



Contents

Meister Eckhart & The Isness of Being.	Al & Alan Mann	2
From The Book of Hours	Rilke	8
The Two 'Wills'	Leonard Cohen	9
A Note on Feynman	Alan Mann	9
A Note on Bernardo Kastrup 1	"	11
A Note on Bernardo Kastrup 2	"	12
The Inheritance—A story	Margot Mann	13

This edition of the NOWletter is largely what has been happening for me since the last issue and is a collection of notes made and correspondence shared. The content under the heading 'The Isness of Being' is a commentary on Meister Eckhart. It is based on the interest in his message shown by a number of contemporary thinkers we have discussed here in the past and whose work I have found particularly helpful. The conversational engagement with Artificial Intelligence has been a new and impressive experience for me.

This is NOWletter issue 249, our first issue was July 1993 and what set out as a monthly appearance has slowed down and become a half yearly event. I will try to get it to the quarter century 250 issue and welcome any contributions to what might turn out to be our last hurrah!

I'm not sure if I have mentioned this before but, as I can't find any sign of posting I will mention here. For readers and participants who find headlessness inaccessible there is a short You Tube by Nitya Shanti which he labels from 'Person to Presence' which is very, brief, clear and convincing. If convinced, then more comprehensive versions are available in the talks by Richard Lang. and papers by Brentyn Ramm. (Brentyn's contributions to the NOWletter at: <https://www.capacitie.org/now.htm#archive>. Issues 192,211,217,228,234 &238)

Nityashanti at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLTjbmhNNhY>

Meister Eckhart & The Isness of Being.

On the 16th of March in my email to my friend Dave Knowles, I wrote: Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: "...we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own *Being*". That is exactly what the Harding experiments, when freed from all explanation and identification and based solely on direct experience, provide. So, in response to my friends who find headlessness absurd I suggest they are giving priority to Time over Being. That is, they identify with Time (their past, future, present combined in a sense of self) as the context in which Being arises rather than the reverse. I don't think Martin would agree with them but we'll see. The poets see this, or versions of it, and in the past I have bombarded you with examples. Here's just one for now '*...th' eternal is yet time includes*'. Thomas Traherne.

Now, in late August, I report on my latest enquiries. I think you said, Dave, that the Heidegger essays in the book you returned did not impress. I decided to go back to it for another look. In reading the preface I found, as though for the first time, that Heidegger was drawn to Meister Eckhart. I stumbled on Eckhart myself in the 70's and 80's but Heidegger's interest didn't register. Then I recalled seeing some Eckhart works on the shelves at Nacton when we visited Douglas Harding and that led me to wonder about Gebser and, sure enough, Gebser had a deep interest Meister Eckhart. Finally, I thought about Barfield and discovered that he too has a connection.

So, from this point most of what follows, to the end of this letter to you is all the work of AI in response to the one question. *Did 'whoever I name' refer to or quote Meister Eckhart?*

Did Jean Gebser ever refer to or quote Meister Eckhart

AI Overview: Yes, Jean Gebser frequently referred to and quoted Meister Eckhart in his philosophical writings. In his magnum opus, The Ever-Present Origin (Ursprung und Gegenwart), Gebser viewed Eckhart as a prime example of someone who manifested "integral consciousness"—a non-dual, aperspectival state of being that supersedes the analytical and dualistic mental structure.

Gebser specifically quoted Eckhart's statements transcending literal or dualistic thinking about the divine, such as: "Whatever man is capable of thinking about God is not [God]."

For Gebser, Eckhart's apophatic (negative) theology and mystical detachment perfectly aligned with the integral realization of transparent, time-free reality. Scholars and interpreters of Gebser's philosophy regularly point to Eckhart's teachings on becoming "empty" to realize the "Godhead" as an early Western expression of the integral consciousness Gebser described.

Did Martin Heidegger ever refer to or quote Meister Eckhart

AI Overview; Yes, Martin Heidegger referred to and quoted the medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart extensively throughout his life. He held Eckhart in high regard, once referring to him affectionately as "the old master of letters and life".

