

## *Coast scripts*

Shane slowed the rig down to the 50 k limit demanded by the High Street of the local market town, and glided along its leafy length, idly sweeping each pedestrian crossing with his gaze as he approached, not that anyone was about at this hour, but you never knew, and he needed a good long length to pull up in, what with the tanker full to brimming behind and his brakes still hot off the hill. The full moon came up behind the Warehouse carpark and lit up the KFC as he passed, and he sang to it as his Ma had done: 'Whetu-marama – Whetu marama...' trying to remember if it was good luck or bad luck to see it rise through glass, and whether or not there was a saying you were supposed to use, it was moments like these you needed them nousey old Aunties who were always so quick with the advice whether you asked them or not, and Christ he hadn't thought of them for years. Good thing they weren't around, they'd have a shitload to say about what was going down with him and Jodie, or not going down more like, all the usual guff about family and how you had to work at a relationship, and wouldn't he like a buck for every time he'd heard that word, flung at him like a curse, but jeez, you know, as he'd told Jode, a bloke can only go so far, and what did she expect? She knew what he was like when she'd moved in, and anyway he didn't remember issuing no invitations, so he was bugged if he was clearing out now, if anyone was hitting the highway it was her, that's what he'd told her. There were plenty of cartons in the shed for her stuff and she could bloody well be gone by the time he got home and he was taking the keys to the car because it was his and she needn't think otherwise, she could ask that useless bastard of a cousin of hers to help, if he was her cousin, which he doubted, the weasel faced little shit always hanging about and if truth were to tell probably the root of the problem, root being the operative word.

He slid through the big roundabout at the top of the town, lifting a little in his seat to see if the tide were in, one of his favourite bits of the trip, as the road curved out onto the causeway giving you water both sides like a very long bridge and shining pools with the moon reflected, sometimes even the stars on a still night, what he called a picture and he wished he could paint. But it was out, just his luck eh, a few channels still running but mostly mudflat, story of his life right now, bogged down, stagnant, dogturd brown, not going nowhere, fast. The moonlight picked out a few of the words worked into the sandbanks with white pebbles, High School kids liked to do them over the holidays, mostly just their names, then they stood on the road to take selfies with their iphones to send to their friends, Look what I did, Look who I am, arrogant little buggers, as if they were of any importance to anyone, good thing it all got washed away after a few days, teach them a lesson about life. Tides were what it was all about, in, out, in again, out again, on and on, and we're just passin' through, 'On the road again,' as the great Willy Nelson put it, and he began to hum the anthem, truckies knew a lot when you boiled it down, they saw more, and had lots of time to think. Too much maybe. He thought about that for a while, but it didn't seem to be getting him anywhere.

As he came up to the Mariri turnoff to the tip and the sign that said 'Refuse Recycling' - he always got a giggle out of that one, like, you could read it two ways couldn't you - he saw the beginnings of a much longer message picked out in the mud, and with no-one behind him slowed down a bit to read it out. 'To - every - thing - on - earth,' it spelled out, 'There - is - a - season'. So what the hell was that supposed to mean? He was pretty sure he had it right. 'To everything on earth there is a season'. Someone had gone to a bit of trouble, for sure, it was a long message, took a lot of pebbles, eh, plus all the floundering about in the mud, even spelled right, somebody thought they had something worth saying, but what, exactly? Could be some kind of ad, those arseholes would piss their mark on anything. He thought about trying it another way, 'There is a season to everything on earth', made a bit more sense, in fact it was oddly like what he had just been thinking, spookily like, but who was it for? When had it been done? He couldn't tell from up here whether the tide was coming in or going out, there'd been no message there yesterday, not so's he remembered, and he'd been up this stretch four times, and anyway it didn't look like the kids' usual tagging - if that's what you called these arty sorts of things, so what was it supposed to be, poetry? What would the rhyme be for 'season'? 'Reason' would work, in fact 'reason' would be quite good. Did they run out of time for the second line - or run out of pebbles? It would take a few. He wasn't even sure where the pebbles came from, did they collect them somewhere on the shoreline, or bring them specially from somewhere else, maybe someone's driveway was being plundered, not so much art as pilfering, he always found it funny what they'd try to excuse by calling it art.

