I thought that nothing could travel faster than the speed of light.'

‘Well, it can’t an it can. Remember, gravitons are like light shinin on photons, an photons are already travellin at the speed of light.’

‘Ahhh, the speed of light times the speed of light ... ah ... you mind passing me that pipe, Zeke?’

‘Sure, sure, here you go. What do you think of me dope?’

‘Oh, I’m not sure what’s spacing me out more, your dope or your theory.’

Zeke laughed as he passed the pipe to Adam. He continued,

‘So let’s go back to that empty space with nothin in it.’

Zeke was starting to get slightly excited as he related his gravity theory to Adam. As he spoke, he gestured with his hands, trying as hard as he could to maintain simplicity in his explanation. At once he was relating the theory to Adam, while at the same time polishing it for himself. He went on.

‘Imagine this empty void filled with a thick soup of gravitons travellin through it in all directions equally, at the speed of light squared. They don’t seem to interact with each other because, to the casual observer, there is nothin apparent goin on. You with me?’

‘Actually, amazingly, I can see this space now, with the little bullets flying around, equally in all directions.’ Adam looked at the pipe in his hand and confessed, ‘You know Zeke, I think this could be the best dope I’ve ever smoked.’

‘I think it’s the chicken shit I get from the chook farm up the road.’

‘Well, it’s obviously good shit, mate.’

Zeke continued,

‘So remember, gravitons are really, really small. Like a photon compared to a planet is a graviton compared to a photon, and they probably oscillate between energy and some kind of matter. Half the time they’re pure energy, like a wave, and half the time they’re, as you put it, little bullets. They’re right on the edge.’

‘A bit like me smoking this dope and listening to this theory.’

‘Now, let’s put somethin into this huge empty space, say a planet like the Earth. What will happen?’

Adam could see it coming. He couldn’t believe that he was actually seeing Zeke’s theory of gravitational effect clearly imaging itself in his head. He said

nothing however, not wishing to take anything away from his friend's pleasure of telling it.

'Gravitons behave kind of like neutrinos, not really, but for the purpose of this discussion most of them basically pass through all matter because they are so small an matter is mainly empty space. This is especially so when they are in the pure energy part of their cycle. But some of them collide with a nucleus an bury themselves in it, an lose their energy in it, an give it a little push.'

'So let me get this straight, Zeke. Most of the bullets pass straight through an object, but some collide and transfer their momentum to that object, giving it a little push?'

'Yep! They go in one end an don't come out the other. Now, let's go back to our big empty space with one single object in it. What do you think happens to that object?'

'Obviously nothing, because it's getting hit evenly from all sides. It just stays in the same place because all the vectors of force acting on the object cancel themselves out.'

'Go to the top of the class, Adam. Gravitons are flyin into the object the same from all sides, but there are slightly fewer of em comin out of the object on all sides, cause some of em got caught up inside.'

'So there's like a spherical graviton shadow all around the object.'

'Jees Adam, you're scarin me. I call it a gravity shadow, an you are right, it *is* spherical, provided the object is spherical. In a ubiquitous, uniform graviton field, all objects will form into spheres if they form from liquid, gas, dust or even rocky debris. OK, now let's do somethin really interestin an try to work out what happens if we place another object near the first one, so that now we have two objects, both about the size of the Earth, floatin in space near each other. What do you reckon's gonna happen?'

'Am I allowed to say? I don't want to steal your thunder.'

'Steal away, mate.'

'Well, let's call the two objects, A and B. Object A is getting hit by gravitons from all sides equally, except from the side where object B is. That's because object B has absorbed some of the gravitons as they passed through it. So therefore there is an imbalance of force acting on object A. There is a

positive vector of force pushing object A towards object B. And the same applies to object B. They both exist in each other's gravity shadows. It's absolutely brilliant, Zeke. It's so clear. I'm just so blown away. They just get pushed towards each other because they literally create a graviton hole between each other.'

'That deserves another puff, mate.'

'So when I jump in the air, the reason I come back down is because there are more gravitons hitting me from above than from below, because some of the ones from below never made it through the planet.'

'That's pretty much it.'

'And the reason heavy objects are heavy is because they have larger, denser nuclei in their atoms, thus presenting a bigger target to the graviton field. Weight, therefore, is equal to the lost energy of gravitons. But wait, Zeke, you can't just keep pumping energy into something. Eventually something's got to give.'

'Tell me, Adam, how good does your car accelerate?'

'Pretty good, it's got a *265 hemi* in it. Why?'

'What do you have to do to keep it acceleratin?'

'I have to keep my foot planted.'

'That's right, you have to keep feedin it fuel; you have to keep feedin it energy. As soon as you stop feedin it energy, the acceleration stops. And what is gravity?'

'It's acceleration. Ahhh, of course. For there to be gravity in the universe there has to be a constant input of energy into it, massive amounts of energy to keep the acceleration of gravity going. And it's all coming in with gravitons flying in at the speed of light squared. And because it's perfectly symmetrical, it's completely undetectable, with a final vector of force of zero. Like two arm wrestlers of equal strength, sort of.'

'It's got to be at the speed of light squared in order to put enough energy into the tiny little bastards. An they've got to be tiny little bastards so that enough of em can get through, so that the ratio between how many get through an how many don't, is big enough. If it ain't big enough, it won't work. It can actually be worked out mathematically. It's such a fine balance, it's incredible.'

'Another one of those God things.'

'Yeah, an I think that there's a fair chance that ol Albert Einstein left somethin out of his famous equation, $E=Mc^2$.'

'Oh really?'

'Yeah. He left out the G, for gravity.'

'You'll have to explain that one to me, Zeke.'

' $E=Mc^2=G$. Mass at the speed of light squared is pure energy. That is what gravity is, an pure energy has no mass.'

'Your theory explains the insane gravity of black holes. Matter is packed in so tight that not many gravitons can get through. That would make a huge gravity shadow.'

'Yeah, an they ain't holes, they're lumps, very dense lumps. There just ain't no space for gravitons to get through. Some blokes reckon that if you took all the empty space out of the whole universe, you could fit everythin that's left into a thimble. That's what I call engineerin.'

The two friends took a break from their frenetic, high-voltage conversation. Adam thought to himself, '*what difference does it make if Zeke is right or wrong. Nobody else has come up with anything better, and what fun it is to explore such lofty ideas.*' Zeke boiled some more water for more Milo and put another log on the fire. He then took another pinch of the sticky green stuff and a bit more tobacco leaf and proceeded to cut it up into a fine mix with a pair of scissors.

'The way I see it, Zeke, there's some pretty big implications if your theory is right. The first thing that strikes me is that we are surrounded with an abundance of free, clean energy. Literally, the air is full of it, and it's everywhere in the universe. We've just got to figure out how to tap into it. But you've taken the first step in that direction, if you're right. First you've got to understand how gravity happens, before you can do anything else.'

'Yeah mate, an all we've gotta do is figure out some kind of membrane that lets gravitons pass through it easier goin one way than the other an we've got ourselves a *gravity sail*.'

'Kind of like a one-way mirror.'

'Yeah, an if we could control the *mirrorness* we could vary the push. That would make it possible to use gravity sails in all kinds of applications.'

'Like space ships?'

'Yeah, but that's just the most obvious. There are other much more useful an needed applications.'

'Like what?'

'Our civilization is based on burnin up masses of stored energy in the form of coal an oil, which comes from millions an millions of years worth of dead trees. Trees are the energy of the sun, captured an stored an ultimately buried in the earth to turn into coal an oil.'

'So the Earth is like a huge energy battery.'

'Yeah, an it only seems logical that one day the coal an oil are gonna run out. You know, the Earth's population ain't much different to a smack addict. We're all on a big high, pumpin oil into our veins, an the Arabs are the smackees who actually control all the governments in the world, without appearin to do so, cause they've got the drug.'

'You know, if you don't see gravity as an effect of gravitons, you're nowhere. You'll never go anywhere. You'll forever be like those apes in *2001 A Space Odyssey*, the ones that got beat up by the other apes with the bones.'

'Yeah, headed for certain extinction.'

'What about the scientists, what are they doing?'

'Sweet ef ay mate, awardin each other Nobel prizes while humanity slides towards almost certain oblivion. The morons keep inventin better ways for all of us to blow ourselves away an to poison the whole planet for hundreds of thousands of years.'

'So tell me about some of your ideas about the applications of gravity sails.'

'OK. The most immediate need would be to invent a gravity engine, to turn a shaft, to power electric generators. As I see it, you'd only need two smallish gravity sails hangin off a shaft. As you powered up the mirrorness, they would start turnin the shaft. No fuel, no pollution, free energy forever, as much as you need an as powerful as you like. It would kill the energy companies overnight. They'd probably start a war over it, the greedy bastards.'

Imagine huge water pumps all over the world, pumpin excess water from the wetlands into the deserts. Imagine the poor countries gettin free energy an heaps of water, an growin heaps of food, an imagine the filthy septics tryin to stop em.'

'I can see that happening, Zeke.'

'We could get rid of internal combustion engines an all the fuel burnin machines, forever. We could make heat by putting a friction module on the end of one of those gravity engine shafts, you know, like a metal disk spinnin inside some metal plates, makin friction an heat.'

'Like how your car brakes get hot.'

'Yeah.'

'Yeah, and we could have cars with just a small gravity sail in the boot, pushing them along, no fuel, no engine, just brakes.'

'Bloody good brakes, mate. An then, when we've got all the problems of the world basically licked, then, an only then, we could look to the stars. Why do you reckon the universe is so big? Why do you reckon everythin is so far away from everythin else?'

'I don't know, why?'

'Cause it's possible to cruise around at the speed of light squared, that's why. No engines, no fuel, just the ship. A sailin ship, a gravity sailin ship.'

'Boy Zeke, the inventing of that one-way membrane will be the biggest thing that has ever happened to this planet. Humans will break out of the Earth nursery and take off to the stars. How long do you reckon it would take to get to some place like Andromeda?'

'I'd have to work it out, but off the top of me head, I reckon, maybe an hour if you were cruisin.'

'Jees, that's hardly enough time to get through one album.'

'I reckon that the gravity sail is not far away. Pretty soon some crazy inventor in some backyard shed will stumble on it. He'll make up a small contraption an strap it on his back, like a backpack, an levitate around in his shed. Then, if he's smart, he won't tell anyone about it. He'll have a bit of fun with it first, just by himself. When he eventually announces it, the whole world

will go nuts and people will go to war over it. I reckon nine tenths of the population could get taken out by the subsequent hysteria.'

'Boy, that's a pessimistic view, Zeke.'

'Yeah, it probably won't happen, but the gravity sail has got to be the Holy Grail of all inventions. There's nothin better, absolutely nothin. I'd give just about anythin to be the one to get it ... anythin!'

'You know, Zeke, this has been a pretty memorable evening for me. I don't think that I'll ever forget your theory of gravitational effect. I'll be thinking about this for the rest of my life. Thanks for taking the time to explain it to me. I don't know much about anything, but it's fired up my heart for the future of humanity. There seems to be hope for a magnificent, exciting, glorious future, where we live in abundance and set out to explore the whole universe, and only God knows what we'll find out there. Hey, look at the time. I've still got an hour drive in front of me.'

'One last puff before you go?'

'One for the road.'

The two friends enjoyed a last couple of quiet drags of Zeke's pipe in silence. They both imagined having a contraption, which could utilise gravity for lift. As he rose and put on his parka, in preparation for the cold outside, Adam took one last absorbing look around the warm, friendly space of Zeke's tiny home. He took a couple of deep breaths, as if trying to take in a small store of the homely ambience to take with him on the road. Zeke rose to his feet and put on his parka as well. They both stepped into the clear, black night outside.

'Before you go, you wanna see what I've been workin on in me shed?'

'Sure, but first let me get my beanie from the car. It's freezing out here.'

Zeke went into his shed and turned on the light. Adam followed him in, after getting his beanie. Lying on the floor, in the centre of his corrugated iron workshop, in a state of partial construction, was Zeke's latest flying creation.

'Oh, you're working on a new hang glider.'

Zeke just grinned proudly as Adam walked around the mass of tubes and sailcloth spread out in disarray in front of him. He nodded his head in approval as he tried to think of an intelligent question to ask.

'Is it another Zekester special?'

‘Mate, this is the most radical wing anybody’s ever made. It’s a supership. In this machine I’m gonna be the first bloke in the world to do a loop in a hang glider.’

‘Whoah, Zeke!’

‘Every tube is double sleeved, every bolt an wire is thicker gauge an the sail is heavier. An check the plan shape.’

Zeke referred Adam to a plan drawing spread out on his workbench. Adam’s eyebrows shot skyward as he realised the radically futuristic vision in Zeke’s head.

‘This looks totally insane. When do you reckon you’re going to be ready to fly it?’

‘About three to four weeks. I’m gonna take it to Kurnell. I’ve gotta find the right *CG* an make sure that it flies right before I jump off Stanwell with it. But one thing’s for sure, this ship’s gonna be fast, super fast. Fast enough to do a loop.’

‘I want to be there when you do it, Zeke. I want to help you off the hill. I’ve got to go, mate. Thanks for the great night, really, thanks heaps.’

As they stepped back out into the night, they both instinctively looked up into the dark, star filled void. Almost immediately, they both noticed something unusual.

‘Did you see that, Zeke? Did you see that star fly along and then do a right angle?’

‘Yeah.’

.....

Chapter Fourteen

ANOTHER AVERAGE WORKDAY

1

The first cars roll into the Bondi Beach car park well before dawn. The night isn't really night there. There are too many streetlights and car lights, especially from the all-night taxis cruising the beachfront for an opportunistic fare. The beach is colourless, empty and cold. The pre-dawn brings with it a change of the guard. It sees the last of the night people. The drunks, the drug addicts, the lost and misplaced just fade and disappear with the darkness, as if they were part of the darkness themselves. And at the first sign of purple light, a new group appears. They are defined by the same energy as the approaching dawn. Some appear in cars, while others walk down to the beach from the many residential streets, from just behind all the shops and restaurants that crowd the beachfront. They are there to run, swim, stretch and breathe deeply as they witness again, in wonderment, the miracle of another golden Bondi Beach sunrise.

2

It was Tuesday morning. Adam was fast asleep in his bed as the first rays of morning light spilled over the South Pacific horizon. The phone rang. Shocked out of his sleep, he groped for the phone. He was attempting to answer it without actually waking up. He had done it before. If the call was short enough, like a wrong number, it was possible to answer it and just keep sleeping. He picked up the handset and put it to his ear.

'Hello?'

'Hi Adam, it's me. Sorry to call you so early.'

'That's OK, Nancy ... ugh ... what's up?'

'You were asleep and I woke you, I'm sorry, but I had this dream. It was so weird and you know I never dream.'

'Ahh, yeah, that's what you always said.'

'I'm sorry to wake you so early ... I just wanted to ... I really love you and, please Adam, can you take it the wrong way this time?'

'Boy, Nancy, what's got into you this morning? Are you OK?'

'No, I'm not. I'm afraid, Adam, so afraid.'

'What? What are you afraid of?'

'That's just it, I don't know what I'm afraid of. This is the weirdest feeling, how shall I describe it? It's like my body's afraid, petrified, and I don't know why. I woke up like this. There's just this powerful fear, like chills running up and down my spine, and I haven't got a clue what for. I'm just so scared, Adam.'

'You mentioned a dream?'

'Yeah, and I haven't had anything, not even a smoke. It was so real, so vivid, so expansive and panoramic. I was driving down a highway, and you know that I don't drive.'

'Yeah.'

'The sky was bright blue and there wasn't a cloud to be seen. I was driving along this wide open, gently winding road, snaking its way through these low, green hills. You could see the road for miles ahead and I remember, that's right, there were no trees on any of the hills. In fact there weren't any trees anywhere and there weren't any other cars on the road, coming or going. I seemed to be alone. Anyway, as I came cruising around this sweeping bend I noticed, in the far distance, one solitary tree, a dead tree on top of one of the hills. Am I making any sense?'

'Sure sure, go on.'

'The tree and the hill it was on were still in the far distance, but I could see that the road was going to take me right past it, and here comes the weird bit, it sends chills through me just thinking about it.'

'What could be so scary about a dead tree?'

'Plenty, Adam, plenty. I'm driving down the winding road, around the green hills, watching the dead tree getting closer. As I'm getting closer, the tree is changing shape, because I'm seeing it from a different angle all the time. Do you know what I mean?'

'Yeah.'

'Anyway, I'm getting closer and the dead tree is changing shape and ... and ... just as I ... just as ... '

'It's OK Nancy, it's OK, it was just a dream. People have weird dreams all the time.'

'As I drove past the tree ... as I drove past it ... it had changed into a perfect image of ... oh God Adam ... Jesus ... of ... the Grim Reaper.'

Adam burst out into a loud belly laugh.

'Are you laughing? How can you laugh? You don't know how I feel. Adam, stop laughing!'

Adam couldn't help himself. In between the deep ho ho hos, he tried to make up for his insincerity.

'Sorry, Nancy, ho ho ho, really, I'm sorry, ho ho ...'

'Look you, I thought I could talk to you.'

Oddly enough, Adam's reaction actually helped Nancy lighten up inside as she began to see the funny side of the whole thing. She began to laugh as well as she tried, in vain, to protest at Adam's totally insensitive reaction.

'Was he carrying a, ho ho ho, scythe?'

'I'm not going to talk to you anymore. Why should I tell you anything? It's all a joke to you. Yes, he was carrying a scythe and he was perfectly formed. He was dark and mysterious and, although I couldn't make out his eyes, I felt him looking straight at me.'

Nancy's voice had such a chill in it as she related the last detail to Adam, that it stopped his laughter in its tracks. He felt a shock of cold fear shoot up his spine as well. She continued.

'That wasn't the end of the dream.'

'No? There was more?'

'Yes. The last thing I remember is looking in the rear vision mirror and seeing The Reaper gradually turn back into a dead tree again.'

'Wow Nancy, I'm sorry for laughing ... really.'

'It's OK. Actually it made me feel better.'

'Want me to pick you up today and take you to work? Would it help?'

'It would help heaps *if* I was going to work.'

'Aren't you working today?'

'No, I took the day off. Robbie's been saying that if it's a nice day we should have a sail. I might do that. I love fanging around the harbour. Sailing is so free. I love it.'

'Ohh, some people ... I'll think of you while I'm up to my armpits in someone's rotten decay. Hey, say hi to Robbie for me. It's been a few weeks since I've seen him. Tell him I'll call him soon.'

'I still want to see you. Can I see you tonight?'

'I'll count the hours. Your place or mine?'

'I don't know. Can I tell you this afternoon, at work?'

'Please. Have a great day and don't worry about the stupid dream, OK?'

'OK. Hey ...'

'Yeah?'

'I love you, Adam.'

'I love you too, Nancy ...' and before Adam could say anything else, Nancy hung up. He felt strange, like there was something else he wanted to say, but he didn't exactly know what. He lay in his bed and closed his eyes. He didn't have to get up for another hour. As he lay there in the womb-like comfort of his bed, his thoughts meandered around the imagery of Nancy's dream. He could see the wide-open country she described and the road sweeping through the rolling hills. '*It reminds me of the country down south of Cooma,*' he thought, '*on the way down to Jindabyne.*' The dream replayed itself in his mind, over and over. He imagined the tree changing shape as it rotated in his vision, until it finally turned into The Reaper.

'*Jees, what a freaky dream,*' he thought to himself as he arose and stepped out onto his balcony, high in the sky, overlooking all of Bondi. '*Wow, what a beautiful day. I won't see much of it though.*' In his bathroom he showered and brushed his teeth, looking blankly at the image in the mirror. He dressed, many would have thought much too casually for a man in his position. After breakfast, he rummaged through his cassettes. '*I might bring some Al Green today. I feel like a bit of the old Al Green today.*'

His first patient was booked in at 9.00am. He usually drove the Charger out of his garage at 8.00am so he never needed to hurry. He drove into town along different routes on different days, to keep it more interesting. He used to like going through King's Cross to bring back the memories of his early days when he lived in Elizabeth Bay. By 8.30, he was parked in his favourite spot in the underground parking station of the Domain. He took the long moving

footway, briefcase in hand, and emerged from the underground into the shady morning light of Hyde Park, right in the centre of the vibrant, throbbing city. He checked his watch at the same place every day to set the pace of his stroll through the park. If he had five minutes to spare, he sat down on one of the park benches and enjoyed the play of life acting itself out all around him. He liked to walk through the front door of his surgery at precisely 8.50. Michelle got there at 8.30 and had everything ready by the time he arrived. Today, like every other day, was just another average workday.

3

‘Who’s first cab off the rank, Michelle?’

‘It’s Mr. Bate, doctor. He’s still having some trouble with his bridge.’

‘Ah yes, there are a lot of very subtle forces acting on that thing and the teeth supporting it are almost floating in the breeze.’

Within minutes, a short, thin, seventy-five-year-old man entered the waiting room. He wore a fine, old, grey suit, shiny black-leather shoes and a grey hat. His skin was pale white and almost wrinkle free, and his eyes shone with a soft blue light. When he spoke, it was always with a smile and he looked Adam straight and deeply into his eyes, giving him a feeling that he knew a lot more about him than he could ever imagine.

‘Good morning, Mr. Bate. Still haven’t quite got it right, have we?’

‘It’s very close, Adam. I can just feel it slightly now, especially after I eat. I’m so sorry to be such a pest.’

‘You’re not a pest, Mr. Bate, you’re one of my favourite patients.’ Adam told all his patients that. ‘You have a very special situation, very sensitive to even the slightest imbalance of forces and we’ll have to zero in on the perfect balance very slowly.’

‘I think you’re right, Adam. I can feel the improvement every time I see you.’

Adam had a look.

‘The gold bridge that we made looks great, but it’s only supported by three teeth. Three teeth are doing the work of six and to make things more challenging, all three teeth, supporting your new bridge, have lost a lot of bone

around them. Somebody should have spotted the *perio* years ago. Are you still seeing Dr. Schimann for your gums?’

‘Yes I am, Adam. He’s such a good dentist, so meticulous.’

‘Well, I wouldn’t send you to just anybody. So I bet it’s the back tooth that’s still a little sore.’

‘That’s right.’

‘Let me check the bite again. Things are so subtle here. If I take just a little too much off this tooth, one of the other ones will start hurting. I think the only way we’ll get away with this bridge is if all three teeth share the load absolutely equally. I can’t take off very much at any one time because I might take too much and transfer excessive load to one of the other teeth. Did that make any sense to you, Mr. Bate?’

‘Perfect sense, Adam. You are such a patient dentist. I have total faith in you. If it can work, I know *you’ll* make it work.’

‘Well, I’ve obviously got you fooled, Mr. Bate.’

Later that morning,

‘But I brush my teeth religiously, three times a day, doctor.’

‘I’m sure you do, Mrs. Pringle, but, and it’s no fault of yours, you’re missing the most important bits. That’s why your gums are bleeding. But how are you to know if no one had ever given you the appropriate feedback. God knows that you can’t look inside your own mouth.’

‘I’m really trying to do the right thing, doctor, but they just keep bleeding.’

‘Here’s the deal, Mrs. Pringle, and I know it sounds wrong, but you’ve got to make them bleed in order to stop them bleeding, when you brush.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes. Even though you are brushing three times a day, obviously conscientiously, you are missing the most important part, the one millimetre band adjacent to your gums. You are, clearly quite unintentionally, leaving that part undone and it’s as if it was never brushed and the plaque attacks the gums and makes them inflamed and bleedy.’

‘Oh, you think so?’

‘Yes Mrs. Pringle, and because they are bleedy, you subconsciously tend to shy off them when you brush, only compounding the problem.’

'So I shouldn't worry that they bleed when I brush?'

'No, and you'll find that after about a week of brushing like that, they won't bleed anymore. They'll be healthy.'

A little later,

'Why do they call you, *doctor*? You're no doctor, you're just an ordinary dentist. Dentists aren't supposed to call themselves doctors, are they?'

'That's a really good question, Mr Tapsell. You know, to tell you the truth, I don't mind what people call me, but I tell you what though, if you find out, come back and tell me. I'd like to know as well. ... Oh-oh, that's one bad tooth you've got there, Mr. Tapsell, I think it's going to have to come out.'

Adam's last appointment, before lunch, was an elegant stage actress who was about twice his age. A pleasant friendship had formed between them in the short time that she had been his patient. Like with all his other patients, he had a special way of speaking with her.

'Joan, so lovely to see you again.'

'Adam, I never tire of your décor.'

'All for you, Joan, all just for you.'

'You young buck, you know, if I was a few years younger ... '

'Joan, darling, to me you are just a girl, young, beautiful and,' he sighed, 'oh so glamorous.'

'Stop all this horseshit before I start believing you. Have you got my tooth?'

'Come in, come in and tell me, how is Madame Arcadina today?'

'Oh please, don't ask me. Brian is driving me nuts. This is too fast, that is too slow, move like this, upward inflection here, you're not cool enough there. God, if You exist, please sustain me. I swear, I'll not last till opening night. It's only a week away. Adam, will my tooth be ready in time? I just couldn't face an audience looking like this. Chekhov would turn in his grave.'

'It's ready.'

'Today? Today? It's ready today?'

'Here it is.'

He produced a meticulously sculptured porcelain crown for the dedicated actor's broken, right front tooth.

'Let's get the temp off and see how it looks.'

He carefully cleaned the prepared tooth and gently slid the new crown over it.

'Perfect fit. Bite together if you would, please Joan ... looks good.'

'When can I see it?'

'Right now, although I want to check it in different light.'

'Oh Adam, you're a genius. Look at my new tooth. How can I thank you?'

'How about letting me take you to lunch. But first, dear Joan, would you mind stepping over to the window, I would like to see how the crown looks in daylight.'

After satisfying himself that the porcelain crown was a perfect match in all lighting conditions, Adam cemented it into place. He then took Joan to one of the new restaurants in the nearly completed MLC Centre over the road, where they sat outside and enjoyed lunch in the pleasant warmth of a balmy Sydney spring day.

'Adam, I have a surprise for you.'

She rummaged in her handbag and brought out two theatre tickets. With gratitude in her eyes and a beaming smile on her face, she handed them to him.

'It's two tickets to the premiere of your show, Chekhov's *The Seagull*.'

'They're front row and just a small token of my appreciation.'

'Gosh, how gracious. Thank you very much, Joan. What a wonderful gift. I've never seen a Chekhov play before. I'm already excited. I'll take my friend, Nancy. She'll love it.'

'And after the play, you're invited to the party. It should be a hoot.'

'I don't know what to say, Joan. Really, thanks.'

Unbeknownst to Joan, Adam had planned for her visit well in advance. Even though she was so much older, he found her company extremely stimulating and very exciting. She was still a very beautiful woman and exquisitely elegant. Just to be in her presence gave Adam a feeling like he felt with no other woman he knew. Every second with her was heightened. He asked Michelle to book her last of the morning because he wanted to have lunch with her. He allowed two hours before his first afternoon appointment so that they wouldn't be hurried. He derived deep pleasure from having long,

relaxed conversations with her. As they sipped their coffees, admiring the neo-renaissance architecture of the MLC Centre, Adam sat back in his chair and blissfully listened to Joan.

‘Harry has built another ruddy temple. It’s as if Alberti himself has come back to haunt us ... ‘

Adam returned from lunch at five to three. His next patient was already there.

‘How was lunch, doctor?’

‘Just plain wonderful, Michelle. Joan is so delightful. I could listen to her talk all day. She turns conversation into an art form. Anything happen while I was out?’

‘No, doctor, just some appointments.’

Adam addressed the patient sitting in the waiting room.

‘Ahh, Mr. Spitz, my most conscientious patient. How long has it been since I’ve seen you?’

‘Three months, doc. You won’t let me come any more often.’

‘Polish, scale and fluoride?’

‘You got it, doc, and anything else you got ... and doc ...’

‘Ah, yes Mr. Spitz, I know, don’t worry, my gas tank is full.’

‘Good, doc. Hey doc, I brought my own tape, is that OK?’

‘Sure is, Mr. Spitz, in fact I just recently bought a new set of headphones. You can be one of my first patients to give them a test fly.’

‘Wow, doc. Now doc, you won’t forget to turn up the gas, will you? You know I like it high, real high.’

‘Mr. Spitz, have I ever disappointed you before?’

‘Never, doc, never. That’s why I keep coming back. I’d be back every month if you let me, doc.’

‘Well, we wouldn’t want to polish your teeth away, now would we, Mr. Spitz? Has Mr. Spitz booked an hour again, Michelle?’

‘Yes doctor.’

‘Well it looks like we’ll have a nice relaxing afternoon. I’ll put your tape on, Mr. Spitz.’

‘Thanks doc, I’ll see you in an hour.’

Adam placed the headphones over his patient's ears and the mask over his nose while Michelle prepared the scaling and polishing equipment.

'We'll leave him for fifteen minutes, Michelle. I'm going to make a cup of tea. Can I make one for you?'

'I can make the teas, doctor.'

'No no, it's my pleasure.'

Michelle sat down at her desk in the waiting room while Adam boiled the water for the teas. The phone rang.

'It's for you, doctor.'

'It must be Nancy, she was going to call me this afternoon.'

'No, doctor, I think it's your friend Robbie and he sounds somewhat distressed.'

'Really?' Adam took the phone.

'Robbie.'

'Adam ... Adam ... Adam ... '

'Robbie, what's the matter, mate?'

Robbie began to cry on the phone.

' ... It was ... oh God ... oh God ... '

'It's OK, mate, take it easy. What's the matter? What happened?'

'It was a total accident, man. I've done it a hundred times.'

'What kind of accident? Are you OK? Did you go sailing with Nancy?'

Robbie, snivelling on the phone,

'I'm so, so sorry, man.'

'What are you sorry about, Robbie? Is Nancy OK? Is she with you? Can you put her on the phone?'

'It was an accident, man. It was a complete accident.'

Adam, with a tone of impatience in his voice,

'What the hell was an accident, Robbie? Come on! Did something happen to Nancy?'

'We were sailing the cat. I was aiming the boat up the ramp like usual and ... oh God ... '

Adam, becoming slightly angry,

'Leave God out of this and tell me what happened!'

'I've done it perfect a hundred times ... there was a gust ... we were flying ... the boat lurched ... we hit the pylon ... Nancy hit her head ... fell in the water ... couldn't get to her ... tangled in the rigging ... tried desperately to get to her ... can't describe the feeling ... the water police was there in seconds ... one of them dove in the water and got her out ... tried to save her ... mouth to mouth ... heart massage ... no good ... broken neck ... I am truly, truly so sorry, man.'

'What?'

'I'm at Darlinghurst police station. The water police saw the accident. They reckon I did it on purpose. They're going to charge me with murder. Culpable navigation or something. I'm waiting for my lawyer. Nancy's at St. Vincent's. It's one big fuck-up, man. Sorry, so sorry, man ... Adam, are you there?'

Adam dropped the phone.

'Doctor, are you all right? Doctor? ...'

Michelle picked up the phone and spoke into it,

'Sorry sir, this is Michelle, the doctor can't speak to you right now.'

She hung up the phone and focussed on Adam who had gone as white as a ghost.

'Doctor, doctor, what's the matter?'

She instinctively locked the front door and began to attend to her boss. She helped him to one of the waiting room chairs.

'Doctor, what happened? You've gone completely pale.'

'That was Robbie. He called from Darlinghurst police station. They are holding him there. Oh Michelle, he told me that there was an accident ... and that Nancy died.'

'Oh no doctor, oh no doctor, no no no, you must have heard the story wrong. I'll call Darlinghurst police and check.'

Adam sat in the corner of the waiting room, staring blankly into the wall, while Michelle busily searched for the phone number. Her conversation sounded completely scrambled to Adam and he couldn't make out any of it. When he heard her hang up the phone, he looked at her and saw tears begin streaming from her eyes. She came over to him and took his head in her arms and hugged him.

'It's all right, doctor, you can let go of it.'

Adam began to cry. Michelle hugged him as if to cover him up and hide him from the world, to give him privacy in this, his most devastating moment of loss.

'What will I do without Nancy?'

There was a long, silent pause while they both cried it out. Then, when she sensed that he'd calmed down enough, she suggested,

'You step into the back room, when you can, doctor, and I'll switch off Mr. Spitz and re-book him for another day. I might scratch the last two patients as well. What do you think?'

There was no reply.

'I think so and, as well, we might scratch tomorrow. I think you'll need tomorrow, doctor.'

She helped Adam, who was sliding into shock, into the back room and sat him down on the only chair in there. She then attended to Mr. Spitz, carefully bringing him out of his relative analgesia and explaining to him that the doctor suddenly took a turn for the worse and thus couldn't perform the routine prophylaxis on him. She re-booked him a couple of weeks down the track and saw him out the door, apologising for any inconvenience.

She stayed with Adam well past closing time. He slowly gathered himself.

'I'll be OK now, Michelle. You've got to go home.'

'Don't worry about me, doctor. You take it easy tonight. Perhaps if you ate out?'

'Thank you, you are the best nurse. I'm fine. That's it, I'll eat out. Let's lock up and I'll see you tomorrow.'

'No, not tomorrow, doctor, I've cancelled all your patients for tomorrow. I'll see you on Thursday. Call me anytime if you need me, if you need to talk. Anytime, OK?'

'Thanks, Michelle, but I'll be OK. I feel that I need to be alone now ... with Nancy.'

'Oh, doctor.'

They locked up the surgery, took the lift down together and stepped out into the evening bustle of the street. They said good night to each other as

Michelle turned left, headed for Wynyard train station, and Adam turned right, headed in the general direction of his car. As he drifted aimlessly through the congested streets, painful thoughts began to overwhelm his mind.

'Nancy, Nancy, my heart feels like a rock. How could I have been so shallow? How could I have laughed at you? Why couldn't I have stayed with you today? Why couldn't I see you again, just once, and hug you and tell you that I love you? I love you, Nancy, I'll love you till I die.'

Later that night, he retraced their footsteps along the shoreline of Bondi Beach. As he dragged his feet through the wet sand, he imagined her there with him, hugging him for warmth. Occasionally he imagined her there so intensely, that he actually thought, just for a fleeting moment, that she was actually there, invisible, but with him.

He sat in the sand for hours, with his head in his hands, not knowing what to do next. He didn't feel like going home. His life now, suddenly, seemed like nothing more than a cold, empty shell.

4

The dawning sun found him asleep on the beach. He fell asleep where he sat, out of sheer exhaustion. When he awoke, he looked up and saw the early morning joggers and swimmers and thought to himself,

'Everyone is so happy and alive, with purpose and energy. I alone am lost and aimless. I feel like an orphan. Oh Nancy, why did you have to go? Why?'

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Chapter Fifteen
SPIRITS HAVING FLOWN

1

The days passed slowly and painfully. Work became drudgery. Adam's cheerfulness was gone and nothing that Michelle could do or say could bring it back.

He organised Nancy's funeral. About a dozen people showed up. Although he disliked himself for it, he secretly resented their presence. Even now, especially now, he wanted to be alone with her and live in the privacy of their shared memories. He chose cremation for her and dreamed up a plan, a parting gift.

'Nancy, I'm going to take you to the most beautiful place I know and release you there.'

He kept her ashes with him until the right day. He rose before dawn on *Christmas Day, 1976*, put *Sweet Thing* on the turntable and stepped onto his balcony to watch the sunrise.

'Look at the perfect sunrise, Nancy. I know that God made it just for you. And feel the wind, beautiful girl, it's from the east. It's going to be a perfect day today. Someone is going to get the best birthday present today, sweetheart ... you. You are my sweet thing, darling, and you will walk and talk in gardens all wet with rain, my sweet thing, and I will raise my hand up into the night time sky and count the stars that shine in your eyes ... oh God, when am I going to stop crying?'

He ate his breakfast, organised his things and took the lift down eight floors into the garages. He strapped his hang glider to the roof of his Charger and drove away.

'It's about time you got out of the city, Nancy. Wait till you see how beautiful it is down south. You won't believe it.'

He took the turnoff into the National Park.

'This is the prettiest road ever, darling, and wait till you see what happens at the end of it. It'll blow your mind, kiddo. Hey, I'm just going to pull over in this clearing. I think we should celebrate this trip with a juicy little joint, what

do you reckon? I think so. For you, Nancy. To you, sweetheart. Nothing will ever compare to being high with you.'

As he blasted out of the southern end of the Park,

'Wow, Nancy, what did I tell you. It's like the south coast literally explodes in your face, see? We're nearly there now. Looks like we're going to be the first ones there. There's no one up, and look at the wind. It's a perfect easterly. The whole coast is going off, Nancy, for you, just for you, darling, from God, from Jesus. It's His gift on His birthday ... oh God ...'

He pulled into the car park on the point.

'There's no one here, just us. Just like always, Nancy. I'm going to set up, you wait. You've never seen me fly. That'll be a first, and you're coming with me.'

As he set up his hang glider on the point of the hill,

'It's going to be a huge day, Nancy. The wind is nearly twenty knots. We're going to get so high. I'm going to fly the whole coast with you. Oh Nancy, you were the prettiest girl I've ever seen. Did I ever mention that? I could talk to you forever. I miss you so badly. I don't know what I'm going to do. Yes I do, I'm going to go flying with you.'

He taped the urn, containing Nancy's ashes, to the left upright of the A-frame of his glider. He then dressed warmly for high altitude, climbed into his harness, put on his helmet, took a long look around the empty car park and clipped into his hang glider. Even though the wind was strong and there was no one there to assist him with his launch, Adam had no trouble ground handling his wing. He was now one of the regulars, confident and accomplished, carrying within him a wealth of flying experience. There was no fear in his heart, only sorrow.

He launched into the powerful wind with just one push of his legs. His glider shot skyward, swiftly rising vertically from the point of Bald Hill, as he calmly transferred his body into prone position. No human saw him take the elevator ride, straight up through the powerful lift, gaining a thousand feet within three minutes. As he continued to climb in the huge lift band, he looked down his left wing.

'Look Nancy, it looks like we've got some company.'

He spotted the resident sea eagle cruising up the ridge from Garie Beach. The majestic bird soared up to Adam's left wingtip and parked itself there, flying in formation. As Adam flew south, high over the Stanwell valley, past Mitchell's Mountain, something very unusual happened. He was joined by another sea eagle, the one from the south. It took up position on Adam's right wingtip.

'Look Nancy, it's like a flying convention up here. Isn't it all so amazing? It's a wonder the birds aren't having a go at each other. Look how effortlessly they live. Who wouldn't want to be an eagle? Maybe you're an eagle now, Nancy? You'd only be a baby still, screaming for your food in your nest on some hidden cliff somewhere. If I was God, I would give you a life as an eagle ... for your spirit, darling ... your beautiful spirit.'

As he flew south, riding the lift high above the escarpment, he marvelled at the charm of the small beach towns dotting the coast south of Stanwell Park, all colourfully bathed in warm morning sunlight.

'This must be how God sees everything, Nancy. He must be above it all. Arguments, wars and disagreements must just be tiny specs way below Him as He soars high above His creation. Why would He want to hassle with the stupid people when He can just spread His wings and come up here? If I was God, I'd want to be separate from them all. It makes so much sense. He didn't want to be separate from you though. That must be why He took you. Maybe He wanted to be with you? I would. God's no fool.'

Adam flew as far south along the Illawarra escarpment as the mountain called *Broker's Nose*. This represented the very heart of the eagle from the south's dominion. The eagle from the north had never flown so far south before, nor would he had ever been allowed to under normal circumstances. About two hours later in the flight, they were all soaring high above Garie Beach, the heart of the eagle from the north's dominion. The eagle from the south had never flown so far north in his life, nor would he have normally ever been allowed to.

The easterly wind picked up in strength as the hours passed. As he flew high above the world, Adam watched the sky gradually fill with other hang

gliders. From time to time a friend flew up to him, not too closely in order not to disturb the eagles in their formation, and say something like,

‘Whose ya mates, Adam?’

Adam just smiled and typically said something like,

‘I know, it’s incredible, isn’t it? They just showed up and they’ve been flying with me all day.’

By early afternoon, he was into his fifth hour in the air. By this time, small groups of pilots, having marvelled at the behaviour of the two eagles, flew along with them for a while, then they banked away, often putting on a big show by executing a series of spectacular wingovers and chandelles.

By the late afternoon, all the pilots that were there that day had a turn at flying in formation with Adam. All the talk on the hill was about him and his eagles, which had by then been flying with him for nearly eight hours.

‘It’s starting to get late, Nancy, and I don’t want to let you go, but I’m going to have to. I love you and I’ll always love you ... and ... and ... I’ll never forget you ... and ...’

He flew high and far out to sea, directly into the easterly wind, due east of the pretty Stanwell valley. The two majestic eagles still followed him like they were his pets. He looked back and made sure that he was in the right position and then, when he thought that he had the spot, he untaped the urn, opened it, spilled out the fine grey dust and released the empty container, allowing it to fall two thousand feet into the ocean.

‘Good-bye, Nancy, I’ll never forget you. I’ll always love you.’

Incredibly, just at this very moment, the eagles peeled off and flew away, one to the north and the other to the south. Adam watched as Nancy’s body dispersed in the wind and was carried with it to fall to the ground all over the Stanwell Park valley, where it would, one day, once again find life as part of the Earth.

It was not until this moment that Adam actually felt that Nancy had completely left him. He finally felt, deep within his heart, while still two thousand feet above the ocean, a positive closure to one of the most enriching chapters of his life. She was gone and he was left alone. He thought to himself,

'Will I continue the journey alone? Will I keep searching? How will I do it without Nancy?'

He gracefully circled his glider into the sunlit valley, drifting westward with the wind, finally touching down in the midst of all his flying friends who all gathered around him, all totally oblivious to his recent personal tragedy, but all very animated in their amazement at the behaviour of the wild eagles.

Later, as he was packing up his glider, Zeke came over to him.

'I saw those eagles today, Adam. They were one of the most amazing things I've ever seen. You know, there's an old legend about eagles, about how they can carry someone's spirit. You ever heard that one, mate?'

Adam looked deeper into Zeke's fiery blue eyes than ever before and replied,

'Can't say that I have, Zeke, but I sure appreciate you telling me.'

'Hey, you comin round for a Christmas puff? I finally finished the *supership*. Wouldn't mind showin it to you.'

'That might be nice, Zeke, I could use an unwind. It's been an emotional day. Can I ring my mum and dad from your place? They'll be wondering what's happened to me. I have to wish them a Merry Christmas.'

'Sure, mate, an I got some good tucker on. We'll have a real feast, a real bloody feast.'

That night they had a time. They ate, smoked, listened to music and philosophised to their hearts content. Hidden within Zeke's coarse exterior was a kind, compassionate heart. He knew when a friend needed special attention, a special kind of company, the kind of company as might make a good first page in a new story that a writer might be sitting down to write.

2

As time rolled on, news trickled out about Robbie. The policeman, who witnessed the accident, testified in court that Robbie killed Nancy on purpose. Apparently one of the best barristers in the country got him off the murder charge in exchange for manslaughter. Robbie got eight years in jail, but he got out in five, for good behaviour. Adam never saw him again, but years later he found out, through an acquaintance, about Robbie's addiction to heroin, which he picked up in prison where he got spiked against his will. The story was that

his parents tried desperately to save him. They sent him to a special clinic and spared no expense in trying to help their son. But they couldn't give him what he really needed, and that was themselves. Their business affairs and their social commitments seemed to always get in the way.

The trauma of Nancy's death, the prison and the withdrawn existence he led after his release, was ultimately too much to bear for him. In the end, perhaps tragically, perhaps mercifully, he passed out of this world blown out of his mind, stuck to the end of a needle in a dark alley, just behind all the bright lights and constant traffic of bustling King's Cross.

3

Adam, although never speaking about the subject again, thought he understood the meaning of Zeke's statement about the eagles carrying Nancy's spirit. But he didn't. The only people who knew the truth about the strange behaviour of the two wild birds, was an attractive young girl, who lived two million light years away, and her older brother.

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Chapter Sixteen

THE LOOP

'How many times did you fly it in the sand dunes, Zeke?'

'I was there for a whole day, mate. I had heaps of glides an made quite a few adjustments. It goes bloody good now.'

I don't think there's ever been anything like it. It looks like something out of science fiction. It's the most incredible thing I've ever seen.'

'Thanks, Arnold. It is, without a doubt, me most ambitious design, ever.'

'It looks ballistic, man.'

'It is, Tim, an it's strong as. This wing will never break in a million years.'

'I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.'

'You better believe it, Steve, an buddy, you wouldn't happen to have a couple of spare castle nuts, would ya?'

'Sure Zeke, sure. Hey, are you sure you tested that thing enough at the dunes?'

'Yep! She'll even fly hands-off.'

Everyone on the hill noticed Zeke's new *supership*, but there were only a few that actually ventured into his proximity. They were his friends, the elite pilots, Arnold, Steve, Glenn, Adam and young Tim, who was still the boy who hadn't learnt to be afraid yet. Also there was Aureole, Glenn's new girlfriend, who saw right through Zeke's gruff exterior and spoke to him as if he were her little brother, calling him Ziki. Everyone else kept their distance. Adam was the only pilot in the group who knew about Zeke's ambition to execute a full loop. He wasn't a talker though. He figured that no one could deflect Zeke from his chosen path anyway.

Zeke clipped the karabiner of his frayed and worn harness into the A-frame loop of his glider. Adam held the nose of the supership while Zeke settled himself into position. Adam then retreated out of the way as Zeke masterfully launched into the air. They all watched him for a while, making various comments, then they all returned to their own gliders and, one by one, launched into the air themselves.

Adam kept the most vigilant eye on Zeke, even while flying. He saw him execute high-speed dives followed by fairly conservative wingovers. He was impressed with the undeniable speed of the supership. When Zeke pulled the bar in, it just kept accelerating until he pushed out into his manoeuvre. Adam decided to soar high above Zeke and watch him closely. He knew what his big friend had in mind and he didn't want to miss the moment, if and when it was going to happen.

Zeke pretty much kept most of his flight centred over the Stanwell valley. The wind was fairly south and quite strong and there was plenty of lift there. Adam did the same, just a couple of hundred feet higher. Glenn was flying two-up with Aureole while Steve and Arnold were setting up new gliders, test flying them, landing them back on top, sometimes making an adjustment, test flying them again, landing them on top again then packing them up and loading them back on their car ready to sell. On some days they tested as many as six gliders, which was as many as they could fit on their car at any one time. That was their work outside of the factory.

It was turning into an average flying day at Stanwell Park with everyone busy with their own flying activities. The wind was nice and strong, maybe a little bumpy, and it wasn't too crowded. In the car park someone had a cassette playing *Take It To The Limit* as Zeke pulled into a steep, whistling, high-speed dive. Adam watched it from the beginning, from high above the valley. He noticed immediately that this one was different when Zeke failed to roll left or right at the bottom of the dive. Zeke levelled out at about the same altitude as the top of the hill, fairly centred over the valley, and pushed the bar straight out.

As far as anyone knew, no one had ever attempted what Zeke was attempting, so how was he to know that, perhaps, he may have pushed the bar out too far, too early, causing his wing to go into a slight high-speed stall at the bottom of the dive. He lost a lot of speed because of that and to Adam's disbelief, Zeke's wing stopped flying exactly midway through the loop, just at the point of total inversion. Adam watched horrified as the supership stopped upside down in mid air. He watched helplessly as Zeke fell into the inverted sail. His hang glider then flipped forwards violently, the momentum of the

forward rotation sending it into another rotation, then another and another. Zeke's body was being flung around like a rag doll as his supership tumbled out of the sky, spinning like a ruler tossed into the air. No one would have been able to count the number of rotations, but they all saw the doomed glider suddenly stop tumbling and enter a vertical, freefalling dive. No one could be certain, but it looked like Zeke might have already been unconscious, perhaps from the unbearable G-forces generated by the tumbling, because it appeared that he made no attempt to regain control of his wing. Everyone heard the sound of breaking branches as they saw Zeke and his glider spear into the top of a one hundred and fifty foot gum tree, just behind the clearing in the valley, at what looked like at least sixty miles per hour.

