



BAYNE OF EXISTENCE

Miles Hunt

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the **Bayne** of
Existence

1. A view of the lizards

The stifled air of a thousand nights of riotous excess hung limply in J. and K.'s apartment and Bayne opened his mouth to it, his throat parched and dry and tasteless. His whole body ached from another night of restless sleep upon their wretched couch. Its cushions had fallen out from under him soon after he'd drifted off, leaving him to sleep through the night on a thin layer of fabric covering the couch's hard wooden frame. When he woke his shoulder ached and stabbing pains raced through his neck. The couch was too short for his rather tall frame. If he used the pillow on the arm rest his head would be jutting up at a silly angle and straining his neck, if he dropped off the arm rest and used the comfortable pillow within the chair, his whole body had to be contorted into the confines of the sofa. He would swap sides and ends, and sleep with his head uncomfortably upon the arm rest, then swap to the foetal position with his head on the pillow, and in the end he just accepted the inevitability of a restless painful sleep.

Bayne needed a drink. His throat hurt. He should have got up during the night when the first thoughts of dehydration appeared in his vivid drunken dreams. He had rolled over, pushed the thought away by telling himself he wasn't thirsty, and fallen back into an uncomfortable slumber, continuing on with his dreams as if the waking was an intermission to an absurd reality... and now he regretted his languor. The hazy memory of a night's drunkenness returned slowly to his throbbing head. He looked around for The Kid. He was gone. He had been asleep most of the night, lying awkwardly on K.'s bean bag. 'He must have gone to work,' Bayne thought. Bayne laughed to himself as he thought of The Kid battling through a day of workers' compensation claims after that heavy night. It was the Kid's birthday and they ended up at some cheap Thai restaurant knocking back bottles of wine. Eventually they had returned to J. and K.'s apartment and The Kid had passed out. Bayne and K. sat up late into the night drinking malty bottles of beer as the night got later. J. was amusing his latest romance in his bedroom, occasionally leaving her to join K. and Bayne on the balcony, where he'd light up a smoke and grab hold of a beer and make a few jokes, before returning nonchalantly to his girl. He was good to the girls, they liked him. He had a soft touch and a carefree spirit; the unimportant things didn't worry him and everyone found him pleasing company. He was their friend first and if something developed, well he'd shrug his shoulders and run with it; he wasn't going to get in the way of things; he was never one for confrontation. It was a contrast to his close friend K.. He'd had the same girl for seven years and their relationship had grown stale. She'd been round the night before, and K. had got stuck into her about something that happened years before. At first she had argued and then apologised, but in the end she went sadly to bed, and K. just kept on drinking.

Bayne sucked the moisture from his lips, hoping this last inch of saliva would quench his desperate thirst. It didn't. He eventually got up, stumbled to the kitchen and drank down gushes of water straight from the tap like a wild animal that had stumbled upon a creek in the midst of the African dry. The kitchen was a mess as usual, awash with stained glasses and cutlery and leftover Chinese strewn haphazardly across the vinyl bench-top. Bayne glanced around for a clock, couldn't find one, and then headed hopefully to J.'s room, where he opened the door slightly and peered through at the sunken body. K.'s door was closed, but it was possible that he was at work. Bayne walked around slowly, like a tiger in a cage, pacing the apartment, hoping J. or K. would

wake. He made loud noises as he went, bumping into chairs, clanging the cutlery in the kitchen as he made a pitiful attempt at cleaning up, and eventually just stamping the ground in hope that he would wake someone to amuse him. A twinge of guilt crept across him and he gave up and went to the fridge to grab a beer. 'It was too early for a beer,' he decided quickly. He would have had one if J. or K. was having one too, but he couldn't bring himself to drinking on his own at whatever time it was in the morning. He put the bottle back and went to the balcony. The sun was pelting down against the hard concrete city, and the air was dry and foreboding. Eventually he sat down on the outside couch in his boxer shorts and looked out across the city. The harbour shimmered against the gleaming sun and boats were already beating across the water. The city was alive, and there was action on the streets far below. He knew the pavements around the city would be crawling with all kinds of people, like lizards awoken by the sun and sent off scurrying to work; and the lizards were dressed in suits and the lizards had a long day, a long week and a long year ahead; and the lizards scurried after their needs and greeds and they fought over every scrap; and they worked on for themselves, and the society that had formed around them was a mere subsidiary to their desires. The ants had once roamed the earth and they had worked together. They scrounged for food and shared it with everyone, and not one starved; they built mighty structures for their community, and not one went shelterless; they fought and died together for their nests... and then sadly they were gobbled up by the hungry lizards and their empires were trampled and forgotten.

The sun reflected off the scrappers and the towers; it drove its powerful heat into every inch of Bayne's skin, and it drove its forceful light through his eyes as it turned the world to daylight. The heat held its suffocating grip on Bayne and he got up suddenly, waving his hands at an invisible enemy, almost squealing in hatred at the mighty sun, for at that moment it was his enemy. It had wakened him from his slumber, and warmed him, and given life to his lifeless soul, and now it pained him and he was forced to retreat indoors- a beaten foe.

He went back to his couch, and fixed up the cushions, stamping at the ground angrily, knowing that he didn't really want to wake them, not like that. He wished he could be back within the clasp of safe and secluded sleep, where nothing hurt, where emotions never frayed, where the world was within his infinite grasp... and their sleep panged him with jealousy, but deep down he was comforted in their comfort. Bayne grabbed hold of the golf club impatiently and switched on the television. The golf club had been there for months, saving J. the effort of having to get up from his couch to turn on the television. The morning shows bored Bayne and he flicked on hurriedly, barely glimpsing each show before flicking to the next and so on until he was going round in circles. He gave up and settled for the news. Once more it was filled with the hate of man. The report was showing some suicide bomb in Israel and there was footage of crying mothers and bloodied children, of angry leaders and hardened soldiers, and then there was the terrifying response from the leaders promising retaliatory bombs on Palestine; more death on both sides to come. This silly war had gone on since Bayne had known existence; it had filled the airways since television first arrived. A never ending war; hate against hate, man against man, God against God, and for what... both peoples claimed a divine rights to the same piece of land, and they both killed each other for it. And as the war was slowly waged over generations and the fear and distrust grew,

the fighting became about protection of their peoples against life-long enemies. Yet the problem was the killing, and they wouldn't need protection if they stopped the killing.

Bayne thought about all the wars of God and suddenly he was angry and he blamed religion and he wanted answers. 'I should ask Heil' he thought to himself. 'Maybe he could tell me why religion has caused so much death? Why something built on the foundations of love, only causes hate?' Bayne grew steadily more restless and the day heated up with him, and he switched off the television angrily and thought again about waking J. and K., and about grabbing another beer, and again he decided against it. And as the day dragged on, his mind kept turning to religion and he kept asking himself the same questions. He grew frustrated with his boredom and threw on his jeans and shirt, found his thongs which had been lost the night before and left the apartment. He slammed the door and headed for the lift and out onto to the cooler streets below where the sun could not penetrate the great buildings of man; and he jumped aboard a train and headed for Heil in the woods. He would ask his great friend that lived alone in the wood at the edge of the city and spent his days in meditation and thought; his wise brother that had wondered the world in search of answers and had created his own ideas of morality and religion. If anyone could answer him with objective clarity it was Heil; if anyone could satisfy his curiosity, could dampen his anger, and could steer him towards the truth, it was Heil.

2. Bayne

Bayne was a simple man; a simple man with the simple desire never to work for the rest of his life. This simple plan was harder than he first envisaged and every time he felt close to realising it, something happened which put it further away. He would then reluctantly shelve the plan and get on with whatever was consuming his life at that particular moment. He dreamt of exciting adventure, he imagined wild romance, and he continuously conjured intoxicating ideas of untouchable freedom. Freedom- beautiful, spontaneous freedom- only ever really possible for those with nothing left to lose. In reality Bayne sought fulfilment and seeing so many around him suffering from alienation in the workforce had conditioned him into a belief that a life free from work was the only way not to waste one's existence. It also paved a path onward toward his impossible dream of pure unadulterated freedom.

Bayne was a conundrum. One moment he was energetic and full of untamed enthusiasm and the next he retired languidly to reticence. At parties he would arrive full of over-stated confidence, slapping each of his friends jovially on the back, chatting hurriedly about anything that came into his head then listening equally enthusiastically to their replies. After this initial burst, he would silently slip out of sight to grab some booze and drink hurriedly in the corner, watching everybody shyly as he waited for the alcohol to have its effects and bring him drunkenly back into the wild conversations and maddening revelry. His friends saw him as an assured and confident leader; a magnetic character brimming with excitement and humanity; a humorous observer; a charismatic story teller. To strangers he was the opposite, nothing more than a shy drunkard, who offered little and preferred his own quiet company to theirs.... somehow he was both.

Bayne was a tall, shaggy, somewhat undistinguished enigma. His light brown curly hair flopped despondently over his unshaven dishevelled looking face. He dressed in casual almost ragged looking clothes, happily flaunting social conventions in favour of comfort and ease. He was pleased in his own eudemonic ideal, enjoying the simple pleasures of life, the indescribable pleasures of intoxicating wine, of delicious food and of laughter and conversation with hearty companions. The world of material possessions had ceased to hold his attention. He didn't feel the buzz, when buying something new, that so many others seem to do. Magazine covers were magazine covers, the parade of celebrities adorning the glossy pages were nothing more than silly pictures; a sad indictment of society's heroes. Bayne was slightly shamed that his fellow man had forgotten poetry and the great novels of the ages for such short-lived frivolity, but he was able to satisfy himself that things would change and the soul of man would return.

Bayne appreciated the greatness of genius; he read eclectically and loved passionately, and whilst he barely understood the dynamics of music, he knew that it had the power to clutch at his soul. He loved the ballads of Dylan, the words of Kerouac, the philosophies of Marx and the music of Lennon and McCartney. He was inspired by folk heroes and the tales of frontiersmen and wild untamed outlaws. His imagination was let loose in the pages of allegories and kind-hearted fables and he fell in love with the Wild Woods and all that it possessed. It was through stories that he soothed the growing menace within, where the reality was his, where oppressed criminals could escape the savageries of justice, where forgotten bums could find meaning in dilapidated lives,

where tragedy was always beautiful, where soldiers were always peaceful, where poets were left untouched to sing songs to the world from the boughs of great figs, where dances could rise like flames from the earth and flicker on through the day and night, where children could smile in the depths of drought, where pain brought pleasure, and where anybody could get up from their lives and shrug off their apathy and walk off into the distance along a pale thread of roadway and never turn their backs.

Bayne had thick curly hair with wisps of white throughout that gave him an air of ancient wisdom. He almost resembled Alexander the Great, and for a while he had held his head slightly to the left in imitation. But greatness was not his calling and he left behind the courageous delusion for a humanist ignominy. He was interested in people, and he spent much of his time watching the vagaries of unknown strangers, trying to capture the story of their lives in one small flicker of recognition. He would then create lives for these strangers that he had only glimpsed from a distance or spoken to for a second. He was captivated by their unknown pasts and infinite futures and he hurriedly imagined their thoughts and emotions, their dreams and destinies, their courage and hope, their fear and distrust, their disillusionment and devastation, and their vast untouchable greatness.

Bayne had a competitive streak, which coupled with his deep interest in everything and his natural co-ordination, allowed him to become quite skilful in everything that he tried. Sadly his impatience let him down, and so he remained talented in almost everything he did but never so talented as to distinguish himself from the rest of the field. In dingy late night pool halls he would remain an unbeatable obstacle to half-drunk social players. But when the competitions started and the sharks arrived bearing their own screw up cues, things took a different turn, and Bayne would be invariably thrashed. It was the same story at the poker table. He was better than most but then again most were not than good. When he found himself in the company of card players and casino dwellers his game fell apart and he would end up losing great sums of money.