Here are a few notable instances and themes regarding Heidegger's engagement with Eckhart:

The 1915 Inaugural Lecture: *In his qualifying lecture "The Concept of Time in the Science of History" (Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft), Heidegger used a quote from Eckhart as an epigraph: "Time is that which changes and multiplies itself, eternity remains simple." [1, 2]*

Gelassenheit (Releasement): *This is one of Heidegger's most famous later philosophical concepts. He borrowed the term directly from Eckhart's Middle High German word gelâzenheit, reinterpreting it philosophically as a non-willing, open receptivity to Being rather than an explicitly religious or mystic state. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]*

Living "Without a Why": *Both thinkers explored the idea of acting ohne Warum (without a why)—moving past calculated, goal-oriented justifications to a state of pure, detached existence. [1, 2]*

Scholarship has extensively documented that Heidegger frequently read, annotated, and referenced Eckhart's writings, with some researchers noting nearly 100 references across his works. For an in-depth analysis of their intellectual connection, you can read more in academic resources like the [SPEP book overview](#) on Eckhart, Heidegger, and the Imperative of Releasement or browse the [Materials on Heidegger's Relation to Meister Eckhart](#) compilation.

Did Douglas Harding ever refer to or quote Meister Eckhart

AI Overview: Yes, English philosopher and mystic Douglas Harding frequently referenced and quoted the 13th-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart.

Harding viewed Eckhart as one of the few Western voices who perfectly articulated the non-dual truth of "headlessness". In his writings, Harding often juxtaposed Eckhart's profound mystical insights alongside Eastern Zen masters and contemporary philosophy to prove that true spiritual awakening transcends cultural and religious languages.

You can explore more about Harding's experiential philosophy and how his teachings harmonize with traditional mystics like Eckhart through the Headless Way platform.

(I would add to this my view that Harding provides us not only with an explanation but a means of realising what Eckhart is pointing to. Something always at hand which defies explanation but made plain in direct experience. Alan)

Did Owen Barfield ever refer to or quote Meister Eckhart

AI Overview: Yes, Owen Barfield frequently referenced, discussed, and quoted Meister Eckhart. He deeply appreciated the 14th-century German mystic, primarily because Eckhart's emphasis on the "birth of God in the soul" aligns perfectly with Barfield's ideas on human consciousness, the imagination, and the Incarnation.

Barfield's philosophical focus was the "evolution of consciousness," charting how humanity shifted from an original, participatory relationship with the divine (where we experienced the world as interconnected) toward our modern, alienated state.

*He viewed mystics like Meister Eckhart as vital historical figures who maintained the "participatory" mindset. For Barfield, Eckhart's theology didn't just point to an historical event 2,000 years ago, but rather to an **ongoing, present spiritual reality** occurring within the human mind and soul. Eckhart's approach perfectly reflects Barfield's view of how the Logos works through human imagination*

Specific Connections. The Timeless Incarnation: Barfield frequently explored how true faith rests in the individual awakening to their unity with God, a concept brilliantly distilled by Eckhart's famous quote on the "ground of the soul".

The Spark of the Soul: In his studies of language and mind, such as Poetic Diction, Barfield drew heavily on the same Neoplatonic roots and mystical traditions that formed the foundation of Eckhart's writings, such as the divine spark (Seelenfunke) within every human being.

Anthroposophy Links: Barfield's mentor, Rudolf Steiner, whose esoteric teachings Barfield championed and helped translate into modern philosophical terms, also frequently highlighted Meister Eckhart as a prime historical example of spiritual awakening and inner cognition. To read more about how Barfield's philosophy links to the Christian mystic roots that Eckhart represents, you can check out essays published in [The Church Times](#) or commentary found on the [Footnotes2Plato](#) platform

End of this contribution from AI

I had a strange realisation after writing this note, I realised that there was a connection between four of the people whose thoughts about life and being have been most helpful to me. It was the unexpected discovery that the largely overlooked aspect of Christianity, referred to as 'the mystical' was something which my guides found relevant to their enquiries and to their life work. It also provided me with a better understanding of my own attitude to Christianity.

