Writing the Sixties: Stardust and Golden

Doug McEachern

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Department of English and Creative Writing

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Abstract

The creative work, *Stardust and Golden*, a phrase taken from Joni Mitchell's 1969 hit *Woodstock*, is a novel set in Adelaide in the late 1960s. The story is told by Mark David who, in 2009, recalls this time after an unexpected encounter with an elderly Elizabeth Ryder, the mother of his closest friend from the 1960s. The novel is centred on the lives of two young men balloted for conscription in 1968. Although opposed to the Vietnam War and conscription they are not attracted to the idea of going into hiding as draft resisters or the prospect of two years in jail. They want another solution. Their lives are shaped by a network of social relations centred on a shared student household, a student commune, in North Adelaide, where the residents are involved in 1960s style political and social agitations as well as the insistent pursuit of pleasure, lots of music, some drugs, some alcohol and sex and varying degrees of generational conflicts with parents. Their 1960s do not turn out as they had hoped. Of the two central characters one dies in India having run from the draft and the other is too ill to be inducted. He too, more or less, leaves the country and has a career as a consultant in the oil industry.

The second part, the exegesis, focusses on the creative practice and research involved in writing *Stardust and Golden*. Here the focus is on how authors re-imagine the Sixties as an age of militant opposition to the Vietnam War and conscription and the rise of a counter culture of challenge to convention and authority. The phrase 'Writing the Sixties' also captures the essentially fictional construction of the era. Hence the exegesis starts with the novels of the Sixties, tracing different ways in which novels written either at the time or close to it compare with the research and writing strategies of those who seek, from a later vantage point, to re-imagine the Sixties. In this chapter a broad range of novels are used to document the anatomy of a Sixties novel. This forms the basis for an in-depth consideration of the writing strategies John Updike (*Rabbit Redux* and *The Witches of Eastwick*) and Philip Roth (*American Pastoral*) use to create a sense of the Sixties in these novels and how they build their characterisation of the times. The exegesis concludes with an account of the creative practice involved in imagining and realising the novel, with a focus on how research, of both the era and the events themselves and of literary forms and writing strategies, provides the scaffolding for reimagining and creatively re-building the sense of era for S*tardust and Golden*.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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Signature Date

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Volume One

The Creative Work

Stardust and Golden

Doug McEachern

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Chapter 1
Nursing Home Blues

January 2009

This was a depressing quest. At Christmas lunch with my much diminished family (my father and our beloved twins had died young) I was assigned to find a nursing home for my mother, recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The rest of my family had given up. Every place they looked at was either too miserable or had no vacancies. So I headed off to the leafy Eastern suburbs. Any nursing home here would be more expensive but I was happy to pay extra. The rest of the family need never know.

As soon as I parked the car I was impressed. The grounds were vast with tall trees, extensive lawns and an inviting atmosphere of green calm. An old two storey mansion had been modernised and converted into a nursing home, with additions discretely placed among the trees. I arrived just as the 'residents' were being fed and the Director, a young woman by my standards, invited me to join them for lunch. I declined. What could be worse? However, with her unusually grey eyes and a gentle, insistent manner, she collected a couple of plates of sandwiches and led me to a small table in the garden where we could do business well away from the bustle of the meal service. We talked easily about the nursing home and pleasantly about other things. The longer we talked the more I liked the feel of the place; just right for my mother. I was happy to sign the papers on the spot but the matron, far wiser, insisted the family should have an inspection before any final decisions were made. Reluctantly I gave her my sister Trudy's phone number but I wanted it all settled quickly as I was soon off overseas on another consultancy.

When we finished our sandwiches, the Director took me to inspect the facilities and then proposed a walk around the gardens. There were little tables set up in various corners of the grounds and small groups were having their lunch in the shade of the large trees. I could picture my mother here. I thought nothing of the actual people sitting and quietly eating their meals and barely looked at them. Imagine my surprise when I was addressed by a solitary diner, a small frail old lady, impeccably dressed and finely turned out.

"Mark David!" She held out her hands in anguish. "Mark David, it is you, isn't it!"

At first I did not recognise her and must have looked confused. The Director watched me with curiosity while I looked at the old lady more closely. She leant towards me, "Help me." She sounded so desperate.

Then I knew who she was! The Director skilfully moved me towards her and, with old fashioned politeness, introduced us. This was Elizabeth Ryder and I had not seen her for many, many years. With a surge of embarrassment I recalled our last meetings. There had been great tension between us as I brought news she did not want to hear.

As if called away by another resident at a nearby table, the Director tactfully withdrew. I did not know what to say. Elizabeth Ryder was the mother of Stephen, my best friend at university back in the nineteen sixties. She had never approved of me; we never got beyond mutual hostility. My first selfish thought was to cancel any plans to move my mother to this home. My mother would never be comfortable in the kind of place where Mrs Ryder lived. Besides, it would be awkward to visit if I might meet her there. Memories and the sharp tang of grief distracted me. Stryder was dead. He died

long ago and ever since there had been something vast missing from my life. If I allowed his memory in I would be overwhelmed. How was I to talk with her? She blamed me then and I am sure she blamed me still. I stumbled for neutral words of greeting.

As if reading my mind Mrs Ryder said, “It really doesn’t matter,” and added insistently, “Forget all the old stuff.” Once more she reached out her thin hands, “You know what happened.” I am sure I looked uncomfortable. She leaned over and gripped my arm. “Why did Stephen go away?” Her eyes gleamed. “Why did he have to die?”

This did not help. Elizabeth Ryder had never wanted to listen to what I had to say before. The last time we met she had been angry but now there was no bitterness in her voice. She held my hand imploring me to respond. I was paralysed by her closeness. The Director came to my rescue.

Mrs Ryder stopped talking, but her eyes focussed on my face with such intensity I could hear her silent pleading. How could I possibly help her?

With considerable skill the Director managed the tension, politely separating us and moving me away. There was determination in those very distinctive, very attractive grey eyes. She continued to guide me along the path as if showing me the grounds of the nursing home.

“Mark,” she spoke gently. “Allow me to give you some background.” We walked on. In an unemotional voice she said, “As far as I know Elizabeth Ryder has no family and few friends. No one comes to visit her.”

I nodded but felt no compassion for Mrs Ryder.

“Her physical health is good but, understandably, she is depressed, seriously depressed.”

I wanted this conversation to stop. The Director was relentless.

“Elizabeth is worried. No, she is obsessed by her son’s death and the way her husband abandoned her.”

“She knows everything about both,” I said. “I tried to talk to her about Stephen’s death before. She swore and accused me of ruining her life.” I turned to the Director. “I don’t think I can do a friendly visit.”

“Apart from her desperation?” The Director turned down the heat. “I understand some things,” she said. “I’ve heard about your final meetings many times.”

“Did you know who I was when I arrived?”

“Not really.” She stopped and faced me. “She has only ever talked about someone called ‘Mark’.”

I felt trapped.

“And what did she say about our last meetings?”

“She hasn’t forgiven you.” She put her hand on my arm and gently urged us to continue walking. “I can imagine why she might be obsessed. Can’t you?” She half turned towards me, “Aren’t you the best person to talk to her about it?”

I had no interest in revisiting my past.

“If you could visit just once and talk to her about the sixties and whatever it was that you and her son got up to then, it might help.”

"I doubt it," I said. My resolve was weakening. The Director gestured with her hand inviting me to tell her my decision. I have no idea why I agreed to come back but I did. Were her grey eyes more persuasive than argument? Since I was not going to be in Adelaide for three or four months, I gave her my business card and asked her to e-mail me if Mrs Ryder forgot our meeting and her request.

The Director handed me her card. "You should make some notes."

I looked quizzically at her.

"Well, you know what they say about the sixties," she said.

"Certainly." I was not amused. "But, I *can* remember." Then I laughed. I could remember but I preferred not to. She was right, making notes would help.

When I went to shake her hand, she said, "You've seen it. Our high dependency care facility is excellent. You know, they might never meet." Turning her head slightly aside she said, "Would it be so bad if they did?"

My evening meal was spent with my ex-wife Helen and our two children. This was a mirror image of our annual Christmas dinner but, this time, it was the meal on the eve of our children flying back home; Tony (named after Helen's father, not my brother) to New York and the New School and Sandra to Sydney and the large TV company where she was a production manager. Both our children are 'in' relationships but show no desire to marry or have children, much to Helen's regret. They don't think I'm a good advertisement for marriage. From the moment they were born I was an absent father. In their teenage years, after the divorce, it was hard for them to treat me with anything

other than cynicism or hostility. As usual there was vigorous discussion during the meal and into the evening and I was the focus of a running commentary.

"Jeez Dad, you look completely wrecked," said Tony, smiling at me.

Sandra joined in. "You need to spend less time flying and more time on the ground."

"You could retire," was Helen's helpful contribution.

Sandra was on the prowl. "Just how much money do you need, Dad?"

To quieten them down I finally let them know I had bought a house at Port Elliott (a madly lucrative deal with some Sheiks just before the global financial crisis gave me the cash for the purchase). It was on a fair sized farm, but I only wanted the old house and home block, the rest would continue to be farmed by the previous owner. If I did decide to 'retire' or 'settle down', I would move there but I was not going to tell them that. They were too excited already so I insisted there was no way I was giving up my consultant life style any time soon.

It wasn't late when I headed back to North Adelaide, to my house in Dunn Street which I had bought as my Australian base after the divorce. For tax purposes and on official forms I use my North Adelaide address but, in truth, I was rarely in Australia more than two or three months a year. Most of the time, I lived on long haul flights, in hotels and in accommodation provided by companies, as I travelled the world working as a consultant to the global oil industry. I didn't mind the lifestyle; it kept me moving on. But when I came back to Adelaide for Christmas and the New Year I stop. In such moments my past could catch up with me. I never expected it to find me in a nursing

home. My meeting with Elizabeth Ryder had allowed a whole set of unwanted memories to return.

It was a warm night. I wound my window down and slowed the car to a moderate pace. There was little traffic. I cruised down Dunn Street and turned left onto Melbourne Street. It looked run down with empty shops and few signs of the once vibrant restaurant culture. It needed a bit of renewal to make it an exciting place once again. As I drove through the streets I recalled North Adelaide as it had been in the sixties. Back then many of the large homes built over the previous hundred years were standing empty in run down and overgrown gardens. The small workers' cottages, also neglected, were rented by university students seeking cheap places to live. I turned right off Melbourne Street and headed towards Kingston Terrace and the parklands, turning left and stopping the car outside one of the grander houses, rendered and with some hint of the English Arts and Crafts movement in its decorative flourishes. I looked at its large entrance doors. The place was empty but it was considerably restored from the time I had known it in the nineteen sixties. I drove on turning left and left again into Stanley Street, parking the car near the high wall and the rear door we had mostly used. Stanley Street was poorly lit and completely deserted. I walked up and down, listening to faint sounds of life behind the walls and enjoying the scents of jasmine and night flowering tobacco from the gardens within. I examined the garden door closely. It was now painted a bright Provencal blue but the door handle and the lock were unchanged. For the first time in an age I felt I might want to see the inside of the house again but, at that thought, I hurried to the car and headed home.

Nothing was right. Restless, uninterested in sleep, I poured myself a brandy and sat moodily in my large lounge chair, looking at the wall as I tried to insulate myself from unsettling memories. The Dunn Street place was a small two storey cottage, bare

floor boards and modestly furnished, comfortable enough but no more. It looked a bit like a basic three star motel. The only real exception was the sound system. It was of good quality and I had bought it, mainly for the turntable, so I could listen to my old vinyl records. It made no difference; I never played them. The expensive hi-fi was used as little more than a radio. On this night I went to my junk room, rummaged around and dragged out a large box of 1960s vinyl. I took it to the front room, sat on the floor and started to pull out records; The Beatles *Sgt Pepper's*, *The White Album*, Jefferson Airplane *After Bathing at Baxters*, *Crown of Creation*, County Joe and the Fish *Electric Music for the Mind and Body*, Cream *Disraeli Gears*, Jimmy Hendricks *Electric Lady Land*, MC5 *Kick Out the Jams* and Muddy Waters *Fathers and Sons*. Nothing quite captured the mood. Then I found the album I had been looking for. *Cheap Thrills*, Janis Joplin with Big Brother and the Holding Company. As soon as I lifted it from the box, looked at the cover and started to take the record out of its inner sleeve, I knew I was doing the wrong thing.

This record just compounded my sense of unease. There was memory associated with it, a memory of Angela Falconer who had been the person in charge of the student commune in the old house filling the block between Stanley Street and Kingston Terrace. It was late 1968. Angela was getting ready to go to Paris and the house was deserted. I was to look after the place while the house mates went overseas for the summer. After a disastrous meal – I was a terrible cook back then- we went to her room. Angela was a music student and a fine musician. Later, under the name Bobby Black, she became famous as a rock and blues musician; she is still on the road, doing a couple of months most years on the blues circuit in America, and festivals in Australia. We listened to the record and then spent some time, Angela on piano, me playing basic electric guitar, doing our versions of the Janice Joplin classics, *Summer Time*, *Piece of*

My Heart (I never could get the guitar intro right) and *Ball and Chain*. It is one of the few truly nostalgic memories I have of the commune. As I sat on the hard floor with the record in my hand, the smell of old vinyl in my nostrils and my memories of Angela, I felt the unfinished business from my past seep into my empty house. There was no way I could play that record.

Chapter 2
I Meet Stryder

February 1966

I first met Stryder in February 1966. There were about fifty of us lined up in some large administrative room at the University of Adelaide, waiting to sort out our enrolments. It was a hot day and the room with its low ceiling was oppressive. Irritated by the prospects of endlessly waiting, I noticed the young man in front of me seemed indifferent to all discomfort. Wearing slim-line blue jeans, Cuban-heeled boots and a linen shirt, he had a light weight jacket slung across his shoulder. He marked the passing time by swinging the jacket from over his shoulder to hang it across his bent arm and, later, back to his shoulder again. Bored, he would glance around the room. One time he turned sufficiently to catch sight of me. He paused to examine more closely this curious specimen before him. I refused to speak first; he was too self-assured for me. As a working class kid from an ordinary state school I was unimpressed with such an obvious private school type. I tried to outstare him and failed. Having looked long enough, he swung his coat onto his shoulder again and turned to face me.

He held out his hand to shake mine and introduced himself as Stephen Ryder.

"Mark David," I was completely outclassed and awkward.

He said, "Mate, we are well and truly buggered. Doomed to stand here for an eternity just to fix up our enrolments." Despite his educated Australian accent, an accent I associated with class and privilege, I had to acknowledge his charm and I liked his amusement. "How come you're in the late queue?" he asked.

I explained. An administrative stuff up meant my enrolment had not been processed and I had to do it all again.

"Could be good news," he said cheerfully. "Now you can change your subjects, if you wish."

To put us on an equal footing I asked why he was in the queue. The sense of fun in his light blue eyes was unmistakable.

"More embarrassing for me than you, mate." He looked ruefully away. "My mother enrolled me while I was off in California seeing my father. Worse, she put me into Accounting 1 and Economics 1. Can you imagine?" Here he stopped himself abruptly. "I am sorry," he said. "Are you doing Economics?"

Like him I was appalled at the idea. "No. I'm an Arts student but I can only choose teaching subjects."

I assumed the fact I was a Teachers College student would discourage him. Instead he said, "Why don't you choose one subject you want to do and let them complain later. I bet they won't even notice."

The line had not moved. We discussed our intended subjects and found we were both going to do English and History. I had to do Philosophy. It was required. Stephen was qualified to study a language and could not decide between Latin and French. I was expected to enrol in Geography – another teaching subject - for my fourth option but I wanted to do Politics. It was a new Department and it suited my temperament but it was not a teaching subject. Stephen was unimpressed and more or less dared me to enrol in Politics. If the College did not approve I could change later. I needed to match this gesture so I set out to persuade him to do Latin, a language he obviously loved. He kept

telling me how much his mother wanted him to take French but I knew his heart wasn't in it.

While we tossed comments back and forth, a large lad, taller and more bulky than either of us, came into the room to laugh at the freaks. He recognised Stephen, strode across the room, barged his way through the line and brushed me aside so he could confront him. "Well Stryder, found another little hobbit to play with." Sneeringly he continued, "Got your mother to enrol for you." He pushed Stephen away, casually, and stomped off, calling out in a loud voice, "Pathetic, Ryder. Pathetic."

Stephen hunched his shoulders. "You wouldn't know Brian, would you?" He spoke tersely and looked off into the distance. "He's probably doing Engineering."

I had to laugh. "So what's with the Stryder and the hobbit quip?"

This time he smiled wryly. "I was born Stephen Travis Ryder, so S T Ryder. At my public school, it was obvious I would be called Stryder"

"And, after *Lord of the Rings,* your friends were called hobbits?" I added.

"At least by the pricks. And Brian was the biggest prick of them all." He laughed, "God I'm glad all that school stuff is behind us."

We remained in line debating the merits of our various subjects until we were called to the counter. Stephen finished first and waited. "Well I kept my side of the deal," he said. I assured him I had done the same with Politics. He punched me playfully on my arm and said, "It will all work out fine. No worries."

I hardly thought about him until I received a brusque summons from the Teachers College saying there was a problem with my enrolment and I needed to meet

urgently with the Deputy Principal. So much for Stephen's breezy self-assurance and his all-conquering charm. When I was ushered into the Deputy Principal's office I was suitably intimidated; big desk, big chair, carpeted floor and a big man. At least he gestured for me to sit down as he picked up a file. He read for a moment and then looked over his glasses at me.

"You knew it wasn't a teaching subject?"

I nodded.

He went back to the file and looked at it for some time. Then he scrawled his signature on the form, put it back in the folder and threw it casually into the out tray.

"All done," he said gruffly. "There aren't enough teaching subjects anyway." He dragged the next folder from his work pile.

As I walked away I felt relieved. Stryder had, of course, been right. They didn't care.

Chapter 3
Political Disruption

July 1966

For students, the central core of the University was the Refectory, mostly called ‘the refec’. Days frequently started or ended there as did conversations, plots, conspiracies and all manner of friendships and intrigues. Although the refec was spacious it was not well lit; it tended towards shadows and gloom. Long tables and serried ranks of metal backed chairs filled the space and, whenever it was open, groups of people came together, separated and departed around the rituals of tea and coffee drinking and eating snacks and meals. At best the food was ordinary but the mugs of tea and coffee were large and strong. Most of those who gathered complained either about the food or the prices. I knew no better so was content with what was on offer.

On this evening I collected a large plate of braised sausages, mashed potatoes and over boiled carrots and was enjoying them with a mug of strong white tea. Stephen came to join me. He examined my plate suspiciously; he even sniffed it and grunted slightly before heading off to collect a serve himself. Even then he didn’t complain about the food as he was eager to tell me his news. A small group of his friends were planning to disrupt a Liberal Party ‘ticket only’ talk being given by the Minister for Defence. Someone had a genuine ticket and they were about to work all night to find a way to forge accurate copies. Once printed, these would be given to student activists so they could infiltrate and disrupt the meeting at the Town Hall. I approved. Here was an opportunity to confront one of the powerful men who was ruining my life by introducing conscription and escalating the war. I was glad he would get me a ticket and I looked forward to taking part. With this out of the way, Stryder regaled me with a

string of tales about his school boy pranks. He was obviously fond of mischief. By the time he left to meet his mates I understood why the hulking Brian might not have been Stephen's best friend.

I first met Angela Falconer as we waited with our forged tickets in the foyer of the Town Hall. She was a legend. In my last year at school I saw her perform at the Catacombs, a dark cave-like venue in the basement of a rundown building that was mostly used as a cheap boarding house for single men. Its derelict appearance hinted at a gritty and richer urban reality. Angela played a 12 string guitar and sang Bessie Smith songs, finishing with a powerful version of *Broken Hearted Blues*. She was in her blond phase and with long flowing hair, blue jeans and a dark blue jumper, looked like a real folk singer. This time she was wrapped in a large calico shawl over her denim jacket and jeans. She was incredibly tense.

"Don't get hung up about it. It's only a demo," I said.

She smiled bitterly. "It's ok for you but my father's organising this show. Imagine what will happen when I get home."

I viewed her with increased respect.

At a signal we all poured into the Town Hall, handing in our tickets and swamping efforts to control us. We spread out taking empty seats wherever we could find them. Angela was seated in the row just in front of me. It was a fine demonstration. The Minister commanded the stage, dealing with hecklers with wit and determination, but his spirit began to weaken when a number of the protesters stood and unrolled posters challenging the legitimacy of the war and conscription. Then the chanting

started and the chairman, who turned out to be Angela's father, intervened to restore order. Shouting broke out between the suited Liberal Party members and the demonstrators and, finally, to bring the whole thing to a close, the chairman ordered the playing of *God Save the Queen*. All the demonstrators sat down and the Liberal Party members rose to sing heartily. There were scuffles as the stewards tried to drag protesters to their feet. TV cameras filmed everything. Suddenly Angela climbed on to her seat and began waving her calico shawl as a banner. "End the War Now" was painted on it in large, red letters. Her shouted slogans could be heard over the singing of the crowd. Several people tried to drag her down and I stood to help her keep her feet. When punches started being thrown we struggled to a side door and out onto the street. Angela was shaking, laughing loudly. She was both stressed and elated, joking and singing snatches of old political songs. I led her to a nearby café where I bought soft drinks and waited for her to calm down. Stephen, who was celebrating the success of the prank, came in to join us. One look at Angela and he stopped. He sat down quietly by her side, took her hand and talked soothingly to her.

I never intended to tell my parents I had been involved in this demonstration but, once I saw the TV news, I realised my actions would not be secret for long. There was footage of Angela leaping to her feet and I could clearly be seen supporting her. I was lucky. When I got home I found my parents had not seen the TV news. I said nothing. The *Advertiser* next morning was another matter. There on the front page was a large photo of the same scene: Angela standing on her seat, her blond hair tied in a bandana, her denim coat covered with protest badges, holding aloft her banner and there, right behind her, I could be seen holding her up. It made for a tense breakfast. My mother was grim faced.

"You've really done it this time," she told me. "How could you be so stupid?"

I went to respond. She angrily told me not to bother but to be home early. My father would want to deal with me himself.

The twins were beside themselves with delight. They wanted to take the paper to school for show and tell but my mother forbade it. My sisters were angry with me for 'getting into trouble', as they described it and my elder brother clipped me across the head and called me an idiot before he headed off for his morning shift. As I left for uni, my mother shook her head sadly.

After wasting a day walking in and out of the library, the museum and the art gallery worrying about being thrown out of home, the parental interrogation was mild. I was invited to join my mother and father at the kitchen table; my brothers and sisters were banished to the front room and told to stay quiet. My father was uncomfortable and sat awkwardly in his normal chair while my mother stood beside him. I sat at the other end of the table trying to be as passive as possible. My mother began with a little lecture about my failings. She ignored my political motives which she probably did not take seriously and described my actions as simple bad behaviour.

"We are a respectable working class family. We work hard, support ourselves and we do not get into trouble. We do not do things like this," she said.

"You acted like a hooligan," my father added. "It has to stop."

My mother followed straight on. "It's on the front page of the paper for everyone to see. You have made us feel ashamed."

There was anguish in the way she spoke and her pinned back hair came loose and she worked to fix it up while trying not to cry. I felt suitably miserable and impressed by how upset they were but it wasn't going to change anything.

My father took over. "You've got in with the wrong sort at that university. Those private school kids can't be trusted. It's all right for them. They can get away with their pranks and larks. You can't."

My mother came closer to me and sat down. "You have what you wanted," she said quietly. "You've got your chance to go to university and to get a good job." There were tears in her eyes as she implored "You can't afford to upset the Teachers College. You'll lose your scholarship."

"It will happen," my father insisted. "One more slip. We can't afford to support you. It's either Teachers College or you'll have to find a job."

They did not make a clear demand but there was an implied warning; stop my political activities or there would be trouble. Would they ask me to leave to protect the twins from my bad influence? For a moment I considered the implicit deal: if I dropped my politics I could live at home in peace. I took my mother's hand, looked at my father and sought for the right words. As unemotionally as possible I explained I would not stop demonstrating against the war and conscription. Rich kids might be able to find ways around the ballot but I couldn't. All my life I saw bad things happen to people like us. I was doomed to be called up. Again and again I apologised for the upset they felt. The argument rumbled on. We didn't want to push too hard but it was difficult to bring the discussion to an end. Finally the twins succeeded. They pushed their way into the room and demanded to be fed. Quietly I set the table and quietly my mother started to

assemble the meal. My father went to the fridge for a bottle of beer and headed off to the front room.

This was the beginning of a long, slow, icy war. As a result I spent more time away from home and, in the following months, came closer to both Stryder and Angela as she faced the full wrath of her father and his moves to expel her from the family home.

Chapter 4
Filling the Chasm

March 1967

"Hey, do you want to know how I've solved my problem?" Angela asked as she moved to join me for breakfast in the refectory. I hadn't seen her for some time. She had run away from home and spent her summer in Sydney, sleeping on the floor in student houses, paying her dues as an itinerant musician, playing rock and blues in scratch bands. Her hair was now near black and cut short. She was wearing boots and a military jacket. I wasn't sure what her question meant so I tried to look encouraging.

"It's a brilliant idea," she said and hurried on. "I've persuaded my father, well my mother actually, to let me move into the old family house in North Adelaide. You know that old pile up on Stanley Street." She was enthusiastic and excited. "It's where we used to live, before he moved us to Hawthorn. I loved living there."

She sat back and smiled as if she was waiting for me to tell her how wonderful this would be. I must have been slow. Angela slapped her hand on the table. "It's obvious, duffer. Come on Mark, think about it. We can all move in and live there while we are at university."

"It's that big place, isn't it?" I asked. When Stryder had told me this had been her family home I'd ridden past, just to take a look. It was a huge, multi storied art-deco house filling a large block between the two streets. It looked a mess, abandoned and neglected.

"There are a couple of snags," she told me. "It needs a lot of work. My father will see to the repairs. He's cutting my allowance. I have to rent the place to make ends

meet." She wrinkled her nose and went to get another round of coffee. When she came back she remained excited. "Finding people to share should be fun but I can't afford to let people live there rent free."

In an instant, her face lightly flushed, she said, "Sorry Mark. I shouldn't have said that."

I interrupted her. "It's ok," I said. "Don't worry. I understand. I couldn't move in anyway, not with how things are at home."

Angela looked relieved and I felt worse so I went on. "I think your father is trying to teach you a lesson. Just do what you have to do. It's fine with me. I'm not offended." And I worked hard not to let it show.

"OK. They must be able to pay the rent and, just as important, keep the place clean. Have you seen the filth in some student houses?" Her nose wrinkled in disgust as if she recalled the acrid rotting smells of aging food scraps and unwashed dishes. "Blokes are the problem," she told me. "They wait for some woman to show up and have mercy on them and clean the lot. I can't stand that."

I caught up with Stryder in the refec before a tutorial that night. "Angela seems keen for you to move in," I said. He concentrated on his lamb roast, slowly moving sideways a depressing piece of pumpkin. There was a risk his gravy would coagulate before he spoke.

"Yes, I suppose she would be." He looked up, paused and said, "It will be a challenge. We met years ago at a 'mixed- social' organised by our schools. She didn't like the company I was keeping."

"A tall blonde?" I asked.

"You bet," he added. "Angela's not my type. OK, her music is brilliant and I do like her. I'm happy to live in the house if she wants but that's it. Nothing more."

Angela was not a conventional beauty, normally not blond and never tall, but she was striking. Personally I was awed by her luminous enthusiasm, talent and ambition. Stryder never noticed. It was unfair: Angela loved him so much and Stryder was so indifferent. This was not going to change. If Stryder moved into the house I was certain Angela would suffer.

Mary Glenn was the next person to be invited. Although she was doing Politics I had not met her. From previous comments I knew Mary was religious and Angela felt she looked down on her as a hedonist. I'd once heard her describe Mary as 'a social worker type and an acoustic folk singer.' Given that, I asked why she had been chosen.

"I've no idea. She's a country girl who needs a place to rent. The other night I met her at a folk club. She saw me in the audience and called me up to join her for harmonies on *Dink's Song*. You know the one . . . 'If I had the wings of Noah's dove' . . . We sang a glorious version, really close harmony, intricate, delightful and a crowd pleaser. It felt so good to perform together. When we sat down afterwards, I just asked her. I didn't mean to."

Maybe that was the best way to make a choice. At the time Angela did not tell me she thought Mary had a crush on her at school and it may not have been over.

The situation was as complicated with the next person to be asked. I knew Jane Morton by reputation as the best student of our generation, tipped to win every major scholarship in sight.

"Are you sure about Jane," I asked. "Were you close friends at school?"

"Hardly. She's the brainy type."

"Then why ask her?"

"It will help with the boy problem. It can't just be Stryder. Jane wants to move in with Edward Leyton. This will be their chance. I'm sure Jane will keep him under control. I don't want the blokes to be too messy," she said.

Things didn't go smoothly. Jane delayed her answer. After three weeks she hadn't decided. By chance I was there when she finally made up her mind.

Angela had organised a working bee for the Saturday, basically Stryder and me with the potential housemates dropping by when they were free. The wiring and plumbing had been fixed and the grass in the garden cut and cleared with the debris being taken to the dump. Early on the Saturday morning Stryder picked me up in his car and Angela was there when we arrived. She had obviously been busy at the house for some days. As soon as we joined her she boiled a kettle for tea and took us to inspect her rooms. They were painted a light grey colour and in one there was a double bed, a bedside table and a wardrobe. There was a poster of ballet shoes on the wall above the fireplace and a Degas print on one wall. Her music room was nearly finished too. A classy upright piano stood against an internal wall; there was an electric guitar and an amplifier already plugged in; an acoustic guitar lay on an old lounge and there was a violin case sitting on the top of a large desk. Boxes of LPs surrounded her portable record player. There were empty bookshelves along the side. "This is where I call home," she said.

With mugs of strong black tea in hand (there was no fridge and no milk as yet) she took us to the room she had chosen for Stryder. It was on the first floor, on the

south east corner and there were French doors opening onto a balcony overlooking the garden. Angela showed Stryder into the room and went to sit on the stairs. Effortlessly Stryder took possession. He stood perfectly still in the centre of the room for a few moments then turned to consider each aspect. Next he examined the walls, running his hand across their surfaces and stood back to examine where the wall had been replastered around a new set of power points. Then he stood on the balcony, eventually turning around to look into the room through the open door. He smiled at me and raised an eyebrow as we walked through to join Angela.

"This room will suit me fine," he said. "I'm not going to paint the walls. I love the texture and the layers of colour. So European. I'm ready to move in."

While Angela worked on the kitchen we were sent to wash walls, brush ceilings, clean windows and other basic tasks. Stryder went to his room and I started on the west wing on the same floor. Apart from being a bit tedious and dirty, there was nothing wrong with spending time cleaning a house. After all, my mother did it for a living and it was a normal part of our family routines. This room was filthy. I was just sweeping up the dust, having brushed the ceiling and wiped down the walls before washing the floor, when I saw a young woman standing in the doorway watching me. She was about 5'6", with a pleasing roundish face, red tinged light brown straight hair, shoulder length and no make-up. She was neatly dressed in a fashionable pastel blue pullover, spotless blue jeans and carrying a dark leather handbag. With her thin lips compressed, she considered me.

"Hello," I said.

"What are you doing? Are these your rooms?" she asked.

"No. I'm just cleaning them. Is that ok?"

She looked perplexed. "Sorry," she said. "I must have sounded rude. My name is Jane Morton." She awkwardly held out her hand for me to shake. I had to wipe away some residual grime before it would be acceptable to respond.

"I have been thinking about moving in and these rooms would be perfect. I just thought you must have wanted them for yourself." She looked puzzled. "Why are you cleaning them?"

"Angela asked me to," I said.

"Is she paying you?"

"No."

"Then why are you doing it?"

"Hey," I replied. "I'm just a friend helping a friend. Nothing wrong with that, is there?" This conversation was going steadily wrong. "Let's start again. I'm a friend of Stephen Ryder who is moving in and I'm just helping to get the place ready."

"Oh shit!" she said as sweetly as possible. Her accent betrayed her social class. "I'm sorry. I'm just being anxious. These rooms would be ideal: two separate rooms separated by a tiny corridor. I don't want to live in the same room as Edward. This would be excellent. Close but not too close."

