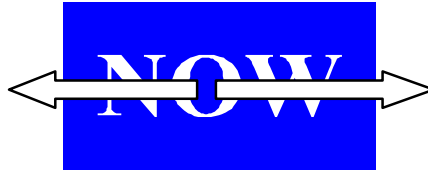


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The NOWletter returns after a three-month break, a period in which Margot and I moved from our home of fifty-seven years in Chatswood to our apartment at the new Uniting retirement village in Leichhardt in which we are now well settled.

The articles this month are by brother and sister Jane Cox of Leominster and Dave Knowles of Canberra. I met Dave sometime around 2000 and his first contribution to the NOWletter followed in 2001, since then he has provided another 29 articles and introduced me to a range of authors and matters of shared interest and generally ‘kept me on my toes’. In this issue Dave describes the effects of a right brain stroke he suffered in 2002 and its impact on his life and major interests.

The opening article is by Jane Cox who, sometime after I met Dave, I discovered was his sister. Jane lives in Leominster, U.K., and I met her through my membership of the Traherne Association which is located in Hereford. Another coincidence in that I had put my favourite Edward Thomas poem ‘Adlestrop’ in the September NOWletter, a couple of weeks before Jane’s article arrived.

## Edward Thomas and Thomas Traherne by Jane Cox

Edward Thomas (born in 1878) and Thomas Traherne both lived short lives, dying before they were forty. Edward Thomas is known as one of the Dymock poets, but before he started writing poetry in 1914, he reviewed editions of old verse and rural books for the Daily Chronicle, wrote articles and was the biographer of Richard Jefferies and George Borrow. He read widely. He enjoyed seventeenth-century authors such as John Aubrey and Sir Thomas Browne together with the later writings of Gilbert White and R. H. Hudson.

Although Edward Thomas wrote 'The Friend of the Blackbird' in October 1911, it was not published until 1928 in *The Last Sheaf*. In it he echoes Traherne's way of thinking and sense of wonder:

"He turned away to look at a blackcap singing every minute high up in golden-green blossom against the blue sky, where the sun and the south-west wind ruled over large, eager grey clouds with edges of gleaming white. The little dead-leaf coloured bird quivered all over; his throat swelled in bubble after bubble, his lifted black head was turned from side to side as he sang; and he moved slowly among the blossom. The high, quick dewy notes filled the paralytic with a thin exquisite pleasure, as if his soul had climbed upon the line of his vision and crept into the singing bird. All these things are mine. They are me. And that is not all: I am them. We are one. We are organs and instruments of one another.'

(In the same year, 1911, he wrote a story called 'The Attempt' published in *Light and Twilight*. The central character was called Morgan Traheron. However, the choice of this name may be just a coincidence.)

Thomas Traherne displays a similar sense of wonder when he says in *Centuries of Meditations 1:18*:

The WORLD is not this little Cottage of Heaven and Earth. Tho this be fair it is too small a Gift ... When you enter into it, it is an illimited field of Varietie and Beauty: where you may lose your self in the Multitude of Wonders and Delights.

(Sue Gee, in her book *The Hours of the Night*, published in 1996, uses this quotation to illuminate her story set in the Welsh Marches.)

What Traherne writes in *Centuries of Meditations 1:14* could be taken as an explanation of Edward Thomas's feelings about the blackcap's song:

When things are ours in their Proper places, nothing is needfull but Prizing, to Enjoy them. God therfor hath made it infinitely Easy to Enjoy, by making evry Thing ours, and us able so Easily to Prize them.

We do not know if Edward Thomas read Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*. Bertram Dobell edited *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, B.D. 1636? — 1674* now first published from the original manuscripts, in Charing Cross Road in 1903. He included several sections from *Centuries of Meditations* in his introduction to it. There were 117 subscribers to *The Poetical Works* including Hereford Free Library, London Library, several people living in Oxford and even from Harvard and Washington, USA. Dobell published the complete *Centuries of Meditations* in 1908. Edward Thomas died in 1914.