My mother died when I was four and my father was agnostic, maybe even atheistic, prayers and sermons only entered my life at the age of eight when I became a boarder at a Methodist run school. On the other hand, my grandparents, on both sides of the family, were devout Christians. One of my earliest memories is of my grandparents, Williamson

and Ruth Mann, kneeling together by candlelight at their bedside and praying before climbing into their bed. I was in a separate bed in the same room, recovering from some childhood illness.

The way I sometimes describe my feelings about religion is to refer to Wm. Blake's reply to Crabb Robinson when asked him about the divinity of Jesus, '*He is the only God ...and so am I and so are you*'. Another version of this is a friend's reminder that we have to consider the need to save Christ from the church. My interpretation of this involves extracting from the Gospel record the reported words of Christ that match the revelation of the me-free being. For example: ' *dwell in me as I in you*' and '*the father and I are One*'. It is perhaps also necessary to accept the word God as an appropriate synonym for Being itself, something that seems to be quite widely acknowledged in certain fields of Christianity.

However, this aspect of the faith was not part of the curriculum to which I was exposed as a young lad. Nor is it to be found in the message generally presented to worshippers by the Church today. Nevertheless, I consider that the feelings which give rise to my ongoing interest in what I consider to be the message of Christ and which I think prompts the sense in many people of a need to express this feeling in worship, is something fundamental. Traherne asks "are you not drawn to some great thing?" It is this which I think inspires my four 'guides' to draw on Meister Eckhart.

At this point I remembered Thomas Metzinger, in his interview with Michael Taft, recalling an experience in his kitchen one day. He was in a rush which meant he was too late to fit in his regular meditation. Suddenly, he realised his concern was unjustified and replaced by a realisation that the whole kitchen was in a state of meditation. (See <https://www.capacitie.org/content/now/Now202.pdf>). I recall that Metzinger found the Harding experiments very effective but that he couldn't go along with what he referred to as Douglas's metaphysics. I didn't understand the reason for this reservation as the Metzinger and Harding metaphysics seems very similar. This thought prompted me to return to AI with the same question for Metzinger:

Does Thomas Metzinger ever refer to or quote Meister Eckhart?

AI Overview: Yes. Thomas Metzinger frequently refers to and quotes Meister Eckhart, particularly in his later work bridging contemplative traditions and cognitive science.

*In his book *The Elephant and the Blind* (available via [MIT Press Direct](#)), Metzinger directly quotes Eckhart to analyze "Minimal Phenomenal Experience" (MPE)—the maximally simple, content-free form of consciousness.*

He discusses Eckhart's concepts in a few key ways:

The Ground of the Soul: Metzinger explores Eckhart's concept of the Seelengrund (the ground of the soul) and draws parallels between Eckhart's mystical writings and modern neuro-phenomenological data on pure awareness. [1, 2]

Quoting "Istigkeit": Metzinger has historically discussed Eckhart's idea of Istigkeit ("is-ness" or "pure being"), using it to frame deep phenomenological states and critically evaluating the ethical implications of achieving these states. [1, 2]

The "I-less" State: Metzinger cites Eckhart as a prime historical example of an individual who maintained an active, functional life while experiencing "ego-dissolution"—a state where the brain operates without activating the "agent self" or ego. [1]

Eckhart serves as a major bridge for Metzinger, showing how insights from 14th-century mysticism align with modern scientific and philosophical attempts to understand pure consciousness.

What, in brief, did Meister Eckhart say to justify this deep contemporary interest?

Yes, whilst [Meister Eckhart](#) did not use the exact modern English word "awareness," he taught that the core of the soul and the essence of God are identical in pure knowing and "Isness". He famously expressed this non-dual view of divine perception in his German sermons.

Key Teachings and Statements

Isness: He stated, "Isness is God" (istikeit ist got), explaining that wherever "isness" or pure being is expressed, God is present.

The Divine Eye: He declared, "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love".

The Ground of the Soul: He taught that deep within human consciousness lies an uncreated "ground" or "spark" of the soul that shares in the pure clarity of the divine prior to thought. [1, 2]

Alan : What the people I have quoted all have in common is the recovery of an aspect of life which is almost invariably lost in living and which Eckhart presents as the *Isness of Being* and a realignment of identity with the wholeness of life.

