

The
**CAST
AWAYS
of
HAREWOOD
HALL**

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FREMANTLE PRESS

Psalm 71:9

Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me
when my strength is gone.

1 · MONDAY

HARLEY

Harley accepted the obvious. He lifted his head from Elizabeth's arm, left the bed, and climbed out of the window. It was time to move on.

2 · TUESDAY

JOSH

Rhubarb was out of season, but Pat wanted to stew some for dessert this week. Her grandmother used to make it when she was a little girl, she said. It was her favourite. It was also good for encouraging your bowels. She said that out loud and Josh turned red and looked around, hoping no-one else had heard. He didn't see her press her lips together in a secret smile, and trailed behind her with the shopping trolley as she searched the produce aisle. They had already found the whipping cream and sago, but rhubarb was the key and the other two were useless without it. Pat's circuit returned them to the asparagus and she made to go around again, her eyes scanning the shelves and her pen tapping the shopping list. Josh pushed the trolley up to her. She'd get tired if she stayed on her feet for too long.

'How about I ask someone?' he said. 'Maybe they have some out the back.'

Pat squinted up at him from her list. She blinked twice, considering. 'I'll ask. You can get me some flour.'

Josh passed her the trolley and walked back along the empty cash registers. The supermarket was quiet, with just a scattering of teenage boys in private school uniforms buying pastries and litre cartons of chocolate milk, their school bags dumped in a pile outside under the *No School Bags* sign. They kept their eyes lowered, hoping no-one would engage them in conversation. A few elderly shoppers wandered up and down, pushing shopping trolleys, taking their time. Josh knew that many

of the oldies preferred to come in early, so they didn't have to negotiate traffic on the roads and in the aisles. He recognised a tall, grey-haired man in a navy blazer pushing a trolley loaded with toilet paper and cleaning products. He was here every Tuesday. They were eye-to-eye and, as Josh walked past him, the man nodded. Josh nodded back and stood a little straighter, then realised he had missed the aisle he needed. He turned around to walk back up the supermarket, eyes down like the schoolboys, hoping he wouldn't pass him again on the way.

In the baking aisle, Josh stood in front of the flour shelves. Why were there were so many different types? He picked up a blue-and-white one-kilogram packet and read the back. It was *plain* and the packet said it was for pastries and biscuits. Higher up on the shelves were *OO flour*, which was high protein and low gluten, and *semolina flour* which was high protein and high gluten. There was wholemeal flour and rice flour and gluten-free flour and self-raising flour. For each type, there were two different brands and up to three different packet sizes. Josh looked up and down the aisle. There were no shop assistants, just a cleaner with an oversized mop; one of the disadvantages of being an early morning shopper. He texted his mum.

What type of flours do I buy for Pat

Flowers or flour?

Flour

What does she want to use it for?

Baking

Cakes, biscuits or pastry?

A cake I think

White self-raising.

What brand

Home brand. 1kg.

Thanks Mum

xx

Josh picked up a pink-and-white one-kilogram packet of white self-raising flour and took it back to Pat, who was now standing in front of the apples, talking with a shop assistant in a red apron. Josh stood at her shoulder, holding the flour, and waiting until they finished. The shop

assistant said he didn't have any rhubarb, but Granny Smiths would be a good substitute if she wanted something tart and with plenty of fibre. Josh looked at his feet and ran his fingers through his hair, pulling the fringe lower on his face. The apples were five dollars per kilo loose or three fifty pre-packed. Pat pursed her lips, disappointed, then nodded. She would have the apples. The shop assistant bagged six apples and put them in her trolley. Pat thanked him and turned to Josh to inspect the flour. It was a different brand to what she usually bought. How much was it? Josh didn't know. Pat clucked her tongue and together they went back to check.

After Pat confirmed the flour choice and they paid at the cash register, Josh loaded the groceries into his car and helped Pat lower herself into the front passenger seat. He took care not to grip her arm too tightly as she lifted one leg and then the other into the footwell. Her skin was soft and thin, and tore easily. He had noticed that she walked slower than usual to get back to the car today, and now she closed her eyes as they turned out of the carpark and drove north through the suburb. It would only take ten minutes to get back to the retirement village.