We broke for lunch when Mary Glenn arrived with hamburgers from the Black and White café. Mary was tall, at least 5'10", maybe more. She was thin, with long arms, elegant hands and an elongated face. Her hair was long, down to her waist, straight and black. For a country girl she was surprisingly untanned. She wore tight

black jeans, tennis shoes and a fawn jumper and a silver cross hung from her neck. She had her work clothes in a separate bag along with a whole heap of cleaning rags and other equipment. Stryder wanted to know if she had made her choice yet. I was vaguely pleased when she mentioned a room I had already cleaned on the third floor at the far end of the corridor on the south western side.

"I'm happy to take a smaller room, if that would help," she told Angela.

There was no need. There were plenty of rooms for whoever joined next. Mary thanked me nicely for cleaning the room. I thought she might leave now, her work being done but I did not know her at all. She set off to clean the bathrooms and toilets on the third floor. "People don't like cleaning bathrooms," she said.

"You'll have to be quick," Stryder quipped. "Mark has been cleaning every toilet he can find already. There can't be many left."

"Well, I better start then," she replied and ran lightly up the stairs from the kitchen.

After Mary had gone, Angela told us, "I've found the last person to move in. Someone you have never met." She sounded gleeful. "His name is Peter Goldman. His parents are refugees from Germany. I've got to know him at music concerts. He is doing a Ph. D in chemistry. Just wait till you meet him!"

We were intrigued but our imagination was not equal to the challenge. Peter was a bear of a man, with masses of black hair and a dramatic beard. He wore a long leather coat and rode a motor bike. Despite being rather withdrawn and quietly spoken he actually named the house as the Stanley Chasm. He'd done a tour of the outback and come across the Standley Chasm outside Alice Springs. When he saw the house and its

location in Stanley Street he could not help himself and the name stuck, though it mostly got shortened to The Chasm.

Late in the afternoon, the bulk of the cleaning done, Stryder and I were ready to finish when Mary asked us to help move some of the surplus furniture into her room. All she wanted was an old single bed, a large wardrobe, a low wooden trunk and a wooden chair, a bit more comfortable than a kitchen chair but not by much. Mary directed and we arranged the furniture, then she found a mattress for us to add to the bed and she pronounced her room complete.

"It looks more like a cell than a student's room," Stryder said, as we headed down stairs. "Bread, water and solitary confinement."

The day wasn't over yet. As a reward for our help, Angela was taking us to the pub for dinner and then onto one of her gigs. We gathered in Angela's music room and I wandered over to look at the electric guitar. It was a quality guitar. Mine came from a pawn shop and looked a bit the worse for wear.

"Try it," Angela said.

I did. The amplifier was good. I worked my way through a few chord progressions and then started a version of *It's All Over Now Baby Blue*. Angela went to the piano and joined in. After a few rough passages we more or less got it together and it sounded good. So we did it again and it was better. Stryder smiled warmly at us, like a brother conferring approval on his younger siblings, impressed that, at last, we had a party trick to perform.

"I thought you said your guitar playing was, and I quote, 'adequate at best,'" she said.

"Well I'm not very good," I replied.

"Nonsense," she said. "You might not want to move into the house but you can play with me and the band at some of our gigs. And you can start tonight."

She picked up a play list from the piano and tossed it towards me. "I've got two sets. I'm playing guitar in the first one but I'm on piano for the first three songs of the second set. After that I'll play violin. You can use my guitar."

I was childishly delighted and no longer felt tired.

Chapter 5
The Year of the Ballot

August-September 1968

With a mood drifting between dread and foreboding, I wheeled my bike as silently as possible past the kitchen window (my father and brother had already gone to work at the ceramics factory and my mother was washing dishes), down the driveway, through the gate and out onto the street. I wanted to get away quickly and not see anyone. Stryder and I had arranged to meet at the Chasm where we had thrown out enough hints we hoped no one would join us at breakfast. The sky was lightening, clear blue and winter cold as I rode along deserted streets, across Port Road and through the parklands, up Hill Street and into North Adelaide. I was playing a game with myself as I rode; I was looking for omens, signs and invented superstitions. Was this to be an auspicious day? Getting away without having to talk to anyone, good; not catching the lights at Port Road, bad; no train at the crossing, good; hearing magpies sing high in the gum trees, very good; passing a gang of crows sullenly watching me as I went, bad; having to wait for cars at each and every intersection along the way, bad. By the time I got to the Chasm I had lost track of the score and just had to accept it was not going to be a good day. Stryder was already up and seated in the kitchen waiting to toast crumpets, brew coffee and face this day with me.

"Why are you two looking so gloomy?" Edward Leyton strode confidently down the stairs as if he intended to join us. He retrieved a jar of orange juice from the fridge. It would have to be Edward. He looked so complacently happy as if he did not know what day this was. There was a healthy glow to his face; his sandy hair was just

sufficiently tousled to hint at recent exercise. At least there was no chance he would be joined by Jane. She was definitely not a morning person.

"It might never happen," he said.

Neither of us looked at him.

He continued cheerfully to the sink, collected a glass, poured himself a drink and sat down at the far end of the table.

"You needn't be so bloody cheerful," said Stryder, not looking up from the leaflet he was reading. "After all, you didn't get called-up."

"Nor have you!"

"Not yet." Stryder put down the leaflet. "We have to go and register. Concentrates the mind."

"The odds on you getting called up are bugger all." Edward was determined to ignore our mood. "Do you know anyone who has been conscripted?"

"One of my friends from Teachers College was called up in the March ballot, the one you missed out in," I told him.

"Bugger," said Edward.

"He's thinking of getting married."

"He should have done it before."

"Well you didn't," said Stryder.

"Jane wouldn't have me," Edward said.

"You asked?" Stryder pushed back his chair, his eyebrows raised.

"Of course I asked. It made sense. If married, no ballot." He put his empty glass down carefully on the table. "She can't get called up so how could she know what it's like?"

Stryder considered Edward as if he couldn't believe the words he was using. "Jane is offended by the discrimination in the rules for National Service," he told him. "She thinks women should be included too." Here Stryder spoke with extra deliberation. "Then she could be a draft resister in her own right."

"That's exactly what she thinks," said Edward. Then he stood up and walked down to our end of the table. He turned to me. "Are you going to register?"

I nodded and he added "Thank God for that."

Then he headed slowly back up the stairs with his glass of orange juice and called to us as he turned, "Stay cool!"

"Dick-head," was Stryder's response.

We were in no hurry to leave and stayed at the table long enough to have another visitor. Peter Goldman, the one we called Peter the Post Grad, came stomping down the stairs. When he saw us he paused and walked slowly across the room to sit at the table.

"Sorry boys," he said in his ever so slightly accented English, "It's today is it?"

We nodded and he shook his head sadly. "It's not fair. I'm exempt on so many grounds: I'm too old, I'm not British, and I'm not a citizen." We knew this to be true. In the first years of the scheme, the sons of non-British immigrants were exempt as they

could not serve in the army and, in better days, we had all laughed about his lucky trifecta.

"I might have gone into the army," he said, "but not to this war."

I couldn't imagine Peter in the army. He was big enough, about six foot tall I reckon, with masses of long, straight, jet black hair and a large beard. The army barbers might have been pleased to see him but I doubt the officers would have been impressed. Peter was an anarchist of some kind and I'm sure he would have been a disruptive influence and not easily intimidated. Then there was the minor matter of his great skill at growing, drying and breeding marijuana, in open defiance of all laws and regulations.

"What a way to raise an army." Slowly he got up and we stood with him.

"We'll be ok," Stryder said. "We're not going to be called up. This is just another lottery we are not going to win." He turned to me knowing I disagreed. "We will play this silly game but we are not going into the army. We are not going to support this war. We will do anything we can to stop it."

This was the most explicit speech I had ever heard Stryder make about Vietnam and conscription. Normally he was so optimistic it was scary. We won't be called up. We will organise mass protests and the government will change its mind. The government will lose the next federal election. I didn't think Stryder would get called up; his charmed, privileged life would continue on its inevitable way. On the other hand, I believed, without doubt, I would be called up and registration was just a step on the way to jail.

Stryder was light-hearted as we walked out from the Chasm and headed down to town. "Hey Ho, Hey Ho, it's off to smash the state we go," he sang with careless

enthusiasm. Along the way he glibly talked about his latest literary venture, organising a reading for young poets to share their works on war and all its consequences. Even some students from the rival Flinders University had agreed to take part, lured, he said by his promise he would publish the best poems in *On Dit*, and the rest in an underground pamphlet with the title "Poets Make War …" This was the opening line of a poem he was working on at the time:

> Poets make war . . . on drunken vandals
> who urinate on memorials
> in country towns.
> They hail to the skies
> the unknown martyrs
> who refuse the call
> when their turn comes.
> Who refuse to salute
> the bright flags before them
> denying the beat
> of the patriots' drum.
> They would die for the rhythm
> the rhyme
> and the stanza
> but not for the claims
> of country and blood.

There was more. I don't know if it was ever finished or published. I mostly heard him chanting these lines as part of a dismissive self-commentary. He thought the

verses were ‘crap’, ‘doggerel’ or ‘like someone trying to parody Kipling’. I can’t be sure I’ve remembered them correctly; they might sound worse than they actually were. Poetry was never my bag. I had no idea if he was any good as a poet. He said he wasn’t and said his time was better spent fixing poetry readings, putting together collections of poems and promoting small literary magazines.

Hearing him talk about his plans as we walked to the Department of Labour and National Service was a pleasing distraction, for me at least. Stryder hardly needed distracting at all. As we walked he was all defiance, playing the role of a fully self-assured dissident. “The state must fall in the round I call,” he said parodying Mohamed Ali, dancing a few steps and throwing a few mock punches.

I was wearing blue jeans, a Stop the War t-shirt and a donkey jacket I had borrowed from Stryder. He was wearing a suit with a lurid tie-dyed shirt and a number of protest badges, the most prominent said “Make Love Not War”. On the breast pocket of my jacket I wore a large badge of the NLF flag. When we got to the Currie Street office we started handing out our leaflets to anyone who looked young enough to be heading off to register. It wasn’t actually our leaflet. It had been produced by Save Our Sons and was intended to explain the conscription system and urge young men not to register. It included the names and phone numbers of people who would help conscientious objectors and draft resisters. I liked the old biddies in SOS, a most unlikely bunch of radicals. Apart from the old communists, they were mostly conservative women from the Eastern suburbs who could not stand what was being done in their name. Many of them had voted Liberal all their life. They were a bit like Stryder’s mother, or like what she would have been if she had not been an enthusiastic supporter of the war.

As we handed out leaflets and called out our anti-war slogans, there was the expected disruption. Some of the young men were openly hostile and threatened to thump us, a few were pleased to find some information about alternatives. Arguments started but nothing too heated. There was surprise, and outrage, when we explained we were going to register but were opposed to the war and conscription and wanted others to know what their options were. Our own topsy-turvy logic was fully exposed when we made it clear we were not going in to the army no matter what happened. Bravado on our part. At least one young man, a nervous, tanned country boy by the look of him, took the pamphlet, stopped to read it and hurried away as if he suddenly had something better to do.

During the previous registration period, a couple of SOS stalwarts had picketed the office and had been arrested for trespass. We knew that couldn't happen to us as we were there for a legitimate purpose. We had to register and it would be unlawful to prevent us from doing so. At least that is what the Act said. It didn't take long before someone called the police and our theory was challenged. I was terrified. I was sure we would be arrested. We must have been breaking the law. Stryder was Mr Cool throughout. Two angry and determined policemen marched up to us and demanded to know what we were doing. When they tried to confiscate our pamphlets we threw them up into the air and a surprising number of passers-by picked them up from where they lay scattered. Some dumped them in a nearby rubbish bin but some took them away to read. In the past, in awkward social moments, Stryder was the one who knew someone in any gathering. This time the situation was reversed. I knew one of the policemen. He was older than I was but we had been in high school together before he left to join the military. When his contract was up, he came back to Adelaide and joined the local police force. It was not a happy reunion but I was polite and introduced Max to Stryder.

This made matters worse. Max was furious, no doubt about it. He grabbed me by the shoulder and pulled me to one side.

"You always were an arrogant little shit," he said (and I had thought we had once been friends). "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I turn twenty in September."

"Holy crap!" He took off his police cap and wiped his hand across his hair. There was plenty of perspiration. I felt sorry for him even though I was sure he was doing this job by choice and he enjoyed his work. "Why couldn't you just come and register without any fuss. Why do you want to make things difficult?"

This seemed a genuine question so I answered accordingly. "I oppose the war and I want to make it as hard for the government as possible." Wrong answer.

Max and the constable grabbed us and marched us up the stairs and into the office where other young men were filling out their registration forms. The room smelled of mustiness and anxiety. The office staff called their supervisor and ushered us into a small interview room. Then started the tedious process of giving our names and addresses (I used the Chasm address) and providing a statement describing our actions. Stryder insisted on the most inflammatory language being included and there was much debate over the wording. It was obvious the constables did not want to arrest us. At one stage the office manager came in and passed on a message. Max left us alone with the young constable who looked nervous as if he feared attack now that we had him outnumbered. Stryder spoke to him in mild, reassuring tones but since he was insistently outlining our case against the Vietnam War the constable never looked at ease. In the end he ordered us to shut up so we talked in low voices about our research

and this was just as effective a way to irritate him. Max returned with the office manager who also looked exceedingly nervous. He replaced the young constable at the table and the two policemen stood against the wall. Away from prying eyes we were to get a registration process all of our own. Maybe they feared some spectacular moments of non-cooperation, or they didn't believe we had come to register. When we signed the forms they greeted this as a triumph as if they had tricked us in some way. It was strange. Max gave us a lecture about our legal obligations and warned us not to hand out any more leaflets and not to disrupt the registration of others. Arrest and imprisonment would follow if we did not obey this instruction. I reached out to shake his hand as I congratulated him on his performance and told him our old school would be proud of him. We were lucky to get out of there unharmed. There is only so much cheek a police constable can stand. As we came down the front steps, we were greeted by the press. There were two photographers waiting. We posed with defiant clenched fists and a chanted slogan; "Hell no, we won't go!"

The *Advertiser* covered the story, no picture, no caption, just a short para on about page 20: "The police were called to a disturbance at the Department of Labour and National Service yesterday. Two young men tried to disrupt the registration process. There were no arrests and all registrations proceeded smoothly." Stryder went to the *Advertiser* and bought a copy of the unused photograph which he had blown up to a great size. He stuck it on his wall between his Breakfast at Tiffany's poster and the one of wet streets in Paris, all in moody black and white.

Stryder and I spent most of our time together, eating breakfast, lunch and dinner in the refectory, avoiding any mention of 'the letter' which would tell us if we had been

conscripted or not. Anyone who overheard us would think we were carefree university students, joking and mucking about all day. The longer the delay the more cautious we became. We moved our base to the less-popular, upstairs refectory. A public phone was close by and more private for the calls we made to check if the 'the letter' had come. On the fateful day I called home about two o'clock as it was certain the post would be delivered by then. Trudy told me the letter had arrived, she had opened it and yes, I had been called-up. I said nothing. Trudy told me to be home by four, when my parents would be back from work. I grunted assent and hung up. When I walked back into the refectory Stryder looked at me and pushed aside the plate in front of him. It clattered to the floor as he rose to hug me. He said nothing as he walked outside to make his own call. I sat down and waited. Stryder returned. His face was stone white as he approached.

"Me too," he said as he sat wearily down.

"She congratulated me!" he said looking bewildered. "She said it was wonderful news."

Chapter 6
The Chasm Reunion Dinner

Early March 1969

Mary was the first to arrive, looking disgustingly healthy. Her lustrous long black folk-singer's hair swung gently as she crossed the room to greet me. There was a scent of lavender around her. Suddenly she stopped. Her nose wrinkled. "What's burning?"

Pale smoke was seeping from the oven door. Shit! I grabbed the door, opened it and black smoke gushed out. I grabbed a tea towel, pulled out the pan and stood it on top of the stove. The molten marinade was bubbling, waiting to explode. I dashed to the sink, grabbed a jug of water and headed back to douse the smouldering ruins of my special reunion roast. Mary, who had been peering at the mess, responded quickly.

"Don't do that! The whole thing could go up in flames."

It looked bad enough already.

"Get me a large spoon," she commanded, ". . . and another roasting pan."

With skill she scraped away the carbonised gunk. Mary poured a small amount of the left-over marinade on top of the meat and gestured for me to return it to the oven. She checked the temperature setting, looked at the kitchen clock, lowered the heat and sighed. "It should be ok and ready to eat when everyone arrives."

When the Chasm dwellers went overseas for their Christmas holidays they asked me to house sit. They knew my cooking skills were limited but they insisted I cook a reunion feast for them all. Thanks to Mary, all was not lost. While she went to

the old fridge and took a beer, I opened the kitchen door. Even though it had been a warm autumn day, it was better to let the smoke out and the fresh air in.

Mary sat on a kitchen stool by the wall telephone and looked at the table I had set, with all the plates neatly stacked, cutlery distributed, glasses of water at each place and wine glasses at the ready. She nodded her approval.

"What was the highlight of your trip to Malaysia?" I asked.

Mary smiled indulgently, collected some fresh cloth napkins and walked around the table dealing them to their appropriate places. "All of it. The place was wonderful. The people were great." She shrugged her shoulders and turned gracefully to survey her handy-work. "Truthfully?" and a smile wreathed her face. "It was the nuns I met. American Catholics. Radicals. Inspirational. I'm thinking of joining them."

Before I could quiz her further Edward and Jane arrived. He was seriously overdressed for the occasion, wearing a white Indian cotton top, much like a night shirt, and a Nehru jacket. His face was pale and he looked like he had been ill for some time. "Mate, I won't be eating much," he told me as Jane helped him to a seat at the table and collected a beer for him. Having settled Edward, she drifted towards the fridge, selected a bottle of white wine and proceeded to open it. Jane was also wearing her Indian finery, a dramatic multi-coloured Indian top with narrow pale-coloured cotton pyjama trousers. A fabulous Indian shawl was draped across her shoulders and she had jewelled Indian sandals on her feet. She looked distinctive as she came and sat at the far end of the table, saluting me with her glass. I could see she was distracted, listening, wanting to catch what Edward was saying to Mary.

"We had a fabulous time. Markets, fairs, temples, all night concerts. I just loved the place."

I could sense Jane's tension. "Yeah, right," she broke in. "Tell Mary about the wonders of Indian medicine and the joys of dysentery."

Edward's enthusiasm collapsed and he looked exhausted once again.

"I know," he said. "You want me talk about poverty, illness, disease, squalor, suffering and the slums." There was an edge to his voice as if these differences had been often rehearsed. "Of course there was bad stuff. Yes, I got ill. Yes, I lost weight.I had a great time." He was defiant. "I can't wait to go back again." He ignored the glass Jane had given him and drank straight from the bottle. "I enjoyed being in India," he said flatly.

Jane could not ignore this challenge. "I hated every minute of the trip," she said. "The filth, the wretched begging children, the noise and the crowds. Dreadful." Her eyes glistened and she said more slowly, "I'm just relieved to be back somewhere hygienic."

I was glad I'd thoroughly cleaned the kitchen before she arrived.

Just as Mary was leaning forward to speak a great noise came from the patio, loud voices and laughing. Peter Goldman, dressed in his long black coat despite the warmth, was trying to get through the door, carrying bunches of flowers and a host of small parcels, a bottle of brandy and his work bag. Stryder appeared beside him, held open the door and took away the brandy and the bag and steered him into the room. Peter stood for a moment smiling at every one and bowing greetings to all. He handed

round his little presents, bunches of flowers for the girls and little boxes of European sweets for the boys.

"It is wonderful to have you all back again," he said. "Mark and I had a good time without you but" and he held his hands up in the air, "we will have better times now."

I handed him a beer; he tossed his heavy coat aside and went to the table. Pausing by the door, Stryder in his light coloured linen suit looked detached as he surveyed the scene. With a slight gesture he waved a greeting to the room and moved forward. As he passed me he whispered, "We'll talk afterwards." Then he sat next to Jane, picked up his glass and held it out for her to pour white wine.

The commotion of Peter and Stryder's arrival must have told Angela it was time to make her entrance. She arrived at the Chasm just after lunch, exhausted by her flight from London and retreated to her darkened room to rest. She hadn't looked good then and she looked even worse now, bleary eyed and dishevelled as she moved awkwardly to a spare seat at the table and gestured to Stryder to pour her a glass of red wine. "A large one, please," she told him in a tired, husky voice. Then she sat staring at the wine in the glass.

For a moment all attention turned to getting the meal on the table; the meat carved, the vegetables served in large bowls, gravy in a jug and bright green mint sauce in a little bottle. I was relieved to find, apart from a slight smoky taste, the meat had survived the fire and the table dissolved into noisy chatter. Through the din I heard Jane explain she had been a vegetarian while they had been in India. This did not seem to dull her enthusiasm for the meat.

"As you can see," Mary said, imposing some kind of order, "Edward and Jane are back from India." She pointed at their clothes. "Edward got ill and Jane had a dreadful time. Jane, is there anything good you would like to say about your visit there?"

"Oh yes," she said. "Kerala was excellent. I loved the lush back waters and the ever so green and quiet spice gardens. I could have spent all my time there. For the rest, it was horrible. The poverty was miserable and so . . . ," she struggled for words, ". . . obvious, overwhelming. All misery and despair. Day after day, dust, dirt and hopelessness." Edward watched her with resignation as the litany went on. "There is nothing that can be done. The religion is so messy and fatalistic." Mary slightly flinched at these words. "There is no hope. There is no way out."

"Would you want to go there again?" Mary asked.

Jane looked at Edward and said, "Never."

When Mary gave Edward a right of reply he mumbled his words. "When we were in Bombay I visited a slum with an American aid worker. I was impressed by how neat and orderly," he looked at Jane, "the place was. The kids were all dressed in the cleanest of clothes. There was no misery or despair. Quite the opposite. Of course they were poor and there was a lot of TB but these were good lives they were making for themselves."

"How could you possible say that?" Jane broke in. "The houses are dark hovels, some of mud, some of cardboard, sheets of hessian and corrugated iron. The women are totally repressed. How can people live good lives in such ugliness?" She turned to

Edward with some pity in her eyes, “How could you possibly want to see all that again?”

“That’s not what I saw. I saw determination, a determination to make better lives. And there was everything else, the temples and mosques, ancient and modern, the culture, music, paintings, dance and fabulous fabrics. And the markets. Noisy, vibrant, exciting places. Not without risks but, for me, well worth it and yes, I will go again.”

Sceptical head shakes round the table but I noticed Stryder did not join in. He just looked thoughtful and said to Jane, “You like the clothes enough to wear them.” He smiled as he poured her another glass of white wine.

“I just lost hope every day I was there,” she replied.

Once again Mary directed the conversation. “Stryder, tell us tales of wonder and amazement from your time in San Francisco. Flower Power, incense and student riots?”

Stryder looked up carefully and spoke slowly. “America, San Francisco, hippies, poets, writers, artists, rock musicians, students, political activism, everything you could possibly want.”

“What did you actually do?” asked Mary.

“I hung out, man,” he responded in a whiney imitation hippy accent.

“Berkeley was great, seething unrest. I went to a teach-in on student power and the draft, all the normal stuff. I had a wonderful time. Met lots of weird people.”

He was talking breezily, answering questions with amusement, but there was something false in all this.

“So what were the chicks wearing?” Edward wanted to know.

Stryder looked at him with scorn. “What do you expect? Mini-skirts and see through blouses? It was winter; people were wearing the usual gear, blue jeans, jackets and a few more beads and badges. Of course they looked a lot like us.”

“Were there demonstrations?” asked Jane.

“Oh – demonstrations yes, and a counter-culture arts happening, all a bit boring. Plenty of police wandering around. No one got thumped, not while I was there.”

“How was your father?” asked Mary. “It must have been good to see him again?”

Here I caught a clear hint of hesitation and unease.

“He was in great form,” said Stryder. “He’s really into the scene. It was fun but I couldn’t stand the pace. I’m pleased to be home.”

“Ahh,” I thought. No one asked the obvious follow up question and I wasn’t going to spoil the mood, at least not in in a public gathering. It could wait.

“While you were having fun in all corners of the globe, Mark and I ‘held the fort’. I think that’s right.” Peter beamed at me. “It wasn’t easy but we did it. A wonderful summer, warm, sometimes hot, and wonderful crops from our little private plot.” He grinned and gestured towards the ruins of the previously large salad. “Everything in that bowl came from our garden.”

Jane cleared away Edward’s plate, poured him a glass of water and took away his empty beer bottle. Angela was excessively relieved by this lull in proceedings but she did not look any healthier. I started to compose a list of words I would have used to describe her pallor; grey green, touch of yellow, back blotches, eyes underlined with

ingrained black pepper dust or gunpowder and an unhealthy shine on her cheeks. Could this just be jet-lag?

Mary hadn't finished. She demanded silence. "Angela, the musical European, how was the magical City of Light?"

Angela looked at the gathering with dull eyes and some panic. "Paris," she said and her voice croaked. "Paris." her voice a little stronger now, she curled around in her seat as if seeking more strength from within. With a great effort she added some light tones to her voice and went on. "I loved all the tourist things I did, wandering the streets at dusk and in the early evening, Montmartre, Sacré-Coeur, the Sorbonne, the Left Bank." She dipped her head towards Jane, "Les Deux Magots and no, JPS and SdB were not there, or it is possible I didn't recognise them." Her voice was stronger. "Too many croissants, baguettes, strong coffee and definitely too many Gitanes." For the first time there was a smile on her face.

"And how were the archives and the music school?" asked Mary.

"Oh, oh, my work went well but," the confidence of a moment ago was gone. Angela's voice cracked and no more words came. She looked distressed, tried to speak and then rapidly got to her feet and quickly but unsteadily headed for her room. Everyone stared. Mary quickly followed her and we were left to wonder what might possibly be wrong.

"Tummy trouble," said Edward. "I know what that's like."

"Jet lag," said Peter. "It does terrible things to your body."

Stryder said, "She must have caught something in Paris, something nasty."

“I’m not sure.” Jane shook her head. “Something upsetting happened to her.”

Chapter 7
Night Owls

Same Night Early March 1969

There was silence at the bottom of the stairs. We left Edward and Jane entwined, thinking about each other more than the mound of unwashed dishes waiting for them by the sink. They did not want us around. We were happy to oblige.

"Well who do you think was right then?" I asked Stryder as we continued up the stairs.

"About what?"

"Edward or Jane. About India," I said.

Waving his hand in a distracted manner, he skipped up the last few stairs and headed for his room. "Who do you think was right?"

"I like what Edward said," I told him. "But Jane can't be completely wrong, can she?"

Normally Stryder's room was neat and somewhat severe, unlike mine which was always messy. Since he had only just got back from San Francisco there was some superficial disorder. Clothes washed by his mother were spread across his bed, his suitcase was open on the floor and newly bought books and records were strewn around. I wanted to have a good rummage through this treasure trove but Stryder handed me a bottle of port and a couple of cut glass tumblers. He led me out to his balcony which looked across North Adelaide towards the Adelaide Hills and poured two large glasses of port.

“I think they’re both right,” he said, opening a packet of nuts and handing it to me. “India’s big enough for all those things to be true.” He sat in the other chair and took a drink from his tumbler. “I think it is a question of contradiction and ambiguity and how well you cope with that.”

In the distance the hills were silhouetted against a dark night sky that was bright with stars as Stryder took a joint from his jacket pocket, lit it, inhaled and relaxed.

“OK,” I said. “Now you can tell me what really happened in California.”

He held out the joint to me. Playing the part of a revolutionary puritan I rejected his offer and waited for him to speak.

He laughed. “So you saw through the little charade at dinner. I thought you would.”

“What did your father say about your call-up?”

Stryder stubbed his joint out in the ashtray, picked up his glass of port and cradled it in his hands. “I’m tired and it’s a confused tale,” he said. “I’ll tell you the full story but . . .” and he empathised the ‘but’, “. . . don’t tell anyone and don’t interrupt.”

No worries. I wanted to know what happened and I wasn’t going anywhere.

Stryder sighed. “The best bit,” he said, “was the Jefferson Airplane concert in San Francisco.”

“You got to see them live? Was it good?”

“Oh yes. Grace Slick was magnificent. She was wearing the shortest mini imaginable and what a glorious voice. What a great performance.”

Temporary enthusiasm smothered underlying anxiety.

"They did a lot of new stuff, darker and more political. They are working on an album, they were a bit paranoid. But defiant." He dropped his voice, "I'll try to tell you how it really happened.

"My father had a car waiting at the airport. Can you imagine? I felt like a film star. I was dropped off at his apartment. I dozed while I waited. No trouble sleeping at all. He arrived full of energy, tanned and dressed in a suit. His hair had grown longer, over his collar. 'Great to see you,' he said but he hardly looked in my direction. The tie came off; he went to the fridge and passed me a cold beer. Then he slumped in a chair and told me he had a treat lined up. The only treat I wanted was a good night's sleep. He had tickets for a Jefferson Airplane concert! How could I say no?

"My father went off to change. When he came back he was wearing cow-boy boots, tight jeans, a loose tie-dyed t- shirt and some kind of western style fringed jacket. His hair was held in place by an Indian headband. He looked so cool and I look so straight.

"After stopping for a burger, we went to the concert and stood in line. A couple of young girls, my age, dropped into conversation with us. They offered to share a joint and my father was right into it. I was so tired I already felt stoned; the air was warm with the smell of weed anyway. So I left it alone. We all went in together. I grooved to the band. The music was unbelievable and I couldn't take my eyes off Grace Slick. At one stage I caught a glimpse of my father dancing with the two girls in the aisle but I thought nothing of it.

"When the concert was over I just wanted to crash. There wasn't room but the girls crammed into the sports car with us and it was obvious they were all going off to party. I was dumped at the apartment and my father disappeared into the night with his new companions.

"It was like that most nights. I hardly had any time with my father on my own. It was an endless flow of music, light shows, parties and other distractions. The longer it went on, the less I enjoyed it. My father, the rich, overgrown hippy! I can't see how he keeps his job.

"So I spent my days entertaining myself. There's a lot to do in San Francisco. Hanging out at Berkeley, visiting bookshops, meeting other people, just wandering around. I got in with a group of students doing poetry and street theatre. We had good times together.

"That is when I first hit acid."

I know I had agreed to keep quiet but I wanted to ask questions, probe details, find out more. I tried to interrupt but he was having none of it. Like the Ancient Mariner, he had his audience and he wasn't going to stop his tale. His concentration was absolute and the flow was relentless.

"There was a poetry reading, part of some counter-culture festival. I read a few of mine. Then there was an all day party. I met this fabulous woman, probably in her late-twenties, gorgeous. We went up to her pad and partied on our own. She split a tab with me. The sex was fantastic but, looking back, I don't think we did anything. How weird is that? Just some kind of dance, waving our hands in the air, tracing the contours of our bodies. I fell into some sort of dream-trance, the music stopped being just sound

and turned into vivid, swirling colours. Time passed. It might have been quick, it might have been slow. I didn't care.

"When I came to I was on a street somewhere near the apartment, standing at some traffic lights. I was mesmerised. I just stood watching the traffic and the slowly changing sequence. I couldn't work out which light was which. They were all kind of blurry. Finally, some kid on the street took my hand and helped me across the road. It was a miracle. He came out of nowhere and then disappeared. It took me ages to get back to the apartment and I crashed on my bed. I was lying there when my father returned. I told him how dreadful I felt, terrified and confused. Do you know what he said to me? 'Bad trip, son. Bummer.' That was all. Then he brought me a large glass of water and told me not to wander around too much and went off to another party.

"I only ever had one serious conversation with him, on the way to the airport, as I was leaving. I asked him what he thought I should do about being conscripted. He gave me his usual word. 'Bummer,' he said. 'Just follow your stars.' My father only had one thing on his mind. He wanted me to tell mother he wasn't likely to come back to Australia and he might need a divorce. 'I want to be free, son, you know.' He wanted me to be his messenger!"

At last Stryder stopped. He held out his glass for a refill and shrunk back into his chair, his eyes staring blankly beyond the horizon. What was I to say to him? I had never bought his rosy descriptions of his relationship with his father; it was simply implausible. His father had gone away to work in California when Stryder had started high school. Since then he had hardly ever spent time in Adelaide, and rarely wrote or phoned. Money was the only real connection between them all. After he finished high school his father had taken to flying him to America for a summer holiday. This year's

had been the longest, just about three months but Stryder had described so little activity. Had he really spent three months just hanging out? What had he been doing? Had he been so depressed by what he found with his father that he had moped around the house or just gone off to read at Berkeley? When he had come back after previous visits, his tales of his father were just too full of admiration. This time the cracks were showing.