Both Traherne and Thomas experienced war in their lifetimes. The Scottish siege of Hereford, in the Civil War, lasted for six weeks in 1645. St Owens' Church was ruined and the Scots fired four cannons against the walls at Friars Gate on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1645. Edward Thomas enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in July 1915. In 1916 he applied for a commission in the Royal Artillery and became a second-lieutenant in November 1916, embarking for France at the end of January 1917. He was on the front line near Arras. The blast of a shell killed him on the 9 April 1917 at the start of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Edward Thomas had kept a diary before he was a teenager and did so again from 1<sup>st</sup> January to the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1917, just a day before his death. His enhanced vision in the trenches is remarkable:

*March 12 ... then a beautiful moist clear limpid early morning till the Raid at 7 and the retaliation on Ronville at 7-30 — 8.45 with 77cm. 25 to the minute. Then back through 6ins. of chalk mud in trenches along battered Ronville Street. Rooks in tall trees on N. side of Arras — they and their nests and the trees black against the soft clouded sky. W. wind and mild but no rain yet (11 a.m.) Letters, mess accounts, maps. Afternoon at maps with Horton at battery. Evening of partridges calling and pip-squeaks coming over behind.*

*March 29 Wet again. Getting refuge trenches dug for detachments. Making crests on map. How beautiful, like a great crystal sparkling and spangling, the light reflected from some glass which is visible at certain places and times through a hole in cathedral wall, ruined cathedral.*

*There are a few notes on the last pages of his diary:*

*The light of the new moon and every star, The morning chill and clear hurts my skin while it delights my mind.*

A similarly enhanced vision can be observed when Traherne writes of the City of Hereford in *Centuries of Meditations* 33:

*And young Men Glittering and Sparkling Angels and Maids strange Seraphic Pieces of Life and Beauty! Boys and Girles Tumbling in the street, and Playing were moving Jewels.*

While in *Select Meditations* 3:99, Traherne says:

*The Sun the Stars the Holy Angels Wings  
All These Adorn'd at once my Heavenly Sphere  
And round about me did my Joys appear,  
Can any more then these my Riches be!*

We are given a touching reminder of Thomas's sensitive response to nature when Helen Thomas recalls in her book *Under Storm's Wing*, how Edward had loved all manner of herbs such as thyme, tansy, rosemary and lavender. She took cuttings of them and planted them on Edward's grave in France.

*Jane Cox*

(This article was first published in the September 2023 edition of Traherne Association Newsletter 86 and included here with permission of the author. )

## **The Emissary Recounts His Plight - from Dave Knowles**

The inside story of a damaged right brain hemisphere.

Inspired by Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary* and informed by my own right hemisphere stroke.

I read *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* while I was recovering from my stroke and it was very relevant and very sobering!

The 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2002 started like any ordinary day. I had had my breakfast and Christine had gone to school where she was a teacher. I had just turned 59 and Christine and I had spent nearly 35 years married very enjoyably having lived on 4 continents and produced 2 delightful daughters. We enjoyed being in Canberra Australia after we had started our life together in Deep River Canada soon after being married in the UK and had a brief sojourn in Johannesburg South Africa and I sipped my coffee looking at our newly completed deck on a sunny morning, thinking, "I need to get out there and fix the skirting." So I picked up my tools noticing a little clumsiness as I sat down on the edge of the deck.

But then I tried to get up and I couldn't! The first thought that came to mind was that the control wires between the cockpit and wing trim surfaces on a plane had been cut. The next was more a sense of alarm as I noted the potential to roll off the deck into the pool with dire results. So I bum-shuffled to the patio door, pulled myself upright and stumbled into the kitchen with a crash. I phoned Christine to try and tell her what state I was in. I later found out she got someone to stand in for her while she called our doctor who surmised a stroke and phoned for an ambulance. When a knock on the door came I felt a sense of relief as I opened it to two paramedics who cheerily swept me up and into an ambulance.

This was the day that was to change our lives together for the next twenty odd years though we little suspected it then.

The first question our younger daughter, Jane, asked Christine was, "which hemisphere suffered the stroke?" On receiving the reply, "the Right" she reassured Christine that the language understanding and expressing left hemisphere was undamaged and therefore this was the best outcome for me and so it seemed.

