

*Notes From The Bibblumun - J. P. Quinton*

*Loco*, the man said, halfway down the first hill, as he spun his right wrist clockwise, and his index finger circled his ear. He stood on a lower step and I enjoyed his discomfort as sunlight was in his eyes behind his spectacles. Stacked behind him, I noticed, were three massive granite boulders, babushka, and tower-of-pisa-like, which were about to topple and crush him, save for a thin jarrah tree that propped up the top two. The squinter talked about a bloke he'd just met at Hewitt's Hut, the first hut ten k's from the Northern Terminus, who carried about thirty kilos of gear; cameras and tripods, and so on and so forth, when he chuckled and said he had no clue why anyone would bother taking photos in the overexposed Aussie air. The squinter then took on an air of expertise as he moved over to my right and took a look at my pack and asked me if I was going *all the way*, and then asked how heavy my pack was, an answer I didn't have, and being answerless I now felt inadequate, even though I was growing to dislike the squinter and starting to take sides with the thirty kilo pack guy, despite having never met the crazy cameraman, for the squinter went on to say the Bibblumun track was *a waste of time* and that there were plenty of *better* tracks overseas, and even *over east*, although he never did say which tracks were superior and I never bothered to ask because that would have led to further doubt in myself, extra doubt I didn't have two minutes before I met the squinter as I found my way from Kalamunda.

To tell the truth I wasn't totally doubtless in my pre-squinter-man days, and I shouldn't go into how Richard double crossed me, or how I emerged from what I call 'The Blinco Street Blunder', except to say I was wronged, and that wronging brought me to a loose end, a loose end I now know was a blessing, a blessing I have kept concealed from everyone I've met since, concealed for my own preservation and sanity, if you will, should they try to double cross me in the same way Richard did. Richard *probably* thinks I wronged him, and that *he* came out of the Blinco Street Blunder worse off than I did. Richard, in his way, *probably* thinks I ripped him off in some way. I never did get around to asking Scott what Richard thinks, although I *do* know that Richard never ended up at a loose end the way I did. Richard is not the kind of person who has the capacity to find himself at a loose end. Richard *can't*

wander and if there is one thing I have learned from walking twenty to fifty kilometres a day from Kalamunda to Albany, through *thinking* on my end to end walk on the Bibbulmun track, it's that only other walkers know what sedentary people don't know. Walking is thinking and thinking is walking, and your thoughts are significant and insignificant, healthy and unhealthy, childlike and un-childlike altogether and at once. Walking twenty to fifty kilometres a day, with a pack packed with chocolate, a mattress and a quilt will teach you walking in the way that those who don't walk twenty to fifty kilometres a day will never understand, can't understand. I might add that the first week of walking the Bibb track, my thoughts, pathetic and insignificant as they are, were preoccupied with what had happened *before* walking the track, to the point I hardly took a step without those thoughts interrupting where I was, what I was trying to watch, and so on and so forth. Scotty has since said that was *me* moving through the space, the bush, or whatever you call that thin strip of trees along the Darling Scarp, and not the space moving through me, as I had hoped would happen as soon as I took my hand off the NORTHERN TERMINUS sign, and moved into *the unknown*, the bush, *the wilderness*; I don't really know what Scotty meant, he does get engrossed in some kinda Eastern things from time to time.

I was down two thousand dollars because of Richard, and this prevented the first few weeks of the walk being carefree, joyous and non-bitter. He said I paid rent in arrears, whereas I was *sure* I had paid rent in advance. You paid your rent in arrears, he said, when I went to drive off with the last of my belongings, in *his* ute. His ute that I had to ask him three times if I could borrow and after each time he went to his room to get his keys, or I thought he was going to get the ute keys, and instead I'd be packing up my stuff waiting for the keys and then an hour later I'd have to ask him if he wanted one of my awesome coffees to butter him up to ask if I could borrow his boogie coloured ute for the fourth time, borrow his ute to move out of *his* house, and because I was borrowing *his ute* I felt compelled to agree with him about whether or not I had paid rent in arrears as opposed to paying rent in advance, at least until I had put my belongings in storage at my cousin Moley's house, for Richard was as likely to say I couldn't borrow *his ute* if I didn't agree with him that I paid rent in

arrears. Large gumtree with a large chunk of bark missing and the letters LU 315 hacked into the wood.