For much of Bayne's recent past he had been a perpetual student. He owed the Government thousands of dollars in student loans that he never intended to repay because he never intended to work. Without work there was no income and no repayments, and coupled with Bayne's further enrolments the debts had steadily increased. Bayne had originally begun an Arts degree, studying the philosophies and politics of life. He spent a good portion of his studies absorbed in the Apollo and Dionysus duality of art and life. He had seen the beauty of the most amazing sunsets and known deep in his soul that it was not just the pleasure of sensory magic that drew him in, but also the pain of knowing his irrelevance in the vast infinite universe, and it was with that knowledge that he drank down grand goblets of red intoxicating wine and danced on the white sands of long deserted beaches.

It was during his early university days that Bayne developed an appetite for the education of thought and had lobbied unsuccessfully for these subjects to be compulsory. He thought a one year study of humanities, philosophy and politics should be a necessary part of the education of anyone wishing to live effectively in a democratic society, but his ideas were dismissed as radical and dangerous. Certainly a society filled with politically knowledgeable and socially aware voters was dangerous, but to whom it was dangerous Bayne was never informed. If the people controlled their state like the old Greek Republic, then knowledge would only be necessary in creating a more harmonious state,

but in a state where the people had ceded their power to elected governments in exchange for protection, then the people needed knowledge to protect themselves from the erosion of democracy and tyranny.

As his Arts degree neared its completion Bayne decided he would rather stay on a little longer than graduate and face a lifetime of uninteresting and unimportant work, wasting more hours of life than actually living. He transferred to Law before graduation, clinging to a thirst for knowledge and an equally desperate desire to avoid settling down into a career and a carefully planned life. On the university campus Bayne felt alive. He could wander the grounds without thought to his direction, he could dress in ragged clothes and feel an equal to any suit, he could drink away the careless afternoons with strangers and feel comfortable throughout, he was as close to free as he felt he could be and in this he was fulfilled. Thus Bayne would seek to remain at university long into the unknown future, intent on transferring again and again as he followed a strange path to fulfilment.

It was during Bayne's law days that he had felt most fulfilled, where he had reached the zenith of his university life. The subject matter would sometimes grab his interest with irrational excitement, but then there were many times when it was dull and monotonous and every second of it was a laboured struggle. It was not the law that captivated his imagination but a great friend he met in its study. The Kid was a brother of enormity that appeared coincidentally by his side during a jurisprudence lecture. They had talked away slowly, both interested in people and each other. Their friendship bloomed indescribably and soon every moment at university was spent in one another's company. Bayne was drawn to The Kid's enthusiasm for experience, his generosity and interest in people, and his curiosity in both the trivialities of life and the great unanswered questions. The Kid was similarly drawn to Bayne and together they discussed the world, the past and the future, the merits of all kinds of political persuasions and philosophical ideas. They realised that there could never be an objective answer to their questions but that to discuss every possibility was itself an answer. So they talked out every possibility and every idea. It was people that interested them most and together they created nicknames and stories for everyone they came across. They understood that people were not right and wrong, nor good and bad, but individuals and collectives responding to their surroundings. People could be heroic and great, could be compassionate and brilliant, could be soulful and wondrous, yet together they could destroy. People could hold and forgive, they could build and unite, they could touch and they could free, yet together they could forget. People could laugh and cry, they could smile and they could love, yet they could also hate.

Bayne and The Kid had spent much of their university days in the company of a few other misfits. They had an enviable group which consisted of the manic Endrich, the tranquil and always happy Cuthbert, the indescribable Aj, who was destined to fail miserably in his desperate dream to make it in any field of art, and Hego, the happy girl that sought humorous attention at every possible turn and then completely surprised everyone by joining one of the cities finest and most well respected corporate law firms.

Most of their fellow students left university and headed straight for the big law firms, happily working eighty hours a week in monotonous contractual work, held by a dream of status and power and knowing that they were working towards great fortunes and high paced futures as partners in the most prestigious firms. The Kid got himself a

job in smaller firm, helping workers seeking compensation for work related injuries. It was a tough calling and The Kid faced merciless adversaries every day that threw huge sums of money trying to defeat the claims. They could settle for half out of court but they preferred to fight on to everyone's disadvantage, like in family courts across the lands where once loving couples fought bitter battles to the end, whittling away their last savings, with the only winners the lawyers and law firms that pushed on and on without compassion. The Kid dreamed of helping the underclass's of society, specifically the battered and bruised Aboriginal people, conquered two hundred year before by British colonialists and spat out and forgotten ever since. The Kid hoped to gain legal experience and then fight against a terrible past and a bleak future. He would help them get their land and dignity back, he would walk through the slums and broken bottled shacks of discontent, he would wander through the shattered lives of misery, and he would help them as an equal and try to make a difference.

Cuthbert, Endrich, The Aj and Bayne were the only four from an entire course of law graduates that didn't end up working for these big firms. Bayne never finished his exams and went on a search to find the best way not to waste his meagre existence. Endrich shambled after the stage and a constant audience, trapped between the dreams of old New York and Broadway, lights, excess and fame, and dingy smoke-filled dens of forgotten jazz and artistic integrity. He found himself on television writing and performing sketches that never quite reached his artistic expectations, falling miserably in a ditch of commonality. Cuthbert remained a chilled-out musician, relaxed in his quiet dreams of excess and fame, yet content to stroll along the humble boulevards of developing talent. His was the Cavern, the Whiskey-a-Go-Go, and the years of ambition would lead one day to greatness. For now he waited and played, aware that artistic reward only comes to the patient and dedicated. He was a dark haired, bearded, soulful bluesy stranger that walked a casual line between an angel and the devil. Cuthbert put all his waking moments into his band Cuthbert and The Nightwalkers, playing guitar and singing soulful but energetic ballads and hitting the road with a dream of making it in the sublime sunset world of music. No one saw The Aj after he finished university and everyone just assumed he had headed to Los Angeles in search of the Hollywood dream, sure to be working in a pub or café on Sunset Boulevard, talking hastily to other dreamy actors waiting for their break and their shot at fame and fortune, all wasting away together in the forgotten dustbin of a hopeless city.

Bayne had worked the early part of his university career at a local suburban hardware store. The owner was an old surfer type that talked incessantly of his glorious past as a blonde charismatic hero of the beach. The full-time workers were all paint experts and hardware hands from a generation gone. They had worked in the blue collar trades their whole lives and remained loyal to its ideals of hard work, quiet conversation, unfiltered cigarettes and knock off time that always came with a refreshing beer. There was an old bearded almost mythical looking fellow who had twice been an alcoholic and twice reformed. He had been bankrupt on numerous occasions and had attempted suicide in another life, now he wandered slowly around the shop making radical jokes to everyone, and living out his twilight years in relative contentment. The others were all faded hippies that had once lived a countercultural dream that had ended in sad failure, and now they worked on with hidden resentment, blaming humanity as their communal ideals faded

into the past. Three of them lived together in a big wooden share house with ragged curtains dividing the rooms, faded burgundy rugs covering old brown floorboards, and melancholic plants hanging curiously throughout. Each night the three would sit on an old green couch and suck down endless bongos of strong hydroponically grown cannabis, and each day they would work on in agonisingly close proximity to schizophrenia. All the full time staff ignored the owner's egotistical antics, and in response he hired a whole host of young university student to work the weekends with him and listen to his excessive stories. They listened eagerly at first and then with less enthusiasm as they understood his nature; Bayne and the others would nod restlessly, before orchestrating a cleverly disguised escape and disappearing down the back of the shop to laugh to one another and mimic his booming voice and cartoon like mannerisms. He truly was an idiot, but he was somehow bearable and beneath the laughter they enjoyed his quirky laid back nature, and buried deep within their souls they even had a slight affection for him.

Bayne spent most of his shifts with the ginger-haired hyper-active Hoppy Fletch. His Gaelic heritage sought danger, his over-active mind sought stimulation, and somewhere in between lurked a wild colonial boy. At school his mischievous streak had landed him in much trouble and on many a Friday-afternoon-detention; and most teachers had labelled him a fool, but now he used it to cause excitement amongst his peers. Bayne had grown up with an older brother with similar traits and he had learnt the best ways to occupy such minds, and as a result he and Hoppy got on immediately.

Hoppy had innate knowledge of the hardware world, he was able to fix anything broken, or advise with great wisdom on the best way to solve a problem, and as a result he was hot property for the weekend mums and dads and retirees that needed help. Bayne learnt everything from Hoppy. Whenever a customer came in to the store in need of advice and Bayne was unsure, he would lose the customer in the maze of isles, find Hoppy as quickly as possible, get his advice, and then re-find the customer, pretending the whole time that he had inadvertently lost him. When Hoppy couldn't be found, Bayne would guess, and often find out later as they enjoyed an after work beer that the advice he gave was wrong and sure to lead to tragedy.

Hoppy had a burning desire to make money as quickly as possible. His dreams were far beyond the realms of possibility and each shift he would suggest a new hair-brain scheme to Bayne. Bayne would go along with the idea and even get caught up briefly in Hoppy's excitement before realising the impossibility of such a plan. They eventually left the hardware store job on such a whim... when Hoppy had found a lady whose house needed painting. As quick as a flash Hoppy told her of his house painting business. He promised her a discount and reassured her confidently of his skills, and then got hold of Bayne to help him out. Hoppy created a dream of the two friends painting houses and make great sums of money, and Bayne enjoyed the thought and was happy to go along with his ever-enthusiastic mate. He didn't know much about painting but put all his faith in Hoppy and the two set off on the road to an unrealistic dream of wealth and freedom. After purchasing a huge can of paint to cover most of the internal walls, they began their careers in the big wooden dining room. The young mother who owned the house left them in peace, confident of their ability after Hoppy's extensive lies about their credentials. Before the first stroke of paint had even been brushed they had somehow knocked the great tin over and twenty litres of paint rushed across the floor. Bayne rolled it furiously from the floor straight onto the wall, whilst Hoppy did his best to clean it out

of the crack and grooves. They did their best, yet a huge stain remained and the two saw the impossibility of the situation and fled the site, leaving behind their house painting business and their dreams of quick money, along with the poor mother and her dreadfully stained floor. Their venture succeeded only in costing them money, and it was the end of the hardware world for both of them. Hoppy was left a broken man, his mischievous Irish spirit deserted him, his plans to make a quick and easy fortune were left to fade and gather dust on a forgotten bookshelf. He faced the crossroads of his life and he left the cobbled lanes and neglected alleys and sought the fresh bitumen, the highways and the corporate world of information technology, happy to trade in his lucky paintbrush for a new and exciting laptop, to move from physical construction to desktop construction, from the reality of manual labour to the electronically created cyber world. He wore a suit and brushed his hair and forgot about the old hardware store. His plans for huge empires of money in as short a time as possible also disappeared and he instead accepted the harsh realities of a long road to the top within the corporate sector. Bayne decided on a whim that he should stick to something he knew and so got a job selling alcohol at a local bottle-shop. The bottle-shop was eventually bought out by the Paterson's Chain and he spent much of his later university life working at different stores across the city. Bayne sought work with laid back managers, those that enjoyed their lives and worked merely to continue them. He avoided those working their way up the great company and he managed to find a relaxed store where he enjoyed humble interaction with interesting customers and the benefits of cheap alcohol. A regular named Mortimer came and visited Bayne everyday and the two discussed their interest in music and stories. They shared their thoughts on novels and writers and artists, on mad revelry, on alcohol and beer and intoxication, on socialism and democracy, and they shared a mutual distrust of the Government and the benevolence of politics. Mortimer was a musician, playing the classics on the keys, a man suited to the roaring twenties and the jazz age of Gatsbyesque America. He too was slightly disillusioned that the promises of social change during his youth had never quite been fulfilled, and this left him slightly cynical of people as his hair greyed and his face slowly withered. Bayne learnt much from Mortimer and his refreshing visits and engaging conversation eased the potential burdens of work. Mortimer was enlivened by Bayne's youthful exuberance and optimism for the future and their friendship was a powerful incentive for Bayne to continue working at the shop. Bayne did continue to work and he was happy and he would have gone on indefinitely with this life, but things never stay the same, and every contenting dream must end, and Bayne's ended when he was moved by Paterson's senior management to one of the new shops in Kirribilli. The setting was picturesque and Bayne would eat his lunch by the harbour shores underneath the great feat of engineering bridge that connected the city to its northern allies; and the young crowd of customers was always entertaining, however the store manager was an unbearable autocrat. Bayne had always detested authority and his manager had grabbed onto his tiny slice of power with gusto. Everything had to be done his way and if someone was doing it another way they would be told to change. If there was a break in work and two employees began a quiet conversation, he would interrupt contemptuously, barking new and ridiculous orders. There was more work to be done than any other store, and more than was necessary for five stores; the manager constantly over-ordered stock, believing in his own self-confessed mastery of sales to explain the huge deliveries. The stock room filled up, and each week they would have to

empty it before another huge order came in, refilling the tiny upstairs room to its capacity once more. He overstated his own ability at every turn and castigated everyone else at every chance and in the end he was running around working all day everyday abusing all the other workers for their slight imperfections. Bayne would have left immediately, however he did like his fellow employees and he had a great relationship with many of the customers.

