End of Story

Mark Pickering

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Chapter 1

Terra Incognita

23 June 1984

'It's a good story if you're prepared to kill for it…'

Who told him that? But he thought that the story had ended, in fact he was sure of it. They'd only found one gold coin and the experts had rubbished it, and Bill said he'd never found any more so what it did mean? A big fat nothing. Then their army platoon got posted away from Farewell Spit. Bill went to Tonga, Hamburger to God knows where and he got sent to India, and battled through Kohima and back into Burma. Got captured by the Japs and for six months they gave him hell. Then they dropped that bomb and it was his turn to give them hell back.

Japan, Malaya, Timor, thirty years had gone by and then that Historic Places Trust magazine arrived through his letterbox. He hardly glanced through it till he spotted the words 'Gold Coin 1502'. What was the guys name? Micklethwaite, funny name. All the note said, was that a 1502 Spanish coin had been found on Farewell Spit, and that it was similar to another coin from 1515 in the 1970's, and and he referred to a article in the magazine to July 1974. What had Micklethwaite said?

'No one knew much about the origins of the mysterious gold coin.'

He burst out loud.

'Bullshit! I've got news for you lad, big news'.

That 1515 coin was his, and none of those high faluting professors of history would have a clue because the sods were always wrong. So Bill had been digging the stuff up! The bastard, and what a liar. He'd kept quiet about it all these years, and there probabaly wouldn't be any of the coins left now, but that didn't matter. He had to find where the slab was, that was the real gold.

He pinned up a topographical map of Farewell Spit on the wall, and just like the ex-army sergeant he was, he paced up and down, his mind pulling disjointed pieces of information out of the thin excited air of his memory. This was gold, and he wallowed in his fantasies.

Beach, Locac, Java la Grande, Terra Incognita, Magallanica, where was this Southern Land? They talked huskily about it in the *fino* bars in Lisbon, and muttered curious tales in the cramped grog shops along the Dover beach as the grey north wind beat the waves into irrational patterns. There was nothing definite. No facts as such, though even the whores in the musk-scented brothels of Amsterdam had heard about this fantastic place, from the lips of sodden sailors on their last grind of the flesh before they sailed into... well, what exactly?

They were men, not the half-men you get today. Practical, practised, prepared to take chances and test their curiousity. He admired those early voyagers. Explorers mostly without names, uncredited, nonchalant, secretive, passionate. What guarantees of return were there? None. What insurance against loss? None. What recompensation for disease or death? None. And then they hit the fear, for was not the world flat? Did not the learned gentlemen think that if you sailed too far you would topple off the edge of the world into the very Devil's pit?

Poor sods! He had to admire them, for they were prepared to sail to the very edge of the world, the border of their superstitions, and then spit on it. If they left port with a body full of syphilis, well, that was the least of their problems, and half of them would probably die of scurvey before they smelt the soft orange-scented ladies of Seville again. This was stuff he could get passionate about, men he could care about, and he mustn't let the chance slip away. He was not going to let Bill filch it from him, and in his excitement he burst out loud.

'This is *my* story now, you bastards, I'm coming to get it'.

Chapter 2

The Evidence of One Swallow

Saturday, 5 June 1984

Before even the first smudge of day the oystercatchers were pattering along the mud-flats, prodding the dark tidal pools with long beaks and chattering all night to their mates. Nowadays the oyster catchers didn't bother him. Like the wind creaking the melancholy line of macrocarpas, the banging of loose iron on Mrs Doughty's chicken shed, and the hiss and slurp of the tide as it swept daily along the slick shore. His brain went back into a grateful doze. It was only when the daylight definitely pushed through the curtains that he realised he had a reason to get up early on Saturday. He ripped the curtains aside and peered out as some purple light was spreading under the ceiling of clouds.

He pulled out his binoculars and Gordon swept back and forth over the shiny sand, and the sun was almost on the beach when he found her, a small rhymic dot running smoothly by the tide-line. Her long hair was tied back firmly and her arms had the confident movement of a practised runner. The sun touched her hair with a burst of light, and her skin seemed almost oily and red, like a flow of lava. Because she was running fast Micklethwaite had to shift position, and made a grab for the binoculars with one hand, using the other to fend off pieces of furniture as he stumbled over last nights dinner. She was only thirty metres away, clearing the oystercatchers out of her way like a broom before abruptly disappearing round the headland. The oystercatchers swirled back into place, and Micklethwaite sighed.

He knew perfectly well who she was and he didn't imagine she lacked for blokes. He boiled the jug and brushed the dust of an old chocolate fish he found in a drawer. He sat on the verandah drinking tea and staring despondently at a million dollar view across Golden Bay to Farewell Spit, and sighed again. It wasn't just the girl.

He still had the column to do, and he looked sadly at the last issue of the *Takaka Times*. His first two efforts were not the best really.

His first article was on the gold rush at the bay in 1857, and they had printed the date as 1875 so he had had two nasty complaints about that one. The second article was on the old iron works at Onekaka, which he'd whimsically called 'Any Old Iron'.

This had provoked an irate letter from an ex-iron worker pointing out various errors (three) inaccuracies (five) silly mistakes (two) and stupid assertions (two more). Gordon had not realised how much passion there was out there for history.

There was, as he so often put on 3B's English test papers, 'room for improvement'.It was all Junes fault. She had sweet talked him into taking over the history section in the *Takaka Times* from 'old Mr Marriott' who had died apparently. June's technique of persuasion was to wiggle her pert little bum, and her school secretary job seemed to leave plenty of time for that.

'Come on Gordon'

June enticed him, sitting on his desk in a silly short skirt. She must be all of forty, with two teenagers as well.

'You are the history man after all, and you get to meet all the locals, and their daughters' she said suggestively.

The annoying thing with flirtacious people Gordon decided is that they seem to imply that everyone else was hunting for the same thing; and they were damn well often right. The flirts just had more nerve.

'I've got a lot of classes June, I mean 4A plus 3B and....'

She waved the matter aside with her plumpish arms.

'Excuses, look..'

She leaned forward to him accidentally or deliberately putting more cleavage in his line of sight.

'This isn't the city you know, everyone does three or four jobs out here in the wop-wops. If you do this it will look as if you're making an effort to fit, you know, that you want to be a local. C'mon, give it a go. Jim will be impressed'.

Jim Doughty was also Gordon's principal, and he was renting his mothers house at the moment. There were some lively rumours about June and Jim though they were married of course, but not to each other, of course. He nodded weakly.

'Good on yer Gordy'.

She patted his bum affectionately just as Gordon discovered a dislike of being both being patted on the bum and being called 'Gordy'. It reminded him of school. I suppose it was better then 'sticky' which was his usual nickname.

He put the jug on again for this third cup of tea, it was mid-morning already. He had to have the column ready by Monday, and now he knew how 3Bers felt when he dished out a history test on Friday. Depressing. He had no ideas, except that he'd been thinking of writing something about Farewell Spit, maybe there were some

wrecks out there? Perhaps he could drive out there on his trail bike one day? He dumped three spoonfuls of sugar in his tea and as he stirred he absently thought of discovering a wreck on Farewell Spit, and then his mind veered quite alarmingly to her golden skin. He jotted a line of poetry down.

She ran like melted gold on the beach

Always running out of reach.

That was terrible. It was going to be a long weekend, he must *do* something.

Chapter 3

Joker

Saturday, 5 June 1984

What he did was to walk down to the Collingwood wharf. Over its hundred year existence it had developed a drunken lean as if in sympathy with the patrons of the Mussel and Stout pub across the road. Many unspecific bits of iron and machinery cluttered the wharf planking which was stained a deep tarry black from the diesel tanks. A couple of piles had broken away from the wharf itself and looked like they wanted to make their own way out into the sea. Two of the boats had been tied up so long that the rust had crept ingeniously from the boat and bonded itself onto the steel supports so you hardly knew where the wharf ended and the boat began.

Gordon walked slowly along the wharf pretending to be super interested in smelly fishing boats, but he was really looking for something else.

This time he was lucky. He'd heard that the father of the running girl had a boat moored here, and when he heard voices he looked up and saw her, standing in the waist of the boat untangling an old fishing net. Her dad was holding the other end, perhaps hoping it would turn into a full beer bottle. They were working steadily and didn't notice Gordons arrival, which left him in the awkward position of trying to attract their attention. The girl saw him first and nodded to him with a unwelcoming look. She was wearing thick, blue dungarees, and big leather gloves, and looked as gorgeous in those clothes as in her running kit.

The older man was more friendly.

'Gidday'.

'Did you want a hand?'

Gordon offered, as some of the gear looked awkward, especially the long trawl net they were shifting.

'Ahh, cheers mate, eh grab that end will yer'.

'We can do it dad'.

'See, she's learned well eh? Don't get help from strangers' he roared.

Gordon found the net slimy to hold and by the time they jointly wrestled the thing onto the wharf he cut his hands several times.

'Geez, I should have warned you about those hooks eh. Bills the name, Bill Hepi, yer the new teacher at Takaka arn't yer?'

Gordon nodded and felt his hand pummelled by Bill's hoary old fist.

'This is me daughter...'

Gordon sensed that she wasn't in a hand shaking mood and said 'hi', she nodded again, and then made herself conspicuously busy laying out the net.

'Tidying her up?' suggested Gordon.

'Yeah, pre-spring clean eh. What do ya think of Collingwood eh? Your living in old Doughty's bach arnt you? You know her last tenant died there eh?'

Gordon was surprised, and he tried a bit of a joke

'It does smell, did they bury him?'

Bill chucked another piece of ironmongery onto the wharf and Gordon had to jump quickly out the way.

'Ha ha, no mate, it was a her. It was Ceci's sister, wasn't it love?'

'Dunno dad. This net's is buggered'.

Gordon was taken aback at her language, though Bill seemed suddenly sad.

'Yeah well, like yer old man eh?'

Bill clambered out of the boat and Gordon saw he was a big man, still strong and wore a vest with his chest hairs were tinged with gray. He was a good looking man, even now, and he must be close to sixty.

'There's not much money in fishing then? asks Gordon.

'Depends whatcha catch, ha. It keeps me out of mischief. Easier than teaching I betcha'.

Gordon smiled.

'I write this history column for the *Takaka Times* and I was thinking of any old shipwrecks you might know .

'What apart from me lad?'

The girl didn't smile at the joke, in fact she frowned at her dad as if she'd heard this all before. Bill scratched his hair and in doing so transferred a large of grease from his hands onto his bald head. He got a cloth and moved the grease around liberally. Gordon persisted

'Well out on the spit, maybe from the seventeenth century or earlier?

'Oh yeah there's few wrecks out there…'

The girl had finished tidying the net and was looking ready to leave. Gordon desperately wanted to bring her into the conversation but could not think of any half-sensible way to do it.

'Orrr, plenty I reckon, hundreds. I've found old timbers many times out there, cause they all get swallowed up, then chundered out again'.

'I'm going home dad, have you finished?'

Bill looked around absently.

'Yeah love, might have a beer eh? You errr..'

'Gordon, Gordon Micklethwaite'.

'Ok, what? Names these days, can't hang onto them. No, there's plenty of wrecks out there, might be a Spanish galleon I wouldn't wonder'.

Gordon was distracted by the sight of the girl walking away, otherwise he would have been more excited by this tidbit. She had the same grace walking as running and didn't once look back. Had he annoyed her? He wrenched himself back to the conversation as Bill was vigorously picking his nose.

'Spanish? But I read an article that said that the Spanish had never visited New Zealand?'.

'Fat lot these academic types know, I've got something to show yer. That'll surprise yer'.

Bill smacked his lips as a better thought came to him.

'Tell you what, I'll bring it over and we'll have a jug in *The Mussel* eh? I better wash up first'.

The pub sat alongside the river, though few of its patrons came for the views. The earliest part of the pub had been built in the 1857 gold rush, but since then add-ons had submerged the original building with changing_architectural tastes for the last 150 years.

Gordon waited about ten minutes before a scrubbed-up Bill ambled over to the pub. He had got most of the grease off his head, and his entrance was something of a parade, nodding to mates, jossing, shouting a joke. He was clearly one of the real locals. Someone had started up the juke-box and the pool table was occupied by a group of lanky young men with a couple of giggly girlfriends as well-trained beer-guarders. Saturday afternoon it was a happening place. Gordon already had to shout to get himself heard.

'Good on yer mate' Bill said absently to Gordon and clearly he had forgotten the name already. 'Beer? You ok. Thanks Harry, make it a DB'.

Harry came back with the beer and Bill settled down on the plastic seat and swung the glass back.

‘Ahhhh, that’s what you need. Did we get any wickets? Three?’

He confided to Gordon

‘I’m a footie man myself but don’t tell on me will yer, hee’

‘Hey joker, you on for tonight? 500?’

‘Sure Georgie. Yer wife doesnt mind sharing, hee? They call me ‘joker’ round here’.

Gordon realised belatedly that Bill was part Maori and it struck him that there were not many Maori in Golden Bay. Harry introduced himself.

‘So you out at Takaka school eh. Find a nice little girl and settle down here for life?’

The more they drank the more the words got left out of the sentences.

‘Joker’s girl, she’d make good catch’.

Harry nudged Bill.

‘Orr, shes a hard one Harry. Determined to be a virgin I reckon’.

Gordon became extremely interested in this turn of conversation.

‘Come on Bill, she’s lived in Wellington for ten years. She wasn’t knitting you know’.

Bill found this funny and roared.

‘Hee, she’s a dag alright, stroppy as, takes after her mum. But marriage, yer carnt mention the ‘M’ word round her. Reckons the men all smell of fish or cow-shit round here’.

‘What about Gordon here?’

Harry was really upping the tease factor now and Gordon had to forcibly struggle not to blush. Bill leaned back in a considering sort of way, he was on his third glass now.

‘Well she likes ‘em educated. I means you says ‘yes’ while everyone else says ‘yeah’. Do you run?’

Gordon immediately decided to start training as he regretfully shook his head.

‘Still you write dontcha. Orr she’s a funny one though, I tell yer there was some bloke in Welly but she don’t like to talk of him now. I’ll be pushing up the daisies before I see any grandkids I reckon. Another Harry me mate?’

Gordon was getting fuddled and the volume inside the room was hurting his head. Rocket Man was playing again. He became suddenly bold, and could blame it on the drink.

‘Why has she moved back here Bill, just on holiday?’

‘Nah, to help out her old man, she reckons I’m getting too old for this fishing

game’

He poured out another glass. Well that was something at least. He had time.

‘You’se been out on the Spit Gord?’

Gordon shook his head.

‘Ah yer gotta go, she’s a beaut place, aint no place like it. Wild enough to blow yer teeth out, heh I’ll take you out there. Have a days fishing eh? Maybe next Saturday eh?’

‘Yes, I mean if that’s all right?’

‘Sure, plenty of room, see, my bloody brain I almost forgot...’

Bill started rummaging in his pocket and he brought out a cloth and began unwrapping it. It was marked with all sorts of dodgy stains, and since Bill had dumped it in a pool of beer, it rapidly began soaking up a new addition to the stain collection. After unwrapping the cloth carefully Bill revealed a grubby envelope with some figures printed on the it.

‘My fingers are all thumbs, yous open it’.

Bills hand was shaking a bit as he pased over the envelope, but Gordon didnt think it was nervousness.

Bill was tapped on the shoulder by another mate and started a lively shouting conversation with him, and Harry joined in, everyone bellowing out so that Gordon found himself ignored and almost in a cloak of solitude as he opened the flap of the envelope. There was a telephone number written on the back and inside a business card ‘Soames and Brothers, Assayers’, which puzzled Gordon at first. He wasn’t sure what an assayer was. He could feel the coin as it slid out into his hand. It was heavy with a dull sheen, and around the edge was some foreign language inscription. There was a crude picture of a king on one side and the words seemed vaguely Spanish to Gordon. On the other side was a date that went into Gordons boozy brain like a sliver of steel — 1502 — that was one hundred and fifty years before Abel Tasman arrived.

Chapter 4

School Skirts

Monday, 7 June 1984

Gordon spun the trail bike sharply into the driveway spraying a few gravel chips as he was running late, and nearly ran over Fat Boy who was always lurking amongst the parked cars.

'Hello sir'.

'Got any good ones Fat Boy?'

Gordon asked as he unhooked the stretchy on the back of the motorbike and released his case and folders.

'No sir, but I'm going to Nelson next weekend. Should get some good ones then sir'

Fat Boy happily trotted along beside Gordon as he went into the main reception area of the school which, as usual, was a chaotic vortex of teachers and kids. Halfway through the year everyone was panicking. Parents who had done zilch to encourage their kids from the habitual convulvolus rows of Cs now wanted bold sunflower rows of As, and if the kids weren't achieving than the teachers were to blame. Funds were already overspent, the list of problem kids was growing and the mid-term was to long, too unceasing, and too much like hard work. Everyone was as busy as bees with bums full of honey.

'Gordon' came an authorititave voice, 'you're on playground duty ok'.

Jim Doughty disappeared into his office. June came out with a smile and dashed to her office. Gordon plunged into the teachers common room, grabbed a cup of coffee and half of it was spilt on the way to his class — the terror 3B.

For some reason today they were all half asleep, and he managed to get the rough scheme of drafting a letter, and to apply the crucial distinction of 'yours sincerely' and 'yours faithfully' (a distinction which he had never once understood in his life) before they started to play up. The bell rang and there was a rush to the door. Gordon got there last and walked straight into *the* girl, chest to chest.

'Oh sorry...'

He was utterly confused. She looked pretty cool and smart in the kind of suit you didn't see often in Golden Bay. June poked her head around the back of the girl.

'Have you too met? Carolyn this is Gordon'.

A mutual nod and a mutual 'hello' and that was it before June bundled Carolyn into the classroom and Gordon was left pink in the corridor. He was furious with himself for blushing and Sandie Pankhurst was the leader of a gaggle of schoolgirls who watched the scene with a devasting fit of giggles. By the time he got back to the common room he had got his face under control though he was still baffled as to what she was doing here?

His second bump of the day occurred at the common room door, this time the object was firmer.

'Oh hi Gordon, good weekend? We went caving into Harwoods Hole, fantastic'.

This was Darren Jacobson, the PE and Outdoor Ed teacher. He was always doing something 'fantastic' and 'brilliant' and 'you must do it' and Gordon in retaliation has dubbed him 'adventure corp', not to his face though.

'Whose the woman Gordon? Hmm, must zip along. She looks fit'.

Remarked Darren over his shoulder as he walked of, and all of Gordon's hopes started to go on a long slide down to his sandals. He could see it now. Darren and Carolyn. They were both good lookers, tanned evenly, keen on the outdoors, their names both ended in 'n'. He grabbed his second cup of coffee, doubled the dose this time, and heaped in the sugars.

'Do you really need sweetening that much Gordon?'

The comment came from Hugh Atkins, the old maths teacher, who was slumped deeply in 'Hugh's chair'. Hugh had been at this school thirty years, too long, far too long. Gordon, not for the first time, thought that teachers should be compulsorily made to stop teaching after ten years. Ditto Members of Parliament, City Councillors, rock n'roll singers. June burst in like a bubble in a champagne bottle.

'Gordon did you do the column for the *Times*? I can drop it off today. Who needs sweetening then?'.

He fished out the short script.

'Oh ta, actually I think he's pretty cute'

She gave an affectionate parting pat on Gordons buttocks that made Hugh grunt.

'That woman' Hugh said 'is only interested in one thing, and it isn't her husband'.

'Surprised she hasn't tried to chat you up Hugh'

That was the best retort Gordon could manage on a Monday morning.

‘She has. I had her twenty years ago’.

Gordon was somewhat taken aback by this remark and tried rather too obviously to change the subject.

‘Do we have a new teacher? A girl... a woman I mean’. Hugh looked surprised.

‘I don’t think so... oh you mean the singer. Carolyn Hepi. She’s come to give some singing lessons, supposed to be professionally trained I’ve heard’.

Just then a faint high note could be heard. The music classroom was two doors down and Hugh and Gordon listened as the refrain of a Mozart aria came faintly down the corridor.

Jim Doughty came in with the languages man, Herbie Mues. He was a German who like a lot of other of his countryfolk had shifted to Golden bay in the 80’s. Life-stylers they were dubbed, pseudo-hippes who were into organic absolutely everything, free love and zero electricity. Gordon suspected the free love was a necessary consequence of the zero electricity, and found them a bit preachy, but Herb was ok.

‘She sounds good’.

The German inflexion quite pronounced so the good came out ‘god’. The principal was pouring himself a herbal tea as well.

‘Yes a lucky find I think. Who is on that playground?’

He looked meaningfully at Gordon, who only gulped down a third of this coffee before heading out to supervise the mayhem outdoors. He was doomed to finishing nothing today, and there was no peace out in the war zone either. Kids were hurling things at each other, hurling themselves at each other, and thumping each other — and these were the permitted sports. In the first five minutes had to stop the interesting experiment of throwing small boys over the fence to see if they would bounce.

‘Hey sir, sir, whose the new singing teacher?’

From anyone else the question was innocent but from Sandie Pankhurst it was carefully weighted. Every single syllable held an innuendo. She was dubbed ‘hanky-panky’ by the staff and had already been caught in several compromising positions with boys, and clearly was prepared to go further than that, given a quarter chance.

‘Mr Mues said that she’s opera trained?’

Sandie turned an endearing smile on Gordon and brushed her long hair with a pose, a trick she had learned from a two-month stint at junior modelling school. Gordon knew he was being baited. Sandie had gathered together a group of followers and found it an excellent sport to ask awkward leading questions of Mr Micklethwaite.

‘Is she married sir?’.

The funny thing was that though Sandie had no brains to speak off, she had an instinctual feeling for sexual situations and double-entendres.

‘I bet she knows how to hit a high note’.

The group oblidgingly tittered. Fortunately a fight broke out in a different part of the playground and Gordon extricated himself to stop it, and was left alone the rest of the play break to try and puzzle out his feelings. During the lunch break he wandered into the library.

'Dot, do you have any books on Pacific exploration?'

Dorothy Brownlee was the type of genial older woman with a heart of gold that everyone took advantage of. Gordon had already established good relations with her, in fact it was the closest thing to a friendship he had so far established at the Bay. He guessed her age at about sixty and she had been managing the school library for twenty years at least.

'Well now...' and she started to rummage through the Pacific section 'we had a book came in last week, now what was it called? Caravels or something. Perhaps I should try the index'.

As a librarian she had surprisingly little faith in the index and liked to rely on her own phenomenal memory.

'*The Lost Caravel*, Robert Langdon, should be about here... got it'.

Gordon was impressed as the coincidences mounted up. First the coin and now this book, and the girl too, he had felt her breasts... He must stop thinking about her breasts, although the little Beast voice inside him said there was absolutely no reason why he *should* stop thinking of her breasts.

'Did you write a column for June?' repeated Dorothy.

'Oh sorry, I was dreaming. Yes, you know Bill Hepi showed me a Spanish coin?'

'Why that's Carolyns father'.

'You know him?'

'Well of course, I saw Carolyn today too. I have not seen her since she was in the school, very talented'.

Gordon paused, hoping for some more gossip, but Dorothy as usual, failed to get the hint.

'A Spanish coin you say?'

'Yes, yes, an old one. He says he found it on the Spit and thinks it came from a wreck...'

Gordon didn't have much time at the pub when Bill showed him the coin, but he had manage to do a rubbing of both sides of it. He also made a sketch to highlight any details the rubbing had missed, and written down other stuff including the 'Soames Bros address' and what he thought was Bill's telephone number on the back of the envelope. He showed the sketch to Dorothy.

‘Hmm..’

‘Anyway I wrote the *Takaka Times* article on it, and I posted a copy today off to the Historic Places Trust magazine. I mean what are the chances of two gold Spanish coins turning up on Farewell Spit?’

‘Two?’

‘’Yes, they found another one twenty years ago, according to the magazine. Different date though, 1515. It was found by someone living on the spit’.

Dorothy looked thoughtful, then fossicked away in a corner and came out with a pile of magazines, which by some amazing feat of memory she selected one magazine and showed it to Micklethwaite.

‘You should look at this then. 1974 mag, it’s up your line’.

Micklethwaite swore. Trust Dot to come up with something like this.

‘’Oh bugger, I should have read this first before writing the article….’

‘No swearing in my library I have enough trouble with the kids.’

‘Sorry Dot, but its…’

Important. Crucial even. The article was written in 1974 by someone interviewing a Professor Morton J. Haldane of Victoria University on early European discoveries in the Pacific. Micklethwaite scaned it quickly. Tasman was mentioned of course, but then the article got really interesting.

‘You think it is unlikely that the Spanish discovered New Zealand first asked the reporter? What about the Spanish helmet that was dredged up in Wellington Harbour though?’

‘Indeed? It does not mean it fell off a Spanish ship. It might have been a souvenier on a European migrant ship, or just thrown away as rubbish and dumped in the sea. Without some other artifact the helmet does not prove anything on its own’.

‘What about that coin found on Farewell Spit, 1515 I believe, Spanish?’

‘I do not believe that the evidence of one swallow creates a summer young man, and that particular Spanish coin could have come from anywhere. Coins are portable, mobile, they could have come from anyone’s pocket. Are we even sure of the source itself? Historic research needs facts, it cannot work on wild speculations’.

The tone seemed exasperated with this line of questioning.

‘But surely its a clue?’

Even in dry print the speakers reply seemed confidently dismissive.

‘Gold was very much the currency of 15th, 16th and 17th century European vessels in the Pacific, the Spanish dollar was widely used in the convict colonies of

Australia, and gold of course holds its value, so people tend to keep it. Some of it was Spanish gold, some Dutch, also English, it was the loose change of the era, and quite international. It would have travelled through many pockets.

The reporter queried.

'There's always been persistent rumours that a Spanish voyage came to…'.

Haldane interrupted him scornfully.

'Where's the evidence young man? There are persistent rumours of the Loch Ness monster as well but that doesn't make it real. It's a field dominated by amateur archaelogists and people with particular axes to grind. Most of it is specious and unwarranted assumptions really by untrained people. Strange wrecks on the coast, reports of white faces in the native population, scratches on a rock, that sort of thing are the bread and butter of these people, and I suggest it will all turn out to be a mares nest.'

The dratted school bell rang insistently again, and he had 4A next on the Maori Wars. Micklethwaite photocopied the article and Dorothy warned him.

'Well, remember Bill is full of stories. I'd take anything he says with a grain of salt'.

Several kids rushed in and were clamouring for attention so Gordon tucked his prizes under his arm and walked across the playground to the classroom. In the carpark he saw Carolyn Hepi getting into a car, and Darren Jacobson was leaning and laughing beside her, sprawling with an apparently gratifying claim of ownership on her bonnet. The bastard didn't waste much time.