All the pilots in the air immediately spiralled down into the park and ran over to the tree. The owner of the small kiosk in the park phoned for an ambulance. Zeke's mangled glider was firmly wedged amongst the thick branches of the canopy and there, dangling in his harness, some one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, unconscious or dead, bleeding profusely and distorted from numerous fractures, was Zeke.

'How are we gonna get to him?'

'I dunno. Somebody's gonna have to get to him quick.'

'Nobody can climb up there.'

'Anybody call the rescue squad? Arnold, run over to the kiosk and call them. Don't forget to tell them that Zeke's about one hundred and fifty feet up a tree.'

'I'm on my way, Steve. They might want a fire truck with a big ladder.'

'They all stood back from the tree slightly, so as not to get dripped on by Zeke's blood. They could hear the sirens blaring from miles down the coast as the rescue team raced around the cliffs towards them on their mission of mercy. The grass around the base of the tree had turned spotted red by the time the rescue truck pulled up in the park. After assessing the situation, their leader declared,

'We'll have to wait for the fire truck, but I don't know if its ladder is going to be long enough.'

The ladder truck raced in a few minutes later. They quickly set themselves up and began extending the metal ladder towards Zeke. As they raised the ladder to its full extension, one of the firemen yelled out,

‘We’re about twenty feet short.’

One of the rescue guys on the ground suggested,

‘I’d like to go up there and try to throw a rope around that big branch just above the pilot.’

He hung a couple of ropes over his shoulder, clipped a number of karabiners around his belt and raced up the ladder. Everyone on the ground watched in amazement as he skilfully weighed down the end of the rope with a few karabiners and threw it, perfectly first time, over the chosen branch. He then secured the rope around the branch and let the rest of it fall all the way to the ground. His team, immediately and without discussion, began preparing for their ascent up the rope. They took with them more rope, karabiners, pulleys and first-aid equipment. All the pilots could do was watch in admiration as the rescue squad went about their business with efficient expertise. Their lead climber scampered up the rope with the aid of special rope-climbing equipment. Everyone held their breath as they waited for the first words from the first man to reach Zeke, almost an hour after the crash.

‘He’s unconscious, but he’s still alive, just. He’s got fractures and his face is lacerated. Looks like a wire cut him and his left eye looks bad. He’s lost a lot of blood. I can’t make out if there’s spinal damage, but I suspect a compound fracture of his right leg judging by its position and the blood soaked overalls ... hang on ... he’s got a dog-tag around his neck. You bloody beauty, mate, you might have just saved your own life. He’s got his blood type on a tag around his neck. It’s type O, Rh positive.’

The ambulance had arrived by this time and they prepared the transfusion equipment for the rescue team. Working suspended, in tandem, they transfused Zeke where he was. They then wrapped special air splints around his limbs. They hauled up a stretcher and carefully manoeuvred it under him before cutting him free of the wreck. One of the rescue guys stayed with him, as they were both slowly and carefully lowered down to the ground using an elaborate pulley system that they had set up for the delicate task. They

placed him in the back of the ambulance some two and a half hours after his crash. All the pilots winced when they saw his horrific injuries, especially the deep diagonal cut running across his face. Adam asked the ambulance man if he thought Zeke would be OK, but the ambulance man just said,

‘We just take em in, mate, you’ll have to ask the doctors.’

‘Where’s he going?’

‘That’s just what we’re tryin to work out over the radio. I think Sutherland will be the better option for his kind of injuries ... yep, we’re takin him to Sutherland Hospital. They’ll be waitin for him there. He’ll go straight into surgery. Gotta go.’

The ambulance raced out of the park with its siren blaring. All the pilots just stood around the tree, stunned, watching the rescue team pack up and the fire truck drive away. They didn’t know what to do. Sometimes they took a look at Zeke’s precious blood, spilled on the grass at the base of the tree. Sometimes they looked up at his broken supership, stuck high up in the branches. Most of the time they just stared into space. Adam was the first to make a positive decision.

‘I’m going to pack up and then go to the hospital.’

‘I’ll come with you.’

‘Me too.’

‘We’ll see you there.’

‘We will as well.’

Zeke didn’t regain consciousness before his surgery. They worked on him for sixteen hours straight. Two teams of surgeons set up a rotation system. They set a new record for the number of metal pins, nuts and bolts that they ever put into one patient. Later, after it was all over and the surgeons rested in their common room, the totally drained chief-surgeon expressed his personal battle with faith to a colleague who wasn’t there for Zeke’s surgery.

‘This guy should be dead. He looked like he got run over by a truck, but that heart of his just wouldn’t stop beating. It just kept beating. Actually, if you want to know the truth, and I don’t like to admit it, but I gave up on him a couple of times. I looked at the mess and just thought, *‘there’s no way I can fix this.’* For a while we all went quiet around the operating table. We had given up

our faith and the only thing we could hear during those moments of self-doubt, those moments of total silence in the theatre, was the beep, beep, beep of his heart beating away, refusing to give up ... and somebody said ... they said ... *'come on, if he can keep going, so can we,'* and we all ploughed in again and started drilling and screwing and suturing ... and he just lay there in front of us, all in pieces, sleeping like a baby, with his heart beating away when it should have stopped ages before, saying to us, challenging us, and this is the hardest part to accept, giving us strength, silently speaking to us in beeps, saying, *hang in there guys, we'll get through this.'*

They wheeled him into intensive care and hooked him up to all the machines. Adam, Steve, Arnold, Tim, Glenn and Aureole came in to see him. They had already been at the hospital for nearly eighteen hours, right through the night, and had all made phone calls notifying their families of their whereabouts. They were shocked to see Zeke lying on his bed, still unconscious, with metal pins sticking out of all his limbs. The breathing machine hissed rhythmically as he slept peacefully, seemingly the only one in the small group of pilots missing out on all the drama. Adam spoke to his friends,

'I talked to one of the doctors and he reckoned that Zeke's not out of the woods yet. He said that he could still slip into a deeper coma. He couldn't say when he was going to wake up, and then he said, *if he wakes up.'*

Tim exclaimed,

'Jesus, look at the stitches across his face. There must be a hundred stitches.'

'Looks like a wire cut him when he hit, and I wonder what that big dressing over his left eye means?'

Later, one of the doctors, who came in to check on Zeke, told them that they weren't able to save his left eye.

They took turns at sitting by Zeke's bedside. Sometimes just one of them sat with him, while the rest slept, stretched out on waiting room benches. Sometimes two or three stayed with him. They wanted to be there when he woke up.

'He was trying to do a loop, you know.'

The story of Zeke's accident quickly spread around the hospital staff. They all marvelled at the small band of vigilant flyers refusing to leave their friend. Both, doctors and nurses came around to talk to the group and listen to stories about Zeke, his inventions and legendary flights. At night, the nurses brought them blankets and pillows to sleep on and, when it was occasionally free, they offered them a bed.

Tim and Arnold made friends with two pretty, young trainee nurses, named Anita and Rachel. They started seeing them at every one of their breaks and met them in the hospital cafeteria where they amazed them with unbelievable stories from their flying adventures. Timmy and Anita, and Arnold and Rachel went on to become best friends, and couples, who stayed with each other for the rest of their lives.

After three days and three nights,

'Ziki! Ziki! You are awake!'

Aureole was the only one present at Zeke's bedside as he opened his eyes. She called the nurse who came over to his bedside and began attending to his needs. Twelve hours later, they wheeled him out of intensive care surrounded by all his closest friends. They all sat around his bed.

'It never broke, did it? My supership never broke.'

They all looked at each other trying to replay Zeke's tumbling descent in their minds.

'Come to think of it, Zeke, I don't think it did break.'

'Yeah, I think you're right, it stayed together.'

'Yeah. If it had folded up, you probably would have ended up the same as Kenny.'

'Yeah.'

.....

Chapter Seventeen

THE JOURNAL

1

Lying in his cosy sleeping bag by the tranquil Murrumbidgee River, next to his campfire, Adam suddenly felt inspired to write some more in his journal. He crawled into his small tent, retrieved his journal and pen, sat down next to his fire and began to write.

From the moment we entered this world and experienced its wonderful light, from the very first moment, and it could be seen in our yearning eyes, there were two instinctive, universal questions that were common to all of us.

What is going on?

And

Who will love me?

And as the days, months and years passed, most of us were lucky and at least had the second question answered for us in the sweetest way through the love of our parents. As time inevitably moved on, we passed through seasons. We passed through the seasons of forgetting and remembering the questions. When love was all around us, who needed to ask,

Where is love?

And when we were lost in the fantasy and magic of childhood, cocooned deep within our precious gift of innocence, who needed to ask,

What is going on?

Because everything was going on and everything was real. Those were the best times, those times of forgetting. We were too busy doing it to think about it. But inevitably, sooner or later, most of us found ourselves alone. We found that we had thrown away our innocence, in fact we were in a hurry to do so, thinking that being an adult was going to be so great. And when we found ourselves in the grimy, dirty, heartless world of adults, some of us may have wondered, why? Why didn't I stay a child just a little longer? And we drifted away from the most perfect love we were ever to experience, our mother's love. Why? And in time, lost in the world of survival, we forgot what innocence was like, and what being a child was like, and began doing things and saying things, which jeopardised the innocence

of children living around us, chipping away at their bliss, stealing it away, perhaps thinking that we were exposing them to something better, but more likely acting out of our own subconscious jealousy and envy of their precious gift, the gift that we, ourselves, so blindly squandered.

But perhaps I am being too hard on us all. Perhaps I am just being resentful of it happening to me. Perhaps, in fact I'm pretty sure, the loss of innocence is just a part of nature, a part of growing up, unavoidable and absolutely inevitable, and whichever way it happens, the whole process is hideous, without exception.

So is the child destroyed? Forever? I don't mean in the world, I mean in us. Is that shining little person we all once were, gone forever? It would appear so on the surface, even beneath the surface.

Who can believe in the impossible, the improbable and the invisible? I don't mean an outward show of belief. I don't even mean a cerebral kind of belief. I mean a total immersion in an invisible reality, a place where even love can be found. A child can do it effortlessly, but what happens when the child is gone? When the hard, stony reality of this world presses in so overwhelmingly, that the child literally suffocates. What happens then, and can there be salvation, and what is the road to that salvation?

As we stand at the crossroads, we see that life offers us many choices. Which of us will take the road that leads to the ultimate truth? A truth, which, we suspect, could be hidden deep, deep within our own being.

We begin life with love and an abundance of life. We forget the fundamental questions because we don't need the answers. We drift away from the love of our parents. We rush headlong into adulthood, like a young soldier in a screaming, heroic charge, and run into a hail of bullets that splatter us into a million little pieces. With this initial wisdom, earned the hard way, we spend much of the rest of our lives surviving in the hostile, myopic, one-dimensional reality of the stampeding mob surrounding us. Shell-shocked, beaten down, sometimes shaking like a scared rabbit, we recoil, we retreat or we hide. Sometimes we do it to save ourselves, a conscious act, leaving the phone off the hook and locking the door. Sometimes fate, through coincidental circumstances, brings us there. And, in a busy, frantic, overpopulated world, we find ourselves absolutely, completely alone. No one to turn to, no one to talk to. And strangely, almost as if having

orbited full-circle around the invisible, magical world of the child, we return to the two fundamental questions, the ones we asked in the first seconds of our life.

What is going on?

And

Who will love me?

Lost in our solitude we realise that these questions can only ever be satisfied through personal experience, not books or testimonies of others. And it seems that deep within ourselves we know that the only way to find that ultimate satisfaction, that ultimate contentment and inner peace, which comes with the realisation of the ultimate truth, is to embark on a quest, a sometimes frightening, always mysterious, secret inward journey, that is the search for the lost child.

2

About half a dozen impeccably dressed business types were waiting for the lift on the eight floor of Adam's building in the city. They were all suddenly startled by a young, shirtless man, wearing only blue jeans and sneakers, bouncing, on his back side, down the last flight of stairs from the ninth floor. The two elegant women and the four slick, grey-suited men only expressed their amazement subtly, with just a hint of a raised eyebrow. The young man ended his bumpy slide sitting on the marble floor right at their feet. He looked back up the stairs as if he was listening for something. Then, still sitting on the floor, he turned towards the people in front of him, gave them a cheesy smile and greeted them.

'Good morning, good morning.'

The group, fairly stunned by the young man's surprising entrance, just stared at him as he rose from the floor and scampered back up the stairs, audibly laughing to himself.

Adam quickly re-entered the wide-open door of his waiting room. On the way back up from the eight floor, he glanced around for anyone who may have known him. Luckily he saw no one. Once inside, he locked the door behind him and sat down in his surgery. He thought to himself,

'What the hell was that?'

He noticed the gas mask still on the floor where it had been flung in a panic. The machine was still switched on. He checked the levels. Three and a half Nitrous, two and a half Oxygen. They were his magic levels, unbelievably low, but most effective. He switched off the machine and placed the mask on top of it. He stepped into the small back room, put on the jug for some coffee and sat down on the chair in there, thinking,

'That was new ... definitely worked ... scared the crap out of me.'

He had a nervous chuckle, then thought,

'I've never run out of the surgery before ... panicked ... clear down to the eight floor.'

He started laughing out loud. He thought the whole event absolutely hilarious.

'Those people must have thought I was completely nuts. Ha ha ha, maybe I am?'

He opened his attaché case and took out of it a thick, hardcover journal and placed it on the narrow bench in front of him. It was already three-quarters-full of handwriting. He found the first empty page and began to write.

Saturday, 18 August, 1979, 11.00am. Concentration, concentration, concentration. All my recent experiences seem to be about intensifying my concentration, but things are happening to me on this gas that are trying to deflect me away, to scare me off. I've got to concentrate harder and not allow myself the luxury of fear. I am learning that the way to intensify concentration is to intensify distraction. Well, the distractions are coming thick and fast. From who? I don't know. But it's like a game. You try to concentrate on your dot and we'll try to distract you. It's a game of telepathy. We'll play it and anything goes. Trickery, cunning, intelligence, cleverness and blatant fear. All these methods are successfully being used against me to break my concentration. Today was no different. I lost the game, again, but the method was very different, very unexpected and ultimately very brutal. I completely lost it. I don't think that today's distraction was particularly clever, but it did work, like a sledgehammer works, or a cricket bat in the head.

I started breathing, same as usual, making my mouth aperture smaller, gearing up my breath, hooking up with the flow, zinging it up, both eyes focussed

on the dot on the wall. I got the tunnel vision, saw nothing but dot. My back was like a ruler. I did minute adjustments of my spine. I felt the resistances clear. I get so focussed now, so powerfully focussed. Then I heard this sound, subtle at first, but constantly, gradually increasing in volume until it became a noise. It sounded like it was in the surgery, a noise like feedback coming out of speakers, but my speakers were switched off. I was concentrating on the dot as hard as I could, but the noise just kept getting louder and louder. I couldn't tell if it was in my head or in the room. It sounded like it was in the room. My concentration and my focus were already shaky. The volume of the noise just kept building and building. It started to become extreme. I thought that if it got any louder, my eardrums, or my head, were going to explode. In the end it was like the loudest noise I've ever heard, louder than it is possible to imagine. It was blowing my head apart.

Right out of my deep trance, I must have thrown the mask on the floor and ran out of the surgery, out the front door and down two flights of stairs, slipping on the last flight because I was running in such a panic. I bounced down the last ten steps on my backside. The most interesting observation I made, though, was that the noise stayed in the surgery as I ran down the stairs. It wasn't in my head. As the gas wore off, the noise went away.

Adam put his pen down and made his coffee. He read back what he'd just written while stirring the sugar. He then stepped out of the little back room and looked out through the venetians. It was raining and cold outside. Total misery. He had nothing better to do so he thought he might as well stay where he was and have another go on the machine in a little while. As he sipped his coffee, he flicked back through the pages of his journal and read some of his entries back to himself. He went right back to the beginning.

Sunday, December 26, 1976, 10.00am. I'm doing this all alone now. There's no Nancy to talk to. I have no idea what is going on. I have my dot on the wall and I am trying to concentrate on it. I'm practicing my yoga breathing and I've got a mindset now. I don't really know where I get all my ideas. The Gita is definitely my main influence, but I'm also relying heavily on my own instincts. As well, I feel a deep, fundamental need to trust in God. I sense that this journey, this unbelievably exciting odyssey, is somehow a pilgrimage towards Him, towards a revelation of His ultimate truth, the truth that sets us all free. I believe that I am

doing Yoga meditation, assisted by Nitrous Oxide. It's as simple as that, and it's the biggest, most mind-blowing trip imaginable.

As I sit down to meditate, I try to set my mind into the following state.

Don't move and don't think anything, no matter what happens. As well, don't expect anything, don't hope for anything, don't wait for anything, don't want anything and don't react to anything. Basically, don't lose your concentration no matter what happens. Do nothing, think nothing, not moving, not reacting, back straight, mind focussed, breathing still, smooth, rhythmical and steady. Just be. This is my Yoga.

I tried to do this at home without the gas and absolutely couldn't even begin. I can't ever imagine meditating without Nitrous Oxide.

Friday, March 11, 1977, 11.00pm. These trips excite me like nothing I've ever done in my life. I think I've discovered a new world. It feels like I'm the first. It is the biggest adventure of my life. I feel like I'm discovering places and things that no one had ever experienced before. I am becoming totally obsessed with this.

Sunday, April 17, 1977, 4.00am. I am becoming totally unafraid of death. It doesn't concern me at all. This is essential. It is impossible to do these trips and fear death, utterly impossible. The only slight concern I still harbor at the back of my mind, however, is that of potentially losing my sanity. But that won't stop me either. I am now more determined to continue than ever. I never ever dreamt that life could be so stimulating, so adventurous.

Saturday, May 7, 1977, 10.00pm. The most amazing thing has just happened. This is profoundly explosive on my psyche. I am so excited that I can barely contain it. Get this, I AM NOT ALONE. Someone is definitely tuned into my trip. Today, about half an hour ago, the gentlest, the cleverest, the subtlest soul interacted with me. I am just so blown away. There I was, sitting on my stool, focussed on physical and mental stillness, breathing rhythmically, seeing the pendulum, zeroed in on the dot, full-on determined concentration. It's my yoga. My mindset was that nothing was going to deflect me this time, when a hand appeared. Actually it was more like half an arm, from the elbow down. The hand appeared, real as life, just above the dot. I can remember drilling into that dot, not allowing myself to take my focus off it, even though the hand was plainly in

my field of view. Then, and try to convince me that this was coming out of my own head like a hallucination, the hand started to sprinkle this fine black dust, and the dust floated past my dot, down. I was concentrating on the dot. I knew that I wasn't supposed to take my eyes off the dot. It's my discipline. But I couldn't help it, I had to look down and see if the dust was settling on top of the cabinet of the gas machine. The moment I looked down, I realised that I had just got tricked out of my concentration. The hand, the dust, the whole deal faded away as soon as I broke my bead on the dot, as soon as a thought passed through my brain, as soon as I moved. How good is yoga, mate. I put the mask down and laughed. Some really subtle person tricked me so cleverly. I am so delighted. And, as I was coming down from the gas, all these understanding thoughts passed through my mind. Like I just knew about these new things, about things like the concentration game. It's a game that telepathic people play, just for fun and to sharpen their own concentrations. Even little kids play it. One concentrates on a focus, while the other tries to distract him telepathically. How outrageous is that? How do I know that? And how do I know that yoga teachers have used a form of such distraction, not telepathic, in secret, for thousands of years? The students would meditate and concentrate and when the yoga teachers thought that the meditating students least expected it, they would sneak up on them, silently, and maybe tickle them behind the ear, ever so gently, with the tip of a feather. Or they might begin making a very subtle sound in the corner of the room, arousing the students' curiosity. Or, with the most advanced students, they would quietly approach them with a razor or a flame and gently, lovingly, cut or burn them, praying that their student was strong enough and advanced enough to not react to the extreme distraction. How do I know these things? I've never read about them. I was so beautifully distracted. It was pure art. I lost the game, but this time I became aware of the game. I have won a million times more than I lost.

There's something going on in the universe that nobody on this planet knows anything about. It's a meeting of minds, minds far, far cleverer than ours. They can communicate with each other and they know everything that is going on. In comparison to them we are like amoebas.

I wish so much that I had Nancy here with me to talk to about this. I'm sure she'd have some profound thoughts about what is happening. But that's not to be,

ever again. But I have you, my reader from the future. I feel like you are here with me, like I'm talking to you right now. And only the future will tell if you were reading the words of a man slowly going nuts, or the words of a man finding a new truth, which in actual fact turned out to be the oldest truth in existence.

Adam leaned back in his stool and thought to himself; *'Wow, I can't believe that I really wrote that. I've got to make sure that nobody ever sees any of this stuff. They'll have me certified if they do, not to mention have me thrown out of dentistry. Now, where's that time some guy tried to saw me into slices?'* He flipped through the pages looking for a specific entry. *'Boy, I'll never forget that day as long as I live. There sure are some nasty mongrels out there, with a really sick sense of humour. Where is it? Oh yeah, here it is.'*

Tuesday, January 10, 1978, 8.00pm. I began my meditation facing the wall, single-point focus, sliding easily into my trance, steeling my concentration, preparing myself for the inevitable distraction. Suddenly I heard the sound of a big electric buzz saw being switched on, like in a timber yard. I sat, unmoving, as I heard the loud noise screaming behind me. Then I heard the sound change, like the saw was sawing through something. As I heard this sound, the wall in front of me began to be sprayed with what looked like blood. I kept my concentration. The loud sound of the saw sounded like it had cut through whatever it was sawing through, then immediately it started to saw through something again. Blood was spraying all over the wall in front of me. I maintained my focus on the dot, but I could feel myself wavering. I could tell by the sound that the saw had cut through whatever it was cutting through, and then I heard the sawing sound again, for the third time. This time I felt a strange feeling across my chest, not pain, just a sensation. I lost my concentration and looked down. What I saw completely freaked me out. As I took my gaze off my dot, it was as if someone pulled the plug on that saw, cutting its power. Looking down, I observed that the huge saw had been slicing through my chest. The whole surgery was sprayed with my blood. The saw jammed itself in my chest as it stopped. I was looking at two-inch-long, bloodstained, metal teeth sticking out of the middle of my chest. I ripped the mask off my face and totally freaked out. As the effect of the gas wore off, the saw and the blood stains on the walls gradually disappeared.

I have genuinely been frightened out of my skin by this experience. What frightens me is the savage nastiness of my opponent. I am uncertain of his motives. I fear that he hates me with a passion and that he, perhaps, would like to destroy me. My greatest fear is my uncertainty of the potential nastiness of this character and the potential horror he is capable of unleashing upon me.

A couple of hours have passed since the sawing incident. I've calmed down and have had time to think about it. I remember Nancy's theory about such experiences. She thought that they were a sign that we were on the right track and that we were getting closer to our goal. Good old Nancy, she was a tough little tripper. She'd get the crap scared out of her, then she'd think about it, reassert her faith and finally turn it into a positive experience. Then she'd get back in there, tougher and stronger than ever. I still miss her like crazy. I don't know that I'll ever find anyone like her again. God I loved her. I still love her.

It's later now. I feel much better about the sawing experience now. I think that it does have something to do with scaring me away and that does make me more determined to keep going. Anyway, I feel so obsessed with this that I don't think I could stop even if I wanted to.

Adam looked up from his journal and thought to himself; 'Isn't that the truth.' He sipped his coffee and casually thumbed through the pages. 'Ahh, my teacher.' He began to read about his teacher.

Saturday, February 4, 1978, 12.00 noon. Today I had the most unbelievably beautiful experience of my life. I will never, ever forget today. It's been a few hours since it happened. I've been coming back down. Today I've been higher than ever before. Today I met my teacher. He came, silent and still, and he did this magic. I thank him. Every atom of my being thanks him. I know he can hear my thoughts, even now. I know he can feel my feelings. I know I am his student, in his care. All my efforts, all my struggles, fears and failures were preparing me for today. I will try to explain, but words cannot describe this experience.

Earlier today I was sitting tranced out, tunnelled into the dot, breathing like a machine, when I sensed, in the subtlest way, the presence of someone behind me. I sensed a closeness, a calmness and a stillness in this presence. I felt that I was being given a choice, trust or don't trust. Something instinctively felt right, so I chose to trust. As I made this choice, oddly enough without thinking or moving, I

Then this other thing happened. I can't really remember how I went from looking at my back to this next thing, but the next thing I remember are two persons, or some kind of beings, I don't know what they were. They were almost semi-transparent, almost made of light. They were floating in front of me and I was the centre of their attention. They brought out some kind of gadget, like a gun of some type, and pointed it at my forehead, right between the eyes. As they did this I literally froze. Suddenly the gun thing, that they were holding, started shining a light, a fine white beam, like a laser, and the light seemed to begin burning a hole through my skull, right between the eyes. As the light penetrated into what seemed like my brain, my whole head filled up with nothing but brilliant white light. I remember my body going into a huge spasm as this happened. I threw my head back and my spine arched backwards as far as it could go. There was no pain, there was just bright white light everywhere, like I had spherical vision. I must have fainted because when I awoke from that experience I found the gas mask on the floor, with the machine still going.

I have had some time to think about this last trip. I don't seem to get past the thought that I have been marked for something, something that is going to happen in the future. I'll write no more about it except to say that this visit from my teacher and the resulting consequences have more profoundly changed me and my understanding of reality than any other single event that has ever occurred in my whole life up to now.

Adam felt a surge of emotion as he thought about his teacher. He felt that this man, who he had never met in person, but only in spirit, had given him a great gift. He sensed nothing but love and guidance coming from him and it touched Adam deeply in his heart every time he thought about him. He never knew his name, he only ever knew him as *my teacher*. He thought to himself,

'What a day that was, what a glorious day. So many words, from so many books, faded into oblivion for me in the light of that magic day. I think I'll have another coffee.' He looked out the window. *'Ugh, check the misery outside. It's nice in here, though. Nancy reckoned it was a magic space, a little magic hole hidden deep in the bowels of the universe, completely secret. God, I really love it here.'*

Adam put the jug on for another cup of coffee and randomly turned over some more pages. He read,

Thursday, April 20, 1978, 10.00pm. I have just seen these strange hieroglyphics, glowing like fire along the base of my vision. They were strange letters, which I couldn't recognise. They just appeared and were not unlike subtitles you'd see in a foreign language film. The only difference was that they were in my eyes.

He turned the page.

Friday, April 21, 1978, 8.30pm. Someone must be trying to communicate something with me. Yesterday I remember strange hieroglyphics, which I can't remember. I couldn't reproduce them and I had no idea what they meant. The only interesting thing about them was the way they appeared along the base of my vision, as if it was possible to communicate text telepathically. Today, while in a deep trance, I saw a geometric shape, a symbol of some kind. It was two triangles, one inside the other, both pointing to the right. The lines making up the figure were glowing, like gold neon. The shape appeared inside my head. It was as if I was under a dark dome and the shape appeared, glowing on its ceiling, kind of in the centre of my forehead. I don't know what it means, or the purpose of me seeing it, but I know that I will never forget it. I'll probably be speculating on its meaning for the rest of my life.

Adam sat back in his chair and sipped his coffee. He looked through the doorway at the Nitrous Oxide machine, thought for a while, then turned back to his journal, flipped the pages forward to the current day, picked up his pen and added another paragraph.

Who would ever guess what that machine can do. It must be the biggest secret on Earth and the only people that have it are dentists, bloody dentists. I wonder how many of them have stumbled into this? One thing's for sure, though, no one will ever know because no one will ever talk. They can't. They'd all be too afraid of being de-registered for behaving way beyond the boundaries of what is generally considered professionally acceptable. I think that the dental machine is the only one you can do it with. It's the only one with individual and separate flow meters for each gas. It's essential to custom-tune the machine for each individual operator, to really get it working. First, the operator has to find out their natural

breathing rate in litres per minute. Mine turned out to be six. Then, the operator has to find their optimum mix-ratio of Nitrous and Oxygen. It's like tuning into a radio station, except it's your brain that's the radio. It's like finding a harmonic frequency. It takes perfect concentration to do it, and perfect stillness. The operator must ultimately become very comfortable at sliding into a trance. He must then learn to keep still, physically and mentally, irrespective of the nature of their inner experience. It's a strange game and if it wasn't so exciting, why would anyone do it? I always feel like I'm the explorer and discoverer of a new universe, who was the first to witness its strange mysteries.

I am quite aware that what I am describing in these pages sounds unbelievable and highly improbable. I believe that such experiences are, by their own nature, only meant for the person experiencing them. As soon as they begin to be related to others they just become second-hand testimonies, and God knows the world is full of those already. Also, I am aware that a majority of people in this world would think me completely loony. That is why it is my intention to never let anyone see these writings, at least not while I'm still alive.

At this time, it might be appropriate to report on the physical changes that I am experiencing as a result of breathing so much Nitrous. It is normal to feel numbness and tingling in fingers and toes while under the influence of the gas. The numbness normally disappears with the effect of the gas. With me, however, two things are becoming evident. The tingling and numbness is there permanently now, affecting more than just my fingertips and toes, and I am gradually losing my physical balance. Interestingly, this does not seem to affect my hang gliding ability. I can see now that I only have a finite amount of time left to find my truth. I expect that my body will tell me when it is time to stop, and when it does, it is my intention to turn away from the gas forever.

I am also noticing mental and psychological changes in myself. I am experiencing a more profound feeling of aloneness, not loneliness. I feel that my experiences are separating me from society, from people. I know that it is impossible for me to relate my journey to anyone. Since I've lost Nancy, I feel like I've lost my last true contact with the human race. I don't talk about the trips with my flying friends. How could I? I feel, in myself, that I am becoming strange and withdrawn. So much of my mind, and body, is focused on the trips that I feel

that I am becoming separated and distant from normal Earthly reality. I have consciously and willingly let go of it. There is no way that you can explore higher realities and stay attached to the Earthly one. I am finding myself walking alone late at night, all over Bondi, feeling disconnected from everything, except, and this is strange, it's a strange feeling, I feel disconnected from everything, except the stars.

Interestingly though, I am managing to practice my profession without a problem. No one has the remotest suspicion of the depth of my involvement with the gas. Even Michelle, whose loyalty is unwavering, doesn't have a clue.

I am finding that I need peace and space more and more. The city where I work, the city that I used to play in and enjoy, is beginning to feel traumatic. I seem to be noticing everything these days. All the noise of the cars, buses, building sites and those bloody ubiquitous jackhammers, is beginning to grate at my nervous system. I seem to be becoming much more sensitive to everything around me. Walking through the city arcades, I find it difficult to cope with the shopkeepers flogging their wares through loudspeakers. This is a new phenomenon and it is exceedingly repulsive to me. I don't know how long I am going to last in this city. I know that this new sensitivity of mine is one of the side-effects of chronic gas use. It's one of the costs of finding out. I am firmly of the opinion, however, that it has already been worth it. I feel that I have been closer to the truth than any person I am ever likely to meet. I also feel much more grounded in my own philosophy. Gone are the days when someone could mess with my mind with his or her stupid religion. They are frauds because their truth is always derived from books and is thus, at best, second hand. My truth is my own. I have seen it with my own eyes and there is nothing, that has ever been written, that can move me from that. I believe that God has placed me on a rock and said, stand here. I have been there and I've come back and I feel that it's only natural that I am going to be a bit strange for a while and develop physical and mental symptoms. I haven't yet been all the way though. I know that there is something special waiting for the one who perseveres to the end and doesn't chicken out. All I know is that I've got to go on, I've got to go on.

Adam put his pen down and took a long, hypnotic gaze at the machine in the adjacent room. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was 1.00pm. Two

hours had passed since he'd run back into the surgery from the eighth floor. He was feeling re-energised. His positive energy was beginning to flow again and he felt ready for another journey into the unknown.

He stepped out into his surgery, sat down on his operator's stool in front of the machine and flipped the switch. He took the mask in his left hand and placed it over his nose. He carefully drew in the first, most critical breath. As he did this, he reaffirmed, in the heart of his being, his total faith in, and devotion to, his God.

He focussed on his dot and began to breathe his yoga breath. These days he slid into a trance almost immediately. He knew what to expect and he just let himself go. His focus was locked onto the dot, his breath was steady and his mind was still. Suddenly, he heard the same noise begin to sound around him, quietly at first, but gradually getting louder, exactly the same as before. He later wrote in his journal, in almost illegible writing,

Saturday, August 18, 1979, 3.30pm. He said to me, KNOW THAT I AM. I cannot write any more right now. I am too blown away. I'm barely hanging in.

3

Adam called Michelle from a roadside phone booth first thing on Monday morning and asked her to *scratch* the whole week. He spent that week driving west to distant isolated places, out in the outback where he could be alone, where he could contemplate the meaning of his last consciousness-exploding experience, and where he could feel closer to God. After seven days of wandering about and camping out in his small tent under the starry night sky, he again felt ready to write.

Saturday, August 25, 1979, 4.00pm. I am camped by the bank of the tranquil Murrumbidgee River, not far from the small, isolated town of Hay. I have collected plenty of firewood for my campfire because the nights out here get freezing cold. It's not long till sunset. Soon my friends, the stars, will fill the clear night sky. The country here is absolutely flat and, except for the banks of the river, is totally devoid of trees. You can follow the path of the Murrumbidgee for miles and miles across the flat plain by the low line of trees growing along its serpentine banks. I can actually feel my spirit spill out over the land out here, giving me an unparalleled feeling of freedom and serenity.

Lately, I have become very sensitive to all things made by man and even to man himself. Walking down a city street, I seem to be picking up everyone's bad vibrations. It's like static, unpleasant and traumatising. People are so full of dark thoughts and emotions and their spirits are like stormy oceans. When I'm surrounded by too many of them, it becomes too hard to handle. Increasingly, I crave solitude. How will I continue to live in this world? What kind of future could possibly be in store for me? Maybe I'm becoming sick.

How different, how refreshing it is to have my journal open somewhere else other than the surgery. This is the first time that I have written in it outdoors. And what a magical place this is, so quiet and tranquil, except for the crackles of the fire.

It's twilight now. You should have seen the beauty of the sunset. I thought that I had seen the most beautiful thing ever, a week ago, but now I realise it's out here, to be seen by anyone who cares to look. God brought me out here to show me this, to show me that every day, every second of every day, is mystical. Every living microsecond is pure magic. This is the ultimate truth. The thing is that we can be looking straight at it and not see a thing. We can be swimming in it and not have a clue. This is the thing. We have eyes, but they don't see anything. We have hearts, but they don't feel anything. They just pump.

Ahh, I'm not going to get into bagging the world. It is what it is. It's the same before we get here and it's the same after we leave. There is heaps of good and heaps of evil, light and dark, but that's how it has to be. There is no point in trying to change it, because it is what it is, and it is, and must always remain for the sake of its existence, in a state of perfect balance between these opposites.

This isn't sounding much like a scientific journal. Maybe it's my environment. Maybe it's the release I feel, like finally biting through a tough piece of leather after chewing on it for ages.

I guess I should begin relating the events that have brought me here to the banks of the Murrumbidgee. I have been changed, like Arjuna.

'All my dark delusions have been dispelled by my inner light. By God's grace, I remember my light and all my delusion is gone. I have no more doubts and my faith is firm and I can say to the Lord, Thy will be done.'

That's out of The Gita. I've got it here with me. I feel like I am Arjuna. I feel like He has brought me out of the darkness into His light. I have seen such wonders that it is impossible to describe them, wonders beyond wonders.

'KNOW THAT I AM.'

'Know that I Am', is how it began. Not 'believe in Me' or 'have faith in Me', but 'Know that I Am'.

A week ago, I had my second big trip on the gas, on the same day. It was in the afternoon. In my first trip, in the morning, the whole surgery filled with an unbearably loud, screaming noise, constantly increasing in loudness, seemingly with no limit. I felt like my head was going to blow. I was so totally freaked out that I cleared out of there and ended up down on the eight floor. I have had hundreds of trips by now and never, not once, has a trip repeated itself. They were always different, always something new. That's why I always lost my concentration. I always got surprised because I was never ready for any of them.

I sat down for my afternoon go. I did my usual point focus meditation when the same thing began to happen as happened in the morning. It was the noise, the same bloody noise, real quiet at first, but I knew straight away where this trip was going. Then something completely different happened. I've never done anything like this before. I closed my eyes for a second, but kept breathing the gas. The noise just kept getting louder. Then suddenly, as if by instinct, I opened my eyes, put the mask down, turned around and grabbed the headphones hanging on the side of the dental unit. The cups that the headphone speakers were mounted in were made of metal and the padding completely sealed out over ninety percent of the outside sound. I grabbed the headphones and placed them over my ears. They weren't plugged into anything. I turned around and rolled the gas machine closer to the dental chair. I then grabbed the mask and, facing in the opposite direction than usual, away from the wall, away from the dot, towards the windows, I placed it over my nose, closed my eyes and began to breathe. I guess I focussed on an imaginary point in my head. I really can't remember that part very clearly. I can remember the noise start up again, but this time it was distinctly outside of my headphones. I still can't work out how that happened or what was going on. All I can do is write down what I remember.

I remember hearing the noise getting louder and louder outside. Outside of me that is, not outside the surgery. I remember keeping my eyes shut and gritting my teeth and literally pulling my head in. The headphones and my closed eyes made the raging noise seem outside, and I was inside, like in a cocoon. It was like a frantic storm, like a wild cyclone. The headphones were definitely working. I could hear the screaming mayhem, almost completely muffled by the headphones, increase in volume and pitch, way beyond that which made me panic and run the previous time. I can remember being too afraid to open my eyes and look at what was going on in the surgery. It sounded like, it's really hard to find words, insane, screaming noise, like a vortex, spinning in the eye of a huge, ferocious storm. I didn't see it, I dared not look. I only heard it, muffled enough to be bearable. I just pulled my head in, stayed focussed on my breath and kept my inner focus firmly locked between my eyes. The next thing I can remember is hearing the mayhem recede away into the distance. Then it became as if I had a kind of hemispherical vision. Everything became silent and I was looking at the night sky, full of stars. I could see the whole firmament at once, horizon to horizon. I remember sensing its majesty and infinity. Then, suddenly, I heard a note, like a musical note. Its sound was beautiful, played on some instrument that I have never heard before. As I heard the note, I saw what looked like a leaf, an iridescent, metallic coloured leaf, appear near the horizon. Then I heard another note, which played in harmony with the first, and I saw another leaf, this one a different colour. It appeared at another part of the horizon. As I watched, the leaves continued to appear, slightly overlapping each other, each a different colour and each accompanied with its own musical note. The leaves, with their colours and sounds, began filling the whole sky, one by one. The music was building, with each additional note making a grander, more beautiful chord. Finally, the whole firmament was filled with the magnificence of thousands upon thousands of iridescent, multicoloured leaves and the most unbelievably mind-expanding celestial music I have ever heard.

Adam lifted his pen off the page. He thought to himself,

'This is so inadequate. How can I describe, in words, what I really saw and heard? ... Hey, what was that?'

Startled, he quickly turned around. He thought he heard something in the darkness. He moved closer to the fire, picked up a branch and listened for a sound. There was nothing, just the crackles in the flames.

'Might be a dingo or a wallaby. Christ, how would I know, I'm not exactly at home out here. Something feels strange though, something is calming me. I can feel it. I should be feeling scared right now, but I can't. How weird is this? Someone's out there, real close. How can I tell? But they don't want to harm me. How do I know that? I feel a strange yearning for contact. What's happening? It's OK, relax, it's OK. Someone is watching me, a person, but it's OK, it's OK. What time is it? 8.35, it's still early. Feels like somebody's out there. I might make a Milo, boil some water on the fire ... hey! ... I'm getting a bit jumpy ... Jesus! ... How weird is this?'

He closed his journal and put it in his tent. He wasn't sure why, but he started to chuckle to himself.

'I think they reckon that you can go a bit loopy out here, especially at night and if you're alone.'

He made his Milo and put on his warm parka, beanie and ski gloves.

'Boy, she's gonna be another freezing night tonight. Look at all those beautiful stars. This Milo sure hits the spot. Oh Nancy, I wonder where you are now? I can't even imagine what life would be like if you were still here. I miss you so. How about some of our trips, eh? I've really been out there, girl. You would have loved it. There's more out there than either of us could have ever imagined. It does all just go on forever, just like you said. Forever and forever, and we're part of it, and that's the most exciting thing. We touched forever together, Nancy. I will never forget you, never. You're part of my heart now, forever. Hey, I've got an idea. Remember the tape you gave me all those years ago? Dark side of the moon? I brought it with me. It's in the car. I think I might play it now, down low, for us, and I'll remember the day you brought it with you and how we were the first to listen to it. Oh Nancy, why did you have to go?'

He opened the glove box in the Charger, which was parked next to the small tent, and took out the cassette. He pushed it into the player in the dash and set it at a low volume. He then crawled into his warm sleeping bag, lay down on the ground, next to his campfire, and rested. Listening to the music

wafting out of his car window, he dreamily gazed at the star-encrusted firmament above him. For the first time in years he felt a deep release within himself. He felt that he'd satisfied his curiosity. He truly felt that he could stop the gas now. He felt a deep contentment, which he knew would stay with him for the rest of his life. He thought to himself,

'This whole world is hung up on names, names and divisions ... and ownership. My god's name is ah ... ah ... Gazza ... and he's the only real god. Renounce your god or I'll go to war with you. Gazza will be on my side and he will destroy you. Am I the only one who sees the stupidity? They give names to the nameless and they build fences across virgin wilderness. What kind of truth is that? And they look for God everywhere except within themselves. What's the point in that? They reckon they know it all and everything they talk about is mystical, but actual mystical experience scares the crap out of them.'

He lay there imagining the depth of outer space and marvelling at its vast infinity. He allowed random thoughts to drift through his weary, shell-shocked brain.

'How beautiful is the Milky Way? Like a huge string of pearls. Like a long archipelago of islands just waiting to be sailed to. Boy, how clear is the sky out here? It's been too long since I've camped out like this. There's really nothing like it. Like taking time out from life. It feels like being a kid again, sleeping out in my tent. Can't get rid of the feeling that there's somebody watching me, real close. Don't seem to be able to worry about it though. Probably just residual side-effects from the gas. I think I'll throw some more wood on the fire. ... My heart, why do you beat with such passion? ... Did I just think that?'

About five minutes later,

'Hey, I just thought of something ... the lost child ... where's my journal? ... and my pen?'

.....

Chapter Eighteen

LIBERTY

1

She had crossed two million light years to see him. She was only eight years old when she first heard about him from her older brother, the adventurous young surfer who liked to travel to distant worlds to find perfect waves. She listened with delight to his stories from the beautiful water planet, which orbited a small star located about two thirds of the way out along one of the spiral arms of their neighbouring galaxy.

She loved hearing about the friends her brother made. She especially loved hearing about Flynn, the dog, over and over. She also repeatedly asked her brother,

‘Tell me about Adam again. Speak to me of his personality. Was he strong? Was he courageous?’

Her brother’s adventurous stories completely enchanted her and she began to dream about visiting the water planet herself. Her brother said that it was as beautiful a planet as he had ever visited. She knew, though, that the planet was still young, like a child, and was therefore still at an early stage of its growth. Consequently it was categorised as a *stealth planet*, meaning that a visit required strict protocols. Deep within her she could feel her young spirit rebel against all protocols. She felt that they were restricting her freedom. But her teacher was wise and patient. He was fully aware of the independent nature of the young spirit within her and he knew how to teach it restraint, without dimming it in the process. She was nineteen, mature, fully trained and travelling on her first, solo, intergalactic voyage. She had come to the water planet and she had come to see Adam.

Everything changed about five years before. Firstly, she was told of the coming catastrophe involving the beautiful water planet. Then something else happened, something that surprised not only her, but her brother as well. Up to then, Adam was a pleasant memory from an exciting visit to another world. He was also one of only a handful of Earth humans who were, at that time, on a

short list for relocation. Then suddenly, one day, he emerged in the *mind plane*, the plane of telepathic communication.

She knew from her earliest teachings that telepathy was a mind activity, not a brain activity. She understood that the mind existed outside of time and space and that it was universal and everywhere. That was why telepaths could communicate with each other across uncountable light years as though they were right next to each other. The brain was made of matter. It was part of the body. The brain could only *think*, while the mind *knew*. It was just how it was. Her teacher had always explained it thus,

There is only one infinity

And

There is only one eternity

And

It is called 'the mind'

Her brother was the first to notice Adam via the fine *mind thread* that had grown between them through their friendship at Broken Head. He couldn't believe that now, all of a sudden, Adam was popping up in the mind plane. When he was on the water planet, surfing and hanging out with Adam, he got no indication from him that he was even remotely close to becoming telepathic. It didn't take him long to work out that Adam was messing about with a drug, which was somehow stimulating him towards the practice of deep meditation.

She tuned into Adam right back then, right at the beginning. First she did it through her brother, then on her own, after she established her own *thread* with him. She couldn't maintain any kind of sustained communication however. In telepathic terms, Adam was like a newborn babe. She watched him and she listened to him and she shared every one of his small triumphs, and every one of his many failures, with him. On her planet, it was impossible to witness the struggles of a newborn telepath. There, all children were born fully telepathic. There was no record of a time when it was not so, although it was generally accepted that such a time must have existed in the far, far distant history of her people. After a period of studying him, she realised that his

venture into the telepathic world was not going to be permanent. In a way he was cheating, and because of that he would one day soon need to revert back to ordinary sub-telepathic life. She knew, as well, that while he was performing his experiments, he needed help. He also needed to know two things. He needed to know the true nature of his own being and he needed to know something about his planet, something that everyone on Rama had known for thousands of years. She asked her teacher to help and, because he was a kind, compassionate man, he agreed. He worked with Adam for years, patiently intensifying his concentration before he was able to reveal to him the slightest truths about his being. Then, one day, even his teacher could not approach him as something far greater, something completely mysterious, even to the teacher, swept Adam away and took him to a place even the teacher had never seen. Upon his return, the teacher knew that his work with Adam was over.

Occasionally she worked with Adam, helping with his concentration exercises. She used many of the distractions she herself had learnt from her teacher. It was *her* hand that sprinkled the black dust past Adam's concentration point. But she couldn't always be there for him. He would pop up in the mind plane at the oddest times. Even his teacher was absent occasionally. Those were his strangest and most frightening experiences. Full telepathic communication with Adam was virtually impossible, but one time she and her brother got through with a nice reality and they managed to send their love to him.

The more she worked with Adam, the more her fondness for him grew, until, one day, she made a conscious decision to volunteer to participate in one of the most honourable causes her people had ever embarked on. As a result, she had to pay him a visit. Her family expressed a great deal of pride in her for what she was doing.

They were a family of travellers. The activity had been in their family for thousands of generations. They owned four ships, all with intergalactic capability. There were two solo ships, one double and a larger family vessel, which tended to sit in the garage most of the time. The kids preferred to travel solo, on their exploratory adventures, while mum and dad tended to use the

double. They mainly travelled as a family group, in the big ship, when they were visiting friends or family in neighbouring star systems.

2

She floated just above the ground, in the darkness, hiding behind a bush. She was no more than twenty feet from him. She could finally see his face in the light of his campfire. *'What a beautiful man,'* she thought to herself. She wanted to move closer, but dared not. She knew that he was sensing her presence already and she was actively calming him. Every cell in her body wanted to be close to him, to speak to him and to touch him physically.

She found him by using telepathic navigation. She literally followed the mind thread established between them and flew towards him. Without Adam it would have been impossible for her to find his location. He was like a guiding beacon pointing the way towards himself.

The velocity of intergalactic flight, or to be more precise, intergalactic sailing, was at the speed of light squared. At this speed she travelled as pure energy. However she didn't notice any change in herself during the momentary transformation. She remembered what her teacher always said.

'In truth, in the very truth, we all, every one of us, are naught but pure energy, already.'

She left Rama while Adam was still collecting firewood for his campfire by the river. She arrived just before sunset and parked herself about one hundred thousand feet directly above him. There she waited for darkness to descend upon the tiny camp and its reclusive occupant.

