

Out of Time

The life of Keith Vaughan (1912 – 1977)
in his own words

Adapted and dramatised by
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For Simon Callow, an actor of blood and fire

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ACT ONE: 10th March 1976. Keith Vaughan, painter, is going through his mother's effects following her recent death, aged 95. Also a rostrum, a chair and table on the rostrum, with diary and pens. Under it, a bottle of wine and a glass. Back projection. SLIDE: Antonuo and Sebastian MUSIC: Of the 1920s. VAUGHAN is looking through a book of photographs – or a porno magazine. Sighs. To audience.)

When I was thirteen and a half or fourteen, I had my first love affair with a boy my own age. His name was John. It was completely innocent, and an extension of our friendship. We coined the term 'love-like' for the feeling, and abbreviated it to 'L.L.' We would pass each other notes, 'Do you feel L.L.?' If the answer was yes, we would go out independently to the lavatory. There we would meet, touch, embrace, kiss each other tenderly and passionately on the lips. We slept next to each other in the dormitory and would draw our beds surreptitiously close enough together so that by reaching out an arm we could hold hands and occasionally touch each other's shoulders or breasts. We never touched our sexual parts, not so far as I am aware, nor thought of doing so. Sex was something totally different. It was very wicked and boys got expelled for it. This was a literal sentence of death, since everyone assumed that for an expelled boy, life was finished. My mother, my dear domineering mother, still here and still a millstone at 93, would also make this wickedness this perfectly clear to me. But we continued these amorous contacts for about a year without the faintest trace of guilt or concealment.

John came to stay in the holidays. There were two beds in my room. The other I imagine must have been my brother Dick's, who was away at school. For a long time John sat on the edge of my bed in his pyjamas talking. By this time I had got to the point of quite openly caressing his back and

shoulders, in a manly way. Probably we were talking about friendship which made the caress permissible. I longed and longed to pull him down against me and kiss him but dared not. And still he sat and still I stroked. Suddenly he leant over, kissed me full on the mouth, said goodnight, and crossed the room and got into bed. Such a torment of bliss swept through me that I lay dazed and unable to speak for several minutes. What had happened was beyond belief and beyond hope. It was the first time I had kissed anyone with sexual desire. I was transported. He felt the same as I did. The sense of fulfilment, satisfaction and deep peace lasted several minutes. I wanted nothing more. I wanted to get up and go over to him but dared not risk ruining what seemed perfect.

By rapid stages we got to spending most weekends together and slept always in the same bed. So pure was our love than the very thought of masturbation was unthinkable. Homosexuality was unknown to either of us. There was no knowledge that we were behaving differently from others, except that our friendship was the most perfect and consummate friendship that had ever been. We began touching and caressing but never to the point of orgasm. We deliberately tested the purity of our love by seeing how much it could stand.

But the day came when he could resist no longer. That our love could descend to such depths of bestiality shocked us both. From that evening on our love declined but our sexual appetites grew in the warm manure of guilt and gratification. He said one night, 'If only you were a woman there would be some sense in doing this.' The words filled me with such utter despair that I cried on his shoulder. It was precisely because neither of us was a woman that gave the relationship to me its particular joy.

My first affair set a standard which I found difficult to reach ever after. Many opportunities which later offered themselves for sexual relations with obvious homosexuals I rejected out of hand as being unworthy of the memory of John. As a result I find myself in my twenty-seventh year quite alone, with no very great liking for life, without much ambition for the things most people pursue, but simply a dumb and mule-like persistence in continuing the struggle.

SLIDE: Soldiers bathing

MUSIC: Vaughan Williams Lark Ascending (middle)

I discovered in 1936 the marvellous bathing ponds of Highgate, with their permanent exhibition of genitalia. I became a regular visitor. One afternoon I saw a smooth skinned blond haired boy who was doing handstands. He noticed me and came over smiling and ready to talk. He took my breath away. His voice, his looks, body were radiant and impeccable. I invited him back to tea. He blushed scarlet, accepted, but insisted on rushing home on his bike to change. A working class boy was flattered by such an invitation but only able to accept after special preparation. I could not invite such people into my mother's flat without extenuating circumstances. But on this occasion the flat was empty and I walked home over the heath through the slanting golden sunset with a radiant white-shirted boy pushing a racing bike by my side. I was enchanted beyond measure. His virginal innocence kept me at a distance, but our parting handshake carried the maximum sexual charge it was possible to convey.

SOUND: Vaughan Williams Sinfonia Antarctica 3rd Movt

August 1939: We wait still; war or peace. Sand everywhere. The weight of London must be increasing steadily by hundreds of tons an hour. The Heath

is blighted by a plague of bull-dozers, their grinning steel faces burrowing into the sand like diabolical ostriches. The boys look proud and confident in their sleek blue uniforms posing gracefully on the backs of the new grey fire engines. They wave and are happy. They are part of something, vital and important. And how absurdly easy. Just call at the office and sign your name and immediately you're somebody instead of nobody. The diabolical deception of war. I have joined the St John Ambulance.

(SLIDE: Working Party SOUND: VW 4th Symphony Opening)

June 1940: The stretchers were held up level against the bunks and the men coaxed, like animals, to brave the crossing on to their steel meshes. They dragged across those parts of their bodies they were able, the rest we carried for them, grotesque shapes of wool and splint and bandage, joined to them only by pain. Some moved suddenly and clumsily, hoping to make the journey before pain had observed their going. Others, like children impatient to show their ability, would begin lowering themselves gleefully before we were ready, their white woolly feet swinging down everywhere from the white ceiling.

In the bunk near the door was a mild, timid youth of eighteen or nineteen, with thick lenses roped to his face with black string. He was a German. His eyes followed each stretcher, a smile behind his lips ready to be released at the first hint of friendliness. We took the boy from the bunk above him.

He was so pale that it seemed to be only a pair of eyes that looked at us from the white pillow. When he saw we were coming for him he turned his face away quickly. We asked him if he could ease himself across a bit. He tried and couldn't and looked miserably at us.

"It's his leg, poor laddie," the nurse said, and gave him a quick little pat and a smile. We drew back the blankets and saw that his arms finished at the wrists in two logs of stained wool and bandage. His right leg was a shapeless embalmment of bandages, and lay supported on pillows. He worked himself across slowly on his elbows, balancing the pain precariously to his endurance while we gathered up the leg gently to being with him. He moved a little way and then froze suddenly rigid and we lowered the leg quickly on to the pillows. He lay back a moment with closed eyes and lips trembling in despair. Then drawing together the last fibres of courage, forced himself too quickly on to the stretcher, so that the leg twisted in our arms and broke open his face into silent tears. We reached for the pillows quickly, to take the weight of the leg, but the nurse came up.

"Put those back, please. No pillows to leave the train." We looked at her helplessly, holding the bones and flesh and bandage in our arms. "Sorry, it's an order." She picked up his kit bag and neatly patted its lumpiness into place where the pillows should be, "There, try that." Her cuffs clicked with authority.

Obediently we lowered the leg, knowing it was cruelty. But he had no strength to protest. Pain too long endured bent him backwards like a strung bow, fretting his face with sweat. We covered him up, miserably. There were others waiting.

That July, I went on a painting holiday to Devon. I wrote: A soldier sits opposite you in the train, his eyes turned sadly on the green country slipping past. His rifle slips forward all the time and has to be pulled back. His face young and strong and sad. His mouth always open a little. Lips that were never meant to feel each other. His hands that you keep looking at – big and straight and generous. His body big and strong, harnessed over like a circus

horse with brass and khaki. You felt you could love him? An impossible yearning to protect him – to put yourself between his clean body and the savage mechanism of destruction. Just to save this one fragment of the earth's springtime from being stamped out utterly. But who are you to think you can interfere? A stranger sitting in a grey flannel suit with the *New Statesman* and a service respirator. A bit of a toff – with suede shoes. "Are you on leave or coming back?" (Not that it matters to you – but it makes a contact, Not a real contact because it is not you speaking but a young toff in grey flannels trying to be pally with one of the fighting boys.)