The truck began the slow grind up the new by-pass, and he played with the idea of a second line that rhymed. There was 'treason,' but that seemed a bit over the top, although Jodie's latest performance was what you could call treacherous, and now he thought of it she hadn't even lasted out the season, last year's model all right, time for a trade in, haha, mind you he had the feeling the terms were not going to be to his advantage.

While he was hosing down the rig at the depot after the offload, he tried the line on Snowy the storeman. 'Sounds familiar', Snowy said, parking his arse on the weighbridge deck as he usually did, 'Isn't it from a song? Old sixties thing I seem to recall', and he tapped his fingers on his knees, 'To everything' he sang, '... something ... something ... something, There is a season ... something ... something ... something ...' 'Can't say I know it,' said Shane, 'and anyway what's the something something bits?' 'Oh prob'ly one of those Yeah yeah yeah things', Snowy suggested, 'She was usually yeah yeah yeah in the 60s, eh'. 'Well I wouldn't know', Shane said, 'not going back that far', and then thinking that when it came to it he didn't seem to be going far forward either, and wondering if Jodie had taken the hint and what sort of state the place would be in by the time he got back. Young Jayden in the caf who called himself a barista for Chrissake whatever that was supposed to be, I mean he made coffee from a machine, big deal, said it wasn't a song, it was from the Bible, and was something called the Book of Ecclesiastes, Shane got him to write it down on the back of the till receipt so's he could look it up on Google, because Jayden said there was a bit more to it, which he couldn't quite remember, but it was the word of the Lord he said and so it was

important to get it right, Jayden being apparently something of a Bible Basher, which Shane hadn't known before, well it took all sorts didn't it, and at least he seemed to know his stuff.

Jodie hadn't quite taken the kitchen sink but there were no bed sheets left, although those had been his too, but what the fuck, he could sort it later, stop off at the Warehouse, pity Bunnings didn't do bedding in fact a bit strange given they did useless crap like lampshades, and anyway he had his sleeping bag up the top of the wardrobe and he got it down and crawled into it, Goodnight Irene, he was puckerood, but totally. All that thinking, wore a bloke out. Tomorrow, eh.

He picked up breakfast at Macca's, cheese MacMuffin and an iced coke, just the go, good to be back to real tucker, and wound over the hill for the first load of the day, all the time working out in his head how the tides would be, and whether yesterday's message would still be there, and how soon before he could check it out again, make sure he had it right because for some reason he had the feeling it might have changed somehow, he wasn't sure how but maybe that was part of what it meant, if seasons changed maybe so did messages, and meaning was always a tricky thing, you never quite knew what anyone else meant, what they were really thinking, hadn't that been the problem with Jodie, or part of it at least, she'd changed every bloody five minutes, you just got things nicely pinned down and she'd go off and do something else, or swear blind she hadn't, he wasn't sure which was worse.

Coming back across the big river bridge he had to stop himself planting the foot, remember that 50k limit, daytime now and peak tourist season – there's that word again – and crazies running out from all over the place as if there were no proper crossings and idiots in Mr Mauis and Britvans all over the road and crawling along at 30k an hour, not his favourite time of year, give him winter any day, but there was the shine coming off the sea, green as the hills, lovely, he lifted again in his seat at the roundabout and yes! the tide was on the way out and he was going to be able to read what the stones would say. He began looking for it after the Mariri turn, but it didn't look right, it looked too long, surely the first letter was now an A, but what was the word? A – N – N – I – H – I – L – A – T – I – N – G Jeez she was a long one alright but what the hell was it supposed to mean? And there was more, it said ALL THAT'S MADE – he had to wait for the mudbank in the next inlet to get the rest of the message – TO A GREEN THOUGHT – so was that it? Nope, here came IN A GREEN SHADE - and then he was past and so that was what it had said, a real puzzler, who was making this stuff up? It didn't sound like last time, more complicated, he'd have to look up that first word, but at least it rhymed, so he'd been right, it was poetry, although until he found out about that long A word it wasn't going to make much sense.

Snowy thought it might be political, them bloody Greens, he theorised, always anti bloody industry eh, 'all that's made – 'well that will be anything that's you know, not 'organic' or whatever they bloody call it, they've sure got it in for the working bloke, and it'll be one of those anti-genetics things, not wanting the food crops mucked about with, I betcha, but Shane wasn't so sure. The political stuff's always much simpler than that, he argued, like the sign on the hill, the one

against poison drops? it just says Ban 1080, says it all, can't see why they'd go all poetic on us, and anyway what does this annihilating word mean? You know what said Snowy, since it rhymes and all I could text the daughter in law, she teaches English at the High School, she's bound to know, give it to me again, and he punched it into his phone, should have an answer for you this arvo.