Heidegger: Waiting, not waiting 'for' but waiting 'on' with the resulting immersion as "meditative thinking".

Gebser: His neologisms of Presentation, and Verition as revealing the 'Ever Present Origin' are his attempt to convey the essential presence.

Harding: Realisation of the 'Aware Space Here'

Barfield. Original participation.

In conclusion I wondered about Whitehead as I have returned to him from time to time. According to AI he has not drawn on Eckhart but I think he understood what this is about as demonstrated in the following:

From 'Modes of Thought' by Alfred North Whitehead, p. 163 of the essay 'Nature Alive'

..... Let us ask what is the function of the external world for the stream of experience which constitute the soul. This world, thus experienced, is the basic fact within those experiences. All the emotions, and purposes, and enjoyments, proper to the individual existence of the soul are nothing other than the soul's reactions to this experienced world which lies at the base of the soul's existence.

Thus in a sense, the experienced world is one complex factor in the composition of many factors constituting the essence of the soul. **We can paraphrase, this shortly by saying that in one sense the world is in the soul.**

But there is an antithetical doctrine balancing this primary truth. Namely, our experience of the world involves the exhibition of the soul itself as one of the components within the world. Thus there is a dual aspect to the relationship of an occasion of experience as one relatum and the experienced world as another relatum. The world is included within the occasion in one sense, and the occasion is included in the world in another sense. **For example, I am in the room, and the room is an item in my present experience. But my present experience is what I now am.**

But this baffling antithetical relation extends to all the connections which we have been discussing. For example, consider the enduring self-identity of the soul. The soul is nothing else than the succession of my occasions of experience, extending from birth to the present moment. Now, at this instant, I am the complete person embodying all these occasions. They are mine. On the other hand, it is equally true that my immediate occasion of experience, at the present moment, is only one among the stream of occasions which constitutes my soul. Again, the world for me is nothing else than how the functionings of my body present it for my experience. The world is thus wholly to be discerned within those functionings. Knowledge of the world is nothing else than an analysis of the functionings. And yet, on the other hand, the body is merely one society of functionings within the universal society of the world. We have to construe the world in terms of the bodily society, and the bodily society in terms of the general functionings of the world.

Thus, as disclosed in the fundamental essence of our experience, the togetherness of things involves some doctrine of mutual immanence. In some sense or other, this community of the actualities of the world means that each happening is a factor in the nature of every other happening. After all, this is the only way in which we can understand notions habitually employed in daily life. From *Nature and Life* by A N Whitehead

Dear Fellow Attendees, Here is the poem I mentioned on Thursday. I had already sent it to Andrew in response to an assignment he gave me. At the time I was digesting messages from two former attendees at our Chatswood meetings which both offered recommended reading and/or listening to material explaining the 'true way' as it appears to the two friends. It made me realise that whatever it is that underlies our everyday mind it seems to turn up in different expressions, as an individualised revelation as it were. I wondered if it is this aspect of our exploration that prompted the Rilke poem below the 'different God(s) made plain'. No answer required. Just thinking aloud. Alan

From The Book of Hours—Rilke

The day is coming when from God the Tree
a bough unlike that over Italy
in summer-ripe annunciation shall glisten;
here in a country where the people listen,
and everyone is solitary like me.

For only solitaires shall behold
the mysteries, and many of that mould
far more than any narrow one shall gain.
For each shall see a different God made plain,
till they acknowledge, near to crying,
that through their so diverse descrying,
through their affirming and denying,
unitingly diversifying,
one God rolls ever-flowingly.

This the conclusive hymn shall be
which then the seers will be singing:
Fruit out of God the Root is springing,
go, smash those bells that you were ringing;
we've reached that quieter season, bringing
the hour to full maturity.
Fruit out of God the Root is springing.
Be grave and see.

I have often wondered whether the, bough over Italy, is the Church of Rome.

The Two 'Wills' Leonard Cohen

In response to the Rilke poem Andrew sent me this piece by Leonard Cohen

“Well, we sense that there is a will that is behind all things, and we’re also aware of our own will, and it’s the distance between those two wills that creates the mystery that we call religion. It is the attempt to reconcile our will with another will that we can’t quite put our finger on, but we feel is powerful and existent. It’s the space between those two wills that creates our predicament.

