



## CONTENTS

<b>Editor's notes</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>Loving the Cosmos or Cosmic Awe</b>	<b>Dave Knowles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Search for Truth Continues</b>	<b>Trisha English</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Galileo Project</b>	<b>The Guardian</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Direct Experiencing</b>	<b>Joanna Malinowska</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Just Like Roger</b>	<b>Margot Mann</b>	<b>12</b>

## Notes

Our early 2019 meetings and articles, on the gaps in purely Darwinian explanations of evolution, were based on Stephen Meyer's book 'Darwin's Doubt'. Graeme Wilkins told me about an update by way of an interview of Meyer at [https://youtu.be/E\\_UnEpIXSHI](https://youtu.be/E_UnEpIXSHI). It is a lengthy YouTube video in which Meyer covers a wide range of approaches to the matter in a very interesting and persuasive commentary on his latest thinking.

Our monthly gatherings continue as Zoom meetings. Our next will be at 11am on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September. Graeme Burn has offered to introduce us to his life and work in Vietnam. Alexey Feigin is taking the September meeting, Christopher Ash is down for November and Eliot Redelman has volunteered for December. How much longer we'll be on Zoom remains uncertain. If you are not already on the list but interested in receiving notice of these meetings please let me know and I will include your address.

The Capacitie website, thanks to our son Simon, is having a facelift. The index of past articles is being redesigned, making it much easier to find the people who've contributed and the material we have included over the years. It is sometimes slow to open, five to ten seconds before the larger pdf files appear. Alan

## Loving the Cosmos or Cosmic Awe from Dave Knowles

On the title page of Part 1: The World of Modern Physics: Space and Time, Energy and Matter of my first school prize in England: Fritz Kahn's Design of the Universe: The Heavens and the Earth there is an epigraph attributed to Spinoza:

*Ens unum infinitum et eternum.*            The one being, boundless and eternal.

The following page represents the empty dark of Space with the word 'Space' prominent in ghostly capitals on a background of faint stars and beneath it the following paragraph in white text:

This is the universe: infinity. Space without beginning, without end, dark, empty, cold. Through the silent darkness of this space move gleaming spheres, separated from each other by inconceivable distances. Around them, again inconceivably far away, like bits of dust lost in immensity, circle smaller dark spheres, receiving light and life from their "mother suns." One of these little spheres, in the light of one of the countless suns in endless space, is our earth. This is man's home in the universe.

Rich inspiration for an impressionable teenager! It started a life-long interest in Physics, Astronomy and science in general, not excluding Science-Fiction and also wanting to know more about Spinoza, especially when I found out he was an inspiration to Einstein too.

I took a first degree in Physics and then started post-graduate research in Astronomy but the latter turned out to be an ill-starred choice (!) and my career started in Information Technology in Canada as Atomic Energy of Canada already had enough physicists when I got there to claim the interview I had been promised in England.

Despite not pursuing a career on a mountain-top (say Kitt Peak, Arizona) looking at the stars, Design of the Universe: The Heavens and the Earth continued to inspire me and guide my interests, first mainly with science-fiction (through "the real heady wine" of James Blish's tetralogy Cities in Flight:

1.     They Shall Have Stars
2.     A Life for the Stars
3.     Earthman, Come Home
4.     The Triumph of Time

Scenes from this masterpiece still haunt my memory set to the backdrop of the Cosmos. Later, when I had exhausted the science-fiction stacks in Leek Library, I went round a corner to discover Literature, starting with Hemingway and progressing through Tolstoy, James Joyce, George Eliot & Bob Dylan. But the vast scope of the Cosmos still haunted me so that I searched out fat books on Astronomy and eventually those with an emphasis on Cosmology.

This theoretical or fictional learning was complemented by vivid experiences:

- Spending my last days in South Africa searching for a high point unpolluted by city lights to spot our neighbour galaxy Andromeda.
- Driving from RSA to Swaziland by night, the night sky seemed brighter than "it ought" to be. We stopped and let our eyes adjust to the dark to be greeted by the spectacular

first sight of the Milky Way from the southern hemisphere wheeling in jewelled splendour over our heads.