Chapter 5

One Out of the Box

Saturday, 12 June 1984

The eight cylinder 1959 diesel Chevrolet chugged into life and the fishing smack turned the corner of the wharf and pushed into the river. Two seagulls perched on the bow suddenly blew off like confetti on a brides back, and the boat's bow creamed the water into the vast Golden Bay, which lay flat and passive after the lovers storm had passed. Gordon couldn't believe his luck.

The boat headed straight out into the bay, Gordon standing easily by Bill in his grubby cluttered wheelhouse. It was half full of oily rags and only apparently propped up by the rust that flowed down the sides in a gala of red and orange. Gordon was apparently listening to Bill's yarns about his fishing days but he could not keep his eyes off Carolyn, who was behaving like some sort of figurehead on the bow. She was wearing something that looked like her dad's old dungaree shorts, which were far too big, and a checked shirt, which was probably her dad's too, because it hung down almost to her knees, yet somehow she managed to look a picture of grace, childlike in that adult costume, as if she would slip out of it if she stood up too quickly.

Only a mild swell blocked the boat and there was no wind at all. It might have been summer.

'..orr yes, I know this place like the back of my hand'

Said Bill expansively, his humour as large as ever. Gordon surreptiously looked at the back of his hand, and wondered if he could accurately describe it.

'Geez you've got to watch the shallows here, but this beauty...' he tapped the steering wheel affectionately 'has got real low draft eh'.

'Have you got it stuck' said Gordon

He was making a conversational effort, though Carolyn had shifted her position on the bow and revealed two long tanned legs and a charming bottom.

'Orrrr yes, lots of times. Often I'm going easy so I can reverse her off, but once... see that point along there? Well there's a mud spit comes right out, almost a mile I'd say, and it changes, the bastard changes, and once I got stuck good and proper

on her. Even the high tide couldnt shift her, oh boy... I was in the shit there. Imagine being so far up a woman you cant get out heh? Heee....'

Gordon found Bill's metaphor unfortunate.

'What happened?'

'The boys came and pulled me off, once we'd chucked just about everything of her, and then...' and Bill was off again.

Gordon leaned back, half in the wheelhouse, half out, so he caught the breeze generated by the boat. The sun was hot, and Gordon had forgotten his sunblock. He patted his thinning top and tried to scrape over some of the long hairs he expressly cultivately for this purpose. He eventually interrupted Bill's prattle.

'Where are we heading for Bill?'.

'Over there mate, just off the Spit, they'll be good stuff there I reckon. We've got a rod for you too, heh heh. Snapper tonight eh boy?'

He turned the boat so that it paralleled the Spit and they plugged along here for a while. Gordon had not seen it this close, and was surprised how much there was to it. It was a peculiar feature altogether. About 15 miles long, or maybe he should convert that, that's 25 kilometres? Gordon had been studying it on his topo map. It ran barely above sea-level with copses of manuka and gorse dotted along its length of sand and mud and dune lakes that swung in a slight curve and the highest point was only about twenty metres or so above sea level. A mile wide, no more than that at the base, and it gradually thinned out to the tip of land and there was no clear point where the end of the spit disappeared and the sea began, it just sort of melted away. There was a the lighthouse at the end of it. Farewell Spit often it made the national news, when a pod of pilot whales got stuck in the shallow, confusing reaches of Golden Bay,

'Is that the Spanish galleon Bill?'

Gordon asked cheekily, pointing out an upturned boat hull, half buried in the water.

'Ha... that's old Georgy Banner's trawler that one, he got it stuck there, orrrr about ten years ago, and when he went back next day it had disappeared eh'.

Gordon gave him a quizzical shrug, Carolyn was coming to the wheelhouse.

'Quicksands, orr they'll dangerous orr right. Suck down everything. The cockies lost lots of stock that way, and a few trucks eh'.

'But how come you can see the boat now?'

'Spews it up again, eh Gordon, quicksand never keeps its bodies they says... They always come back to the surface. It popped up about two years...'

'How about here dad?'

'Ok Sheila, I'll turn her'.

Gordon looked surprised, and Carolyn was a mite embarrassed, as Bill Hepi threw

out the clutch and switched off the diesel letting the boat coast gently.

'Try that anchor Sheila... orrrrr'

He grimaced at Gordon as Carolyn released the anchor and confided.

'She perfers Carolyn eh, but we always called her Sheila. Carolyn is her middle name'.

'Will the anchor hold here?

It was a surprisingly intelligent question for a non-boatie like him.

'Oh no, but it will check her eh, and we'll drift back slowly. Bit o' movement good for the fishing, keep 'em on their toes eh'.

The day was suddenly silent, still no wind, and as the diesel fumes cleared away Gordon could taste the sea in his mouth, and hear the chattering flocks of wading birds. There were thousands of them on the sands. They were a good three quarters along the inside of the Spit as they set their rods, and Gordon could see inland lakes and a few strange hut-like buildings on stilts, not really huts at all, more like the size of porta-loos.

'Mai mai's eh, for the duck shooters, only they dont allow it nowadays. The whole spit is a sanctuary for birds'.

Bill expertly hung his live wriggling silver bait on his hook and cast with an easy arm. Gordon was struggling with his.

'Put it like this Gordon'.

She took his rod and snapped the silver thing on with a professional flourish..

'Here, you know how to cast? Ok. The main thing is not to hit anything'.

Gordon squirmed under her expert hands, yet was gratified that his first cast went a considerable way. Carolyn nodded.

'Well at least you held onto the rod'.

'Heees doing orright eh? What could be better than this Gordon?'

Bill slotted his rod on one of the catches on the boat and started rigging up rod number two.

'Fresh air, free air, heh, I've been doing this for sixty years now, all my life here'.

'Not all of it Dad. What about Tonga?'

'Heh, oh yeah. Well I had to get a wife eh? Couldn't find one in Collingwood'.

Bill tossed him a beer, which Gordon fondled cautiously. Bill told him he had been sent to Tonga by the army during the war and met his wife there, a kiwi nurse from Nelson.

'Orr they were worried that the Tongans would go German or something. They

had some deal going, well I didn't see any jerrys. Spent two years playing footie with the Tongan boys; boy they were fast'.

Carolyn caught the first fish, a dogfish, which she pulled off disgustedly

'Not even good for bait eh Sheila?'

Gordon watched her bash the strange shark-looking fish againt the gunwale then tossed it over the side. The beer must have loosened his tongue.

'Where did you find that Spanish coin Bill?'

'Orr, well that's a long time back, eh. I didn't find it..., err a mate of mine, errr army mate found it on the Spit, well, so he reckoned. He found a couple of them, gave me one'.

Gordon persisted

'He didn't say where on the Spit?'.

'Look, couldn't help there... He was always finding things. He was a hard case alright.'

This seemed rather unhelpful.

'You sure its genuine?' Gordon asked incautiously.

'Cause it bloody is! A coins a coin, look at it, that's the real Mckoy orright'.

'It's a great find really' said Gordon hastily and Bill seemed mollified.

'Any kids Gord?'

'No'.

'Waiting for Miss Right eh?'

Gordon blushed a bit at that and Carolyn looked up and grinned at him. He changed the subject in the most awkward way.

'How many children do you have Bill?'

Carolyn threw Gordon rather a sharp look he thought, as if she didn't like him getting too personal. Bill didn't seem to mind.

'Just Sheila here, in 1956'.

Which made her thirty thought Gordon quickly, six years older than him. Hell she didn't look it, and Gordon cast a surreptitious eye on her profile. Hardy a wrinkle.

The talk under the hot sun became desultory and Gordon was content to watch the slowly exposing sands of the spit as they drifted slowly down its length. There was quite a bit of bush on the spit, manuka and gorse mostly. Bill had three empty cans of beer lined up beside him and was contemplating a fourth. Gordon spotted a lonely figure walking on the beach, some way off.

'Does anyone live on the Spit Bill?"

‘Orr not now. The cockie I spose down the other end’.

‘What about that guy?’

He pointed and Bill squinted hard. Carolyn looked up.

‘That’s Hamburger’ she said abruptly.

The figure saw them, hesitated and then slipped back into the dunes like a shadow. Carolyn commented sourly.

‘He’s a strange one, runs away from most people. Sort of a hermit I reckon, lives out on the Spit and been there since the year dot. He’s real old, sixty?’

‘Wash yer mouth out love, that’s prime, not old...’

Gordon was rather intriqued

‘Has he got a hut out here?’.

‘Yeah, comes into town once a month. Lives on the smell of an oily rag I guess he’s got a pension…’

‘Maybe a beachcomber?’

‘Yeah maybe’.

Did Gordon imagine it or did Bill suddenly change the subject? He roared out.

‘So where’s my lunch sheila?! I’m starving’.

Lunch was substantial. Saveloys turned out to mean a half-dozen each, with tomato sauce and some beansprouts, which Bill wouldn’t touch.

‘Rabbit food eh’ he laughed scornfully.

Gordon proved his worth to Carolyn by eating plenty of beansprouts, but he was burping steadily from the second beer Bill handed him, and the harsh blue wash of light made him feel sleepy. His attempts at conversation with Carolyn always seemed to fall slightly flat. She wasn’t rude or anything, indifferent perhaps. Carolyn got two snapper after lunch, and Bill landed one.

‘No beginners luck for you Gordon? asked Carolyn, almost the first question she had directly asked.

‘I don’t mind, it’s great being here’.

She smiled. She had taken off her check shirt to reveal a t-shirt, and Gordon could see (though he really, *really* tried not to look) that she wasn’t wearing a bra underneath.

‘Well just don’t enter the fishing game, or you’re soon go broke. They don’t like you’.

Gordon pulled in another dogfish. By now they were half-way down the spit and further away from it, a light breeze pushing them towards the middle of the bay. Several seagulls had gathered upon the wheelchair and were debating a noisy point of order before Bill threw them a piece of dogfish that bounced off the wheelhouse and into the sea causing a scramble that would have done Battle of Britain pilots proud.

'Never like 'em much, the gulls'

'Any oysters in the bay? asked Gordon

'No mate, I've only ever seen one oyster'.

He said in a wry voice, so unlike his normal jokey tone, but in a second the jokiness was back.

'Plenty of mountain oysters on the hills though eh?'.

By mid-afternoon the fishing had ceased. They had already got plenty to eat with half a dozen blue cod to add to the snapper, and it was getting hot. Bill was snoozing in the wheelhouse and Carolyn was lying under the shade of a tarp stretched from the wheelhouse to the stern. Gordon joined her. He looked at her eyes which were closed, but he sensed she was not alseep. Probably ten minutes passed, with just the plat of waves against the boat and the creaking of the ship.

'Do you like teaching?'

The question, only the second, came out of the blue and caught Gordon on the hop.

'Well, it's... frustrating at times I guess'.

He struggled to gather his thoughts.

'I mean, oh the kids are pretty good, especially these ones. I mean that's often the case with more rural schools, because the kids are bussed in and bussed out, they dont get as much contact with other kids. I suppose they are more grown up really'.

She had closed her eyes again and he wasn't sure if she was really listening.

'Why do you ask?' he asked.

'Just wondering...'

Gordon knew he should ask her and he felt the inevitability of the reply.

'There's the Fishermans Ball next month, would you like to come?'

His voice sounded a little feeble, but she didn't seem to notice.

'I'm going with Darren'.

That was it. Straight question, straight answer. There was a long silence after this, and Gordon felt, well at least he had asked.

Faint heart never won fair lady his mother used to tell him, but a bold heart was not having much success either, but then what did he expect? He could have guessed

she'd go out with 'adventure corp', and for the life of him could think of no way to restart the conversation, and the longer the silence the worst it got. Then he heard a slight snort and looked at her and realised she was fast asleep with her mouth slightly open and her lips dry with salt.

He got up and stretched by the wheelhouse, Bill shuffled awake.

'Well now, maybe you could haul that anchor up Gordon... we should rattle our dags eh?'

Gordon realised that Bill had overheard the exchange and he suddenly felt foolish. He patted his thinning patch, it felt hot.

'Hey dad wait, I'll have a swim'.

Carolyn threw off her t-shirt (he had been right, she wasn't wearing a bra), and stepped out of the huge brown shorts (oh God, no knickers either) and stepped like a ballet dancer on the rail and dived off. It all happened so quickly that Gordon had not the time to be polite and look away.

'How about you Gordon?' asked Bill

Gordon shrugged, he was not a good swimmer, and he could not dive for the life of him. He fancied his style of belly-flopping was uncool.

'Yeah, I've never been a fish much myself, too busy catching 'em, but Carol here... I used to know a fellah who swam every day, and he drank half a cup of sea water. Said it had lots of minerals it it. He was a fish orrighty'.

'That's the kind of thing they do in the army to toughen you up'.

Bill looked amazed.

'Well we wuz in the army, right over there'

Bill pointed vaguely at the spit.

'A group of us army fellahs, taken over there.. all hush hush, we didn't know what it wuz about. We sweated for days building this concrete slab eh, a foundation for something'.

Gordon was interested, he really was, but a naked Carolyn was climbing back in.

'They reckoned' continued Bill remorselessly 'it was fer some sort of radar post, yer know, to guard the spit. Course it wer hush hush, top secret in those days, even we weren't supposed to know, just a concrete slab eh'.

Carolyn dried herself with no apparent embarassment.

'Nice bod eh?' teased Bill 'like her mother, boy oh boy'.

'Dad!' she pleaded.

But she didn't really seem to mind, and as Hepi started up the old Chevrolet, Carolyn pulled on her clothes while Gordon at first looked away, and then (for the flesh is weak) glanced back furtively and met her eyes as her head popped through her

T-shirt. The smack plodded back into a fine sunset, with a rim of gold along the soft edge of Farewell Spit and a sparkle on the easy sea. It was magic, beautiful, but Gordon had packed a sad.

Chapter 6

VD

Saturday, 19 June 1984

Two weeks had gone and he had not been prepared to feel so bad about it really. It was like a lost love, but for a love that had never even gotten into the pie warmer.

The last fortnight he had hardly thought of anything else, but he hadn't seen her at all, except when she ran on the beach, though she still did not seem to do that lately — perhaps she had changed her route, or had seen Gordon watching her, or she was making lovey-dovey with Adventure Corp. He had seen her twice at school, once down the wharf and a couple of times with Darren in the pub. He supposed he was 'dating' her and rather hoped that did not imply raunchy, unforgettable sex.

Was this really love or just loneliness? He'd written a particularly long and wrought-up poem about her and after many drafts threw into the fire. It seemed to have been raining for two weeks now and he felt worn down by teaching brats and administrating brats. Piles of English tests lay unmarked on his desk, alongside the Historic Places Trust latest issue. Neither gave him much comfort.

The Trust had printed his article after butchering it down to a two hundred word memo, and they hadn't even included his sketch. Gordon was pleased and discouraged at the same time. He had already shown it to anyone who might care, Dot from the school library, June, and Jim Doughty, but with school certificate looming and all manner of tests, kids reports, marking, inspections coming up, it was like an out of season snowstorm of paper was burying everyone and no one had time for more than the passing comment. The principal said.

'Well done Gordon, now what about those history tests? Are they done yet?'

He put a pot of water on the hot-plate to boil. His jug had burnt out last week and Gordon was determined not to see this as some kind of metaphor on his life. A gentle northerly rain was dripping down the corrugated iron and down the window. By six it would be dark.

The best and glorious thing about the bach was the huge old fireplace. It was constructed of rounded river stones, cemented togather, and topped with a large rimu mantlepiece. It was out of size to the rest of the wee cottage and it had a hungry appetite. Gordon collected driftwood off the beach and amused himself by hauling

logs the size of bleached whales onto his backyard. He loved the snap of the driftwood as he broke it up into kindling, the first rush of flame through the wood and the fierce crackle of salt and sea-weed as the room was lit up with flickering benevolent demons.

He read '*The Lost Caravel'*. It was a great story and Gordon made notes and began to see the makings of something more. What had that snooty prof said? 'One Spanish helmet does not prove a thing...', but a Spanish helmet and a Spanish coin, now that's different surely? And where had the coin come from?

Gordon watched the black moggy watching him. It had arrived some days ago, a scrawny thing with the bit of one ear chewed off. He was strict about not feeding it (except milk of course, which was drink not food) and was now was haunted by this black shadow that miaowed in a well-contrived series of plaintive calls all through the day, rising to a pitch of nagging desperation that only eased when Gordon finally opened the door and the stray dived in and immediately positioned itself with a congratulatory purr in front of the fire. Admit it Gordon, you're a soft touch.

At T-Col he had fondly imagined that Golden Bay was full of sunshine and single girls with friendly breasts, but he hadn't seen them. The brochure on Takaka school revelled in the outdoor opportunities of Golden Bay, which in hindsight should have warned him off. There was no mention of the opportunities for bookworms and coin collectots, and anyway he'd hardly looked at his coin collection. The pile of unmarked tests seemed to achieve a weighty gravitional effect in the room, the more he tried to avoid looking at them the more his eyes seemed drawn to them. Oh Carolyn... Unintentionally it came out loud, and it sounded pathetic. He had to pull himself together.

His mum, ever loyal to her son, had sent him a photocopy of a historic map of 1827 which had the curious notation on it: 'New Zealand discovered by Tasman in 1642 but whose Eastern coast was known to Portuguese in 1550'. Also on the map was printed on the Tasman Sea side of New Zealand 'Gulf of the Portuguese'. He mused out loud to the cat who said nothing

> 'I suppose the Spanish helmet could be Portuguese? I mean how does history work cat, I mean the accumulation of history? It's just facts isn't cat? Lots of little facts that build a picture'.

He had looked up the Portuguese in an exploration book from the library, and been surprised that they had had a colony in Timor in 1516. That seemed early, but then they had rounded the Cape of Good Hope by 1447.

> 'So can't dismiss the Portuguese, but they are a long way from New Zealand eh cat? I mean if you were a bet-placing kind of cat would you pick the Spanish dagoes or the Portuguese dagoes?'

The cat settled deeper into the sofa.

> 'No bets huh?'

It was Dot the librarian who pointed out the famous passage written by Captain

Cook. The book was weighting down 3B's English test papers, and Gordon read it again as sipped his tea

> 'One day, on our enquiring of Taweiharooa how many ships, such as ours, had every arrived in Queen Charlotte's Sound, or in any part of its neighbourhood? he began by giving an account of one absolutely unknown to us. This, he said, had put into a port on the north-west coast of Teerawhitte, but a very few years before I arrived in the Sound in the *Endeavour*, which the New Zealanders distinguished by calling Tupia's ship. At first, I thought he might have been mistaken as to the time and place; and that the ship in question might be either Monsieur Surville's, who is said to have touched upon the north-east coast of Eaheinomauwe, the same year I was there in the *Endeavour*, or else Monsieur Marion du Fresne's, who was in the Bay of Islands, on the same coast, a few years after; but he asured us he was not mistaken, either as to the time or as to the place of this ships arrival, and that it was well known to everybody about Queen Charlotte's Sound and Teerawhitte. He said, that the captain of her, during his stay here, cohabited with a woman of the country; and that she had a son by him still living, and about the age of Kokoa; who, though not born then, seemed to be equally well acquainted with the story. We were also informed by Taweiharooa, that this ship first introduced the venereal disease amongst the New Zealanders. I wish...'

Cook was God as far as Gordon was concerned, and venereal disease was a fact even though it took time to spread, at least time enough for a ships crew to chat up the local ladies and have a good bonk. It was such a surprising fact that Gordon was amazed historians did not draw upon it more often. He had not read a single general history of New Zealand that had even mentioned Cook's comment, and they followed the same well-intentioned trail from Abel Tasman to Cook, with nowt in between.

> 'I mean' he said aloud to himself' (the cat was not listening now) 'how else could you explain the presence of VD without suggesting a pre-Cook voyage?'

But there were so many to choose from: Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English… it's like New Zealand was Charing Cross in the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries, and hell there was the French as well.

He dumped two spoonfuls of instant coffee in a cup and poured simmering water on top, sitting with the steaming cup in front of the fire. The rain dribbled on and the wind barely ruffled his washing, which he'd forgotten to bring in and was now sodden again. The rain had really settled in now and the cat had restretched herself to occupy a closer position near the fire. Gordon had started to doze off in front of the fire, imagining pieces of eight, conquistadors and Spanish galleons churning through the Pacific, and pirates ready to board...

There was a loud banging and Gordon started. He had to shake off the pirates and realised that someone was knocking at the front door, and got up dazed with sleep.

> 'When you gonna get a decent box eh Mr Micklethwaite? That thing ain't no bloody good in this rain!'

The postie pointed disgustedly over his shoulder at the mulch of brown cardboard that had been doing the job, and thrust some mail into Gordons dazed face. After deducting the junk mail, one power bill, and an invitation from the local church to 'Get with God' tomorrow he was faced with an unknown hand-written letter.

There was something polite about the way the address was written, neat organised uprights and straightened cross-bars. Gordon got so few letters that he was in no rush to open this one and played the game of trying to guess who it was. The back address said 'R. Haldane, 321 Kelburn Road, Wellington'. Never heard of him, though the name sounded vaguely familiar. Gordon opened the envelope and was disappointed to see how short the letter was, but it was to the point.

'Dear Mr Micklethwaite.

I was interested in your note on the Spanish coin you found at Golden Bay, and I took the liberty of getting your address from the Historic Places Trust.

The date on the coin is very early, 1502, and I wonder if you could provide more specific information on where you found it?

Yours sincerely

Reginald Haldane'.

The truth was Gordon didn't know where Bill had found it. He'd been pretty vague, and seemed to think someone else had given it to him. Maybe that hermit bloke? Gordon found a presentable piece of paper and started to write.

'19 June 1984

Dear Mr Haldane,

Unfortunately I am unable to confirm the precise origin of the coin, as the current owner, a local man Bill Hepi, was given the coin many years ago and is now rather vague about the circumstances of its origin.

He believes that it was found from Farewell Spit but cannot confirm that. I realise that this is rather unhelpful but I am still continuing with my enquiries and it was partly with the hope of jogging local memories that I published the note in the Historic Places Trust magazine.

I hope to visit the Spit at some stage with Bill Hepi and he has promised to show me the site.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Micklethwaite'.

It wasn't his fault really, and hindsight is always 20/20. If he hadn't written to the Historic Places Trust in the first place, or been so faultlessly organised at posting a reply. Most of all if he hadn't mentioned Bill by name (that was a stupid thing to do)

maybe everything would have been different? But he knew, deep down, it was his fault. There was a sequence of events and he had propelled them along quite happily, even wanting something to happen — and it did. He might as well have clubbed the man to death himself, the result was the same.

Chapter 7

W I W S E

23 June 1984

The room was cloyed with memories. They were stuck on the wall in mahogany frames, tinted black and white photographs of men in funny shorts against a thick jungle, or lined up in jingling rows, smart in their home uniforms. They were mostly young men, with cheeky kiwi grins and strange tropical hats. There were memories framed as maps, faded to a brittle white, with odd names like 'Penang' printed neatly on them, and a large one on Timor Island. Some memories on display were metallic: an Indonesian knife, a 1917 German mauser gun, a Japanese officers sword, and a row of medals.

On another side of the room were hundreds of books neatly ordered covering the owners passions from military history, from Burma to Indonesia, and perhaps the most prized was a book signed just simply 'Ollie' — Oliver Wingate. There was very little written on the Malaya insurgency, the 'forgotten war', that was not on these shelves. He also had practically every book on Pacific exploration, and there was a whole long row of the Polynesian Societies Journals — and they were not covered in dust.

Just above the roll-top was a singular item, oddly feminine, a long delicate strip of dyed Timorese cloth, with a once gay printed design on it, though now faded into a dusty red. On the roll-top itself were two items, that had been occupying the attention of the rooms owner. One was the recent copy of the Historic Places Trust magazine, and the second was a letter postmarked from Golden Bay.

Haldane stared through the window at the scudding patches of blue, and reminded himself it was the clouds that were moving, not the sky.

Bloody liar! Joker probably had been digging up the stuff all along, what a mate eh? Just turn around and filch the stuff when no one was looking, and hocking it off probably, and he'd thought Joker was dead — Charlie at the 17th's reunion — told him that. Where was that letter? Haldane went over to the bookcase and brought out a large ring-folder, with the label 'Spit' on it. March 1971, Bill's writing was execrable, and in very short sentences, as if he could not trust himself to write a long grammatical one — which was probably true.

‘Sorry mate but I never did find the spot again. I believe that the sand covered it over. Or the foundation sunk. The spit changes so much that a storm might have washed it out too’.

How much was left? Bill might have got rid of all the coins by now, but so he must know where the slab was, but there was a good chance that the real stuff was stil there. Bill wouldn’t be interested in bits of metal. Haldane started pacing slowly up the down through the vast room, like a staff sergeant on a parade ground. There was no barking of orders but he marched to a different tune, one that was uncannily mimicked by thea old tick tocking of the grandfather clock in the hallway, as if time itself were ticking away, it was forty years gone, back to a long, hot, sepia, summer.

There was a man running on the beach, in long ungainly shorts and bare chest. He had worked up a good sweat but did not look unduly troubled by the exertion. The other men jossed him.

‘All the way there and back?’

‘Sure, its a good run. Do you slobs good’.

‘Didja touch the lighthouse?’

He grinned

‘It’s not like we’re working hard digging this. Any char?’

‘Yeah its smoke-ho time’

‘Again?’

‘Every hour, hee’.

It was a cracker day, practically every day was Haldane remembered.

‘Any smokes Hamburger?’

The men sat and drank from the heavy army-issued enamel cups and watched the seagulls circling.

‘Geez I hate those things…’

‘Why?’

‘Dunno. Always watching, waiting, cruel, I reckon.’

‘Well we’re not having bloody roast seagull again’.

‘Hee, that was a bad idea eh?’

Joker had shot two seagulls and cooked them Maori-fashion in a hangi for seven hours. They got them out and they tasted vile. Like diesel oil

‘Here’s a good hangi menu. Cook seagull for three days. Dig out seagull. Then throw it away. Suck on hot stones’.

Oyster was on his third fag.

‘I reckon we’ve dug deep enough? Can’t we start putting in the concrete now

sarge?'

Bog shook his head.

'You guys waste so much time yakking that the sand fills in the hole again during smoke-oh, another two feet I reckon. Where's that shingle anyway you were getting?'

'Geez sarge, we've had to go miles eh? Its sand, sand, mud, sand...'

'We're short on cement too sarge.'

'What about those shellbanks we saw? Shells have got calcium in eh, should be good for the foundations?'

The sarge scratched his head, yeah it was an idea. Joker wasn't so sure.

'Them's Maori middens those'.

'You'll be doing a waiata next'.

Bog yelled after Hamburger.

'Watch out for the quicksand! You buggers, yer don't take enough care'.

'Didja see oh Harry, got a foot stuck in the stuff... orrr its evil I reckon'.

'Where we gonna get the rocks from sarge? There's no bloody iron or anything to reinforce it eh?'

The sun made his head hurt.

'It's gotta be a good straight slab tho sarge, for this bloody radar thingy'.

'Heh! Hammie that's all hush-hush'.

'We'll thats what I heard, you heard that Oyster?'

