

*TURN OF THE TIDE*  
*BY*  
*PETER THOMAS*

*Starting thousands of miles apart, two vessels converge in mid ocean. Aboard one vessel three fugitives are attempting to escape from the Indonesian police. The other boat crewed by two couples and a baby, carries medical supplies for a remote island hospital where hopeful refugees gather. But the Indonesian news is grim. Seamanship and intuitive cunning are the only tools available to turn the tide and restore hope to a new breed of Islanders.*

*This novel is a work of fiction and any similarity between anyone living or dead is coincidental.*

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*This novel is dedicated to the memory of my mother  
Audrey Nabarro (1916 – 2011).*

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*“There is a tide in the affairs of men  
which taken at the flood leads on...”*  
*William Shakespeare*

*CHAPTER 1*

Nothing provided any indication of the coming events. Meteorology provided no warnings. The barometer remained steady. The weather map displayed no isobars closing up. At midnight when she started her watch-keeping shift there was no moon and low clouds obliterated the possibility of starlight, but there was nothing unusual in that. By two o'clock in the morning Rachael had given up trying to peer into the blackness. There were no navigation hazards. The radar displayed an empty ocean in all directions for the full twenty-six nautical miles of its range. There had been no traffic on any of the scanned channels on the VHF radio. The rest of the crew were sleeping in their cabins while the wind remained on the beam at a steady fifteen to twenty knots. The scow was sailing on the port-tack on automatic

pilot with an easy broad-reach. The ocean, whispering to the hull, lulled her watch keeping into a sleepy formality. Trying to keep awake she slipped into the galley and made herself a mug of coffee. While the coffee was going cool her eyes kept drifting from the blackness outside, through the flickering light emanating from the radar screen, towards the face of her three-month-old son Manuka who was sleeping in his carry-cot on the chart-table next to her.

At three-forty-two am. a “Mayday” on the VHF jolted Rachael from her tranquillity. Lifting the microphone from its holder she hesitated while listening to hear if any other vessels were responding. She glanced at Manuka to check whether the radio was disturbing him. Having taken a pencil and a note-pad from the draw in the chart-table she pressed the talk-button. While trying to keep her voice soft, to avoid disturbing Manuka, she hoped she could also provide a calming influence to the excited voice animating the airwaves from a vessel called *Lucky Strike*.

The voice that had been coming to her over the radio was obviously speaking English as a second language.

Rachael spoke slowly. *‘Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, this is the hospital scow Rurenga responding to your “Mayday”. Please state your present latitude and longitude, the nature of your problem, the size of your vessel and the number of people on board.’*

She recorded their reply on the note-pad and advised *Lucky Strike* to stand by. Lifting Manuka’s carrycot off the chart-table she placed it on the floor. Taking a parallel ruler and a pair of dividers from the draw she plotted *Lucky Strike’s* position on the paper chart and updated *Rurenga’s* current position which she obtained from the GPS. Using the dividers she measured the intervening distance before using the parallel ruler and the compass rose to determine their bearing. She noted these on her note-pad and picked up the microphone.

*'Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, this is the hospital scow Rurenga responding to your "Mayday". Do you copy? Over.'*

*Lucky Strike* acknowledged the call and Rachael continued. *'This is Rurenga. We are currently thirty-two nautical miles from your present position.'*

She was about to supply them with the bearing but at that precise moment Manuka gave a startled cry and, in the brief second it took Rachael to glance in his direction, a wave of suspicion flooded her subconscious. So instead of giving them the bearing she decided to miss it out before continuing.

*'Lucky Strike, Have you activated your Personal Locator Beacon or an EPIRB? On Rurenga under ideal conditions we have a maximum speed of eleven knots through the water so we could not be with you in less than three hours. As you say you are taking on water faster than your pumps can clear it, can you carry out emergency repairs to stay afloat for over three hours or will you need to abandon ship?'*

*Lucky Strike's* reply came back instantly. *'We have no Personal Locator Beacon and are now down to one life raft. There are three of us. We're not sure whether we will have to abandon ship before you get here. Urgency is essential.'*

Dishevelled by doubt Rachael pressed the talk button again. *'I will relay your "Mayday" on other channels in case we can find another vessel in a better position to respond. If you stay listening on channel sixteen I'll get back to you shortly. Rurenga out.'*

Unable to get any immediate response from relaying the "Mayday" she picked up Manuka's carrycot and hooked it back onto the chart table. Crossing the wheelhouse she started descending the companionway steps. She'd have to wake Hemi.

Rachael crossed the saloon and opening the door of their cabin leaned over and kissed him. As he emerged from sleep he asked, 'What's the time Rachael?'

'About quarter to four.'

Hemi asked, 'Is Manuka alright?'

'Yes love, he's fine. I fed him, got his wind up and changed him over an hour ago. Now he's asleep. But I've just picked up a "Mayday" call on the VHF. It's from a vessel called "*Lucky Strike*" with three people on board. She's thirty-two miles away and claims to be taking on water faster than the pumps can clear it. What should we do?'

Hemi forced his brain to exit the twilight world of sleep, where more than one thought at a time constituted a mental overload. While re-running Rachael's words at half-speed through his still sleeping brain to extract their significance his brain found a momentary handhold. 'Have you tried relaying the "Mayday" on the VHF?'

Rachael continued. 'Yes, and I've received no response. Do you think the "Mayday" is genuine or could it be pirates? I've already told the *Lucky Strike* we're about thirty-two nautical miles away but I haven't given them our bearing so we could be anywhere along the circumference of a circle close to two hundred miles long. I'm worried Hemi. What should I do?'

Hemi's brain took another step into the waking world. 'We have to respond to a "Mayday". It's part of the fraternity-of-the-sea. Could you get any indication whether the call sounded genuine?' As Hemi spoke he was getting out of bed.

Rachael picked up his shirt from the floor and handed it to him as she replied. 'How can I distinguish a genuine call from a counterfeit one? The caller spoke in good enough English but it was obviously English spoken as a second

language. From his accent he could be a French speaker. That tells us nothing! They claim to have neither a Personal Locator Beacon nor an EPIRB.’ As Hemi pulled his shirt over his head Rachael opened his drawer, took out a clean pair of undies and handed them to him. While he was putting them on she picked up his shorts.

Hemi’s brain was moving from neutral to forward gear as he pulled on his shorts and tightened his belt buckle. ‘Not having a locator beacon sounds suspicious. No one goes offshore without one. Get on the Single Side-Band, put in an “All Stations” call and try relaying their “Mayday”. You could try Danny’s Rock Radio; drunk or sober Danny usually keeps his ears pretty close to the airwaves. If you can raise anyone this side of the Coral Sea at this time of night tell them we’re responding. In the meantime the engine is ready to start, so you could fire it up. Last night I made sure the sails were all self-tacking in case you needed to tack during your watch. So you could get back on the VHF and tell *Lucky Strike* we’re on our way. Hopefully in the next three hours we might be able to find out a bit more about the *Lucky Strike*, assuming such a vessel exists.’

‘Thanks Hemi. I’ll get back to the wheelhouse.’

Rachael crossed the saloon. Hemi had made the decision. Had he done it in full knowledge of her foreboding? His decision seemed to be encompassed by the term, “The-fraternity-of-the-sea”! Was it just a cliché? “Fraternity!” What did it mean? Did it mean “brotherhood”? Should Manuka at thirteen-weeks-old be included in Hemi’s “brotherhood”? Does “fraternity” include the way mothers think? He must have used it unconsciously, but something had changed since Manuka was born. Perhaps the silent-hours of the night seeping into the wheelhouse had whispered something intuitive to her. Reaching the wheelhouse she glanced at Manuka rather than the blackness beyond the toughened glass. He was sleeping and trusting her. Damn “The-fraternity-of-the-sea”!

At least Hemi had left everything set up for her watch. Come on Hemi I'm waiting for you. Don't you know "The-fraternity-of-the-sea" can't be kept waiting! She used the light on the chart table to see her watch. Was it true that only four minutes had elapsed since she received the "Mayday" call?

She didn't really need to wait for Hemi before starting the engine. She knew what to do, and Hemi knew she knew what to do. She'd done it heaps of times in the past. But that was in the past. It wasn't now. From beyond the toughened glass some worm had burrowed into her subconscious, convincing her something was wrong. No, that wasn't it, she wanted something to be wrong so they couldn't respond.

But Hemi had checked everything was "ready-to-go" before he went to bed. She had no doubt that the port and starboard tanks would have been levelled and separated. The diesel would be turned on, the engine oil would be OK and the seacocks would be open for the engine cooling water. She had seen Hemi take down the flying jib. All the remaining sails would be self-tacking. Other than procrastination, nothing prevented her from starting the engine!

Checking the gear lever was in neutral she switched on the instrument panel-lights and isolated the low-oil-pressure alarm. If the bleeper went off she would be sure to wake Manuka. She took a deep breath as she turned the key and reached for the pre-heat button and started counting. Little Manuka opened his eyes. She made a silent request to herself. "Please don't start crying right now." She counted the required twenty seconds and turned the key one more click, the engine turned over and started. So far so good! As if in response to her request Manuka closed his eyes again. While the engine was warming up she checked the oil-pressure gauge. It showed normal, so she switched the low-oil-pressure alarm back to normal. Lifting the torch down from its hook above Manuka's carrycot she opened

the wheelhouse door and felt the night-air wrap around her skin as she crossed the deck. Using the torch to peer over the taff-rail she checked the cooling water was flowing freely out of the exhaust. As she stepped back from the taff-rail a single thought pursued her back to the wheelhouse. If she had fallen overboard no one would know until Hemi came looking for her. Back in the wheelhouse she glanced at the ammeters to verify that the alternators were charging. They were, and no warning lights were illuminated. She switched the automatic pilot to manual and set the new bearing to the supposed position of *Lucky Strike*. Baby Manuka's eyes were still closed as the diesel settled to a steady idling beat. The engine temperature-gauge was starting to move in its upward path towards eighty degrees. She pushed the gear lever to forward and nudged the throttle to slow-ahead and maintained their present course for almost sixty seconds before she heard Hemi climbing the steps in the companionway.

‘Everything going OK, Rachael?’

‘Yes I'm running the engine slow ahead. We'll need to go through the wind onto the starboard tack for the new course. I'll need you on deck to adjust the sails to the new relative wind speed when I increase the engine revs to full-ahead.’

Manuka was staying asleep. Hemi was with her, confidence was returning.

‘As long as the wind holds we should be able to stay on the new tack for three hours Hemi. We might get an extra knot if we hank on the flying-jib.’ As she finished speaking she heard Chris and Huia climbing the companionway steps. As Chris stepped into the wheelhouse Hemi greeted him.

‘Give us a hand on deck Chris. We're going onto the starboard tack. And we need to hank on the flying-jib.’

Chris and Hemi moved towards the wheelhouse door as Huia asked, ‘Can I help?’



Chris answered apparently for both of them. 'It's OK Huia. Hemi and I can manage, but you can switch on the deck-lights if you want.'

As the wheelhouse door shut behind them Huia flipped the switch and turned to Rachael. 'Did you find that Rachael? A year ago Chris would have said, "Thanks Huia" expecting me to help, but just because my pregnancy is showing they assume all I'm good for is switching on the bloody lights.'

'I'd make the most of it while you can Huia.'

'I don't specially want to winch in sheets or hank on sails but I don't like Chris writing me off as incapable of doing anything but switching on his lights.'

'He's probably just trying to be considerate, Huia. Think yourself lucky. Half the women in the world have the opposite complaint. If you want, you can give me a hand trying to get Danny's Rock Radio on the single-sideband. I doubt if we'll get hold of Danny at this time of night. But it would be good if we could get him to fire up his microwave and use his contacts to find out anything about the *Lucky Strike* before we make visual contact. Providing they gave us the right position and their drift isn't excessive we should have three hours before we find them.'

'Did you tell them we are a hospital scow?'

'Of course! Perhaps I should have also told them we only have a cargo of medical instruments and supplies for Sentinel Island. Pirates probably wouldn't be interested in that. Besides they might need our services themselves one day.'

Huia nodded. 'Hemi said you were wondering whether or not it was a genuine "Mayday".'

'It's a calm night. Why would a boat suddenly start taking on water? It can't be a weather-related problem. Also they claim they haven't got a locator beacon. Who goes offshore these days without one?'

Illuminated by the deck-lights Rachael could see Chris and Hemi had the flying jib hanked on and were hauling

it up. With the engine still running slow-ahead Rachael brought the scow upwind and held it there long enough to enable Hemi to get the jib halyard winched in hard. Rachael steered the scow to port as Hemi and Chris sheeted in the sails on the starboard tack. She slowly eased the throttle to full-ahead on the new course as they trimmed the sails. *Rurenga* heeled to a fine-reach on the new course and surged forward as the sails became smooth hard curves.

A few minutes later they were back in the wheelhouse and Huia switched off the deck-lights. Rachael and Huia watched the log climbed towards ten knots. Rachael glanced at her watch. Only sixteen minutes had elapsed since they received the initial Mayday call. It seemed like hours.

She picked up the VHF microphone, checked they were still on channel sixteen and pressed the talk-button.

*'Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, Lucky Strike, This is the hospital scow Rurenga responding to your Mayday. Do you copy? Over.'*

*Lucky Strike* replied. *'Receiving Rurenga. Go ahead please.'*

Rachael replied. *'We are now proceeding at maximum speed under sail and power. We should be with you in a little over three hours from now. Has there been any change in your situation?'*

The reply came back. *'Negative. No change.'*

Huia rested her hand on Rachael's shoulder. *'You've been on watch since midnight, its gone four o'clock. Someone should have taken over from you five minutes ago. As Chris and I are up why don't you take little Manuka back down to your cabin with Hemi and try and get some rest. I'll take over the watch keeping and see if I can get a copy on any of the possible radio channels. Chris would be available to trim the sails if necessary. Everything is logged in the notebook isn't it?'*

Rachael only nodded to Huia. She was unwilling to add, “Yes everything is in the book except my doubts.”

Huia continued. ‘You get some sleep and leave the rest to Chris and me. But unless the situation changes there shouldn’t be much to do for the next three hours. It’ll be dawn and we’ll be able to see what’s going on. In the meantime we’ll keep our ears on the radio and our eyes on the radar once we get within range.’

She carried Manuka down the companionway steps and into her cabin telling herself it was one thing to take Manuka back to her cabin but quite another thing to get any sleep herself. As her eyes closed she saw pirates hovering like hawks at the roadside anticipating a fresh road kill.

The sun was streaming through the porthole in Rachael’s cabin when Hemi touched her hand to wake her. According to the radar, they were now three nautical miles from *Lucky Strike*. They were in visual contact and closing, but there were problems.

## CHAPTER 2

In under one minute Rachael was dressed and in the wheelhouse. Huia had already reduced the scow's speed to slow-ahead. Chris had the binoculars trained on the vessel ahead. The notebook, in which she had written the details of the "Mayday" call, was open in front of him. As she approached the chart table Chris handed her the binoculars.

'What do you make of that, Rachael?'

Rachael pushed her hair back that had fallen over her face. As she re-focused the glasses on the vessel ahead, a puzzled frown creased her forehead.

'Has there been any further radio contact, Chris?'

'Not a thing!'

'Rachael, are you sure you correctly copied down the details about *Lucky Strike*? Could there have been any confusion in the wording of their call? I know you said they spoke with a foreign accent.'

‘No! I’m sure I copied down exactly what they told me. I think it could have been a French accent, but I’m not sure.’

‘Allowing for drift, the latitude and longitude you wrote down seems correct but, whatever else that vessel is, it certainly isn’t a commercial fishing boat. I suppose a French accent could tie in with a vessel operating out of Port Moresby there are a few French speakers there. Not many, but there are a few.’

The frown in Rachael’s forehead deepened. ‘Might *Lucky Strike* have sunk and that boat is searching for survivors?’

‘Anything is possible, but Huia and I have kept *Lucky Strike* in radar contact most of the night and we haven’t seen her vanish from view or seen any other vessels approaching. Also we certainly haven’t picked up any other radio traffic on channel sixteen.’

Hemi cut in. ‘It’s not likely, but they could have been communicating with another boat using ham-radio or a satellite-phone. Even if they were on VHF they could have been operating on some channel we’re not scanning. If they’ve been talking to some other vessel where nobody speaks English our radio calls would go unanswered, even if they heard them. Another boat could have approached the *Lucky Strike* from the other side and, if they don’t give a good radar reflection, you might not have noticed them.’

Chris pursed his lips and, taking the binoculars back, had another look at the boat ahead. ‘It’s just possible I suppose. I can’t believe that boat’s a pirate vessel. Look at it! It’s a heavy displacement yacht. It’s difficult to tell from this distance but I’d guess it is probably about twelve metres overall. Probably it’s got a top speed of about eight knots. It’ll be slower than us!’

‘If it is a pirate boat might that be why they’re getting us to go to them? They’re too slow to catch us so they get us to go to them.’ Rachael shook her head. ‘There’s something wrong here. If that’s *Lucky Strike* they certainly aren’t on

the point of sinking as they said on the VHF. Have you tried calling them on channel sixteen?’

Huia answered. ‘Yes, I’ve been calling them all morning and received no reply.’

‘If they’ve repaired their damage and don’t need assistance they should have cancelled their “Mayday” shouldn’t they?’ Rachael asked.

‘Of course they should.’ Chris replied.

‘If they’ve already repaired their boat why are they just sitting dead-in-the-water and not moving. What are they waiting for?’ Huia asked.

‘Us!’ Rachael suggested. ‘I’ve been suspicious of that call ever since I received it.’

Chris nodded and continued looking at the vessel ahead. ‘Of course you would be, these are dangerous waters. That obviously isn’t a local fishing boat, it looks like a private yacht to me. Let’s think about this. Most of the pirates round here are failed fishermen. They were once fishermen themselves; some of them are probably still fishing.’ Turning to face Rachael he asked, ‘If you were a pirate would you rather plunder a potentially prosperous private yacht or another local fishing boat? Would you waste fuel on a fishing boat?’

‘What are you saying Chris?’ Rachael asked.

Chris raised the binoculars to his eyes as he answered. ‘I’m trying to look at it from the point of view of the people on that yacht. If they want to avoid attracting the attention of pirates wouldn’t they be likely to say over the VHF that they were a local fishing boat rather than a private yacht.’

‘Yes Chris,’ Rachael answered. ‘But why would they say they were sinking when it doesn’t look as if there’s anything wrong?’

‘That boat could be both a decoy and a mother ship.’ Hemi suggested. ‘We’ve only seen the yacht from this side. They could have a high-speed boat rafted up abeam on the far side. A small boat low in the water wouldn’t show up

either visually or on radar from here. I think we should circle round it before we get too close.'

'That's the best suggestion I've heard all morning. 'Chris glanced up the sun before replying. 'Let's do it.'

As Huia reached for the throttle lever to increase speed Hemi added, 'Turn to port Huia and pass astern of them. That will broaden our reach to allow for the change in relative-wind-speed if we need a further increase in engine revs. If we turn to port we won't be caught while changing tack if we need to get away. There's no name or registration number on this side as far as I can see from this distance.'

Rachael bit her lip. 'I feel uneasy about this. I received a "Mayday" from a fishing boat and this isn't a fishing boat. Neither do they seem to be sinking. Do you think getting any closer is worth the risk, Chris?'

'Risk?' Chris seemed to ponder the word. 'We aren't the only ones taking a risk. They transmitted their position on the radio. They must have had a good reason for doing it. If they aren't pirates themselves it was a risky thing to do in waters infested with pirates.' Chris turned to face Rachael as he made the decision. 'If we see nothing suspicious we'll go in to investigate. If we eventually go alongside we'll have to take all the sails down.'

Huia spun the wheel to port and *Rurenga* settled to a new course that would take her within a-few-hundred-metres of *Lucky Strike's* stern. Meanwhile Chris focused the binoculars on the vessel, and Huia focused her attention on Chris's face. Streaks of grey were appearing in his Tongan thunderhead of black curls. She decided the lines, like scalpel cuts, spreading from the corners of his eyes were probably caused by years of screwing up his eyes to reduce the glare from the face of the ocean. If the lines seemed deeper than usual could it be stress or was it no more than the low morning sun emphasising his facial lines?

Anxious minutes elapsed before Chris announced. 'I can see three people in the cockpit. It could be two men and

a woman, but I can't tell from this distance. Most pirate vessels aren't crewed by women.'

As *Rurenga* passed astern of the yacht Hemi announced, 'At least there doesn't seem to be a high-speed boat rafted alongside.'

Chris turned towards Hemi and nodded before raising the binoculars to his eyes again. 'I can't see a thing to indicate they might be pirates can you Hemi? Saying that he handed the glasses to Hemi. 'Here, you have a look.'

'They seem to have the boat's name written across the stern in reasonably large letters. I don't think it says *Lucky Strike* it looks like one word, not two words. Huia's steering us closer all the time. Can you make it out Chris?'

A full minute passed and then another. *Rurenga* slid through the water towards the boat. As Chris looked through the glasses again the puzzled frown slid off his forehead and his lips curled up in a smile as he handed the glasses back to Hemi. 'Yep! Take a look yourself. I don't think we have to be concerned about them. I'd guess they're more concerned about whether we're a threat to them. What did they say their boat was called? *Lucky Strike*! If they're pirates they're pirates with a sense of humour. I'll wager my next turn at the washing up they've only just hung a painted cloth across the stern. I'll guarantee the paint's still wet or only just dry! Can you see what it says Hemi!'

Huia's eyes were tracking a path between the name on the stern of the boat and Chris's face. They seemed interrelated because now the lines in the corners of his eyes had turned into smile lines.

Hemi looked through the binoculars again. 'It says PYRITES! Does that mean pirates in some other language? Is someone trying to warn us there's a pirate vessel in the vicinity? Perhaps they've been boarded by pirates.'

'I don't think so, and neither is their spelling wrong. It's subtler than that.'



‘*Pyrites!*’ Huia asked, ‘What does “*Pyrites*” mean?’

Chris explained. ‘Pyrites, or using its full name ‘Iron Pyrites’, is “Fool’s Gold”. They’re telling us their vessel isn’t a “*Lucky Strike*”. We’ve discovered *Fool’s Gold*. Let’s move closer and see what they...’

Hemi cut in as a lamp started flashing aboard the yacht. “They’re sending us a Morse message.”

He spelled out each word. “All...that...glitters...is...not...gold.”

As he did so, Huia found herself looking into Chris’s face trying to imagine what was going on underneath his thunderhead of black curls. He was the one who would make the decisions but his eyes seemed to be focused on some point beyond the horizon. Was his mind meandering, or did he know what to do?

Huia asked, ‘Do you think we should call them on the VHF and ask what’s going on?’

Chris shook his head. ‘I don’t think so. The only reason anyone uses signal lamps and Morse now-a-days is because they want to maintain radio silence. In waters infested with pirates it’s not difficult to imagine why they might do it but I suppose it could be for some other reason that we still need to discover.’

‘Perhaps their radio isn’t working.’ Huia suggested.

‘It was working last night when they transmitted their “Mayday”. You didn’t have any problems talking to them did you, Rachael?’

‘No!’ Rachael replied. ‘They came over load-and-clear at the time; but later I couldn’t get any response.’

Reading Chris’s face Huia realised what he had decided to do even before his lips parted to issue the instructions. ‘Hemi, would you take down the inner headsail but leave the flying-jib. Rachael and I will drop the main so we’ll be sailing under headsail and mizzen. Huia can you take us in to a-hundred-metres off their leeward beam so that we’re within hailing distance. Go in dead-slow and when we’re on

station put the engine in neutral. Then I want Hemi to back the flying-jib and winch it to windward as hard as you can. While he's doing that Rachael and I will sheet the mizzen in till it's close-hauled. Once we've done that Huia can you make sure we're laying close to the wind, without putting us through the wind, before you put the engine in neutral. But leave the engine idling, in case we need it. Then turn the wheel hard to windward and hold it there, lash it if you like, and we should be hove-to and only creep forward very slowly. We'll find out what that boat wants but I'd like us to be prepared to sail off if necessary. To do that all you have to do is for Huia to turn the wheel to leeward and we should move away. Once we're off-the-wind if Hemi sheets in the flying-jib to leeward we'll move ahead and sail clear without any noise or fuss. If there's a problem Huia, put the engine full ahead and take us out fast.'

With the flying jib backed *Rurenga* slowed and her motion changed from a slight pitch and roll to a gentle heave in a half-metre swell. Huia lashed the wheel and, illuminated by the morning sun, she watched a burst of activity aboard the other boat as they operated their davits to launch their dinghy. Huia also noticed a woman in the cockpit of the other boat was shading her eyes as she looked into the sun towards *Rurenga*. Huia grinned to herself. Chris hadn't got them to manoeuvre into that position by accident.

A bald heavily bearded man was climbing down the ladder and getting into the dinghy. Cautious movements indicated an older man. Huia flung open the wheelhouse door, 'Hemi, its Grandad!' Hemi and Rachael rushed towards the bulwarks as the dinghy drew closer.

Excitement mounted as Rachael accepted the dinghy's painter and secured it to a ringbolt. Hemi placed a boarding ladder over the side. Chris leaned over the side offering his extended arm and shouting, 'Harry! Welcome aboard again, you mad-old bugger.'

As Harry scrambled onto the deck, and before he had even straightened his back, Huia left the wheel lashed and throwing her arms around him gave him a hug and a kiss. After a moment Harry took a step back and held her shoulders at arms' length. A smile spread out of his eyes, rippled across his face and chuckled into his beard. Noting Huia's advanced pregnancy Harry observed, 'So you're going to turn me into a great-Grandad are you, Huia.'

Huia smiled back. 'No Grandad, I'm too late. Hemi has already done it.'

'Hemi has?' The surprise showed in Harry's voice.

'You've got a bit of catching up to do Harry.' Chris advised.

'You just said Hemi has given me a great-grandchild. Is that right Hemi?'

'With a lot of help from Rachael.' As Hemi spoke he took Rachael's hand.

A puzzled frown skipped across Harry's forehead and his eyes momentarily flicked towards Chris. 'I thought... Rachael...and...' Harry let the sentence trail away into his beard as he decided he didn't know how to finish his sentence and also knew, even if he did know how to finish it, he didn't want to.

Chris helped him out. 'It's OK Harry, let me explain before you embarrass yourself. As I said you have a bit of catching up to do. I think I know what you wanted to say. The answer is "Yes". Rachael and I have been partners from our university days till about two years ago. Then things changed. While trying to salvage a ketch, a tropical cyclone struck. The crew became separated. Huia and I ended up on the beach, sheltering in a life raft. We discovered each other.'

Huia cut in. 'And now I'm having Chris's baby.'

Rachael turned towards Harry and continued. 'Other things also happened in that cyclone. I want everyone to know I would have died if Hemi hadn't risked his life to save

me. He saved me and single-handed Hemi's seamanship saved *Rurenga* and everyone else aboard. And now Hemi and I share a permanent relationship.'

'And a three month old son.' Hemi added.

'But right now Manuka is asleep in our cabin.'

'Manuka!' Harry spoke the word slowly as if he was attempting to balance it on a fulcrum. 'Manuka... Manuka Morgan! Yes it's got has a fine ring to it. It's a good name, I like it and I'm sure Susan will as well. Manuka Morgan eh!' Harry was chuckling to himself and his pale blue eyes twinkled as he added. 'My first great-grandson!'

Harry paused before continuing. 'Manuka! That's a fine New Zealand name. When the land has been stripped bare; Manuka is always the first tree to grow.' Harry nodded to himself with each sentence. 'It's an unpretentious tree but it provides a nursery for the mighty totara, rimu, and kaikatea that follow. Manuka oil heals skin and arthritic joints. The honey from its flowers is one of the most effective antibiotics we have. For a son born on a hospital scow I can think of no finer name. You have chosen his name well. And think of the passion. Manuka burns with such intensity no other timber can match it. So it will be with our Manuka. I can't wait. Come on, take me to see him. Take me to see my own great-grandson!'

As they moved towards the wheel-house Chris introduced the question they all wanted answered. 'We're all glad to see you but we're also wondering why you put out a "Mayday" in the name of a local fishing boat. There are heavy penalties for transmitting hoax "Mayday" calls as well as the possibility of attracting pirates.'

Harry nodded. 'Yes I know but I took a calculated risk. Penalties and pirates are the least of my problems just now. I'll explain it all to you shortly but it'll take more than a few minutes.' Harry paused at the wheelhouse door and looked towards his boat. He turned back to Chris. 'We seem to have half-a-metre of slop just now, but the sea could be

dropping so if we could manage to raft-up alongside for a few hours I'd like to try and explain the whole picture or at least as much of it as I can. Sometimes it's hard to see the picture when you're inside the frame.' As they entered the wheelhouse he added, 'It's something that will involve all of us. But first let me see my great-grandson before I go back to my boat and raft up.'

### *CHAPTER 3*

With the sails taken down the boats manoeuvred alongside each other. Snatched sentences and warps were passed between the two boats until only fenders separated them.

‘Harry! What shall we say if anyone else turns up in response to your “Mayday”?’

‘I hope no one else heard it. I only transmitted it on the VHF. It’s got quite a limited range and at night in mid-ocean most boats are only listening with half-an-ear, if at all.’

‘We heard it so...’ Rachael commented.

‘That’s why I sent it. I’ve been trying to catch up with you for weeks. I’ve left messages for you all round the Coral Sea.’

‘We certainly haven’t received any.’

‘Every message I’ve sent seems to have been a day or two behind you.’

‘How did you know where we were this time, Harry?’

‘I called up Danny’s Rock Radio and Danny told me your latest position and that you’re heading back to your hospital on Sentinel Island. I took a guess at your probable position and sent the “Mayday” and hoped no one else heard it.’

‘We heard it OK Harry but there could be other boats in the area. They could turn up as well.’

‘If they do, we’ll tell them we’ve both been searching for the *Lucky Strike* but found nothing – not even wreckage. And right now we’re having a “council-of-war” to discuss what to do next.’

‘Harry! We could get them to check on missing fishing boats that have been using Port Moresby as their home port.’

‘Good idea Rachael. That’ll cause enough confusion to see the week out! By that time we’ll both be well away.’

‘If you knew we’re heading to Sentinel Island why didn’t you just sail there to meet us instead of going to all this trouble?’

‘I need to stay in International waters as no one’s likely to bother looking for us out here.’

‘Who’s looking for you? Why all this subterfuge Harry?’

‘It’s complicated; I’ll explain later when we don’t have to shout to each other between the boats.’

Within ten minutes the boats were secure. Harry and Susan together with the third member of their group, who Harry introduced as his friend Dr. Jacques Valence, entered *Rurenga’s* wheelhouse and made their way down the companion-way and into the saloon. Glancing at Jacques, Huia found herself looking into a face styled to smile but now the smile lines were cross-hatched with worry lines. As Huia lit the gas to boil water for coffee Chris asked, ‘What’s all this about Harry?’

Harry hesitated. ‘I hardly know where to begin. It must be ten years since we left *Rurenga*.’

‘Eleven!’ Susan corrected him.

‘Yes, you’re right Susan, it must be eleven years. Anyway until recently there have been six of us friends who meet regularly. I suppose we could say seven if we count Figgy.’

Susan interjected. ‘If you’re counting friends, I’d leave it at six.’

‘OK six! There have been the three of us, plus Yvette together with Gary and Ann.’

As Harry mentioned Yvette’s name he glanced towards Jacques.

Jacques explained. ‘Yvette was my wife.’

There was a moment’s uneasy silence at Jacques use of the past tense: “Yvette WAS my wife.”

Susan broke the silence. ‘There’s an urgent message that Danny passed on to us over the radio. Apparently he’s received an email from Ingrid. She’s Gary and Ann’s eleven-year-old daughter who attends a boarding school in Baltimore, in the United States.’

‘It’s Ann’s old school.’ Harry explained.

Susan continued. ‘Gary or Ann normally ring Ingrid every weekend when she’s visiting her Grandma’s house. Apparently they’ve suddenly stopped ringing and Ingrid hasn’t been able to contact them by phone or email either at home or at the university.’

Harry continued. ‘Ingrid tried contacting both Susan and Jacques with the same negative results because of course they’ve been at sea for weeks with me. But Gary and Ann haven’t, we all thought they were still in Jakarta.’

‘Ingrid’s a pretty sensible girl but suddenly loosing all contact with her parents must have been traumatic for her. Danny’s Rock Radio must have been Ingrid’s last resort.’ Susan added.