"Your mother," I asked, "Have you told her?"

"You have to be kidding. She is at her worst when I come back. Too solicitous for my welfare and too hostile to him in a ranting, running commentary. I wouldn't take the risk."

Despite the sweet smell of the night time grass in the parklands, the atmosphere soured. The night seemed darker and the quietness, previously comforting, now felt ominous, burdened with disquiet. I only understood one part of Stryder's relationship with his mother. She was so hostile to me, always had been, it was easy for me to see her as an ogress and to see tension and anger in the way the two of them interacted. I knew there had to be more than that, even if Stryder would not acknowledge it. He visited her every week, ate with her, but when he came back he would never say a word about what had happened, apart from a dismissive comment to the effect that it had been awful. I let it ride and I let the silence continue.

"Follow your stars," I quoted. "What does that mean?"

For the first time since we had come upstairs, Stryder laughed. "Best advice my father has ever given me." He picked up his stale joint and toyed with it for a moment, then put it back in the ash tray, yawned and laughed again. "It means we are on our

own, sunshine." Then he added as a casual afterthought. "What happened to your Teachers College mate? Did he get out of the army in the end?"

"It was messy. The court eventually upheld his CO status."

"And now?"

"His family won't have anything to do with him. The Education Department took him back and sent him to some remote country hellhole. He can hardly talk about what happened in the army."

"Doesn't make the CO option sound attractive."

"Abso-bloody-loolty not. After seeing his trial, even if I were a pacifist, I would think twice about it."

"Well, I could make a case," said Stryder. I knew at once he had been thinking about it. I questioned him and he went on. "Unlike your mate Jeff, I could make a religious case for conscientious objection and with witnesses."

True I thought. One of the advantages of going to a religious school and having the courage to argue your case. Respectable people who could testify. "Would you?" I asked.

Stryder moved restlessly as if he were trying to work out what would happen. "I'd feel like a hypocrite. We've only got a few choices left."

We rehearsed all our usual arguments about why we had registered. It was a good choice. The chance of being called up was slight. Why should we risk two years in jail when by doing nothing we might miss out completely? It hadn't turned out right but it had been worth taking the risk. Since we had been called up we had increased our

support for the real draft resisters, hiding and moving a number on the run from the police. It was not what we wanted for ourselves but we could never think of a better alternative. For my part, the decision to register had gone with a commitment to increase my activism. I had worked hard to promote militant demonstrations to raise the cost to the government of fighting the war. Stryder saw it differently. He thought we should stay in the game for as long as possible and hope the case for conscription would collapse or the war would end before we were summoned for induction. He put his faith in persuasion and public opinion.

I moved to the railing. "Do you know what I really want to do?" I said. "Drift away and disappear. Leave the country, go somewhere safe and wait out the war."

"And how would you do that?" he asked, not hiding his scepticism.

"You've just been to the States. No one stopped you. You had a deferment and a return ticket. What else did you need? You could have gone to Canada and not come back. There must be other places we could go."

Stryder said, "It can't be that easy. Think of all the draft resisters in hiding."

"They want to make a political point by going on the run. They want to use draft resistance to build a base for the anti-war campaign. Besides some have been hidden on boats and sent to Sweden. It must be possible."

Stryder responded cautiously, "It would be difficult for you to go. It would mean giving up your political struggle. I can't imagine you leaving your family behind, especially not the twins."

I was deflated. Stryder was right. It was just a fantasy. How could you refuse to be called up without being a conscientious objector and avoid going to jail for two

years? I returned to sit by Stryder. “You could go,” I said. “You have a family you want to run away from. You could just pack up and leave.”

“Sure I could leave my family,” Stryder smiled grimly. “I wouldn’t just go away. This is our country and if it is doing wrong we are duty bound to try and stop it.” Here his argument ran out of force. “I’m not sure I believe that stuff anyway.”

We both sat there. Stryder took another slug of port and handed the bottle to me and I put it on the table.

“Well Stryder,” I said. “Ambiguity and contradiction. It’s all a matter of how well we can live with that.”

Chapter 8
Angela Goes Away

April 1969

Are there such things as premonitions? For a few days, or maybe more, there was a growing sense of unease. Angela was less visible, less engaged, less her old lets-have-fun self than before. She was listless and lifeless, drifting in and out of rooms, mostly silent and spending hours alone and, most worryingly of all, there was no music, no piano practice, no record playing and no singing. Perhaps this is what I noticed, a slight shift in the aural signature of life in the Chasm. There were other changes. The women of the household were together more of the time, sharing coffees in quiet places, whispered conversations between Jane and Mary, just an accumulating sense they were now a self-sufficient group.

At this time, Stryder often joined me for an early morning coffee or a breakfast in the refectory. “I’ve no idea what is going on,” he said to me as he put down his white crockery mug of steaming hot, strong, sweet, milky tea and went to fetch a mounded plate of something strictly unhealthy. “The mood at the Chasm is weird,” he said. Faint shadows had appeared under his eyes and he looked like he had spent the whole night writing or reading. “Nobody is talking anymore. I haven’t spoken with Angela, Mary or Jane for days and Peter and Edward are keeping out of everyone’s way.”

Before we could discuss this, we were surprised to see Edward lined up at the counter, filling his tray for a refec breakfast as well. “This is a world first,” Stryder said as he watched him complete his transaction.

Edward did not look worried in any way. He was in his usual university uniform; blue jeans, plaid shirt and a short cut leather bomber jacket. His hair was ruffled and there was a wide smile on his face as he approached the table. “I had to get out of there,” he said. “Too much freaky business for me.” He unpacked his tray and added, “Too much atmosphere, if you know what I mean.” We nodded.

“Let’s admit it,’ said Stryder, “None of us knows anything. We can speculate but to what end?” Turning to Edward he added, “Hasn’t Jane told you anything?”

He shook his head, “Not a word and when I ask, she just gives a thin lipped smile. You know the look.”

The miracles of this morning were not over. The dark form of Peter Goldman hovered at the end of the table. He put his black motor cycle helmet down and fetched himself a mug of black coffee, pursing his lips as he tasted it. Sitting down he looked at us all. “A confab? If that’s what it is,” he said. “We need a confab. We need to talk together.”

We were pleased to have Peter join us like this. He knew we were likely to be in the refec at this time but he had never visited us before. Unfortunately, in combination we were no wiser than when we were apart. We left with an agreement to watch out for clues.

The uncertainty was partly dissolved when Mary met me in the foyer of the Arts Building at the end of the day. She had been waiting for me to finish a seminar. We stood in the little entrance space and she gave me a note from Angela, a little note of folded thin pale blue paper. There was no greeting. In her usual scrawl it read: “Could

you collect the rent on Thursday? Please see the Chasm runs smoothly. I will be back in a couple of weeks." That was all. There was no signature.

"Ok," I said to Mary as we walked out together and headed down past the Engineering Building and the Library, vaguely in the direction of the footbridge over the river. "You tell me what's going on."

Mary was too strongly committed to the truth to be comfortable with any subterfuge. "Angela hasn't been well, as you know. We took her to the hospital yesterday and they checked her out. She has some infection picked up on her travels." Mary was hurrying through her recital and it even sounded rehearsed. "The doctor has ordered complete rest and she is off to the farm for about three weeks. My parents picked her up today." I knew this wasn't the full story. She handed me a bankbook.

"Why does she want me to collect the rent and do the banking? Why didn't she ask you?"

"Good question." With that Mary folded her arms behind her back and walked on strongly, heading for home. "She doesn't want anyone living at the Chasm to be involved. You're an outsider. She would prefer you to do it."

I knew the rest of housemates made fun of Angela on her collection round, mocking her as a rent seeking capitalist or referring to her as 'the landlady', but it was rather light hearted jesting. Perhaps she didn't want any rivalry about who was the second in charge. It seemed strange to me at the time and, on reflection, it still does. None-the-less I agreed. I would play the part and I fully expected them to make fun of me as well.

All the lights were on at the Chasm when we arrived and everybody was seated at the kitchen table. Stryder was cross examining Jane, Edward was half-turned away and Peter just sat staring at his well-cut finger nails. I heard Stryder demand to know what was precisely wrong with Angela and, when our arrival interrupted his questions, Jane looked incredibly relieved. Peter took our entrance as a chance to leave, only adding as he headed for his room, "No more bloody changes." I had never heard him swear before. Edward tried to pacify Jane, offering her his hand as he went to lead her to their rooms but Jane would have none of it. She loosened her hand and walked in front of Edward, aggrieved and saying nothing. This just left Stryder sitting at the table looking disturbed. Mary collected a bottle of beer and three glasses, poured drinks for us and sat down and waited.

Stryder's exasperation collapsed into weariness. To Mary he said, "I'm just worried about her that's all," and then to me, "They won't tell us the secret."

With Angela gone the routines of the place fell apart. The household shopping wasn't done, the seminars and groups discussions disappeared and the Thursday night collective dinners just came to an end. For me, the worst of all were the cleaning routines. Increasingly the kitchen started to look like a normal student household. I got into the habit of visiting the place on my way home and ended my day by clearing the table, doing the dishes, sweeping the floor and making sure the place looked like it had done before. Apart from Stryder, I saw none of them. I'm not sure if Angela's absence made the difference but the internal dynamics had changed.

For the rent collection I set myself up at the kitchen table with a book to keep me company. Edward arrived first clutching his rent in cash. I had expected cheques.

“OK buddy,” he said. “I heard you’d been appointed the resident, no, visiting, bloodsucker. Well, here’s my cash, my stash, my wad, my dosh, your rent.” At least he was smiling. I duly counted his money and wrote him a receipt. “You know, I’m not allowed to pay Jane’s rent.”

The noise of the large motor cycle being parked outside told me Peter would be with me soon. It was a while before he came in through the patio door. “I’m going to have to get out in that garden,” he told me. “The weeds are threatening my precious plants.” Just as well. At least the weeds provided some camouflage. “Rent day?” he asked and pulled out an envelope and handed it to me. “It’s all there,” he said and went on his way, adding as I gave him his receipt, “The place doesn’t work without Angela.”

Jane was next. She must have been going home to her parents as she was wearing a dress and looked demure. She sat down. “Thank you for doing everything. You are a real friend.” I was embarrassed. “I’m sorry the place is going downhill. I’ll try and help next week,” she said. Jane opened her handbag, took out her purse and carefully counted out the rent. By now I understood the system and had already written out a receipt and handed it to her. She smiled contentedly as she left to go to her car.

Mary came gently down the stairs to sit at the table. She was wearing her usual uniform, dark jeans, white t-shirt and a long dark coat. Her usual silver cross gleamed on its silver chain and her lustrous hair was swept back from her face and tied in a long pony-tail. “I know you don’t believe in sin,” she said. “There’s no point in asking you about it.”

What had sin to do with anything? “I think I believe in evil,” I replied.

“That’s too simple,” she said. “It’s easy to see evil at work in the world today. No, I was thinking of personal sin. Doing what you know to be wrong but thinking it’s the right thing to do anyway.”

I’d like to think I searched my conscience and found myself blameless before I replied but I know I didn’t. “I’m not sure collecting the rent is a mortal sin, is it?” I enquired. “I’m not good on these things.”

I had meant it as a joke and I was pleased when she laughed, if only a little, but she looked tense: if I had understood her point I am sure I would have worried.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. “I’m going home on the week-end and will see Angela. Maybe she will come back with me.”

“Has she recovered?” I asked. “It would be great to have her here. The boys might relax a bit then.”

“So you think they are worried for her?”

“What a strange way to put it,” I said. “I know Stryder would dearly like to know what is wrong.”

“I bet he does,” said Mary sharply, with no evident sympathy.

When she saw the look on my face she relented a little. “No, no,” she said. “It will be sorted out when Angela comes home.”

All this served to intensify the mystery once more and again I felt totally clueless. Marxism was no help in trying to fathom these kinds of things and without a religious background I found Mary’s utterance to be completely gnomic. Who had

sinned? What had they done? Was she talking about herself? I can't imagine she had ever sinned in word or deed. Then I remembered her crush on Angela.

"Rent night," I said to break the spell and it worked. Mary looked awkward for a few moments. Squirming a little to slip her hand into the back pocket of her tight fitting jeans, she eased out the money. I handed her a receipt and she told me she was off to sing in a coffee shop on Unley Road. She invited me to drop in to see her set. "You know," she said, "if she was here, Angela would have been singing with me."

I had plenty of time to think about what she had said before Stryder turned up.

"Here's the money, mate," he said. "It's a shitty job you're doing. I'm pleased it's you not me."

He was amused and I smiled in response.

Then his pleasure increased. "I bet you haven't thought about what you are going to do with all the money you've collected."

I hadn't. I knew it had to be banked but, of course, at this hour of night the bank was closed and would not open until ten the next morning.

"Angela collects the rent first thing in the morning and goes straight to the bank. Now you have to mind the cash."

Damn. I thought I'd arranged it all so well. I could hardly ride home on my bike with Angela's cash box strapped to the back. Nor could I go out and leave the money just lying around the house. I'd have to stay the night.

Stryder solved the problem. "I was going to suggest we go to O'Connell Street for dinner and then to the pub but instead I'll go to Gus's and get fish and chips and

pick up some beer. You sort out my table upstairs, get glasses and things and I'll join you there just as soon as I can."

Gus was a Greek bloke and he did the best fish and chips at our end of town. His shop was a fair way from the Chasm but the drive was worth it for the quality of the chips alone. I got everything sorted, carried the cash box up to the little guest room I used and hid it in the small chest of draws. I was sure it would be safe but I was paranoid about things going wrong. I phoned home to explain then I went back to my reading. I got plenty done before Stryder returned with this large newspaper parcel and its aroma of cooking oil and batter along with some bottles of Southwark, our preferred drink at this time, a slightly more bitter taste than its West End rival, a perfect antidote to the grease taint of the fish and chips. We settled in for a long evening and approached the chips with the enthusiasm of seagulls.

"Do you believe the story about Angela's illness?" he asked.

"Up to a point."

"Well it doesn't work for me," he said. "Jane's dad is a doctor. Why would they take Angela to the hospital?"

"Why would they tell us she had gone to hospital if she hadn't?"

"Search me," he said, brushing his hair back from his face. "No idea."

The fish and chips were excellent. We were sure the fish was shark but it tasted so good, it glowed so beautifully golden, we didn't care. If Gus was cooking it, then it was the best fish. The smell of the fat only heightened our hunger. We didn't say much for a while; there was too much eating to do. As our pace slackened I told Stryder about my conversation with Mary and her question about sin. This set him back for a moment.

"There is no point in talking about sin with an un-churched heathen like you," he declared, "but it would have meant a lot to Mary. Yes indeed it would."

I waited.

"Did she say what kind of sin it was?"

"No. Just something about a thing being wrong and doing it anyway. No. I've got it. She said, 'knowing something was wrong but doing it anyway as if it was the right thing to do.' Too subtle for me."

"She is worried about something she's done. No one else in the household would care that much about sin; even the ones brought up with religion, like me."

This added an extra layer of mystery which I meekly accepted, but it puzzled Stryder. All through the evening as we chatted about our research and writing, he kept coming back to this question. Then began a frantic period of calculation which made no sense to me.

"When did Angela go to Paris?"

I told him.

"And when did she leave Paris for London?"

"Either New Year's Day or the day after."

He was silent for a while but I could see he was counting and then he said out loud what he was thinking. "I left for The USA at least a week before Angela went to Paris." I agreed. "Well, thank God for that," he said, still counting days.

His mood improved. He now was in full party mode, hunting out some whisky which he drank as enthusiastically as he had eaten the fish and chips. I stayed with the beer. He was quite pissed by now. I decided to head off to bed and my role guarding the money. Stryder was unsteady on his feet as he rose. He put one arm on my shoulder and leaned on me, standing too close. "Now Mark," he said haltingly. "I know you aren't fucking around. You're too upright, no, uptight. One day you will and I want to warn you. Always, absolutely always, promise me, use a condom, you know, a rubber, a French letter, a franger whatever you call them in your household. Use a condom every time. Without fail. Never forget."

This was as mysterious as Mary's comment about sin but Stryder was drunkenly insistent, so I promised and made my escape. At the time I had no idea what he was on about. I had no idea Angela was away because she had just had an abortion. Later I realised Stryder must have guessed, or at least feared, what had happened. At one point, I recall, he said, "I hope Angela hasn't done anything rash."

Chapter 9
Dinner with the Davids

May 1969

The aromatic smoke moved in mesmerising drifts across the space between us and then steadily wound its way up past pitted metal and slight touches of rust, slowly past the edges of a ragged spider's web, past the mirror and then, impelled by the slight breeze from my half open window, it moved slowly to one side, creeping along the roof as it went, gradually thinning and being sucked upwards and out of the slightly open window on the other side of the car. I watched Stryder concentrating on his joint as another breath of smoke began its slow, tortuous ascent. He seemed at ease. It was a strong contrast to his mood when I met him at the Chasm. The prospect of going to my parents' house for a family meal prompted Stryder to smoke his joint. "I can't mix with parents, not even yours, without a protective coating of smoke," he told me. Still he agreed to come and this was his first proper visit to my place. He was, of course, fleeing a worse prospect: a seminar on feminism, for women only, being organised by Jane and Mary at the Chasm. Jane had written a manifesto and there was to be a debate over forming a women's liberation group. Angela was back, dressed in black now, with short cropped hair, pale face, and no makeup, angry, depressed and mostly silent. She had made clear her opposition to the seminar but she would attend, if she was in the right mood, she said. Stryder was offended; not only was he not invited but Jane and Mary insisted he go out for the night, banished along with Peter and Edward, neither of whom cared in the slightest. "Why can't I stay? I support your cause. Isn't that enough?" he told them. And Jane explained in clear, uncompromising terms why that was simply not

enough and he had to go away. To quieten things down I invited him out and, without enthusiasm, he agreed.

I had been to Stryder's place often enough. He had a room of his own, indeed whole areas of the house were his to use as he liked. All the same I had to feel strong enough to face Mrs Ryder who, without hesitation, would make obvious her disapproval. Would a 'protective coating of smoke' have helped me? We never used my house as a base for our Friday night get-togethers. Eight people overfilled our small house and we could never have had our kind of chats, nor played our favourite music. Only during the summer break had I put together a separate bed-sitting room for myself in a partitioned off space at the end of the car shed, part of the agreement negotiated with my parents after I was called up. It had eased the tensions just a little.

Stryder finally, reluctantly, finished his joint, dampening his fingers and twisting the end to kill it. He was now ready to face my family. I drove the car out of the side street and parked in our drive way. The smell of dope was heavy on our clothes. Stryder unwound himself from the car - he really was too tall for his VW - threw off his pullover and collected his jacket from the back seat. As he stood up he made great flapping movements with his arms to lessen the smell. "Don't worry; they'll either think you're a drug fiend or that this is just the incense hippies use."

Oh, yeah. As we walked down the drive, Stryder put his arm around my shoulders and went on, "This is far better than being trapped in a women's liberation meeting. Don't look so glum."

I opened the back door for us to go in through the veranda, past a curtained area where my brother Tony slept, and into the kitchen, one of the larger rooms in the house. My mother and my sisters were preparing tea, as we called the evening meal. My

mother, pushing her apron aside and smoothing her unruly curly hair, came towards Stryder with her hand held out to him. I introduced them. “Welcome Stephen, you can call me Sheila.” That was a surprise; she had never been Sheila to any of my other friends before. She then turned and introduced him to Trudy, my older sister and Jenny the younger one. “Your Dad is in the front room with the twins, go through, go through,” she said.

As we entered the passageway, past the bedrooms on our way to the lounge room, the tiger twins, Dan and Sam, came running from the front room to greet Stryder, jumping around him like a pack of untrained dogs, trying to separate him from me and to lead him into their bedroom to play. They failed. Now here was a dilemma. Was I to introduce my father as Mr David or as Trevor, or Trev? Clearly my parents had discussed this question and had an agreed response. My father was well scrubbed this night. He half rose from his usual arm chair, ordered the twins to turn the TV off, gestured for Stryder to take a seat and said, “Welcome to the house, Stephen, I’m Trevor, Mark’s Dad.” The twins dragged Stryder to sit in my mother’s chair and dashed to get a bottle of beer, a glass, a pack of cigarettes, Craven A, and a box of matches. Dad sat back to watch the pantomime as Dan and Sam competed to give him his beer – who would hold the glass, who would pour – and light his cigarette. Eventually it was all done and disaster averted. Stryder was a little bewildered as he sat there surrounded by this first instalment of my usual family life.

“Well, Trevor,” said Stryder looking uncomfortable and awkward about using his first name. “It’s a nice place you’ve got here.”

“Built it after the war,” he said gruffly. “Didn’t build it large enough.”

The twins scrabbled at Stryder's feet, trying to get his attention. My father sternly threatened to send them to their room. Relative quietness.

"Tony won't be with us tonight," he said to me. To Stryder he explained, "Tony's my oldest boy, works in the ceramics factory with me. Doing overtime, extra shift. Good money. He's saving up."

I looked at this room and wondered what Stryder would think of it. The contrast with his family home was great; our rooms were modest, his were grand. Our furniture was suddenly shabby and even the paint on our walls looked tired. Rather like the Chasm, only this was our real home.

"How was your work day?" Stryder enquired.

"Thanks for asking, son." My father lit another cigarette and pointed for the twins to fill his glass. "These are good times," he said. "Lots of work, lots of new products.' He turned to me and added, "I've had good news today. They want to do the prototype of a new bath design. I've been asked to work with the team on it." He smiled in a craggy sort of way. "Could be a bonus in it. We'll all feed well if it comes through." Then he looked a little sheepish as if speaking too soon could ruin his chances.

Just as he was turning to ask Stryder a question, my mother came to the door. Her apron was gone, her hair had been brushed and she looked less flustered than before. "Tea's ready," she called.

"Thanks Shirl," my father said enthusiastically. For reasons we had never discovered, my father often called my mother Shirl when he was nervous or proud of her and, I imagined, in amorous moments. The twins grabbed Stryder's arms and

dragged him to his feet to lead him to the kitchen while Stryder did his best to abandon his cigarette and to keep his beer from spilling.

Our kitchen was dominated by a vast old wood table, much like the one at the Chasm, with an odd assortment of wooden and chrome kitchen chairs ranged around. The table was full of food. I knew my mother would have cooked a lamb roast; it was her all-seasons festive family meal. This was a large leg of lamb for the occasion. There were mounds of roast vegetables, potatoes, carrots and parsnips, a bowl of turnips mashed with butter and a large bowl of silver beet; all vegetables grown in the back garden. It was an overwhelming and hospitable sight. Dad carved and my sisters walked around the table, handing the meat platters to each in turn. Near chaos followed as the bowls of vegetables were passed and everyone took what they wanted.

There was a lull as we settled in to eat. The twins had contrived to have Stryder sit between them and they wasted no time before quizzing him on where he lived, how many children in his family, what his father did and so on. My mother quickly intervened to stop the flow of questions. She didn't want the twins to press him for answers. Then she turned the questions around and made the twins take turns in telling us about their day. They squabbled mildly over what had happened to them in a convoluted tale about some playground dispute.

It was Trudy's turn to describe the highlights of her day at the bank. She had a story about a customer who had complained to the manager about a mix up in her accounts. "She had two accounts," she declared. "No wonder she got confused."

Jenny was reluctant to speak and, without looking at Stryder, she gave us the latest update on the ongoing saga of the teasing relationship between the young female staff and the much older shopkeeper where she worked. She tried to make it seem like

fun but my parents looked uneasy and hurried the subject on. Stryder gave me a questioning glance.

When it was her turn my mother dismissed her day as just more of the same and then told the rest of the family the news about the possible bonus and my father smiled warmly on us all.

"Well boys," my father asked, "what did you do with your days?"

I mumbled something but Stryder intervened with full enthusiasm.

"It was a lazy day, at first," he said, "cup of coffee and a turn around the garden for a smoke. Then I walked into uni, at a leisurely pace. I had a seminar at 11.00, part of my honours program. I tried to be a star but I failed." He was animated and waving his glass of beer around, not pausing to take a drink or to eat anything. "Lunch with Mark in the refec and then I spent some wonderful hours in the Barr," he looked around at them all, "the Barr Smith Library," he explained. "I have an essay to do on modernist poetry and I was hunting out book reviews." He put his beer down and sat back. "The highlight of my day was coming here and meeting you all." He looked terribly self-satisfied.

There was calm as the meal came to an end. My mother took charge. She dismissed the girls, saying they had already done their bit by cooking for the meal and sent them off to the front room. She tried to send us off as well but we refused, Stryder making it clear he intended to help. "I can do my bit, you know," he told my mother. The twins were delighted. "We can do it all", they cried, rushing to start clearing away. Then they stopped, had a quick word to each other, and went to drag my parents out of the kitchen and send them to the front room. They came back and took charge,

instructing the visitor on what had to be done. Dan explained: “We all clear the table and stack the dirty dishes, remove the table cloth and all that. Then there are four tasks to be done; washing the dishes, wiping the dishes, and putting them away.”

Sam broke in, “And there is sweeping the floor, the easiest job. When it’s done you get an early night.” He gestured towards a list stuck on the cupboard drawer, “That’s the weekly roster. We take all the jobs in turn.”

Dan rushed on, “Because you are our guest you can sweep the floor, Stephen, but you have to stay and talk to us while we finish the dishes. We will let Mark wash. I’ll wipe, because I’m the older one.” Here Sam gave him a kick, “and my baby brother, the unruly one, who can’t be trusted, he will put the dishes away.”

They even gave Stryder directions on how to sweep the floor. He took an obvious pleasure in the way we all worked together in the kitchen. He joined in with the games played by the twins as they competed for how fast they could get their tasks done and Sam kept up a flow of mocking sports commentary on their efforts. The pace of washing up slowed, and with less to do, Sam came to sit next to Stryder. Sam wanted him to help with his homework but he knew Dan would not let this happen. So he turned it into a sort of quiz, but since it was on maths, Stryder pretended to be incompetent and this made Sam excited as he gleefully corrected the errors. Finally the dishes were done and we all retreated to the quiet of the front room.

Usually after dinner, we would, as a family, gather and watch television until about eight o’clock when the set would be turned off and the twins sent to bed, never an easy task. This night was different. When we trooped into the front room the TV was already off and my sisters were sitting quietly, waiting for us. No sooner were the twins through the door than Trudy and Jenny stood up, collected one each and headed off

with them to their room to play. There were loud protests to make and goodnights to be said and it was a while before some order was established. Our usually chaotic front room was now a stage waiting for action. We were urged to sit and we waited, expecting I know not what. I was planning our escape.

"Stephen," my mother asked, "How is your mother?" There was a pause. Recognising the awkward moment she went on quickly, "And your father? Is he coming back to Adelaide for a visit this year?"

Stryder took this questioning well but I knew he was uncomfortable. "I don't think so," he replied. "I'm likely to see him in January in California. We tend to catch up once a year, at least."

My mother was unimpressed but she went on with her questions. "I know it must be hard. To write a thesis and do all those seminars. How are you going? Is everything all right at university?"

Stryder nodded. "I s'pose," he said.

My father watched these social exchanges with increasing tension. Now he intervened. "What are your plans after university?"

So this was the moment for a conscription and army talk. I had not expected it. Apart from the awful night when I was called up we never discussed my conscription. I hated to remember the moment when my father told me that it would be best if I accepted my call-up and went into the army; this from a man who had no sympathy for either the army or the Vietnam War. And here they were, obviously planning to say something to Stryder about his call-up. So this was why the girls and the twins had gone to their rooms so early.

Stryder responded better than I thought possible. He looked at them, straight at their faces, and said, “Honestly, Mr David, I have no idea.” He stopped and waited. My father fiddled nervously with an unlit cigarette and an unstruck match. It looked as if he was trying to offer Stryder a smoke while refusing the gesture at the same time.

My mother broke in and rushed her words. “Stephen, we just want you to know. If, like Mark, you refuse to go into the army, then you can count on our support.”

She took the cigarette from her husband’s hands, lit it and handed it back to him. “We don’t know how your mother feels, Stephen, but I would be happy to talk to her if you think that would help. It must be hard for her, being on her own, thinking she might soon lose you – to the army or to jail.”

Stryder rubbed his hands together, hunched his shoulders and his head drooped. Was he imagining what would happen if my mother knocked on his mother’s door? There was an effort at gentleness when he spoke. “Your offer is,” he hesitated, “most generous.” Here he took a deliberate breath and said more slowly, “My mother is an enthusiast for it all, war and conscription. Much of her passion is directed at the army and our family’s tradition of military service.” He ticked off on his fingers, “My father, my grandfather, her grandfather and beyond. She was delighted when I was called up.” He must have realised he sounded shrill as he lowered his voice. “When I go home, not all that often, she berates me for my actions and my politics.” He turned to face my mother. “So, I think, thank you kindly but no, not at this time. It would not be good for you to visit.”

“Sorry,’ she said and turned away, upset. My father was flustered too and sought to rush from the subject by asking trivial questions about where I would be on the week-end. I just wanted out of there. I rose quickly to take Stryder away. He refused to

go, not until he had said goodbye and thanked my parents for the meal and the evening. He was humbly grateful.

We stumbled outside and headed for my room. “Heavy shit,” he said, “but what wonderful people.”

The harsh fluoro light made the space look more dismal than it was. The lack of a ceiling, the bareness of the floor, the cold metal surfaces of the sheet iron were all made so obvious. I quickly lit some candles in old wax-covered Chianti bottles and turned the overhead light off. The room was now dim, the harshness banished in shadows. Where before it looked cold, it now appeared warm and, I hoped, comfortable. Stryder sat down in the scruffy old blue lounge chair I’d salvaged from some verge where a house was being demolished. I put on a blues record - Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee and Lightnin’ Hopkins - and lit the kerosene stove to take the chill off the damp air. Stryder hung his long legs over the side of the chair, lit a cigarette and leaned back. He closed his eyes for a moment and relaxed. “I like this shed-room of yours,” he said. “You’ve done it well.” He looked around and gestured at my improvised bookshelves which, along with my posters, covered as much of the unlined walls as possible. “Che Guevara I see. Hardly surprising, not for you. And Vietnamese peasant fighters bursting out of bamboos, I would expect. But why that monstrous poster of an atomic bomb?”

It was garish; all oranges and reds in the familiar mushroom shaped cloud. “Maralinga,” I said. “It shows how dangerous the world can be.”

“You need to be reminded?”

Chapter 10
Making Militants

June 1969

Rugged up in coats to keep out the night chill, we waited for Big Jim to arrive. We were sitting apart, on opposite sides of the brick patio, separately staring at the door in the garden wall that was only just visible in the feeble light. A single bare bulb was suspended from the cross beams of the pergola. It felt like winter and the garden smelt crisp with lingering undertones of autumn decay. I was slightly on edge as tonight the Chasm was gathered to debate a brief note I had written, making the case for increasingly militant demonstrations. Informal chat about the house told me I was the only one in favour. Jane was opposed and her comments had been openly hostile but that did not explain the tension between us, not at this time.

"I don't get it, Jane," I said. "Why did you invite Big Jim?"

She turned her face to me, a scarf pulled high around her throat and her shoulders hunched. "It just seemed right," she said.

"But it's a problem for me. He's my supervisor. I want to keep things separate."

"What things? Your politics and your thesis? Not possible. You're writing about the Americans in Asia and the Vietnam War, you've been called up and you're an anti-war activist." To emphasise her point she added, "He's from California, new to the Politics Department, into democratic theory and an ex-student activist. Who could be more appropriate?"

She was right of course. I was uncomfortable. My little note on militancy was pathetic. It was not a piece of academic work. Besides, Jim at this moment was marking my essay on Marcuse and I didn't want anything to intrude on his judgement. Jim was such a scrupulous supervisor I knew he would treat me fairly but I feared too much knowledge about what I thought could complicate matters.

We heard Jim noisily crunch his old mini up onto the footpath, abandoning it there to make his way through the door in the wall. He was trying to carry a flagon of d'Arenberg red under one arm, a folder of papers and a heap of books under the other. He was struggling with the lock. There was no doubt he had well and truly earned his nick name. He was well over six feet tall and bulky with it, bigger than Peter Goldman, and his large hands were having trouble coping. Help was needed. Jane took the flagon and I took the books, mostly texts by Marcuse with lots of book marks in them. It was going to be an intellectual night.