The first things I remembered in Calvary Hospital were the faces bending over me solicitously— Christine, Malcolm Whyte from our Men's Group and later Jane, who had taken an emergency flight up from Melbourne.

I was grateful for the care I received and felt I was in good hands and with every chance of making a good recovery.

Later I was transferred to RILU (the Rehabilitation Independent Living Unit) at Canberra Hospital where physiologists further treated me, I did gym work and found out I suffered left-side neglect as was to be expected from a right hemisphere stroke. I had to allow for this as I learnt to walk again and later to cycle and drive. I noticed it was not so easy to dress myself and that Christine on her daily visits seemed to treat me with a little reserve. I also noticed on reading a book that had been gifted to me: Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* that I got a good deal less out of it than its reputation and cover blurb lead me to expect. This seemed odd. At some point in my gradual recovery I acquired and read Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* which, in my current condition, I found fascinating though the statement on p. 72 that said:

This is why a right hemisphere stroke, although not involving speech directly, is in practice more disabling than a left hemisphere stroke, despite the fact that in a left hemisphere stroke speech is usually lost. Following a left hemisphere stroke, despite the difficulties incurred with loss of speech and loss of use of the right hand, the chances of independent living are higher than after a right hemisphere stroke.

was alarming though I found difficult to take seriously as I could not note any evidence in myself. But then as McGilchrist further points out on p. 84:

The right hemisphere is also more realistic about how it stands in relation to the world at large, less grandiose, more self-aware, than the left hemisphere. Insight into illness generally is dependent on the right hemisphere, and those who have damage to the right hemisphere tend to deny their illness — the well-recognised, and extraordinary phenomenon of *anosognosia*, in which patients deny or radically minimise that they have, for example, a blatant loss of use of what may be one entire half of the body or deny they have any loss of capability.

His other observation (p. 85):

In the presence of a right hemisphere stroke, the left hemisphere is 'crippled by naively optimistic forecasting of outcomes.'

which later explained the complete failure to master the job I first took after the stroke and why I welcomed retrenchment as liberation from an impossible situation.

McGilchrist shed so much light on my subsequent life it is now with humility that I realise it is no wonder Christine treated me with reserve (which I viewed

as loss of empathy) and why she said: “You are no longer the man I married” but could not explain what had changed in me — after all my undamaged left hemisphere thought I had not changed at all —in fact it *denied any change had occurred!*

There was only one change in me which was clearly obvious to me and to Christine usually on one of our holidays abroad though it was not attributed to right hemisphere damage specifically — this was the suffering of strong bouts of anxiety when faced with crowded conditions in a foreign language environment which seemed to present a danger of being lost. I considered it a malady of the whole brain and was a ‘natural’ reaction to having had the rug pulled out from underneath my customary life by the stroke or so I rationalised. So I sought the ‘normal’ help on how to overcome what might have been considered the generalised anxiety that afflicts many people. I settled on *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* with the help of a psychologist. It was partially helpful but did not eliminate the anxiety I felt. It was painful for me and disruptive for our holidays together. I now think I might have to attribute this as another aspect of right hemisphere damage specifically. How to treat it is less clear. The anxiety was harder for us to tolerate as before the stroke the situations that caused trouble now were considered adventurous then - to be sailed through with aplomb!

Over the 20 years that have elapsed since the stroke I have reluctantly concluded that I have lost The Master of my mental life and The Emissary is in charge to adopt McGilchrist’s vivid metaphor to describe the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

The Emissary is extremely grateful that he can employ and understand language much as before (as Jane hoped, knowing that I was a prodigious reader and loved discussion) but realises belatedly how much the Master contributed to my mental life and character (as Christine noted). He feels a little lonely and helpless without the guidance of the Master and, indeed, in October 2023 just when I turned 80 I woke one morning to feel that I had lost some essential spark of myself, which I found very disturbing. Ironically, the aim of Buddhist meditation is to eliminate the sense of Self but not, I’m sure, in the sense I had experienced.

So now David Charles Knowles is represented by my Emissary, which to others’ eyes may seem a form of dementia, which it may be taken as by a geriatrician or a neurologist?