‘Could she try the Indonesian police?’ Huia asked.

‘It’s not that simple.’ Susan replied. ‘They could be the problem, not the solution.’

‘Why’s that?’ Huia asked.



Harry shook his head. ‘About a year or two ago things happened at more or less the same time and have been gathering momentum at a frightening pace. Jacques published and released another book on the evolution of modern thought and I made a surprising discovery while I was engaged in my shellfish research. Gary and Ann’s disappearance could be related to either or neither of those things.’

Hemi shook his head in disbelief. ‘That sounds crazy to me! How could someone else’s shellfish research programme cause Gary and Ann to vanish?’

Harry nodded. ‘Nevertheless they may be related. As you know I started my research programme on the effects on shellfish of the increased levels of carbon emissions into the atmosphere.’

‘If it’s not a long story why does atmospheric carbon effect shellfish?’ Hemi asked.

‘About half of the carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere is absorbed by the oceans where it reacts with water and becomes carbonic acid which dissolves the shells of shell-fish.’

‘Does it matter?’ Hemi asked.

Harry nodded. ‘It sure does. Shellfish are low down in the food chain. Without adequate shells they will vanish and so will the fish that feed on them. Some shellfish are more vulnerable than others. The damage also depends on other features including sea-temperature. It’s already too late for many of the deep cold-water shellfish. Around the world other scientists are measuring the thickness of modern shells. But we don’t have much accurate historical data on how thick the shells, of the same species, used to be before we pumped so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. So, along with gathering and testing modern shells, we also need to test old shells of the same species from the same area. It’s the old story I suppose. The further we can see into the past, the further we can see into the future.’

‘How can you tell whether a shell you pick up is old or new.’ Hemi asked.

‘We can use carbon dating but there are other ways. As you know Indonesia is full of active volcanoes. Ancient volcanic activity has buried many old shells. I have been gathering new and old shells from as far away as Selat Sunda and taking them to a laboratory that the university has made available to me. Via the Internet I have been working with other universities, oceanographers and fisheries research from all round the world. We’re trying to get a world-wide picture of what’s going on. We’re making progress but there is still much to do and I fear time is running out for many species.’

Susan interjected. ‘Since we bought the boat I’ve been away on a few of Harry’s shell-gathering expeditions. But mostly I stay in our flat in Jakarta near the university and sing at the night-club in the Jaya Pub just behind the Jaya Building. Seven of us often gather there in the evening. They have a good piano-bar and it’s popular with artists and film-makers as well.’

Harry added. ‘Gary is a Kiwi but did his post graduate work in Washington where he met Ann. She’s New Zealand born with a Maori father and an American mother. But her father died when she was nine and, at about the same time, her mother inherited a small family farm in Chesapeake Bay. Ann and her mother moved to the States where her mother re-married. Now both Gary and Ann work in Jakarta. We see them in the night-club. It’s where Susan first met Danny Delaney while he was still on the run. For those six months I was spending quite a bit of my time away gathering shell samples. Susan and...’

Light streaming through a porthole made Susan’s eyes flash in the reflected glare from the sea. ‘You don’t need to go into that Harry.’

‘Oh! OK! Well Danny was using another name then. In fact he changed it at least twice when he was with us in

Jakarta. That was quite a few years ago. He helped himself to more than he should, took off to Papua New Guinea and set up Danny's Rock Radio. But Susan's kept in touch and...'

'And you should be damn grateful that I did. If it hadn't been for Danny's Rock Radio you'd still be out there looking for *Rurenga*.' Susan added.

Harry nodded. 'Yes, I must admit he was helpful on this occasion, and he may be able to shed some light on what's happened to Gary and Ann. When Danny was staying at our flat in Jakarta Susan told him all about you on *Rurenga*. Since then he's been following your progress round the Pacific by listening in to some of your radio transmissions. That's how he knew where you were.'

Susan interrupted. 'It's not just you. He follows the progress of other boats as well.'

Huia interjected. 'We guessed he had been following our movements from the things he knows about us. Not many radio transmissions go past him unnoticed. But, until now, none of us knew why. But we still have no idea why you wanted to catch up with us, especially out here in the middle of the ocean. What's this all about Harry?'

Harry hesitated and fingered his beard before replying. 'It revolves round our friend Jacques. We've been friends for years. We both worked at the university.'

Susan added, 'And he used to frequent our night-club along with Gary and Ann. Gary is a pharmacy lecturer at the university and Ann is a specialist in genetically transmitted diseases. She works in public health but occasionally lectures at university. They both came from Baltimore before they arrived in Jakarta.'

'Yes that's right. We've formed quite a tight little community both at work and socially.' Harry continued. 'We've known Jacques and his wife Yvette for years. Jacques also lectures and has written several textbooks on "The Evolution of Modern Thought". The last one was

intended for a wider readership than simply academia. It was entitled “A Botched Job”. That was what caused the trouble.’

‘Why was that? What was wrong with it?’ Chris asked.

‘I couldn’t find anything wrong with it, nothing at all. It was well written and well researched. To me it made perfect sense. Unfortunately not everyone else thought so.’ Harry replied.

‘Why?’ Huia asked as she started pouring coffee.

‘Unfortunately not many people read past the first page or they only read the criticisms and I doubt whether the critics read much of it before they wrote their articles. If they had they might have gained something from it. Jacques got devastating criticism.’

‘What did the press find difficult to handle?’ Chris asked.

‘Would you like to explain Jacques?’ Harry asked.

Jacques shook his head. ‘I’m too close to it. I’d rather you explained Harry, you can be more objective.’

‘OK Jacques, but stop me if I say anything wrong. Normally an academic work passes virtually unnoticed into oblivion but this one attracted the attention of religious clerics who unwittingly gave it nearly enough publicity to shake the stars out of their heavens. Even the title gave offence. Indonesia is a melting pot of most of the world’s major religions. Usually Indonesians relate well to each other’s religions, which made the reaction Jacques received, so surprising. In retrospect I think, although their culture encompasses different religions, they can’t seem to tolerate an implied criticism of religious thought. As I said the title of his book was, “A Botched Job”. Jacques went on to say that if there was a God who created us then he had “botched the job”, and the history of human development has been the result of our defects.’

‘What sort of defects?’ Huia asked.

‘In his book Jacques listed some examples. Are you sure you don’t want to explain it yourself Jacques?’

‘No please continue. I would much prefer you to do it Harry.’

‘I can’t remember all the examples you use Jacques but here’re a few of them. Our lack of skin covering means we would die of exposure in most parts of the world unless we have artificial clothing and shelter. We are slow runners compared with most other animals and, without weapons, most of us would fall prey to predators half our size. Our eyesight, hearing, sense of smell and taste are all poor compared with most other creatures. Unlike migratory birds we couldn’t navigate using the earth’s magnetic field until we invented compasses. We starve if we only have raw food; our digestive system can’t cope. Some cooked food is essential. Even the process of giving birth is painful and hazardous without medical assistance. I know I’ve missed out many of Jacques examples. But he pointed out that we have evolved into a biological disaster and have survived by compensating with the development of our brains, using tools and modifying our natural environment at the expense of most life-forms, including our own. Is that summary OK Jacques?’

‘Yes it’s fine.’

‘I didn’t hear anything I disagreed with.’ Chris observed.

‘Nor me.’ Harry replied and added, ‘Often the most explosive eruptions occur when someone breaks the mould and starts to tell the truth.’

Harry paused and took a sip of the coffee Huia had handed to him before continuing. ‘Some religious dogma insists God created us; not the other way round. So what Jacques was saying was seen as a direct criticism of God’s ability! It’s worse still if you believe we are created in God’s image and so should be perfect!’ Harry sipped his coffee again. ‘It seemed as if Jacques had inadvertently triggered an earthquake and the whole of Indonesia felt the tremor but there was worse to come in later chapters of his book. We could only wait for the tsunami to follow.’

Chris nodded. ‘Perhaps you were wrong Jacques by being right too soon.’

Jacques smiled but Huia noticed he smiled with his mouth, not with his eyes. It was a smile from which the warmth had drained away. ‘That’s not quite how Figgy put it.’

‘Who’s Figgy?’ Huia asked.

‘His full name is Franklin I. Goldberg. We often see him at the night-club, I suppose you’d call him a friend...’

‘I wouldn’t.’ Susan interjected.

Harry continued ignoring Susan’s comment. ‘He works for the American Embassy. His initials spell FIG and he always insists everyone has to use his full name, Franklin I. Goldberg, as a mark of respect. So we call him Figgy.’

‘Does he object?’ Huia asked.

Harry interjected. ‘Not when it comes from Susan. His eyes follow every movement she makes.’

Susan grinned. ‘He’s one of those people who will never get calluses on his hands. On other parts of his body perhaps, but never on his hands.’

Harry continued. ‘He read Jacques proof-reading copy and was totally opposed to him publishing the book.’

Jacques spoke with a heavy ponderous French accent. ‘We live in a last-minute world. I think people would prefer just going-along-with-authority and waiting until irreversible-catastrophic-collapse nudges us into thinking that perhaps something might have gone wrong. Then we can show amazement that there is no superman who’ll come and put it right. But people will always find someone else to blame...’

Chris nodded. ‘That’s what’ll happen. But it’s one thing to articulate a problem and another to implement a solution.’

Harry replied. ‘What Jacques says in his book is that humanity only has two infinite resources. One is human ingenuity and the other is human stupidity. He goes on to say that the only thing standing between us and unimaginable

disaster is the ongoing ingenuity of scientists and engineers as they attempt to support a growth in population so out-of-control it can only be described as an example of exponential stupidity. Often we fail to see stupidity, not because it is hidden but because we are so accustomed to it that it has become part of our culture.'

Jacques interrupted. 'It's not all one sided. Sadly our ingenuity is frequently used to support our headlong pursuit of fool's gold. And you don't need to look past rising sea levels to realise it's endemic.'

Susan cut in. 'But this isn't why we're here – well not directly anyway. The mischievous media stirred up anger and opened pandemonium's gate.'

Jacques nodded. 'To be fair that's exactly what Figgy and the US Embassy predicted would happen. But I don't think even Figgy could have imagined the consequences. Or if he did he kept it to himself.'

Harry continued. 'If the book had been rubbish it would have been dismissed without much comment. But the criticism was loud and vociferous. Jacques was asked on television why he thought he was right when so many people had come together to tell him he was wrong. He simply replied, "Because if I'm not correct only one person would be needed to prove my mistake." He then asked, "So what is the weakness in their arguments that means that fifty people find it necessary to band together in mutual support to try and refute my arguments?" But you can't discuss anything with people who have made up their mind or have vested interests. Unfortunately the world's never short of zealots who see themselves in a heroic light, and are so obsessed with their own righteousness they have become a threat.' Harry paused and asked, 'Jacques would you like to describe what happened next?'

Jacques didn't answer but just shook his head and looked at Susan for help.

Susan replied. 'It started when Harry was away getting shells and Jacques sent me an email from work. I can remember it word for word. It said, "What are you doing tonight? Are you going to the night-club?" I replied, "Harry is at sea and I'll be staying home. But you're welcome to slip round and have a coffee on the way home from work if you want to.'" He replied, "See you at five." And that's what he did. He went home just after eight.' Susan paused and looked towards Jacques as if looking for permission to continue.

Jacques nodded and Susan continued. 'He rang me about fifteen minutes after he left our place in such a distressed state that I could barely hear, or believe, what he was saying to me. Painful as it must have been for him I had to ask him to repeat it.'

Huia looked at Jacques. He was sitting with his knees drawn up and his arms folded together so tightly that he was shaking.

'Susan continued. 'Jacques had arrived home to find the lights on, the doors locked, and smoke coming out of a smashed window.

'Was the house on fire?' Hemi asked.

'The dinner on the stove had burnt dry and was on fire.' Susan glanced at Jacques who had his eyes shut tightly and his face screwed up as if in pain. She continued. 'Yvette lay on the kitchen floor she had been shot in the head.'

'Why?' Huia asked. 'Was it a burglary gone wrong?'

Jacques shook his head as if still in disbelief. 'Her eyes were glazed like the surface of frozen lakes.' He paused for several seconds before continuing. 'They took Yvette's life. Nothing was missing but there was damage. Yvette was an artist...'

'And a very talented one.' Harry added

Jacques smiled at the compliment for Yvette and continued. 'She had almost finished another harbour painting. Yvette had been working on it for several weeks.



I'm convinced it was one of her best. I've always been in awe of her ability to capture the mood of sea and sky reflected in the faces of people and the lines of their boats. The seascape is a popular place for artists and in her last painting she incorporated another artist painting the same scene. But whoever killed Yvette slashed her painting while it was still on her easel. Destroying something she had created was like...' His voice trailed away.

'Have you any idea why?' Huia asked

'After the fanatical publicity I received I guess it was some religious fanatic who came for me. Perhaps, because I wasn't there, either by mistake or vindictiveness he, and I presume it was a he, murdered Yvette.'

'What did you do?' Huia asked.

'I phoned the police who arrived in about five minutes.' Tears ran down his face and his voice choked with emotion.

Susan continued for him. 'The police took a DNA sample from him and removed both his home and his work computer. Within a few hours they came round to our flat and demanded an internal DNA swab from me. I suppose they were looking for insights into what, "Slipping round for a coffee on the way home from work." had entailed. Doubtless they were disappointed. They also took our passports and my laptop. When Harry got back into harbour about ten days later the police were waiting for him.'

Harry cut in. 'Most of the time I was at sea I was out of cell-phone range and I don't usually have the VHF switched on, unless I need to call someone and I had no reason to use it. So I had no idea about any of this and to make things worse I even missed Yvette's funeral by one day.'

Jacques touched Harry's shoulder. 'You have more than made up in sympathy since then Harry. I don't know how I would have managed without you and Susan.'

Susan explained. 'Yvette's mother, father and brother came over from France for the service. It was a beautiful service and a wonderful celebration of her life.'

‘Susan wrote a song especially for Yvette and sang it at the service. All of us, even Figgy, had tears in our eyes and running down our faces before she had finished. It was so beautiful. I don’t know how she did it with all the stress she’s been under.’ Jacques added, ‘You’ve got a very talented wife Harry.’

‘The stress has been horrific.’ Susan agreed. ‘Losing Yvette has been devastating and the police made it intolerable. Even our friends Gary and Ann received a grilling immediately after the murder before we had a chance to tell them about Yvette. Following the funeral they had to face another inquisition. It’s obvious, based on nothing, the police had already made up their minds Jacques had murdered Yvette, and I was both part of a love triangle and Jacques’ accomplice. With every hour I imagined them inventing more circumstantial evidence and making gaseous generalisations about character profiles. They had already started ordering me about as if I was already a convict. After the publicity over Jacques’ book they seemed to want believe the worst of him and me.’

‘You must have been devastated.’ Huia observed.

‘Devastated? It’s an inadequate word.’ Jacques nodded. ‘Yvette’s death was a knife thrust of grief. I don’t think the wound will ever heal. I’ll carry the scar to my grave. I didn’t care what happened to me. I could have thrown myself off the top of the university buildings had it not been for mounting guilt about how that might leave Susan exposed to the inquisition. I was expecting to be arrested at any moment. But unknown to me, as soon as he docked his boat the crafty-old-jungle-cat Harry started moving swiftly and silently in the shadows.’

## CHAPTER 4

‘What did you do Harry?’ Huia asked.

‘Even before I had finished securing the boat to the dock I had three police officers hopping aboard...’

Jacques interrupted him. ‘Like three intellectual rabbits trying to stalk a tiger.’

Harry grinned. ‘Jacques doesn’t have a very high opinion of Indonesian police. But like all police forces they have more than a few duds. On this occasion they were civil enough. They sprung the story about Yvette on me. They did it so clumsily and with such a lack of sensitivity for the death of a friend it was obvious what they were hoping for.’

‘What was that Grandad?’ Huia asked.

‘I realised immediately that they were giving me the “shock-treatment” hoping, in an unguarded moment of disbelief, that I’d reveal something vital for their case.’

That's probably why there were three of them. Two to put the pressure on and one to show sympathy.'

'What made you think that Grandad? Huia asked.

'Police normally try and inform close relatives about a death, but not friends. Also they wouldn't go in threes just to pass on information, however sad. They were clearly on a "fishing expedition" looking for evidence to support some wacky police hypothesis. They could only have known Susan and I were Yvette's friends if they had already been making enquiries. I'd been away for over a week and there would be people who could verify it, so they'd know I couldn't have been involved or witnessed anything to do with Yvette's death. All that remained was a hope that, in an unguarded moment, I would inadvertently reveal some crumb of crookery.'

'And did you?' Huia asked.

Harry shook his head. 'Does a fish that has seen the hook take the bait? If what they claimed was true and Yvette really had been murdered they would be fishing for a name to carry the blame. By the time the next question arrived I was prepared for their psychological warfare.'

'What was their next question?' Rachael asked.

'They asked if I knew my wife Susan was having a relationship with Yvette's husband Jacques?'

'How did you respond?' Huia asked.

Harry took a sip from his coffee before answering. 'Long ago I taught myself to circumvent shallow sentences and instead listen to the deeper pitch-and-heave of words that carry the true meaning. By linking together Yvette's death and Susan's affairs they were assuming the two things were related. Susan and Jacques were clearly in danger.'

He replaced his coffee mug on the table and continued. 'I had been away for over a week. Susan and I are mature enough to discuss such things under open-skies, not amidst wild-seas and thunder-clouds. Did these three fools, standing on my deck and displaying all the intelligence of

a row of belaying pins, think they could make me spill a cargo of happy memories for them to plunder?’

‘So what did you say to them?’ Huia asked.

‘I looked at them for a moment with their polished shoes and spotless uniforms and told them it was impossible for me to listen seriously to anyone wearing such silly hats. I ordered them off my boat and told them I knew my wife infinitely better than they did and such an accusation was beyond comprehension.’

Susan cut in. ‘A healthy contempt for authority is every New Zealander’s birthright. But in Indonesia they expect you to grovel.’

‘What did they do? Hemi asked.

‘They muttered something about proof. So I told them their evidence was clearly false and told them I would be demanding a written apology. Yelling abuse, with my voice cracking with emotion, I pursued them back to their car which was parked on the wharf alongside the boat. I think I even managed to fake a few tears and let them wonder whether they were tears of sorrow or tears of rage.’

‘Why did you do that?’ Huia asked.

‘As I approach the harbour I get into cell-phone range and I normally send Susan a text so she can come and pick me up. After I get in there’s a bit of work to do before leaving, so I usually say “give me an hour,” and then Susan can estimate when she needs to leave to pick me up with all my shells which I have to drop off at the university. I hadn’t seen the police car arrive. I needed to know if they had been waiting all day on the off-chance of catching me as I docked and before I had a chance to talk to Susan, or whether they had intercepted my text and knew when I was going to arrive.’

Huia looked puzzled as she asked, ‘How did your hysterics help?’

‘In three ways. First, I wanted to convince them that they had scored a hit by telling me about Susan having a

relationship with Jacques and my violent denial was the best way to achieve that. Second, I wanted to convince them that in my present mood there was no point in continuing the conversation. And thirdly, I needed to pursue them back to their car, which was parked in the shade of one of the wharf buildings, so I could touch the bonnet to see if it was still warm. It was. So they must have arrived in the last fifteen minutes or so. To get their timing spot-on they must have been bugging our phone because not even Susan would have known when I would dock... It's always wind and tide dependant... As it turned out as soon as Susan received my text, instead of waiting for an hour, she drove to the harbour and arrived only minutes after the police left.'

Susan interjected. 'I couldn't wait to see Harry. I was as high as a moon-probe on adrenalin and acid anxiety was burning my guts.'

Harry continued. 'The cops had only been on my deck. I had been with them the whole time. There had been no opportunity for them to plant any bugs on the boat. I took Susan into the cabin and drew the curtains while she gave me the background.'

Susan smiled. 'Harry spoke softly, held my hands and the grotesque shapes slipped away. Together we made a plan.'

'What did you decide to do?' Huia asked.

Without hesitating Susan answered, 'Get out of Jakarta, which is what Figgy had been advising ever since Jacques published his book.'

Harry intervened. 'It wasn't just because of the book and the murder, although they were the urgent reasons. But even before that there was a host of other subliminal things. Perhaps we were feeling the constraints of living in a city. I was managing to get my relief from gathering my shell samples. But every time I returned to Jakarta I started wondering how, after several million years of evolution, we got ourselves into this mess. Gary and Ann never missed any opportunity to get out on the ocean with me. Ann in

particular had become fascinated with life on and in the ocean.' Harry shook his head. 'We needed something more. Perhaps it was hearing about your work here that inspired us. Huhana and Susan have been in fairly regular email contact for the past couple of years and we've all been enthusiastically following your progress. It's too late now for Yvette but none of us could think of anything more worthwhile than contributing to your work on Sentinel Island.'

'Every scrap of help we can receive is more than welcome. There's no shortage of work to be done but you were saying the cops had taken your passport away.' Huia noted.

'Well! Yes and no!' Jacques answered. 'I should explain. I was born in rural France and I've got a European passport. At least I did have one until a few weeks ago. When I was born my mother was a single student-nurse. Nine months earlier she had been on holiday in Corsica. A young Australian was also spending a few weeks in Corsica. Holidays finish and people move on, my mother lost all contact with him and when I was born she gave me her own family name. Eventually she married someone else and gave me two half-sisters. Time went on and I did my undergraduate studies in Marseille. I won't go into the reasons just now but it's enough to say I made contact with my birth father in Australia. I thought I was putting everything French behind me. I did my post graduate studies at the University of New South Wales. Because of my Australian father I applied for and became an Australian citizen and the proud owner of an Australian passport as well as my European one. I had a chequered relationship with an Australian woman who convinced me I preferred the green fields of France to the red desert of Australia. So after I obtained my PhD I returned to France where I met and married Yvette. There was some work but the job situation in France wasn't what I expected. We could have struggled on but an opportunity came up at

Jakarta University, so we decided to make the move. When we came to Indonesia we both entered with our European passports.’ He looked up at Harry before adding with a smile. ‘The police only knew about my European passport and I haven’t thought it necessary to tell them I still have, in my possession, a valid Australian passport.’

Harry continued. ‘While still wounded with Yvette’s murder, Jacques and Susan were facing the possibility of sharing a murder charge while the wrecking ball of Jacques’ book hung suspended over his head and casting a shadow over their defence.’

Jacques explained. ‘I had an Australian passport but Susan didn’t. She only had a New Zealand passport and the police had taken that.’

‘So what could you do?’ Huia asked.

Susan answered. ‘I rang our friends Gary and Ann. With a mixture of tears and hysterics I told Gary I’d had a massive argument with Harry about my relationship with Jacques. Then I explained he had taken off and I didn’t know where he was. I played my “distraught woman” card. Gary and Ann know Harry. They wouldn’t have believed a word I said. Fortunately they didn’t say so over the phone and instead they made sympathetic comments and suggested I met them at the “usual cafe” for lunch the next day. I suspected Gary had guessed the phone call was being bugged so he didn’t even say which cafe, he only said the “usual cafe”. I particularly wanted the police to believe they had been successful in stirring up conflict between Harry and me by inventing a “relationship” with Jacques. I think the police would have found me convincing over the phone.’

Harry interjected. ‘I’ve always said that if Susan hadn’t been such a good singer she could have been a brilliant actress.’

Susan continued. ‘But before I rang off I told Gary and Ann that our computers had been taken away by the police and I asked Gary if he would book one-way electronic



tickets to Perth in Australia for Jacques and me. I assured him that if he used his credit card on line that I would give him a cheque. I emphasised ad-nausea over the phone that we needed the “earliest possible flights”. I had already looked up flight times and I knew the earliest flight would be on Monday morning. Also I asked him to book a double-room at a hotel in Fremantle and organise a shuttle to pick us up from the airport. I seemed to be getting into the swing of this; and asked him if he could return my red suitcase that Ann had borrowed.’

‘I never knew Ann had borrowed any of our suitcases.’ Harry observed.

‘She hadn’t.’ Susan replied. ‘I just made it up on the spur of the moment. I only told Gary that Ann had borrowed it in case he replied over the phone that they hadn’t got it. If he said that, I was just going to say “Oh! Didn’t she tell you,” and leave it at that. But he understood and replied he’d seen it in the hall and he’d try and remember to bring it to the cafe. That was the proof I needed. Gary had worked out that my phone call was being bugged.’

Harry added. ‘Gary picks up on things real quick.’

Susan continued. ‘I explained over the phone that Jacques and I both had Australian passports. I gave them Jacques’ passport number in case the airline wanted it and told Gary I’d have to get back to him with the number of my passport and explained Harry had taken it away after we had our row. Dredging up a few more sobs I asked them if they had any idea where Harry had gone. Of course Gary said no. Harry was right beside me with his hand on my shoulder and a grin hiding behind his beard! I finished by saying how desperate I was to find him. You know, all the usual feminine stuff and begged him to let me know the instant they heard anything.’

Hemi cut in. ‘You said you thought your phone was bugged. Wouldn’t the police have heard all this?’

‘That’s what we were banking on.’ Harry grinned. ‘They would rapidly check Jacques’ passport number and get confirmation that it was correct. But without the number they would get bogged down trying to trace Susan’s Australian passport; especially as she didn’t have one. Out of the twenty million or so Australians there is sure to be at least one Susan Nelson. Probably there are several, and women often change their names when they change partners. It would give them something to do! Police enjoy those sorts of computer games as it saves them getting off their backsides and doing any real work! As luck would have it, it was a Saturday so we made a point of phoning at night when most of Australia is asleep, drunk or both. They’d be lucky to get any help there. By apparently giving away the information about Jacques’ passport over the phone we would be convincing them we had no idea we were being bugged. They’d believe they could rely on anything else they overheard. They would also want to believe they had achieved something by “slipping in” their mischief story about Jacques and Susan. We were telling them what they wanted to hear so they would probably believe it.’

Susan explained. ‘They couldn’t possibly have any genuine evidence against us, so they would be eager to catch us trying to board a plane particularly as they had told us we had to remain in the country.’

Harry continued. ‘It wouldn’t be evidence of anything but it would be circumstantial evidence, which was the only sort of evidence they would ever be able to produce without manufacturing it. If I know anything about the Indonesian police, even the thought of grabbing both Susan and Jacques together at their point of departure, complete with an audience of hundreds, would be their chosen route for a trip down the primrose path to the heart of police psyche.’

Jacques nodded, ‘Harry was certain they would delay any action till they grabbed Susan and me together at the boarding gate.’

Harry added, 'Over-planning an operation like that would consume all their mental capabilities and distract them from speculating on the other things we were planning.'

Susan grinned. 'To emphasise the imminence of our departure I rang the night-club and told them I wouldn't be available to sing on Monday evening as something personal had "cropped up". I didn't say what. But with this phone call I sounded business like, with just the right hint of stress in my voice to make them refrain from asking what had "cropped up". Next I phoned my dentist and cancelled my appointment for an inspection in two weeks time and then cancelled a hairdressing appointment for the following Wednesday afternoon. I even took my library books back and posted them through the "return" slot.'

'Did all these plans work out?' Huia asked.

'We'll never know,' Susan answered. 'The three of us left by sea on Sunday night. But I can't help wondering if some poor cop is still waiting at the departure gate!'

Harry continued. 'I was reasonably sure when the police discovered Jacques and Susan hadn't turned up at the airport they would check our boat and find it gone. Of course they wouldn't know whether I had gone off by myself, as a result of an apparent "jealous rage", or whether I had Susan and Jacques with me.'

'Where did you go?' Hemi asked.

Susan answered. 'If Harry had gone out alone to gather shells he would have sailed west to the Selat Sunda straits. It's only half-a-days sail away. If we were trying to get away from Indonesia we would also go through the straits and into International waters in the Indian Ocean. From there we could pick up Easterly trades and enjoy a beam-reach in deep water all the way down the Western Australian coast to Fremantle. Just to encourage the police I made a point of using my credit card to order paper charts of the Indian Ocean, the West Coast of Australia and the approaches to Fremantle harbour. They would not expect

us to sail East from Jakarta through the Java sea where we would be sailing past Indonesian waters for about two and a half thousand nautical miles with the disadvantage of reefs and rocks with light headwinds most of the way.'

'So that's why we took the Java Sea route. It's where they wouldn't expect to find us.' Jacques added.

'We've kept well offshore in International waters nearly all the way. It's been slow going with fickle winds, but we've avoided the reefs and Harry has got us this far.' Susan stated with a smile.

'But we've still got to re-enter Indonesian waters to get to Sentinel Island.' Harry added.

Chris interjected. 'Officially you won't have left Indonesia. Sentinel Island is privately owned but both Indonesia and Papua New Guinea claim it. Which, in practice, means no one has any interest in administering it.'

'Which means', Harry observed, 'As we will be in territory half-heartedly claimed by Indonesia we haven't even been naughty and left the country without going through emigration. But the trouble is we don't know where Sentinel Island is. It's not named on the charts, and the archipelago seems to be a vast labyrinth of reef, rock and islands.'

'You're spot-on Harry. Both paper and electronic charts are about thirty years out of date.' Chris explained. 'Not all the islands are named or, if they are named, the same island has a variety of different names depending on who you are talking to and in what dialect. It's anyone's guess what they are named on the charts, if at all. Oswald named "Sentinel Island" less than ten years ago when he bought it. It was, and still is, financed by an American religious sect. But Oswald is now a stroke victim living in care on the island. And we've been converting the buildings into an island hospital. Right now we've got a cargo of hospital equipment. When Oswald bought the island it was uninhabited like half of the other small islands round her. But you're quite right Sentinel

Island isn't named on the chart, its name is newer than the charts. Originally Hemi only found it because a yachtsman had given Huia a one-year-old copy of a cruising guide and "Sentinel Island" had been marked in, by hand, with a biro.'

Susan explained, 'We still have to go through inshore Indonesian waters to get to there, and we could run foul of a patrol boat which might have a description of our *Fool's Gold*. We had to meet up with you to avoid having to go island-hopping and asking whoever we encountered, "Where's Sentinel Island?" It would be ironic to have sailed thousands of nautical miles and get caught in the last fifty.'

'There are that many different languages and dialects spoken round here, Grandad. You'd be lucky to find anyone who'd understand you. And probably no one would be able to give you the latitude and longitude of Sentinel Island. Islanders don't navigate like that. They use local knowledge.' Huia explained.

'Using a false name, which wouldn't have fooled Danny, Susan tried asking him on the VHF and he either didn't know or wasn't going to tell us over the air.' Harry confirmed.

'Even if he did tell you, it might not be as helpful as you think. There's the problem of finding a passage through a labyrinth of reefs.' Hemi shook his head. 'There's virtually no buoyage system here. If you're lucky you might find a stick pointing skywards on a reef and you're supposed to guess what it means.'

'That's where you come in.' Harry stated. 'It's why we were so keen to meet up with you while we're out here and still in deep water. We're hoping a couple of you would volunteer to sail *Fool's Gold* the last few miles to Sentinel Island while we go with you in *Rurenga*. According to Danny's Rock Radio you're boat is so well known no one's likely to question you, or look for us, aboard *Rurenga*.'

Huia offered instantly. 'Chris and I could sail *Fool's Gold* for you, Grandad. That's OK isn't it Chris?'

Chris nodded. 'How could we refuse? You're quite right Harry. Although we've only been in these waters a short time most Islanders appreciate that they, or their families, could need help from us at any time. No one hassles us, in fact quite the reverse. We'd be delighted to sail *Fool's Gold* for you if it helps.'

'Thanks, that's great.' Harry grinned and added, 'I'll write out a "receipt" for your "purchase" of *Fool's Gold* and back-date it a few weeks so, in the unlikely event of any Indonesian patrols stopping you, you could show them "the receipt" and say you bought the boat from me. Now you are simply on holiday with a valid New Zealand and a Tongan passport. If they ask you about us, you could say you understood I needed money for air fares and travel in Australia.'

Susan stood as she added, 'If you come aboard *Fool's Gold* now, we can show you where everything is kept on the boat.'

As Huia and Chris followed Harry and Susan up the companionway steps Harry added, 'She's a stiff, heavy, boat built of teak and is easy to sail. I can sail her single-handed without many problems although it's always good when Susan, Ann and Gary come out with me. *Fool's Gold* has given the four of us quite a sea-going culture. Ann in particular always seems in tune with the ebb and flow of the tides. I always reckon *Fool's Gold* handles like a contented woman with Ann at the wheel. Most people find her a forgiving boat. She draws about two metres and is slow, particularly upwind. Being schooner rigged she's good off-the-wind but she won't point too high with her straight-run-through keel.'