'Yeah, I told you, I saw the word on the document the captain was waving about, sure it said radar'.

'What the hell is radar anyway?'

The sarge shrugged.

'Buggered if I know, but I do know if we don't keep digging we're be buggered digging out the sand again... '

'Work, work, work, in the army' muttered Hamburger as they set too

'All I says is... double-U, i, double-U, s, eee, heh heh'.

'Can you get the radio working?'

And out of Haldanes long memories came the sad sweet song of the Forces Favourite, Vera Lynn, singing about 'he White Cliffs of Dover', a place he'd never seen and never would see. Someone, it was probably Joker, he had a good voice, was singing the song to another Vera Lynn tune 'We'll Meet Again', but with new words, which he'd made up himself.

‘Well I Wish I were Somewhere, Yes I wish I Was Somewhere, Yes I Wish I was Somewhere, Elllssseee...’

The memory made him smile, but then he tapped the table loudly with a frown. There was no time to waste. He needed to see someone.

Chapter 8

Rock Around the Clock

Saturday, 8 July 1984

'One, two, three o' clock, four o'clock rock

Five, six, seven o'clock, eight o'clock rock

Eight, nine ten, eleven o'clock, eleven o'clock

We're gonna rock around the clock tonight'

Harry and the Beatniks were winding up nicely, the bass thumping out around the Collingwood Valley Comunity Hall, with a hundred cars drawn up outside and more rolling in every minute. The Fisherman's Ball had a rock and roll theme this year, and this had sprung the oldies out of their closets. Harry was a local boy made good, with a big smile and a voice that could sound like Elvis on a good night. The Beatniks always delivered a good show, and the dance floor had been polished and ready for the blue suede shores that were being dusted off in cupboards from Takaka to Bainham. Some ripe hairychested specimens from the communes, caravans and cannabis plots along the bay would make a point of turning up, and they'd drag their men along too.

The trouble with dances is that people generally turned up with a partner and no one had asked him, and he had been let down flat by the only person he had asked... Still he did like rock and roll. At the front door he immediately met a gaggle of his pupils, led of course by Hanky-Panky.

'Hi sir, ready to' (that euphemistic pause again) 'rock and roll?'

They all burst into fits at this witticism. Hugh Atkins was at the door, which surprised Gordon. Hugh struck him as more of a party pooper than him.

'They always manage to find a giggles nest' Hugh commented sourly.

'I don't see you as a dancer Hugh?'

He shrugged.

'My wife likes to hop around a bit'

He looked disgusted, and Gordon shrugged him off and plunged into the hall. People were up and ready to roar at the start time of 8 pm, with the dance floor already having a few writhing couples on it. He noticed June and her hubby (what was his name?) getting into it, or at least June was, jitterbugging like a teenager. Harry was yelling down the microphone and Beatniks already had a sweat up on the second song. Gordon saw one of his less talented 3B'ers fiddling with the sound box at the back of the hall, a pimply personality called Gary, who never-the-less had a small entourage of 3Bers getting a bit of glamour from being associated with the sound man.

'I don't think he will go home a virgin tonight'.

The remark made Gordon jump, as it came just as the Beatniks had finished *Hound Dog* and the voice had been shouted into the sudden silence.

'Oh June, hi'.

'Look at 'em round Gary like he's God. I bet Millie Trots fancies him too. Feel like a dance Gordon?'

Gordon excused himself to get a drink and then regretted it, as the next number was one he liked, an old Bobby Darrin number. Bit slower, and some of the oldies tentatively tried it on. At the bar already were the old faithfuls, including Bill Hepi.

'Hi yer Gordon, Carolyn coming along later. Give her a whirl eh?'

He nudged Gordon suggestively and looked a tad drunk already. Gordon got chatting with some of the other teachers — Herbie Mues was there with his pretty wife — but still he kept an eye on what was happening the floor, and noticed when the Beatniks got the timing wrong, and muddled the words of *She's My Baby*. June was the best dancer so far, though Millie Trotter was looking stylish.

The noise was deafening now and he slipped back against the wall a mite, since conversation was getting hard above the wall of sound the Beatniks were drumming up. Darren was over there, working the girls, teasing, laughing, touching them in a casual ownership way that they seemed to like. The Beatniks were doing a rather mournful version of *Heartbreak Hotel* which brought quite a few grippy and sucky punters out onto the field, then they went into quite a funky (for them) version of *Tutti-Frutti*. Then he saw her, oh yes, she was glamorous, and in a dress too.

It was sort of pleated and quite wide, a bit like a rock'n'rollers outfit except it was much shorter, and sexier. Her top was a sort of skin tight white top with an old-fashioned cardy draped over her shoulders. She looked chic, and just right. Her hair was tied up and exposed a long interesting neck. It was the first time he had seen her in a dress, and she made the schoolgirls look like garbage bags. Where was Darren?

'Gee she's a stunner your girl Bill? Set her up yet?'

One of Bill's drinking cronies said fairly loud.

'Orrr... she'll look after herself eh?'

'Yer still keen for 500 tonight?'

‘Sure. For sure eh. Come round, I’ll be there with my lucky cards eh?’.

Gordon got a second g & t and watched the parade. The Beatniks were doing a slow *Blue Velvet* with Harry crooning away, too slow really. The guys wanted to dance. They weren’t ready for smooching. Principle Doughty pumped him on the shoulder.

‘Going to get dancing soon Gordon, this is my wife’.

Gordon saw a rather thin-lipped woman, done up, with a fixed smile. She started talking to him but Gordon wasn’t really listening because there was something odd happening over there. No it wasn’t Millie Trotter snogging the neck out of Gary, and getting hauled off by her mum, it was Darren getting a rebuff. It was clearly a rebuff, couldn’t be more pointed in fact.

He had rolled up to Carolyn in his smooth way, like a cue ball over a billard table, and sort of gestured towards the dance floor, and she’d just said no. Or rather she had shook her head and turned back to talking to old Auntie Mab, the custodian of the marae. It was over in a second, but Darren looked genuinely put out, then managed to extricate something from the moment by turning to another woman who eagerly took up his offer. And here was a second surprise, Darren couldn’t dance for toffees. He sort of jiggled on the spot, vainly trying to make the upper body move when his feet were set in concrete. Gordon could not understand why men did not realise that if you don’t move your feet you can’t dance.

This was cause for celebration and a third g & t, though Gordon hardly had time for a sip when Carolyn simply walked up to him.

‘Would you like to dance Gordon?’

Dumbfounded was hardly the word, but she’d asked and he could not say no. But the Gods were on his side, and the Beatniks started in with a great number — *Blue Suede Shoes*. It took him a moment to regain his dancing feet, and she looked even more distractingly gorgeous up close, but as the song picked up momentum Gordon (two and half gin and tonics inside him) gave Carolyn a quick swirl.

It was an easy movement, one of the first he learnt, but it was incredibly effective. By holding Carolyn’s hand he sort of pulled her forward, then lifted her hand and her body quite naturally turned under his hand like a top, and he released his hand as she came round then grabbed the spare hand as it floated round. Carolyn looked astonished and after another few steps he tried another swirl, this time anti-clockwise and she looked flushed and surprised.

‘Don’t you step on my blueeeeee, suuueedeee shoooeeeees’.

Harry crooned with soul he wound up the song. She really did look surprised. The Beatniks then went for a slowie and Gordon took her waist in a waltz to *Simply You.*

‘Gordon, where did you learn to dance like this?’

‘I thought you were dancing with Adventure Corp... I mean Darren.’

That was the brave g & t's speaking.

'What did you call him?'

Even her hair smelt sexy, maybe this was his night?

'Err... Adventure Corp'.

She laughed, and Gordon was chuffed. It was the first time he had made her laugh. They waltzed some more, bumping into Millie Trotter who was sucking deeply upon Gary's face.

'I thought you were coming to the dance with Darren?'

'He's a bit of a sleazbag'.

Carolyn said, nodding towards Darren. Gordons reply was stunning.

'Oh'.

The next dance was a real rip it up, Chuck Berry's *School Days*, and Gordon really enjoyed himself, though at the next number Will Banks cut in and took Carolyn away with him. Gordon saw rather enviously that they were having a deep and meaningful conversation, but he got little time for reflection because Millie Trotter burst in. Every sentence she uttered had innuendo in it.

'Hey Gordon, you're a great dancer, can I do you for the next one?'

Gordon to his surprise found himself whirled from one female to another throughout the evening. He had never been this popular before, so those rock and roll lessons at the uni students club had finally paid off. After all most of the kids and even the older guys were not that good at dancing, but some of the oldies were surprisingly sharp, though they ran out of breath after two dances. He got so brave as to ask Hanky-Panky 'for a quick one' and she didn't turn him down, in fact she laughed all the way through the dance and said afterwards 'you're a real groovy dancer Gordon' the highest compliment in her limited dictionary.

At supper break he met up with Carolyn.

'You're popular'.

Her face had a real smile, not a put down smile, or a I'm-going-to-be unpleasant smile.

'You're pretty good too, I wouldn't mind a couple more dances?'

'Sure, but the competition is tough you know'.

She smiled cheekily and left him to talk to her dad who was just putting on his coat.

'Supper' turned out to be a formidale array of mince pies, sausage rolls, cheerios, sandwiches, Anzac biscuits, a real traditional kiwi spread in fact, something Gordon hadn't seen in years, and on top of that there was practically every kind of cake you could think of, all well plastered in the Golden Bay's Dairy Co-Operative's gener-

ous dollops of cream. Tea came out of an urn controlled by Auntie Mab and after several sorties Gordon felt well stonkered and was regretting the shark and chips he had earlier.

Harry and the Beatniks were charged up after the break and ripped into several stomping numbers. June grabbed Gordon at the start, and they both really went for it and blatantly showed off. Gordon couldn't wipe the sweat off fast enough.

'Come on Gordon, let's cool down' and June tugged him outside 'over here, by the river there'.

One couple were coming up from the bank, giggling, and Gordon was sure he recognised Sandie Pankhurst's elaborate giggle, but he wasn't sure, and didn't care anyway.

'Here Gordon, this looks fine'.

It was a fallen tree stump beside the river, and in quite a lot of deep shade from under a dark rustling willow. They could not be seen from the road, which apparently was the idea.

June grabbed him and put her lips firmly on his, and Gordon lipped back. He was astonished (it *really* did seem to be his evening) and he was aroused. She grabbed his buttocks and started squeezing and rubbing them, and he did the same with her bum, and then ran his hands up her legs and under her skirt and up to her knickers. This was crazy! She was forty, with a husband about twenty yards away (what *was* his name?), but she had the hots alright.

'Gordon, Gordon, stroke me all over'

She muttered her tongue slobbering around in his mouth (which he didn't actually enjoy), but by now he had brought his hand round to her plump stomach. She shivered all over.

'Gordon, Gordon'.

He hadn't the faintest idea what to do next, I mean they could not possibly have sex here could they? His hand was fondling her thighs when a man's voice could be heard close by. Immediately June pulled away, and brushed her dress down so that Gordons hand sort of fell out of her knickers. She didn't seem embarrassed.

'You stay here, come up later'.

She whispered this quickly and started scrambling up the bank.

'Oh hello Hugh, you've caught me. The ladies was full up, with a mile long queue. Are you enjoying yourself?'

Her voice twittered on as she led Hugh back to the hall. Gordon was trembling as he stood there, and for about five minutes he waited, till his heart went from rock n'roll to a medium foxtrot, then he too walked up the bank and pretended to be taking the air by sauntering back to the main door. Will Banks stumbled out with some smart little piece, till Gordon did a double-take and realised it was one of his 3B's.

‘Jesus the bands really rocking it Gordon, they all wanna footy with yer eh, you’re number one, shit she’s hot’.

Gordon was left wondering whether he meant Harry and the Beatniks were hot, or the temperature inside the hall, or the girl who he was apparently dragging off into the roadside bushes. He felt a spark of voyeuristic curiousity, but then pulled himself up and went inside to the mayhem.

He danced and danced and danced. He got one more with Carolyn who was starting to look tired, but fortunately it was a slow dance and they were able to take it easy. Harry looked stuffed, but he was a performer, give him that, and this version of Elvis’s *Love Me Tender* was right on the spot.

‘Has your dad gone home?’

‘Yes, its his 500 night tonight’

‘I like your dad, I mean he’s genuine’.

She seemed surprised.

‘Well, I’m too close to him in some ways, I know all his bloody jokes’.

She certainly looked tired but cool still, and under control. She seemed happy to dance with him, and you can always tell. Some girls just put a fight from the first step to the last, but she was happy to let him take control, and even softened in his arms. He wanted to say she was beautiful but then remembered that old Nancy Sinatra song and decided not to spoil it all by saying something stupid.

‘You’re a rock n’ roll afficiando Gordon?’

‘I like the music’.

‘I wouldn’t have guessed’.

She said that quite straight and Gordon was puzzled.

‘You can walk me home later if you like’.

She released her arm and wandered over to sit by the oldies. The Beatnicks finished with two roaring numbers, that had just about everyone up on the floor. Then the party was over.

The cars started pulling away and the women were clattering in the kitchen, washing up the supper dishes. Two of the young fishermen from Takaka had got drunk and were having an argument over something, probably Sandie Pankhurst who looked tearful. Jim Doughty stepped in and defused the situation nicely, after all they were ex-pupils of his, and they responded like naughty schoolboys and slunk off. The last Gordon saw of Millie was her mother dragging her off to the family saloon. Gary had gained the earnest attention of two of Hanky Pankies gang, and he looked happy. June was probably right.

Gordon helped shift some of the hay bales outside where Harry and the other Beatnicks were having a brew and fag. ‘Great stuff Harry’ someone called out. The organiser was pulling out a wad of cash.

‘Great show boys’.

The stars were bright and bold and it was quite cold by the time Gordon, who had got roped into a clean-out the hall, had finished. He had not forgotten his mission however, and kept an eye on Carolyn as she helped her aunties with the kitchen clean-up. He nodded to her and she put up a hand of five fingers. Thirty minutes later she joined him outside, her cardigan back on. They walked down the road together as Jim Doughty beeped in passing.

‘Great night’ said Gordon helpfully.

‘Hmm’

‘I liked your dress’.

‘Thanks’.

Gordon once again could not think of any opening lines, but perhaps it was better if he shut up. They had already walked half the distance home. Then she took his arm, which pleased him immensely, although it did then strike him that she had made all the moves.

‘Where did you learn to dance like that?’ she asked after a long pause.

‘University, they had a rock and roll club’.

‘Good way to meet girls eh?’

Gordon nodded ruefully. In theory yes, in practice, not so much, but he didn’t say that.

‘Hmm... your degree sounds more fun than mine. I’ve been a fool Gordon.’

‘Err why? I don’t understand’.

‘No. You’re not supposed too, I’m talking to myself’.

‘Oh’.

He so wanted to kiss her, but you couldn’t grab a woman could you? Though that hadn’t stopped June, but Gordon already knew there was a difference. You couldn’t grab a girl you really wanted, only one you didn’t want. He began another topic tentatively.

‘June could really dance for it’.

Carolyn giggled.

‘She can really rock and roll. She’s bedded half the male teachers at school you know Gordon, you watch out or it’ll be your turn next’.

Gordon looked alarmed at Carolyn but there did not seem to be any intensity in her words, it was as if they were thrown away. She was looking at the stars. He had to change the conversation to a safe topic.

‘Do you know Sirius? It’s the brightest star in the sky’.

She stopped to look at it, and they were only a hundred yards from her home.

'The Egyptian called it the Dog Star'.

This had nothing to do with anything, although she did not seem to mind as he prattled on about the Egyptians and the Nile River floods.

'That's the trouble with the city, you don't see the stars' she said.

He could not see her face, she sounded sad. It was desperately romantic, and he really ought to just grab her here, but he remembered June's clinches and just could not bring himself to do it.

The Hepi home stood right on the shoreline, as befitted a fisherman perhaps. A big macrocarpa hedge kept the house out of sight of the road and there was a caravan parked oddly on the grass front. Her believed that Carolyn lived in it. There were glass buoys tied up along the verandah, and an ancient honeysuckle scenting the otherwise salty air. Cray pots lay in a pile on one side of the house and Bill's old Holden on the other. The weatherboards had lost most of the paint they ever had, and as they used to joke it was propbably only the borer holding hands that kept the cottage standing.

Carolyn suddenly gripped his arm and then released it.

'That's odd. The front door is open'.

A beam of light was coming out of the front door and Carolyn walked into it.

'Dad?' she called.

'He must have left it open. Oh well, goodnight Gordon, thanks...'

She could not quite finish the sentence, and seemed to be pulled inside by some intuitive sense that something was wrong. Gordon must have sensed it to, or else why did he follow her?

There was a small startled cry and as Gordon walked into the living room he saw Bill lying on the floor, with Carolyn kneeling beside him, feeling his head. As he looked around the room for the phone Gordon saw a table upturned, and a whiskey bottle drained into the carpet. As he dialled he noticed that there were old newspaper clippings scattered everywhere, and Carolyns hand was quite red from her father's blood. It made him feel sick. The mirror was cracked too. For some reason Carolyn had stood up and clasped her white top with the bloodied hand and as she removed it it left a bizarre blood imprint. As if a hand was milking her.

Chapter 9

Unaccustomed Territory

Saturday, 8 July 1984

She was between bewilderment and numbness. From the moment she looked up from her father's body and saw Gordon dialling the police she felt she was in somebody's else's movie. Everything revolved slowly, and she kept waiting for the credits to arrive at the end where she could leave the fantasy world and walk back out into the real world. Except that she was not sure which was which, and if the distinction made any sense her dad would still be alive. Carolyn remembered how when she travelled overseas that the first few days in another country always seemed to her, not as if she were moving through it, but as if she were at the movies, and she was standing still and the country was unravelling around her. The scenery, the people, even the smells, and if she turned away all those sights were just quickly wrapped back onto a giant spool for the next customer. It was weird, and one part of her could acknowledge it was weird.

After Gordon put down the phone, she went to the kitchen and washed her hands, then sat in the lounge waiting and stared at her hand. Gordon had hardly moved. She wanted to wash her father clean from blood that had seeped from the the head wound, and make her father comfortable, but Gordon said no. He had given her an awkward hug but she did not respond. She was damned if she was going to cry to order. She watched Gordon check the other rooms and look out the back, but felt unable to take her eyes off her father's face. I suppose I'm in shock she said to herself.

The local cop, Micky Duggan, lived only three doors down and just been getting into bed, so he arrived in a few minutes. He could see it looked like a burgarly gone wrong. There was some sort of struggle and Bill Hepi had fallen and hit his head on the table. Perhaps he had come into the room and surprised the burglar. He dialled Nelson police and watched Carolyn carefully, and Carolyn knew that she was being watched. They went through some question and answers.

> 'I have got the team to come in, you know fingerprints and everything. I'll ring Mabel?'

That was Carolyn's aunt, who only lived four more doors down the road. Duggan rang Mabel who took some time to come to the phone but the explanation was brief.

'If you don't mind Carolyn I'll get you two to wait outside. Are you alright to go home sir?'

He did not know Gordon well enough to call him by his Christian name, but he had gone to school with Carolyn. They had actually dated once. Auntie Mabel and her husband arrived, it must have been past 1 am now.

'It'll take two hours for the team to get over'.

Duggan did not suggest to Carolyn to try and sleep, because that was ridiculous.

Gordon said 'goodnight' and something about 'being sorry' but she could only stare at him, and he scuttled off like a crab wondering where the tide had gone. And that was it. A few phone calls, some muted conversations and the thing was all done. It seemed so civilised and polite beside the stiffening body of her father. If she could have thought of a prayer she would have said one.

The night passed sipping tea, talking in hushed tones and the tears began to come about 4 am. Auntie Mabel had seen slow death and sudden death before. She knew how emphatic and commonplace it was, how dislocating, and how ordinary. She knew the stages of grief and was not going to hurry them.

Shock, numbness, anger, regret, guilt, they all came to Carolyn over the next few days, and although she was not aware of it, Auntie Mabel steered her gently through the unaccustomed territory of death. Even the tangi was a shock. Carolyn had hardly seen many of her relatives, many of which were from down the coast. Her singing career in Wellington had taken all of her energies, and anyway she had never felt particulary Maori. That wasn't a polite thing to say, and she didn't say it publicly, but it was what she felt. The *tangi* did not change that, and there was something strangely uncomfortable about the rituals and wailing waita. It was as if they belonged to someone else, and she really no right to them since she had played no role as a Maori.

She was comforted that other people obviously cared, and comforted by the sheer warmth and enjoyment of the recollections of her father's life, yet the *tangi* seemed to drag on and on, exhausting all her reservoirs of grief. Perhaps that was the idea? When dad was finally buried, the relatives packed up and the marae was deserted, Carolyn went back to her home and then, just as she had wished for them to be gone and she could get stuck into a session of private drunken grieving and rage, then perversely she wished they had stayed longer.

What was it that Auntie Mab had said?

'Everyone will be gone soon and then you will start to feel it. In a week, in a month. These things take time love, and you have to face them on your own. It's a bit of a shit really, but that's the way God seems to have organised it. He will be there for you. He alone'.

Carolyn had no trust in Auntie Mab's God. Both her parents had gone now, and she was alone. Well, not exactly alone because she felt she was always on public display. Not exactly an entertainment, but an object of interest. She had not realised this

about death before. It was like a wedding without the fun, and everyone was on their best behaviour when they spoke to her, and she could sense every cautious word they phrased, every concerned look they gave, till she wanted to scream and say she just wanted to get pissed and who was joining her?

Fortunately she had a good session with Auntie Mab, quietly drinking gin and tonics and giggling over what they remembered about Bill's pranks and jokes. She had memories that surprised Carolyn, and so many people had fond memories of her dad that it made it cry. At the funeral orations she remembered clearly thinking that it was a pity that people saved up the nice things to say about their friends after they were dead.

> 'Of course you wished you'd said that or said this' Auntie Mab consoled her 'but he knew you loved him you know. People who love each other usually do know'.

These wise words had been a great source of comfort to her as she got through the business of tidying up after the dead, and what a lot of tidying up there was to do. The dead leave a big mess behind.

There was the formal police report to give, and the sorting through the house to see what was missing. The questions and flat empty answers. The police stuck to Mick Duggan's first suspicion that it was a burgarly gone wrong, but the autopsy report was unexpected. Bill Hepi had actually died of a heart attack (she hadn't even known he had a weak heart? wasn't he like a whale of a man?) and the wound on the head was incidental.

There was the life insurance to sort out, the will to be read, her Dad's belongings to be sifted through and ultimately discarded. Auntie Mab was staunch and her hubby Ted slowly got her through the tidying up, but in the two weeks of polite hell she went through they're never seemed to be any spare time. It was a sort of conspiracy of strangers, whereby people were always dropping by, wanting to share some part of the loss. Endless cups of tea with near-strangers who remembered the Joker and did you hear this story... Carol was sick of stories and sick of tidying up the remains like a cleaner after the party. At one point she got actually annoyed with her dad for having such a stupid heart attack.

And the killer himself, for that was the way Carolyn looked at it. What was he like? Was it even a he? Was he a local?

That question bothered Mick Duggan, but as he said to Carolyn two weeks after the tangi, there were so many people in town that evening for the Fishermens Ball that it could have been anyone, and everyone was so drunk they wouldn't have noticed anything anyway. He had interviewed thirty people by now and no one had seen a thing.

Bill had left the ball and gone home to pick up his set of cards for his Saturday night session of 500 with his three mates. Around about 10.30-11 he had grappled with some intruder and had a heart attack. End of story, and here was something surprising. Nothing was misssing, nothing at all. Yet it looked as if the intruder was search-

ing for something, there were newspaper clippings from a file box Bill had kept over the years, and they were scattered everywhere. One or two drawers looked as if they had been hastily searched.

> 'I mean' said Mick Duggan 'anyone local would know that your dad didn't have anything valuable in the house, though he did keep a pile of cash, but that's still there, so I reckon it was an out-of-towner. And you're sure nothing is missing?'

She shook her head. Mick hesitated here.

> 'Look Carol, you know we're old schoolmates and I'm telling you off the record. I don't want to upset you, but the team found no prints except Bill's, yours, and some of Mr Micklethwaite's of course, and one or two other locals. What you'd expect really. The inspector reckoned that without some new clues its going to be damn difficult to catch the intruder'.

Carolyn was just amazed.

> 'So that's it then?'

Micky Duggan shrugged, he wasn't enjoying this.

> 'I'm just passing on what the inspector said, without evidence there's not a lot to go on'.

Actually what the inspector had said was.

> 'We havn't got a dog's show Mick, though don't tell the girl that. We won't put any resources onto it, what's the point? It's not a murder anyway. You saw the autopsy and the coroner will agree. Nothing was stolen. We couldn't charge anyone, nah, it's dead in the water mate. She's a looker eh? Didn't you go out with her once?'

That was a long time ago Mick reminiscensed and Carolyn had actually got prettier. It was a schoolkid crush thing, they never got into sex or anything. Well he had two kids now anyway, but boy she could sing though. He wouldn't have known what an opera looked like if he'd fallen over one, but he had plenty of Irish in him and he knew good singing when he heard it and that aria at the tangi was impressive. What had she sung, something by Pukekini? Some Maori composer maybe? They'd all heard about her singing stuff in the capital but no one had heard her and boy, the looks on many of the faces as she sang beside her father's coffin. Like a row of stunned mullets, heh, it was the highlight of the tangi.

Then he gave her a big hug, and strangely Carolyn felt better after it.

> 'You're be right lass, take care. Let me know if you find anything gone'

Mick Duggan went back to the mundane petty thefts, schoolboy pranks and searching for cannabis plots that made up most of his daily beat.

But as Carolyn closed the door she was not sure she felt alright at all. It was now just past three weeks since the death, and at least on the surface her life was back together again. She was still living in the caravan, but most of her dad's things had gone.

All the clothes and knick-knacks had gone, and she had had a determined clean-out. Quite a bit of furniture had gone as well and she was surprised to find that relatives were quite happy to take bits and pieces away as curios. So the cottage had got bigger with all this clean up, she'd taken down the old-fashioned net curtains as well, which stank of beer and fish, and suddenly light flooded in.

'I suppose mum put those up' she said to Auntie Mabel one afternoon.

'Yes love, past their best though'.

Mabel was thoroughly practical, and surprisingly did not hanker after the sort of mementoes that people love to accumulate.

'What was she like?'

'Why love you must remember her, you were almost ten when she died?'

'Yes I know, but...'

'She's was lovely. Real singer, lovely voice. She could have been a star like you, you know'

'But I'm a shooting star Mabe, I'm all burnt out'.

Carolyn said this very matter of factly and Auntie Mabel looked thoughtful.

'Well that was bad luck love...'