The bottle-shop was unique in that it not only served the rich and powerful, the countries highest minister and its executive, well known television personalities, and an endless supply of directors and high flying corporates, but also the poor, the destitute and the drunk. A nearby community housing centre brought the bottom end of society to purchase their booze from the same shop as the elite and the upper middle class. Whilst the wealthy suits bought fine French Champagne and aged red wine, the bums came in for cheap casks of sweet whine and bottles of sherry, and mixed between these extremes of a supposedly equal society came a an eclectic array of personalities from students to young couples, to semi-retired professionals all in search of beer and middle priced wine for middle priced lives. The manager spoke with elegance to the wealthy and followed them around like an obedient dog; he simultaneously ignored the poor, turned his back on the homeless, and pretended with haughty smugness that he had too much work and not enough time to acknowledge their existence. Bayne found himself at ease with the poor and he developed friendships with whole variety of vagrants, winos and unemployed rascals.

There was the old merchant navy engineer that had sailed across the world, stopping for port calls along the coast of Africa where him and his fellow sailors had ravenous drunken sex with black whores and African princesses and everything in between cloaked by the innocence of the dark continent in an age before AIDS had severely ravaged her. He now grew old and bald but still wore the navy blue with pride and returned each night full of new and vulgar jokes, happy to tell Bayne all he knew as he bought his usual supply of alcoholic cider to get him through the lonely nights. He told Bayne stories of days on board various merchant ships in between more jokes, and then quite easily the two would slide into intriguing political conversations at the detest of the nearby manager.

There was Paul Newman the homeless Englishman who clung eagerly to a faded past and always wore a newish suit, carrying his life in a bag and returning for a cask of cheap wine whenever he had the money. He handed out magazines each week to pay for his addiction, and his addiction healed some painful wounds, and brought momentary contentment to a dreary life. Bayne would shake Paul Newman's dirty hand each time he came in to buy some booze, and they would chat away about sport and life, and as time went on Paul opened up and told Bayne of his misfortunes, and as Paul left the shop he would always cheerily and over zealously yell out and thank his "bruver".

There was Huffy, the bare-footed hobbit; the weed dealer at the community housing centre; always a big grin on his face and a troop of other young unemployed lads on his shoulder. Finally there was George, the wise old Lebanese man that came into the store each night after long walks to clear his mind, grabbing a cask of wine for his evenings entertainment. His clothes were old and dirty, covered in unknown stains, and he always carried a lingering smell, a concoction of stale urine, damp clothes and musty cigarettes, yet he was full of ancient wisdom; aware of all the problems in the world, not

happy to wallow in his own mess...instead seeing the greater beauty in philosophy and politics and intangibility. He had walked the globe at various stages in his life and he wanted to walk it once more; he laughed at the idea of marriage, describing it as a prison. He knew only one thing and that was freedom, and he was happy to endure the world alone in return for it. He taught Bayne much. The two would have long conversation when the shop was empty. George would show Bayne words written in the ancient Arabic script, and tell him tales of old Europe and long walks alone in the backwaters of historic cities, and ladies frequented in the Parisian night, and Morocco and Tangier and anywhere. George understood what it meant to live; he was a wise beat, a wanderer, a traveller, a nomad, an open mind that had a thirst for knowledge that was only quenched through experience. He wandered the streets each night and dropped in to the bottle-shop for a curious conversation with his young apprentice, and the manager would bite his tongue at first, then look furiously in Bayne direction and finally tell him angrily to do some work. Bayne would apologies to George and go back to some unnecessary task, swearing bitterly under his breath.

Bayne was in a quandary. He loved the atmosphere of the bottle-shop, he had a great fun with some of his fellow employees and most of all he loved the down and outs that frequented the shop. But he hated his manager's attitude, his relentless workaholic life, his poor people skills, his abrupt and abusive tone, his fiery outbursts, his hypocrisy and his school-master like authority. Bayne wanted desperately to leave but he couldn't bring himself to discard the lively characters so unique to that shop. Bayne instead decided to do everything in his power to annoy the manager, to revolt from the inside; to enjoy the shops atmosphere and cope with his manager's autocracy with mischievous rebellion.

Bayne talked longer with every bum and dirty looking vagabond that entered the store. He would continue the conversation until his irritated manager could handle it no longer and ordered him back to work. When back on task, Bayne would intentionally begin with the least important tasks, leaving the fridges empty as he dusted the shelves, leaving deliveries lying around as he straightened wine bottles. When a particular task arose where the manager had set out specific procedures to follow, Bayne deliberately followed the procedure most contradictory to it. When his manager seemed ready to explode, Bayne would casually wander to the toilet, and when his shift finished he would leave without a word. Bayne began to preach socialist ideas to customer, to his manager's conservative annoyance. Bayne attacked Government policy that he knew his manager most favoured. Bayne ridiculed capitalism and chastised the extreme commercialism that had infected the world. He picked out the most corporate looking customers to begin his tirades, and smiled towards his fuming manager. Bayne laughed haughtily with everyone in the shop, showing great affection for his fellow employees, determined to bring a friendly air to the place, and then he quickly turned cold and sombre when speaking to his manager; and the two trod an uneasy path. Bayne had to do this for his own revolutionary soul. To submit to this authoritarian would be a weak and gutless move that would dent his pride and self belief... it would destroy him.

The manager reduced his shifts to a bare minimum, and Bayne continued his relentless onslaught. Bayne found himself almost enjoying the battle. He had waged war against an unfriendly enemy and the war itself brought frightening excitement to his work days. A history of rebellion was being released in Bayne and he felt the pride and courage

of all those that fought against tyranny, and every mutiny and uprising since man first walked the earth was released in his every move. Bayne was a wild bushranger fighting the corrupt and racist police, a cowboy stealing to survive on the deserted range, a revolutionary leading an army against imperialist invaders. He took his rebellion up a notch and stole more and more alcohol. He began taking booze for his friends, filling J. and K.'s apartment with all kinds of spirits and wines. J. and K., two old friends that lived together in Kings Cross, drank more as a result and encouraged Bayne in his theft. Bayne would often leave his work with a bag full of booze, jump aboard a train and head hurriedly to their apartment where the three of them would drink long into the night.

Bayne told his other friends to visit him at the bottle-shop, and when they arrived he would load them up and charge them nothing. His old school friend Sappy came every week for a case of beer and a bottle of vodka, and they were both content. The Kid regularly placed an order of spirits whilst Domingo Desayuna, Sappy's flatmate, dabbled in the finest wines courtesy of Bayne. Bayne was only too happy to help. He provided his friend with wine and drink, and he felt alive as he did so. This was the beginning of a revolutionary spirit that developed within him and slowly enveloped his whole being.

Bayne made deals with the local pizzeria and the nearby fish and chip shop. He provided the owners and employees with beer and cigarettes and bottles of wine and in return he got free meals whenever he desired. He would sneak a bottle or two out of the shop as he closed and trade it for a pizza which he would take over to which ever of his friend's apartments he was staying at that particular moment. Bayne became mates with the chef's at all the local restaurants and they would sit around and drink beers together long after closing. He had created a community and he loved it, and most of all he felt alive.

There was something fulfilling about this move to bartering ways. It was through this regression of the monetary system that Bayne filled his head with idea of subsistence. He imagined himself as a lonesome farmer standing in his field in the cold morning, surrounded by his gardens filled with fruit and vegetables and innumerable spices; a vat brewing beer and decanted wine waiting on the table; ducks and chickens running freely amongst the foliage, providing eggs and the occasional feast; maybe a dog by his side, and a beautiful girl with whom to share every moment. It was only a dream, but like every dream it captured Bayne and he followed it indiscriminately. He had no land and the idea of complete subsistence was impossible, but Bayne grabbed at it as best he could and clung on to the dream. He decided to reduce his hours of work to the bare minimum, and use those hours to provide life's essentials. His bottle-shop job gave him ample opportunity to provide his alcohol needs. He went out and hurriedly got himself a casual job at a Mega-Mart, which provided him the chance to steal any clothes, cooking utensils or any other necessities that may arise. He also found an easy job filling the shelves one night a week at a big chain supermarket, where he was able to steal his much needed food. He worked a few hours a week at three jobs and spent those hours stealing enough goods to survive. In this way he brought his life into a harmonious balance between the necessities of survival and his desire to live. He thought of himself as a revolutionary subsisting in the modern world, like an ancient herdsman in the savannah lands of Africa or a long lost farmer in the muddy hills of Scotland.

He was still being paid wages for all his jobs, and this bothered him slightly as it took away from his much cultivated image of a subsisting revolutionary and tied him

forever with the economic world. He thought much about a solution and eventually cut up his credit card and burnt all his bank documents. He left behind his family home completely and moved between his friend's apartments. Bayne felt that he was truly living by stealing to survive and surviving to live. His bank account was now a mere memory, beyond his grasp and unattainable in his dreamed of future. He moved between apartments, wanting desperately to settle, but unwilling to pay rent, knowing that would bring him unwillingly back into the world of money. J. and K. were happy to have him a few days a week; they enjoyed his company and the grog he provided, and all three of them wallowed in a mess of intoxicating drunken madness. Sappy and Domingo didn't mind his irregular arrivals and departures, it amused them slightly and he was a loyal and generous friend that kept them entertained. The other nights he spent at The Kid's family home or in Cuthbert's band room or occasionally with another friend Harry Cook.

Bayne tasted freedom and although he was rushing between apartments every couple of nights, he knew he had found a path to fulfilment, and that he must follow this intoxicating road wherever it took him. It was on this path that Bayne had searched out his friend heil, and stumbled accidentally upon a hovel that would become his residence, and change the course of Bayne's existence.

3. Heil

Heil was born the only child to a pair of devoutly religious parents. They lived out their lives in vicarious imitation of God. To them God was perfect, God was humble and most importantly He gave meaning to their somewhat meagre lives. Heil's parents had emigrated from South Africa, escaping the burden of Apartheid on their morality.

Heil was born a Catholic and raised a Catholic, he was baptised in the official way and when the time was right he performed the sacred vowels of Holy Communion. He was sent to a highly respected school within the Jesuit brethren, and it was hoped he would one day don the cloth of religious service.

Heil's parents spent much of their younger days searching out what it meant to be Christian. They sought the meaning of the bible and its utility on earth. They agreed upon a presumption that every word of God telegraphed through humanity was itself the word of God. Indirect as it may be, it appeared for a reason and under the guide of an all powerful God. The continued existence of the Bible and its ancient heritage was proof that it had been sanctioned by God, and thus it was the Bible to which they turned for sacred guidance. They listened attentively in church to everything the Fathers would say. The Pope was especially prominent in their lives and his messages were reviewed and discussed over Sunday dinner. Through pure determination the family managed to follow all the tired traditions and every minute detail of every painstaking rule. The two gave themselves over completely to God and threw their earthly trust into the Church. If the Church needed money, they donated. If they had lived eight hundred years earlier they would have paid to bypass purgatory and go straight up to heaven. If they had lived a few hundred years earlier they would have enthusiastically boarded a vessel to the Spanish colonies in South America to reveal to the local Incas or Indians the shame of their pagan ignorance and the necessity of one omnipotent God, knowing that each enslaved indigenous soul was being saved from the fiery depths of hell.