The others were waiting in the kitchen, standing behind chairs around the table. A large jug of water sat at the centre with glasses at each place. Jane placed Jim's flagon on the sideboard, next to the wine glasses and an impressive slab of cheese from the market. Peter had volunteered to chair this informal discussion and Jane took Jim to meet him. The mood was not as relaxed as usual; there was more tension than excitement in the gathering. Jane introduced Jim as we all sat down. Peter took his place in the middle of one of the sides and I sat next to him. At this point Angela appeared in the doorway, draped in black, her hair shaved from her head with her sunken eyes looking warily at us. Since her return she had been aloof from such gatherings. She drifted in and didn't look at all well. Without a word she sat next to Stryder.

Peter began, “Jim Cole is joining us tonight. He has a PhD from the University of Santa Barbara. The title of his thesis was “Student Politics: The Limits of Democratic Theory” now published by the University of California Press. In the USA Jim was a member of Students for Democratic Society and he has just been appointed to the Politics Department here at Adelaide, lecturing in Political Theory and Issues in Contemporary Society. For his sins he is supervising Mark’s thesis but we hope he doesn’t hold this against us. Welcome to Australia and the Chasm.”

Jim nodded in response and I was invited to speak to my paper.

“Not a paper, just some notes,” I said. I outlined an argument which was to become commonplace in the 1970s under the moratorium slogan, “Stop the Country to Stop the War”. At this time it was only used by those on the fringes, like me, seeking to push dissent into a full scale radical critique of Australian society and government. I outlined my case for more disruptive, militant demonstrations to make the war in Vietnam too costly for the government. The seeds I cast fell silently on stony ground. I heard them bounce. Jane had her arms folded and was looking at the ceiling, Jim was listening politely, Edward would have preferred to be spending the night in the pub, Mary was frowning, tapping her pencil on the table and Angela looked disturbed for whatever reason. Trying to fulfil his obligations as chair, Peter was watching me with silent encouragement but it was an effort. I could see the slight tensing of muscles in his face. Only Stryder was at all animated as he made notes.

I proclaimed: “If we are to stop the war we must take the battle to the streets, city by city, town by town until the government can no longer go on. We must be as brave as the Vietnamese when the bombs from the B52s drop down on their flimsy homes. We must dare to struggle, and dare to win.”

Such a declaration might have worked as a rallying call to a mass meeting but on this night, and in the downbeat, mundane tones in which I uttered it, no-one was moved.

The chilling silence killed my hopes. “We may as well chuck this in,” I said. “Let’s get Jim’s wine and the cheese and forget all about it.”

Jim replied, “Wine and cheese are fine but this topic is going to haunt us for some time. Best get down to the fundamentals right now.”

He rose vigorously to his feet and walked to the sideboard, picked up the flagon with ease and looked for the missing corkscrew. Angela quickly handed it to him, and took the cheese to the table. With the open flagon in one hand, Jim picked up a handful of glasses with the other and went to the table to pour wine and pass it round. Everyone was relieved, except for Stryder who looked like he had missed out on some treat. “Look mate,” he leaned across the table. “We have to work out what to do. To stop now is a cop-out.”

“I agree.” Jim paused with a wine glass in his hand. “You were drafted too?”

Stryder nodded. Big Jim turned to Jane and asked “Does that make a difference? Do you think Stephen and Mark think better or worse on this issue than those not drafted?”

After some hesitation she admitted she was not sure.

“Do we think more clearly because our position is not complicated with wild political calculations of who benefits?”

“Of course not,” Jane responded hurriedly.

“I don’t think the question is fair,” Mary said.

Jim sat down again with a slight smile on his face. The debate had begun but on a different footing from the one I had proposed.

Mary continued, “Divide and rule is what they do best.”

“Jim, I think you are wrong,” said Stryder, slowly and deliberately.

The mood in the room had changed. Before, while I had been speaking, there was something glum about the way people were listening. Where there had been dissonance and static now there was an electricity building. The folded arms, the eyes cast up, down, or away, the body language of negativity was gone. There was now eagerness for the debate, an urge to engage, a desire to find an answer. At this moment I greatly admired Jim’s academic skills. My comments had divided; his questions had called everyone together.

“Take Mark and me,’ Stryder said, “Both called-up, two different political positions. He wants more militancy. For my part, I’m not sure.”

Jim quietly asked, “What do you want?”

Stryder gave a tight-lipped smile and wrinkled his brow. He sat back and we all waited for him to speak. “I want a big campaign.” He gestured with his hands. “A lot of effort, mass mobilisation.”

“Like Mark,” suggested Jim.

“No! I want it focussed on the election. It’s a few months away. I want leaflets, door knocks and a big demonstration. No one turned away, no one turned off. Church groups, pensioners, artists, singers, writers, school groups, sports clubs and families

with kids, everybody. No one too old, no one too young, everyone focussed on opposing the war and making the war the major election issue. It's our only chance."

I went to respond but Jim held up a hand to stop me. Instead he asked Stryder, "What do you think Mark wants?"

I was intrigued. I would never have thought to take the conversation in this direction. Stryder looked at me for a moment. I hoped he would get my position right. As Big Jim asked his question I noticed Jane and Mary exchange a glance. I couldn't read its meaning. Edward and Peter leant forward warily watching Stryder. Only Jim looked completely relaxed. Angela was distancing herself by cutting hunks of cheese and arranging them on a plate.

"Oh, Mark wants to bring the city to a complete standstill." Stryder turned towards me and continued, "Only the demonstrations would make the news, not the war or conscription. Only radicals will take part."

Was he right? Militant demonstrations would be the story but was that a problem? Many voices talked over each other. I could hear Mary and Jane agreeing with Stryder. Peter and Edward were disputing his position and wanted me to respond. Angela kept on cutting cheese and the plate was starting to look like a cubist monument. Although there was a pause and a chance for me to speak, I waited.

Jim used his considerable physical presence to freeze the moment. He poured himself another glass of red, deftly took the cheese mountain away from Angela, and passed the plate around. He offered it first to Mary. "In place of the bread?" she asked, selected a piece, put it in her mouth, raised the red wine in salute and took a mouthful, smiling at Jim. He had not moved. "Tell me Mary," he asked, "Where does your non-

violent activism sit between these two alternatives?" And he moved on with the plate of cheese, offering it to each in turn.

Mary gulped at her wine in surprise and she had to wipe way the spillage before she could speak. Both Mary and I were in Jim's Honours Seminar and the two of them had spent some time debating the potential of non-violence and direct action. Although she was inspired by Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Mary had been reluctant to do more than support community service to help the less well off. She was not willing to endorse any more radical political purpose. Regaining her composure, she sat completely still as if she were trying to make her sense of calm cover the whole gathering. I thought she might be meditating, silently chanting some mantra with her eyes open or, maybe, praying.

"I stand with Stryder on this issue," Mary said, "for one main reason; the threat of violence." She looked at me with suspicion.

"Not my intent," I gestured.

"It seems only a short step from militancy and disruption to acts of violence and destruction," she went on.

Jane spoke up. "But Mary, that's what they said about Ghandi and his agitations." She looked shocked to hear what she had just said. The list of Ghandi's faults, in her eyes, were endless; his fascination with cotton, hand spinning and home weaving, ancient crafts and voluntary labour, his religious obsessions and his obscurantist pronouncements on women and sex; none of these appealed to her in the slightest. In our debates over strategy and tactics Jane was pragmatically opposed to violence. How was this going to play out?

"So, Jane, you don't agree a call to militant demonstrations and disruption is a call to use violence?" Jim sat back down next to her and invited her to continue.

"If there could be disruption without violence it might be possible to justify Mark's approach," Jane said. "Disruption provokes violence and then what?"

There was surprise when Peter spoke up. "It's not like that," he said. "I'm an anarchist. Violence comes from the state. If we create disruptive demonstrations, the state will act, the police will attack." He glared defiantly around the table. "Haven't you noticed? Over the last four or five months, the police have been using force more and more often. There was that demo where they chased us all the way to the University after we marched down Rundle Street at peak hour. If we hadn't slammed the iron gates on them they would have trapped us in front of Bonython Hall and what would have happened then? There would have been violence, their violence against us."

Edward took up the theme. "And there have been threats of violence against demonstrators. The last time we marched to Currie Street, the police said they intervened to keep the peace because there were rumours some national servicemen were on their way from Woodside to attack the demonstration."

"It never happened," said Peter, "but the police made their arrests anyway."

I was ready to reply. "I think we should be responsible for our own actions. We can't change what we want to do because the police or someone else might attack us. We will march and we will disrupt until the war is stopped. If they attack us, that's a price we must pay. We might get public sympathy, provided we haven't done anything stupid."

"If we fight back, we will be blamed for the violence," Mary added.

The mood in the room was changing. Some of Mary's hair, usually so neatly controlled, had escaped in wisps around her face, outlined against the light. Edward now looked like he wanted a chance to speak. He was watching Jane closely so as to get his timing right. Stryder had stopped making notes.

"Wow, is this guy some sort of magician or what?" Angela cried. She looked like a politician about to make a public speech. "It doesn't matter to me, I agreed with Mark from the first. We're not going to stop the war by whining and pleading; 'Please Mister Big Shot, if it's not too much bother, would you mind not getting our boys killed in Vietnam. We'd be ever so grateful.'" She smiled at me and then turned towards the rest of the table. "But for the rest of you, Big Jim has you all twisted up. Just a few questions and you're turning yourselves inside out and now you find yourselves agreeing with something you started out opposing."

She applauded Jim who sat, unmoved, watching her closely.

She picked up a glass of water. "I'm not feeling well. I'm sorry for my outburst." She waved in an off-handed manner and headed back to her room.

The focus of the gathering was gone. People called out to each other, got up, and paced around, sat down. Mary went after Angela as she always did. Jane had not moved, leaning close to Big Jim, talking to him with some intensity. Edward fell into his domestic mode, collected up the cheese, plates and wine glasses and carried them to the sink. He rinsed the glasses, wiped them and brought them back to the table, then headed upstairs. Peter and Stryder were standing close together, toe to toe, smiling broadly at each other. Peter clapped him on the back and I heard him say, "Welcome to the anarchist camp." They both laughed. I watched them all and thought Angela had been spot on: Jim was some kind of miracle worker, conjuring up these responses with

nothing more than well-crafted questions. Simultaneously Mary and Edward came back into the room, Edward with an open bottle of port which he put in the centre of the table. After Mary reassured us Angela was ok, Jane spoke.

"It's not Jim who has done magic," she said. "He was a facilitator, he helped make it happen and we should recognise his efforts. The real magic comes from democracy itself. Through discussion we have taken an issue, probed it, disassembled it and put it together again and now we have an agreed outcome, without rancour, bitterness, coercion or violence."

I hadn't notice any agreed outcome.

"A perfect example of working anarchism," said Peter.

Jane regarded him with a mixture of scepticism and friendliness. She was not going to be distracted. "In an ideal world this is how it should be," she said. "We need to make democratic spaces like these available to more people, in workplaces, families, schools, the army, wherever."

Peter said, "Jim should sum-up and bring the session to an end."

Jim looked around the table and spoke in conversational tones. "When I left the States, Students for Democratic Society was riven by conflict over this question. I felt I was on the losing side. There were dark forces being unleashed."

He went from magician to a normal decent guy in just a few words; if anything this made him more appealing, more interesting. I could understand why Jane was fascinated and why she had invited him to this gathering.

“I tell you,” he said. “I sat through endless, acrimonious debates over militancy. This was better than any of them; better informed, more thoughtful and conducted in a far better spirit.”

He turned to us all, “That’s why I’m glad I’ve moved to Australia and I’m glad you chose to invite me. I hope you don’t mind if I quit now.”

There was confusion as people rose to talk with him, ask questions, thank him and challenge him. It was hard for Jim to get to the door. In the end I intervened, picked up his folder and his books and escorted him out to his car. As we moved through the garden, Jim deliberately slowed down and told me how much he had enjoyed the evening.

“There is a risk,” he said. “Good arguments can’t guarantee good outcomes.” As he climbed into his mini he looked serious for a moment, “Times will change, you know. Being drafted gets in the way but you need to make plans. What do you really want to do with your life?” He closed the door and wound down the window. “I’ll be looking for a tutor next year. Think about it.” As he drove off he called out, “You can’t be a student radical forever.”

Chapter 11
Death Rehearsal Rag

July 1969

The walls of the hospital room oozed unhappiness and despair. Who would paint anywhere with this depressing, institutional off-green colour? The weak wintery sunlight could not penetrate the drawn curtains. By a dimmed side light I could see Angela's face, a ghastly pale colour, her eyes closed, her hair scraped back, and the skin of her face stretched taut over her now prominent cheek bones, her breathing incredibly shallow. For someone who had survived a suicide attempt she was sleeping so calmly. There was endless time to think about what I had been told. If Stryder had not found her in his room, she would have died. The Chasm had been deserted; Peter at his lab, Jane and Edward staying with their respective parents, Mary at some church gathering and not been expected back until late. Even if she had returned, would she have found Angela? Stryder was visiting his mother and would not have been away long. Even so, he had been delayed in a visit to collect some books for an essay he was writing. How much was chance?

A mid-night phone call from Stryder at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. "Angela," he said. "There was a note. A suicide attempt. Pills." Then the demand: "Get a message to the Falconers. Their phone doesn't answer. They want her mother, as soon as possible."

Their house was in complete blackness when I arrived. My footsteps crunched loudly on the gravel. I walked to the front porch, rang the bell and waited. No response. Finally I heard children's voices calling their parents and, after a longer pause, lights

started to go on. A dishevelled Mr Falconer came to the door in his dressing gown. He turned the outside light on and peered at me through the frosted glass, opened the door and ushered me inside.

"Mr Falconer," I hesitated. I had no idea how to break the news to him. "I've had a call from Stephen Ryder. Angela is in the Royal Adelaide. She's unconscious." He looked like I had slapped him. Bewildered he turned towards his wife as she hurried down the hallway.

"What's happened, John?" she asked and then examined me, "It's Mark, isn't it?"

"The hospital has been trying to call you but they got no answer," I told them. "So Stephen called me."

"OK, there's a problem with our phone. What has happened? Why is she in hospital?" she implored me.

Again I hesitated, "There's a note," I said.

John Falconer looked, as I felt, completely out of his depth. Children's voices were raised in the background. Mrs Falconer took charge and sent us to the kitchen. She disappeared down the corridor towards the noise. Mr Falconer introduced himself as John, sat me down at a laminex table and in the harsh fluoro light we considered each other. He did not ask for further details and I said nothing until we were joined once again by Mrs Falconer.

"Stay with the children, John," she told him forcefully. "Mark. You have a car?" She had changed into street clothes and was ready. "Take me to the hospital."

Before John could say anything, she cut him off. “If I’m on my own, she just might be willing to see me.” Briskly she led the way out the door and into the night once again.

“I’m Linda,” she said. “Tell me everything you know.” There was nothing I could say. Her face was set and she looked nervously around as we drove through deserted streets. “I should never have let John throw her out. She should have been home with us.” Then to me she said, “Why did it have to come to this?”

She wanted to know how Angela had been, before this happened. I wasn’t going to break the news about her recent hospital treatment. Besides, were the two things related? “She’s been a bit withdrawn.” In that instant the puzzle made sense. Angela had been aloof since returning to the Chasm and now I realised she felt abandoned. All along she had been lonely and none of us had done anything.

I parked the car and we walked through the reception area to a rather depressing waiting room. Stryder was there, looking pale, standing by the doorway, staring at his reflection in the window.

“How is she?” Mrs Falconer asked as we approached. Stryder took a moment, surprised to find a cigarette in his mouth he removed it and looked at us. He threw the cigarette away and led us to some uncomfortable chairs in a corner. He wrung his hands and softly said, “She will be OK.” He smoothed out his jeans. “They have pumped her stomach and she’s now conscious.”

“Have you seen her already?” Mrs Falconer was watching him closely for a flicker of additional meaning.

"Briefly." Stryder took out a pack of tobacco and cigarette papers and started to roll another one.

"And?"

Stryder kept working the tobacco into a thin line. "It's kind of complicated. She'll see you." He looked up from his task but went on rolling the cigarette back and forth on his thigh. "It wasn't easy." He neatened the ends and passed the cigarette to Linda Falconer. She took it, admired it and said "It's times like these a roll-your-own seems just the right thing." She leant forward for Stryder to light it.

"We are in for a long night," he told her as she held the smoke in and waited to exhale.

"Angela's a complete mess," he said.

Linda looked at the ceiling and concentrated on her smoking. He sighed. "I need to tell you something – the doctors asked me about it, though how the hell they could have known I can't imagine. She's had an abortion, not that long ago. They think it's all related."

Linda snapped into alertness, sat up straight on the hard back chair. "What?"

"I know nothing about it." There was no colour in his face and the pupils in his eyes were incredibly small. He now worked on a cigarette for himself.

Linda and Stryder were both absorbed by the act of smoking. I needed time on my own. Stryder insisted I go to the Chasm and pass the news to Mary and the others as they arrived. Linda put her hand on my arm as I stood to leave and asked me to visit

when everything was back to normal. I headed home for a couple of hours sleep and got Tony to drop me back at the Chasm before he went off to work.

The Chasm was deserted. The garden was damp as I walked to the back door and there was condensation on the windows. Inside the house was deathly quiet. As I sat there waiting I could hear Angela's clock ticking in her bedroom, the fridge running in the pantry and a tap dripping in a sink; nothing else. At seven I got a call from Stryder and was relieved to have a set of instructions relayed from Angela. I was to send Mary to her just as soon as she appeared and I was to visit her at three in the afternoon. Stryder assured me she was 'more or less fine' and he was trying to convince her she should stay with her family while she recovered. It all sounded too humdrum and routine. My emotions were not ready for such a tilt at normality and I was surprised Stryder sounded so complacent.

The phone call disturbed someone in the distant reaches of the house. Faintly I could hear drawers being opened and closed, and then footsteps. Eventually and slowly Mary descended the stairs to the kitchen. Her long hair had not been brushed and her eyes were finding it hard to focus. She stopped and looked down at me, trailing a hand along the stair rail.

I went to the stove and heated the coffee pot I had prepared. Mary did not speak but went to the fridge and got herself a glass of juice and sat at the table, staring at nothing. I poured our coffees and went to join her. Before I could sit down she suddenly became alert, looked quickly around the room and out through the French doors. "Where is Angela?" she cried.

I looked into her face and said slowly and calmly, "Angela is fine, now fine." Her eyes flashed alarm and I went on. "Stryder found her unconscious in his room and

called an ambulance." I was confused by her response; Mary looked both shocked and ashamed. "She wants to see you. Stryder said she wants you to come as soon as you can. I'll make you toast while you get ready."

Mary continued silently staring at me so I added, "There was a note. There seems little doubt."

And here Mary spoke for the first time, ". . . and so she tried to kill herself." This was said in low tones of self-recrimination. "Something was wrong and I did nothing."

"You knew about the abortion?" I asked. There were tears on the edges of Mary's eyes and she used her sleeve to deal with these.

"I told you I had done something wrong." She took her coffee mug and headed back to her room. In just a few minutes she returned, jangling her keys this time as she came down the stairs. "Will you hold the fort while I'm gone?" I nodded. "And tell the others?" She stopped by the French doors. "Would you mind, just for my sake, could you be a little gentler in letting them know?"

How do you give someone bad news? I thought I had done the right thing, reassuring her Angela was OK but obviously I had not got something right. While waiting for the next person to show up I kept rehearsing other versions. None were any good. Then Stryder came through the door, barely shuffling. Everything about him shouted of tiredness and his clothes stank of crude, stale tobacco smoke. It was so obvious he even smelt it himself and quickly took off his jacket and jumper and threw them over the back of a chair on the patio. He asked me to make him coffee and toast

while he had a shower. When he returned he looked like a freshly minted version of sheer exhaustion.

"What a night." He slumped down, sat and tackled both the coffee and toast with some enthusiasm. Looking up from this late breakfast he said to me, "Angela insists you go and see her at three."

"Sure,' I said.

"I doubt she will be awake for much of the time but she just wants someone to be there with her."

"And what did she tell you?"

"Too much. Far too much." He looked wretched. "She did it all for me, or so she says."

Unlike Mary there was no guilt in his tone or demeanour and I wondered what it was he was supposed to have done.

"You know all that crap about how she has claimed to love me?" He shuddered, pushed his hands out, palms up, towards me. "She says she had the abortion for my sake. Pregnant to some other man, some Parisian academic who forced himself on her; she had the abortion because if she had the child I might never love her. Crazy stuff."

In the past, when I criticised his attitude to Angela he was amused by my concern.

"Then she tried to kill herself, not over the fact of the abortion, but because she finally realised our great love was over!"

"I guess you'll have to move out."

It was unimaginable they would continue to live under the same roof.

Stryder finished the last piece of toast and brushed the crumbs aside. "Apparently not."

"What?" I was struggling to understand.

"It doesn't make sense," he said. "Angela knows I don't love her but she doesn't want me to leave. But how can I live here?" He slumped deeper in his chair and said in a totally flat voice, "I don't want my presence to be a threat to her."

Well that was a start. Was he finally seeing Angela as an actual person? Was he now taking responsibility for his actions? We talked for a few minutes more and Stryder agreed he would stay in and tell the others what had happened. I'm sure he was going to have trouble sleeping, even with his extreme tiredness.

Angela started to stir but she was not yet awake. Sitting in the near darkness had become uncomfortable, so I raised the blinds slightly so there would be some natural light for her when she woke. I stood by her bed and looked down; slightly better colour, slightly stronger breathing. She opened her eyes and looked at me. She untucked her arm from below the covers and gave me a tiny wave, letting her hand fall back gently to lie by her side.

"Being dead would be so much easier," she said in a cracked and husky voice.

I passed her the glass of water; she drank too quickly and spluttered a bit. I mopped up the drips and sat by her side. "I'm glad you are still with us," I replied, ". . . there is so much to do, so much to discover, so much to learn . . . "

". . . and so many people to love," she said wearily and closed her eyes again. With bad timing and uncertain pitch she hummed the tune to The Airplane's *Somebody to Love*.

"All can't be lost," I said, ". . . you've still got the music."

She opened her eyes suddenly. "You bastard," she said. She reached out her hand and gave my arm a gentle squeeze. "You're going to have to play a lot of guitar and sing a lot of songs with me before you are forgiven for that quip."

"At least we have the time," I said.

"You can't imagine what it was like, having him in the same house and seeing him every day. I could not cope at all if he were not there." Angela took a handkerchief from under the pillow and struggled to sit more upright. "Before he went away, I thought he was changing. I thought he might grow to love me, you know." She frowned. "I heard him tell you I wasn't his type but that can't be true. I was sure he was wrong, but now. . ."

She lapsed into defeat.

"I have to learn to live without him and I can. And I can. I'll need you there."

"Yes?"

"To help me to remember. When I'm strong enough, I'll go."

I nodded as if I understood.

"I've made up my mind. I'm giving up uni. I'm changing my name. I'm heading out on the road. I'm going to form a band in Sydney. Living the blues and playing the blues, whatever it takes to keep me on the road. You know the wild ones, the

troubadours, the musical hustlers, well, I'll be one of those. Always moving on, living for music, never looking back and never being hurt."

Here her flamboyant gesture ran out of energy and she fell silently back to sleep.

After about an hour she woke up, stronger.

"You heard what I said?" she asked.

I nodded.

"I mean it," she said. "When I'm better, I'll be off on the road. Don't tell anybody, Mark. Don't even hint. Please, please, come and live in the Chasm until I go."

I agreed to stay in the Chasm while Angela was away, only going home to my family on the weekends. This evening the wood stove was lit in the kitchen. It made the room cosier. We all huddled together discussing Angela in desultory conversation. As soon as I arrived, Stryder left, finally succumbing to his tiredness.

Mary, looking as neat and as prim as a nurse, returned with the latest bulletin. Angela was now asleep for the night and would be released in a couple of days. Discarding her coat that looked like a cape, Mary pulled a chair up to the fire and stretched her hands towards the warmth. "She is going to stay with her family for a while. We are not to visit for at least a week."

"But I haven't seen her," grumbled Peter. "I have to see her."

"Tomorrow," said Mary.

Peter was not happy. “I just want an orderly and predictable life,” he said. “Not much chance of that.”

“The place is never the same when she is not here,” Edward said as he handed Mary a letter he had written for Angela. “It feels colder and more miserable.”

Peter, Edward and finally Mary drifted off upstairs leaving me with Jane, who was staring at the stove. All evening Jane had been on edge, not exactly restless but as if she was making a great effort to contain some explosion trying to make itself felt. She didn’t explode, not then. She walked to the side board, picked up a book and held it out to me as she went to sit down. It was a copy of *The Prime of Life*. I looked at it closely; often read and well-loved.

“Would you like to read this book?” Jane said. “It’s about de Beauvoir’s efforts to become a writer and her relationship with Sartre.’

I turned the book over to read the cover blurb and nodded. I had never finished the first volume of the autobiography but I didn’t want to be rude.

“I find it most interesting,” Jane told me. “It’s hard for women to find a proper mode of being, especially in their relations with men.”

I wondered what that meant. “Thanks,” I said. “It looks fascinating.” And dreading the moment I added, “Maybe we can talk about it afterwards?”

“That would be great,” she said and her mood lightened. “Let’s go to eat at one of those cheap places in Hindley Street, make a night of it.’

We stared at the fire for a few moments longer.

“Aren’t you curious for the truth of what’s been happening between Angela and Stephen?” she asked.

I wanted to say, ‘not really’ and flee the room but . . .

“You’re going to have to give up your blind hero worshipping of Stryder,” she said. “It’s not good for him and it’s not good for you.”

Oh my god, what was this all about? I’m sure I didn’t hide my panic.

“The two of them were stupid, really stupid. You know what Angela is like. Gets drunk, has sex, never takes precautions and then suffers remorse, regret and guilt.”

Well, yes, in a sense I did know. Because she thought she did not appeal to men, sex took her by surprise. She saw no need to go on the pill.

“Well that’s what happened. Before he went to San Francisco. They got drunk, got stoned and fucked all night. The next day he goes off without a word. Angela thought it was the start of a relationship. For him it was just another one night stand.” The anger was building with every word she spoke and even though she was talking softly and with great deliberation it was as if she was shouting.

“Don’t worry,” she said with bitterness. “It wasn’t his baby she aborted.” The brutality hurt. “Some French slob takes her out on New Year’s Eve, gets her drunk and it happens all over again, only this time, her luck ran out. So much for the sexual revolution.”

Chapter 12
What Was True and What Was Not

Late July 1969

We were relieved no one else was expected to come into the On Dit office for hours. We quickly made ourselves a coffee and got to work. There were four articles to be proofed and retyped if necessary. There was a flyer advertising the march in August, a couple of ads for anti-conscription organisations and we needed at least one photograph for dramatic visual effect. There would have to be some serious editing to get everything to fit in. I started to cut up the paragraphs of the articles and lay them out on a blank story board sheet.

"How's your reading going," Stryder smirked. "Will you have finished de Beauvoir in time for your date tonight?"

"It's not a date," I said.

"Well what do you call it?"

"Jane and Edward are a couple."

"You're going to dinner with Jane. Edward's not going with you. Looks like a date to me."

"We're just talking about a book for God's sake. It's not a romantic assignation."

"Hey, don't get upset. There's nothing wrong with you dating Jane. It will do you both good to go out together." Looking cheeky he added, "You can talk all that

highfalutin theory and not bother anybody else." Stryder shuffled a set of photographs. "If you want to blame anybody blame Big Jim. He was the one who told her your essay on Marcuse was, and I quote, 'outstanding'." He spanned out a number of photos in front of me. "Have a look at these," he said. "Which one do you want to use?"

I chose four and placed them against the layout board. In black and white they were all grim photos of the war in Vietnam, some famous, others obscure. There was the notorious photo of the Saigon police chief shooting an unarmed, captured Vietnamese fighter; the naked napalm victim running down an endless highway; a US soldier looking totally wrecked, staring into the far distance, silhouetted against a burning building; and the shot of an NLF flag flying over another bombed building in Hue during the Têt offensive. I didn't like any of them but I had to choose at least one. Too much worthy text was a drag. There had to be something visual.

"There are plenty more," said Stryder. He slid towards me a photo of women, children and old men lying dead in a ditch with an American soldier looking on with a gun in his hand.

"Well I'm not going to use that," I replied.

"But it makes the point," said Stryder. "Civilian casualties and the US looking on."

I shook my head, "Too ambiguous. The message would be in the caption."

"Civilian casualties grow as the war drifts on?"

"With the hint that these were victims of a US assault?"

"Yes." Stryder sat back, put his hands behind his head. "Have you heard rumours about a big US massacre of civilians, somewhere in the delta, after the Têt offensive?"

"No evidence as yet."

"The US military took photos. At some time, believe me, they will be published." He picked up the photo of the bodies in the ditch, examined it more closely, and waved it at me. "And one will look like this."

"So you think we should use it with a caption? 'Rumours abound of civilians killed by US forces after the Têt offensive,'" I suggested.

"Great caption."

"I'm not going to use the photograph. Not with a caption like that."

"It would work," said Stryder. "It would make the point about this dirty war."

"As I said, it wouldn't tell the truth and I'm not going to use it."

Stryder looked frustrated with my obstinacy. He stood up from the table and stalked around the room, pacing back and forth. Energetically he grabbed a duster and wiped some old chalked comments from the black board. Then he leant back against the wall, folded his arms and glared at me. "This isn't about the photos, is it? You've been so tense since the Angela thing." Defiantly he added, "Tell me straight. What's your problem?"

"Sure," I said. "You're right. I should have said something." I got up and walked around to the other side of the table to face him. "It's been bugging me since

that afternoon at the Chasm, when your mother burst in to confront us all. What did you think of Angela's response to her claim the baby was yours?"

"God," he said. "It was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life." He looked relieved and sat down. "No need to stand over me. I will talk," he added.

I gave him some space.

"I thought she was magnificent," he said. "The right combination of defiance and disbelief and so beautifully calm, considering the circumstances."

"I would have to agree with that," I said slowly. "What about her denial?"

Here he blustered, looking slightly embarrassed. "She told the truth. It wasn't me. It was that French bloke. She's told everyone."

"It could have been you, couldn't it? You could have been the father."

"What do you mean?"

"Angela has mentioned a drunken one night stand between the two of you. You insisted she wasn't your type and you couldn't fancy her at all."

From so recently sitting down and appearing calm he was now back on his feet and pacing around the room. "I don't think my sex life should be a matter for general conversation," he said.

"Don't be silly. Your sex life has been the subject of conversation for years. You can't go around with an endless collection of young blondes on your arm without people noticing."

"Oh right! It's open season now is it."

I said nothing and waited.

"Ok, we had a fling. Yes there was some drink and some drugs and we had sex. So what? Just a joyous spontaneous moment."

"It meant something to Angela."

"I don't think so." He paced around looking more and more uncomfortable. "It's not the secret to the suicide attempt," he said, without conviction.

"What was in the note you found?" I turned the photos face down. I couldn't look at them while I talked to Stryder.

Stryder forced his hand into the pocket of his jeans and with his fingers extracted a much crumpled piece of paper which he handed to me. He then turned his back and slumped against the far wall.

The note read: "If it had been our child would it be different?"

So Angela had intended to be found and to be found by Stryder. Perhaps she had taken the overdose and had gone to his room to leave the note but collapsed before she could get away. I read the note again and again. "What does it mean?"

Stryder turned, angry, uncomfortable. "The child was not mine and the suicide was not about that."

"No," I told him. "It was about her relationship with you."

"What relationship?" said Stryder. "Sex on one night doesn't make a relationship."

"Perhaps Angela thought it did. You two have been friends for years. She has loved you for ever. What did you think you were doing?"

"Having fun." Now he returned to the table and sat opposite me and continued. "It couldn't have been much of relationship. She went off with this French academic on New Year's Eve. They obviously didn't take precautions."

"You did?"

"Of course. Can you just shut up about this and can we finish the bloody layout of this pamphlet. After all, it's for your bloody militant demonstration."

We worked on in silence. I studied the photos one by one while Stryder started to work on the placement of the text, discarding paragraphs and realigning those remaining.

"I'm going to use the photo of Hue, the one with the NLF flag flying from the ruined citadel but we are going to crop it so the bodies of the US soldiers aren't seen. There will be no caption. People can make of it what they will. I think it speaks for itself. From this point on the whole world knows the US can't win this war."