"Just back. Came from Narvik."

"Oh really? What was it like? Pretty awful?"

"Only there a day. Lay out in the boat for ten days. Got three days leave now. Lucky to be back at all."

"Yes, I expect you are."

Three days leave, then back again. Then you can wipe the sweat off his face when you move him on to the stretcher and his arms are gone.

(SLIDE: HFA 2895. Music VW English Folk Song Suite III)

August 1940: Went to Reading for my Conscientious Objector tribunal today. I had rehearsed many different roles, but in fact it was a complete anticlimax. It all happened so quickly. My name was called first, a minute after I got in. I walked up feeling like the first man to step onto a new continent. The four of them sat on a dais in high backed chairs looking magisterial and untouchable. The president took a copy of my statement and another copy was handed to me. He began to read it out in a flat, expressionless voice, getting the sense wrong in one or two places. I had spent so long writing it

that I knew it by heart, and wondered vaguely whether I was supposed to correct him. When he had finished there was complete silence while the members looked at each other with inscrutable expressions. I steeled myself for the attack. Then the president looked up with a kindly smile and asked very politely, "Do you have any objection to serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps?" I said no, but immediately regretted not saying that I did have objections, yes.

All I seem to have done is to earn the right to join the army without the one thing that would make it attractive – solidarity and companionship.

(SLIDE: October Landscape. MUSIC: VW Norfolk Rhapsody No 1)

September 1940: The situation came about like this: I had come upon a deep square trench which had been dug along the edge of a wood and across the nearby sloping fields. Its sharp geometric lines contrasting with the gentle undulating lines of the landscape interested me and I resolved to make a painting of it. When I got to the site next day a group of soldiers were working on the trench, with a young lieutenant in charge. I asked the lieutenant if it would be all right for me to work there. So I set to work. It was a warm sunny September afternoon.

After half an hour or so a policeman came cycling slowly along. He saw me, seemed rather surprised, and came across. He asked what I was doing, and I explained. His manner was friendly and I imagined he might perhaps be an amateur painter himself. "How long will you be here?" he asked. "About an hour or two," I said. "Don't go away just yet," he said. "I don't intend to," I answered. With that he went off on his bicycle. I noticed that he seemed in a great hurry all of a sudden.

(Music – VW The Wasps)

Half an hour later a small black van came bouncing along the road, stopped suddenly, and three policemen hurried across the field to where I was working. The atmosphere was now quite different. I was ordered to pack up my things and come with them. I protested, argued, explained the situation all over again and was met with stony silence from all three. The order was repeated, Could I not finish the painting? I asked, and then if they wished I would bring it into the police station that evening, and they could see for themselves what I had done. "You're under arrest," they said. "Get your things in the back of the van and look sharp about it."

I was driven to the police station, brought before the sergeant in charge, and charged with making a drawing or photograph in the neighbourhood of defence operations, contrary to section x of the Defence Regulations, I was cautioned, searched, and told I would be held in custody while further investigations were made. I was allowed to keep my tobacco, matches, and a pencil and paper, but my sketchbook, letters, and all personal documents were taken away. I was taken to my cell and locked in.

The first impression of a prison cell is of a defiant and absorbing neutrality. Not only does it isolate you completely from all sound and contact with the human world, but it seems to absorb your own natural vitality and cohesion so that you are left in a state of loneliness so extreme that the binding fluid of your personality is slowly dried out and you begin to fall apart, like heated crystals.

My cell measures about eight feet by six. When the cover of the WC is lowered it forms a table on which food is placed at regular intervals. The table is too low to sit at, and anyhow there is nothing to sit on, except the bed, which is too far away. Every so often someone goes along the corridor and pulls the chains of all the lavatories, since they cannot be flushed from

the inside. There is no window or daylight, but high up in the centre of the ceiling, a single sixty-watt bulb burns continuously night and day. I can hear the hours strike on the church clock, but it is not always easy to know whether it is am or pm.

One of the most distressing things is that although I am only here on remand, everything I do or say is automatically regarded with suspicion and mistrust. It is this incessant suggestion of guilt which undermines one's spirit, and makes one wish one really were guilty of what they suspect.

Slowly the truth of the situation became clear. For weeks the papers had been full of stories of fifth-columnists. They were dropping from the skies dressed as nuns. They were lurking in woods dressed as gamekeepers. They came in crates of bananas. They came in coffins disguised as corpses. And at last they had caught one and at Guildford of all places, disguised as an artist and caught red handed in the act of making a plan of tank trap.

After eight days my case came up, and I was brought before the bench of magistrates. I remember sudden pleasure of seeing the sky and daylight again. Also the surprise of seeing my half finished painting propped up on an easel in the centre of the court, as though it was about to be auctioned. It was the first picture of mine ever to be publicly exhibited.

It was a fairly large canvas and as I had only worked on it for about an hour it was almost completely abstract. It looked rather like a late Cezanne watercolour (or so I hoped). It was scrutinised by each member of the bench in turn. They nodded approval. "I think there can be no question at all what the picture represents," announced the chairman, and the bench agreed. This surprised me. It seemed unusually perceptive. It was not a time when abstract art was popular in the provinces.

"The penalty," said the magistrate, "for the serious offence you have committed can be £100 fine and six months imprisonment." My heart stopped, but my mind clung to the tiny word, "can". "Nevertheless we are prepared to take a lenient view. You will be fined £25 and the picture will be confiscated."

I sometimes wonder what happened to the picture. Does it still decorate some waiting room or canteen in Guildford Police Station? Or does it repose in the Black Museum of Scotland Yard, along with the effects of other convicted criminals?

(SLIDE: Bulmer Tye. MUSIC: VW Job Sc 6)

August 1942: I spent the whole morning painting round the bottom of one of the Nissen huts, and I got up to stretch my back at the moment when a boy was passing down the street on his bicycle. There was nothing else moving in sight, and I watched him pass the short length of the street, approaching, receding, and finally disappear round the corner. I experienced what I can only describe as the reality of the situation. I was aware of a purpose before him, and an impulse behind him, which had combined to set him in motion. I was aware of his existence subjectively in the strain and flexing of muscles, the hardness of saddle and the coolness of handlebars; objectively as a figure in movement against a row of stationary houses; aesthetically as the pattern of his limbs against the geometrical framework of the bicycle. I was aware of his existence in time – about ten seconds, and in space about fifty yards. If one could sustain the welded sensations of that complex moment throughout the time necessary for painting, one might succeed in painting the subject of a boy on a bicycle.

August 1943: Roland Boulanger! My hands still carry the perfume of his skin. The pressed sheets loved the weight and alabaster smoothness of his

limbs. The quite unexpected cleanness and smoothness of thighs and stomach and shoulders. The exact texture of his nipple, like the opalescent inner surface of an oyster. The solitary white pearl set in his navel. Everything was in perfect order; no flaw; no omission. Everything fitted together in the highest quality. And his lips opened at the touch of mine. And he took into himself the place, the bed, the curtains, the moon-lined chairs and tables until it seemed that I no longer had any place or connection with the room at all.

June 1944: Once again the towns and villages of France are being ground and battered to dust and mud. People are being killed with absolute certainty and precision. But people prefer not to be reminded of such things. The thing is Victory, unqualified and unconditional. The human cost, as the financial, is entirely a matter of figures.

Each part of the game is also interchangeable. German prisoners step off the boat at an English port smiling like tourists, waving to the camera men. They have simply moved from one section of the board to another. The game needs an enemy and it needs prisoners. A catastrophe would happen if someone smiled at an enemy or shot a prisoner.