Harewood Hall faced east from the top of a sandy hill overlooking school playing fields. Fig trees shaded the drive up the hill and the circular entrance and made purple stains on the tarmac. As he drove past the portico, Josh could see the office towers of the CBD and the flat-topped hills in the distance, hazy in the morning heat. More school students ambled past him in twos and threes, ducking down the stairs that ran down the hill to the school buildings, their school bags bobbing behind their heads. Some carried musical instrument cases; all wore blazers. Harewood Hall used to be a psychiatric hospital when such facilities were known by less politically correct terms. Loony bin, funny farm, sanatorium, mental hospital. He guessed the first two were never correct and filed them away to ask his girlfriend after work. She was a third-year psychology student and, on reflection, would probably deliver him a lecture on attitudes to mental health. Maybe he'd give it a miss.

These days, residents and staff referred to Harewood Hall's three-storey signature building as the *heritage building*. It avoided confusing conversations about Harewood-Hall-the-building versus Harewood-Hall-the-retirement-village and reinforced the village's status as a long-standing local landmark. Inside the portico, the entrance lobby

and residents' lounge had soft armchairs, fresh flowers, and restrained chandeliers. Classical music piped through discreet overhead speakers in the mornings and was replaced with mid-century jazz in the late afternoons. It was, Josh supposed, more inviting than it had been in its former life. The building was warm in winter and cool in summer, and the smell of good coffee and sound of folding newspapers signalled a place where a person who had enjoyed a profitable career could spend an unhurried and thoughtful retirement. Josh could imagine his own grandparents living here someday.

Josh drove past the circular driveway and its rose garden, and around the heritage building to the villas on the western side. Here, he parked behind a white hatchback in Pat's carport. Summer grass was growing through the pavers behind the wheels and under the chassis. He'd move the car next week and pull them out, he thought, as he packed away Pat's groceries. She had refused his offer of a lift back to the heritage building for morning tea. She wanted to take Bobby for a walk, she said. He frowned, remembering her pace on leaving the supermarket but let it go. It wasn't his place to insist.

Josh drove around to the staff carpark. The warm morning easterly would keep the sea breeze and any clouds away until late afternoon so he parked the Golf under a bottlebrush, figuring that the benefit of shade would outweigh the cost of the litter on his roof at the end of the day. He unfolded himself from the car, banging his knee against the steering wheel, and walked to the staff entrance, where he turned down the stairs to the residents' garage rather than straight along the corridor to the staffroom. The door at the top of the stairs was chocked open with a triangle of wood, but the sunlight only penetrated so far. He reached over and flicked the light switch at the top of the stairs as he passed.

Josh was not due to see his next client, Martin, for another half hour. Martin was a stickler for punctuality, as Josh had been told by Fiona, the village manager, and he wouldn't appreciate Josh being early. Martin was a retired engineer and a stickler for a few things, Josh had discovered. He had a particular impatience with village management decisions that involved trade-offs between expenditure and risk. Management called these decisions pragmatic. Martin called them irresponsible. Josh had heard from Martin that the previous irresponsible management had traded off expenditure and risk in the construction of the retaining wall

on the southern side of the village and the village was now at risk of sliding down the hill and killing them all.

At the bottom of the stairs, Josh turned towards the residents' storage units. Residents in the heritage building had access to underground car bays and secure storage units with numbers that corresponded to their apartments. This was a point of some contention in the village as the residents in the west-side villas only had open carports with attached storage. Worse, the west-side storage units were smaller than the heritage building storage units. The west-side residents believed this constituted an added unpaid benefit to the heritage building residents and had petitioned management to charge the heritage building residents for the extra cubic metres. This was denied. Josh had heard from the other support workers that the west-side residents were now considering an appeal to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Josh's third client for the day after Pat and Martin was Meira, and she had given Josh a key for her storage unit so he could help her move her belongings to and from her apartment. Meira avoided the basement. Josh thought that was fair enough for a ninety-year-old woman with a walking frame, but her aversion turned out to be convenient for Josh, as Meira's storage unit was at the back of the basement and for the most part unseen. Josh bent down to unlock the door to number five, ducked through, and walked along the narrow path he had made between the packing boxes, his hands splayed out to the sides to avoid knocking them over. The side of each box displayed a series of white sticky labels where Josh had listed the contents as he had searched and ferried them up and down between apartment and basement.

Against the back wall, Josh had built a waist-high shelf out of four of the same boxes (black-and-white dinner set, hats, black fur coat) next to an old bar stool. On top of the shelf sat a rounded, blanket-covered shape. Josh removed the blanket and sat on the stool, his knees hard up against the boxes. Two white mice looked up at him with expectant faces.