- Crossing the deserts of Namibia at night, with no habitation for dozens of miles, every night revealed a hemisphere of stars unknown to those who live in towns or cities today but a sight shared with desert nomads and Polynesian navigators of the Pacific

I hope to complement these experiences by ones in Australia, eventually, maybe, in the Red Centre with an Aboriginal guide.

What is certain is that I shall always be thrilled by looking out from ‘man’s home in the universe,’ though it be ‘a bit of dust lost in immensity’

Whether one can actually “Love the Cosmos” is debatable but it seemed a good title at the time!

On reconsideration I think “Cosmic Awe” is much better.

I have 2 books to recommend [the first thanks to David Oliphant] which may induce some awe for you:

- The Human Cosmos: A Secret History of the Stars by Jo Marchant (in which you can read of the amazing Polynesian navigators)
- Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False by Thomas Nagel (a harder philosophical read which could figuratively blow your mind into the cosmos!)

[Dave Knowles’s synopsis of Nagel’s “Mind and Cosmos” \[his comments are in \[...\]\]](#)

Preface: [Thomas Nagel expresses his thanks to many people] In view of the unorthodoxy of the result, I hope these thanks will not give offence.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this book is to argue that the mind-body problem is not just a local problem, having to do with the relation between mind, brain, and behaviour in living animal organisms, but that it invades our understanding of the entire cosmos and its history.

One of the legitimate tasks of philosophy is to investigate the limits of even the best developed and most successful forms of contemporary scientific knowledge.

It may be frustrating to acknowledge, but we are simply at the point in the history of human thought at which we find ourselves, and our successors will make discoveries and develop forms of understanding of which we have not dreamt.

## 2. Antireductionism and the Natural Order

The interest of theism even to an atheist is that it tries to explain in another way what does not seem capable of explanation by physical science.

However, I do not find theism any more credible than materialism as a comprehensive world view. My interest is in the territory between them. I believe that these two radically opposed conceptions of ultimate intelligibility cannot exhaust the possibilities.

All explanations come to an end somewhere.

Both theism and materialism say that at the ultimate level, there is one form of understanding. But would an alternative secular conception be possible that acknowledged mind and all that it implies, not as the expression of divine intention but as a fundamental principle of nature along with physical law?

To sum up: the respective inadequacies of materialism and theism as transcendent conceptions, and the impossibility of abandoning the search for a transcendent view of our place in the universe, lead to a hope for an expanded but still naturalistic understanding that avoids psychophysical reductionism. The essential character of such an understanding would be to explain the appearance of life, consciousness, reason, and knowledge neither as accidental side effects of the physical laws of nature nor as the result of intentional intervention in nature from without but as an unsurprising if not inevitable consequence of the order that governs the natural world from within.

That order would have to include physical law, but if life is not just a physical phenomenon, the origin and evolution of life and mind will not be explainable by physics and chemistry alone. An expanded, but still unified, form of explanation will be needed, and I suspect it will have to include teleological elements.

All that can be done at this stage in the history of science is to argue for recognition of the problem, not to offer solutions. But I want to take up some of the obstacles to reduction, and their consequences, in more detail, beginning with the clearest case.

### 3. Consciousness

[DCK: my favourite subject but which attracts the most neuro-babble unfortunately!]

Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science. The existence of consciousness seems to imply that the physical description of the universe, in spite of its richness and explanatory power, is only part of the truth, and that the natural order is far less austere than it would be if physics and chemistry accounted for everything.

### 4. Cognition

I now want to take up a different type of antireductionist argument and its consequences. Consciousness presents a problem for evolutionary reductionism because of its irreducibly subjective character. This is true even of the most primitive forms of sensory consciousness, such as those presumably found in all animals.

The problem that I want to take up now concerns mental functions such as thought, reasoning, and evaluation that are limited to humans, though their beginnings may be found in a few other species.

These are the functions that have enabled us to transcend the perspective of the immediate life-world given to us by our senses and instincts, and to explore the larger objective reality of nature and value.

### 5. Value

Real value—good and bad, right and wrong—is another of those things, like consciousness and cognition, that seem at first sight incompatible with evolutionary naturalism in its familiar materialist form.