Chris responded, 'There's nothing new for us in that Harry. We've been sailing *Rurenga*.'

In less than an hour *Fool's Gold* and *Rurenga* were sailing independently towards Sentinel Island.

Several hours later Huia watched *Rurenga's* sails slide into a tropical haze. She and Chris were alone in an empty ocean with a compass bearing pointing towards a smudged horizon and an archipelago of island, rock and reef.

## CHAPTER 5

As *Rurenga* sailed at six knots in a light sea towards Sentinel Island Susan joined Hemi in the wheelhouse. As she rested her hand on the chart-table Hemi noticed the protruding veins on the back of her hand. There was no room left on her fingers for more rings and her knuckles were bigger than he remembered. Two liver spots had crept across the back of her hand. Her formally long black hair was now cropped short and showing streaks of grey. The same sunlight that flicked on her earrings accentuated the smile lines in the corners of her eyes. As Hemi tried to remember if he had seen them before, he realised she was speaking to him. ‘Hemi, did you notice me as *Rurenga* approached *Fool’s Gold*?’

Hemi shrugged and looked directly into her eyes. ‘We were a fair distance away. I could see a woman in the cockpit but I didn’t know it was you. What should I have noticed?’



Susan touched his hand and the sun glinted in her rings. 'When I finally realised we had caught up with *Rurenga*, I started retching. Acid anxiety welled up in my guts.'

'I hope we don't usually have that effect on you Susan!'

Susan ruffled his hair and grinned. 'It wasn't because of you Hemi. But it was real.'

'Why?'

'Because I was expecting Huhana to be on the scow with you.'

While looking out to sea Hemi replied, 'I guess if she'd known in advance we'd be meeting you she would have been aboard.' He glanced towards her. 'What made you feel anxious Susan?'

'Because Hemi, I had no idea of the reception I'd get.'

'What do you mean?' A puzzled frown puckered his forehead. 'Huhana would be delighted to see you.'

'Would she Hemi? Would she really be pleased to see me?'

'Of course she would.'

'How do you know?'

'Because you're her mother and because I know Huhana.'

'You know Huhana!' The stress lines in Susan's forehead deepened before she added. 'That's more than I do! I'm not totally convinced I'd even recognise her now.'

'Wouldn't recognise your own daughter! That's nonsense. Of course you would Susan. Huhana hasn't changed that much.'

'I haven't seen her since she was ten. That was twelve years ago. She's a woman now.'

'Well I hope you're not expecting to see a ten-year-old girl.'

'Does she hold any deep seated grudges about me leaving her on *Rurenga* and going away with Harry?'

Hemi laughed. 'I guess you really don't know her or you wouldn't have asked that.'

‘Why? What do you mean?’ Hemi felt snared by her direct gaze.

‘Why are you asking me what your daughter is like Susan?’

‘Because I’ve only had email contact with her. I haven’t seen her for over a decade, and you have. I don’t know what she’s like any more.’

‘What do you want me to say Susan?’

Susan hesitated and looked down. ‘What do I want you to say? I don’t know Hemi. I really don’t know.’ She shook her head and the light in her eyes died. ‘If I was honest I guess I want you to tell me anything you think I would want to hear and not that Huhana has descended into a quagmire of melancholy and permanently closed the door to any approaches from me.’

Hemi grinned ‘Huhana enjoys life to the extent she has a job keeping her thoughts in order. Her emotions open up faster than the zip on her jeans but harbouring long-term grudges is definitely not, in any way, part of Huhana’s personality.’

‘I can’t believe how selfish I was leaving her...’

‘Huhana’s been OK Susan. All of us on *Rurenga* have enjoyed having her as part of an extended shipboard family. Well, most of the time anyway!’

Susan contemplated his words. ‘I suppose, when I left, I hoped Huia would be like a sister to Huhana, and you and Rangi would be her big brothers.’

Hemi grinned and shook his head. ‘Huhana and Huia are OK now, but for a time they fought as if they were sisters. But Rangi and I certainly haven’t behaved like her brothers... You know Rangi and Huhana are an item now don’t you?’

‘She’s not pregnant is she Hemi?’

‘Not as far as I know. But she’s not a little girl any more.’

‘I’ve been an appalling mother... I haven’t a clue who her father is, so I deprived her of a father... I was all she had

and I sailed out of her life. Do you think I'll ever be able to make it up to her?'

'I don't think you'll have to make up anything Susan. Huhana will be overjoyed to see you. I don't know what else I can say to convince you she doesn't hold any grudges.'

'Do you know why she stayed ashore Hemi, instead of joining you aboard *Rurenga*? Is she lonely?'

'I know fine why she stayed. She stayed because she wanted to be with Rangi even if it meant helping him with his work on the island.'

'Oh! What are they doing Hemi?'

'They're putting in photo-voltaic solar panels and wind turbines to replace the diesel generators which we've been using to power the hospital. We intend to keep the diesel generators just for standby, and save fuel and greenhouse gases. Huhana and Rangi are running power cables round the volcanic ridge ready for the wind turbines.'

Susan nodded. 'Harry would be interested in that.'

'We'd welcome all the help we can get. There's so much to do. If we hadn't needed to fetch more medical supplies and equipment we'd be helping as well.'

'What's the island like Hemi?'

'It's an extinct volcano and is privately owned. It's covered in tropical rain forest except in places where we've created clearings. The crater wall has collapsed on one side and the sea has flooded into the crater leaving a small sheltered harbour in the middle. But originally there was no access to the inner harbour because of coral in the entrance.'

'So no one could use the harbour?'

'Not until a channel was blasted through the coral reef to allow boats, barges and heavy machinery access to the harbour. Then the rock and coral which had been blasted out was taken by barge and used to form a landing stage and later a garden at the front of the building. The crater is just big enough for a float-plane to land. Funded by "The Church of the Island Kingdom" in the States, Oswald constructed

a massive conference centre complete with hotel like accommodation. It started off as his private residence but he didn't know when to stop. It's built into the inner walls of the crater. About two years ago we started converting the buildings into a hospital for Islanders who have no other medical care. In the meantime a number of Islanders have built houses and settled on the more gradual slopes on the outside of the cone. When they arrived some of them were little more than distant echoes of human beings who suddenly found good land beneath their feet. It's a volcanic soil enriched by millions-of-years of sea-bird droppings. Almost as soon as the Islanders stepped ashore they started creating clearings in the forest. They built gardens, first for their own use and later to supply the hospital and medical staff. The Island fishermen keep us in sea-food and now some of the women bring their children and work in the hospital gardens and kitchens.'

'Why did they leave their own islands and go to Sentinel Island?'

'For a whole variety of reasons, inter-tribal disputes, some have been pushed off their land by mining and logging gangs. We had a boat-load of starving war refugees. Then we brought in ten families who lived on an atoll where the soil was becoming too saline to grow crops.'

'How does soil suddenly become saline, Hemi?'

'Usual thing I suppose, a combination of rising sea-levels and poor coastal management.'

'Could that happen here?'

'I don't think so Susan. Sentinel Island is composed of volcanic rock and soil. It's surrounded by coral reefs and there's coral inside the crater but it's a true island not a coral atoll.'

'So why didn't people settle there long ago?'

'There would have been other easier options. To get access into the lagoon Oswald had to employ explosive experts. He got engineers to blast through the reef and widen

the breach in part of the crater wall. Then they brought in heavy machinery by barge. All this expense resulted in reasonable access by sea. This opened the way for a floating jetty to be constructed, followed by the conference centre and gardens. They were built into the inside of the crater walls. But a disastrous situation followed.'

Susan raised her eyebrows. 'What was that?'

'The island was taken over by thugs who used it for the abduction and rape of young island girls. This was happening when we first arrived. You know Danny of Danny's Rock Radio don't you?'

'Yes, He had a different name when he was in Jakarta and on the run, but I knew him very well...' She emphasised the word "very" before glancing over her shoulder and finished the sentence with... 'I knew him intimately.' She gave a little laugh for no apparent reason except nervousness.

Hemi shrugged at the confession. Wondering why she had confided this to him he continued with only the slightest pause of embarrassment which he hoped she hadn't noticed. 'Well, with the help of an African woman called Mobe he co-ordinated *Rurenga*, Island fishermen and local pirates who all played a part in permanently ridding the island of the dark shadow that had stained it. But the harbour and buildings remained and without them the subsequent development would have been virtually impossible.'

'What development, Hemi?'

'With the thugs gone, Islanders didn't take long to arrive. They weren't interested in the concrete and stone buildings and steep slopes inside the crater. I think they found the structure of glass and stone intimidating not welcoming. But they needed the channel Oswald had blasted through the reef to provide harbour access. Instead of living inside the crater they settled on the easier slopes near the water's edge on the outside. For a time it seemed we had two independent communities: the Insiders and the Outsiders as we called them. But despite language difficulties and totally

different backgrounds a few incidents occurred which made us realise how much we needed each other.’

‘What sort of incidents Hemi?’

‘A boatload of war refugees was a major one. Their boat broke down about sixty miles offshore. They were all dehydrated and starving. Several of the younger children and old men had already died when we discovered them. The survivors were traumatised by war and starvation. They needed urgent medical help. If we hadn’t found them, none of them would have lasted more than a few more days. We towed them in and took them to the hospital.’

‘How were they?’

‘The trauma still bubbles below the surface and occasionally breaks out in unexpected ways, but physically they all recovered surprisingly quickly. The best medicine we gave them didn’t come out of the dispensary. The turning point in their recovery happened when we gave them the tools to clear some land and build themselves homes and gardens. It’s like the relationship between a boat and her crew. It’s the way we Polynesians think. We are an extension of the islands and the islands are an extension of us. So our trauma victims cured themselves and helped us in the process and are continuing to do so. We always need fresh fruit, vegetables, coconuts, eggs and seafood as well as help with the hospital grounds and cleaning. They needed a tractor to help break in the ground and to construct rice terraces. There are thirty children permanently on the island, thirty-one counting Manuka who stays with us on *Rurenga*. The number of children keeps on growing. So we’ve started a school for three-hours-a-day for four-days-a-week.

‘A school! You should talk to Jacques about that. He’s got heaps of ideas on education.’

‘We only have very limited recourses. Do you know what sort of things he has in mind?’

‘No really! I don’t spend much of my time alone with him talking about education! But one thing he always says is that children are compulsive learners and to be a successful teacher all you have to do is to not prevent them from learning. And if we don’t stop them, children will create their own learning resources’

That sounds good to me. When patients arrive at the hospital often we get whole families arriving with them. Sometimes there can be a dozen or more and there are always children. We don’t have room in the hospital for them. Also many Islanders find the hospital buildings alien. So our permanent settlers have built, in their village, what we would call community accommodation. It’s built Island style, which means it has a coconut thatch roof, trodden earth floors and walls which are only wind breaks. Families find this less intimidating. In fact it’s not intimidating at all. Every evening a party atmosphere pervades the village. If we get a chance, we go round there to join in. Also when we participate in the village it does wonders for staff-patient relationships. Sometimes the village community seems to do more for post-surgery rehabilitation, than anything we can offer in the hospital. Trying to encourage good access between the village and the hospital we cut a track through the bush which runs over the volcanic rim to the village. It was a mistake. It’s a steep climb and most people prefer to go by outrigger keeping inside the reef and then entering the harbour through the channel. When we don’t need the hospital facilities for surgery or infectious disease isolation we often treat patients in the village. So we’re trying to improve the village facilities. Rangi and Huhana have run a plastic pipe from a stream above the village to provide a gravity-fed water supply. One day they hope to provide tap water to all the homes. The whole island is a work-in-progress. It’s evolving based on the people we have and the cultures they come from.’

‘Do you have a committee to organise all this Hemi?’

‘Good God no! If you want to stop something from happening the best way to do it is to form a committee to promote it. The only thing committees ever agree on, is to delay making a decision until the next meeting. We can see what needs to be done and we know what we are capable of; so we get on with it. We certainly don’t want to hold them back with committees.’

‘Who’s funding all this?’

‘After Oswald came out of the slammer, for fraud, he used a certain amount of financial slight-of-hand and started a church in America.’

‘He started a church?’

‘Yes, while he was in prison he used his time to write a new version of the bible or, more correctly, rewrite the old one. When he was discharged he set up a church based on his own bible and called it, ‘The Church of the Island Kingdom.’ He gained a significant following in America and they funded the purchase of this island and near enough everything else that has gone on here.’

‘Why would a church do that?’

‘Presumably because they had faith in Oswald or Jesus returning or God knows what. But the financial success was only partially due to Oswald. He employed Tanya who was formally a Hollywood film star. She wrote his press releases, directed documentaries and handled his public relations. She made a brilliant job of it. But malevolent thugs took control of the island and started a campaign of abduction and rape of young Island girls.’

‘What did the church members think about that?’

‘They didn’t know what they were funding; so the money kept coming.’

‘Why did Oswald let that happen?’

‘He didn’t let it happen; he was powerless to stop it. It would probably still be going on if Danny and Mobe hadn’t intervened. But the intervention coincided with Oswald



having a stroke. Since then Tanya has taken over and now she's being totally honest about what we're doing with the church's money.'

'It sounds as if everyone's co-operating at last.'

Hemi shrugged. 'Co-operating?' He seemed to be trying to balance the meaning of the word co-operating. 'Well we've never had anyone who wasn't able to make a contribution even if the contribution doesn't arrive until it's too late.' He paused for a few moments and smiled. 'We wouldn't even attempt to try and stop people "borrowing" what doesn't belong to them. When you see someone wearing your new jandals and they replace yours with old ones belonging to someone else you know you're in the Pacific. At least they don't steal your life-savings like western financial advisors! In the hospital we have to stitch up the results of the odd fight. I suppose you'd call that co-operation.' Hemi turned to face Susan as if he had finally discovered the meaning of "co-operation." He nodded. 'Yes, you're right Susan, we are all co-operating, after our own fashion. And your Huhana is playing a major part in it.'

'Now you've got me feeling anxious again, Hemi.'

'You don't need to. Would you like me to call Sentinel Island on the VHF when we get in range and let her know you're on-your-way?'

'Oh no! If you do that, by the time we get in, her reaction will be planned and co-ordinated. I might never know what emotions lurk beneath the surface. If I surprise her, her instant reaction will be genuine not choreographed. Then I'll know, and so will you.'

## CHAPTER 6

In *Rurenga's* saloon Harry and Jacques were seated at the table while Rachael sat on the couch breast-feeding Manuka.

Jacques made the comment, 'It sounds as if the "Church of the Island Kingdom" has invested a considerable amount of money in Sentinel Island.'

Rachael replied. 'Yes many millions of US dollars.'

Jacques looked up. 'Why?'

Rachael shrugged. 'It's their religious belief I suppose.'

A frown puckered Jacques' forehead. 'They can have religious beliefs without spending large amounts of money on a tiny island the other side of the world. Most of them will probably never even see what they have paid for. There must be more to it than that. It's not an established church so there must be something about this church which makes it different to other churches.'

Rachael replied. ‘One difference is that they promote adultery, and hold annual carnal carnivals in California.’

Jacques shook his head. ‘People participate in adultery all the time. It’s an indelible instruction written into our genes. We don’t need a church to tell us it’s OK or it’s not OK. Neither does anyone need to buy an island on the other side of the world to indulge. People do it despite the risk of breaking up their family. They even do it in countries where adultery carries a death penalty. I’ve dealt with some of these ideas in my latest book, so I’d be intrigued to try and understand what is special about Oswald’s religion that makes people invest such huge sums of money in it.’

Rachael nodded. ‘I think I’m being a little unfair to Oswald. Promoting adultery is how his religion is being interpreted in the States but it’s not what Oswald had in mind or what he has said.’

‘So what does he say, Rachael?’

‘That sexual desires are a fundamental part of the human psyche and we can’t do anything about it. We should be honest and recognise the fact and be aware that attempting to repress those desires can be the cause other more severe problems. He says that lack of respect for others and being judgmental are the fundamental causes of much social and domestic unrest not our sexual needs.’

‘His ideas and mine don’t seem too far apart. I’d like to discover more.’

‘If you want to see how it works in practice you’ll have to look at our island. It’s how we’re attempting to run things. But it is only a very poor attempt. If you want to know more about Oswald’s religion you’ll have to ask him, but that’s not easy since he had his stroke. He has difficulty speaking. You might get a few clues by looking at his version of the bible. I must admit we’ve been more interested in using the church’s money to set up our hospital than investigating his ideas. I don’t think any of us has looked very deeply into

the religious aspects of his church. It's probably something we should get round to.'

'How do we do that?' Harry asked.

'There's a copy of his bible right here.' Rachael stood up with her left breast exposed by her unbuttoned blouse. Holding Manuka in one arm she picked up the book from the shelf and handed it to Jacques. 'Oswald gave it to us ages ago but I don't think anyone has taken the trouble to even open it, let alone read it. Come to think of it I suppose it's a bit insulting to accept his money and show indifference to why the money is available.' Rachael sat down again and continued breast-feeding Manuka.

Jacques flicked through the pages. 'It's a lot thinner than a standard bible. He must have left a lot out.'

Rachael quipped. 'Perhaps if he spent longer in prison...'

Jacques commented. 'There's nothing wrong with leaving bits out. Most religions would benefit by significant amounts of pruning. Religions evolve painfully slowly. They are reluctant to relinquish supposed "wisdom-from-the-past" in the face of modern knowledge and attitudes. But religions do evolve. We don't stone adulterers to death. We don't kill prostitutes and put their children "to the sword" and we don't buy and sell slaves any more. Well it's not done with the blessing of the Christian church.'

Harry leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table. 'There's nothing wrong with testing modern thinking against traditional values from the past. Tradition can provide a brake to unrestrained financial imperatives. If we say something is inefficient, unjust or unsustainable we haven't questioned its right to exist. To question its right to exist in Western societies we have to say it's uneconomic. Unrestrained economics will permit whatever improves the balance sheet at the end of the financial year regardless of future...'

Rachael cut in. 'Virtually everyone on the island is there because in some way they are victims of callous economics.'

‘It’s not just the island Rachael.’ Harry shook his head in dismay. ‘It’s the world. People, plants, animals, fish, birds and insects, every living thing is threatened because of burgeoning unrestrained economic imperatives. It’s only now we are starting to rediscover and appreciate our old Polynesian Gods of the forest, the ocean, the sky and all the others. We now call it, “Respect for the Environment”. I’m convinced “Respect for the Environment” is now the only God with sufficient mana to challenge the economic bulldozers which threaten both our planet and all the little people who stand in their way. Politicians are supposed to protect us but they run for cover and surrender as soon as the economic juggernaut moves out of neutral and engages first gear.’

Harry paused and took a sip from his coffee mug before continuing. ‘Perhaps we shouldn’t dismiss the established religions, Jesus was a visionary who stood firmly on the side of the little people and died for it. He was prepared to turn over the tables of the “money-lenders”. He must have understood the financial sector pretty well when he called them “a den of thieves”. Now-a-days instead of turning over their tables and driving them away with whips, I guess he’d pop a virus into the banking computer with much the same effect. Sadly most of us simply shake our heads and put up with the shenanigans and profiteering of financiers. Oswald has been to jail hasn’t he? That could be a recommendation in my eyes. Perhaps we should have a good look at what he has written before we make any hasty decisions.’

Jacques nodded. ‘I know the consequences of misunderstandings. I’m convinced my Yvette was murdered because of things I didn’t say in my book. That’s a scar that will never heal. On the island you’re accepting Oswald’s money. When we go ashore could I scrounge a copy of his book and at least read what he has written before we pass judgement on him? It sounds as if it could be relevant to my work on the evolution of modern thought.’

Rachael nodded, ‘You could take this one with you. Alternatively there are several paper copies in the library on the island, you could borrow one of them or even download it as an e-book. Thanks to Danny we now have a direct broadband microwave link to Danny’s Rock Radio and satellite links from there.’

Susan appeared halfway down the companionway steps. ‘We have the island in view now. Come and have a look.’

With a reply of, ‘Thanks Susan.’ Jacques and Harry ascended the steps into the wheelhouse and peered into the tropical haze where the horizon ought to be. Harry stepped out on deck. A light breeze ruffled his beard. It felt good after the airless heat in the saloon.

The volcanic rim of the island appeared as a dark smudge against the background of an opaque sky. Below the rim, the lower slopes vanished into strings of misty vapours. Waves, whispering to the hull, seemed to be materialising out of a translucent breeze before vanishing into obscurity astern. Ahead lay the island. He couldn’t explain it, but to Harry it was becoming more than just an island. It was as if his past-life had been manoeuvring him irrevocably towards this peak rising out of a confusion of half-remembered things he never knew.

As he stood looking towards the island, Harry heard the wheelhouse door open. Stepping over the sill Jacques joined him. Both men leaned against the bulwarks looking out to sea without speaking for several minutes. It seemed they were sailing into torn fragments of clouds. Jacques knew it was only the sigh of wind in the rigging but he was equally certain he could hear Yvette’s voice somewhere out there in the drifting mist beyond the bowsprit calling him to follow her.

Lost in their thoughts the sudden rumble of the diesel engine jolted them back to the present. The wheelhouse door opened as Susan stepped over the sill and onto the deck. ‘Hemi wants us to get the sails down while we’re

still in deep water. He's going to put the steering back on manual and he'll bring us upwind while we drop the sails. He wants me to drop the inner staysail first, while you two take down the main. While you're lashing it, I'll get the flying-jib, then we can drop and lash the mizzen together.'

As Susan was speaking *Rurenga* started to turn. The hard curve of the sails started quivering. Then they started flogging as the boat came upwind. The deck-crew finally dropped and lashed the sails. As the halyards were belayed *Rurenga* continued her course, under power, towards the Island.

Ten minutes later the background rumble of the engine reduced to a slow thump, thump, thump, as Hemi throttled back to slow ahead. Surprised by the proximity of the reef both to port and starboard Harry realised they were proceeding through a buoyed channel leading into the inner lagoon. The reef was so close he flinched at the thought that any miscalculation of the effects of cross-winds or tidal-flow would result in a grounding, or worse. Harry glanced at Jacques. He too was looking over the side at the reef and clearly thinking the same thing.

As the channel opened out into a wider lagoon *Rurenga* turned to port. The wheelhouse door opened. Harry glanced in that direction. Susan was now holding Manuka as Rachael stepped on deck. Going for'ard she picked up a warp and asked Harry to grab the stern warp. Hemi edged *Rurenga* into the floating wharf.

Rangi and Huhana must have seen *Rurenga* coming in as they were waiting on the wharf to take the warps which Rachael and Harry passed ashore. Susan appeared on deck at the bulwarks still holding Manuka in time to receive an excited 'Mum!' from Huhana. Huhana clambered aboard before the loading door in the bulwarks had been opened. Still in the wheelhouse Hemi grinned as he saw Huhana throwing her arms round her mother. They hugged each other with baby Manuka getting squashed between them.

Huhana hadn't rejected her! There were a thousand things Susan wanted to say but words and emotions were all mixed up inside her head. Escaping they stumbled and spilled across the deck in a meaningless jumble. But it didn't matter. The impossible had happened! Huhana had become an adult woman overnight. There had been no intervening teenage years... It was as if a caterpillar had become a beautiful butterfly without passing through that critical chrysalis-stage where mothers lose control while an internal metamorphous takes place in their daughters. There had been no tenuous transition from girl to woman, the intervening years had evaporated. And Susan had Huhana in her arms

As he carried boxes up the companionway and placed them on deck ready to be taken ashore Hemi glanced at Susan on the jetty. He watched her catch hold of Huhana's hand as they strolled along the wharf towards the shore. He raised his eyebrows and shrugged. A mother taking the hand of a three-year-old daughter was normal enough. Was Susan imagining Huhana was still a three-year-old girl and not a twenty-three-year-old hard-case woman? Hemi paused on deck as he watched the scene evolve. Hurrying along the wharf to fetch the stores trolley Rangi drew level with Huhana. At the point of passing them Huhana held out her other hand for Rangi to hold. Surprised Rangi took it. They might be an item but Hemi had never seen Rangi and Huhana walking hand-in-hand before; it wasn't their style. Shagging at any opportunity certainly but walking hand-in-hand? But now they were holding hands with Susan still holding Huhana's other hand. Hemi smiled to himself as Huhana's motivation became clear. The bridge from the floating jetty was only just wide enough for two people to walk side-by-side. As they approached it Huhana let go of Susan's hand and continued across the bridge with Rangi, this forced Susan to walk alone behind them. Once across the bridge Huhana let go of Rangi's hand, as he picked up



the trolley and returned to the jetty with it. Susan made no further attempt to hold Huhana's hand as they continued walking and talking through the gardens towards the hospital buildings. They finally disappeared from view. Hemi turned and descended the companionway steps to fetch more boxes for unloading ashore.

The sky changed from blue to coral pink. Hemi, Rangi and Jacques continued unloading stores from *Rurenga's* hold. Kate had to switch the lights on to continue stacking and cataloguing in the hospital dispensary. Meanwhile Tanya, Susan and Huhana had finished filling the freezers and were now stacking tinned food and filling the bins with dry goods. On the beach Harry had been helping Islanders load agricultural tools and general supplies together with building materials into the outrigger canoes. As the light faded the canoes stopped arriving and Harry watched the last outrigger heading out of the harbour entrance and disappear as it turned inside the reef and headed towards the beach on the outer slopes of the volcanic cone. Doubtless other Islanders would still be carrying the materials up the beach to the village.

Everyone had been busy – too busy to notice the time. Harry had to peer at his watch in the fading light to see the hands. It was past seven o'clock. A frown traversed his forehead as he did the mental arithmetic in his head. It was true *Fool's Gold* was slower than *Rurenga* but she should have been here several hours ago. He hurried off the beach and headed for the jetty. Hemi needed to know *Fool's Gold* with Huia and Chris aboard was several hours overdue.

Harry spotted Hemi in the hospital foyer. As he explained the situation Harry imagined he saw a shadow flick across the back of Hemi's eyes and an involuntary crease in his forehead lingered a moment too long before he answered. 'I don't think we have any need to worry Harry. I'm sure Chris wouldn't risk coming through the channel after dark. First thing in the morning is the best time when there's

daylight to see the channel and there's no afternoon glare on the water. Also you said *Fool's Gold* has a straight run-through-keel so you'd be drawing more water than *Rurenga* as we can retract our keels. Chris won't risk anything with Huia aboard. She tends to be nervous at the best of times and even more so now she's pregnant. They'll stay out in deep water overnight and will be in on the morning tide. There's no need to worry.'

It may have been the way Hemi glanced at his watch and the intonation in his voice as he said, "There's no need to worry." that convinced Harry there might be need for concern.

## CHAPTER 7

Under a fading breeze Huia glanced at the log. *Fool's Gold* had a speed through the water of four knots. The GPS showed a Velocity over the Ground of three knots. So they must be pushing into a tidal flow of about a knot as they approached Sentinel Island. They still had about five nautical miles to reach the channel into the lagoon. The earlier mist had been burnt off. Huia pulled the peak of her cap lower over her eyes and put on her Polaroid glasses as she looked into the afternoon sun as it sank towards its own reflected glare on a shimmering sea.

She was on the point of suggesting to Chris that they should stay out for the night rather than risk the channel this late in the day when she caught the glint of a vessel on the horizon. Apprehension changed to fear as the boat, throwing aside spears of water, approached them off their

starboard beam. She picked up the hand-bearing compass and took the boat's bearing. One minute later she took a second reading. It was the same. That could only mean one thing. They were on a collision course! It wasn't necessary to know its speed. There was no possibility of outrunning it or getting to the island before it reached them. The vessel would only be shallow draught and would certainly draw much less water than *Fool's Gold* with her deep-run-through keel. They would find no sanctuary in the shallows over a reef even if they could get there before the approaching craft was upon them. Starting the engine would give them no significant advantage. The boat would still catch them. They still had an hour to go before sunset. They wouldn't be able to hide in darkness. Even if she contacted Hemi by radio he was on the island and wouldn't be able to reach them in time even if he used the semi-inflatable. They could do nothing to avoid the oncoming boat.

From his position on deck Chris watched it approaching through the binoculars. He called to Huia in the wheelhouse. 'It's not a coastal patrol-boat. I'd guess it's a pirate vessel. All we can do is continue on our present course and see what transpires.' He continued watching and after several minutes announced he could see at least three people on board. The boat was a long slender craft with a high powered outboard on the stern and a small curved Perspex wind shield up for'ard. It must have been the windshield that had flashed in the sun. With a speed across the water of about twenty knots the approaching vessel was rapidly overtaking *Fool's Gold*. Huia slipped the steering out of automatic and reverted to manual. With one hand on the wheel it was an involuntary action not a conscious movement that made Huia's free hand describe an apprehensive circuit of the pregnant bulge in her stomach. Chris remained on deck facing the oncoming vessel. Pirates and their families needed doctors as much as anyone else. Assuming it was a pirate vessel he hoped they would recognise him as the skipper and surgeon from

*Rurenga*. They certainly wouldn't recognise *Fool's Gold*.

With trepidation Huia watched the vessel reduce speed and draw alongside. Without noticing it both her hands were gripping the wheel and her knuckles were showing white. She clenched her teeth and her right arm started shaking as she watched Chris lean over the bulwarks to make verbal contact with the incoming vessel. How could he do that? He could at least hide behind the bulwarks and not lean over them. She screamed to him from inside the wheelhouse. 'Chris! Be careful. They'll have guns.' Suddenly everything seemed to rely on her. Their vessel was much lower in the water than *Fool's Gold*. It was so low that when it was alongside she couldn't see it. To board they would have to tie up or use grappling hooks and climb over the bulwarks. At that point they would be at their most vulnerable. If she could start the engine, push it to full-bore and turn hard to port she might be able to swamp the pirate boat. But not with Chris leaning over the bulwarks inviting a bullet. She called to him again. 'Chris come back.' She would have to get the timing spot on. The engine would have to start first time and she would have to turn at the moment they attempted to board. If she turned to port *Fool's Gold's* stern would swing to starboard crunching their stern while at the same time the gap amidships where they were attempting to board would suddenly widen. But she couldn't do it with Chris leaning over the bulwarks.

Suddenly Chris was walking back towards the wheelhouse. Her hand moved to the start switch at the same moment that Chris called to her. Was he anticipating what she was about to do? His words penetrated the fear barrier inside her brain and made her hand hesitate on the switch. 'It's OK Huia. It's Danny, Mobe and a local Islander.'

She didn't know why but her face creased up and she burst into tears. Suddenly Chris had his arm round her. 'It's OK Huia. They've just come to bring us some news.' But the tears would not stop. As she watched them clamber

aboard she broke away from Chris and said, 'You talk to them.' Still crying, she stumbled down the companion-way, through the saloon, into the toilet and locked the door. It was ten minutes later when she unlocked the door and re-entered the saloon and climbed the steps to the open cockpit. Reaching the top of the steps she hesitated and her arm started shaking again as she was greeted with, 'Good afternoon Huia.' from Mobe.

Huia smiled back but it was a forced smile and she felt certain it never reached her eyes. Wondering whether Mobe had learned many more English phrases since the last time she saw her. Huia replied, 'Good afternoon Mobe.' But there was tension in her throat as she said it. And she knew why. Chris had been wrong. There hadn't been three people in the long boat. All five were now present in the cockpit. There was an Islander she didn't recognise together with Danny, Mobe and Mobe's two children, Kudu who was now nearly five and his little sister Oceana just one and a bit. Huia shuddered at what might have happened if Chris hadn't been leaning over the bulwarks. Another second and she would have started the engine and tried to swamp their boat. She might have drowned Mobe's children, or any of them. Someone might have gone through the propeller. She might have murdered them all because she couldn't control her own fear. She wasn't safe to be left in charge of a boat.

Gradually the shaking in her arm subsided but she had to sit down. The tension in the back of the throat made it hard for her to speak. *Fool's Gold* was still ghosting along in the same light breeze with the other vessel rafted alongside. Chris had put the steering back on auto-pilot and they were still heading towards Sentinel Island. She looked at the others. They were all smiling at her. Did they know, did they have any conception of what she had planned to do to them? Would she ever be able to tell even Chris what might have happened? No, not what might have happened, what almost happened. They had been trusting her to maintain

a steady course while the boat came alongside and she had come within a hormone of deliberately killing them. Another thought scratched the inside of her brain. Could this sudden panic attack affect her unborn baby?