FIONA

Fiona heard Martin Havelock at the reception desk and looked up from the document she was explaining to Mrs Herbener. Mrs Herbener – Pam – had wanted to move into Harewood Hall for over three years. She and her husband Brian had attended each sales event Fiona had hosted but Mr Herbener was adamant. There was no need for him and Pam to downsize. They could still manage the family home perfectly well. Which was easy enough for you to say, thought Fiona, when your eighty-two-year-old wife does all the cooking, cleaning and gardening. Well, Brian passed away yesterday and here was Pam in her office asking if apartment six was still available. There is a God, thought Fiona, and she is good. But right now, Fiona needed to leave Pam with her tea and calm other waters.

‘Please excuse me for a moment, Pam.’

‘Of course, dear, I’ve got all the time in the world.’ The round woman settled back in her chair and lifted a travel magazine out of her handbag.

Fiona left her office, closing the door behind her, and crossed the entrance lobby. Fiona’s office had belonged to the last medical director of Harewood Hall when it was a psychiatric hospital and it held on to the solid wood and moulded cornice trappings of a time when offices were designed to elevate the incumbent and put visitors in their place. Jarrah floorboards, heavy bookcases, and sash windows were set off against pale walls, and the ceiling twenty-one feet above the floor supported a large plaster rose. A stern man in a suit looked out of a picture frame that had more surface area than was functionally necessary, and three deep armchairs circled a vintage occasional table in front of Fiona’s desk. Pam Herbener sat in one of them. Fiona wasn’t sure what universe had produced the interior designer who selected the chairs, but she was certain it wasn’t one that contained eighty-two-year-olds who need help to get in and out of sitting positions. At least there was no oriental rug on the floor.

Fiona smiled an apology at Melissa, the village receptionist, as she worked to keep her composure with Martin. Fiona had seen Martin at the southern retaining wall with his spirit level when she arrived earlier and had hoped this moment would come later in the day.

‘Good morning, Mr Havelock, how can I help you today?’

Martin was leaning on the reception desk and half turned his head, shaking it in frustration. 'Something needs to be done about that wall. It has shifted another half a degree. I've told you before. If you don't do something about it, the whole bloody place will collapse.'

Fiona gathered herself. The Harewood Hall retaining wall had been a subject of consternation since Martin had moved into the village. It had its own file on the shelf in Fiona's office.

'Perhaps Gerry can go with you to have a look later this morning. Or even now. How about we do that? Melissa, can you please call Gerry up from the maintenance shed and have him inspect the retaining wall with Mr Havelock?'

'I can't see what Gerry can do; he is only a bloody gardener. What would he know?' Martin protested. 'What you people need is to get a qualified engineer to do a proper risk assessment. I seem to have to do everything around here.'

'Thank you, Melissa. Mr Havelock, Gerry is on his way. Perhaps you could wait in the lounge? Melissa, can you fix Mr Havelock a cup of tea while he waits? Thank you.'

Fiona walked back across the lobby without looking to check if Melissa and Martin were making their way to the lounge.

'I'm sorry, Pam. You asked about our care services.'

JOYCE

When her husband was still working, Joyce lived all over the world. Beautiful places. She raised her children in a Cape Dutch house in Constantia in Cape Town and, after the children left home, she and Peter lived for a time in an apartment just below The Peak in Hong Kong. But now that Peter had retired, her favourite place in the world was her balcony in her apartment on the first floor of the Harewood Hall heritage building, back in the suburb where she'd grown up, in her hometown.

Joyce's husband was playing golf, so she had the apartment to herself this morning. She opened the bifold doors to the balcony to let in the easterly. At this time of the year, it was warm and gentle. I won't be able to do this in a few weeks time, she thought. The balcony was wide and tiled

and furnished with two Adirondack chairs and a matching low table. Joyce bought those chairs in California and shipped them to South Africa and then Hong Kong and now here. When she sat in them, she could read for as long as she liked and look out across the school playing fields and the treetops to Kings Park. Nothing could bother her.

The best part of Joyce's balcony was the line of mature lemon-scented gums that shaded her reading chair and provided a home for the magpies that sang on cold mornings. Joyce had heard that magpies sing to keep themselves warm. She wondered if that were true. It would be nice if it was. There were three magpies in the trees now, probably twenty metres off the ground. Joyce laid out a line of birdseed on the balcony railing and went back inside to take out the chicken to defrost.

