

Chapter One: The Offer

I wasn't expecting to see my mother sitting in my office when I arrived at work this morning. She never comes to see me in Sydney, always says that she's too busy helping Carl with the house, and my little sister. I never understood why she wouldn't come and see me, but it has something to do with Melbourne, and not wanting to leave that shithole of a house. It's fucked up that they still live in that town. Briony brought me coffee, and looked from my mother to me, before she left the room. I sat down, placed the coffee on my desk, and told my mother that she had twenty minutes, because I have a meeting, and I can't be late. There's something so different about Sherylynn McMahon. She's older than I remember, and her hair is a pallid blonde colour. Her eyes are filled with pain, and her clothes are baggy around her skinny stomach. The smile that always used to be on her face was replaced with a sort of sullen look, just patiently waiting for me to say something, or for something to happen that would make her life better. If my brother couldn't help her, then I don't know how I can, and if Carl isn't around, then there is nothing anyone can do, because Carl, my stepfather is my mother's life, and without him, she has nothing.

I sat patiently, waiting for her to say something, but she just stared at me, her eyes reading mine, a slight grimace on her pale face. She's clutching onto an old rag that looks alot like the blanket I used to have when I was a kid. I don't know what she's done, or what she thinks I can do for her, but she is my mother, and I'll try my best to help her. 'Mum, why are you here? You hate Sydney,' I said, handing her a tissue because she'd started to cry
'You need to come home Rhiannon. We need you,' she said softly
'I can't come home mum. That's not a home. You and Carl need to get out of Englesberg. Move into Melbourne, you like Melbourne. You need to leave the past behind mum,' I replied, sipping my coffee
'Rhiannon, your brother...'
'Nick is gone mum, you can't keep holding onto this, it's going to destroy you,' I replied, as she reached out to touch my hand

I wanted to shrug away from her touch, to be the one who put an end to this whole thing, but there was something so normal about my mother being here, wanting me to come back to the place that ruined my life. I shook my head, noticing my boss walking towards my office. Shit, this can't be good. When David Duchvonny, the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald comes into your office, it's not to congratulate you on something you did. It's to reprimand you for something you did. My mother stood, leaving the office quickly. She took one last glance back at me, before she disappeared around the corner. David entered my office, closing the door, and leaning against the far wall. I hate that he has all this power over me, and I can't help but look up at him. His slim figure, his muscles, his abs... It's empowering and mesmerising... David sat, throwing down today's edition of the Herald in front of me. I looked at the front page.



There was a story about a small Melbourne town that was getting bulldozed. I'd been told about this. It's been in the news for weeks. I folded out the paper so I could read the story, and stopped when I realised why David was showing me this. The town that was getting bulldozed is Englesberg. I know where this is going, and I know why my mother wants me to come home. Nick is buried there, and so is pop. Damn it!

Briony was watching me from her desk, tears streaming down her cheeks. I'd told my friends about my life in Melbourne about two months into our friendship after they begged me to tell them everything about me. David didn't know any of it, and I swore to myself I wouldn't let him find out. He's going to though, because this expose is going to force me to reveal the most sordid details of my past. I don't want to be doing this story, I don't want to be the one to tell the people in the town that I grew up in, that I'm a journalist from Sydney, come to report on the bulldozing. I just want to stay here, in my apartment, with my friends, and my life as it is. It may not be exciting, but it's the way that I want it, and that's more than anyone could ask for. I'm twenty years old, and already, I've got my dream job. Who else can say that by the time they're twenty, they're working their dream job, studying at university, and living in Sydney? Apart from Briony, Dean and Gracelynn, no one can say that. Briony, Dean and Gracelynn are my housemates, and best friends. We met first year of uni, and have been friends since. I could tell David wanted me to say something but I had no words that he'd want to hear. 'I don't know David; it's a big story,' 'You're from Englesberg right? You're perfect. Take Dean, Grace and Brie. You'll have a blast,' David said, patting my hand and standing to leave 'You don't know what you're talking about,' 'Two months, I want a draft on my desk Rhi. You leave tomorrow,' David said, walking out into the busy news room.