Somehow, in some way, we have to be a reflection of the will that is behind the whole mess. When you describe the outer husk of that will which is yours, which is your own tiny will – in all things mostly to succeed, to dominate, to influence, to be the king – when that will under certain conditions destroys itself, we come into contact with another will which seems to be much more authentic. But to reach that authentic will, our little will has to undergo a lot of battering. And it’s not appropriate that our little will should be destroyed too often because we need it to interact with all the other little wills.

From time-to-time things arrange themselves in such a way that that tiny will is annihilated, and then you’re thrown back into a kind of silence until you can make contact with another authentic thrust of your being. And we call that prayer when we can affirm it. It happens rarely, but it happens in Book of Mercy (another psalm like book Cohen published in 1984), and that’s why I feel it’s kind of to one side, because I don’t have any ambitions towards leading a religious life or a saintly life or a life of prayer. It’s not my nature. I’m out on the street hustling with all the other wills. But from time to time, you’re thrown back to the point where you can’t locate your tiny will, where it isn’t functioning, and then you’re invited to find another source of energy.”- Leonard Cohen.

A Note on Feynman

Comparing the Feynman talk with what I understand in relation to my Krishnamurti interests, I think he wants to explore what is real in a spirit of gratitude for being and suggests that his aim will be thwarted if we expect that success in this endeavour would result in an accumulation of information promoting me to a higher level of knowing. On the contrary, he suggests, I need to learn to fall in love with not knowing and how to carry the questions not the so-called answers. He warns that confident certainty about these matters is a sure sign of missing the point.

As to what the necessary action might be he talks about reverence for what is by looking longer, curiosity about what’s next, interconnecting with the occasion instead of skating over the circumstances as ‘already seen’ ‘already heard’ etc., and thereby overlooking the immediacy of everyday being. To realise the importance of not-knowing, not as a form of

ignorance but in understanding the impossibility of converting what is revealed in direct experience as knowledge as opposed to 'presence'..

He says he is sympathetic to religion as an attempt to grapple with what matters most and says 'a faith that cannot bear questioning is not worth having'. However, he describes himself as an atheist. I always think of atheism as another belief system and consequently itself a form of knowing.

On the question of God it seems to me that it is best to consider what that word is pointing to, if it is to a superhuman somebody in a heavenly abode then I cannot go along with such a belief, or with any religion that holds to such notions. However, there are religions which think of God in terms of 'what is' for example the Bhagavad Gita:

He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is, immortal in the field of mortality – he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others: then he goes indeed to the highest Path. He who sees that all work, everywhere, is only the work of nature; and that the Spirit watches. Bhagavad Gita 13:27-29

Here is another Advaita Vedanta saying which strikes a chord:

Yes, this love which is the joy of the Infinite, the ananda of Brahman, this love that is God, is here and now.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad Bhrigu Varuni asks his father to explain to him the mystery of Brahman, the mystery of the universe. His father speaks to him of the earth and the food of the earth, of life and the breath of life, of the mind and of reason, and of consciousness behind reason and mind.

In the end Bhrigu Varuni saw the Truth expressed in these words sublime:

....and then he saw that Brahman was joy, for from joy all beings have come, by joy they all live, and unto joy they all return. God is love, and love is joy. All the universe has come from love and unto love all things return.

Could that be true, after all it is just words. However, based on the approach demonstrated in Feynman's talk, it is the wrong question, and the right question might be simply 'does it resonate with experience'? How does it feel? As to the relevance of all this to Krishnamurti's teaching we have his affirmation in his claim that 'what is' is sacred' and his views on 'the ending of time' as two of a number of parallels.

Alan Mann

A Note on Bernardo Kastrup 1

Think of it as the inner attitude we adopt—or rather, slide spontaneously into—in the presence of very material religious symbols, such as the statues and paintings in a church or temple, and even the building itself: something subtle changes within us, even if we rationally reject the significance of the symbols. Our inner chatter gives way to a degree of silence and solemnity, a spontaneous readiness to abide in a field of meaning. We become more alert, although without any particular focus of attention. Our consciousness shifts to a more receptive state, as if we were trying to hear the silent whispers of the symbols, the message of the represented behind the material representations."