The enemy know they must go on fighting till they lose. Mines and booby traps must be laid and later moved, after blowing off the calculated number of arms and legs. The wounded know they must scream and wait to be picked up. The people who read the papers know they must buy the flags to help the good-looking young men in head bandages. France knows that she must supply marshalling yards to be bombed and wheat fields to be burned; also the map for pins to be stuck into. Churches and houses know they must collapse into rubble suitable for snipers and later on grandstands to view the liberators. A certain percentage of quite innocent people know they must get

in the way of precision bombing. So long as the supply of living people and material resources holds out, there is no reason why the war shouldn't go on indefinitely.

MUSIC: Vaughan Williams 6th Symphony, 4th Movement. SLIDE: Medical Inspections

September 1944: P. is nineteen and the youngest here. He has a fresh face and shy eyes and thick auburn hair. Everything about his face has the appearance of curling slightly upwards like petals - his lips, his eyelashes, and the lock of fine silky hair on his forehead. He sits huddled in the armchair by the stove with his enormous boots in the white ashes. If anyone speaks to him he looks up covered with shyness and smiles. The older men tease and pet him but he only smiles and says nothing.

One day a letter came from his mother. It was written in the painstaking script of a child, the result of several fair copies. She had not heard from him and was anxious.

He is illiterate. It seems that somehow or other the question of teaching him to read and write was overlooked. At fourteen he went to work in a steel works where he had to catch metal sheets as they came off a machine and stack them. Later he cut up scrap metal into convenient sizes for remelting. His documents say "Lacks both intelligence and education. Cannot read or write. Has little ability."

Officially his peacetime job is known as "Scrap Boy". What is to become of scrap boys in the new world after the war? Can they too be melted down to make some useful ingredient?

(SLIDE: Berkshire Landscape MUSIC: Vaughan Williams 5th Symphony, 3rd Movement)

May 7th 1945. VE Day.

The first sign of anything unusual that I noticed was a string of small triangular flags being hoisted up across the road by some workmen. The flags appeared quite suddenly out of the leaf-laden boughs of a chestnut, crossed a patch of sago-coloured sky, and disappeared into the foliage of another tree. They looked surprised to be there. They were not new flags. They had flapped for a jubilee and a coronation and numerous local festivals, and now they seemed to be getting a little tired of it all. They were faded and grubby and washed-out-looking. They hung languidly in the bluish evening air. Further on there was a cottage with two new Union Jacks through out from the window still. They hung down stiffly to attention. Against the mellow sun-bleached texture of the stone their strident colours looked ridiculous, and because they were there on purpose to disturb the quiet and familiar contours, they gave a feeling of uneasiness. From there onwards all the little cottages were sprouting flags.

I crossed the little footbridge and sat down on the stile to smoke a cigarette. The near field was full of sheep. The full woolly forms with sharp accents of light against the dark grass, the alternation between light-coloured sheep and dark ones, small and large, had that air of carefully planned accident which one sometimes sees in paintings but not often in nature. Two sheep had strayed down on to the steep bank of the ditch and were tearing ravenously at the thick, dark water-grass which met over their backs. They had pushed their way through gaps in the hedge and seemed to be expecting at any moment to be driven back. They were gulping as much as they could in the time, their eyes wide with anxiety. Each sheep was eating with a sort of desperate concentration as though it had not seen grass for some time. Some, perhaps because their necks had got stiff, had bent their front legs and were kneeling on their little fluffy knees with their black hoofs tucked up

off the ground so as not to soil them, and their backsides sticking absurdly into the air. They seemed just able to eat and transport their cumbersome genitals and excrete little shiny damp balls of dung from time to time. That was a complete existence.

MUSIC: Vaughan Williams Pastoral Symphony

This, then, I thought, was the beginning of it all. This was perhaps the oldest thing on earth. Before cities and civilisation men had sat and watched sheep graze. In Canaan and Galilee and Salonika and Thrace, on the mountain slopes of Olympus, along all the routes where men had fought and followed, searching for a home and a pasture, sheep had grazed and men had watched them. Daphnis, Hyacinthus, Thyrsis, Corydon, and the famous, anonymous Christmas shepherds of Galilee.

Out of the north a flock of Fortresses came flying high. The slowly-mounting aircraft noise focused the uneasiness in the air. Then I realised that tonight they would not be carrying bombs; the meaning of all the little flags suddenly became real. A sense of absolute security closed over everything.

The sun had gone and over the horizon was left a stain of dried blood. At the camp the German bugler was blowing lights out. The sheep had finished eating and sat with folded feet, looking without concern on the first night of peace.

August 1948: Back from two weeks in France. Sentimental debauch for the most part. Paris, Pigalle, new experiences on the dark side. Obsessed all the time by my baldness and personal unattractiveness. Treasure nevertheless the memory of K. – his debonair grace, his laughter, his easy availability. His fantastic, sordid little room. Stairs, naked lamps, labyrinth of corridors, pitch black, holding his hand like Ariadne stumbling after Theseus. Bugs on the

walls. Sense of adventure sought and found. A pure experience. Blank misery starting at Newhaven.

September 1948: What to do about X? For some time now it has been evident that my relationship with him is entirely one-sided. He costs me anxiety, money, endless patience and loss of time, much heartache and uncomfortable boredom. He lies, cheats and deceives me. Yet his childishness somehow makes everything he does innocent. What binds me to him is his helplessness and unhappiness. No parents, no home, no friends, no age, no proof of his existence at all.

But what exactly is *my* natural way of life? Do the people I would like to know simply not exist? Or do they exist but not here? Or do they exist here and now and I, through some defect in myself, fail to make contact with them?

February 1952: Very enjoyable dinner party with Christopher Isherwood, Johnny Minton and EM Forster. Forster inclined to allow himself to be old – to be humoured. Very likeable but already a little apart from this age. Round like a robin, easily moved to laughter. A once natural zest for life appearing now as a habit. Isherwood rather rasping in speech, sentimental, looking like a dehydrated schoolboy. Enormously interested in the superficialities of life. Forster was the only one who noticed my remarks and appeared to think them worth hearing through to the end. Very nice manners. Significant how often Virginia Woolf was mentioned, rather as the disciples at Emmaus might have talked of the Virgin Mary. One felt a great light had gone out of their lives, and they felt a little lost without her. I can still find no mind today that is really in sympathy with mine. Not, at least, on the deeper levels. Only in the shallows can I splash around with others. It is probably my fault for expecting altogether too much. But I long sometimes,

more than ever, for someone with whom to share the darkness. I would like to know someone for whom one does not immediately start to have to make allowances.

New Year's Eve, 1953: I first saw Johnny on the other side of a bar in Soho, and he saw me, and we held each other's eyes, oblivious to everyone else. We slowly pushed our way through the crowds until we were together. Or do I imagine it? Certainly for me it was a moment of love so intense that everything else was blotted out except his young, strangely nervous, face and the look in his eyes.

June 1959. Mexico. As I was drinking an aperitif and writing outside the Bella Vista this evening, I became aware of a youth leaning against a car on the other side of the road and watching me intently. Each time I looked up he tried to catch my eye. Finally I let him, and we smiled at each other. He came across rather uncertainly and I indicated the empty chair by my table. He sat down. He asked if I was American. When I said I was English he immediately took hold of my hand under the table and laid it on his knee. He was wearing a pink shirt and blue jeans, and was obviously out to kill. He looked about sixteen, but he could have been fourteen or eighteen. He said his name was Miguel. Conversation was not easy as he spoke no English, but it was soon apparent that his Spanish vocabulary was not much larger than mine. We got across with infinitives and hieroglyphs. He had ten brothers and two sisters, all of whose names he told me, all of whom are farmers, and he, the youngest, worked as a sandal-maker in town. Did I like sandals? Yes, but I had some. Would I like another pair? No. But he would make them for me for nothing. Why? Porque te quiero. I look up *querer* in the dictionary and see it means to like or love. (Maddening ambiguity of foreign languages, as if it made no difference.) Have you been to Tepostlan? Very beautiful. I will come with you, I am on holiday.