And then Carolyn started crying, huge tears swamped her face and she hugged the granite shoulder of her auntie. She had cried several times already but this burst forth with an intensity that surprised herself. It was a real wash-out coming from some scar in her hill of memories, and she must have sobbed for a long time. Something about her mother's memory, or possibly her thwarted singing career brought home the utter emptiness of her life. She had come to Golden Bay to help her dad, though in fact she was really helping herself. She knew that. It was quite a selfish, calculated move, to escape the humiliation of Wellington and the pity of the other singing students. It was a ready made excuse to escape, and now the excuse had been snatched away. It was a damn good wallow in self-pity, and Carolyn was honest enough in herself to admit that its what she needed, and in fact what everyone needed.

That was yesterday and today the sun was shining through a veiled sky of high cloud. It was quite warm and she had moved her dad's favourite armchair out on the back verandah. Tide-watching was soothing her. A book of poetry was on the grass beside her, and she particulary liked Yeats poem, the lines where he says 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold'.

Yet she found, and this is so true to those left alive, that the centre did in fact hold, and that things kept ticking over.

People asked her out to tea. Jim Doughty had rung her today and wanted her back teaching singing for next term. Someone else was keen to buy the boat. Even Darren had rung up last week and offered her a getaway weekend trip to Nelson for the

wine festival. He was quite persuasive the bastard and she almost accepted, but then knew she'd be spending most of the weekend fighting of his hormones, and if she got drunk and got into bed with him what good would it do her? It wasn't a bonk she wanted, it was... well what was it? Justice? Affection? Solace?

And oddly enough that's where Gordon came in. She sipped at her half-cold coffee and watched two birds that looked like godwits stalking elgantly over the mudflats. Wasn't it early for godwits? There was kingfisher, perched like a decorative clothes peg on the telephone line. A flash of fire and he was gone.

God knows she didn't fancy him. His hair was half gone and he was only 24, and he had terrible dress sense. In a funny way Gordon was more a part of her life then her blood relatives were. She was only close to Auntie Mab, who wasn't really her real auntie, and they had only got closer through her dad's death. But Gordon had been right there, he had taken her home. God the dance seemed light years away, and he had been there at the moment of discovery. He must have been at the tangi but she couldn't remember seeing him, was he keeping away out of consideration?

She went inside and put a record on her dad's old gramphone. A Mozart's aria from *The Marriage of Figaro* which boomed out through the old speakers. The tone was rich, and you could not get that sort of sound off the modern ghetto blasters. She had a whole stack of records she had bought cheap and brought them back from Wellington. She got out the ground coffee (that was a gift from Auntie Mab, you couldn't get that from Collingwood superette) and measured an amount into the plunger. The hot water sent a blast of aroma throughout the cottage, and it reminded her poignantly of Wellington. Her life there seemed far away...

She hadn't even rung one of her singing friends, except Diane. They all came from a different class really, and most of them did not have to work to pay their fees. The Bank of Daddy provided. Diane was pretty cool, and down to earth, and her Aussie accent was like a breath of the outback, although she was Sydney born and bred. She had a great contralto voice and Carolyn had gone over one summer and stayed six weeks with Diane, and experienced a different world altogether.

Nights at the opera, dinner parties, flash eating out (none of these crummy chips and dead burgers), a wine trip to the Barossa valley. It was all laid on and hectic and Carolyn wallowed in every moment. Diane's folks owned a station in the outback and were pretty well off, but they wern't snobbish. Her and Diane cruised Bondi and flirted with the studs on the beach. Diane had a good looking boyfriend and he had a mate who worked at the gym. The four of them had gone to the folks beach house and of course *it* all happened. In retrospect she realised there had been a bit of a plot to make it happen, but she did not really mind. He was nice, and she found him sexy. A bit vain of course, but he knew how to make love, and she plunged into the affair as if into a perfect blue sea-warmed coral lagoon.

And the singing was great too. Diane had this really neat teacher and Carolyn's voice noticeably improved in depth and quality over the six weeks away When they weren't talking of boys they lived and breathed opera, learned new songs and went a dozen times to the opera house. Her folks had a season ticket. It was magical, the

kind of stuff her mum had talked about. Mum would have proud to see her daughter doing song recitals and gaining in confidence. The talk around the breakfast table was witty and smart and Carolyn realised how dumb she had been, and felt embarrassed about her dad, who was just a fishermen at some hick town in the hickish South Island.

God it was hard coming back. Carolyn put on more coffee and stared out the window.

She was also the only one at the college who worked part-time, she had to basically, though dad paid the fees, but she still had to come up with day-to-day living expenses. She worked at a burger bar on Courtenay Place. There was a good mate there, Maisie, she must ring her soon, let her know what had happened. She and Maisie often shared a cab/sav late after the burger bar shut up, and they'd gossip outrageously in one of those new trendy wine bars and suss out the boys. Her mum would have loved to gone to the Sydney Opera, and it was her dream to see her daughter achieve some sort of singing stardom. It had all ended quite quickly...

She got back after Sydney in March and one term had started when she noticed problems with her voice. The oral surgeon said she was developing nodes on her throat which interrupted her vocal sounds, and could even become cancerous. It was devastating, and she actually was relieved her mum was dead so she would not see this failure.

Her dad did not seem to mind, or even understand. He thought singing was a bit like a job you did, if it fell through, or you had a bad season you went and did something else. He was probably right. Dad, and mum. She wondered, and this wasn't the first time she had wondered, how dad and mum had ever met up, they seemed so unlike.

Tears were starting up again and Carolyn hastily jumped up and went into the kitchen to make another brew. Why was the taste of coffee was Never as good as the smell? What had she been thinking of before? Oh, Gordon.

He clearly fancied her, which was a nuisance. Oh, he was nice enough, he could wash more often maybe, and like all women everywhere Carolyn indulged herself in a mental picture of giving a man a good scrub over and a decent set of clothes. He was tall and could dance, two points in his favour. She had another sip. He was too young for her, and she inwardly laughed when she thought of Gordon as a toy boy. Didn't his eyes pop out on stalks when she went for a swim!

By evening her mood had settled into a sort of gentle melancholy, much like the sea-fog that crept in from the Bay sometimes. She felt lonely again, and needed someone, but surely not Gordon?

Perhaps she should see Mab? No. Well she had an excuse, something had turned up, or rather had not turned up. When she vacumned around the back of the sofa she had found an old envelope, and recognised that it had once held the Spanish coin — only it was empty now. There was an old phone number scrawled on it. She should tell Gordon.

She pulled on a jumper and adjusted her face in the mirror. She didn't like make-up

so there was nothing much to do there except tie up her hair, and she walked down the road around to Gordons place. She wasn't trying to be pretty or anything, she was just lonely. God she felt bloody lonely.

There was a light on, and when she knocked she could hear a rustling noise inside and a miaow.

'Oh hi Carolyn...'

'Gordon'.

The cat darted out from the opened door.

'I found this. It's the envelope that had the coin? You know the Spanish coin?'

'Oh right...' but he looked puzzled.

'There's no coin, I can't find it'.

'Oh. You want to come in?'

Suddenly she decided no, she didn't want to come in. She'd rather be alone. There was a stale single mens smell emanating from the house, half-cold chops and soiled tea-cloths, and Gordon looked rather odd in the half-light of evening.

'You havn't got it have you?'

He looked surprised and run his hand through his lanky hair in a typical mannerism. It irritated her again. Was he trying to stretch it out or something?

'What the coin? No, have you told the police yet?'

'No'.

It was a very 'no' type of conversation

'I suppose it could still be in the house somewhere... '

She shrugged.

'You can keep the envelope, see ya'.

She walked away regreting the whole journey to his door. Gordon was a dead end, she'd rather give Darren a good shag.

Chapter 10

1515

Saturday, 22 July 1984 (school holidays for two weeks)

It took him some time to find 'George Soames and Bros, Assayers'which had an address in Manners Street. After he had looked up the word 'assayer' in a dictionary, he wondered if the business card Bill Hepi had in the envelope held more significance than he first realised. Gordon walked up the grubby back stairs and the door gave an old-fashioned tinkle as he opened in. The room had a large desk, a substantial wooden filing cabinet with a gold trim and quite a lot of dusty looking books. On the desk was a large balance scales, the old fashioned kind with two brass saucers dangling on either side. These were also covered in dust. There did not seem to be anyone in.

'Yeeeeeees?'

Gordon almost jumped out of his skin and turned around and saw a commodious armchair with a wizened figure lost in it. This being, almost submerged, wielded a cigarette in one hand and what looked like a whiskey glass in another..

'Can I help? Looking for gold to steal perhaps?'

Gordon looked quite closely at the man who must be in his seventies at least, his face wrinkled like a walnut and with the rather loose jaw that you get in the very old, some dribble escaping. However the man quickly and expertly dabbed his handkerchief over his mouth and sipped the whiskey again.

'Errr, not really. It doesn't look like you have any gold' joked Gordon.

Mr Soames looked offended. He stubbed the cigarette in the over-ful ashtray.

'You would be surprised'

On impulse Gordon asked

'Do you get any gold from Golden Bay'.

'Of course, I get gold from everywhere, New Zealand is full of gold'

He waved a grandiloent hand as if to indicate that this very room, with its dust and grime were in fact a treasure trove of gold.

‘Do people come with old gold coins, or melted down coins?’

The venerable Mr Soames squinted at Gordon.

‘If the gold was melted young man how would I know they were from coins? But excusing your oxymoron, I can state that strictly speaking, I assay, rather than melt. Though I do engage in some of that business, take a seat young man’.

His voice was slow and excessively English, deliberately cultivated. Clearly business was slow, and Gordon did not like being called a moron.

‘I’m 82 you know, my brothers have all passed on and I alone maintain this well established family business. For 120 years we have been in existence, but, now, sadly, it will die, with the last, the very last, of the Soames’.

Every sentence seemed sprinkled with commas that emphasised his pauses accurately. Gordon realised with a sigh that Mr Soames was talking about himself and was already roaring along the twisted ill-illuminated lanes of his life.

‘People come to me for all sorts of reasons, some legal requirements, some illegal reasons’ he dropped his voice like an actor ‘I try to cater for their needs. People with gold are shy, secretive, fearful, they have reason to be. People will die for gold. They will not really die for love, but they will die for gold. Such is the human condition, in my opinion. What do you think?’

Then without waiting for an answer Mr Soames continued.

‘For 120 years Soames and Brothers has seen a parade of scoundrels, pirates, explorers, mad prospectors, and the merely hum-drum vacumn cleaner salesman who imagine that his piece of glitter, found on some beach, will make him rich. Love makes people fools for a month or so, gold makes people’s fools for life, at least that is my opinion. Few people ever become rich from gold, the history of the goldfields is one of unrelenting poverty and misery. If you sold water, liquid gold, you would make money faster than gold, and of course if you sold brown gold...’

He gazed fondly at his whiskey.

‘You could be a rich man far quicker than digging up the dirt of the earth. Golden Bay?’

Suddenly reverting from reminiscences back to the topic.

‘Of course, not much these days. Every gold has its characteristics of area, it is not the same by any means, people do not understand that. Show me some gold and I can tell, if its pebbly, fine, grainy with quartz, mixed in with other rock, I can tell where gold has come from by the look of it you know. I can even tell the specific river, possibly even the actual lode vein itself, just from its characteristsics.’

Mr Soames smootlhy recharged the glass, and did not offer Gordon any.

‘Ha, some very clever merchants come in here pretending that the gold they have

in their possession was dug up in their back-yard, when I can tell at a glance that it is from the Coromandel, or the West Coast, and probably stolen to boot'.

Mr Soames lowered his voice with a careful display of showmanship

'Of course' 'not all the gold comes in its original state.'

'Melted you mean?'

'Yeeeesssss'.

Mr Soames could make a yes sound like a sentence.

'Any from Golden Bay?'

Mr Soames seemed annoyed at the impertinence of the question, and its haste. He did not answer for a while.

'There is a charge for advice' he said significantly.

'Oh, how much?'

'$20 an hour'.

The reply was brisk, certainly the fastest response Gordon had got so far.

'I've only got $15 bucks'.

Mr Soames shrugged and extended a hand, which Gordon, reluctantly shoved three $5 dollars into. There was nothing feeble or cultured about the hand that grasped the money and shoved it into a waistcoat pocket.

'Now where was I... ahhhh yeeeees. Golden Bay. Sometimes'.

Then silence, Gordon was pardonably annoyed.

'That's not worth $15'.

'You have to ask the right questions, I have considerable abilities, but, in my opinion, I am not a mind reader'.

'Recently, any gold from Golden Bay'.

'Now you are asking the right question. Yeeees indeed, I have had a regular client from there. Haldane? No, Never heard of that particular chap, no, it was a member of the native races, a Maori chap.'

Mr Soames made a sneezing movement that Gordon realised was a sort of laugh, it seemed to hurt so Mr Soames stopped it shortly.

'Happy or something like that, he was called, I think, he really was a happy chappy as well'.

Gordon was shocked.

'Bill Hepi'?

Soames became conspiratorial and dropped his voice.

‘Between you and me, yeeeeeesssss, that’s the fellow, you know him?’

‘He was murdered two months ago’.

Gordon said that for pure effect. Something of the stilted atmosphere of Mr Soames boutique had got to him. Mr Soames sneezed again.

‘Yes, they often are. A good customer though, perhaps, for, let us say, twenty years, he has been coming with regular piles of conglomerate gold, not natural you understand’.

‘How much?’

‘In value or weight or number? Weeeeeeell. I could look at my records....’

Mr Soames seemed to go asleep but he was really thinking, apparently. He pursed his lips, and wetted them again with the whiskey.

‘Perhaps 150 to 200 troy ounces, I should entertain that figure. Of course I have not seen Mr Happy for many years, four or five I would think. Perhaps his source ran out?’

‘It was always melted down?’

‘Oh yeeeees, it was not natural gold, that I do believe. From some artificial source I suspected. Perhaps he was raiding the church plate, ha, ha’.

Gordon fumbled into his pocket and brought out the envelope.

‘It’s a rubbing, of a Spanish coin that Bill Hepi had at Golden Bay’.

Mr Soames looked at it, then peered at it again and switched on a strong side-light.

‘Hmmm... 1502, where did you get it? I’d buy it if you have the original, though its condition is poor’.

‘How much?’

The owner shrugged in that accustomed and professional manner of all buyers and sellers the world over.

‘Hard to say really, $300?’

Gordon was surprised, he thought it would be worth more than that.

‘It is gold isnt it?’

‘Yes my friend, but gold is low at the moment, exceptionally low. So that’s where Mr Happy was getting the gold from, I guessed of course. Interesting...’

There was a silence whilst Gordon slowly digested the implications

‘It’s curious ‘I saw another just like it, ten, twenty years ago I suppose years ago. Very similar design, but a different date I think, slightly older than this, 1515 or something like that. That man made the same mistake as you’.

Gordon looked surprised.

'I'm sorry I dont know what you mean'.

The man adopted the inevitable permanent smug smile of the expert.

'It's not Spanish, its Portuguese'.

He smiled formidably as the door bell tinkled and Gordon stumbled down the pitch black stairs.

It all started to make sense now. Bill had been milking the gold for years., and how old was Carolyn then? Didn't she go to voice training at 16, so that's how Bill paid the bills? Slowly melting down and selling off the coins over twenty years, so Carolyn's whole career has been financed by Portuguese gold. Despite the tragedy of a crucial period of New Zealands history being melted down, irredeemably, unrecoverable, lost for ever (oh dear, he was sounding like Mr Soames), Gordon could still see the funny side of it.

II

Gordon usually stayed at Slimey Joe's in Wellington, mainly because there was a convenient lock-up for his trailbike at the back. The actual name of the backpackers hostel was Limey Joe's Ocean View, which was stretching the point considerably, as only the top story could claim a view over the clutter of shops in Cuba Street, and then the sea-seeker had to stare between several tall buildings at Courtenay Place before catching a glimpse of what, quite possibly, was the ocean at Oriental Bay.

The steady parade of healthy, tanned, young, female backpackers, mostly in scanty, clothing, kept Joe's eyes (whose real name was Pete but everyone called him Joe) revolving constantly and Gordon found it was impossible to get eye contact with Joe, not that he particulary wanted to. Slimey Joe's was central and cheap, almost hip in fact, just above the 'red light' district, close to the cheap Indian restaurants, and where all the genuine 'action' was.

The owner was a 'sleaze-ball' as the well-endowed Swedish girl seriously explained to Gordon, but you knew where you were with him. Gordon found this argument baffling, but of course he was not entirely resistant to the charms of the place. The daily turn-over of fresh, bright faces, a sudden glimpse of young flesh on the way to an early morning shower, the skimpy knickers drying on the radiators, there was always a chance of something developing. He had invited a few girls over to Golden Bay, but none of them had ever taken up the offer.

He never slept well at Slimey Joe's and by 7 am the next morning Gordon was in the kitchen which was empty apart from a loud American couple who were arguing in a courteously vicious way and the Swedish girl with large breasts. She at least was friendly and was interested when Gordon mentioned he lived at Golden Bay.

‘I have heard that Golden Bay is only beautiful’.

She said carefully and without smiling. Her long blonde hair was tied up neatly this morning.

‘Well if you come over to Collingwood you should drop in and stay a couple of nights’.

‘I will consider that offer most carefully.’

She said in a very serious tone that made Gordon stop graunching on his weetbix. No, she wasn’t having him on.

‘Thank you’ she said, and shook his hand vigorously ‘I like to meet local bodies’.

The American couple were still arguing as Gordon left and sauntered down Cuba Mall, still wet after last night’s rain and watched the Chinese fruit-shop owner, opening up and brushing the pavement vigorously. He munched on an apple, and walked slowly, enjoying the rush of commuters and pedestrians heading to work, whilst he sauntered along in his own private fantasy holiday. She was quite a stunner really, ‘local bodies’ indeed!

At the National Library he found several coin books that showed pictures of coins that looked very similar to the one Bill Hepi had shown him. Definitely Portuguese, made of gold, with the characteristic St Mary’s rose (‘rosas de Santa Maria’) of Portugal on the obverse and some King on the other side. So George Soames was right. Things were lining up nicely. There was even a photo of a Spanish helmet found in Wellington harbour.

The history books on exploration opened up a new world to Gordon. The Portuguese had entered the Moluccas in 1512 and had a base in Timor from 1516, only 300 miles from Australia. Magellan might have been on one of those early voyages, and then came to the Moluccas from the other side, through Magellan’s Straits and across the massive Pacific. This was a great story. The Spanish kept coming back and were making regular crossings fo the Pacific from 1530 onwards, and then back to their colony in Mexico laden with spices. They were all trying to get those spices, which were more valuable than gold — ten times more valuable.

But it wasn’t just the Spanish or Portuguese out there, there was the Dutch. They found Aussie in 1606, then Tasman in 1642, who sailed right around the continent of Australia without seeing the mainland. What a no-hoper, but before then, then there were other early references to other explorers, Chinese, Timorese, Javanese, there was the Arab explorer El Edrisi, the Italian Varthema, Tamils, in fact the whole bloody world seemed to have sailed to Australia and New Zealand before Tasman!

The problem was that Gordon had a Portuguese coin, and he had Tasman in 1642, so how could he marry them together? Where were the links, and how could he make that link? He liked a phrase he had come across:

‘That the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence’.

By lunchtime he had a headache, and was tired of watching the cute electronic suitcases that travelled across the ceiling, and so he went down to the cafe in the basement of the library, and he stuffed several cakes into his lanky body. His mum had always complained of her inability to fill out that frame. The afternoon dragged in circles and by 3 pm, he started doodling on a sheet of paper.

On impulse Gordon tapped in Haldane on the search menu. He got quite a few choices so tried 'Reginald' and threw up two names. The first Reginald Haldane had written an article on the engineering properties of concrete, but the second one had several hits to his name that looked more promising. *Malaya: the Dirty War* by Reginald Haldane. There was an article about Wingate, who Gordon had never heard of, which had been published in the *Pacific Military Journal*. The next one was... Gordon gawped.

Coin throws light on Spanish discovery of New Zealand. Jesus, he must get that article. 1971, *Australian Journal of History*, volume 89. Gordon scrambled for the index number and ordered the journal.

'It will take ten minutes to come from the store'.

She said this severely and looked at the clock, and Gordon paced up and down. After an eternity an electronic suitcase rattled up from the storeroom underneath, across the far wall and tracked over the ceiling following the metal rails that lead down to the librarian's desk.

'Here you are sir'.

Gordon was searching for the page before he got to his desk, here it was. The opening sentence was the clincher.

'Recently I have had come into my possession a Spanish gold coin of 1515, that was found near or on Farewell Spit...'

Gordon scanned the text furiously, but the guts of the article had been stated in the first line. There was a photo of the reverse and obverse of the coin, and Haldane went on to speculate about possible Spanish voyages, and how the coin found its way there, but he gave no hint of where exactly the coin was found, or in fact who found it.

So this was 1971 and what date was the article he read in the Historic Places Trust? 1974, but that was Haldane as well wasn't it? No hold on, that was *Professor* Haldane. Two Haldanes? Gordon thought really hard about this and photocopied the article.

On the walk back to the hostel his head was full of pieces of eight and he ploughed through the late night commuters like a Spanish galleon coursing the Main. When he got back to Slimey Joe's the owner was leaning out of his office hatch and his eyes swivelled to Gordon and nodded, but then swerved back to studying the buxom Swedish girl who was earnestly and obliviously reading the information board.

'Good day Gordon?'

Drawled Joe, not shifting his eyes one jot from the blonde.

'I've struck gold Joe'.

'Really Gordon? Have you? Does it have nice tits?'.

III

In the morning the weather was foul and the Swedish girl was nowhere to be seen. The wind was really blowing down Manners Street now, and he had to struggle with the trail bike as he hurtled up the back streets of Kelburn, getting lost twice on the way round. It was a posh suburb, but he was still surprised at the splendour of the house. Tall chestnut trees shaded the front door which had an impressive brass button set in the doorway. Gordon pressed it and waited. Steps sounded slowly, and a short man with almost a bald head and thick shoulders like a rugby prop opened the door.

'Mr Haldane?'

'Yeah?'

'Gordon Micklethwaite, you wrote to me, errr remember? About that Spanish coin?'

'Yeah... of course'.

Haldane smiled faintly

'You took me by surprise you know, the helmet and gear on, I thought with all these bikies around... you know. You can't be too careful eh? Won't yer come in, Mr Micklethwaite?'

Gordon felt awkward about plumping down his helmet on the antique looking table so he kept carrying it as Haldane led the way into his study. The room impressed Gordon and he secretedly yearned for bookcases full of distinguished and valuable looking books. There were also several swords and old-fashioned guns on the wall. Haldane had recovered his poise and was back on his own territory so to speak.

'Yeah, the coin was interesting. You don't have it with you?'

'No... you see Bill Hepi was killed.'

'Killed?'

Haldane looked shocked.

'There was buglary at Bill Hepi's place, and in the struggle Bill got killed. Well they think he had a heart attack, so its not really a murder. An assault I sup-

pose'.

'Geez that's bad…' mused Haldane 'take a seat'

'I don't know where the coin is but I took a rubbbing.'

Gordon showed it to Haldane who looked sort of interested

'It's not actually Spanish, it's Portuguese.'

Haldane looked up sharply.

'Really?'

'Yes. George Soames, the gold and coin dealer told me, and I checked it against other photos in the library yesterday'.

Haldane nodded lost in thought and looked carefully at the rubbing. Micklethwaite asked cautiously.

'You found a coin didn't you?'

Haldane looked puzzled.

'This is your article I think, from 1971. You said you found a 1515 gold coin on farewell Spit?'

Haldane really looked concerned now.

'Yeah, but that was ten, fifteen years ago now...'

'You don't have it anymore?'

Haldane had to think quickly.

'Well to tell you the truth my ideas in that article weren't very well accepted at the time, you know what academics are like, and well, I sold the coin in the end you know, I needed the dosh.'

Gordon looked disappointed.

'That's a shame..'

Haldane got into his stride as he found the right words.

'Yeah, well' and 'the ideas wern't going anywhere. Nobody liked the Spanish bit. Hey my names Reg' and he held out a hand

'Your one might have been a Portuguese coin too?'

'Could be I 'spose, I hadn't thought of that'.

'Where on the spit did you find it?'

Haldane grimaced,

'Look. it was so long ago. I didn't really find it, it was given to me by someone, an old army mate. He said he found it on the spit, but I dunno where'.

Haldane resettled himself in his chair, and looked in control of the conversation

now.

‘Bill Hepi said his coin was given to him as well, and said that the bloke had found his coin on Farewell Spit’.

Haldane kept his face unmoved.

‘Really, huh, well, that’s a coinicidence, well... I know nothing of this Bill Hepi, but was he an old man? Had he fought in the war eh? You see? People love their yarns eh, and I tell you if people have the choice between telling you they picked up a gold coin in some second-hand shop in Cuba Street, or they found it buried with a suit of armour on Farewell Spit, I’m sure I know what they’ll tell yer?’.

Gordon bit his lip. He had to admit Haldane was right, and had put his finger on his own doubts about Bill, but then what about all the other coins Bill had sold? There was an awkward pause and Haldane was watching Micklethwaite very carefully but Gordon did not seem to notice. Finally he changed topic. His dad had always reminded him that people loved talking about their passions and all the military books gave Gordon a hint.

‘You were in the army too. I saw your book, *The Dirty War*, on Malaya’.

‘Didja?! ‘

Haldane looked pleased. He stood and got a copy and handed it to Gordon. *Malaya: the Dirty War*, R. Haldane.

‘Betcha you don’t know much about the Malayan war eh? Hardly anyone knows, that’s why I wrote it?’

Actually Gordon did know a bit.

‘It was the British army wasn’t it, weren’t they fighting against a communist insurgency?’

‘Well done lad. God, its good to hear younger people know it. I was there. Nasty bloody war it was too, you can keep that. I’ve got dozens. It never sold out. Another nasty episode in Asian history that no-one wants to talk about eh? Like Vietnam. Just send someone to die and forget about it’.

‘Thanks Reg... you’ve got a lot of Pacific history too?’

‘Oh yeah, I’m interested, yer know a bit... but ah... well, I tell yer if you find another coin let me know eh?’

Haldane laughed a deep bullish sound. Gordon noticed the topographic map on the wall of Farewell Spit, and Haldane followed Gordon’s eyes and looked at the map with a frown.

‘Oh yeah, me and a mate were thinking of fishing trip on the spit, sometime, so I put it up, a while ago now…’

Gordon put on his earnest face.

‘I went out to the spit with Bill and his daughter on Bill’s fishing boat, last week. We didn’t catch much fish tho, at least I didn’t’.

‘Ohh…’

‘It was nice out there, real remote. We did see a man on the beach, who lives out there Bill said’

Haldane kept his face unmoving.

‘Did you meet him, this guy?’

‘No, he sort of ran away, disappeared into the dunes. Bill said he had a nickname, err I can’t remember what it was’.