She parked her silver ship amongst some tall scrub, just down the river and around a small bend. She knew that he was the only human within miles of her, except for the occasional car speeding along the long, straight highway, about a mile to the east of them. In order to be able to sneak up on him silently, she dressed herself in her levitation suit.

Her levitation suit was a one piece, body-hugging costume, with a hood, socks and gloves. The only parts of the body not covered by the suit material were the eyes. These were always protected by special, tightly fitting, polychromatic, almond-shaped goggles. Basically, the brighter the glare the darker the goggles. At night, in total darkness, the goggles became completely

clear, and if willed, gave her perfect, full colour, night vision. In flight, she liked to follow the contours of the ground, flying amongst the trees or between buildings. Another useful feature of the suit was its chameleon effect. By changing colours it could blend with whatever environment it happened to be in. This pretty much rendered her invisible. Even the goggles harmonised their colour with the rest of the suit. For example, if she stood in front of a red brick wall, or a green leafy bush, the suit perfectly mimicked the bricks or leaves, making her appear to melt into the background. All the functions of the suit were affected through *non-thought* alone, in the same fashion as how one lifts one's arm or turns one's head. This was called *mind control*. Thus it was almost impossible to see her if she was in camouflage mode. The kids on Rama, being kids, went in exactly the opposite direction. They loved to make elaborate colour patterns in their suits, and always tried to outdo each other with more outrageous designs. The hood and goggles were mainly worn when the suit was being used for flight, otherwise the hood and goggles were pulled off the head and allowed to hang behind the neck.

Incorporated in the material and running down the arms, across the shoulders, down the back, over the buttocks and down the back of the legs were panels of gravity membrane called *sails*. When activated, they began to develop gravity lift and began to move her as gently or as rapidly as she wanted. Her non-thoughts were transmitted through the hood and down through the suit into the panels.

She flew the few hundred yards from her hidden space ship to his campfire. She floated the last twenty feet only inches above the ground. She tried to be as silent as she could, but she knew that he would sense her presence through their shared mind thread. She tried to remain calm as she concentrated on keeping him calm, but she couldn't subdue the thump, thump, thump of her heart within her breast, beating excitedly out of control at finally seeing him right there in front of her. She watched him for hours, lying there in his sleeping bag, occasionally rising to place some wood on his small campfire, or to take a sip from his warm drink. Tears began streaming from her eyes as she felt his thoughts and feelings and remembered his valiant struggles within the mind plane. The main thing was that she was with him now. She suddenly

felt an inner happiness and contentment and a feeling that she could not wait for the day when they would meet, although she knew that that day was still some time away. She needed to prepare her deception, as was the protocol, and he needed to be ready. She knew that he was still too entwined with events from his recent past to be fully open to the unfolding of a completely new chapter in his life.

It must have been around midnight when he finally placed the last of the dead branches on his campfire and spread out his sleeping bag back inside his tent. He still had a strong feeling of a presence of someone very near. He remembered the feeling of Scott at Broken Head all those years before. Strangely it felt like that same feeling was there now, by the Murrumbidgee, so very near to him. He was feeling a friendship, and love.

'It's so strange,' he thought to himself. He paused for a long time, just prior to entering his tent, and listened and looked out into the darkness, curiously in the direction that he thought the feelings were coming from. She froze completely as he looked directly at her. He stood there motionless, staring into the darkness for what seemed like an eternity. Although she was no more than twenty feet from him, she was confident that he could not see her because her whole body was the colour of pitch black. She felt her heartbeat again as, for the first time, she was able to gaze directly into his *beautifully expressive* eyes. Eventually he turned back towards the fire, gave it a little prod with a stick and finally entered his small tent to drift away into a restful, deep sleep.

She returned back to her ship, peeled off her suit and launched into the night sky to park herself high above him at the edge of the atmosphere.

3

Next morning was Sunday morning. He would have to drive all day to get back home in time to go to work on Monday. He loved a long drive, especially in country Australia. He always got the same feeling if he drove far enough away from civilization. It was a feeling that the land he was driving through was alive and that its spirit was holding him in its embrace.

One week before, nothing was real, or maybe everything was real. He was completely unsure. His mind had been shocked into an acute paralysis. He could remember a time, one week before, when he hung onto rationality by a

fine thread. He remembered that he managed to totally short circuit his whole nervous system. He was scared and he was acting through the motions of life by instinct alone. He had been taken beyond imagination and he had been brought back. He couldn't talk to anyone. His only thought was survival, to get through the next second, to breathe the next breath, to take the next step. He had to get away, far away, from people. He desperately needed silence and the wide-open spaces. Then, as the week passed, and he had himself a fill of emptiness, things began to crystallize within him. Slowly everything began to make sense. The old reality was gone. It was replaced by the new, boundless, endless and timeless reality within which he now dwelt forever, as spirit. His body was just a vessel, a vehicle, a magnificent machine of biotechnology, a method to experience the adventure of life, as a human, in a reality he grew and perceived as his universe. But that wasn't him. He knew that now. And he knew that he knew it because he took the trouble to find out for himself.

While driving home, he thought about life and death and what he now perceived as the illusion of mortality. As his thoughts became clear, he pulled his car over by the side of the road, retrieved his journal from his bag and wrote another entry.

Sunday, August 26, 1979, 3.30pm.

*Every day we live
Brings us one day closer
To becoming a child again*

Satisfied, he closed his journal, put it away and began driving again. He thought to himself,

'I wish Nancy was here right now. I really need to talk to her. I want to tell her how death is a myth, how we go on forever and how exciting that realisation is. We are spirit, eternal spirit. This body, this life, this place, is just something we go through, for the adventure.'

He breathed in deeply, like a prisoner who had just been released. He soaked up the beauty of the countryside as he cruised up the Hume Highway

towards Sydney. Then suddenly, almost as if a spark had gone off in his head, he thought to himself,

'I think I'm going to make a change. I think I'm going to leave the city. I need to leave. I've got to sell up, everything, and move out to a better place. God knows there are better places. I'm going to leave the jackhammers, the sirens, the loudspeakers and the blank faces. I'm going to find a place in the sun, with trees, lots of trees and lots of sky, and simpler people who smile a lot. Yes, that's what I've got to do. My freedom is out there, I just have to receive it.'

Michelle noticed the change in him immediately. It was as if he was on a permanent high. She could see it in his eyes, which now burned with a distant gaze, like a man living in a dream.

4

'I think that you are making a mistake, Adam. You are on the threshold of a very successful career in this city. Everyone is talking about you. All my friends and associates see you. You must take time to really consider if what you are contemplating is the best for your future. Look, if it's money, I can assure you that the bank will stand behind you.'

'It's not the money, George, and I do value success in my profession. I know that I've been lucky, really lucky, to stumble into such an established practice so early in life, but something has come up and I can't really talk about it. I just know what I've got to do. I just wanted to thank the bank for backing me with the loans for the surgery and flat. I'm going to sell everything that I own in this city and I'm going to pay those loans off. That's the main thing I came to see you about, and to thank you for your help and financial advice over the last five years. Truly, thanks mate.'

The bank manager just looked at Adam across his desk. He looked deeply into his eyes. He knew that he didn't mean a word that he said to him, not in his heart. His own spirit, shackled into conformity decades ago, yearned to make the great escape as well, but it did not possess the kind of courage required for such a rebellious act.

'All I can do is wish you luck in whatever you do in the future, Adam, and if you should ever require the services of our bank, please don't hesitate to come and see me.'

‘Thanks George, thanks heaps, I’ll remember that.’

5

A few days later, *on Saturday, the first day of spring, 1979*, Adam enjoyed an exhilarating, late-afternoon flight over the Stanwell valley. He landed on the beach well before sunset. He finished his flight with lazy wide circles around the perimeter of the whole landing area. The wind was generating lift almost down to ground level, so it was possible to delay the landing approach and make the descent very gradual. As he circled the picturesque valley, admiring its beauty, colourfully lit by the afternoon sun, Adam suddenly felt as though he was looking at it for the first time. It hit him in moment. He flew around into his final approach and glided gently to a landing on the beach. He stepped out of his harness, backed away from his glider and stared into the valley as if hypnotised. He began to talk to himself.

‘Why haven’t I seen it before? Look at it, it’s absolutely beautiful. It must be one of the most beautiful places on Earth. It’s like I’m seeing it in 3D for the first time. I can see each individual tree standing out. I can see all the colours of the spectrum ... like ... like ... for the first time.’

As he stood there by the side of his hang glider, marvelling at the beauty of the valley, a young local kid walked up to him. It was Danny.

‘Pack up your glider for a dollar, Adam? I’ll even carry it into the park for you, no extra charge.’

‘Sure, Dan. What a beaut afternoon. You live here, don’t you?’

‘You know I do. How was your flight? I watched your approach. It was real cool.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Did you hear about Tim jumpin off the Harbour Bridge at three o’clock in the mornin? He jumped right off the top of the arch. They went up there, him an a couple of his mates, an another one of his mates had the getaway car waitin somewhere near Luna Park. They set up his kite on top of the arches an they reckon he used a couple of painter’s boards an put em across the arches, an he walked the planks an just jumped off into the darkness about three in the mornin. Did you hear about that?’

‘No Dan, you’ve got to be kidding me.’

'No way, Adam, it's the truth. They reckon he did a couple of wingovers on the way down, then came in for a perfect landin in the park right next to his mate's car. They packed up the glider real quick and got out of there before the coppers showed up. They reckon that the coppers found out about it though, an came around to Tim's place a couple of days later an took him in. They reckon that they kept him at the station for three days, askin him questions an threatenin him, but Tim never opened his mouth for three days. They reckon he didn't say a word an didn't eat for three whole days, until they let him go. What a legend, eh Adam?'

'He was already a legend, Dan. Are you sure about the story?'

'Sure I'm sure, ask anybody. It really, really happened.'

Adam shook his head and tried to refocus on his own thoughts. He gazed at the surroundings and asked Danny,

'Dan, what's it like living here, in the Park I mean?'

'Well, I reckon it's great, but I never lived no place else, so I wouldn't know what livin anyplace else'd be like, but it's unreal livin here. When we visit Sydney, I don't know how people can live there. It's crazy, an the people are crazy, an all the cars. Sometimes I go an stay with Steve an Arnold, when they take me flyin to Kurnell. They're teachin me to fly, an it's good, but I couldn't live there, no way.'

'I'm thinking of moving down here, Dan. If you hear of a house going for sale, can you let me know? I'd really appreciate it. I think that I'm falling in love with this place.'

Adam sat on one of the logs surrounding the car park and imagined himself living in Stanwell Park, while Danny busied himself packing up his glider.

'This place is like an island, Dan. It's surrounded on one side by the ocean and on the other three sides by one thousand foot escarpment.'

'Yeah, an it's miles away from the next place, an we got our own beach, an sometimes the surf goes right off.'

'It's been a few years since I've had a good surf. The flying and my work kind of took its place, but I've had some great times surfing up the coast when I

was younger. Have you ever been up the coast, up around Byron and places like that?’

‘Naah. Except for sometimes goin to Sydney or Wollongong, this place has been me whole world since I was born, but I love it here an I’ve met people from all over the world, right here. They just keep comin through on their travels, an in the evenins I come over to their vans an talk to em an they tell me stories about all the places they’ve been to an where they’ve come from. It’s like if I can’t go out into the world, the world comes to me.’

Danny smiled broadly as he said that. Adam just looked at him and the beautiful environment around them. He had decided on the place he would try to make his new home.

6

Later, as he drove back towards Sydney, Adam dropped in on Zeke. As he drove up behind his hut he saw that Glenn’s car was already parked there. Aureole opened the heavy, old, wooden door in response to Adam’s knock, undoubtedly because Zeke was still having trouble getting around.

‘Adam, come in, join the party.’

The inside of the hut reeked of ganja and the new Gerry Rafferty album, *City To City*, was softly playing through the speakers. The three of them were having a hilarious conversation when Adam arrived.

‘Did you hear about Tim, Adam?’

They all laughed, even Zeke, even though it hurt him to laugh.

‘About him jumping off the Harbour Bridge?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Yeah, Danny told me today. So it’s true?’

‘You bet. The cops caught his two mates as they climbed back down off the bridge. They frightened them so much that they gave away Tim’s address. They came around there the next day and picked him up for questioning. They took him to the station and started screaming at him and scaring him, trying to get him to own up to what he did. But how cool was he? They interrogated him like that for three days, made every threat, promised to go easy on him, but he never uttered a word. He just sat there, like a deaf mute, for three whole days,

with the cops screaming in his ears, getting all frustrated, and he just ignored them like they weren't even there.'

Aureole added her little bit.

'Everyone is talking about Timmy, about his brilliant fly from the bridge in the night and about his cool in the police.'

'What's that music?' Adam asked. 'It's unreal.'

Aureole showed Adam the album cover.

'We buy it for Ziki, for present. You like it Ziki?'

'Love it Aureole, thanks heaps. It's been ages since anybody's bought me anythin.'

'Hey, I've got an announcement to make.' The others all looked at Adam. 'I've decided to move down to Stanwell Park, to live.'

'Whoah Adam,' Glenn exclaimed, 'that's a big move!'

'Especially for a hang glider pilot.' Zeke added as he clumsily leaned forward and handed Adam a loaded pipe.

Adam took a careful tug on the pipe, held the smoke in for a while, breathed it out and said,

'I'm looking for a house, nothing fancy, just as long as it's in the Park.'

'Wow, that is really big news.' Aureole commented.

Adam had another toke on the pipe as the conversation took a natural pause.

As Zeke's homegrown began to go to Adam's head, his attention focussed on the ambiance of the interior of the hut. His friends' faces were warmly lit by the flickering firelight, casting shimmering shadows on the walls. His gaze momentarily locked onto Aureole's exquisite face. He thought to himself that maybe he had never seen such a beautiful woman in his whole life. She was even more gorgeous than Nancy, and God knew that his Nancy could make a whole crowd turn and stare. He thought that Nancy's beauty was *fresh*, while Aureole's was *smouldering*. He then looked at Zeke's face. It had a huge scar running across it, and even after all this time, he could still make out where they took out the stitches. Adam thought that he looked like one of those old pirates you see in the movies, with his black eye patch covering his left eye socket. As he looked around the room, his thoughts drifted to how his universe

could change its form. A few hours before, he was soaring in limitless space, and now he was sitting in a tiny, warm room with three very special people. Then, as Zeke's smoke really kicked in, he thought,

'This must all happen in the mind. That's where we all meet and that's where we all exist. It's everywhere and it's everything.'

He refocussed on Zeke's face and noticed that Zeke was looking at him now, straight in the eyes. He smiled a casual smile and commented,

'Bloody good stuff, Zeke.' Then he turned to Aureole and asked her, 'Have you been getting much airtime, Aureole?'

'Heeps, every day.'

Glenn weighed in, 'She can't get enough of it. She won't stay on the ground, but at least she's nice and light.'

'Sank you cheri, I love flying. I love it so much that Glenn will teach me and I will solo one day.' She changed the subject. 'It will be nice to visit you in your new house.'

'Oh, it doesn't have to be new.' Adam responded.

'There aren't many pilots that actually live down here,' Glenn observed. 'You'll be one of the first. You'll always be aware of the local conditions cause you'll be a local. You could really get into the flying living down here.'

'It's only an idea at this stage. There's a fair bit to do before it can happen. I haven't even figured out the first step yet.'

7

Two weeks passed between flights for Adam. He liked to land on the beach at the end of the day, lay his glider on the lawn in the park and while away the time in spirited conversation with the other pilots. The conversations were usually highly animated, with expressive hand gestures, as the pilots described their flights to each other. Every day the young band of adventurers gained new insights into the secret art and lore of foot-launched, weight-shift-controlled flight, and amazingly, almost as if it was decreed by some higher power, this whole magnificent human phenomenon unfolded, like a beautiful flower, in total secrecy from the rest of the world.

Adam was always one of the last to pack up. He often finished the job in total darkness, lit only by the cool, monochromatic light of a solitary streetlight.

He had just zipped up his glider bag when Danny materialised out of the darkness.

‘Hey, Adam.’

‘Hey, Danny, where have you been? I’ve been looking for you. I would have loved a pack up today.’

‘I was home. Hey, I heard about a house that’s gonna go for sale. I know the old lady that owns it. I can show it to you. The place is locked up tonight because she went to visit her daughter in Sydney, but she said it was OK to look around the outside of it.’

‘Where is it?’

Danny turned and pointed into the darkness in the general direction of the hill.

‘It’s just over there, just under the top-landin area an a bit to the left an about a third of the way up the slope.’

Adam stared into the darkness trying to imagine the place.

‘We can have a look at it if you wanna drive over there,’ Danny suggested.

‘Let’s go. Hey, mind giving me a hand putting the glider on the roof, Dan? I can’t wait to see it. Do you think we’ll see anything in this darkness?’

‘I reckon you’ll get a pretty good idea.’

Adam drove along the narrow, winding lanes that traversed the steep slopes of the northern hill, guided by Danny.

‘Here it is.’

They parked, stepped out of the Charger and walked to the bottom of a very steep driveway.

‘You can’t see the house from down here. Let’s go up.’

They walked up the long, steep, concrete driveway.

‘There seem to be a lot of trees here, Dan.’

‘Oh yeah, the whole lower part of the block is natural bush with big gum trees on it. You can just make em out. Check em out.’

As they climbed to the top of the driveway, Danny said,

‘Turn around.’

Adam turned around and gasped.

‘Wow!’

The view from the front yard was breathtaking. He could see the lights of the Park shining through the trunks of the tall eucalypts, and in the distance, stretching out like a string of Christmas lights, all the way to the southern horizon, was the south coast, with the lights of Wollongong shining like a distant galaxy, thirty-five miles away. In the moonless visibility, the house could only be seen as a dark silhouette.

‘It’s nice and small.’ Adam observed.

‘Actually it’s bigger than it looks. There’s a back half.’

Adam walked up to the corner of the house and ran his hand down the wall.

‘It’s brick.’

After walking around the house a couple of times, trying to visualise it in daylight, they stepped onto the wooden veranda in front.

‘Look at that view, Danny. It’s like a Van Gogh. I love the balance between the mountains and the sea, and the line of lights, and the big sky, wow, what a spectacular view of the southern sky.’ Adam looked at Danny. ‘Dan, I think this is it. I’m already starting to feel like I belong here.’

‘But you haven’t even seen it.’

‘I’ve seen enough, thanks to you. Really, from my heart, thanks Dan. You’ll have to introduce me to the old lady.’

A few days later, Adam *scratched* a few patients and drove down to Stanwell, in the mid-afternoon, to meet the old lady and properly inspect the house. She looked him up and down and said,

‘I know what it’s worth and I know what I need to get for it.’

She told him her price, to which he instantly replied,

‘I’ll take it.’

Adam placed his surgery and his Bondi unit on the market the very next morning. The surgery sold in four days and the unit, with the million-dollar view from the spacious east-facing balcony and adjoining kitchen, not to mention the two-car, lock-up garage, sold in eight days for a *motza*. Adam was able to pay off all his loans, buy the house, move in and have a little left over to see him through the transition.

In the evening of his last day at the surgery, Adam stayed back after Michelle left to go home. It had been over a month since his last gas trip. The time had come for the *magic space* and Adam to part ways. He always understood the necessity for a closure to this adventure. He understood that there was a beginning, middle and end to everything in nature and selling his surgery was going to terminate this trip. So he thought that he ought to have a farewell session, being nostalgic, remembering Nancy, being more *kicked back* and even playing some music while on the gas. He wanted his *last blast* to be more like the great parties they used to have in the old days when everybody laughed their brains out and when they all ended up sitting on the floor because they couldn't fall any further from there.

He played *Caravanserai* as he focussed on the familiar ballpoint dot marked on the wall above the gas machine. He set his focus on his first breath. He executed an easy, slow, first in-breath, followed by a smooth, steady, first out-breath. Soon the sound of the music began to fade away into an echoing distance. There was a certain faith and a core belief one had to have to just let go the way he did. An hour and a half later, he frantically scribbled an entry into his journal.

Friday, September 28, 1979, 8.00pm. I've just had this amazing experience. I don't know what to make of it. A hand appeared. I think that it was the same hand that sprinkled the black dust. This time the hand was holding a pencil. I was concentrating on my dot. I felt something intensify my concentration. Suddenly, staying focussed on the dot became effortless. The hand began to draw on the wall. It drew a circle, then another smaller one to the right of it. The hand drew slowly, with precision and purpose. It continued to draw a series of smaller and larger circles, running from left to right, out from the first, largest one. As soon as the hand drew a ring around the seventh circle, I recognised that I was looking at a drawing of our solar system. Then the hand went higher, up above the line of planets and out to the right. It then drew, with a little more speed, from right to left, a downward-descending parabolic curve towards the sun. As the line approached the sun, it curved down close to Venus and then hooked itself around Venus. Then the hand continued to draw the line, much more slowly now, in a

short parabolic curve, aiming directly at the third planet. It ended its path dead centre of the third planet, the Earth. Then the hand disappeared and the surgery wall, that the drawing was on, changed into an ancient, weathered, stone wall, and chiselled into the stones was the same drawing. Then I remember the diagram dissolve away and the surgery wall return back to its normal appearance.

There is one other thing I remember. It is very strange. I heard some words. A voice said, 'I have nothing for the future.' That was it. I scrambled madly for my journal so I could get the memory down before I lost it.

Adam never ever breathed Nitrous Oxide again, except for the times when he went to the dentist for his teeth. However he didn't see it all go away immediately. It took two years for total feeling in his extremities to come back, and his balance, well, that just kept improving very slowly. He also had his memories to live with for the rest of his life. He certainly remembered that drawing of the solar system, the firmament, and celestial chord, and the angel. He remembered the white bird, and his teacher, and the secret symbol burned permanently into his brain. After a while, he thought of it all as something the human race was heading towards in its natural evolutionary development. After many more years, it all finally crystallised into an understanding that he just got a little peek into *the big right now*, that was all, and that was what telepathy was.

9

It was *mid-December, 1979*, before Adam finally emerged from his transitional hibernation. He spent his first two and a half months in Stanwell Park lying on his couch, or sitting on his veranda, in a mindless stupor, blown out on his new view and a bunch of potent home-grown that he scored off Zeke. He didn't fly for a whole three months and was quite happy to just sit on his veranda and watch them silently soaring high above him. On the windy, easterly days, he watched them glide across to Mitchell's and work their gliders up the precipitous east face, finally getting lit up like candles by the setting afternoon sun as they rose gracefully, like soaring eagles, above the thousand-foot summit of the now conquered mountain.

Adam had his first flight, as a local, a week before Christmas. He launched into a fifteen-knot, velvet-smooth southeaster. The wind was so smooth that he experienced moments when he actually forgot that he was flying. He landed at dusk and felt like the old feeling had come back again.

He knew that he was going to have to start working soon. His savings were running down, but Christmas was coming, and the New Year, and a new decade with it. Everything shut down for a month anyway, so he made a decision that he would look for work in February. He figured that he'd be all right till then, if he kept a low profile. He continued to enjoy long blissful days of peaceful contentment just hanging around his beautiful new house.

10

On Christmas Day, Adam left early to visit his parents. He was hoping to get back in time to catch the predicted afternoon easterly wind. He launched skyward at 3.00pm on *the last Christmas Day of the Seventies*. His thoughts always drifted to Nancy on every Christmas Day.

'Three years today, Nancy.'

He climbed to fifteen hundred feet in front of Mitchell's and cruised south around Coalcliff, then down the escarpment all the way to Bulli Pass. He rose above two thousand feet down there. When he returned to Mitchell's, he still had two thousand feet. He aimed his ship at Bald Hill, far below him on the other side of the valley, and pulled the bar all the way in. He streaked across the valley, like a dart, in a sustained, shallow, high-speed dive. He ended his flight with a low, downwind landing approach, skimming the tops of the trees in the process, flying deep into the valley where he executed a spectacular, high-bank, stalling, one hundred and eighty degree, hammerhead turn back into the wind, no more than a hundred feet above the football field, and coolly finished his flight with a pinpoint landing on the grass, right in the middle of the packup area. He dropped his glider where he landed and, while scanning the park for a friend, casually stepped out of his harness.

Almost immediately, something caught his eye. It was a picture, an airbrush, painted on the side of a white camper van that was parked in the car park. He recognised it instantly. It was a picture of perfect barrels breaking at Broken Head, just as he remembered it. He noticed that the jagged headland

was depicted perfectly. Even the old fence was there. He hypnotically froze on the image for a moment, superimposing it over his memories of over a decade before.

He had nearly completed packing up his glider, when he spotted her for the first time. She looked like a gazelle in a wetsuit. He thought to himself,

'Wow, how could anyone be so thin and look so athletic at the same time?'

She was walking up the beach towards him, carrying her surfboard underarm. He paused and watched her walk towards the car park. She placed her board down next to the van that had been attracting so much of his attention. She sneakily retrieved her keys from their hiding place in the front bumper bar, opened up her van to get a towel, then disappeared into the women's showers. It was at about this point that he realised that he was staring. He didn't think that she noticed though. She came back out of the showers wearing only a brief, olive-green bikini and carrying her wetsuit and towel. Her skin was the dark brown colour of a deep suntan. She hadn't combed her hair, which was straight and long, hanging about half way down her back. It was a light brown colour with blond streaks in it, like sun bleaches. He couldn't take his eyes off her. She returned back to her van, dressed herself in her jeans and T-shirt and put away her things. When she was done, she set up her little gas cooker and started boiling some water for a cup of coffee.

Adam lifted his packed-up hang glider and placed it on top of his car. He strapped it down, took a silent, deep breath, turned around and walked over towards her van.

'Is that a picture of Broken Head?'

'This picture? Why yes, it is.'

He was standing not more than six feet away from her now, seeing her face much more clearly. It was beautiful, like a child's face, with beautiful lips and almond eyes, and a nose like *Claudia*. The colour of her eyes was green, like emerald that shone like opal. Her wet, sun-bleached hair hung down the left side of her face, partially concealing some of the radiance of her beauty, like the young *Lauren* just after a shower.

'It's just how I remember it,' he said.

'It's how I imagined it,' she replied.

'Oh, you're the artist?'

'Oh yeah. I've got a little compressor and an airbrush kit on board. I do the odd painting for friends and people I meet ... er ... along the way.'

Her sentence trailed off as their eyes met. Then she picked it up again.

'I surfed Broken Head, not more than a month ago. Six foot, deep, thin barrels.'

'Wow, it's amazing to hear someone speak like that again. It's been a while for me. Do I detect a slight accent?'

'I'm from California. I live near Manhattan Beach, down in the South Bay area. Have you ever heard of it?'

'Oh, er, once I think.'

'Was that you in the high-speed glide across the valley?' Adam nodded. 'I watched you from the water. It was so cool, man.'

The sun was just beginning to set behind the escarpment.

'Are you travelling in the van?'

'Yeah, I've been on the road, in Australia, surfin, for four months now.'

'Are you travelling with anybody?'

'Naah, I travel on my own. I hook up with other travelling surfers every now and then and cruise the coast with them for a while and pick up a few secrets along the way. But my main focus are the waves.'

'Four months, you say?'

'Yeah, I've been everywhere. Crescent, Scott's, Angourie, Byron, I just *love* the Byron scene, man, Coolangatta, Burleigh and all the way up to Noosa, which was my best time. I surfed the amazing points of Noosa every day I was there. I've pretty much had every place good. It's been the most amazing surfin trip ever. Would you like a cup of coffee? I'm making one anyway.'

'Oh, only if it doesn't put you out. I wouldn't want to drink your last cup of coffee.'

'Nonsense, I've got plenty of coffee, as long as you don't mind the two dollar stuff. I figure once it's instant it's all the same anyway, so why pay ten bucks for somethin you can get for two.'

'I am in absolute concurrence with you on that point ... and you've been to Broken Head?'

She smiled. 'Yeah, and I surfed the legendary waves.'

'It's been over ten years since it happened to me, but they are still the best waves I've ever ridden. And you sprayed the picture on your van, there?'

'Yup, and there is a picture of Granite Bay on the other side. That's an awesome place ... ahh ... ahh ...?'

'Oh, sorry, I'm Adam.'

'Granite is also an awesome place, Adam.'

Her heart missed a beat the moment she first spoke his name to his face.

'Could I ask you your name?'

'It's Liberty ... Libby ... Lib.'

'I like Libby.'

'Oh you do? Adam is a nice name as well. Cream and sugar? It's powdered cream, but the sugar's real.'

She spooned some cream and sugar into the plastic cup and stirred very slowly as she looked him straight in the eyes and gave him a beaming childlike smile. As she handed him his coffee he commented,

'Your eyes are so green and clear, like opals.'

'Probably too much sun.'

'Where do you stay at night?'

'I sleep in my van. It never ceases to amaze me how little space a person needs to be comfortable. I have my bed, my board goes inside and I can park it anywhere I want. The van is like ... like my spaceship. Where do *you* live?'

'Just over there, on the side of the hill.' He pointed towards his house. 'I've been living there for about three months now, nearly as long as you've been travelling up and down the east coast. You seem so young to be on such an epic expedition.'

'I'm nineteen.'

'You look ... ' He paused mid-sentence.

'Yeah, I know, I look years younger, like a kid.'

'Boy, this tastes like the best coffee I've ever tasted.'

'Oh yeah? You don't get around much, do you?'

'Definitely not as much as you, Liberty ... er, Libby. So you're going to stay here tonight?'

'Yeah, the car park is perfect. I've got everything I need here and I can get out there early and get the offshore breeze.'

'Look ... ah, Libby ... ah ... I fancy myself as a bit of a chef ... and ah ... and ah ... it's as easy to cook for two ... and ah ... and ah ... I have a very cosy carport for the, ah ... the, er, ah ... spaceship. It even has a view ... '

'Are you inviting me for dinner?'

'Well, er ... yes. It would be my pleasure to ... '

'Then I accept, but it'll take me about ten minutes to get ready.'

'Take your time cause I've got nowhere to go ... and the rest of my life to get there.'

She loved the smile that came with that quip.

He sat on a log and watched her wash the cups, dry them and put everything away neatly. About ten minutes later she followed him through the narrow lanes to the bottom of his driveway.

'I'm not driving up *there*, it's too steep.'

'Come on, just line the van up and take a run-up. It's easy.'

The first time, she stalled the engine half way up the driveway, but with a more determined go, she made it up to the carport on her second attempt.

'Wow, look at the view,' she said excitedly. 'You can check the surf out from up here and what a nice little Christmas tree.'

Right at that moment, she was the only view he was interested in. He asked her if she ate meat and she said that she did, but in small quantities. He made a veal and vegetable stir-fry. She asked him if he smoked and he replied,

'Oh, you know ... ahm ... mainly on special occasions.'

She stepped out to her van and brought back a small, green-velvet, drawstring bag. She opened the top and took out a beautifully intricate, solid-gold container and a small, elaborately carved, white ceramic pipe.

'Hello, hello, what's going on here? I might have something to go with that as well.'

'Are you shocked?'

'Not with you Californians. Your reputation precedes you, you know.'

'I've been smoking since I was seven.'

'Crikey! ... You know, I feel so honoured tonight. I've only been living here for three months and already I've got a guest from clear the other side of the world. You may as well be from another planet, you're from so far away.'

She laughed out loud,

'Yeah, but it's not me who's from so far away, it's you.'

'Have you always lived in California?'

'Have I always lived in California? Ahh ... no. I was born in Maine. My dad was a boat builder. He owned a business with his brother. We lived there for ten years. They were the happiest years of my life. Growing up as a family, having a mom and dad who loved each other, playing on the beach all day ... '

'Sounds idyllic.'

'It was, until my dad and my uncle disappeared at sea one night. I was ten years old when that happened. Neither they nor their boat were ever seen again. In the end they thought that their boat may have hit a floating container and sunk, with possibly them trapped in it, but that was only a theory. There was never any evidence.'

'Wow, that must have been hard to take.'

'It was, especially for mom. She sold the business and moved us to California. I made a very good friend there, a girl named Jamie. She's my age and people say that we look like twins. Things were OK for a while and I got into surfing with Jamie ... then mom got sick and died. I was fifteen when that happened. I've been with Jamie ever since. I was more friends with mom than mother and daughter, especially after my dad disappeared.'

'I'm so sorry, Libby.'

'Don't be. And my name, Liberty, I think dad was thinking that he was naming another one of his boats. ... Jamie and I have a business.'

'A business, really?'

She smiled broadly as she proudly told him,

'Yeah. We started a small dog-walking business, which quickly evolved into a dog-minding business. We go to people's houses, feed their dogs and give them a run around while their owners are away.'

'That is so American.'

'Oh, you think that's American? Starting a dog walking business?'

'Yeah, *very*. I mean think about it, where else in the world would it happen?'

'I've never thought of it like that. It's just a job. It's been going well though. We've really got ourselves established. We have an arrangement where we share the work. Jamie looks after the business for six months, while I travel, and then I take care of it the other six months, while she travels. It works out great.'

'Well, this sure changes my perception of you. Now I'm having a successful entrepreneur over for dinner.'

'Yeah,' she replied proudly with that beautiful smile on her lips.

He noticed how her face lit up when she smiled, and when he gazed into her eyes, they beamed like emeralds, like there was light shining out of them. She continued,

'There was an idea we came up with just before I flew to Australia. Would you like to hear it?'

'I'm all ears.'

'Jamie calls it *anti-work*. There's this new fad starting in Southern California called *doggy-cise*. People are starting to find out about the health benefits of taking a dog for a walk. All of a sudden they all want to hire a dog to take for a walk. They want you to bring it to their house and pick it up from their house, and they're prepared to pay big bucks for the service. Then there are our regular customers who treat us like gods because we free them from the bruising shackles of dog responsibility. One day, Jamie and I started thinking. We thought how the needs of one group of customers could be fulfilled by the needs of the other.'

'That's brilliant, Libby.'

After dinner, Adam started clearing the table.

'Don't do that. Where I come from the cook never washes up.'

'No, I couldn't ...'

'Of course you could. When I cook, my work's done when the cookin's done.'

She cleaned and washed up, quickly finding her way around his kitchen.

'You even have a view from here,' she noticed.

He watched her as she made everything tidy and admired her high standards of domestic self-discipline. When she finished she asked him,

‘Could we sit on the porch outside and look at your view?’

‘Sure. Do you feel like tea?’

‘Tea sounds fine. Got a light?’

‘Yes I do.’

She opened the small gold box, took out a pinch of crumbly brown powder, loaded it into her little white pipe and handed it to him. As he took it he asked,

‘California hash?’

‘Actually, I think it comes from further away than that.’

‘Oh, of course, it’d have to.’

‘There is an ancient native legend about the particular strain of plant that this, er, *hash* is made from.’

‘You don’t say?’

She looked him directly in the eyes.

‘Yeah, it is said that this stuff will make you live longer, a *lot* longer.’

He laughed,

‘Oh really?’

‘It’s very mild, but strong. You only need a small amount of smoke. One hit is usually enough.’

‘Oh thanks, I’ll be careful.’

‘Is your balance out a bit?’ she enquired, ‘I’ve noticed your walk. I hope it’s not too personal a question.’

‘No no, of course not. My balance went right out there for a while, but it’s actually coming back now. It’s better every day and, interestingly, it has never affected my hang gliding.’

The hours passed in bliss for both of them. He switched off all the lights, except for the Christmas tree lights, which were softly shining behind them in the window. He played *Morning Of The Earth*, down low, through Nancy’s old *Stonehenge Threes*. They sat together on the veranda enjoying the evening view and telling each other stories from the past. They both felt a strong, almost gravitational, attraction to each other. He could feel himself being drawn to her

like steel to a magnet. They had still not actually made any physical contact yet and both of them were acutely aware of it. She could feel every cell of her skin yearn to be the first to touch him. Every time one of them got up, they would slide their chair fractionally closer to the other on returning. By the end of the evening, they were sitting right next to each other with their feet up on the other two chairs. She mainly spoke about her surf trip, while he enjoyed reliving his days at Broken Head. She loved hearing Adam's stories about Scott. She asked cheeky, penetrating questions about him, like,

'Was Scott romantic with Maria?'

He replied,

'Is the Pope a Catholic?'

She let out a shocked, 'awooo,' and giggled.

'Why the interest in Scott?' he enquired. 'Do you think you might know him from California?'

'No no no, it's just you boys, the way you are.'

Adam had his hand resting on the armrest of his chair. She looked at it and commented,

'You have very fine hands.'

'Oh, what, these?'

She looked into his eyes and asked,

'May I?'

He looked deep into her big, emerald pools and replied, as if in a hypnotic trance,

'Sure.'

She took his hand in hers and as her fingertips made first contact with his, a small spark zapped between them. He jumped about an inch, reacting to the tiny shock, then casually enquired,

'What was that?'

'What was what?' she replied, all innocent like.

'The spark ... electric ... thing ...'

'You have very fine, long, artistic fingers, Adam.'

He looked down at her fine-fingered, smooth-skinned hands, gently caressing his left hand. He felt the warmth coming from them, and the delicate

touch, like that of a blind person. He thought to himself, *'Why do I get the feeling that I've seen these hands before?'* She kept holding his hand for the rest of the evening. She just couldn't make herself let go.

'This is really strange, Libby, but it feels like I'm sitting with an old friend.'

'I know exactly how you feel, Adam.'

That night, she slept in her van, parked under the carport. She left the side door of the van open all night and went to sleep admiring the spectacular view of the glittering south coast from her pillow.

.....

Chapter Nineteen

BEN

1

Adam rose early next morning because he wanted to surprise her and make her breakfast before she woke up. But to his astonishment, she was already up and busy in the kitchen making coffee, toast and cereal.

‘Good morning, Libby.’

‘Good morning, Adam, look at the barrels.’ She pointed through the kitchen window at the beach in the distance below. Adam looked out the window. He could see the whole southern half of the beach from his kitchen. He realised that he had forgotten about surfing. It had become something he did years ago, when he was younger with time to travel to the point breaks. He couldn’t believe that he’d been looking at good surf for months, but it never registered.

‘I apologise for raiding your kitchen.’

‘There’s no need to apologise.’

‘I woke up looking at that,’ she pointed out the window again, ‘and just went mental.’

Adam noticed that there was a light westerly breeze blowing out of the valley, hollowing out a clean four-foot peak with lefts and rights coming off it. The right looked best as it was walling up more and breaking along a deeper channel.

‘It’s been years since I’ve had a surf. I’ve still got my seven-six in the garage. I’ll have to get the spiders off it though. You got any wax?’

She was scoffing down slices of toast with marmalade spread generously all over them and washing them down with gulps of sweet, black coffee.

‘Sure. How long are you gonna be?’

‘Ahh ... you go ahead and I’ll come after you. You don’t have to drive down. You can walk down to the beach from here. It’s a nice walk.’

Beaming a huge smile she said, ‘Cool, I’ll see you out there and I’ll leave the wax out,’ and scampered out into her van to put on her wetsuit. He watched

her walk down the driveway carrying her surfboard underarm. He thought that she looked so slender and sexy in her body-hugging wetsuit, like an agile cat.

‘And her beautiful long hair ... this can’t be real, she can’t be real. What’s real? I’m not really going surfing, am I? Yeah! Better get into it. I hope I don’t make a fool of myself. I hope I still know how to surf.’

She had already paddled out by the time he walked down to the beach. It was early in the morning and the sun was still low above the horizon. The air was cool and the breeze was light offshore. The ocean was completely glassy, with the sets rolling in every few minutes, two or three waves at a time. It was bigger than it looked from the kitchen though, about five feet.

He placed his board on the sand and sat down to watch her. She was out alone. She sat right on the peak. A solid set came rolling in. She stretched on her board trying to see over the first wave. She let the first two waves go and took the third, biggest one. She dropped in through the back of the peak, straight into a long, walling barrel. She snapped off a few turns while racing the peeling lip, finally finishing her ride with a stylish, arched back pullout. Adam’s jaw went into stroke-like paralysis.

‘Jees, she can surf better than me.’

He watched her paddle back out, lean and fit, and hungry for the next wave. She paddled straight into the next set and caught one going left. Executing a perfect forehand pivot turn, she picked up the barrel grinding its way down the shallow sand bank, and rode it deep inside all the way to the beach. She waited in the shallow water for a few moments, while three bigger set waves rolled through, then she ripped back out through the shore break like a paddling machine. Eventually he paddled out and pulled up beside her.

‘You look like you surf every day.’

‘I usually surf twice a day.’

She turned and paddled into another perfect peak and shrunk off into the distance, racing away, partially obscured from his view by the smoking curl. As she paddled back out, she saw him drop into a nice clean five footer and set himself up for an easy bottom turn, when he just fell into the wave, face first. He scrambled to his board and smiled at her, slightly embarrassed.

‘I seem to be a bit rusty.’

She proceeded to gorge herself on a feast of waves, while he swam, paddled and got thoroughly thrashed by the white water. It was becoming clear that his problem wasn't just his surfing hiatus. It was also the lingering after-effects of years of Nitrous Oxide abuse. He still couldn't feel his feet or his surfboard. He just couldn't find his balance. In the end he swam to the beach, totally exhausted. She came cruising in about half an hour later, giving him a chance to recover. He commented on her surfing,

'Wow, you absolutely rip out there, Libby.'

'You should have seen me in eight-foot Granite. I got the place so wired. I was there for a whole month and it pumped every day. I had two weeks to prepare for the big days. Big rides, long way, all the way to the beach.'

There wasn't enough water in the whole Pacific Ocean that could put out the fire of the passion with which he enjoyed the vision of her perfect beauty. He couldn't help but again become mesmerised by her fine torso, her strong, lean shoulders, her long, thin, muscular arms and legs, the way her wet hair hung over her face and how her smooth, wet lips glistened with their beaming smile.

'I must apologise for my surfing.'

'You ate a lot of lunch today. It feels like your balance is out.'

'What?'

'I mean, it might be your balance. Do you want to go back to your house?'

'Have you had enough surfing?'

'The Pope ain't always a Catholic.'

'I'm not so sure that that is the correct use of that phrase. You know Libby, we could do something special for lunch, in celebration of our friendship, that is if you don't have other plans.'

'My life is a clean sheet, Adam. It is a self-revealing pathway.'

She grinned as she said that. Then she asked him to,

'Define *special*.'

He looked her in the eyes and whispered,

'Memorable, with a view and a great chef.'

'With music?'

'With music ... and wine.'

‘Mmmm Adam, my head is spinning already.’

So there they were, walking up the narrow lane, side by side with boards underarm. He was thirty-two, living a whole new life in Stanwell Park and she was nineteen, but she looked fifteen, in the dog business in California and on an insane surfing trip in Australia. Who says that truth isn’t stranger than fiction?

They never made it out to lunch. They had sandwiches sunning themselves on their beach towels, on his front lawn. She wore her bikini, lying seductively on her back, while he sat up serving her food and drink admiring her flawless femininity.

‘Have you seen Sydney?’ he asked.

‘No I haven’t. I try to avoid cities when I travel.’

‘You know, I grew up in that city. Would you like to see some nice places and maybe have dinner somewhere special? ... So we won’t forget.’

It was the middle of summer. She wore a tight pair of trendy, ankle-length jeans, with patches in them, and a brief, lacy white top, tantalisingly concealing her small, bare breasts and enhancing her dark, suntanned complexion. Decorating her long, slender neck was a delicate seashell necklace. On her feet she wore an intricately woven, leather pair of sandals with the ties bowed around her fine ankles. Adam’s eyes literally popped out of their sockets when he saw her.

‘I don’t have too many clothes because I’m travelling.’

‘You are a vision,’ he declared.

She spun on the spot and smiled,

‘You really think so?’

The old Charger two-door coupe was still a good summer ride with its roof racks removed and pillarless windows wound all the way down. It still had its purposeful stance and they could hear the soft burble of the *265 Hemi* under the mellow rhythms of *J.J. Cale* bopping out of the stereo speakers. They drove along Botany Bay and stopped for a coffee. They sat together in the sun looking out at the tranquil bay. He showed her Bondi Beach and pointed out the building where he used to live. They had a gelato and a walk along the sand. How different she was from Nancy, yet how similar. Both women had completely entranced him. He drove her to the harbour where they walked the

promenade from Lady Macquarie's Chair, past the Botanic Gardens and the Opera House to Circular Quay.

'Thanks for showing me all this, Adam. Sydney is truly a beautiful city.'

He drove out to Rose Bay and parked behind the tennis courts. They walked to the water with their arms around each other and sat on a park bench and watched the seagulls flying amongst the moored boats in the bay.

'This is my place of tranquillity in this city,' he told her. 'I used to come here when I felt stressed out. I'd buy a roast beef and salad roll and a bottle of ginger beer from the deli in Rose Bay and relax here feasting on my lunch. It was always a peaceful interlude in time, a brief contact with some kind of freedom mysteriously lurking out there, just beyond reach.'

They continued their drive through the wealthy harbour-side suburbs, all the way to the tip of South Head where they watched the yachts unfurl their colourful spinnakers as they sailed out to sea through the heads.

They arrived at Doyle's Restaurant early and were given the best table for two, right out in front overlooking the narrow beach. Draped before them like a huge painting was Watson's Bay with its moored yachts and the city skyline in the far distance. The sun was just setting behind the bridge turning the harbour into liquid gold. She positively glowed in the afternoon light, a gentle breeze making her hair seem alive. He couldn't take his eyes off her, as was the affliction of every other person in the restaurant. She placed her hand in his and admired his sunlit profile through her sunglasses. Surveying the glittering bay through his Polaroids, he commented,

'Doyle's is famous for its fish, you know.'

'I love fish.'

'Do you like wine?'

'Do they have Chianti?'

When they finished their wild Barramundi, had their mousse and coffee and were fairly flying on the Chianti, she asked to be excused and left the table for a few minutes. Later, when Adam asked for the check, the waiter informed him that the *beautiful young lady* had already taken care of it.

'Oh? Thank you.' He turned towards her and whispered into her ear, 'Are you nuts? I can't let you pay.'

'It's my way of saying thank you for your friendship.'

'I'm sorry, but ...'

She looked deeply into his eyes, smiled and said,

'Adam, would you like to walk? And would you mind so much if I asked you to put your arm around me, if that's, you know, OK with you?'

'These are all unfair tactics,' he protested.

'What tactics? Is it a crime to want a walk and a hug?'

They walked along the curved promenade underneath the park lights, which had strings of multi-coloured Christmas lights suspended between them. They could hear the sound of the lapping waves along the sea wall and see the long curved line of festive lights reflected off the water, like off polished chrome.

As they strolled, arm in arm, he kept noticing her moist lips and imagining the sweetness of their taste. They stopped under one of the park lights. He couldn't control himself anymore. He turned towards her, looked directly into her big, green pools, gently placed his hands around her thin waist and tenderly kissed her. That was their first kiss. He remembered immersing himself completely in the delicacy of her mouth. She remembered spinning within his embrace, his lips tenderly making love to hers, with the stars, the moon, the city and all the lights whirling around them.

That night, after releasing some of their pent-up passion, they said good night to each other and hugged. He went to sleep in his room and she in her van. About one o'clock in the morning, he heard a quiet knock on his bedroom door. He whispered,

'Yes?'

The door opened,

'I couldn't sleep. Can I sleep with you?'

'Oh sure, here ...'

In the soft moonlight, shining in through the window, he could see her remove her pyjama top over her head, revealing her fine torso. He then saw her slide her shorts down her legs and slip into bed with him, stark naked, squirming and backing into his embrace.

'Hug me.'

2

The next couple of weeks were spent in the intoxicated mind-spin of each other's company. They were never apart. They slept together, they ate together, they washed each other in the shower and they kissed each other incessantly. She watched him fly and drove his car down the hill at the end of the day, while he enjoyed watching her surf in the crisp, early, offshore mornings.

About half way through January, she walked into the bedroom one morning, carrying two cups of tea, and asked him,

'What are your plans for the next few weeks?'

'No big plans,' he replied. 'I know that I have to start looking for work in February.'

Her eyes beamed as she suggested,

'Why don't we do a trip north in my van? We can tie our boards on the roof and go surfin.'