The thing is, all matter—not just religious symbols—can have this same effect on us, if only we adopt a receptive attitude to it. The whole physical world can become an endless field of meaning, whispering its secrets to those who pay attention. This is the potential power of matter in the Western mind. Unlike some Middle-Eastern traditions, in which iconography is often discouraged or forbidden for the sake of unmediated access to transcendence, we are inherently predisposed to sensing the represented through the representation, thereby intuiting the extra dimension of meaning that provides depth to all material objects.

I've become explicitly aware of this thanks to two personal traits discovered late in my life: my attraction to churches—which, for the longest time, I attributed to an innocuous interest in their architecture, but which I now know to reflect a deeper disposition in me, despite my not having had a religious upbringing—and my passion for restoring old computers."

(from "The Daimon and the Soul of the West: Finding identity, meaning, and purpose in a sacrificial life" by "Bernardo Kastrup").

Bernardo Kastrup

The final paragraph on the response to the 'feeling' of churches reflects my own responses and a lifetime passion for English Parish churches, although any church experience tends to activate this response. Alan.

A Note on Bernardo Kastrup 2

It is almost impossible to describe the duality of being I try to explain from time to time, it is a case of experience or nothing. However, in reading Bernardo Kastrup's autobiography and thinking about it whilst lying in bed last night I realised Bernardo was struggling to communicate what I believe to be exactly what we were discussing at the Loaves and Fishes. (A small group of us recently enjoyed lunch there) As a bonus he refers to the Barfield book which I have here and with which I have had an unsuccessful struggle. I have extracted this relevant section from the Kastrup book, he says:

"Somehow, the Western mind can see magic in mere things, thereby falling in love with them. We continue to intuit what, according to Owen Barfield, early humans quite spontaneously did too: namely, that *...there stands behind the phenomena, and on the other side of them from me, a represented which is of the same nature as me. Whether it is called 'mana,' or by the names of gods and demons, or God the Father, or the spirit world, it is of the same nature as the perceiving self, inasmuch as it is not mechanical or accidental, but psychic and voluntary.* (Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry, Barfield Press, 2011, page 42)

In other words: we see magic in things—the “phenomena” of the world, in Barfield's language—because we intuit that they represent a reality of the same nature as ourselves. Just as “behind” our material body there stand the thoughts and feelings of a person, so “behind” material things—which are made of the same types of elementary particles and fields that make up our body—there stands the inner life of a non-personal, non-individuated field of subjectivity. Underneath appearances, the world is our kin: it represents an underlying reality as alive as us, with its own intrinsic qualities and meaning. Although metaphysical materialism has largely driven this notion out of our intellect, it remains alive and vibrant in the deeper, intuitive, feeling-toned layers of our Western mind, covertly but powerfully modulating how we relate to the material world."

(from "The Daimon and the Soul of the West: Finding identity, meaning, and purpose in a sacrificial life" by "Bernardo Kastrup").

Alan again, that's as close to a meaningful description as I am likely to get but the experience itself is always at hand. And some of us find headlessness provides us with an opening to that impersonal perspective.

The Inheritance

Bart opened the front door, picked up the case and stood there for a moment, looking at the carpet. Finally, he called out a thin “Bye”, and stepped outside, pulling the door shut after him.

Blinking back tears, Pearl walked purposefully towards the kitchen and the remains of the lunch she and Bart had shared, and sat down on the only kitchen chair with a cushion.

Now that he had gone, she was feeling pain in unexpected places. She poured herself a cup of tepid tea and tried to feel some of the relief she hoped would flow from her husband's departure. He had been even less communicative than usual for weeks, even months – ever since he began going to those self-awareness courses. She knew he met a few women who found him attractive, in spite of the fact that he wasn't young, but all the facilitators' exhortations to group participants to work out what they wanted in life and then go for it, definitely had an effect on him. The trouble was that he wanted an exciting new woman, whoever she might be, and he wanted Pearl as well.