They chatted away for half an hour. Haldane clearly didn’t think much of academics ‘snobby bunch’ and seemed to know a lot about early New Zealand history. All the dates were at his fingertips. He was very active, jumping up for books and pacing up and down, gesticulating to make his points. Haldane had been around alright, mostly with the army in Asia, and words like Malaya and Indonesia were sprinkled throughout his conversation, and Gordon was deeply impressed that Haldane had had books published.

‘Are you writing another book?”

‘Oh, yeah, I’m thinking about one on Timor. I got booted out in 1975 when Suharto’s mob came in, that was a bloody nasty business too...’

Haldane seemed pensive.

‘See that cloth? That’s Indonesian, Timorese actually’.

‘It’s nice. You fought there?’

‘Yeah... got tangled up with Suhartos boys, nasty lot they were’.

Sensing it was time to go, Micklethwaite stood up and was fiddling with his helmet in the hallway when he noticed the large oil portait and stared at it. You could see the resemblance straight away. Haldane noticed.

‘That’s my old man’.

Gordon remembered the name

‘Professor Morton Haldane? He was your father? His name comes up a lot on the library databases. He’s written a few books too.’

Haldane smiled thinly under a frown, and Gordon noticed that the old soldiers body went slightly tense. Haldane joked.

‘Like father, like son eh?’

Gordon immediately seized on this.

> ‘He was interviewed in the Historic Places Trust magazine, about the coin you found wasn’t he?’
>
> ‘Yeah…’

Gordon threw in one of those pauses that gave people an opportunity to say more. Haldane oblidged.

> ‘Yeah, well, he didn’t like my theories much. Thought it was speculation I guess. He was a stickler. I learned a lot from him, well nice meeting you Gordon. It’s been good talking, say drop me a line if yer find more coins eh?’
>
> ‘Thanks Reg. I appreciate your time’.

His bike didn’t like starting in the rain and it was quite grumpy for a few minutes, and as it ran slowly warming up, he looked up and he was sure he could see Haldanes shadow through the window watching him. All Gordons hopeful notions about a Portuguese discovery of New Zealand were washing away, like the drizzle that enveloped him as he twisted down the slippery Kelburn streets past the university to The Terrace.

As he rode down he wondered why Haldane had lied. That’s why he’d kept mum about the other coins that Bill Hepi had sold: if Haldane was keeping something from him, he would keep something from Haldane. Tit for tat.

Chapter 11

The Larrikin

Sunday, 22 July 1984

The first thing Haldane did after Gordon left was to unlock a small safe in his study, and carefully place two coins side by side on the mahogany table. They gleamed dully, looking more bronze than gold. One was dated 1515 and the other was 1502.

Gee that was scary, that was bloody scary. Him turning up like that, bugger it, and he'd left the map on the wall. Dead giveaway, still the lad didn't seem to realise it, nice lad, but a bit slow. He hoped he'd put him off, but he couldn't fob off the situation for ever. Bloody Bill, why didn't ya tell me when you could have? Now it was too late now yer bastard, well, maybe he could go back, but where? Forty years had gone now, and he couldn't remember the exact place, probably couldn't get within a kilometre of the slab.

The clipping didn't tell him anything and hell he didn't have much time and he had to do it right. He really needed the stuff to be *in situ* to prove his case, but he could hardly search the whole spit with a metal detector could he? Hamburger eh? Yeah, it was time to track that bastard down as well.

His truck should get him along the spit ok, shovels yeah, tent, water, the metal detector was ok, and his military mind ticked off all the requirements. He pulled out another drawer in the desk and a heavy ex-military style Luger, and carefully started to load the bullets into it. This was *his* story, and he was not going to let Bill or any other sod steal it away from him. It would be one in the eye for the old bastard, and Haldane involuntarily looked up at the portrait.

He was always about somewhere. Once he thought he saw him in the hallway, lean, angular, the sour mouth zipped tight, the eyes that had had humanity drained from them — but it was just a shadow. He'd kept the place as it was. Didn't live in half of it. What would he say now if he saw Reggie, little Reggie Haldane lording it over the precious mahogany and fumbling through the massive tomes?

'Don't touch Reginald, don't touch'.

Now he could touch as much as he liked, fondle even, smear with jammy fingers, grease each page with its army-thickened paws. Except that he didn't. He borrowed the same habits, kept the books ordered in well-drilled categories, knew the position of each one and enjoyed their upright stance, that angular search for knowledge. He even dusted them. He'd added touches of his own, of course, yet for all intents and purposes it was another man's room, and it was as if he put on a mask when he came inside. Pretty bloody sad really, when you thought about it.

But here was the chance of a lifetime, the chance to prove the old bastard wrong, to fling his sanctimonious bookish words right in his face. So it was luck, a great gob of luck, Haldane slammed his fist down joyfully on the mahogany table and the thump made the books leap. Haldane's stride up and down was a mixture of excitement, anger and even joy.

What did they say? The lads not too bright, a bit of a larrikin, put him out in the army. They'll get a grip on him Mr Haldane. So they did.

> 'You have been a disappointment to me Reginald, I had rather hoped you would take an interest in this work, but you seem to be interested in girls and guns'.

Yeah, well I've killed people too dad. In cold blood in Burma, and Malaya, and hot blood to, but you killed people slowly, a long precise crucifixion with your exact bloody grammar and pointed words. How you did love to shaft people eh, whereas I never enjoyed it dad, I never did. Haldane stopped marching before an old portrait on the wall.

> 'So I was a disappointment eh? No medals, no gongs of congratulation, cause governments like to pretend that their hands are clean, so no thanks to the likes of us, here's your pension, run along Reggie. You seee the way I see it dad everyone needs a help up, a hand along eh, some encouragement, and the army gave me that. They really were my parents, but don't you think that's strange dad? '

> 'You know dad, you said I was wrong, all wrong. Well I've got news for you dad. This time I'm right, this time Im going to prove it..'

Haldane stared at the oil portait on the wall and he spat deliberately, and the spit dribbled down over the old mans face.

Chapter 12

Blue Velvet

Monday, 23 July 1984

A soft glow was over Collingwood on late Monday afternoon as Gordon ruined the peaceful slumber of a late Spring day. His trail bike had developed a hole in the exhaust after the weekend in Wellington and was making more clatter than usual as he pulled up. He must pick up some milk first, but here was a surprise. Right next to the dairy, in what had formerly been an empty shop with Cannabis Rules scrawled across the window, was the 'Collingwood Cafe', and a sandwich board outside listed blueberry muffins and cappucinos amongst its temptations. Gordon could see plain and polished wooden tables and chairs inside, oh, and there was Carolyn.

He bought some milk and went into the cafe which was playing something nice over the speakers, an old 1950's classic *Blue Velvet*.

'Hi Carolyn'.

She nodded, and once again Gordon definitely felt the cold shoulder was higher than the faint smile.

He ordered a cappucino and suddenly realised he was confronted with the awkward problem of where to sit. If he sat beside her it might look too bold, if he sat at another table he wouldn't be able to talk. So with the brimming froth, wobbling like a serac about to fall off the glacier, Gordon sort of hovered somewhere between two tables. He didn't think he could start by asking her how she was, it looked sort of intrusive. She seemed to be staring far away. They were the only ones in the cafe and the hairy male owner was clattering dishes in the sing.

'I've just been to Wellington...'

She looked up vaguely. Sighed.

'Take a seat Gordon'.

'Thanks'.

Actually as he looked at her he realised that she seemed tired rather than hostile.

'What were you doing there?'

'Oh.. well, I.. you know that Spanish coin your Dad had? You know the one that's missing? Well I took a rubbing of it...' (her eyes flicked to the window, was she getting bored already? get to the point Micklethwaite!) '...and showed it to a dealer who said it was Portuguese'.

Put so flatly like that, it did not seem very earth shattering, but Carolyn seemed interested.

'Portuguese?'

'Yes, I've often wondered where your dad got it?'

Damn that was twice he mentioned her father but she didn't seem too perturbed. The froth had gone up one nostril. He rubbed it away.

'He never did say, the Spit I think'.

The hairy man came over and she looked up and gave him a lovely smile and Gordon was instantly jealous.

'Thanks Bernie, yeah another one'.

Gordon looked around curiously.

'This all happened whilst I was away'

'It's a godsend, they sell real coffee beans too. Bernie and Flo run the place'.

Gordons jealously receded somewhat. The coffee had hit the spot and Gordon found some confidence again.

'How have you been?'

His mum had always told him that you should always ask after people, they love to talk about themselves.

'Oh alright. Sorting out dad's stuff has taken a long time'.

Any extra information she volunteered about herself gave Gordon a bit more confidence.

'I'm... sorry about your ermm... have the police found the burglar?'

She shook her head.

'They don't even think it was a burglar. Apart from the coin there's nothing missing really, except...'

Bernie came over with a brimming cappucino and she took a note out of her trendy Wellington leather bag.

'Thanks Bern'.

'No probblemmo Carol my dear, it's a pleasure to service a lady of such qual-

ity'.

Carolyn laughed, but Gordon thought it was a strange way of talking. He prompted.

'Except what...?'

She looked at him puzzled as she spooned goblets of foam into her mouth, no nostril problem there.

'Oh yes, it looked like the man had been through the newpaper box. Dad kept a whole box of newspaper clippings and they were everywhere on the floor'.

'Did you notice anything missing?'

She shrugged.

'I don't know what was in there, oh maybe some of the war stuff was gone, I'm not sure'.

Gordon digested this.

'Was it stuff from your dad's time in the army?

'Yeah'.

Gordon noticed that Carolyn switched from a posh voice to a crude voice, as if she had two quite different ways of speaking. Even to Gordons unobservant eyes Carolyn was only trying to be interested, and he babbled on about Haldane and his gold coin, and the strange Mr Soames, for a while then lapsed into silence. The evening daylight was heavy and thickening into a glorious red sunset, some of it was tinging the polished tables giving them a rosy hue. Carolyns face looked pensively out of the window. He asked her.

'What are you going to do?'

The question startled Carolyn, partly because it was exactly the question that had been occupying her since her father's death. It was rather a bold question from Gordon and it just caught Carolyn at the right reflective moment. He had finally and mysteriously hit the right button.

'I don't know Gordon'.

She was back into her posh voice

'I'm a bit bewildered'.

This was like her sudden statement on the night of the Fishermans Ball. Actually she looked a bit tearful.

'Dad didn't have any debts, so there's a bit of money there'.

Gordon anticipated her.

'You could sell the house and go OE?'

'Yes. I suppose'.

But she didn't add that she had already done that OE thing, and wasn't it a bit like running away? She was 30, there must be other options.

'The coroner said it was a heart attack'.

'They've had the inquest?'

'Last week'.

'Would your dad have had...'

Gordon was not sure how quite to put it and realised the question might be deemed insensitive.

'Dad would have had a heart attack anyway? God knows. I mean he's a bastard whoever he was, maybe not a killer, but a bastard. He could have saved dad maybe if he stayed? Given him mouth to mouth or something. The police think he was an out-of-towner, maybe even from Nelson or Mot'.

And Gordon thought to himself, or Wellington? She stirred her empty cup. Words came out in short dribbles, almost forced out.

'I was really mad but now, I'm just sad really. He was a good dad, a really good dad, put me through singing school, it wasn't cheap either. And it was a bit of a waste'.

'Why?'

'Don't you know? My vocal chords are stuffed, so the surgeon said, I had to give it up.'

'You were fanastic at the tangi, it blew everyone away'.

She sort of smiled. He added helpfully.

'My mum says you should treat doctors like bank managers, always get a second opinion'.

She shrugged and got into her tough voice.

'Yeah bugger it, I could, maybe'.

Gordons cup was empty and he was tempted to get another brew but did not want to spoil this intimacy.

'I could get a man? Kids?'

She looked whimsically at Gordon who squirmed. He found a way out of it by joking.

'You could marry adventure corp?'

'Darren? That slimy bastard. I saw him all smoochy with June'.

'June Darby? She's married' said Gordon obviously.

'Well that doesn't seem to stop her does it? Hasn't she had the hots for you yet Gordon?'

This was terrible. He was still too young to be able to control his blushes and she saw it.

'She did come on a bit, I mean... when did you see him and June?'

It was a desperate and unsuccessful lunge out of the topic.

'In his car, just before the Ball. They were having a real snog eh, more than a smooch'.

She had seen Darren's hand stuck up under June's top fondling the accessible treasure. Gordon was thinking in a disappointed way, so that's why she danced with him, rejection, not love.

'The dog has been round too, sniffing...'

She did not put into words the strange desperation that made her think that Darren would be some sort of release for her trapped body. If he had been less slimey she probably would have gone to bed with him, but he had made fun of June and in a clairvoyant moment Carolyn could see she was just next on the scorecard. She got rid of him.

'Look at the sunset!'.

Gordon said suddenly, and it was true the clouds were a deep purplish red.

'Let's go to the beach' she said suddenly.

Gordon paid up and they walked down Collingwood's deserted main street to the shoreline. The wind had died to a mutter and there was a sultry warmth wrapped around the evening like the fur on a cloak. The sea was full in so there was not much beach to explore and as they walked around the edge they naturally came to the back of Carolyn's cottage. The caravan was gone.

'I sleep inside now, come and have a look'.

She opened the unlocked back door and they walked through the kitchen into the lounge. Gordon whistled, it was quite a change. The clutter had all gone, the windows cleaned and there was new curtains and a new sofa. The room was suddenly flushed with light and, Gordon struggled with the thought, hope. That was it, and he said that out loud.

'The room seems full of hope'

Carolyn looked surprised.

She was going to sell the place, and most people told her she should. How could she live in a house with the image of her father dead on the floor, except, that there were the other images as well. Her dad and her playing 500 by candlelight. His old records of Glenn Miller. The fridge still had his tinnies. Her father's laughter was imprinted into the walls, and sometimes she really heard it. She asked Mabel, should she sell or stay: 'just stick to your heart dear' her aunt advised, so she stayed. That seemed to shock some people but she didn't care. The cottage was all she had of her parents and she was determined not to see a stranger walk into the door again.

'Try the sofa?' she suggested,'I bought it Nelson last week. It opens into a bed too, if I have people to stay'.

Gordon bounced tentatively on it and was invited to also look into the bedroom. The light was almost gone now with a stain of red touching occasional surfaces of the room.

'It's all changed round'.

What was Bill's bedroom was hers, the bed was new and so was the Nelson-bought arty sort of quilt on top, and once again she had got rid of all of Bill's junk and had established a clean and uncluttered layout. It was like she was getting rid of memories, and he said that too. She looked bewildered and totally vulnerable, and they were standing awfully close. He was almost sucking in her carbon dioxide.

'Yes you're right, that's what I've been doing. Gordon, I've been so lonely'.

Gordon did not have time to move before he found that the moment he had dreamed off, the moment he had fantasised through long dull evenings of marking English essays, had actually, was actually, (I mean this was not a dream Gordon!) happening. She was grasping him and hugging him. Her face was wet and pushed against his, and he was kissing her like a madman, grasping her whole body which felt unexpectedly weak and small. He had always seen her as strong, but he knew (or at least he had sensed) there was plenty of vulnerability there, but this unexpected melt-down, this blast of desire threw Gordon off balance.

Perhaps the frantic kissing lasted ten seconds but they lost balance and fell by accident on the new Nelson quilt and writhed in a sort of mutual ecstasy for several minutes, and they hadn't even got their clothes off. Gordon was desperately tugging at his zipper on his fake-leather jacket, but whether that was the moment he lost it, or whether Carolyn had already decided that this was going to be an absurdly disastrous encounter (Darren without the hunky bits) she suddenly pulled away and stood up.

'No Gordon, no'.

Her face went quickly blank and posh.

'I'm sorry, you had better go'.

Gordon was stunned. Perhaps a Darren would have got up slowly, and moved quietly over to the unhappy woman and gently stroked her into submission and acceptance, but Gordon was no Darren. He sat up as she stood and turned away from him. He pulled back up his zipper on his jacket and that seemed a final admission of failure, and fumbled his way out, miserable and humiliated. No one saw him walk down the exposed street with an assumption of dignity, even though he felt completely and justifiably sordid.

Chapter 13

History Business

Friday, 27 July 1984

Four days later and Gordon was sitting in the small Collingwood Museum. Before him was the back numbers of the *Collingwood Gazette* but it is fair to say that very little of his mind registered the photographs. School holidays had left him with plenty of time, too much time. He had not seen Carolyn in those four days and had a terrible feeling he was not going to see her again, at least not alone. He'd muffed it, blew it, stuffed up, call it what you will. She was melting in his arms and then turned shy, and what did he do?

And he'd chosen the whimpiest option, and left a lonely crying woman who would have probably preferred a nerd like him to nothing at all. It was so bitterly clear to Gordon that he'd thrown his chances away, and that *that* opportunity would never come again. They were both mortified, embarrassed, humiliated. She was probably even sneering at him for not taking advantage of her, women were so bloody perverse. One minute she was a bottle of champagne, ready to pop, the next, flat as an old opened beer. Gordon noted down the simile and put it in his notebook.

Still the pages of old newspapers refused to turn, and he mentally lashed himself in every possible and unlikely way, pouring onto his head all his past follies and disasters. His life, his whole 24 years stretched out behind him (he could see it clearly now) like a desert of lost opportunities. What had he been doing? He was old, and getting older, going nowhere in a dump like Collingwood.

The triumph of the Fishermans Ball was all ashes in his mouth, and all he could remember was the way Carolyn had grasped him and the fullness of her lips, and the scent in her hair as it started to unravel from its clasp... Stop it Gordon, this was going to drive you mad! Yer balls it up. Admit it, now get on with it, and for a few minutes Gordon did pretend to get on with it, turning newspaper cutting over listlessly, but he was not ready yet to cheat himself yet of a thoroughly good wallow in self-pity.

The history business also came in for a good lashing. The Beast inside him said

sneeringly (again!) 'get on with what you hopeless little nerd? Still playing your pathetic history games? Think you will discover that the Spanish came to New Zealand first, and will be on the telly? Pah! The history man? How I Found the Spanish Treasure. Yeah, yeah, yeah...'

'Here's a cuppa for you Gordon'.

It was Auntie Mabel who interrupted this enjoyable bout of misery. Among all her other chores she also looked after the museum. In some ways she was the mother of the town, cheering up the sick, looking after the babies, comforting the old, the forgotten, the lonely. What about the sheer bloody stupid thought Gordon, maybe he could ask her how Carolyn was? No, don't be silly, its over.

'Thanks Mabel'.

He was not ready for more conversation and Auntie Mabel did not seem offended, probably she already knew thought Gordon gloomily.

He looked at the three boxes of cuttings left. He had been turning them over rather listlessly and already knew that he would have to go back and do the first box again since his eyes had registered nothing. One box had the label 'Second World War to 1950', he should have started with that first. Oh Carolyn, I'm sorry, and he was sorry, genuinely sorry for making a fool of himself, and for making a fool of her.

Auntie Mabel was happy to let him take the box of clippings home and as Gordon lugged the thing to his place he diverted past Hepi's home and saw the lighted window in the kitchen.

The stray cat had disappeared a day ago and Gordon missed its frantic miaowing. No meat in the fridge so Gordon munched on a packet of biscuits as he broke up kindling and watched the flames lick eagerly. His trail bike was occupying one part of the lounge, standing on pieces of newspaper and partly dismantled. It somewhat ruined his improvement list but he wanted to fix the hole in the exhaust and tighten up all the loose bits prior to selling it, (Number 7 on the improvement list, 'Buy a Car'). Had to do an oil change too, which accounted for the ice-cream containers of black sludge under the sump. He just hoped Mrs Doughty wouldn't look through the window.

He made a strong coffee and noted the carefully printed list stuck on the fridge door as he got the milk out. Number one was '1) Make new friends'. Number four was 'Write More History Articles'.

The newspaper clippings were all sorts of odds and sods, mostly from the defunct *Takaka Times* and the *Collingwood Gazette*. The yearly drama of the vegetable competition, or fund-raising for the school hall, very little changed. Stories of population drift out of the district, and the farmers moaning about the weather. Trampers rescued from the Heaphy Track popped up frequently as well as various school reunions. Monuments built, homesteads burnt down. Years and years of living that looked trivial and inconsequential, and Gordon had to force himself to realise that this was the basic stuff of history, and if he was going to be taken seriously he had to take this stuff seriously. He wished the clippings had been better organised. There

seemed no system to what was included and what wasn't, and the good stuff was few and far between.

What Gordon had his eye open for were the stories and yarns of the old-timers. For a while the *Takaka Times* had a regular 'Looking Back' column and this threw up some interesting stuff. Halfway through the box he made himself a cup of tea and listened to the wind groaning against the chimney. Last week two firebricks had crashed down in a burst of hot soot and embers into the fire, but he did not want to tell Mrs Doughty in case she forbid him to use the fireplace.

Must be almost 9 pm now. Hell, he'd almost missed it. The *Collingwood Gazette* had an article in 1954: 'Two local boys working on secret army outpost' said the headline, which Gordon had ignored and was just ready to file back the clipping into the box again when something in his brain just managed to recall the byline.

'An interview with Bill Hepi'

It said that in bold type, and his hand snatched it back. Bill Hepi?! Bill had talked of the radar, so he should have been listening more carefully instead of staring at Carolyns tits.

> 'Bill Hepi was one of a number of army men who were building a secret radar post on Farewill Spit in 1942'.

Gordon glanced down past the next paragraph. The 'Wish I Were Somewhere Else', 'WIWSE', gang was recalled by Bill Hepi.

> 'There was Bill Hepi and Johnnie van DeBurgh, both local men from Collingwood, plus Reg Haldane from Wellington, the sergeant, and Harry 'Oyster' Shell, a well-known marathon runner from Nelson'.

Gordon's eyes popped open. Haldane and Bill were mates! Why didn't Haldane mention this? He knew he'd been lying about the coin, now it looked like he'd been lying about everything else. Gordon read furiously through the article and saw at the end a mention of Harry 'Oyster' Shell, who had died drowning, but his body was never recovered. All the nicknames were listed Bog, Joker, Hamburger, Oyster, and the story went on to say that Reg Haldane was decorated in the Burma war and he'd lost sight of Hammie, maybe he was killed in the Solomons.

He knew Bill was called 'Joker' and 'Oyster' for Harry Shell, and Johnnie van DeBurgh was 'Hamburger' or 'Hammie' which was sort of cute, but why was Haldane called 'Bog'? So everyone's been telling fibs. Bill Hepi lied about not knowing where the radar station was, or admitting he knew Hamburger, and Haldane lied about knowing Bill Hepi, yet they were all mates in this together but they all denied everything. Micklethwaite felt suddenly sure that the WIWSE gang had a secret. Something had happened out there…

There was a sharp knock at the door and Gordon nearly leapt out of his skin.

He looked at the clock, it was nearly nine pm, who on earth was visiting him at this hour? Not Haldane surely? Gordon was gripped by a sort of irrational fear, and reached out and grasped the fire poker and waited. There was a second, even more determined knock.

Chapter 14

Wish You Were Here

Friday night, 27 July 1984

He opened the door tentatively and illuminated there in the porch light was the well-endowed Swedish girl.

'Hello Gordin. You see I have come to see you'.

Gordons draw drooped slightly.

'Come in, errr, well hi, err you'd like a cup of...'

No it was no good offering Swedish girls cups of tea, maybe some of that sherry?

'I am sorry. I do not drink but this is a nice home you have'.

Since most of Gordon 'home' was covered either in boxes of newspaper clippings or the disembowelled trail bike, this was a very polite thing to say .

'Coffee, ya, would be most pleasant Gordin'.

'Gordon'.

'Yah, Ingrid'.

She held out her hand. Of course, all heavy-chested blonde Swedish bombshells were called Ingrid. Her eyes were an amazing blue and whilst Gordon prattled on about the weather she sat beside the fire and gazed with serious benevolence on his domain.

'I am staying at the hostel, a nice man there I think. New Zealanders are very nice I think'.

She looked gorgeous, and smelt young too, if there was such a smell in existence. The conversation proceeded in a stilted fashion, with Ingrid sipping coffee delicately and munching on various half-biscuits that Gordon had discovered from the bottom of the barrel.

'You are lucky to be New Zealand I think'.

'Oh?'

‘Such a beautiful country. Sweden is beautiful too, but so cold, the winters are so long’

She shuddered elegantly.

‘You caught the bus over?’

‘Ya to how do you say it? Tackacka?’

‘Takaka’.

‘Ya, and a nice truck driver offered me a lift to Collingtown’.

‘Wood’

‘Pardon?’

‘Collingwood’.

I bet he was a nice truckie thought Gordon sourly. The truck drivers in Takaka would be queueing up to give her a lift.

‘Such a pretty place, with the river and Golden Sea’.

Was it really worth his while to say ‘Bay’?

‘How long are you here for?’

‘Oh, for the length of the a week I think. I hope to see everything, but so little time’.

Gordons chat up lines were non-existent.

‘You have errrr, a boyfriend, I mean....’

‘Yah? Oh yes. He lives in Lund, a nice university town. Henri’.

Gordon thought it was strange that a Swedish man was called Henry, still, Henry was on the other side of the world wasn’t he?

‘You must get lonely’.

That was worse than his last line. She smiled beautifically, like a saint

‘Of course, but he will come to join me soon’

He munched on a handful of crumbs as she chattered on about how she and Henri were going to do the Routeburn track, then suddenly, there was another rap on the door. Gordon was startled. He was lucky to get one visitor a month, now they were queueing up. He was even more flabbergasted when he opened the door and found Carolyn standing there, holding his cat. This romance business was a feast or a famine.

‘This is yours Gordon, it’s been around my place. It’s skinny, you should feed it you know. Can I come in’.

The words came out in a rush, which if Gordon had the wit to realise, were forced and rehearsed.

'Umm... sure'.

She walked in and kept hanging onto the cat as if it might be useful in a defence strategy. She was just about to speak when she noticed the Swedish girl, and looked quite put out.

'Oh, errr Carolyn this is Ingrid, she's popped in for a visit, a friend, err'.

'Hallo, but now I must go'.

Ingrid gave a big smile, put down her cup, and quite happily pulled on her jacket and Gordon was somewhat dismayed as the blonde bombshell shook his hand vigorously and left.

'Thank you for the coffee and chat, it was nice. I will engage you again yah?'

The door closed and Gordon looked baffled at Carolyn, who remarked in a catty way.

'I hope I didn't interrupt your love life Gordon?'

'I don't have a love life'.

Carolyn smirked callously as if she already guessed this, then pulled herself together. She had came to apologise to him not humiliate him. Why was it so easy to do the latter?

'Look Gordon, I'll, I'll, get to the point. About last night, you know the two of us...'

Carolyn started to talk as if she had already scripted it in her head.

'I'm sorry for what happened, I might have lead you on I know, and I don't want you think that there was anything between us. It was just, I was tired and...'

Carolyn seemed to be faltering, mainly because she had not expected the Swedish girl and Gordon had his mouth open and he looked funny. She started one more time.