You shouldn't unhinge Richard any more than he is already unhinged, I thought, as I stopped to do up a shoe lace. I had to stop to do up my shoelace about five times that day, and in the end I got so tired of bending over with my heavy pack on to do up my shoelaces, I ended up double knotting them, but I reckon I thought *that Richard is so thoroughly unhinged* more times than I had to do up my shoelaces on that first day of walking twenty kilometres on the Bibb track. Speaking of unhinged, just because you're halfway through a prescription of lithium, doesn't mean you can label someone else's writing and attitude as entirely *negative*, just because now you're *sorted* and the weeks when the black dog would hound you into submission, and make you cry and snob, and then you'd drink yourself stupid to ignore yourself; just because you *feel* like those dog days are behind you, and you *feel* like they belong to someone else, and those stuck people, those depressed and stuck people should take lithium and prosiq or prozac or whatever the doctors give away like lollies, doesn't mean someone who used to suffer the same things as as you used should simply do what you did to make yourself better, and then *be better*. Track marker on a pine pole. There was a time when Richard took a kind of solace in my poetry, I thought, as a 747 cruised overhead and the trail started to go up a granite breakaway. Richard would read my poetry and say if that poem worked or if that poem didn't, I thought, as my right shoulder strap started to hurt. Richard and I would go to The Rose Hotel once a month to listen to various people, including myself, read their poetry to one another and afterwards we would get smashed with Scott, a serious young poet from Mirrabooka who was an angry young greenie who'd write about greed and waste and dystopian images of ecological collapse. Now my big toe was killing me and I wanted to stop thinking about Richard and how he pissed me off and came out *ahead* in his relationships, as he had done in every relationship I'd seen him in. Even his girlfriends, of which there were many, would complain to me how he'd always, by some miraculous mis-calculation, lose his bank card or have to slip to the toilet when it was round-buying time.

*This* walk, the one I was doing, was meant to be Richard and I and Scott, and all three of us were meant to walk from Kalamunda to Albany together, but as usual, I'm

the one who ends up carrying through with Richard's ideas, and finishing off what Richard started. He said he was going to pay me to paint the exterior of his house on Blinco Street. We were going to paint *his* house together, and I wake up one freezing day after a big night of drinking and he's running into and out of the house slamming doors and clanging scaffolding tubes inside and outside of the house because he'd decided that *he* was painting the inside of the house *as well*, to increase the value of it when he decides to sell it at the peak of the housing boom and his dog Gerald is following him in and out of the house and he's starting up the sander to strip back the old paint and dust is flying all over my record collection and I go out there to see what all the noise is about and my head is pounding and he's sanding away and I'm looking up at him and moving my record collection into the kitchen when he gives me this look like I'm a bludger. He'd been on the Laverton mine for four weeks before this and he arrives the night before when I was out, that's right, he said he was coming to The Norfolk to watch the footy and talk shit and organise when we were going out on The Bibb and he was a no show, I remember now, Scotty and I were talking about The Bibb; I was excited Googling gear and Scott wasn't so sure but he would go if Richard would go because Scotty did what Richard told him to most of the time. If it was just Scott and I, I'd spend the whole night trying to prop him up and get him to think for himself and to quit his job, which he hated, and which made him fat because he was sitting at a computer rotting away fifty hours a week, although Scotty was always the one who had money and didn't mind buying round after round and getting the carton from the Freo Doctor bottle on the way home. That night I convinced Scotty we should go back to his place instead of mine because I knew Richard was going to be back that night, and I lied, well, I omitted to say to Scott that Richard was back in town and I knew Richard, as stubborn as a red wine stain, wouldn't text us. He only ever texted when he wanted something from me. No hellos or goodbyes or anything, always: I'll be back on Friday, pick me up from the airport at three, make sure you're home on Wednesday the plumber is coming to put a line out to the outside shower. I stood on top of the granite outcrop and tried to get a sense of the way the track worked along the valley to Mundaring Weir, in range of phone reception, I was tempted to get my phone out to read some of his old messages to confirm what a prick he was to me. Down two grand, making me