Joyce's kitchen was her second favourite thing after her balcony. Not that she cooked that much anymore. She and Peter didn't have the appetites they once had and Harewood Hall had employed an excellent chef, a local boy who had returned from London last year. Joyce and Peter ate in the residents' dining room three nights a week and at least one night each week they ate out. Usually locally but this winter they had ventured as far as Fremantle. The suburb had come a long way since Joyce left Perth forty years ago and its restaurants were just as good as Melbourne. But the clean lines and neutral colours in Joyce's kitchen were comforting and the appliances were German. It was a joy to cook in, she thought, even if she didn't cook much.

One magpie had come down from the gum trees and worked its way along the line of seed. It got to the end and peered into the kitchen, its head tilted to one side. Joyce went back out onto the balcony and tipped a little more into her hand. She couldn't see so well anymore but she thought this was the same bird that had brought her fledgling to the balcony last year. She was sure it had grey feathers on the back of its head – a female then – but couldn't make out any other distinguishing marks. She remembered how the little bird had hopped about under the trees and pestered its mother with begging calls and how the mother had obligingly supplied it with bugs she found in the leaf litter.

The mother magpie hopped towards Joyce's outstretched hand, pausing every couple of hops to study her.

'Come on, mum,' she whispered. 'I won't bite.'

The bird took a quick, hard peck into Joyce's hand, scattering most of the seed, and fled to the nearest gum. Joyce gasped and pressed her thumb into

her palm. Not such a gentle mummy bird after all. Joyce inspected the bead of blood on her hand. That would be annoying if she was going to cook tonight. Maybe they would go out instead. Perhaps she would ask Bevan and Julie if they would like to join them. It was their wedding anniversary soon and she hadn't seen them in a while. The chicken would keep.

A grey car passed underneath Joyce's line of vision. She knew that Golf: it was Josh's car. Joshua was the support worker who visited Pat and Martin and who knew who else on Tuesdays and Fridays. He seemed nice enough – he had gone to one of the local private schools and his dad was in mining – but Joyce didn't approve of support workers in the village. Harewood Hall was supposed to be independent living but these days it seemed like everyone needed someone else to do their cleaning or take them shopping or give them their medication. And the number of scooters and walkers lined up outside the resident's lounge was too much. Joyce had to walk around them to get in the door.

She watched Josh park under the bottlebrush. At least management had planted natives so there would be food for the cockies. She had missed Australian native birds when she was overseas. As Josh passed under her balcony, Joyce could see that he had bottlebrush flowers in his hair where his head had knocked against the branches. Behind him, a small white dog trotted around the corner, trailing a red leash along the ground. Joyce frowned. After a moment, the dog was followed by a woman wearing a lemon-coloured cardigan and a white dress.

'Oh, for goodness sake,' Joyce muttered. She watched the slow progress of dog and woman along the path towards the residents' cafe. If Joyce went down there now, she would be stuck for an hour. But perhaps if she was quick, she could go and warn the others. If Pat joined them, they would never have a decent conversation and would have to listen to the story about that damn dog three times. That was another thing that shouldn't be allowed, Joyce thought. Once people had dementia, they shouldn't be permitted to stay in the village. How can you live independently if you couldn't remember to turn off your stove? In any event, if Pat set fire to her villa, Joyce herself would be fine. Pat lived in the new section, on the western side, in a semi-detached villa with a pocket garden and no balcony. Those could all burn down, as far as Joyce was concerned. She was confident that emergency services would arrive before the heritage building was threatened. She and Peter would be safe. Soothed by this

reflection, she went inside to change and go down for coffee with the girls.

PAUL

There was some crusted glue on the surface of the pine table. Paul could feel scratches in the wood around the edges of the small lumps where someone had tried to scrape it off. He rubbed the tips of his fingers over the uneven surface and wondered whose grandchildren or which craft group had been here, gluing and sticking. Probably whoever had made the Christmas decorations stored in the cupboards at the end of the room. The decorations were in shoeboxes and sorted by type. Angels (clay, paper, and toilet roll, with and without wings, some with more legs than others), reindeer (all with red noses), baby Jesuses (male and female, infant and toddler) and an array of dinosaurs representing each of the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods. Paul himself preferred store-bought Christmas decorations in a single colour scheme. He was shamefully pleased that the entrance hall Christmas decorations were traditional red and white, and the shoebox decorations used solely for decorating the more functional spaces in Harewood Hall.

Paul looked at his watch. Roy had been speaking for ten minutes now and was repeating himself. He'd taken longer to circle back to the beginning than most people Paul knew these days. Perhaps he should let him go on while he was still coherent. But he could see that the other committee members had had enough and were giving Paul meaningful looks. He knew what meaningful looks meant and the consequences for ignoring them. He looked up. Meaningfully.