It took Huia several minutes to calm down sufficiently to even hear that the others were speaking and another ten minutes before she could even start to comprehend what was being said. Little Kudu was obviously bored with the adult talk and getting restless by his Mum's side. Huia held out her hand to him. He ran over, sat on her lap and tried to poke his fingers through the hole in her earrings and pull them out. Instinctively she tried to hold his hands, to protect her ears until she realised it was a game. He kept pulling his hands free to grab her earrings as fast as she could restrain his fingers. The more she tried to stop him the more he struggled and laughed. Eventually the laughter seeped through her defences and she started to laugh as well. Huia was convinced a little of the laughter reached down and touched her baby, who started kicking in response. Kudu and her own baby seemed innocently unaware of what had almost happened.

Danny was drinking heavily out of his hip flask as his American accent, difficult to understand at the best of times, became more slurred. The blotches on his face had become more pronounced, and he had lost another of his front teeth since she saw him last. It was a measure of the calming influence little Kudu had installed in her that she managed to force a smile and admit, 'When we saw your boat approaching we thought it might be a pirate vessel.'

Danny grinned but his two eyes didn't seem to be focused on the same point. 'Whether or not we're a pirate vessel depends not on who we are, but on who you are.' He took another swig from his hip flask before continuing. 'You don't need to worry your pretty earrings about pirates Huia. I've put the word around about you. If anyone so much as lifts a finger against you there ain't a pirate in the whole

damned archipelago who wouldn't come to your assistance.' He pointed his finger at her. 'Now you remember this Huia, any time you need a bit of sea-going muscle you only got to lift your microphone to whistle up the "A" team. There ain't a pirate in the whole damned archipelago who wouldn't come to your assistance. Have you got that?'

Huia smiled back. 'Thanks Danny. Yes I've got that.'

'The whole damned archipelago. You won't forget will you?'

'No. I won't forget Danny.'

'We love you Huia, and we love your hospital and we love everything about you.'

'Yes we love you too Danny.'

Danny continued after taking a further swig from his hip flask. 'Mind, I didn't know it was you in this damned boat. I thought it was Susan. I love Susan too you know.'

'You must be a very loving person Danny.'

'Oh I am but I'm not always loving. Sometimes I'm a real fucking bastard when the dry-horrors get me. But I wouldn't be to you, cos I love you and there's not a pirate in the whole damned archipelago who wouldn't come to your assistance. I'll see to that.'

Danny drained the last of his hip flask and threw the empty over the side.

Huia watched it fall into the sea. It partially filled with water and floated away with the neck of the bottle just above the surface. Within a few moments it had passed astern and vanished from view.

'Perhaps we could be in touch tomorrow when we get back to the hospital. Chris and I are staying out in deep water tonight, as it's too late to go through the channel.'

'I'd like to go through your channel Huia.'

Chris interjected. 'The light will be fading soon Danny. Don't you think it would be a good idea to duck into Sentinel Island for the night rather than attempt returning to your



island in the dark. Whatever you decide, you should be on your way while you can still see the reef.'

Danny's eyes narrowed. 'Is Susan on Sentinel Island?'

'She certainly should be. She went aboard *Rurenga*. They're faster than us. We haven't checked because we're trying to avoid using the radio right now. But Susan will be there.' Chris replied.

'Then I'll go to Sentinel. Susan's prime shagging material you know.'

Huia pursed her lips before answering. 'It's over a decade since you saw her in Jakarta. You might find she now has other plans Danny.' Huia shrugged. 'But regardless of Susan, I guess you'll be wanting to find a new gin bottle won't you now that one's dead.'

'If I'm going to survive the night I don't just want another gin bottle, I need another gin bottle.'

Chris raised his eyebrows in dismay. 'With the speed your boat travels if you leave now you could get to the channel while it's still light. You might even manage to sneak into the harbour when the sun is below the volcanic rim. You'll miss the glare but still be able to use the residual-glow just on sunset to see where you're going.'

'I don't suppose you've got another bottle of gin aboard have you?'

Chris shook his head. 'No I haven't Danny, and even if I had one I wouldn't give it to you. You're too much of an asset to die of alcoholic poisoning.'

'Then I might as well bugger off.'

Huia hit him with a grin. 'I'll look out for you tomorrow Danny.'

Five minutes later Huia watched the longboat's wake stretch towards the island while Chris checked the depth sounder looking for a suitable anchorage for the night.

## CHAPTER 8

As night's damson-darkness became streaked with the rhythms of a new day, the ancient arsonist was busy lighting up the horizon astern of *Fool's Gold*. Black smoke and cooling-water were ejected into the morning air as Huia started the engine. A few minutes later the initial black smoke had drifted away and the steady throb of the diesel was augmented by the clank of chain passing over the bow roller, through the gypsy and falling into the anchor well. In the quivering morning above Sentinel Island gulls rode the first shafts of dawn in time to see *Fool's Gold's* sails being hoisted and subsequently changing colour during the pink-prelude to the sulphurous sunrise. Even before the dawn-sun had shrunk to its normal size the diesel engine was silent and water chuckled and gurgled its way astern as *Fool's Gold*, under sail, glided in the tail of a wind-shadow towards the channel into the lagoon.

Despite yesterday's resolve never to be in charge of a boat again Huia was at the wheel steering manually while Chris remained on deck adjusting the sails to the light zephyrs which seemed more fickle than the wind vane. In a little over an hour the sounder was showing a rising seabed with deeper trenches and heads of coral not far below the surface. Huia started the engine again while Chris took down the sails and lashed them in place. With the engine running slow-ahead and the sun's glare astern they approached the channel. Huia waited for Chris to come and take over the wheel as the red and green channel buoys came into view. There was a moment of panic as she realised he wasn't intending to take over. Didn't he realise her confidence was leaking away with every extra second she was at the wheel? Was he deliberately trying to test her confidence by letting her continue through the channel? Another thought sprinted across her mind. Yesterday she had told Rachael she didn't want to be excluded from jobs aboard just because she was pregnant. Might Rachael have had a quiet word with Chris and might that be why he was expecting her to negotiate the channel and steer *Fool's Gold* into the lagoon? It was always Hemi or Rangi who took them in. She called Chris.

'This is a strange boat. I haven't sailed it before. I'd rather you took us into the lagoon.'

But Chris shook his head and ran his fingers through his black curls.

'I'm no more capable than you of taking us in. You do it. The sun's behind you, there are no cross winds and we have a rising tide. Just take us in between the buoys and you can't go wrong.'

Huia hesitated unsure how to respond when Chris smiled at her. "Go on Huia, you can do it."

Chris turned away as he said it. He had no intention of taking over. There remained an element of panic in her voice as she replied, 'Will you stay by me in the wheelhouse in case I get a problem?'

Chris ruffled her hair. ‘Yes if you think it’ll help. But you don’t need me. You can do it by yourself. You’ve watched your brothers do it dozens of times.’ He put his arm round her and gave her a hug. ‘Don’t think you’re going to get out of these jobs just because you’re pregnant.’

That solved the problem! Rachael had talked to Chris. Now she wished she’d kept her mouth shut. She grinned, giving him a playful punch. ‘Right Chris your life’s in my hands.’

*Rurenga* and Danny’s launch were tied up alongside the floating jetty together with the semi-inflatable. All boats were on the leeward side of the jetty. The light morning air was sufficient to hold them away from the wharf. There was no docking space left on that side. She would have to take *Fool’s Gold* onto the windward side. She saw Rangi on the beach start to walk towards the jetty to meet them. ‘Would you like to take over Chris?’ Huia asked as they edged dead-slow towards the wharf.

‘No, you take us in and I’ll get the for’ard warp ashore.’

This wasn’t what she wanted. With the wharf to leeward the wind might take her onto the jetty. This is Harry’s boat. They might bump and there were no fenders out.

Huia pursed her lips. Chris had asked for this. ‘OK Chris if I trust you with the warps you won’t drop them in the sea will you? Try and get it right first time.’

Chris grinned back and waved.

As Huia brought the boat in towards the jetty she checked Chris’s progress. She mustn’t get there before he was ready. He had threaded the bow warp through the starboard fairlead and secured it to the Samson post. He still had about a third of a boat-length of warp in his hand with the spliced loop in the end. Hanging on to the starboard shroud he stepped over the rail and balanced on the gunwale. As they reached the jetty Chris stepped ashore and dropped the loop over the bollard. Leaving the engine still running slow-ahead Huia spun the wheel to port. The for’ard warp tightened and the

stern moved in alongside the jetty. She lashed the wheel hard to port. With the engine running slow-ahead the boat would stay up against the wharf all day if necessary. She uncoiled the stern warp passed her end through the stern fairlead and handed the spliced loop to Chris on the jetty. He slipped it over another bollard and, tightening the stern line, Huia belayed it aboard. When Chris stepped back aboard Huia handed him the second bow line. He went up for'ard put the spliced loop over the Samson post. He threw the loose end onto the jetty. Rangi had arrived, he picked it up and ran the line forward along the jetty and belayed it to a cleat. Once the line was tight Huia switched off the engine and unlashed the wheel.

Rangi walked back to Huia. 'Did all right for a kid sister with a bun in the oven didn't you. I watched you bring Grandad's boat through the channel. Somehow I couldn't imagine you bringing his boat in.'

Huia smiled demurely. 'Don't worry about your lack of imagination Rangi, everyone has their limitations.'

Rangi gave her a playful punch. As they walked up the jetty they met Harry approaching them. Rangi called to him. 'Grandad I don't want to worry you but did you know my kid sister's been responsible for bringing your boat through the channel and docking!'

'I'd be a lot more worried Rangi if she hadn't been responsible. Thanks Huia you did a good job.'

Harry and Huia continued walking along the jetty in silence for a few steps, while Rangi picked up the trolley and started back down the jetty with it. Huia asked, 'Are you staying in the hospital Grandad?'

'We did last night. Tanya and Kate moved a few beds round and created an empty room for Susan, Jacques and myself. The room is really reserved as accommodation for parents to stay with sick children but tonight I think we'd better stay on *Fool's Gold* and not take up hospital space. In the longer term Susan and I want to live in the village.

I'm keen to explore the reef for shells and Susan likes the idea of the music and singing in the village. After living in an apartment in Jakarta I think we'd both like to cultivate a garden.'

'What about Jacques?' Huia asked.

'I don't know. My guess is he'll want to go to the village as well. It's only a couple of months since Yvette died. He's not finished grieving for her. In fact I don't think he's started yet. He's still emotionally stunned and the reality of life without her has been suspended in limbo by working a sailing boat and the day-to-day living aboard.'

'Is that a good or bad thing Grandad?'

'I don't know Huia. Susan and I don't know what's going on inside his head. I'm not certain he does either. We've done the best we can not to leave him alone to brood on lonely night-watches. That's suicide material. It would be easy for him to take the one irrevocable step over the side at night when no one's in the cockpit. We've also been emphasising that he is an essential part of the crew and we can't manage without him. To a lesser extent Susan and I have also experienced the trauma of losing a friend and being wrongly suspected of involvement in her murder. We've all severed our lives in Jakarta with virtually no time to get accustomed to its implications. Without knowing what we'd find when we arrived, we took off for an unknown destination. The uncertainty is our own fault. We've not been keeping properly in touch with you for years. But right now I can think of nothing better than having a small garden and becoming part of the social-life in the village. I hope Jacques will join us. What do you think he should do Huia?'

'I hardly know him. I only met him for an hour yesterday. Does he ever talk about suicide?'

'Yes in an oblique sort of way. But I don't know whether he means it or not.'

'I've heard it said that people who talk about it don't usually do it. He must know that you and Susan have gone

to a great deal of trouble to get him this far. He might want to hang in there and put his life back together even if it's for no better reason than not wanting to let you down. That's how I think I might feel in his position but I've never been exposed to his situation.'

The two of them walked along the jetty in silence. Reaching the shade of a coconut tree they rested and looked out over the lagoon. Huia continued. 'When we first came to the island eighteen months ago the place was being used by armed thugs to abduct and rape young Island women. Tanya was powerless to stop it and she mentioned throwing herself off the cliff. But she came through it and now is invaluable helping us run the hospital. She's an ex Hollywood film star, perhaps she could help Jacques. Our hospital anaesthetist Sandra has been abused in the past but she's come through it because she's a tenacious woman and can see what needs to be done.'

Harry nodded and the two of them paused as a flurry of fish broke the surface of the lagoon sending widening circles over the still water. Eventually Harry broke the silence. 'You're right Huia. The tenacity of life is probably the best antidote to suicidal depression. Let's try telling Jacques if he wants to stay here he's got to start building himself Island-style accommodation in the village and I'll tell him we'll help.'

'When do you want to start?'

'Procrastination never built a house, but I'm hoping you might be able to lend us some tools. We've got a reasonable toolbox on *Fool's Gold* but they're just tools for boat repairs not...'

'In the village there is a reasonable sized community store-room which was originally supposed to contain the tools needed to cut clearings in the bush, work the land and build homes. We worked out how many tools would be needed and supplied the shed with that many, plus a few extras. But it was a mistake.'

‘Oh! Why’s that Huia?’

Unfortunately no one ever returned the tools to the shed. The refugees arrived from different countries for different reasons. Even if you managed to overcome the language difficulties and ask for the missing tools, you’d find nothing and no one would have anything to lend to you. We didn’t realise it at the time but by setting up a community tool-room we were inadvertently setting up the conditions for conflict. Even if we replaced the tools in the community storeroom people still had to keep their eyes open while they sneezed or they wouldn’t see their tools again! So we kept supplying new tools. They weren’t expensive ones, just machetes, axes, hammers, and saws. We figured, by the time everyone had a full set, the thefts would stop.

‘And did they?’ Harry asked.

‘We had to abandon the idea of having a community pool of tools, it just didn’t work. So I left the community shed empty and instead I supplied everyone with their own set. That sort-of resolved the problem but there were other factors as well.’

‘What were they Huia?’

‘As I said people have come here from different places. I didn’t appreciate the way their background affected their attitudes.’

‘In what way?’

‘Some of the war refugees for example would grab anything that looked useful or could be used as a weapon and squirrel it away.’

Harry nodded. ‘That sounds very human or perhaps it’s anti-human, I’m not sure which, perhaps both apply. But Huia it’s not just war refugees who behave like that. Millionaires and even billionaires who could have whatever they want still feel the need to indulge in every devious form of semi-legal crookery to try and get more from those least able to afford it. If you’ve found a solution, I’d love to hear it. So would the rest of the world!’



‘Eventually things changed Grandad but I was convinced I’d set up the conditions for conflict without knowing what I’d done wrong. Meanwhile in the hospital Chris and Kate were patching up the results of fights over tools.’

‘But you solved the problem in the end.’

‘No I didn’t really solve it Grandad. I just gave all of them, tools of their own. If they “lost” them I gave them new replacements and that removed the need for blame and retribution. In the end it cost us a thousand dollars. But if we’d had warring factions the whole island project together with the hospital would have failed. It only works by co-operation. But I didn’t solve the problem. The villagers solved it by themselves. The women needed each other for minding children and exchanging food, later the men needed help with the canoes, clearing land and building houses.’

‘Might there be more conflicts ahead Huia?’

‘Yes but if we can’t turn the tide of aggression at a village level there can be little hope for the rest of the world.’

‘The rest of the world never seems to have either the wit or will to solve their problems.’ Harry rested one hand on Huia’s shoulder and pressed the end of her nose with his middle finger before adding with a grin. ‘But neither do they know about you as a peacemaker yet Huia.’

‘The villagers did it by themselves Grandad. If they’d failed and continued fighting there would have been no village and no hospital. They’d probably have ended up by burning it down.’

‘With politicians in charge the same is still happening to the world.’

‘Refugees know they’ve got to make it work this time.’

‘I’m sure you’re right but we’ll need continual vigilance.’

‘Don’t worry Grandad. The tide has turned and I know the villagers will help you build your house not burn it down.’

‘I hope you’re right Huia. Does it matter where Susan and I build?’

‘Not if you use common sense in selecting your site. There’s a big Flame tree that happens to be in the middle of the village. No I’ll rephrase that. The tree doesn’t happen to be in the middle of the village; the village was deliberately built round the shade tree. They keep the shaded areas clear of undergrowth. The children sit under it for school four-days-a-week. It’s used as a communal kitchen and it forms a bit of a village centre, as people like to gather in the shade. Why don’t you take Susan and Jacques in *Te Waka* and have look at the village? Going by canoe is much easier than climbing up to the volcanic rim and down the other side, especially in this heat. The water’s too shallow for *Fool’s Gold* so you’ll have to leave her in the harbour here. You’ll want reasonable beach access for your house site to be able to come and go by canoe or long-boat.’

‘Longboats! I didn’t know you had any long-boats.’

‘Yes we’ve got two. Rangi and a couple of the Islanders built them. They’re a bit rough, but capable of carrying much heavier loads than the outriggers and they don’t draw much more water, but they’re too heavy to pull up the beach unless you use the tractor. So we leave them moored and paddle out to them. We can only use them when the tide’s in, as there’s not enough water over the coral. But if you need to take any heavy stuff to the village the long-boats can certainly carry the loads. We’ve even got outboards for them. We can load the long-boats OK at this end, but to make the best use of them we still have to build a stone jetty round by the village so we can unload them round there.’

‘What’s the story about building materials at the village Huia?’

There are quite a few old coconut trees past their useful nut producing age and there’s some bamboo growing near the water’s edge that you could use for building. I seem to remember there are some coconut logs that have already

been left in the lagoon to soak up the salt. If you use them they'll last much longer than fresh timber. We've got a good stock of nails and a few lengths of pre-sawn timber. We also have a portable chain mill which you could use as a last resort, but cutting even fresh coconut wood doesn't do saws any good. It's probably an idea to have a look at what the other Islanders have done. Also I guess you'll want a garden so you'll have to find some ground that's got reasonable soil. There are some rocky outcrops where the ground's too stony and the soil's rather thin. Go and see what you fancy. I suppose it would be polite to check with Tanya before you start work but she'll probably say "yes" to whatever you want to do.'

'It's as simple as that?'

'What complications do you want Grandad? Carving out a clearing in the bush, selecting and cutting the materials you need and getting a roof over your head should be tough enough for anyone. In the meantime I guess you'll be staying on *Fool's Gold* here on the jetty won't you?'

'I'd a lot sooner be as independent as possible on *Fool's Gold* till we manage to fix up somewhere to live in the village. I don't want to consume hospital resources however generously they're offered.'

'You won't Grandad. By growing crops you'll end up contributing to the hospital resources. Also the rest of the world needs to know about your shell research. You've brought *Fool's Gold* she's an asset. Ocean transport is one of our big problems. *Rurenga* can't be everywhere and Danny is often too drunk to use his boat.'

Harry shook his head. 'Last night he was totally wasted. Mobe had to help him walk up the jetty as well as carrying her baby. Eventually Hemi and Rachael came down to lend a hand. I haven't seen him today. He's probably hung over.' As Harry spoke he spotted Mobe with Oceana in her arms coming down the hospital steps with Kudu running beside her.

As Mobe drew near she greeted them with most of the English words she knew. 'Good morning Huia. Good morning Harry.' She then indicated to Huia and Harry to follow her back up the steps.

Harry commented, 'Danny's too hung over to look for us, so he's sent Mobe to find us.'

Harry was correct. Slumped in a wicker chair Danny's right hand clutched a hip flask. His right eye was closed but his left eye followed them as they approached.

Harry greeted him. 'Hi Danny you drunken old bugger! You haven't improved any since you left Jakarta. I bet you can't remember how long it has been.'

Danny nodded with a fixed grin on his face. Harry continued. 'Huia tells me you went out in a long-boat yesterday to find us.'

'Sure did!' Danny's slow American drawl had become even slower than usual. His face was twisted sideways and dribble ran out of the corner of his mouth. 'Thought I'd find you with Susan and Jacques in *Fool's Gold* instead I found Chris and Huia.'

'According to Huia you've received a message for me from Gary and Ann.'

'Sure have.' Danny tilted his head further sideways and viewed Harry with his left eye.

There was a significant pause while they waited for Danny to elaborate. Eventually Harry broke the silence. 'Was it anything important?'

'I guess that depends on what you consider important.'

Huia tried prompting him. 'Was it anything to do with Gary and Ann?'

Danny nodded. 'I guess so.'

Harry asked, 'So you've been in contact with them?'

'Wouldn't know otherwise would I.'

'So how did they contact you?' Harry asked.

'Over the ether.' Danny answered evasively.

Huia noticed concern showing on Harry's face as he asked. 'Was there any chance the messages were overheard Danny?'

Danny opened both eyes and raised his eyebrows. His voice became aggressive and he stuck out his jaw as he spoke. 'Not a chance in hell. I didn't become the most devious journalist on the whole damn planet by letting anyone read my fucking messages.'

'So how did you manage it Danny?' Harry asked.

Danny didn't answer immediately but instead tapped the side of his nose three times with his forefinger. Eventually he replied, 'By using me brains.'

'If you talked to Gary and Ann by using your satellite dish your position could be traced.' Harry observed.

'Not the way I do it. I told you didn't I. I'm the most devious bloody journalist on the whole damn planet. You don't think I'd make a mistake like that do you?' He paused. 'Well do you? If anyone traced that call they'd have found it came from a satellite dish in St Petersburg in Russia. There's more than one satellite network available providing you know how to access it.' He tapped the side of his nose again with his forefinger. There was professional pride in his voice as he added, 'I've got more stolen software in my shed than the whole of the bloody KGB.'

Harry grinned. 'And more alcohol on your breath. Even the radio waves coming out of your microphone are gin-flavoured.'

Danny looked directly at Huia and his left eye opened wide. 'If you need any secret love-notes sent, then you come and see me Huia.'

His skin looked as dry and brittle as a snake's sloughed skin. He sat up from his slouched position leaned forward in his chair and patted her bottom.

She moved back a step before replying, 'I'll remember that Danny.'

If he noticed the ambiguity in her answer he didn't show it as he sank back into his chair. Unscrewing the cap he raised the bottle to his lips. Huia noticed his Adam's apple move several times as he swallowed.

He commented, 'Gin's bugged me liver you know. But at least I've taken full advantage of every temptation offered and enjoyed every one of the deadly sins. I've probably only got six-months-to-go.'

As he fumbled with the screw cap on the bottle trying to replace it Huia whispered to Harry, 'He told me the same thing eighteen-months-ago when I first met him.'

Harry slapped Danny on the shoulder. 'Danny you bull-shiting old bugger, don't give me that shit. Your liver must be so pickled by now that when you die we'll have to get a stick and beat your liver to death.'

'Pickled? Me pickled! I thought it was you Harry who was in a "bit of a pickle" having to get out of Jakarta in a "bit of a flap" and...'

Harry interrupted. 'Yeah! Well you're not so far wrong at that Danny. You were saying you've had a message for me from Gary and Ann.'

'Perhaps I have Harry, but if you're to be believed I might be too pissed to pass it on mightn't I?'

Harry raised his eyebrows. 'Danny I can't believe a journalist like you would want to sit on a good story and not pass it on.'

'I'm a one-hundred-percent-proof ex-journalist now Harry.'

Huia turned to Harry. 'I've got a feeling this message could be important Grandad. We've got to get it right and not jumbled up. Why don't you go round to the village with Susan and Jacques in *Te Waka* while the tides in, have a look for a building site and come back later when Danny's alcoholic tide's had a chance to ebb.'

Harry nodded. 'But I don't know how we'll ever manage to catch Danny at slack water before the next alcoholic flood

tide. I'm sure this message is important. We need to know what's happening in Jakarta. I'd like to know how Gary or Ann managed to contact Danny.'

'So would I and we were with him.'

'His drinking is a lot worse than I remember it Huia. I think I'll need a bit of help to catch him sober enough to make sense. Perhaps if we could hide his drink...'

'I don't fancy your chances Grandad, he has alcohol stashed away in the most unlikely places even here in our hospital. He might be too drunk to talk coherently but he always seems to remember where he's hidden his gin.'

Harry shook his head in despair. 'The more I think about it the more convinced I'm becoming there's something sinister behind that message from Gary and Ann. I think I'm going to need help getting the message and even more help understanding what necessitated their call.'

## CHAPTER 9

*Te Waka* came alongside the floating jetty as Harry, Susan and Jacques returned to the harbour from the village. The rust-red eyebrows of dusk glowered over the volcanic rim of the island at the darkening waters of the lagoon. Harry was the first out of the canoe. As he secured the painter and the stern line to the cleats on the jetty Susan and Jacques clambered ashore and started walking along the wharf towards the hospital. They walked in silence for a few moments until submerged thoughts broke the surface. Anything louder than whispered words would have seemed an intrusion into the world of water lapping against the piles.

‘Back in Jakarta Yvette and I let all the little things become so big that we missed everything else in life.’ He paused before continuing. ‘We traded our years together for something that wasn’t even useful. All I have left now is the



unfinished sentence, “If only...” The leap to a different life would have been possible providing we’d had the foresight to jump far enough.’

Susan and Jacques reached *Fool’s Gold* and paused as they waited for Harry to catch up. ‘If only... is a very mournful song Jacques and it doesn’t have an ending. Yvette wouldn’t have wanted you to sing it. She’d want you to sing a more vibrant tune.’

Jacques shook his head. ‘I don’t think I know any vibrant songs anymore Susan.’

‘You do Jacques.’ Susan slid her hand along the safety-rail until her hand reached his. A light breeze ruffled her hair. She squeezed his fingers and her smile met his eyes. ‘A song is like a sail, all you have to do is unfurl it. Let the wind fill it and it’ll take you wherever you want to go. You’ve a long journey ahead of you Jacques. First there’s a reef to cross. But you have a cargo of knowledge we all need.’

As Harry reached them Susan moved her hand back along the rail so that it was close but no longer in contact with Jacques hand. ‘How would you two feel about going up to the hospital with me to see if we can catch up with Danny on the off-chance he’s sober enough to give us our message from Gary and Ann?’

Jacques nodded. ‘Of course Harry.’

As they walked towards the hospital gardens Susan informed them. ‘We may not need to get the message from Danny.’

‘Why’s that?’ Harry asked.

‘I had a chat with Huhana in the village while you were looking at the building site. She’s been taking many of Danny’s calls for him as he’s not always in a fit state to receive them. She thinks she’s pirated the message you’re talking about, and she’s got it on her laptop.’

‘What does it say?’

‘She doesn’t know because it’s all in code. Apparently it’s a long message. Danny started to decode it, found it too much trouble, never finished it and has forgotten what it’s all about except that it’s from Gary and Ann.’

‘Does Huhana know how to finish decoding it?’ Harry asked.

‘I don’t think so. But between us we might be able to work it out. It’s probably worth a try. Huhana says it’s based on a method you worked out years ago in Jakarta to enable us to get messages to Danny while he was on-the-run.’

‘How does it work Harry?’ Jacques asked.

‘If it’s my method it’s relatively easy to code and decode with a paper and pencil. A child can do it, providing they are meticulously careful. They need “the key” but without “the key” it’s baffling to all but the largest computer networks and they’d have to sweat a bit.’

‘How does it work?’

‘It’s quite simple really. Every letter in the alphabet has a number. A is one, B is two, C is three and so on. Then you need a piece of text for “the key” that is known to the sender and the receiver and preferably no one else. It could be just a particular page in a book. And of course you need the message you want to send...’

Susan cut into Harry’s explanation. ‘Danny stayed with us for several months in Jakarta when he was on-the-run. When he left I wrote “Danny’s Song” and sang it for him at the night-club on the eve of his departure. Danny liked it, we’ve both remembered it and Gary and Ann made a note of it. Before we set sail I reminded them about the possibility of using “Danny’s Song” as “the key”. It was the best part of a decade ago I sang it. I don’t suppose anyone else remembers it. That makes it a private “key” known only to the sender and receiver.’

‘So how does it all work?’ Jacques asked.

Harry explained. ‘Spaces between words and all punctuation marks need to be removed in both “the key”

and the message. Say the first letter in “the key” is a “C”. That’s the third letter in the alphabet. Then say the first letter in the message is an “R”. That’s the eighteenth letter in the alphabet. Add them together 3 plus 18 equals 21. The letter “U” is the twenty-first letter in the alphabet so the letter “U” is transmitted. Then we move on to the second letter in “the key” and the second letter in the message and so on.’

‘Why do you remove all the spaces and punctuation marks Harry? Wouldn’t it make it hard to read?’

‘Yes, but if you have a word with only one letter anyone would know it’s either an “A” or an “I”. Words with only two letters are limited: - “IS, IT, OR etc.” So by removing the spaces between words we’re depriving an unauthorised translator of an easy starting point. Also with our method the same letter in the message would normally be a different letter every time it is coded. If you wanted to make it even more secure you could repeat the coding process using two or more different “key” messages. But we’ve never bothered to go to those lengths.’

‘What happens if you have say the letter “P” in “the key” that’s the sixteenth letter in the alphabet and the letter S in the message that’s the nineteenth letter. 16 plus 19 is 35 and there are only 26 letters in the Roman alphabet.’

‘Easy, you go round the alphabet twice. You would transmit the letter “I”. Because “I” is the ninth letter and also the thirty-fifth letter if you go around a second time. When it’s decoded 9 minus 16 is negative. So, if you get a negative number, you use the “second-time-around” numbers so instead of “9” you use “35”. Now 35 minus “the key” number “16” gives an answer “19” or the correct letter of S. It’s a bit slow which is probably why Danny got either pissed-off, or pissed, before he was half-way through.’

Susan grabbed Harry’s hand. ‘Come on. We’ll wait forever to catch Danny sober enough to sort that out. Huhana reckons she’s got a copy of the original on her laptop so

why don't we go and find her and try to puzzle it out. Gary and Ann wouldn't have bothered to send a coded message if it wasn't important.'

As they walked through the gardens Harry suggested, 'Why don't we try getting two translations done independently. It's unlikely we'd both make the same mistake so we can check each others translation one letter at a time then if either of us makes a decoding error we'd spot it immediately.'

Susan interjected. 'There's much less chance for confusion if we use two people to do each translation. One person can tick off each "key" letter and the corresponding message letter while the other person does the arithmetic and writes down the decoded letters. You've only got to get one letter out of step and you get gibberish.'

Harry nodded. 'Assuming Huhana has the correct message perhaps we could get Huia to give her a hand decoding. You and I Susan could do the other translation and Jacques can compare the two, letter by letter and look for any discrepancy.'

It took an hour and a half to decode the message and another twenty minutes to re-write it with the correct spacing between the words and to insert the missing punctuation.

Huia looked at Harry. 'We know now what it says but I hope you know what it means because I haven't a clue what half of it is about.'

Harry nodded. 'There's a lot of background that needs explaining. Let's read it through and I'll do my best to fill in the details.'

*Dear Danny,*

*Please pass this message on to Harry, Susan and Jacques if they manage to reach you. We hope to join you shortly.*

*The stupidity over Jacques book continues unabated. Prof. Patel has been on TV defending the right to academic freedom for all university lecturers. Ann has also been on*

*TV and pointed out that nowhere in Jacques' book has he mentioned Islam, Christianity or any other religion and any insult against Islam has been created by religious clerics not you Jacques.*

*As a result both Ann and I have had our research budgets cut. So much for Prof. Patel's academic freedom!*

*On an optimistic note we have isolated bacteria in the gut of the kakata shells which you correctly predicted could be the problem. Your last sperm count has returned to pre-test levels.*

*The murder weapon has been found but as yet no progress on finding Yvette's killer. We don't believe the lack of progress is accidental. We've had another visit from Figgy but this time he was on Embassy business. He says Embassy Intelligence has uncovered a security threat involving us because of our support for Jacques' book and because all of our names are mentioned in the credits. The Embassy could experience difficulties continuing to guarantee our safety. We shouldn't have put the US Embassy into the embarrassing situation of trying to protect us at the expense of US relations with the government in Jakarta. Also we haven't forgotten your song Susan.*

*Regards Gary and Ann.*

‘What was the song about?’ Huia asked.

Harry grinned. ‘When she sang it Figgy had just given us another lecture on his favourite theme. Academics, in his opinion, should stay at the university and not venture into public relations because they don't understand them. He reckons this is especially true in Indonesia that he considers the spiritual-home of confusion.’

‘But Figgy wallows in confusion like a pig in butter.’ Susan explained.