Another troublesome issue that compounds difficulties for me is the progressive loss of my hearing, which is only partially ameliorated by high quality hearing aids in both ears. The best benefit is the Bluetooth connection between my hearing aids and my iPhone, which render phone calls almost clear. But the

progressive hearing loss can leave me at sea in company especially around a table in a noisy environment; I can understand the association of hearing loss with dementia!

It is a good job that my Emissary had such a good training according to Western education norms although it is clear that he will never understand Phenomenology now which McGilchrist asserts is the right hemisphere's view of the world.

Before my stroke understanding Phenomenology was one of my aims, inspired by Francisco Varela's writing in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. Ultimately I recorded the aborted attempts to understand Phenomenology in my *The Fascinations and Frustrations of Phenomenology*.

After the stroke I retain my interests in Consciousness and Physics, especially the quantum world, and I continue to read about them.

I have also acquired and read Iain McGilchrist's subsequent book: *The Matter With Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* not without a little apprehension. I admire his words on spirituality and have a particular liking for Walker Percy's: *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* which McGilchrist references. I still maintain a reading list of books that seek to expand the understanding of my own brain and increase my cognitive reserve.

But I miss the Master who contributed so much to my mental life and to my character, and whose loss has discomforted Christine for 20 odd years.

Some later thoughts (13 Dec 23)

On how to treat my right hemisphere damage:

Acceptance of the status quo

Live the experience and observe R & L hemisphere operations as best "I" can!

Keep up regular trike-riding

Keep up challenging reading

Re-learn classical guitar (I dropped it after my stroke)

Pick up learning ancient Greek (I had started)

Look over Zen again

Do everything with mindfulness

**Notes:** learning a musical instrument & learning a foreign language (& Zen?) particularly exercise the right hemisphere

A healthy mind needs a healthy body



Challenging reading, though mainly exercising the left hemisphere, may require a right hemisphere viewpoint, e.g. on phenomenology

On Hearing:

I had my old hearing aids refurbished by Audika and they have come back much clearer, even better than the newer ones I had on temporary loan. This bodes well!

*Dave Knowles*

### **Much Ado - from the Archive – Alan Mann**

This is an extract from NOWletter 154, it followed our meeting in May 2011. It is prompted by our recent group enquiry into the nature of the ‘self’.

I gave my *Backward Step* talk a trial run at the May 2011 meeting and benefited from some helpful feedback. I will include the notes I assembled for this event in the NOWletter. (Dave has pointed out that the ‘I’ in this piece is not identified, it is me, Alan Mann)

George Schloss rounded off his extensive writing on the relevance of the revelation of the Harding experiments with a unforgettable but enigmatic aphorism” to describe the revelation of the experiments as “*Unfolding time in the service of enfolding space*”.

This can be interpreted in a number of ways but during a Harding meeting at Greville Street on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and subsequent observation during a walk along the southern Sydney foreshores with friends, then at a concert on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> it opened up to me from an angle it hadn’t presented previously.

I thought at our meeting, as we were discussing the self, why don’t I just watch it. So, I set about trying to watch my self and of course there is nothing to watch, only the space in which everything including the sense of self arises. An interesting exercise and worth trying in all or any circumstances. Of course, I could not see myself any more than I can see my head but the important thing is what is seen *through*. What I found myself seeing through was a pretty firmly established assumption. ( Yes, I realise I should know better after all this talking, seeking, experiments and so on but, not surprisingly, I have an answer to that particular observation/objection as well if you are interested).

But watch nevertheless, what is there in this space between where I sense my self to be and the speaker or whatever is happening ‘out there’. Watch that space and in watching it seemed to be in some way substantial. It is, I thought, a substantial transparency in the way a crystal, or clear glass is substantial. It is solid but admits the light. And then followed an immediate reaction against such a notion, how absurd that this space and openness could be in any way substantial! And yet the sense of substantiality continued to pervade the openness. It is more felt than seen.