'OK, Roy, thank you for explaining that. Does anyone have any questions about Roy's proposal?'

'I do, Paul,' said Jean.

Jean always had questions. Jean used to run to Harewood Hall Residents' Committee before Paul became president and Jean's husband, Geoff, was active on the state retirement villages residents' association. Jean took a set of papers out of a green plastic folder. Looking across the table (Jean always sat directly opposite Paul, where she could catch his eye), Paul could see

that the papers included Jean's Harewood Hall residential lease and a copy of the *Fair Trading (Retirement Villages Code) Regulations 2015*. Jean had tagged sections of both documents with red and yellow sticky tabs. Paul settled back in his chair. His fingers found the remains of the glue.

'I don't have a question as such,' said Jean, 'but would like to point out a few crucial matters that are important to our discussion.' The other committee members also settled back.

I know, thought Paul in sympathy, no morning tea for us today.

'The Village Rules that Roy proposed that we change are appended to all of our leases.' Jean turned the pages to one of the red tabs. 'Section 2(f) of the Village Rules state, and I quote: *We are responsible for the common property gardens and grounds. You* – here, Jean looked meaningfully at each of the committee members – *are responsible for your courtyard/patio/balcony only. You may not locate potted plants, shrubs or trees in your courtyard/patio/balcony which have an adverse visual impact to the exterior of your residence, or which are inconsistent with the general landscaping and planting theme for the Village.*'

Jean paused and took a sip of water. Committee members shuffled their feet and recrossed their legs. Paul found a loose edge under one of the lumps of glue.

'However, clause four point two of your lease states: *The residents may by special resolution and with our agreement (such agreement not to be unreasonably withheld) change or revoke the Village Rules.* A special resolution is defined in the lease, which of course you all know.'

Another pause and another sip. Paul thought that, with another ten to fifteen minutes, he might unpick one of the glue lumps.

'This means that Roy is correct. We can change the Village Rules if we successfully put a special resolution to a meeting of the residents.'

'Thank you, Jean,' said Paul, unsure of Jean's point but keen to close the discussion. He sat forward and picked up his pen.

'However,' Jean gave Paul a look and he settled back again. 'Roy's proposed change to the Village Rules will not allow him to achieve what he wants to achieve. I refer you to clause six point one of the lease. Clause six point one states that a resident *must not plant or remove or prune any plants, shrubs or trees in the Village (other than those in the rear courtyard of your residence) unless you are authorised to do so by us.* Roy's motion won't change clause six point one.'

‘So I’m afraid, Roy,’ said Jean (not looking apologetic at all), ‘you can change the Village Rules all you like but you still won’t be able to plant a liquid amber in your front garden. Clause six point one of your lease won’t let you. It is quite clear.’

Everyone looked at Roy. Roy looked at Paul.

‘Well,’ said Paul, ‘this is clearly a complex matter, but I think we are out of time. Perhaps we can come back to it at the next meeting. Thank you, Jean, for again raising these important clauses in our leases. Do we have any items of other business? No? Good then.’

He read out the actions arising from the meeting and looked around the table for confirmation.

‘Joyce won’t like our decision about the trees, you know,’ said Roy. One last dig.

‘Yes, I know, but our decision was unanimous and reflects the views of the residents. The trees are a hazard and must be pruned. I expect that all committee members will communicate that position when they discuss the matter outside of this room.’ Paul’s tone was becoming curt. It was time to wrap it up.

The committee members gathered up their papers and headed out of the room, avoiding eye contact with Roy. Paul looked at the crucifix on the opposite wall and gave a silent thank you for a meeting that was less fractious than usual. He tidied his agenda papers, put a clip around the bundle, pushed in the chairs, and wiped down the surface of the table.

Roy was waiting for him in the corridor.

‘There is another thing, Paul. Have you seen your statement this month? Did you see the increase in water charges? They are up by more than ten percent over the last month. We are only at the end of spring, and it has been a mild season at that.’

‘No, I haven’t seen them yet, Roy, but I will be sure to have a look.’

‘Well I can tell you; I have been monitoring the water bills over the past four months and they have been increasing since April. Over winter. During water restrictions. I’ve made up this spreadsheet ...’

‘Is that right, Roy? You must have gone to a lot of trouble. Tell you what, bring the spreadsheet to the next committee meeting and we’ll put it on the agenda. If you will excuse me now.’

Paul didn’t wait for an answer, and headed out into the residents’ lounge, where he hoped to find the last of the morning tea sausage rolls.