By the time Shane had picked up his second load, the tide was back up to the roadway, the mudbanks all under water, 'annihilated' he thought to himself, having done a Googlesearch on Snowy's phone over his pie and iced coffee, and found out what it meant, a useful word, a bloke needed all the words he could get for wiping things out, he wished he'd known it before, obliterated, destroyed, reduced to nothing. Washed away, in a tide of green, like Pharoah's charioteers in the remake of The Ten Commandments when the Red Sea opened to let the Israelites through, and then came crashing back to drown their enemies, swirling them away, nothing left, back to bedrock. Not their season, he thought, still rolling words about in his head, all gone, the grass grown over, greenwashed, it all fits. 'Might not need the info from your boy's missus' he told Snowy at the depot, but she'd sent it anyway: it was by some dude from 300 years back, she knew it straight off, bit of a classic it seemed. Jayden had been right too, the first one was the Bible and the second one was based on some Bible proverb: 'all flesh is grass' apparently, springs up, mown down, so yeah, it was all starting to fit together, and even Snowy had kinda been on the mark, with that song he'd remembered – half remembered – based on the same piece. Seemed it didn't matter so much how a message came – just that, somehow or other, it got there, got through, and stuck. Then kinda welled up again, when you needed it. Interesting.

Shane thought about that through the day, watching the tide pull back again, waiting for words to emerge – which they did, in the late half-light, just enough to make them out, because once again the message had been changed. 'Because' was the first word this time, good – at last, an explanation, although it seemed to get more confusing as it went on. 'Because – I - Would - Not – Stop – for –Death' – he read out, so what was it going to be this time, bloody road rules? Shane began to feel he was being got at, all his impatience at the summer drivers, his fury at having to pull over for them on the hill when he had fifteen gears to grind through and needed their lane on the tighter corners – is that what this was about, a road warning? He peered into the gloom to pick up the next line, 'He – Kindly – Stopped – For – Me', well that sounded better, not all his fault then, but shouldn't there be more? He wanted more. He needed more. He needed things spelled out, a resolution, some kind of ending, something clear – but that's all there was, it was going to be back to Snowy's boy's missus at this rate, he was bugged if he could work this one out, although if death – whoever that was meant to be – was willing to stop for him well that seemed pretty positive really, like a get out of jail free card, made him feel quite up, more than he had for weeks – well that and Jodie being gone, hallelujah for that eh, what a liability and he couldn't for the life of him remember how she'd smarmed her way into his life in the first place, some things made no sense and she was certainly one of them - hell she was two of them, what an albatross round the neck, a millstone, enough to drown anybody, annihilated, that's what he'd been, but no more eh. The moon

came up across the water and he sang to it again, the same song, must have been lucky then to see it through the glass after all, things were looking up, blessed by marama, she was all the messages he needed, he said as much to Snowy and Jayden, things were on the up, who'd have believed that a few words written in the mud could have helped him come good? 'So you think that's it then?' asked Snowy, 'well I guess it'll help keep your eyes on the road the way they oughta', and they'd laughed.

As he drove the rig back the tide was way way out, the moon high and silver white, even the mud glistening, just the big deep river channels left running and Shane humming now to himself, working out in his head what he was going to do to the lounge, set himself up a proper sound system, spread himself out a bit, now Jodie's junk was outa there, out of his life, space a-plenty, lots to be doing, all good eh, words flooding his own mind, not needing any outside prompts, who knew who'd been writing that stuff anyway, probably the local Year 12 kids Snowy's girl had said, it was all on their reading lists it seemed, some bloke called Andrew Marvel, some chick called Emily Dickinson, he might get them out and read them, then again he might not, wait for the movie haha, and yes, Jayden had been right, the Bible, not that he'd be bothering with that, no God botherer him, and glanced out to where the words had been, catching sight of one, just one word this time but writ large, huge letters, vast letters, only this single word, and it said FIN. Just FIN, and he laughed, hadn't the lazy buggers got round to finishing this one? That was good: FIN-ishing, and he laughed some more, language was a funny thing alright, and full of tricks, and then the back tyres blew and the rig jackknifed, down, down, into the river channel and the endless silver stream of the moon on the water and the mud.