Lying awake the following night I suddenly recalled a verse of My Spirit in which Traherne seems to have been wrestling with the same question, I recalled his description as “super substantial, rare...” and of course there’s Shakespeare’s “glassy essence”. At the time it happened, Garry (Booth) was telling us about Tiruya\*\* (see below), a happy synchronicity in that of course, but the situation I am trying to describe is always the case; here for the looking. This is Traherne’s attempt:

*...O what a World art Thou! a World within!  
 All Things appear,  
 All Objects are  
 Alive in thee! Supersubstantial, Rare,  
 Above them selves, and nigh of Kin  
 To those pure Things we find  
 In his Great Mind  
 Who made the World! tho now Ecclipsd by Sin.  
 There they are Usefull and Divine,  
 Exalted there they ought to Shine.*

*From ‘My Spirit’*

Traherne deals with my problem by describing this sort of substantiality as super – substance and underlines that description by defining it as rare in the sense of it being fine as opposed to gross.

A few days later I listened to the Lawrence Krauss interview with Richard Fidler on the ABC in which he talked about his book *The Universe from Nothing* and later I watched the Q& A session in which he was a panel member. I gather he did a tour with Dawkins, setting fire to the straw men they keep setting up, (usually fundamentalist Christians and creationists). And much fun they would have had—upsetting simple souls— they should know better!

The joke is on them however as the Christian mystics, not to mention Buddhists of various kinds, Sufis and Advaita Vedantists have been aware of ‘nothing,’ as

the foundational stuff for centuries. Here's a couple of examples from my 17<sup>th</sup> century comrade, Thomas:

*Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all Ages as with your walk and table: till you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made: till you love men so as to desire their happiness, with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own: till you delight in God for being good to all: you never enjoy the world.*

*Traherne Cent: 1/30 and...*

*That Being Greatest which doth nothing seem !  
Why, 'twas my all, I nothing did esteem  
But that alone. A strange mysterious Sphere !  
A deep Abyss  
That sees and is*

*From Traherne's poem 'My Spirit'*

And if you were able to press these early nothing-finders they would probably have agreed that the word *nothing* in the sense they intended, and as science is now beginning to use it, is an acceptable synonym for *God*. And here is Emily Dickinson for good measure:

*By homely gifts and hindered Words  
The human heart is told  
Of nothing  
'Nothing' is the force  
That renovates the World*

And to cap it all, I read only this afternoon that Neitzsche said somewhere or other "I am a mystic and believe in nothing" followed by Brian Cox claiming that in a cubic metre of what we regard as 'empty' space there is actually more energy than the Sun outputs in 1,000 years and that reminds me of a comment of David Bohm we covered in May 2006 NOWletter 116.

*Indeed, if one applies the rules of quantum theory to the currently accepted general theory of relativity, one finds that the gravitational field is also constituted of such "wave-particle" modes, each having a minimum "zero-point" energy. As a result the gravitational field, and therefore the definition of what is to be meant by distance, cease to be completely defined. As we keep on adding excitations corresponding to shorter and shorter wavelengths to the gravitational field, we come to a certain length at which the measurement of space and time becomes totally undefinable. Beyond this, the whole notion of*

*space and time as we know it would fade out, into something that is at present unspecifiable. So, it would be reasonable to suppose, at least provisionally, that this is the shortest wavelength that should be considered as contributing to the "zero-point" energy of space. When this length is estimated it turns out to be about 10<sup>-33</sup>. This is much shorter than anything thus far probed in physical experiments (which have got down to about 10<sup>-17</sup> cm or so). If one computes the amount of energy that would be in one cubic centimetre of space, with this shortest possible wavelength, it turns out to be very far beyond the total energy of all the matter in the known universe?*

David Bohm

I spoke to Garry about this substantial nothingness after the meeting and he said it reminded him of something Nisargadatta had said and I asked him if he could find it. He sent an email:

Below are a few references from Nisargadatta concerning solid rocklike reality. You can search through the text at the following link if you want more, as he talks about it in quite a few places.

[http://www.maharajnisargadatta.com/I\\_Am\\_That.pdf](http://www.maharajnisargadatta.com/I_Am_That.pdf)

Regards, Garry

Q:What then is in the centre of consciousness?