Saturday. Caught the morning bus with my "guide" for Tepostlan. His name is not Miguel but Raul. The reason he gave me a false name is impossible to decipher, but it seemed not to matter as our relationship is not exactly an intellectual one. The bus we went in had little painted curtains with tassels round the windscreen and a little plaster Madonna inside, lit from beneath with a red lamp. There were also bouquets of lilies in the corners. During the journey we either held hands or he linked his arm through mine and pulled gently at the hairs on my fore-arm. His own skin is smoked velvet colour and as soft as chamois. Hairy arms must strike him as very exotic. About every twenty minutes he would ask, *Que Pensas?* Difficult enough to reply to in any language, and if I stopped smiling for a moment, just to relax the muscles – *Es triste*.

We had lunch in a rather grand posada. Apart from the waiters, he was the only other Mexican. There was no easy conversation to help out. Impossible to tell exactly what he is thinking. His expression one moment is childish, the next it is filled with a sad compassionate understanding which is ageless and timeless. I can understand almost nothing of what he says, though he understand my stumbling Spanish, which makes him laugh. It was obvious we were a source of interest to several tables, but not, I thought, disapprovingly. Their amused curiosity was what might be shown to someone who had brought in a large and picturesque poodle. I felt at any moment someone would get up and stroke him. Also the waiters, I was pleased to note, treated him with the same diffidence and concern that they showed the other guests.

He refused the offer of some money when we got back for his services as a guide – he earns the equivalent of three shillings a day at the sandal-maker – but thanked me gravely for a happy day. Then, looking round quickly to see

that no-one was following, he backed into the shadow of a doorway and took my hand and kissed it, and ran off quickly without looking back.

Sunday. Manana. I waited thirty minutes at the bus stop but he did not turn up. I felt ridiculously put out and jilted. Serve me right. Spent the morning swimming and romping with the New Orleans children in the hotel pool.

Walking through the square after lunch I came upon Raul sitting on one of the white benches and almost in tears. What had happened? He had missed the bus in from Amacuzac and had to wait for the next one. But I thought you lived in the town? No, he lived in Amacuzac. I looked it up on my map. It is about 35 kilometres away, He had asked for me at the hotel but old Penario, the patron, had told him I had left. All this took half an hour to discover with the aid of dictionaries, pencil and paper, three-dimensional diagrams of match boxes, twigs, pebbles, and the usual deaf and dumb gestures. At the end he seems more cheerful. Something to eat? No thank you. I have a stomach ache. He pulls up his T-shirt to show me the place. Just there. He takes my hand and puts it against the spot. I take it away. I am not used to stroking a smooth brown belly in public. "*No, te enoyas?*" he asks suddenly. More work with dictionary and pencil and paper. "Am I annoying you?" No, Raul. No. But it's impossible to explain. We have to settle it with smiles and a gentle touching of fingers. I give Raul some anti-vioformo tablets for his stomach. He gives me a quick hug and a kiss.

Tuesday. For me the whole of Mexico now became focused in Raul and our strange silent relationship. There was no point in visiting monuments from the past when I had the companionship of the living present. So I cancelled my plans and each morning except Sunday, which was for God and his family, I would meet the bus from Amacuzac and we would set off somewhere of his choosing. If it was fine we would take a picnic and bathing things and go to some place where we could swim. When it was cloudy we

would swim in the hotel pool, have lunch and take a siesta afterwards. With effort we might exchange ten sentences of conversation in the course of a day. For hours on end we would say nothing, and neither of us was bored. Each day he brought with him some books, usually a simple English primer or school grammar, and would sit entranced while I would read to him the banal English phrases which he did not understand. Then he would read to me the parts in Spanish. He would sleep a little, cradled in my arms. And then always there came a moment towards the time of parting when his laughter and gaiety would suddenly die out and he would take my hand carefully in his two hands, as though I was a child, and gaze long and silently into my eyes while his own filled with tears until he could see no more, and crushed his face against my shoulder.

The last afternoon before I left, while we were dressing in the hotel after a bathe, I slipped a 100-peso note into his shirt pocket and begged him to keep it. *Quisiera te dar esto*, a phrase I had carefully rehearsed for the occasion. He had accepted no money from me all week and refused even to allow me to pay his fare home each evening. He said nothing, nodded acceptance as though in shame, then slipped slowly to the floor and abandoned himself to sobbing at the foot of the bed. I became involved in his grief. Not normally given to crying, I was surprised how painful it was to produce tears. Tears not of grief at parting, but of defeat and bewilderment at the pain I had caused. It was as though I had beaten him to the ground and thrown him away. And as soon as he saw my distress he forgot his own and was concerned only with comforting and drying my swollen eyes. We stood together in the bright afternoon light, and the buzzing of insects for what seemed an eternity of meaningless grief. When it was over and I had finished packing he said quite simply, as though it had been obvious all along: "When you go, I shall have nothing."

29th June, New York. Raul in Amacuzac. Three or four times a day his memory returns with such force that it shatters the present reality. I stand stock still in the middle of the sidewalk. People must think I am mad, but they don't show it. The ridiculous pricking of tears behind the eyes. But it is like trying to keep in sight a toy kite which has drifted away in the wind. Its isolation and loneliness increases, but at the same time it becomes more and more difficult to identify until in the end its very existence is in doubt.

What will become of you, Raul? Trapped in your huge family of farmers, you escaped as far as the nearest city and met me. Despite the vast distance of background, race, language and age there was something which brought us together in compassionate understanding. Your hands, like the petals of a flower warmed by the sun, seemed to give life to everything they touched; never searching or grasping by touching in confidence and trust.

I offered the promise of something fabulous beyond the horizon, and then forsook you. You accepted without complaint. You shook hands quietly outside the cathedral, said goodbye in English in a voice which was scarcely audible above the noise of traffic, then turned away before the tears broke, and walked up the hill without looking back. Beneath your smooth cheeks are the lines of someone already old who knows his fate. *No te olvidar nunca.* 'I will not forget you. Never.'

13th May 1960: The Home Secretary told Mr Abse (Labour, Pontypool) in the Commons yesterday that he regretted to say that two youths, aged seventeen and nineteen, were sexually assaulted by two cell-mates aged twenty. A third boy aged seventeen was also assaulted by one of the assailants in an attempt to commit an indecency. And I am supposed, like any 'decent' member of society, to throw up my hands in outraged horror? Well, I don't. I can think of nothing less shocking or harmful to anyone than

five boys in a prison cell passing the time in a little vigorous and enjoyable sexual combat. I have yet to meet a man who was sexually assaulted as a youth, and is honest enough to admit it, who does not recall the occasion with pleasure and gratitude. When will adults get a sense of reality about these things? Do they not know that boys 'sexually assault' each other all the time, just for kicks?

June 1960: Anniversary of my meeting with Raul. His memory hangs close over the days. His letters arrive about once a fortnight. Each airmail stamp costs him half a day's pay. Each letter says almost exactly the same thing. He tells me nothing about himself, what he is doing, but fills the page in his elegant script with a long unpunctuated mis-spelt lament in Spanish which takes me hours to decipher, though now I am beginning to know the phrases by heart. I have to reply at once, otherwise another expressed letter will arrive a few days later, demanding to know what has happened to me. And I have to reply in the same vein with the same phrases since the only Spanish I learnt was with him. Thus the unreality of the relationship is assured. I have gone. I have abandoned him, and his impossible dreams. What else could I do? It is all that I know. It is all that I am.

No te olvidaré nunca. 'I will not forget you. Never.'

(MUSIC. Lights fade. INTERVAL)

ACT TWO: Alone in his own part of the house, later in 1976, reading back from his own diaries.

October 1961: Life, as biological existence, is grossly over-valued. No one is the worse for not being born. The aged, crippled and insane are forbidden to die, even if it means lying for years flat on your back in a metal box. They are not even asked. Only the young and vigorous may die and kill each other – under State orders, of course.