Harry explained. ‘Figgy is a bit of an enigma. You can't tell where his “official jargon” finishes and the genuine Figgy takes over. That is assuming there is a genuine Figgy!’

He has two voices. One we call his “Embassy Speak” where every word is clearly enunciated and every sentence is grammatical, to a fault. The other voice we call his “DNS” which is short for “Double Negative Speak”. He uses that one when he’s trying to convince you he is “One of the boys”. It’s full of grammatical errors and back street slang. Both voices are fake. Talking to him is like playing pass the parcel with a room full of suicide bombers. Years ago in the States he was a criminal lawyer. I think he must have been a “good one” because he had to find another profession in a hurry. Working it out from the things he didn’t tell us we reckon he got rather too close to the criminal-side of the legal profession and managed to “engineer” a few too many acquittals. There was a case of a mining engineer, a geologist and an accountant who had been working on a project in Papua New Guinea when a few million US dollars lost their way. Apparently Figgy got them off by the use of some dubious witnesses and a degree of sleight-of-hand. I know there were other cases as well and some of his clients were well connected.’

‘Somehow he must have managed to “engineer” himself into an appointment at the US Embassy in Jakarta.’ Susan added.

‘Which suggests to me there are crooks in high places in the American administration. Someone must have wanted him out of the States.’ Jacques commented.

‘Nevertheless he was probably admirably suited to Embassy work.’ Harry observed. ‘In his opinion every public statement needs to be sufficiently ambiguous to provide a back-door escape route because no one can afford the luxury of promoting only one version of the truth. If something produces a positive reaction then it’s true if it gets a hostile reaction it’s wrong. All facts, according to him, are flexible and diplomatic skill is dependent on bending them to tell people what they want to hear. So Susan’s song praised him for all the attributes that he and everyone else

in the nightclub knows he doesn't possess. The nightclub resonated with laughter.'

'Did he get the joke, Grandad?'

'He laughed along with everyone else but I think he'd take anything from Susan.'

Susan interjected. 'Laughing at his own expense isn't normally one of his attributes. Other than manipulating clichés he has very few attributes if you don't count neatly pressed trousers and polished shoes.'

Jacques explained. 'Harry and Susan go barefoot most of the time and give him a hard time about his polished shoes. I reckon there isn't a nation on earth that does "scruffy" as well as New Zealanders. I'm sure it's a Kiwi badge of honour.'

'Aussies are pretty good at it too, Jacques. I'd put them second.' Susan added

Harry continued. 'But along with polished shoes he owns a vast store of platitudes. He can roll them out like a prayer mat for any and every occasion. After Susan's song he gave us another lecture that we shouldn't "Rock-the-boat" or "Create-waves" otherwise it will be difficult for the American Embassy to "Look after our interests." In retrospect I think he was genuinely concerned about our safety.'

'With good reason as it turned out.' Jacques observed.

Harry continued. 'Ann can be laceratingly concise; so Figgy was "Frankly appalled" when Ann went on TV to support Jacques. He explained that as Ann is an American citizen he is obliged to protect her but the Embassy can't be seen to support someone who is determined to run headlong into a clash with religious clerics. Apparently Ann was making his job impossible because the Islamic world isn't noted for its sense of humour and doesn't understand American foreign policy.'

Jacques shook his head. 'Neither does anyone else including most Americans. But perhaps he was right. It

seems Gary, Ann and all of you are being victimised for supporting me.’

Harry smiled. ‘If I know anything about Gary and Ann they would have known the likely outcome and went into battle voluntarily on your account Jacques because they believed you were right and they did it in the knowledge you would do the same for them. We can’t let the voice of every visionary drown in a sea of slogans.’

‘So what was all that about shells in the message Grandad?’ Huia asked.

‘It’s rather a long story Huia.’

‘But a very interesting one.’ Jacques added.

‘The whole story started two-and-a-half years ago when I called into a village on one of the islands to try and buy some provisions and refill my water tanks. I heard screams and shouting coming from one of the houses. I assumed someone was in trouble so I investigated. A woman, who had just given birth, was being beaten with a stick by her husband, even before the afterbirth had come away.’

‘Why?’ Huia asked.

‘I asked the same thing Huia using rather stronger language than, “Why”. It turned out it was because she had just produced a girl and not a boy.’

Huia rested her hand on her stomach. ‘Is that such a crime?’

‘Not for you Huia but in some places there’s considerable prejudice against girls.’

‘Why?’

‘Sometimes it occurs in countries where there is no social welfare. Girls eventually get married and live with their husbands, whereas boys are expected to support their parents in their old age. In short, girls are seen as a financial liability and boys as an investment. Many girls are aborted while still inside their mothers or murdered shortly after birth. As a result in India for example there are about thirty-



percent more boys than girls. In China things are only a little better.’

‘That will create a few problems in the future won’t it?’ Huhana asked.

‘It sure will.’ Harry added. ‘But when I asked around the village I discovered that with only one exception all the babies born in the last twelve months were girls.’

‘Out of how many?’ Huia asked.

‘Twenty-seven births. Statistically that’s improbable. The solution, according to the husbands, was to beat the women immediately after giving birth to teach them not to do it again!’

‘That’s brutal.’ Huia commented.

‘That was my reaction. But I became interested why such a statistical abnormality had occurred. It could be just a statistical glitch. Then I called at a neighbouring island and found a similar thing had happened there as well, at about the same time.’

‘With the same brutal consequences?’

‘I don’t know Huia but I suspect it might be similar. I was more interested in the cause than the effect.’

‘Did you find the cause Harry?’

‘Not by myself but I think with Gary and Ann’s help we might be well on the way. In the meantime the birth statistics seem to have returned to a more or less normal fifty-percent split of girls and boys.’

‘I hope the husbands didn’t think the beatings worked.’ Huhana commented.

‘I don’t know. Probably they did. As you know it is the father’s sperm not the mother who determines the gender of the babies. But it was no use trying to explain that to the men. The women were producing the girls so it was clearly their fault! In their eyes I’d have had no case. But I continued with my investigation. Two possibilities occurred to me. Either the women were unknowingly aborting male babies but not

female babies at an early stage in their pregnancy, or for some unknown reason the men were producing only female sperm. If the women were aborting early in their pregnancy then there should have been a significant reduction in the number of live births. This wasn't the case so that left me with the possibility that the men were producing only female sperm.'

'Could you test the men?' Huia asked.

'Even if I could persuade them to agree to a test, which I doubt, the test would not have been very relevant as the birth-ratio was returning to a statistical norm. I was interested in what might have caused such a statistical glitch. One thing was common to both islands. A tropical cyclone had passed through the area and destroyed most of the crops and damaged many of the fishing canoes. This had left the Islanders with very little to eat and nothing to sell to enable them to buy-in food. So, as you would expect, they started gathering shellfish. They ate them raw. There is a local shellfish the Islanders call kakata. It's not normally popular but it provided a source of food. In fact it became a main feature in their diet for many months until they produced more crops. I took a wild guess that perhaps this particular shellfish was responsible for destroying the male sperm. So at the university I got my own percentage of male and female sperm checked. It was normal. Then I indulged in a course of eating these kakata shellfish. The result was a drastic reduction in the number of male sperm I was producing but the female sperm count remained more or less the same. I was now convinced I was on to something. With a great sense of relief, because the diet was so horrible, I returned to eating a normal diet. My sperm count returned to normal. And according to Ann and Gary it has remained so in their latest test just before we left Jakarta. Now it sounds as if they have isolated the bacteria found in the gut of the shellfish that was responsible. Those

particular shellfish are simply concentrating a bacterium that is naturally occurring in that part of the ocean.’

‘Were there any other side-effects Grandad?’ Huia asked.

‘So far we haven’t detected any side effects. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t any. It’s just that we’ve detected nothing yet. Only exhaustive statistics over long periods can suggest the lack of other side-effects.’

‘If a storm happened again what could the Islanders do?’ Huia asked.

‘I imagine thoroughly cooking the shellfish would go a long way to solving the problem. But that’s more in Ann and Gary’s field, not mine. I don’t know whether anyone has tried it yet. It might be too early in the research programme. At least they seem to have isolated the bacteria responsible. So hopefully they are now in a position to grow them in the laboratory.’

‘Why would anyone want to do that?’ Huhana asked and added, ‘I’d have thought we’d have wanted to eradicate it not grow it.’

‘Not necessarily Huhana. There could potentially be many practical applications for it.’

‘Such as?’

‘A farmer hatching day-old chicks for eventual egg production produces as many male as female chicks. Then they all have to be sorted and the male ones are placed on a conveyor gassed and ground up. If only female chicks were produced production costs could be reduced. To maintain milk production dairy farmers need to ensure all their cows produce a calf per year. Usually the male calves are put down and the better female calves are retained for replacement stock. There are some genetic diseases that are transmitted from mothers to sons but not from mothers to daughters. Many afflicted mothers want a child but are concerned they stand a fifty-fifty chance of being faced with the dilemma of either having a son with problems or undergoing a medical abortion.’

‘Would the fathers have to eat lots of these shell-fish?’ Huia asked.

‘I imagine a course of injections would be adequate, perhaps even pills. But this isn’t my field of research.’

‘Grandad, would it be possible to bring endangered species back from the brink of extinction if we could increase the ratio of female to male offspring?’

‘I’m sure it would. The list of possible applications grows longer the more you think about it. But all of this could only take place after exhaustive research. That’s where Gary and Ann come in. But their research funding has been cut, by bureaucrats who can’t imagine anything beyond a giant eddy that always returns them to the same place. Jacques book caused problems resulting in Yvette being murdered. I can’t begin to imagine the reaction to Gary and Ann’s research programme if it became known to religious clerics.’

‘Need anyone else know about their research?’ Huhana asked.

‘Yes, if Gary and Ann stay in Jakarta. There’s ethical committee approval, peer reviews and public exposure to religious zealots who only think in clichés.’

‘Could they finish their research here?’ Huia asked.

Harry didn’t answer. He just smiled and winked.

## *CHAPTER 10*

The contrast with Jakarta and the long sea voyage couldn't have been greater as Harry, Jacques and Susan started down the hospital steps. The thin arms of the moon were vanishing over the volcanic rim of the island. No word passed between them yet each of them paused halfway down the steps. The night commanded attention. They had become part of something much larger and more intimate. Across the gardens the black waters of the lagoon were sprinkled with the reflections of millions of stars while the lightest of night-breezes brushed them with the scent of frangipani. A fish plopped and the lagoon-stars shimmered as the rings widened. The moment passed but each of them trod a little more lightly as if a single footfall would be an intrusion into the world where silence was becoming more intense as it lingered on the night air. That evening whispered words

would have been for people who were very close, but at that moment their thoughts were drifting through private fragments of inner-space.

*Fool's Gold* rocked as they clambered aboard creating ripples of phosphorescence that spread into the still dark water. Harry touched a switch, light streamed into the cockpit and the reflected stars sank out of sight. Susan and Harry slid back the aft-cabin hatch. Harry's words, 'Night Jacques' were echoed by Susan as they disappeared down the steps into the aft-cabin, and were followed by Jacques words, 'See you both in the morning.' as he slid open the main-cabin hatch. If anyone had been watching from the hospital they would have seen the fore and aft cabin portholes leak light into the lagoon for a few minutes until they were both extinguished and the reflected stars on the surface of the lagoon resumed their unseen vigil.

Despite Jacques call, 'See you in the morning.' when Susan pushed back the for'ard hatch, sunlight streamed into the main cabin but she got no response from the 'Good morning Jacques.' she called down the companionway steps. A puzzled frown creased her forehead. 'Are you there Jacques?' Still no response! Turning, she backed down the steps and into the main-cabin. No Jacques! His quarter berth had been slept in. She walked for'ard to the heads and knocked on the door. Still no response! She opened the toilet door. Clearly he wasn't aboard. Returning to the cockpit she called into the aft cabin. 'Harry, I can't find Jacques. He's not aboard.'

There was moment's delay before Harry replied. 'Perhaps he's gone up to the hospital to use the toilet rather than fill up our holding tank as we're not planning to go out to sea in the next day or two.'

Susan replied, 'I'll wander up and see if I can find him. I feel uneasy about leaving him alone for too long.' As she walked through the gardens, the sun was only a little above the crater rim emphasising contours and casting long

shadows. Then she saw him sitting on the hospital steps with Tanya. A smile of recognition flickered across Susan's face. Tanya had the same dimples in her cheeks when she smiled as Yvette. Susan couldn't hear her words. But she guessed, from Jacques' large Gaelic gestures that he was enthusiastically immersed in one of his favourite topics and Tanya seemed a good listener. As Susan approached the steps Jacques looked up.

'Good morning Susan.' Jacques waved enthusiastically. Susan grinned to herself this was the most animated she had seen him since Yvette's death. I bet he's talking about his, "Origins of modern thought".

She greeted him with 'Hi Jacques.' And turning to Tanya added. 'You're up bright and early this morning Tanya.'

'Yes I try and get out here every morning for my exercises before the sun gets too high.'

'We all ought to join you Tanya. I know I could do with losing a few kilos.'

'Great! I feel quite isolated out here on the steps all by myself. A couple of lifetimes ago I used to be a dancer and I never got out of the daily-ritual of morning-exercise. But this morning I was fortunate enough to meet Jacques. He's been telling me about the way children learn.'

Susan thought to herself, "Kids learning! The origins of modern thought! My guess was pretty close. I'll give myself one-and-a-half out of two." Susan smiled, 'Jacques! What've you been telling Tanya.'

Tanya replied. 'He's been explaining how children, and adults, understand things much better by metaphor and it's the learning method they invariably choose.'

Susan grinned. 'That sounds a bit of heavy morning-exercise.'

'Not at all, Jacques has got me thinking.' Tanya flicked the hair out of her eyes. 'I was a dancer. Now that Jacques has pointed it out I realise it's what dance is all about. Dance is a metaphor for the emotions. Everything is there,

love and anguish, lust and spite, arrogance and pity. If the emotions are missing dance degenerates into a meaningless gymnastic exercise. You must experience the same with your singing. If music fails to become a metaphor for the emotions it, becomes noise pollution.'

Jacques continued. 'It's the same for all the arts. A digital photo faithfully records a scene. But an impressionist can look at the scene and create a metaphor of it that we can instantly recognise as containing the essence of the scene not a reproduction of it. That's why the painting is prized so much more than a photo.'

Susan grinned inwardly. Jacques is breaking out of his melancholy. Let's encourage him. 'What's that got to do with children learning Jacques?'

'Children think in metaphors. If you give a young girl a doll she will play with it as long as the doll remains a metaphor for her baby. But should the metaphor fail, as like as not, her imagination could turn the box the doll arrived in into a tropical garden or a coral cave beneath the sea. But without the metaphor the doll and box are just pieces of plastic, cloth and cardboard.'

'This doesn't just apply to children does it Jacques?' Tanya asked.

"Good for you!" Susan thought. "You're getting inside Jacques protective shield."

'Not many people can imagine anything new if they can't find a metaphor for it. The elderly usually have even more difficulty than the young. The first motor cars needed the interim name of "horse-less carriages". Without a metaphor for mechanised-road-transport the concept needed time for people's imagination to catch up. The concept of space-time is nearly as old as the motor-car but there's no metaphor to explain it, so it remains a mystery.'

'Jacques!' Susan flicked her hair in disbelief. 'This isn't a university! I don't think Tanya is intending to teach the kids about space-time.'



Tanya grinned. ‘True, but I’m always interested to investigate new methods. Come on Jacques. How should we approach teaching in our school?’

Jacques paused before answering. ‘To use a couple of metaphors we shouldn’t be trying to fill empty vessels but kindle a fire.’

‘How do we do that Jacques?’ Tanya asked.

‘Children are compulsive learners. As long as we don’t turn them off, all we need to do is provide the correct metaphors at the right time and we’ll never be able to teach them anything because they’ll understand it all too soon. I’ve had a flick through Oswald’s bible. Do you know why he wrote it?’

‘I dunno. I guess his genes gave his wallet a nudge and he thought it was the voice of God.’

‘Perhaps you’re right but I’d like to take the opportunity to read it properly. One thing struck me immediately. He’s left a lot out of the usual bible but I notice he hasn’t left out the parables or as Oswald refers to them, the metaphors Jesus used.’

‘But there’s one significant feature he has omitted. I made a point of looking it up in his index.’

‘Oh yes? What’s that?’ Tanya asked while pondering where the conversation was leading.

‘He’s left out everything to do with the virtues of faith.’

‘Oh! Do you know why?’

‘I think so. Faith means believing in something that has no supporting evidence. If evidence exists we don’t need faith. The belief stands or falls on the quality of the supporting evidence. But blind faith crashes round the world like a loose cannon on a gun deck.’

Jacques didn’t see Susan glance at Tanya and raise her eyebrows and look skywards to convey – “What have we started now?”

Jacques continued. ‘There are three constituents to most religions. There is an unsubstantiated belief in one or

more deities. Then there is a largely discredited account of historical events and a code of conduct for social interaction.’

Susan chewed her lip and decided they should probably encourage Jacques because at least he wasn’t brooding over Yvette.

Jacques continued. ‘Unlike many religions the original Christian one takes a compassionate approach to social interaction. I think that’s what Oswald wanted to promote.’

‘I believe he’s left out most of the Old Testament hasn’t he.’ Tanya observed.

‘Yes very wisely in my opinion. It’s the basis of the Jewish religion not the Christian one. Most of its vindictive attitudes are diametrically opposed to the Christian ones. If I had to sum up the social attitudes of the Old Testament in a sentence I’d say it’s a list of “Thou shalt nots” and a catalogue of punishments for those who did. Much of it is quite brutal even when viewed from an age of machine-guns and suicide-bombers.’

Tanya nodded in agreement. ‘Brutality isn’t a lesson the kids need to learn.’

‘What are you teaching in the school Tanya?’ Susan asked as an attempt to move the conversation on.

‘The children are all learning to speak English and we will eventually teach them to read and write. Hopefully they will teach their parents. In most cases it’s English as a second language. The languages, which washed ashore here, are as varied as the shells on the beach. We all need to be able to communicate with each other. In some of the cases the children only speak their local dialect. Usually there are no books written in that dialect. So if they first learn to speak English then there will be books available for them.’

‘Are the children taught anything else?’ Jacques asked.

‘Yes we run swimming classes nominally for the kids that can’t swim, although the others usually join in as well. But that’s an extra hour when the classes are finished and we

only run the swimming classes when the tide's reasonably high in the middle of the day.'

'That's great but I meant do you run any other academic subjects?'

A frown of puzzlement passed over Tanya's face. 'Why do you ask that, Jacques?'

'There's mathematics, science and...'

'I don't think you understand Jacques. Our problem isn't getting the children to learn what we teach. As you said yourself children are compulsive learners but they learn too well. Our problem is to teach them to forget.'

'Teach them to forget! I don't follow.'

'All the families are here because they've escaped from some trauma like war or famine. Some have been forcibly evicted from their land. We're all here because we've escaped from something. Most of us see this community as a last chance. We have to make it work and we can only do that if we all co-operate. Co-operation and self-interest are two sides of the same coin.'

'Huia was telling me that Indonesia and Papua New Guinea both claim this island as part of their territory.'

'That's right Jacques but in practice it means neither country wants to be involved.'

'What would happen if thousands of refugees came here?'

'Then I guess we'd have to think again. But it won't happen.'

'Why not?'

'Most refugees want to live in rich consumer societies. Not one family in a hundred would want to settle for living on trodden dirt floors with a coconut thatch roof over their heads. We can only offer a subsistence lifestyle. To most people we'd be a poor choice; especially when it's compared with living in a rich country. But rich countries like Australia don't want to share their wealth. They call it Nationalism or Patriotism which is another way of saying

“Refugees Aren’t Welcome”. So we take just a handful of the most traumatised, take care of their medical and emotional needs and every other nation looks the other way. In practice we are getting the most traumatised refugees. Oh! And while I think of it I don’t want to sound offensive but I’d prefer it if you didn’t go to the village without...’

‘Oh sorry I went last night.’

‘Did you go by yourself Jacques?’

‘No I went with Harry and Susan.’

‘With Susan! Susan went with you?’

‘Oh yes...’

‘That’s fine Jacques. But please don’t go on your own.’

‘OK! But why’s that, Tanya?’

‘You’ve got white-skin Jacques.’

‘Is that a problem?’

‘Not for me Jacques. I’ve got white skin as well but there are two young women - no they aren’t really young women, they’re just girls. Nunia is about twelve and Luisa is a bit younger, she’s probably about nine or ten. Whenever they see a white-man on his own they rush away into the forest to hide and don’t come back for ages.’

‘Why’s that Tanya? I wouldn’t hurt them.’

‘I’m sure you wouldn’t Jacques but it’s not me you have to convince. The two girls are wary, but they are usually OK with white-men providing the man is accompanied by a woman.

A frown crossed Jacques’ face. ‘Why’s that?’

‘I haven’t a clue, and I’m certainly not going to probe. I don’t want to open old wounds. Any questioning would distress them even more. I’d guess a white-man has done something to them at some stage. You can probably guess what it might have been. But I feel it’s best to leave it as a guess.’

‘But you say they’re OK if I have a woman with me?’

‘Yes usually. They’ll still keep well out of your way and keep a wary eye on you but they probably won’t get

spooked and take off into the bush unless you approach them directly.’

‘Is it just white skinned men?’

‘Yes it seems so, with those two particular girls. They appear more relaxed with brown-skinned men and seem OK with women of any colour. Probably after a time when they get to recognise you and realise you aren’t going to harm them they’ll start to feel safer with you. That’s where I’d love you to participate. Sooner or later they’re going to have to come to terms with white-men. Very cautiously, and I mean very cautiously, I’d like you to become integrated with the village community. But in the meantime I don’t want the two girls to spook any of the other children. So I’d like you to be seen moving through the community with women. One of the little boys Dak who’s about six is also very cautious in the presence of white-men and he could easily be spooked.’

‘Could I help with the teaching?’

‘Huia and Rachael do most of the teaching. Rachael takes little Manuka with her and that’s always popular with the school children. I expect Huia will take her baby as well when it arrives. But if Huia and Rachael are both at sea either Sandra or I step in. It’s not just for the sake of the three kids I’ve mentioned. Most of the children are more relaxed with women than men; but there’s no reason why you couldn’t jointly teach in a supportive role with a female teacher.’

‘Do you know why the other children are uneasy with men Tanya?’

‘No, but I can guess. Virtually all the people are here because they are escaped victims otherwise they’d have stayed in their own villages. I know two of these kids have watched family members being murdered by soldiers. Others have been driven from their homes because logging gangs want to move in. Some have watched their mothers

and sisters being raped and been victims themselves. Why do you think they might feel easier with women than men?’

‘Not all men act like that Tanya.’

Susan who had been listening in silence cut in. ‘Jacques, how does a child, with limited experience, know which men to trust? I’m forty and I can assure you I have difficulties at times, and so do most women.’

Tanya touched Jacques elbow. ‘We’re not dealing with “normal” children. In fact I don’t know how to define a “normal” child anymore. Given time, with no more traumas, I hope they will start to trust again and not add compound interest to the aggression they have already received. That’s a real danger and I’m not sure how to avert it. Have you any ideas Jacques?’

Jacques shook his head. ‘You run school four mornings a week Tanya?’

‘Yes from seven in the morning till ten. After that it’s getting hot and the children get restless. We’ve found early morning is the best time to get them to concentrate.’

‘What are they doing for the rest of their time?’

Depending on their age the children are assisting their families with building houses, clearing land, working the gardens, helping with the boats, making clothes, minding younger children and, I hope, constructively playing with each other. Strange as it may seem many of the traumatised children don’t know how to play, constructively or otherwise.’

‘There’s a lot more in this than I realised Tanya.’

Tanya shook her head. ‘There’s a lot more involved than any of us realised. When Chris offered to start the hospital he was thinking in terms of having a base hospital to mend broken bones and cure some of the tropical diseases. Because of satellite communications there’s no longer any reason why a tiny hospital on a remote volcanic island shouldn’t have access to the latest medical research. But we all imagined the villagers would be able to look after

themselves. Well some can but we've found broken bones mend much faster and need less care than broken lives.'

Susan interjected. 'I think Jacques is experiencing the same thing aren't you Jacques.'

Jacques nodded. 'Yes I am Susan.'

There was a moment's pause before Tanya continued. 'You know Jacques, I came from America that fancies itself as the richest country in the world. But in some ways I'm convinced it's one of the poorest. I worked in Hollywood and was devastated by what was being put on the screens and into video games and misnamed art! The real tragedy of Hollywood isn't what they are doing but the fact that they don't know they are doing anything wrong. To them the dollar's the passport to heaven and if something earns a legal dollar it's got to be good. If you ask the average American what they mean by "co-operation" they'll probably tell you it's two or more people helping each other. When I first came here that's what I thought it meant too. But most of *Rurenga's* crew are Maori and I've learned a lot from them, particularly from Huia and Hemi. Maori have a different way of looking at things. To Maori co-operation always has to be between people and the environment. Failure to understand that is one of the world's big problems. We Americans are so self-centred. Too many of us think the world is ours to exploit. Fortunately I got out before I became contaminated. Hollywood seems to have a destructive desire to select the ugliest aspects of fact and fantasy, put them on a pedestal for their own youth and export their "beacon of menace" to the rest of the world. American youth has become infected and I fear the disease is not only contagious but will be handed down from generation to generation a bit like a genetic disease.'

'At least we're a long way from the States right now.' Susan commented.

'Perhaps' Tanya added, 'If we tread softly, I'd like to think we might manage to turn-the-tide of greed, fear and

aggression on our little Island. We have had some things work in our favour. As you know Kiribati is disappearing because of rising sea-levels. The government there is training the youth in professions like diesel mechanics and nursing so they will have the skills to start new careers in rich countries like Australia and New Zealand while their own islands vanish into the ocean for ever. Three nurses took up the offer and went to work in Sydney. The huge city was so alien compared with life in the Islands they had to get out. They came to us and live in the village. Never have three nurses been so appreciated, they have been well trained and most important of all they understand life in the Islands and our Island people.’

Susan watched Jacques’ smile as he brushed a wisp of Tanya’s hair away from her face and saw his fingers “accidentally” brush against the dimple in her cheek as he drew his hand away. Susan smiled inwardly as the thought skipped across the surface of her mind, Tanya can’t have any idea that she and Yvette had the same dimple-smile but obviously Jacques has noticed it. Susan was still wondering what other similarities Jacques was finding between Tanya and Yvette. His face light up in a smile.

‘What you’re doing sounds great, Tanya. I think I’ve got a lot to learn.’

‘We all have Jacques. As I see it children need to play to escape from past traumas. Working with their families and participating in their own futures seems beneficial as well. In the States I’ve witnessed a brutal form of murder – the killing of time. Kids with youth-to-burn hang round video corners, indulging in binge-drinking and wacky-backy parties. In my opinion providing that environment is a serious form of child abuse.’

Jacques nodded. ‘Kids don’t need to emulate those sorts of metaphors for living, assuming you can define that sort of existence as any form of living.’



Tanya grinned. ‘You’re right Jacques it isn’t any form of living. It’s probably too late for many of those city kids. But I wonder if we can do any better. The hospital for sick bodies is right here inside the crater. It seems to be working, but the hospital for sick minds is out there in the village already and we’re the only doctors and nurses those kids are likely to have. Do you think we could manage to turn the tide, Jacques?’

Susan thought to herself, making the attempt is probably the best possible route for Jacques’ recovery, perhaps that’s why Tanya has brought this up with him.

She noticed enthusiasm in his eyes as he replied. ‘I’d like to give it my best shot.’

## *CHAPTER 11*

The leaves on the flame tree in the village were returning. Jacques had seen the flame-flowers come and go and now pods were hanging black against the morning sky. Two groups of children sat in circles. Jacques was in the centre of one group and Huia closed a circle with the other group. This was only the second morning that Nunia and Luisa had dared to sit in Jacques' group. As usual, six-year-old Lucia sat in her place on the woven mat next to Huia. She couldn't help running her hand over Huia's pregnant bulge. 'Who put baby inside you?'

Huia smiled back. Lucia's English was improving. 'It was Doctor Chris, Lucia.'

'Is your husband?'

Huia hesitated unwilling to answer either "Yes or No". She hesitated a moment longer and decided she definitely

wasn't going to answer "Yes". That would be tempting fate. Lucia's eyes waited expectantly. 'He's not my husband but he's like a husband to me.' Was that sufficient for this waif-like girl with the searching black eyes?

Lucia stroked Huia's stomach again. 'Big baby hard to get out.'

Huia smiled but it was a bleak smile tangled in a web of doubt. 'Doctor Chris and Doctor Sandra will help the baby to come out Lucia.' Already nearly two weeks overdue she added as an after thought, 'When the time is right.' And punctuated it with a little laugh for no reason except that she was nervous and didn't need reminding that "Here and now" was finite and carried with it a sting from Chris's past. If only Chris had never told her. Then she wouldn't have this compass finger tracking every movement she made and invading her sleep. He had kept it from Rachael for the fourteen-years they had been together. Couldn't he have kept it from her as well?

The first time Chris told the story he emphasised it was rubbish and it didn't apply to her. He'd been repeating that diagnosis over and over again throughout her pregnancy. But she was uncertain whether he was doing it to convince himself or to prevent her own wisps of anxiety becoming a gathering thundercloud. Her time was running out. As if working to an orchestrated plan both Rachael and Chris had been contriving opportunities to explain that the future can't be foretold. She'd heard them the first time. Why did they need to keep repeating it? Was it her pain or their pain they were trying to anaesthetise? The fact they kept repeating that, "It didn't apply to her", had made it impossible for her to even discuss it with them. She was already nearly two-weeks overdue, there could be only one-or-two days left. She had to talk to someone but who? Her brothers! Rangi would laugh at her and Hemi wouldn't know what to say. Would Grandad understand? Did she have to face

this alone? Could, looking into the barrel of a prophesy, be the trigger that would cause her to make that prophesy self-fulfilling? Was that how prophesies worked?

She felt a hand on her shoulder. ‘Are you alright Huia?’ It was Jacques. He had left the other children and was standing behind her.

‘Why do you ask Jacques?’

‘Little Lucia has been talking to you for several minutes. She’s doing her best with English and you haven’t responded.’

‘Oh! Haven’t I?’

Jacques sat on the mat beside her. ‘No you haven’t Huia.’

Huia turned her head in time for Jacques to see her face contort into anguish as she burst into tears. Suddenly he had pushed into Huia’s circle of children and had his arm round her shoulder. He drew her towards him as she buried her face into his chest to hide her tears. ‘What’s the matter Huia? Is baby coming?’

Huia shook her head and Jacques felt her body shaking in turmoil like an earthquake before a volcanic eruption. Then an eruption did occur. It was a spontaneous eruption of chatter from the children.’

He made a decision and stood up. ‘Children! Children! Children!’ He held his hands up for silence and waited while the chatter stopped. ‘Huia is feeling unwell. Are any of you strong enough to help me pull the outrigger down the beach.’ Every hand shot up amidst shouts of “Me! Me! Me!” Jacques held his hands up for silence. ‘You can all help and go home early today but come back as usual tomorrow. There will be no swimming classes today.’

For a brief moment Jacques and Huia were alone as the children ran down the beach to pull the outrigger into the tide.

‘You didn’t need to do that Jacques.’

‘I think I did. And now I’m going to take you round to the hospital and you can tell me all about it on the way.’

‘What if some of the children want to go as well?’

‘Then I’ll tell them they can’t on this occasion.’

Jacques stood up and held out his hand to help Huia to her feet. As Huia stood she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and sniffed. ‘Jacques I thought you told the kids there was no swimming today.’

Jacques turned his head to see what Huia was looking at. The outrigger was already floating and the children were in the water. One of them had grabbed a paddle and was busy splashing the others with it while the others were retaliating with hands and feet.

Jacques smiled at Huia with what he hoped was a reassuring smile. ‘Come on Huia we’d better get down there before the canoe ends up full of kids and water. I’m not sure which will be the harder to get out.’

‘It’s good to see the kids playing together isn’t it Jacques. Every one of them has been dished out more than enough trauma to last several lifetimes.’

‘Given half a chance kids are quite resilient aren’t they Huia.’

Huia nodded. ‘I guess they’ve had to be.’ She paused before adding, ‘But I wish I was.’