I felt uncomfortable as I waited for Jane to collect me from the main reading room of the Library. The conversation with Stryder had not helped. I looked up when I heard her come through the doorway. She was dressed with more formality than usual, twin set and pearls rather than jeans and a jumper. My awkwardness increased. Although I had carefully chosen my clothes, they were only slacks, a long sleeved shirt, a short sleeved jumper and a grey corduroy coat. Even before she said anything I felt they might not be good enough.

Jane hesitated. Instead of going out to eat, she asked if I would mind going home with her, to have dinner with her parents. Apparently her English grandmother was going to call that evening to speak to her. It made little difference to me. I was not going to feel at ease regardless of where we went to eat. The plan had been to go to a restaurant, a common enough experience for Jane but a rarity for me. Before I left him Stryder had jokingly lectured me about how to know what knife or fork to use. All he said heightened my fear of the social implications of massed cutlery.

As we drove to her house, Jane was chatting away about her supervision session with Big Jim. She spoke cheerfully enough but the session had obviously unsettled her. I thought they must have been discussing more than Max Weber's pessimism. Jane was desperate to get good grades and worried she was not working hard enough to win the international scholarship she needed for her independence. When she stopped the car in the gravel driveway she turned to me. "My mother is somewhat formidable," she said, looking sternly at me to underline this warning. "She knows everybody who counts in this town. My father is gorgeous and kind. They will want to debate everything at length. Don't let it worry you."

How could it not? I quickly considered the territory covered by a word like 'formidable' and in that instant I thought of the pleasure of eating alone in the refectory. Would 'gorgeous and kind' be enough to offset 'formidable'?

Jane's parents lived in Mitcham in a large bluestone mansion set in leafy grounds with a curving driveway and a winding gravel path leading to the front door. Jane ushered me in, past the lounge room, past the formal dining room (I looked inside and saw a fearsome array of cutlery), past the kitchen and out to a red tiled veranda where her parents were sitting in comfortable, well-worn cane chairs. They greeted Jane

warmly and stood to meet me. Jane introduced them as 'Dianna' and 'Robert'. I tensed as we shook hands. Robert directed me to a chair and went to pour a glass of wine. "This is one of our favourite white burgundies, Australian," and he added, "excellent with chilled green olives." He held out a delicate blue and white Chinese porcelain bowl.

Dianna looked at me with obvious curiosity. "I know your Vice Chancellor," she said. "I was with him yesterday. He said you were one of the most interesting students he had talked to about changing the University Act."

"Oh cut it out Mother. Mark's only just arrived. Give him a few moments to get used to us first." She looked despairingly at me. "Why were you talking to the Vice Chancellor?" she asked.

"He invited me to tea and wanted my opinion on his reforms," I said.

"Why you?" She appeared suspicious. Then she picked up her glass and hurried away through the French doors, into the garden.

I was bemused; I felt like I had been invited to a dinner with cannibals and was the first course. Dianna apologised for her unsuitable opening remarks, gestured for Robert to persuade Jane to return from the garden and moved to sit next to me. I could not help but notice she held a book in her hand and glanced at the title, *The Four Gated City*.

"Doris Lessing," she said, gently putting the book down. "Do you know her work?"

"I have read *The Golden Notebook*," I said, "but not this one."

"Didn't you find the psycho-analytic stuff hard to take. Madness doesn't sound like liberation to me." She looked serious and asked, "And what are you reading at the moment?"

What was I to say? "I'm reading *The Prime of Life*," I said.

"Did Jane lend it to you?"

I nodded. Dianna smiled with surprise. Her mouth formed an almost perfect circle to match her face and her raised, widened eyes. "Oh," she said. "I see." And then she went on. "You should read this one." And she gestured towards her book. "When you finish your thesis? According to the blurb 'it probes the tormented spirit of our times'."

I could think of no response to this but I was damned if I was going to be silent. I had to say something so I blurted out, "Have you lived in Adelaide long?"

Dianna laughed. "So you are the good host in this gathering. Well I came to Australia after the war to marry Robert. I followed him to Adelaide with hope but no great expectations about the city."

She was delightful. I was falling under her spell. I wanted to know more about this kind of mother in her flimsy flowing fashionable dress and artistic shawl. I could now see the reality behind Jane's term 'formidable' but saw a sharp intellect and a fierce sort of kindness as well. I stumbled over a stilted question. "With your sophistication and cultured background, how do you find living in Adelaide?" I felt a fool for being so awkward.

Dianna gave me a quizzical look. "Much the same as you, I suppose. I praise the Lord and John Bishop for the Festival and I wait for my copies of the *New York Review*

of Books and the TLS." Her tone was tantalisingly dry. "I can escape to London when it all gets too much. I don't suppose you can. How do you find Adelaide?"

I spoke as lightly as I could. "Not as good as you do, well at least not in the way you do. I'm hoping it will be a fine place to come from, at some stage. I just have to get through the next few years. Call-up and all that."

The muscles in Dianna's face tightened. "I understand," she said and tilted her head slightly. "How has your mother responded to your call-up?"

We were interrupted by Jane returning from the garden, an empty glass in one hand and her arm around her father. She was smiling in a way I could not recall seeing her do before, completely relaxed. Whatever problems she had been wrestling with over the past few weeks must have been erased. Her father kissed her on the forehead as he handed her into her chair, collected the wine bottle from its cooler and filled her glass. I declined the wine he offered me. He went to top up Dianna's glass and stood awkwardly by the door. "Should we eat soon?"

"In a moment," Dianna replied. She turned to me and said, "Since it is just a family meal –informal, no fuss - I thought we might eat in the kitchen."

She smiled at me in a charming, knowing way.

"Why is the dining room all set up?" asked Jane curtly.

"Oh lunch tomorrow dear. Do you want to come? It's a fund raiser for the women's health clinic. Come if you're interested. I would be pleased."

Jane shook her head warily.

The kitchen was large, a pleasant space in which to eat. The first course was already on the table, prawn cocktails made with prawns, not shrimps and with a herb vinaigrette rather than a pub style pink mayonnaise. When this was finished Dianna cleared the table and then set out the cutlery for the main course, once again smiling reassuringly at me. The main course was a fricassee of lamb with dauphin potatoes and green beans. Now the conversation and the wine started to flow in equal measure. I even accepted a second glass of red wine "A Coonawarra Cabernet," Robert explained, holding his glass against the light. I copied his gesture and admired the dancing colours on the surface. It was well worth breaking my usual self-restraint for this wine. Jane was not being restrained. She was drinking more enthusiastically than normal and exchanging witty commentary with both her father and her mother; on the University, an exhibition at the Art gallery, a whole range of novels people were reading and she worked generously to keep me in the conversation and feeling comfortable.

Dianna looked encouragingly at me and asked the question every honours student dreads, "And your thesis, how are you going?"

Jane rolled her eyes and looked heavenwards, "Please mother!"

"It's OK," I said to Jane and to Dianna, "I'm having fun. I'm enjoying research, despite the topic. I hadn't meant to write about Vietnam but in the end I couldn't avoid it."

Robert, who had been fairly quiet, leant forward and asked what it was meant to be about. So I explained as quickly as I could how I had got from a general argument about US involvement with Asia after World War Two to a more detailed case study of the war itself.

"Being called up can't make it easier," he said. I noticed Jane was looking at him with open affection. I hadn't seen a lot of that in the interactions between my friends and their rich parents. Robert went on, "There was no doubt in World War Two. It was easier for us."

"But this time, there is only doubt," was Dianna's acerbic comment.

"And it isn't made any easier now it is certain the Americans will lose," I said.

"Oh, the war has years to go before it is over," said Dianna. "So much more damage to be done, both to the Vietnamese and to the Americans. America will lose faith in itself for years to come."

"What would be bad about that?" Jane asked and we descended into a free for all on every associated topic imaginable: Laos, Cambodia, China, the presidential elections in the US, the federal election in Australia. They argued long and passionately but with a warm family feeling. I watched it all and thought about the stunted conversation we had over our dinner table. I knew why we didn't talk as freely as this but it was a glimpse of another kind of family life. The longer they talked the more I understood Jane's description of her father but her reservations about her mother did not make sense.

Our political ramblings were interrupted when Jane went to answer the phone call from her grandmother. Dianna, who was seated next to me, put her hand on my arm and explained this was a birthday phone call. She told me Jane was close to her grandmother and whenever there was a crisis in Jane's life, she liked to talk things over with her. Robert nodded his agreement, and added in a slightly earnest whisper, "And yes, there is a crisis at the moment".

Dianna took over and spoke briskly. “Edward is a lovely boy. We have known his family for ever but Edward and Jane are not destined for each other. They make each other miserable.”

This was news to me. I thought they were perfectly suited. Now Dianna turned to me and politely said, “Spend some time with her, please? I know the Honours year is tough and you are all so competitive but if you could just let her talk, it would help.”

Robert offered further wine and coffee and again I declined.

“She likes you Mark,” Dianna said. “Just be careful. Things might be more complex than you think.”

I could still hear Jane’s voice in the distance. Dianna was no longer calm. “Come with me,” she said, “Robert, fix Mark a glass of your special liqueur port.” She then led the way to the room she described as ‘the library’. It looked much like I imagined a small room in a gentleman’s club in England; bookshelves on all sides, filled floor to ceiling with mostly old hard cover books, with only one bookcase behind the door, filled with paperbacks. There was a large dark wood desk, with a banker’s light and writing paper neatly stacked to one side of a large pad of blotting paper. There were letters neatly placed on the other side. Dianna went to stand by the desk as she gestured me into one of two large faded blue leather armchairs. (I’d never sat in a leather arm chair before – indeed I’m not sure I had ever seen one.) With her left hand gently resting on the edge of the desk, her head lifted slightly back and her glass of port raised theatrically in the other, she looked steadily down on me. I was completely intimidated and unprepared. Her comments on Jane and Edward had been enough for me. I could hardly imagine what would come next.

"What do you know about Elizabeth Ryder?" she asked cautiously.

I stumbled in my response. "Not much. She hates me and doesn't want me spending time with Stryder."

"What did you make of her outburst when you were with Angela the other day? I gather there was embarrassment all round."

Embarrassment? Fury on her part and slow burning anger on ours. "Well it didn't go well. She was hysterical."

Dianna gave up her pose by the desk and moved to sit on the arm of the chair opposite. "She has had an unfortunate life." My doubts showed for she went on quickly, "Full of disappointments. Elizabeth was the daughter of a vicar from rural Kent. She met Charles in London during the war. It never worked out. When they arrived he settled her in Adelaide and went to work for an oil exploration company and has been away more or less ever since."

This glimpse of Elizabeth's life meant little to me. So they didn't get on. Their relationship was poisonous. I knew that.

Dianna said, "Mark, I'm not asking you to do anything. Just be aware of the background. Stephen and Elizabeth both need help."

On the way back to the Chasm Jane stopped on Unley Road just across from a coffee shop, somewhere near the Cremorne Hotel. I vaguely remembered Mary saying she would be singing there, late at night. I'd done a gig there once with Angela. It was a good place. With a mild apology Jane took me inside. She was distracted and uneasy

once again. The cafe was deserted and lit only by candles in wax dripped Chianti bottles. We sat in the window corner and sipped our chinottos.

Jane examined me carefully and said, “I don’t understand it. I never understand it. Every time one of my male friends meets Dianna they fall for her charm.”

“Yes,” I said. “I can see why.”

“You can see why I can’t understand or why they fall for her?”

“It’s not a competition. It is possible to like you both. I found your mother fascinating, beguiling. With your family I also saw you as happier, more relaxed, witty, funny and warm. I can’t understand why you are not happy with your parents or why you feel driven to leave.”

“Mark, I just have to get out.” There was resignation in her eyes. “It’s this city. It’s this place and yes, it is my mother.”

Chapter 13
The Demonstration

August 1969

"Why did you tell Angela not to march?" Stryder strode up to our meeting point on the steps of the Bonython Hall. Despite the threatening weather a few stalwarts were already sheltering in the entrance, well rugged up in long coats, beanies and scarves and carrying a varied collection of furled banners and flags.

I considered Stryder carefully. "Where did you get such a loud jacket?"

"It's Edward's," he said showing off his bright red plaid coat.

"You'll be the most obvious person in the march," I said.

"No I won't. I'm going as the On Dit photographer. I don't want anyone to think I'm part of the demonstration."

"Hey Mark," Mary called. "That was the right thing to say to Angela." She joined us. "She is relieved someone told her to say at the Chasm."

Stryder interrupted. "Why Mark? What have you got planned?"

We huddled against the sandstone front wall of the building. "Nothing much. Just a stroll down to Victoria Square, then once around and a brief rally. Mary is going to sing, aren't you?"

Mary nodded her head.

"If it's going to be so boring why couldn't Angela come?" Stryder asked.

"You never know what's going to happen. I don't want to worry about Angela."

"Mark's right," said Mary. "She can't deal with crowds at the moment."

"But getting better," Stryder said.

I left them to do my duties as an organiser. At the appropriate time, I took the megaphone from one of the marshals and addressed the crowd. I was surprised there were so many people there, about a couple of hundred. This would increase the disruption considerably. I made the usual pre-march noises, outlined the route of the march and stated the slogans we were using this time. "End the War: End the Draft." And "No Conscription: No War." It wouldn't make any difference, with the crowd that turned up it wouldn't be long before more provocative chants took over and that was fine with me. This time I was just a little bit more insistent about the importance of discipline and the need to do as the march organisers instructed. The crowd laughed at my concern.

The march formed up in ranks of eight, wide enough to block two lanes and ensure disruption. The only policeman on duty stopped the traffic to allow us out onto the roadway without interruption. A good sign. As always I was in the front row and could easily see what was happening. By the time we got to the Pulteney Street, Rundle Street intersection there was chaos. Cars were backed up in every direction, pedestrians spilled onto the roadway and the pace of our march slowed, maximising the disruption. Even the lone cop had disappeared. Our chants echoed off the buildings and drowned out the abuse shouted by irate drivers and pedestrians. Loud shouts of "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, The NLF are gonna win" alternated with "One side right, One side wrong, Victory to the Vietcong." Seething congestion in Rundle Street added to our delight. This was the disruption I wanted; no shopping as usual while the war went on. We were

getting euphoric. Big Jim and Jane were marching together about six rows back and I could clearly hear his American accent joining our chorus of dissent. I doubted Jane would join in; she sternly opposed open support for the enemy. Stryder dashed here and there, taking photos of the marchers, the bystanders and of the massed red, black and occasional NLF flags. As he danced past the front of the march he gave me a big grin and an enthusiastic, thumbs up sign. So far so good.

Sometimes there was a sense of menace, from the police or hostile bystanders but once we moved away from the shopping precinct, there was nothing. The roads were so broad our chanting started to sound puny. It felt more like a stroll than a demonstration. My attention wandered. I checked my watch, plenty of time for an after-march pub session. Protest marches can be so boring.

As we approached Victoria Square I realised there were two ways to go around; on the outside along a perfectly rectangular set of roads or on the inside on the diagonal divided sides of the main road through the town. In an instant I thought, why not do both? I gave the order to turn sharp left as we went through the traffic lights. I realised my mistake. I had turned the march so we were now storming along directly at the police headquarters. It looked like we would swarm straight up the steps and into the building. I could hear Big Jim shout a warning. Too late. A squad of motor cycle police rode their bikes out of a side lane and swung them across the foot of the steps and a group of uniformed police lined up behind them. This was not the confrontation I wanted. I slowed the march to a near halt. At the rear a group of anarchists set up a chant “Smash the State. Smash the State.” Now I was frightened. A second line of motorcycle police rode across the street and stopped twenty feet from the front line of the demonstration. I tried to keep order in the front ranks. Uniform police ran towards us, slowing just behind the motor bikes. I urged those near me to stand their ground.

The noise behind us suddenly lessened. I looked around. The bulk of the demonstration had either faded away or had moved into Victoria Square where our sound system had been set up. Something was happening but I could not see what it was. I gave an instruction to break ranks and head for the rallying point. As soon as we moved off, the lines of motor cycle police went away. My heart was beating recklessly and my throat was dry.

The late afternoon light was fading and the sky was dark with clouds threatening rain. The wind had picked up again. About a hundred protestors remained. Jane and Big Jim, easily identified even at a distance, frantically gestured for people to sit down. There was a melee going on. Bystanders were attacking the march. There were no police. I started towards the remnants of the demonstration. At the edge of the road I was grabbed by a large man. It was my old school friend Max in plain clothes. "I've got you now," he shouted, "stop struggling." Finally I was arrested. The first time in all the years I'd been demonstrating. I deserved it. My attention was drawn to Mary. She was moving around trying to keep people calm. In faint snatches I could hear her singing "We shall overcome." I saw this man - young, athletic with short hair - wade into the crowd. When he was a few feet from Mary, he lunged forward, swinging his fists. She was not directly facing him. The first blow hit the side of her head; the second took her to the ground. I went to cross the road but Max tightened his grip. I shouted at Max to help her. He did nothing even when the man kicked Mary as she lay crumpled on the ground. Another two burly men stepped through the crowd to get to her. At that her attacker walked calmly to the edge, took one last look towards Mary and walked off. Now my attention went to Stryder in his dramatic red jacket. He too was heading for Mary, taking photos as he went. One of the burly men caught him. He grabbed at the camera. It was attached to a strap around Stryder's neck. I could see him dragging

Stryder forward when the strap snapped. He grabbed the camera and smashed it into Stryder's face and then he leant forward and bashed it repeatedly on the ground. He was joined by another of the men who wrestled Stryder away. Max held me more tightly than before. Paddy wagons stopped near the sprawling brawling crowd. Uniformed police jumped from the vans and started taking away a lot of demonstrators, collecting many of them from the burly men.

"So they are plain clothes police," I said to Max.

He just grunted. There was no point in struggling any more. I waited to be taken into custody. I could do nothing but watch my fellow protesters and friends being taking to the wagons. Big Jim was comforting Jane, holding her tight. At one stage she called me to come across to them. When she saw I was being held by Max, she turned away. The paddy wagons started to leave. I thought Max must be planning to walk me back to the police station at his leisure but no. As the last wagon left and the crowd started to stand up again. Max said, "It's over," and he let me go.

I ran across the road, dodging cars, heading towards where I had last seen Big Jim and Jane. Protestors stood around in bewildered clumps.

"Where's Jane?" I called to Big Jim as I approached.

"Stay calm," Jim urged. "These people need to be looked after." I paid more attention. Demonstrators were huddled together, staring around, fearing further assaults; some were crying while others were helping their friends to their feet. The scene looked like the aftermath of a natural disaster.

"Is Jane OK?"

Jim put his arm around my shoulders and led me to one side.

"Scared, of course, and rather angry with you." For some reason he smiled at me. "She's gone in the ambulance with Mary." Jim pulled a notebook from his large coat pocket and a biro and handed them to me. "Start collecting names and addresses of people who witnessed what happened. Try to find out who was arrested."

Jim looked around. "If people want to stay, move them across the road to the watch house," he said. "I'm off to arrange bail and I'll get a lawyer down here as quickly as I can." He hurried away. I remained confused. My actions caused this mayhem. So I started doing the rounds, getting the names of people who could act as witnesses. Everyone was in shock. Despite their radicalism they had expected a fair deal from the police. If we had charged the police station or blockaded a building there would have been less surprise. For us, the attack was unprovoked. There was a common thread to all the stories I heard. As soon as the demonstrators arrived at the area for the post-march rally, a gang of men waded into the crowd and started to push, shove and punch the demonstrators. As people responded and tried to protect themselves, or went to aid friends, the fighting increased. At no time had these people identified themselves as police. It only became clear they were not bystanders when they started to cart people off to the paddy wagons. There was one exception. Those who saw it were convinced Mary was not initially attacked by a policeman. Witnesses thought he was a soldier and rumours were circulating that he was a conscript from Woodside. Even amidst the other assaults and injuries, the ferocity of the attack on Mary stood out. More than thirty people had been arrested.

The evening was now much colder. The wind was blowing more strongly. It was a miserable night to be standing around in Victoria Square. Gradually the crowd dispersed. A fair number went with me to the alleyway by the watch house to hold a vigil until our comrades were released. Pleasingly, some adults came to join us and

brought warm parcels of fish and chips and bottles of soft drink. This helped keep our morale from falling even lower. Big Jim returned with a lawyer who disappeared into the building to start the negotiations for bail. We were joined by a number of university staff, the professors from the Departments of Economics and Law and a senior lecturer from the Politics Department, all with documents to provide the guarantees to support bail applications. I was pleased when Robert Morton turned up. Jane had called him and we had the first news about Mary. She had regained consciousness and her broken arm had been set and was in plaster and a number of wounds on her back and legs had been stitched. Robert assured us she was not at all cast down by events. If anything she was elated. There was a policeman outside her room and she was praying for him, loudly. She would be charged and released in the morning.

Gradually the prisoners were allowed out on bail and as they left the building we cheered and shouted. With each release our crowd grew smaller as friends and parents took their arrested away with them. At around nine thirty the lawyer came out to announce everyone had now been bailed and had gone home. I hadn't seen Stryder. I was told he was the first one released. He had his own lawyer and they had left through the main door. Jim offered me a lift home but I declined. I wanted to walk back through the deserted city and think about what had gone wrong. I did not feel too good and, just to make it worse, the gusting wind now blew in strong pelting rain.

Chapter 14
Thinman at the Party

Late August 1969

"Hey Mark," a couple of Maoists, dressed to look like builders labourers, called to me. "Great demo," they said. "You showed real guts taking on the pigs." I looked warily at them. None of them had hung around to see what happened and before the march they had criticised me for being petty bourgeois and planning a tame-cat stroll through the town. "We're running a special forum on student power. Some of the big men from The Party are coming. They want you there."

I made an ambiguous gesture and allowed myself to be moved away by the milling party goers. Jane took my arm and handed me a glass of beer and led me to a corner where we could lean against the wall and watch the crowd.

"Mad at me?" I asked. "Other than the Maoists," and I pointed in their direction, "everyone else is."

Jane balanced herself more comfortably on the wall by half raising her left leg as a prop, showing off a classy pair of black boots. She took a mouthful of her beer and looked over the heads of the crowd towards the garden. "Are you looking forward to playing tonight?" she asked.

"Look, I know you were upset," I said. "It was my fault. Spur of the moment."

"Was it?" she asked. "I thought this was your real plan to make us militant."

"It was a stupid idea," I said. "Never change the route of the march."

“Big Jim worked it out,” she said. “He actually praised you for how you handled ‘the police steps incident’ as it is being called.”

I smiled wryly.

“I don’t feel so badly about it now,” she said and raised her glass to clink it with mine. “Then I didn’t get hurt. Mary and Stryder think differently.” She sent me off to get some food while she looked for Big Jim. She had not come with Edward. I hoped Jim was there. I wanted to talk to him.

Some Young Labor activists caught me as I was heading for the table. They opposed conscription and the war and were uncomfortable when talking with those of us who had actually been called up. They preferred the Labor Party to activism and wanted everything kept quiet until after the election. “Hey Mark. Pretty crazy to try and launch an assault on police headquarters on a wet Wednesday night!”

“Crazy at any time,” I said.

“Fortunately your troops deserted you.”

“They did the right thing,” I said.

“Yeah, but you must have felt like an idiot standing there, confronting the police all on your own.”

I went to move on.

“The ‘police steps incident’ is going to rival Custer’s Last Stand.” They laughed and gestured rudely towards me.

I sat on a step to eat some roast chicken and salad, trying to balance the plate and a glass of water. A young woman I knew, Stephanie, sat down beside me. Her

brother, Sam, had been conscripted and was now in Vietnam. Her life was an unending litany of anxiety for him. Against her parents' wishes she was involved in the anti-war movement. She said protest was the best way to get her brother back. Despite her small physique and general timidity, in a demonstration she was defiant, carrying a placard and marching in the front ranks. We exchanged greetings and family news. Sam was ok but they hadn't heard from him for a while. "I just want to tell you how well you handled the police steps incident," she said. "When I saw those motor bikes I was scared, but you kept us all calm. If we had turned and run, there would have been chaos. Who knows how many would have been injured? Thanks anyway," she said and walked off.

This was a party I didn't want to be at. Angela insisted as I had committed to play in her band. Now I was pleased. I could hide behind my guitar and concentrate on Angela's piano playing and song making. Her voice was better than ever, more lived in, determined, with no weakness. The drummer never came on time so we worked our way through some Beatles, early Stones, Kinks and a few of the more obvious hits from the Mamas and the Papas.

Mary turned up part way through the set. She looked absolutely dreadful with a deathly pallor achieved entirely without make-up. Most of her injuries were concealed by her clothes, apart from the broken arm which was now in plaster. When Angela started to sing the Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody*, Mary limped to the front and stood by her side. They sang in achingly perfect harmony making this a joint statement of unrequited love. I didn't want to think about it. As they finished, the drummer walked in looking dishevelled. Stryder arrived with a young blonde on his arm; they were laughing together. There was no hiding the damage done by the camera being smashed into his face, the black eyes, the stiches and the taped nose did not help. Stryder and his

date disappeared into the crowd and the drummer joined the band, looking surprisingly contrite.

Angela stepped down to go and find Stryder, so the drummer and I did a fairly restrained version of *Paint it Black*. The mood of the crowd felt good. There was a lot of movement and noise as people greeted each other, shared drinks and there was the faintest fading hint of pot smoke clinging to the clothes of some who had come in from the garden. There was a bit of dancing on the fringes, mostly girls dancing together while the blokes hung around in clumps. A few people tried to sing along with the band. Nothing unusual.

When Angela returned she said, "It doesn't suit his mood to read poetry."

I nodded. As expected he did not want to join us.

She went on, "He's going to sing. He says he's not angry any more just bitter."

"I'll catch him later," I said.

She shook her head. "He said to tell you he was going to sing *Positively 4th Street* but he's changed his mind."

"I get it," I told her. "He hasn't forgiven me yet."

So we cranked up the volume and went for underground classics from the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish and, of course, Janis Joplin. This encouraged more dancing and more talking, well shouting actually, from the crowd. The parents were freaked but we ignored them. In a pause between songs, looking dislocated, Stryder walked up to the stage. He frowned at me and then without emotion he turned towards Angela and said "Thin Man". He stood at the mike and stared at the

crowd surprised to find himself there. It was as if he was lost, staring into a mirror and trying to work out who was looking back at him. He counted Angela in and she started the song with a stark statement of the melody. I added some sparse but large, echoing, open chords and the drummer tapped a softly underscored rhythm.

Stryder started the opening lines in a bare whisper of anguish. Dylan's version sounds like a bitter condemnation of those who can't handle the unpredictable ways of the world. Stryder's bewildered voice changed the meaning. The sneer was gone. Now it was the singer who was Mr Jones, and the song was about his confusion and his disorientation. It was as if Stryder was trying to come to terms with everything that had happened, his anger over being arrested and, worse, having it all on the front pages of the papers. Although he had told Angela his anger was fading there was enough left to feed this performance. With considerable vehemence he worked his way through the verses. The drama of the song and the intensity of the performance stopped the crowd; laughter and idle mingling were replaced by a focus on the band. Stryder now sang with bitterness unmistakably directed at himself. It was hard to look away. Even the drummer caught the mood and produced an inspired fragmented and syncopated solo to match the sense of chaos and unpredictability. Angela and I exchanged glances, delighted by Stryder's performance and the way the audience responded. I forgave him the jibe about *Positively 4th Street*. I had to talk to him. I had to explain.

When he finished, Stryder stood there for a moment. Then he nodded to Angela and walked from the stage. He put an arm around his young date and together they moved through the room. I saw him pause where Mary was sitting awkwardly by a pillar. Stryder bent down, spoke to her and helped her to her feet and they all moved towards the front door, his arms around them both. He looked back at the party, apparently bewildered, and was gone. The drummer kept up a quiet tapping on the

drums and looked down at the floor, his most expressive gesture all night. Angela got up from the piano and leant towards me and said, “I don’t want to follow that.”

Chapter 15
The British and the Blues

Early September 1969

"Tuesday night. I'm doing a Bessie Smith gig at the British. Do you want to come for a counter tea?" Angela asked. I distrusted her motives. As Stryder and I were not talking we did not do the many things we usually did together and it was harder for Angela to spend time with Stryder without being obvious. She was determined to see us reconciled, whether we wanted to or not. When I went to meet Angela she immediately, noisily, scooped Stryder up and marched us out of the garden and onto Stanley Street. We were heading down the hill. Boisterously Angela held both our hands, swinging her arms like a school girl with her friends, babbling enthusiastically to mask any awkwardness. She started to sing a silly song she had just made up about the people who lived in the Chasm, to the tune of *Widecombe Fair*:

> Mark David, Mark David come live in The Chasm
>
> All a-long, down a-long, lee
>
> For I want you to see what a fine time we're havin'
>
> With Mary Glenn, Stephen Ryder, Edward Leyton,
>
> Angela Falconer, Jane Morten,
>
> And Peter the Post Grad and all
>
> And Peter the Post Grad and all.

It was nonsense and we hardly wanted to join it but Angela was insistent. At least while we sang this stuff we didn't have to talk. It gave us time to think about how we would react to each other once we got to the pub.

Strangely enough, singing this gibberish improved our mood and we forgot whatever hostility had been raised by the demonstration. We were acting like friends, so there were no issues to discuss. Just being close to Stryder made Angela high. As we walked down the lane from Melbourne Street to the British she let go of our hands and put her arms around our waists and pulled us towards her so we were now stumbling along. In an embarrassing huddle we staggered through the door into the pub.

At first glance, the lower end of North Adelaide, the area closest to the River Torrens, was much like the rest of this inner city suburb; green, leafy and quietly residential. This corner of North Adelaide was special for here was the British, the heart of bohemian Adelaide and one of our favourite pubs. By the 1960s the front bar was a seething, egalitarian maelstrom, indifferent to distinctions of class or gender. On a Friday night women were as conspicuous as men in the Front Bar and in the mob spilling over and onto the footpath, sharing in a communal system to ensure drinks bought at the bar were passed out doors and windows and over the head of the crowd to find their way to the rightful drinkers. On any Friday night gathered here would be a motley collection of voluntary exiles, a counter-cultural elite of judges, lawyers, doctors, trade unionists, journalists, artists, musicians, writers, dissidents, assorted malcontents and, of course, student radicals, especially those who made this area their home.

It was never so crowded on a Tuesday night. There was plenty of room for locals. It was easy for Angela to organise a round table in a corner and we were left

there while she went off to get drinks and food and check all was set up for her performance.

"So were you pleased with the demonstration?" Stryder asked in casual tones, picking up a beer mat and trying to balance it on its side.

"You've got to be kidding," I told him. "So many arrests, so much violence. All I got was guilt."

"You can't complain," he said. "you wanted us to be radicalised

"So you think I planned it?

"Something like that."

I looked at him, trying to project my disappointment and an apology at the same time. He ignored me.

"It had to be a set up," he said. "Not by you." He shook his head. "By them. They had those plain clothed police in place just waiting for us to arrive. They hit us as soon as we got to the lawns in Victoria Square. They knew what they were doing."

"More stuff up than conspiracy," I asserted.

"There was a spy," Stryder responded. "That's how they knew what you were up to."

"Not likely," I told him. "They wouldn't need a spy. It's not as if I made any secret of what I wanted to happen, or where we were going to rally in Victoria Square."

"Yeah, but that off duty soldier who beat the crap out of Mary? Why didn't they arrest him?"

“Look mate,” I said. “It was my fault. I should have known better. The police do these things all the time. We should have been better prepared, especially as I was trying to get as much disruption as possible.”

“Well you got more than you planned.” This time Stryder smiled. “I tell you what,” he said as he rearranged the place mats, the salt and pepper shakers and the ash tray on the small table top. “It was just so crude. The police hit me, arrest me, charge me, and I find my anger against the whole system getting greater and greater. It was better when I could just blame you.”

Before I could respond, Angela brought the cutlery, napkins and a jug of beer, juggling them all as skilfully as if she had been a proper waitress. “The benefits of a miss-spent youth.” We laughed as she stood with her hands on her hips and said, “I don’t get you two. One minute you’re sulking, not talking to each other. The next minute you’re as thick as thieves, giggling together.” As she sat down she leaned in towards us and whispered, “Guess who’s in the next room? Jane and Big Jim. Having a private drink. She could be more discreet.”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” I said. “Jane just wants to talk about her thesis. Next week we are doing the same.”

Angela and Stryder looked at each other as if they were in on a conspiracy about which I did not have a clue. They were right to be amused.

When the food arrived Angela ate her steak with great enthusiasm. She hadn’t been as good as this with food for some time. Her face was lightly blotched and there were dark rings under her eyes.