I would advocate voluntary extermination camps (Eternal Rest Hostels) for those who felt they'd had enough. Free alcohol and crunchy, sugar coated narcotics. There should be as much rejoicing and family congratulations over an elderly suicide as there is over new born birth – "Good old granny, I hear she's *made room*."

It's no good expecting Nature to keep the balance. She was never very interested in human life. We have deprived her of her classic bacteriological weapons, reserving those for our own use, but lack the nerve to put anything in their place.

December 1961: In painting, we are told that old-fashioned space, perspective, is illusionistic, and therefore 'Out'; whereas cubist space, and even better, non-objective space, is 'real tangible space'. As far as I can see, all space in painting is an illusion, whether it comes forward or goes back. What is real is the flat surface of the picture, and the important thing is what has been painted there. I sometimes think that space is being used as a more respectable word for nothingness, and what many artists are doing is demonstrating that they have nothing to paint.

April 1962: Johnny is in Pentonville – now – this moment – asleep – someone - one of the few I have loved, rightly or wrongly, and whose image, memory,

smell, touch I can recall instantly at any moment of my life. It was ten years ago or less. But there were moments of incomparable rapture. Maybe I invented them. Never mind. For me they were real, were and are real, can never be forgotten or replaced or superseded. Dear sweet Johnny. Those moments of rapturous responses, not sexual but physical, when my heart burst and flooded a whole territory of experience which I had never dreamt could be real. That I'd dreamt but never lived. And now, there he is in stir, as they say - 13778 Walsh, J.W. Dear sweet Johnny.

April 1963: Rome. Spent much time in front of del Piombo's 'Flagellation'. Some flow and blend in the modelling of the limbs, the colours cool and sonorous. What a time they had – flagellations, crucifixion upside down, every device of physical torture. Perfect masochistic co-operation of all the victims. Never a hint of any real suffering, as in Flemish painting, where people seem to be tormented even by the everyday clothes they wear. Could one do a flagellation today, with a small 'f'? The sport has not exactly died out. (My doctor says that he often has to treat three or four patients a week with deep wounds voluntarily incurred in this way. But since it is nowadays regarded as a sexual perversion, it would presumably be classified as pornographic.

May 1963: Kings' Cross Station. Would you claim that you loved mankind? No I would not. They are a nasty selfish ugly stupid species. But individually? One at a time? Take the man opposite... Fortyish, balding, pasty yellow complexion, clear eyes, clean mouthed. Doesn't drink much. Plays games. Thirty-six perhaps. Properly dressed – dark suit, white shirt – And undressed? Neck suggests a lean body, long thighs. Keeps in training. Lawn mower on Sunday. Perhaps squash. Long bony fingers. Not self-conscious. Totally unaware he is being observed and documented. Buried in

the *Daily Telegraph*. Not stupid, engineer perhaps. He would have been a quiet boy at sixteen. Top of his class. A swat. Not particularly attractive but loyal. Always looked older than he is. Too reserved. Not given to demonstrations. Am certain he has not thrown one glance in my direction. Totally incurious. Or is he being very cunning? Does he know exactly what I'm doing? Sized me up completely the first moment. Knows all about my type.

So you might perhaps love mankind one at a time? If they were rarer. If one came across another one now and again. But there are so many of them. Nothing can be loved in such quantities. As well try to love bacteria. Christ was a fool. Love mankind indeed. As soon love a nest of ants.

April 1964: Went to the New Generation picture exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Patrick Proctor, Brigid Reilly, Patrick Caulfield, Davids Hockney and Jones. All that pop art ephemera. I understand now how the stranded dinosaurs felt when the hard terrain, which for centuries had demanded from them greater weight and effort, suddenly started to get swampy beneath their feet. Over-armoured and slow-witted they could only subside in frightened bewilderment. Compared to their work my own must appear indecisive, uncommitted, full of contradictions and unresolved. A critic once wrote that I seem to be obsessed with what it feels like to have a body. He was right – I find it a constant baffling mystery,

1st January 1965: From midnight to 2am I mingled with Generation X, about a quarter of a million of them, between Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square. I did not notice one ugly or uncomely person. Fleet-footed, warm-hearted, tender, perplexed, they were good to look at and good to be with. Conspicuously unpleasant, as is usual on such occasions, were the police, looking and behaving as though there was imminent civil war. The fountains

were full of wet boys instead of water. The roads were blocked with stationary traffic. But in two hours I saw not one clumsy, brutal or vicious gesture. All was in good sport and good heart. Yet the few members of my generation who were still out of bed, whom the police were presumably still protecting, acted as though they were dealing with an invasion of rats.

Groups of youths went along the lines of stranded, expensive cars, shaking hands with the irritated occupants. It was a totally charming gesture with just the right amount of ironical insult. The rich were stranded and helpless, the poor were mobile.

No-one was doing any harm, and yet all the time one was "moved on" in that suspect friendly manner the police are taught to use. Areas of the square were put arbitrarily out of bounds, challenging the young, quite naturally, to try and cross them. As soon as one did, shoals of police would chase after him, looking ridiculous and undignified. What was the point? But people must not be out on the streets of their own city enjoying themselves at 2am. "Come along now – let's all get home to bed, shall we?"

April 1965. Marrakesh. Sheep being gathered everywhere for the great slaughter on Tuesday. Men carry them round their shoulders like furs, tie them to carts, to donkeys, stuff them into the boots of cars. At first you assume the animals must be dead, but on closer looking they are not. They are dazed and uncomplaining and do not appear to be at all alarmed.

A youth suddenly appeared seemingly from nowhere and sat down quietly beside me. You never seem to hear an Arab approach, they just materialise. They act on the assumption that all European males are passive homosexuals unless they look French. He sat quietly for some moments watching me reading and waiting for me to get to the end of the page. Then he asked me if I would like to go into the bushes with him and *faire du pi-pi*. He looked at

me with a broad smile and steady brown eyes. He was about fifteen or sixteen. I thanked him very much but declined. 'Why not?' – he asked in tones of astonishment. Because I was reading, I said. Clearly he did not accept this as a valid alternative, and suggested he went off and found me someone younger, asking what age I preferred. I implored him not to bother. He remained quite quiet for some minutes, looking at me with a puzzled, almost offended expression. Then, thinking perhaps that I hadn't properly understood him, he unzipped his trousers and invited me to inspect his equipment (which, as with many Arabs, is somehow maintained in a state of permanent erection), and began to explain and demonstrate its method of operation. I expressed my admiration and suggested, rather hurriedly, that he might like to smoke an English cigarette. This he accepted. And so we sat and smoked and talked about the weather.

June 1965: Numerous letters congratulating me on my CBE. Extraordinary how many people notice such things. It would never occur to me to read through the small print in the Honours List. Obviously I don't know how to behave.

January 1967: A boy of nineteen called Stephen has moved into the small room in my mother's flat which was 'mine' from the age of about 15 until I moved into the larger front room at 22 or 23. Here I had my first terrifying and unexpected orgasm as a result of tying up my genitals with my pyjama cord; where I experimented guiltily with masturbation techniques from electrical stimulation to threading cotton through my foreskin in pursuit of God knows what fantasy. I passed Stephen on the stairs once, going up. A tall lean youth, fleet-footed, shy-looking, lynx-like, attractive. My mother tells me he has a girlfriend, bit on the wall over his table is a photograph of a good-looking young man who is not his brother. The more I hear about him, the more curious I become. I feel a strange affinity, almost tenderness for

him simply because we shared that room, lived there through one of the most intense periods of our lives, very much alone.

September 1970: Proof of the improvement in human salvation is that a Penguin paperback, *Boys and Sex*, can be bought at any bookshop. Its message is in principle that sex is fun and pleasant, and the more you have of it, the better – autosex, homosex, heterosex. Never before in the history of human society has such a book been published so freely and openly.