## 6. Conclusion

Philosophy has to proceed comparatively.

In the present climate of a dominant scientific naturalism, heavily dependent on speculative Darwinian explanations of practically everything, and armed to the teeth against attacks from religion, I have thought it useful to speculate about possible alternatives.

Above all, I would like to extend the boundaries of what is not regarded as unthinkable, in light of how little we really understand about the world.

It would be an advance if the secular theoretical establishment, and the contemporary enlightened culture which it dominates, could wean itself of the materialism and Darwinism of the gaps—to adapt one of its own pejorative tags. I have tried to show that this approach is incapable of providing an adequate account, either constitutive or historical, of our universe.

I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid.

The human will to believe is inexhaustible.

[Afterword from the synoptist —I hope I have given you an idea of why I think it is so important even though it may be hard reading in some parts (not in my extracts, I trust?) It is worth noting that Nagel was burnt at the stake (in cartoons) as a heretic by some scientific critics. Unjustified]

*Dave Knowles*

### **The Search for Truth Continues from Trisha English WA.**

The problem with investigating any subject outside of academia is the degree of fragmentation caused by specialisation. As knowledge expands at an exponential rate, it is almost impossible for individuals to form a holistic viewpoint on any subject. The result is that we have countless areas of specialists in each category, whether it be medicine or science, archaeology or theology. Each specialist claims authority over the data studied and findings which conflict or challenge a particular research area can evoke hostility.

An enquiry into the origin of religion in ancient homo sapiens for example, necessarily involves a myriad of experts from areas such as archaeology, evolutionary psychology, anthropology, sociology, theology and so forth. The list is quite formidable and often involves conflicting and quite contrary methodology. These in turn result in theories that are accepted or rejected by experts in the field. Universities tend to select an area of enquiry and to concentrate research and direct funding to that area with a view to establishing itself as a leading authority.

But outside of academia there are many talented and learned people who have spent their entire lives researching areas of interest without the restriction and limitations imposed on them by ingrained conditioning. These people frequently attract the hostility of competition from those operating within established departments.

This article is concerned with four extraordinary individuals who chose to fearlessly operate outside the usual restrictions in order to bring fresh, exciting and controversial views to the

attention of human intelligence which they attribute to extraterrestrial intervention dating back to the ancient Sumerians. A dispassionate consideration may question whether the technological advancement was worth the apparent dumbing down of consciousness.

The early Sumerians transitioned from primitive people to the first sophisticated builders of a civilisation that invented writing, the use of tools, advanced agricultural practices as well as temples and forms of government administration. The Sumerians attributed the leap in knowledge to extraterrestrial beings who they referred to as the “gods from the sky”. These sky beings were depicted in numerous wall drawings as having wings, wearing a mysterious bangle which resembles the modern “fitbit” and carrying a bag that could easily be a computer or some other form of communication.

The four individual trail blazers investigating the Anunnaki as they are called are: Zecharia Sitchin, Erich von Daniken, Graham Hancock and Paul Anthony Wallis. Each writer has been influenced by Sitchin but worked independently. It is not within the scope of this paper to give a detailed description of the entire body of work these authors have produced, but some very brief indications may motivate readers to follow up on their ideas.

Zecharia Sitchin. (1920-2010)

Sitchin was a prolific writer and his 17 books have sold millions of copies and been translated into 25 languages. He received a degree in economics from the University of London and was an editor and journalist in Mandatory Palestine before moving to New York in 1952. He was employed in New York as an executive for a shipping company and taught himself Sumerian cuneiform in his spare time.

Sitchin in his first book *The 12th Planet* and its sequels claimed that beyond Neptune was a undiscovered planet called Nibiru which followed a strange elliptical orbit reaching our solar system approximately every 3,600 years. On this planet dwelt an extraterrestrial race called Anunnaki (or Anunaki).

The people of this race were called the Nephilim and they are cited in Genesis, although they may have had their origin in the Book of Enoch which was compiled hundreds of years before Genesis.