'But I can't surf and I've got to keep cutting the grass.'

'Cut it when we get back and you can learn how to surf along the way, and sleeping in the van is real cosy.'

That was about all the persuasion it took for Adam to lock his house and hit the road with his childlike, longhaired, Californian, surfing girlfriend. They drove north to Crescent Head where she liked to camp on the point. They could watch the waves from her van there and walk down for a surf.

'Crescent's a great scene for travelling surfers,' she said.

She made breakfast and coffee for him and then enticed him to paddle out in the surf with her. He actually stood up and rode a few small ones, while she ripped up the bigger stuff out the back. Later that night, snuggled together in the van, she lovingly encouraged him.

'You see how much you have improved. You surfed so much better today than your first time.'

'I know, and I'm starting to feel my feet again, when I walk barefoot.'

'Surfing may accelerate your recovery, and isn't it fun? *And* we're together.'

He kissed the back of her neck and whispered in her ear,

‘Did you know that you are the fruit off the vine, ripened in the sun like a juicy peach?’

‘Don’t peaches grow on trees?’

‘The moment, the moment ... ‘

‘Sorry.’

‘Where was I?’

‘You were telling me how you thought I was a grape.’

‘You are more than just a grape my darling, you are the very essence of that grape, you are *Chianti*.’

‘Really? Chianti? The wine of love?’

‘*And* a ripe, juicy, succulent peach.’

‘Mmm, careful, you could get it all over your face ... goodness ... ohhhh ...’

They didn’t stay anywhere for very long as she kept moving at a steady pace. She had been buying the newspapers and checking out the weather maps, and she’d been glued to the radio during the weather reports.

‘They’re predicting a swell to hit southeast Queensland in three days. We really ought to be in Noosa for that. We have to keep driving.’

He sat in the passenger seat, watching her drive, and thought to himself,

‘I am but a leaf in your stream, my young and lively brook. I want to feel the joy of all your waterfalls and pools.’

She smiled to herself and let out a barely audible, ‘Ooooooh,’ then she blurted out,

‘We could drop into that natural water slide place. We’ve got time for something like that.’

‘You mean Currumbin Creek? The slide where you earn your right to live on a higher plane?’

‘Yeah, the place you talked about the other night. Can we go there?’

‘Did I talk about the slide? I can’t remember ... ‘

‘Maybe I heard about it from a travelling surfer.’

‘We could be there in a few hours,’ he suggested, ‘if we give Byron Bay a miss.’

‘Is there somewhere to camp?’

'I'm sure that there are some nice spots along the road on the way into the valley.'

They ended up spending the night camped in a clearing by the creek. There was a burnt-out campfire there and some wood, so they lit themselves a fire and fried up some bacon and eggs from the small fridge. They also had some sliced bread that they toasted over the flames and some ripe, juicy tomatoes. They washed it all down with a cold beer, after which she brought out her gold container and her little white pipe.

'It feels like a special occasion,' she said.

'You know Lib, that stuff of yours makes me feel like every cell in my body has gone into *hyper-life*.'

'Yeah, and I've got some stuff that makes you feel like a fish.'

'Like a fish?'

'Yeah. No arms, no legs and no brain.'

He laughed,

'You crack me up. Should I try some of your fish stuff?'

'I wouldn't advise it. You have to be completely alone and not expecting any company. You get pretty *non-comprende* for a while. The ancient practice goes right back to the old Anasazi Indians who used to do it as part of their rain ritual. Legend has it that they could make it rain.'

She went to sleep curled up in the warmth of his secure embrace. They left the van door open, facing the fire and the creek. In the middle of the night they were startled out of their sleep by the sound of a car driving up, its lights lighting up the darkness.

'Don't move,' she whispered.

They heard the engine stop and the car doors open. They then heard footsteps coming through the grass towards them. He tried to move, but she stopped him. They heard two male voices speaking just outside the van.

'It's judgement day, fuckers!'

'Fuckin bullshit tourist shit ... owwww!'

'Owww, fuck, owwww!'

'Owww, me fuckin head, fuck, owwww.'

'Stop, me fuckin head's killin me, owwww, fuck.'

'Me too, fuckin go back, Jesus, owwww.'

They heard the two voices, whining and cursing, recede back to the car, the car doors slam shut, the motor fire up and the car race away in a long, sliding wheelspin. The camp suddenly reverted back to dark, tranquil serenity. After a few anxious moments, he whispered into her ear,

'That was like a bizarre dream.'

'You're not hugging me tight enough,' she replied.

As he drew her closer to himself, she curled up again and, while looking at the glowing embers of the fire outside, promised herself,

'Nothing will ever hurt you, my darling Earthman. My heart does truly beat for you tonight.'

She then whispered to him,

'What are you doing to my ear? ... Ohhhhh ... the ecstasy of your touch ... I am always so wet when I am near you ... '

3

Mid morning, next day, at the slide.

'God, there's twice as much water going over the top as the last time I was here. There's like a foot of water going over the top. It's a raging torrent.'

'I feel the fear, Adam. It's a bona fide place, man.'

'Fear?'

'So you go from up here and land down there, in that little pool?'

'Yeah, with a lot of faith.'

She undressed down to her bikini, while he removed his backpack, T-shirt and sandals, remaining only dressed in his faded-blue board shorts. They both surveyed the slide for some time, marvelling at how all the water going down it formed a perfect barrel as it flowed around the right hand bend. Finally, he had a go from half way. He could barely hold himself in the strong current. He let go, flew down the chute and splashed down in the pool, twenty feet below. He beamed a wide smile at her from under literally hundreds of gallons of water, as she cheerfully applauded. He had barely gotten out of the way, when she splashed down next to him. She threw her arms around him and pulled him back into the torrent where she wanted to be kissed by him.

After a few slides from the lower takeoff, he was ready to go from the top. He sat there for a while, watching the rushing water. She sat lower, on a wide sloping rock. Her long, flowing hair glistened in the sun as her eyes panned around the lushly vegetated gorge. She began to see native faces appear in the stones and tree trunks. She noticed how one large boulder sculpted itself into a young black man and she saw a small palm change into a young black girl holding a piece of bark, full of fish. All the rocks around her began to sculpt themselves into young aboriginal children's faces, all smiling at her. She saw an old woman in the creek, who was washing her long white hair, which cascaded down the rockslide, all the way into the pool. Beneath the sound of the rushing waters she could hear singing and banging together of sticks. She sensed that this was a happy place, a place one visited in one's youth. She looked up at Adam, who was sitting on a rock in deep contemplation, and asked,

'How does it look?'

'Oh, you know, a bit intimidating.'

She watched in amazement as he eased himself into the powerful current. Her eyes followed him as he plummeted, uncontrollably, down the slide and got flipped by the lip, to fly through the air for twenty feet and land upside down right in the middle of the tiny pool. He burst through the surface of the water with the most joyous look on his face. He looked at her, smiling and applauding him, then he looked at the treetop canopy, sparkling with its rays of light breaking through the leaves, and exclaimed,

'What a rush!'

'That looked out of sight, man!'

After a while, when he calmed down, he began to philosophise.

'This place always feels like an initiation. You've always got to make the choice, but the years will make sure that one day we will all have to knock it back.'

She looked at him, then at everything alive around them, and replied,

'There will always be others, but the choice confronts *me* now.'

Sliding from the top of the slide was most daunting the first time one did it and being telepathic didn't make it any easier. She looked concerned.

'You have been here before, Adam. You've done it before. This is my first time.'

'Try to relax and go with the water.'

'Oh yeah, go with the water. I saw you go with the water, head first!'

'You can't control it. It's a ride of faith.'

She focussed on the rushing water and crabbed herself into the current. She took off with a loud scream and squealed all the way down. She splashed into the pool much neater than Adam, actually appearing to be in control around the bend of tunnelling water, off the lip and through the aerial part of the drop. Exhilarated, she looked up through the cascading water at the rays of light sneaking through the thick canopy above her. She had finally done what her brother had been excitedly talking about for all those years. She looked around at the hundreds of smiling faces and she looked at Adam's smiling face and realised that she was now one of them as well.

They had three slides each before Liberty said that she felt pretty lucky and that she wasn't going to push her luck any more. Adam had one more go. He felt free and fearless on that last slide, ending it with a satisfying inner contentment, knowing that he was still up to the mark. Then he said,

'You know Lib, there are some nice pools just upstream of here.'

They picked up their things and negotiated the round boulders and stones as they made their way upstream along the banks of the swollen creek. They arrived at the first pool where they had a swim, to get wet and cool down. The day was turning into a typically hot, January, Queensland-sauna kind of day. It did one no good to be anywhere very far from water.

As they negotiated their way further upstream, she commented,

'It's like an emerald tunnel in here.'

The emerald tunnel opened up into an emerald dome.

'This is the pool, Libby. Look at the water, it's almost iridescent green, like opal, like your eyes.'

She walked up close behind him, put her arms around his waist, placed her chin on his shoulder and whispered,

'It's just beautiful. I'm going swimming.'

As he stood there, admiring the pool, she neatly placed her things down and unbuttoned her bikini top.

‘Wow darling, what if someone shows up?’

She slipped off her bikini panties and, wading into the pool, said,

‘There’s not another person within a mile of us.’

‘How can you be so sure?’

‘I have a highly developed sense for people’s presence.’

‘Maybe it’s not as highly developed as you think.’

‘Adam, this is a sacred pool. You may only ever swim in a sacred pool completely naked.’

The vision he had of her right then, playing in the shallows, brown skin, long sun-bleached hair, slender muscular body, imprinted itself deep into his memory.

He undressed as she swam to the middle of the pool and waited for him there. He waded into the water and swam into her open embrace. She kissed his mouth and straddled his hips.

‘I love you Adam, ohhhhh, especially when you do *that* to me.’

They made passionate love in the cool, emerald waters of the pool, completely lost in each other’s embrace.

A little later, still naked, they lay down side by side on a flat rock and sunned themselves in a ray of light breaking through a small gap in the rainforest canopy. Looking up at the trees, lying on her back and holding his hand in hers, she felt the arrival of a new innocence. She lay there for a few moments, trying to comprehend the meaning of this new presence within her. She squeezed Adam’s hand and he squeezed hers in return. She did not move as she gradually realized the true meaning of her inner feeling. The wisp of a presence within her was a new person.

She knew that telepathic women could feel the moment of conception. They witnessed the arrival of the spirit of their future child. As they grew its body in their womb, they spoke to it telepathically, in pictures, words and feelings. They spoke to their children right through their pregnancy. By the time a telepathic child was born, it had already been taught rudimentary telepathic communication. On the day of its birth, the child received a teacher,

who began to guide the suckling in its first steps on the road to self-discipline and advanced concentration.

She spoke, in thought, to the little shining light in her belly.

'Hello little boy, where did *you* come from?'

Adam lay next to her in blissful exhaustion.

'Ah, sorry there darling, I think I got a bit carried away.'

She responded with,

'Did I ever tell you how much I love the feeling of your skin on mine?'

'No.'

She closed her eyes and rested with her right hand in his and her left caressing the new life within her.

4

They arrived in Noosa that night and slept in the van in the car park at National Park. In the morning, Libby was up early, with the tailgate down, making cups of coffee for a couple of young travelling surfers from Finland. Adam looked over his pillow at the tall, suntanned, blond boys and listened to them describing the previous day at Teatree in broad Nordic accents. He then turned and looked out the windscreen and saw three perfect barrels peeling along the point of National Park. She scrambled some eggs and made more coffee on her little camp cooker and served it to him. After breakfast, they took the long path into the park, walking side by side, carrying their boards under their arms, headed for Teatree Bay.

The next week was spent blissing out in the waist-high, tubular perfection of Teatree. The days were sweltering in the mid-thirties and the water was a clear, warm twenty-six. They spent all their days in the sheltering bays of Noosa, surfing, swimming and lying around in the shade of the Pandanus palms.

Adam's feel for his board quickly returned in the learner-friendly waves of inside Teatree. He had some long rides and was beginning to turn his board quite well. He sensed that it was soon going to feel like the old days. Liberty spent most of her time out the back taking off deep inside, close to the rocks, stealing a few deep, grinding barrels off the locals.

In the evenings, they parked with the group of travelling surfers, up in the corner of the now empty car park. There was a small lawn there, with picnic tables and a barbecue. They sat around in a circle on their fold-up canvas chairs, the backs of all their vans open, with music playing. Their faces were all lit up, expressing their joy of being on a surfing odyssey. For some of them Noosa was the last stop on a trip up the north coast, for others Noosa was the other side of the world, as far away from home as they could go, and for one of them, Noosa was another galaxy. But they all had one thing in common. Noosa was the place where their pilgrimage ended.

Before going to sleep, Adam and Liberty took a stroll to the water's edge. In the reflected moonlight they watched line after line of perfect empty waves peeling off for hundreds of yards down the point of National Park. She hugged him with both arms and expressed her feeling,

'They are like the waves of love I feel for you, Adam.'

'I fell in love with you the first moment I saw you, in your wetsuit, down in the park. I noticed your long hair and you looked so sexy. What is going to happen to us, Lib?'

'Don't think about it now, lovely man. We're on a surf trip and we can pretend that this is forever. Right now? Right now I feel like I need to be with you constantly.'

'I feel the same way, Lib. I don't want to be away from you, ever.'

5

They surfed Noosa for a few more days, until the swell finally died. On their return journey south, they dropped into Broken Head and decided to stay there for a while. Liberty knew that the low tides were going to be early in the mornings for the next few days and that there was a southerly wind blowing. She knew that early in the mornings it could be southwest and offshore.

Adam was amazed at the change in the place. His twelve-year-old memory of an open meadow, with tents and caravans scattered around, was shattered by the new image. The dirt road was paved now and the caravan park was all set out in regimented sites. There was a new fence and slatted walking paths to the beach, instead of natural foot tracks. And instead of parking in a clearing, there were now proper car parking spaces.

They couldn't camp right on his old spot because of the way they had the campsite set out now. There was actually no camping there at all anymore. It was a picnic area now. He noticed though, that his tree was still there, along with the old picnic table, which was showing its age a bit.

She woke him early next morning. Still half asleep he mumbled,

'What darling, now?'

'Not what you think, sweetheart. The surf is,' she leaned over and whispered into his ear, *'insane.'*

He opened his eyes as she lovingly kissed his lips.

'It's still pitch black outside.'

'It'll be light in half an hour. Come, let's taste some perfection and see if we can beat the crowd.'

In the dawn light the thin, hollow barrels of Broken Head looked like something made in heaven. As they paddled out together, just outside the break, they noticed how each wave broke like the one before, like they were coming out of a machine.

'There's no one out here, Lib.'

'You take the first wave today, Adam.'

A beautiful four-foot swell came rolling in around the point, peaking up right in front of him.

'You are too kind, my darling.'

He turned his board around and with only two light paddles angled into a rapidly racing vertical wall of water. His surfboard took off like a rocket, with him desperately trying to keep up with it. The wave peeled off like a machine. He steadied himself, went into a relaxed crouch and basically didn't come out of the barrel for the next fifty yards. He pulled out of the wave with a nicely carved turn, dropped onto his board and gave a little, 'Wahoo!' There was some zest in his paddling now. On the way back out he watched her compress herself into a small ball and bury herself deep in a grinding barrel. He thought to himself,

'She surfs with such natural balance, such poise and style, so artistic, like she's been doing it all her life.'

She pulled out next to him and paddled out with him.

'Well, how's my honey then? Who got barrelled on their first wave, eh?'

'It's starting to come back to me, but you, you absolutely rip out here, darling. Did you ever win any competitions?'

'No sweetheart, never. Competitions kill the spirit of surfing. Mickey Dora knew that. Surfing is an art and a communication with nature, and everything that supports nature. It's about one person and one place, and it's about the waves, waves of pure, perfect energy.'

'So you don't like crowds?'

'You got *that* right. Surfing alone is the ultimate, but I love surfing with you. You light up my surfs, darling. Can I take this one?'

'Be my guest.'

Adam watched her turn her head and focus on the approaching wall of water. She paddled into position and took one stroke to drop into a steep five-foot wall. Adam could see her through the back of the thin wave as she sped by, all lit up by the morning sun. It was like looking at her through a hand-made piece of emerald, French, stained glass.

6

A few days later, as they drove through the banana plantations around Coff's Harbour, sipping on a couple of Big Banana chocolate thick shakes, she turned to him and asked,

'Do you like children?'

He thought for a moment, then replied,

'Actually, I love children,' he thought some more, 'and I'll tell you something else, I'd have one with you at the drop of a hat. The kid would be out of this world. I'm ready to go, baby, want me to pull over?'

She laughed at him,

'Any excuse.'

'Who needs excuses?'

'Yeah.'

He slowed the van down and, checking the rear vision mirror, pulled over in a small clearing and switched off the motor. He turned towards her, took her hand, looked her in the eyes and said,

'Listen darling, it's not such a ridiculous idea.'

She smiled,

'You ol romantic. We've only just met, but I feel good about us.'

She looked into his eyes and he could see tears welling up within hers as she whispered,

'Do you like families?'

He took her into his arms and hugged her tightly and replied,

'I love *you*. All I want is to be with you and to look after you, and who wouldn't want to have a kid with you? ... Don't cry, darling. If you look at everything objectively, we're actually laughing.'

It took her another month to tell him that she was pregnant. After a seemingly endless pause, lying in their bed, he looked at her across the pillow and quipped,

'Boy Liberty, you're so bloody fertile that a bloke as much as looks at you sideways and you get pregnant.'

Then he eased himself up close to her and kissed and hugged her. She began to cry again. He consoled her and held her, then asked softly,

'Are you sure? How sure are you?'

In between sniffles she replied,

'How Catholic is the Pope?'

He sat up and looked at her tummy,

'Do you think he'd like being called Ben?'

'Sweetie,' she blew her nose into a tissue, 'I think he'd love it.'

'He might be a she.'

'It feels like he's a he.'

'How do you know?'

'Mothers just know these things.'

Adam lay there for a while, thinking about the new development in his life. He finally went to sleep completely embraced in her arms, both of them bathed in the silvery light of the full moon streaming in through their bedroom window.

.....

Chapter Twenty

FAMILY

1

The house was eleven years old when Adam bought it. It was a *project home*, but its design was perfectly suited for the slope it was built on. It reminded Adam of some of the ski lodges he had stayed in, years before, when he was down in Perisher with his student mates. It sat on the side of one of the most beautiful coastal valleys on Earth and faced south, down a long line of headlands and beaches, elegantly elevated two hundred and fifty feet above sea level. It was split-level with four bedrooms and a bathroom on the top level, and the living area, the dining area and the kitchen on the lower level. The whole front of the house was basically glass. Two sliding doors opened onto the hand-railed timber deck out in front, one from the dining area and the other from the living. At the back of the house the bedrooms all opened up, through sliding doors, onto a spacious, wooden back veranda. The veranda had a translucent *Alcenite* roof, which made it a great place on rainy days. The back was really the warm, sunny side. It tended to be warmer, as well, because it was sheltered from the cold, blustery southerlies, which buffeted the more exposed front of the house. The back yard was a small lawn on a moderate slope. The garage, sitting in the right rear corner of the back yard and set into the hill, was one of those build it yourself, tin shed types, with a *Rolla Door*. It was painted a near invisible matt green colour and fitted the Charger like a glove. Liberty's van lived under the carport, next to the house, exposed to the corrosive salty air. The property was only fenced on its eastern side. The neighbouring block of land, on the western side, was vacant, creating the feeling that they were living on a much larger property. The whole space around them was filled with tall eucalypts. From the front of the house there was the amphitheatre view, but from the rear the hill rose steeply to six hundred feet. In the middle of winter, the sun wouldn't appear from behind the hill until ten o'clock. Adam used to joke about the freezing mornings in the kitchen. His favourite quip was,

'It was so bloody cold in the kitchen this morning that I had to open up the fridge just to warm the place up a bit.'

2

She surfed the beach every day and managed to drag him out on a regular basis. There was no doubt that she was the shining light of surfing in his life. She kept it alive for him. She watched the surf from the house and constantly picked off the quality conditions. She knew the tide, the wind and the swell at all times.

During their evenings, after they had finished their dinner, they enjoyed long conversations on the front veranda. They both agreed that young Ben, gestating in her womb, had made a lot of decisions for them already. They talked about her business in California. She told him that she was happy to give her half to Jamie, which she could sell to someone else if she wanted to.

'But won't you miss California?' he asked.

'How could I,' she replied. 'Just look around, this is the *new* California. It's like California was fifty years ago, before they all went mad.'

They resolved that the easiest way to get around an Australian residency visa for her, and make Ben legitimate, was to just get married.

He sat next to her, held her hand in his, looked deeply into her misty eyes and said softly,

'Darling, I know that I'm not the best looking'

'Stop it, you are.'

'And darling, it's my fault that I got you into this unexpected ...'

'You know that's not true.'

'But baby, you know that I can't imagine living ...'

'Me either.'

'And I know that marriage wrecks a lot of ...'

'Not ours.'

'But despite all that, darling, will you marry me?'

She kissed his lips and hugged him and told him how it all felt like a childhood dream coming true.

Later, after a prolonged interval of passion and a brief cool down, she revealed to him that she was actually, amazingly, quite *independently financial*.

It turned out that her uncle, the one who disappeared with her dad, was a wealthy property owner. She said that she was a beneficiary of a testamentary trust he had outlined in his will. She said that they had to wait seven years before they declared her uncle officially deceased. That was about two years before. She said that the money helped her and Jamie start up the dog management business. She said that she could draw money out as she needed it.

‘But I don’t like to abuse it, Adam.’

‘Boy, beautiful *and* rich.’

‘*You* make me rich, sweetheart.’

He spoke to her about his profession, never mentioning his Nitrous Oxide addiction. He talked about his university days and his five and a half years in the city.

‘I still can’t imagine you working and living in the city,’ she said, shaking her head.

Suddenly, right in the middle of her sentence, he got the idea that instead of looking for a job, maybe he should look for a place to set up another practice and go into business for himself again. After all, he already knew how to run a business.

A few days later, they set out on a reconnaissance, driving south along the winding coast road. They stopped in a small beach town, about fifteen kilometres south of Stanwell Park, and walked into an old-fashioned real estate agency where they heard about a newsagent that was planning to relocate.

‘Yes sir, I know the landlady and she’s looking for a dentist or a doctor to take the newsagent’s place.’

‘Can we look at it?’

‘Yes sir, just walk down the main street and take the first left. The newsagent is right there, but would you mind not saying anything to him please.’

‘Oh no, we’ll just look.’

‘Or maybe we’ll buy a paper,’ Liberty added.

At the back of the newsagency, pretending to browse through magazines, Adam whispered,

‘This is unbelievable, Libby, it’s absolutely perfect.’

That afternoon, Adam called his old bank.

‘I found a good location, George. I think it should go well because there is only one other old dentist in town and I heard that he can’t wait for someone to show up to take some of the load off his shoulders. I’m going to need a bit of a loan to set up though.’

By the beginning of *March 1980*, Adam had measured everything, drawn up the scale plans, organised the team of tradesmen and equipment specialists and got them all together at the new premises so they could synchronise their activities.

Liberty got involved with making up lists of things to do, ticking them off after they had been done. She designed the letterheads and cards and organised the printing. He hassled with the registration, the council and the details of the surgery fit-out. A Nitrous Oxide machine crossed his mind, but he thought,

‘I can’t go around that merry-go-round again. I wouldn’t mind things being a bit less intense for a while.’

That was the end of it. He never thought about it again.

3

During the construction of the new surgery, Adam and Liberty took a drive up to Sydney’s north shore to introduce her to his parents, who were visibly dumbstruck when they first saw her. She was a vision wearing a light summer dress and sandals. His dad couldn’t stop staring at her until his mum gave him an elbow in the ribs and told him to go help her with the coffees in the kitchen.

‘What’s the matter with you? Did you have a stroke? I thought you were going to start drooling.’

‘Why don’t you look at something else, eh?’

‘She is so beautiful.’

‘He could get arrested. She must still be in school.’

‘Adam told me she was nineteen.’

‘There must be a streak of insanity in her family. What could she possibly see in him?’

'Plenty, plenty, he's my beautiful boy.'

'It won't last. She'll open her eyes one day.'

After they brought out the coffee and cake and sat down again, Adam's dad continued the conversation.

'So, now you're going to work in the country, with the peasants and farmers.'

'You had such a nice business in the city, Adam,' said his mum. 'We were shocked when you sold it.'

'Just when it looked like they were going to let you stay a dentist,' said his dad sarcastically.

'When are you going to cut your hair, Adam? You look like a hippy,' said his mum. Then she looked at Liberty pleadingly. 'Please Liberty, can you make him cut his hair and buy some new clothes? He's a professional dentist.'

'Professional, hah!' retorted the father. 'Farmer boy! He's become a farmer boy. I think you have to go back four generations in our family before you'll find the last farmer boy.'

His parents switched to politics, while he and Libby politely listened.

'You don't vote Labor, do you Adam?'

'Of course he votes Labor, he's a communist.'

'You're not a communist, are you Adam?'

'I remember those bastards well. You know Liberty; communism is what happens when the criminals get into government. Everything you owned was taken from you by the government. Then they rented you your house back and told you that you were lucky to get it at all. If you were rich, they took all your money and moved into your house themselves. If you complained, they threw you in jail.'

'Or *shot* you!' added Adam's mum.

'There were no elections, there was no private business and there was no contact with the outside world. Everyone worked for the government for cheap wages, became lazy, afraid, poor and depressed, while the criminals lived like princes, drunk with power, but their hands were dripping with the blood of their own people.'

Liberty joined the discussion.

'It sounds like another world.'

'I know, Liberty, but Adam's father and I lived through it, even Adam, but he was too young to remember.'

Adam steered the conversation into another direction.

'You know, father and mother, Liberty and I have some big news.'

They both smiled at his parents. There was a pause.

'I know that Libby and I haven't known each other for long, how long has it been, Lib?'

'We met on Christmas day.'

'What's that, three months? I just know that it has been the happiest three months of my life and mum, dad, me and Libby, we're hoping ... to ... to ... to get married ... with your blessing.'

For a few moments they were all struck speechless. Eventually Adam's mum broke the stunned silence. She suddenly raised her hands above her head and exclaimed,

'My dreams, my hopes, my prayers have all been answered.'

She looked up at the ceiling like a heavenly light had just burst through it, held her hands up in prayer and cried,

'Thank you God!'

After initially being lost for words, his father quickly returned to form.

'It looks like your mother might be right; you might not be a homosexual after all. Me? I just say that we will see where the dog is really sticking his paw.'

Adam's mum couldn't help throwing in,

'I was going to kill myself if you turned out to be a homosexual, Adam. I couldn't face the world ... and your father ... aghhhhh!'

Adam and Liberty looked at each other as his mum suddenly stopped talking, mid sentence, and looked at everybody as though she'd just woken up. There was another short pause in the conversation. She then asked them both,

'Are you both sure?'

They replied in unison,

'We're positive.'

They all rose from their seats and started hugging and shaking hands. Adam's mum looked at Liberty, held both her hands in hers and asked,

'Do you love my son?'

'I love him with all my heart. I want to be with him and I want to take care of him.'

Adam's dad butted in,

'You'll get over it.'

'She's not marrying you,' retorted his mum. 'She'd get over that!'

'Do you realise, son, that once there is a woman in your life, you are no longer a free man. You have to do what you are told.'

'Oh shut up you. He thinks that everybody likes the sound of his voice as much as he does.'

Suddenly everyone was overcome with joy. Adam and his dad talked about his dad's favourite subject, UFOs, while Libby and Adam's mum talked about Adam. Liberty said that she hoped for a small, intimate wedding with just some close friends. Adam's parents offered their house for the reception and his dad insisted that he *take care* of all the bills. All in all, things were looking pretty good. Later in the evening, his mum pulled Adam aside and whispered to him,

'Your father always said you were a lucky boy.'

4

Four weeks later, they opened the new surgery. Due to the fact that Liberty never left Adam's side, she ended up becoming his receptionist. He taught her himself.

'Darling, it's easy. There's the phone, the appointment book, the patients' cards and the bills. We just keep the receipts and cheque butts and that's all there is to running this business.'

Unbeknownst to Adam, Liberty had already done some preparation of her own. About a week before the surgery was finished, she went for a walk up the main street to visit the old dentist's practice and introduce herself. When she got there she noticed how neat and clean everything was. She glanced across the empty receptionist's desk and admired the organised paperwork, the electric typewriter and the way the pens and staplers and things were all neatly placed into their own groups. Finally, a middle-aged lady, looking very prim, walked out of one of the surgeries. She was the receptionist.

‘Yes?’

‘Oh hi, my name is Liberty. I’m with Adam and we’re the ones opening the new dental surgery in town.’

The receptionist smiled and introduced herself as Rose.

‘We’re so glad to see you. The doctor’s just about to blow a gasket. You’ve missed him though, he’s out to lunch.’

‘Oh that’s a shame. When do you expect him back?’

‘Ahh, he likes his counter lunches at the pub. Sometimes he doesn’t even come back. He calls it his balancer. He reckons that he really neeedsssss hiiiiiiiiiiiis Baaaaaaaalaaaaaa ‘

Rose appeared to just go to sleep mid-sentence. Liberty quickly locked the front door and positioned herself directly behind the sleeping receptionist. She gently placed her hands on top of Rose’s head, closed her eyes and made a barely audible low sound, like humming.

‘HMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM ... ‘

After less than fifteen seconds, she lifted her hands off Rose’s head, walked to the door and unlocked it. She then returned and stood in the same spot that she was in originally. Rose suddenly woke up speaking, beginning mid-sentence.

‘ ... needs his balancer. Poor old guy, he’ll be so happy to see you.’

‘I’m sorry I missed him, Rose, but I’ll come around again real soon. I might have to pick your brain about a few things.’

‘Sure, anytime Liberty, any way I can help. I’ll tell him you called in, if he comes back from lunch. You can always catch him in the mornings.’

‘Bye, Rose.’

Liberty walked out of that office with twenty years of office management and chairside assisting experience. Adam was amazed at how quickly she picked up the dental language and how she went out and bought a new electric typewriter, copier, calculator and fax machine. Their correspondence was something to behold, meticulously typed on the intricately art-worked letterhead paper. In the surgery he commented on her assisting,

‘Darling, you do this like you’ve been doing it for years. Are you sure you’ve never done any dental nursing before?’

‘No hunkster, you just inspire me to do great things.’

They both wore their surgical masks while they worked. One day, when there was no one in the surgery, she made a comment about his mask.

‘That mask makes me want to just rip all your clothes off and attack you right here in the surgery.’

‘But baby, we could damage some equipment ...’

‘The way it hides your face except for your eyes, ooooh, I can’t stop thinking about sex.’

‘But darling, we have to be professional in here. What would people think? Baby, what are you doing? What if someone walks in? We should lock the door.’

‘Yeah, and put the back in an hour sign up.’

‘But sweetheart, this is no way to run a business ... do I ever tell you how I never tire of seeing that incredible body of yours?’

‘I can’t remember. Come here you.’

5

Glenn and Aureole occasionally came down for a visit after a day of flying. Sometimes they stayed overnight, if the flying was going to be good the next day. They all enjoyed long evenings on the veranda, dining alfresco and lost in conversation. As a consequence of the visits, Aureole and Liberty became very good friends. One time, in the park, while packing up their gliders and watching the girls kick a soccer ball around the oval, Glenn commented to Adam,

‘Look at them Adam, they look like two angels, like they’re from another world. They are just so gorgeous.’

At nights, when Adam was asleep next to her, Liberty closed her eyes and began to breathe smoothly. She slid into her trance and entered the mind plane. There she merged with her mother and father and her darling older brother. They became aware of her successful pregnancy and the coming wedding. She shared realities of all the people she had met, especially plenty of Adam. Her family were delighted. They shared her emotions, her true love for Adam and her commitment to her mission.

It was rare for a telepathic traveller to fall in love with a non-telepathic human being from another planet, but it happened occasionally. There was one

chance in four for an offspring from such a union to be fully telepathic and two chances in four for it to be partially telepathic. The part-telepathics were the problem as they were considered retarded in the telepathic community and schizophrenic in the non-telepathic community. The telepathic mother usually knew, within a few days of conception, if the embryo was healthy and fully telepathic. If the embryo was not fully telepathic, she aborted it immediately, with just a loving thought. It was because of this ability that telepathic women were the only ones that chose to conceive children on other, non-telepathic planets, and it was precisely for the lack of this ability that telepathic men chose not to take the risk. This is also the reason that there were no babies born on Rama with any kind of congenital diseases or defects.

When the hybrid, telepathic child was born on a foreign planet, there were necessary protocols to be followed in regards to their education. Also, at all times, there existed the requirement to keep the child's telepathic ability a total secret, even from the father.

6

A month later, Adam and Liberty got married. His mum and dad organised the most beautiful wedding for them. His mum baked the wedding cake and prepared some of the food. They organised catering for the rest. They only ended up having a small group of guests, just their closest friends, but it was the happiest of weddings for everyone that was there.

The dental practice thrived as Liberty's tummy grew. Adam became very caring and protective of her. By the time she was six months pregnant, the old dentist in town decided to close up shop and retire. It turned out that Adam acquired the old guy's patients by default, as well as Rose, who joined the practice to replace Liberty, due to the imminent arrival of Ben. The first thing Rose said when she began work was,

'Libby, I just can't believe how you have set this place up. It's like I did it myself. Everything is exactly, I mean exactly, how I would have done it, even down to my favourite pen.'

'So you think I did OK, Rose, considering that I am just a novice.'

Rose ran her hand over the reception desk and replied,

'It's perfect, Libby, just perfect.'

7

Around about that time, one Saturday morning, while Liberty was in Sydney shopping and lunching with Aureole, Adam had a rummage around his garage looking for something, when he came across his journal. He remembered that he had hidden it there when he moved in. He sat down on a small box and started flicking through the pages. He opened his last entry, on Friday, September 28, 1979, and read it. He thought to himself,

'Wow, it's hard to believe that it was only nine months ago. It's like I'm in a completely different reality now.'

He flipped through some more pages and read some of the entries and thought again,

'Man, what a time that was, but I wouldn't want to go through it again. Jeesh, when you read it back it really sounds suspect. If you weren't there you'd have to think that the person that wrote this stuff was totally nuts.'

He kept turning the pages, becoming more and more concerned about someone finding and reading his notes.

'There is no way that anybody can see this, and what good would it do anyway? It wouldn't be very good for me. Look at this stuff. On one hand it's precious, on another it's dangerous, and on another still, it's probably meant to be secret, so nobody should ever read it. It's just meant for me, to remind me of what happened. But I can remember what happened. I can't imagine Liberty finding this. She thinks she married a completely different person to the one that wrote this stuff. I don't want to open that part of myself to her. I don't want her to have to deal with any of this.'

He closed the journal and looked out through the open garage door. After thinking about it for a while, he went into the kitchen and picked up a lighter. He then walked down to the front section of his yard. There was a small clearing there where he had a small circle of stones set up as a fireplace. He needed to burn off dead twigs and branches on a regular basis and that's where he used to do it. He sat next to the fireplace, flipped the pages of the journal with his thumb and thought,

'I'm sending you back to where you came from. These trips, in these pages, can be made more perfect. Does not a perfect journey leave no tracks? I know what needs to be done. I have to let go of the past and make space for the future.'

He began tearing out the pages, one by one, from the back to the front. As he glanced at each page, before he scrunched it up and threw it into the fire, he flashed on the experience described on it. He fell into a nostalgic melancholy as he watched his past life go up in flames, page by page. As he neared the front of the journal he began to feel a new lightness, as if a burden was being lifted off his shoulders. Finally, he came to the first page. It began,

Sunday, December 26, 1976. 10.00am. I'm doing this all alone now. There's no Nancy to talk to ...

He remembered Nancy. He thought it fitting that the page with her name on it should be the last to go in the fire. Their time together seemed like another life away, and his heart, well, it felt different now, now that there was Libby. As he threw the empty hard covers into the fire, he lay down on the lawn beside it and savoured the feeling of release. He thought,

'That's it. The whole thing is gone from the Earth. It's all gone. What a relief. All that is left are my memories. It's finally finished.'

As he watched the wisps of smoke rise into the sky, he noticed the local sea eagle come gliding over from the centre of the valley and begin circling above him. In amazement he watched the eagle soar the warm air rising from the fire and for a while there, he thought that the bird was watching him. He thought to himself as he lay there,

'I just want to have a normal life, that's all. Nothing big needs to happen ... happy with the little things.'

8

A few months earlier, as she sat on the hill watching Adam flying, Liberty spotted the local sea eagle soaring the east face of the escarpment. She focussed on the bird and employed a special skill, which was known by some telepaths. It was the ability to control the mind of a bird in a most intimate way. She had the ability to establish a mind thread with a chosen bird and merge with its consciousness. Back on Rama, she and her friends used to go *eagle flying*. They all met on the summit of a high mountain and sat down together in

a circle. They then each chose one huge mountain eagle that soared the peaks there and telepathically entered it and began to experience its consciousness. They then began to control the eagle's movements as though they were their own. The experience was totally real. Sitting huddled together, all in a trance, they transformed themselves, in their own minds, into mountain eagles. The eagles on the other hand, although very intelligent, nonetheless remained completely oblivious to the fact that someone else was controlling their flight. They all occasionally executed flyovers of themselves and saw themselves, sitting on the mountaintop, through the eagles' eyes.

Interestingly, the Rama, as well as other telepathic beings, not all completely human, liked to do the same thing with other animals as well. Liberty actually knew some telepaths who loved to hunt wild game as lions or tigers, or any one of a number of other wild predators.

It is important to note here that learning a skill such as telepathically flying an eagle was at least a hundred times more difficult as, say, learning to fly an aeroplane on Earth. Not all telepaths had what it took to do it.

9

Liberty stopped on top of Bald Hill on her way home from her day out with Aureole. She stepped out of the car and walked to the edge of the hill and thought to herself,

'I can never tire of this view ... oh? What is that smoke? It looks like it's coming from the front of our house.'

She looked to the north, trying to locate the local sea eagle. She spotted it soaring a warm air bubble a couple of hundred yards along the east face of the escarpment. She sat on the grass, on the point of the hill, and closed her eyes. Almost immediately, the eagle left the thermal and turned towards the valley. It glided around in a big semi-circle and headed towards the plume of white smoke. It found the marginal lift above the fire and proceeded to fly small circles around it, just managing to maintain its altitude without having to flap its wings.

Her heart sang as she saw Adam lying next to the fire. She could see that he was watching her circling above him. She gave him a couple of loving

screeches and flew back out into the valley. The afternoon was almost completely calm.

He watched the eagle climb to about a thousand feet, right in the middle of the valley. He then saw it pull in its wings and plummet like a stone in a five hundred foot freefall. It then spread its wings and pitched up into a massive full loop. Coming out of the loop, it retracted its wings again for another hundred feet and then again pulled up into a completely vertical climb. Right at the point of zero velocity, at the top of the climb, the eagle suddenly collapsed into what to Adam looked like an epileptic fit. It fell out of the sky like it had been wounded, tumbling and spinning. Then, about two hundred feet above the ground, it regained control and flew back over to him. It screeched a couple of times as it swooshed over his head and then flew off.

Liberty arrived home a few minutes later. She greeted Adam and asked him about the fire.

‘Oh, I just burned off some old deadwood lying around the place, darling,’ he explained, ‘but you should have seen this eagle ...’

She put her hand on her tummy.

‘He’s been kicking again today. Here, you want to feel?’

Adam placed his hand over hers.

‘Oh yeah, darling, ooh, it feels so strange. I wonder if he knows what a beautiful mum he has?’

‘And dad.’

10

Ben was born in Southerland hospital, at ten in the morning, on a sunny spring day in *late October 1980*. No one at the hospital could believe the way Liberty handled the labour and the birth. She had a completely natural birth with no medications whatsoever. The doctor said that he had never delivered a baby from such a relaxed mother. The same could not, however, be said about the father and you could multiply that by ten for the grandparents. Everyone at the maternity ward was amazed at how calmly and peacefully Ben was born. He did not cry at all. In fact he came into the world with his eyes open, smiling at his mum when they first made eye contact.

Adam took a couple of weeks off from work while Ben settled into the house. Rose kept the surgery open and read a good book.

The next two weeks were like the best two weeks of their lives. For the first time, since he was a kid with his parents, Adam felt like a family again. The days were sunny and warm, heralding the approach of summer. Liberty loved to lie naked on a blanket, which was spread out in the sun on the front lawn, and breast-feed, with the little tyke sprawled out over her belly. One such afternoon, Adam lay down next to her and made a curious observation.

‘You know, darling, I can’t remember ever hearing him cry.’

‘I know, he’s such a contented little critter. I think it’s because of his dad.’

‘Oh Lib, look at you both lying there in the sun. My family. I love you both so much.’

He leaned over and kissed her lips, then the top of Ben’s little round head.

‘So far so good, Lib, so far so good.’

She replied softly,

‘So far so good, Adam.’

Adam cooked, shopped, cleaned, mowed, played with Ben and generally wallowed in domestic bliss. In the evenings, after Ben was put to bed, an occasional friend came over for an evening visit.

Now that Zeke was getting around a bit better, he started to drop in from time to time. The first time Libby met him was just before the wedding. It was on a balmy autumn night when Glenn and Aureole were visiting. There was a knock on the door. Adam opened it and there he was, the big guy. Aureole reacted with the most enthusiasm.

‘Ziki, Ziki, you are so much better.’

Adam introduced Zeke to Liberty. She looked up at him, he looked down at her, they shook hands and their eyes met. She knew immediately. It took every ounce of self-control she possessed to conceal her surprise at realising that Zeke was a part-telepathic hybrid. She looked deeply into his bright-blue, almost iridescent eye. It was just a shade of those of a full telepath, like her, but nonetheless unmistakable. The full brilliance of her own *emerald pools* was intentionally subdued by the tinted contact lenses permanently shading her irises.

'Zeke, I've heard so much about you from so many people. I feel like I know you already.'

'Libby, you're even more good lookin than everybody says.'

Glenn joked,

'Watch out Adam, I think he's got his eye on her.'

Adam replied laughingly,

'I better, she's got a thing for eye patches.'

'Don't believe anything he says, Glenn.'

Zeke brought out some home grown, Adam made some tea and snacks and they all spent a happy evening together listening to music and lost in conversation.

Liberty looked through Zeke as though he was made of glass. She saw a kind and honourable heart. She also saw a man waging a heroic, private, inner battle with schizophrenia. If the mind plane could be imagined as a boxing gym, then Zeke was the punching bag in that gym. But then she saw his inner strength and courage. She realized that this was no ordinary *part-telepathic schizo*. She could see that he cleverly philosophised his way around all his bizarre experiences. For her though, the one outstanding thing about him was that she couldn't see an ounce of fear in him. She couldn't even imagine herself existing with retarded telepathic ability. '*It would have to be so frightening,*' she thought to herself. She felt her heart reach out to him as she thought, '*The poor guy, and to top it all off, his body's been all broken as well.*'

About six months had passed since that first encounter with Zeke. After a few visits, Liberty realised that anything that Zeke picked up from the mind plane was so scrambled that it was impossible for him to make any sense of it. She thought it unlikely that he would ever come to suspect her true identity. She thought about ways that she could help him and she wondered if there was any chance that his dad may have been a telepathic traveller or whether maybe Zeke was just an ultra-rare natural mutation. One night, when he was over for dinner, she asked him,

'Zeke, do you see much of your mom and dad?'

'Oh, a bit.'

'Where do they live?'

‘Cronulla, not far from the point. Have you ever surfed Cronulla Point?’

‘No, but I love point waves. So you grew up in Cronulla?’

‘Yeah, with mum an dad. Actually not me real dad. Mum told me that me real dad just disappeared before I was born. But I’ve got a great stepdad. He was the one who taught me how to surf.’

Liberty thought that if his dad was from another planet, he could have come from an uncountable number of them. She knew that all telepaths practiced stealth on non-telepathic planets. She could see now how necessary that was. Also it was becoming obvious to her that some of the visiting males were not as careful with pregnancies as they should have been.

‘But that is the way of the universe,’ she philosophised to herself, *‘and boys will always be boys. They just can’t keep their pants on,’* then she looked at Adam and smiled to herself, *‘and thank God for that.’*

After dinner, Zeke asked if he could choose a record. After a period of rummaging through Adam’s extensive collection, largely courtesy of Nancy, he finally chose one. The mellow rhythms of Van Morrison’s *Astral Weeks* again gently oozed out of the giant *Altec Stonehenge Threes*. Adam and Zeke sat outside while Liberty quickly slipped upstairs to check on Ben. Adam began the conversation.

‘This music takes me back, Zeke, to a small veranda overlooking Rose Bay ... but that was in another life.’

There was a short silence between them, then Adam continued,

‘Look at all the stars. Don’t you ever wish that you could travel to all the stars?’

‘You wanna be careful what you wish for, mate, it might come true. I knew this bloke once, who told me a story about a bloke who wished for a million bucks. One day, he went out an got run over by a government bus an ended up becomin a paraplegic. The government paid him a million bucks in compo an put him on a pension.’

‘Jees, Zeke.’

Not long after that, Libby came out with her gold container and little white pipe and sat down with the boys.

'We were just saying, Lib, how amazing it would be to be able to fly to the stars.'

She looked up at the starry night sky and commented,

'You can barely see the Andromeda constellation from this hemisphere. I could see it easily from California.'

'That's where our neighbouring galaxy is, isn't it?' Adam enquired.

'Yeah, two million light years away,' answered Zeke. 'Can you even imagine how far away that is?'

'Distance has always got to be considered with how fast you can get there.' Liberty postulated. 'If you measure it against the speed of a photon and the lifespan of an Earth human, then it's really far away.'

Both of the boys just looked at her, slightly stunned, then Zeke asked her,

'Are you into this sort of stuff?'

She handed him her loaded, white, ceramic pipe and replied,

'Oh, you know, no more than your average space cadet.'

'We talked about this, Zeke. He's into ... do you mind me telling her?'

'Naah, go ahead.'

'Zeke's got this theory about gravity and what causes it and he reckons that when you've figured that out, you can make an anti ... '

'A gravity sail,' interjected Zeke.

Liberty couldn't believe her ears. She asked,

'And what would you do with this gravity sail?'

'Not what you think. You probably think, *fly off to the stars*, but you'd have to know what you were doin before you could do stuff like that. Me, I'd just keep it simple.'

'Ooooooh,' she responded, 'now you've really stirred my curiosity.'

'Once I figured out how to make a *G-sail*, I'd make a real small one, maybe no bigger than a matchbox, I reckon, then I'd strap it on me back. I'd have a control in me hand,' he held out his hand, 'it would control how much gravity the sail engaged, like pullin the mainsheet of a boat sail. Then I'd go down the snow, somewhere real flat, an clip on a pair of skis an get pushed around by me G-sail.'

'Hello, Zeke's back,' commented Adam in jest. Zeke continued,

'I'd also start workin on a shaft turner, to run a generator, to get free electricity, eventually as much as I wanted. I could disconnect from the power grid. I could pump me own water from the creek. Hell, I could build a machine that made water out of the humidity in the air, an it could run twenty-four seven. I could build greenhouses an grow me own food in a perfect artificial environment under lights. I could go completely hydroponic with everythin bein powered by me G-engine, which would be nothin more than a gravity windmill. I'd install a G-sail in the boot of me car an drive around in neutral all day, with the motor switched off. I'd have to get new brakes though.'

'What about using it for flight?' Liberty contributed. 'You might be able to fly with the matchbox gizmo thing on your back?'

'Whoah girlie, you're gettin ahead of me now.' Zeke looked at Adam and exclaimed, 'Where did she come from? I've first gotta figure out the sail an now that I'm finished with hang gliders, this is all I wanna do.'

'What, invent the antigravity machine?'

'It ain't anti anythin, Adam. It's gonna be the *G-sail*.'

'I guess that's what I meant.'

'It's the Holy Grail of all inventions. It's the invention that sails the human race out of the age of darkness an seein as I've got nothin better to do, I might as well do that.'