October 1970: Very unpleasant session with Income Tax Inspector yesterday. Hostile, polite and Kafkaesque. They are after my blood.

Rationally I know there is little or nothing to worry about. I am not a major criminal. I have indulged in no more than normal techniques of tax avoidance where possible. But I have operated as an amateur, instead of employing professionals as most do.

That is the crux of my problem. Inability to sustain aggression. I must make the enemy smile, like me, agree, forgive, shake hands. The confrontation was designed to be hostile and intended to undermine confidence.

Presumably this is part of an Inspector's training. If you plead guilty to your fiscal crimes, thus making their job much easier, they will settle for an amicable payment of tax in arrears. A long, tiresome and tedious investigation increases their hostility but also increases your chance of victory. They are better armed technically, but have nothing to gain. You have only your slings and arrows, but everything to gain. They are simply doing a routine job. Successful prosecution brings them nothing. So the sensible thing to do is to fight and not surrender and plead for mercy. But that assumes you are really guilty of something, which is not true. The guilt is imaginary and subconscious. It has nothing to do with tax returns, but concerns childhood traumas.

At some time during my first term at Christ's Hospital – this would have been in 1921, when I was nine years old – I saw a boy bend over before the class and receive two strokes of the cane on his buttocks. I had not known such practices existed, and the sight filled me with terror and panic. For days afterwards I could think of nothing else, and the memory made me burst into tears. Many monitors obviously got great enjoyment out of caning, the slow lingering way they would draw out the proceedings was proof of some sadistic enjoyment. There was one monitor who was notorious. I cannot remember my crime, but I was ordered into the washhouse after I had gone to bed. .. He spent an endless time arranging me to his satisfaction before he brought the first stroke, with all the power of his arm, across my body. It made me stumble, but the first stroke however hard is usually numbing rather than painful. It was the second, which he succeeded in placing exactly on top of the first, which brought me up grimacing and squirming. This is precisely what he intended and enabled him to add to his previous accusation one of cowardice. I bent down again, in fear; he made several feints with the cane, causing me to flinch in anticipation. By which time the pain of the first two was subsiding and I bent over and received the third, and then the fourth, which again coincided with the previous weal and brought me up in agony. I was goaded now to the point of revolt, but to my surprise he announced he would let me off with four, and I could go back to bed. I think this episode with its charged emotional tension touched depths of perversion in both of us. I still remember it vividly with an odd quickening of the pulse.

Second confrontation with the Revenue over my tax returns last Tuesday has reduced me to the same state of panic anxiety in which my instinctive urge is to throw myself on their mercy, confess all, and beg for forgiveness. Of course their technique in questioning is precisely designed for this effect, and the worst that can happen is that I shall have to pay them some money. But

this does little to loosen this absurd knot of panic which precludes any peace of mind except when I'm unconscious.

October 1970: For two years now I cannot remember feeling happy, positively actively happy. There have been times when I have been free from pain, of course, drunk, doped, asleep. Why? Why? What has gone wrong?

I've never had a proper human relationship. Proper? There has never been anyone I could go to in distress, in helpless disarray. Yet, curiously, I don't want to die, though I have the means of doing so at hand. If I did, I would use them as one pours a drink.

I want to be happy. To enjoy life. Which is surely one of the feeblest and most pathetic remarks a man of 58 could make.

I do not know. I do not know how.

May 1972: On the same day that Michelangelo's Pieta in St Peter was mutilated by a young man with a hammer, I read of Vito Acconci's 'exhibition', at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. This consists of a sloping ramp covering half the floor area of the gallery, beneath which the artist crawls on two afternoons each week, and masturbates, while listening to the footsteps of visitors walking about over his head. He cannot be seen, but readers of *Forum* are shown a photograph of him lying on his side beneath the sloping ramp with his trousers round his ankles and quite clearly handling his penis. The report states that the act is prolonged as much as possible to ensure maximum ejaculation of semen. The title of the piece is called '*Seedbed*'.

Well – I remember one day alone at home in Harrow Hill soon after my new studio had been completed, ejecting some semen onto the new floor boards

to stain them and, as it were, baptize the room. But it didn't occur to me it was creating a work of art. Apparently I was wrong. I also possess an 8 x 10 piece of towelling, dating from the early 60s which is stained an ochre yellow from 100 ejaculations of my own semen. I used to make a point of ejaculating always into the same piece of cloth, folding it up, and putting it away until the next time. In case Mother came in unexpectedly. What would be the value of such an object in the current art market?

June 1972: John Piper has been made a Companion of Honour. I think him a less good painter than I, but an infinitely nicer and more able man. More active. More in the swim. Done more. Been about longer in the right circles. Perhaps I spend my time with the wrong people. I was more or less offered the position of Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art a few weeks ago. Naturally turned it down because I have no ambitions that way. Am too old for change.

Checking my entry in the International *Who's Who*, I see my leisure interests are noted as 'eating and drinking with friends, bathing in the Ionian Sea.' I wonder when I said that? What I should say is 'Drinking alone, sexual self-pleasuring with autoerotic devices.' But I shan't.

There can be little doubt that stimulation by electrical current offers the most completely satisfactory experience on the autoerotic level. Psychologically it ensures the passive nature of the act, and physiologically it imparts stimulus directly to the most sensitive areas of the body. Unlike manual manipulation an infinite variety of sensations can be obtained by skilful use of the apparatus. Under conditions of mild sedation with alcohol or sedatives, and accompanied by visual material of an erotic nature, up to five or six hours of sexual pleasure can be enjoyed without the need for orgasm or aggravating after effects. In electrical stimulation, current is fed into the foreskin and

scrotum by means of electrodes attached to the respective parts of the body. The electrodes consist of specially constructed clips, insulated on the outside and covered with cloth on the live surfaces which are moistened with a warm saline solution before use. The clips are attached to the top and bottom of the foreskin and to either side of the scrotum just above the testicles. The sensations experienced will depend on the strength of the current, and the area of skin in contact with the live surfaces. Not only can abnormally high states of tension be built up, but it is not necessary for the sexual urge to be present before the session begins. The stimulus is so irresistible that desire will be aroused in the first few minutes and can be maintained thereafter for as long as is required. It is more suitable for men of a mature age, and a state of almost total hallucination can be reached.

March 1973: Drove to UCL and then took a bus to Soho this morning and bought hastily but brazenly four porn books for £20 which I can well afford but which in fact is not very good value. Cannot find good corporal punishment pics which is what I really want. However there was some sense of achievement in overcoming my inhibitions and at last doing something I have long wanted to. Surprising how easy it was and how pleasant and obliging the shopkeepers were when I explained precisely what I was looking for.

September 1973: The knocking of Lord Longford continues. It is obvious that society is not going to try once more and ban pornography, as he demands, but no-one has yet come forward to extol its benefits. I think perhaps it is time...

To the editor of the Times:

"Sir, as a middle-aged, homosexually-orientated pervert, obliged, through personal inhibitions and timidity, to content himself with an exclusively

imaginary sex life, the availability of porn is of the greatest benefit to my well being and mental health, as well as affording hours of harmless sexual enjoyment. Before it was available to me, compulsive and chronic masturbation was severely taxing on my powers of imagination as well as sexually unfulfilling and boringly frustrating. Now I can live a full and satisfying sex life, albeit with myself alone. The worst that can be said about such a programme is that one comes to prefer it to interpersonal sexual activity. But since this is nearly impossible to achieve anyhow and when it was actively sought and sometimes found, never satisfactory, the loss is negligible. To deprive someone so addicted of the wonderland of sexual pleasure would be senselessly cruel and likely to result in severe nervous breakdown, or a desperate pursuit of satisfaction through criminal activity.”