(See Genesis 5-6) In those days when the sons of gods had intercourse with the daughters of men and got children by them, the Nephilim were on earth. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. When the Lord saw that man had done much evil on earth and that his thoughts and inclinations were always evil, he was sorry that he had made man on earth, and he was grieved at heart. He said, “This race of men whom I have created, I will wipe them off the face of the earth - man and beast, reptiles and birds. I am sorry that I ever made them”.

The Nephilim according to Sitchin first arrived on Earth around 450,000 years ago in search for gold which they initially found in Africa. The Nephilim used primitive homo sapiens as slaves and through genetic engineering saved themselves from the trouble of mining it for themselves. But apparently, they could not resist the female homo-sapiens who they found to be beautiful and sexually attractive. They desired them as wives and from their union they produced giants. In the book of Enoch (which was excluded from the Old and New Testament) we get the foundation story of what became the story of the fallen angels from Heaven and their banishment into everlasting damnation. As a punishment for the sexual excesses of the Nephilim, the God of the Anunnaki caused a flood which is recorded in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This story was subsequently rewritten in the Old Testament to become the flood of Noah’s time. The reworking of the story would explain why Enoch never made

it into the early scriptures, though it is recorded that he was taken to Heaven in a fiery chariot (possibly a space vehicle of some kind) and never returned to earth. Enoch is referred to in various places throughout the Bible, but very few people know the details of his many books and predictions.

One reason for this exclusion may be that the Anunnaki established an exotic religion, which arguably rivals the Old Testament in its breadth and detail, and certainly would have derailed the biblical tradition in its current form which evolved over hundreds of years. While the Anunnaki established its main base in Sumer, it spread throughout the world and has been attributed with building space portals and it provides a totally different version of the function of the ancient pyramids of Egypt. Sitchin based his beliefs on his personal interpretations of pre-Nubian and Sumerian texts. The entire story of the Anunnaki race is much too detailed and complicated to summarise here, but a full account of its existence and influence in the early history of Sumeria is covered in various entries in Wikipedia and in many YouTube documentaries.

Sitchin has millions of followers. Many who find the theory of evolution highly implausible, turned to the saga of the Anunnaki because it offered an explanation of why our genetic structure remains a mystery to this day. The 223 genes found by the Human Genome Sequencing Consortium are without the required predecessors on the genomic evolutionary tree. In short, we are more than we know and we know almost nothing about consciousness even after thousands of years of speculation and theorising. Certainly we may be related to Chimps, or other primates, but I don't see any of them building libraries, researching hypotheses, and experimenting with genetic engineering and artificial intelligence as we humans are doing today.

Needless to say, Sitchin's ideas have been rejected and roundly criticised by scientists and academics alike who dismiss his work as pseudoscience and pseudohistory. Every possible criticism has been thrown at him for everything from flawed methodology to incorrect translations of ancient texts and incorrect astronomical claims. Newton and Einstein would never have accepted such a stance. Nevertheless, Sitchin's work lives on in the work of Eric Von Daniken, Graham Hancock and Paul Wallis. Every year archaeology is uncovering findings that suggest that many of the claims of Sitchin and others deserve a closer look.

Erich von Daniken (1935 - )

The Swiss born author Erich von Daniken made his name with the publication of his best-selling book *Chariots of the Gods* (1968). He had a colourful background, travelling the world in pursuit of evidence to support his research. Be that as it may, he has gathered a world wide reputation for his writings about ancient astronauts and he has made numerous films and documentaries for Netflix and YouTube in which he provides archaeological evidence to support his claims. Von Daniken has travelled widely and his hypotheses are dramatic and not without relevance. A full account of his life and "discoveries" can be found on YouTube and in his books and I commend them to you. Like Sitchin he has gathered an equal amount of praise and criticism, condemnation and banishment like the ancients before him.

Graham Hancock (1950 - )

Hancock like his predecessors has written a number of best-sellers. He is a noted public speaker and researcher and although his work also attracts trenchant criticism he tends to gain more acceptance than Sitchin and Von Daniken perhaps because he holds a First Class Honours degree in sociology from Durham University. His main interests are in ancient civilisations, with particular emphasis on the stone monuments or megaliths, altered states of

consciousness, and ancient myths. He describes himself as “an alternative historian” who argues against an intellectual elite and their “dobermans”...He sees hypotheses that are well supported by evidence and have withstood the criticism and scientific peer review as “previously unquestioned theories” and states that his work is about presenting one side of the argument, not a balanced view - as a journalist would”.