As they walked towards the water’s edge, Jacques caught hold of Huia’s hand. ‘I said, “Given half a chance.” It’s you and the rest of *Rurenga’s* crew who have given them that chance Huia. You’re wasting your time trying to fool me into believing you lack resilience. If that was the case you’d have given up years ago, and a lot of those kids would be dead by now. It’s your courage that’s kept them alive.’

‘I’m not courageous Jacques, I get scared.’

‘Being afraid is no indication of lack of courage; the reverse is true. Courageous people act in the face of fear but without fear courage has nowhere to go. It becomes an illusion.’

‘Look at me now Jacques. I’m having a baby and...’

‘And you’re not telling me the whole story, are you Huia?’

They reached the shore, the canoe was floating and three children were already sitting in it. Jacques and Huia paddling in calf deep water were splashed and greeted with a shout of, ‘Us come?’ from one of the children.

‘Not this time kids.’ He lifted the wet children out. ‘Huia’s unwell and I’m going to take her to the hospital.’

‘We could help paddle. Is baby coming?’ That came from one of the twins and Jacques could never tell them apart.’

He decided to play safe with his answer by not using their names. ‘Not yet boys but I don’t think it’ll be long.’

‘It better not be.’ Huia added in an aside to Jacques.

Jacques helped Huia into the canoe. She sat on a thwart gripping the side of the hull as Jacques climbed aboard and standing, picked up the pole, to push the outrigger off the beach. But he needn’t have bothered as a dozen of the children up to their thighs in water did the work for him. They briefly grounded on clumps of brain coral and several strands of staghorn were snapped off before they found deeper water. Two of the boys were hanging on the back as Jacques poled them towards the main channel into the inner lagoon.

Jacques turned. ‘You have to go back now boys.’

He was met with a cry as wild and forlorn as a gull, ‘It’s too far.’

As Jacques pondered whether he should turn round and tow them back or continue taking Huia to the hospital Huia intervened. ‘You’d better help them aboard Jacques. I know they’re both swimmers but I don’t know how good they are. They’re probably out of their depth.’

Jacques put the pole down and kneeling caught the boys by the hand one at a time and dragged them aboard while Huia moved to the other side of the canoe to balance it. As soon as they were aboard, and without being told, both boys picked up a paddle each. Leaving the pole in the canoe

Jacques picked up a paddle and saw Huia do the same. They paddled towards the entrance to the inner lagoon and the hospital. Ripples on the surface danced to the whispering of the south easterly trades. A school of flying fish broke the surface, skimmed fifty metres beyond the bow of the outrigger and vanished into the tide.

Jacques looked at Huia's hair rippling in the morning breeze and the rhythmic movement of her shoulders as she paddled to the pulse beat of the canoe. 'You shouldn't be doing this just now Huia.'

'Do you think it might make baby come early?' She asked and Jacques thought he detected a returning imp-of-mischief in her voice. Perhaps this steady paddling and the sleek sheen of the sea spreading from the bow would leave behind the dangerous company her mind had been keeping. Should he bring up the subject that was troubling her or hope it would sink into the wake astern? As he hesitated on the brink Huia resolved his dilemma.

'Jacques, do you believe in premonitions?'

'Not if you mean what I think you mean, Huia. I don't believe anyone can foretell random events in the future. But we can predict things like the time of the next high-tide because tides follow well understood natural laws.' He hesitated for a single breath before continuing. 'What sort of premonition did you have in mind?' He'd done it now and opened up the subject. 'What premonitions have you been having Huia?'

'It isn't my premonition, it's Chris's.'

'Chris's premonitions! Chris is an educated man! He's a medical doctor for God's sake. I can't believe he's into fortune telling and superstition. These are diametrically opposed to the scientific methods of modern medicine.'

'Oh! Chris says it's all rubbish and it doesn't apply to me. But I still think he believes it just a little bit.'

'What are you talking about Huia? You haven't told me half the story yet.'

‘It started a long time ago when Chris was fourteen. I wasn’t even born then. He was in love with a fourteen-year-old Tongan girl. Her parents forbade them to meet. But they did meet in a tropical cyclone under some palm trees. A coconut fell and she died a week later of head injuries. To punish him her Mother and Grandmother took Chris aside and told him he would never have any children because his wife would die in childbirth. I’m overdue with Chris’s baby. Do you think it’s possible that...’

‘I do not Huia. There’s no possible way of predicting such things decades into the future. It’s total fantasy. Even allowing for the fact Chris was at an impressionable age I’m surprised he even repeated such superstitious nonsense. Ridicule is the only rational response to such rubbish.’

Huia nodded and continued with her paddling. ‘He was in a de facto relationship with Rachael for fourteen years. He made a point of neither marrying her nor making her pregnant.’

‘There could be many reasons for that Huia which don’t rely on a belief in the supernatural. The fact he is now your partner, not Rachael’s, and has chosen to trust you, instead of her, with both his own happiness and his child should suggest one plausible explanation.’

‘It’s good talking to you Jacques.’

‘It would be abnormal for a woman not to feel apprehensive before the birth of a child – especially a first child. With your lifestyle you are probably fitter than most women. You are an ideal age and in a loving relationship. And you have your own modern hospital a few dozen paddle-strokes away. How many other women have those advantages Huia? I can’t imagine anyone more likely to have a straight forward delivery, than you.’

‘Baby is nearly two weeks late.’

‘I’m not a medical doctor Huia but I do know babies don’t come with calendars and wristwatches attached. Half



of them arrive early and the other half late. Two weeks either way isn't unusual.'

Jacques decided to try and move the conversation on to something more positive. 'Do you know if baby is a boy or a girl.'

'No and I don't want to know. I want us both to have a surprise.'

'How about names? Have you been going through books of babies' names?'

'Yes but they're still names in a book. They aren't our baby's name.'

'I know. Nothing is ever special enough is it? Every parent has that dilemma because their new baby is the most precious thing they own.' Jacques was looking at the back of Huia's head. He wished she'd turn to face him while he was trying to sense her reaction. Paddles clattered behind him. The outrigger lurched and the trim of the vessel changed. They still had a hundred metres to go to reach the jetty. The two boys dived in one after the other and within moments were swimming strongly towards the beach. At last Huia turned her face to look astern. But it was turned towards the boys not him. He saw her face lit up in a grin like the moon breaking through wind-torn tatters of clouds. He concluded the boy's trickery had been a far better medicine to dispel her dark tapestry of disaster than anything he had said. By the time Jacques had tied the canoe up to the jetty and helped Huia ashore both boys were running up the beach and waving to them.

## *CHAPTER 12*

As Huia and Jacques climbed the hospital steps Susan and Harry were emerging from inside. Standing in the shade of the balcony Susan smiled at Huia. ‘Can’t be long now Huia. Have you got a list of names sorted out yet?’

Huia shook her head. ‘Not yet Susan. Chris and I could name several dozen babies if they belonged to someone else but we’re having a lot more difficulty with our baby.’

‘Of course you are but at least you only have to find his or her first name; that’s fun. When I had Huhana it was a bit of a lottery what family-name she should have, so I decided she might as well use mine - to avoid errors.’

‘Huhana’s never said anything about it. Doesn’t she know who her father is?’

‘Well I sure as hell haven’t a clue. It was party-time, Huia! Even if I knew their names at the time right now...’ Susan shrugged and left the sentence unfinished.

Harry cut in. ‘Huia I’ve just been telling Jacques we’ve just decoded another message from Gary and Ann. That’s our friends from Jakarta. Ann is a geneticist and Gary is a pharmacist. They’re still working on the bacteria I discovered in the gut of the shell-fish.’

‘Do the bacteria harm the shell-fish?’ Huia asked.

‘It doesn’t appear to. In fact the bacteria and the shell fish both benefit. It’s what they call a symbiotic relationship.’

‘How does that work?’

‘The bacteria can increase their numbers quite rapidly inside the gut of the shellfish because the shellfish are filter feeders and so are constantly providing nutrients for the bacteria. Now comes the interesting bit that I managed to discover by talking to a marine biologist at the university. There’s a species of fish living in the reef that the locals call hulimala. It’s got a biological name but I can’t remember what it is. Quite a number of fish change gender when they grow. In New Zealand our blue-cod for example are all born female and change to male as they get bigger. Well hulimala are all born male and change to female when they get to about thirty centimetres in length. That’s about the right size to get the shellfish in their mouth and start feeding on them. If they eat excessive amounts, bacteria in the gut cause the hulimala to fail to produce male offspring. But at hatching all their offspring are male. So the bacteria biologically limit the reproductive ability of those hulimala which predate excessively on these particular shellfish.’

‘So the bacteria attack the reproductive ability of the shellfish’s predators, even when the predators are human.’

‘Exactly Huia, Nature can be quite cunning can’t it. And that’s what Ann and Gary are hoping to exploit.’

‘So do you know what are they’re hoping to achieve?’ Huia asked.

Harry nodded. ‘I think I might have a bit of an idea but there are many facets to their research. For example, Gary has mixed a yeast-like product with the bacteria to produce

a stock-feed additive for roosters so they will only produce female chicks for eventual egg production. So they'll cut out the wastage and save having to destroy the male chicks. The additive is being manufactured under licence in Malaysia for poultry breeders. Some of it is used within Malaysia. The rest is distributed by a company in Singapore. There are even more exciting developments that are enabling Ann to make big advances in an extension of the research work she and others have been working on for years.'

'What was she working on?'

'Cervical cancer. She had been investigating the differences between healthy cells and cancerous ones, with the object of finding better methods of treating it. This isn't my field but I understand traditional methods of fighting cancer usually involve one or more of three possibilities. Surgery to cut away the cancerous cells, chemotherapy which is a poison which kills the cancerous cells more effectively than live cells and radio-therapy which uses radiation to kill the cancerous cells. The treatments all cause significant trauma to the patients.'

'Do you know what is different about Ann's methods?'

'Ann got very excited about the bacteria's ability to be so selective in what it attacks. Apparently the precision of its attack makes it invaluable. She says it's like a musician suddenly having a finely tuned instrument when none had previously been available.'

'How does that help?'

'The bacteria in the shellfish had no noticeable effects except destroying male chromosomes in sperm. Now, supposing instead of focusing its attack on the male chromosomes it could be genetically changed to attack cancer cells instead.'

'Is that what Ann is doing?'

'It's one of the things she working on. I understand she needs large amounts of computing power to decode the bacteria's DNA and change it. Or to use her analogy it's

like changing the tone of a musical instrument to a different note. But I suspect it's a lot more complex than that and it's not my field. I'd rather she explained it when they arrive - in case I've got it wrong.'

'When they arrive!' Huia exclaimed. 'They're on their way out here?'

'It's a possibility. It's something we've talked about, Huia. But there are complications - like lack of research facilities here.'

'If they're doing their work in Jakarta wouldn't it be easier to finish it there, rather than having to set up everything here?'

'Yes much easier if it wasn't for ethics-committees, form-filling, funding problems, and religious clerics.'

'I thought you said they had already had their research funding cut because Ann supported Jacques on TV.'

Harry screwed up his face and shook his head. 'Well they did and they didn't.'

Huia grinned. 'That sounds decisive!'

'In Indonesia, as in most Muslim countries, they are having difficulty separating the roles of state and religion. So after the adverse publicity Jacques received and dubious religious implications of Gary and Ann's research their grant was totally withdrawn. And it was seen by the public to have been withdrawn. Prof. Patel chaired the research committee and made sure their funding-cut became publicised in the media. But what the media didn't know, and I didn't know for quite a time, was the fact he quietly took over their research grant, nominally for his own research. Which in practice meant Gary and Ann continued their research under Prof. Patel's "guidance" but he gave them a total free hand. As their work wasn't in his field he didn't have any choice except participating in a superficial way. But it worked out well. Prof. Patel of course would take all the "credit or blame" for their work if it became public knowledge, and Gary and Ann were freed up from form-filling, ethics-

committee interference and research-committee meetings. The only thing those committees ever agree on is to delay making a decision until the next committee meeting. So with Prof. Patel telling the committees whatever they wanted to hear – as long as it wasn't the truth – Gary and Ann made exceptionally fast progress particularly as they linked up on the net with overseas research workers. Also they used some of the largest computers in America and Germany on a contract-basis to do their analysis. That way they avoided the ethics-committees in the USA and Germany as well.'

'And you started it all Grandad.'

Harry shook his head. 'That's a bit like saying the cave man who invented the wheel was responsible for the development of a modern motor car. I made some observations and Gary and Ann turned those observations into research projects that hopefully will have tangible results. But there's been a set back.'

'Do you know the problem, Grandad?'

'Yes. Prof. Patel had a heart attack over a month ago and has since died. Carrying on with her research when it was believed her funding had been cut has infuriated religious clerics. Ann and Gary have made a lot of enemies in Jakarta. Now someone else has taken over Prof. Patel's job. Need I say more.'

'So might they have to stop their research, Grandad?'

Jacques answered for Harry. 'If you knew Ann you wouldn't ask that question, Huia. To quote Gary, "When something turns-her-on, she's about as single-minded as a bitch on heat." And I don't think he's exaggerating. She'll often get up at two or three o'clock in the morning to write down the concepts which have been fermenting in her mind while she's sleeping.'

Harry continued. 'Gary and Ann work well together. Ann is the innovator and Gary is methodical. No error or alternative-solution will get past him...'

Jacques interjected. ‘If you think of them an automatic motor car, Ann is the accelerator and Gary is the brake. Ann, by herself, would crash at the first bend in the road and Gary, by himself, would never get going. But together they make an unbeatable research team.’

Harry continued. ‘Ann is a bit of a “street-fighter”. When her funding was cut for the second time following Prof. Patel’s death she decided to get the support of the wider scientific community, and pile the pressure on Jakarta and the clerics. So she put a research paper into an international medical conference in Singapore. She’s at the conference right now and is presenting her paper at three o’clock tomorrow, Singapore time. In the meantime Gary has stayed in Jakarta and has contacted media outlets via the Internet to get support from women’s groups to ensure promising research on cervical cancer isn’t buried. I think you’ll find there will be a lot of media interest in that conference and in Ann’s research paper. I’ve had a look on the net myself. Gary has done an amazing job of publicising Ann’s work. But it’s one thing, to get public interest and another to get public finance. If everything else fails they are hoping to come here to complete their research without being hampered by outside interference. But even that wouldn’t be without complications.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘Leaving their research project behind would be unthinkable to Ann. But if they bring it they’ll have to bring more than just a tee-shirt and shorts.’

‘Do you know what sort of things they’ll need?’

‘Not exactly! The facilities they have been using belong to the university and Jakarta hospital, not Gary and Ann. So we’ll have to try and obtain the equipment they need prior to their arrival. It’s no good them arriving with samples and having nowhere to put them, or having to wait months for something to arrive.’

‘How will we know what to buy Grandad?’

‘We don’t Huia. It’s not possible or desirable trying to duplicate the Jakarta facilities. Ann is convinced there are now better and cheaper ways of achieving the same thing. Ann and Gary have just been in Europe visiting companies in Germany and Switzerland trying to find out what equipment is available and what it’ll cost us.’

‘We can’t afford to buy a lot of expensive equipment. We are only getting our regular income from Oswald’s church and that’s all earmarked. We have heaps of other priorities. You should talk to Tanya. We’d like to put a tap water into each of the houses in the village. The hospital needs more medical supplies. Our renewable energy project will enable us to reduce costs on diesel and make future savings. *Rurenga* has to have a refit or we won’t be able to provide our medical service to the islands. We won’t turn away people who desperately need...’

‘Steady on Huia. No one said anything about curtailing your work here.’

‘Do you know how much this equipment is likely to cost?’

‘No I don’t know Huia. That’s why Ann and Gary have been to Europe to find out what’s available and how much it will cost to purchase and install. All I know at this stage is that it will be substantial. We’ll have a better idea when we hear from Ann. I’m hopeful Ann and Gary will be able to make a contribution from their own resources. They are also getting some income coming in from Gary’s rooster stock-feed project. If it became necessary I could sail *Fool’s Gold* to Darwin and sell her to raise some cash. Gary and Ann wouldn’t want you to curtail any of your other projects. Quite the contrary, I’ve been telling them about it, and they want to make a contribution.’



Jacques interrupted. 'I've got some money in Jakarta and some investments in France. I'd be quite happy to contribute what I can. I'm sure it's what Yvette would have wanted me to do. In fact I'd see a contribution to medical science as a wonderful memorial to Yvette.'

## CHAPTER 13

Harry, Susan, and Jacques sat round the computer as Huhana brought up the live-transmission from the medical conference in Singapore. They chatted as previous speakers became a background drone until suddenly out of the noise the words, they were waiting for, entered their consciousness.

‘I’d like to present to you our next speaker, Dr. Ann Siers from Jakarta University who will be presenting her paper entitled, *The use of Bacteria for the Clinical treatment of Cervical Carcinomas*.’ He held out his hand. ‘Dr. Siers.’

The camera focused on her as she picked up the microphone. She was wearing a plain red dress, a pearl necklace and matching pearl earrings. Jacques noticed she had her hair cut shorter since the last time he saw her. No one spoke as she presented her paper. Several times the camera traversed the audience. Clearly everyone was captivated by

her delivery. Harry saw several heads nodding in agreement as she made various points. She finished her delivery as the twenty-minute buzzer went.

The presenter stepped forward. 'Thank you for that fascinating paper Doctor Siers. We now have five minutes for question time.' The camera traversed the audience, as four hands were raised. The presenter pointed to a woman near the front.

She introduced herself. 'Dr. Jenny Metcalf from Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Have any trials been conducted on live patients?'

'No. But experimental results have been obtained from mice, as I outlined in my paper, and further tests have been carried out under laboratory conditions on carcinomas after they have been surgically removed from patients. But no patient has yet been treated using this technique. This is due to lack of medical clearance and lack of funding to complete the research work.'

A woman in the second row back stood up and the presenter pointed to her.

'Dr. Heather Aitkin from Cape Town. In your paper you only discussed the possibility of using this technique for cervical cancer. Could it also be used for other carcinomas?'

Ann nodded her head. 'It is possible but I've done no research on other carcinomas so have no experimental data available. Perhaps you would like to investigate the technique.'

The presenter stepped forward again and pointed to a bearded man at the back of the room who introduced himself.

'Dr. Vladimir Potropov from St Petersburg. As the treatment you propose is largely non-invasive, would it not be possible to administer your bacteria on a trial basis which would not preclude the use of conventional techniques? Would not the subsequent surgical removal of the carcinoma be an advantage to you?'

Ann smiled. ‘Yes to both questions but it has not been done yet.’

Dr. Vladimir continued. ‘One additional question please. Could these bacteria you have isolated be made available for us to verify your medical claims?’

Ann smiled again. ‘Yes again Doctor. If you see me after the meeting I will take down your details and get a sample to you.’ Ann looked up before adding, ‘And that applies to anyone else who is interested.’

The presenter pointed to the middle of the hall.

‘Dr. Klaus Metz from Hamburg. If your procedure is effective there would be considerable financial gain to be made. Why are you offering to give away live samples of your bacteria, which I imagine could be reproduced in a laboratory, without patent protection, instead of seeking to obtain the financial benefit for Jakarta...’

Ann didn’t let him finish. ‘Because Doctor I’ve run out of funding, women are suffering and whenever I shake hands with commercial backers I need to count my fingers afterwards. So I’m saying, *Bugger the boss I’m going to pour the concrete anyway.*’

The whole room exploded in a spontaneous uproar of clapping and Ann got a standing ovation. It was several minutes before the presenter could silence the buzz of enthusiasm to enable him to present the next speaker.

Simultaneously Harry slapped his hand on the table. ‘Brilliant! That little gem’s got her on side with everyone at the conference.’

Huhana logged off, and added, ‘Tomorrow I’ll try and get a newspaper report off the web on the first day of the conference and see if they mention Ann’s paper.’

Harry looked up at Huhana. ‘I imagine most of the reporters wouldn’t understand a word of what was being said by the delegates. Most of them have studied the humanities at university and carry ignorance of science and mathematics as a badge-of-honour. But every one of

them would pick up on Ann's finishing statement. And I guess most of them will have enough problems with their own bosses to completely understand Ann's sentiments. My guess is the papers will concentrate on Ann's presentation to the exclusion of most of the other participants.'

The following morning Jacques, Harry, and Susan gathered round the computer as Huhana brought up the relevant news item. Harry grinned when he saw the headline.

*“BUGGER THE BOSS I'M GOING TO POUR  
THE CONCRETE ANYWAY.”*

These “words of frustration” were spoken yesterday by Dr. Ann Siers at the International Medical Conference. They were in response to a question from Dr. Klaus Metz. Dr. Siers has developed a non-invasive treatment for cervical cancer using little known bacteria obtained from the gut of a shellfish found in Indonesian waters. She is experiencing difficulty getting adequate funding and, despite the potential financial benefits that could accrue from patent rights, is prepared to make her technology freely available world-wide.

Replying to Dr. Heather Aitkin from Cape Town in South Africa Dr. Siers stated that her procedure could potentially be used to treat other forms of cancer but lack of research finance was limiting her ability to carry out the necessary work. To date the tests carried out on rodents and on surgically removed human tissue have given positive results. But more research is needed. She hoped other researchers would continue with the investigation. The conference delegates gave Dr. Siers a standing ovation at the completion of her presentation.

Later Dr. Siers explained that research-committee procrastination was making it impossible for her to complete her development. And in the meantime cancer victims were suffering needlessly.

The conference is continuing for a further four days with speakers from around the world.

Four days later as the dawn sky changed from purple to gold the floating jetty swayed in time to the rhythm of Huhana's feet as she ran down the floating jetty towards *Fool's Gold*. She stepped over the rail and into the cockpit. Pulling back the forward hatch she called into the darkened interior.

'Jacques, Harry, Susan, I've just received an email from Gary. Ann and Ingrid have gone missing.'

Jacques appeared in the companionway. Huhana moved back from the hatch as Jacques climbed the steps into the cockpit. Simultaneously the aft hatch slid back. Susan and Harry emerged from the aft cabin.

'What did you say? Jacques asked.

Huhana, still breathless from running down the jetty, repeated herself. 'I've just received an email from Gary. Ann and Ingrid have both gone missing. I presume Ingrid is their daughter.'

'Yes she's eleven and at boarding school in Baltimore, but stays with her widowed grandmother at weekends in a house on Chesapeake Bay and flies out to Jakarta for the holidays.' Jacques replied.

'Apparently her headmaster has just rung up and said Ingrid went missing last night and her Grandmother doesn't know where she is. She is frantic and has informed the State police but neither Gary nor the US police can contact Ann.'

'Isn't Ann still at the conference?' Susan asked.

'She was originally supposed to be there until tonight. But she rang Gary and said she'd had a potential offer of research funding from Australia. They have offered to pay business class air fares for her to go to Cairns to visit their research facilities. She was supposed to ring Gary again when she got to Cairns but he's heard nothing. He's tried ringing her hotel in Singapore but they said she had checked out. At the Conference they have put out calls for her over

the speakers but she hasn't responded. No one there seems to know anything. Since then Australian immigration have confirmed she entered the country at Cairns International Airport on her New Zealand passport as a tourist and intended to stay in Australia for ten days. But she hasn't checked in at her hotel in Cairns where she was supposed to be staying. Her Visa card has had no deductions. So he rang the Australian Police who have now listed her as a missing person.'

A single thought passed through their minds. "Ann and Ingrid! Could it be coincidence?"

As if in answer to the unspoken question, Huhana continued. 'Apparently the American State police are working on the scenario that Ann may have arranged to have her daughter abducted or that Gary has arranged for both of them to be abducted because of an imagined family dispute.' Huhana raised her hands in a despairing gesture.

'That's crap! The police are going to be more of a hindrance than a help, aren't they?' Susan added.

'The two things are unrelated aren't they?' Jacques asked.

Harry was the first to speak. 'I'm not convinced we are talking about two things. I think we're talking about three or more things:- Ann's presentation, her own disappearance and her daughter's disappearance. Look at it this way. Ann's possible cancer cure could potentially be worth a king's ransom if it's the success we anticipate. Right now most of the information is in Ann's head. Without Ann the possibility doesn't exist. She was on the point of making it available worldwide on a limited trial basis. Did I say a king's ransom? For cancer patients and their families Ann is worth far more than a king's ransom. And I'd guess a ransom note won't be far away. Once it hits the headlines even if governments refuse to pay ransom demands, patient's families worldwide would collectively find whatever was being asked. But that's not the finish of it.'

Susan cut in. ‘Many companies have financial investments in existing cancer remedies. They may see Ann’s research as a threat. They’d have a vested interest in suppressing it and...’

‘If that was the motivation Susan, why abduct Ann and Ingrid? Company policy would probably want to buy her out by offering her research grants she couldn’t refuse, and if her technique works as well as she thinks it will, they’d legally secure the market and end up making even more money.’

‘If there’s a link between Ann’s research and Ann’s disappearance what’s it got to do with Ann’s daughter?’ Huhana asked.

‘Ann will comply with whatever her captors ask if Ingrid’s life is in danger. Everyone has their price and Ann’s price is her daughter’s welfare.’ Harry added.

‘Could there be another innocent explanation?’ Jacques asked. ‘Following Ann’s presentation might she have had another invite from...’

‘Do you see her going anywhere different without letting Gary know?’ Susan asked.

Jacques paused and shook his head. ‘No I don’t.’ Lowering his voice as if asking the next question was a precursor of ill omen he asked the question they had all pondered. ‘Has Gary tried ringing the Cairns hospitals?’

Huhana answered. ‘Yes, and so have the Australian police. She’s not in hospital.’

Jacques decided the subject had to be introduced. ‘So they have listed her as having been...’ He paused before completing the changed sentence. ‘...a missing person?’ He realised he wasn’t prepared to use the word “abducted”.

Harry added. ‘One advantage is the fact Australian police are probably more responsive when it’s an overseas visitor who is...’ He too was about to say “Abducted” but replaced it with “Goes missing”. He decided to continue with a reasonable facsimile of a positive thought in the hope



no one would realise it was counterfeit. He continued. 'I imagine the Singapore police will have already obtained all the delegates' names and addresses from the Registrar and all the details of the other hotel guests.' Resignation returned and crept into his voice as he added, 'Police worldwide are good at making lists.' He couldn't resist adding, 'Even if they don't know what to do with them once they have made them.'

'If we can find Ann I'd guess we'll get a few clues about Ingrid's disappearance.' Susan observed.

'There's something else which worries me.' Harry observed. 'Abducting Ann between Singapore and Australia and Ingrid in Baltimore at the same time indicates a degree of planning at an international level. I don't see it could possibly have been done as a spontaneous response to Ann's research paper. Weeks of planning would have been needed. The reason for abducting Ann and Ingrid, if that proves to be the case, could have nothing to do with her research. Doing it immediately after Ann's presentation could be an attempt to divert attention from the true reasons for targeting them.'

Suspecting the answer Jacques asked, 'What motivations are you talking about Harry?'

'A religious motivation resulting from her support for your book Jacques. Think about it. If the abductions had taken place in Jakarta following the controversy and Ann's appearance on TV it wouldn't be difficult for even the police to know where to start looking. But these abductions didn't take place in Jakarta or even in Indonesia, they happened in Australia and the USA. So why would anyone think of starting investigations in Indonesia or even imagining the planning for the whole venture started in Jakarta? Any potential investigation would be met with blank looks, denials and a quagmire for any foreign investigations. There's another thing that has been bugging me for a while. I feel we three managed to escape from Indonesia too easily.'

Either we were very lucky or no serious attempt was made to catch us. Do you think it's likely someone was greatly relieved to find us gone, especially after Yvette's murder. Perhaps that person wants to ensure none of us return?'

There was a pause while everyone pondered the implications of Harry's suggestion. Huhana broke the silence. 'Do you want to see the emails?'

They nodded. The decision was simultaneous. Without a word being spoken they stepped ashore from *Fool's Gold*. Together they made their way along the jetty toward the communications room in the hospital. They hastened in silence. The floating jetty, moving beneath their tread, became the symbol of a faltering future. The fluffy white clouds hovering over the island seemed to be the harbinger of a gathering storm. They had to remind themselves they were focused on Ann's disappearance, and she had only disappeared. So there was no need to make any mental reference to Yvette despite the lingering wayward thoughts which hovered in their subconscious as they tried to think what possible encouragement they could send to Gary, as if some quirk or twist of words could make his pain less virulent. Ann and Ingrid had been the solid core of his life. Others, who didn't know Gary, might resort to worn out clichés or religious incantations but they realised these would be dangerous company for Gary and sound as doom-laden as a judge's verdict.

Gathering round Huhana's computer they read Gary's emails. She had faithfully reported everything Gary had said. They re-read the messages in the hope they could extract any additional detail they had previously missed. There was nothing. Any additional implication existed only in their imagination not in anything Gary had written. Precise as ever, and despite his personal anguish, Gary had left no word of ambiguity in his sentences.

An hour later they were still trying to compose a reply. Fresh sentences were being constructed as rapidly as recent ones were being deleted. Having convinced themselves no adequate response was possible they were equally convinced their reply was of paramount importance. Emotional adjectives tumbled under the relentless advance of the delete button.

An ocean away Gary resolved their dilemma as he typed a fresh message and clicked on the send icon. It read. *I have just received a ransom note asking for five million dollars to be paid in advance for the safe return of Ann and Ingrid. As you know I don't have anything like that much money.*

Harry leaned forward and typed. *Suggest you reply that you need proof Ann and Ingrid are both safe before you will be able to raise the money demanded.* Harry looked up at the others. 'OK with everyone if I send that?'

They all nodded.

## CHAPTER 14

A day later Huhana found Harry, Susan and Jacques aboard *Fool's Gold*. Excitement bubbled over as she explained. 'I've just recorded a video from Gary via our satellite link. He's received a clip from Ann.'

Within seconds they were hurrying towards the communication room. They clustered round the computer as Huhana brought the video clip onto the screen.

Ann was standing on a flat beach with the sun on her face and her back towards the sea. Harry made the comment. 'That's very interesting she's standing on the sand barefoot. She usually has her hair tied up but now she has it loose. That's showing a bit of foresight.'

No one asked why, as Ann started speaking.

'My name is Ann Spiers. I have been abducted but I am fit and well and I am being treated with respect. I do however have to co-operate.'

Ann put her left hand over her eyes to shade them from the sun and moved side-ways until she found she could look towards the camera without looking into the sun. Harry grinned, 'Well done Ann.' and commented. 'The other set of footprints on the sand, presumably belong to the cameraman. From the size of the prints I'd be reasonably sure they belong to a man. Did you notice the sole of the footprint has no tread, suggesting he's probably wearing leather shoes? That's unusual footwear for the beach so perhaps he's a city gent and not too familiar with coastal or rural ways. Notice too how he has been walking with his toes turned out. That's a townie's way of walking countrymen and athletes normally leave straight footprints.'

Ann continued. 'They tell me, although I have no means of verifying it, that my daughter Ingrid has also been abducted. Her wellbeing depends on my behaviour. I would not be at liberty to tell you where I am even if I knew. Neither can I tell you the names of either of my captors.'

Harry cut in, 'Either! There are two of them. Thanks for that Ann.'

Ann continued, 'At this moment there is a pistol pointing at me and if I make any attempt to disclose my whereabouts they might use it. This sounds frightening but I must repeat I am being well cared for. My other captor even asked me what time I usually have breakfast and what I wanted for breakfast. I told him I usually have breakfast at 7.30...'

Harry interjected again. 'They are both male.'

Ann continued, 'I said I wanted bacon and two sunny-side-up eggs with toast and coffee. One difference between being here and at home is the fact he cooked it for me and I didn't have to do it myself. The other difference is the fact I'm eating my meals on a balcony, twenty metres directly above the damp sand at the top of the beach. It comes complete with magnificent views over the sea. As I ate my breakfast I couldn't help wondering if you were having the same thing Gary, at the same time, until I realised with the

time difference you wouldn't be getting yours for another two-and-a-half hours. I felt robbed because I wanted to imagine I was having breakfast with you as we always do.'

'Harry interjected, 'Clever girl!'

Ann continued. 'My captors have just downloaded a copy of today's New York Times. They have asked me to read it and tell you what it says so that you will know this message was not made days ago and that at this moment I am alive and well.'

Ann continued. 'The headline read,

“NEW YORK ROCKED BY UNDERGROUND  
EXPLOSION.”

As Ann started to relate the newspaper article she spoke with a slightly lowered voice and with a light breeze blowing across the camera it was getting hard to hear her words. The camera moved in closer until only her head and shoulders were visible on the screen. At that moment Ann hesitated and scratched her right ear with her left hand.