"What matters most to you, at the moment, your music or your thesis?" I asked her.

"Music, of course."

"Classical or rock?" asked Stryder and then he laughed. "I don't know why I'm joining in. I haven't done anything on my thesis for weeks. Does it matter? What's the point of literary criticism anyway? It's hard enough to get people to read."

Angela sat tall, alert, ticking off the names on her hands as she went. "You don't write criticism, I don't play classical music. Mary no longer does social work. Edward is too busy smoking, drinking and watching sport. Mark is the only one who thinks his thesis is worthwhile. So that is why Jane is talking to Big Jim. She must have her problems as well."

Angela finished her meal and lit a cigarette. She puffed it for a short moment, made a face and stubbed it out. She picked up the ashtray, leant across and moved it to another table. "I'd better go and earn my supper," and she headed off to her twelve string guitar and a set of Bessie Smith songs.

We watched her disappear into the larger of the side rooms. A few moments later we heard her pick out the opening theme of *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* and we both smiled as it morphed vigorously into the first song of the night, *Oh Daddy*.

After listening to a couple of songs, Stryder became restless. We headed out to the empty beer garden. It would be cool but the air would be fresher. Ironic really, since as soon as we got outside, Stryder lit a cigarette and started to pace back and forth while I sat at a table and watched him. "I'll tell you what Mark," he said after a pause. "There was something strange about that night at your place."

What could have been strange about that night?

"Your parent's attitude to you being called up. Where was the anger?"

"You thought they might be angry? Not that I've noticed."

"Look," said Stryder moving his hands as if he were about to reveal some mystery. "Why aren't they angry?" He came closer to make sure I was listening. "I see it like this. You're the first of your family to go to university. They make big sacrifices to get you there and now you're conscripted." He moved back and waved with his cigarette. "Their dreams are going wrong."

"Alright, I don't get it either. My Dad is no great fan of the army but he wants me to meekly comply."

Stryder intervened in his softest and most gentle voice. "It must have been hard for them to offer you the support they did the other night."

"They didn't; my mother offered you her support."

"Same thing. By implication at least."

I could hardly agree. "Their passivity pisses me off."

I lunged towards the jug of beer but Stryder moved it swiftly out of the way. He shook his finger reprovingly at me, took my glass and poured out a modest amount.

"Don't rush it," Stryder said, handing back the glass. "At least my anger makes sense. Normally you don't express anger about your parents; everything else, everyone else, all the time, to excess, but mostly your family is exempt. Despite the conflict, you know they love you. That's the way it is."

I didn't want to hear Stryder talk about my family. Obviously something was getting at me. "It's not as if I ask them to be radical. I don't. I just want them to face up to my situation but they never will."

Stryder stooped over the table and filled his glass and then leant back against a pillar. "Imagine how they feel." I didn't want to do that. "Your Dad had a tough war in the jungle. What kept him going?" Once more he started to prowl. "The dream that one day he would get home, build a house, have a family, work hard and make a better life for you all. The dream starts to come true. Then you start spouting all sorts of radical stuff about wanting a revolution." Stopping in front of me he said "They think you don't appreciate what they have worked so hard to achieve."

I shook my head and started to mumble a response. Stryder just spoke more quickly. "Of course it is much worse when we talk about Vietnam. Our parents believe the Americans saved us from the Japanese, from an Asian threat. And we sit there calmly telling them they have it all wrong. We take the piss by saying we are only in Vietnam to keep America in the region because we are paranoid. To them, the US keeps us safe so they can go on making better lives for their kids. You can't expect them to respect our radical politics."

I waited for Stryder to sit down again and said. "I would just like them to show some sympathy for my position." I sounded so pathetic.

We then started a slow, casual conversation about our work. It was obvious Stryder was finding it hard to concentrate. His comments kept straying from the thesis to his approaching court case. All the preparation had been done. There was not much more he could do but he wanted to fill his hours hunting down more witnesses and finding TV footage. This was futile but it made him feel a little better about the ordeal.

There was plenty of evidence to show what had happened to both Stryder and Mary; if facts counted they were well placed to be found not guilty. But I feared they would be found guilty anyway. I wasn't that worried about Mary, she would feel vindicated by a period in jail. How would Stryder respond?

As if on cue, Mary arrived. She was not dressed in her usual way. For a start she was wearing a long, colourful, peasant style dress with a vivid red and green shawl across her shoulders. Her hair was swept back in a ponytail and, most surprisingly of all; she was wearing make-up and large bronze coloured Egyptian styled earrings. There was no sign of her ever present silver cross. She carefully sat down and leant her elbows on the table and supported her head with her hands. "Bloody Bach", she said, "I heard bloody Bach when I came in. I thought she was going to do Bessie Smith." She stared across the table, concentrating hard, first at Stryder and then at me. She was either drunk or stoned. This would have been a first for Mary. From her small Indian bag she took some money, crumpling it slightly as she pushed a note across the table towards me. "Buy me a drink. I want a bloody mary," and she laughed, too lightly and in too high a tone. We didn't respond so she added with a glare, "What? Didn't you hear me?" I left Stryder to deal with her while I went to get the drink.

They were sitting much as I had left them, Mary resting her head on her hands and Stryder sitting back watching. As she took her drink she looked as if she was trying to work out what sort of creature I was. "Judas," she said. "Can't you see what you have done? I'm the peacenik, the household pacifist, the non-violent Christian activist and what happens. Thanks to you I'm charged with assault." She took a significant gulp from her glass and her eyes began to water. "I wasn't even conscious at the time! And I'm injured." She peeled back the sleeve of her flowing blouse to show her arm in plaster. "And it is your fault."

Before I could respond Stryder took over. He tried to soothe Mary with gentle words and light humour, comparing his injuries with hers (his black eye and the stitches on his face were far more obvious than her bruises, cuts and gashes, all of which were hidden by her clothes). He also congratulated her for starting the clash, since the police now claimed they had only intervened to protect the marchers from angry bystanders, and Mary was the proof.

"No one is going to believe that," said Mary sulkily.

The two of them got caught up in a debate, often rehearsed, on what might happen with their cases and for a moment I could sit back and watch. I thought I should take Mary back to the Chasm. Her belligerence passed and she was now being sentimental, telling Stryder how much she liked him and how much she liked living in the Chasm. She did not respond well to my suggestion but Stryder was relieved and nodded his assent. He joined in to persuade her it was best to go home. Eventually she relented and wrapped herself around me but would not leave before she had spoken with Angela. As we passed the room where Jane, Big Jim and now Edward were seated in awkward silence, she lurched towards them, dragging me with her.

"I've been arrested," she said and indicated me. Then she added wistfully, "I'm under house arrest at the Chasm." Then she dragged me away and turned in pursuit of Angela.

Angela was just finishing a song as we came near. As she looked up Mary waved her hand in the air and called loudly to her. "See what I've got. I'm being taking home by a boy!" Nervously laughing, she led me out the side door and into the laneway.

It took me some time to get her home. She kept stopping to describe the beauty of the night sky, the stark trees and the mellow light from the windows of the houses we passed. I just kept on steering her towards Stanley Street. When we were outside the street door she broke away and stood with her arms outstretched blocking the entrance. "You mustn't come in," she said. "This is a dreadful place. I know you think it is wonderful and you would like to live here but please don't," she urged. "It is a bad place. I love Angela and she does not love me. She loves Stephen and he doesn't love her. Jane and Edward pretend to live together but they are always falling apart. And Peter the Post Grad makes bad medicine in his room and grows dope in the garden. This is a home for secrets and lies."

She fell against me and was quiet.

It was an effort to get Mary inside the house, up the stairs and to her room. She was mostly silent but stopped unexpectedly from time to time to berate me. Gradually, if not steadily, I helped her to her room, sat her on the edge of the bed, took off her little boots, removed her shawl and undid her pony tail, to let her hair flow free. Then I carefully laid her on the bed, adjusted the pillows and covered her with a blanket. While I was doing this she lay floppily asleep. When I switched on a small side lamp she opened her eyes, looked straight at me and said defiantly, "I don't usually kiss on a first date," then she laughed softly, turned over and fell asleep.

Chapter 16
On Trial

Late September 1969

"You say you did not know these men were police officers but attacked them anyway." Angela was playing the part of the police prosecutor. "Who did you think they were?" She waved her hands in accusation and triumph.

I could see Stryder willing himself to relax. In over rehearsed tones he recited: "If they had been police, they would have been in uniform. At every demonstration the police wear uniforms and use loud hailers to give their orders."

"Couldn't you tell they were police just by what they did?"

"Hey, you're right of course. Other than the pigs, who would attack us like that?"

The two of them collapsed laughing at the absurdity of it all.

When Stryder asked Mary about her evidence she said, "I'm not interested."

"You're going to have to say something," he told her.

"OK. I was getting people to sit down when this young man waded through the crowd, called me a whore and hit me. After that, nothing."

Mary spent her time reading Ghandi's autobiography and speeches by Martin Luther King and wrote a tract about non-violence and civil disobedience. This frustrated the legal team she shared with Stryder. The senior lawyer was Derek Carmody, a bit of a dandy in his dress, with a slightly bouffant hair style and

flamboyant gestures to match but with a reputation as a polite legal thug. His assistant was Rachel Samuelson, a young, left-wing labour union lawyer who had done all the leg work, preparing witness statements, collecting film and other evidence and interviewing potential witnesses.

"Don't bother with my defence," Mary told them. "Like Gandhi and King I'm not going to recognise the authority of the court. I put my faith in my faith." She handed Rachel a copy of her screed.

After a brief glance Rachel said, "Mary, you are wrong. This court isn't particularly unjust. Blame the system but don't make it easy for them to send you to jail."

Mary now set herself on a path of excessively demure acquiescence; she fussed about her clothes, wanting to look as little like a radical as possible. She made Jane go shopping with her and came back with a navy blue twin set which she intended to wear with her mother's pearls. She modelled this outfit for Stryder with unnerving glee. "Since being arrested," she said, "you've let yourself go. I like the no haircut, unshaved look but will it work in court?"

"You must be kidding." All the same he compromised just enough by finding a mid-blue double breasted suit to wear along with one of his father's old silk ties. He looked more like a rake than a respectable defendant. "It's not my looks or how I dress but the evidence which will win this case," he said.

On the day of the trial the whole household went to the courtroom. It was gloomy with grimy windows, set up a bit like a church with wooden benches for the spectators, a

wooden dock for the witnesses and a raised bench for the magistrate. Bad memories. I'd sat in this room almost a year ago, supporting Jeff in his conscientious objection trial.

From the moment he entered the room it was obvious the magistrate, Mr John McAllister, was the absolute ruler in this court. With his short cut steel grey hair, his thin, almost pinched face, his wire rimmed glasses, his excessively neat suit, shirt and tie and his newly laundered black robes it was an easy ambition. His body spoke of authority and determination. There was contempt as well, for the minions who prosecuted cases before him, the clerks who served him and the defendants who came before him. All were intimidated by his bearing and the austerity of the room. This was to be a no-nonsense trial. I had seen McAllister at work. On one occasion I was early for Jeff's case and watched him convict an old age pensioner for stealing a single stick of cabana. He showed such grim satisfaction as he dispatched him to jail. It was depressing just to be back in this room.

When Stephen was called before the court, McAllister glanced at him with no effort to disguise his revulsion. He responded differently with Mary: he approved of what he saw. Mary considered him carefully as she slowly undid her bag, took out a bible, placed it on her lap and folded her hands over it. McAllister shook his head and looked down at the papers on his desk.

There wasn't a lot of drama, just mind-numbing, tedious cross-examinations almost about nothing. The essence of the case was known before it all started. The police would try to prove that Mary and Stryder resisted arrest and knowingly attacked police officers going about their duty. It was never as tense as US TV dramas like *Perry Mason* or even the local product, *Consider your Verdict,* but it had its moments. The arresting officers gave their evidence in monotones and they sounded like Stryder had

done when he rehearsed his cross examination. McAllister watched them with benign geniality, nodding his head in agreement and making occasional notes. We were easily bored. Only Stryder was fascinated by the details.

During the first adjournment Derek explained this was a text book version of what was needed to prove the charges and secure a conviction.

"But they must know what the TV footage shows. Once it is on the record they will have to change their story," Stryder said.

Derek said, "The police don't need to do much. Discrepancies don't matter if the Magistrate believes what he hears. Why should the film make any difference?"

Rachel broke in, "Given his track record McAllister won't have any doubts at all."

When Stryder rose to give evidence he walked to the witness box with a worrying sense of enthusiasm, almost eagerly taking the oath on the bible. As directed, Stryder confirmed his name and address.

"Mr Ryder, when you address this court you will stand erect and give the officers of this court due respect. Do not mumble."

Tension flattened Stryder's mood.

"I want to hear clearly what you have to say. I want you to look at me. I want to be able to judge your demeanour."

Stryder was in the witness box for a long time and the situation didn't get any better. McAlister kept interrupting and pointing out what he saw as weaknesses in Stryder's statements. There was a legal tussle about when the TV footage could be

shown. Derek made the formal request and McAllister was savage in his questions to both Rachel and Derek, implying they were wasting time, improperly introducing evidence, and seeking to divert attention from what the police had said.

In the end he agreed "Perhaps it is best for me to see this now, if not for this trial then for later."

Rachel was delighted, "He knows this will go to appeal and he is worried."

Derek said, "That means he's likely to convict."

The TV footage was brilliant, fragmented but, in our opinion, clear. There was Mary being assaulted by the conscript, unconscious on the ground before being dragged away by the police in civilian clothes. There was Stryder being grabbed by the police, thrown to the ground and being hit with the camera before being led away with blood showing clearly on his face. This had to be decisive. We had a lot to learn.

McAllister was completely unimpressed and obviously irritated when Derek insisted he wanted to recall the arresting officers to explain the discrepancies. "Are you suggesting, Mr Carmody, the police attacked these two demonstrators?" Once again Derek politely asked for the arresting officers to be recalled. "I can't see the point," McAllister said, removing his glasses and staring blankly at Derek Carmody. "When I've actually heard the defence case I may consider your request again. Don't waste my time with these unnecessary diversions."

Mary's presentation was completely different. When offered the bible to take the oath, she politely declined. "I have my own bible," she said and showed it to McAllister. "As a religious person I would not normally swear on the bible but out of respect for you and your court," she smiled, "I will." He was impressed. Mary remained

true to her previous position; she could not say much as she had been unconscious at the time of her arrest and could not answer questions. The police created a nuanced story: Mary was shouting abuse at bystanders; fighting broke out, the police moved in and she was ordered to leave, she refused, they arrested her. As they arrested her she threw herself to the ground and collapsed and they had to pick her up and carry her away, later calling an ambulance to take her to hospital. Derek carefully took Mary through her account and McAllister did not interrupt although he occasionally drummed his fingers on the table, looked around the room and yawned soundlessly. There was no meeting point between the two stories. There was no assault on Mary in the police account, not by the police or a soldier or any other kind of bystander. In Mary's account there was no fighting, just a by-stander shouting, wading into the crowd and attacking her with his fists and his feet.

After she had described the assault Mary turned demurely to McAllister. "It's like this," and she smiled sweetly. "I am a pacifist and I've looked at the film of the assault and I've watched myself closely." McAllister seemed suddenly interested and I noticed Rachel flinch. "I wanted to see if I responded in anyway, by word or deed. Had I breached my commitment to non-violence?" She looked at the defence team, nodded and smiled again at McAllister who seemed mesmerised by her soft voice. "I'm pleased to say I did not respond. Not a flicker. Not a word. I was not provoked by his violence."

McAllister said, "The court is not interested in your political opinions."

Dull concluding statements followed and the case was adjourned for the verdict.

A fortnight later we were all gathered in the court again. There was a lone journalist sitting with his notepad at the ready. Mary and Stryder were upbeat about it all, although Mary was still dressed in a variant of her demure court clothes. McAllister was also cheerful as he walked into the court, pausing to look at Mary and Stryder and at the rest of us. We strived to read his mood but he was giving nothing away.

McAllister spoke at length about the background to the demonstration and the cunning organisers who led their brainwashed followers into clashes with the police. "They are too cowardly to take their places in the front row," he said, "and abandon their followers to their fate at the first hint of trouble. Once the demonstrators confronted the police outside the police headquarters and occupied Victoria Square this was an illegal demonstration, a breach of the peace. I find that the police acted lawfully and rightly when they intervened to stop this illegal activity. The community is entitled to be protected against deliberately planned breaches of the peace foisted on it by conspiracy." As he read this passage he glared at the few students and the journalist. With exaggerated care he assessed the evidence in the case, praising the demeanour of the police and criticising both Mary and Stryder, asserting they were not convincing witnesses despite sounding plausible. "Miss Glenn, for all her neat appearance and her mild manners, could not disguise her contempt for what we were doing in this court. Her attitude in the witness box was one of arrogance bordering on contempt. I did not find her to be a credible witness where her account differed from that of the police." He looked at Mary with every appearance of feeling disappointed in her. "Mr Ryder," he said, "is obviously a talented, maybe even a gifted, student but he is motivated now by his hatred of the police and what he calls 'the system'. He gave the impression of a mild fanaticism – a state of mind which is not very answerable to the hard bite of fact and not

a satisfactory foundation for firm findings of credibility. Frankly I distrust the witness as not having much respect for the literal truth."

From the fragments of the contradictions of police evidence McAllister constructed a coherent account to prove Mary had attacked the bystander and the bystander had been caught on film defending himself before the police intervened. He made no finding on how it was that Mary was arrested while unconscious but he asserted that the injuries had occurred when she fell to the ground as she was struggling with the police. He described both Mary and Stryder as part of the conspiracy to disrupt the city. He rejected Stryder's claim that he was an observer and not a participant in the demonstration and determined he had gone to the march fully aware that there would be a clash with the police, intent on taking photographs to suggest police aggression and brutality as had happened before.

He concluded his review of the evidence with the comment, "On balance, I find the police to have been the most credible witnesses. After all they attended the demonstration for the express purpose of detecting offenses and it would be surprising, given their years of experience and commitment to the interests of the public, if they had not done so. Where there are discrepancies between the police evidence and the TV news films it can be explained by the confusion arising from the demonstrators' concerted breaches of the peace. The actions of the demonstrators made necessary the forceful intervention of the police, an intervention that was both legal and completely justified."

"I find both defendants guilty as charged. I have heard many cases involving arrested demonstrators. I regard Mr Ryder's offences as some of the worst that have been before me. I am considering a serious jail sentence for the assaults and a

substantial fine for resisting arrest and refusing to obey a police direction. For Miss Glenn, I considered a mitigating factor; she was easily led astray by the more radical elements in the protesters' cause. I would consider appropriate a short jail sentence suspended on the basis of a good behaviour bond as well as a fine." He picked up his papers and quickly left the court.

There was silence in the courtroom. The journalist left the court in a hurry. Mary and Stryder were stunned. They huddled together and Derek and Rachel moved quickly to join them. I went up too, overwhelmed by my sense of failure while the rest of the Chasm crew waited at the back of the room. I murmured an apology as I put my arms around them, feeling wretched. Derek was speaking, urgently and insistently.

"This isn't over yet. You must remain disciplined. If you speak out now, who knows what could happen. Rachel and I will start work on the appeal." He looked with concern at Stryder, "You won't be going to jail just yet and not at all if I can help it. Put it out of your mind."

Stryder was distraught and Mary said not a word. By the time we left there was a press scrum on the steps of the Magistrates' court. Photos were being taken from every angle; questions were being shouted. I stood to one side with Rachel and Derek. Stryder was grim faced, pale, defiant, angry. Mary withdrew into herself, seeking some other source of strength. She looked at the crowd and the TV cameras and seized the moment. She walked to the centre of the steps, raised her hands high, speaking over the heads of the crowd, straight to the TV cameras which had been rushed to the court. With fierce gestures she spoke with commitment.

"The proceedings in this trial have been a farce. So long as the unjust war in Vietnam continues and young men are conscripted to fight in it there will be more demonstrations, more arrests and more cases like this. Those who defy the state will be jailed. Our struggle will continue. Justice is on our side and our justice will not be denied."

Channelling Joan Baez she sang in her clear folk voice a rousing version of *We Shall Not Be Moved*. Gradually the small crowd of supporters joined in. So did Stryder and I. The words no longer seemed hackneyed and the tune had lost its dreariness. When Mary sang, "we are on our way to prison," the crowd cheered and shouted back, "We shall not be moved."

After she finished she deliberately linked arms with me on one side and Stryder on the other and marched us straight through the gathered press. In that moment we felt Mary was really quite fabulous and her future ought to be in showbiz rather than the cloisters of the church. She laughed nervously. "That should get our message on TV," she said.

Chapter 17
Aftershock

Early October 1969

"Can't you hear me? I don't fucking care!" From the doorway I could hear Stryder's rage and see Mary sitting demurely on her bed. With her hands folded in her lap she was unmoved by Stryder's vehemence. I waited by the door, not wanting to disturb this scene, this post mortem, on the jail sentences they had received. I'd come upstairs to persuade them to spend the evening at the British.

"Stephen, you have every right to be angry," she said. "But what are you going to do with your anger?"

Good question. Mary's room was clean and neat, a perfect mirror for her life. Usually austere now this antiseptic smoothness had a calming effect, both on me as the unseen observer and Stryder as a raging bull of unrestrained emotion. Mary's question acted as a cape turning aside Stryder's on-rush and lessening his momentum. As he sat on the only chair in the room and leant forward I could, for the first time, see him but, with his head in his hands, he could not see me. We all waited: Mary passively observing Stryder, content with the silence, fully certain he would, in time, speak. The tension built in me. I wanted to burst into the room, break the mood and support Stryder but there was nothing I could say to him which would not just restate my guilty feelings. No value for either Mary or Stryder. Best wait for the scene to be resolved.

"When I came to university," Stryder said leaning back and away from my line of sight, "I could never imagine this happening. Conscription and Vietnam had nothing

to do with me. All I wanted to do was study English, read, write poetry and have fun with girls. Not a lot to ask."

Another long pause and Mary showed no impatience and no change in how she was sitting. She just continued looking sympathetically towards Stryder.

"How could it not relate to me? One ballot. Pow! One arrest. Pow! One court case, one jail sentence. Pow! Pow! Even if I get through this appeal, pow! I'll be back in jail for draft resistance!"

"For you, disruption and distress," she said, "for me, continuity and commitment." Mary stood gracefully and moved so she could look more directly at Stryder. She saw me for the first time. A swift glance of acknowledgement, then she turned back to concentrate on him. Her gesture suggested I should stay where I was. Fair enough.

Stryder said, "There is worse to come. I can't work on my thesis. It's pointless. Some smart arsed whinge about literary criticism. Who cares? At least Mark can write about the bloody war."

Mary turned to invite me in. Awkwardly, with self-conscious embarrassment I moved inside the doorway, leaning on the frame. Stryder looked up, acknowledged me with a slight grin and said, "Well it's true. At least you can write about things that matter but what about me?" Then Stryder stood up, held his hand out to Mary and said, "come on, let's all go to the British. I've had enough."

My thesis was nearly finished. In the library I was checking quotations and footnotes when Big Jim turned up. He leant towards me and whispered, "Stryder's in trouble."

Not again. What this time?

We moved outside and stood by the steps to the library entrance. Jim spoke earnestly, “I met the honours’ coordinator in English yesterday. Stryder hasn’t been to see his supervisor, hasn’t submitted a draft or even an outline. If he hasn’t got an outline signed off by Friday he will be suspended.”

“You’re kidding me,” I said. “It’s that serious?”

“Yep. You have to do something.”

I accepted my fate and promised I’d find some way to fix things. But where was Stryder? Most days I saw him in the library hunting down journal articles although I had no idea what he did with them. I checked where he often sat in the main reading room and then downstairs in the stacks. He wasn’t there so I went to the refec. He wasn’t there either so I phoned Angela. Something in her voice told me she knew what this was about. “Check the British or the Kentish Arms,” she said. “He hangs out there at lunch times.” I was on my way.

He was not at the British, an empty forlorn place at this time of the day. The sun needed to be setting before its mood would improve. The Kentish Arms was an old pub at the bottom end of Stanley Street. Just as depressing as the British. In the front bar a couple of old barflies were sitting looking at their beers, not talking to each other or to the barman. When I asked where Stryder was, the barman told me to go to the snug. Without any comment from me he poured a schooner, handed it to me and wished me luck. As bad as all that. Yes, Stryder was in the snug, on his own. The snug was a rather small, dimly lit room with just a couple of tables and chairs and a bench seat along the wall. Stryder was at one of the tables with a stack of notes and papers, the remains of a

pint in a glass in front of him. He saw me and just stared, so I sat down, sipped my drink and looked at him.

"It's all over," he said. "I can't do this. I've got nothing to say. I'm just going to walk in to the Department and quit. Save them the bother."

"What then?"

"No idea but at least this will be finished."

"And how long before the police knock on your door and invite you to enlist?"

"They won't, you know. I'll get a letter first for the medical. It will take them time."

"Why make it easy for them?"

"Don't start that again. If I could do this bloody thing I would have done it by now but I can't. I told you, it's over. I quit."

"Not yet it isn't." I told him what Big Jim had said. "You've got until Friday to present an outline."

"It's never going to be done."

Not yet drunk but certainly depressed, he sunk with his head in his hand. No wonder the barman had wished me luck. I had to get him back to the Chasm so I worked on separating him from his beer, collected up all his papers and began the wearisome task of moving him out of the pub. Slowly, haltingly, I guided him back up Stanley Street. It reminded me of my earlier efforts to get Mary home after a night out at the British but Mary was much more lyrical than Stryder who was largely morose. He stopped and sat in the gutter, trying to throw up. The everyday fate of being a student,

helping a drunk friend home. Eventually I got him to the house. Just as we were moving through the kitchen we ran in to Angela. She had probably been brought out of her room by the noise we were making. Seeing her made Stryder even more distraught. Walking with drunks is the pits. Angela looked embarrassed and tried to move away but Stryder clutched her arm and loudly called, "It's my fault. I've betrayed you. Please forgive me." No wonder Angela looked confused but she stopped and looked more coldly at him. "I've done a terrible thing. I've got your father to work on our appeal."

"Oh yeah? So what?"

"I don't want to go to jail. And your father is . . . "

". . . an excellent lawyer. Yes I know. Has he agreed?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now get to bed and sleep this off. We'll talk tomorrow.

When I arrived in the morning, Stryder was barely awake, trying to keep his head still and his eyes away from any light. No sympathy. This had to be a work day. Time was nearly gone. So I retreated to return with a plate of dry toast and a strong black coffee. Stryder was not impressed but he did get up, take the coffee and headed off for a shower. While he was gone I took a chance to return his desk to its normal ordered state. There were poetry collections lying around that he was obviously using, so I put these neatly to one side of an untouched writing pad, sorted out his pens and threw the clothes strewn across the floor onto a chair by his wardrobe. I also opened the window and threw out the cigarette butts and other detritus and hoped this would make a difference to the mood of the room. The sunlight slanting across the window sill and part of the desk was much more effective than anything I had done.

When he returned he was less grumpy, but not by much. He munched on cold toast while he finished his coffee, inspected my reordering of his room. I stayed where I was, in the sun, leaning on the window sill.

"It's not going to work, Mark." Tones of resignation. "I can't write. Not a single sentence. Just accept reality and give up."

"Why should I? You can write and you will write again and you will have an outline to take to your supervisor by the end of today. And it will have real words in it, sentences and joined-up writing."

He shrugged his rejection but I was not dissuaded. I coaxed him to his desk and asked, "What did you do yesterday?" He gave me the obvious and mundane answer. "Write it down, just one sentence will do." Once again he shrugged, not pleased but he did as I asked. "Now write another sentence. What happened next?"

"You bloody came along and dragged me out of the pub."

"Well write it down." He did. So far so good.

"Ok, so I've written two trivial sentences – even if I write a hundred that wouldn't make it a thesis."

"Ah but it will," I told him. "I know you can't write the thesis you planned but there is a thesis you can write, we just have to find it. Start with something practical. The thesis has to be about 15,000 words. Break it up into chunks. An introduction and a conclusion and how many chapters? Not more than three or four. Given the time left three might be the right number."

As I talked to him Stryder started to write headings on his blank page; no substance just the obvious Intro, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 and Conclusion. “Well that is a start but we might need to get further than that today.”

Stryder doodled. Amidst the squiggles and looping lines odd words started to appear: criticism/critics; poets/poems and readers – these stood out from the swirling mess.

“Ah, I think I understand,” I said. “So that is a way of writing your thesis. Don’t write about theory. Write about specific acts of criticism of specific poets and poems, with some kind of focus on the relevance of criticism to readers. At least you could do that.”

Stryder was unimpressed and looked at me with a good deal of disdain. Obviously my desperate efforts were too transparent and too far below his academic dignity to be taken seriously. Then his mood changed. “Well I suppose I could try,” he said. Grudgingly, Stryder started to write out names for the chapters and then made a few notes under each, stopping, tearing off the page, screwing it up and throwing it at the waste paper basket. Was this progress? I was just pleased he was sitting at his desk and trying to write. I grabbed a book off his selves to read. It was *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. I sat in the armchair watching his scribbling and scratching. At intervals I brought him coffee and sandwiches for lunch. By then it looked like he had found some sort of rhythm and had started on a new version with text under each of the chapter headings. “It’s almost there,” he told me. “I just have to rearrange how I’m going to do this: Three chapters, three poems and poets, each with an account of what a critic has to say and what benefit this might be to a new reader. I should be ready by four.” Indeed he was. With just enough time he headed off to see his supervisor.

Hours later he returned, drained of energy and not a bit elated. “Thanks mate,” he said. “It worked. Now all I have to do is write the bloody thing.”

“Just about enough time. But no distractions.”

So we headed off to the Black and White Café to celebrate with burgers and an extra-large portion of chips. No British this night. Stryder needed the sleep and he had to be ready to start writing the next morning. When the burgers arrived Stryder turned cheerfully to me and said, “It’s going to be a crap thesis but, at least it will be a thesis. Good enough to keep me from being called up until March next year.”

Although Stryder, and Mary in her own way, were haunted by the threat of jail the pressure to complete was increasing daily. Angela, who had quit uni months ago, spent a lot of time making tea for her house mates and cooking for them but, as the submission date got closer and closer the house emptied, leaving only Mary in need of her care. Edward and Jane, less of a couple than ever before, moved back in with their parents for the duration. Even Stryder was affected. He had this mad idea that if he went home he could work without distraction. I argued against him. How could he possibly work calmly on his thesis with Elizabeth on the rampage?

Despite this, he did go to his Mother. To make his isolation as certain as possible he insisted I borrow his car. When it was time to take the draft to the typist or to the binder or make the final submission he would call me and I would drive him around. Happy to oblige.

One Friday afternoon when I dropped into the Chasm on my way home, Angela gave me a message. Ring and give your name as Mr Albert Grossman. Apparently he was banned from answering the phone. I did as I was told.

"Hey man, it's almost finished. I'm desperate. Get me outa here," he told me. "Come around ten. Park the car out on the street. I'll be all packed and ready to go. Come round to the side entrance. Don't make too much noise on the gravel. Don't knock, just wait. I will be there as soon as I can."

The best laid plans! I followed his instructions and walked on the lawn as much as I could. I hardly made a sound at all but I should have realised something was wrong. There were too many lights on. I stood by the steps to the side door and suddenly the porch door was thrown open and there Mrs Ryder stood even angrier than I could have imagined.

"I'm glad you could come, Mr Grossman. I've been waiting for you. Please step inside."

What had I expected? She led me to the laundry of all impossible places and shut the door behind us. Apart from chatting with my mother while she did the washing I can't imagine anyone having a conversation or a shouting match in a laundry.

"Well Mark, 'Could you tell your son Mr Grossman would like to speak with him'", she imitated my voice in a high pitched whine. "You thought you were so clever. Well of course I listened on the other phone. What was wrong with that? What were you planning? Smuggling some dope into him? I found his 'stash' and got rid of it in the compost. What else were you up to?"

Stimulated by the confrontation I said, “I was just driving the getaway car. Stryder wanted out and I came to help.”

This made the situation worse. Light the blue touch paper and retire. Only I couldn’t get far away from her in the laundry and she looked like she would hit me if I provoked her again. Now her voice became fatally calm. “You have destroyed my son, you and your hippy radical friends. He came home a complete mess. He will never finish if I don’t do what’s best for him. And I tell you, he’s not going back to that rabble in North Adelaide. I’ve got him home now and he is not getting away again.”