Although they gave much of their meagre savings to the Church to spread the Word of God, they had started to feel that they were not giving enough. They briefly considered heading to the Pacific to help the local tribes on some small island, teaching them of their naked shame, teaching them of good and evil and the need to give oneself entirely to God in this life for a chance at another... Instead they bore a son, Heil, and decided to devote their lives to the education of him in the Word, and all things ethical and Christian. They hoped and prayed that on his maturity he would join the priesthood and in that way they would have fulfilled their earthly roles.

Heil was very bright and his education at the local Catholic school was going wonderfully well. His parents saw the perfect model of a child. He was well versed in scripture, and took a great love to God, and a shining to the church; even working as an altar boy on Sunday to everyone's delight. Though he was top of his classes in everything, his parents were most proud of his excellence in religious studies and his strong unyielding faith in God. But Heil was only twelve. By the time he was seventeen and had grown into a tall lanky young man with inconclusive curly-straight blonde hair, a great big envious smile and the European elegance of his heritage, he had begun to see holes in everything he knew. He was an intelligent rational being and he refused to accept things without question. His initial attempts to understand were thwarted with his parents reacting angrily at any perceived doubt. He vowed to find out more, and like any one kept

from a certain room, curiosity will get the better of fear or trust and eventually all will wander unaccompanied into that fateful room, and Heil knew he must search out the answers to his questions, or he'd never know the truth, and without truth life ceases to have any great value beyond mere survival.

A class discussion of Jesus' Ten Commandments had led to some initial questions. 'Thou shall not kill,' seemed simple enough. But he soon discovered that the Church he followed had failed to heed the sacred words over the centuries. He read of the Crusades, then of the religious wars in Germany and England, the fight between two sides of the same coin costing the lives of thousands; Catholics killing Protestants and Protestants killing Catholics over a slight deviance in their religious developments and subsequent histories. Heil read about the Spanish Inquisition and was horrified by at the Church sanctioned torture. He read the history of South American colonisation and the murder of the Incas by Pizzaro, who quashed so many lives as he plundered the land for gold under a claim of divine right.

Heil was ashamed by so much hypocrisy, but one story really struck him as deceitful. The Catholic Church had denounced the coca leaf in Bolivia as the Devil's leaf, before realising the commercial benefits that it might produce. When they realised that by chewing the leaf, their Indian slaves would work twice as long and twice as hard on less food and water, the Spanish men of God quickly revised their position. The leaf, it seemed, was a gift from God.

How could he follow the religious claims of man, when man was the cause of so much hate and pain? How could God really be the spirit described by his Church when his Church had such abhorrent history? If it were a man, no-one would take it seriously, its past would have destroyed its credibility, it would be a forgotten outcast, a deceitful vagrant thrown to the wolves and left to rot in the barren wilderness. Heil could not be part of such a Church, though he still believed in the premise of its message. He realised that laws could not be written as unbreakable truths, they could be guides to ones action but action must be determined by the situation. He thought that 'thou shall not kill' should be understood as a spiritual principle, one people could work towards, but it was certainly not an absolute. There were times, he realised, that murder might be necessary; in self defence, in revolution, or maybe even in search of equality, but certainly not for increased fortunes, and certainly not in the name of religious conquest. There were no finite laws that could be followed as the Church and his parents vehemently proclaimed and subsequently broke. Absolutes bred lies. Instead Heil searched out the worlds faiths. He read objectively through the tenets of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, and he took ideas and beliefs which he felt had substantial merit to the betterment of the world, and he discarded ideas that seemed dangerous or hurtful, that would add to the woe of the world and he slowly pieced together his own understanding. Heil wandered the road of spiritual awakening alone in his bedroom, the house quiet and Heil reading late into the night. It was here he began to follow a moralist attitude to life. He defined his own moral values and followed them. He was determined to act solely on what was ethically and morally right, and based on this background he decided that a utilitarian greatest good for the greatest number idea was best for the world.

After telling his parents of his new position, they were clouded in ecstatic thought, believing he had returned to the church, returned to them and all that they loved and believed. However, it soon became obvious how different he had become.

Heil spoke out against the Pope and the Catholic Church for their derision of contraception. "Rejecting the use of condoms as against the wishes of God is increasing the spread of AIDS," he said. "Not only are more people in Africa being infected than need to be, but a Church sanctioned rejection of contraception is causing more unwanted births and more mouths to feed in a place where there is not enough food to feed the mouths already there."

Heil shook his head in anger as his parents stood gaping in his direction. They were shocked by Heil's outburst. It crushed their hearts to see their son fighting against everything they had taught him. They had dedicated their lives to Heil, he was to join the priesthood; he was to be their great work, their great earthly mission for God. To them the Catholic Church was right, was always right. Its word was the truth and any contradiction was heresy. Heil had committed great sin and they feared for his soul. They told him stories of eternal damnation and they increased their nightly talk of religion, of God, of the Word. Heil's new outlook became more pronounced as these attacks began and his position became more and more incompatible with theirs, and his life in the family home slowly became untenable. Heil's mother cried constantly and his father only talked to him to remind him of what a mess his mother had become because of his heretic stance. Heil's road went a different way; the great cities of the world beckoned him forth, and as a utilitarian the time had come for him to leave. His presence was only adding woe to all their lives; it made his parents sad and angry and it kept him from the awaiting world, where he had more to learn and much to impart. He kissed his crying mother and farewelled his stubborn father and walked out of his old family home with nothing but a rucksack and he headed into the world in search of the light.

So Heil, barely twenty, was forced out of home to wander the road, to philosophise like Zarathustra, and to follow wherever the path of his moral-utilitarian ways would lead him, and he believed his path would prove golden and would lead him to enlightenment and happiness.

Heil embarked on a great period of study and travel. He visited his ancestors in South Africa, and watched a country still in ruin from years of racial hatred. He wandered north through the depths of tribal Africa, all the while seeking a true understanding of every culture, staying most of his days with generous locals who guided him onwards. He walked through the desert and out the other side into the darkened alleys and smoky overcrowded corners Marrakech and to the coast of hashish riddled Morocco, where he jumped aboard a cargo ship heading for Jerusalem. This was the centre of religion, where so many had followed profits throughout the ages and Heil walked the path of Jesus. He explored Islam in the rocky deserts of Iran, and he followed the path of Mohammed leading his people peacefully in to Mecca, and then across the barren mountains and endless poppy fields and on to Pakistan and eventually India; the great country of a billion, teeming with the heritage of mankind, a melting pot of colours, languages and people. He felt a true kinship with the generous souls of India, where the wise and courageous prefer a life of rags over riches, and he wandered the swarming roads, as one with the flowing crowds, the cows, the innumerable bikes and cars, the artery of people sprawling forth across the sepia land. And as he travelled he studied and developed his own spirituality in the heart of religion. He knew well the Bible from years of fervent study and was most inspired by the Christian understanding of forgiveness and its acceptance of human fallibility. He read through the Qu'ran, and was humbled by its

understanding of the good person full of devotion and charity, and one that would never lie or exploit others. Heil read the Vedas and Upanishads writings, and he loved the Hindu idea of Karma and the self-improvement inherent in the Dharma religions. He also saw something beautiful in God, not as a supreme-being, but simply as the becoming of a spirit beyond space and time. It was through the teachings of the Buddha that Heil was most inspired. He was struck by the idea of life as suffering which could only be ceased through the removal of all desires from one's life. He spent time in the hills of Tibet, learning to pacify his mind in the sanctuary of a monastery built in amongst the dense jungle and set high above a gushing river.

Heil learnt the ways of every religion and began to write his own dichotomy of the best way to live a harmonious life at one with the earth and all its beings. He read the philosophers, the works of Plato and Aristotle and the foundations of democracy in the Greek Republic. He compared it to Marx's socialist doctrine and took the best parts of each and created his own political ideology, mixing the economics of communal equality with the ideals of democracy and freedom. He read Kant and Locke and Hume and studied the metaphysics of reality, free will and determinism, and he saw the beauty that surrounded him and he was humbled by something powerful and beyond the world of men.

He eventually returned home, a wise and noble spirit, ready to live out what he'd learnt.

Heil had originally met Bayne through J.; not surprisingly it was at a local betting house. Bayne had always enjoyed any addictive behaviour and J. had a weakness for the pleasures of drinking, smoking and gambling. In the early afternoons J. and Bayne would often meet at the local pub or tote, have a beer and throw a few casual bets on the dogs. Bayne at that time had a gambling problem, which would disappear when he gave up work and left behind the folly of money. He soon lost his interest when each bet made and each race run had no impact on the levels of adrenalin in his body or the dopamine in his brain. Heil pointed out the greed inherent to gambling and without the desire for money it became a sad and boring pastime, like matchstick poker, played cautiously at first, then with no regard and eventually put down and never thought of again. Gambling needed money and money needed meaning.

Bayne and J. had for many years enjoyed each other's company, basking in the other's reflective similarities. They persuaded each other into bouts of heavy drinking and then talked through the night and into the hung-over mornings. Bayne loved absurd conversations about the every day and every day conversations about the absurd and with J. they went on uncontrolled for hours, talking passionately through the ludicrous, discussing seriously the preposterous; mimicking voices and inventing characters, taking un-lived lives and living them out in the most ridiculous fashion. As Heil wandered in to the tote that fateful afternoon, with Harry Cook- his childhood friend by his side, he laughed at the usual sight of his friend J. placing bets, and was then introduced heartily to Bayne. Bayne and J. had been discussing the "Wind in the Willows", and the various characters that haunted the Wild Woods. Heil and Harry joined in quickly, they too had a simple affection for silly creativity and before long they were deep in thought about Moley and Badger and their special kinship as underground dwellers, and then they were on about the Ratty and his poetic search for endless freedom on his old happy river.

After their meeting at the tote, Heil and Bayne became close friends. They walked and talked like old Greek philosophers, they laughed and joked about J. and all his quirks, they mimicked Sappy and his great booming voice and right wing views, and they found a common love for discussing the personality traits of everyone they came across. Heil explained to Bayne that many friendships enjoy one or two similarities or ways for its expression, like drinking, or joking, or philosophising, or just a common hobby or belief, but with them they had so many common interests and similarities and so many different conversations and emotions to share that it was inevitable they would be great lifelong friends with a special bond. They were equally happy in serious political discussions as they were in dissecting the personalities of their friends, in doing accents from across the world together and in joking around at their surroundings and turning the every day exciting and surreal.

Heil had the uncanny ability to mimic every accent he had ever heard. He had spent many years travelling on his original search for spiritual awareness and his years on the road had introduced him to all kinds of folk from all kinds of backgrounds and lives. Not only could he impersonate with exactness the voices of people from every nation across the globe, he could also slip into obscure dialects and the different voices of different races and classes within those nations. He could impersonate a Chinese American driving a taxi in New York, a rich Dutch South African during Apartheid, a cranky German, a poor but happy Ethiopian, a rich corrupt politician in the heart of Africa, a whiney middle class Londoner, a working class soccer loving Lancastrian, a young carefree Irishman, a Scottish bum drinking quietly in the corner of a small Scottish tavern, a gringo hating Mexican, a Ukrainian living in post cold-war apathy, an oil-rich Arab, in fact anyone from anywhere. Bayne and J. and Cookey and some of Heil's other friends tried their best to join in, but they could never keep up the accents and in the end they just listened and laughed as Heil kept up voices, and not only mimicked them perfectly but said something hilariously stereotypical for every one.

"That is the genius of Heil's accents," The Kid had once said to Bayne. "Not the perfect imitation, but what he has to say." Bayne tendered to agree.

It seemed interesting that Heil as a moralist would concoct racial stereotypes for a laugh, but he was adamant that his words were only meant in fun and that his intention was relevant to the way they should be received.

"Only a nation where all can laugh at themselves and each other is ever truly free from prejudice," he would say in his defence.