And as for Malcolm Muggeridge, that other pillar of righteousness! Malcolm Smuggeridge likens psychoanalysis to palmistry as examples of the desperate methods to which people today resort to find some ‘magical’ solution to the problems of life. Of course he dislikes it precisely because it challenges *his* magical ‘religious’ solution to the problem of life; he is wilfully distorting it with the intention of perverting and corrupting his views on TV. MM therefore wins the crown as the arch pornographer of the age. Vain, smug, untruthful and using his considerable powers of personality and media control to mislead and misinform his audience. If pornographers should be banned, let’s start with Mr Muggeridge.

December 1973: Much aware all the time of my ‘enlarged liver’. Wish I’d never been told, since it will not make me deny myself the indulgences without which life would not be worth living. Feel like this notebook – “narrow, faint and ruled”. Certainly, I feel best after drinking. Maximum daily consumption is three sherries midday, four martinis, one bottle of wine.

Often wine lasts one and a half days, two bottles in three days. LP Hartley drank two bottles of vodka a day. He did not presumably die in agony.

Legs and thighs of footballers. Watched this evening trying to discover whether a padded crotch covered their genitals. Like to see them play naked – or better, strip off naked after the match and stand still. Examine them minutely. Such stamina, skill and vital charm. Incredible that people can see, think, react as quickly as they do. Marvellous people. I bow down in deference.

November 1974: I am an adult on probation. I was condemned to life imprisonment in childhood at the queen's pleasure – the queen being my mother. I must report and justify any independent actions. On parole I must report when I leave London and when I return. I must give a full account of my reasons for going – what transpired and with whom the transpiration took place. Then I must reinstate my vows of lifelong devotion to my mother.

June 1975: I see some loops of Venetian cord hanging on the door. A small length of chain. Some leather straps. If I fixed it round my neck – attached the end to the balcony railings and jumped over – what would happen? The cord would break and I would fall into the basement patio, and the Italians downstairs would come running out. What a silly idea.

July 1975: Convalescing from my kidney stone operation is very nice in the morning, because no-one expects you to get up, but boring in the evening, because you are expected to go to bed early, and indeed there is nothing else to do. I have my stone in a sterile jar (my first work in three dimensions) and a large zip fastener embedded in the left side of my torso. It looks as if it could be opened up for inspection whenever necessary. Driving is still difficult – the zip seems to get caught up with the intestines – you know how painful a carelessly zipped up fly can be.

August 1975: Upwards through the roof of the mouth would blow out the back of the cranium and cause instant death (or oblivion). If it didn't there might be time to try a sideways shot through the temples. Bang, bang, bang. Dud little man is done. Meanwhile carefully planned fire is leaping up from the petrol soaked sofas licking the dry wood crackling beams and floor boards pouring sharp smoke, asphyxiating. The lovely licking flames pouring into the soft August sky. Burning out hate and the desire to kill. All goes up in smoke, the guilty and the sappy innocent.

And then there is needling, wheedling, needy cloying annoying Ramsey. What did I see in him? How on earth did I let him in to scrape his nails down the blackboard of my life? The crash of a fist in the face splintering the thin nasal bones and sinuses chicken thin and soft bone & blood oozing. Kick of the heel in the flaccid gut. Pounding of hard bleeding fists into the dislocated jaw and swollen eye. But – to silence that nagging bitching voice of Ramsay with two thumbs pressed deep into the trachea – blotting out sound in gurgles. Sharp snap of the base of the skull with the back of the hand.

Ding along dong. Won't do it, just think about doing it. It goes on year in year out. Sitting festering into a sour misery of impotence static stagnant self-corroding. And the long longing for sleep and oblivion.

16th September 1975: Mother phones to badger me two or three times a day. Dear Dr Meeson, I am very concerned about my mother, who is a patient of yours. Allowing for the fact that she is, and always has been, something of a manipulative hysteric, it seems clear from what I am told and what I have seen when she has been staying here over the last months that she is no longer capable of looking after herself. She is becoming incontinent, is unable to dress or undress herself, or get her own meals – even with the help of kindly friends and neighbours, and the Camden geriatric services. It

seems to me that the time has come when she must have either a permanent, paid nurse companion – or must go into a home of some sort. But I do not know how to organise these things myself. I am at present convalescing from a major operation earlier in the summer, and in any case do not know what steps to take.

24th September: Ramsey increasingly impossible to deal with. I get none of the pleasure out of this endless friction which he seems to, to judge by the sly, twisted smile on his face, when he has worked me up to steaming irritation and aggression. Just the thought of him nauseates me. And the thought of the endless days and years ahead (for he cannot be got rid of) like a growing cancer eating out what little healthy tissue I have left. Strange that one can come to hate another human being to the intensity which I now do. And I'm sure he hates me equally – though he prefers to call it 'love' – thus escaping the quiet of truthfulness.

22nd October 1975: Cancer era begins. The possible, or indeed likely, proximity of death does not worry me. If it turns out that I have cancer of the rectum and they want to make a prosthesis so that I go around with a plastic bag of my own shit attached to my waist, I do not want it. I do not want living on those terms. But I do want to make a graceful exit. Not in pain or prostration. And alone, alas, because I can see how good it would be to die holding someone's hand. But I do not know anyone to whom this would be agreeable. Since I have lived mostly alone it seems agreeable to die alone. I can see that it would have worked out better in other ways. But they didn't come my way.

To my executors: Regarding the disposal of my body. Any part which may be used should be removed and put to such purpose. The remains should be

treated as garbage and disposed of with the minimum of ceremony allowed by law.

24th October: It seems likely that the ulcer is malignant and the rectum will have to be removed. And myself provided with some sort of plastic bag. A colostomy – or some such name. I told the surgeon that I would rather die, but this was quickly dismissed with the assurance that I would be able to live a perfectly normal active life – not that I have ever done so, even with a rectum.

28th October: I cannot believe that tomorrow I start an entirely new form of life. Never again to sit on a lavatory pan. The morning crap was so much a part of my life. Fortunately I have never been addicted to anal eroticism, and so shall not have to relinquish a source of pleasure. The prospect of the future absolutely appals and terrifies me. It is alright when I am slightly drunk or under the influence of drugs. But I cannot remain permanently in that state. If I thought it might be an experience I could turn to some use, it would be different. Curious numbness of sensation. There seems nothing to say. Curiously reassuring when the doctor told me the Queen Mum has had a colostomy for some years.

3rd November: Solid food for the first time at lunch. Colostomy starts working with some vigour, soon half filling the bag. The bags must be deodorised, so the emptying by a nurse was not quite so revolting as I had feared. Nevertheless I can't say I look forward to this daily operation for the rest of my life. Everyone says you get used to it. Perhaps. If only I were affected by one of those sexual perversions which take a delight in excreta – what fun life could be! Here in hospital I can see how much my present troubles come from living with Ramsay. Here among sane, capable and kindly people all depression vanishes. But the daily living in the aura of his personal misery,

failure, incapacity to cope with anything but the most menial chores – the sadness which surrounds him – the pathos and pity of his futile attempts to help and comfort – slowly drags me down. I cannot reason with him or help him to a fuller life. He is utterly alone. Clinging to me for everything. Guilty. At times quite mad. But someone who now, for better or worse, is part of my life.

11th November: Have been tormented by an itching scrotum. The best remedy, the Indian doctor thought, would be to paint the parts with gentian violet, the only trouble being that the dye would remain rather a long time. So I was given the materials and painted the parts myself. The results are certainly colourful. At the baboon house in the Zoo I dare say I could fetch quite a high price as a rare species. The only trouble is that it has made little or no difference to the itching.

Have quite got used to emptying and washing out my bag morning and evening. It is unpleasantly smelly while the process lasts, but it is absurd to be frightened of touching your own excreta. You just wash your hands afterwards. I would never have thought of doing this before – touching one's own stools. When, as happened recently during a solitary walk, I had to do a shit in the hedge and then found I had no paper, I wasted a perfectly good handkerchief to wipe my arse. I could just as easily used my fingers and cleaned them on the grass. Deep childhood phobias make this impossible. From now on it will at times be unavoidable.