'I was tired and strung out. I like you, but I don't think there should be anything between us... I mean we can be friends... and...look, could you close your mouth? You like a bloody fish!'

It was easier to hurt someone then to apologise. Gordons mouth shut.

'Errr do you want a cup of tea?'.

Carolyn looked hopelessly at him, and nodded, still stroking the cat continuously. She tried again whilst he was turning on the jug.

'I'm trying to apologise I guess'.

Gordon was completely baffled, didn't he grope her? What had she to apologise for?

'Really you needn't…'

The disease of awkwardness was contagious. He shifted the coin collection off the top of the stove and put on the kettle.

'Well I was wrong to encourage you, that's all. Look, I won't bother with the tea, here's your cat'.

Gordon waved the teapot in the air.

'Hey Carolyn, errr can I ask a question? I mean, do you recognise this?'

Carolyn was expecting quite a different question an when Gordon shoved a newspaper clipping in front of her she almost became angry.

'What's this? That's what dad had in the envelope. Where did you get it?'

'It's not the actual clipping, just a copy from the newspaper, I've been looking through these old clippings.'

She shrugged and walked nearer the door.

'Look here, see this name. Reggie Haldane? That's the man I saw in Wellington, the man that wrote to me about the Spanish coin'.

'Yeah?'

'Well I told him about your dad, you know the story of the Spanish coin. He never once mentioned that he knew your dad. Not once'.

Carolyn looked weary.

'I don't get it Gordon.'

'You see he wrote to me, oh I'll start again. I wrote about the 1502 coin on Farewell Spit. Haldane wrote a note to be asking about it, and I wrote back saying it belonged to Bill Hepi… oh god'.

Gordon looked stricken, as something dawned on him. Carolyn caught his anxiety.

'What's up?'

'What have I done. I told Haldane about Bill finding the coin…'

Carolyn suddenly grasped what Gordon was saying.

'You think this Haldane killed my dad for the coin?'

'I'm not sure, but, oh Carolyn what have I done. Look I'll explain everything'.

He breathed deeply, and pointed to the old news clipping.

'It's all there. Reg Haldane and Bill Hepi were mates working a on a radar station at Farewell Spit. Now, maybe they found a coin or two, I don't know. Something anyway. So the radar wasn't needed and abandoned and they all split up. But

Bill, your dad, went back and found more coins. In fact your dad found lots of gold coins, maybe two hundred, and he's been melting them down selling them to Soames and Brothers in Wellington. He's been doing that for years, twenty years maybe'.

Now it was Carolyn's turn for her jaw to drop open like a fish. She knew intuitively why her father needed that money. She said flatly and sat down like a full stop.

'That's how he paid for my singing lessons'.

Gordon nodded.

'You see because I told Haldane by letter, it alerted him to the fact that your dad had found more coins. That's why your dads coin was stolen, I think, and the clipping. I mean the burglar must have been looking for that, but hold on…'

Gordon suddenly got excited.

'That envelope with the coin in, now where did I put it?'

'You don't know Haldane killed my dad? You're just guessing'.

'Sure. But it's a hell of a coincidence, all the same…'

'Did you tell Haldane my dad was murdered?'

'Yes'.

Carolyn sat down and read the clipping carefully, and Gordon reassured that she was not going to leave, was quickly making tea and disentangling one or two whole biscuits from the broken detritus in the bottom of the tin. Ingrid had scoffed most of the good ones. He showed the envelope to Carolyn.

'See this six-digit number on the envelope? I copied it from the clipping'.'

'A phone number?'

'I thought so but ol God… See, I rang this number but there's no such number, but look…'.

Gordon laid out the Farewell Spit map and read the first three digits of the number and moved his finger along the vertical blue line, then he read the last three digits and moved a second finger along a horizontal blue line.

'It's perfect, my God it's a map reference. I've been stupid, don't you see?'

Carolyn was leaning over Gordon trying to understand the importance of his excitment, and pushed her breasts quite close to his ear.

'I don't get it...'

Gordon barged in, and strangely his excitement made him look surprisingly handsome.

'The Spanish, sorry Portuguese coin and the news clipping were in this envelope, right, this envelope with a cutting on the Wish I Was Somewhere Else gang, and

the phone number, which is actually a map reference number, and that was written on the back of the envelope. And, and look where the numbers fall?'

Carolyn stared at where Gordons two fingers had fallen on Farewell Spit, on the last third of it, near an ominous feature called 'quicksands'.

'I bet that's where they were building the radar post and I bet that's where the army gang found the Portuguese coins'.

Carolyn was getting interested despite herself, carried along by his excitement. Gordon turned anxiously to her, eager to explain as he outlined what he did in Wellington and the importance of the find.

'I mean, how could it be a six digit phone number, when in those days there were only local party lines and three digit numbers'.

Carolyn pointed out.

'But the map is dated 1964 and there's nothing marked on it'.

'Yes but this is a third edition, I bet the first map goes back to the 1950's or so. Oh damn, I forgot the tea'.

Gordon headed off in the general direction of the teapot again, then swerved over to the filing cabinet and started rummaging again.

'You know I think I've got that old map?' he muttered 'yes'.

He brought over a second map and unrolled it, and Carolyn caught up in the rigmarole of Gordon's spat-out words without quite understanding what all the fuss was about. She had completely forgotten the purpose of her visit.

'See? I must have been thick, see what's written on the map. See?'

Carolyn had by now sort of worked out what Gordon was getting in a tiss about. The map was oddly coloured, and the contours were in a thick orange, but there were hardly any of them. The words 'military building' was clearly printed on the 1951 sheet on the same reference point as the 1964 topo, and a square black dot was imprinted on the Spit beside the words.

'They always marked military sites, and it wasn't a secret after the war anymore. I bet that's the radar post you're dad worked on, anything you like'.

Carolyn looked at him and in this excited state Gordon looked young and potent. She moved away slightly. Then she said something in her jossing voice.

'You're a bit of a detective eh Gordon?'

He blushed.

'Can we go there Carolyn, I mean I know...'

He had started the second pot of tea and wanted to say in some eloquent manner that there did not have to be anything sexual between them, though he desperately wished that there might be. The Beast inside him wanted it of course, but then it

always did.

'Ok. You think there might be more coins there?'

Gordon was elated.

'Yes, and we should see this building, I mean it's concrete, it's probably still there'.

'Dad often talked about it, the radar stuff you know. Ok, what about tomorrow?'

She couldn't give a toss about the coins, Portuguese or Outer Mongolian, but she liked the idea of visiting a part of her father's past. It would be like paying a homage to him, and more fun that going to a grave site. And she wouldn't be alone.

'That sounds great Carolyn'.

She downed her tea and slipped away before Gordon could refer back to The Groping Incident, but then that did not seem to matter so much now. She hadn't brought it up again either. He put on Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* and only noticed the bizarre coincidence halfway through the to the Wish I Was Something Else gang.

So, so you think you can tell, heaven from hell...

Chapter 15

Sani

He never could feel the cloth without bringing back memories, Sani he called her. Sani Chuong, or something like that. She could wear an old table-cloth and still look damn good, and what she did after she took it off, boy oh boy. Those days and nights in Jakarta, the long cool drinks in the garden, the humidity like an oven and Sani uncoiling and coiling her hair. When she let it down like that it was always a sign that she was ready, and he remembered how he watched her afterwards, patiently, cleverly, coil it up again after they had finished. Neat as a pin, like all them Asian girls. Like living dolls they were. It had been a good time until Timor.

Bloody British and their la-di-la officers, it was alright getting killed for them but get smart with them when you'd had a drink or two and they showed their spots alright. Ten years in Malaya and what had he got for it? Well he'd done alright for it. A pension, yeah, few bouts of vd, but Never a promotion, no sir. Sergeant for life, oh yes he could hear their mess-room comments even now 'good man Haldane', 'good with the men' 'drinks terrible you know', 'pity', yeah pity.

But what a laugh, after finally getting chucked from the snobs he'd landed right on his feet. The Dutch couldn't keep their hands off him and he made more money in a year with them then he made in ten for the Brits. There were a good mob too, few South Africans, couple of Americans, quite a few Aussies (jeez they could drink) and Brits, and just him as the standalone kiwi. They sorted it alright. Not all of it legal but hell it got the job done, reckoned they put Johhny Suharto's mob back a couple of years at least.

The cloth still smelt of her, better than a wife really, better than the one he'd never had. He didn't really want to go to Timor, he knew Sani would take up with someone else. Some other merc got the chance to unwrap her lovely body, pull the cloth away and let himself drown for an hour or so.

It was funny really, when you thought of it. He owed those Suharto's mob a favour maybe, he'd never have gone to Indonesia if things hadn't got nasty there, and he wouldn't have seen those books and buildings, and read about the history. Then there was Timor. Sani stayed behind, but he found another Sani in Dilli that wasn't so bad, but not the same.

What happened to her, oh yeah the Indo's got her. Jesus Suharto's mob were evil, what they did then. He would write that book, tell it how it was. Whole villages razed, men butchered on stakes, women... well the things he saw. Yer couldn't forget, those evil bastards. He really believed in that fight, it wasn't just the money, or the women laid on, those guys in Timor were helpless beside Suharto's men. Even in Malaya they weren't as bad, not even the Japs were as bad as that. He'd seen the lot, which nasty Asian gang was worse than another nasty Asian gang. He could compare ethnic torture methods, different cultural ways of killing yer enemy, he could write a book maybe and he'd been afraid.

He knew what was coming when they caught him. He knew exactly what they would do, and how they would go about it. He was lucky to escape, but not before they'd done him, and they'd done him well. The thing that amazed him, even now, was when he screamed in pain, and half-choked on his own blood, when he knew in fact that this was just the warm-up to the real business, the word that came like a demented shriek from his throat — was Sani.

Chapter 16

Hamburger on a Spit

Saturday, 28 July 1984

It was another flat calm bay, inviting in the fishing smack as it laboriously chugged across to Farewell Spit. The sun was higher and hotter than last time, and two dolphins cruised by, scarcely taking an interest in the sluggish bow wave that fell away from the boat. It was a different sort of day, Gordon was sure of that. Carolyn was more relaxed around him, more ready to speak and joke. When she went for a swim she wore her swimming togs. Of course that might be because her dad wasn't here, and couldn't protect her from The Beast's ungovernable lust, but Gordon didn't think so. It was like she was deliberately not taunting him, like she had the last time. She came out of the water with a big grin and her hair swept back black and wet on her shoulders. She was a beauty alright, Gordon hadn't changed his mind on that.

He steered, and was rather enjoying himself, adjusting and over adjusting the smack quite needlessly, whilst Carolyn boiled a brew on a gas rig that Bill had concocted out of the tiny wheelhouse space. Gordon even found a couple of full beer cans rammed down the back of the charts. He chuckled as Carolyn handed him a cup of tea.

'What are yer grinning at, is my tea that funny?'

'No, of course not. I was thinking of Darren'.

She rolled her eyes. Darren had rang up that morning just as they were leaving her dad's place.

'No, I'm busy Darren'.

Gordons ears positively tingled with pleasure.

'No Darren'.

Yes!

'I'm going out on the boat with Gordon, see ya'.

One in the eye for Adventure Corp thought Gordon with delight, and it put him in a mood of utmost felicity. He glanced at the map and could see the Spit quite clearly now, but it was such a featureless place that it might be hard to locate the reference point. On the map it clearly showed a sort of break in the scrub, and then a slightly higher hummock that overlooked a small pond. There was an old fence-line marked on the beach. If he was building a radar post then he would put it up as high as he could.

'Do yer have another name Gordon?'

Carolyn was coiling up a rope.

'Err... no'.

She had on her 'hard' voice this morning although she was not pushing it too much.

'Just stuck with Gordon eh?'

'Well at school they nicknamed me 'Sticky'.

'Sticky?'

'Rhymes with 'Mickey' you know 'Micklethwaite'.

She grinned and teased him.

'It suits yer'

Gordon wasn't sure what she meant. She came forward and glanced back at his wake which had done a profound series of zig-zags across the bay. She took the wheel.

'Hold it steady like this'.

Gordon glanced down at his map

'Sure, actually I think we're getting close, maybe we can stop here Carolyn?'

'Shit no, that's too way close Gordon, it's mid tide now but it's going out. If we moor here we'll be parked on the mud till midnight'.

Gordon thought that was not such a bad prospect but could see the practicalities might be awkward. She cut out the engine cut and threw the anchor thrown over, then she unhooked the dingy and dragged it round to the side. Everything she did with such expert grace.

'Test yer rowing skills Gordon?'

He felt dismayed.

'But I've never rowed in my life.'

He clambered down the slimy sides and positioned himself on the seat, tentatively slotting the oars into the rowlock thingies. Carolyn swung down into the boat, which rocked alarmingly, and then sprawled out on the back seat waiting for the entertainment to begin.

'Take her away then Abel Seaman Micklethwaite'.

He grinned nervously then pulled and one blade lurched out in the air. He pulled again and banged against the side of the boat, and got one oar stuck behind the anchor chain and as he was trying to extricate it knocked himself over and desperately grabbed for the other oar that was slipping away, swore vigorously, and finally seated himself back again to find Carolyn pissing herself with laughter.

'Geez, I see what you mean Gordy...'

He said defensively

'It's harder than it looks'.

'Yeah, yeah, we'll swap. That way we'll get to land before dark'.

Before he realised Carolyn had crossed to his seat, and the dinghy rocked perilously before he made a grab for the rear seat and settled himself. By the time he had got his cap straightened, and rescued the map from the water slopping in the dinghy, Carolyn was pulling strongly and confidently to the shore. Showing off she was.

'Where we going then Abel Seaman?'

'It's all wet'.

Muttered Gordon flapping the precious paper to dry it, and he cast around desperately for some reference point. All he could see was a golden line of sand and a straggly line of manuka, was that a break there? There was a sort of hill over there wasnt it?

'Try left'

'Whatcha mean, my left or your left?'

'Your, no, I mean my left'.

She turned neatly and Gordon barely had time to watch her strong arms pulling the blades cleanly through the water and he wondered how had an opera singer got such muscles. The legs were stretched wide apart in her old brown shorts, which The Beast was enjoying, when he felt the dinghy scrape on the sand. He leapt out and together they pulled the boat a short way.

'This will do' said Carolyn 'the tide's gonna go out'.

Gordon looked around with pleasure, he was finally walking on Farewell Spit. Carolyn attached the painter to an old waratah that was jutting out of the water as Gordon waded ashore in his sandals and looked around.

There were some fresh 4WD tracks but otherwise the place was pristine, just dozens of wading bird prints criss-crosssing the wet mud in a strange wallpaper pattern. The air too smelt uncluttered and spacious, and a light breeze ruffled the marram grasses along the fringe. At a glance he could see several different species of wading birds, godwits there, were those whimbrels? Oystercatchers of course, and a white-faced heron went overhead with long lolloping wing beats and a harsh clacking call. It was marvellously peaceful. He wished he'd brought his bird-book now, he was sure he could get several new species for his hit list.

'It's great to be here at last'

He murmured to himself as Carolyn had wandered along the tide line, pulling off her T-shirt and draping it over her shoulders. Her swim suit was a sort of ritzy affair that started out red at the top and changed into purple somewhere down by her bottom. She turned and looked at him with a 'what now' query in her face.

'Oh, right'

He'd been daydreaming. He studied the 1947 map and noticed the old line of totara fence-posts and felt sure this was the place. There was a dead seagull nailed to one of the posts, its rotten feathers and skull black.

'I think we should try up here, through these trees'.

They walked past a distinctive horse-head's lump of driftwood and he pointed it out to Carolyn who ran her fingers along it, and then up through the manuka which rustled seductively in the sea-breeze. They entered a sort of dune valley with a small pond, barely subsisting in the middle. Two paradise ducks beat the water angrily as they took off.

'Try that sandhill'.

Something about it suggested to Gordon that it was more substantial than just sand, and yes there was some rock here, and 'bloody thing' Gordon tripped over and swore as a piece of old iron jabbed his toe.

'Hey Gordon this is it!' said Carolyn excitedly.

The foundation pad was quite obvious, for out of the seaward side of the 'dune' emerged a concrete platform with the sand half blown off it. Gordon was trying to wipe sand off the bloodied toe. He'd been spot on, it was almost too easy. Carolyn was suspicious too.

'You think this is it?'

Gordon patted his long strands of top hair carefully back into place.

'Must be I think. It's quite big, and there's a bit of junk lying around'.

He was referring to the completely unindentifiable pieces of iron that lay half in and half-out the sand. From the concrete pad there was a superb view along the outer curve of the spit, stretching into some sort of infinity.

'It's hard to see where the Spit finishes and the sea begins, its like one of those pointillist pictures by Seurat'.

Carolyn said this unexpectedly and Gordon noticed again how Carolyn, when it suited her, spoke quite posh and educated.

'What now Gordy?'

Back to her pretend working class voice. It was a problem really, what now indeed?

She did not immediately seem to need an answer, for she wriggled out of her shorts and lay her shirt and shorts down on the concrete and nestled down on top of that and closed her eyes. Gordon watched her secretly for a few minutes, then went back to studying the endless rollers of the Tasman Sea as they pushed against the spit. Okay, so they had found the site of the radar post, but they could hardly dig it out could they and look for coins? It would take weeks. Carolyn had quickly dozed off and when she next looked up saw Gordon had smoothed out a patch of sand and was drawing letters in it.

'Sand sculpture Gordon?'

She yawned, sat up and pretended to listen but her eyes roamed along the restless sea edge. Gordon drew two circles.

'We know two coins existed and there were many more. Both were said to come from the Spit, two separate stories confirm that, and both from men who knew each other and worked on this radar post, right'.

Gordon was actually talking to himself and Carolyn stared out to sea. Gordon drew another question mark. He was trying to think, when all he saw was the curve of Carolyns body against her swimsuit.

'The man who killed your dad wanted the coin, and took away the paper cutting. Let's say its Haldane, we don't know that, but it sort of makes sense, but why didn't he come back earlier for the coins? Why has he waited till now? I mean Haldane has waited for forty years?'

Gordon drew another question mark.

'My dad lied to him?'

Suggested Carolyn.

'Yes, that's probably what happened, until I wrote that letter Haldane believed there were no more coins, maybe the site had been forgotten…? Whose that?'

An odd figure was walking along the beach sands towards them, odd because he had some sort of sack over his back which rather changed his shape and made him look hunchback.

'That's Hamburger'.

He was quite old, in his sixties with a grizzled unkept beard and straggly hair that was thick with salt and sand. The eyes were shielded by an incongruous pair of sunglasses, patched up on one side with a bit of sticking plaster. He had shorts and shirt on and a pair of cut-down Buller rubber gumboots on his feet, which must have been literally stinking hot. He walked within a few feet of them and Carolyn had adroitly pulled her T-shirt back over her swimsuit.

'You'se fellahs from town?'

A squeaky rising voice. Gordon stood up awkwardly and offered his hand for a shake which the man took amiably enough, looking at it as if he hadn't seen another

human hand for a while. There was plenty of strength in the hermits grip.

'Guess yer heard about me? I own this place'.

The hermit swept his hand in a grandiose way. Gordon glanced sideways at Carolyn. The hermit chuckled.

'Well I don't actual own it but I might as well as. Eh, emotionally speaking its mine' he said emphatically 'come for a brew then? I live just there'.

Gordon looked at Carolyn and she said 'yes thanks' loudly so that was that.

'Wuz yer name?'

'Gordon'.

'Yer Sheila aint yer, Bill's girl? Oh, that was bad business'.

'You heard about that' she looked surprised.

'Yeah. I go into town quite regler, every season. I wuz at the funereal you know.'

Carolyn didn't know and was slightly embarrassed. The hermit's eyes twinkled.

'Cus I was all dressed up I wuz, yer wouldnt hav known me in all my smarties. Hamburgers the name'.

He lead them through some dunes and past several small ponds to a clump of manuka where an old corrugated iron hut stood shaded by two macrocarpa, about the only trees left on this section of the spit. There was a post outside with another dead seagull pinned to it. That seemed to be Hamburger's boundary markers. The hut was small with a tidy well-patched roof and inside was neat and orderly, with clean pots clean on the walls, a large open fire with a few embers in it and four bunks on one side, most of which had various gear stored in them. Hamburger poked at the fire.

'There's gold everywhere here abouts. Gold in the sun, gold in the sand. Heh, look even gold in their eyes'.

Hamburger pulled from his sack three rotting seabirds and showed them to Gordon who drew back a little. Carolyn looked and shivered.

'You eat those?' asked Carolyn dubiously.

'Well you have to boil them with a stone for two years and then threw 'em away and suck the stone, hee hee. I get oil of 'em. For candles and burning stuff. I stick to fish'.

Gordon suddenly realised there was a row of fish high in the hut, black and wrinkled and unappetising, smoked probably.

'Grow some silver beet out the back, just about independent'.

'What about sugars?' asked Gordon winking at Carolyn.

Hamburger looked sad.

'Yep, you've got me there. Yer can't get sugar from fish and birds, so I have to go to town for me sugars. It's a failing, I know's it. Yer haven't by chance, yer know...?

Micklethwaite produced out of the pocket of his cavernous check shirt two disreputable boiled sweets. Hamburger took them as if they were treasure. He unwrapped the lollie and put both into his mouth, sucking hard, and shifting it from cheek to cheek in noisy pleasure.

The billy boiled and he threw some tea onto the boiling water, expertly flicked it off the hook and tapped the side to settle the leaves. Micklethwaite had been looking around the hut and had found quite an impressive set of books on a shelf. A dictionary, two of them, an atlas, several good novels (Vanity Fair, Dickens) and a whole range of New Zealand historical books, and some back issues of the Historic Places magazine. Hamburger handed round the cups of tea.

'No milk my lass, unless you brought a cow. Like my library? So what brings yer here?'

Carolyn asked.

'We were looking at the old radar post, my dad helped build it. It is the radar post isn't it'.

Hamburger studied her carefully.

'Yes my love, that's it alright. This is the hut they lived, your dad and his mates'.

Gordon almost choked on his tea, of course! He should have realised. They had to live somewhere. Hamburger started to crunch on his lollies.

'Hmm, that's my weakness, still everyone has one weakness I 'spects. What's yours love?'

Carolyn looked thoughtful, and curiously not at all embarassed.

'Well, Hamburger, I'm not very good at decisions. I just pretend I am. Seems to get worse as I get older'.

'I'm old too, but I'm not valuable, though I wuz once'

Hamburger chuckled at his apparently in-joke. Carolyn looked at him.

'You don't get caught in the quicksands Hamburger?'

'The slicksands?! Orrr no, but they are deadly to the soul. All around here, you watch em' .

He waved a warning finge, and went closer to Carolyn who got a strong waft of fishy breath and rotting armpits.

'You can tell em sees, they always look like real sand, only they are realer'.

He grinned, a row of imperfect brown teeth.

'Its true as I speak. The wind doesn't blow em you see, and you dont get drift-wood on em, that's how you tell. They sit there like silent crocodiles, and wait for a bit of bait.'

Hamburger paused and slapped his hands together with a loud smack that made Carolyn jump.

'Gotcha! The jaws are closed, they are nasty those slime sands. Seen a whole herd of cattle go down. Waste of good meat eh, but I wasn't gonna get em, oh no. You sees the cars run along so fast that they often don't have time to see the real quickies, so down they go' he emphasised with delight.

A company ran Nature Tours along the Spit in four wheel drives, which was the only allowed public access, for the rest was a nature reserve.

'There's plenty of fish of course, but in seasons it goes aways (I don't know where) but I catch birds, wekas are tasty but seagulls... ugh, like fried car tyres. I nail em up for fun, scare away the loopies eh? Of course ducks are good and I've got me 22 here, and I can smoke em and store 'em through winter. I tried a penguin once but worser than the seagull! I use the mai-mais for shooting from that the duck-shooteres leave behind, yer dont see many bang-bang people and they miss most of them anyways. Two-three ducks a week can keep me going. Buy some flour and make damper here in the oven, its a good life. Free. Lots to do too. There's always been gold here'.

'Why haven't the Forest Service chucked you out Hamburger?'

Carolyn asked curious. He looked upset.

'Bloody foresters, they tried, but I'm happy here, why can't they leave me. They didn't like my looks, and I told em I didn't like theirs. Talk, talk, talk, I'm tired now' he ended inconsequentially.

His voice gradually got slower and slower as if he were wearing down like an old gramaphone record, and Carolyn realised that talking like this was hard work for the curious hermit. Gordon was struggling to make sense of all this but he sipped the horrible tea and watched Hamburger carefully. He should ask him of course, that's why they came here.

'Oh… errr, you like being a hermit?' asked Gordon incautiously.

Hamburger looked mightily offended and spluttered.

'I aint no bloody hermit, that's for them's weirdos and the like. I just live alone'.

'Of course, of course'

Gordon hastily tried to mollify Hamburger.

'Bloody hermit...' Hamburger muttered 'next youse be putting me away'.

‘Thanks for the tea Hamburger’.

Carolyn tactfully butted in, and Hamburger brightened up.

‘No problems lovee, don’t look so sad. Yer find what you want. I did’.

He walked back into the hut and shut the door, and for a while they thought they could hear him singing. They walked back to the dinghy and the tide was right out.

‘Queer old buzzard’.

‘No he’s not, no queerer than you Gordon’.

Carolyn replied, a little too forcibly for Gordons liking. It shut him up for a while. They had to pull the dinghy a long way to make it float but Gordons oarmanship was better on the return, not that Carolyn seemed to notice, for she had gotten pensive. She started up the engine and they chugged back across the bay, the day had already lost some of its meaning and he was beginning to wonder if he would ever get to the bottom of anything in this business. He put out the map on the wheelhouse table to dry.

Two seagulls attached themselves hopefully to the stern of the boat and Carolyn had hooked up the ships wheelwith some rope and it lumbered quite contentedly on its own across the Bay. She leaned on the rail and stared out back to the Spit. As Gordon watched Carolyn he felt sure a Darren would slip over to Carolyn and put an arm (a friendly brotherly arm of course) over her shoulders. But again Gordon was not like a Darren, and once again the moment slipped by, till they were coasting alongside Collingwood before Gordon could think of anything to say.

‘Thanks Carolyn, it was a great day’.

She smiled faintly.

‘Yes’

That was her posh voice then, or maybe it was just tired. Gordon could recognise the difference, but he wasn’t sure what it meant. Which one was the real Carolyn? He remarked inconsequentially.

‘Sometimes you talk just like your dad and sometimes you talk like someone else’.

She looked startled and looked away.

‘Like my mum perhaps. I was ten when she died. Perhaps that’s my other voice’.

And oddly Gordon noticed she was talking in her other voice when she said that. She looked upset.

‘You really think I have two voices?’

‘Well... sometimes you swear really badly, but other times... you, oh I don’t know’.

She manouevered the boat back to the wharf and they tied up without much fuss.

‘I might make an early night thanks Gordon’

Her posh voice, her posh tired voice, after he suggested a drink.