“I don’t think it will be so easy,” I said. “Stryder wants out. There is still the call-up to come.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You don’t have to do anything. You don’t have any right to be involved.” Elizabeth stood even closer. She was no longer out of control. “You know nothing about this family. You don’t understand my son. Only I do. Stephen must go into the army. Fate has come to his rescue. We are a military family. My father, my grandfather and his father before him, great uncles and more, all were in the army. It’s who we are. Stephen is one of us. Even his useless father was in the army. Not that it did him any good. The army is the only thing that can save Stephen now.” She put her hands on my shoulders and she looked into my face. “You are not getting him back. He stays here, with me, until his time comes. This play-time tantrum rebellion is over. His duty begins.”

Best accept my defeat, be humble and apologetic. Retreat as fast as possible. If Stephen was to be released I would need reinforcements. Dianna came to mind. Now I had to get out of here myself. “Can I see Stephen before I leave?”

"You are such a joker," she said but before she could continue we heard wheels spin and a car being driven off at high speed. A second set of keys and he was gone. Show no delight. Immediately Elizabeth Ryder left the laundry and I went to the side door and waited, contemplating a long walk home. Where was the nearest phone box? Slowly and rather sadly she returned. "Get out," she said unlocking the door, "I want him back and back here tonight. You tell him."

I put my coat collar up and pushed my hands deep in my pockets, trying to look like Dylan on the cover of *Blonde on Blonde*, and headed down that long lonesome road wondering where Stryder could be. I hadn't gone more than a quarter of a mile when I saw his car parked under a street light. As I approached, the headlights came on and he lowered the window. With a grin he asked, "Going my way?"

Chapter 18
The End of the Chasm

Late November 1969

At around nine o'clock on this mild party evening I moved outside to run the BBQ. I was not in the mood for a boisterous, noisy, smoky affair and this was my best chance to keep everything in perspective. Many people had already arrived and more would come and go throughout the night. The place was full of parents. Peter had come with his and they set themselves up on the landing. They were quickly joined by the Mortons, the Glenns and the Falconers; John and Linda took care not to seek out Angela or to stray far from the landing. Edward's parents had called by in the late afternoon to drop off a crate of booze before hurrying away. I had invited mine but they told me they would feel 'too out of place' to be comfortable. On the other hand, the twins had been delighted to help, enthusiastically hanging long strands of coloured party lights over the pergola.

Having lit the fire and fuelled it with leaves, twigs and dropped branches collected from the parklands, I sat in a chair on the smoke free side and nursed a large glass of beer. The party was being held in honour of Peter Goldman; his Ph D had been awarded and he had won a prestigious scholarship to the Max Planck Institute in Germany. His parents were proud of his success but they were more delighted he would now return to Europe. Peter treated this as nostalgic nonsense but he was pleased to be going to live in the home of classical music. I felt better about the party because it focussed on Peter's success and it marked his departure and not the break-up of the

Chasm. Angela had decided not to play or hire a band for the night but recorded music has its draw backs; the second side of *Sgt. Peppers* had already been played about ten times. There had been some live music. When I first went outside I saw Angela take Peter to her music room where she played some Chopin preludes for him. She finished with a short rag time piece, closed the piano lid and threw a blanket across it to protect it from any chance of party damage.

Dianna Morton, with a substantial glass of white wine in her hand, stood on the doorstep and looked at the garden, her flimsy pale dress flowing as she made vague gestures with her unlit cigarette. She followed me out when I collected the first plate of meat to cook. For her, I pulled up a slightly more substantial chair than my own and gallantly lit a match for her cigarette. I threw the first batch of cut onions onto the hot surface and watched the fat sizzle around them.

"When I first arrived in Adelaide I thought this was a lovely house, a bit grand," she said leaning comfortably back into the chair. "It's worn well probably because you lot moved in. Slowed the decay."

While listening, I distractedly moved the onions across the hot surface. I expected the smell of onions cooking would seep into the kitchen through the open doors and windows and others would come to visit me.

"I was having a chat with Stephen," Dianna continued. "I think I should worry about him, you know. Has he come to terms with his future?"

"I don't think so." Not likely. We were ground down by circumstance and more paralysed than relaxed. "He will either get his call-up papers now or early in the New Year. And we are waiting to hear about the appeal. If he loses . . ."

"Poor boy," Dianna said and she too stared at the fire and the cooking onions. Changing the subject she added "Who would have thought Jane would go to England? She will have Christmas here. Then she is off to Oxford. "

I was surprised. When I had last heard Jane talk about this she was trying to decide between Harvard and Yale. England was not mentioned.

Dianna got to her feet, threw her half smoked cigarette into the fire, and turned to see Robert waiting for her at the door. "Anyway," she added, "drop in and see us, anytime. I look forward to our little talks."

I put the meat on to cook and sat back in my chair and waited. At least the record had been changed. Jimi Hendrix's guitar now sounded loudly over the top of the vast sea of party noise. Before long, I knew, the record would be changed again. Some Cream fan would want to put on the live record of *Wheels of Fire* to show off Clapton's solo on *Cross Roads*. It always happened.

Mary walked out to the patio carrying a large plate of buttered bread, followed by Stryder trying to balance another plate piled even higher and a stack of paper plates and a bottle of tomato sauce. After he had managed not to drop these he headed back to get knives and forks and a pot of hot English mustard.

"Keep it cool, brother," he said as he went inside.

Mary looked across the garden and watched me.

"You didn't know how to cook, did you? Remember the welcome home feast? Never mind. You can cook now. A valuable skill."

"When are you heading back to the farm?" I wanted to gauge the speed with which the house would empty.

"I'm going home on Monday. There's a party on Tuesday night to celebrate my IIA. It's a big deal to them, and I'm proud too. I was thrilled when you, Jane and Edward all got Firsts but I had never expected so much. I thought I would be lucky to get a IIB, so you see, it was good news all round. Don't worry. I'll see you before I head out to the Solomons in January."

Stryder returned to make the table BBQ ready. There was more food inside. Jane and Edward had organised take away catering from a suburban Indian restaurant, The Nizam's Kitchen, out on Goodwood Road but a party of this size needed a big BBQ as well. I would keep cooking until late to match the eating needs of the crowd. Stryder patted me on the shoulder and collected Mary from her reverie and took her off to show her his vegetable garden. This is where Stryder had spent much of the time since the court case, clearing a patch and working under Peter's direction. He was proud of his creation and what he had learnt. Mary put her arm through Stryder's as they walked on the now cleared path to where the tomatoes, corn, cucumbers and beans were growing. Peter's dope crop was long gone.

As they walked I heard Mary say to Stryder, "Gardening is easy where I am going. Yams grow anywhere. Our team includes a fulltime gardener. It's a valuable skill." Was Mary trying to persuade him to go with her to the islands? Perhaps she was trying to tell him his IIA was not a bad result and there were other valuable things he could do besides literary criticism.

While Mary and Stryder were contemplating his gardening success, I began piling cooked sausages and chops onto serving plates. As they moved back inside,

Stryder picked up one of the platters and Mary grabbed a plate of bread to hand around. I set up a new batch of meat on the BBQ, fed the fire and sat back to sip another beer. "Food's ready," I called to the empty air and from nowhere a large number of party goers arrived to collect a serve, stood around for a few moments and headed back to the crowd and the music. I smiled; Hendrix had been removed, but not replaced by Clapton. Some blues fan had taken the chance to put on *Fathers and Sons*, Muddy Waters and some young friends. Since Michael Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield were among the young, I had a soft spot for the record, despite its other failings. I sat back relaxing into the music, just watching the smoke drift up from the fire.

Jane appeared in the doorway, looked around, and moved to sit in the chair so recently abandoned by her mother. She too watched the smoke and took a drag on her Gauloises, the strong pungent smoke combatting the smell of cooking meat. I was not sure which I disliked more, the Gauloises or the Indonesian clove cigarettes she so often smoked.

"I'm worried about Stryder," she said in greeting. "He seems too relaxed, too happy about things at the moment. I can't believe he feels that good, given everything."

"Do you mean the chance he will go to jail or that he only got a IIA?" I exercised my irritation. "Stryder is happy about the IIA. A few weeks ago he would have been thrilled with a Third."

Jane relented. "I see," she said. "But I would like to know how he gets on."

"Hey, when are you heading off? Dianna said you are going to Oxford."

"I gave up on the States," she said placidly. "Too many complications." She put her hands behind her head and looked up at the skies. "I'm really pleased to be going to

Oxford. It means I'll move in with my grandmother, a wonderful woman. I get on better with her than I do with Dianna." She raised her eyebrows to acknowledge our different judgements of her mother and to tell me there was no need to comment.

Jane got up and bent over to kiss my forehead. "If I had stayed on, we might have got together. Who can know? I think it is best that I'm going now." As she moved slowly off she added, "Keep in touch."

A few moments later Angela came to the doorway and beckoned me to come inside. She was about to make her farewell speech for Peter. I hesitated so she put her arm around my waist and manoeuvred me further into the room, well away from the wall she knew I would have preferred to lean on. The record player was turned off and the noise level dropped. Angela stood by the table with a glass of red in her hand. Peter-the-Postgrad stood next to her looking embarrassed, his eyes searching the room for his parents who were standing on the edge of the crowd at the bottom of the stairs. Angela made a short speech congratulating Peter on his success, joking about his gardening exploits and their contribution to the happiness of the crowd. She thanked him for coming to live with us in the Chasm, despite the fact we were all arty types who made too much noise, sang too many songs and knew nothing about the research he did. She then wished him all the best and proposed a toast. There was much applause and some raucous cheers. Angela led a chorus of 'for he's a jolly good fellow,' and stepped back laughing.

Peter was tentative as he addressed the crowd. He gave a brief account of his family history and how he had come to be in the Chasm and spoke of his delight to be going back to Europe; he could not bring himself to say Germany. He thanked his parents and bowed to them in an old fashioned way. Then he turned to Angela.

"Dearest Angela, from the moment we met all those years ago, standing in line for a Bach concert at the Town Hall, you have been my wonderful friend. I am so sorry for your recent troubles. You have so much to give to the world. I will daily wait for news of your success." He joked about how appalled he was with her obsession now with electric guitars and electric pianos and added, "With you style, your voice, your talent and passion you could be Australia's Janis Joplin or even better, a new Bessie Smith. I wish you every success and I will come back to see you in your triumph. To see that everyone prospers."

He gave a clenched fist salute and plunged into the crowd to hug Edward and Jane and the party returned to its casual mood of music and chaos. Through the crowd he went seeking out his housemates, thanking them in turn. When he finally found me I was back at the BBQ. Peter now had his great black leather coat with him and was carrying a small black bag. As he loomed tall I realised how rarely he ever stood fully upright. "Mark, my friend," he said with great politeness. "I have a special gift for you and one for you to give Stryder at Christmas. They are strange old books my parents brought with them. Just a few inconsequential things packed hurriedly as they fled. When I was about nine, they took down this bag and found the books and were disappointed. These were not the ones they had packed; these were English books. I loved them anyway. I would take them out and read them, amazed by their strangeness. Smelling the bindings and the paper made me dream of libraries and a need to travel. They are a gift to encourage you both to move on when you get through this awful conscription mess."

I opened the bag and took them out. They were indeed strange things to have travelled so far in such confusion. One was a small book, a copy of the *Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam* and the other, not much larger, was the *Bhagavad Gita*. "Peter, you

can't give these treasures away," I said. "They have so much history for you, for your mother and father."

Peter reached out to shake my hand and he held it while he replied. "I kept the best and the most valuable for myself," he said, "a small leather bound copy of *Winnie the Pooh.*" He laughed unexpectedly loudly and clasped me in a gigantic bear-hug. "Keep yourself safe, my friend." He turned and was gone. I don't know how good a chemist he was but I knew we would miss him.

I cleaned up the BBQ, added more wood to the fire, collected a further serve of sausages and chops and set them to cook. I was amused to hear Angela and Mary shouting out the lines of some Joplin songs on the record player. Stryder and Edward joined in howling out the choruses. For my part, I was content to be where I was, chatting with the strays who wandered out to collect food to fuel the remainder of the night.

Edward must have tired of his role as a back-up singer. He drifted out and stood by my side. "What a bash!" he said. "It's starting to wind down. I reckon there are about fifty people left. The oldies have all gone now, and Peter and Mary with them. There are about six incapable of moving." He had a bottle of whiskey with him and took a large gulp. "You're likely to find them on floors and in bathrooms upstairs in the morning. Angela and Stryder are doing the rounds trying to move them on." Edward had partied enough to become philosophical, musing about how much he would miss the Chasm and the rest of us. He stumbled as he moved to get close enough to tell me something in confidence. He was not speaking clearly and it took a while before I worked out what he was trying to say. "I'm not leaving," he repeated again until I worked it out. "I'm staying in Adelaide. Just for a bit."

"Are you going to live here?" I asked.

"Can't afford to," and he shook his head sadly. "No support from my parents now. I'm moving in with my brother and I'll earn a bit of cash at the British over the summer. I'm looking for a higher degree in Economics and Finance. Most likely in the States." Blearily he wandered away, took an uncertain turn around the garden and headed off to climb the fire stairs back towards his room, waving to me as he went.

The night was late and the party was growing old. I started cleaning up, taking one last large platter and putting it on the kitchen table for the stragglers to devour as they wished. Angela and Stryder were clearing away the debris and stacking up dishes by the sink. When Angela saw me she stepped across and around bodies and junk to get to my side.

"I don't like parties," she said, "I hate the cleaning up."

"Me too," I said as seriously as I could.

Stryder laughed at our exchange and said, "We will just have to work together."

Angela took me to one side. "I'm off to Sydney, mate," she said. "Next Thursday. I'm joining a band. I'm out of here." She said, "Look Mark I want you to stay on as a caretaker, rent-free, until the family decide what to do." She smiled as she told me she had a veto over any sale of the house, so I was secure until I wanted to move on. The removal van was coming on Friday and she asked me to supervise the loading.

The three of us worked together, rounding up the waifs and strays, persuading them to leave and tidying up the wreckage left behind. When all was done we sat down at the scrubbed kitchen table and took stock of the day. Stryder collected his special

bottle of scotch and poured glasses for us all. We sipped in tired silence and Angela went off to bed.

"There are just the three of us left," a yawning Stryder said.

"And Angela goes next week," I added with depressing certainty.

Chapter 19
Stryder Goes Away

Late December 1969

On a mid-December evening, as I walked across the parklands to the Hackney Hotel, I revelled in the lingering warmth from the day and felt exhilarated by the changing tints in the slowly darkening sky. Stryder had unexpectedly asked me to join him. Apparently there was something to celebrate. We had just finished cleaning up the Stanley Street house, washing down and airing the place: to get rid of the grime and the smell of stale tobacco from Peter's room, the smell of incense from the rooms where Edward and Jane had lived and the carbolic cleanliness from Mary's cell. Perhaps we should celebrate that. What about the new life we had created in the absence of the others? We were having a great time. Stryder had given up all his routine distractions of dates and dope and we had plenty of time to indulge ourselves. We now rose late and went to bed even later, wallowing in an unending orgy of movies, late night meals and all night arguments. Was Fellini better than Bergman? Was the musical the pinnacle of artistic achievement for Hollywood? Did Grace Kelly give her best performances when bullied by Hitchcock? And what the hell did happen last year in Marienbad? In truth this was all a distraction and we knew it; we were just waiting for this time of limbo to end. Maybe this is what we were to celebrate. But if it had ended with Stryder's call-up papers, there was nothing to celebrate at all.

The Hackney was a modest student pub, with a famous beer garden, unpretentious pub meals and scope for little more. When I arrived I was told Mr Ryder was waiting for me in the private dining room. I didn't know there was one. When I went in I found a large table set with a white table cloth and napkins, with an array of

plates, cutlery and wine glasses. This was no ordinary celebration. As I turned I caught sight of Stryder. “Why the hell have you cut your hair?” I asked.

“Don’t get distracted by trivial details. All will be clear.” He bowed and ushered me to a seat. There was an ice bucket with a bottle of champagne by the table. Stryder gestured to the doorway and a waiter – there was a waiter? – moved to open the bottle and pour for us. With a flourish he snapped the folded napkins and laid them by the side of our plates for use and he left.

“Impressive,” I said.

“It is a special occasion, in more ways than one.” He held up his hand to stop me from commenting further. “The meal is all arranged and paid for. Nothing to worry about. We start with seafood cocktails and oysters. Have you eaten fresh oysters before?”

“Only smoked oysters out of a tin.”

“Tonight will be a treat. I’ve organised a special version of a fisherman’s basket for the main course. Not in a basket of course and the fish and sea food haven’t been deep fried. Real cooking for a change. And of course we will finish with stilton and some port.”

“It is summer,’ I replied, “and we are not in England.”

“So you say. That will make it even more of a feast.” Stryder picked up his glass and stood to propose a toast. I stood too. “To revolutionary justice,” he cried. I repeated the line without much conviction and sat down. Stryder remained standing, his eyes gleaming and a supressed grin on his face. “The appeal court has delivered its judgment. McAllister copped a walloping. All our convictions were quashed.”

I jumped up, only just missing the ice bucket, putting out my hand to shake his and then clumsily turning it into a hug. “Wonderful news. Wonderful news. Does Mary know?”

“She is ecstatic. I could hear her mother crying in the background when I phoned.”

“And you’re in the clear?”

“Oh yes. Derek and Rachel met the prosecutors this afternoon. They’re not interested in a retrial.”

“It’s all over. Well, that is something to celebrate.”

“We can drink champagne all night.’

“And how did Mary respond?”

He raised an eye brow. “She’s drafting a press release condemning the police, pledging more militancy to oppose the war and conscription.”

I shook my head in wonder. At least she wouldn’t be around for further demonstrations. The police would be even less forgiving the next time.

I made a comment about the call-up but Stryder brushed me aside. “Later, later,” he said, “Plenty of time later.” The food, the wine and the good news made me euphoric and we worked our way through the meal, telling jokes and outrageous stories as we went. I noticed Stryder was more restrained than I would have expected but what did I know? I hadn’t been facing jail for assaulting the police.

The cheese and the port brought the celebration to a close and we started back to what I still thought of as The Chasm. There was a cool edge to the evening and as we

walked up Melbourne Street, I sobered up rapidly. After we turned towards Stanley Street, Stryder hardly said a word. He moved slowly and kept looking at every house and garden as we went by.

We wandered inside, picked up a bottle of brandy left over from some other night and went up the stairs to Stryder's balcony to finish the celebration. He gave me a glass, a slight tremor in his hand, and stood in front of me. He raised his glass in salute and said, "This is the real news for the night. I'm not going to sit around waiting for the call-up papers and the medical. I'm getting out of here and I'm not coming back."

"You're going underground?" It took a moment for me to understand. "It will take a few days to organise but you can be gone by Christmas if you want." I was shocked but I should not have been. What other choices were there? We had debated them all endlessly before. I wasn't going to rehearse the objections. How long could he run without being caught and, if caught, he would be jailed for two years. We both knew that. As I looked up, the gloom I felt was instantly mocked by the brightness of the stars and the silky texture of the blue darkness in between. Stryder had chosen non-compliance and draft resistance. Our game ended in December 1969.

"I'm off to India," he said. "I'm going to work on an aid project in Bengal." His face was strained and he sat down.

"Stryder! India? What do you know about India? You can't be serious."

"They won't find me there. They won't even look."

This was awful. Stryder sat there looking as calm as I'd seen him over the last few months. He looked serene, as if he had accepted his fate, chosen to act and his new life had begun.

“But Stryder, India will be a hard place to live. You heard what Jane said about it and Edward got so ill and . . .”

Stryder interrupted. “No arguments,” he said. “I leave tomorrow morning. All the arrangements are made. I’m flying to LA and then taking a flight to India on a separate ticket.” He turned his head to show off his new haircut. “It had to go,” he said, “I can’t afford to draw attention to myself on the way.”

“Yeah, in Singapore they would cut it all off anyway,” I shrugged.

“I’ll be gone so quickly I’ll disappear before anyone notices.”

“Does your father know?”

“Of course not. He’s not expecting me this year. He thinks I’m waiting for my call-up.”

“But India? I don’t think you should go. Go to Canada, go to Sweden. Stay here. We can hide you. Anywhere but India.”

“Look, if it gets too much, I’ll go to Sweden. If you find it too hard to think of me living in India, just treat it as a stopover on the way to somewhere else.”

We both fell silent, staring at each other. I knew this was a mistake and would like to think Stryder did too but his face showed none of his feelings. He had made a choice and like the amateur existentialist he was he intended to live this choice through to the end. It would be an act of betrayal if I argued and there were no good alternatives to suggest. “OK,” I said, “but you must keep in touch.”

"Thanks mate." He smiled shyly. "You can visit me, you know. Book that student charter flight like Edward and Jane. We can meet up in Calcutta, in a year's time.

"Sure mate."

"In an emergency you can contact me through Mary. She got me onto the aid project. Only write when you hear from me and I give you an address." He got up and moved towards his room. "I've got to pack. Will you drive me to the airport?"

Stryder's room was a complete mess. There was a small suitcase on his unmade bed and a much larger mound of clothes and books waiting to be packed, discarded things lay strewn across the floor. The only clear place in the room was his desk and his armchair. All the rest was chaos. As he started sorting his clothes, I slipped out to get Peter Goldman's little black bag. Now was the time to give him these farewell gifts. I took them out and placed them on his desk. "Peter left these behind for us. You need to choose which one to take with you." I sat in the armchair and watched Stryder move awkwardly to sit at the desk. He picked up one and then the other, read a few passages from each and set them back on the table and turned to me.

"I'm not playing the game. I'm choosing the one for you to have. Believe me, you need this book." He picked up his pen and wrote for a few moments and held the book out to me. It was the Omar Khayyam. "I've paraphrased one of the verses,' he said. "Can't remember the words exactly but this will do."

I read the inscription:

Mark,

When you are with warm and generous friends,

Serving good wine

And you come to the place where I would have sat,

Think of me.

Turn down my empty glass.

Stephen

December 1969

I leant across and picked up the other book. “So you will take the *Gita* to India with you. Seems appropriate.” I sat at the desk, read through a few verses and started to write my inscription. It would not be as poetic as Stryder’s. All the time Stryder was folding clothes into his case, and a few urgent supplies, a metal water bottle and some water purification tablets, and a couple of books; *Great Expectations* and *War and Peace*. I don’t think he had ever finished reading them. He completed his packing with a flourish, threw a winter coat over the top of the suitcase and put on a favourite, well-worn pair of boots.

We were both tired and slumped in our chairs. There was desultory conversation, long pauses, then dozing off and waking again through the rest of the night until it was time to drive to the airport. Before we left Stryder called to me, “Hey! Don’t look so gloomy. You won’t forget me.”

Chapter 20
Consequences

1970

I've never forgotten the day I took Stephen to the airport. It was a hot morning. We were both distracted and quiet, dreading the moment when I would drop him off and he would head into the terminal. When we parked out the front and I helped him take his bags to the footpath, we embraced and he threw me the keys, telling me the car was now mine and I could do with it as I pleased. His last words to me were obvious but a shock at the time. "Wait until I'm well on my way to India and then you must tell my mother I have gone. No details, just that I have gone." He smiled, picked up his suit case and headed through the doors.

It was early morning and I took the car and drove to my parents' house and had a breakfast with the family. The noise and usual morning chaos dulled the pain but I desperately wanted someone to talk to. After playing with the twins for a bit and a walk around the vegetable garden with my father, proudly showing off his tomatoes, I made my farewells and headed off to visit Dianna Morton.

Jane was out. Once again Dianna and I sat on the veranda and drank green tea. Apart from swearing her to secrecy and giving her no details I explained what Stryder had asked me to do. She sympathised but said, "Your meeting won't go well. The situation is impossible. It doesn't matter how well or how badly you handle this. Nothing will make it better." She was right.

When I called Mrs Ryder there was deep suspicion in her voice when I explained I needed to see her. She wanted to know if Stephen would be with me.

Elizabeth Ryder met me at the door with no words of greeting but led me through to a small room with a view across a large lawn to a distant flower border and larger trees. We sat on wrought iron chairs facing each other. I told her Stryder had gone away, had gone underground to avoid complying with his call-up for national service. I made no mention of where he was. Her face went rigid and her hands clenched before she put them by her side, looking stern as she spoke to me. "Where is he? Can I see him?" I shook my head. "I need to talk to him, tell him this is wrong." When I explained any one of us trying to contact him would put him at risk her anger flowed. "This is ridiculous. You won't let me talk to my own son. He is doing the wrong thing. He should do his duty. He should go into the army. It's our family tradition. Has he talked to his father?" I told her I didn't think so and she went on. "It's your fault, Mark David, you and that juvenile rabble in the student commune. I blame Angela as well. She should have known better." She ordered me to leave and I was happy to go. When I got to the door she added, "If you ever find it in your heart to help me, let me know where he is, let me talk to him or write to him. Do the right thing for a change."

After a few months one of those blue aerograms came for me. There was no letter just a name, Dravid Singh, and an address in West Bengal. I wrote back, we exchanged letters. At first he was cheerful, excited about teaching at this school, working in a communal garden, eating peasant food and living a simple life. Gradually the tone changed. In one he reiterated his plea for me to visit in December and I dutifully booked my student charter flight for a two and half month trip to India and was excited by the prospect. By this time I was making good progress on my Master's thesis on the international politics of the oil industry and was on notice about my call-up status. There was little chance my MA enrolment would allow me to continue my deferment

but I hadn't heard. I would not stay on with Stryder; it wasn't a serious option. Then, late in the year I got a letter which disturbed me. Following instructions I read the letter and burnt it straight away. I had no doubt Stryder was depressed; being in India was getting to him. He had not been well, usual stomach problems, and there was a vague mention of some trouble in a nearby district. Immediately I wrote back asking for reassurance, stressing it was only a couple of months before I would arrive. I gave him my dates. A reply came swiftly. Stryder would meet me in the Calcutta railway station and he gave me the details of the train I should catch from Madras to make sure I was there on time. There was nothing else in the letter.

I called on Dianna Morton. I was seeing a lot of Dianna and Robert at this time. Most Friday nights I went to the market and bought a collection of exotic treats - stuffed olives, halva, hummus and Lebanese bread and a bottle of white wine - and we would talk about all manner of things until late. Dianna was instantly concerned when I explained about the letter and Stryder's mood. She paused extravagantly before selecting which olive she would eat and held it in her fingers, looking into the distance as she said, "You are right to be worried. It is a good thing you're soon to visit but I wonder," here she turned to me, "should you not ignore Stephen's wishes and contact his parents? At some point they do have a right to know what is going on."

What finally decided me was a conversation I had with my mother. I had arrived early for our now weekly family meal and she was on her own in the kitchen. While the twins were confined to their rooms to finish their homework we shared a pot of tea. As I outlined the problem I could see she was deeply upset by my words. "Oh Mark, you can't do this. You can't go on keeping this information from his mother. I know they didn't get on but … no, this is unkind. You have to tell her." She wrung her hands and twisted sideways in her chair, uncomfortably. "I would be beside myself if it was you

and Stephen wouldn't tell me." There was an awkward silence for some time and then she added, "Don't tell me you're thinking of running away to India as well."

I decided not to call ahead but just to turn up and trust to luck. Another wrong move. When I knocked she came to the door in an apron looking like a housewife in an American sit-com. Elizabeth was upset to see me. She ushered me inside and took me to the kitchen where she poured me a cup of tea, offered milk and sugar and quickly withdrew. After a while she returned without the apron and with makeup neatly applied. She was ready to face the world. I apologised for turning up unannounced; my thoughtlessness had added to her distress. She brushed my comments aside. With an obvious effort at self-control she spoke carefully. "How is he? I assume you have been in touch."

Without any strategy for this moment I just let it all come out. "Mrs Ryder," I said but she interrupted.

With dignity and discipline she said, "Please, Mark. Call me Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth," her name tasted sourly in my mouth but it served as a reminder of how much was at stake in this conversation. "Elizabeth. Yes I have heard from Stephen. I am concerned about him. He seems distressed to me."

With closed eyes and in a soft voice she said, "Go on, please."

"He is in India in West Bengal, somewhere near Calcutta. I have a postal address but I'm sure it is not where he is living and working."

"Working?"

"As a teacher, as part of an aid project."

"I see."

"I think he may be depressed. I'm booked to meet him in Calcutta in December but I thought I should tell you now."

Elizabeth opened her eyes. "Are you planning to join him in India, running away from your call-up?" Her voice was crisply polite.

"No."

"Well your mother won't have to go through what I have. Knowing nothing with no one to talk to and always worrying." She stood up from the table and pushed herself away from me, squeezing up against the return bench in the corner of the kitchen. There was distaste in every word she spoke. "I'm glad, finally, after all this time you have chosen to tell me, more or less, where my son is. I have had visits from the police as I suppose you have, trying to find him and I could say nothing. Now, I will call them and they will bring him home."

"Don't do that. I beg you, please don't call the police," I cried out. "They will arrest him and he will go to jail."

"Yes,' she said. "They will and that would be better. I can live with that."

"I couldn't. I didn't come to see you to put Stephen at risk."

"What did you expect me to do, thank you meekly and be grateful for this small crumb of information?"

"When I see Stephen I will try and persuade him to call you and to leave India."

"Not good enough. I want it to happen now." With a careful slowness Elizabeth walked to the door. "Please don't leave. We need to talk further. I have to make a phone

call." I stood but she held up her hand. "I'm not calling the police. Not yet anyway. I'm calling his father. It's the middle of the night so he should be there."

It was dark when the phone rang. Three o'clock. I hurried to the kitchen.

"It's Charles," the voice said, "Stephen's father." I was now awake, shivering slightly even though it wasn't cold. I was gripping the T shirt to my body with my free arm. I mumbled a greeting. There was a pause. "I've had a call from the Indian police." My breathing stopped. "Stephen is dead."

"What happened?" I never doubted it was true.

"There was an accident. He drowned. You may get a call. He had you listed as his contact person."

I just clung to the phone as a last grip on reality and waited.

"I haven't phoned Elizabeth yet," he said. "I know she is on her own. Could you get there in half an hour?"

"Me?"

"I'll call her now. Get there as quickly as you can."

When I arrived, the porch light was on and the front door was open. There was no reply when I knocked. I listened. Retching sounds came from the garden. There was enough light to make out Elizabeth, on her hands and knees, rocking back and forth at the edge of the lawn. She was shaking, her hair was astray and bedraggled and her night clothes were a mess. I leant down to comfort her, to help her to her feet. There was horror in her eyes when she saw me; she flinched away from my touch. "No! No!" she

cried out. “Go away!” I would have willingly fled the scene but I couldn’t. Her distress was obvious and there was a connection between us at this moment. Finally she let me lead her back into the house and into the kitchen. I sat her in a chair while I went to find a blanket and a face washer. When I returned she had a bottle of brandy in her hand. “There is orange juice in the fridge, pour me a glass.” I did and she added a slug of bandy and gulped it down. I handed her the face washer and she wiped herself down and brushed strands of hair from her face. Coffee was a good idea and the activity needed to find the jar, boil the kettle, add the milk and hand it to her, helped me to endure this moment. We hadn’t spoken. She sipped at her coffee holding the mug in both hands, the blanket draped around her thin rocking body. “You took my son from me,” she said, “and now he is dead.”

I have no idea how we got through the next few hours. Death did not bring us closer together.

As soon as it was light enough and there was a chance she would be awake I called Dianna. She came about nine, took over from me and sent me home. I wasn’t relieved to go. With all her misery, she was Stryder’s mother.

Charles came to stay in Stanley Street with me. Elizabeth wanted a divorce and had asked him to leave the family home. Still they spent most days together and Elizabeth insisted on a low key event in the garden of the house for Stryder’s funeral. It wasn’t a funeral at all. There were only six of us. After extended negotiations I was allowed to invite his Chasm friends but only Edward and I were in Adelaide and Angela was in Sydney. I sent her the details. It was a warm day with a gusting dusty north wind. We gathered near some old willow trees at the bottom of the garden. They gave some

shelter. Charles had got one of his company's couriers to bring Stephen's ashes back. Elizabeth clutched the jar to her chest, rocking back and forth. She was reluctant to let it go. One of her church friends was with her. This friend looked at Edward and me in a disapproving manner but she reserved her most bitter glances for Angela when she arrived, late, and stood some distance away, dressed completely in black and looking dreadful. Charles spoke briefly about Stephen's life. Elizabeth stepped forward with the jar of ashes and said simply, "He was my son." Then she bent over to shield them from the wind, poured them out and they swirled and scattered. We stood for a few moments with our heads bowed. When I turned to follow the others back to the house I saw Angela disappearing down the drive. I called out and ran after her but she was gone.