store all of my stuff at my cousin Moley's instead of in my old room, even though he had no intention of renting my room and he couldn't sell the house because no one was willing to pay what he wanted for it. Camel farm. Two dudes strapping mountain bikes to a car rack. Think about buying a drink from the vending machine on the verandah.

Must have been at least two dozen times I picked Richard up or dropped him off at the airport and he was meant to drop me off at the Northern Terminus, at least, assuming I'm right and Richard's wrong, *he said* he was going to drop me off at the Northern Terminus and then he changed his tune the day before I set off on the Bibb track and told me the night before when he and Scotty and I were off our faces that he never said he was going to drop me off at the Northern Terminus. What pissed me off was not that Richard changed his mind, he always changed his mind to ensure he never ended up at a loose end, I was more pissed off with myself for not keeping my shield up, for falling prey to thinking that they would *go out of their way for me* as much as I had gone out my way for them. I'd built up in my mind this scenario where we'd all drive together from Freo to Kalamunda and then we'd be standing at the Northern Terminus and Richard and Scotty would give me a hug and say goodbye and they'd be happy for me and even be sucked in to saying they'd meet me somewhere along the track, maybe in Dwellingup or Collie or maybe at the Mumballup Tavern to have a few pints together. To get these thoughts out of my head, I closed my eyes and shook my head like someone who had taken a bite of a lemon. Those motherfuckers probably weren't even jealous of me walking the Bibb. *They* probably sat at The Federal watching the Dockers lose and chatting as if I weren't there, as if I didn't exist, as if we weren't even friends, never *were* friends. Yes, *we* never were friends I thought to myself as I heard motorbike engine noise from Mundaring Weir Road.

Nope. I'd picked up Richard from the airport at least two or three dozen times, every time he'd be wearing his hi-viz mining costume that he'd wear around the house and to the pub most of the time, as if his costume made him more workman-like. When I'd reached Asher Road the motorbike had gone and my ears rang with tinnitus. I'd driven to the airport so many times I had found the perfect spot to park, a spot less than thirty seconds from bay K, where he always waited, a spot where no

security or airport staff ever asked me to move and I could wind the windows down and have a nap or listen to J. J. Cale, and watch the planes land and the taxi drivers line up and share food and cigs and so on and so forth. Nope. Richard couldn't even drive me to the train station, let alone the Northern Terminus. He was still *finishing his house off* the day he was meant to drive me to the Northern Terminus, which meant dismantling the scaffolding he borrowed from Fran's husband; *I'd* ended up painting the inside *and* outside of his house because I got sick of living in a construction site and he was too tight to pay a professional to do the work for him, even though he was earning two or three grand a week and I was on Austudy, trying to finish my degree. I worked out that the money saved from not buying beer and professionals to fix his house Richard ended up spending on America's Cup Memorabilia. He had a whole room devoted to the stuff and he bragged about the time he ran into Alan Bond at Capri Restaurant one evening. Richard and his mum, he'll never forget, he'd say after four or five beers, especially if someone new was sitting near us at The Federal, or if we hung around after the poetry reading at The Rose. Alan Bond was sitting at the next table the night The Dockers made their way into their first preliminary final and South Terrace had turned into a party, and everyone wore purple and danced and drank and were merry and the cops had to block the streets off after someone fell out of a ute outside Hungry Jacks and broke their arm. Richard's chair was touching Alan's chair, was how Richard story usually started. My mum had to point out to me that the back of *my* chair touched the back of Alan's chair, Richard would say, sometimes out of the blue, even if we talked about something completely different. *I'd* heard his rendition a million times even though how long or short he chatted with Alan changed every time.