‘Goodnight’.

‘Goodnight’.

He was pre-occupied and didnt notice a 4WD parked opposite the wharf in the pub carpark. I mean there were so many 4WD vehicles in Collingwood.

Chapter 17

Te Po

Satuday evening, 28 July 1984

You talk in two voices, is that what had Gordon said? God that hit the spot. Everything she said about him to her girlfriend Maisie was true, and yet, unbelievably she was missing him. She ought to apologise, although that seemed to be the main thrust of her relationship with Gordon. A series of retrospective grovels. She had described Gordon to Maisie and they had had a good laugh. 'Nerdy Gordon' was Maisie's nickname, and Carolyn got a great deal of pleasure in describing his cord trousers, checked shirt and balding head.

'He's half bald' she said to Maisie 'and strokes his hair like back like this' she did a first class imitation 'as if it might grow some more'.

'Sounds like he's wearing it out' joked Maisie.

'Well he's not wearing his dick out, I reckon he's a virgin'.

Carolyn did not know why she said that, or expressed it like that, though it brought a roar from her girlfriend.

'Geez yer a card Carol, and he wants to get into your knickers eh?'

Carolyn nodded, and changed the subject abruptly when she realised that Gordon had almost succeeded in that regard.

She got up abruptly from her gloomy soliquoy and put on the jug. The stray cat was sitting ensconced on her sofa with a humming purr coming from its now sleek and well-fed body. Every now and then it gave its black coat another lick. She had named it Te Po, the Maori for night. It was black as night, and cats seemed to use the night.

Carolyn saw her face in the lounge mirror and saw in it a great deal too many lines, not deep ones, but ones that started and then petered out on the smooth skin of her cheeks. She could go to Wellington and get her throat checked again, but wasn't it too late now? No, lots of professional singers only warmed up in their thirties. Carolyn rubbed at the lines from her eyes. She was not worried about getting old

but was scared of always being alone. Even her boyfriends seem to come and go, mostly go. Stay here and fish, or go to Wellington and try for another degree. How many degrees did a girl need? Carolyn put on another disc, it was Maria Callas. God she could sing, and Carolyn had to bite back tears. She was becoming a real weepy lately, any little thing made her cry.

Callas burst into a full-blooded wail and there was a knock on the door, and her immediate thought was that it wasn't Gordon, except oddly she sort of hoped it was. It was 7.30 pm. She tipped off the record.

'Yes?'

She spoke through the locked door, then thought that was a bit of a woozie, unfriendly thing to do. It was probably Auntie Mab. She opened the door. It wasn't.

'Yeah gidday, I was looking for Gordon, Gordon Micklethwaite, but he doesn't seem to be in. Someone I asked, an old lady, said you knew him…?'

Carolyn was puzzled but she didn't want to seem rude. She opened the door.

'He was here a couple of hours ago, we went out to the spit on my boat'.

'Oh, oh yeah I saw a boat come in. Sorry my names Dick, Dick Smith, your name is ..?'

'Carolyn'.

He rambled on for a bit about catching up with Gordon and said he was a keen coin collector. She was puzzled as to why he was here. Perhaps he was lonely?

'Can I ask for a glass of water or something, my throats pretty dry'

Carolyn said yes before she thought it was an odd request. She went into the kitchen and did not realise he had followed him until a hand suddenly stifled her mouth and the other expertly delivered a blow to her neck. She collapsed, gasping, stunned.

'Old army trick, pretty easy eh?'

Haldane got out a pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket and expertly turned her over and locked her hands together. Carolyn tried to muster something like a scream but he had stuffed a large handkerchief in her mouth and all her words were muffled. She tried one desperate movement but her limbs felt half paralysed.

'Sorry about this luv but amazing the useful things you learn in the army. We are just going on a short journey, you and I. Only you and Gordon know where the radar post is and I want you to show me. I would have got Gordon but he's not here, and I'm running out of time. I drove up and down the bloody spit yesterday but I couldn't find the radar post eh, and I couldn't find that hermit bloke either… its just been too long ago, every bloody sand dune looks the same as te last one'.

Carolyn tried a feeble struggle as Haldane moved the curtain aside and peered through.

'Still a bit light though, I might wait for darkness, if you don't mind'.

Carolyn made a throaty yell as if to indicate that she really did mind, but felt quite helpless. Part of Carolyn's mind felt simple rage at her predicament, that it had happpened so simply and quickly, and then another part felt a terrible fear of what was going to happen.

'I'm sure you're wondering what all this is about girl, well, I can't let this chance slip away, and your clever boyfriend has rather jeopardised my hopes'.

Carolyn wanted to say that Gordon was not her boyfriend and she never thought he was particulary clever. Oh God, she hoped Gordon would turn up right now. Her stomach felt fear.

'I think its dark enough'.

Very expertly, considering his age and Carolyn was no lightweight, he got her on her feet and manouevered her like an automatum out of the door and into the back compartment of the Landcruiser, where he took two straps and lashed it around Carolyn and tightened her down to the floor. Twice Carolyn tried to collapse herself, but each time Haldane anticipated her and strapped her in very briskly.

'Nice try my girl'

He patted her on the bum affectionately. He seemed to have it all worked out, and Carolyn saw the house lights flick off and heard the Landcruiser start up. The diesel drowned any thumping noises she could make and within minutes they were out of town, and guessing from the corner, on their way to Port Puponga and Farewell Spit. Carolyn knew she was going to be killed. He was too professional, too sure of himself. He answered her unspoken question.

'I was watching yer. I saw your boat come back today, with you and that young fellah on board. Followed your with my binos eh. Your boyfriend said he might go out the spit and find the radar post. You wern't very tidy eh? I snuck on board the boat and I found a map, with a circle on it and someone had written 'radar' all over it in nice juicy letters. Handy that, but it was a big circle, I needed closer detail, and then I thought of you… so you're the detail'

Despite being bounced around in the back for forty minutes, half choked and sickened by the gag and feeling her hands go numb with the handcuffs she was actually becoming more terrified that he might stop soon. At least if he was driving he could not hurt her. The Landcruiser lurched a lot more now and they seemed to be off the gravel and onto grass or something. There was a huge lurch then and the straps really dug into her then the Landcruiser seemed to pick up speed and be travelling on a very smooth surface. Was he humming or something? After another thirty minutesor so the Landcruiser slowed down and stopped, and Carolyns heart stopped with it.

'Here we are dearie'.

He undid the straps and hauled her to a sitting position.

'Ready to walk?'

He took out her gag and peered into her eyes. It was pitch black outside but she

could hear the sea. Haldane shifted her into an upright position and frog-marched her around to the passenger seat.

'The handcuffs are hurting' she said.

'That's the idea, I'm a brute dontcha know? You know where we are? No of course not. This is the Spit, the Golden Bay side, the tide is out of course. I want you to show me where the radar post is.'

Carolyn protested.

'It's bloody dark now'.

'Sure, but you've been here. I could get lost among these sand dunes'.

'Why?'

Was all Carolyn could get out. He laughed. He started up the Landcruiser and they swept along the exposed mud flats.

'I think we're close to it, theres a fence line here when I came out yesterday'.

Haldane got out a torch and went searching. This was Carolyns chance. Even though her hands were handcuffed she managed to knee-up the door handle and it opened and she half tumbled out, falling on her knees, but struggled up and started to run till somehow she felt herself spinning and realised that Haldane had got hold of her and was spinning her round till she fell with a crunch on the wet mud, which she realised was both cold and hard. She cried with pain and Haldane quickly turned her over on her back, sat on her and shone the torch in her face.

'Very clever luv. You've got guts'.

He placed a long steel knife against her breasts.

'Don't flinch luv, you'll cut yourself. This is a parang, a Malay knife. I could cut your nipples of you in two seconds, that's what the indos did to their prisoners'.

He emphasised the point by pressing the blade against her face. She was in despair. This man meant everything he said, she knew it.

'Yes or no? You promise to obey like a good girl? Excellent. We'll try again eh'.

Carolyn suddenly threw up. The gag, the threat, the whole nighmare made her vomit. Haldane watched impassively as she finished, then he pulled her up and she was covered in mud and he pushed her along to the Landcruiser, which was still chugging quietly to herself. He switched off the motor and turned off the lights. This sudden silence seemed terrible to Carolyn and she started weeping. There were flecks of vomit on her lips.

'This is the fenceline, I'm sure. Look around here, do you recognise it?'

'You aren't going to kill me?'

'Do you recognise this place?'

Carolyn looked around and immediately saw the two clumps of manuka and the horse's head piece of driftwood silhouetted in the headlights.

'It's there, between the two manuka patches' she said dutifully

'Are you sure?'

She nodded and explained about the driftwood.

'There's our footprints as well, from this morning'

'Excellent'.

He started the motor and trundled along the stony stream bed till his headlights fell on the sand dune, and in the light he saw the sharp angular shape of the concrete platform. He stopped the engine but left the lights on briefly as if drinking in the view, then he flicked off the lights.

'This was worth it. Half my life I've dreamed of this'.

Nothing made any sense to Carolyn, she hoped that Gordon might come, but realised in her misery that she was on her own. He was mad, quite definitely mad. For some reason at this moment she remembered Auntie Mabels soothing words — 'people who love each other usually do know'.

Did he know?

Chapter 18

Terra Cognita

Saturday night, 28 July 1984

The days were getting longer now and there was a soft night hanging over the fishing village. It was deliciously warm, like an air bath.

When he opened up the bach he got a waft of stale clothes, old unwashed dishes and oil from the trail bike. He should give this place a good clean up, give his life a good clean up, and it suddenly depressed him although minutes ago he was looking forward to coming home. He hadn't seen the cat for days? Hoped it hadn't died under the bach, or was that funny smell just his funny smell? There was a beer in the fridge along with some indescribable pile of greenery seething on a plate. He popped the can and went out on the verandah and in the warm air could hear noises of boys fishing on the wharf.

Suddenly feeling like company he strolled towards the wharf and had to sharply jump out of the way as a large four-wheel drive roared past with its lights off.

'Bastard! Switch your lights on!'.

The pub was humming with the juke-box belting out an old Beatles number 'It's Been a Hard Days Night', and there were three or four kids fishing off the end of the wharf. Bill's boat was one of the four tied up, and like the others quietly rocking itself gently to sleep. Gordons heart sank when he saw it was Fat Boy on the wharf, who immediately trotted up when he saw his favourite teacher.

'Hello sir, I got some good numbers'.

Gordon leaned on the railing and looking at a small pile of spotties twinkling in the starlight.

'Lots of little uns sir, and Jimmie here here's got a blue cod. Show im Jimmy?'

Another little boy, a sort of disciple of Fat Boy's, proudly displayed his smallish blue cod.

‘An we saw a flounder sir, huge it was’ and Fat Bots hand swept to an impossibly wide position.

‘You sure it wasnt a shark?’

‘No sir, it was a humungous flounder’.

Fat Boy had learnt a new word. The evening had finally curled up its toes and died, and stars were ripe all over the horizon now. The boys moved like grey dwarfs and Fat Boy has been distracted by the jiggling of his rod and was busy grappling with something that must be the size of a whale judging by the effort. Gordon was sauntering back when he suffered one of those strange disconnected but intuitive thoughts. He swivelled round.

‘Heh Fat Boy?’

‘Sir?’

The rod had wound in a large gob of seaweed.

‘The night of the Fishermans Ball, did you get lots of numbers?’

‘Oh yes sir’.

Fat Boy was super excited that anyone bothered to take any notice of his car-number collection that he dropped his rod and fished into his bag and flourished the little red book.

‘There all in here sir. Lots and lots, and ...’

Gordon interrupted the flow of enthusiasm.

‘Let’s have a look’.

He motioned Fat Boy to stand under a street light so they could see. It was a long shot, about as much chance as Fat Boy landing a flounder.

‘Here sir, here’s the Fishermens Ball, that was a great day, I got over a hundred cars easy...’

But Gordon wasn’t listening and was leafing through the surprisingly well-ordered collection of numbers. Everything about Fat Boy was dirty it seemed except his number collection.

‘What’s up sir?’

Fat Boy was staring at his teacher who was suddenly muttered a series of profound expletives.

‘Look at this Fat Boy, this number’.

‘Oh yes, its a weird one eh sir. People-alised one they call em...’

‘Personalised. You know what it means? ‘WIWSE’ Wish I Were Somewhere Else’.

Quite ironic really, that Haldane should choose a number plate that so readily identified him.

'Yeah sir thats a beaut that one, that's my favourite, and I got it again too, look sir!'

'Ehh...?' Gordon was momentarily puzzled.

'It came back...'

'When, what do...'

'When?' Fat Boy peered into his diary 'just an hour ago sir'.

There it was 28 July 'WIWSE', and beside it Fat Boy had written 'Landcruiser'.

'Sir sir.....'

Fat Boy looked bewildered as Gordon uttered two more juicy expletives and sprinted off the wharf. He was not a runner but he made it to Carolyn's door in little more than thirty seconds. It was never locked. The lights were out, but he entered straightaway and switched on the lounge light.

'Carolyn! Carolyn'.

It was empty. It looked ok, there was no struggle or anything, had he been expecting one? He spent five minutes rummaging for any clues and tripping over the bloody cat (so that's where it had got to) but he could not see anything to justify his fears. He reluctantly closed the door and walked home feeling flat and worried. Gordon walked back to his house and stood on the verandah and faced out towards the sea. He was worried.

If Haldane had killed Bill Hepi then he could kill Carolyn. I mean Haldane might just be taking a tiki tour somewhere... It was as if the thought had pushed his chin up and there on the horizon was a pair of headlights, low down right on the tide-line, travelling along the edge of Farewell Spit. Gordon looked at the estuary, it was low tide. Who would be driving along the Spit at night at 10 pm on a Friday night? He dashed inside and got out his binoculars, and peered intently at the streaks of light.

He had a choice, and he could be massively wrong. There was that 4WD that nearly killed him, there was the proof of Fat Boys numbers. He'd no justification for any assumptions, except that he'd been following instinct all evening and saw no reason to stop now.

Gordon pulled his false leathers back on again, wheeled out his trail bike and started it with one kick. To hell with the helmet, and he was off with a roar through Collingwood. Gordon was going flat tack on the estuary road, clocking 120 km and taking the corners with a determination that surprised him. This was crazy he knew it, and he was hardly cut out for knight on shining steel role, but here he was (God, he ran that corner tight!) going like a bat out of hell on the road to Farewell Spit to capture a villian and rescue a damsel.

Oh hell, look at the petrol gauge! He'd be lucky to make it there, let along get back.

Christ, that was bloody Micky Cannocks horses out on the road and with a deft swerve Gordon dodged two (then wondered weren't there three?) when the third loomed up like the apocalypse before his eyes and Gordon came so close he could smell the horses fear, then he was gone in a cloud of dust and shingle. The stars were glorious and the moon was heralded by a soft glow to the east. This was simple craziness so why was he enjoying himself so much?

Where was the turn off? Over the back-paddock, across the dunes, then onto the hard flat mud and Gordon could really gun it now. This was fantasic, he had never got 140 km out of the machine before and he seemed to be leaping along like the wild horses that ceaselessly pushed against the Spit. The tide was already coming in and halfway along the Spit Gordon had to slow right down to negotiate piles of driftwood and a dank mass of seaweed, making his wheels spin. Progress was slower now, with the tide pushing him amongst the shore detritus of plastic bags, fishing buoys and other rubbish. Twice he almost got stuck in soft sands and Gordon was worried about the quicksands, though he had the feeling they were all on the seaward side.

Suddenly in the light beam Gordonile saw a figure moving and waving, like a match-stick man, and he slowed down as the gesticulations became more familiar.

'Why, its you sirs, you indeed, and on such a marvellous night'.

He stopped, and spoke quietly.

'What's going on Hamburger, what do you want?'

'The truck, I saw the truck and the girl, your sheila'.

'Where Hamburger?'

'Up ahead, by the radar thingie, oh such trouble I've caused. As soon as I saw im I knew him, I knew what trouble I've caused'.

'Hop on'.

'Eh sir?'

'Get on!'

Gordon roared this out, and Hamburger did not hesitate, and wrapped his spindly form around and over the back of Gordons pillion seat and placed two quite feminine arms around Gordons waist. It was the time for weirdness tonight and everything was becoming surreal, almost dangerously comic as Hamburger clutched on desperately.

'Not so fast sirs, he'll hear you!! He's evil he is'.

One part of that seemed to make sense and Gordon slowed down and weaved through more driftwood.

'Who's evil?' he shouted back.

'Mr Bog'.

'You know Johnnie, you've known him more than anyone. That's your real name

isnt it? Johnnie van deBurgh? ‘

Gordon had to shout as the trail bikes wheels span on some seaweed.

‘Easy sirs, not far now’.

‘Why did they call him ‘Bog?!’ he yelled.

‘Eeee killed Bill, eee did’.

‘You knew?’

‘Oh yes’.

Hamburger replied in a matter of fact way, then tapped Gordon excitedly on the head which annoyed Gordon.

‘Stop here sir, quieten your mechanical device’.

Gordon did as he was told, and switched off the trail bike and let the machine slip silently over the mud bank to the dune shore.

The silence was unnerving. Even the oystercatchers had shut up. No wind, no sound, and pitch black to Gordons eyes, though gradually the subtle shades of sand dunes and manuka began to emerge. He turned to Hamburger.

‘Johnnie you dug out the coins and sold them to Bill Hepi?’

‘Yup’ says Hamburger, ‘its a weakness I have, for sugars, otherwise self-sufficing apart from that. You can’t get sugars from a tide-pool you know’.

Hamburger scampered off along the beach and after a while turned off into the dunes and motioned elaborately like a surreal modern dancer to Gordon to follow.

Gordon saw the horse-head driftwood and the Toyotas tracks and followed the strange elongated figure of Hamburger as he padded silently with bare feet up the sandy track. There was whiff of wood smoke in the air, funny time for barbeque, then Hamburgher seized rigid like an eye dog and pointed up to the dune, and proceeded in a highly exaggerated fashion to wriggle up the sand dune like a worm. However peculiar it was Gordon, was affected by the secrecy of his actions and silently clawed up the bank. He could hear a voice now, just one voice, but that implied someone was speaking to someone. Then he heard Carolyns voice, it sounded so close!

Hamburgers head was already peering through the marram grass and Gordon brushed aside the blades and peered over patting his hair in an anxious gesture, and getting some sand into it.

Two people by a fire. Carolyn on one side, and it looked like her hands were tied up. Jesus, and there was Haldane sitting on a log of driftwood. Hamburger jabbed Gordon and pointed. The black thing beside Haldane (that Gordon had initially taken for a camera or something) was a revolver. He wasn’t playing schoolboys tonight, and although Gordon had been congratulating himself on his excellent deductions so far, once he saw that gun, he felt sickly apprehensive. This was a long way from the rigours of school reports and coin collecting.

Chapter 19

RIP Oyster

Saturday night, 29 July 1984

'It started here, it will end here'

Haldane said this elaborately and carefully, as if he was pleased he could unburden himself at last.

'I could see Gordon putting two and two together and I could see it was just a matter of time before he found out that I had been to Golden Bay. If you are going to commit sin don't get personalised number plates. That's a joke by the way girl'.

Carolyn looked blankly at him. Haldane poked the fire and regained his thought structure.

'You see I killed a man, not in cold blood you understand, but in hot blood, as if that makes a difference, well I think it does, both legally and morally, but still...' his voice trailed off '…dead all the same'.

Gordon wondered what the hell Haldane was talking about, he looked at Hamburger who had made a brace of hands for his head and was studying the scene with great attention.

'Four of us you see, me, Hamburger, Joker, that's Bill Hepi your father, and Oyster, Harry Shell was his name, you can see why we called him Oyster. He was a runner, a good one too, won the New Zealand junior marathon in 1940, always running you see... huh, like me I spose. They called me 'Bog' cos of middle name, 'Marshall', marsh, bog you see? Just army stuff. It's a funny thing conscience, it never really goes away. I havn't told this story to anyone and for some reason I chose you, lucky you eh'.

Haldane stood up and threw some more logs on the fire. He took a swig from a flask.

'Yer drink? It hasn't done me much good. I got to Captain once and then court martialled, never could keep off the booze. Same in Malaya too, so I got out of it in the end and went Dutch eh? Joined the Dutch in Indonesia, then went to Timor

as a mercenary. Yeah, I've had a life alright.'

'Well anyway, there were four of us building this radar post, and one day we needed more cement for the concrete and Joker knew of some Maori middens, so we dug up the shells and stuff and then we found, what was a sort of Maori burial site, bones and and stuff. Thern we found treasure, actual treasure. Gold coins, about two I think, but actual gold coins, and metal pieces, some broken armour, bits of musket even a half a helmet. It was weird. Well we got excited by the gold coins and dug around, but didn't find anymore, just more rusty metal. We stayed up all night arguing what to do'.

Haldane poked the fire again and some sparks jostled into the sky and met the new moon which had risen in a slim crescent.

'Tempers got heated, you know how it is with young men. Bill did not want to use the gold really, he thought it was bad mana, disturbing some Maori burial site. But Hammie and me we were keen to sell the gold, melt it down first perhaps, then sell it. Oyster took Jokers side and he was a bit hot-headed, and started getting abusive to me. Words were said and things got pretty nasty, well that's gold for you I suppose, at any rate, Oyster got really mad at something, I can scarcely remember what he said, it was forty years ago and he whacked me with a stick or a spade or something, and I... well I lost my temper and picked up a shovel and whacked him right back. I aimed low, you know for the chest but the bugger ducked and I swiped him hard in the head. He gave a sort of cry and fell, just like that. Dropped dead'.

Carolyn could not believe it.

'Just dead? just like that?'

'Just like that my girl, we couldn't believe it either. Pack of stunned mullets with a corpse. What were we going to do?'

Haldane poked the fire again and gazed into the past. Carolyn prompted, propably hoping that the more Haldane talked the calmer he would become.

'What did you do?'

'We talked about that and came up with a crazy idea, although at the time I thought it was pretty clever. We buried Oyster in the concrete foundation. He's still there, and we bunged in all the metal stuff we'd found for extra reinforcing. Yep our mate is still in there'.

Carolyn could not help look over her shoulder and Gordon followed her gaze to the square slab of concrete that was pale white and suddenly surreal in the starlight. Hamburger squirmed beside Gordon.

'Hallo Harry'.

Haldane seemed to enjoy his macabre joke.

'Don't get me wrong he was a good mate. A bloody good mate actually'.

Haldane paused and ruminated.

'Now Joker feels bad about there being no burial, so he marks RIP Oyster in the wet foundation. I didn't realise that till the next morning, and I didn't like it either. Then bugger my days on that very morning after the fight, a boat with an officer and private turned up. Ordered us off, said the radar post was not needed, and we were quitting.'

'We had not had any sleep that night, what with the arguing and fight, and we were mixing concrete at 3 am and chucked Oyster in the foundation. I mean when the captain took us off the concrete had not even set over poor Harry's body'.

There was the low squawk of oystercatchers out on the mud flats and the surf sounded louder now.

'What about the coins, the gold coins?'

Carolyn was curious, though she was thinking all the time of some kind of escape. Perhaps if she could gain his trust there might be some way out. She was sure she could out-run him, even with the handcuffs on.

'I kept one, dunno who took the other one. Maybe Hamburger, though I didn't know it. Then the army whisked us away'.

'They must have wondered about Harry Shell surely?'

'Yeah a bit, but it was wartime you know, everyone was in a panic. The Japs were coming! The Japs were coming! We said Harry had drowned, that evening, and we'd been up all night looking for him. We made the story up on the spot and it would not have taken close inspection but the army was in a flap. Yeah it was a funny business, I mean we were made to make a statement at the army base in Nelson, but they didn't question us at all, didn't even separate us to check our stories, which would have fallen apart pretty quick. It was the war you see, things weren't normal. Within a couple of days we were all scattered. Oh, we made out some affadavit or something the next day and then Hamburger was shipped to the Solomons two days later. Three weeks later I was in Burma. It all happened very quick, the times weren't normal eh'.

'But what about at the inquest?' echoed Carolyn unwittingly.

'They accepted the affadavits, I mean what else could they do? All the witnesses were overseas, perhaps dead by now. No body ever tuned up, of course, it never would'.

Gordon had always understood from his crime-fiction reading binges that getting rid of the body was the hardest matter and he had to admit that Reggie's solution was ingenious. Haldane giggled, a very odd sound, and he had taken another swig from a flask.

'We never had enough cement or rock or anything, it was all gravel, and that was as salty as hell. No water to wash the gravel with, it was hopeless building a concrete pad. No reinforcing yer know, we used whatever came to hand, old fence

posts, bits of iron... anyway. One bash with the crowbar and you'd find Oyster's bones sticking up I shouldn't wonder'.

Carolyn shivered and moved closer to the fire.

'These handcuffs are hurting, I will not run away. Where can I run to?'

Haldane started as if he had genuinely forgotten about the handcuffs.

'Your word of honour luv you'll not run away?'

That was an old fashioned thing to say thought Gordon, of course she'll run away.

'Yes of course, please'.

Haldane unlocked the cuffs and Carolyn groaned as she rubbed her wrists and arms which had cramped up in the unaccustomed position. Carolyn looked at him carefully.

'Did you kill my dad, like you killed Harry Shell?'

'Now hold on a minute I didn't murder Oyster, it was self defence' Haldane protested 'any court will tell you that. I've spoken to lawyers, a Queens Counsel no less, and he agrees that it was probably self-defence, manslaughter at the worst. Anyway there's the Statue of Limitations, forty years has gone. I think twenty years and that's it, they can't prosecute. That's what I've been told. Nah, our worst crime was concealing the body and failing to report the proper circumstances, but that's not such a serious crime in itself, no it's not murder, my hands are clean there luv, you can't bloody well push that onto me'.

Haldane got vehement and stood up and Carolyn realised that she could not push this man too far. He still had a gun and his mood seemed to be swinging wildly from nostalgia to anger. What he had threatened to do with her eyes terrified her.

Upon the sandbank Gordon was having similar thoughts. Take it easy girl, he's got a gun, take it easy. Hmm, how could he get that gun? There was a long gap from this dune down to the fire, he must think of something really clever.

'Why handcuff me at all, and drug me just to tell me a story?'

This casual remark seemed to irritate Haldane beyond measure.

'Why bloody not? It's a good story and it's not finished yet. The future is boring compared to what happened in the past, but the stories, ah, you wouldn't know luv.'

Haldane was working himself up into a rage. He let loose a whole range of expletives.

'I tell you luv people die for all kinds of reasons, fight for all kinds of reasons. I've fought for King and country, though you wouldn't know what that means, and I've fought for money. Yeah, I've been a mercenary. In Malaya I was there, bet yer never heard of that war have yer? In Timor too before Suharto's mob kicked us out. I've fought for all kinds of reasons and I tell yer I'd die for a story,

specially when I own it. Yeah, it's worth it.'

