It had been more than 30 hours since his last sleep – a sleep that had been on the other side of the world. His head rested against the window of the bus, his eyes staring at the passing scenery, his mind miles away. It had been ten years since he last saw the land in which he had been raised, and that his father called home. The squeal of the brakes broke his reverie as he realised he had reached his destination. The bus lurched to a halt as he rose, picking up the small overnight bag of belongings and headed to the front of the bus. Halfway down the aisle a hand reached out and touched his arm, halting him. He looked down to see a familiar face, old Mrs Bamforth.

‘Good to see you again Warren. Are you home for long?’

‘Thanks Mrs B – just long enough to sort a few things out. Good to see you as well’ he replied.

‘Mind how you go then son’ Mrs B smiled, squeezing his arm gently.

He stood by the side of the road as the bus moved off in a cloud of dust, gears grinding.
The old dog sat in his usual spot under the shade of the eucalypt next to the letter box – a small drum nailed to the top of a post, ears flicking as the flies, looking for a place to settle, buzzed around his head. The dog stood up and shook the dust from his coat as he recognized the visitor. Together they set off down the long dusty drive that eventually led to the homestead, the dog slowly trotting on arthritic legs, trying to keep up.

He climbed the steps to the verandah, pulling the fly screen door open, knowing the place wouldn’t be locked. The dog disappeared around to the back of the house as he made his way inside, dropping the bag in the hallway. The kitchen, always the hub of family life when he was growing up, was now empty. He took a glass from the cupboard and poured himself some water from tap at the sink, downing it in a few gulps. Looking through the window over the sink he saw the old garden bench near the edge of the property, the lone figure of his father seated there, the dog now alongside, both looking out over the small cliff to a relentless sea that separated the island from the mainland in the distance.

He approached the bench and sat quietly beside his father, noticing the face that had weathered to tell a lifetime of hardship, paper thin skin over prominent veins on brown gnarled hands. His father still looked resolutely out to sea through rheumy eyes. There were a million things that he wanted to tell his father, but they sat in silence, a silence of communion that spoke of love and a deep understanding – a silence where words were not necessary – all three listening to the sounds of eternal waves washing against a shore that changed minimally with each passing year.

The sound of an approaching car caught his attention – he reached out to touch and reassure his father but hesitated. They were both men, one old, one not so old - the bond was taken for granted.

He headed back to the homestead and found his father’s carer Annie, in the kitchen. She approached him and gave him a hug, tears forming in her eyes. She held him at arm’s length.

‘I’m glad you’ve come home Warren, and I’m sorry you couldn’t be here for your father’s final days. I *can* tell you that he did go peacefully. It’s a shame you couldn’t talk to him one last time’

He looked through the kitchen window to the now empty seat at the end of the garden.

‘That’s ok Annie, strangely enough, I did get to see him one last time’