I could feel the tears welling up. Right now, I just want to stand up and scream fuck at the top of my lungs, but people here don't know that side of me. They think I'm this controlled person, who doesn't let anything or anyone get to her. Truth, I never used to be like this...

The nights here get cold really quickly. It's not a lie, it's just the facts. My mother says it's because we're so close to the ocean, I tell her it's because god doesn't give a fuck about us and wants us all to freeze to death, she laughs and tells me that I sound just like dad. I hate being compared to my father. He was a fucking scumbag, and that's all. He's nothing else, and nothing more and he won't ever be. Carl is okay, he's not perfect, but he treats me, mum and Nick okay, so I guess that's important. He tells mum how much she means to him, and I can tell they really love each other. I haven't spent much time with Carl since he and



mum married, but Nick says he's real nice and all that. When all of my family are tucked in their warm beds, I climb out the window of the shitty house we call home, and make my way down the back path to where Ryan and I hide our dirt bikes. Always, at the same time, Ryan is there, standing on the beach, looking out at the ocean. I wonder what he thinks about sometimes, but whenever I ask, he just shrugs me off. There is something so normal about hanging out with Ryan Carmichael on this beach, at midnight on a school night. We're just so right for each other; he just doesn't see it yet.

When he sees me walking towards him, he smiles. His smile fills me up inside, and reminds me that at the end of this year, we have the whole world in front of us, we have our whole lives. Year Twelve has only just started, and it's so fucked up already. The teachers are shit, the curriculum looks like it's been written by a bunch of dickheads who are high on crack, and the campus is in the nicest part of town, which means that all the stuck up popular sluts think they own the joint. Ryan and I always make fun of them whenever we see them. I don't like them, and they don't like us, so everyone wins. I think this year I'm going to tell Ryan that I'm madly in love with him. My friend Rachel thinks I should have done it years ago, but I'm eighteen soon, and I want to have a boyfriend when I graduate, so I can make plans to leave this dump. 'Where's your head at McMahan?' Ryan asks as we stroll slowly along the beach

'Just thinking about what I'm going to do next year. How about you Carmichael? Are you going to change the world with your Dynamic Business instincts?' I asked, as I flopped down on to the cold sand 'I'm not going to Uni Rhi. I told you that,' Ryan replied, lying down beside me

'You have to... it will be perfect,' I replied, turning my head so that our lips were almost touching

'You're beautiful you know that?' Ryan said, sitting up and running down to the water

I followed him, but it was too dark to know whether or not he was skinny dipping, or had his clothes on. I waded into the water, wearing my jeans and Led Zeppelin T-Shirt, over to the dark figure standing a far way out. I could hear Ryan's breathing, in and out, softly, like his life depended on it or something. People in Englesberg don't like to talk about their futures, mostly because they all think they don't have one. Rachel and I have been planning to get out of this shithole town since year ten, and the minute we graduate, Ryan, Rachel me and Rachel's boyfriend Scott are going to leave Englesberg and go to Sydney, we we're all going to study at Sydney Uni, and live in a flat in the suburbs. We're going as far away from this town as possible, and we're not coming back... I know that sounds harsh, and it probably is, but if you know this town the way that we do, you wouldn't want to come back either. I'd lost sight of Ryan's figure in the water, and before I could find him again, someone had pulled me under. I stood up, wiping the water out of my face, and



laughing. He was going down. I started splashing, and I could hear Ryan laughing, and in my mind, I could see his grin, the one I love so much.