'Well, all I can say is, lots of luck buddy.'

'Thanks. I might need some help.'

'Like a test dummy?'

'Naah, that's my job.'

Liberty asked Zeke when he intended beginning his project, but before he could answer her they were all distracted by a very unusual sound. During the short pause in the music, when the turntable stylus was between tracks, all three of them thought that they heard a high-pitched voice calling out the word *daddy*. Adam was the first to respond.

'Did anybody hear that?'

Zeke also made a comment.

'Was that on the record?'

'No way.' Adam replied. 'Did you hear that, Lib? Do you think it's Ben? I'll just turn the music down for a sec.'

Adam got up, went inside and turned the volume control all the way down. Then they all heard it again, and this time it was definitely coming out of Ben's bedroom. They heard a tiny little voice calling out,

'Daddy ... daddy.'

Liberty rose from the veranda table,

'Excuse me Zeke, I'll just check on Ben.'

'I'll come with you,' said Adam.

They went up to Ben's bedroom door and looked inside. When the tiny little boy saw his parents, he smiled, his little face lighting up like the sun. Then he spoke again.

'Daddy, mummy.'

Adam's eyebrows hit the ceiling and his jaw hit the floor. Liberty, on the other hand, had to fake her surprise. He asked her,

'Are kids supposed to talk at four weeks, darling?'

'Daddy, daddy.'

'I don't know, but you better give him a hug, daddy. Look, he's got his little arms up, he wants a cuddle from his daddy.'

.....

Chapter Twenty-One

1990

1

‘Maybe she just decided to leave you, mate.’

‘No! No way! We’re madly in love with each other. We’re the happiest family in the world. There’s no way she would have left me and taken our son.’

‘Look, that’s what they all say. Their wives are cleaning out their houses, movers are carrying out all the furniture and they still don’t realise that they are being dumped like a mangy old dog.’

His heart pounded like a base drum. His breathing was shallow and strained and there was a look of total panic in his eyes. He hadn’t shaved or even dressed properly. The young constable was trained to be completely unaffected by the surging emotions of the distraught man sitting opposite him. He was tempted to say something funny like, *take a ticket, or, get in line*, but he held back. He saw this sort of thing every single day. Some deserted husband ringing up in a panic or busting in through the station doors, screaming something like, *she’s kidnapped my kids*, or, *she’s stolen everything*, or, *she’s run off with some bloke and emptied the house while I was at work*.

‘Look, why don’t you try and take it easy, mate. How about we make you a cup of coffee. You had breakfast? How about a doughnut?’

The policeman opened a drawer and brought out a printed form and a tape recorder and placed them on the desk between them.

‘I’ll treat this as a missing person’s report for now, mate. Why don’t you first tell me your name and address again and then start from the beginning.’

Adam took a few sips of the watered-down, instant coffee and a couple of bites out of a chocolate-flavoured, iced doughnut. He closed his eyes momentarily and sucked in a deep lungful of stale police station air. His mind was in a complete spin. The policeman could see his hands shaking as he brought the coffee up to his mouth. Although he was young, with only a few years of on-the-job experience, the policeman had already learnt not to get sucked into any kind of *academy award* performance. He could remember his instructor telling him that crooks were the best actors in the world. *They are*

like wily old foxes and they'll pull the wool over your eyes every chance they get. A good cop believes nothing.

After giving the policeman his personal details, Adam began a nervous and disjointed account of what happened.

'Where will I start?'

'Anywhere you like, Adam. How about the last time you saw your wife and son.'

'OK, that was yesterday. I got home from work at the same time as usual, about five thirty. We had Ben's tenth birthday party last weekend. Everything seemed normal. Libby was cooking dinner. She does these stuffed mushrooms. You've never tasted anything like them. She uses these strange herbs. Reckons they make you live longer. Ben was working in the workshop. He got a hacksaw to the brushcutter and was building his *jetpack*. It's what he calls it. He's had the idea ever since he got his roller blades.'

'Excuse me, Adam, did you say that your son is ten years old?'

'Yeah, he's a genius, a bona fide prodigy. You know, he spoke his first words at four weeks of age.'

The young constable looked Adam squarely in the eyes trying to discern whether he was a *nutter* or a very cagey crook.

'Please go on.'

'Right back in the early days, Libby pulled him out of school because the teachers didn't know how to deal with him. He always knew everything they ever wanted to teach him. It freaked them all out. Anyway, Lib got him out of there. That's when he was six. She taught him herself through the correspondence scheme. He learnt a whole years worth of work in a couple of weeks, got a hundred percent in all his tests and then took the rest of the year off. He's the most unbelievable child.'

'You got *that* right. Please go on.'

'Sorry, I'm going around in circles. I'm not making much sense.'

'It's OK, mate, you're doing fine. You just take your time. We've got plenty of tape. Please continue.'

'Do you want to hear more about Ben?'

‘Whatever you think might help us understand your problem, as long as we get to your wife’s disappearance eventually. She did disappear? That’s still what you claim?’

‘They both disappeared ... *and* took all their things. Nobody said anything. No note, no indication. It was just happy, happy ... gone!’

‘Did she take the car?’

‘No, I’ve got the car.’

‘How did she leave then?’

‘I ... don’t ... know ... I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know ... ‘

Adam broke down and started moaning, causing the constable to call in a female police officer. She came into the room, sat down next to him and put her arm around his shoulders.

‘He reckons his family’s disappeared. His name’s Adam.’

‘It’ll be OK, Adam, it’ll be OK. We’ll find them. That’s what we do, we find people. You’ll be right, don’t fret.’

She looked at the constable with a *what’s going on with this guy* sort of look. He looked at her then rolled his eyes up at the ceiling as if to say, *this guy is some kind of nut*. Adam slowly composed himself and then continued his story.

‘We had dinner, we laughed and listened to music. Ben described a small technical problem he was having with his machine. He told me he got Zeke to pop down to help him with it. I think he was looking for something to go around the throttle control cable and Zeke came up with the idea to use a length of bicycle inner tube.’

‘This Zeke guy, who is he?’

‘Oh, he’s a really good friend of the family. I’ve known him for more than fifteen years. You wouldn’t meet a nicer guy, although most people think he’s a bit crazy, but that’s because they don’t really know him. Zeke and Ben are the best of mates. He’s like Ben’s uncle.’

‘Does he live locally?’

‘Yeah, he lives alone, up on top of the escarpment, in a small two room shack.’

'Is there any possibility, in your own mind, that this Zeke person could have had anything to do with your wife's disappearance?'

'No way! Zeke's got a heart of gold and anyway, he's pretty much a cripple. He nearly killed himself in a hang glider accident about thirteen years ago.'

'So you had dinner and your son Ben was talking about his project, what happened then?'

'What happened then? Well, nothing. Lib and I sat around on the veranda having a sm ... a beer. She loves to talk about the stars. I keep telling her she should try to write a book, she has such a fertile imagination. Some of the stories she comes up with, I don't know where she gets it all from. I can just sit back and listen, and I swear, she sends me off into her stories like they were real. We don't even have a TV. We don't need it. I've never enjoyed conversation as much with anyone as with Libby. To listen to her tell stories is like listening to Mozart playing music. You guys couldn't even imagine it in your wildest dreams.'

The two officers looked at each other. Adam continued to speak into the small microphone.

'After dinner, Ben went back up to the workshop to cut a thread into the end of the propeller shaft of his machine. He was going to use the new thread cutter that he asked me to buy for him from the hardware store. I guess he was still there till about nine thirty, messing about with his jetpack. By ten, we had all gone to bed. There are four bedrooms in the upper portion of the house. Ours is next to the bathroom and Ben's is next to ours. We all said good night and went to sleep.'

'Ah, sorry to ask you this, ah, please don't take it as anything. I'm just trying to get the whole picture. Er, did you and your wife make, er, love last night?'

'Oh, I see where you're coming from. Look officer, we really, truly love each other, and of course we made love last night. We make love every night, and most of the days as well. Making love to Libby is like breathing for me.'

'Thanks for that, Adam. Er, sorry I had to ask that question. It's actually as hard to ask some questions as it is for people to answer them, but you

understand, I've got to establish the nature of the relationship between you and your wife.'

'Sure, it's OK.'

'So what happened then?'

Adam looked at them for a moment, attempting to compose himself. He tried to speak a number of times, but the words just couldn't find their way out of his mouth. Unable to speak, he broke down and started to moan again. The young police lady consoled him and suggested another cup of coffee. Adam began shaking like a leaf.

'Can we get him another doughnut, Sam? I think he's going a bit *hypo*.'

'Sure, I'll pop out and get it.'

The male officer left the room.

'Don't try to say anything, Adam, take a break. I'll switch off the machine.'

Adam began to turn white and break into a cold sweat. Realising that he could slide into syncope at any moment, the police lady positioned herself ready to catch him if he fell. Adam, however, just sat there looking like a sweating ghost. He'd had some experience at keeping his balance in a state of near unconsciousness. Sam walked back into the stark, featureless room carrying a whole tray of doughnuts and more coffee.

'I put heaps of sugar in the coffee. Have a few swigs of this, mate ... there you go ... you OK?'

'Yeah, just feel a bit far away at the moment. Be with you in a sec.'

'No worries. Have another doughnut.'

'Thanks.'

Adam took a few deep breaths while Sam went out for a smoke. After about ten minutes, everyone was set. Adam began to speak into the tape recorder again.

'I usually wake up when the light starts coming in through the window. Then I usually roll over towards Libby and put my arm around her and we just lie there like that.' Adam took another big swig of coffee. 'Jees this coffee reminds me of the coffee Libby made me when I first met her.' He had a big sigh. 'When I turned toward her this morning ... she ... she wasn't there!'

'Was there any sign of struggle?' Sam asked. 'I know it's unlikely seeing as you never woke up.'

'No, the bed on her side was made like she never got in it.'

'Amazing.'

'And when I got up and checked Ben's room, he was gone and his bed was made as well.'

'What did you do then?'

'I went downstairs and looked for them there. Then I called out their names. The silence hit me like a sledgehammer. I felt the first chills of panic shoot up my spine. I stepped outside, looked around and called out again. Nothing. I walked all around the house, in the garage, the workshop and the laundry. I ran back upstairs and checked the other two bedrooms. I was starting to spin-out by now. I had another look into the bedrooms, just to make sure that I wasn't hallucinating. For several seconds I actually made myself believe that it was just a bad dream and when I looked into the bedrooms again they'd be there, just like normal, but they weren't. It was real. Then I thought maybe they went to the beach, maybe she went surfing, but she never went without telling me. I ran into the garage. Her board was still hanging on the wall. Then I thought they might have just felt like an early walk down in the park, so I got dressed and drove down there. I looked everywhere. I kept thinking that I was just missing them and kept driving back up to the house, but they weren't there. In the end, after driving all over Stanwell Park again and even driving up the hill, thinking that maybe they decided to climb up there, I went back home and had some coffee and just waited for them, figuring that they should show up there sooner or later. I knew that the corner shop opened at eight, so I drove down there at eight and asked them if they had seen Libby and Ben, but no one had seen them since the day before. I waited till ten-thirty, then I came here ... and here I am.'

There was a protracted silence as all three of them looked at each other. Then Sam suggested,

'Why don't you call home from here. They might have come back home since you left.'

There was no answer.

2

About an hour later, Adam drove up his driveway followed by a patrol car. Sam and the police lady, whose name was Margaret, but everybody called her Meg, thought that they had better take a look at the scene of the disappearance. They all stood on the front veranda, the two constables completely overawed by the view.

‘Wow Adam, this is so spectacular.’

‘Yeah, we never get tired of it.’

‘Is that a vegetable garden?’ Sam pointed down towards the right front corner of the yard.

‘That’s Libby’s garden.’

‘Looks pretty freshly dug up.’

‘Yeah, Lib just planted it out last week.’

‘She’s sure got it looking good.’

‘That’s because she’s a perfectionist.’

‘Could we see the bedrooms?’

‘Sure, up here.’

‘Have you altered anything?’

‘I haven’t touched a thing. I just put my pants on and looked in the wardrobes. Look, they’re all empty.’

‘It looks like no one else lives here, other than you. Can you show me something of theirs? Anything? Maybe a photo?’

Adam scanned the room, desperately trying to spot anything that might have belonged to Ben or Libby, but he could see nothing.

‘They’re real. Go ask down at the corner shop.’

‘Can you excuse us for a sec, please Adam?’

The two officers stepped outside. They looked at each other as they exchanged a few quiet words. Finally Sam suggested,

‘You want to take a run down to the shop and check that out? If the wife and son turn out to be real, then we’ve got ourselves a doozy of a case.’

Meg drove off and returned a few minutes later.

‘They’re real, Sam. The shop owner saw them yesterday.’

‘Are you thinking what I’m thinking?’ Sam asked.

They both uttered the name in unison.

'Doyle!'

'Definitely Doyle.' Meg repeated. 'This is too weird for anybody else.'

'You want to call him?'

'On it.'

After Meg made the call they stepped back inside and calmly spoke to Adam.

'Adam, er, it's our job to assess the specific nature of a case and then call in the people who specialise in such cases. You'll get a visit from a Detective Doyle in about an hour. He has a much more trained eye for this sort of thing. You'll have your best chance of finding your wife and your son with him on the case. We'll be going back now. Please refrain from touching anything.'

'Would you like a coffee before you go? I owe you one.'

The two constables looked at each other and then at Adam.

'You've found our Achilles heel, Adam. I guess we can spare a few more minutes.'

As it turned out, the two officers ended up waiting for Doyle as well. Sam thought that it would make everything easier if he briefed Doyle himself instead of leaving it to Adam to have to agonise through the whole story all over again.

The three of them were sitting on the front veranda, sipping away at their second mug of Adam's fine coffee, when they were all startled by the sound of screeching car tires. They all stood up in unison and looked down the driveway. They saw a huge cloud of blue smoke surrounding a grey car, of indeterminable make, stalled half way up the driveway. Adam suggested,

'Tell him to take a bit of a run up.'

Sam walked down and had a word with Doyle. They then all watched the grey car roll back down the driveway and almost disappear in the lingering blue fog. They heard the engine rev up and the car take off. As the back wheels hit the driveway, they broke traction and began to spin, furiously belching out clouds of blue smoke. The second time around, Doyle managed to burn nearly two thirds of the way up the driveway before coming to a complete stop, stalling his engine in the process. It became almost impossible to see anything

for all the smoke. Doyle tried to restart the car, but it wouldn't kick over. Sam made an observation.

'I think there's smoke coming out from under your bonnet, Doyle.'

Doyle backed the car down in neutral and rolled it backwards into a parking spot on the other side of the lane. Sam walked down the driveway and sat in the passenger seat of Doyle's car. They sat there for about ten minutes while Sam briefed Doyle.

'I'm still not sure if this bloke's a nut. If it wasn't for the fact that people around here saw his wife and son yesterday, I'd have written him off ages ago. Apart from that, there doesn't seem to be one shred of evidence that they ever lived here.'

Doyle was a thin, fifty-five year old man who looked old for his age. He was a chain smoker who always had a lit cigarette hanging out of his mouth. He was officially retired, but he still occasionally helped out in a tricky case. Secretly, he lived for the phone calls. He loved a good case and these days they only gave him the best ones, the ones they couldn't figure out themselves. He could now do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. There was nobody to answer to anymore. He was his own boss because he now did it as a favour.

Adam and Meg watched Doyle struggle up the driveway with a much younger Sam casually shuffling up beside him. When they reached the veranda, Adam put out his hand to shake Doyle's.

'Mister Doyle.'

'It's Detective Doyle, but you can just call me Doyle.'

Doyle's beady little eyes scanned his surroundings as he put his hand out to shake Adam's.

'You're Adam I presume?'

'Yes sir.'

'I got a pretty good brief from Sammy here, Adam. What you describe is a tad strange, but then, that's why *I'm* here. You see, strange is my speciality.'

'I just woke up and they were gone.'

'Apparently. Can I see the bedrooms, please?'

They walked up the stairs into the bedrooms. Doyle took his time as he carefully studied the scene.

'So all their things are gone?'

'Well, Doyle, I don't know, but I can't see any of their stuff anywhere.'

Doyle tried again.

'Is there anything here, at all, that is your wife's or your son's? Have a good think.'

Adam thought and thought, then suddenly remembered,

'The surfboard!'

'I knew it!' said Doyle.

'Her board,' repeated Adam, 'her surfboard, it's hanging in the garage. I saw it this morning.'

'Let's go see it,' suggested Doyle. When they got to the garage, Doyle asked Adam, 'Would you mind taking it down.'

Adam unstrapped the fluid foil and brought it out into the light. He was the first to notice,

'Hey, there's no wax on this board. It's been polished clean.'

Doyle wasn't familiar with surfboards, so he asked,

'How's it supposed to be?'

'It's supposed to have heaps of wax on top, to give traction in the water.'

'So she cleaned the wax off, so what?'

'She wouldn't have, but she obviously did, but she wouldn't have polished it up like this though. I don't know, Doyle, it just seems unusual. She was using it all the time.'

'This is nothing personal, Adam, but technically speaking, that surfboard could be anybody's. We'll take a good look at it nonetheless. Let's not touch it anymore. Meg, can you call in the lab boys. Adam, I'm getting a couple of lab boys up here. We're still looking for evidence that your wife and your son actually lived here. They'll want their prints and hopefully some hair follicles to get their DNA. Let's sit tight, the boys will be up in about half an hour.'

A few hours later, Sam and Meg had returned to the station and the lab boys were still busy searching and scouring the whole house with magnifying glasses, tweezers, microscopes and a variety of powders and chemicals. Adam noticed how they kept scratching their heads and placing their hands on their hips. Finally Doyle pulled Adam aside and spoke to him in a low voice.

'I find myself in a quandary, Adam. This place is too clean. Somebody's cleaned this place up. There are no prints on anything, doorknobs, kitchen utensils, nothing. And your bed, we found a small hair in it, but the boys are sure that it's yours. And the sheets and pillow cases, they're not just washed, they appear to have been sterilised they're so clean.'

'Libby is very clean,' said Adam.

Doyle continued,

'There is no hair at all on Ben's bed. There is no hair in the shower and just in case there might have been a trace of DNA embedded in the surfboard wax, that's been polished off as well. Do you see my dilemma here, Adam? The boys only found a few of your prints. They reckon they're the ones you made this morning, so the house was cleaned up sometime before that.'

Adam couldn't believe what he was hearing. A shiver ripped through him as he thought to himself how like a huge gas trip all this was. For a moment he actually wasn't sure what was real. Fear began to take grip of his body.

'Are you alright?' Doyle asked.

'Actually, I'm a bit shocked. I just woke up and all this was happening. Last night I went to bed with my wife, we were in love with each other, Ben went to bed in his room, it was about 10.00pm, off to bed, one happy little family, sleep tight, see you in the morning light, nite dad, nite Ben ... that's all I know!'

One of the lab boys called Doyle over and spoke to him in a low voice.

'There's no way he could have done this, Doyle. This house is devoid of even one human cell, except for the two short hairs we found on his side of the bed, which are his. It's so clean that he couldn't have possibly had any visitors. I've never seen anything like it. No DNA, no prints, this guy couldn't have done this cleanup. Not even a pro could do this, I mean, no hair, no skin, nothing in the rugs, give me a break! This is really, really weird.'

Doyle was almost watering at the mouth. This was going to be a feast for his soul. He asked Adam,

'Sam mentioned a Zeke.'

'He's a good friend of the family. He lives up on top of the escarpment.'

'Can we pay him a visit?'

‘Yeah, sure.’

They drove up to Zeke’s place in Doyle’s car and pulled up behind his hut. They knocked on the door and Zeke opened it. They could see the surprised look on his face when Adam introduced him to Detective Doyle. Doyle smelt the thick, pungent odour of smoked marijuana wafting out the door.

‘Don’t worry, mate, I don’t care what you smoke, I’m here about something completely different.’

Doyle gave Zeke a summary of the mysterious disappearance and then asked him to describe his visit the night before. Zeke’s description matched perfectly with the one Adam had been telling all along. Doyle enquired,

‘What’s the jetpack?’

‘Ben was building it and Zeke was helping him. It was their little project.’

‘So what is it, Zeke?’

‘Oh, it’s just a thing for kids, to push them on their roller blades. It’s a small two-stroke engine with a model aeroplane prop, on your back. It was Ben’s idea. He did all of it. I mostly kept him company. He was teachin me. He’s a genius, a total mind-blowin genius!’

‘Let’s go see the jetpack.’ Doyle suggested.

They drove back down the hill to Adam’s place. They walked around the side of the new, two-car garage and up a small flight of stairs into the sizeable workshop above the garage. The new garage was Adam’s first major project after he settled down with Libby. The first person to speak was Zeke.

‘It’s finished? No way! This is impossible.’

Adam immediately noticed a piece of paper lying on the workbench.

‘What’s this paper?’

‘Don’t touch it!’ snapped Doyle. ‘There’s a number written on it.’

Written on the paper, in inch-high numerals, was the number *2023*. Adam commented,

‘That’s Ben’s handwriting. The two and the three, only Ben does them like that.’

‘Don’t touch anything on this bench,’ said Doyle, ‘especially the paper. I’d like to see them clean *that* up. The boys will be back tomorrow ...’

Zeke butted in on Doyle,

'This jetpack was only half finished last night. There is absolutely no way that Ben could have finished the machine between nine-thirty last night and now.' Zeke pointed at the beautifully welded, stainless steel propeller guard and exclaimed, 'He hadn't even drawn up the plans for this, and he's got no welder. He's never welded before, and check out these welds, they're bloody perfect. You ever tried to weld stainless, Doyle?'

'A bit out of my line, Zeke, but I take your point. What else do you see?'

'I don't know, everything looks so clean and polished, but Ben always kept his tools looking brand new.'

'Never mind. Look Adam, I can't let you sleep in your house tonight. I want it locked up until the boys come back out tomorrow. They've got a room with a bed in it down at the station, or if you prefer, I've got a spare bed for the night. Well, that just about does it for my official duties so I guess this is where I bundy out. ... Ah ... listen Zeke ... ah ... I've had a tough day on the case and I ... ah ... feel pretty stuffed and you, ah, seem like a fairly reasonable sort of bloke to me and, ah, I was just wondering what you reckoned about a bit of a smoke for a tired old detective, eh?'

Zeke laughed,

'Sure Doyle, and a hot coffee if you like.'

'Sounds good. Where do you want to stay tonight, Adam?'

'Oh, I think I'll stick with you, Doyle.'

'You might as well take what you need and lock up the house.'

Zeke drove back up the hill followed a few minutes later by Adam and Doyle. When they got out of the car at the back of Zeke's hut, Doyle took a short walk around Zeke's yard. He noticed Zeke's large vegetable garden, which was looking slightly neglected. He kicked a few sods of dirt with his shoe then turned and walked back to the hut. They all sat around in Zeke's *guest room* and shared a few *puffs* of Zeke's pipe. In a very relaxed voice, like light banter, so as not to generate any tension, Doyle announced,

'Just because I bundy out doesn't mean I don't talk about the case. You see, this isn't just a job for me, it's a passion, it's my nectar of life.' He casually turned towards Adam and calmly asked him, 'Tell me a bit about Liberty, from before you met her.'

Doyle's skilful use of verbal technique ensured that Adam remained completely calm as he began to reminisce about the early days. Eventually he meandered into some relevant detail.

'She was from California, from Manhattan Beach in the South Bay area. She had no living relatives. Her mum and dad died. She had plenty of money because of her uncle's trust fund ... and she was gorgeous ... I can't describe ... you just fell in love with her. She was out here on a surf trip, travelling in a van up and down the coast. God, it sounds incredible when I say it now. She was nineteen when I met her.'

'Did she get pregnant *before* you got married? Sorry to ask, it's just the case, no big deal.'

'Yes, she was very fertile.'

'And your son, Ben, do I remember Sam briefing me correctly? Did he begin to speak at four weeks of age?'

'Yes, isn't it amazing? We'd be driving down the road with Ben strapped in the back seat in his safety chair and he'd be reading out every billboard that we went past, and he was only six months old. It was like having a human audio billboard in the car. We loved listening to him. We laughed so much and we helped him and corrected his mistakes.'

Zeke contributed with a comment.

'He is an amazin little engineer. He knows all the maths an his geometry messes with me mind. He understands stresses an materials an everythin, an he's only ten.'

Doyle spoke to Adam.

'So there's nowhere she could go, nobody she could have gone and stayed with?'

'No.'

'We don't even have a shred of hard evidence that they were even here. Let's get that first. I don't know about you guys, but I'm pretty stuffed. What's say we take off, Adam, there's still a bit of a drive.'

'Where do you live?'

'Brighton-le-Sands.'

3

It was dusk by the time they arrived at Doyle's house. He lived in a quaint little red-brick house built during the post-war building boom of the fifties. He was situated a few blocks back from the beach and just a short stroll from all the nightlife and bright lights. He lived alone. His home was neat and not too cluttered. Things seemed to be logically organised. His living room and his study were lined with bookshelves full of books. On closer inspection, Adam noticed that the majority of them were about UFOs. It was also obvious that Doyle was heavily into his computer. Adam asked him,

'You're into UFOs?'

'It's just me, kid. I can't resist a mystery. The bigger the better, and there's nothing bigger than UFOs. The books are full of strange, illogical accounts. You won't find anything like them in any other books. In fact they're a bit like the account I'd have to write if I wrote one about your case. But don't worry, I don't write accounts. I keep everything in my head.'

'What are you suggesting, Doyle?'

'Isn't it obvious?'

'Are you seriously suggesting that my wife's disappearance had something to do with UFOs?'

Adam's eyes were almost popping out of their sockets as he asked that question. Doyle smiled at him and quipped back,

'I only deal with facts.'

'Yeah, but has that thought ever crossed your mind?'

'What is this, the inquisition? OK, it's possible that that thought might have crossed my mind. So?'

'This is weirder than weird, and it's getting weirder all the time. UFOs? Aliens? Little skinny runts with bug eyes? They pinched my family?'

'The possibility is infinitely small, but the cleanup and disappearance without a trace, doodoo, doodoo. I've got to get that jetpack thing analysed tomorrow. Aren't you getting tired?'

'No! You've got me wide awake with your bizarre abduction idea.'

'You know what I fear the most, Adam?'

'No, what?'

‘What I fear the most is that we’ll never find out. If they did the whole job like they did the cleanup, we’ll never find out.’

‘What? You mean it will always stay a mystery, like it is now, not knowing what happened to them? That’s like a living hell!’

‘Oh, you’d have to get over it eventually, so you might as well get over it quick. That’s the way I see things. I wish that I could say that I was just your hallucination, Adam, but I can’t. What transpired today really happened, and believe me, it’s as weird for me as it is for you. But it was real, it was fact and therefore it has my undivided attention.’

4

Next morning, everyone was up at the house early. A couple of guys started digging up the veggie patch. Later, they went up the hill and dug up Zeke’s veggie patch as well. He reckoned that they tilled it for him pretty good. They took away the jetpack and the piece of paper, with 2023 written on it, for analysis in the lab. They did a much more sensitive search for DNA in the whole house and the workshop. Better technicians came. One of them showed Doyle an old screwdriver handle.

‘Look Doyle, look how this handle’s been cleaned. It’s like it’s been sandblasted with fine sand. Look, all the fine crevices are completely clean. We can usually get plenty of skin cells out of something like that, but this is unbelievable.’

Doyle was getting less surprised by the minute. He walked around the house silently singing *doodoo, doodo* to himself.

They did everything they wanted to do and took everything they wanted to take. At the end of the day Doyle spoke with Adam.

‘Well, I’ll be going now. You can stay in your house again. We’ve got everything we want so you can touch everything and go back to normal living. We’ll do some tests. I’ll be in touch. I’ve got your number, you’ve got my number, call me if something happens. I might drop in on Zeke on the way home. Do you want to come up for a while?’

‘No thanks, Doyle. I think that I’ve had just about enough socialising to last me a lifetime. I’m ready to crash.’

‘OK then, I’ll call you soon.’

5

A week passed with no word from Doyle. Adam was roller-coastering, struggling to stay on a mental even keel. He found that going to work helped because it gave him something else to think about. The hardest thing was coming home to an empty house each night. He usually drove straight to Zeke's place and didn't come home till late. Entering his house, he didn't even bother to turn on the lights. He went straight to bed in the dark and buried his head in his pillow and rode out the heavy stone from the many pipes he had with Zeke. Most nights he ended up crying himself to sleep.

Ten days after Libby and Ben disappeared, Adam's phone rang late on Friday night. Adam answered it.

'Hello?'

'It's Doyle. I've got your jetpack. I've also got some news I thought you might be interested in. I might drop down tomorrow morning if you're free.'

'I'll be free, Doyle. I've been waiting for your call.'

'See you tomorrow then.'

Doyle hung up before Adam could say anything else. Next morning he huffed and puffed his way up Adam's driveway carrying the jetpack in one hand and the prop guard in the other. He sat down at the veranda table to catch his breath and immediately lit a cigarette. Adam made him a coffee and sat down with him. He made a comment about Doyle's smoking.

'Those things will kill you, you know.'

'Is that a promise?' Doyle picked up the guard. 'We tested the welds on this prop guard and guess what.'

'What?'

'They're not welds. The whole guard is made out of one piece of stainless steel.'

'That's impossible,' said Adam, surprised, 'nothing could make this guard out of one piece of metal.'

'Not on this planet,' replied Doyle.

'But look, Doyle, you can see the welds ... see?'

'They're fake welds to make it look like they're real, but it's really one piece. I can't believe that we've actually caught them out. Look, you can see it

with the naked eye, here where we cut it. See how the metal is homogeneous right through the join. Except it's no join, it's one piece. We are holding a miracle, an impossible construction.'

'Hang on, it could have been cast.'

'It wasn't cast. That's the first thing we checked.'

'You're freaking me out again, Doyle. Tell me, what would a copper who hasn't got a house full of UFO books say?'

'He wouldn't have tested the metal. He wouldn't have known.'

'So you are suggesting that this stainless guard, that I am holding in my hand is ... '

'Extraterrestrial.'

'God Doyle, what are you doing to me?' Adam paused, stared at the guard in his hand and took a few deep breaths to calm down. After a moment he asked Doyle, 'What are you going to do now?'

'Not much. We're going to file a missing persons report. Pity there isn't even one photo to put in it.'

'Oh, that reminds me, Doyle. When my parents found out about Libby and Ben's disappearance, my mum went looking for their photo album and guess what?'

'She couldn't find it?' Doyle replied, feigning surprise.

'How did you guess? Mum thought she misplaced it and is probably still searching for it. Nobody broke into their house or anything.'

'Of course not.'

'The missing persons report you're filing, what are you going to say about all the weird stuff?'

'There's no point in reporting too much of that. They wouldn't know what to do with it anyway. I'll treat it as my personal case. I am here to help you, Adam, and to satisfy my own curiosity. I want to find your family ... but ... '

'But? I know what but is, Doyle. But is that I'll never see my family again. This case will never be solved, like you said in the first place, cause it's as perfect as the cleanup.'

'Nobody knows the future and only fools deal with it. We'll just see what happens. You keep the jetpack. I'll be going now. Let's stay in touch. See you when I see you.'

'See you, Doyle.'

And just like that Doyle walked out of Adam's life. He would not hear from him for over twelve months.

It was right about then that the full impact of what had happened hit Adam like a Mack truck. The full realisation that he was alone descended upon him like a thick fog. The house, which seemingly only yesterday sang with the sounds of a happy family, today was silent and devoid of life, like a total vacuum.

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Chapter Twenty-Two
SO MANY BLOODY STARS

1

The first few days after Doyle left were the worst for Adam. Work was still the best medicine for him. He focussed on his practice and increased his hours. Rose was like family to him. He enjoyed working with her and she treated him like a son. The weeks and months passed as Adam slowly adjusted to solitary life again. Then one morning he woke up in his bed, opened his eyes and sat up highly excited.

'That was them. What a dream. Oh, I can remember it so clearly. Oh, I don't even have to try to remember, it's there, like I'd been there. I was at Broken Head with Libby and Ben, back in '68. The old camping area was back. I was there, like I went back to '68 and they were there. I remember looking into Libby's eyes and she was crying. I held her fine hands. I looked into Ben's eyes and he was crying. We all hugged each other, all together. I can still feel the hug. Then they both smiled and gave me a feeling of reassurance, like everything will be all right. Wow, what a dream. It was so real and it's so burned into my memory.'

Adam spent the whole rest of the day blissing out on his memory. He only had to close his eyes and he could see their faces. He thought about what was happening to his brain. He wondered if the dream wasn't some kind of Nitrous Oxide flashback, some kind of long-term side effect that nobody knew anything about. But he didn't mind. The dream was the best thing that happened to him since the disappearance.

2

One freezing, windy, mid-winter's night, *July '91*, Adam was sitting cosy next to Zeke's fire, lost in conversation.

'You know, Zeke, I think that some books are better read stoned. I think that some books might have even been written to be read stoned, in order to be properly understood.'

'You won't get no arguments from me, mate. Lots of things are better stoned, like solitude for example.'

'Yeah, that's true.'

'So how are you holdin up? How long has it been?'

'Nine months. I just keep remembering the good times we had and how Ben was always so caring towards me, like he was looking after me, not the other way around.'

'He was a bloody amazin kid. The day he got the idea for the jetpack was a classic. It was about a year an a half ago. You were workin that day. There was a howlin gale an he'd only had his roller blades for about four months. Well, he got it into his head to go for a tailwind skate up the fifteen-mile-long bike track along all the beaches from Wollongong to Sandon Point. That's where he got me to wait for him. The wind, mate, it was at least fifty knots. The ocean was boilin an the trees were strainin bent right over an even the windsurfers were sittin it out, but not Ben. He came flyin in at Sandon laughin his head off. He was hysterical. Reckoned he hadn't had such a good time in ages. He reckoned that he hardly had to skate as he pretty much got blown along all the way. He reckoned that he was hittin forty miles per hour on some open sections. That's flyin, mate! He wanted me to drive him back to Wollongong straight away. Altogether he had three runs that day. He couldn't stop babblin on the way home. He was a babblin speed-freak. That's when he got the idea for the jetpack. He said that he wanted to feel like he was skatin downwind all the time. He got the idea to put a small engine, with a propeller on it, on his back. He started the project the very next day. Remember how he hacksawed the brushcutter?'

'Yeah, how could I forget?'

'I miss him.'

'Yeah, me too.'

3

About three months later, Adam finally got a call from Doyle who said he wanted to catch up and talk to him about something. He suggested lunch at Doyle's the following Saturday. He said that the place made him feel like it was his restaurant. Adam informed Doyle that he'd only ever been there with a woman, but Doyle told him to stop bragging and that he'd see him down at the wharf at 12.00 noon on Saturday.

Adam rolled into Watson's Bay early. It was only 11.00am so he thought he would have a wander around the place and remember some of the good times he had enjoyed there over the years. He thought it interesting how he kept returning there at different stages of his life, like it was a punctuation mark between what happened before and what happened after. He was really looking forward to seeing Doyle again. He wasn't expecting any answers, but he was keen to hear what he had to say. He strolled down to the ferry wharf and noticed that the ferry was about to come in.

'Oh how nice,' he thought, 'something to entertain me.'

He leant against a thick, wooden post and settled down to enjoy the ferry docking. It glided in silently and efficiently and made the lightest contact with the wharf. A young man athletically jumped off it and proceeded to tie it off to a bollard.

It was a beautiful, warm, sunny spring day. The wharf area was teeming with people out for a walk and kids running around, with dozens of seagulls flying above everybody's heads, hustling for a feed.

They were at least thirty yards apart when their eyes coincidentally met. The young deckhand's stare locked itself onto Adam and he called out,

'Doc?'

Adam focussed on the deckhand. He thought he looked familiar.

'Tommy, is that you?' He walked towards the fit, suntanned, young man. 'I can hardly recognise you. You look so healthy.'

'Doc, we haven't seen ya for years. How ya goin?'

'I'm good, I'm good. How's Bob?'

'Bob's the captain. He's up in the wheelhouse. You should ... good mornin miss, mind your step ... you should go up an see him. He'd love to see ya ... good mornin miss ... '

'How do I get up there? I can't believe that it's you, Tommy, and this ... '

'Go up an see him, Doc; it'll make his day. Up those stairs there.'

Tommy pointed towards a narrow, wooden stairway as another pretty girl distracted him. Adam climbed up the steep stairway and knocked on a polished, wooden door. He saw the brass door handle turn and the door open. Bob's craggy face appeared in the doorway.

'Adam? Adam?'

Bob opened his arms and pulled Adam into his embrace.

'I can't believe it's you. I thought we'd never see you again. How are you?'

'I'm good, Bob.'

'We tried to see you at your surgery in the city, but they told us that you sold out and moved somewhere south.'

'Yeah, Stanwell Park, hang gliding country. I can't believe what I'm seeing, Bob. You're the ferry driver? On the Watson's Bay ferry? This is like a dream. I'm so happy for you guys. Actually, I'm totally blown away. I'm speechless.'

Adam looked at Bob. He was like a different man. He now seemed self-assured and composed, with a clear, steady focus in his eyes. He spoke slowly, in a low, confident voice, and his English seemed to have become much more refined. The only thing that gave away his past was his potholed face.

'I can't talk to you for long, Adam, so I just want to say this one thing, just in case I don't see you again. There are no words in the known English language that can express the gratitude I feel ...'

'Oh give it a break, Bob, this is me ...'

'No! Let me talk. What you did for me, what you told me, do you remember?'

'Aww jees, Bob, I say so many things. How am I supposed to remember what I said to you?'

'You said that every life you save can make up for one you took. Remember?'

'Did I say that? Maybe you've got me mixed up with somebody else.'

'I never forgot that. You made me realise it with Tommy, and since then there's been heaps of Tommies, you wouldn't believe it, Adam, and it all started with you and your beautiful heart.'

'Give it a break, mate, before I start throwing up. So tell me how you got into this.'

'I can't, I haven't got enough time. I've got to keep to the timetable. But listen, Tommy and I do the sunrise shift on weekends. Why don't you come down to the Quay one Saturday morning and hop on the ferry with us and

come for a ride up here with me. How about it? I can tell you the whole story then. I've got to go, mate.'

'It's a deal. I'll be there one day. What time?'

'Six o'clock ferry to Watson's Bay. The velvet run.'

'OK, I'm getting off. A mind blower seeing you, Bob.'

Adam ran down the gangplank just before Tommy pulled it in. He waved goodbye to Tommy and Bob, who he could now see through the pilothouse window. He watched the small ferry undock and silently glide through all the moored boats. The moment briefly took him back to his time with Nancy.

As he stood there on the wharf, he began to feel that special feeling one gets when one is close to the water of Sydney Harbour. He hadn't felt it in a long time. He promised himself to take up Bob's offer and go for a ride on his ferry one day. He started drifting off into a daydream when he heard,

'It looks like a jewel in the sun, but just beneath the surface are the catacombs of pure hell. That's where I operate. How are you, Adam?'

'As well as can be expected, Doyle. It's been a while.'

'Yeah, well, I wanted to wait till you got over your emotions. I figured a year should be enough. You have to be in a fairly cool state of mind to deal with the picture that's emerging. Anyway, not a lot of new facts have come my way, that is, until now. Hey, let's go and have some fish-n-chips and a couple of beers. I want to have a good talk with you.'

'Sounds delightfully schizophrenic, Doyle. You always intrigue me with your comic-strip scenarios.'

'Well, I hope you took your pills, because you're gonna need them today buddy, but let's sit down and start relaxing and enjoying the view. Don't you love the name of this place?'

They sat down at a nice outside table in the shade of a large beach umbrella. There was a light cooling breeze wafting through the restaurant as Doyle lit a smoke, took a sip of his Fosters, then began, quietly and rapidly, speaking to Adam.

'Twelve months ago I went easy on you. You were in such a state that you couldn't handle anything, so I let it slide and let you think what you wanted to

think. Get used to the fact that this case will never be solved, at least not officially. Your family has disappeared and will never be found.'

'Christ Doyle, is that what you brought ... '

'Look, just listen for a minute. Steel your mind and get objective. I need you to be objective. Imagine ... imagine that it happened to someone else. That's it, it happened to someone else, not you, and you are my partner on the case. That's how I need you to be. Can you do that?'

'I don't know, Doyle, I suppose I can. I'm your partner and it happened to someone else. OK, I'll try.'

Doyle continued,

'It took a while, but some amazing new evidence has come through the grapevine, and these are all hard facts. Remember partner, we only look at facts, OK?'

'OK, Doyle. I'm already starting to feel freaked out. There's got to be some money in freaking people out. You could be a millionaire. Facts it is, facts and nothing but facts.' Adam scanned down the menu. 'The John Dory looks good.'

'I like my Barra.'

'Jees, Doyle, you like your beer as well, don't you?'

'I like the first one. It doesn't even touch the sides.'

'I'll order some more.'

Adam raised his hand and called the waiter. They ordered their meals and another couple of beers. When they settled down again, Doyle continued.

'I got a report from the computer statistics guys. They've got a new program that can match files of similar cases from anywhere around the world. It comes in handy in cases of missing persons and such. Well, I know the boys up in the computer room and I got them to do a special search for me, off the record, and guess what the computer spat out?'

'I don't know, Doyle, its chips?'

'No, my son, not its chips, but dozens of cases identical to yours. And that's just the ones we know about. There's new ones popping up every week, all over the bloody world, and they're all the same. Mother and child vanish into thin air, with all evidence of them having ever existed gone with them.' After a short pause, 'What's the matter, cat got your tongue?'

'No, Doyle. Couldn't they be coincidences? Computers can't really differentiate between ... ah ... that accurately.'

'I've got the reports. Copies of the original notes taken at the scenes. This has got nothing to do with computers. This has only got to do with observed factual information, and the facts were that the properties were all DNA clean, just like yours. And I've got an even bigger surprise for you. You know the kids?'

'Yeah?'

'They were all an only child, about half of them were girls and they were all geniuses and prodigies, all studying at home via correspondence, getting taught by their mothers while their fathers were at work. They were all brilliant.' Doyle leaned forward across the table and whispered to Adam, 'Can you see my dilemma here, Adam? Can you understand why my intestines are knotting up? We have discovered dozens more unexplainable disappearances with the identical fingerprint to yours. Can you see the pattern? And they all happened around about the same time, within a few months of each other. This whole phenomenon is developing the odour of a *grand plan*.'

'So now it's multiple abductions? A grand plan? Doyle, I think you got *your* medication mixed up this morning.'

'It was never an abduction. I just let you believe that that was what I thought. You couldn't have handled the truth then.'

'Truth? What truth, Doyle? You fill my head up with ...'

'Only facts, Adam. Look at all the facts.'

'Yeah OK, the bloody facts, what about them?'

'Liberty and Ben went of their own free will. They weren't abducted by aliens. There was no struggle. They must have known they were going. Maybe they were going reluctantly, maybe they wished you could have come with them, but it wasn't to be. Ben even finished the jetpack for you. He knew he was going. He even left clues. The one-piece prop guard, Adam, the one-piece prop guard is his way of tipping you off. And the note, nobody's got a clue what that means, other than the year 2023. And your family, you were all passionately in love with each other, isn't that a fact?'

'Yes, that's a fact.'

'And she was brilliant and he was brilliant. Fact? Fact! But you've got no idea just *how* brilliant, because she had to keep that a secret.'

'Keep *what* a secret?'

'The secret about her and her hybrid son's true identities.'

Adam accidentally breathed in a French fry and began to cough and choke violently. One of the waiters came over with a glass of water while Doyle gave him a couple of solid whacks across his back. After a few moments he settled down.

'Are you suggesting that *my* wife, *my* Libby, was an *alien*? She's supposed to have been kidnapped by an alien.'

'That's the old story, to keep you sane, but still get you partially acclimatised to my way of thinking. I've been doing this a long time, mate, sorry if I don't get too excited.'

'So let me get this right ...'

'Keep your voice down.'

'You reckon that my wife was an alien? From another planet? That's what you reckon?'

'One of dozens. That is a fact. All with a mission from central control. That is speculation.'

'Doyle, you're completely freaking me out. Why do you do this to me?'

'Sorry kid, I know it's tough. I know you just fell into this. It's bizarre, I know, but it's only bizarre for a while, then it's just like *nitro*. You cannot dispute any of the facts that I have presented to you, not one. Listen, there's a private bar around the corner from where I live. There's more I want to talk through with you. It'd be better there.'

'OK Doyle. Have you got a smoke?'

'Oh, I might have a little something.'

'Well, I guess you'll do for company for a few more hours. You were actually right; I am starting to acclimatise into your insanity. It's beginning to sound plausible and that is a great concern for me.'

'Don't be concerned. Even if we found out everything that was going on and had hard evidence, even then we wouldn't do anything about it. It wouldn't

be worth it. There's nothing that anyone could do. No, this is just for us to know and that's it.'

An hour later, they were both comfortably sprawled in a private booth in a small bar just off the main road in the Brighton-le-Sands café and restaurant district. Doyle was ordering the drinks and revving up the conversation.

'A grand plan, Adam, that is what the evidence points to. Look at the facts. All the mothers came to this planet alone and they all left with a hybrid ten-year-old child. So, going by the hard evidence, if that was the final result, then that was the original mission, to bring back a half-Earth child each, which had spent its first ten years of its life on Earth. Why? Why not just take the children ... er ... even before they were born? Why go through the whole deception hassle and *then* go back? Adam, we must review the ... what must we review, partner?'

'The facts, Doyle.'

'Got it in one. Have you not told me that you and your wife loved each other? Is that not a fact?'

'That is a fact, Doyle.'

'Why did the alien put up with ten years of deception? Was it love? I don't think so. I think it had something to do with Ben and his development. They wanted him to know his way around this planet before they took him back to his mother's.'

'His mother's *planet*? God, Doyle, we fell in love, in the most perfect way.'

'I'm sure *you* did, but I'm not so sure if *she* did.'

'You weren't there and now *you* are speculating. That's against your principles. You can take it as gospel, I got nothing but love and caring from both of them.'

'But why did all the mothers leave when all the hybrid kids were ten years old? Why not eight, or six?'

'Could it be that they might be meant to come back?'

'What? That is an interesting idea, Adam. A return to this planet, even alone, would not be such a difficult thing for those kids. They were all brilliant anyway.'

'It would be like coming home for them, back to the planet of their birth.'

‘Let us, for the moment, assume a return sometime in the future, let’s say the year 2023, just as a logical, evidence-based choice. But that’s not the main issue. The main issue is why are they coming back? Why were they born here at all?’

‘You know, Doyle, if she was an alien, she sure looked like a normal human being to me.’

‘That’s because they are human, just like us. They just grew in a different paddock and got started a whole lot earlier.’

‘So what’s all the mystery?’

‘They are the same, but they are different as well. Why do you hide anything?’

‘You hide something because you don’t want anyone to see it.’

‘And what has been hidden in all the disappearance cases?’

‘Ohh, the DNA!’

‘That’s right, Adam, the DNA. Removed, in toto, by some inexplicable means. That’s the biggest fact of all. It’s what really got me into this case.’

‘So they’re different in some way?’

‘Some recognisable way, via their DNA.’

‘So what type of difference could they have? It would have to be very subtle because I sure didn’t notice anything different about Libby, except that she was extraordinary.’

‘I don’t know that we should speculate on that right now, but I’m sure that if I ask you the right questions, I can dig up some hard evidence of their differences. I reckon the answers are all in your head, Adam, and it’s my job to dig them out.’

‘So you think that I know things that I don’t even know I know?’

‘It’s the common scenario, kid. In every case the key witness usually doesn’t know what they know because they’re the ones that have been deceived, see? So I’ve got to dig it out of them. It’s what being a detective is all about. Knowing what questions to ask.’

‘You were right about the nitro, Doyle. I think I’m detecting a bit of nitro.’

‘What did I tell you. When you get on my wavelength it gets so exciting that you sometimes think that you’re going to jump right out of your own skin. By the way, how much of this have you told Zeke?’