He swung the flask right over his mouth and the last drops trickled in and he threw the flask away.

'Jesus, just a story. Whatya know luv? It's a good story, if you're prepared to kill for it. I mean that. It's worth it. The future looks bloody predictable to me and if you seriously want *terra incognita* you have to go back in time. History books are full of stuff about what's 'sposed to have happened, but it's all guesses, half-truths and bloody lies for the most part. You know the medieval sailors swore they saw the black forearm and hand of Satan coming out of the sea at the edge of the world? There were edges then. Look at this place, one huge cutting edge, Farewell Spit. Life doesn't live here, it clings, that's how it is for us humans. I've never had soft corners and easy excuses, I feel at home here. My forearm could be Satan's and this place could be the edge of the world...'

Haldane stared at his arm in a strange way, and Carolyn was petrified, transfixed. She felt quite certain he was going to kill her now.

'Yer don't know what I'm talking about eh? You see you've had many chances, but I've had to fight for very damn thing, every damn hell-hole step of the way. Army was the place for a lad like me, no brains to speak of...'

Haldane had calmed down a mite. Carolyn felt a dry fear for herself and some sort of pity mingled with horror for Haldane. She had no idea what he would do next.

'Anyway, well, where was I, yes… Hammie, well I didn't know what happened to him, so that only left me and Bill. You see in 1946 I was not much interested in history, but in Indonesia I met some Dutch ex-pats who were proud of their history, and the same in Timor.

They talk Portuguese over there you know? Well, it made me think of those coins eh? What a discovery that would be! My dad was right into history so I picked up some ideas from him, not that he liked them much. I wrote an article about my coin, although it was not very good article because I couldn't prove anything. I thought the coin was Spanish then eh? Didn't even get that checked. You can't get a summer out of one swallow, that's what I was told, again and again and a bloody again'.

Then Gordon understood. The rage, the passion, he understood it then.

'After the war I wrote to Bill, twenty years ago maybe, but he said the sands had covered in the concrete pad, and he couldn't find it, so I let the matter lie. I guess Bill felt partly to blame, said the place was jinxed, you know because of Oysters death. You know what the Maori say? Bad mana. Tapu, that's it. Bill kept saying that it was tapu and he wouldn't go back there… So I kinda forgot about it but I often wondered about that gold, then I saw your clever little boyfriends article'.

'He's not my boyfriend'.

Gordon winced, that was the tough Carolyn talking, and strictly speaking she was

right, but did she have to be so emphatic?

'But the dates were different, 1502. The coin Bill showed me was 1515. I guessed then that Bill was digging the stuff out'.

Gordon but his lip again, he'd as good as written Bill Hepi's death warrant.

'I came to Golden Bay, it was the night of the Fisherman's Ball I suppose, there were loads of cars about. At any rate, Joker's place was empty, door open, so I poked around and found an assay note from Soames and Brothers. Then I knew he was melting the stuff. He came in, I accused him, he denied it, then admitted it. I got mad. He told me all the coins had been melted, I got mad even more. Then the poor bastard clutched his chest, like this, said he couldn't breath. Then he collapsed on the floor with a heart attack, he really did. I don't expect you to believe that. Your dad was a Joker alright' he said bitterly 'and played a last joke on me'.

Carolyn stared at him, and forgetting her situation.

'You murdered him you bastard'.

She was getting angry now, but Haldane spat back.

'You murdered him yourself love, you cost him a fortune. Bill told me about all your singing lessons and opera stuff. How do you think all those la-di -dah singing classes were paid for? From flounders and eels? Do you think fishing paid for that? All those fees and tuition to train your precious little voice. Your daddy didn't have money, so what did he do? Go back to the spit, ignored the tapu, and dug out those coins'.

Haldane was really mad.

'…ahhh you kids'.

He said the last quietly as he saw Carolyn was crying.

'Well he was using up all the gold, and to tell you the truth I don't really give a toss about the money, but that was my story going down the tubes. Some of the most important history in New Zealand, don't you see? I could be bloody famous. He could have been famous. If I didn't act soon they'd be no history left. End of story'.

'You killed to save your story?'

Carolyn spoke with hardly a whisper.

'Yeah, but I didn't kill your father, how many times do I say that? It was an accident'.

There was a moment of silence as Haldane seemed to be recollecting something. He had a last suck at the flask then flung it away in disgust and paced up and down.

'Look, its an incredible story' insisted Haldane 'the Portuguese discovered New Zealand, 150 years before Tasman, 300 years before Cook, and the proof is buried

under this concrete slab here'.

Up on the sandbank Gordon agreed, it was a incredible story. He had totally forgotten about his plan to get the gun, and Haldane's tale had completely enthralled him. But Haldane seemed to be getting tired of talking and Carolyn knew that sshe had to keep him talking

'You have my dad's coin?'

'Yeah, but coins don't prove bugger all. Coins are moveable they can be taken anywhere, got from anywhere...'

Up on his sand dune, this was all painfully familiar to Gordon. Carolyn was thinking desperately as Haldane tossed some more wood on the fire.

'I liked Gordon, your boyfriend…'

'He's not my boyfriend'.

(Bloody hell thought Gordon, one more time and I'm leaving her to it).

'We could have been friends in a way, interested in the same stuff yer know. It's a pity it'll end like this, but death stops a lot of story-telling eh'.

Carolyn's bowels turn liquid but she was also angry.

'You're really going to kill me? Why? What harm have I ever done to you?'

Carolyn could hardly think. The grim night and the macabre jokes were exhausting her.

'I could pay you.'

She had an idea, not a very good idea.

'Errmmm?'

'It doesn't have to be in money'.

He seemed puzzled and then she slightly shifted and raised her breasts.

'Oh, it's a very charming bod too my dear, but dontcha think I'm getting too old? What would your boyfriend say if I got into your glory box?'

Gordon was ready to leap out and murder Haldane right now. He stood over her as if contemplating the possibility of a nice bit of sex, then he suddenly swung his arm and bashed her viciously across the face. She squealed in pain.

'Bitches, you're all bitches! Whores!'

Gordon was ready to run down and fling himself heroically at Haldane, but Reg had picked up his gun and pointed it at her. Carolyn had started weeping now and tears were running through a face grubby with sand, mud and sweat. Haldane looked long and hard at this woman, her face strained with fear and her breasts taut against her tank-top.

'No girlie, I'm going to dig'.

Haldane walked to the back of the Landcruiser and picked up a shovel and pick axe.

'I came prepared you see'.

He waved the gun.

'This is a German Luger six-shot, so please dont run away luvvie, I want you to see the final proof. Then people will know the truth'.

Carolyn was bewildered.

'Proof, of what?'.

'Proof that I'm a smarter man than my dad'.

'You are going to dig out the dead man?" she asked incredously.

'No. Im going to dig out all the metal we found all those years ago. You watch'.

'I don't understand, please, please, please let me go...'

Gordon wanted to jump Haldane, but he could hardly cross thirty metres of open sand dune without being seen. That gun looked impersonal and professional. Besides he was scared shitless. There was killing in the air, and he still hadn't thought of anything clever. Gordon looked around, and Hamburger was gone. Haldane had set up a powerful torch that stared hard at the base of the foundation and started to scrape sand away from the concrete slab, and immediately giggled. A strange sound in the silence of the dunes.

'See? RIP Oyster, WIWSE, heh your bloody dad, he was a joker alright'.

He laughed, turned around and found Carolyn had gone.

'You stupid bitch'.

He fired three times.

Chapter 20

The Slime Sands

Saturday night, Sunday morning, 29-30 July

Out through the night the sound of the three shots echoed and rolled like small nasty pulses of thunder. No, that was not right Gordon decided, thunder was a long and brawling sound, these shots brooked no arguments at all. They were cracks. Final, like the sounds you might get at the time of the Ragnerok, when the gods themselved were destroyed by their own folly. Gordon had never heard gunshots before. The noise was obscene, and the silence afterwards was more chilling than anything he had heard in his life before. Gordon expected to hear some cry of anguish from Carolyn, a scream, anything would be better than this dreadful nothing. He was up on his haunches. The man was evil, drunk, armed and evil.

Haldane bellowed out into the night, a drunken fury, or was it anguish in his voice.

> 'I wasn't going to kill you, you stupid bitch, don't you understand? Don't be stupid. I wanted someone to see. It's not the coins, haven't you got it yet? The gold is nothing, it's the story'.

Gordon realised that one of his hands had fiercely gripped a clutch of marram grass and ripped long gashes. If Haldane was yelling to Carolyn then maybe he had missed her? Where was Hamburger?

From out over the dunes came a strange song. Perhaps behind him, or maybe near the Landcruiser, it was hard to pinpoint, it came everywhere, and it sounded rather oddly cheerful. It was Hamburger's voice which rose and fell squeakily but it could sort of hold a tune and the whole effect was spine-tingling. He was singing Vera Lynn's 'We'll Meet Again' only with the words 'I Wish I were Somewhere else' made up by Joker..

> 'Jesus, is that you Johnnie? I havn't heard that bloody song for forty years? Johnnie where are you?'

Haldane spun here and there with his torch looking for the source of the song.

> 'Johnnie I can see you? Johnnie you bastard aren't you dead! I thought you were dead!' then under his breath 'theres no such things as ghosts Reggie you know

that, there's flesh and blood out there somewhere'.

He fired again. And again. The sounds were catastrophic in that space, but wasn't that six shots at least? He said it was a six-shot gun didn't he?

Gordon realised that his time had arrived for being a hero and whilst Haldane's back was turned and staring into some God-awful blacknes of his soul, Gordon jumped up and ran softly down the sandback and basically into the back of the man and knocked him over. They both scrambled for the gun, which Gordon missed in the confusion. Haldane struggled to his feet and with a well-timed whack knocked Gordon back onto the ground again.

'Jesus, the place is crawling...'

Haldane muttered to himself as he headed for the Landcruiser. He turned the key on. He didn't know what he was doing and felt outnumbered and confused by this events. Everything was a mess 'gone to custard' he muttered, and where was the girl, and Johnnie? And who was that guy? Haldane didn't realise it was Mickleth-waite who had knocked him over, just some random shadowy bloke who come out of the darkness. Maybe there were more of them? He got the urgent desire to escape.

Gordon felt his face numb at first, and then a roaring pain spread all over his cheek and jaw where the gun hit it. One eye had blood in it, he was sure it was gone. The Landcruiser started up Gordon saw it out of his other good eye, and rolled violently out of the way as the vehicle lurched past. But instead of turning back to the Golden Bay side, it hauled itself over a dune and disappeared onto the seaward side of the Spit.

Good riddance was Gordon's last clear thought as he grasped the side of his head which was throbbing in an unpleasantly syncopated manner. He sat down on the log and Carolyn rushed into the firelight.

'Oh Gordon, Gordon, that was horrible, what happened? How come you're here? Oh your head...'

A gush of good thick blood was streaming down the side.

'Are you alright Carol?'

'He's mad, quite mad! I thought he would kill me'.

Just then Hamburger strolled into the picture and regarded them warmly. Caro-lyn jumped out of her skin with a scream, a really decent one that ripped into the night…

'God, I thought it was him. Hamburger you freaked me out!'

She started to weep and wipe Micklethwaite clean at the same time.

'What were you singing Hamburger?' asked Gordon thickly.

Carol had taken of her T-shirt to wipe his head. His head hurt like hell but still he noticed that. This was one long weird night.

‘An old Vera Lynn song, We Will Meet Again, just for Mr Bog, but oh, he’s gone a bad way. I must look’.

He scampered off into the night again. Gordon stumbled into some words.

‘I’m sorry Carolyn.’

‘What are you sorry about? I should have taken you more seriously. He’s mad’.

‘I messed it up, my rush I mean.’

‘That was brave Gordon, I didn’t think you had it in you.’

He winced at the pain as she dabbed his head with a cloth.

‘Of course it was a bit late, I’d already saved myself’ she said matter of factly.

Then she hugged him and burst into a sob.

‘I’m sorry Gordon, I’m always saying horrible things to you. I’m not so bloody brave really, I’m so glad to see you, so bloody glad’.

She whispered and hugged him with a vehemence that Gordon enjoyed, especially as the little ribbon on her bra was tickling his nose. There were worse ways to be thanked. Between him hugging her and she wiping his head down, and finding his hands all bloody, they managed to explain most of the sequence of the night. Gordon was glad Haldane was gone and it was all over, and then Hamburger turned up, screwing his hands agitatedly.

‘You best come now sir, there’s big problem now for us, big problem’.

‘What?’

‘Best come’.

Hamburger waved them on urgently, like a puppy running and sniffing ahead through the dunes and out onto the broad seaward side of the Spit.

About four hundred yards further on two headlights were pointing rather oddly in the air, and Gordon was puzzled for it looked like Haldane had crashed or something. The moon barely gave any light and several oystercatchers scattered out of the way as they walked hurriedly to the Landcruiser.

‘Heh stop sir!’

Hamburger shouted when they were 20 yards away

‘Can’t yous see? The slime sands’.

Hamburger uttered that word quietly, which seemed to give the situation a deadly significance. Even in the poor light Gordon could see that Haldane had driven right into a bowl of quicksand and the Landcruiser had tilted backwards so the headlights poured into an empty sky. The engine was switched off and the driver seeemd motionless inside.

‘Hey, Reg. Hey, are you alright?’

It seemed odd asking a man who had been trying to murder them a few minutes before if he was alright. Unthinkingly Gordon started walking forward but Hamburger grabbed him and pulled him back, not before Gordon felt the strangest sensation in his short life.

The surface looked solid sand, it even had little ridges and ripples on it, perfect sand in fact except that to step on it in wobbled like jelly, no that was a weak metaphor. It had a slimely, grippy quality to it, like it was alive. Gordon tested one foot and found that only a slight movment and the foot slipped in and the quicksand seeemd to eagerly hold onto his leg. It was like a living monster, silent, unseen, almost evil.

'He must have driven straight into it. Why doesn't he say something?' asked Carolyn inconsequentially.

Hamburger guided them round to the driver's side where Haldane remained motionless.

'I ain't got nothing to say'.

His low voice made them jump and they all involuntarily stepped back.

'Yeah, keep away my boys. It's nasty stuff'.

'We can get you out. It's only a few yards across to firm sand here, we can find a log too...'

Hamburger started tugging hopefully at a large length of driftwood.

'What's the point Gordon, what's the point'.

'What you talking about?' Gordon felt chilled.

Carolyn was also thinking it was pointless.

'He was horrible Gordon, horrible. The things he said to me, he threatened to cut off my... my... nipples' she said with a shudder.

Gordon was stunned and they all lapsed into silence. Haldane heard what she said.

'Let me show you something'.

Haldane started undoing his shirt and then lifted it up.

'Have a look… they really got me'.

'I can't see..' muttered Gordon, but Hamburger said 'Lordy'.

Carolyn had seen. The headlights had reflected back from the window and were casting a weird light on Haldane. There were two sets of dark scars on his chest, where his nipples might have been. She gulped and Hamburger seemed to grasp it first.

'Ahh them Japs, evil them Japs'.

'Indos matey, that's what happens when they catch you…'

Would this night ever end? She suddenly clung to Gordon and tears started coming

down her cheeks.

'Suharto's men. I took risks, I knew I took them...'

Haldane seemed to be talking to himself in a detached voice.

'Sorry about hitting you Gordon. I sorta lost it tonight, and I was so close'.

'Come on Reg, we can get you out, really we can'

Just as Gordon said that the Landcruiser settled a bit more, perhaps another two inches lower.

'No point lad.'

He looked at Hamburger.

'Johnnie van de Burgh isnt it? Hiya Hammie'.

'Hello Mr Bog'.

'Is he a bit touched? Well I would be living out here…'

Gordon said quietly.

'He found the coins'.

This surprised Haldane. He shifted in the car seat but no mood to get out, and the Toyota shifted a centimetre or two into the quicksand. It was poised there and any little movement triggered a slurpy sound as if it was hungry for more metal.

'Did you now?'

'Yes sir, wind blew them out'.

'Any more coins left?'

'All gone sirs, and I'm hungry for some chocolate'.

Haldane pulled a face.

'He was digging out the coins and selling them to Bill Hepi. He likes sugar'.

'All gone, unbelievable eh'.

Haldane did not look that upset, but leaned back and the Toyota quivered and sank a bit more. Gordon tried one more time.

'Come on don't be stupid Reg, we can haul you out!'

He could not watch this man slip into the quicksand, even if he was a murderer.

'I killed many times my boy, I would kill again probably'.

'You wouldn't have killed us?'

He grimaced.

'Dunno. I dont know what I would have done tonight, just to prove to myself really, no to prove to him. That's what I wanted. I was gonna show him for what

he was…'

Gordon guessed who 'the him' was..

'Anyway you didn't kill Bill Hepi, he had a heart attack'.

'Well that makes me feel better I'm sure'.

'Stop being bloody ironic, you can't just die in this muck?'

Gordon was exasperated and helpless. He really though Haldane had a death wish, and he was right.

'You have to die sometime lad, it's not a bad graveyard. It's good enough for my mate...'

Haldane looked at Gordon in the pseudo light of dawn.

'It was an accident, like life, life is an accident you know'.

His words were whispered. There was an infinite silence and the bizarreness of the situation was overwhelming Carolyn. She wasn't crying but her breath was panting as if her lungs were struggling for air. The half buried Toyota slurping into the sand, and the vast droaning roll of the tide. The stars were big tonight, and wasn't that the morning star over there? Venus or something. Carolyn desperately wanted to see the new sun, wanted to breathe fully again.

'Do me a favour Gordon, go and dig into that concrete. Don't worry about the coins, this geezer has stolen them all anyway. There's metal in there, solid stuff. You carry the banner now, the glory must be yours. You're girlfriend, she's pretty. Maybe you'll be famous...'

Haldane was rambling away and they could hardly hear what he was saying. He paused.

'Satan's reached out his hand to me, I know that'.

There was another long silence, then he said suddenly.

'I'm disgusted with myself'.

He lifted up one arm and shot himself in the head.

The audience of three staggered back and Gordon was open mouthed as Carolyn clang to him and literally sank down to her knees, suffocated in a wave of both anguish and astonishment. She'd just seen a man shoot out his brains before their eyes. Hamburger kept walking round in circles saying 'lordy, lordy, lordy' and praying to some unknown God and the oystercatchers chattered away maniacally on the tide-line.

Haldanes body had slumped forward on the wheel and triggered the horn which wailed in a ghastly fashion, and this proved to be the only funeral chant raised over the soul of Reginald Haldane. The shift in his body seemed to subtly disturb the angle of the Landcruiser and broke the suction, as it shifted in the quicksand and disappeared more into the quicksand. Carolyn could not watch and walked away but

Gordon was transfixed as the Toyota sank was sucked backwards like a captured fish down the gullet of the monster. As the bonnet went under the horn abruptly cut off and incredibly the whole truck got swallowed up and disappeared. You would not credit it could happen like that. What was left was silence.

Gordon's shook his head, as if trying to awaken himself out of a dream. All he could say out loud was.

'And I was so sure he'd fired six shots'.

Chapter 21

Every Dog Has its Day

Sunday morning, 29 July 1984

By the time they wandered back to the dying fire Venus shined out brilliantly. Gordon threw some logs on the embers and quickly the flames sprouted up and the three of them stood around for the most part silent, making the odd comment here and there as they each made sense of the events that had passed.

'A night to remember, or forget'.

'He was evil'.

Carolyn said that flatly as Gordon brushed back his hair.

'I thought he had fired all six shots' he said ruefully.

She mocked him.

'So you weren't that brave?'

'I miscounted. He might have killed me.'

'But he didn't, he just clobbered you. How's your head?'

'Ow! don't touch... Those scars on his chest...'

'Oh please don't speak of it...'

'Nasty them Japs' interposed Hamburger.

'He was obsessed I suppose'.

'It was haunting him'.

'Yes, and then we gave him the clue. You know Carolyn I practically started the whole damn thing, sending that letter, finding the radar post…'.

'It wasn't...'

Carolyn was going to say that it wasn't Gordons fault when she realised that actually it was.

'It's not really your fault. In opera, you were a *deux au machine*, the mechanism of the plot, the story depended on you'.

Hamburger said portentously.

'The cogs and machines grind exceedingly slow and fine'

They all stared into the fire and pink light started to leaven some of the greyness from the shadow of the dunes. Gordon could see Carolyn's face clearly now. There was dried blood on the side of her face, which looked puffy and swollen.

'Poor bastard. He knew the coins were there, and if he could prove his father wrong. It was his dad you know, that wrote that article. I can see what happened. Reg finds the coin yet his own father rubbishes his claim, it's like he was looking for...'

Gordon hesitated on the word 'love'.

'Gordy you look awful. Your face has all blown up. Can you see out of your eye?'

He squinted through the bad eye. Yes, it was alright. He sighed.

'It would make me obsessed' he said inconsequentially.

'You are obsessed Gordon'.

Carolyn said this matter of factly.

'There's nothing wrong with obsession, if you mean passion. Tell me, why do you sometimes call me Gordon and sometimes Gordy?'

'Don't you like Gordy?'

'No'.

'Neither do I. I call you Gordy, when, when, I like you'.

'Oh'.

'I could call you Sticky?'

She giggled, but it was a giggle of exhaustion, shock and relief. He hugged her, and she didn't pull away. She even rested her head on his shoulders. Gordon was pleased and turned to Hamburger.

'Tell me Hamburger, you really sold all the coins?'

'Everyone sirs, chocolate. I tried to control my appetite, ahhhh but the sweet hunger, you can't contain it'.

'They were Portuguese you know'.

'Arr but the Dutch took over a Portuguese colony, used Portuguese gold to pay their men with'.

'Is that true?'

'It could be sir. It could be true. Now I must be off. Come and have a cup of tea when you want. If you have any sweeeties...'

He asked this wistfully. Gordon shook his head and he trotted off, his thin frame bent rather like the manuka that clung improbably to this harsh piece of nothing. Carolyn was nestling against Gordon, and somehow his arm came round. It wasn't planned and she didn't protest.

'Is he telling the truth Gordon?' she asked.

'It could be true' mimicked Gordon, then giggled.

Carolyn snuggled in more and asked a question,

'I don't really understand why Haldane made me come here, or even told me his story'.

'Perhaps it was just his conscience. You are Bill's daughter. Perhaps he felt he had to pass something on, his story on. He said something about proof... He went on and on about that didn't he? His story? But what was he afraid of. We couldn't prove he'd killed Harry Shell? Maybe it was an accident? And your dad too, it was true what he said, I accept that, he was a bastard of course, but they were probably two accidents not two murders'.

There was a lovely pink light in the sky now and bathed the side of her face in a delicious glow. Gordon felt comfortable with her head on his shoulder as her hair stroked his cheek. They were both thinking of the same thing

'Oh God that was awful. I just didn't expect...'

She looked up briefly into his eyes.

'Thanks Gordy, I mean Gordon...'

Suddenly he knew she was ready for him. He had no idea how he knew, but maybe people have some primal genes that automatically inform them of certain things — like fear, or love. He pulled off his jacket and jumper and laid it down on the sand beside the exposed concrete foundation as a sort of blanket they could lie on.

He kissed her and she tilted her head so he could get a better fix. Her lips were soft and active, grasping his, returning his kisses. His hand was busy exploring her back ran up the centre of her spine fiddling idly with her bra strap, then deciding that was too early and he ought to make it last, but Carolyn did not seem so reluctant. She got hold of his checked shirt and started undoing the buttons, one button zinged off and she was nibbling at his chest. This was now too much and Gordon pulled off his shirt and bent back her neck and started kissing her delicious breasts. How long ago had he wanted to do this!

Carolyn was whispering him on, and even if she could recall all the nasty things she had said about Gordon to Maisie, they were lost in a mutual flush of desire. Gordon wanted to go slower, he really did, he wanted to take his time and to enjoy this mo-

ment, but he was in a frenzy to possess her totally. He was sinking into a warm dark triangle of bliss. She had grabbed hold of part of the concrete foundation to stabilise herself as he mounted her like a stallion, oh God, one final thrust and he fell into a final shuddering collapse.

Dawn. That's what it was.

It took him a while to even think again, then he heard the oystercatchers, always the oystercatchers. Screeching away, and there was Venus, still half-bright in the pink-blue sky. Carolyn had not been surprised at his tumult and smoothed down his thin strands of top hair with her hand. He liked her hand there, stroking him.

Gordon gaze fell upon the concrete platform that Haldane had partially cleared. Her hand had tore at the foundation as she tried to hold onto something, and the concrete had just crumbled away. It was feeble stuff alright. Haldane was right, mostly sand and pebbles. Metal? He could see a smooth curve of metal in the hole her hand had made. It was quite rounded, maybe head-like in size with a sort of flower design on it. He looked at it for almost a full three minutes, and could almost feel his brain slowly ticking over the options and gradually engaging the correct gears. He'd seen that type of metallic parabola in the National Museum.

He groaned.

A helmet!? So of course the army boys used the metal they found, and buried it in the concrete as reinforcing forty years ago; of course they would do that. In an hour he would have walked away and never come back. What had Haldane said? Here was the treasure trove, not gold but armour with crests, stuff that could be dated, tools with a provenance, nails with a history... How often had people told him that coins do not prove a thing, but dump another Spanish helmet on the public and you could change the record books. He could be famous, actually he was probably was famous right now. What more could you ask?

Carolyn misinterpreted his groan and movement and stroked his head

'Lay still if you like. It feels good'.

Oh it did, it did feel good, and Gordon sank back into a kind of sticky satisfaction. So with this moment of fame upon him, when he was blessed with perhaps one of the greatest historical discovery in New Zealand's history, when fame and fortune beckoned, when all manner of mysteries had unravelled before him, and when he had finally copulated with a girl, why on earth should he be worrying whether he had enough petrol to take her home?

He sighed. If the tank was empty then they had a long walk ahead of them, but it might be romantic. Just the two of them and ten thousand oystercatchers.

Notes

All the characters portrayed in this book are fictional and are not based on any living person.

The town of Collingwood in this novel differs from the actual location. The wharf has been enlarged for my convenience, and I added the rustic pub The Mussel and Stout. To some extent I pictured the Collingwood as it was before the great fire of 1904 destroyed most of the history, an old goldship town of peeling buildings and lingering memories. New visitors might be disappointed.

The geography used is largely accurate. Collingwood has a superb situation between Golden Bay and the estuary, and Farewell Spit is indeed a huge desert-tongue of sand and gravel half enclosing the Bay. It has a remarkable presence, haunted by migratory birds and the constant humming wind. As far as I know there are no buildings or baches on the spit, and certainly no old concrete radar emplacements — this is a literary fiction.

As far as I am aware there is no sound evidence for a Spanish or Portuguese discovery of New Zealand before Abel Tasman in 1642, but this has not prevented endless speculation, to which this fictional story may add a literary spice, but little in the way of proof. Did earlier Europeans arrive *before* Tasman? Did any Europeans arrive *between* Tasman and Cook?