Heil sought a life free from desire, living peacefully in the world; living in harmonious balance with his surrounds; living spiritually and gaining and sharing wisdom with other beings. And it was at this point that Heil left society all together. Like the Buddha, he decided to leave behind the city, even the suburbs, and move to the woods on the edge of town to follow his golden path. The woods were not immoral. They were natural and neutral and unaffected by human hands. They were part of the earth which was itself beyond the question of morality; part of an ancient wisdom of higher intellect, and beyond triviality. The woods provided Heil with an opportunity to live out his spiritual doctrine; to subsist on the surrounding fruits, to sleep under the infinite stars, to seek warmth in the foliage and shelter in the trees, to walk in aesthetically pleasing meadows, and to meditate in the quiet jungle away from the desires and pleasures of mankind.

Heil did not leave behind the world. He stayed close to the city and his ties. He could never forget his friends nor leave Lara, his romantic companion. He knew that he must stay close to the city and all that he loved. He had not banished himself from society; he merely preferred to spend the majority of his time in a quiet wood. Heil had a duty to spread the wisdom that he'd gained through all his readings and wandering, all his thought and experience. He also knew that there was always much to learn from others and that a life free from social contact is not a happy one, and thus he found a wood beyond the bustle of the city but close enough to the living. Heil didn't keep many possessions; he felt strongly along Buddhist lines that they encouraged desire which in turn aided suffering. What clothes and meagre possessions he owned, he generally left with Lara in her inner-city apartment, which he returned to from the woods many times a week. He didn't forget his friends and made sure he made appearances at J. and K.'s apartment, where he could also catch up with Bayne who spent many of his nights on their couch. Heil had many visitors from the many sides of his life. Harry Cook would come without word, talk for a while and leave. J. and K. made rare appearance, most often on Saturday mornings after long binges, before tiredness overtook them and sent them sleepily back to bed. Bayne would come and discuss the world in the late afternoons; when the heat of the day ebbed away and the cool evening breeze had arrived. He would bring beers from his bottle-shop and Heil would listen and laugh to all his stories about the troubles and mayhem of J. and K. and others. It was a happy time, and the soft hypnotic woods gripped Bayne magically every time he appeared. His burning desire to leave his life behind and wander down old dusty highways and into the hazy sunsets without thought to his destination, had left him for a second, and for a moment he was content, but then out of the beauty of the woods came the call of the wayfarer, and his desire to roam nomadically across the globe returned with greater vigour than ever before.

4. J. and K.

J. and K. shared an apartment high above the grimy pavement of King's Cross. Originally the town had housed Sydney's thieves and whores, and the main artery of shops still kept that heritage with an array of brothels and strip shows, yet the spot had recently become a fashionable place to live for young workers that wanted to be close to the trendy clubs and late night action. Rents went up and so did demand and the Cross became a strange mix of rich and poor, of corporate and vagrant, of plastic and sandstone. The front of their apartment building opened out onto a well kept street filled with trendy cafes and backpacker hostels, whilst simultaneously backing brutality against an inner city cobblestone alley, where junkies lay grey against the road and waited in hollow anticipation of their next hit. A giant balcony gripped onto the side of the apartment, and one could sit comfortably in the morning sunlight, looking out across the overcrowded city to view a snapshot of Sydney's beautiful harbour, the city skyline leading to the famous harbour bridge that took traffic to simpler, humbler suburban lifestyles, and north and beyond.

The residence was always a debacle, and half used clothes from each of J. and K.'s bedrooms spilled into the hall and marched onward toward the kitchen. The bathroom was a mess, the sink itself permanently stained with recently shaved facial hair. The living room was filled with scraps of old magazines, torn apart in drunken rages and strewn heedlessly across the carpet; empty bottles had been flung to all parts and the balcony overflowed with long forgotten beer bottles slowly seeping hops and wine bottles opened and then left to rot away for months. Chocolate wrappers and old discarded pizza boxes and plastic take-away containers lay carelessly across the table and couches and onto the floor. The kitchen was worse. Stained and dirty saucepans and pots were scattered across the bench top, whilst plates and glasses sat unwashed for weeks. A table adjoined the entrance and remained sticky from weekends of vodka mixes and beers spilt aggressively in riotous revelry. Poker chips were always left on the table or scattered across the floor from forgotten poker games, and a wine stained mattress took up the space between the kitchen and the couches. The apartment could have hosted a week long party for a hundred youths, it could have housed thirty destitute squatters, it could have been a nice clean home torn apart by a bomb, but it was none of these, it was merely J. and K.'s apartment and the host to much of their binge drinking and socialising.

Bayne spent many nights in the apartment drinking beers and talking with J. or K. or both, and he had slept many times on the wine-stained mattress or the musty forgettable couches.

The apartment was always teaming with all ends of varying friends and acquaintances relaxing in the company of flavoursome beers, expensive and undistinguished whisky and beautifully hypnotic views of a seen a thousand times but unforgettable city scene. All weekend parties raged. Noise complaints were ignored and every night the music got louder, the drinking heavier and the talk more constant and ridiculous. On Friday nights the main group of J. and K.'s friends would appear for post work drinks. Robyn Smee would be first there, joining Bayne and J. for some quiet beers before the night turned rowdy and ridiculous. Robyn would invariably drink too much and pass out on the couch or stumble to a taxi home away from the debauchery. Heil appeared every so often and Harry Cook was there every week, drinking away a bottle of bourbon in quiet contemplation, talking calmly to anyone interested, never worried too

much about where the night would end. Sappy and Domingo would arrive late, a case of beer and bottles of vodka in hand. Sappy in his loud haughty nature would immediately declare it time for shots and start pouring them out for everyone, all the while relaying a witty tale or chauvinistic joke to everyone's general amusement. He would invariably have a troop of work mates, or flat mates or any mates, happy to be in company with the man everyone affectionately called The Fat, and once a person had got past his over-confident obnoxious exterior, he was a hard man to dislike.

On Saturday evenings the place would fill up with ever changing faces. A crowd of J.'s mates would stop by for a relaxing beer on the balcony, talking hurriedly of the evening to come. Then a few of J.'s strange acquaintances would leave to be replaced by K.'s university or work or school friends of old that had decided their time had come to join in the merriment. Then J. and K.'s usual gang would begin to arrive and dominate the scene, talking equally furiously over their hazy memories of the night before and the possibilities for the evening to come. The evening would while away in constant conversation, silly conjecture and alcohol induced stupor until the sun came up and all of J.'s mates had gone to sleep on couches or carpeted floors, K.'s mates had disappeared never to be seen again and the JK gang had gone to other parts of the city in search of women, or to other parts of the world in search of madness....and every week J. and K. would still be drinking and slurring words upon the balcony and awaiting a break for a tiresome sleep. None would come and the two would still be sipping on the remnants of empty whisky bottles, still in thought and slow conversation, when those staying on the couches and sleeping across the floor would wake from their uncomfortable dreamless slumbers, slightly amused and bemused by the sight of J. and K. still awake, still drinking and somehow still in high spirits.

J. and K. had a unique friendship built on competitiveness and a mutual love of intoxication and experience, and both pushed each other to new limits and crazy actions. The nights were always an array of endless possibilities and they would choose the path that suited their desires at any particular moment, quite content to spontaneously go to any part of the city or partake in any amusing or heightening experience. Many weekend nights would involve heading out to jock-filled clubs crammed with Friday night suits and women in revealing cloth of high expense, and burly bouncers stopping the progress of semi-interested fellows with the wrong shoes or big desperate groups of horny men without handbag women to get them in. Other nights would involve dark and dingy clubs and late night underground electronica and internally unencumbered dance and sitting in the corner high on love-feeling tablets, all talking of beautiful things easily discussed and understood but forgotten in the morning and turning to stone throughout the night. One thing remained constant throughout, and that was J. and K.'s enthusiasm for any version of a similarly different night and their willingness to get absolutely belted and stay out with unrequited energy, returning home only after the arrival of the sun and heading despondently to bed, always the last two standing after excessive intoxication had floored their friends, comrades and amigos.

The two had been friends for a long time and their lives had slid into a neat symbiotic relationship that neither could really afford, nor want to break. One was useless without the other and the other as useless without one, and neither could happily face the cruel and lonely concrete world alone. It was their decision thus to live as one being and

ease the burdens and difficulties of life across two shoulders and double the fun that two lives instead of one could achieve.

K. was a high rolling stock broker, selling shares and buying stock, dealing in futures and pasts and things of no consequence, playing the markets of exchange and the values of currency, and the value of markets and the exchange of exchange. Buying and selling stuff that never really existed but for the minds of silly men addicted to the Siren's lure of irrelevant and unreal expectations, dealing in the trade of an invisible and improbable equation. Many of K.'s co-workers had believed every word and now lived lives of similar consequence by filling their garages and wardrobes with invisible and inconsequential nothings. K. was a shining beacon of light not sucked in by the hype and high pay. A relaxed, caring and extremely generous individual that laughed at the opportunities afforded to him and exalted in the possibilities that such opportunities afforded his family and friends. Although his work brought great financial reward it also pushed K. to the limits of acceptable social behaviour. He raged constantly when things went wrong and his temper could erupt at any moment. He would then go quiet for a while and brood, before forgetting about the whole incident. He also wandered around the many facets of his life with a surly countenance, giving others the impression that he was angry or depressed or both. He was neither, merely a passionate individual with the potential to lose his cool. He didn't mean harm on others, and most of his rage was centred on his own actions and failing, but through all that shined a generous and excitable madman that waited patiently through the high stress days at work for the nights of excess that followed.

Ka. never dressed over the top- in fact he always dressed under the bottom, and in his usual attire of old frayed stubbies, faded singlets and flip flops with an unshaven face- he could have easily been mistaken for a dishevelled drunken bum. He owned a rattly broken down car from another decade and he felt most home at old inner city pubs with heavily stained carpeted floors and proper wooden top bars with seats huddled around, and real beers flowing from rusty brass taps. He avoided lavish corporate dinners and overpriced over described breakfasts, or meals consisting of softly boiled quail eggs followed by fresh baby pears sliced and caramelised. K. instead spent his money on excessive drinking and entire weekends out at the various red-light districts that surrounded his life and provided evenings of mad capped entertainment. His only other expense was the spacious apartment with the fantastic views that he always shared with J., and often shared with a whole host of other bandits and characters.

Symbiosis is the living together of two animals or plants where the union is advantageous or necessary to both. The relationship of J. and K. was symbiotic. Each relied upon the other to provide a necessary element of life for both, like the plover bird in Africa that feeds itself eating the bacteria on crocodiles. The crocodile allows the plover to enter its mouth and eat away the infectious bacteria whilst the bird enjoys a safe and sumptuous meal. The same could be said about J. and K.. K. provided the financial support for two crazy lives; the apartment, the booze, the food and the occasional illegal but far from immoral tablets or powders. K. provided the funds for a debauches life for two whilst J. led this debauches life. K.'s stressful stock broking job gave him little free time to organise such a life and thus this heavy responsibility fell upon J.'s broad shoulders. He would organise mates, nights out, booze and illicit materials when necessary. He would talk non stop when they were quiet and laugh and make humble

jokes when the sun was coming up and there was nothing to do in such a situation but laugh and make humble jokes. He organised their cricket team and the barbeques and parties after every win. J. did all things expected of him with such aplomb that the two enjoyed an endless stream of invitations to various social events and gatherings. They had numerous options each weekend and they chose whatever best suited their moods. Each week was consumed with regular nights at different locales, beginning with Tuesday night pool, Wednesday night poker at 'El Casa de Doming-Sappy', and Thursday beer jugs and trivia. 'El Casa de Domingo-Sappy' was the name given drunkenly to Sappy the Fat and Domingo Desayuna's nearby apartment in the trendy East, inhabited by two of J. and K.'s mostly lively friends. Friday nights usually revolved around a post work drinking session that lasted well into the night at various clubs, pubs and nightspots around the city, whilst Saturday was often spent drinking till sunrise at J. and K. famous, apartment overlooking the water as the sun slowly emerged.

J. and K. lived together in a perfect symbiotic relationship; K. providing the financial support for two lives and J. the entertainment. J. and K. created the perfect being, a well organised, highly paid, relaxed, funny, charismatic, highly social, energetic, excessive, conversationalist that never took himself too seriously and understood the irrelevance of work.