‘Oh, he knows a bit, but he doesn’t know it all. He doesn’t know about your alien theory. I haven’t broached that with him yet.’

‘Tell him. Tell him the lot. I want him in on it. He spent so much time with Ben and Liberty that he must have seen something that he doesn’t even realise he’d seen. One day we’ll all get together at his place and work through a few questions.’

‘Boy, Doyle, it’s certainly got you sucked in, big time.’

‘Voluntarily sucked in, kid. There is a difference.’

4

A few nights after his meeting with Doyle, Adam visited Zeke. Although Zeke had seen it a year before, just after Doyle brought it back, Adam thought he would bring the prop guard with him. He felt that he needed something physical to hold while he talked to Zeke about Doyle’s *crazy one-track logic*.

‘He only thinks in UFO terms, Zeke. He doesn’t even consider any other possibility. If it wasn’t for his bloody facts and the bizarre evidence, like this one-piece prop guard, for example, I would have given him the flick a long time ago, but he just keeps stringing me along and keeping me interested. Watch out, he’s got you in his sights now. He wants to ask you some questions.’

Zeke studied the prop guard and mostly kept silent while Adam did all the talking. Adam brought him right up to date in Doyle’s logic.

‘That’s about the whole story so far, Zeke.’

Zeke sat quietly for some time, deep in thought, then took his bowl and pipe and started loading it up. He looked up at Adam. His eye burned with light as he broke into a smile.

‘You wouldn’t wanna tell this to too many people.’

‘Nobody knows, Zeke, other than you, me and Doyle.’

‘She was somethin.’

‘Who, Libby?’

‘Yeah. Have you ever met a cooler chick?’

Adam looked at the floor and sighed,

'No, never. The stories she used to tell me, honestly Zeke, she was a master story teller, like it was an art, and the stories take on a whole new perspective now, now that Doyle has brainwashed his crazy theory into my head.'

'She used to come up here for visits durin the day when you were at work. She used to bring Ben with her. I think they liked the isolation an tranquility of me place. Libby used to tell me that bein here made her feel very relaxed. *No people for miles around*, she used to say. They both always wanted to know all the minute details of any project I was workin on. You know, come to think of it, she spent a lot of time talkin to me, pickin me brain about me gravity theory. She always got really excited talkin to me about the gravity sail idea. She'd keep bringin up the subject an geein me along. *You must find the first step on the stairway*, she used to say, an I used to reply, *the stairway to the stars, Libby?* An she replied, *the stairway to the galaxies, Zeke*. What about the stuff she gave us to smoke? What was that stuff?'

'She never really said. I just thought it was hash she brought from California that came from somewhere else. I remember now, I asked, *is it from California?* And she replied, *oh no, it's from a lot further away than that.*'

'It wasn't like any hash *I'd* ever smoked before.'

The two friends looked at each other as they contemplated the possibility that Liberty, their dearest and closest friend, might have blown in from another planet, with alien dope. As they sat there, deep in thought, flashing in a whole new light on times they had spent with Liberty, they heard the familiar bucket-of-bolts sound of Doyle's car roll up at the back of Zeke's hut. They heard the squeak and clunk of his car door opening and slamming shut, followed by footsteps approaching. There was a knock on the door and Adam got up to open it. Doyle's shadowy face stared at him out of the blackness, dimly lit by the low ambient light spilling out of the room through the partially open door.

'We were just talking about you, Doyle.'

'Yeah? And what is the verdict?'

'The jury's still out.'

'That's good for me.'

'Two times in one week, Doyle, I don't know if my medication is up to it.'

‘That’s why I brought you some of mine.’

The late October evening still had a chill in the air due to the higher altitude of the escarpment. Zeke tended to one of his last fires of the winter season, making his *guest room* cosy, warm and inviting for his two visitors. Doyle threw his jacket over a chair and sprawled himself next to Adam on the ratty old lounge. He threw a small plastic bag on Zeke’s rustic coffee table, smiled and casually quipped,

‘Every time I come here I don’t know if it feels like I’m visiting Obi-Wan Kenobi or the Clampets.’

‘You should talk, Doyle. Visiting you is like taking a pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Eric Von Daniken.’

Doyle lit a cigarette and said,

‘I see you boys started without me.’

Zeke handed Doyle his pipe and replied,

‘Well, you better catch up then.’

‘I know it’s like bringing coal to Newcastle, but you boys might be interested in trying some of this.’ Doyle picked up the little plastic bag off the coffee table. ‘It’s called *The Soul of Morocco*. Apparently the dope that this hash got made from was grown high up in the Atlas Mountains, in central Morocco.’

Zeke’s ears pricked up with interest.

‘Jees, Doyle, where’s a bloke like you get his hands on stuff like that?’

‘Ahh, it’s who you know, boys. Some of us have got mates in narcotics, don’t we.’

‘So this is some poor Arab’s dope that got busted trying to bring it into the country?’

‘I believe that the poor son of a bitch was a Berber.’

‘Boy, Doyle, you’re like no cop I’ve ever met before.’

‘Well, I *am* retired.’

Zeke cleaned his pipe and attended to making a new mix incorporating some of Doyle’s *Soul of Morocco*. Doyle opened the conversation.

‘I asked Adam to brief you on my investigations.’

‘Yeah, he told me everythin.’

‘Good, and I bet that you’ve both been going over things that happened with Liberty, things that may make a lot more sense in the new light. Those are the things I want to know about. Strange things, bizarre things, unusual things. They’ll come to mind, don’t you worry about that.’

‘Good old Doyle, it’s funny-farm time again.’

‘Make jokes, Adam, but I know something that will wipe that smirk right off your kisser.’

‘Not another fact, Doyle?’

‘Picked it like a nose, son. As a matter of interest, I’ve known this for more than six months, I just never bothered to tell you.’

‘The suspenders are killing me, Doyle.’

Zeke contributed,

‘You’ve got my attention, Doyle, what’s the news?’

‘I had Liberty’s background checked. She presented her US papers to various institutions here in Australia. They took copies. Everything was in order. There’s just one problem, there’s no record, in the US, of her ever being a US citizen. There is no record of her ever even visiting the US, not California, or Maine, or anywhere. I sent them copies of her US papers and guess what I got back.’

‘What?’

‘The US authorities reckoned that the papers were forgeries, perfect in every detail, but forgeries nonetheless. They said that Liberty was a fictional character that never lived in the US, and just to rub it into your noses, I brought the report with me.’ Doyle pulled a letter out of his pocket and threw it on the table in front of Adam. ‘I found this out six months ago. Since then I’ve been checking up on some of the other cases and guess what? You guessed it. None of those mothers existed either. They all got in on forged documents as well. One of the outstanding facts was the degree of perfection of the forgeries. They were indistinguishable from the real thing. Same level of expertise as the DNA cleanups and the prop guard.’

‘She’s never been to California? But what about all her stories and the *doggy-cise* business with her friend Jamie?’

Zeke was keeping very quiet, trying to handle the full impact of the fact that he had been best friends with an alien, a magnificent, exciting, beautiful alien. He commented,

‘You’re suckin me in now, Doyle.’

‘I know I’m sucking you in. I just had to do it in stages. I can’t have you boys spinning out on me.’

‘What about her cheque account, Doyle? She always had money. She said it was from her uncle’s trust fund.’

‘I had her bank account checked ages ago. She kept about ten thousand bucks in it most of the time. There was only a record of periodic cash deposits made at various bank branches around your area. It seems to me that she was putting the cash in herself.’

‘Where would she get cash from?’ Adam enquired, surprised.

‘Where did she get everything from? She brought it with her. It was probably counterfeit cash, perfect and indistinguishable from the real stuff. What else could it have been?’

‘What about her uncle and her dad, the boat builders that drowned, and her mum?’

‘According to US records, those people never existed.’

‘You know what constantly amazes me, Doyle?’

‘No, Adam, what?’

‘Your psychotic imagination, that’s what.’

‘Oh ye of little faith. Shall I remind you that I have told you nothing but hard, confirmable facts? Do you want another one? I got the airline records checked and guess what, she never flew out of America, or any place else either. It seems that she just popped up out of thin air, with a bundle of cash.’

‘So there’s no record of her flying into Australia on any flights, from anywhere?’

‘Not under her name.’

‘Where did she come from then?’

‘From someplace that wasn’t America. Or do you think that if I searched every other country in the world, I’d find her?’

‘There are a lot of countries.’

'No! I wouldn't find her because she didn't come from any of them. She came from,' Doyle pointed at the ceiling with his cigarette, 'up there.' Adam and Zeke both looked up at the ceiling. Doyle asked, 'Are you getting goose bumps? I am.'

'That's because you are a freak show, Doyle.'

'I laugh at your jest, Adam, but I must remind you that I am not the news; I am only the bringer of the news. It is the news that is the freak show. I have never disagreed with you on that point.'

'So you're saying that she deceived me, in the biggest way possible.'

Zeke quickly softened Adam's outlook.

'No no no, Adam, she never deceived you. She loved you with all her heart. I know that for a fact from the way she spoke about you. You were her life and I have a strong, ever-present feeling that you still are.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I mean your story is not over. It's just begun. There's more for you and Libby, sometime in the future. I feel it in me. I can't describe it, and it wasn't deception. She did what she had to and we won't know what it was all about until the time to know comes, when it means something.'

Adam hung his head in sadness. He was suddenly close to tears.

'Do you think so, Zeke? Do you really think I'll see Libby and Ben again?'

'I do. Inexplicably I feel it deep inside me. She says her heart beats at the same time as yours.'

Doyle sat up startled.

'What did you just say?'

'Yeah, who says?' Adam added.

'I can't believe that I just said that. What's in this hash, Doyle?'

Doyle was switched on like a relative at a will reading. He repeated Zeke's phrase, word for word.

'You said, *she says her heart beats at the same time as yours*. Did you hear that, Adam? There is another one of those things you don't like; I believe it's called a fact. What's going on, Zeke? Did she tell you before she left? Were you in on it?'

'No way! I don't know why I said that. That's weird, I thought it, I felt it and I said it ... like she told me to say it.'

'We use the word *weird* a lot around here lately, don't we boys?'

'I reckon it's your bloody Moroccan Soul, Doyle. Zeke has obviously started to hallucinate.'

Doyle thought he'd change the subject.

'You know why I like coming down here to visit you boys? It's because I can go out and have a good piss in your yard and feel completely relaxed knowing that there's no one around for miles that can see me.'

Doyle got up to step outside. Zeke made a comment.

'If you're in a killin mood why don't you go and kill a few weeds in the garden.'

After Doyle stepped outside, Adam whispered to Zeke,

'What do you reckon, is he a nut?'

'He sucks you in. He's followin a trail of logic that's gonna pass right through our brains, I think. ... Hey how's his hash anyway?'

A few minutes later, Doyle was back inside. Adam quipped,

'You have left your mark, Doyle, the dogs will be howling for weeks.'

'I love it.' Doyle replied. 'It feels like being a caveman, getting in touch with my ancestral past.'

Doyle settled back into the lounge and announced,

'It's pick and shovel time, boys. I think I might take a trip through your stoned little minds and see what I come up with.'

'To find out stuff we don't even know we know?'

'That's right, Adam.'

'So start already.'

'OK, but I'll just have to have one more hit on that pipe ... *uno momento amigos* ... sssss ... *Morrroccco* ... ahhhhhh ... now ... ah, can either of you open this discussion with an account of an unusual or strange memory involving Libby or Ben?'

Adam and Zeke just sat there, thinking.

'OK, let me rephrase that. Can either of you ever remember seeing anyone behave in an unusual or involuntary manner around Libby or Ben?' Just relax

and think. There must be something in your memories. It might have happened a long time ago.'

'There was this one really strange thing that happened.'

'Good, Adam, I knew there were going to be things.'

'It happened a long time ago, before Ben was born, before we were even married. It wasn't long after we met. We had only been living together a few weeks, that's right, I wasn't even working at the time. It was the middle of a hot summer and Libby decided to take us up the coast on a surfing trip in her van. I'll never forget that trip as long as I live, but not for this reason. The incident was just a small insignificant thing, a fleeting event that was almost over before it even began.'

Doyle lit another cigarette while Zeke listened intently.

'We were driving up to Noosa to catch a swell. On the way, we spent a day at the Currumbin Creek rockslide. I still remember it as one of the most magic days of my life. The night before, we camped by a creek in a roadside rest area, half way in along the Currumbin valley road. It was the middle of the night. We were both fast asleep when we got woken up by the sound of a car driving up. We couldn't see the car, even though we had the van door open, because the van door faced away from the road and towards the creek and a small campfire we had lit. All we could see was the night all lit up in car headlights. We heard the engine stop and the car doors open. We then heard two men approaching. They were swearing and spewing obscenities and raving on about judgement day.'

'It sounds like a bloody horror movie.'

'That's what it felt like, Doyle. I instinctively tried to get up, but Libby stopped me, that's right, then she shushed me. The two men almost reached the van, when they suddenly started howling with pain, like headaches. They moaned and swore their heads off and basically retreated back to their car and took off.'

The three men just sat there silent for a while as they tried to imagine what kind of girl this Libby actually was.

'You never mentioned anythin like that to me before.'

'I know, Zeke, I never actually thought too much about it. There were lots of weird things happening to me at the time.'

Doyle got back to business.

'She stopped you from getting up to defend her?'

'Yeah.'

'She was taking the initiative for the defence?'

'What are you talking about, Doyle?'

'She must have figured that she could handle the situation herself.'

'You think that she did something to those guys?'

'The result of a successful mission is always its original objective.'

'I think that Doyle thinks that she had somethin to do with those blokes' headaches.'

'How could she do that?'

'How indeed,' remarked Doyle. 'Remember anything else?'

'Actually, there was this one other time. It was years later. Ben was about four and we were all out shopping and I was driving the car. I remember I accidentally overshot a red light by a few feet, causing a tip truck, going the other way, to swerve to miss me. The truck pulled over and this huge, ugly driver got out and started running towards our car with his fists clenched and screaming obscenities. I started winding up the window when Libby coolly told me to wind it down again. I said, *are you crazy?* But she just said, *it's OK, wind it down.* The truckie was already there, swearing and banging on the window. As I wound the window down, he completely changed. We all just sat there stunned as he said, *that was a close call, would kind sir like me to apologise?* I couldn't believe it. I said, *no no no, it was all my fault* and I apologised to him and then he said, *sorry to bother you, sir,* and walked away.'

'No way!' Zeke said, laughing.

'What a wealth of information you are, Adam. I feel like I've hit the mother lode. These are new facts. A new kind of Liberty is emerging out of the fog.'

'Are you suggesting, Doyle, that Libby somehow controlled the minds of those people?'

'No, Adam, *you're* suggesting it.'

Zeke weighed in with a story.

'About two and a half years ago, Ben came up to the *Burgh* with me. I had to pick somethin up from the hardware store. Ben waited for me out in the street. I was standin at the counter an I could see him through the big window in the front of the shop. Three bigger kids walked up to him an started talkin to him. Then I saw the biggest, fattest kid push him on his shoulder. I was about to step outside when I saw the big kid look down at his pants. He'd completely pissed his pants. Both his mates started laughin at him, so he ran off with his mates chasin after him. He went home, I guess. I stayed where I was an watched Ben standin there like nothin just happened. He didn't even look flustered, absolutely no fear, an those kids were at least five or six years older than him.'

'Oh great, now Ben's one of them.'

'We already know that Ben is a hybrid. What we don't know is how much of him is his mum and how much of him is his dad. Can you make somebody piss their pants, Adam?'

'Oh give me a break, Doyle. Zeke, you never told me about the kid pissing his pants?'

'I mustn't have never come around to it.'

'What we are dealing with here, boys, is the power of the mind. All the facts point towards it. She had the ability to fly across light years of space like it was a drive to the corner store. She could control a person's behaviour without even having to see them, without any physical contact. She pulled off the biggest deception of the century and took an Earth kid back home, who could probably do everything she could. I've gotta have another smoke.'

'Lloyd! Lloyd talked about the dominance of the telepath.'

'Who is Lloyd, Adam?'

'Lloyd was this smart guy I knew at uni. He talked about evolution and how it was human destiny to evolve into telepathic beings because of the dominance of the telepath. He said that a full telepath would be completely untouchable because everyone would be totally transparent to them.'

'Telepathy. Look what we have dug up out of your stoned little minds. You're lucky you've got me to talk to.'

'I'm not so sure, Doyle. Sometimes I fantasize about what life would be like if you had never shown up.'

'About as much fun as a fart in a crowded elevator, I reckon.'

Zeke picked up the prop guard lying on the floor next to him and asked Doyle,

'So you reckon that this guard wasn't made on this planet?'

'There's no known way. It's one piece and not cast.'

'Hey Adam, can I keep the guard for a while? I'd like to take a closer look at it. I'll take good care of it.'

'Aww, go ahead, but not for too long. I thought I'd give Ben's jetpack a run one day.'

'Thanks, mate.'

'It's getting late, boys, and I've still got a big drive in front of me. We made a lot of progress tonight, but we're still not much closer to the answer to the big question.'

'What's the big question, Doyle?'

'Why? Why is all this happening? But we know why they didn't want us to find any DNA, don't we, boys?' Doyle began to awkwardly extricate himself out of the low lounge in preparation for his departure. 'We're not finished. I'd like to talk with you boys some more. It's been a blast. I'll be in touch.'

'I'll be holding my breath, Doyle.'

'You might want to stock up on your medication as well, Adam. Something tells me you might need it. This story's not over yet.'

Zeke saw Doyle out the door.

'Don't be a stranger, Doyle. I might let you in on me project if you come round again.'

'What are you up to?'

'I'm workin on a gravity sail.'

Doyle's eyebrows shot to the sky, accompanied by a rare smile.

'Under normal circumstances, Zeke, I would pass you off as a total nut, but under *current* circumstances,' Doyle's voice suddenly changed into sounding very interested, 'Jees really? I must drop in then, and check it out.' He

looked up before he entered his car. 'How is the sky out here, so many bloody stars. See you around Zeke. ... She said her heart beat how?'

Zeke heard Doyle laughing as he drove off into the darkness. When he came back inside, Adam spoke to him.

'I think he knows a lot more than he's telling us.'

'I'm sure of it. Do you like how he's lettin us think that we're figurin everythin out ourselves?'

'Yeah, but he's figured it all out already.'

'I wonder what else he knows?'

'Or thinks he knows.'

5

It was late at night. Adam soon left Zeke's place and drove slowly down the hill. He decided to pull into the empty car park on top of Bald Hill. He stepped out of his car and walked out to the tip of the point. Standing there in the chilly offshore breeze felt like standing on the edge of the world. He had lost count of how many times he had launched from that spot. He remembered the adventures and tragedies he had lived through from there. He remembered all the young characters that so magnificently played out their roles, as if performing in some epic, Elysian opus.

He hadn't flown since Libby left. He could feel himself drifting away from it. It frustrated him because he lived there, but the loss of his family had taken away all his will to fly. He looked into the night with its long string of Wollongong lights and spoke to her.

'If you're really telepathic, Libby, then maybe you can hear me, even if I can't hear you. Well, it's been a big day, sweetheart. We found out stuff about you. It's all a bit weird, but you have to know that I still love you, darling. I don't know why you had to go. And Benny, if you can hear me ... I love you, son,' he started to cry, 'and I miss you ... too much.'

That night, he drifted away into a deep, deep sleep and dreamt that he got a visit from Ben and Libby. They all sat around the veranda table in the afternoon sun and talked to each other for hours. When he woke up in the morning, he could still feel the warmth of her lips on his.

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Chapter Twenty-Three

THE GRAVITY SAIL

1

The mid-December night was dark, calm and balmy. In the absence of the moon, the stars seemed even brighter and more numerous than usual. A shooting star streaked across the heavens like a burning arrow. Everything was pitch-black except for the soft light streaming out of the partially open, double wooden doors and the small, dirty, spiderwebbed window of Zeke's corrugated iron shed. The air around the shed was saturated with the sound of Pink Floyd's *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*. It was as if the whole shed was one giant speaker radiating music into the black emptiness around it.

The interior of the dusty, cluttered-up shed was filled with smoke. There was a solitary globe softly glowing above the ancient, heavily constructed workbench. The enormous speakers, either side of the workbench, wailed and throbbed as Zeke's distorted body stood hunched over Ben's prop guard, which was resting on a new set of digital scales that Zeke had bought that very day.

In the corner of the window frame, a black spider pounced on an unfortunate fly that had blundered into its sticky web. Standing in the small circle of light, Zeke weighed and re-weighed the guard. He scribbled some numbers on a piece of dirty paper and then stepped back, out of the light, in animated amazement. He ran his weathered hands through his long blond hair, making it stick out like that of a mad scientist. He looked around excitedly, as if looking for someone to speak to, but there was no one else there. Dramatically, he turned back towards the prop guard, which was glittering in the centre of the light, his body language that of a man who had just seen a miraculous vision. He stepped forward to his bench and weighed the guard again, this time standing it on its side. He scribbled down another number. He then scribbled some calculations and stepped back from the bench again. He looked at the smooth, shiny, space-frame shape in total bewilderment. He couldn't believe what he was looking at. He returned to his bench and repeated the weighing experiment a number of times. He was shocked to find the results the same each time. Completely blown away, he whispered,

'Ben, what have you left us?'

2

Next morning, Adam's phone rang at 8.00 o'clock. It was Zeke.

'Hey, Adam, what are you doin?'

'Oh, you know, Zeke, trying to kick-start the motor, having some coffee.

I'm always a bit lost on Saturday mornings. Why, what's up?'

'Plenty. You gotta come up here an see somethin.'

'See what?'

'There's a lot more to young Ben than either of us ever imagined.'

'Like what?'

'You gotta come up an see.'

'For Christ's sake, Zeke, will you stop with all the mystery and tell me something.'

'Nah, I wanna show you. I want you to find it yourself.'

'Find what?'

'See you when you get up here.'

Zeke hung up the phone.

As Adam drove into Zeke's yard, Zeke was already hobbling out of his house carrying two mugs of coffee.

'We can go straight into me workshop.'

Adam followed Zeke into the shed and sat on his spot, on a box, off to one side of the workbench.

'So what has the Zekester discovered? I sense by the look, something urgent.'

'Urgent ain't the word, mate. I don't know what the word is, but I want you to find it the way I did.'

'Find what?'

Zeke beckoned Adam to come over to the workbench.

'Does this mean that I have to stand up?'

Zeke beckoned impatiently.

'Yeah yeah, come over here.'

'Here?'

'Yeah. Now weigh the guard, front side down.'

'Is this the front?'

'Yeah, that's it. Put it on the scales.'

'Wow, Zeke, look at the fancy new digital scales.'

'Accurate to a tenth of a gram. Put it on the scales.'

Adam placed the guard on the scales, front end down.

'What's it weigh? Is this the readout?'

'Yeah.'

'Is it in grams?'

'Yeah.'

'1026.5. Is that 1026.5 grams?'

'Yeah. Now turn the guard over, back side down, and weigh it.'

Adam did as he was told. He weighed the guard the other way up and read out the number.

'996.5. It's lighter!'

'Surprised?'

'Are you kidding?'

'Now weigh it on its side.'

Adam weighed the guard, standing it on its side on the sensitive scales. He read out,

'1011.5 grams. That's different again. There's something wrong with your scales, Zeke, they give a different reading every time.'

'Go ahead, weigh somethin else.'

Adam looked for something asymmetrical. He picked up a hammer and weighed it lying on its side and then standing on its end.

'It's the same.'

'That's because there's nothin wrong with the scales. I'm thinkin that maybe Ben might have left us with a little surprise.'

'I'm still not with you, Zeke.'

'There's more. I've been weighin the guard for about eighteen hours. It weighs somethin different every couple of hours. That's only when it's lyin down with either the front or the back down. When it's on its side, it always weighs the same, 1011.5 grams.'

'That's amazing!'

'Then I did some figurin an worked out that the two variable weights always added up to twice the constant weight, an guess what that is?'

'Jees Zeke, that's twice 1011.5 ... which is ... 2023, which is the number Ben wrote down on the paper.'

'That's right. Do you see why I had to call you? An there's more. At night, when it's cooler, the weight difference is less, an durin the day when it's warmer, it's more. Are you thinkin what I'm thinkin?'

'Zeke, I wouldn't even attempt something like that.'

'It's pushin. You can just feel it.'

Zeke picked up the guard and held it up, lightly moving it from side to side.

'You can feel it, fifteen grams.'

'Let me feel it.'

Adam took the guard and held it upright. He moved it from side to side, trying to feel fifteen grams of sideways push.

'It's so slight. I don't know if I'm imagining it, but I think that I can feel a bit of a push, just like you said.' Adam rotated through 360 degrees holding up the guard. 'It pushes all the way around.'

'Let's do somethin,' Zeke suggested.

He began to rummage amongst the piles of junk lying around the perimeter of his workshop. He pulled out an old bicycle wheel and gave it a spin.

'This'll do.'

He clamped a set of locking pliers to the end of the wheel axle then fixed the pliers in the vice bolted to his workbench.

'Can you get me the spirit level please Adam. It's over there. I've got to get this wheel dead horizontal. Can you give me a hand settin this up.'

Adam placed the spirit level on top of the horizontal wheel rim as Zeke made minute adjustments and turned the wheel, checking the spirit level constantly. When he was satisfied that it was perfectly horizontal, he said to Adam,

'Tighten up the vice, nice n tight.'

Adam tightened the vice. Zeke picked up the guard and carefully placed it on the wheel rim, standing it up on its side, with the front of it pointing in the clockwise direction of the turn of the wheel.

‘Your setup mightn’t hold the weight of the guard, Zeke.’

‘It’ll be touch n go. Is the vice tight?’

Adam gave the vice another tighten.

‘Come here, hold the guard for me.’

Adam held the guard while Zeke cut some fine wire. He then proceeded to tie the outer rim of the guard to the outer part of the spokes of the bicycle wheel. When it was secure he said,

‘There, you can let go now.’

Zeke grabbed Adam’s shirtsleeve and stepped back, pulling Adam back with him. Neither of them said anything as they stood there watching the wheel. The light, half-metre-wide propeller guard sat in position, wired to the spokes. Suddenly, as if by magic, the wheel, ever so slowly at first, began to turn in the clockwise direction. It gradually increased speed until it settled into a steady, silent, spontaneous, unassisted rotation. The two friends’ eyes bulged clear out of their sockets.

‘It’s turning ... by itself!’

Zeke’s jaw hung open as he stared at a vision he knew no human on Earth had ever seen before. He started to mumble,

‘It looks like fifteen grams is enough to break the friction of the wheel bearings. I thought we’d have to give it a push to get it goin.’

‘Look at it Zeke, It’s just going round and round, all by itself.’

‘Look at what your son left behind, Adam, a prop guard that generates fifteen grams of thrust.’

Adam wanted to say a couple of things, but he couldn’t make any words come out, so Zeke kept talking.

‘Listen, we need another cup of coffee ... and a puff. What do you reckon? Don’t you think we’ve earned it?’

Adam sat on his box, not saying a word, staring at the slowly rotating bicycle wheel with the guard silently going round and round on top of it. Zeke disappeared into his house and returned a few minutes later with fresh coffee,

biscuits and his bowl and pipe. He placed it all down on an upturned milk crate and sat on his chair.

‘I see it’s still goin round.’

‘Yeah, about one revolution every nine seconds.’

‘If it is what I think it is, it’ll keep goin round an round forever. You know, Adam, Lib an Ben used to come up here heaps. She often dropped him off up here if she went shoppin or surfin. We spent a lot of time talkin about the gravity sail. Ben said that he’d use one with his rollerblades, but it was just a dream. I had no idea where to start. Now all *this* happens an we end up lookin right at it, like magic. Look at it. It just keeps turnin, seemingly for no reason. It’s like a bloody windmill. We’ve just built a bloody gravity windmill, the first one on Earth. I reckon it must be time for that puff.’

‘What do you think is doing it? The metal? Do you think it’s some special alloy?’

‘I wouldn’t be surprised, although I’m wonderin if the shape might have somethin to do with it. See the triangles an rectangles in it, an part of it looks like a tetrahedron. It might pay to take some accurate measurements. Do you think we should tell Doyle?’

‘I don’t know. I’ll have to think about that. He keeps secrets from us.’

‘Hang on, I’ve got an idea.’

Zeke had another rummage in the pile of junk in the corner of his shed and produced an old, two bar, electric heater. He plugged it in and held it close to the guard as it came around.

‘Are you trying to heat the guard up?’

‘Yeah, to see if it does anythin ... look it’s speedin up!’

‘Are you sure? It looks the same to me.’

‘No no no, it’s speedin up, only slightly, but it’s speedin up. I’ve got a stopwatch somewhere. Switch off the heater.’ Adam did as he was told. ‘Let’s put that small box under the heater, on the bench here, that’s it, that’s good. Where’s that bloody stopwatch?’

Zeke hunted for his stopwatch while Adam juggled some figures.

‘If it weighs 1011.5 grams, then it would have to generate 1011.5 grams of thrust to levitate. That’s a lot more than fifteen.’

Zeke found his stopwatch and stepped up to the experiment. He grabbed a pen and some paper and said,

‘It should have cooled down enough. I’ll measure one rotation.’

Zeke timed one rotation of the wheel then got Adam to switch on the heater again. As the guard warmed up, Zeke noted,

‘It’s speedin up. Before it was 9.1 seconds for one turn, now it’s 8.5 and it’s still speedin up ... now it’s 7.9 ... you can see it’s spinnin faster. We can switch off the heater now.’

Zeke put the heater away, sat down and lit his pipe. The wheel, with the guard wired to it, continued to silently spin in a clockwise direction at one revolution every 9.1 seconds. Zeke asked the question,

‘How well do you know Doyle?’

‘No better than you. I slept in his house, but he’s basically still an enigma to me. I still haven’t worked out his true motives. What’s he trying to do? He’s created this whole mad reality with his bloody facts, but now we’ve got a fact for him.’

‘Who does he talk to?’

‘Who doesn’t he talk to. His connections are a complete mystery to me. What isn’t a mystery is that he’s got lots of them.’

‘This is pretty big, mate. It’s only gonna be fun while no one knows about it. As soon as somebody finds out, we’re stuffed. They’ll take it off us straight away, no doubt.’

‘What if we got Doyle to promise not to tell?’

Zeke pointed at the rotating guard.

‘This is the biggest discovery in history. This is free energy. This is what takes the place of fuel. Can you imagine what this news would do to the world’s stock markets? Can you imagine it in the hands of just one country, especially as a secret? They could develop it and achieve total world domination.’

‘You might want to take it easy on that pipe, Zeke. You’ve gone from an old bicycle wheel to world domination in three sentences.’

‘Do we trust Doyle or not?’

‘I think so, after all, if it wasn’t for him we never would have thought twice about the prop guard and we never would have thought of Libby being

an ... you know, it's still hard to say it ... an alien. And Doyle probably still knows things we don't and who knows what else he might come up with. He might be able to help.'

'To do what?'

'I don't know, make it fly? He's got all the books.'

'There's lots to do before we can make it fly.'

'So Doyle is in?'

'Yeah, I suppose so.'

Zeke thought for a while, finally coming up with a decision.

'I'm gonna need the bottom half of a forty-four gallon drum, or maybe a big garbage bin. I've got to go to the tip.'

3

Adam decided to go back home for a while. He called Doyle and told him that they had something to show him. Doyle's voice always made Adam feel a bit edgy.

'That's a turn-up. It's usually me showing you things. What is it?'

'I think you should see this for yourself.'

'A bit of mystery as well, eh? I was waiting for something like this. I can be at Zeke's in about two hours.'

'OK, we'll see you there in two hours.'

Adam drove back up to Zeke's place after eating a sandwich. When he rolled up he saw Zeke busy in his back yard building a wood fire. He got out of his car and walked over.

'What are you doing?'

'Settin up experiment number two.'

'I called Doyle. He'll be here in about half an hour.'

'I suppose I better not dismantle the *gravity windmill* until he gets here. How do you think he'll react?'

'I doubt that he's ever seen anything like it before, but with him you just can't be sure.'

'You can bet it's all he thinks about. It's all everybody thinks about. Antigravity and free energy. That's why they all get interested in witness

accounts of UFOs. They just want to get closer to the unimaginable technology. You wanna give me a hand with this drum?’

Zeke pointed to a bottom third of a forty-four gallon drum that he had just scavenged at the rubbish tip.

‘Oh, I see you found your drum.’

They sat the drum over the firewood, supported by three large bricks. Zeke turned on the garden hose and began filling the drum with water. Just about when it was nearly full, Doyle’s car rattled into the yard. Doyle clambered out, lit a cigarette and wandered over to the two boys.

‘What’s on the menu?’

‘Nothing, Doyle,’ said Adam, ‘I hope you took your pills today.’

‘You boys shouldn’t gee me up like this if you’ve got nothing good to back it up with.’

‘Go take a look in me shed.’

Doyle walked into the shed. Adam and Zeke stayed outside and waited for his reaction. They soon heard Doyle yelling from inside the shed.

‘How are you doing this, Zeke? What kind of bullshit is this? Will you boys come in here.’

The boys stepped into the shed, grinning from ear to ear. They all sat in wonderment, watching the spinning wheel, as Zeke explained how he accidentally discovered the amazing phenomenon.

‘You’ve found the bloody Holy Grail,’ exclaimed Doyle, ‘the future of the human race!’

‘It wasn’t us, it was Ben,’ explained Adam.

‘So the guard is making it go round.’

‘Yeah, the guard pushes.’

‘Fifteen grams at room temperature.’

‘Whoa Zeke, you’re losing me.’

‘The guard, on the wheel, generates fifteen grams of thrust, and the hotter it gets the more it pushes. That’s what we’re testing next. We wanna see how much thrust it has when it’s hot,’ Zeke looked at Adam, ‘or should I be callin it lift?’

'Lift sounds better,' responded Adam. 'Thrust sounds too much like burning fuel.'

'Yeah, I agree. Lift, like a sail. I'm goin out to light the fire.'

They all went outside and watched Zeke light the fire. He then went into the shed, unwired the guard from the wheel, brought it out and dropped it, back down, into the drum of cold water. Doyle remarked,

'You're going to cook the guard.'

'Yeah Doyle, to one hundred degrees centigrade.'

'What do you think will happen?' Doyle asked.

'I don't know. The heat should increase the lift generated by the guard. Actually, I've got a thermometer somewhere. I'll go find it. I can measure the water temperature as it's gettin hotter.'

Zeke disappeared into his shed as the fire began to take hold and make a huge amount of smoke. Adam and Doyle kept moving around the fire.

'Isn't it amazing how smoke always follows you around a fire, Doyle.'

'I've been meaning to call you, Adam.'

'Really?'

'Yeah. I've been going over the records and uncovered an interesting statistical aberration.'

'More intrigue?'

'Well, what did you expect? You know all the fathers that got left behind, like you?'

'Yeah?'

'A disproportionate number of them just happened to be dentists.'

'Wha ... ?'

'Lost for words, Adam? I fail to see any logical connection, but then I am not a dentist and you are. What could it be about dentists that would cause them to attract beautiful alien women to breed with them? Maybe they fall in love with their smell.'

'I can't think of anything at the moment, Doyle.'

Zeke reappeared carrying a thermometer. 'Got it. I see the fire's a bit smoky. Some of the wood's still a bit green.' He placed the thermometer into the water, stepped back and declared, 'We might see the most amazin thing in

about half an hour. Listen, seein as we're all here, we might as well all agree to keep this a secret. How about it Doyle?

'Don't worry boys; this is my private investigation, not a public inquiry. Anyway, this doesn't tell us what it's all about. It doesn't answer the big question. There's a reason why they came to this planet and there's a reason why they took the hybrids. There's a *big* reason. I want the whole loaf. All these other things are just the crumbs.'

Doyle lit another cigarette as Zeke made some coffee and brought out a mix and his pipe. The water in the drum was beginning to steam on the surface. Zeke looked at the thermometer and announced,

'Seventy degrees.'

Smoke belched from the fire as the three men hovered around the drum, keeping it under intense scrutiny.

'A watched pot never boils,' blurted Adam.

'This one's gonna boil, buddy.'

'You should have supplied gas masks, Zeke.' Doyle joked.

'Look, it's breakin the surface of the water.'

As the water began to bubble, the three men stared spellbound as the metal guard slowly rose out of the water.

'Bloody hell, Zeke!' exclaimed Doyle.

When everything stabilised, with the water in the drum boiling furiously and the smoke spiralling and rotating in the swirling breeze, Zeke observed,

'Look, it's levitatin just above the water. It's generatin how much lift, Adam?'

'1011.5 grams, Zeke, the same as its end on weight.'

Zeke postulated, 'I wouldn't be surprised if it generated a tiny amount of lift right down to absolute zero.'

'How much lift could it generate if it got hotter?' Adam asked.

'You could only take it up to the meltin point of the metal, then it would lose its shape. Let's try somethin else.'

Zeke suddenly got all excited. He went into his shed and brought out an old towel. He folded it over a few times and picked the hot guard up with it. He held the guard in front of himself and exclaimed,

'Whoah! You can *really* feel the push now. It feels like a bloody kilo. Here Adam, feel it.'

Zeke handed the hot guard to Adam who felt its forward thrust.

'Oh man, that's a solid push. I reckon it would push you along on skates. I can feel the push getting lighter though, as it's getting cooler. Here Doyle, feel it before it cools down too much.'

Doyle took the towel-wrapped guard and held it out in front of himself.

'So this is how they propel themselves through space, eh.'

Zeke postulated, 'If this guard was floatin somewhere out in deepest outer space, a long way from anythin, it would start acceleratin, ever so gradually, even though it was only generatin the minutest amount of lift in the super cold environment of space. Even with the miniscule lift, it would keep acceleratin for years an years, right up to the speed of light squared, the speed at which it would ultimately transform itself into pure energy. After that, your guess is as good as mine.'

'Nothing can go faster than the speed of light, Zeke.'

Adam couldn't resist the opportunity.

'Your ideas are about as ancient as your car, Doyle.'

'My car? I will have you know that you are casting aspersions on one of the finest vehicles ever built.'

Zeke disappeared into his kitchen and reappeared carrying a portable, electric hotplate. He limped into his shed saying,

'Would you like to bring the guard into the workshop, experiment number three is about to begin momentarily.'

'Hotplate! Great idea, Zeke.'

'I wonder if we can make it pick up the hotplate?'

'What's the hotplate weigh?'

'A couple of kilos, I reckon, so we'll need about three kilos of lift.'

Doyle just stood back, watching in silence, as Adam and Zeke bounced ideas off each other. Zeke tied the guard to the hotplate with some wire. He placed it on the ground in the middle of the shed and plugged the end of the lead into a power socket.

'OK, stand back, I'm gonna switch it on.'

'Is there a thermostat control on it, Zeke?'

'There is, Adam, but I've got it set on full. I figure I can control it with the on-off switch. We can always find a stable heat for it later.'

Zeke flipped the switch. They watched the hotplate begin to glow red-hot.

'It's got to be over 100 degrees by now.'

'Yeah, but that's only one kilo of lift, we need three. We don't know how hot it's gotta get for that.'

Then suddenly,

'Look, it's movin. It's liftin the hotplate!'

'Bullshit!' exclaimed Doyle.

'Three kilos of lift!' Adam added.

They watched the guard and hotplate slowly rise off the ground, first just an inch, then a few inches, then a foot, then, as it got hotter, Ben's prop guard lifted the red-hot hotplate right up to the ceiling. Just as it was about to make contact with the corrugated iron roof, Zeke switched off the power. He stepped out to the levitating contraption and said,

'It'll start comin down as it cools. I'll switch it back on when it gets half way down an try to set the thermostat at that temperature. We should be able to stabilise the temperature, an thus the lift, at a point where the guard is floatin about four or five feet off the ground.'

Doyle began getting slightly emotional.

'This is such bullshit, Zeke. Do you know that there are governments spending trillions of secret dollars on classified black projects doing research in unimaginably hi-tech labs searching for exactly *this*? Have you got any idea?' Doyle looked around at all the junk with a nauseous look on his face. 'And in the end it happens *here*, completely *secret* from all of them. If they found out,' he shook his head like he knew something, 'if they found out it would be like the whole world coming down on your heads.'

Zeke fine-tuned the thermostat control on the hotplate. The contraption ended up stabilising, levitating silently about three feet off the ground.

'There it is,' declared Zeke, 'three kilos of lift. Three times its own weight an it'll keep doin it forever as long as it stays at that temperature.'

Doyle began steering the conversation in his direction.

'I guess I can assume that any doubts either of you had about Liberty and Ben's true identities have been completely dispelled by current events. I can assume that I don't need to expend any more energy convincing you of that.'

Adam responded, 'I've got to hand it to you, Doyle, I'm convinced.'

'Good, because I've got to ask you some more questions, but I might save them for another day.'

They spent the rest of the afternoon and evening getting stoned in Zeke's shed. They watched the guard levitating in front of them and enjoyed themselves speculating on possible designs of space ship incorporating what Zeke called *gravity drive*. He postulated,

'You'd only need a gravity driven, variable friction turbine to generate the heat, to keep the gravity drive hot, and you'd be away.'

'How would you stop yourself being squashed, like roadkill, by all the G-forces?' Adam asked.

'It must have somethin to do with the shape. Maybe if you sit inside the shape you don't feel any G-forces. You couldn't accelerate from zero to the speed of light squared in a few minutes, or maybe in just a few seconds, without gettin pancaked. Maybe you somehow lose your mass inside one of those ships. Come to think of it, you'd have to. Maybe mass is an effect of gravitons as well, just like gravity. Maybe matter actually has no mass when it's not in a graviton field.'

Doyle cleared the air.

'One thing is an undeniable fact. Liberty flew here from at least four light years away.'

Adam considered,

'Libby wouldn't have spent four years in a space ship. She was only nineteen when she arrived here. There can't be any doubt that she travelled faster than the speed of light.'

'She flew at the speed of light squared,' Zeke declared, 'because she used a gravity sail, because gravitons travel at the speed of light squared, as pure energy, because $E=mc^2=G$. There's two kinds of matter in the universe, the kind you can see and the kind you can't see. The stuff you can see is *sub light squared*, symmetrical matter. The stuff you can't see is *light squared* and

probably some kind of asymmetrical matter. It's very fine, finer than photons and there's an ocean of it. All the *sub light squared* stuff floats in it. The *light squared stuff* is the *missin mass of the universe*, except it's all in the form of pure energy, perfectly balanced, a fraction of it manifestin as the effect of gravitational attraction, and probably a fraction of it manifestin as the effect of mass in all the *sub light squared* matter as well.'

'So you think that you have solved the riddle of the missing mass of the universe, Zeke?'

'Well, Doyle, let me try to explain it to you in simpler terms. Imagine the universe as a glass of frozen water. The ice weighs so much, say 10 units. Over time, 91% of the ice melts. The remainin 9% floats in the 91% that is now water. Now, the genius scientists come along and say, *the universe should weigh 10 units, but we can only see 9% of it*. Get it? They're only seein the ice and not the water it's floatin in.'

'So you're saying that gravity is the missing mass.'

'No, the ocean of gravitons is.'

'You should write a paper.'

'What good would that do, Doyle? Anyway, I don't write papers, I keep it all in me head.'

They spoke late into the night, about such subjects as they would have never imagined speaking about before. They spoke with confidence and certainty, each of them occasionally glancing at the levitating guard in front of them as an affirmation to the new reality. It was well after midnight before they managed to tear themselves away from *the gravity sail*. As soon as Adam left and began driving down the hill, a particular sentence of Doyle's surfaced into his conscious thought and repeated itself, over and over.

'A disproportionate number of them just happened to be dentists ... dentists ... dentists ...'

'What could that mean?' he whispered to himself. 'It could only be one thing ... the gas!'

.....

Chapter Twenty-Four

KHUFU

1

The morning light gently coaxed his eyes to open. Beneath his waking breath, he uttered the words,

‘See you guys ... I love you forever.’

They came to see him again, in another dream. He remembered it with such clarity. He relived the dream, over and over, while sitting in his kitchen sipping on a cup of black coffee and rolling his first joint of the day. He thought that Ben seemed older this time and that his hair was longer, and he thought that Libby had cut hers shorter.

It was another Saturday morning. Another day, of another week, of another month. He thought to himself, *‘This crazy life of mine, I seem to be destined to spend most of it alone,’* then he philosophised, *‘but at least I’m used to it.’*

He hadn’t flown for a year and was beginning to lose contact with his flying friends. He occasionally thought about whether he had slid into a low grade, chronic depression, but then he rationalised his mental state as either neutral, grey or numb, but not depressed. Anyway, he still had the crazy thing with Doyle and Zeke. That kept him amused enough and he felt that he had enough social contact with his patients to prevent him from becoming too eccentric. He had absolutely no inclination to fall in love again. He felt like he had enough of that game. Besides, he was still in love with Libby and he couldn’t see *that* changing anytime soon.

He began to drift back towards his parents. They were getting older now and were slowing down somewhat. His dad was still working in the same place, thirty-two years after he began there with a bucket and a kitchen chair. He had done well for his family over the years and he could have moved to a better location, but he said that he could never tear himself away from *his people*. That was one of the few traits that Adam shared with his dad. He harboured the same caring feelings for his own patients. On some weekends, he slept over on a Saturday night and helped out around the house. Slowly he rediscovered his

joy of being with his mum and dad and was much more aware now, that they were all the family he had. His mum fried up a pile of schnitzels and they all sat around the kitchen table enjoying their lunch, with the radio permanently tuned to 2CH, the *blue rinse* station. Adam now actually found the music soothing, as it helped to calm his frayed nerves. Even his dad was going easy on him. He had substantially cut the sarcasm after the trauma of Libby's disappearance. The house was generally more subdued these days, compared to the past when lively family arguments raged within it like runaway hurricanes. Back in those days, his parents were younger and still full of the energy of life. Age calms us all, as does loss. The loss of Libby and Ben brought an ever-present sadness into the house. Adam's mum expressed her grief the most.

'That poor boy, I worry about him the most.'

They remembered all the visits and how their lives lit up every time Libby and Ben came around. Usually, Libby helped Adam's mum in the kitchen while Ben hung around his grandad.

Adam remembered discussions between Libby and his dad. He remembered everything in a new light now. His dad had been a UFO fanatic ever since they both saw what they agreed must have been a UFO way back in the early sixties not long after they emigrated to Australia. It was the middle of the day and they were lying on the grass in the back of the house. He remembered how together they saw what looked like a bright star doing right angles in the sky. From that point on, his dad bought every UFO book he could get his hands on. He also began to read the Bible religiously, not in a search for spiritual salvation, but in a search for evidence of alien intervention. He used to lecture everyone around the table,

'God was an alien! That's as obvious as the nose on her face.' He pointed at his wife's nose.

'Don't start me, mister perfect. You know, Liberty, I have to open all the windows in the house every morning, doesn't matter how cold it is outside. I only have two choices, freeze or die of gas poisoning.'

'Listen here, I love how she fabricates these fantasies ... and Jesus, either His father was an alien, or Mary got artificially inseminated with an alien egg,

pre-fertilised by an alien male, becoming a surrogate mother. In that scenario, Jesus was adopted before he was even born.'

Adam's mum rolled her eyes and exclaimed,

'It's a wonder that God hasn't struck you down with lightning yet!'

'Have you ever read Ezekiel? Read that! Have you read about Elijah? I rest my case.'

Liberty listened intently to these conversations, occasionally offering a comment when asked.

'Everything can be seen from many points of view. From each point of view it looks a little different. Each written testimony is always only one of these points of view and is therefore, at best, only a one-dimensional description of a multi-dimensional phenomenon.'

There was always a silent pause after Libby said something, as everyone attempted to decipher her meaning. Adam's dad was usually the first to say something like,

'I couldn't have put it more eloquently myself.' When no one else spoke, he continued. 'God was an alien and He is coming back after the *great tribulation*.'

Ben and Libby glanced at each other.

'Boy, ah, dad, that's very Biblical.'