Nisargadatta: That which cannot be given name and form, for it is without quality and beyond consciousness. You may say it is a point in consciousness, which is beyond consciousness. Like a hole in the paper is both in the paper and yet not of paper, so is the supreme state in the very centre of consciousness, and yet beyond consciousness. It is as if an opening in the mind through which the mind is flooded with light. The opening is not even the light. It is just an opening.

Q:An opening is just void, absence.

Nisargadatta: Quite so. From the mind's point of view, it is but an opening for the light of awareness to enter the mental space. By itself the light can only be compared to a solid, dense, rocklike, homogeneous and changeless mass of pure awareness, free from the mental patterns of name and shape.

Q:In my daily actions much goes by habit, automatically. I am aware of the general purpose, but not of each movement in detail. As my consciousness broadens and deepens, details tend to recede, leaving me free for the general trends. Does not the same happens to a jnani, but more so?

Nisargadatta: On the level of consciousness -- yes. In the supreme state, no. This state is entirely one and indivisible, a single solid block of reality. The only way of knowing it is to be it. The mind cannot reach it. To perceive it does not need the senses; to know it, does not need the mind.

Q:That is how God runs the world.

Nisargadatta: God is not running the world.

Q:Then who is doing it?

Nisargadatta: Nobody. All happens by itself. You are asking the question and you are supplying the answer. And you know the answer when you ask the question. All is a play in consciousness. All divisions are illusory. You can know the false only. The true you must yourself be.

Q:There is the witnessed consciousness and there is the witnessing consciousness. Is the second the supreme?

Nisargadatta: There are the two -- the person and the witness, the observer. When you see them as one, and go beyond, you are in the supreme state. It is not perceivable, because it is what makes perception possible. It is beyond being and not being. It is neither the mirror nor the image in the mirror. It is what is -- the timeless reality, unbelievably hard and solid. So far you took yourself to be the movable and overlooked the immovable. Turn your mind inside out. Overlook the movable and you will find yourself to be the ever-present, changeless reality, inexpressible, but solid like a rock.

(Alan. I think the Nisargadatta quote was “ *Wisdom tells me I am nothing, Love tells me I am everything*” Thank you Garry.)

\*\*

Turiya: Ex Wikipedia - In Hindu philosophy it is also referred to as **chaturiya**, **chaturtha**, is the true self (*atman*) beyond the three common states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and dreamless deep sleep). It is postulated in several Upanishads and explicated in Gaudapada's Mandukya Karika.

## Country Life – A story by Margot Mann

“So O.K. I went online because I wanted the patent leather ones,” Frankie flicked a blonde lock behind her ear. “I thought it must have been a Chinese company ripping off the brand. So O.K. I waited for about 3 weeks and then sent an email, and they replied saying please be patient, you know, in weird stilted English, so then I was sure they were ripping off the brand. So O.K. I finally had a notification saying they were at the post office — I don't know how the parcel found me because it was only addressed to my first name.” Frankie's laugh reverberated. “So O.K. Then I rang the post office and they said I could pick up a parcel and I said can't you send it and they said alright and a couple of days later it finally arrived. And these are what they sent. You wouldn't call them patent leather would you?” Frankie laughed. “everyone has been admiring them but they aren't patent.”

There was a faint snore from the easy chair beside her. “Now I've sent Phil to sleep. He's only heard the story about ten times.” She hooted again and Phil jumped awake. “The old patent leather story,” he said mildly, stifling a yawn.

Frankie and Phil were staying at a country homestead which rented out rooms and a couple of cottages for homestay guests. It was Frankie's idea to get away from civilisation for a few days and Phil reluctantly accompanied her after cancelling some golfing arrangements. There were half a dozen other guests and they all met at dinner in the main homestead in the evening, with the choice of watching television or drinking wine and socialising after the meal. On their first night Phil had tried to sneak off to the bedroom after dinner but Frankie had called him back and launched into a story about meeting Mary Anne at the swimming pool. Phil sucked his teeth. A couple of the other guests got up and went across the room to some shelves which housed a few dog-eared paperbacks and some board games.