When we were both water logged, we returned to the beach and fell back onto the sand, just looking up at the stars. Ryan told me about his grandmother, who was sick, and that's why he wasn't himself. I can understand why he's so freaked out. Ryan's mother died from cancer two years ago. It hit him really hard when his father took off to the city, and left him and his little brother Jesse with their grandmother. If he loses her too, I don't know if he'll ever recover... I was crying, the tears hitting the sand. Ryan stroked my cheek softly with his hand, pulling me close to him. I wanted so badly to just kiss him right there, but the moment was ruined when Trevor Anderson, owner of the local store walked by, shining a torch in our direction. Ryan pulled away from me, standing, and extended his hand to help me to my feet. I brushed the remaining sand off my jeans, and followed Ryan up the sand mound to the road, where we walked side by side back towards my house. When we got to the gate, Ryan hugged me awkwardly and turned to walk off. I closed my eyes, trying to hold onto the moment, and then, just like everything else, it was gone. I walked down the stone clad path towards the old Victorian house we called home, and unlocked the front door as quietly as possible. No doubt Trevor Anderson would tell his wife Sue about my rendezvous with Ryan on the beach and it would get back to my mother, and she'd rip into shreds over it, but I don't care. Not this year...

Dean and Grace looked at me, horror shocked at what I was telling them. They couldn't believe that David was doing this. I made the excuse that it could have something to do with the fact that he doesn't know, but they put it down to him being a fucking dick, and just wants to make us do something we hate, because he's mean. I laughed at Dean's utter outrage, given that he's usually so calm and sincere towards everyone here. Briony was staring down at the paper on my desk, trying to make sense of what was going on. I don't understand what David wants me to do. Does he want a story on the town, the people, the reason the town is being bulldozed? I don't know if I can do this, go back to that place. If my mother is any indication, it hasn't changed much. I really don't even remember much about it to be honest; I try to block it out as much as possible. Grace pulled out her phone, calling god only knows who, about any nice four star hotels in the area. I told her she shouldn't bother, because the only accommodation in Englesberg is the pub, and we won't be staying there. The time has come to call my mother and stepfather, and let them know what's going on. I hate having to do this, but it's the only way. I pulled out my phone, getting a look of pure shock from my friends, as I dialled the number I'd almost forgotten after all these years. There were three rings, and then an old male voice, answered the phone with a stern 'ello'.



'Hi Carl, it's Rhiannon, I'm coming home for a couple of months. Can you have mum make up three beds in the guest room? We'll be there tomorrow,' I said, turning away from my friends
'Ah that's great love. I will sure tell her. We'll see ya tomorrow then,' Carl said cheerfully
'Sure will,' I replied, hanging up the phone
'Welcome to hell,' Dean said, falling back on the couch in the corner of my office

After my friends had left, and the office was empty, I pulled out a box I kept hidden in the back of my cupboard. It should be at home, tucked away amongst all the old clothes I don't wear, but I brought it to work for some reason, and I think now is an appropriate time to open it. I pulled the lid off, and threw it onto the floor, pulling out the first picture on top of the large pile of shit. The photo was of three young children, me, my friend Rachel, and my brother Nick. I closed my eyes, letting the tears fall, before I returned the photo to the box and stood up. I picked up the lid, put it back on the box, and grabbed my stuff. I wasn't going to do this in an empty office complex. I needed to go home and pack. Carefully, I lifted the box, and carried it to the elevator which would take me to the underground car park. It just occurred to me, standing here alone in this elevator that I'm going to have to spend my twenty-first birthday in Englesberg, the town on the outskirts of Melbourne. How much is that going to suck? There are no nightclubs or lounges in Englesberg. The only attraction is the local pub, and even then, that's pushing it. I do remember they used to do Karaoke there on Monday's, but it's been three years. A lot could have changed about the town. I guess I'll find all that out tomorrow. The elevator doors opened, and I exited, walking hastily over to my large, black BMW. I unlocked the car, threw the box in the boot, and slammed it shut, venting my frustrations on my new car, that I haven't even had for a month yet. It's an early birthday present from Briony, Dean and Grace. I know David put in too, he just won't admit it. I hopped in the front seat, and started the car, reversing carefully out of my park, before speeding off towards the exit. The highway is empty at this time of night, which gives me an easy ride back to the house. I don't like to think whilst I'm driving. I find it distracts me from everything that's going on around me.