'That's because it *is*, Adam, and whoever God was, He was trying to tell us something, something about a big catastrophe and how He will return after it.'

'What kind of catastrophe do you envisage, dad?' queried Liberty.

'My guess, judging by the stuff in the Bible, nuclear Armageddon. The good guys versus the bad guys, but the idiots all end up dead guys, and they take the rest of the world with them.'

'Hello, it's mister cheerful,' said Adam's mum sarcastically. 'You must remind us to book you for our next party.'

'How could aliens predict something like that? Liberty asked. 'There will always be a chance that nuclear war will be averted. They could never predict a nuclear war with certainty. Only God could do that. But you say they were aliens ... unless they planned to trigger the war off themselves?'

There was another one of those long pauses while everybody mulled over Liberty's question. Finally Adam's mum opened up.

'Why don't you answer her, mister genius Einstein?'

'You make a very good point, Liberty, a revolutionary point. You have changed my thinking. Bravo! So what do *you* think the great tribulation should be?'

'If God was an alien?'

'Yes, if God was an alien.'

'If God was an alien, the great tribulation could only be something that could be predicted with mathematical certainty, thousands of years before it happened.'

'And what would you suggest that could be?'

'Well, for example, the orbit of a comet ... or something like that.'

There was another stunned silence. Everyone, except Ben, marvelled at Liberty's incisive intellect.

'That narrows it down a bit,' declared Adam's dad. 'So we can scratch the nuclear holocaust, that's a relief.'

Everyone laughed, then Ben threw in his little bit.

'And then they're coming back.'

Everyone stopped talking and looked at Ben. His nana asked him,

'Who is coming back, darling?'

'The aliens, nana, in the Bible. Grandad said that they were coming back.'

'He's right! That's what it's all about. It's about a total destruction, in fire, and then a new beginning. I doubt that we will be around when that happens, though. Thankfully it's going to be somebody else's problem.'

'Will anyone survive?' Libby enquired.

'Ahm, yes. The Bible talks about the *chosen ones*, in Revelation. The ones with *the mark* will be taken away and spared the suffering. It says that they were chosen before even time began. Go figure that.'

'They can put a mark on you!' exclaimed Adam's mum. 'They can have you with my compliments.'

'There are some things that I bet even aliens don't understand,' commented Libby.

'Would you like more cake, Ben? One more piece?'

'Thank you nana.'

2

It had been three weeks since anyone heard from Doyle. Adam occasionally thought about dropping into his place on the way back home from visiting his parents, but always changed his mind at the last minute. He thought that everything about Doyle was so surreal. '*I feel like I'm in one of those Dali paintings and Doyle is Dali, painting his anarchic reality all around me.*' Then on one return trip from his parents' house, he thought, '*What the hell, I might as well see if he's home.*'

It was a pleasant, warm, sunny afternoon with enough northeast sea breeze blowing to keep things reasonably cool. He drove by Doyle's house and saw his car parked in the driveway. He pulled up behind it and got out of his car. The small, well-maintained, red-brick cottage seemed a little friendlier this time around. Adam knocked on the door. After a brief moment, he heard the sound of footsteps and Doyle's voice grumbling, 'keep your shirt on.' The door opened. Doyle's face cracked a rare smile.

'Bloody hell, the world *is* full of surprises. Come in Adam, come in.'

'Did I drop in at a bad time, Doyle? I was driving by and I thought, Jees, I haven't seen Doyle for a while, so I thought I'd drop around and see if you were home.'

'Good, mate, good, come in. I've been meaning to call you.'

The inside of Doyle's house was pleasantly cool with the sea breeze wafting in through all the open windows.

'Coffee?'

'Coffee'd be nice, thanks, Doyle.'

Adam followed Doyle into his kitchen and watched him make the coffees. They chatted about this and that and finally retired into Doyle's *office*. Doyle had the TV on with the sound down, Willie Nelson was playing through a small set of speakers and his computer was switched on.

'What do you do in here, Doyle?'

'This is where I live and work. It's my sanctuary and my mission control room.'

Adam looked around the cluttered room. He noticed Doyle's overflowing ashtray sitting on his desk next to a half-empty plastic bag of dope, a packet of Tally-Hos, a lighter and a carton of B&H. Lying open on his desk, next to the computer, were two paperbacks, which on closer inspection turned out to be collections of UFO eyewitness accounts. They both sat down and relaxed. Doyle lit a cigarette and Adam had a sip of his coffee. He couldn't help himself, so he asked,

'What got you so interested in UFOs, Doyle?'

'Oh, you wouldn't want to know.'

'Why not? Is it a secret?'

'No no, nothing like that.' Doyle sighed deeply. 'It's just a painful memory, that's all.'

'You don't have to tell me if it's painful.'

'No, it's OK. I guess if anybody ought to know it's you.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'You'll figure that out when I tell you the story. Do you want to roll one?'

'Yeah, OK. So what got you into UFOs then?'

Doyle stretched his body, had a sip of his coffee and lit another cigarette. Adam could see that he was psyching himself up to tell his story.

'It happened twelve years ago. Actually, over twelve years ago. It was *Saturday, August 25, 1979*, on the Sturt highway, just south of Hay. I'll never forget that day.'

'Hey, I know that place.'

'Jules, I mean Julie, my wife, was driving back from Adelaide, from a conference. They reckon that it happened not long after sunset. They found her car in a paddock, off the side of the road. They said that the car must have rolled at least a dozen times. It was all smashed up. They found her dead inside the wreck. She was a mess. The Hay boys called up and told me the news. I got straight into my car and took off. When I got down there, she was in the fridge at the morgue, in the local hospital, and the car was still in the paddock by the road. The accident report estimated that she was doing at least 140kph when she lost control. She went off the road on an open stretch of clear, straight highway. The police couldn't determine the cause of the accident. They checked

the vehicle for faults, but they couldn't find any. After all, it was a Volvo. In the end they thought that she may have gone to sleep at the wheel, or maybe she had to veer suddenly to avoid an oncoming car or kangaroo. They said that they would probably never know the true cause.'

'So you lost your wife as well. Jeess, sorry, Doyle.'

'After I did a positive ID for the Hay boys, I drove out to the wreck and had a close look at it. By this time I was feeling worse than shit.'

'Been there, Doyle.'

'I know. I walked around the Volvo. It was totalled. All the windows were smashed, every panel was crumpled and all the wheels were hanging off it. It was a horrible sight, I've got to tell you.'

Adam lit the joint he had just rolled and handed it to Doyle. Doyle took a drag and continued.

'I tried to open the driver's door, but it was jammed shut. I then had a go at the passenger door. It opened OK. They must have got her out through the passenger door. When I looked inside, it was not a pretty picture.'

Doyle took a couple of long drags on the joint and continued,

'When I looked inside, there was dried blood everywhere. You'd think that I'd be used to all that stuff, but when it's your own wife's blood,' Doyle shook his head, 'you can never get used to that, mate.'

Adam sighed, 'You poor bastard.'

'Ahh, I'm OK ... anyway ... I looked around inside the car. Most of the windscreen was smashed in, but there was a bit of it intact on the lower left hand side. And there, on the cracked remnants of the windscreen, written in her own blood, was her last message to the world. With the last bit of life left in her, she dipped her finger in her own blood and wrote out the letters U F O. Can you believe it, Adam? That's the last message she leaves me. Not I love you or anything, just U F O.'

'I'm sure she loved you.'

'Yeah, and I loved her.'

'Jeess, Doyle, are you going to Bogart that joint all day?'

'I think you better roll another one.'

'So you figure that she might have seen a UFO, got distracted and crashed.'

'Well, there's no way of knowing for sure, but if you knew Jules you'd know that she wouldn't have written that down for no reason. She saw something alright, and that was when I made a decision to take an interest in flying saucers.'

'When did you say she crashed?'

'*Saturday, August 25, 1979.*'

'I think that I was out there around that time. I've only ever been there once. That's right, I remember now, I literally ran away from the city for a week. I had to get away. The place was stressing me stupid. Let me think, I sold the surgery in *September '79*, I met Libby on *Christmas day '79*, I was out there in *August*. I wonder if it was the same weekend?'

'Since then I've been chasing up as much information about UFOs as I could get my hands on, and then your case came along and all of a sudden I'm closer to them than I've ever been before.'

'But what do you hope to achieve?'

'I don't know. I know that I can never bring Jules back, but I can't control myself. It's become an obsession, like a psychosis, and the more I meddle, the more obsessive it gets. But look, it's not like I haven't made any progress. We now know for sure that they have been here.'

'I couldn't let go of it either if I were you, Doyle.'

'How about Zeke and the guard? I wonder what he intends to do now?'

'Zeke is in his element. I've never seen him so excited.'

Doyle had it in his mind to ask Adam some very penetrating questions. He had been holding off for months waiting for an opportune moment. He knew that the information he wanted might not exist because Adam had never spoken about it, but there was a common thread of evidence running through most of the plausible UFO accounts in his books. Doyle's suspicions that Adam's memory held the answer to the big question never waned and he played him like a fish, taking his time to reel him in, being careful not to lose him in the process. He was contemplating whether he should begin the new line of questioning right there and then, when his phone rang. He answered it,

'It's your money.'

'Doyle, it's Zeke. Is Adam there? Have you seen him?'

'I'm looking at him right now.'

'Great, I was starting to go nuts lookin for him.'

'Starting?'

'You should talk, Doyle.'

'So what's up?'

'I found somethin, in the guard.'

'Is this information just for Adam?'

'Of course not, you're in this too. We're all in this together. You ought to come down an tell Adam to come down as well.'

'Do you want to give us a hint?'

'OK. I did a precise measurement of the guard an did some detailed drawins. I got the surprise of me life.'

'A surprise? I like surprises.'

Adam butted in, 'Is anybody going to let me in on this?'

Zeke continued, 'Did you ever get into the pyramids, Doyle, you know, in Egypt?'

'I might have had a dabble, why?'

'I'd rather show you, or better still, let you find it yourself.'

'Oh come on, Zeke, give me something to make me get into my car.'

'OK, let's see how much you know. I measured the diameter of the guard.'

'Yeah?'

'I got exactly 524 millimetres.'

'Bull ... shit! That's the bloody *Royal Cubit!*'

'You surprise me, Doyle. That's not all, but it'd be easier to go through it with you if you came down.'

'How sure are you?'

'Come on Doyle, how hard is it to measure the diameter of a circle? Hey..?'

'Yeah?'

'You got any books that might help?'

'Might do.'

'Can you bring them?'

'If you're lucky. We'll be on our way in about half an hour. I'll tell Adam what you told me. It'll be dinner time by the time we get there, so how about I pick up a couple of pizzas on the way.'

'Sounds good.'

'See you in about one and a half hours then.'

'OK, see you then.'

As Doyle hung up the phone, Adam asked him,

'What was all that about?'

'How much do you know about the pyramids in Egypt?'

'Absolutely nothing. Why?'

'Zeke might have found a link between the guard and ancient Egypt.'

'Really?'

'He found that the diameter of the guard measured exactly one Royal Cubit, 524 millimetres.'

'What's a Royal Cubit?'

'It was the standard unit of measurement in ancient Egypt. Amongst other things, the Egyptians used it in the construction of the pyramids, that's assuming that the Egyptians even built the pyramids.'

'I fail to see the significance of all this, Doyle.'

'There may be none, but two of the oldest mysteries on this planet are, why the pyramids were built in the first place, and who were the real architects.'

'Weren't they tombs for the Pharaohs, or something?'

'Mainstream scholars hold fast to that assertion despite the fact that there has never been a body found in any of them, mummified or otherwise.'

'So you think that if Ben used the ... what was it called again?'

'The Royal Cubit.'

'If Ben used the *Royal Cubit* as a basis for measuring the guard, that would connect an alien intelligence with the construction of the pyramids?'

'Something like that. We should start thinking about taking off. You go, I've got to find some books for Zeke. I'll get a couple of pizzas and meet you down there.'

'OK Doyle, I'll see you there, but I've got to say that this just keeps getting weirder and weirder. Where is it all going to end?'

'Your guess is as good as mine, matey.'

3

Adam had already been at Zeke's for about half an hour when Doyle arrived. The aroma of the hot pizzas filled the tiny hut. The three men all smiled at each other as they gorged themselves on their delicious meal. As they ate, they watched the guard, hanging by a piece of string from the ceiling, centred between the three of them, swinging around spontaneously, silently announcing to anyone who could see it that a new age had indeed dawned.

After they ate their dinner, Zeke brought out his drawings and spread them out over the coffee table. He untied the swinging guard and put it away to one side. He then took a small reading light off a side shelf, plugged it into a power socket and placed it onto the coffee table. Switching it on, he bathed the drawings in a circle of soft light. The three men leaned over the plans as Zeke began to speak.

'OK, I've already told you that the diameter of the guard is 524 millimetres. Do you want to measure it, Doyle?'

'Ah, no, it's OK, I'll take your word for it.'

'As you can see, I drew the plans to scale, one to one. The next thing I measured was the length of the angled rods.'

Ben's prop guard was shaped like a cage. It was designed to be bolted to a small, 35cc, two-stroke motor. It was shaped to surround an 18-inch propeller, its chief function being to protect people from the spinning prop. The rear of the guard was made up of two metal rings, each exactly 524 millimetres in diameter. These were separated by four 100 millimetre-long rods. When the guard was bolted to the engine, the propeller was situated between the two rings. The front part of the guard was shaped like a pyramid with a square flat top. The flat top was the mounting plate, which had four holes in it, for bolting to the engine, and a large hole in the middle for the prop shaft to pass through. The mounting plate was connected to the anterior ring by four rods. They ran at an angle from each corner of the square mounting plate to each of the four

junctions of the rings and separating rods, making it look like a flat-topped pyramid resting on a circular base. Zeke continued his explanation.

‘Each angled rod measured out to, as close as I could make it, 200 millimetres. On the surface of it, this measurement seemed pretty meaningless, but I decided to have a muck around with me calculator anyway.’

His two friends watched in silence as Zeke turned around and grabbed his calculator off a shelf. When he saw the complex instrument, Adam made a comment.

‘Jees Zeke, that’s a pretty fancy calculator. You actually know how to use one of those things?’

Zeke’s mangled face broke into a poker player’s smile.

‘There are still a few things you don’t know about me, buddy.’

Doyle lit a new cigarette off the one that was still burning in his mouth and zealously focussed all his attention on Zeke. He was enjoying this moment immensely. Zeke switched on his advanced calculator, placed it on the coffee table and continued his analysis.

‘I juggled the numbers around a bit until I found this. I subtracted 200 from 524 an got 324. Then I divided 324 by 524 an got 0.618321. Does that number mean anythin to either of you?’

Adam and Doyle looked at each other, then looked at Zeke shaking their heads.

‘You poor bastards, don’t you know anythin? 0.618321 is very close to 0.618034, which is a numerical expression of the *golden ratio*.’

Adam protested in frustration,

‘What are you talking about, Zeke?’

Doyle calmed Adam, saying,

‘Take it easy, Adam, I think Zeke is trying to find evidence of what is generally described as *sacred geometry*. I’ve read about the *golden ratio*, or the *golden section*. It occurs everywhere in nature, like in the insides of sea shells and such.’

Zeke continued,

‘Well, I wanted to figure out what number would give me the correct answer, and it turns out that if the angled uprights are exactly 200.15

millimetres long,' he entered these numbers into his calculator, '524 minus 200.15 equals 323.85 millimetres. Now divide 323.85 by 524 and presto, 0.618034. The angled uprights are actually 200.15 millimetres long. I was out by 0.15 of a mill.'

Zeke sat back with a look of total satisfaction on his face. Adam scratched his head looking at the numbers on Zeke's calculator.

'Mate, you have so lost me, you might as well be talking Chinese. What has all this got to do with anything? Do we really need to know this stuff?'

'He's trying to tie the mathematics in Ben's guard with the mathematics in the *Khufu* pyramid, Adam.'

'The who foo pyramid?'

'Cheops, the great pyramid of Giza.'

'What?' said Adam with his voice breaking into falsetto. 'Oh, you mean the *big one*?'

'Yeah, the *big one*, Adam!' answered the other two in unison. Zeke continued,

'Just to give you a miniscule insight into the *golden section*, Adam,' he placed the calculator in front of Adam, 'I'll try to demonstrate what the golden section is. First I'll describe it in words. On every straight line there is a point that divides that line into two parts, such that the ratio of the short part to the long part is equal to the ratio of the long part to the whole line. Get it?'

'No.'

'OK, take the calculator.' Adam took the calculator in his hands. 'Now punch in the number one. That represents the whole line.' Adam did that. 'Now subtract the number 0.618034 ... that's it. Now press equals. What do you get?'

Adam did as he was told and answered,

'0.381966.'

'Do you know what that number represents?'

'I think it's the short part of the divided line.'

'That's the one. Now, divide the short part of the line by the long part of the line and see what you get.'

Adam called out the numbers as he entered them into the calculator, with Doyle looking over his shoulder, while Zeke got up to get his bowl and pipe.

'So, 0.381966 divided by 0.618034, is that right?'

'Yeah that's right. Now strap yourself in an press equals.'

Adam pressed equals and cried out in astonishment,

'It's the same number! 0.618034, bloody hell!'

'I think,' Zeke announced proudly, 'that we can safely deduce that young Ben incorporated the *golden section* into his prop guard, an there's more.'

Zeke continued his analysis of the geometry of the guard as he proceeded to cut his homegrown tobacco and marijuana. Doyle stood up for a moment, had a stretch, then a rummage amongst Zeke's extensive record collection. He pulled an album out of the stack and exclaimed,

'*Abbey Road*, how appropriate.'

As the music saturated the dimly lit room, Zeke explained how he found the angle of the angled rods, relative to the horizontal plane of the circles, to be exactly 38 degrees 10 minutes, which, he declared, was precisely half the angle of the apex of the Khufu pyramid. He also demonstrated geometrically how the design of the guard successfully squared the circle, both for circumference and area. This last piece of information left both Adam and Doyle completely confused. It became obvious to them that Zeke's mathematical competence was on a level that neither of them could even imagine. Zeke could see that he had expected too much from his friends, so he made his summary as simple as possible.

'The main thing to know here is that Ben cleverly concealed the true function of this guard behind its apparent function. He made two things in one. He made a rollerblading toy, and he also made a simple gravity sail, as far as I know, the first one that has ever existed on this planet.'

Doyle complemented Zeke,

'That's a pretty impressive bit of work, Zeke.'

Adam spoke out proudly,

'That's my boy that did that. You know, I'm not going to let him down. I'm going to buy a pair of skates and I'm going to learn how to skate. Then, when I'm good enough, I'm going to bolt the guard to the rest of the machine and take it for a run. I think that's what he wanted me to do. Why else would he have left it for me?'

Zeke nodded his head in agreement.

'I think you should, mate. It should be a blast. You should have seen him skatin the gale. It was insane!'

'This is all very warm and cosy, boys, but I must remind you that we must not take our focus off the main game.'

'Aggh, you and your main game, Doyle. What if there is no main game? Have you ever considered that? Why do you always have to be so suspicious?'

'It's my job to be suspicious, Adam, and there *is* a main game, you can trust me on that one. There are dozens of missing hybrids that attest to that. Rest assured that there was more to you and Liberty than a perfect interplanetary love affair.'

After a few puffs of the pipe, Adam checked out the *Abbey Road* album cover, Zeke scratched an itch behind his eye patch and Doyle kicked off his shoes and put his feet on the coffee table. He took a long drag of his cigarette, blew out the smoke and quipped,

'I wonder what those poor sons of bitches at NASA are doing right now?'

.....

Chapter Twenty-Five

TWENTY TWENTY THREE

1

Adam awoke startled. He scanned his bedroom like a man unsure of his surroundings. He suddenly sprang out of bed and ran down to the kitchen where he picked up a writing pad and a pen. He returned to his bed and began to write as fast as he could. He wrote,

I just had the most vivid dream. We met some people, Libby and me. Libby made the contact. I don't know. They were very special. They could telepathically make you dream. They told us stories by actually sending us into dreams. So I experienced a dream within a dream. I remember remarking on how real this dream was. I even looked at my own body in my dream within a dream and it was real. It was like I was dreaming while I was still awake. I felt quite comfortable with it. I can't remember the first dream I went into in my dream, but I remember the last.

First of all, we ended up in a lecture hall full of beings who all appeared to be from other worlds. The lecturer, who I was never going to see, was going to give me a special dream. This was actually part of a long story that they were telling me about themselves through my dream, which seemed to last the whole night. Anyway, this special guy, who I was told was one of their best dream givers, was going to tell me something about the past of his people. I actually remember waiting for his dream to begin. It was like entering a new reality. It wasn't like dreaming. I thought I was there. The dream within a dream is fading, but I'm writing as fast as I can.

It was night. Pitch dark. I couldn't make anything out. The ground was rutted and pitted with potholes and was dirt. There didn't seem to be any grass or trees, or anything. I was running across what seemed like a field when I noticed a pillar of fire in the distance. It was almost silent. It appeared to be about 100 to 200 feet high, but I can't be sure. It was spinning and seemed to be under some kind of control. It was making a muffled sound, sort of like electricity. It was as if it was in a vortex. It was wider at the top and bottom and narrower in the middle. It was rapidly travelling over the ground, darting to and fro. I began to run,

fearing that it may get me. I ran in the darkness towards where I thought there might have been some buildings. I ran and ran and watched the pillar of flame systematically covering ground. There was no other sound. I didn't see any other people. The flame was getting closer so I dove into a deep rut. Just when I thought I was a gonner, the flame retreated and then went out. The next moment, a young man appeared in front of me in the darkness. I could just make him out. All excited and afraid at the same time he exclaimed, 'we're safe, we're safe, the fire stopped short.' I began to walk back. As I walked back I started to notice hundreds upon hundreds of dead and dying burnt bodies. I began to run, hopping over some. There was not much sound. All of a sudden, a small dog bit into my ankle and ripped out a bit of flesh. I think it thought that I was a bit of a meal as well. I had to flick it away. I ran and ran over the field of death until I reached these, what appeared to be like, stretched out horizontal nets. I jumped from one to another, like on trampolines, and became lighter and lighter as I did so. After the last jump, I reached the lecture theatre. As I got inside, the lecture had just ended. I was still light and I floated down to the front of the lecture theatre, taking ten steps at a time. Libby was there. I noticed that she was wearing a one piece, skin-tight suit that looked like it was made out of fish scales. I now remember that I had seen that suit before. It was in one of my early gas trips. It was that girl with Scott. I'll never forget that suit. The girl had the same suit as Liberty. Same suit in different dreams. Maybe it was the same girl? She must have known Scott. What does that make Scott? Maybe she met him on her surf trip? But why did I see them in my gas trip, years before I ever met Libby? Unless she planned it from way back then. Doyle! I'm sidetracking myself here.

The dream. In the end I can't remember ever seeing the dream giver in my dream. However it is clear that he and many in the lecture theatre were from other worlds. They looked very cool and purposeful. They were into something.

Finally, Libby said, 'let's go,' and I said, 'where is Ben?' and she said, 'outside,' and sure enough, there he was waiting for us, looking a little older, with fully-grown long hair now. At that point I woke up here in my bed, in Stanwell Park. I can't tell you how real this dream was. I was there.

Adam put his pen down, thought for a while and then continued writing.

I am left with a final thought. I sense that the people, upon seeing the pillar of flame, ran out of the villages and into the fields, thinking that they would be safe there. But in the end it was the villages that were spared.

2

Adam's concentration was suddenly broken by his ringing telephone. He stopped writing, went down to the kitchen and answered the phone. It was Zeke. Highly excited he announced,

'Adam, I've done a lot of thinkin an I've decided to build a full-sized version of Ben's guard.'

He said that he had decided to scale everything up by a factor of four. He said that he would let someone else have fun designing the shaft turner.

'I'm gonna build a big gravity sail, one that I can get in. I wanna fly one of these babies so bad. It's all I can think about.'

Over the next few weeks he scrounged a number of lengths of thin-wall, 16-millimetre-diameter, steel tube. He spent the nights buried in his drawings designing the high-precision jigs he would have to build out of plywood. He found Heinz, a young German guy who bent up eight perfect quarter-circles out of the 16-millimetre steel tube. Zeke constructed a large, circular, plywood jig on which he twice welded four quarters into two perfect circles, each with a diameter of exactly 2096 millimetres.

The February nights were warm and hazy. The doors of Zeke's shed were wide open, inviting any cooling breeze to waft through his cluttered workshop. The soft light emanating out of the shed lit the back of Zeke's hut and Adam's car just enough to lift them out of the darkness. Music was blasting out of the giant speakers. Every now and then, the night was pierced by the noise of metal being ground and the light of thousands of sparks flying out of the shed. Sometimes there were longer, brighter flashes, accompanied by electric sounds, as Zeke welded pieces of tube together.

Within four weeks of commencing, Zeke had welded up the rings and welded them to each other via the 400-millimetre-long spacers. He let Adam grind and polish the ends of the tubes. Adam said that it came naturally to him because it was just like polishing dentures. They were very precise with the measurements, but were still limited to an accuracy of about half a millimetre.

They both wondered if their limited accuracy would be enough to make the big gravity sail work. Zeke figured,

‘There’s only one way to find out, ain’t there?’

The construction of the jig that supported the angled uprights and the flat plate on top was one of the trickiest tasks. The boys found the setting and welding of the uprights at exactly 38 degrees 10 minutes the most difficult to execute. However, with care and perseverance they finally had the whole contraption built six weeks after they began. Both Doyle and Adam were there on the night it was finished. They all sat around the *big sail* late into the night.

3

Three nights later, they were all together again. In the interim, Zeke had set up a giant set of scales in the shed. He set up an elaborate rope and pulley system designed such that he could weigh the sail with sandbags.

The three of them turned the tubular construction over and hooked it to the rope via three attachment points so that it would hang level. As it sat on the ground, pointy end down, resting on the flat plate and hooked up to the pulley system, Zeke began adding sandbags to the other end of the rope until their combined weight started to lift the big gravity sail off the ground. He finely balanced the weight of the sail with the weight of the sand, down to the last spoonful. When it was perfect, he announced,

‘There you go, that sand represents the weight of the sail when it’s upside down. If it’s workin, this should be the heavy way up. Let’s unhook it an turn it over an see what it weighs the other way.’

The three of them unhooked the large contraption, turned it over and re-weighed it, pointy way up this time. Adam was the first to comment,

‘It’s not picking up the sandbags! It’s lighter!’

The next moment turned out to be the most hysterical moment ever experienced by the three of them together. They all went totally nuts screaming, dancing and hugging each other. Even Doyle’s usually morbid face lit up like a Roman candle. Finally Zeke settled things down and said,

‘Let’s see how much sand we have to take away to balance it out.’

He started spooning sand out of one of the bags into a plastic container. When he spooned out about eighty spoonfuls of sand, the sandbags lifted off

the ground. At eighty-five spoonfuls it was balanced. Doyle and Adam watched Zeke's every minute move, making sure that they didn't miss anything. Zeke announced,

'Now, all we've gotta do is weigh the sand an we'll know the lift.'

He poured the sand onto the digital scales. They all gathered around the scales to read the weight. Zeke read it out.

'484 grams. 484 grams? Wait a minute!' He started mumbling to himself, '484, four threes is twelve, four squared is sixteen, times thirty is four hundred an eighty. So what's the four? It must be the friction in the rope an pulley. In a perfect system, I bet it'd be 480.'

'Would you mind letting us in on this, Zeke,' said Adam.

'The lift goes up exponentially with size. We increased the size by four, but got sixteen times more naturally occurin lift. Of course the 480 grams represents the difference between the two weights. Actual lift, at room temperature, is 240 beautiful, free grams.'

'Exponential increase with size, that's got to be good, ey Zeke?'

'It's great, Adam, it's better than great. Actually it's amazing that it even works. It's gotta be the geometry. It can't have anythin to do with the metal. It must have somethin to do with gravity harmonic lengths, diameters an angles, but who's to know?'

Doyle started laughing,

'How are you going to boil this one, Zeke? You'll need a bloody swimming pool.'

'That's a good question, Doyle. I'm gonna have to figure out some other way to heat it up.'

'You'll need lots of heaters, I think,' said Adam.

'How are you going to heat it evenly?' Doyle queried. 'It's such a big bastard that you'll get hot and cold spots.'

'Yeah, it's a problem. It's the next problem.'

Through the next week, Zeke prepared himself for flight. First he raised the gravity sail off the floor of his workshop and supported it on four besser-brick blocks standing end on. He owned an old fibreglass bucket seat, which

came out of a wrecked rally car. He hung it from the square plate at the top of the gravity sail. When he sat in it, he was right in the middle of the two rings and his feet just touched the ground. He went to an old second-hand shop where he bought a dozen two-bar heaters. He took the heaters apart and mounted the individual heating elements to the tubing with hose clamps. He spaced them at even intervals, attempting to get as even a heating of the tubular construction as possible. He bolted four lengths of seatbelt webbing into the concrete floor of his workshop, with expansion bolts, and then looped the other ends around the lower ring of the sail at exactly 90-degree intervals. The idea was that if the sail flew when it was heated up, it would be allowed to rise about a foot before becoming restrained by the *hold-down straps*. Zeke saw this as an easy to achieve safety feature. He was already thinking ahead, though. He thought that it might be possible to control the gravity sail with weight shift, just like a hang glider. He thought that if the gravity sail successfully flew, he might be able to control it by swinging around in his seat, thus shifting the centre of gravity and thus redirecting the vector of lift. But at this stage it was still only a fantasy. He first had to get it to fly.

5

That same week, as Zeke prepared himself for gravity flight, Doyle visited Adam with the intent of finally attempting a deep probe into his memory. He came one evening carrying a folder full of photocopies detailing descriptions of what are commonly known as abduction experiences. He had phoned Adam the day before and explained to him that he wanted to enter into the subject of memories with him. He said that all Adam had to do was answer his line of questions.

They sat on the veranda where they ate dinner that Adam prepared for them. After dinner, Doyle opened his folder and began.

‘Whenever you deal with an abduction case, you’re dealing with a memory, that’s all. No different from any other memory. And something had to put that memory in there. There are all kinds of things in these pages,’ Doyle flipped through the pages, ‘really strange stuff that people reckon they remember and even things they can’t remember. Some have had unexplainable or missing lost time, some can remember flying through the air, some have

strong *marker memories* that won't go away and many talk about strange recurring dreams. It's all here in these pages. Most, if not all, have had strange unexplainable events happen to them. Some think they're psychic, some have memories of light and of being transported to different places, some remember seeing alien beings and some reckon that they have been poked and prodded. Personally, I find *that* the most hideous to imagine. Can you see where I'm going with this, Adam? I know you don't talk about this sort of stuff, anyway, I've never heard you. Maybe you've got nothing to talk about, or maybe you just don't like talking about stuff like this ...'

'Maybe it's because I'm a dentist and I'm paranoid about things getting out that could adversely affect my profession.'

'So there *is* something. Adam, how long have we known each other?'

'I know, Doyle.'

'Look, this isn't about *you*, it's about *them*. What do you think I'm going to do, call up the Dental Board?' Doyle began to laugh. 'Do you think I'm going to tell them that they've got a fruitcake dentist out there, running amuck with his drill? I want to know *why* they came, that is all. I'm not here to judge you, or report you, or to even take notes.' Doyle looked Adam squarely in the eyes. 'I just want to know *the truth!* ... So what did you do that was so bad?'

'I got into the laughing gas, big time. Just for fun at first, with my friends. We all got stoned and laughed our heads off. We played music. You know how it is, Doyle, it was all recreational.' Doyle lit a cigarette as he listened attentively. 'Then one day, I had the most incredible experience.' Adam proceeded to describe his first reality change experience. It was the first time he ever mentioned Nancy. 'The whole surgery became the stage of a huge lecture theatre full of people studying us. What really got me at the time was not the detail of the changed reality, but the fact that there was a reality change at all. It completely blew me away. I had to find out more about it. I was young and I thought that I had stumbled onto something that nobody knew anything about. It was so exciting, I can't tell you, Doyle.'

'There is documentation of reality change experiences in abductees. They are described as involving all five senses and being indistinguishable from real reality.'

'Well, it was happening to Nancy as well. She was having her own trips.'

'Nancy, what happened to her?'

Adam sighed deeply, 'Ohhh ... she got killed in a boating accident.'

'That's a shame.'

'Yeah.'

'She sounds nice.'

'You know, Doyle, I've been having dreams of Libby and Ben on a regular basis.'

'Since they disappeared?'

'Yeah, and there are a couple of things that I've noticed.'

Doyle leaned forward.

'Yeah?'

'Ben and Libby are not staying the same, as if I was dreaming them out of my memory. They're changing. Ben is getting older and he has grown his hair really long, and Libby, who looks as stunning as ever, has cut her hair shorter. That seems strange to me. And in my last really weird dream of her, she was wearing this one-piece, fish scale suit. It looked incredible. And I remembered that suit because I'd seen it maybe more than fifteen years before, in a gas trip. It was one of my earlier trips when Nancy was still around. Oh Doyle, what a gorgeous girl she was ... anyway, I saw a girl, in the gas trip, wearing the same suit. She was with a guy I actually met, years before, way back in '68 on a trip up north. His name was Scott. He was out here from California on a kind of a surf trip. He was living in a camp near Broken Head, this fabulous surf place just south of Byron. I made good friends with him and we met a couple of beautiful girls together. Wow, I remember now, what a time *that* was. I never saw him again, until years later when he popped up in my gas trip, and now I realise that the girl with him was Libby. She was years younger, just a child. It was always hard to tell her age because she looked so childlike. I now think that I saw Libby with Scott, in my gas trip, years before I met her.'

'When did you have the last dream?'

'A couple of months ago. I wrote it down. I can show it to you if you like. You can read it, but I've got to warn you, it's very strange.'

Adam retrieved his notes from his bedroom and gave them to Doyle to read. Doyle took a small plastic bag out of his pocket, placed it on the table and suggested,

‘Why don’t you try to figure out what to do with this, while I read your notes, and what do you reckon about a coffee?’

After Doyle finished reading Adam’s account of his dream, he commented, ‘That’s some weapon you describe.’

‘I just wrote what I saw.’

‘You also wrote what you felt and you seem to have got quite an insight into the *dream giver* concept. If it was a real thing, it would have to be some kind of telepathic technique.’

‘I know about that, Doyle. It’s got a name. It’s called *creative telepathy*. It’s a skill. The closest analogy to it would be silent movies. Pictures are the universal language, you know.’

‘How would you know about something like that?’

‘That’s the weird thing, Doyle, I just picked these things up as I went along.’

‘Some abductees claim to have attained an understanding of some of the aliens’ techniques, especially in the area of telepathic communication.’

‘I imagine that that would be one of the first things.’

‘So you saw Libby in a gas induced, what ... stone?’

‘No, more like a trance. And it’s not just the gas, it’s also the yoga.’

‘What, pretzel bending?’

‘No no, it’s breathing, concentration, stillness and non-reaction. This might be a bit outside of your scope, Doyle.’

‘Just a bit. Lucky it’s got nothing to do with what I’m after. So ... let’s assume that Libby knew this guy, what was his name?’

‘Scott.’

‘Let’s assume that Libby knew Scott and that he came here before her and then went back. You were friends you say?’

‘Yeah, we ended up good friends.’

‘Good enough to establish some kind of telepathic link perhaps. Who knows what they are capable of?’

'Couldn't my mind just have juxtaposed them into the same trip?'

'No, because, as you have stated, you hadn't met Libby at that time.'

'Oh yeah, that's right. Hey, you're pretty sharp, Doyle.'

'It's just my job, mate. You know what I reckon? I reckon they had you picked out years before she came on the scene. There was no accident about your meeting. I bet if you analyse it, you'll realise that it was all orchestrated.'

Adam reflected back to the day he met Liberty.

'You know, she was travelling in a camper van. On the side of the van she spray-painted a picture of Broken Head, an image instantly recognisable to me, and probably only me. I used it as an excuse to talk to her. She looked so *hot* ... blew my mind ... '

Adam's voice faded away as he drifted into his memory of Libby. Doyle snapped him back to the present.

'So now there are three of them, Liberty, Ben and Scott, and how long have I been here? Hey, you got any intentions of rolling that joint, or what? So you had your first gas trip in which you were in a lecture theatre and you had a gas trip in which you saw Liberty years before you met her. What other gas trips did you experience?'

'I can't remember all of them, I can only remember some of them, but there are some I can't forget.'

'Those ones are called *marker memories*.'

'Oh? Well, I've got a couple of beauties. Do you want to hear about the white bird?'

'I'm all ears, fire away.'

Adam related his fantastic story of his flight on the back of the big white bird. He told him about flying over the giant molten canyon.

'I don't know if it was a canyon or a crater, all I know is that it was huge, horizon to horizon, and that it was all boiling lava and sulphur smoke everywhere. It was like a giant, red-hot hole in the Earth. What do you make of it, Doyle?'

'It sounds more like a religious experience than an abduction experience. You describe a vision of hell.'

'I know, and it was so real. I was there. I can still hear the sound of the big bird's wings.'

Doyle rubbed his chin. 'Hmm, we'll have to put that one into the memory banks to give ourselves a chance to think about it.'

'Well, I've thought about it. It doesn't make much sense until you put it together with what happened to me the very last time I ever used the gas.'

Doyle was barely managing to contain his excitement. He lit another cigarette and sucked in a deep lungful of smoke as Adam continued.

'I had a number of trips where I never left the surgery. What I mean by that is that I didn't get taken anywhere in my mind. I used to use a dot on the wall as my focus of concentration. I would breathe the gas and focus on the dot. It was a game.'

'A game?'

'Yeah, the concentration game. Whoever was laying the trips on me was also helping me to become better at concentration, like a teacher was guiding me. He made me aware of a telepathic game called concentration. I concentrated on the dot, trying to not-think, while somebody tried to break my concentration with a telepathic distraction. I've got to say it worked, and most of the time it was fun. Actually, it was probably one of the most exciting things I've ever done. I got better at concentrating and the distractions got more and more ... ah ... distracting. You know Doyle, the only way you can intensify your concentration is by dealing with more intense distractions. That's what was happening to me. If there was some kind of constant thread running through my trips for all the years that I messed around with the gas, that was it.'

'Did it ever occur to you that you were dealing with alien intelligence?'

'No, not in the way you think, not at the time. It's hard to explain ... ah ... it's sort of like ... there are no aliens in the *mind plane*.'

Doyle's jaw was beginning to hang open in amazement as Adam continued his incredible explanation.

'Everyone is the same in the mind plane, except that some of them are very advanced at what they can do in there. Let me tell you about the hand.'

'The hand?'

'Yeah. I'll never forget the first time I saw the hand. I was concentrating on the dot on the wall, playing the concentration game, when a hand appeared.'

Adam told Doyle the whole story about the clever distraction in which the hand sprinkled the black dust past his concentration point. He then proceeded to tell him about the second time he saw the hand.

'It was the last gas trip of my life as I had already sold my surgery in the city. What looked like the same hand appeared above my dot, but this time it was holding a pencil. It began to draw a diagram on the wall, circles in a line. First a big circle, then smaller ones, then a sixth, bigger one.' Adam drew an invisible diagram on the table, with his finger, as he spoke. He continued. 'After a while, I think it was when the hand got to Saturn, when it drew the ring around the seventh circle, I recognised the drawing as representing our solar system.' Doyle leaned forward across the table, listening to Adam intently. 'It seems to me that the hand might have known the moment that I recognised the drawing as our solar system because it didn't draw any more planets after that. Instead it began drawing a long parabolic line from the upper right. The line curved towards the sun. It looked like a classic parabolic arc, like that of a comet or something. As the line approached the sun, it started to curve down towards Venus. Instead of going around the sun, the line dipped down and hooked tight around Venus and headed straight for Earth. The hand drew the line straight into the Earth. I think that's the main part of it.'

Doyle sat back in his chair, totally stunned. For once he was speechless. He could feel the hair on his back standing up on end. Adam kept talking.

'It was so real, Doyle.'

Doyle sat there mute, just staring at Adam, who continued,

'Initially I didn't put two and two together, but when you look at it now, with everything that has happened ... '

Doyle sat there in silence.

'So what do you reckon, Doyle?'

'About what?'

'About what I've just told you.'

'I'm thinking.'

'You're not often lost for words.'

Doyle took another cigarette out of his packet and lit it off the one in his mouth. After thinking for a while, he spoke in a low, suspicious voice.

‘I think the bastards have known about this for thousands of years.’

‘Are you thinking what I’m thinking?’ Adam asked.

‘I’m thinking that judging by what you have told me ... ‘ Doyle paused, then continued, ‘judging by what I have read, the reports, scriptural prophecy, the Bible, what’s happened, the hybrids, everything, it all seems to point to one thing.’ Doyle looked Adam squarely in the eyes. ‘It all points to the Earth getting whacked by some huge, er, meteor or comet or something.’

Both men stared into each other’s eyes. Within them they could both see shock, surprise, fear and uncertainty. Adam spoke first.

‘You know, Libby said something once, in a conversation with my dad. They were talking about the *great tribulation*, out of the Bible. She said that the only kind of future that could be predicted by anyone, other than God, is one with mathematical certainty. Then she gave an example, *like the orbit of a comet*. I didn’t take much notice of it then. Come to think of it, when I think about it now, I didn’t really take enough notice of anything she said.’

There was another long pause. Adam lit the joint he’d been rolling and passed it to Doyle, who said,

‘I think I need this.’

There was more protracted silence as the two men passed the smoke between each other, when on one pass, Doyle held the joint out to Adam, but as Adam put his hand out to take it off him, Doyle hung onto it. Their eyes met again. After a momentary frozen silence, as if they were suspended in time, as if they each read each other’s minds, they both uttered the same words in perfect unison.

‘Twenty ... twenty ... three!’

.....

Chapter Twenty-Six

ESCAPE VELOCITY

1

Zeke had been ready to fly for a number of days. He had elaborately set up the large *gravity sail* with twenty-four separate heating elements, all hose-clamped to the tubing at regular intervals. He sleeved the twelve electric leads in a heat resistant ducting material. The twelve leads were plugged into three four-socket power boards, which were in turn plugged into three power points on the wall. He allowed enough slack in the leads so that the gravity sail could rise freely to the limit of the hold-down straps. The bucket seat hung in the centre of the geometric, metallic contraption.

He could have performed the experiment on the *19th of March*, but Doyle couldn't make it that day. He could have done it on the *20th* or *21st*, but Adam couldn't make it on those days because he was attending a dental seminar in Sydney. In the end they all managed to get together on *Sunday, March 22, 1992*.

It was late afternoon and the three of them were relaxing in Zeke's shed, doing their favourite things. Doyle needed to step out for a moment, for the usual reason. The other two joked with him,

'Gee Doyle, I could set my watch by your excursions.'

'Maybe you ought to get your prostate checked.'

'How tragic it is that you boys don't have anything better to worry about other than my natural bodily functions.'

When he returned, he commented,

'It's getting dark outside, I think there is a storm brewing.'

Within a few minutes they began to hear the tap tap tap of the first raindrops hitting the corrugated iron roof of the shed. Like all tin sheds, it amplified the sound of the rain like a drum. As the noise of the rain became louder, the three men engaged themselves in casual conversation. Zeke walked around his construction checking the electric leads, the heaters and the plugs in the wall. He had done this at least a hundred times already, but he always seemed to find another reason to do it again. He had chosen the musical track he wanted to listen to while attempting to become the first Earth human to

gravity fly. It was *Stairway To Heaven* by the iconic English band *Led Zeppelin*. For the occasion he also wore his favourite all black Led Zeppelin T-shirt.

When he satisfied himself that all was in order, he sat in the swing seat, which hung within the framework of the sail. He grabbed the two angled uprights in front of him like they were the uprights of an A-frame of a hang glider, and swung himself side to side and forward and back.

‘I really think that I can control this thing with weight shift.’

Doyle, who was lounging on a pile of old hang glider sails, and was quite stoned by now, queried,

‘I wonder if Liberty’s space ship was controlled like that?’

‘Not a chance, Doyle,’ Zeke answered, ‘a weight shift gravity ship like this one would have to be strictly terrestrial. You’d need the gravity of the planet actin on the pilot, creatin weight to shift around, to control it. The pilot would be weightless in space, therefore it wouldn’t work there.’

‘What about mass?’ Adam queried. ‘Wouldn’t the mass of the occupant of the space ship have to be zero in order to withstand the insane accelerations?’

Zeke thought about it for a while then answered.

‘If an object can be rendered to possess zero mass, it would take next to zero energy to accelerate it. Also it would have no inertia and therefore would experience no force of acceleration. That has to be how they accelerate through the speed of light. They zero their mass. It can’t be anythin else.’

Doyle sat up and recalled,

‘I read somewhere that some physicists believe that mass is nothing more than a vibration, that even matter is just a vibration. I think it’s called *string theory* or something.’

Zeke responded,

‘Mate, string theory is one huge wank, just like religion. It can never and it will never be proven. It can’t be. It will always just be a theory. That’s why they all jump on it. They can’t find any other way to get famous or powerful, so they get into somethin that can’t be proven or disproven, like string theory or bloody religion. Mate, there are no such things as strings. It’s all bullshit. Mass is caused by gravitons interactin with matter. The same thing that causes gravity causes mass. In fact, mass is the primary effect, an gravity, or weight, is

only the secondary effect. Mass is not dependent on weight. Both the mass and weight of matter is dependent on the field of gravitons. In space, something weightless still has mass. That is because it is still in a graviton field. When matter interferes with the flow of gravitons, an inertial effect is created, and it's called mass. Matter outside of, or shielded from, a graviton field has no mass whatsoever. Why should it?'

Doyle scratched his head, irritated.

'Jesus, Zeke, who can keep up with your crazy logic. You know, we haven't spent much time talking about how Libby got here and where she came from. When you talk about Libby you're talking about an interplanetary astronaut. Just think about it. Think about her reality, like her navigation abilities for example. Her skills and her knowledge had to be beyond our comprehension. And her technology, I can't even find the bloody words.'

Zeke fantasised, 'I wonder what her ship was like, what the controls were like, whether she could see out, where she came from and what it's like there?'

'I wonder if all the women on her planet are as gorgeous as she was?' Adam added.

Doyle grinned and said, 'I hope they've got a soft spot for old bastards. I hope they've got a couple of soft spots.'

'You'd be so lucky, Doyle, but you can dream.'

'We can all dream, Adam, in fact that is all we can do.' Doyle changed the subject. 'So what are you going to want us to do tonight, Zeke?'

'You mean with the experiment?'

'Yeah.'

'Besides just witnessing the world's first human gravity flight, I'll need you to control the power points. When I say switch em on, you switch em on, and when I say switch em off, you switch em off. You have to be ready to instantly react to my instructions. I'd do it myself, but I won't be able to reach the bloody things. Other than that, we'll cross every bridge as we get to it.'

Doyle enquired further,

'What exactly do you expect to happen?'

'Well, Doyle, ultimately I hope to lift off the ground. How it's gonna happen, how hot it's gotta get, how quickly it's gonna rise is anybody's guess. I

hope to end up hangin a foot off the ground, bein held down by the seat belt straps.'

'Shouldn't we take a photo of that?' Adam suggested.

'No!' Zeke replied, shaking his head. 'That's how these things get out. It's only a good thing while nobody knows about it. I wouldn't recommend any photos at this stage. Maybe later. I don't know, what do you guys think?'

'It's OK with me, Zeke.'

'Me too. Who's rollin?'

'I'll roll,' said Adam.

'Don't you like me pipe, Doyle?'

'Oh yeah, I like your pipe, Zeke, but, you know, sometimes it's nice to just smoke one on your own.'

Adam recalled, 'Remember that stuff of Libby's we used to smoke?'

'Oh, mate, how could I forget? You wouldn't have believed it, Doyle. It was the most *different* stone. It felt like every cell in me body was comin to life. An me pain stopped an I felt like I was floatin. An the oddest thing is that a tiny bit of that feelin has stayed with me. It's still there, I can still feel it.'