Doubt often arose between the more distant acquaintances of J. and K. as to whether they were really individuals living symbiotically. There were hidden whispers that floated on the edges of the city and occasionally permeated the darker alleys and seedier pubs, suggesting that they were in fact two halves to the one person; a well organised fella that juggled social and work life with precision and perfection; a player in the cricket team that did a lot of bowling and batting, but a player that only took up one spot not two; a person called JK, not J. and K. Although these discussions between strangers and bare acquaintances was often heated and the truth distorted, it was acknowledged across the pubs and late night city dwellers that either, J. and K. were two souls that enjoyed life in a perfect symbiosis, or JK was an incredible being of magnetic exuberance and fantastic proportions.

5. The finding of the hovel

Bayne left behind J. and K.'s apartment and headed for the woods in search of Heil. His head throbbed with pain as if in punishment for the previous night's excesses. "I'm not drinking again," he said to himself meekly; but even as he said it, memories of the night before came flooding back and he felt once more the flow of red wine through his veins, and he thought of The Kid, and he thought of their drunken celebration of his birthday and he knew then that a celebration could only be a celebration if it lay in the midst of intoxication, and he knew then as he always did that he would drink again. Bayne walked on, sweating profusely in the heat, the sun penetrating his every move, draining his body of its last fluids, but he pushed on determined to make it to the last wood at the end of the city to ask his wise friends some questions of religious importance that plagued at his mind.

He saw the great wood rise up in the distance and he doubled his pace in response. The houses thinned and the grass thickened and the bitumen street came to an abrupt end at a cul-de-sac and gate, and passed the gate a dirt road skidded on into the depths of the wood. Bayne left behind the remnants of society and wandered along the dirt road. It weaved on through the wood and the wood thickened on either side. A small path split off to the left, inland toward the city and Bayne followed it into the dense mass of trees and shrubs, it wound on, slowly and steadily, meeting up with a heavy stream, and then leaving it. The trees ahead grew across the path and the path filled with leaves and scrub until it had disappeared into nothing, and Bayne was forced to beat his way through the bush on instinct until he found the stream once more, full of water heading along the way he had come and off towards the sea. The great wood left the city at its north eastern point and filled the land all the way to the magnificent Pacific Ocean, and it went north along the edge of the suburbs until a great bay cut it off and herded it towards the mighty sea.

Bayne pushed his way through the prickly scrub and the animals he never saw burrowed away in fright at this intruder. He felt relaxed and easy now and the canopy of the wood sheltered him from the sun, and scattered a dappled light across the forest floor. The trees suddenly thinned and were steadily replaced by a thickening grassy weed which covered the ground and led on to a sunny glade close by to where Heil resided. On the far end of a the glade some rocks shot up to higher ground and provided Heil with a small shelter from the wind and rain, and here he kept his miserly possessions. Bayne scanned the sunny glade for his friend, and sure enough Heil sat by the little stream, legs crossed, his eyes shut to the world around, his mind drawn inwards to something more heavenly. Bayne stood and watched patiently not keen to disturb his friend from meditation. He didn't have to wait long as Heil opened his eyes, a smile already grown across his face. He jumped up energetically and embraced his friend.

"Bayne, How are you?" he asked excitedly; his mouth wide and grinning, innumerable teeth gleaming.

"Good Heil. And you?"

"Always good mate, always good." Heil looked at Bayne and saw him dripping with sweat. "Come have a drink from the stream, you look hot... Did ya run here?" He asked slightly confused.

“Yeah, yeah, well sought of,” Bayne answered. “I came from J. and K.’s place, and walked from the station. We had a big night last night for The Kids birthday and I’m battling now. The alcohol has been sweating out of me all day...it’s so hot today. I can’t believe it”

Heil nodded. “Ahh the Kid how is he...I haven’t seen him for ages. He’s a good man the Kid, always happy, not a bad bone in his body,” Heil said with a grin.

“Yeah you’re right Heil; he truly is kind hearted fellow, and he’s a character as well, which is of almost equal consequence.”

“True, my friend, very true.” Heil led Bayne to a heavier part of the stream.

“You know what I mean Heil. You don’t want to spend too much time with nice guys with no personality. I mean they are nice but they are boring. But then I suppose they are better than a bad person full of personality. Or are they?” Bayne paused, his brow furrowed in confusion. “I don’t really know, well anyway the point is that the best people are those that are charismatic and at the same time genuinely good blokes, like The Kid.”

Bayne bent down to the stream and sucked up some water and splashed it all over his face and shoulders, and he felt a huge relief shudder across his body as the cool draught of water quenched his throat and cooled his skin.

“How was his birthday?” Heil asked as he watched Bayne splash himself with water.

“It was great fun. The Kid and I had dinner together and then we all went back to J. and K.’s apartment and got on it.”

“How is the great J.,” Heil asked already laughing as he thought of the infinite possibilities of J.’s actions. Bayne quickly told Heil about J.’s new girlfriend and they reminisced about the J. they knew, their addictive friend, so unique in his quaint ways, hilarious to those that understood him, generous with everything he ever owned, a great friend that would do anything for anyone, a person that made you feel great, yet a soul that needed others to get him through life, a fellow that needed his friends to finance him and steer him through the world, someone so addicted to his weaknesses that he was destined for a life of dependence, yet at the same time he could make the most paranoid person feel at ease in any situation; a drinker, a smoker and a penniless gambler, yet a man simply brilliant with people.

“J has given up all illicit materials. He is now only on alcohol and cigarettes.” Bayne said with a smile. He really did love talking about J., and there was no-one better to talk to him about than Heil, and Harry Cook when he was back from the Mother country.

Heil laughed. “But what has he replaced them with.”

“Well I’m glad you mentioned that Heil, ‘cause you know how we always say that J. just swaps his addictions... well now he is gambling again. All that time that he was taking pills and stuff, well, he didn’t gamble at all, but now he is off them he has slid back to gambling.”

“J. just moves from one addiction another again.” Heil grinned. “At least this ones better for his health and he doesn’t have any money anyway so it’s not likely that he can cause too much damage gambling, and K. is too smart to give him money to gamble with.”

They exhausted their conversation of J. and Bayne stood silently his hands on his hips, feeling a new lease of life from the fresh stream water that dripped over his face. Heil talked on about his recent movements in the city with Lara and then his last few days back in the woods. He was just happy to see his friend again and words tumbled steadily from his mouth, and the two reminisced about the old days and joked carelessly in the glade, and laughed at the idiosyncrasies of their friends, dropping into character when appropriate; mimicking Sappy the Fat and his right wing views, and then Lazza, the elite soldier, the sporting hero and the supercilious brother of a friend of theirs. The two wandered slowly around the glade like two ancient Greek philosophers discussing the world around them, and suddenly they were Hylas and Philonous and the world was merely a reflection of their minds, and reality was nothing but a mere creation of their thoughts, and their conversation was wide as always and they philosophised with the world and at the same time they laughed at their silly jokes and observation.

They stood for a while in the shade of an old gum tree and Bayne kicked at the ground with his feet. “Why is an omnipotent and omniscient God at all worried about how people perceive it?” He finally asked Heil, bringing their conversation to the purpose of his visit, trusting his wise friend to have the answers to the questions beyond his own grasp. He had come in anger at the wars that raged in the name of religious servitude and now he found himself a philosopher in the trees who sought a deeper understanding of God. He went on. “Most religions preach an idea of knowing and accepting God as a path to heaven. But wouldn’t an all powerful and an all knowing God already know, and understand who has accepted him and who is on a path to heaven? Would not God have imbued the righteous with the exact qualities that we suggest God is searching for? It would be cruel for a God to create a life in which our belief determines our path to heaven, if the same God created every person, and every belief and every choice within that person knowing that many will not follow God’s belief of choice.”

“Like the fundamentalist, those that denounce religion on the basis of its bad priests or sometimes confusing holy books totally miss the true meaning of religion,” Heil began before turning to the crux of the question. “The question of whether God is omnipotent or whatever else is therefore irrelevant. God, for me is the singing of the soul, the better part of man and woman that extends beyond the everyday and the world that dies. God is the sunset, the majesty of nature, the embodiment of mercy, compassion and love. These are the only manifestations of Him that are worth worrying about. Discussions as to the makeup of His precise nature are absolutely pointless. They lead to things alien to His greatness – things like crusades and jihad. God is love, my friend, God is love.”

“What about...,” Bayne stopped. He intended to probe further about wars in the name of religion, yet he realised he already knew, that Heil had answered all his questions in that one simple reply. Wars were the manifestations of people. If God could be used to promote hate and death then that was not God at all... it was merely the spirit of man at its most evil. God could never be anything that led to corruption and evil. God was not power or control, it was not omnipotence or omniscience, it was simply love. Heil’s last words floated in Bayne’s thoughts. If people could step back from their own only desires and could see the wasted life and the destruction of humanity, maybe then they would realise that this couldn’t be God. If anything God could only be the opposite.

God was love. It was not an omnipotent being, nor a great warrior, it was not a person or a thing, nor even a God...it was love, and if everyone realised this, if every person across the world could accepted God as being anything anyone wanted it to be, and realised deep down that God was just love, just a beautiful thing that brought meaning and fulfilment and happiness to people, and a thing that should unite all humanity and not divide it as it did...then the world would be a better place.

They talked on for a while and ended up going for a swim downstream where the river thickened. They ate some fresh fruit that Heil had by his cave, and as they sat on a rock, Heil rolled a joint from his patch of marijuana that grew naturally in parts of the wood. They smoked into the afternoon, resting on the soft grass looking at the trees above, and beyond them into the vast blue sky, lying languidly in surreal beauty, talking in low mutterings as if each word was a great strain that could only be forced out if it truly merited it. In this way they said what needed to be said and left all else for another day.

The mellowing effects of the humble weed slowly wore away with the afternoon and Bayne became restless. He walked in circles for a while and spoke in jolts and through his growing agitation came the call of J. and K.. The merriment of night danced its holy dance and the exciting thought of music and intoxication grew and like the piper at the gates of dawn, it drew him in. He left Heil to his thoughts and meditations, happy with this clear and beautiful answer to a question he knew so many religious zealots would engage so poorly. He hugged Heil and farewelled him until their next meeting and stumbled off in the opposite direction from which he came, desperate for one final adventure in the wood before he reached the barren grey cement of the world he'd haphazardly chosen. He past a small lake teeming with underwater life and meandered through a soft meadow like glade and into a thicket of trees; he broke through the dense foliage and appeared quite suddenly in a small natural garden that led to a quaint hovel. It could have been a log cabin for a lumberjack or a forgotten hideaway for bushrangers long ago, and hidden somewhere within the little hovel came a warmth from decades gone... as if this hovel had been the ancient guardian of the forest; a place of sanctuary in the fearful hollows, a place of shelter in the depths of winter, a place of light in the darkening night. It was all of it, like cosy fire providing heat and light and safety to its surrounds... but that was just memory and now the fire was ashes and the last embers were the only trace of its warming heritage.

It was a strange sight in amongst the world of trees, and Bayne wandered around it carefully, surprised that it had remained hidden from his view throughout his many journeys to the wood. It was snug but roomy, it was real yet illusionary, it was on the cusp of the world and it was perfect. In it, one could live within and without civilisation, close to the city yet away from it and near to the humble bikhu life that Heil enjoyed. The thought of living there rushed through Bayne, and he felt alive. The garden was dilapidated, and fast growing shrubs were overgrowing, but there was potential for seeds and fruit and spices and all kinds of growth, and the thought of subsistence raced through his head. He was sick of wandering between the flats of his friends, he was sick of the grimy city, the uncomfortable couches, the drunkenness, the terrible hangovers and the horrible anxiety that overcame him in the sober days, he was sick of his hopeless search for fulfilment, and now here before him lay all his life's desires, and he threw himself once more into this dream as if every answer to every question lay residing in that hovel.

To him, it was freedom, and he wanted it. He saw himself as a revolutionary living beyond the world of triviality, a mater of the modern world, and now he saw his castle, from which all his battles would be directed. He walked up onto the balcony that ran across the front of the hovel, and in a trance, created by his own delusions, he opened the door. Inside he found an old lady, wrinkled and coming to the end of life, sitting in a faded armchair, an old lady that sat all day in the same chair and barely moved, an old lady that watched time go by, with little regard for anything, an old lady that had forgotten the world and had been forgotten by it.

