

BOB. Stop your swearing!... Please, I'm asking you. Both of you. To stop.

Beat.

Look, this is not easy. I don't know what to say. Maybe I never did. But this is what I know now. You're a beautiful boy. A beautiful man. You have been since you were born. You didn't get it from me. I look like I've been kicked in the face with a boot so it's your mother you've got to thank for that. Beauty and strength. You've got both. You're blessed. And now you want to mess with that. With what nature has given you. And I don't understand it... And I don't even want to. But I'm asking you not to do this.

MARK. That is too much to ask.

BOB. I'm asking, Mark. I'm asking. I've never asked for anything.

MARK. You can't ask that.

BOB. I'm asking.

MARK. Don't.

BOB. I'm begging you.

MARK. I love you, Dad. I love you both, so much. Too much. But that is too much to ask of me.

FRAN. Then go. Go on. Wear a dress if you have to. Cut your dick off if it makes you feel whole. Become the person you need to be. But not in my house. I don't want to see it. So, get out. Go. But when you come back as a woman, I will look for my son in her face and mourn his loss.

Interval.

As Winter Turns

ROSIE *is folding clothes and passing them to MARK as he packs a suitcase.*

MARK. It's a one-bedroom apartment... more of a bedsit really. But with rents in Sydney the way they are it's all I could afford. But at least it's on the train line and it has light. And they say that if you have light you don't need space.

ROSIE. Who says that?

MARK. People who live in bedsits, I guess.

ROSIE. I'll come up and see you.

MARK. Leave it for a while. Let me find my feet, start the treatment, you know.

ROSIE. How soon...

MARK. I have my first appointment next week.

ROSIE. And when...

MARK. I'll start to see some effects within a couple of months.

ROSIE. I'm scared that you're going to be lonely.

MARK. I'll meet people.

ROSIE. I'm worried that you're going to be unhappy.

MARK. I'm unhappy now... I have been unhappy for a long time.

ROSIE. I'm worried that people will make fun of you.

MARK. They will. Some people. Just as long as you don't.

ROSIE. I'm worried that you won't feel the same way about me.

MARK. I don't know how I'm going to feel about anything.

ROSIE. I'm worried...

MARK. Rosie... stop it.

Beat.

ROSIE. I was thinking maybe I could come up at the end of the year. That we could get a place together.

MARK. No.

ROSIE. Why not?

MARK. Because I can't be looking after you.

ROSIE. I'll look after you.

MARK. I don't want you there.

ROSIE. Why are you being so mean?

MARK. You just don't want things to change.

ROSIE. I don't know why they have to. First Pip. Now you.

MARK. You need to grow up. You need to decide who you are and get on with it. You're smart, you know. You're smarter than any of us.

ROSIE. I don't know how to do that.

MARK. You have to stop loving us so much... Mum and Dad, Pip, Ben and me. You can't love us as much as you do.

ROSIE. How do I do that?

MARK. Stop thinking that we're the best thing since sliced bread.

ROSIE. We are.

MARK. We're not. We're fucked up. Like most families.

ROSIE. I hate you.

MARK. You have to say goodbye, Rosie. You have to turn around and walk away.

ROSIE. I can't do that.

MARK. Then stay. And be the one they want.

Beat.

I don't know what I'm doing. I mean look at all this stuff. These shirts and jeans and ties and jocks. My razor and deodorant. This all belongs to somebody else now. And my watch. Rosie, Mum and Dad gave it to me for my twenty-first. It means something. I don't know what to do with all the things that mattered to me.

ROSIE. Let me wear it.

She holds out her arm. He places it on her wrist.

Hold up your arm.

MARK holds up his arm. ROSIE takes off her watch, and places it around his wrist.

What's her name?

MARK. Mia.

Transition – MARK picks up the suitcase.

I hear the sound of the horn and I know that it's time to go. I wish it was a taxi and that the goodbyes were over but Dad has insisted on taking me to the airport. Rosie comes too, of course. She's at the wheel. Dad is in the front passenger seat. So I sit in the back, which makes me feel like a child again, which I resent a little. Dad wants Rosie to take the coast road. She insists on taking the expressway. There is a kind of useless argument. A stand-off, that you would only tolerate with members of your own family. Rosie wins. She can be surprisingly stubborn. So we take the expressway only to discover that there are roadworks in progress so it takes longer than usual and Dad gets this 'I told you so' look on his face. And Rosie is reduced to a silent kind of rage. And I'm sitting in the back seat looking out the window thinking just how ugly the road to the airport is.

Mum is not with us. She's at work. We have hardly spoken. Our farewell was brief and hard. We both tried to outdo each other with an 'I am Still Angry With You' face. But she won. She always wins that game. But I felt the strength in her final quick embrace before she turned away and I thought it's going to be okay with her. That one day she will soften. One day she may even want to get to know... Her.

I want them to drop me at the airport and keep going. I want this goodbye to be over. I beg Rosie with my eyes. She gets it but airport farewells are still a big deal for Dad and he insists on coming inside and walking me to the gate. There is mayhem at security as he sets off the alarms. How a man can have so many pieces of metal about his person is a mystery to me but given that my time as a man is finite it's not a mystery I need to give much further thought to.

At the gate I tell Dad that I will come home soon to visit. And he tells me that he'll come to see me in Sydney as soon as I have settled in. Both of us know that neither of these things will happen but pretending they will seems to make the parting easier. I linger in his embrace knowing that it will be the last time I will be held by him, as a man, and then he does something that takes my breath away. He kisses me on the lips. And it almost does me in. It is so intimate. And I have never loved him more.

And I look back from the gate and he has broken. He is weeping. Rosie is holding him. She has him. I have to look away. I have to look ahead. I have to keep walking. My father's grief is a price I am prepared to pay.

The plane turns down the runway, increases its speed, lifts off the ground and as it makes its ascent I look down upon the city where I grew up, and steel myself against memories, against history and against the man I was. By the time I land in Sydney, Mark Price will just be someone I used to know.

Spring

Ben

The buds are bursting. There's music... there's light.

BOB and FRAN are dancing. Slow, lovely, close. It's then. It's now. It's always. Their children are watching... their children are remembering... then and now.

BEN. In the chaos of our home, in the kitchen when we were cleaning up after dinner, as arguments were being had about who did what to whom, and arrangements were being made about who had to be where when, basketball, netball, football, soccer, drama, piano, and who would take them, Mum or Dad or the bus and in the middle of the arguments about who would do what in the clean up, the washing, the drying, the putting away, and the wiping down the surfaces and who does more and who does nothing and who always goes to the toilet when the sweeping up needs to be done. (It was me.) In the midst of all this a song would come on the radio and Dad would stop and reach for her. And she would resist, she would push him off... 'I'm too busy', 'I don't have the time', 'My feet are too sore' but it was just part of their play, part of the game because she loved it when he took her, she loved it when they danced. And we, we kids, we groaned and stuck our fingers down our throats and pretended that we weren't interested, in their dancing, in their love, in the secrets that only they shared.

The children fall away, except BEN who holds on to the memory a little longer as BOB and FRAN are left dancing. Maybe they're at the local pub or a dinner/dance at a local Surf Life Saving Club. She wears a lovely dress. Nothing too flash because she doesn't do flash and her hair is down, which it never is, and she wears her best earrings and she is beautiful. And BOB has his good sports jacket on and he doesn't scrub up too badly either.