Harry leaned forward on his seat with excitement, 'Good girl! Did you see that!'

Ann continued. 'The article goes on to say an explosion in the sewers lifted manhole covers in downtown New York. Traffic problems resulted when emergency services had to replace them. One elderly man injured his ankle and wrist when he fell but no other injuries occurred. Republican Senator George... someone or other – sorry I can't remember his name – said the explosion was due to a failed Islamic terrorist plot to destroy the city and the city was negligent in not providing adequate security for the sewerage system. He is demanding additional surveillance. Later the City Mayor said he had received an engineers' report stating that the explosion had been the result of a partial collapse of the ageing underground network and the resulting blockage caused a methane build up which ignited and exploded.'

The Senator claimed the mayor was attempting to cover up both a terrorist plot and his own inadequacy in providing security to the underground network.'

Ann continued. 'I think that should be enough to indicate I have read today's New York Times and this is not a pre-recorded message. It should be easy enough for you to check. If you get this message Gary and Ingrid I want you to know I miss you both very much and I am going to cooperate with my captors in every way I can so I can get back to you both as soon as possible. Last night I was standing on the balcony and watched the Sun's orb just touch the horizon. I glanced at my watch. It was exactly six thirty and I realised what a long night I would have without you, Gary. Please let Harry know you have seen this video clip. I miss him as well. Love you all.'

The screen went blank.

Harry jumped up exploding with excitement. 'They've probably decided treating her decently will make her more amenable. Huhana can you get an urgent message to Gary and ask him for Ann's exact height?'

Huhana looked puzzled. 'Yes OK but...'

Harry didn't let her finish. 'Did you see that point where she scratched her ear? Can you get a print of that and also a selection of pictures of her on the beach? I'm particularly interested in pictures of her that include her feet. I'd like prints from before and after she moved because she had the sun in her eyes. As soon as you can get me those I'm going to start work. Ann's brilliant, she's outwitting them! I'm going back to *Fool's Gold* right now. I've got a lot of work to do. Bring all that stuff down to me as soon as you get them, especially Ann's height, it's very important.' With that he got up and left the room leaving the others with puzzled expressions on their faces.

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The filming had taken place about four hours previously and when it was finished Ann had turned back up the beach towards the solitary house overlooking the bay. At the top of the beach she picked up her shoes and put them on.

‘Why did you take your shoes off?’ Karl asked.

‘Oh! I just like walking on sand in my bare feet, it’s so sensual. I just like feeling the sand squiggling between my toes.’

She just received a “Huh!” in reply, so presumably he hadn’t considered she might have had any ulterior motives.

‘Who is Harry?’

‘Just a friend.’

‘Do you mean a lover?’

‘A lover! Good lord no! He’s old enough to be my grandfather. I’m thirty-five but he still worries about me as if I was ten-years-old. He’s just a gentle old man who likes collecting seashells. Gary and I have known him for years.’

‘Huh!’

The path became stony as they climbed up towards the house and the shade under the veranda. She would have liked to walk down to the sea and at least paddle in the water. The sun was hot. Obviously Karl wanted to get back to the shade and the air-conditioning. This was hardly surprising as he was wearing a flamboyant red jacket to match his red spotted bow tie.

Karl carried the camera. Ann had exaggerated when she said a gun was being pointed at her. She knew a gun was available because she had seen it but it had remained in Karl’s inside jacket pocket the whole time. It could be used, but she’d decided she would be of no value dead; so hopefully she wasn’t in any immediate danger. If they’d wanted to kill her they could have done it earlier. If Karl thought she’d said the wrong thing her recording would have been edited, or not transmitted at all, and she would have lost the opportunity to give any indication where she was. At least she had been able to warn Harry that



one of her abductors carried a gun. Probably they would have guessed that anyway but at least she had managed to confirm it. Hopefully Harry might be able to work out where she was from the clues she had given. Fortunately Karl imagined himself the sharpest knife in the draw and he seemed oblivious to her subterfuge. She had come to the conclusion he only looked intelligent in a mirror. And fortunately for the mirror it didn't have to respond to his stink of after-shave. She wondered whether he had put it on for her benefit or to cover up a stinking self-image.

Ann bit her lip. Even if Harry could work out where she was, that would only be the beginning of the problems. Karl had told her Ingrid had been abducted, somehow she would need to get confirmation of that, if it was true. Even the fact that he knew her name was ominous.

As Ann picked her way over the rocky ground beyond the beach her mind started over-reaching her immediate problems. "I can't consider doing anything which would leave Ingrid vulnerable. Would they see Ingrid as expendable? If Harry and the others tried to rescue me... Hell! I'm getting too far ahead of myself. Harry might not even pick up on the clues I've given him, and if he doesn't, is anyone else likely to work it out..." She paused and took three deep breaths.

"Take things slowly Ann. It's like picking my way up the path. One step at a time! Gary's not here to bring me back to reality." But her mind refused to stay inactive. If Harry worked out where she was from her clues that would only be the start of the problems. If Harry came, it would be by sea. But she had been dismayed the first time she saw the beach. The bay was a disaster. Breaking combers on the outer reef drained into a shallow crosshatched inner reef. "If I'm ever going to escape from here, I'm sure it'll be by sea. But could a canoe or outrigger get through that lot with the tide swirling through gaps in the reef?"

The answer lay on the seabed inside the bay. It appeared to be rock strewn and thick with brain coral that would ground even a shallow draught outrigger. Would there be a route at the top of the tide? By observing the sea from the balcony she decided she could make a tide-chart to predict the state of the tide. Needing to get a better idea of where the deeper channels ran she decided there was a limit to what she could determine from the balcony. She could spot channels through the coral but couldn't tell how deep they were or where the tidal surges would carry her in if she tried swimming or wading through the inner reef inside the bay. If Harry ever discovered which bay she was in she was reasonably sure the timing of her escape would be dependent on the state of the tidal flows. First Harry would have to get across the outer reef with combers breaking over it. Then there was the problem of the rock strewn inner lagoon. Would it be possible to find a passage through that? It was essential to find out at what states of the tide there would be any possibility of finding a passage, if one existed.

'Karl would you have any objection to me going down to the beach for a swim sometimes.' As she asked the question she recognised the hardening of his eyes. It was a mistake. Karl would refuse requests just to establish his status. He turned towards her, as a frown formed between his eyes. Ann watched the twin vertical lines between his eyebrows deepen. Damn! She needed another approach! Looking as ostentatious as a puffer fish he stuck his thumbs in his belt and lifted his chin high enough to enable him to peer down his nose at her while he made her wait for a refusal. Ann decided he might look like a puffer fish but as he seemed to possess all the integrity of a wharf rat she felt she had something tangible to work with.

So she added, 'I'd like to go skinny-dipping. In fact if I want a swim I haven't got much choice as I haven't got my swimsuit here.'

The frown relaxed and his eyes momentarily seemed to focus on a point behind her head as he pondered the implications. She watched his eyes track down to her cleavage.

She experimented with her sweetest smile. ‘Couldn’t we just try it once Karl, then if you aren’t happy with me I won’t ask again.’ As she said it she had decided to provide his imagination with a potential “happy-ending”.

He was hesitating. Men might be predatorial but women excelled at baiting hooks. Hopefully he wouldn’t see the barb.

‘I really miss my daily swim Karl.’ She considered adding, “I get so hot in these latitudes...” but decided to leave that double-meaning unspoken. If she knew anything about men, by now his imagination would have opened the door to that possibility and was already engaged in active exploration. He was licking the bait so she added, ‘You could see me all the time from the balcony.’ Clearly his imagination was rooting-around looking for an opening. Ann smiled to herself at her unspoken pun.

‘The track’s alarmed and there’s no way I’d let you go down to the beach alone.’

Ann grinned to herself. He was taking the bait. ‘This evening when the heat has gone out of the sun we could go down together then you could check that I don’t swim off into the sunset. I’m not prudish. And you look like a man who is sufficiently experienced with women’s anatomy to prevent you dribbling and gawking like Tom Fool in a brothel at the sight of a woman swimming. And that’s all I want to do, just go for a swim and nothing else, you do understand that don’t you?’

He gave a grunt meaning nothing except that his mind was in fantasy mode. As if preening himself at the prospect of what his imagination thought these swims might entail

he straightened his ridiculous red spotted bow tie. If he was taking the bait she had to let him run with it. There would be plenty of time later to drive the hook home. In the meantime the longer she could let his fantasy invent possibilities the more amenable he would become. Most women knew how to cheat a man with fool's gold. But this was a dangerous game, she could only maintain baiting his illusions until he discovered the bait was simply fool's gold. Sooner or later he would demand more and she could end up losing control.

That evening she stood with Karl on the sand above the tidemark as the sun dipped into the horizon. The furnace doors of the sun were closing as she undressed. Swallowing hard and, leaving modesty on the beach with her towel, she walked into the ocean. She imagined her husband Gary shaking his head in consternation, at the risk she was taking. Probably it was only a perceived risk and not a real one. Like a gull following a fishing canoe Karl dived into the sea behind her. Despite the fact he couldn't resist touching her in places she would prefer he left alone, after the sweaty heat of the day it felt great to feel the flow of water over her body. She was a strong swimmer and in the past had swum competitively in the women's freestyle at university but now made a point of only swimming breaststroke or doggy-paddle in the shallow water. It was the extent and position of any channels through the inner reef that she was interested in exploring. Deeper water further out would be no problem. To get a clearer picture of what was navigable she'd need to explore the seabed at all states of the tide and make a tide-chart so she could predict tidal flows in advance.

She knew Karl wouldn't be able to resist showing her his clumsy "over arm" which produced quantities of splashing if nothing else. Sooner or later, and it turned out to be sooner, he offered to show her how to swim "over arm". She resolved to make slow-progress in subsequent

lessons and appear to get out of breath and resort to her slow breaststroke. But to encourage him it was important he saw some daily progress. He even anticipated future progress as they dried and dressed. Meanwhile the textures of light began to change. The horizon swallowed the afterglow and the south easterly trades faded into the night. But, carried by that dying wind music like thistledown drifted past her and out to sea.

The next evening and the next she listened for it and anticipated it. But by the time they had climbed the path to the house nothing disturbed the evening air, the music had gone.

With Karl she'd decided to try to twist and turn between the roles of smouldering-temptress and a rigid deity. She hoped she would manage the "quick-flip" so he'd never know which woman he was with. This could be a form of insurance policy but it didn't prevent his fingers from wandering until she snapped, 'If I have to put up with being groped I would prefer it to be done by someone I find attractive.' She regretted it as soon as she said it. The quip was effective but what alarmed her was the cruel movement of his eyes that convinced her sooner or later she would be made to pay for the insult. Would it have been better to put up with being pawed? At least in the meantime she was plotting a mental picture of the depth of water over the inner reef.

Karl wasn't her only guard, she also had Rud to consider. It would be obvious if she appeared to be playing one off against the other unless... No slow down Ann, you need time to explore Rud's weaknesses first. He's more of an enigma. Superficially he's lazy, obese, and the wrong side of fifty. In the heat of the day he seldom gets out of the wicker chair in the shade on the deck. Every day he's wearing the same shirt that's open down the front exposing his guts that sag over his belt and turn his belt buckle upside down. Every evening he's drinking bourbon from the bottle and some

of it invariably ran down his chest to mix with the dribble from the corner of his mouth. But she had been counting how much he drank and noting the level in the bottle each day. So far he hadn't been drinking to excess which was a pity because she couldn't rely on him being drunk if she tried escaping. But right now that opportunity seemed only a remote possibility. She couldn't contemplate anything until she had got far enough inside their psyche and be able to predict what would make them respond.

Every woman knows how to use her cleavage to advantage. Those that aren't too sure often hang a chain round their neck with a pendant pointing at it. But in Ann's experience this was a waste-of-time because guys' eyes invariably focused on cleavage long before they noticed pendants, and in any case pendants got either tangled up or in the way. Mostly their sole use was to give other women something to discuss. She was reasonably certain Rud wasn't interested in either cleavage or women. He was softly spoken and appeared reticent to offer any opinion unless responding to a direct question in which case he would answer it and add nothing. Often the reply was only a nod. She couldn't find any line of thought that interested him. Even when she asked, he said he wasn't married but wouldn't elaborate on any other relationships or even whether he had any children. She was at a loss to know how to penetrate his cocoon of silence to enable her to discover what life form lurked inside. Was it just shyness? She pondered the problem. With introverts it's possible to find a crack in their shell and then they spill out the whole of their lives.

Trying to make conversation, she asked him if this was his house, but he evaded the question by giving the non-committal answer that it "belonged to a syndicate". Ann tried speculating what sort of a syndicate would want to build an ostentatious property in an isolated area where no one was likely to see it. Money appeared to have been

no consideration in its construction. Might privacy be the objective? If so, why did the owners seek privacy? Obviously it hadn't been built to keep her prisoner, yet it must have been available and unoccupied. This place must represent a large investment, so why had it been empty? Might it be somewhere for rich men to entertain willing mistresses or perhaps unwilling girls? She looked at the shaded balcony complete with recliners and tables overlooking the bay. If she had to be kept captive, from her point of view, this was a respectable choice. Certainly her concept of the sort of places kidnapped victims were held had changed. Compared with her image of a rat-infested cell complete with leg irons, this place was hedonistic. The house bridged a gully between two rocky outcrops. The only inland entrance was via a causeway over a vertically sided chasm. A waterfall cascaded under the causeway and passed beneath the cantilevered deck and veranda with a twenty-metre drop onto rocks below. The waterfall hit rocks above the beach and entered a rock-lined pool. The tail of the pool spilled through boulder-strewn gravel and cascaded through rocky pools to the sea. The veranda gave unrestricted views of the beach and ocean but no other buildings marred the horizon. The only way out of the house was either via the concrete causeway to a dirt road that vanished into rain forest or via a track that snaked down the cliff-path to the beach. She had no idea what lay beyond the twin headlands at the ends of the bay or even if she was on an island. She hadn't even known what time zone she was in, until she reset her watch to the clock in the lounge and noted the two-and-a-half-hour time difference ahead of Jakarta. Karl made it clear when she arrived she could have a free-run of the house. No one ventured onto the roads alone at any time of the day or night. The waterfall prevented any unauthorised access and laser alarms protected the causeway and the cliff-path. They would know the instant the beam was cut. If she tried escaping they would use a needle to restrain her, "for her

own safety”. The choice was hers but she should remember “they” (whoever “they” were) were holding her daughter Ingrid... He left the rest unsaid.

Panic had entered her voice. ‘What do you know about Ingrid? How do you know her name?’

Karl had shrugged. ‘I know nothing. And if I did I wouldn’t tell you.’ He’d turned his back on her and walked away. She had to remind herself that medical professionals aren’t supposed to call anyone a “Bloody arrogant pig” even if it’s a fair description. At least they weren’t supposed to do it while the “Bloody arrogant pig” remained within earshot.

Early on Thursday afternoon a four-wheel-drive open truck arrived and pulled up by the causeway. Karl turned off the laser alarm and, for the first time since she arrived, she was allowed to step onto the causeway. Beyond the waterfall she could see a dirt road, complete with power poles vanishing behind the trees. The power must have been laid on specifically for this house. Seeing the growth of lichens on the pole and the corrosion on the metal bits reminded her of the long coastal lines in Indonesia and their notorious unreliability. While she pondered the implications of a possible power failure the truck was being backed onto the causeway. A young man, no not a young man a young giant poured himself out of the cab. Probably in his early twenties he stood a full head taller than Karl and was wearing only a vest and shorts. Ann looked at his arms and decided the muscles in his upper arms were probably bigger than her own thighs. Like a stone skipping across the surface of a lagoon an untidy thought, which must have been deposited by some primeval ancestor, skipped across the surface of her mind. “God! If I wasn’t married...” Then the stone sank from view.

Karl was glaring at him in open hostility. Cardboard boxes had been bouncing in the back over dirt roads and had contained a mixture of food and road-dust. But a bottle



of cooking-oil and a bottle of Jack Daniels had smashed and the contents had formed a muddy sludge. Several of the more soggy cardboard boxes had subsequently broken spilling their contents onto the floor of the ute. Two packets of milk powder had split open and the white powder had mixed with road dust. But Ann was more interested in the cardboard boxes. They all had "Port Moresby" on the side. So she was in Papua New Guinea and probably within driving distance of Port Moresby even if, at least part of it, was over dirt roads. The sun set over the ocean so she was on the West Coast of the peninsula. As far as she could remember Port Moresby was also on the peninsula's south western side. Beyond the causeway the road vanished into moss and forest. She had no means of telling whether the road to Port Moresby ran north or south. Although she had noticed when the driver was trying to communicate with Karl, he made an indication with his head to the north which made her suspect they were south of Moresby.

The afternoon sun hammered on the truck and the causeway. Karl stood in the shade with his legs apart and his thumbs stuck in his belt shouting instructions to Ann's young giant who appeared to speak only Pidgin English. He certainly couldn't understand Karl's American accent, especially when it was overlaid with foul-mouthed abuse that increased in intensity, as the lad became more confused. The state of the dirt roads wasn't his fault but he wouldn't raise his eyes, which Karl took as an admission of guilt. Pressure, like a volcano about to erupt, built up inside Ann's head. How dare Karl use such abuse against this young man? She had worked with Islanders at the clinic; most of them were poised on the cliff-edge of poverty yet she had to be careful not to admire anything they owned because, if she did, they insisted on giving it to her. Instead of making eye contact they lowered their gaze, in case direct eye contact was seen as a challenge. Even handshakes were never firm in case it could be interpreted as aggressive. A mortician's

smile lingered in her mind as she thought how easy it would be to put a Hippocratic Oath on hold, if this giant took it into his head to pick Karl up by his arrogant neck and drop him over the edge of the causeway.

Embarrassed by Karl's arrogance, Ann felt she couldn't leave the lad to carry all those boxes by himself in the heat of the afternoon. As a gesture of support she picked up one of the smaller crates and carried it across the causeway and into the house. As she did so, she realised it was only a token gesture as he could carry five crates for every one she could manage. But that wasn't the only reason for helping. She spoke gently so he would understand from the intonation of her voice, if not from the words she was using. Once certain Karl could hear above the sound of the waterfall she commented, 'Not all of us are lazy and abusive, please don't judge me by that man.' She received a smile from the boy in return; perhaps he understood. At the far end of the causeway once they were far enough away so the sound of the waterfall would blanket her voice from Karl she asked, 'Is that the road to Port Moresby?' She received a short Pidgin English sentence in reply, but was only able to extricate one word from it. "*Bagarap!*" Fortunately it was an adjective she could translate. "Bugged up!" She gave him a grin of comprehension. When jumping to conclusions, in a case like this, she was seldom wrong providing she jumped far enough. If that was the local opinion of the state of the roads she had no doubt she would consider it an underestimation.

As the truck drove off Ann's eyes followed it while Karl escorted her back inside the house. He unlocked the office door and reinstated the security alarms before re-locking the door. As Ann looked at the pile of groceries sitting on the floor outside the pantry she heard raised voices. A few minutes later Rud appeared. Many of the tins and jars were sticky and stained with a mixture of cooking oil and road dust. She and Rud carried them into the laundry and placing

them in the tub started to wash them. Many of the labels, which were still attached, came off. They tried Sellotaping the labels back on. They weren't sure which label applied to which tin. The Sellotape got wet and didn't stick properly. In future opening the tins would be a bit of a lottery.

The sun had sunk low in the sky by the time they had finished salvaging the stores. It was late, and she was too tired to walk down the path for the evening swim. And in any case she held an aversion for being anywhere near Karl after his performance with the delivery boy. Ann went to her room and lay on the bed. Then she heard the music again. She lay awake listening for some time until she got up and, walking through the lounge towards the balcony, expected to find a stereo turned on. Instead she found Rud and a violin. Barefoot she made only a light footfall on the stone floor. He wasn't aware she was standing there, listening. No! Not listening captivated. The rocks below the balcony glistened blood-red while the twin headlands at the ends of the bay stood stark against a burning shipwrecked-sky. He had his back to the sea, although he was facing her and she was illuminated by the lounge-lights, he hadn't see her. Like a rabbit, hypnotised by the eyes of a stoat, all she was aware of were the wild demons burning in his eyes as Wagner's valkaries spilled out of his violin and rode through scarlet skies, across an ocean shot-through with horizontal flame.

Ah, music! She'd discovered Rud's strength and hence his weakness. This was the first time she had seen him without his protective coating of sloth. There was a man in there! Now she had something tangible to work on. This had been a good day because she had also discovered more or less where she was.

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An incident occurred exactly one week later. The truck arrived with the delivery as before. Ann assisted her young

giant carry the boxes into the house while Karl stood in the shade and watched. They stacked their boxes but as she was about to leave the storeroom the gentle giant touched her arm to restrain her. Startled, and anticipating an unsolicited encounter, she looked into his face but he was preoccupied taking a piece of paper out of the pocket of his shorts. As he unfolded the newspaper cutting she recognised the picture. Gary had taken it during the last school holidays. It was a head and shoulders shot of her with Ingrid. The news about their kidnapping was being circulated in the media round the world. Now this delivery boy had recognised her! He pointed to Ingrid on the photo and then to Ann, his eyes were asking the question if she was the woman in the picture and whether Ingrid was her daughter. Ann nodded. Then he handed her another photograph of two girls. Both girls had bare feet and were wearing light summer dresses. The younger, darker girl looked about seven and the other lighter skinned girl looked about nine. It wasn't Ingrid but the similarity was unmistakable. Anyone could be excused for confusing the two. He pointed to the girl in the picture. Ann shook her head.

The whole incident would have consumed no more than a minute but that was sufficient for Karl's foul mouth to shout down the steps, 'Is that fucking coconut rooting you?' Whether her giant understood or was frightened by the tone of his voice Ann never knew but the effect was instantaneous. He ran back up the steps and onto the causeway leaving Ann holding the photograph. As the truck drove off Ann memorised the registration number. Back in her bedroom she wrote the number down on the back of the picture and looked again at the girl in the photo and pondered the implications.

## CHAPTER 15

Huhana brought the prints to Harry who was sitting at the chart table aboard *Fool's Gold*. He was already engrossed in calculations. Placing the prints on the table she explained, 'I've just heard from Gary and he says Ann is five foot five tall.'

Harry replied with an 'Ahh!' and wrote it down. He tapped the keys on his calculator. 'That's 1651 millimetres. Thank you Huhana. Now where are the pictures of her on the beach?'

'I've just put them all on your chart-table. But why did you need to know Ann's height?'

'So I can find out where she is.' As Harry said this he was sorting the pictures Huhana had given her.

'Ahh! Yes. This is a good one. See how she had the sun in her eyes when this was taken.'

He put it aside and looked through the other pictures. He selected one more and placed it along-side the first one.

‘Now I need to find the picture of her scratching her ear.’

‘Why?’

‘She was scratching her right ear with her left hand and exposing her wristwatch to the camera. She had the foresight to start speaking softly so he, I presume it was a he, moved the camera closer which gave me a chance to read the time on her watch. Modern quartz watches are extremely accurate and did you notice when Ann told us the time of the sunset she said it was “exactly” six thirty. If she said “exactly” I’m sure that’s what she meant. She would have checked her watch against radio time signals.’

As Harry said this he placed the picture on the table and examined it through a magnifying glass.

‘Here Huhana! You have younger eyes than mine, what time do you make it on Ann’s watch?’

Huhana took the magnifying glass. ‘I’d say it’s twenty-five minutes past ten.’

‘That’s exactly the time I’d have said as well. Thanks Huhana.’

‘Why do you need to know the time Harry?’

‘Do you remember what Ann said. Because of the time difference she had been having her breakfast three-hours ahead of Gary. Gary is in Jakarta and Jakarta is seven-hours and thirty-minutes ahead of Greenwich Mean Time in London. So Ann is in a time zone ten-and-a-half hours ahead of GMT. So for a start we know which time zone she is in. That gives us a longitude to within fifteen degrees. But we can do much better than that.’

‘How can you do that Harry?’

‘In several ways. Do you remember she said she had been standing on a balcony twenty metres above the damp sand at the top of the beach?’

‘Yes.’

‘If Ann said it was twenty metres I’m sure that’s what she meant, not nineteen or twenty one metres. Her eye would be close to one and a half metres above the deck. So our best estimate would position her eye about twenty-one and a half metres above the wet sand at the top of the beach. Which I guess means twenty-one and a half metres above mean high water. We now know the altitude of her eye.’

‘OK! But how would she know the balcony was twenty metres high?’

‘Ann is creative. It isn’t hard to tie a spoon, or something similar, to piece of string and lower it to the beach and measure the length of the string.’

‘Why does the height matter Harry?’

‘So now we can calculate the angle of dip between her eye and the horizon. We know the sun just touched the horizon at six-thirty local time; that’s ten hours thirty minutes ahead of GMT. I’ll have to allow for the refraction causing an apparent change in the Sun’s position. If I do that there’s nothing to stop me drawing a curve on the chart linking together all the places where the sun set at that time and seeing where my curve cuts the coast.’

‘That’s clever Harry.’

‘But there are other methods as well. Ann gave us lots of clues. We know the time the photos were taken from her watch and we also know the date. I’ve already looked it up. On that day the sun would have been six-minutes ahead of Greenwich-Mean-Time. I haven’t done it yet but shortly I’m going to calculate the exact position of the sun relative to the earth’s meridian at twenty-five minutes past ten on that morning.’

‘How will that help?’

‘Ann is standing on a flat beach. We know her exact height because Gary told us, and from the photo we can measure the length of her shadow. This will be foreshortened but fortunately she had the sense to turn sideways, and make

the camera move to a new angle, so we get a second view of her shadow. The length and angle of the shadow on the ground won't change with the position of the camera. So once I've measured these two pictures we will have two equations and two unknowns. All we need to do then is to solve two simultaneous equations and we will be ready to determine her position. But I'm not as quick as I used to be. The calculations are going to take me the rest of today, tomorrow and probably some of the next day as I'm going to have to work everything out from first principles.'

'I'll take your word for it Harry. I find it a bit confusing.'

'Then let me put it this way Huhana. If you were standing on a flat beach, you know how tall you are and if you knew the sun's angle relative to your position on the earth you'd be able to work out the length of your shadow wouldn't you?'

'I'd have to think about it but I guess so.'

'Well I'm just working backwards. I can measure the length of Ann's shadow. I'll calculate the position of the sun relative to the earth's meridian at the time the photo was taken and from that we should be able to determine Ann's position by cross checking the various methods.'

Harry opened the draw under the chart-table and took out a pair of dividers, a rule and a protractor. Huhana commented. 'Even if you could calculate her position to within half-a-degree it still represents a thirty nautical mile radius, Harry.'

Harry looked up into her face as he spoke. 'Very true Huhana. But we also know she's on the coast so we won't have to search through a thirty-mile radius, which would be a hundred and eighty eight square nautical miles. Also it was morning when the picture was taken. The sun rises in the East and as the shadow is pointing seaward we know she must be on a West Coast. Also she told us she was looking across the ocean to see the sunset. So we might have to search sixty miles of coastline or twice that if the coastline



is rugged and indented with bays. But by use of a chart we could probably eliminate some of that. For example there are no mangroves in the picture. They wouldn't have done the filming on a busy beach. They must have known there was no possibility of being disturbed. My initial guess is that we'll find her in Papua New Guinea but I'll be able to tell you better the day after tomorrow when I've done my sums and had a good look at the charts on the chart plotter. There is one other feature I'd like you to investigate with your computer. We know there were good sharp shadows at the time and date that the filming was done. That means clear skies. By checking meteorological satellite pictures it could help us eliminate any areas that had cloud cover at that time. In the meantime Huhana, perhaps you could persuade *Rurenga's* crew to get her fuelled and provisioned.'

'That's easier said than done Harry. It will have to be Hemi and me. Chris has surgery in the hospital. Huia is totally pre-occupied with her new daughter. Rachael is still getting sleepless nights with Manuka. Also she is having difficulty getting through her own work in the village as well as taking on some of Huia's jobs for the next couple of days so Huia gets a break after the birth.'

'What about Rangi? Could you get him to at least help Hemi lash *Te Waka* on deck? We've got an urgent voyage ahead of us and I'm going to be flat out with these calculations for the next day or two. Also I'm hoping you might give me a hand with the background checking. Look at this picture here. Why do you suppose they decided to take the pictures on the beach?'

'I don't know Harry. Why do you think they did it?'

'I guess they were worried if they had done the filming ashore or indoors there might be something in the background which someone might recognise. Perhaps the building or the topography where Ann is being kept captive is sufficiently distinctive to make it easily recognisable. Someone must have decided that filming on an open beach

with no offshore islands in view could be anywhere and not traceable. I could imagine Ann's mind dancing a sailor's jig when that error was conceived.'

'Do you think she encouraged it?' Huhana asked.

Harry winked and nodded. 'I'd say Ann has worked this out meticulously. Did you notice she didn't have her hair tied up? That's unusual isn't it?'

Huhana looked puzzled. 'If you say so. I've never met her.'

'Did you notice in the video her hair was being stirred by the wind?'

'Yes?'

'From that what would be your estimate of the wind speed?'

'Dunno! About fifteen knots I suppose.'

'That's what I'd have said as well. And what was the direction of the wind?'

'Off the sea.'

'Precisely. And how big were the waves on the beach in a fifteen knot wind?'

'I don't think there were any.'

'You're quite correct. There weren't any! There were no waves in a fifteen knot onshore wind! Does that suggest to you Ann's bay has a reef that is not far offshore?'

'Of course.'

'Weather reports could help us. We only need search areas where the wind speed was fifteen knots at that time of the day. It's just possible it might help eliminate some areas. And what colour was the sand Ann was standing on?'

'White.'

'So the reef is almost certainly coral not rock.'

'Of course!'

Harry smiled. 'Simple isn't it? Now did you notice at the far end of the beach there was a patch of grey gravel and rock?'

'No I missed that, Harry.'

‘Well there was grey gravel on a coral beach! Not very usual is it. How do you suppose an isolated patch of gravel got carried onto the beach? Might a stream have deposited it there? Now what did you hear, Huhana?’

Huhana shrugged. ‘Only Ann talking.’

‘Is that all? I heard a rumble in the background and I’m sure it wasn’t just wind in the microphone. It sounded to me like falling water. Falling water has to fall from somewhere. So at the top of the beach there must be a steep enough cliff to have a waterfall. Streams and rivers only run in valleys so the topography of the land must rise either side of Ann’s bay. It implies to me a bay with twin headlands either side of it. I’d say were looking for a cliff-lined bay with twin headlands where the outer reef runs close inshore and has a waterfall that has carried the gravel and deposited it on the sand. A river running into the sea carries silt with it. Silt poisons coral so my guess is that we will also find a reef with a hole in it. Ann has told us quite a lot in her video clip. Using charts and satellite pictures we can narrow the search area. We might even manage to pin point the bay. Then it’s up to us to find her and bring her back.’

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The following evening Karl went into the office and closed the door leaving Ann outside without any means of seeing the code he punched in to isolate the alarm. With the alarm disabled Ann and Karl stepped onto the path leading to the beach, she was listening beyond Karl for the first notes from Rud’s violin. He seemed to be waiting till Karl was out of the way before he started. Obviously Karl objected! The notes reached her at the first hairpin bend in the track. Clouds hunched their shoulders glowering from the hills. The music followed her to the beach and whispers of dark images sliced the air like shark’s fins on the evening-tide. Shadows moved. Flying fish scattered. The ocean surged

as leviathans from the depths broke surface. What was the music doing to her? What was it saying to her? The more she listened the more it surrounded her, hovered above her and pressed down on her shoulders while she removed her clothes. Dangerous company hammered the inside of her head. This wasn't what she'd planned. Suddenly Ingrid was beyond the reef being pounded by breakers. Putting her hands over her ears and pursued by the music Ann ran to the sea. Water hit her face. 'Ingrid! Ingrid! I'm coming love.'

Karl caught her by the arm with one hand spun her round and, grabbing her shoulder, shook her. 'What's up with you?' He yelled in her ear. She felt her heart thumping; her breathing came in gasps. 'You're bloody raving. What are you on? There's no one there. You stoned or something?' Her arm quivered. He shook her again. She was caught in the middle of a maelstrom. He thrust his face into hers. She could taste his breath. The whirlpool was spinning, sucking her down into blackness.

When she opened her eyes Karl was bending over her. She was laying on her back with her hair in a pool left by the ebb tide.