'Yeah, Doyle, I feel it too. It only took one tiny puff out of her special little white pipe and it felt like someone filled me up with warm water.'

'Cut it out, boys, you're making me even more envious than I already am. You can't imagine how much I wish that I had met her.'

2

As the evening wore on, the rain falling on the iron roof of the shed became heavier and heavier, saturating the workshop with loud noise. Zeke looked at his watch, then at his friends and, in a raised voice, declared,

'I suppose now's as good a time as any.'

Adam and Doyle watched him check the contraption one last time. The noise from the rain on the roof was becoming almost deafening. Just as Zeke was about to insert Led Zeppelin's audiocassette, Doyle yelled out,

'Hang on a sec, Zeke, you got an umbrella in here?'

'God, Doyle, *now*, you gotta go *now*?'

'I want to be relaxed during the experiment, OK, so can both of you get off my back?'

Zeke handed Doyle a large golf umbrella. As Doyle opened the shed door, there was a bright flash of lightning and a loud crack of thunder. Adam exclaimed,

‘Jees ... us, that was close. The storm seems to be getting worse.’

The violence outside only had the effect of exciting Zeke even more. There was another loud crack and the boys could see a lightning bolt strike the ground through the small side window of the shed.

‘Wow! Did you see that, Adam? That wouldn’t have been more than a hundred yards away. Doyle better watch it standin out there under an umbrella, he might get fried.’

Within a minute, Doyle was back.

‘Did you see that? The lightning struck the ground less than a hundred yards from me. I nearly shat myself.’

The thunder cracked again and then again as the boys observed the white light of multiple lightning flashes strobing through the window.

‘It’s getting biblical out there. How safe is this shed, Zeke? Maybe God is not entirely happy with us. Maybe we shouldn’t be messing around with this stuff.’

‘Keep your shirt on, Adam. If the lightnin hits the shed, it’ll go around us.’

The violence outside was rising to a manic crescendo as Zeke slid the Led Zeppelin cassette into the player. He looked at Adam and Doyle. Their faces were highly contrasted in the single-point light source of the solitary light globe. He could see a hint of apprehension in their eyes. He gave them a big smile and screamed out his instructions before pressing the play button.

‘Cause it’s gonna be so noisy, I’m gonna have to give you hand signals instead of verbal instructions. When I hold me hand out like this, it means switch the power *on*, an when I hold it up like this, it means switch the power *off*. You got that?’

Adam replied at the top of his voice.

‘Got it, Zeke. Out is on and up is off. Good luck buddy, let’s hope it works.’

Adam and Doyle positioned themselves next to the power points while Zeke pressed the play button on the cassette player, cranked the volume full up, pulled a pair of heat resistant welding gloves over his hands and sat in the

swing seat. Suddenly everything around them became larger than life. They heard the music begin. It was so loud that it felt like it was going to blow the shed apart. First the acoustic guitars sounded their crisp notes, then the flutes came in, then the lyrics.

Zeke looked at his friends, right in the eyes, and held out his hand. Adam switched on the power to the twenty-four heating elements. They heard multiple thunderclaps outside. It sounded like bombs were falling. Every so often there was a bright flash, its light briefly lighting up the dimly lit workshop through the small side window. In that light, Zeke looked like a mad scientist, with his body bent and distorted, his face scarred and dominated by the black eye patch and his long, blond, scraggly hair sticking out like he himself had been plugged into the 240 volts. His good eye burned with blue light and his face possessed an expression of intense excitement as he began to live out his life's biggest fantasy.

The boys observed all the heaters begin to glow red hot, transferring their heat to the steel tubing of the gravity sail. Zeke lightly touched the angled uprights to see if they were getting hot. He looked at his friends and smiled, nodding his head, when suddenly, faster than suddenly, in less time than the blink of an eye, accompanied by a deafening bang and a bright flash of lightning, he and the gravity sail literally disappeared right from before their eyes. Rain began to deluge into the shed through a big hole that had suddenly appeared in the roof. Doyle and Adam were thrown back against the wall as roofing iron rained down on the shed and all over Zeke's back yard. Looking through the hole, they saw another blinding flash of lightning. They lay there on the floor momentarily frozen in shock. The rain, falling through the hole, was beginning to soak their clothes. Their eyes bulged with astonishment as their brains desperately tried to comprehend the meaning of the unexpected event. It was Doyle who first managed to get some words out.

'Switch em off! Switch those fucking power points *off!*'

It took a moment for Adam to react. Most of the heaters disappeared with Zeke, while some of them got ripped off the sail and were sparking on the wet floor in the centre of the workshop. Adam scrambled to the power points and switched them all off. He then grabbed a handful of power leads and ripped

them out of their sockets. The music stopped. Both men sat there in total shock and complete disbelief. The realisation of what had just happened slowly began to dawn on them. Zeke and the gravity sail were gone. It seemed like the experiment worked too well. It seemed like Zeke and the gravity sail got shot straight up, straight through the roof. There was now a huge hole in the roof letting in a deluge of rain, soaking the two men to the skin. After a brief moment of stunned silence, Adam screamed out at the top of his voice,

‘Zeeeeeeeeeeke, Zeeeeeeeeeeke.’

Doyle struggled to his feet. He made an instant observation.

‘Look, Adam, the bolts got ripped right out of the concrete. Quick, let’s look outside, he might have come down outside.’

‘It’s too dark to see out there, Doyle, we’ll need a torch.’

Adam scrambled to his feet and screamed out into the darkness,

‘Hang on, Zeke, we’re coming.’

Both men desperately searched for a torch amongst all the junk. Doyle expressed his frustration,

‘It’s so bloody dark in here. Why doesn’t Zeke get some more light in this fucking dump?’

‘Here’s a torch, Doyle, get the umbrella.’

The rain was still falling very heavily and there was still an occasional flash of lightning, welcomed now by the two desperate searchers as it briefly lit up the surroundings of the shed. They searched the whole cleared area that was Zeke’s property, calling out his name at the top of their voices.

‘I can’t see him anywhere, Doyle. There’s just the roofing iron everywhere.’

After about five minutes, it became clear to them that Zeke had not come down anywhere in his yard.

‘He might have come down somewhere in the bush, Doyle.’

They shone the torch into the darkness.

‘He could be anywhere,’ commented Doyle. ‘He could have got shot into outer space. He could have hit escape velocity and be on his way to the next galaxy.’

‘We should call somebody, to help search for him ...’

Doyle turned towards Adam, shone the torch directly into his eyes and with a stern voice interjected him mid-sentence.

‘We can’t do that! Do you understand?’

‘What? Why not? We have to find Zeke!’

Doyle grabbed the front of Adam’s shirt and pulled him towards himself.

‘We don’t call nobody, got it?’

‘What’s got into you, Doyle? Have you lost your mind? I need to help my friend!’ Adam pushed Doyle away. ‘He might be dying out there.’ Adam pointed into the darkness, desperation beginning to creep into his voice. ‘He’s my mate and I’m going to find him, and you can do whatever you want. You’re a bloody idiot, Doyle. I’m calling the police and you can go screw yourself.’

Adam ripped the torch out of Doyle’s hand and turned to walk into Zeke’s hut with the intention of calling the police and reporting the incident.

3

The next thing he could remember was being woken up in his bed by the incessant ringing of the telephone. At first, as he opened his eyes, he didn’t know where he was. His vision was blurred. His first realisation was that he had a vicious headache. He felt the back of his head. It had a huge, painful lump on it. He winced as he felt it. Everything was a blur. He struggled to his feet and stumbled downstairs to the kitchen. The phone did not stop ringing. He picked it up and answered,

‘Ugh ... hello?’

‘Doctor, it’s Rose. Where have you been? I’ve been calling you for a day and a half. I’ve been worried sick. I’ve been cancelling your patients, one by one. Where have you been?’

‘What day is it, Rose?’

‘Why, it’s Tuesday, doctor. You’ve missed a whole day of work. Where have you been? Are you OK?’

‘Ohh ... sorry Rose ... ahh ... ah ... Rose ...’

‘Yes, doctor?’

‘Rose ... ah ... could you please scratch the rest of the day ... and Rose ...’

‘Yes, doctor?’

'Rose ... would you be so kind and scratch tomorrow as well. I don't think that ... agh ... I'm going to be able to make it tomorrow either.'

'Are you all right, doctor? I was worried sick about you.'

'I'm fine, Rose ... ah ... I had a little accident. Got a bump on the head, but I'm fine now.'

'You don't sound so fine, doctor.'

'Really, I'm OK. Thanks for looking after the surgery, Rose. I'd be lost without you ... really.'

'It's my job, doctor. You don't know how much you worry me sometimes. Please be careful, please.'

'Thank you, Rose, I will, thank you. I'll call you tomorrow. Thank you again. Bye Rose.'

'Bye, doctor.'

He hung up the phone and looked at the clock. It said 10.39 and apparently it was Tuesday morning. His head hurt and he realised that he was very thirsty. He drank a glass of water and put on the kettle for some coffee. He looked out the window at his front yard and the beach in the distance. It was one of those perfect, calm, autumn mornings. The sun was shining bright and the ocean looked like turquoise glass. He noticed a small group of surfers sitting off a clean three to four foot left and right peak. He wasn't really thinking though. His brain was completely stalled. The sound of the boiling water brought him back to the kitchen. He made his coffee and stumbled back to his bedroom. He sat down on his bed and sipped his coffee staring at the blank wall in front of him. After a couple of minutes of not thinking anything he lay down, placed his sore head on his pillow and fell into a deep sleep from which he would not awaken until the following morning.

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Chapter Twenty-Seven

NUMBER 13

1

The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was the lush green canopy high above him. It looked like the ceiling of a stained glass cathedral. The next thing he became aware of was that he was floating, naked, in a warm pool of crystal clear water. His brain couldn't connect this present with any recent past, so he stayed motionless. Then he felt something. It was a pair of slender arms sliding around his waist from behind, wrapping themselves around him, giving him a big hug. The next thing he felt was her smooth, naked body against his and her sweet voice whispering into his ear in that familiar Californian accent.

'Have I ever told you how much I love you?'

'Only in my dreams, darling, only in my dreams.'

'Have I ever told you how much I yearn to see you?'

'I can remember hearing those words, darling, a long, long time ago.'

'Have I ever told you that I will wait for you forever?'

'Forever is a very long time.'

'Sweetheart ...'

'Yes, my love?'

'There *is* a time for us, and it is coming as certainly as a comet returns to its sun from the furthest reaches of its universe. So shall I return to you, my soul.'

He felt her arms tighten around his waist and her warm, soft lips kiss his cheek. As he felt these things, he began to feel sleepy again and promptly drifted back into another deep sleep.

2

When he awoke he was back in his bedroom. He remembered his dream as clearly as all his other dreams. These days he just accepted them. They were his, they were beautiful and they were always of Liberty and of their love for each other.

He felt the pain in his head as he lifted it off the pillow. It was much less severe than the last time he was awake. He lowered his head and tried to fix his bearings. What day was it? What had happened? What caused his headache and the lump on the back of his head? Slowly it came back to him. He remembered Zeke's disappearance and the subsequent search. He then remembered Doyle's sudden and bizarre change of character. He tried to think. What else happened? He couldn't remember anything else. He suddenly sprang out of bed like a startled rabbit. In an instant he forgot his headache and remembered Zeke. He dressed himself and went down to the kitchen. He looked at the clock. It was 8.45am. Rose would be at work by now so he called her. He asked her what day it was and she told him it was Wednesday. He thought for a while and then asked her to cancel the rest of the week's appointments. He then tried Zeke's phone. It was dead. He then called Doyle. The phone rang, but there was no answer. He made himself a coffee and some toast, scoffed it down as fast as he could, ran to his car and raced up the hill to Zeke's place.

When he arrived there he was confronted with a sight that completely bewildered him. Zeke's hut, his shed, the vegetable garden and all the scattered junk were all gone. There was nothing there. It looked like there had never ever been anything there. It looked like it had all been bulldozed down and trucked away, but on closer inspection, it didn't. Adam thought that if it had been bulldozed it would have looked like it had been bulldozed, with marks on the ground and cleared areas. But it looked more like Zeke's place had never existed. For a moment he felt a loosening of his grip of reality. A chill of fear shot through him like an electric shock. His experience and his memory did not match. What was happening? He sensed himself sliding into shock, so he instinctively just let go of it. He accepted it, not trying to understand it. He quickly calmed himself and began to walk around Zeke's empty block. It was as if Zeke, his home and all their adventures were nothing more than a memory. *'Less than a memory,'* he thought. *'A memory would have meant that it had all actually happened.'* At that moment, standing in that empty space, he was completely uncertain whether any of it had ever really happened at all.

He walked back towards his car taking an occasional glance over his shoulder to check whether Zeke's hut and shed had somehow magically reappeared while he wasn't looking. He sat in his car for a while, thinking. He began to think that maybe he was in another one of his dreams. After about five minutes he had virtually convinced himself that he was dreaming and that he would wake up at the end of all this. He laughed and whispered to himself,

'Boy, this one sure takes the cake.'

He thought and thought trying to remember something he was sure he must have forgotten, something that would make sense of the bizarre circumstances. He was searching for the missing piece of the jigsaw, but it wasn't going to come to him. He finally decided to completely let go of it. Just let it go. He turned the ignition key, started the motor and drove off towards Sydney, towards Doyle's place.

As he rounded the corner into Doyle's street he immediately noticed three police cars parked in front of his house. He drove up slowly, curious about all the activity. He stopped his car a couple of houses short of Doyle's house and noticed that the police had strung up their tape around his front yard, designating it as a crime scene. He stepped out of his car and slowly walked over to a policeman who was standing out in front of the house.

'Er, hi, uhm, I'm a friend of Doyle's, the guy that lives in there.'

The young constable turned towards Adam.

'The guy that used to live in there, sir. Unfortunately he's been shot. He died instantly from a bullet wound to the head.'

'What?'

'Are you a close friend?'

'Oh, fairly close ... Jeess ...'

Adam was lost for words. The policeman beckoned him inside the perimeter tape.

'Do you want to have a quick look at your friend's body before we bag it?'

'Does it look gruesome?'

'No, clean as a whistle. Last chance.'

'OK.'

Adam followed the constable to the front door, which was wide open. There, just inside the doorway, he saw Doyle's body spread-eagled flat on its back. The constable casually remarked,

'He got it right between the eyes. See the entry wound?'

Adam grimaced and observed,

'That's a really small hole.'

'Yeah, he got shot with a twenty two, and guess what ...'

'What?'

'He tape recorded his own murder.'

'He what?'

The constable chuckled, 'Yeah, he had a mini cassette recorder in his shirt pocket, taping the whole thing. We know who did it and we've got him. I might be able to play it for you. I'll just ask the sarge.'

The constable stepped over to the sergeant and spoke to him. Adam saw both of them look at him and the sergeant nod his head. The constable then picked up a small tape recorder out of the patrol car and brought it over.

'It's a very clear recording. Listen.'

Adam listened to the tape. There was the sound of a knock on the door, followed by the sound of the lock unlocking and the door opening. Then there was the sound of Doyle's surprised voice.

'Dugan! How did you get out?'

'Shut the fuck up, Doyle. I finally found ya. This dog's day has *come!*'

'What are you doing here, you lowlife? Shouldn't you be rotting away in some rat hole? Hey, where did you get the gun? Hey, put that down!'

'Shut your face, prick. It's judgement day you son of a bitch copper. I've been waitin twenty years for this an I intend to enjoy it, so start beggin for your life you gutless piece of shit.'

'Listen, Dugan, you moronic slime, did you come here to bullshit all day, or are you gonna get on and do whatever it is you came here to do, you pile of putrid excrement.'

Next could be heard the sound of a small calibre pistol firing one shot followed by the thud of Doyle's body hitting the floor, which was immediately followed by the sound of Dugan's voice.

'Rot in hell, pig.'

The constable switched off the tape and informed Adam that they caught Dugan asleep in Doyle's bed. He told Adam that Dugan had escaped from the mental hospital, through the sewers, and *stunk like shit* when they caught him. He said,

'We're just about to throw him in the paddy wagon. Just stand back a bit because even though he's restrained in a straitjacket, he's got a nasty habit of spitting on people.'

Two burly policemen escorted Dugan out of the house. As he stepped over Doyle's body, he gave it a good kick, causing the policemen to restrain him more firmly. He laughed out loud in a demented, demonic sort of laugh, showing a set of filthy, decayed teeth. On the way out he glared at Adam and asked him,

'Who the fuck are *you*?'

He then laughed loudly, looked Adam straight in the eyes and boasted,

'Clean job, eh? I plugged him with a 22 cause I didn't want the slug to come out of his ugly head. I just wanted it to rattle around inside and blend his fucked-up brain into soup.'

He laughed like a mad man as they dragged him into the paddy wagon and drove him away.

'It sounded like they really hated each other.' Adam said.

'Yeah, I think the crazy guy killed twelve people before Detective Doyle finally hunted him down. That was something like twenty years ago.'

Adam watched them place Doyle's body into a body bag and zip it up. That was the last time he ever saw Doyle. He turned around and walked away thinking to himself,

'How unlucky was Doyle, he turned out to be number 13.'

.....

Chapter Twenty-Eight

RELEASE

1

Adam was suddenly awakened by a loud metallic noise that sounded like train cars coupling together. His eyes opened wide. He was in his bed, lying flat on his back. He observed his room sliding out of itself. It was as if there were two identical rooms, one perfectly superimposed over the other, and one room slid away from the other and the walls became transparent. Next, the room he was in began to accelerate. He could see everything outside the room flashing by, faster and faster. Everything became a total blur. After accelerating to what seemed like infinite speed, it all came to a stop.

Later, after he woke up, he could remember sitting around a large, beautifully carved, round, wooden table. He could remember Liberty and Ben sitting either side of him and there was Scott sitting adjacent to his right, with two tall, blond girls, who looked like twins, sitting either side of him. To the left of Libby sat Zeke, happy and smiling and giving him a thumbs-up signal. Opposite him sat an older couple. He remembered the table being in a large semicircular room, one side of which was solid glass. He remembered the room being full of flowering plants and palms and a variety of intricate geometric sculptures. Outside the huge glass wall there was a large semicircular veranda, which was made of stone with a heavily carved, low, stone balustrade running around the semicircular perimeter. The veranda seemed to form the opposite half of a big circle with the semicircular room. He could remember lots of colourful flowering vines decorating the veranda. He remembered the house being perched high up on the edge of a soaring precipice. In the distance below he could remember seeing a deep, wide valley with a serpentine river meandering through the middle of it. And above all this, high in the sky, he remembered seeing two suns, close to each other, with one sun being slightly smaller than the other.

It felt to him like he spent a fair bit of time there and that he participated in a long, joyful conversation with them, but he couldn't for the life of him remember what they talked about. He felt a new calmness, though, a new

confidence. He somehow felt reassured, but he didn't know about what. He somehow sensed that his life was going to become much more normal very soon and that everything was going to be all right. He felt all these things as he rose out of his bed, sucked in a deep lungful of clean Stanwell Park air and stepped down to his kitchen to make his morning cup of coffee.

2

The months following Zeke's disappearance and Doyle's death strangely felt like what he imagined a post-war peace would feel like. Everything was shattered causing the peace to scream out at him. It seemed to him like everything had built up to a crescendo and then exploded and disintegrated.

Zeke was never found. Adam never contacted anyone about the incident. He'd had enough. In the end he figured that Doyle was probably right about him being shot into outer space.

'He's probably still blasting through space at the speed of light squared,' he thought to himself. He imagined Zeke still sitting in his contraption, all bloated in the vacuum of deepest space, with his face frozen solid in a bloodcurdling scream.

As more time passed and the bizarre events concerning Doyle and Zeke diluted into distant history, Adam's life gradually returned to a semblance of normality. At the core of it was his work, which he continued to find exciting and stimulating due to the constant rapid evolution of dental technology. He also derived a great deal of pleasure from seeing his flock of *victims* enjoy perfect dental health. After a while, he cut his hours to working only three and a half days a week. Even though he enjoyed his work, he nonetheless found it taxing. He found a better balance by splitting his week exactly in half. This gave him time to develop new interests, like landscaping around his house and art. He also began to ride a bicycle to work and he learnt how to skate.

3

About two weeks after Doyle was shot, Adam went into his workshop to get a screwdriver. He opened the door and froze in utter astonishment. There, lying on the workbench next to the two-stroke motor of Ben's jetpack, was the prop guard. He couldn't believe it. How did it get there? The last time he saw it was at Zeke's place on the night of his disappearance. He picked it up and held

it in front of himself, feeling for the lift. It was still there. It was still pushing just like before. It was still a gravity sail. He shook his head with disbelief that he still had the guard. That was it. He decided there and then that he would bolt the guard to the rest of the machine and learn how to skate. He also decided to keep the gravitational nature of the guard a total secret from the whole world. He thought to himself as he admired Ben's beautiful construction, *'They would come at me like savage dogs, like a pack of starving hyenas. They would tear me apart for this wondrous thing. Nobody is going to have the faintest, not while I'm alive.'*

Over the next couple of days, he bolted the guard to the rest of the machine, filled the tank with fuel and tested it. It was beautiful. The small motor had a capacity of 35ccs and it spun the 18/10 pusher-prop at 6100 rpm at full throttle.

Adam bought himself a set of five-wheel skates and began skating every chance he could. When he felt that he had become reasonably proficient, he began to skate with the jetpack. With the machine strapped on his back he could effortlessly cruise around at 50kph. He learnt how to tune his skates so they remained rock stable at any speed and he learnt how to brake from high speed with either foot. Towards the end he even became comfortable ten-wheel drifting through high-speed bends. On some tailwind runs he achieved maximum speeds of over 90kph.

Over time he became conscious of the fact that he was the fastest skater on Earth, especially on a point-to-point, cross-country skate. Racing cyclists were no match for his speed. He trounced them decisively.

An old feeling reawakened within him. It was the awareness of *her*, his own, unique universe. He felt her presence strongest when he skated in secret, alone, at Tempe velodrome in Sydney. She gave him a feeling there, as he carved up the track, that she had shaped herself into that perfect concrete bowl, in that space, at that time, just for him, just to show him how much she loved him. She gave him a sensation that he was at some kind of trans-dimensional cosmic crossroads, like a singularity, where all forces merged into harmony and events unfolded in total perfection, like a blossoming lotus flower.

4

Nearly six months after Zeke's disappearance, Adam became acutely aware of the approaching equinox. On the day of the equinox, *Tuesday, September 22, 1992*, he took a drive past Zeke's place, which was still empty and showing signs of reverting back to natural bush. He drove on to Doyle's old house. As he drove by, he saw colourful toys scattered in the front yard and young children playing. He stopped for a while and remembered how he once asked Doyle what life would be like without him around. Well, now he knew. A broad grin appeared on his face as he remembered Doyle's quip.

It was a beautiful spring day so he thought he would keep driving. He drove to Rose Bay and sat on the same harbour-side park bench he once sat on with Libby. He unbuttoned his shirt in the mid-day sun, spread his arms out on the backrest and fixed his gaze on the glittering harbour in front of him. As he sat there, daydreaming, he noticed the Watson's Bay ferry round the headland into Rose Bay. He watched it elegantly glide into the bay and dock with the jetty, a few hundred yards away over his left shoulder. He remembered Bob and Tommy and wondered if they were on that ferry. He watched it undock and glide out past him. He remembered the magic times watching the ferries with Nancy, from her deck. He smiled to himself when he thought about the way he met Bob. He remembered the frantic taxi ride through The Cross and the breakfast he had with him at The Fountain Café. He remembered what a deep hole Bob had fallen into. He then remembered Bob's offer of a ride, in the pilothouse, on any Saturday morning at 6.00am.

5

Adam stepped out of the car parking station and looked at his watch. It was 5.30am. He had half an hour to find Bob's ferry. The morning was calm and chilly. He zipped up his jacket and pulled his cap tighter over his head. The dawn light was just beginning to stream through the misty gaps between the tall buildings. The streets were still bathed in the ghostly light of the streetlights. He stepped across the road into the steel and stone architecture of Circular Quay, already busy with machinelike activity. As a train passed overhead, the whole space filled with a surge of deafening metallic noise. He walked along the ferry wharves, eventually finding the one to Watson's Bay. He

stepped up to the window and purchased a roundtrip ticket. As he walked out onto the wharf, he marvelled once again at the majesty of the Harbour Bridge and the elegance of the Opera House. He heard a voice call out to him,

‘Doc?’

He recognised it immediately as Tommy’s voice.

‘Hey, Doc!’

He looked in the direction of the voice and spotted Tommy on the foredeck of the small ferry that was docked at the wharf. He saw Tommy wave to him and then wave him on aboard. Adam walked up the gangplank and stepped onto the ferry. Within seconds, Tommy was there throwing his arms around him and warmly hugging him. Tommy held him back with his hands on his shoulders and eyed him up and down.

‘You’re a sight for sore eyes, Doc. I can’t believe that I’m actually lookin at ya. This’ll make Bob’s day, this’ll really make Bob’s day.’

‘Hey Tommy, you look great, you look real great.’

‘Bob’ll be showin up any minute. Mate, how good is it to see ya. There he is, that’s him over there.’

Tommy pointed at a man walking out of the wharf terminal. Adam turned around and spotted Bob walking towards them. He waved. When Bob recognised Adam, he broke into a jog. He ran up the gangplank and threw himself into Adam’s arms. He hugged him, patting his back, saying,

‘Finally, finally, I thought we’d never see you again. What took you so long?’

‘I know, Bob, I know, but you know how life can just take you over sometimes.’

‘Tell me about it, tell me about all of it. Come on, let’s go up into the wheelhouse, I’ll make us some hot coffees.’ He turned to Tommy and asked him, ‘We all set, boy?’

‘All set, Cap.’

‘Good. Let’s go and make that coffee then.’

Tommy returned back to his tasks of preparing the ferry for undocking, while Bob shepherded Adam up the old, polished, teak steps into his wheelhouse.

Once inside, he showed Adam his seat and began to fiddle with the controls. He turned a key and Adam could hear the cough of the powerful diesel firing up. The engine quickly settled into a mellow, rumbling idle. Bob checked some gauges, looked at his watch, then picked up a large thermos flask from under a shelf.

‘Tommy gets it filled up for me at the Italian café over the road. Wait till you smell it.’ He unscrewed the top and placed it under Adam’s nose. ‘Eh what? It’s like you’re drinking it just by smelling it.’

‘Wow, that’s nice coffee, Bob.’

Bob grabbed two tin cups from the shelf and put them on the bench. As he poured the coffees he said,

‘This is the best run of the week, hardly any passengers. It’s more like a pleasure cruise ... sugar?’

‘One, thanks, Bob.’

‘Unfortunately I don’t have any milk.’

‘Oh, that’s OK, I prefer it black anyway.’

Bob looked at his watch, leaned over the radio, flipped a switch and spoke,

‘OK Tommy.’

He opened the wharf-side door of the tiny wheelhouse and watched Tommy pull up the gangplank and untie the ropes, setting the ferry adrift. Bob eased the throttle lever forward and gently steered the ferry away from the wharf.

The ferry glided out of Circular Quay, passing through the cool shadow of the Opera House, whose billowing sails were silhouetted in the orange glow of the sunrise. The noise emanating from the Circular Quay complex slowly faded away into the distance as they rounded the Opera House forecourt and glided out into the expansive harbour.

‘You know, Bob, there’s a house that we’ll go past, with an old boathouse down near the water in front of it, on the eastern side of Point Piper. It’s got a small deck in front of it. I’ll show it to you when we go by. Years ago I used to sit on that deck with my best friend at the time, a girl called Nancy, and we used to watch the ferries cruise in and out of Rose Bay, and I can still

remember us saying, like it happened yesterday, how the job you got driving one of these ferries was the last job you got before you went to heaven.'

Bob looked at Adam, took a sip of his coffee, smiled and replied,

'Or it's the first job they give you when you get there.'

The morning light made the water look like shimmering, liquid gold. There was not a breath of wind and there were still patches of lingering fog in the shaded, deeper parts of the bays. The main sounds that could be heard were the low rumble of the engine, the squawking of the multitude of birdlife and the sound of the spray being made by the bow wave of the sleek ferry as it cut through the morning glass.

The ferry made a close pass by Robbie's house as it rounded the point of Point Piper. Adam saw the opulent mansion with the jetty and ramp out in front of it. Then he saw the wooden post against which, he imagined, Nancy hit her head. The house appeared to be locked up as though there was no one living there. As they glided past Nancy's old place, Adam pointed it out to Bob. He told him a little about Nancy and what a good friend she was. Bob reminisced about the taxi ride.

'Do you remember that taxi driver?' They both laughed. 'You wouldn't believe it, he did two more mercy dashes for me, pure coincidences, same scenarios, but guess what ...'

'What?

'He did the other two for nothing, and I found out his name. It's Mohammed,' Bob took another sip of his coffee, 'and he is actually a very nice man with a beautiful family.'

Bob told Adam that if it hadn't been for pastor Ted, he and Tommy wouldn't be where they were. He said that at that time they just let go and put all their faith in the good pastor and did what he told them.

'And here we are, and in eight years I get to retire on a nice pension.'

'You're too young to retire, Bob.'

'Ahh, don't let my good looks fool you.'

As the ferry pulled away from the Rose Bay jetty, Adam spotted his park bench on the shore. He thought to himself,

'There's one of my sacred sites.'

Bob continued the conversation.

'I've got into caravanning.'

'Caravanning?'

'Yeah. I own a nice old EH Holden and a small, old van. It tows like a dream and doesn't cost me too much in petrol.'

'Wow, Bob, that sounds like a pretty nice rig.'

'It really is. I've been going on trips during my holidays. It's been great just to get out of town, out in the wide-open spaces. It gives me a feeling of being as free as a bird.'

'You know, I can really relate to that feeling. It reminds me of the surfing trips I used to do in my youth.'

'Well, I've been everywhere and I reckon that I've found the place where I want to retire.'

'Really?'

'Yeah. It's got the prettiest river. It's the nicest place. Noosa, have you ever heard of it?'

'Are you kidding? It's one of the best surfing places in Australia. Everybody's heard of it.'

'Well, it's going to be my final resting place, God willing.'

Adam looked out over the water at the far shore.

'That is a beautiful dream, Bob.'

'I've seen these little houses in a town called Tewantin. It's just a few miles up the Noosa River. Something like that, where I can park my car and van in the back and maybe go fishing in the river in a small tinnie.'

'You know, Bob, it's funny that you should mention Noosa. I've been going up there, off and on, since 1965, surfing.'

'I wouldn't know the front of one of them surfboards from the back.'

'Noosa is a great choice.'

'Good fishing.'

'Is that Watson's Bay over there?' Adam pointed to a bay in the distance.

'That's it. She's a picture on mornings like this, isn't she?'

'Yeah Bob ... she sure is.'

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Chapter Twenty-Nine

THE EMBRACE

1

The phone rang at quarter to seven in the morning. Adam crawled out of bed and went downstairs to the kitchen.

‘Hello?’

On the other end of the line he heard the distressed, crying voice of his mother.

‘Darling, it’s your father ... I can’t wake him ... he’s so cold and pale ...’

She began to cry uncontrollably as Adam, who felt that he had to sit down straight away as his legs turned to jelly, instructed her to call an ambulance.

‘I’m coming straight over, mum. I’m leaving now.’

His head spun with concern as he drove across town to his parents’ home. Crawling from traffic light to traffic light, he became acutely aware that this drive, although the same as hundreds of others, was different. This was the first of a new kind of drive, where there wouldn’t be the same happiness waiting for him at the other end. He sensed the imminent arrival of a new aloneness and a new uncertainty about his future.

As he drove up to his parents’ house he noticed that the front door was wide open. He ran inside and up the stairs to the bedroom where he found his mother lying on top of his father’s body, crying hysterically. He attempted to console her and tried to pull her off his father, but to no avail. She clung to him like a barnacle to a rock.

Within a few minutes the ambulance arrived. The ambulance men assessed the situation, helped Adam take his mother out of the bedroom and called the police.

‘It’s routine, sir,’ they told Adam. ‘Could you ask your mum to call the family doctor. He will need to sign a certificate.’

The ambulance men left as the police arrived. The doctor arrived soon after and sat with Adam’s dad for nearly an hour. When he came out he said,

‘He passed away very peacefully, in his sleep. His heart just stopped beating. I’m sorry.’

Adam's mum commented between sobs,

'He seemed so normal last night. He had a big dinner and enjoyed a delicious apple strudel for dessert. We watched a movie and went to bed and when I woke up this morning ...'

She couldn't continue. She just began to cry. Adam put his arms around her and didn't leave her side for the rest of the day.

The doctor called the morticians and they all had a cup of coffee while they waited for them to arrive.

Adam took a little time and looked at his father's body through the bedroom door. How peaceful he looked. There was not much indication that he wasn't actually there, except for the pale colour of his face. Adam flashed over the years that he knew him and the happy times they had together. He remembered their trip to Noosa, way back in '65. He now thought that it was probably the best two weeks that he ever spent with him. He looked at his body lying there as though he was just asleep and thought to himself, *'I can't believe in this, this death thing. He must have taken off into a new reality, like Nancy used to say. He took off the old coat and let it fall away. And we're all part of his old coat. Now he'll go and grow a new one. His new body will be the inner lining and the rest of the coat will be his new universe, and his old universe, which he had departed from, will slowly decay and disintegrate like a palm leaf that has fallen to the ground. That's nothing to be sad about.'*

The last thing he saw of his dad was a body bag being carried out of the house on a stretcher.

About a week later, they had to restrain his mother from attempting to jump into her husband's grave as they lowered the coffin into the ground.

Two days after that, Adam made his usual early morning call to his mum, however on this day there was no answer. As it turned out, she passed out of this life in her sleep as well, undoubtedly, Adam thought, chasing after the love of her life. He thought, *'I wonder if he waited for her? I wonder if they travel through eternity together, like best mates, sometimes being siblings, sometimes lovers. Who knows? But the thought is wonderful and God knows, crazier things have happened.'*

One thing was for sure, Adam just couldn't conceive of them being dead. He accepted that the fleshy construction of them was gone from all existence, but he couldn't make himself feel that they were gone. They had just moved on, leaving everything behind, including the memories of the lives they had just lived. He smiled as he thought, *'and if they were to meet in a new time and a new place, as new people, they might meet as young strangers and fall in love again, perhaps thinking to themselves how strange it was that they felt so much like kindred spirits.'*

2

Adam's parents passed away in *August 1998*. Up to that point he had lived a simple, solitary life. He enjoyed his three and a half days a week of work and he had nearly completed three years of heavy manual labour landscaping every square foot of yard around his house. He chose to do the whole project manually, using only a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow. He had decided to refrain from using any power tools of any kind. He wanted to feel the energy that it took to transform his property and he also wanted to strengthen his body in the process. The project included creating level areas in front and in the back of the house. This involved moving more than twenty tons of dirt from the back of the house to the front. He lay down over seventy square metres of beautiful cobblestone paving, completely encircling the house. He planted over twenty large palm trees, strategically placed all around the house. He did all the digging manually. The average hole took him five hours to dig and it took him another three hours to plant the tree. He did all the work alone and derived great pleasure from the heavy physical exertion.

When his parents died, Adam was forced to concentrate on sorting out their affairs. As he was the only child, everything they owned became his. He became wealthy overnight. As a result of that, he became aware of the fact that he would not need to work for money for much longer. He finished all the landscaping work by the beginning of 1999 and put the house and the surgery on the market that autumn. They both sold within the month. The house sold for a record price for Stanwell Park, making a rich man even richer.

Part of his inheritance included a number of quality rental properties, all situated near the centre of Sydney. They were always rented and were collecting a comfortable income for him.

After everything was sold, he bought some more properties in the inner Eastern Suburbs and moved into a small two-bedroom unit in Double Bay, while he figured out the next move in his life.

During this time, he took a few rides on the Watson's Bay ferry and enjoyed some long conversations with Bob, washed down with some of the best coffee he'd ever tasted.

'I've got a couple of weeks off next February, Adam. I'm booked into a real nice caravan park in Noosa. It's right on the river at Munna Point. Why don't you meet me up there and we can do some fishing together. What do you say?'

'It's been a while since I've been to Noosa, more than ten years.'

'Oh, it's changed, mate, you won't recognise the place, but it's still a picture.'

Adam booked himself a holiday unit for a month. He stayed right on the main beach, right in the middle of Hastings Street. During the two weeks that Bob was there, he spent many happy hours in his company. He also bought himself a new surfboard on that trip. The salesman in the surf shop convinced him to buy a nine-foot *Mal*. He said that it would be perfect for the summer waves on the points.

His first attempts at riding his new surfboard took him back to his early days with Liberty. He remembered his clumsy attempts at surfing with her and how she helped and inspired him. It was similar now, but not quite as difficult. The new surfboard was stable and beautiful to ride in the perfect, walling waves of Noosa. He spent nearly all his time surfing in Teatree Bay. He loved that place. He remembered the many long days he spent there with his beautiful Libby. Ten years had passed since she disappeared, yet it felt like yesterday. The memories all came flooding back. He still felt her presence in his heart in the evenings, especially when he sat on the same rock that he sat on with her, at National Park. And as he watched the clean barrels break along the point, he let his emotions run free and allowed himself to cry, for a while, for the happiness that he had lost.

Another thing began to happen to him as he surfed in the crescent bay of Teatree. It was the emergence of a new feeling within him, within his heart. As he sat on his surfboard, in the middle of the bay, admiring the beauty of the natural setting, he began to feel that a mother, a huge mother, was embracing him. It was weird, but it felt so real. She was invisible and her arms were as big as the whole bay. He felt her hug him and welcome him there, and he thought that he could hear her speak to him.

'You are my child and I have set this place aside for you. Come, come and live here, right here within my embrace, where I can love and nurture you.'

The memory of that feeling stayed with him for the rest of his days and he felt it every time he entered the water of those beautiful bays. Finally, it was that experience that convinced him to move to Noosa and seriously focus his life into surfing her magnificent points.

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Chapter Thirty

THE PICKUP

1

As he rounded Dolphin point, he stopped for a moment to take in the classic scene. Spread out before him was a vision of heaven. Granite Bay glistened in all its magnificence and was highlighted by line after line of clean eight-foot swells wrapping around the point from the east. As he marvelled at this scene he remembered a picture he once saw, a long time ago, on the side of a camper van. He realised, there and then, that the scene he was looking at right now was identical to the one in that picture, in every detail. He shook his head in amazement and thought,

'How could she have done that? How could she have painted this day, this very moment, on the side of that van?'

He then thought to himself that he was beyond being amazed. There had been so many things that had happened, so many impossible things, that he was becoming numb to them all. These days he just experienced them and moved on without trying to understand or explain them.

He took a drink from his water bottle, refocussed his mind on the grinding barrels and continued his walk along the narrow foot trail that led around the perimeter of Granite Bay, towards the point.

It was mid-afternoon, on *Wednesday, April 20, 2005*. The day was stinking hot and walking along the track and over the boulders along the shoreline, was like walking on an electric hotplate. He hadn't worn a pair of shoes for five years and the only time he put on a pair of sandals was when he went shopping or taking care of business. As a result, his feet had toughened up so much that he no longer felt any heat beneath them. This was just one example of how his body had changed and adapted to its new environment. To look at him now would leave you disbelieving that he was the same person from five years before. His skin was a deep dark-brown colour and his body was lean and muscular. His eyes burned with a ferocity for life and maintained a constant, sharp, razor-edge focus on the waves that broke along the five classic points of Noosa.

In the last five years since he had arrived there, he had not missed one day of perfect point surf. His life beat to the rhythm of the swells, the wind and the tides. Everything revolved around these elements of nature.

He arrived at the top of the steep, narrow trail, which led down the side of the precipitous cliff to the small beach hidden amongst the boulders, midway out along the point. He knew, by heart, every tree root and every stable rock that acted as a step for him. He negotiated his way down with the balance of a tightrope walker. Once on the beach, he took a few more big swigs of water then placed the bottle in its special spot amongst the rocks, where it would be in the shade all afternoon and stay cool for him when he finished his session. He strapped his legrope around his right ankle, picked up his longboard and absorbed the scene.

He was in the fifty-seventh year of his life. Over the last thirty or so years he had evolved a very personal, singular perception of his reality. Everything he saw and sensed was her. Everything he was not was her. Everything he moved in was her. She was alive and she could change into whatever she wanted to. She had feelings just like anything else that is alive has feelings. She could love and she could get upset. She could be Granite Bay on a perfect day, or she could be a rat hole of a prison cell where no light entered. She could be a bullet. It was up to her. It all depended on how she felt about things, because she was alive and she had feelings. She deserved respect and sometimes she demanded it. She was everything in his reality that he was not, including, as he discovered through his personal experiences, his physical body and its brain. She was the Earth, the Sun, the Moon and the stars. She was his universe. And the way he understood things now, it was she who was mortal, destined to die and disintegrate around him, and it was he who was immortal, existing within her while she was alive, and when she died, it was his destiny to continue growing and grow a new universe and live within *her* until *she* died. And this happened over and over, forever, like a palm tree losing an old leaf and growing a new one.

He loved his universe like nothing else and he let her know it. He thanked her daily for being what she was and he thanked God for making her and him and for everything that was. Then he went surfing.

As the liquid sets rolled through the bay, he watched the young surfers race the huge, long-walled barrels, sometimes disappearing from view, only to reappear again further down the line. He was waiting for a lull. He stood in waist-deep water focussing his gaze out to sea, looking for a break in the swells. When he saw one, he lay on his board and exploded in a burst of paddling energy. He made it out about three quarters of the way when the next set ground through. The waves hit him hard and caused him to roll under, nearly ripping his surfboard out of his hands. But he hung on through the violent turbulence, holding his breath, came up on the other side, righted himself and powered on until he made it out all the way through the break. Once there, he could relax a little and paddle out to the takeoff in a more leisurely manner, studying the huge, pitching barrels on the way out. There were about thirty surfers in the water that day. Two thirds of them were mostly spectators, numbed by the intimidating power and speed of the massive waves. The rest were active participants, unafraid and experienced, searching for the barrel, the place of highest energy and greatest danger. The place where, some said, time stood still.

He caught many waves that afternoon, some as good as any he had ever ridden. He felt so attuned to his universe that he no longer took the waves, he received them. He no longer competed for them with the other surfers. He waited until his wave came to him and when it did, he turned and casually paddled into the wall of water and allowed it to pick him up and propel him along its face at lightning speed, chasing him with its menacing barrel all the way to the end of the ride.

He recognised her in the waves he rode and he understood how she played with him in a game of harmony. It was a game she invented, a game to be played between her nature and his spirit.

As the sun slowly drifted towards the westerly horizon and its golden light began to reflect off the curved surfaces of the long, liquid walls, he noticed how, one by one, the surfers began leaving the water. Before long, there were only ten left. He rode another speeding wall and paddled back out. When he got back to the takeoff, there were only five left.

There was about half an hour of sunlight remaining in the day, the surf was classic and everyone was leaving? He looked around and scratched his head. What was going on? Normally, no one left until it was nearly pitch dark, way after sunset. A subtle, strange feeling began to permeate through his body and his mind. He looked out to sea and saw the next set smashing over the rocks on the tip of the point. He looked around and saw that now there was no one else there to go for the waves. He had no time to think. He paddled towards the approaching wall, placed himself into position, turned his board and pushed himself into the rising swell. As his surfboard picked up speed and began to plane, he stood up and while still crouching, slightly bent like a bow, he dropped straight down the near vertical wall of glass. As he sped out onto the flat in front of the huge wave, he leaned into his bottom turn, straightened his body and released all his energy in time with all the forces and kinetics of his precious, beloved universe. Coming out of the turn, he shot out onto the face, climbing high for the long, critical section he was about to negotiate. As he climbed to the top of the wave, he caressed the pitching curl with his right hand and just before he risked sliding into freefall, due to being too high in a hollowing wave, he leaned back on his board, placing his weight over his fins, flicked the board slightly down the face, gaining incredible speed, and set himself up to enter the hollow mystery hidden beneath the pitching lip of the perfectly peeling tube. Fifty yards down the line, he shot out of the barrel, climbed high up the face and leaned back into a radical, long, carving cutback, sending out a wide plume of spray. He brought his board beneath himself again, crouched and leaned forward into another powerful bottom turn, lined up the face, took two steps forward and disappeared inside the hollow vortex, not emerging from it until the end of his ride, where he executed a powerful, arched-back pullout.

As he paddled the long five hundred yards back to the takeoff, he admired the golden sunset and the beautiful rainbow of colours it painted across the western sky. He was alone now. He looked around and could not see a soul. He had never experienced this before. He was never the last in the water. There were other surfers who always surfed into complete darkness and he couldn't

understand why they weren't doing it today. God knew that the surf was good enough.

He sat out the back waiting for a big set. He knew that the next wave would be his last for that day, so he wanted to make it a good one. Eventually, one of the biggest sets of the day came through. He caught the last, largest wave and rode it all the way to the beach, some six hundred yards away. He pulled out of the wave just before the deadly shore break and began to paddle back out to sea. In order to come ashore on the tiny beach, half way out along the point, he had to paddle back out almost all the way to the takeoff, then turn around and catch a small wave into the beach, proned out on his board.

By the time he stepped ashore and took a drink of water, it was nearly completely dark. He stood there motionless for a while, admiring the beautiful twilight and reflecting on the many classic waves he enjoyed that afternoon, when something bright attracted his attention. It was a star, a very bright star, just above the north-eastern horizon. He thought to himself,

'Boy, that's a bright star. I don't remember ever seeing that one before.'

He took another drink of water and began winding his legrope around his fins. He had another look around to see if he could see anyone, but there was no one else anywhere. He was alone. Another huge set grabbed his attention. He looked out to sea, but instantly lost interest in the waves. He noticed the star again. It seemed brighter and he could have sworn that it had moved sideways. He momentarily forgot everything and fixed all his attention on the star. He muttered to himself,

'It's moving, the bloody star is moving ... sideways.'

He watched it drifting, first to the left, then to the right, all the time maintaining its very low altitude above the ocean. He mumbled again,

'It's getting brighter. Must be a low flying aircraft with powerful lights ... seems to be coming this way ... Jees, it's getting really bright ... it's sure flying close to the water ... Christ, it's coming this way!'

He remained transfixed on the bright object, which still oscillated from left to right as it kept coming closer, staying just above the surface of the water, while becoming brighter and larger.

'This is no star and it's looking less and less like a plane all the time ... Jesus!'

He felt a shiver of fear run through his body. The thing was big now and seemed no more than a mile out to sea. He stood on the tiny beach, with his water bottle in his hand and his surfboard by his feet, with all his attention frozen on the flying object. As it came nearer it dimmed its light. It slowly glided in over the surf break, softly lighting the tops of the waves. It made absolutely no noise and no wind and appeared to him to be almond shaped.

He could not move now, even if he wanted to. He didn't not feel in control of his body, but he didn't feel like he could have moved it if he wanted to, which he wasn't sure if he did or he didn't. He felt his fear melt away and a warm calmness take him over. He was also having trouble thinking, but he managed to get one thought out.

'It looks like some kind of polished silver metal.'

The silver space ship stopped and levitated about two feet above the water, right in front of him. A small portion of it was over the beach. It made no sound. It looked like it was about fifty or sixty feet in diameter.

He stood there completely paralysed, but totally calm. Suddenly, a panel opened underneath the ship and a silver ramp, which was covered in some kind of black, grippy rubber, silently extended out and downward, until it nearly, but not quite, touched the edge of the beach, no more than ten feet in front of him. He stood there transfixed as he saw a stunningly handsome, longhaired, barefoot young man, wearing a pair of faded blue jeans and a black Led Zeppelin T-shirt, casually saunter down the ramp and hop onto the sand.

Nothing was said for a moment as the two men looked closely at each other. Then the young space traveller noticed a tear stream from the old surfer's eye. The grey haired waterman felt fifteen years of anguish melt away from his heart as he heard the softly spoken words,

'Hi dad.'

He barely composed himself enough to utter the question,

'Ben, is that you?'

CONTINUED IN 2023.2

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