24th November: Waves of panic overcome me at times when I realise I must live with this bag hanging from my side for the rest of my life. It's not so bad lying in bed and half pretending to be an invalid. But that can't go on. On Friday morning I woke up with half the stoma exposed and gum and shit all over the place. Very depressing trying to clean it up. Rushing for toilet

paper with the stoma still slowly oozing shit dropped on the floor. But why write about it? Who on earth wants to know?

6th March 1976: Mother died in hospital this afternoon. So one problem ends and another begins. To deal with all her affairs, flat, furniture, clothes etc. I suppose I shall learn how these things are done. I cannot pretend to feel grief. Only relief that a useless life has ceased. Of course it would have been better if she'd died thirty years ago. She had little happiness except in brief moments, and long anxieties and worries which she sowed like tares among others' wheat. I feel only a numb relief that the inevitable has happened, and anxiety at what I have to do. Certainly her death does not leave me in freedom.

So ends the first evening without mother. How has she spent her first evening dead, I wonder? Her corpse is only half a mile away in deep freeze. Do others feel different? I am at a loss. I feel nothing but a longing to sleep. But at least I share with her, perhaps for the first time, a sort of peace, which I never had while she was living. Peace and quiet were not of her nature.

13th March: Most of the week spent at Mother's flat going through her things. What finally brought real grief to me was the letter she had written in 1962 and left for me with her will, and which she closed with the words, 'Goodbye darling – you have been the greatest joy to me.' She also must have wept as she wrote it. If only she had died then.

Surprised to find at the back of her wardrobe the bottle of brandy which my brother Dick brought back on his last leave about 1940. There was still the same little drop at the bottom.

I want to remember now all I can about him; about our childhood together and the casually intimate attachment that grew in later years. We retained a certain curiosity about each other, which kept our relationship fresh and rather adventurous. After he left school we saw each other only rarely and at each meeting there was something memorable and unexpected.

The last time we met, we took leave of each other at the entrance to Trafalgar Square tube station. A casual wave of the hand and a smiling glance was all the ceremony, although each knew it was unlikely we should meet again. I knew his squadron was going into action, although he was not able to tell me this, nor was it necessary. Four days later he was dead.

April 1976: When I was young, people of my age now simply did not exist. I looked on them with utter disdain, hideous objects daring to clutter up the face of the planet. I had not a grain of sympathy or compassion with old age. Old men were simply objectionable by reason of being old. It never occurred to me they might once have been young. Neither did it occur to me that I should one day be old myself.

Nor do I think I really felt old before the operations of last year. I still took some interest in my body. Then gradually the truth dawns that one is old and will continue to get older – that one will never be young again. The fact is not sad as much as frightening. I feel utterly unequipped for being old. I have no resources for it.

May 1976: Took a bus up to Flask Walk and bought coffee and cheese. A very sad looking youth in a duffle coat caught my eye and murmured, 'Are you enjoying yourself?' I hurried on, rather sheepishly. I might have stopped and talked for a moment. He was probably as miserable as I. We could have exchanged symptoms. But fear of involvement drove me on – as usual.

July 1976: There is not a single one of the paintings in my recent show that I would want to do again. Cannot understand how they came to be painted. But the notion of painting bores me – it fills me with anxiety and mild panic. The idea that I shall never paint again.

August 1976: The problem ending one's life will always be taking the final dose at night – when I feel reasonably content. It is the morning when I want to prolong the oblivion of sleep. Suppose one took the dose in the morning – no alcohol in the blood stream – would it work? Could one just go back to bed and sleep into eternity? But it's ridiculous to leave so important a matter as suicide to a question of mood. If the decision to end one's life is made, then it must be done in the most practical and efficient way possible. After all, it's a permanent decision. It cannot be reversed.

My ideal of death would be a ceremonial suicide. We would have a meal here at Belsize Park. Then with help I would take the necessary pills, alcohol, change into my night attire and go to bed. The others would be drinking, laughing, perhaps playing some music by my bedside. As I get dozy I would take my leave of being, one by one, with sadness but not despair. And not lonely. It would be a ritualised affair, civilised and well conducted.

September 1976: Have now got radiation sickness and cystitis on top of everything else. Feel like hell. No appetite. Fits of panic when I feel I cannot endure this long drawn-out torment any longer. But what can I do but endure it like others have to?

May 1977: The reason I sit in the window now each evening is to see some life going on. I watch the lithe limbs of boys with a faint memory of desire. No desire – only a desire for desire. Am an old man before my time. Not yet sixty five. Pension papers arrived the other day. Life gets more and more like a Samuel Beckett play. No wonder he won the Nobel Prize. My feet

need washing. It must be a year now since I had a bath. And apart from my genitals, which get washed about every three weeks, I have not washed any other parts. It appears I do not smell.

8th September 1977: I was never very good at sex. I had no proper technique. I knew nothing of the sophistications of fellatio or buggery. Usually it was simple mutual masturbation. But sometimes I would achieve orgasm simply by rubbing myself against their crisp pubic hair. This pleased some and surprised others. It surprised Moran Caplait. I remember the night I spent with him at his mother's house in Herne Bay. I was deeply in love with Moran but he was a breaker of hearts and didn't want to get involved with someone who could not further his career. At the time he was a student at RADA. Now he is managing director of Glyndebourne.

I wonder what will happen to my Electric Therapy machine which lies unused gathering dust behind my desk. I think I have invented a little machine offering intense pleasure to masturbators. I cannot be the only one. The use of electricity to maintain a high degree of sexual pleasure is something which I did not know existed before I perfected my machine. It took me years to find out first how much and where on the sexual organs to introduce electricity to produce the refined pleasures I have enjoyed for hours on end over the years.

Masturbation in youth is an unsatisfactory affair, hurried and furtive and concerned only with the release of sexual tension and the achievement of orgasm. It is later in one's middle years that the pleasures of prolonged masturbation become apparent. The postponement of orgasm until the last possible moment. But all that is over now.

9th September: I thought in bed last night about Boulanger, the French Canadian I picked up in the York Minster one night about 1944 and took him

home to bed. He was with a friend who had a date with a girl, and asked me if I would look after him. They were both very drunk. I got him home by taxi and gently undressed his half-sleeping body. Never have I seen anything more beautiful. His skin was the texture of rose petals, his nipples mother-of-pearl. His navel set like a pearl in his belly. His legs were straight and strong, but not bulging with muscle. His hands and feet were perfectly formed. He was 16. I lay for hours with the light on, gazing with rapture at his perfect loveliness. He lay half-sleeping, heavy with drink. His lips half-parted showed the edge of his white teeth. I kissed him many times, but got no more response than from a statue. His body smelled of warm new bread. His name was Boulanger, which seemed appropriate. We had no sex. It was enough for me to look at him. Then later in the morning it got cold and I drew up the covers and held him in my arms, warm and supple, breathing gently against each other's cheeks. Some weeks later I met his friend again in the York Minster, and asked after him. He'd been blown to pieces on the Anzio Beachhead.

4th November 1977, 9.30am: Suddenly the decision came that it must be done. I cannot drag on another few years in this state. The capsules have been taken with some whisky. What is striking is the unreality of the situation. I feel no different. It's a bright sunny morning. Full of life. Such a morning as many people have died on. I am ready for death though I fear it. Of course the whole thing may not work and I shall wake up. I don't really mind either way. Once the decision seemed inevitable, the courage needed was less than I thought. I don't quite believe anything has happened, though the bottle is empty. At the moment I feel very much alive. PW rang and asked me to dine with him tonight. But I had already made the decision, though not started the action. I cannot believe I have committed

suicide since nothing has happened. No big bang or cut wrists. 65 was long enough for me. It wasn't a complete failure, I did some –

SLOW FADE TO BLACKOUT. ON A SLIDE:

KEITH VAUGHAN 1912 – 1977

MUSIC – VAUGHAN WILLIAMS TALLIS FANTASY

THE END