As he passed the village manager's office he paused, then thought better of it. He could brief Fiona later.

MARTIN

Martin knew it would be a waste of time showing Gerry the retaining wall. The retaining wall problem was a failure of the structural engineer to observe the Australian Standards for Steel Reinforcing in Retaining Wall Systems AS4100. Gerry was a gardener, or perhaps the maintenance man, Martin couldn't remember, and couldn't be expected to know about Australian Standards and retaining walls. In Martin's view, it was another example of management irresponsibility. Anyway, gardener or maintenance man, Gerry was no use. They needed a qualified engineer to assess the wall. And besides, Josh was due at 10.30am and Martin needed to be upstairs.

But Melissa had already made Martin a cup of tea. Quite efficiently, he thought. Martin understood from his wife, Maureen, that when a person fixes you a cup of tea, it was impolite not to drink it even if you were not strictly thirsty. It would cause offence and hurt feelings. Martin thought that it was irrational to drink a cup of tea when hydration or thermal comfort were not required, and a person whose feelings were hurt over a not-drunk cup of tea lacked emotional resilience. But Maureen had got angry when he said that, so now Martin drank cups of tea when they were offered. To give credit to his wife, he had noticed that this seemed to please the tea-makers and make future interactions with them more amenable. He sat by a window in the residents' lounge, scalding his tongue as he drank his tea as quickly and politely as possible.

As he sat, he ran his hand over the surface of the occasional table next to him. It was well finished, he thought. Someone had taken the time to sand the wood back and apply at least three coats of varnish. Remarkable, given that the tables were imported cheap from Indonesia and cost half the price of local products. He turned his hand over and ran his fingers around the lip. He felt a sudden sharp pain, swore and a small amount of hot tea escaped his own lips and ran down the side of his chin. The edge of his fingers had caught on something rough that had not been sanded back and coated with three coats of varnish. He was bleeding.

Someone had neglected to finish the underside of the table, not thinking of the end user and creating a risk of injury. Careless. Martin took out his handkerchief and wrapped his injured finger. He carried his half full cup and saucer over to the bar and returned to the table, which he cleared of its lamp, and up-ended on the floor. As he thought, the underside was ragged all the way around. And there were four unnecessary staples fixed to what looked like pieces of a torn plastic bag. It also smelled like – Martin put his nose down to the wood – cat pee. Disgusting. What if one of the ladies caught their dresses, or their hands on this mess? Old ladies' hands take a long time to heal and are susceptible to infection. Martin huffed in frustration at the lack of attention to detail in the world. Did he still have to do everything himself? But it was 10.25am already. He righted the table and, not waiting for Gerry, went to the stairs to fetch Joshua.

Martin liked Joshua. He was punctual, polite, kept his hair short and seemed to maintain his car. He was still built like a foal, all awkward arms and legs, but he was young, and Martin could see that he would fill out in time. He did a thorough job of cleaning Martin's apartment, paying attention to tricky corners and following Martin's instruction list. This surprised Martin and he had needed to write a note to himself not to assume domestic competence based on gender in the future. Martin suspected that Josh also took instructions from Martin's daughter Elise to check that Martin took his medication. He didn't mind this. He thought that he would do the same in Elise's position.

Martin understood that Joshua studied environmental science at university. Joshua had been unspecific about what environmental scientists do and who employed them, but Martin had googled *what do environmental scientists do?* and discovered that Joshua would most likely become an academic, a government regulator, a consultant, or work for a mining company rehabilitating mine sites. He also found an especially useful website that benchmarked salaries for environmental scientists working in various positions. He had printed out job descriptions for each one and handwritten the salary ranges in the top right-hand corner. He would give them to Joshua today to help him get some career direction.

Martin stopped at the top of the stairs to catch his breath. There was Joshua, at the front door of Martin's apartment, pleasingly on time.

'Look, I know you are not terribly good at men's things, but you have to come down to the basement to get some tools. Never mind the cleaning.'

HARLEY

In storage unit number eight, Harley had found a soft woollen rug folded on top of a box. The box was wedged between an old refrigerator and a bookcase, creating a safe and comfortable nook for the type of animal that needs eighteen hours sleep each day. Harley's ears twitched when Martin and Josh walked past and unlocked the door to number seven, but he kept his eyes closed and his head down. Martin's presence in the basement was unremarkable to Harley. Martin was often carrying tools and sandpaper and bits of wood and metal back and forth, and Harley's stomach was still sufficiently full of Elizabeth's chicken from the night before not to have to worry about bothering humans for another day.