Paul Anthony Wallis

There is a fourth influential person who is presently dominating the ET scene and it is Paul Wallis, an intrepid writer and researcher whose YouTube offerings surpass even those above. Before becoming an independent and influential researcher in this area he was a devoted Christian and held positions of authority in his Church. One day he decided to look at Genesis through “new” eyes, and suddenly he made connections, saw plausible explanations for otherwise unintelligible events and this in turn sent him examining the ancient beginnings. His research, which is open to everyone, marks a turning point not only in theology, but in history as we have come to know it.

The four authors mentioned above are recommended to all thinking readers who like a challenge. I have read the work of all four authors - as well as visited their documentaries on YouTube - and I have no hesitation in recommending them to you. As Albert Einstein once said: “Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world”. Now that humans have established a space station, landed on the Moon, Mars and Venus, it seems a good time to reflect on where we are going and even to reconsider how our past beliefs may be limiting our future. It is worth remembering that no one has a monopoly on truth. Everything should be subject to scrutiny. Indian gurus, like Krishnamurti, were clear that knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom. Human beings have not yet determined the nature of consciousness - and perhaps they never will - so we should not be too quick in our quest to find solutions to what appear to be insurmountable problems or too quick to reach conclusions. Richard Dawkins and John Lennox are two of the most learned minds in our present age, yet each is conditioned by a particular belief system. Dawkins is held firm by his belief in Darwinian theory, and John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, is held fast by his belief in an anthropomorphic God. Both these views are holding us back from unfettered exploration. Could it be that the world is reaching some kind of climax in which we are given the choice to self-destruct or to leave the past behind and venture into new fields which are creative, flexible and without the violence of dogmatism? Is it possible to have a gentle inquisitive mind and to purposefully explore the universe, or will we always be victims of a harsh vindictive acquisitive history, whether known or unknown? Will we transform ourselves, or leave the job to artificial intelligence, and a mechanistic view of the world. Will we accept the outworn values of past civilisations, or will we re-invent ourselves while we still have time?

Recommended Viewing: Why are We Here? Paul Wallis They Found it - Human DNA was designed by Ancient Aliens 3. This 12,000 Year Old Ancient Discovery is Shaking the Foundations of History. 4. A1 Agenda 2020. Rise of the Machines, “Super” Intelligence Quantum Computers Documentary.

## The Galileo Project from The Guardian

*(Coincidentally, and shortly after Trisha's article arrived, I read the following note in the Guardian. Alan)*

A team of scientists will embark on a new international research project led by [Harvard University](#) to search for evidence of extraterrestrial life by looking for advanced technology it may leave behind.

The Galileo Project is led by the Harvard astronomy professor Avi Loeb. Loeb co-founded the project with Frank Laukien, CEO of Bruker Corporation, a Massachusetts-based manufacturer of scientific equipment.

“Given the recently discovered abundance of Earth-Sun systems, the Galileo Project is dedicated to the proposition that humans can no longer ignore the possible existence of Extraterrestrial Technological Civilizations (ETCs),” the team announced in a [statement](#) on Monday.

The project follows the US government's [report](#) from last month on a number of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena that were reported by navy personnel and Oumuamua, an interstellar pancake-shaped object that entered the solar system in 2017. Oumuamua did not resemble any previously observed comet or asteroids and in turn sparked a [debate](#) among astronomers regarding its true origin.

[According to](#) the Galileo Project team, “Oumuamua turned out to have highly anomalous properties that defy well-understood natural explanations.” “We can only speculate ... by stretching our imagination to ‘Oumuamua’ perhaps being an extraterrestrial technological object, similar to a very thin light-sail or communication dish,” it [added](#).

Rather than searching for electromagnetic signals, the Galileo Project will search for physical objects associated with extraterrestrial technological equipment, also known as [technosignatures](#).