The guests had had a busy day on the farm, sometimes walking and occasionally rattling around the property in the back of an old ute, driven by the owner's son. The highlight of the morning was meeting a six-day-old calf, an adorable brown and white creature, named Sophia after the owner's grand-daughter. Little Sophia's mother, a beautiful jersey called Esmeralda, had mysteriously died two days after giving birth, and it was touch and go whether Sophia would live without enough crucial colostrum from her mother. “If she gets bad diarrhoea we have tablets and injections we can give her and then we just have to hope for the best,” the owner's son told her. “Of course we'll have to wait a couple of weeks to see if she survives before we tell Sophia the calf is named after her.” Frankie couldn't believe there wasn't more that could be done to save Sophia's

life. The little calf had sucked her fingers desperately in her endless search for her mother's milk.

A short time later, the small group stopped to observe a young goanna as it walked, comically lurching from side to side, towards a pool of water. "You know about goannas don't you?" the owner's son asked. Without waiting for an answer, he said "their eyesight isn't good, so you have to get out of the way if you see them coming towards you, in case they think you're a tree and climb up your body. And if they do climb on you for some reason, you have to stand still to give them time to unhook their claws so they don't scratch you." While the group digested this information, the owner's son added, "but look at the wonderful markings, they must be the inspiration for some aboriginal art, don't you think?" Frankie gave the goanna a wide berth and began to think that living in the country might present more problems than she thought.

After lunch they walked down to the orchard to pick apples. "Watch out for snakes," said the owner's son. "Here are some baskets and I'll come back in an hour or so. Apple pie for dinner. Keep an eye open for eggs, those chooks are always finding new places to lay." He gunned the ute and with a cheerful wave, drove off in a cloud of dust.

Frankie was subdued as she wandered around, occasionally picking up a windfall. Phil, who had tried unsuccessfully to avoid the apple-gathering party, had already found a patch of grass under a tree and was sitting with his back against its substantial trunk, his eyes closed. Before long, everyone in the group had followed his example and were sprawled on the grass under the trees, windfall-gathering forgotten. There was very little conversation. Someone said they had heard the owner's son say he was going to teach them all how to milk a cow before dinner that evening and someone else added that she had heard watering the young trees in the house paddock was one of the activities planned for the next day. There was a muffled groan.

No one spoke. Insects buzzed and hummed and Phil snored softly. Frankie began to tell the story of their house-sitting experience in the Lake District in England last year. For three weeks they had looked after four very large dogs and a cat in a house which was like something out of *Wuthering Heights*.

Suddenly there was a very loud crack. A branch slid down the trunk of the tree where Phil snoozed and pinned him to the ground. Shocked into consciousness, he murmured '*Wuthering Heights*.' Apart from a few bruises and a scratch to the side of the head, he was unhurt, although it took the others a while to extricate him from beneath the dead branch. "My grandfather died when a huge gum fell on his car during a storm," Frankie said. At that moment, there was a screech of brakes as the owner's son arrived to pick them up. The group slowly stood,

brushed sticks and bits of grass off their clothes and wandered across to the ute. “Bit of bad news,” said the owner's son, “Mum's not well so dinner will be a scratch meal I'm afraid. We've got plenty of frozen chops, so there's no chance we'll starve, ha ha.” After a pause he added, “where are all the apples?”

Frankie and Phil left next day. The following week at dinner with friends, Frankie said “So O.K. We get there and we're straightaway put to work watering the garden, I think we even had to do some weeding. And then the guy showed us how to milk a cow, he said one of their cows had died recently, and then he sent us off to look for eggs in the long grass. Look out for snakes, he said. Thanks very much. We even had to collect windfalls for the apple pie and that's when a huge branch fell on Phil. I thought he was dead but you can still see the scar on his head. Show them Phil. So O.K. he didn't lose consciousness and we were just going back to the house when the guy tells us the cook is sick and we have to cook dinner and there aren't enough apples, or they're all wormie. Can you believe it?” Frankie paused, sipped some wine and continued. “So O.K., we get back to the house and we're all starving by this time.....”

Phil gasped loudly for breath, moved in his chair, and proceeded to snore gently.

*Margot Mann*