The lights were all off when I arrived home at eleven thirty. That's shocking, given that Briony and Dean usually do a movie night on Thursday's. I drove into the three car shed, and turned off the ignition. As I got out of the car, I noticed a stick-it note on the wall beside the garage door button. "Dean's freaking out. At Sandy's, don't wait up Bitch. Love ya. Grace". I laughed, pressing the button which would shut the shed door. A seven hour drive, I'm going to need to sleep for three days just to get into Melbourne, let alone make myself drive to Englesberg. Deciding I would pack the car tomorrow, I left the box in the boot, hoping that the others wouldn't notice it when we pack our shit tomorrow. Right now, I just want to sleep, and forget all about this



fucking story that David has us doing, and go back to yesterday, where I was the Editor in Chief of the Sydney Morning Herald, and I spent the night at clubs, where I would dance the night away, and let Briony talk me into giving random guys my phone number. I always hate when she's right, but it turns out, sometimes, that I underestimate her powers against the opposite sex. I can't wait to see how she holds up in Englesberg. The only men there are the ones who hang out in Lavish Pub and Bistro. Flicking off the garage light, I walked up the stairs into the empty house. My room is on the third floor. I don't know why we live in this place, it's nothing like the other places I used to live in, but it's nice. I kicked my shoes off and fell onto my bed, setting the alarm for four-thirty. Knowing Dean and the other's, they'd get in at two, sleep until four, and then wake up, pack the car, and sleep the rest of the way. Idiots I want to murder them sometimes. That's not funny... I rolled over onto my back, closing my eyes, and trying to dream about something happy, something, real...

'If we do this, you understand what that means? No more dodging the bullet, we'll be boyfriend and girlfriend?' Ryan said, pushing a strand of hair out of my face.

'I love you Ryan Carmichael,' I replied, kissing him with such passion, Britney and Madonna don't have nothing on me.

'I love you too Rhiannon. Always and forever,' he replied, unbuttoning my blouse

There was a moment where I thought it would never happen, that he'd keep stalling, but when it finally did, it was amazing. Lying under the covers, on the double bed at the beach house, it was the most amazing thing ever, just being able to spend this perfect moment with Ryan, and not having to share it with anyone else... the best birthday ever... when I opened my eyes, Ryan was leaning on the balcony railing, his pyjama pants caressing his torso seducingly. I pulled on my camisole, and joined him. He wrapped his arm around my waist, and kissed my forehead. This moment is perfect, this moment is one I want to capture and remember for the rest of my life. The beach house used to belong to Ryan's father, but when he split, he left everything in Ryan's name. Now he and his little brother Jesse live here, especially lately, since his gran died, it's sort of become his haven, a little piece of heaven where he can be alone to think, or write, or just be with Jesse, or me. He's a brilliant writer. I told him that one, but he just laughed, and told me that it's a novel subject, and I should drop it before I get myself in trouble. I've tried to tell him that there are plenty of publishing companies in Sydney that would accept his work, but he doesn't say anything, and I wonder if he listens at all sometimes. He's been working on a novel for about a year now, but he won't let me read it until it's finished. I've told him that one day, his name is going to be on the New York Times best-sellers list... he's holding me to that.



Through the serenity, my phone rings. I refuse to answer it, but the batman ring tone is beginning to drive me insane. I kiss Ryan, and run inside to answer the call. It's my mother; because that's the tone I have for her. Carl has a Spice Girls song and Nick has Backstreet Boys. I know, lame right, but I didn't pick them. It was all Rachel, who set her song as Katy Perry's Firework. Like that is her at all. My mother is talking a million miles an hour, and I only hear a few words, because the reception out here isn't that great. I manage to catch the words, coming...get...and hospital. After I hang up the phone, I begin to freak out about the hospital. I couldn't hear her, but it can't be good. I'm running around, trying to find my clothes, when Ryan enters the room, his perfect body distracting my thoughts for a minute. I tell him about the call, and he insists on coming with me. I agree, because I'm not in the mood to argue or get into a fight. I'm am hoping beyond hope that Nick hasn't done something stupid, like crash his car into the north-bound wall again. The first time he did it, he was in a coma for three months, we had to fill him in on everything, and he was angry when he found out that Collingwood had beaten St. Kilda in last year's AFL Grand final. To be honest, I was too.

