On the morning of your funeral
I rose at four-thirty from a Sydney hotel bed
and caught the five o-clock train to the airport.
In Melbourne, I ran
to catch the Skybus into Southern Cross,
rained again to the corner of Spencer
and Collins where I jumped
into my brother’s waiting car.
We drove to Port Fairy without stopping,
the landscape as familiar as your kiss
after almost four decades
of journeys to your home.

We discussed your life, times
spent with you, how lucky we were
to see you three days before you died,
how we kissed your forehead, voiced our love.

We took the scenic route into town
past the golf links where you played,
stopped at the beach to check the surf.
Unable to face a crowded house
of mourning relatives
we changed into funeral clothes
in the healing air of the beach car park
like kids after a refreshing surf.

At St. Patrick’s, you lay in your coffin,
where your husband laid less than four
years ago, inches from where my parents
were married. The priest swung incense,
delivered requisite words
in a booming Dutch-Australian accent.
I wondered if you were dressed
in your best Fletcher Jones, still loyal
to the man who measured your father
as he stood on his farmhouse kitchen table
and tailored a beautiful suit from the wool
shorn from your family’s flock of Merinos.
Your daughters, your granddaughters,
Nathanael O’Reilly. ‘Your Funeral’.
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your son-in-law spoke and read comforting words. I read Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar.” My brother and I draped your coffin, dressing you for your next appointment.

After the service, we gathered outside in the winter sun roughly halfway between the cemetery and the house you called home for half a century, chatted sombrely with relatives, neighbours and your patients.

We walked behind the hearse to the gravesite and buried you beside your husband, dropping flowers and dirt onto your coffin.

At the wake I drank beer with uncles and cousins in a bluestone building as the sun went down over the Moyne and realized that now you are gone I no longer have a reason to return.

Nathanael O’Reilly