He was chatting up some birds from Pinjarra one night when he said Alan asked the waitresses at Capri to put his and his mum's table together with Alan's table. Before Richard discovered that his chair touched Alan's chair, Alan was dining alone. After that Richard showed Alan photo's of his America's Cup Memorabilia shrine and then Richard's mum, uncouth as they come, as they say, asked the waitress to put their tables together. I imagined Richard and Alan sitting together, with the white paper table cloth and the black vinyl chairs and the salt and pepper shakers with the additional miniature pepper grinder and the glass milk bottle filled with tap water,

Alan and Richard and his mum slurping complimentary soup and eating from the small wicker baskets lined with a cotton handkerchief filled with bread and a small dish upon which sat a sliver of butter. What Alan and Richard and Richard's mum talked about I could never exactly glean from Richard, and his story never really held up to cross-examination, and to this day Richard still maintains that he forgot to get a photo of himself and Alan and his mum to put on the wall with the rest of his signed posters and scale models of the *Australia II*, with the controversial winged keel that dangled from the hull.

Richard repeats the Alan Bond story to every girl he tries to pick up or to anyone who happens to come to his house and happens to ask him about his America's Cup memorabilia. My mum asked Alan if he had any regrets, Richard always says, and I'll never forget what Alan said until the day I die, I reckon Alan had a thing for my mum says Richard, Alan said that even though he got done for fraud and ended up in Worrooloo for twelve months he didn't regret anything because no one could take away what he'd achieved; winning the America's Cup and building The Bond Empire and so on and so forth, and that if he ever lived to regret anything then that would be the day you could throw him off a jetty, Alan said, said Richard to anyone who asked about his memorabilia or to any girl who would listen, I remembered as I found a log to sit on and lit my little gas stove to make a cup of coffee. That's when Richard always went on to talk about his mum, as simple as a seagull, as Richard would always say, asked Alan *which jetty* he wanted to be thrown off, *and* then Richard and Alan looked one-another in the eye, and laughed at Richard's mother's expense for not getting the fact that Alan meant *throw me off a jetty* as a figure of speech, not literally throw him off a jetty. Richard's proudest moment was at his mother's expense when Alan, who said to throw him off a jetty, meaning throwing him off a jetty as a metaphor if Alan had lost his nerve, lost his winning spirit, lost his carefree attitude, so to speak, not literally that Alan wanted to be thrown off a jetty, and then Alan reached across the table and put his hand on Richard's mum's hand and told her that he *didn't mean* any jetty in particular and then he and Alan and Richard's mum laughed and laughed about the jetty in the Capri restaurant and they ate roast chicken spaghetti and knocked off two bottles of wine on the night the Dockers made the prelim, and across the road outside Timezone a Japanese busker

had a crowd of about thirty Dockers fans dancing and singing along to his tunes thrown from his tiny Marshall amp.

Never did I realise how much Richard and I were unlike than on the first day of walking The Bibb, after I had taken the 502 to Freo station, a train to Perth, a train to Midland, and then the 297 to Kalamunda, a journey of over two hours where I was half excited and half anxious about what lay ahead—sitting there in my hiking clothes, feeling like a dork, with my toothbrush visible in the front mesh pocket. The chimera of long walks, I've since discovered, is that they promise adventure, and what you find, mostly, is a long boring list of boredom, and hours upon hours and days upon days of endless chit-chat inside your own head and only when you've given up trying to prop up the idea of finding adventure and *given in* to boredom does the track come up behind you with a good wallop of fun and adventure, to the point where what you thought you valued before no longer holds the same value anymore.