'Did your mother tell you what it was about?' Ryan asked, as he threw my stuff into the bag I'd brought

'I didn't catch much. But I heard her say hospital. I hope Nick hasn't done something stupid,' I said, as Ryan pulled me into a hug

'He's probably lying in that bed, eating chips and yelling at the TV. Like normal Rhi,' Ryan said, kissing me tenderly and picking up my bag as we heard a car pull up

'I hope you're right,' I said, grabbing the keys and pushing open the front door

I was the first one up this morning. It took all the strength that I had to wake Dean, who sleeps like there's no tomorrow. I was considering using the car horn to wake them all, but that would wake the neighbours also, and Mr. And Mrs. Hall don't like to be awake this early. They may be elderly, but they can yell louder than a little kid throwing a tantrum. It's not pretty to be on the other end of. Trying to push away the sleep that was nagging at my eyes, I put the last of the bags into the BMW, and slammed the boot closed, just to give us all another burst of energy. Grace had called shotgun, and that meant she got to control the music. The best part about getting up at four-thirty, is that they'll all be asleep by the time we reach the Hume Highway, meaning I control the music, because they're not awake to tell me off for playing Howie Day's Collide fifty times in a row. Briony had made coffee for everyone, and I was sipping mine like I was a druggie, trying to get as high as possible, before I went cold turkey. When I was sure I'd had enough to keep me awake, I started the car, letting Grace put on Good Charlotte's new album, before I reversed out of the shed and sped off down the road. Navigating through this city is like reading a map backwards and upside down,



pointless, and a waste of time. That's why Dean brought a six hundred dollar GPS for the car, as an early birthday present for me, last year. It's not the brightest tool in the shed, but it's going to get us to the highway, and then from there, it's all us.

My mind was wandering off, something I don't like to do. I'd had a weird dream last night, it was so real. Maybe it was, it could have been a memory, it could have been fantasy, but it just felt so real, like it had actually happened. I tried to remember the dream, but I couldn't, it was a blur in the back of my mind. Focus Rhiannon. Seven hours cooped up in a car, with coffee, and three idiots who can't tell right from left is going to drive you insane enough. You need to keep focussed... easier said than done mind...

'Dean, I need to get to Burke's road. Can you tell me whether I need to get on the Bolte or West-Gate?'

'Rhi, you need to be on the West-Gate, and then through the Burnley where you'll get to a turn off onto Burke's road,' Dean said, shoving the Melway's in my face

'Thanks, Grace, can you turn it down, or change the CD?' I asked of her choice in songs

'It's the Dandy Warhol's... come on Rhi,' she said, turning it up

Giving up on Gracelynn changing the music anytime soon, I turned my attention back to the road, and making sure I was on the right one. Englesberg signs were becoming more and more prominent as we got onto Burke's road, and sooner or later, there's going to be a turn-off onto a dirt road, which takes us onto Yabsley drive, which takes you to the main centre town of Englesberg Melbourne. Dean, Briony and Grace have heard all my stories about Englesberg, but they haven't seen it. It's nothing like Melbourne, and it's definitely nothing like Sydney. There are no sky-scrapers, no fancy bridges, or office complexes. There's a corner store, a bunch of one level houses, the ones who work in the mill have two level houses, a football field, cricket oval, school, pub and a park. That's it. Other than that, there's nothing attractive about Englesberg. It won't be winning any awards, and it won't be photographed by Jamie Durie for Australia's prettiest town. I know what to expect, but the others don't. They haven't seen pictures of my parents house, they don't know the town folk the way I do, they don't know that Ryan Carmichael, the man that I lost my virginity to in year twelve, the love of my life, owns the beach house that I told them I grew up in. I'm nothing special. I've worked for everything that I have, and I earned everything I was given. I followed my dreams; I did what I was going to do for years. I left. It was Ryan's fault that he never came after me. He could have, he knew where I was, but he didn't, and that's the price he had to pay.