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jul/27/galileo-project-search-signs-extraterrestrial-technology>

## Direct Experiencing Quotation—Reminder

*Alan speaking: I concluded the last issue, NOWletter 229, with a question about Krishnamurti's statement that “The art of direct experience is attention without motive” and a question as to whether any of our readers could throw some light on Krishnamurti's rather unsatisfactory explanation of what he meant. Joanna replied and provided some helpful comments on the question of why many people do not find the Harding experiments helpful in resolving, or making plain, what Kishnamurti is trying to get across.*

*This was the quotation:*

***The state of direct experiencing is attention without motive. When there is the desire to achieve a result, there is experiencing with a motive, which only leads to the further conditioning of the mind. To learn, and to learn with a motive, are contradictory processes, are they not? Is one learning when there's a motive to learn? The accumulation of***

*knowledge, or the acquisition of technique, is not the movement of learning. Learning is a movement which is not away from or towards something; it ceases when there is the accumulation of knowledge in order to gain, to achieve, to arrive. Feeling out the nature of consciousness, learning about it, is without motive; there is no experiencing, or being taught, in order to be or not to be something. To have a motive, a cause, ever brings about pressure, compulsion. J.K.*

### **Direct Experiencing – from Joanna Malinowska**

Thank you, Alan, I always read the Newsletter with pleasure. Usually, it seems a bit too sophisticated for me, but today I want to write a few words about your last question, after the quote from Krishnamurti

"The state of direct experiencing is attention without a motive"

I read what he says (yes, it is quite ambitious, the way he says it)

But I think he has the point, this is the main reason why Harding's experiments do not work with everybody. The reason is an expectation that there is something very difficult to achieve or learn, something special to achieve, so it is difficult to stay with what is, just now, and see or experience just the obvious.

When it comes to learning, he is not very clear. Perhaps it is because the word learning does not make sense in the context of awareness or consciousness. Learning is a word on a human level, to acquire skills or knowledge necessary for the person to be in this body, in this world, to communicate with others etc.

For awareness nothing needs to be done, it is some kind of knowing without knowing. It is difficult to put it in words, but perhaps we may say that personal consciousness is different from awareness of being the Source, or being one with the source or everything, the non-dual oneness. Because when there is a motive, something to achieve or gain, or arrive, the duality arises, and there is somebody who needs to learn or achieve (ego? person?) and something to be learned (God? Enlightenment? Consciousness) So the story takes over, and it may be very frustrating, the more we try, the more difficult it becomes.

I read it and I wonder if I am more confusing than Krishnamurti. I only wanted to say that by reading that it became clear to me why Harding's experiments do not speak to everybody. And of course, it applies to everything else, because it is possible to maintain this "direct experiencing" with "every day experiencing", it is just the different level, not exclusive, the same way it is possible to drive a car and have a conversation. So when you have some "direct experiencing", the memory stays, but is it the memory? Part of that is the memory, the way the experiment was run etc, but it is also insight and shift in consciousness.

*Joanna Malinowska*

### **Direct Experiencing—Postscript**

Alan again: I think that makes it very clear Joanna. Thank you. A couple of days ago I opened an old notebook and found another possible answer, it was a section I'd clipped from the Bahiya Sutta (Udana 1.10)

*"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In*

*reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."*

### **Just Like Roger - A story by Margot Mann**

He looks just like Roger, Edie thought. All that curly black hair, and the graceful way he moves around the kitchen, manoeuvring her new cupboards into position. He didn't talk much but he seemed to enjoy the coffee she made him at regular intervals and occasionally he ate one of her ginger slices. Edie wandered into her bedroom. On every level surface there were pictures of Roger Federer, stretching for a forehand, leaping for an overhead smash, or smiling as he held high his latest trophy. There was even a newspaper cutting stuck on the wall documenting the time he cried when Raphael Nadal beat him in one of the grand slams. Edie stood still for a moment and then walked down the passage to the kitchen.

She tried not to think about how much this kitchen renovation was going to cost. Her sister Meg had been surprised when Edie said she was thinking of getting the renovators in to give the kitchen a make-over. It was quite an attractive and functional space and only last year Edie had had the lounge room and hallway refurbished. They often talked about money and worried at the way their respective savings seemed to be leaking away, now that they had retired. The house Edie lived in had belonged to her parents until their death. Meg lived in a small semi-detached house in the next suburb. As they both lived alone, the sisters saw a lot of each other.