At first she had reacted in fright at this intrusion, but Bayne had alleviated her fears with some soothing talk, telling her he had lost his way and was weary and thirsty and could she be so kind as to let him have a drink. The old lady was from a different age, a chivalrous age, and her charitable beginnings overthrew her fear and she tried to get up.

“Don’t get up, Ill get it,” Bayne said, before striding through the hovel to the small vinyl kitchen, where he filled a glass of water and drank heartily, and filled again to keep his façade.

“Would you like something to eat,” the old lady said. Bayne could hardly refuse and she seemed pleased when he nodded. “There are some biscuits in the cupboard.”

Bayne grabbed a few hungrily and ate them with delight. His senses still alive from the joints he had enjoyed with Heil. Bayne sat down on the couch near to the old lady. He had no social fears because he knew that this hovel was something he needed, and like a shy man that sees a lady that he must have across the street, Bayne rushed across it. They talked a little, made a few quiet observations and the lady too seemed quite content to have his company. He asked her questions, aware that the weakness of anyone is to be listened to, and no more so than with the lonely or the elderly, where their lives have shrunk and any conversation is a comfort. He asked her of her life and at first she spoke slowly and timidly, but with his nods and smiles her confidence grew and the tales lengthened.

She had grown up in a time of great wealth, and her family had been rich and well connected. They had entertained much and the parties roared on in a time of frivolity. She fell in love with fashion and class, and it was during these carefree days that she dreamt of a life where ones only cares are social. She danced and drank champagne and all the boys sought her courtship. She was bubbly and full of energy and at the same time graceful and ladylike, and life was a mad dash of excitement and opportunity. But then the unthinkable...the crash of ‘29 and the great depression; her father had worked in banking and they had lost everything. Suddenly she had grown up and the world was big and her family in ruins; her confidence shot, she faced the world alone. She was forced to work, and she gave away the life she’d known, forgot about it as best she could, left behind the dance halls and the drink, the parties and the people and formed a life of rigid formality. Fortunately she met her husband and they had fallen in love and as the world came out of its struggles they had begun again to live. She read books of her time, F Scott Fitzgerald and Steinbeck two of her favourites; they struck a chord with her, reminded her of two lives she’d almost led. The world looked bright, and she and her husband had a child, and she was beautiful and there was hope and a future for their family. He was doing well in an accounting firm and happiness returned. But then their child died, pneumonia took her from the earth, the fragility of the young a curse that would leave a

gap in all their hearts. As they began to heal, and the nightly grieving ceased, the world plunged once more into chaos and her husband was called to war, to fight an enemy that for a time seemed a friend, an enemy that was more than its people, it had to because all people are just the same. Her husband came back alive, at least alive in limb, but he was a shattered man, the world of economics which he had taken too with such aplomb was forgotten, left behind on the battlefield with his hope. He had always dreamed, but now the dreams were gone, no more did they sit up together late into the night talking of the endless possibilities, no more did they think of the future, no more did they ever mention their child. His depression grew and their relationship strained, and their marriage fluttered above the rocks, their wings flapping listlessly, almost ready to accept a broken fate. But a gust of air blew across the rocks and sent them soaring above the sea once more. He stumbled into a job with the National Parks and he was assigned this stretch of wood, which was much bigger then, and they moved into this cabin, because all the rangers lived in their parks in those days. Her husband found a soothing fulfilment in his noble work. He was contributing to the world, making the earth a better place, and it was in the woods, away from man that he found his peace and left behind the memories of murder in the name of war. They lived a happy life together. Once more sitting up into the night, she with her books and he his thoughts. She tendered her garden and enjoyed the arts, and read a great deal and even penned some verse, and her husband looked after the great wood until his death. For over thirty years he gave his all for a wood that could never thank him, a wood that would never miss him, but a wood that never ceased, a wood that bared itself to all and never turned away in fright or anger, a sad and happy wood forever free from the pains of man. And the National Parks left her the house as a gesture of goodwill for all her husband's years of service and commitment to the wood and she lived on in the cabin, getting frail and day by day a little older and the wood encroached upon her cabin and every day she died a little more.

Bayne had listened attentively to her life story. He nodded and smiled and sighed appropriately and with every second of his attention the old lady grew fonder of this stranger that listened to her stories, this stranger interested in her life, this stranger seemingly mesmerised by her past... and the loneliness that had enveloped her since her husband's death slowly receded, and a smile broke across her tired face.

The old lady's skin was withered, her hair was almost gone, and her hands shook slightly, and Bayne knew that her days upon the earth were numbered. He desperately wanted to live in the hovel, and he conjured an image of himself as Buddha at home amongst the trees; as an Inca farmer subsisting high in the sierra, alone with his stone hut, his patch of vegetables, and the sun and the moon for spiritual comfort; as an artist forever creating upon his balcony, looking out at the majestic woods for inspiration; and he slowly created a dream of finding fulfilment in this quiet humble wood away from the dirt and grime of the city of love and hate.

Bayne thought of kicking the old lady out of her house, but immediately suppressed the thought, and turned over the idea of living here with her. The hovel was big enough for two of them, he could easily sleep on the couch, he was only sleeping on J. and K's couch or the Fat's floor, and here was a chance to hear the tales of a distant past, of generations gone. Moreover she was looking old and frail and he couldn't imagine her living long and then the hovel would be his own. Bayne decided to make himself indispensable, and with hunger eating at his stomach, he offered to make some

dinner. The old lady held her breath and considered the offer. She barely knew this young stranger, but he had been a good listener and she felt herself to be a good judge of character, at worst he was eccentric. Anyway, dinner did seem to be a good idea and she was hardly in the mood for cooking, her frail body was getting weak of late and she would much prefer to remain in her chair, keeping her energy for another day. She relented with a nod and watched as Bayne disappeared into the kitchen.

Bayne was filled with excitement as he looked around the vintage kitchen. He peered in and out of every cupboard, nodding to himself when he found something of use, making note of all the ingredients and cooking utensils available. There would be many hours spent cooking in this kitchen. Food after all was one of the many delights of living that needed to be enjoyed to the fullest, and for Bayne that meant long lunches with mountains of food, washed down with great jugs of delicious wine, enjoyed with fine friends and good conversation. There was merit to the adage that one should only eat to sustain life, and that life was for living, but Bayne could never bring himself to this position. Eating was a glorious part of living, one that should be undertaken by all the senses, one that should take time and one that should be attacked with hearty excitement.

Bayne went around the entire kitchen, opening and closing every cupboard before making a decision and grabbing some dirt ridden potatoes and washing them. He found some sausages on a little plate in the fridge and after heating up a pan he found under the sink he began frying them. He found some garlic and chopped it up and threw it in with the sausages. The fat sizzled and the smell of burning garlic overcame the kitchen. He left the potatoes to boil and returned to the living room. The old lady was in her chair, her eyes closed. She opened them, suddenly aware of another presence.

“Do you want a drink?” Bayne asked when he realised the old lady was awake.

“Thankyou dear. There’s some whiskey by the fridge and dry ginger in it. Could you make me a tall one with some ice?”

Bayne went to the kitchen and made two strong drinks, gulping down some of his before taking the Old Lady hers.

Bayne dished out the sausages and mash potato, then added a little water to the pan and made some gravy which he poured over both meals. He finished his drink and made another, and then took the meals out into the living room. The old lady ate at her chair and Bayne sat at the table and they talked between mouthfuls. They ate and drank into the evening, finishing the Old Ladies scotch, whilst Bayne told the Old Lady of his own life, his university days, and his decision to leave behind any semblance of an acceptably normal life and search out the best way to live a fulfilled life. He told her of his friends and their plans, of Heil living nearby in the wood, of J. and K. and their symbiotic relationship in the heart of the grimy city he was hoping to leave behind. He told her of his plan to subsist, and then carefully mentioned her broken down garden and told her that he could fix it up and grow all kinds of vegetables and spices there. They had moments of silence that were comfortable like old friends, and most of their conversation was spent with Bayne asking the Old Lady as many questions as he could. He hoped in this way that the Old Lady would become attached to his company and not have the heart to send him on his way, and all the time he listened he became more fascinated and he too enjoyed her company.

The next morning the Old Lady awoke, her head slightly dulled from alcohol. She left her bedroom and found Bayne asleep on the couch. The day before she had gone

along with this stranger, accepted his company and she had felt the endearment of friendship, but in the cold and sober morning that was long ago, now a young stranger lay asleep in her house, on her couch. He had come, and drank her whiskey, had eaten her food, had left the kitchen a mess and now lay asleep on her couch in her house, and she woke Bayne up with a start.

“What are you doing here,” she began.

Bayne sat up, and rubbed his eyes. What was he doing here. The night before came flooding back into his consciousness and he saw the hovel disappearing from his grasp. He thought again of throwing her out into the wood. No one would notice. He couldn't and instead he suggested that they live together as companions. It was right, he explained, that an old lady with years of life experience, wisdom and education should live together with someone young and energetic. He convinced her that his energy and lust for life was absolutely vital to her remaining time upon this earth; that their symbiotic relationship was crucial to them both, like J. and K. but even more necessary. He offered her the chance to share her abode with another creature that didn't want to work at all... but she wouldn't let him stay. The old lady said the house was hers. That she owned it and chose not to share it.

“It is impossible to own anything, especially a part of the earth. A person's life runs for around eighty years; time that is insignificant in the context of this ageless earth. Each spot we walk upon has seen all the centuries ever recorded by man and well before, as far back as is imaginable. It is so old that its measurement is beyond any human reckoning but the reckoning of numbers. And even those numbers can only be imagined by comparison and every reasonable comparison is beyond our meagre brains.” His whole body shook with excitement. He rubbed his hair with his hand and sweat began to drip from his forehead. His words gathered momentum and he spoke on with rapid intent. “Yet we have the hubris to claim a piece of it in exchange for our labour? What if the earth doesn't want to sell itself for labour? Why would it want to? It has lived happily, even excelled for billions of years without the need for labour. Why should this ageless mass be beholden to the forces of capitalism? Each piece of earth has seen enough human destruction and death and murder and lies to quite happily reject everything that remotely resembles our beliefs.” He relaxed and his body stopped its frenetic movements. He spoke calmly and intently to the old woman, peering directly into her eyes. “If a little insect resided in your hair, would it be fair for it to stake a claim of ownership and then pass it onto its offspring after its death? Would it be fair if a creature you had never noticed, so small and insignificant, decided to sell a spot on your body, or worse, if they collectively claimed your arm as a nation state with an independent government, an army that protected its borders and everyone within claiming hairs and freckles to live?” Bayne's thunderous argument was having an effect on the lady, and she listened more closely as he spoke in a whisper that added a spine tingling importance to his voice. “The earth shouldn't be bought or sold or divided into states and countries that have visa restrictions on the movement of people. The earth cannot be owned and ruled or conquered by tiny insignificant beings that live for three quarters of a century and then vanish without a trace, leaving behind plots of land that are greedily divided up by hungry children.” His voice grew once more in power and the words flowed on like a river of soothing and intoxicating wine. “This land cannot be sold by anyone nor be bought by anyone else. So this land is not yours and the construction you have made from

the trees and the minerals of the earth should be left as a tribute to the mighty planet and as a warning to all those idiots that attempt to own any piece of anything.”

“I will move in right away and we can share this patch of earth, and live in harmony, and teach each other valuable things that neither of us knows,” he said.

The old lady accepted the rants of this madman that had invaded her home. She had listened hard and forgotten most of all he said, and now it was her turn to speak. She could denounce him and abuse him, and send him back to whence he came. But he could turn into a savage beast and force her will his way. The conundrum sparked a light somewhere deep within the hidden recesses of her mind, beyond the soul and dimmed by years of repression. The ideas this madman brought were fascinating and they brought life and warmth to an often far too cold body. The lady accepted Bayne’s compulsive offer, unaware what led her to this strange decision.