Reluctantly, I turned down Yabsley drive, knowing that what was about to be seen by my three friends, wasn't going to be their ideal picturesque town. We reached the main centre, and I saw the general store, Sue and Trevor Anderson standing behind the counter, serving the locals. I saw the old pub, still standing strong, the highschool, the football field, and then, I slammed on the break. Standing gloriously in front of us, was the beach house. Three levels, built above everything, overlooking the ocean. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. It never used to look like this. I pulled into the drive, getting out of the car, and closing the door. I walked slowly towards the house, hearing three doors slam shut behind me. Briony had my arm, and was shell-shocked.

'It's...'

'Different,' I replied, walking up the steps, onto the wooden balcony, which wrapped around the bottom of the house.

'Rhi, maybe you should get back in the car. We still need to get to your parents house,' Dean said, as I reached out to open the oak doors.

'Right, of course,' I replied, turning and running after the trio.

As we drove away from the beach house, I couldn't help but look back at it. It's nothing like my childhood. Ryan must have come into a lot of money; he must have re-done the whole thing... I'd have to ask my parents. It was then I remembered the other little dilapidated houses in the area where mine is. I could tell that Dean and the others weren't impressed when I pulled into the driveway of the two storied Victorian, on the edge of Jameson Road, where the beach meets Milton Drive. My mother was sitting on the porch, and stood slowly as I walked up the path to the front door. She pulled me into a hug, and I introduced her to my friends, who happily greeted the frail woman. Carl picked me up and twirled me around when we got inside, and Abbie, my little sister, jumped onto my back the first moment she got. I didn't know I had a little sister, until I got a letter from mum last year, explaining that she'd given birth to Abbie in 2008. She's three years old, and looks nothing like Carl. It's all mum. That's a good thing I guess. Better than looking like your dead-beat father, that's what I say. Mum and Carl led us through to the guest room where I told the trio they'd be staying. I was taking my old bedroom. I hadn't been in there in about four years, so when I walked in for the first time, and saw the Beyonce and Shakira posters on the wall, I wasn't surprised. I threw my bags onto the floor, and sat down on the double bed in the middle of the room. Everything was exactly the way I'd left it. Nothing had been moved, nothing had been changed. That was the way mum coped with everything. She'd just close the door, and pretend. That's what she did after Nick died. She just closed his bedroom door, and pretended. I hate myself for leaving after what happened to my brother, but I couldn't stay. There was too much bad shit that had gone on.

'You must all be tired, so we'll leave you to settle in. You know where to find us,'

'Thanks Carl. Wow, Shakira?' Dean asked, sitting on the couch in the corner of my childhood room



'I was twelve... what do... '

'Rhi, are you alright?' Grace asked, as I left my room suddenly

I was right. Nothing had changed. It still smells like him. I haven't been in here since Nick passed away... I sat down on the bed, and pulled the photo of him and me off the nightstand. It was taken after graduation. We looked so happy in that picture. I was crying when the other's entered the room, realising what was going on. I've only been here ten minutes, and I'm already crying. I never went to Nick's funeral, I was too mad at him for leaving me alone to deal with all this shit. I remember telling mum that I wished I was dead too, and she told me that some day, I would be, and that I should be grateful for the days I do have with the people I love, because Nick doesn't have that anymore. I stopped speaking to mum after that. I told her I was leaving for Uni, walked out, and never came back. That was the last time I saw her, four years ago... until she showed up in my office yesterday... Briony sat beside me, pulling me into a hug. I felt awkward, having this part of my life, conversing with my old one. I promised myself I wasn't going to let the past influence me on this trip. I promised I was here to work, and that's it. Through the silence, my phone rang. It was David. I smiled as I answered the call, leaving the room to talk away from everyone else. Briony, Dean and Grace were in the kitchen when I found them again. They'd been talking with Carl about the best place to go fishing around "these parts" as Dean called it. Sometimes I wonder, what would happen if I told David to stick his story, and just ran away from it all? I've been running for three years... and maybe that's three years too many...maybe it's time to stop running from everything, maybe it's time to face the past... so I can move on...