This morning, however, Pearl surprised herself and Bart by shouting that she was sick of him mooning around the house and begged him for God's sake to go and do what he needed to do. Bart, disconcerted, nevertheless knew that this was his chance, and after they had a perfunctory discussion about a three month separation and a date to reconnect was agreed on, he put a few clothes and his laptop in a case and then ate a tuna sandwich Pearl made for him. She never doubted that after three months Bart would come to his senses and they would be back together.

The three months dragged interminably for Pearl, especially as Christmas fell in the middle of it, but they kept their word not to contact each other and, on the days, when Pearl was feeling particularly down, she was buoyed by the thought that in another few weeks Bart would be back, sheepish, but convinced that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. She, for her part, would work very hard at being a good wife and Bart would be pleased. She even allowed herself to consider some of the conditions she might place on him when he returned, such as each of them having their own credit card. Bart could be funny about money.

After three months, at the appointed time, Bart arrived back at the house in a taxi. Buttoning his new sports jacket and telling the driver to wait, he marched up the front path to the porch where Pearl stood waiting, and told her that he was moving out for good. He was sorry, he said, but he was in love with someone else. There were things they needed to discuss of course, but they could make a date to do that and he would collect his belongings then. Pearl, too stunned to speak, noticed that the fringes of greyish hair around his balding pate were dyed orange. "I'll give you a call," Bart said, before turning and walking quickly down the path to the waiting taxi.

In the months that followed, Bart came to the house from time to time, always by appointment, to pick up some of his belongings. Pearl dreaded these occasions, promising herself she would remain dignified and unprovoked in his company but the visit always ended with her sobbing and screaming. Once she threw a cup of hot tea at him. She told friends that she might be persuaded to take Bart back, but there would have to be some changes. Her friends smiled sympathetically. Bart, meanwhile, showed no signs of regret or remorse for dumping his wife, and six months to the day from his shocking ultimatum, their big house was put on the market. Pearl, with the help of

friends, found herself a small unit near public transport and shops. She paid for it with half the proceeds from the sale of the house. Bart made it clear that she wouldn't be getting any of the money his mother left him because that was his inheritance, despite the fact that he couldn't stand his mother and frequently over the years, before his mother died, it was Pearl who responded to her cries for help when she was ill.

For ten years after Bart left, Pearl lived alone, although she always said she expected to find a partner. Occasionally she saw Bart at family gatherings but these meetings, while civil, were usually stiff and awkward. She knew from her children that he was living with a younger woman called Jessie, but she neither sought nor was told details about his life, until she received a phone call one evening and learned that Bart had fallen out of bed in the middle of the previous night and died a few hours later, from an aneurysm.

Bart's new partner, Jessie, said in her eulogy that it had been especially difficult to leave the hospital and return to the house she and Bart shared, to find the unfinished crossword on the table from the night before and Bart's clothes slung over the back of a chair where he left them when he went to bed. She expected him to walk in the door, take off his old gardening hat and put the kettle on. Such a lovely man, she continued, he would spend hours with my mother in the nursing home, listening to her demented ramblings. I couldn't sit with her, but he could, and she adored him.

Jessie's son, Sam, also spoke at the funeral. He said "Mum had been single for some years when I persuaded her to put an advertisement in a small Sydney paper whose production I was involved with. This was about eleven years ago, after Pearl and Bart separated. We wrote something like "Wanted: kind older man, young at heart, interested in music, literature and bushwalking who is not afraid to do the dishes and take out the garbage." I remember we laughed at the time, and then I think we both forgot about it. There were one or two replies eventually, including one from Bart."

A couple of months before Bart died, Pearl agreed to a divorce. Bart and Jessie were planning a trip overseas and wanted to get married to facilitate travel arrangements. Pearl signed the divorce papers and mailed them back to Bart. Some weeks later, she received a document indicating that she was Bart's widow and she realized that he had died before the divorce could be declared legal. In fact Bart, who had always been in denial about old age and death, died intestate, and Pearl and the children were declared the heirs to his estate.

Pearl bought a small house with a garden. At Bart's funeral she renewed acquaintance with an old family friend and discovered that he lived in the same suburb. They married the following year and embarked on a protracted overseas trip.

Margot Mann