Later as I left, Elizabeth Ryder walked me to the gate, her hand tightly gripping my upper arm. "I am pleased you are going to India and you will visit the place where Stephen died. Do what I ask for once. Find out everything."

She let my arm go, turned and walked grimly away, not waiting for a reply.

Chapter 21
I remember …

October 2009

Some young kid in Amsterdam, a bright young thing working for Shell, gave me a USB stick with a downloaded version of *Bitches Brew* as a farewell present. He was being kind. We had worked together on a couple of projects and had spent the odd night, sitting up late, drinking and listening to jazz. We shared a fondness for Miles Davis. When he heard I had resigned he decided to give *Bitches Brew* to me as a present. Unfortunately my memories of *Bitches Brew* are memories of the time after Stephen left the Chasm and ran off to India. I listened to it continuously then. I loved its edgy, syncopated, chopped up, electronic, rock and jazz intensity. It mirrored the state of the times we were living through; high-energy, risk and creativity but with a sense that danger was always close by.

I quit my job in a mood of global dissatisfaction. I was fed up with oil and gas companies. I no longer wanted to be part of the whole energy, carbon industry thing. My plan was to cash in my super fund and move to the south coast of South Australia, to the farm just outside Port Elliott. I was not ready for a world without work routines but I was delighted to put an end to a life of international flights and hotels. I could try living off the land. Whatever I did it had to be better than what I had been doing for the last decade. At least my children would be pleased. Not that they would visit but they would like to think of me as settled.

Now I was on my way, flying back to Adelaide via Dubai and a stopover in Perth, listening to *Bitches Brew* on that USB, staying awake all night, just thinking

about my past.

I remember: the train was early. Even after just a couple of days in India I could see that the station, seemingly crowded, was in fact comparatively deserted. On this winter morning, in this dull light, the station seemed vast and outside there was a mist covering everything and filtering the light of the dawn sun. It looked like it should have been cool. No one was there to meet me. I walked up and down the platform. As it was early I bought chai in an earthen cup and sat on a bench cradling it with my hands to warm them. There was a kind of luxury in just sitting and watching the trains come and go with passengers surging in vast mobs either onto or off the platforms. Steam trains. I swear I remember steam trains but I can't believe they were actually there. Such an obvious Victorian era railway station needed steam trains to make the picture complete.

There was no sign of my guide and I was just starting to look for the Station Restrooms where I could wash when I noticed a small boy. He was dressed in baggy shorts with a maroon-red cotton shirt, shiny jet black hair, skinny arms and skinny legs. He was carrying a too large sign with "Mr Ryder" printed on it. Reality hit me in the face. Stephen was dead and that was why I was here. When he got near I signalled to him. He came to me and I asked him if he was looking for me. He shook his head in that distinctive Indian way and he asked me in a halting Bengali accent if I was Mr David. I said I was and he handed me a note. It said the boy would take me to the school.

I tried to chat as he led me to the waiting room and organised my breakfast. I insisted he ate with me and I paid for our meals. He obviously spoke some English but he would not talk to me. When we finished he took me outside to catch a bus. We stood

in a large group and then the boy grabbed, pushed and shoved me through the crowd and onto the bus while he twisted and turned through the jumble of passengers with my suitcase, finally throwing it safely onto the luggage rack. I looked from the window fascinated as we made our way across a vast bridge spanning a massively broad muddy river and through the crowded streets of Calcutta, now clogged with morning traffic. Eventually we left the city, passing into surprisingly green countryside with small fields and palm trees. I must have dozed off.

I remember we arrived at the school on a cart. There was no one around but I could hear school like noises coming from one of the buildings. The boy left me at an entrance way telling me to wait. It was uncanny. I kept expecting to hear Stephen's voice or at least his footsteps. A short man dressed in a white shirt and thin cotton trousers with sandals on his feet came out to greet me. He folded his hands in front of him and gave a bow. I tried to do the same. He took me through to a messy office and sat me down in an old rattan chair by a low table, pulled up another chair and sat facing me.

"My name is Ravi. I am the head teacher. Welcome to India, Mr Mark David." He gestured for tea to be served. We waited and watched a worker of some kind take the tea cups away and return with them filled with spicy milky tea.

"Mr Stephen was your friend?"

I nodded.

"Later I will tell you about his time with us and our regrets now he has gone. You will need to unpack and rest, get a feel for the place. Stay with us as long as you like."

I thanked him and tried to ask about Stephen but he wanted to postpone such talk.

"Bandhu, the boy who met you at the station, he has taken your things to the guest house. He will look after you."

"Does he speak English?"

Once again he made that distinctive nod with his head. "He is shy but he is a good worker and he is friendly."

I meet Ravi for dinner that night. After a simple meal we sat talking on the veranda while Ravi smoked some strongly scented cigarettes. The smell reminded me of Jane. "Mr Stephen was an unexpected god-send," he said and laughed in a lilting self-conscious way at his choice of words. "Sent to us by an American Catholic mission. We hardly expected an Australian and certainly not one like him. Open, friendly. I think your word is 'egalitarian.' He got on with everyone. The children loved him. He even worked in the communal vegetable garden, growing gourds, herbs, even tried his hand at growing spices. Mr Stephen would light up with a smile when we used his produce in our kitchens. And the gardeners did not mind his efforts – they did not treat him as an interloper. Often have I seen them, sharing tea and cigarettes at the end of the day, squatting by the vegetable garden. They did not speak English; he did not speak Bengali but he tried. They laughed together over his efforts."

I was nodding to encourage him to continue. Then I interrupted, gently I hope. "How did Stephen come to die?" I asked.

In the semi- darkness left by the kerosene lamp I could see Ravi look down at his hands, take a last pull on his cigarette and look to the sky. He did not glance at me,

nor did he turn towards me, instead he talked to the night.

"How am I to say?" He shook his head again. I was not sure what the gesture meant but I was used to it by now. In this context it seemed to show reluctance to continue but continue he did. "The police say he died in an accident, drowned at the little ford just down the river from here. It made sense. He did not know how dangerous the ford was. It could have happened easily like that. One slip after rain and he was gone. They found his body well down stream."

He stopped and called for Bandhu to get him another cigarette, giving him a few small coins. Wasn't this a strange way to tell me what had happened?

Hesitantly I said, "You don't think it was an accident?"

"Mostly likely an accident," Ravi said, "but he had been depressed." Here he shrugged and shook his head sideways again. He got to his feet. "We have to go to the police some time. They need to see your papers. They want to talk to you. You will hear their version for yourself. I know only what they have told me."

I remember how uncomfortable I was in the days that followed. Partly it was being in a strange country, partly because I was tired from the travel, the food was totally unfamiliar and there was nothing for me to do. Bandhu was reluctant to speak English but he understood what I asked and wanted. We wandered around the school, a fairly primitive affair, just a couple of class rooms and a small hall for assemblies which doubled as a church for services and, as I grew more adventurous, we would go for longer walks from the school, across the fields and paddies to nearby villages. I came to enjoy the countryside, the occasional meetings with water buffaloes, the exotic birdlife and the green of paddy and the palm trees. I kept seeing it through the eyes of various

Satyajit Ray movies, a staple of the university film club programs.

One day Ravi took me to see where Stryder had slept. It was as bare and austere as Mary's room in the Chasm. Stryder's few clothes were folded neatly on the unmade bed; a pair of faded blue jeans, a collection of Indian tops and trousers. A pair of sneakers and a pair of Indian chapples stood on the floor. The small leather bound copy of the *Gita* lay on the bed next to the piled clothes. It all made rather a pathetic sight. I picked up the book and read my awkward dedication. I told Ravi to give the clothes to anyone who needed them but I kept the book. It did not make me feel any better to have this memento but I couldn't just leave it behind.

We took the cart back to the village and then the bus to the nearest town with a police post. They had been waiting to see me. I spent hours with the police, Ravi and the boy waiting to assist as required. They brought me coffee and food. The police wanted to know the whole story of how Mr Stephen Ryder had come to be in India; for their files, they said. I only told them about his plans to come to India to work on the aid project. I did not mention conscription and call-up. They had his Australian passport and his Indian visa issued in America. They wanted to know why that was so. They painstakingly took down my statement. It took hours. I had to read it back and sign it. When we were finished they gave me Stephen's passport but they cut out the visa page. They gave me a document which was like a death certificate, a police notification of death.

Then I was ordered, requested politely, not to leave the school without police authority. They took my passport. They would want a further interview, after they had completed their inquiries and had finished their report. We did not discuss how Stephen had died.

I was at the school for about ten days. For a while nothing interested me. I had another talk to Ravi about Stephen's death. "It was an accident," he said more definitely this time. "He had been depressed and ill; being ill made him more depressed. Even the news he got in letters did not seem to cheer him. He withdrew into himself in the days before the accident, kept to his bed by the dysentery, eating only a little rice and drinking weak tea. He was getting better. On the day of the accident he had spent time in the class room. The children were pleased to have him back. He was in a weakened state. He could so easily have slipped."

I wandered around the place accompanied by the boy. For most of the time he said little but he walked with me as I made my rounds. He showed me the vegetable garden and then took me to the ford where Stephen had drowned. Then, in broken words, he told what he saw. There had been an unexpected flood. Two old people got into trouble. Stephen went to help them. They survived; he drowned. He took me to where Stephen's body had been cremated. Stains from the fire and ashes were on the ground.

I lost all interest in food and I had trouble sleeping. One day Ravi took me for a tour of the area on the back of his antique motor bike, an old khaki coloured contraption. The villages looked poor, rundown, dilapidated places. We took tea in one of these, surrounded by a large group of curious, smiling and pointing children. We were taken into one of the huts to meet a family. Ravi translated for me. The room was spotless, the clothes were clean and neat and the people spoke without bitterness about how they lived their lives. I was surprised. They were among the poorest of the poor. Their existence was precarious but they spoke warmly and with hope. Of course they would have liked things to be better, for the landlords to be fair in their dealings, for the

crops to be more prosperous, but their first aim was the welfare of their families. The children placed necklaces of marigolds around our necks and waved us goodbye. As we walked away Ravi just said they were good people but Hindus. It was a holiday; normally the children would have been at school.

In the evening I went alone to sit by the remnants of the cremation fire and talked to Stephen.

When I left the school I had about two months to fill before I could catch the charter flight back to Australia. I had no plans. There was nothing else I wanted to do. I went to the police station to collect my passport. After signing a second statement for the police saying I had read their report, I took the bus to a town and a railway junction. I didn't care where I went. I looked at the departures board and took the first train I could catch. It was going to Benares so that is where I went. From there I just went on and on, taking trains and buses at random. Stopping off in towns, villages and cities; sleeping on railway benches, restrooms and in cheap hotels; eating everything and anywhere. Taking no special precautions I travelled on and when the water purification tablets ran out I drank cokes, tea and the local water. I stopped in Delhi for about a week, going to films, museums and all night music concerts. In Bombay I stayed long enough to change trains and despair about the massive slums. Then I headed south, stopping off at temples, mosques, ruined forts and towns, always moving on. I met all kinds of people; teachers going off to villages, salesmen going to market towns to sell trinkets, husbands going home after being away for years working in distant parts of the country, children, storytellers, fortune tellers, astrologists, a snake charmer and a famous Bengali novelist. The people fascinated me most. We met, talked, shared and parted and I hurried on. I

thought of this existence as something like *The World of Apu* where, grief stricken after his wife's death in child birth, he headed off to all corners of India, running away from his past and himself. Still there was adventure in what I was doing; it was a bit like being on the road, Indian style.

Somewhere along the way I fell in love with the place but it was a romance with more than a hint of bitterness and regret. I remember how it felt at the time and in my many other trips to India there often comes a time when a taste, a smell, a face glimpsed in the crowd or a building, sunrise or sunset can trigger an acute form of this feeling. Somewhere along the road I got sick. I had been losing weight steadily and I had a hacking cough, the India railway cough as we called it at the time but I wasn't really ill. Then in some southern fishing town I ate my first seafood curry. It was late at night; I was tired and even more reckless than usual. The taste was sensational and so was the aftermath. I ended up in a run-down Madras hotel being treated for dysentery by a kindly doctor I could barely understand. In that shape, wasted and worn-out, I headed off to catch the flight home.

I remember going to see Elizabeth Ryder after I got back from India. It was late afternoon and she was sitting in the immaculate garden at a cast iron table on a terrace overlooking the vast lawn. This time she was dressed impeccably, her hair had been done by a professional and she looked like a formidable society matron. I was the one in disarray. I had showered and changed into really clean clothes, the first for three months. The clothes hung from my bones. There was a grey pallor to my skin. It was easy to refuse the gin and tonic she offered me. Even the smell of it made me feel ill. I had come intending to tell Elizabeth everything I knew about Stephen's death but she wanted to hear nothing. She clutched her glass and stared through cloudy eyes at me

and the world. Not a word of abuse or rebuke this time. She said hardly anything at all. After about five minutes, in a tired voice, she told me I could go. I thought I should at least tell her something of the circumstances but she refused to listen. As Elizabeth made it clear that I should leave, I handed her Stephen's copy of the *Gita*. For a moment she looked hostile and then exhausted. "You keep it," she said.

I remember some of the things that happened next but not all of them. My memories of 1969 and 1970 are clear but, at best, I have a fuzzy recall of even the most important things that happened in 1971. I was continually ill, in and out of hospital throughout the year. There were all kinds of weird diagnoses and treatments and prognoses. While ill I resigned from my position at the University. True but the sequence is wrong. When I got back from India, despite obvious health problems I worked hard to complete my MA on the International Politics of Oil. It was the only thing I did. In the language of the time I dropped my bundle. I gave up on everything. I took part in demonstrations with increasing levels of recklessness but I sensed the radical moment had passed, at least for me. I was too tired to care. Eventually I resigned from the university. I did not want to study and I wanted to get away from students, my fault not theirs. My long-standing application to defer my call-up while I did the MA was rejected but I had almost finished by then. I talked to few people about what this meant; not my family, not my friends. Dianna and Robert Morton were the only ones I trusted. Robert maintained I was too ill for either prison or underground as a draft resister. In a dejected mood I went to the army medical and failed. I told no one and was back in hospital for a spell. Although I was free of the call-up, I felt no relief. Indeed I felt little at all. One of the examiners for my Master's worked part time as a consultant to the oil industry. He wrote to me after the degree was awarded and invited me to join him in Sweden to work

in his business. He was convinced an oil crisis was coming and the demand for our expertise would be great. He was right. So began my career. Even after all these years I can't make much sense of what I did in the months after I returned from India. It was as if my strategy for random travel from India had invaded the rest of my life.

Chapter 22
Nursing Home Blues: A Reprise

October 2009

I remembered my recent visit to the nursing home. The matron with the grey eyes was no longer there. Her temporary replacement met me with cool indifference, letting me know she had given my brief notes to Mrs Ryder. She had arranged for us to meet in a consulting room, a drab medico-corporate affair with a ghastly pastel mass produced print on the wall. A care-worker escorted Mrs Ryder in to sit at the table and Elizabeth only just managed to acknowledge my presence. She was frailer than before but her self-control and determination had not been diminished. She considered me at length with obvious disappointment. I started to talk about my notes but she cut me off with an imperious hand gesture.

"Enough," she said. "I'm not interested in all this stuff." She leant forward and smiled coldly. "The only question I want answered is this. Did Stephen have a son?"

I hesitated and looked bewildered. The aggression in her voice increased.

"I know he was the father of Angela's aborted child but what of India? Did my son have a child while he lived In India?"

I shook my head but this did not stop her. She glared and said, "Why don't you go back to India and, this time, find the child? At least that would be useful." She stared at the blank wall.

I understood her strange comments about the phantom lost child. Even at this late stage Mrs Ryder longed to find a missing heir. I could see she still carried hurt but I

would no longer accept her bitterness and anger. I had been passive before as I had felt guilty about Stryder. Her obvious hostility to me had meant I did not have to think of her needs. Indeed I didn't have to see her as a person at all. This time it would be different.

"Elizabeth," I said and pulled my chair closer, to force her to look directly at me. "I understand," I spoke carefully. "This is not about an heir. There was no child with Angela, and there are no unknown offspring in India."

She kept her face turned away.

"You asked me to tell you about how Stephen died but that isn't the real question. We both know how he died."

I paused and looked at Elizabeth. No longer could I see her as 'just' Stryder's difficult mother. I saw her as a woman who had lost her only child when he was 22, lost him before their relationship could be repaired. They had enough time to grow apart but nowhere near enough time to grow together again. Twenty two, what a ridiculously young age to die! And then to have this relationship with her son frozen in the time of tension with no chance ever, for them to get over it. She dropped her head and stared at her hands clenched tightly in her lap.

I braced myself for her response to what I was going to say next. "This is not about his death. It's about his life. His memory, not his offspring."

There was a slight but forced smile on her face and caution in her eyes.

"I know there was trouble between you but Stephen was a good person. You brought him up well and gave him everything he wanted. Maybe you spoiled him. He was stardust and golden, a shining boy; full of hope, full of fun, full of life. For me he

was a charming catalyst. With his encouragement I found I could do so much more than I assumed was possible. Just being my friend was enough."

Elizabeth turned herself further from me so I could not see her face.

"I am forever in his debt. He made it easier to live my life under the threat of conscription and that stupid, pathetic war in Vietnam. Even now, there is hardly a day I don't think of him and regret his death." I paused to emphasise the next point. "Please don't forget. He died trying to save those people at the river crossing."

I would have continued but words were too hard to come by. As I spoke a vision of Stephen came to my mind as old as he ever was in my memories, walking across campus, wearing his blue jeans, with a pale-coloured, light-weight jacket slung over his shoulder, his light brown hair shining almost blond in the sunlight, waving to friends as he passed, calling out to others, teasing them and laughing.

Mrs Ryder turned to look steadily at me and said, "After all these years you still remember him". This was not a question but a statement, as if this was something she could not have imagined possible. "You kept that from me too." She looked off into the distance. I hoped then she also remembered Stephen at some quiet moment in their past.

We sat in silence for a while and I told her I would come and visit whether she wanted me to or not. I would talk to her about Stephen, to keep his memory alive and fresh to her mind. Nothing had changed in her facial expression and her dissatisfaction seemed to continue. Carefully I placed on the table Stephen's black covered edition of the *Gita*, now much worn from travelling with me round the globe. Elizabeth picked it up and opened it to read my inscription. She took the book in her arms and folded it to

her chest. With some residual reluctance I opened my copy of the *Ruba'iyat* to where Stephen had crafted his dedication and handed it to her. "Have them both," I said.

Elizabeth did take my hand, for just a moment, before she stood, straight backed and determined, and walked from the room without assistance and without looking back.

I waited for a few moments before heading out to the dementia ward where my mother was resident. The substitute Matron caught me up. She had been waiting to see how the meeting had gone. "Well enough," I replied. "We didn't reach an understanding but I will visit her when I come. There is a lot more we could say to each other."

She looked at the clip board in her hand, "I see from our records you were concerned to ensure your mother and Mrs Ryder did not meet." Smiling faintly she said, "We failed you. You know how news circulates in a place like this. When your mother moved in, Elizabeth found out she was here and went looking for her. Now she spends time with her most days. Despite your mother's Alzheimer's, they seem to get on. They just sit and talk, sometimes they argue, sometimes they swear at each other but, mostly, they just sit in silence."

Chapter 23
No Direction Home

October 2009 (Fremantle)

"Well hello, Mr Mark David," she said, world-weary like a Hollywood starlet. Then in tones reminiscent of her youthful singing, only huskier, she continued, "Still in a business suit. What brings you drifting over to the dark side of the town?"

I took my time to try and see in her rock-star face the lineages of a youth we partly shared. I went to call her Angela but I corrected myself in time, "Greetings Bobby. I saw your poster. I just stopped by for a beer. Surprised and pleased to see you anyway."

She pulled up a chrome chair to sit at the bar and her manager placed a bottle of soda water and a glass by her side. Then he went back and continued to talk to the band.

"Did you hear any of the rehearsal? Do you want to borrow a guitar?"

I shook my head and showed her my soft hands. "No guitar playing for me after all these years."

She leaned on her elbows and looked at my reflection in the long mirror behind the bar. "How long are you staying in this town, Mister?"

The traces of our past were there in her reflected face and her eyes. "I'm out on the first flight in the morning."

She took my arm and swivelled her chair round, at the same time turning mine so that we looked at each other straight on. "Mark, you don't have to take that flight. I'm doing a show tonight. Tell me you'll come and see me play."

"I'm not sure I can do that."

"Even I can reschedule a flight," she broke in quickly. "If it's a hassle for you I can get my manager to make the changes. It won't take a minute."

"No thanks." I looked at my watch. "As of now I am retired and I have to get used to a do-it-yourself world." I was already calculating and adjusting flights and schedules and, in truth, there was no one and nothing waiting at the other end.

"Do stay. I want to talk to you about the old days, about Stephen, and us. There are things I need to tell you."

I was not sure I wanted to hear.

"Come on Mark. I've run into you, what, two or three times in almost forty years. Only ever by chance, and you walk away before we can say anything serious. You never get in touch with the others from the Chasm. When did you last see Mary or Jane, Edward or Peter?"

"I saw Peter in an airport in Berlin on this last trip."

"I see them all almost every year. Mary and Jane are easy to find since they have hardly moved and Edward has a house in Sydney. It wouldn't hurt to look them up, you know."

"I have trouble with my past," I said.

"Come about nine," she said. "No one will bother you."

Angela got up from her seat and moved away. "Hey Marty, can you fix a seat at our table for Mr Mark David," she called to her manager. "He'll be on his own." At the end of the bar she turned back to me. "I'll be hoping to see you." In her old voice she

softly added, “Give peace a chance.”

I sipped my beer as I watched her go. Then I realised how much I had missed her.

Angela was right. In the years since the Chasm, we hadn’t met often, but when we did the meetings were strained. We never talked about Stryder. She resented the way I looked, how I dressed and what I did. I remember once she told me I was just a ghost trapped inside a business suit, pretending I was alive, just drifting around with no place to go. If we talked we would have to talk about Stryder and that would be painful.

As I left the bar I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror. Perhaps Angela would like this look better: a tired, crumpled traveller lost out on some endless highway without a clue where a safe haven could be found.

When I got to the venue there was a single table set up for me at some distance from the band. Marty brought over a bottle of Margaret River SSB. He was obviously curious. Angela waved as she headed back stage.

The venue was a vast cavern of a place. Lots of chairs set up close to the stage and most of these were taken. There were a few tables at the back with people sitting, drinking and some talking loudly. I sipped my wine waiting for the show to begin. Angela came out alone and sat at the keyboard. Immediately I knew why I’d been placed where I was. When she sang she would be looking directly at me, although with the bright stage lights shining on her I doubted she could see anybody. She was not dressed in any special way; she was wearing a pair of jeans and an old blue jumper, just as she had in the early days.

Angela started with *Oh Daddy*, one of her favourite Bessie Smith songs. After a couple of other old blues numbers, the band joined her. On the way from the hotel I had rehearsed detachment so I could keep everything in perspective. Partly I was concerned about the impact her music might have on me. I couldn't help it. I remembered the trouble trying to play that old Janis Joplin record earlier in the year. I knew it would be so much worse with Angela singing those songs. Now I found she only had to sit at the piano, play her opening chords and start to sing a familiar tune for my resolve to collapse completely. Once more I was the shy young kid mesmerised by her raw talent. Her performance was brilliant and the band became more excited; they fed off her energy. She relentlessly drove them on, forcing them to be more creative. The crowd caught the mood and made it clear how much they loved what she was doing. There was nothing routine or mechanical here. This was live music as it should be. The spontaneity, the risk taking and the freshness of her performance overwhelmed me, drowning all other distractions of the senses. Nobody wanted a song to end; nobody wanted the set to finish. Angela completely inhabited her songs. The force of her performance was so powerful, her words and mood dominated my mind. When she left the stage I sat there stunned.

During the interval Marty came up to the table. His hair was awry. There was sweat on his face and his eyes gleamed. "Man, I don't know what there is between the two of you but whatever it is, stay close. This is her best show for years." He put his hand on my shoulder. "Thank God I have it on tape." He leant forward to shake my hand. "Hang in there, buddy."

I just smiled. He sauntered off shaking his head. The band returned chatting loudly, grabbing drinks and talking with the patrons but there was no sign of Angela.

The second set was different. Angela came on with the band, carrying an acoustic guitar and walked to the front of the stage. She stood behind the mike and shielded her eyes against the light. In her self-deprecating, self-mocking, slight American accent she said, "A long time ago I was a bit of a folk singer. Some of that might find its way back here tonight. I hope you don't mind." Some in the crowed whooped encouragement to her and she checked the tuning of the guitar.

Angela started with some of the songs we used to do back when she lived in the Chasm. She paused to gather strength for her next song, *No Other Name*. It was usually associated with Mary Travers from Peter Paul and Mary. I hadn't heard the song for years and I almost choked when I remembered the words to the last verse. Her voice faltered just for a moment when she came to the line about dying alone in another country and lying in an unmarked grave. Only I could have known what it was, a song for Stryder. At this point she returned to the keyboard and worked through a selection of old songs from the sixties.

Angela stood up slowly, collected her acoustic guitar, bowed to the band and to the audience. There was sustained applause. She did not leave the stage but waited for the crowd to quieten down. She handed her guitar to one of the band members and stepped to one side, stretching out her arms to allow her hands to rest on the microphone stand. She shook her head and her shoulder-length hair fell forward over her face and she counted the band in. Immediately I recognised the guitar riff and we were launched into a lengthy, raunchy, version of *Take another little piece of my heart*, the Janis Joplin classic. It was desperate and I was grateful the audience was loud in their applause. It gave me cover while I tried to make sense of how I felt about Angela's performance.

As the band left the stage the audience became animated and noisy; some filed out, while others hung around and bought drinks at the bar. Angela did not appear. Marty started to pack up the recording gear and gave me a thumbs-up sign when we looked at each other. The band came back on a post-gig high, laughing, collecting their equipment and heading out. No Angela. Placidly I sat there and let my mind wander back to images of Angela from her, from our, youth. At some other time I had described Angela as luminous. This time her radiance made me uncomfortable. I recognised both excitement and anticipation. Now there was more to talk about than I had imagined. The crowd was gone. The bar staff were washing the dishes and glasses and putting everything back in its place and I sat at my table, waiting. The stage lights had been turned off and there was a pool of silence all around me.

I felt her hand, warm on my shoulder. She had showered and changed and was now wearing a white T shirt and a light black jacket. I hadn't noticed before but she was wearing glasses and yes there were lines on her face; no makeup, no jewellery apart from Mary's small silver cross. There was an anxiety around her eyes but she did not speak.

"Well hello *Angela*. It's good to see you again." This was my pathetic effort to break the silence.

"Yes Mark," she said with a slight twist to her mouth. "The band is going off to Fast Eddy's to celebrate. It's just round the corner from the hotel. There is a table booked just for us." Here she paused. "Will you be coming with me?"

Ok," I said. "I'd be happy to join you and yes I will talk about our past . . ." My voice cracked a little.

Fast Eddy's was a bright, neon-lit, down-market themed burger bar. It was late and the crowd hanging out looked a bit shifty. There were a number of loners nursing coffees, legs jiggling, fingers tapping and spaced-out eyes. It was that kind of joint, urban grunge. The band was well established and their table was crowded with bottles, glasses and mounds of food. They greeted Angela nosily, shouting "Hey, Bobby" and waving, until they saw me and suddenly they turned full attention to the food, only casting furtive looks at us as we walked to a dim corner well away from the action. It reminded me of other dim corner tables in other eating places at other times with Angela. As soon as we were seated a waiter came up with bottles of sparkling wine and soda water, and a large plate of hot nachos. We hadn't even spoken when Marty bounced up to the table, announcing he had arranged for a clip of the last song to be uploaded to YouTube and there was already comment on Facebook about the gig. "Wild enthusiasm," he said.

"Marty's a bit overwhelmed by how good it was tonight – thinks it was you not me!"

At last I could comment on the concert. I ran out of superlatives. Angela smiled wryly and said, "It's just what I do." She poured our wine and we chatted over the meal. I noticed how often she would pick up a glass to drink, hesitate with it in her hand and put it down without even taking a sip. Plates were moved around, glasses rearranged, napkins folded and unfolded. In the end I stopped talking and waited.

Finally her restless activity stilled. She sat back with her hands pressed together on the table top, concentrating on my face, looking uncomfortable.

"Listen," she commanded. "You know, when I had the abortion," her eyes dimmed, "I denied it but it was true. Stryder was the father of the child."

All my systems shut down. There was no way I could speak.

"The story about the Frenchman, I made it up. I didn't want Stryder to know."

My pulse raced and my stomach felt unstable. How could this be the truth? Did he ever suspect? I recalled our embarrassing conversation about their drunken one night stand, Stryder counting his dates and lecturing me on the use of condoms.

"I didn't tell Stryder because I knew he didn't want to be with me. I wasn't his type, or so he said." By this time her napkin was knotted and the remaining nachos had been ground into crumbs. I refused to speak. "About a year later I wrote to him and told him everything. I asked if I could visit him in India. I wanted to apologise."

"Apologise?" I sat upright.

"Yes. I should have told him when I was pregnant. We should have discussed it. We should have made a decision."

"When Mrs Ryder said Stephen was the father . . ."

She slumped in her chair, a picture of abject misery. "I wanted to protect him," she said.

I looked around the restaurant. Marty and the band were gone and only a few of the all night loners remained in silent communion with their coffee cups. We had to get out of this depressing place.

"Come on," I said, standing up.

Angela did not move. "Then I heard about his suicide." She looked like she would never speak again.

I sat down quickly and spoke sharply. “When you are next in Adelaide I’ll take you to see Elizabeth Ryder. She is the one person left who might benefit from your confession.” As I heard what I said I regretted my words. “Maybe she will understand,” I said.

There was more acid in my voice than necessary and I felt a sudden sadness for Angela, for Stryder, for Mrs Ryder, and yes, perhaps a little for the person I had been. It couldn’t end here. I would not let it.

We were silent for some time as if sitting together and not talking was a deeper form of communication, capable of building understanding and acceptance. My shock, my anger, faded to a low growl.

Softly I said, “There is something tragic about it all.”

There was no way I could reach out and take her hand, not even to provide comfort.

“Angela, Stryder did not suicide. At the time it seemed possible but no. I talked to everyone who knew him in India. An old couple got into trouble on a dangerous river crossing. Stryder went to help, lost his footing and drowned. Simple, awful, tragic. An accident not a suicide.”

All the same I heard this inner voice saying, “You can’t be certain, can you? Not now. Not after hearing this story.”

This was not a night for being alone. I helped Angela stand and I led her from the all night cafe. There was a faint edge to the night darkness as I steered us towards the harbour. We I had a lot to talk about. There was a certain pleasure in stumbling along together as the port lights were being turned off.

Angela broke away as we came close to the hotel. “I sleep alone,” she said. “Can we meet at the bar? Around noon?”

“OK.”

Some hotel worker came to the entrance. I waved my key and ordered a glass of Amaro, my favourite, bitter, Italian after-dinner drink. The outdoor tables were deserted. It was easy to find the view I wanted of the harbour, the silhouettes of the Norfolk Island pines against the lightening sky and the steadily fading stars. I wanted to sit and sip until the sun started to rise. I felt chilled, numbed. I’d got through the night all right, surviving meeting Angela and all she had to say. There would be no harm in meeting up with my old friends from the Chasm. Not often but enough.

Now there was another challenge. How would I manage any encounter between Angela and Elizabeth Ryder? Elizabeth had a right to know and Angela needed to be the one to tell her. Being in the same room with them would take some kind of skill. I didn’t want either of them to walk out angry or hurt. If only it could be easily done. It was a meeting I could delay but not avoid. They wouldn’t end up buddies. There was the other moment I feared. I had been lucky so far, but one day I would visit my mother and find Elizabeth there too, with her as well.

As the dawn brought an end to my reflections, I raised my glass to salute the sky. One more session with Angela, one more sun rise and one more flight. Now was the time to head out for my new home, the old house on the south coast with its abandoned orchard and a garden in need of repair. Fix the house, celebrate the tall cherry plum tree shading the north corner of the block, and start a modest vegetable garden to suit my present needs.