“Why did I accept the logic of a madman?” She asked herself. “Am I scared? Am I crazy like him? Do his words make sense in a funny sought of way?” She never answered her own doubts and before she thought again her life changed and excitement and energy filled the house, and the sun brightened the room with more strength every day after.

Bayne lived in that humble hovel with the old lady for company. She wisely taught him the things that she understood from a score of decades of life upon the earth. Bayne listened intently and conversely discussed philosophical ideas that she had never considered. He told her of the effect that the Beatles had on music and he played her Bob Dylan records on her old LP player. Bayne looked after the garden, and trimmed back the weeds that threatened to overgrow it. He planned to subsist again and he began his plans in earnest; digging up the soil, plantings seeds, and watering them at the same time every day. The garden would one day grow and Bayne would get is staples, his pumpkin and potato, he would get his fruit, he would get his tomatoes and limes, and he would get his spices, his ginger and garlic, his chilli, his coriander and basil, and he would make his food, like a miller creating bread in a lonely parlour, and eating the bread to live on and make more bread to live on in happy cycle. As his garden slowly grew Bayne taught the Old Lady how to cook dishes from the orient; curries form India, stir fries from the Pacific Rim, fish dishes from the land of the Incas. He read to her from Kerouac and performed Ginsberg’s Howl with beatific jazz-fuelled intensity. Bayne introduced her to Kafka, Dostoyevsky and Bukowski and showed her the oft forgotten beauty of the fallen down vagrants of the world. She read to Bayne from Chaucer and the fables of Hans Christian Anderson. She told Bayne of the poems of T.S. Elliot and acted out great renditions of Shakespeare’s plays and Bayne had never really understood the strange language used in them, but the Old Lady had a grasp like no one he’d met before and as she acted out the parts and spoke with enthusiasm and intonation, suddenly the strange language was poetic and the words meant more than they ever had, and they filled his mind with great colours and images and history was brought to him by the poetry of Shakespeare. She made him read Hemmingway’s fables, and the great novels of Steinbeck and Fitzgerald that she kept on her bookcase, and he devoured them on the balcony as the sun shone upon the hovel, and every day his garden grew and he learnt more.

“I always liked Jane Austin,” The old lady had replied to Bayne inquisition as to her favourite writer. “There was always something in that wealthy carefree life of the

nineteenth century that captured my heart. The clothes, the simple lives, the romance, and I read it and dreamt of it and I imagined myself in that time, as one of her lovely characters, and I always wished that I had been born in that era.”

Bayne wondered if he was born in the right era and wondered, like everyone does at some time in their life, whether they would have been more successful, would have fitted in better, would have been happier, would have been greater, if they were born in a different time or place. There must be so many drop-outs and failures across the world that could have been something; artists that never quite made it, that could have been Renaissance men employed by the king to put beauty across the world, leaders of men, soldiers and revolutionaries that end up in gaol, that could have been great warrior lords remembered in history for ruling great empires, how would Alexander the great or Genghis Kahn fair today, would they make it in the world of business and politics, or fall out the bottom. There must be Alexanders in the world today, and the philosophers that could have been famed in the Greek republic, stuck in stuffy university offices battling to pay the rent, their ideas rejected in a world of conservatism, roman emperors, kings, nobleman and serfs, where would all be today, during the great war or beyond. Would Jesus have led such a following today, or maybe Jim Jones’s idea of Utopia would have taken off a thousand years before. And Bayne contemplated his own place in time and wondered if he’d not have been better off wondering the roads in the careless fifties, or maybe as a part of the 60s counterculture, that had such appeal with the music, the drugs, the socialistic ideal, but then would it not be more sad when it failed miserably in a heap and all those that turned on, tuned in, and dropped-out made a late grab at wealth. Then again maybe Bayne was meant for today, maybe he too would be great and his time had not yet come. There was after all a moment when Che was just a wondering medical student, when Dylan was hanging in the folk bars of New York playing Woody Guthrie songs, when shy Jim Morrison was writing poems in L.A, copying the charisma of his beat hero Neal Cassady, when Ghandi was just a lawyer, when Mandela was just a crook, when Jesus was just an apprentice carpenter, when Alexander was just a playful boy.

6. A sad realisation

Bayne had remained hidden from the world as he and the Old lady lived on together in the hovel. Each day the Old lady grew wearier and Bayne knew that death was coming. He hoped it would come before she became so enfeebled that her life became a misery not worth one's effort. The Old lady spent more time each day locked away in her room and Bayne used his time alone out in the garden hoeing the land, or on the balcony reading books from the old ladies library, beer in hand, every so often looking out at the wood and wondering about the world he had so quickly forgotten.

His first thoughts were of Heil. He only lived nearby and he had hardly seen him since the day he had found the hovel. On the day after he had found the hovel he had rushed off to find Heil and brought him back to see what he thought of his new abode. They had laughed at being neighbours and promised each other that they would spend much time together deep in glorious conversation. They would be ancient Greeks once again and they would wander the courtyards of Athens in philosophical thought. But they had hardly seen one another since and Bayne craved his friend's good humoured company. The old lady was once more locked away in her room. She hardly left it now and the great stories had stopped, and the swapping of ideas had ceased, and her room smelt like the coming death and once more the hovel was sad and lonely. Bayne occupied himself outside it more and more, only coming in to cook up a meal. The coming of death hung over the hovel like a dark cloud and Bayne could bare it no longer. He tallied his fields and walked more and more in the great wood. Each day he passed Heil's normal abode and Heil could never be found. Bayne knew Heil was likely to be in the city with Lara, but he hoped he would return soon. Most of all he wanted to tell him his new idea that had been growing in him every day that he watched the old lady slowly die.

It was on one of Bayne's walks that he finally found Heil again. He was bent over the little river, his shirt off, washing his face in the cool draughty water.

"Heil, my friend. Where have you been? I have been watching out for you this last week and haven't seen a sign of you."

"Yeah I was in the city with Lara. Then I found out Harry Cook had returned from Ireland so went and visited him and stayed with his parents for a few days."

"How is he?" Bayne said quickly. "How was his trip?"

"Ahh you know Harry, he didn't do much but still he had a great time. You know how he is, he didn't do anything really, just whiled away the evenings with his own meagre ways, his own ideas, watching his sport, smoking pipes and drinking cider, talking late into the evening with anyone who'd listen... you know how he is... and he loved every minute of it."

Bayne laughed as he thought of his odd friend and his unique ways, his intentional rejection of normal social ways, his deliberate actions to annoy his closest friends, and his happiness in his own quaint company enjoying the nights, sleeping through the days."

"J. and K. are having everyone over this Friday for Harry's return. Harry told me to tell you."

"Sweet. Will you be going?"

"Definitely," Heil replied.

“Well come over to my hovel on Friday and we can head into the city together then,” Bayne said measuredly.

“For sure,” Heil answered.

They both went quiet for a moment, and Heil began to wash himself again. Bayne squatted on the grass and ripped out a long piece of grass and began chewing slowly. He had always chewed pens in class and straws in pubs and now the grass alleviated his oral fascinations. Maybe he never fully completed his oral face. Freud’s theory for his habits was as good as any and he often took it up with gusto when quizzed why he chewed so much.

“Heil,” he said slowly, thinking of the Old lady as he spoke. “I was thinking that when people reach an age when life has been or should have been lived, they ought to be sent off to wander the land, to tell their stories and spread their wisdom. They can leave behind all that they once used and all their belongings to people who have just started to live. These people are then given more chance to live, who in turn will themselves eventually wander off, wander off to teach and wander off to die. People wouldn’t be so afraid of death as death would be their last heroic wander, their last journey; the last march of the living... and on this journey they would teach others they came across.” He paused and threw down the long piece of grass he had been chewing with slight embarrassment. “What do you think old friend?”

Heil was surprised by the theory and thought a moment before responding. “Becoming old is a tragedy Bayne. As our knowledge and experience grows the body and mind wanes. Even those that were once giants of intellect are struck down by an infirmity of the body and the mind. The only thing that might and should become more firm is the power of the spirit. As death creeps ever-nearer, the selfishness of life disappears and people who lived their lives in dronish pursuit of their own ends start thinking about something bigger. This is the experience of old age. Life is meant to be learnt living; not taught by those that are about to die. Although I would love to gain the knowledge of the old and wise amongst us, it would destroy the joy of the journey towards understanding.”

“Ah, the Journey of life,” Bayne repeated. “But their lives could be given one last moment of meaning and they could impart their knowledge on any that seek it.”

Heil was troubled. “Ought we not show some respect and look after them in their twilight years?”

“We should but we don’t,” answered Bayne. “Maybe they do in Asia and the third world where the children will look after their parents as their parents looked after them as children. But here in the first world, where there is lots of money and little time, we stick the elderly in homes and hope never to hear from them again.”

“That’s true but so very wrong,” said Heil mournfully.

“Heil this would give meaning to the twilight of their lives. It cannot be good to be a burden. I think we would be happier if we all went off to die on our own terms, with some great and final dignity in our last bold march into the wilderness.” Bayne looked up at Heil as he spoke, and saw he was troubled. He knew then he couldn’t convince him and rather than be convinced by Heil to leave the Old Lady to die, Bayne decided he must go now to her side and convince her of the merits of his plan. “Anyway I must go Heil, I’m glad you’re back in the woods and I’ll see you on Friday.”

Before Heil could comment, Bayne was gone again, rushing with as much enthusiasm as he had come. Bayne had decided that the old lady he lived with must begin

her own heroic march. The old lady had lived for many decades, she had lived her life and he refused to let her waste away. He remembered a Neil Young song that proclaimed that 'it's better to burn out than fade away'. He would not let such a tragedy befall the lady that had shared her hovel with him. The old lady had taught Bayne much but now she must teach others. He wanted to give her the dignity of a last beautiful journey, rather than sitting around in a hovel waiting for death to come. He found her upon the soft green sofa inside the hovel and told her immediately of the heroic journey that she would take. He told her to teach and to educate, to show others how find there own path in amongst the spiralling jumble of madness. She would walk through the forest and out, and past the houses and people and beyond the edge of society, standing tall, hobbling to a death that comes to all, alone with her thoughts in the breathtaking serenity of life's infinite eternity.

Before she died she would live one last time. She would move on like a tribal elder, imparting ancient wisdom then disappearing from the earth and leaving behind a legacy to the tribe. She would leave her house for Bayne to enjoy, passing on her life to another soul and together they would carry on the torch of life. Bayne pushed her out the door to wander upon the planet. She would die out there on the fertile ground as one with the mighty earth, far older and far wiser than any person that ever walked upon it.

The old lady was frail of mind and her thoughts had not collected as she was pushed eagerly out the door and into her garden for the last time. Her head rang with deluded thoughts and minor hallucinations, and anything that she heard would have seemed reasonable. She had trusted the madman in front of her before and she had felt alive again. She knew her time upon the earth was coming to an end. She felt it deep in her bones. She had much to teach, to many students and so little time. She walked spiritually out through the wood to die, living for one last time and living like she had never lived before. She breathed in the clean afternoon air and felt a rush of pride and dignity as if completing one final but important task. A tingle of pleasure ran up her spine, the pleasure in running great untracked distances, climbing steep and endless mountains or completing the last in a series of novels. She left to wander and to teach and eventually to die.

The Old Lady would stagger slowly through the wood, pushing her way through overhanging branches and dry impenetrable shrubs. She would stop and catch her breath before going on, hardly thinking, she had reached such a state of delusion that she barely knew who she was or where she was going. She struggled on, and slowly tiredness overcame her. Her stops became longer and more often, and the air harder to breath. She suddenly felt hot, and sweat dripped from her wrinkled forehead, then just as quickly she became desperately cold and she shivered and attempted to find warmth, and eventually it became too much and she lay down to sleep. She had walked north without any reason and it was towards the north edge of the wood, a few kilometres short of the river that cut it off that she fell into a coma and never awoke. She would never wander the world teaching those around her as Bayne had hoped in his ludicrous suggestions. She instead died unaware of herself, in a different world, her thoughts a hazy mess of delusion, but she had lived happily over those last weeks and in some ways that was enough, and now she remained a cold body to the world, hidden in the undergrowth, forgotten.