Ryan and I sat on the steps of the church, not saying anything. It was the day of his grandmother's funeral, and I didn't know the words to make him feel better, even though I wanted to. Ryan told me that just being there with him was enough, but I didn't think so. I needed something extra, to make him smile, or laugh, even if it hurt him inside. I don't know what time it was when we left the church, but it couldn't have been any later than ten-thirty, because the macca's on the corner was still open. We found ourselves out here sometimes, halfway between Englesberg and Shoreville. MacDonald's falls on the boarder of Englesberg, so technically, we're still in the town, but it's nice to believe, even for a minute, that we're somewhere else. Ryan and I take our usual booth in the back of the fast food place. It's secluded, behind the napkin and straw bench, and there are no windows, so people can't see in. We don't order anything; instead, we just sit, looking at each other. Sometimes I wonder, what Ryan would say if I told him about my father, my biological father. He doesn't really know much about him, except that he's a barstard. I asked him once, and he told me he'd rather not know. It makes it easier for him to hate the man. I haven't told anyone the story



about my biological father, and I don't think anyone will ever hear that story, unless Ryan wants to know, in which case, I'd tell him. We've been best friends since grade prep, me, Rachel and Ryan. You know that everything is going to go to shit, but we're only in year eleven, you can't expect us to have our futures mapped out already.

'Did you speak to Sherylynn today?' Ryan asked, taking my hand

'No. Did you speak to the Chancellor at Sydney Uni?' I asked, wanting to change the subject from my mother

'I told you Rhi, I'm not going to Uni,' Ryan replied, letting go of my hand

'Sometimes I don't get you Ryan Carmichael,' I said, leaning back and crossing my arms

'Sometimes I'm glad that you don't,' he replied

That's how he always replied...

The local news hasn't changed much either. Bernie Gray, the kid I went to highschool with does the sports, and Fiona Moore does weather, but other than that, it's still Dennis Nightly reporting live from Englesberg studios. It's really Scopedale Studios in the posh part of town, but no one cares about that. There was a story on the news about the bulldozing, and I tried to make mental notes of what they were saying, but I was going to have to go up there anyway so I gave up after the football scores for Englesberg VS. North Melbourne came up, and Carl started yelling at the TV. Briony was drawn in, when the festival was brought up. Every year, for the last sixty years, the Englesberg Festival has been on, and every year, something always happens, which changes the town. It's next weekend, and when Dean, Grace and Briony all looked at me with pleading eyes, I had to give in. They hi-fived each other, and went back to eating the roast mum had just put on the table. I hadn't been to that stupid festival in six years. The last time I went to that thing was in year eleven, when Rachel... let's just say I haven't been to one in six years. I promised myself I wouldn't do this, but my friends deserved to know the old me, and David deserved this story, even if that means attending this stupid festival. Through the laughter of Carl, and the talking between my friends and my mother, my mobile rang. I remember, we used to have a rule, no mobiles during dinner, and I only remembered that, because of the look my mother gave me. Excusing myself, I stood to answer it. I hadn't told them I was only here for the story. I hadn't told anybody, except the trio. I'd told the Uni I'd need the two months, and the office knew, but that was it. I put the phone to my ear, half-expecting to hear David's voice. I was shocked when I heard Maxine Hargrove's. She was Rachel's sister. I didn't know what to say.

I returned to the table, hanging up the phone, having made time to spend with Maxine tomorrow at the little cafe on Main Road. My mother smiled weakly at me, and resumed talking to Dean about god only knows what. Briony was deep in conversation with Carl about rising petrol prices, and



Grace was entertaining my little sister. Someone, please pinch me because it feels like I'm dreaming... oh wait, I'm not...