Last year Edie had had the carpets and curtains in her lounge room replaced. Meg joined her sister visiting department stores and seeking advice from interior decorators on interesting ways to redecorate Edie's lounge room. They brought back samples and swatches and spent hours discussing colour schemes, becoming more and more energized and excited as the project developed. "Where are we going today?" Meg would ask, after parking her car in Edie's driveway. "I think you should get a new hall table," she told Edie one day. "That old antique of mum's and dad's is alright but you need something nice and modern if you're having new carpet."

A few weeks later, a young man arrived to lay the carpet. He reminded Edie of a newsreader she had seen on the ABC, he had the same deep rich voice, and the same gap between his front teeth. Edie read somewhere that a gap between your front teeth meant good luck for life. He offered to help out by taking the existing carpet. "I'll get rid of it for you - all part of the friendly service," he said to Edie in that wonderfully modulated voice, displaying the gap in his teeth as he bit into a ginger slice. "I can take that old hall table too, if you want to replace it."

That was last year. She had been happy to give the carpet layer some old furniture, including the hall table, and the replaced carpet, after he explained that he and his wife could not afford to furnish their new home. He had been so grateful she had looked around for other bits and pieces to give him. He showed her a picture of his wife and baby daughter smiling at the camera. Such a lovely little family, she was so glad she could help them out in a small way, especially when the carpet layer confided that his wife had recently been diagnosed with

breast cancer and he didn't know which way to turn. From then on, she took special care making his coffee, and she baked a batch of ginger slices for him to take home. He hadn't wanted to take them, but she had insisted.

The redecorating proceeded slowly, with the inevitable delays as tradesmen rang to say they had been held up by deliveries. The fabric Edie had chosen for her new curtains sat on the wharf for weeks. Finally, everything was in place and the paintwork was patched up where curtain fittings had been changed. Edie and Meg strolled around the house, their stockinged feet leaving footprints in the carpet pile. There was a new table in the hall, rather smaller than Edie would have liked. She had been shocked at the price, but at least it fitted in with the new décor. The sisters were surprised that the curtains looked disappointingly similar to the ones they had replaced. "The material looked much lighter in the shop," Edie said. "I should have chosen the thicker lining fabric."

Meg had brought a pot of scarlet cyclamen to put on the new hall table. "Let's go out and celebrate," she said suddenly, catching Edie by the hand. "I've got that champagne in the fridge," Edie countered. "No. Come on. We're hitting the town for lunch," Meg said, slipping on her shoes and beckoning Edie to follow. "I'll drive," she added.

She and Meg had driven to the next town and had an unaccustomed pub lunch, washing down their fish and chips with more than one glass of cider. Edie had talked briefly about the effect of the cost of the new-look lounge room on her savings, but after agreeing that you can't take it with you, they wandered into the street in a tipsy haze and strolled for a couple of blocks towards the street where Meg had parked her car, enjoying the weak spring sunshine. Meg stopped suddenly and pointed, and as Edie drew close, she saw an old hall table in the window of an antique furniture shop. It was instantly recognisable as the table she had given the carpet layer. The price tag was clearly visible. After a long moment, the sisters walked on in silence and neither the hall table nor the carpet layer were ever mentioned again.

Edie gave a small involuntary shiver as she recalled the moment when she recognised the old table in the window of the antique shop, and registered its price tag. The carpet layer had been so convincing. She looked at Roger's twin as he moved about her kitchen, and smiled. Then she looked at her watch and walked to the sink to fill the kettle. Time for a coffee break.

The carpenter accepted a mug of coffee and a ginger slice and leaned against the fridge, explaining to Edie that it would only take another day or two and her kitchen would be finished. She hardly heard him, admiring the length of his eyelashes and the way a lock of black hair kept falling across his forehead until he pushed it away again. He put down his coffee mug and turning to Edie, said, "We've had some terrible news. My wife has just been diagnosed with breast cancer and I don't know where to turn." He held out his wallet. She saw a photo of a pretty young woman with a baby, both of them smiling at the camera.

*Margot Mann*