'Ingrid's out there in...'

'There's no one there, Ann. It's just empty ocean. Ingrid's OK, she's in the States.'

Ann felt herself trying to nod until her mind gasped. The music was warning me! I'm naked. Karl's kneeling beside me, over me! I have to get up. 'Get away from me'. She jabbed with her left elbow to get up and turn her nakedness away from Karl. 'Don't touch me. I can manage.'

As she struggled free, the music retreated into the night. Wrapping a towel around her she dressed in a quagmire of melancholy. Unrelated pieces of her mind struggled to find relevance like discordant notes in a symphony. In the dark-hours last night, ideas had flooded her brain like monsoon rains in a riverbed. Then her plan had seemed complete. But that was last night!

As they climbed the cliff path Karl reached out to help her. Probably that was all it was, just a helping hand. Snatching her hand away she felt she would sooner fall down the cliff than be touched by him.

Where was her plan going wrong? To keep sane she had to focus on anything positive however speculative it might be. At this moment Harry would be calculating her position. She forced her mind to imagine him sitting at the chart-table aboard *Fool's Gold* with his scientific calculator and half a mug of coffee standing on a pile of hand-written notes. She could see the coffee stains on the top sheet beside him as he scratched his beard and copied down another set of figures. She smiled, his right eyebrow was swept up while the left one drooped. One day she'd get a comb and straighten them!

When they reached the house she went straight to her room locked her door and lay across the bed. She did see Ingrid in the surf, didn't she? The moon, not content with casting eerie shadows on her walls, had decided to superimpose its monthly rhythm on her body. She lay on her back and watched the moonlight slide across the wall. She looked at the ceiling for an answer. "Is it a form of blindness, or a form of sanity, if we fail to see things which aren't there?" The more she thought about it the more she became convinced the answer was the question. The moon's frame moved onto another wall. "Is insanity a home for someone who hasn't got one?" She had gone beyond tiredness. All that remained was a mischievous whirlpool of intangibles.

She knew she'd been asleep because she was startled into waking by the forlorn cry of a sea bird from somewhere beyond the walls. Reality and illusion were mocking her. She opened her eyes to a sunlit window, but it was memories, not daylight, which flooded into her consciousness. There was an empty-space in the double bed but it was more than a vacant space, it was the absence of Gary – sensible, reliable Gary. Reality and illusion wouldn't confuse him.

While pulling aside the sheet, which was her only covering, her memory head-butted her. When she came into her room last night she lay on top of her bed, there was no question about it, she lay on top of the covers. Now she was under a sheet. Someone had entered her room while she was asleep and covered her up! Still wearing last night's clothes she examined the bed. Her mind wasn't playing tricks. She really had been on the top cover but someone had found another sheet and placed it over her while she slept. Would that be Karl or Rud? She had inadvertently achieved getting someone worried about her mental health. Did they believe her sanity was floating away on the ebb tide over concern for Ingrid? If they did, were they correct?

The bedside lamp had an opaque spherical shade with an intricate pattern etched into the glass. It was quite a pretty design and it reminded her of sunlight on the seabed. Picking up the lamp by the stand she struck the shade on the bedpost scattering shards of glass over the floor. She decided deliberately smashed glass made a rather pleasant sound, it had a ring of freedom about it. She plugged in the table lamp. The bulb still worked but it was only a twenty-five watt lamp, which wasn't nearly big enough so she unplugged it and dropped it on the floor along with the broken glass.

Rud was playing his violin. It probably meant Karl was out of earshot. In the store-room she found two corrugated cardboard boxes, a "giant" tin of sliced peaches, a roll of Sellotape, a couple of metres of string, three paper clips and a one-hundred-and-fifty watt light-bulb which she unplugged from bulb-holder in the ceiling and replaced with a brand new hundred-watt bulb. Hopefully no one would notice it was a smaller bulb. In the kitchen she collected a pair-of-scissors and a tin opener. She reminded herself to return them before they were missed. Having carried everything up to her room she opened the tin and flushed the peaches down the toilet and washed and dried the empty can and lid.

Having decided to start with the cardboard, before blunting the scissors on the tin, she cut two strips of cardboard about two hundred millimetres wide and about six-hundred millimetres long. She laid these out on the dressing table end-to-end and by overlapping them, joined them together with Sellotape. She now cut six vertical slots in them. The first slot was about twenty millimetres wide and the second about sixty wide. The wide one had to be three times the width of the thin one. Then she cut four more which were alternately wide and narrow, wide and narrow. She put these on one side and started work on the tin lid by making a hole in the middle and cutting out four propeller blades. She twisted them to an aerodynamic shape, bent the cardboard into a circle round the blades, and pushed the ends of the blades through slits in the cardboard. Bending the tips to secure the blades in place she finished by wrapping Sellotape round the cardboard cylinder.

Now she was almost ready to try it. She forced one of the paperclips into the top left-hand corner on the window frame and the other into the right-hand corner. She tied one end of the string to the first paperclip and bent the third paperclip so part of it went through the hole in the middle of the tin lid. She checked the tin lid would spin round on the paperclip. Then she threaded the string through the loop on top of the paperclip and tied the free end of the string to the paperclip in the right-hand corner of the window. Placing the table-lamp on the window ledge she adjusted the length of the string so that the slots in the cardboard lined up with the filament of the light bulb. She switched the bulb on. It took several seconds until heat rising from the bulb passed over the propeller blades and started it turning. The light, flashing through the different width slots as the cylinder turned, would be able to be seen at sea during the hours-of-darkness. It spelled "ANN" in Morse. There were no other buildings in the bay. And because her room was upstairs on the seaward side of the house it wouldn't be visible to Karl

or Rud, unless they came into her room or went out onto the balcony at night and looked up. “Remember to put the bolt on the door at night Ann, don’t just lock it. Someone has a key!” Just in case Harry traversed the coast at night it would be hard for him to miss her signal, even if he was well out to sea. At bedtime she could relax, draw her curtains behind the lamp on the window-ledge, switch on and go to sleep.

She took the string down and hid her “Morse lampshade” in the bedside-table.

She’d been sitting on the bed. She was about to straighten the bedspread but hesitated, pulled it off the bed, walked to the window and held it up against the curtain. An executioner’s smile crossed her face. It was big enough and the colour was right – plain white. She dropped it on the floor and, looking into her overnight case, pulled out the new scarlet dress she had bought for her presentation at the conference. Pity! It had cost a fortune and she’d only worn it once. And it fitted. Even Gary liked it!

Wishing she’d thought of it before she’d blunted the scissors on the tin lid, she put them on the bedside table. She got the bedroom chair and standing on it unhooked the pale green curtains. Sitting on the bed again she unpicked the curtain-tape using the point of the scissors. She picked up her dress and pursed her lips as she cut into it. “It would have to be this dress that’s the right colour!” After the first cut she decided, “It’s too late now anyway” and continued cutting.

Thank goodness she had her “emergency” needle and cotton in her bag. That was in the birthday present which Ingrid had given her last year. She had only slipped it into her bag as an after-thought when she left Jakarta. “Thanks Ingrid I never needed it more than now. I wouldn’t have a clue where to find a needle and cotton in this place. You’re a life-saver love.” Hand stitching was slow. In these days of sewing machines she was out of practice. Making the new curtain took all afternoon. It was almost dark when she



finally hung her masterpiece in place, a red diagonal cross on a white background.

“There you are Harry – International Code V - (I require assistance) and it’s hanging in my bedroom window! It couldn’t be clearer could it? Hopefully Karl and Rud won’t recognise it as a signalling flag; they don’t appear to know anything about boats and marine signals. They’ll probably think I’ve just changed the curtain – if they notice it at all – after all they are only men! Harry you should be able to see it during daylight-hours; and at night you’ll have my name in Morse to guide you.”

She looked at the original curtain she had taken down. Should she cut it into little pieces, so it couldn’t be used to replace her signalling flag, or use it as a bedspread? She decided to cut it up, it’s a pity because it’s a good curtain and matches the other ones. “Sorry syndicate, but I didn’t ask to be kidnapped.”

“I think I’ve done my best to tell Harry where I am but somehow I’ve got to make arrangements for him to pick me up. I wonder if I could get Rud to do it for me?”

Ann walked to the window and looked out across the sea. Outside the reef three fishing boats were heading up the coast. Hovering gulls dived into the darkening water. The setting sun was a golden knife slitting the sky between the horizon and dark clouds. The fishermen in those boats must be heading home. They would have a home to go to and a welcome waiting for them! Ann bit her lip. “If everything goes right it’ll take Harry a day or more – probably more – to work out where I am.” She looked out to sea again and watched the boats disappear behind the headland. “Assuming I’m near Port Moresby it’ll take him a couple of days sailing to get to Papua. He’ll be pushing into the south-easterly trades all the way. I must be on the west coast, because the sun sets over the sea. He’ll need to stay outside the reef but he’ll need to keep as close as possible to see into the bays even with binoculars. He won’t want to be

tacking down the coast, as the tacks would take him further out to sea. So he's sure to approach from the south where he can use the trades. The wind will pick up in the afternoon so he'll probably just be using headsail so he can go slowly enough to examine each likely bay and bear away if he gets too close to the reef. Even if he sees my signals he won't be able to bring *Fool's Gold* or *Rurenga* inside the reef. He'll have to anchor off, hopefully it'll be out of sight from the house and he'll come into the bay by waka or dinghy. Somehow I've got to let Harry know the best time to round the headland and come into the bay to pick me up."

Shutting her bedroom door behind her she walked into the lounge. Rud was sitting on the veranda with the bottle of bourbon at hand.

'I loved the music the other night Rud. It was superb playing I felt certain I could see Valkaries riding through a blood red sky.' He smiled in response. Ann continued. 'Could you play Sibalius's Finlandia? It's a real favourite of mine.'

His answer was to put his violin up to his double chin and pick up the bow. He didn't need sheet music and Ann didn't need the rest of the orchestra. From a tropical dusk she was transported to a land where thin sunlight, scattered by ice crystals, failed to penetrate the dark shadows within the forest. The air cracked its fingers as a branch overloaded with snow snapped scattering spears of tinkling icicles.

'Ann! What's that fucking noise?' It was Karl.

'It's Finlandia...There something's stirring, in the forest. Listen! A great black bear is shaking the snow from its coat, stretching its limbs and swaying as frost on the tips of its coat cracks as it hunches its shoulders...'

'Fucking Hell! If you've got to make a bloody noise can't you play something cheerful?' with that he turned back into the house, slamming the door.

Ann shook her head in dismay as Rud stopped playing. 'Sorry Rud I didn't expect that reaction.' She had lied but

continued. ‘In Jakarta we often go out in Harry’s boat. His partner Susan is a professional singer and when we’re anchored out in a little bay at night often we all join in with a song or two. Susan has her guitar and sometimes Harry brings out his accordion. Do you know “Tom Dooley”?’ She grinned at him as she added. ‘Do you think a song about a murderer waiting to be hanged will seem more cheerful to Karl!’

Rud didn’t answer but she saw the humour in his eyes as he picked up his violin. Ann sang all five verses and Karl didn’t come out and object again.

Now the key question. ‘Do you know... “The Pirate Song” Rud?’

Rud shook his head. ‘If you can sing it, I’ll pick it up.’

Excellent! That’s just what she hoped he’d say. Rud might not know the words but Harry does. And what’s more Harry would recognise the tune instantly. We all sang it together when we were out in *Fool’s Gold*. But if Rud doesn’t know the words, he won’t understand the significance!

‘I don’t know all the words Rud but I can hum them. The tune is a real favourite of mine. It’s quite an old song, I think it dates back to the eighteen-forties. There are several versions but the one I know is a ballad about an illicit affair between a pirate and a Governor’s young bride. It goes like this. Ann recited the words of the chorus in her head as she hummed the tune.’

My ship’s past the cliff. But my boat’s in the bay,  
 And both must be gone at the dawn of the day.  
 The moon’s in her shroud, and to light thee afar,  
 On the deck of the boat’s a lamp like a star.  
 So wake lady wake, I’m waiting for thee,  
 On this night or never we both will be free.

After Ann had hummed the first verse, Rud picked up the tune and accompanied her for the remainder of the song. After they'd finished Ann asked if they could play it a second time. She needed to be sure Rud had got it right. Harry could arrive in the bay at any time. Probably it would be in daylight hours, as he wouldn't risk going aground on coral at night. If he realised this was the right bay he would need to anchor outside the reef and investigate inside the reef by waka or dinghy. Even if Karl or Rud were not watching at that moment, the laser would sound the alarm and the video cameras would start recording if she set foot on the cliff-path. Even if she crossed the line at night all the security lights round the house would turn on automatically.

I'll only get one shot at this. Even if the alarm were disabled it would be too risky to attempt to go down to the beach during the day. Karl or Rud would be sure to see me. Night would be the only time I might stand a chance when they're both asleep. Somehow I've got to communicate that to Harry. Perhaps I can get Rud to communicate for me. That's where my song comes in. Rud and I would have to play it when Harry came into the bay to investigate. Harry knows the song and the words. Would he understand it was an instruction to get out of the bay, anchor out of sight past the cliffs and return before dawn with a riding light on the waka to guide me? At dawn Karl and Rud would both be asleep. By the time they wake up and get out of bed I could be down the cliff-path. Of course they wouldn't know whether I had gone to the beach or across the causeway. I'd stand a fifty-fifty chance they'd check the causeway first. Standing she hummed the first verse of her song again.

My ship's past the cliff. But my boat's in the bay  
And both must be gone by the dawn of the day.  
The moon's in her shroud, and to light thee afar,  
On the deck of the boat's a lamp like a star.  
So wake lady wake, I'm waiting for thee,  
On this night or never we both will be free.

## *CHAPTER 16*

Ann sat on a wicker chair on the balcony alongside Rud. Several times a day she sang while he accompanying her on the violin. He seemed to know the tune to almost every song she selected and he played without reference to sheet music. If she selected one he hadn't heard before she only had to sing it once and he could not only pick up the tune but also add the little intricacies that embodied her mood into the spirit of the tune. But at least once a day Ann made sure he could play, "The Pirate's Song" perfectly. Rud seemed happy to let Ann choose the songs and appeared flattered when she showed her appreciation of his playing. If it hadn't been for trepidation about Ingrid she could have been bewitched by Rud's ability. His music had the impossible ability to transport her to wherever she chose to go.

Over coffee they started talking, first about music and then their conversation evolved into the empowering emotion of music. Their coffee mugs sat empty on the floor as they looked out to where the sand dipped its tongue into the flood-tide and the ocean glistened like glass. Effortlessly the sun climbed over the mountains and Ann started telling him about Gary and Ingrid. At first the stories of her life moved in a smooth curve like water at the top of a waterfall until her emotions exploded in a tumult of broken water and she found herself choking in tears and the words would no longer come. As her emotion's gasped for air in the pool at the bottom of the waterfall Rud was there to pull her out.

He explained how he had once been in an orchestra but had lost his job. When his monthly pay packet failed to arrive, his wife had taken off with someone else and taken his two daughters with her. Then the bank had taken his house away and for a time he lived under a bridge and did enough to earn eighteen months in the slammer. When he came out, a prison mate fixed him up with this "security" job. No one offered any explanations except that it didn't come with a "Job Description" and he knew better than to ask questions.

Ann tried asking him which orchestra he had played in but for some reason he brushed off the question and only replied that he'd been in the prison orchestra when he was "inside". His body language and the tone of his voice made Ann suspect this needed to remain a valley between them that she shouldn't attempt to cross. So instead she started talking about her work at Jakarta University, the cut in funding and how she'd intended to transfer her research to the hospital on Sentinel Island. It came as a surprise to him. No one had said why she had been kidnapped or what her abductors expected to get out of it. But the thing he wanted to know most was about the hospital and village on Sentinel Island. Although Ann had never been there Susan had been

in reasonably regular contact with Huhana and had passed on details about the island. But viewed from this balcony those details seemed as remote as a dream dissolving in the morning-light. Yet the more Ann tried recalling incidents about the island the more Rud seemed to want to hear. He didn't seem interested in details or statistics but instead wanted anecdotes. As if attempting to capture the intonation of her voice but not the words she was using. He wanted the tone and not the substance of the island. That seemed strangely feminine, most men would want it the other way round!

Almost of their own volition Ann's eyes kept drifting towards the bay. Ships hugged the horizon and closer inshore fishing boats worked the coast but she had seen no welcome sail standing off beyond the reef.

That night she lay in bed looking at the ceiling and remembering the things Rud had told her and without being aware of the transition she started speculating on the things he hadn't said. With Rud in mind she fell asleep.

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To Ingrid that Friday afternoon seemed a lifetime ago. Yet she remembered every detail as clearly as if was happening at that moment. She could remember every word she said to Sally as they walked the two-hundred-yards from the school gates to their boarding house. It was the first time for ages she had packed her pink weekend bag before leaving for school in the morning. Usually she had to pack it while the taxi driver was waiting. But this afternoon she not only had her pink bag packed but also had her week's washing in the yellow duffle bag. Grandma always asked her for it and said it was good to have it as it helped her to make up a full-load for the washing machine. As a result Ingrid was earlier than usual when she went outside to wait on the sidewalk



for Helen's taxi to go to Grandma's house. But today a taxi was already waiting.

'Are you Ingrid Spiers?' A man's voice called from the taxi window.

'Yes but Grandma always books me to go in Helen's taxi.'

'Don't worry about that.' The driver loaded her pink and yellow bags into the boot as he replied. 'There's a petrol tanker overturned on the freeway and Helen can't get through so she radioed for me to pick you up. I've got another passenger going your way. Is that OK?' Without waiting for a reply he called, 'Jump in.' and slammed the boot shut on her bags. He got back into the driver's seat and they drove off.

After a few minutes Ingrid leaned forward. 'Excuse me but this isn't the way to my Grandma's house.'

'Sorry love. We can't get through that way. The freeway's closed because of the petrol tanker. I'm taking you by another route.'

An hour later Ingrid interrupted again. 'Excuse me but it only takes about twenty-minutes to get to Grandma's house.'

'Like I told you I have to go a longer way round because the freeway's closed.' The venom in his voice silenced Ingrid and her arm began to tremble.

It was fifteen minutes later she asked, 'Would you please take me back to school? I don't like this.'

The other "passenger" leaned over and using his left elbow as a weapon slammed it into her shoulder forcing her back against the seat. 'Shut your mouth or I'll shut it for you.' He threatened her with his right fist inches from her face.

It was dark when the taxi turned off the tar-seal and drove up a dirt track into the hills. Her right shoulder throbbed. Originating in the pit of her stomach Ingrid's crying tried

escaping through her throat but she choked back every convulsion until her whole body was shaking anticipating the next attack and imagining what would happen when the car stopped.

The taxi jolted to a stop. Illuminated by the headlights Ingrid saw they had pulled up outside an almost derelict house. A slit of light glowing in one of the windows gave Ingrid the only indication that the place was not disused. The driver switched off the headlights and got out. His door slammed. She was alone in the back of the car with the other “passenger” who reached his arm across her body and his right hand clamped her upper arm pinning her back against the seat while his left hand grasped her right elbow. .

‘Sit still and keep quiet or I’ll wrench your arm out of its socket.’

Ingrid stayed motionless.

Beyond the darkness light briefly leaked through a door in the cottage and vanished as the door shut. A glimmer remained in a slit between drawn curtains.

Fear choked off the passage of time as her heartbeat hammered her rib cage. Her eyes peered into the patch of darkness concealing both the cottage door and her future.

A strangled gasp stuck in her throat when light started escaping past a figure framed in the opening doorway. The driver returned and opened the rear car-door.

‘Get out!’

The other passenger got out and grabbing Ingrid by the arm pulled her out into the darkness. No sooner was she standing on the grass than her arm was twisted behind her back and she was pushed towards the entrance. The driver must have opened the car boot because her bags were thrown on the floor inside the open cottage door and the hand twisting her arm behind her back relaxed its grip. A heavy middle-aged Afro-American woman stood inside. She took Ingrid’s hand and led her into the kitchen and into an easy chair where she stood over her.

Two of the woman's front teeth were missing and her nose appeared to have been broken at some time in the past. She wore slippers, one of which had sagged over on one side emphasising the sagging flesh of her ankles and her sideways pointing flat feet. She wore a sleeveless calf-length blue dress with large yellow and red flowers. Rings, that would have to be cut off to be removed, emphasised the swollen nature of her hands that were so enlarged that it prevented her closing her fingers together. Pendulous flab sagging beneath her upper-arms seemed to lag behind every movement of her arms. Ingrid heard the car-door slam before the engine started and the car completed a "U" turn on the grass and changed gear as it drove off into the night.

The woman spoke with a thick Afro-American accent with a strangely masculine pitch to her voice. 'My name's Elsie. I'm looking after you for a while. Have you had anything to eat?'

Ingrid shook her head.

'Cat stole your tongue has it? Would you like some pancakes with maple syrup?'

Ingrid nodded and added, 'Yes please.' As she answered she read the sign hanging on the wall above the cooker. "*If you don't like my cooking then lower your standards.*"

'Sit down there then.' Elsie nodded towards a bent wood chair next to a wooden kitchen table. The tabletop was hollowed out in one corner where countless things must have been cut on it. Ingrid got out of the easy-chair, pulled out the kitchen chair and sat at the table while Elsie waddled to a cupboard, took out a mixing bowl and started mixing flour, eggs and milk. Ingrid watched every movement wondering whether the old woman might be trying to slip something bad into her food like they'd warned her about at school. Perhaps Elsie sensed this or she may have just wanted some for herself but it came as a relief to Ingrid when Elsie's grin turned into a smile and evolved into a chuckle. 'I've mixed a bit extra so I can have a couple of pancakes with you.'

Her laugh seemed to originate inside her boobs, which wobbled with every infectious chuckle. Within hours of being dumped in this place by those two vicious men, who had held her in the back of the taxi, the pulse-beat inside her chest began to slow to the rhythm of Elsie's chuckle. Having eaten her pancakes Elsie picked up Ingrid's bags and carried them into the bedroom.

It was a tiny room with a single-bed. The headboard reached just below the window. Ingrid noticed the window was shut but it had hinges so it must be an opening window and was big enough for her to climb out. Elsie drew the curtains and took a pillow, sheets and two blankets out of a cupboard and started to make the bed. Ingrid went to the other side and helped pull up the blankets and tuck them in.

The woman smiled. 'Thanks Ingrid I can see we'll get along just fine. See you in the morning.' She walked out of the bedroom and closed the door.

Kneeling on the bed Ingrid pulled open the curtains and looked out into an intense blackness devoid of any hopeful wink of light to signify human activity. She drew the curtains again in an attempt to shut out the malice of the night. Opening her bag she took out her pyjamas, undressed and, switching off the light, got into bed. With her head on the pillow she could watch a crack of light sliding under the bedroom door. If someone approached the door she would see their shadow under the door and if the crack widened by a millimetre someone would be coming into her room. After a while she realised she only needed to watch it with one eye.

By mid-morning the following day she sat at the kitchen table with a cup of hot chocolate and three cream-biscuits. She was learning, not only to chuckle, but to laugh out loud with Elsie, who seemed to laugh for no reason except that she enjoyed laughing and making the air crackle with fun.

By lunch-time, scattered sunlight playing with Ingrid's glass of juice left orange footprints on the table and a

dancing jelly on the ceiling which wobbled every time Elsie made the floor-boards squeak. Ingrid moved her glass to try and make the jelly-light on the ceiling bump against a knot on the roof-beam. The backdoor was open and Buzz, the dog with lonely eyes, sneaked past Elsie when her back was turned and nudged Ingrid's leg. She broke off a piece of her sausage. He caught it before it hit the floor just at the moment Elsie turned round.

‘Out Buzz!’

Buzz darted round the far-end of the table beyond kicking-distance and back into the garden, swallowing Ingrid's sausage as he went. ‘Rat bag!’ Elsie called after him but left the kitchen-door open. A few seconds later Elsie saw Buzz's nose peering round the doorpost. Grinning, Elsie leaned forward looked him straight in the eye and growled a ‘Grrrr!’ before turning her back on him. He stood his ground and continued peering into the kitchen and moved his two front paws onto the doorstep. He seemed to be tingling with fun and daring Ingrid to go out and play.

She finished her drink and with a biscuit in her hand walked into the garden and out of the gate. Elsie made no attempt to stop her. Beyond the oak trees round the house rolling grassland spread as far as the trees on the next hill. The dirt road she had come along last night disappeared into a hollow. White fluffy clouds hovered above the hills. She watched a circling hawk and spread out the fingers of her hand like the wing feathers of the bird. It reminded her of the picture of a hawk on the wall at school with the disdainful glint in its eye as it looked down on tiny earthbound creatures. She imagined being transformed into such a creature of wind and air sweeping across valleys and hiding in white clouds.

Buzz was barking at her. She picked up a stick and threw it for him. He caught it and brought it back to her. She kept throwing it for him and he anticipated the direction she was throwing by starting to run while the stick was still in her

hand. Throwing the stick down the hill she found a small stream at the bottom. The banks were muddy. She looked up at Elsie's house two hundred metres away. She could run downhill from the house and there was no chance Elsie could catch her. If she crossed the stream Elsie's old car wouldn't be able to get through the mud. She could be up the other side and into the trees. But then where could she go? She had no idea where she was. That line of power poles would probably lead to other houses. If she were to follow them... She continued throwing the stick for Buzz. After a while he refused to give the stick back and Ingrid went back up the hill and into the cottage out of breath from running after Buzz.

Elsie smiled at her and asked. 'Play a lot of sports do you?'

'Only what I do at school. Sometimes in the holidays I go fishing with my Dad in Harry's boat.'

'So how come you were in the sports shop at the time of the robbery?' Elsie asked.

Ingrid looked puzzled. 'Sports shop? I haven't been in a sports shop. I don't know anything about a robbery.'

'Good girl. That's best. You stick to that story and no one won't come to no harm.'

'But it's true I haven't seen a robbery and I haven't been in a sports shop.'

Elsie nodded with approval. 'That's right of course you haven't and as long as you're here no one's going to ask you anything about it. I can see you and I are going to get along fine. Do you want any more sausages before that rat-bag dog gets the rest?'

'No thank you Elsie.' A puzzled frown creased Ingrid's forehead as she pondered what Elsie had been asking her about the sports shop. Might it have been something the driver had told her when they arrived? If so he must have made it up.

The kitchen radio was permanently tuned to a local radio-station. For Elsie the continuous music was a form of mental bubble-gum which would pop with laughter to the flavour provided by the DJ's comments and the sports-news. It had the added advantage that it stopped Elsie thinking. If Jake really had done a job at the sports shop and Ingrid was the only witness how long would she be expected to look after Ingrid to keep her son out of prison? Time wasn't necessarily on her side because, since her last visit to the doctor, she'd been given a lot more to think about than Jake's burglaries. But Ingrid seemed a nice enough kid. Perhaps looking after her might prevent terminal thoughts. There weren't any decisions to make. She had neither medical-insurance nor money. The little they were paying her for minding Ingrid might pay for the painkillers which, according to the doctor, she'd need shortly. Unless Jake could pull off a big job there was no possibility of any money for any surgical procedures. They were reserved for the rich who, not only didn't know how to laugh, but went round with a permanent frown.

It was four days later when Ingrid and Elsie were sitting at the kitchen table talking that Ingrid heard the radio announcer use her name at a music-break in the programme.

*“State police are searching for eleven-year-old Ingrid Spiers who was apparently abducted in Baltimore by a two men using a stolen taxi and posing as a taxi service. She was last seen leaving her school on Constitution Avenue last Friday afternoon intending to spend the weekend on her grandmother's isolated farmhouse near the head of Chesapeake Bay. She failed to arrive and police are concerned for her safety. Her mother, Doctor Ann Spiers, was also abducted from her hotel at approximately the same time after giving a presentation at an International Medical Conference in Singapore where she described a breakthrough non-invasive technique for cancer treatment.*

*Ingrid's father, Doctor Gary Spiers, from Jakarta has received a ransom note demanding five million dollars for the safe return of Doctor Ann Spiers and Ingrid. Her current whereabouts is unknown and since the delivery of the ransom note her father has also disappeared. It is thought by State Police that Ingrid's abduction may have been to ensure her parent's compliance, as no specific ransom note has been received for her."*

Ingrid jumped up from the table and pushed her chair over in her excitement. 'Did you hear that? They're talking about me.'

Elsie chuckled. 'Then we'd better look after you real good to make sure nothing bad happens to you.'

'They said your Daddy is in a place called Jakarta. I ain't never heard of no place like that round here so how come you go to school in Baltimore?'

'It's the same school my Mum went to when she lived on the farm with my Grandma. Mum wanted me to go to her school cos she reckons the Indonesian schools ain't cool. So I live at the school and visit Grandma at weekends and she lets me ring Mum and Dad.'

'Lord love us! So when do you see your Mammy and Daddy?'

'In the holidays. I have to fly to Jakarta.'

'You only eleven and you have to fly in an aeroplane all by yourself.'

'Grandma takes me to the airport and Dad pays extra for one of the cabin staff to look after me. She gives me chocolate bars. When I get to Jakarta, Mum or Dad meet me at the airport.'

'Well I never heard of such a thing. You poor kid. That ain't fair only seeing your Mammy and Daddy in the holidays. But what was it they said about your Mammy? She knows how to fix cancer? Is that right, can she really fix cancer?'



‘Yes, I think so. Mum’s been working on it for ages at the university and had to present a research paper at an important conference in Singapore. I saw her on television in her new red dress which she bought ‘specially. It was on the news at my boarding school but some bad men have kidnapped her and want heaps of money off my Dad to let her go, and now they can’t find Dad.’

‘You ain’t kiddin’ me? Your Mammy knows for real how to fix cancer real good?’

‘Yes she can, for sure.’

Elsie sat on the kitchen chair. ‘Now you tell me honest-to-God true did you see my Jake do a job at a sports shop?’

‘No I don’t know anything about a robbery or a sports shop. And I haven’t seen anything.’

‘You swear that’s honest-to-God true.’

‘Of course.’

‘Then it’s them two lying buggers. They jist think Elsie’s stupid. You wouldn’t lie to me would you Ingrid? This is important.’

‘No I’m telling you the real truth.’

Elsie put her head in her hands and Buzz came in from the garden and sat by Ingrid’s feet. Eventually Elsie spoke. ‘I heard it on the radio meself. And them dudes brought you here to make sure you’re Mammy and Daddy do like they’re told. Honest to God I dain’t know nuffin’ about that. But I know what’s right and what’s wrong and it ain’t right to keep you here like that. Them told me I had to look after you real good and keep you safe till your Mammy cum ‘n fetch you. They don’t tell me nuthin’ about gettin’ money off your Daddy. They just think Elsie’s dumb but I tell you I ain’t that dumb. Where’s your Daddy right now?’

‘I don’t know. He should be in Jakarta at the university but the radio said they don’t know where he is.’

‘Jakarta? Is that the place you tell me about?’

‘Yes. It’s in Indonesia. We live there.’

‘That’s the place you can’t drive to and have to go by plane?’

‘Yes and I have to change planes in Tokyo.’

‘Tokyo! That’s in Japan Eh! And you come all this way to go to school?’

‘Yes and I stay with my Grandma at weekends and I go back to Jakarta in the holidays.’

‘Is it true your Mammy really knows how to fix cancer like they say on the radio?’

‘Yes but the university won’t give her any more money so Mum and Dad are going to this hospital that my Grandad Harry knows about. He’s not my real Grandad; I just call him Grandad. My Mum has ordered heaps of stuff for the Island hospital so they can make people better. And they’re going to live on the island.’

‘Where’s this island Ingrid?’

‘I don’t know. It’s a long way from Jakarta.’

‘But Your Daddy knows where it is don’t he?’

‘Yes he was going to...’

‘Do you reckon your Mammy and Daddy might have gone there?’

‘I don’t know. Dad should be at home and Mum went to Singapore but I don’t know where they are now.’

‘Ain’t there no one you could ask?’

‘Sometimes Uncle Danny knows where they are.’

‘Who’s Uncle Danny?’

‘He’s not really my uncle but Mum says it’s OK to call him uncle. His real name is Danny Delaney and he used to live in Jakarta with my Mum and Dad when he was on the run. Just after I was born he took off but he sends me birthday presents and Christmas presents every year. Mum sends him email photos of me and sometimes gets email pictures back off him.’

‘But you ain’t never seen him?’

‘Sometimes Mum shows me the photos on the computer before she deletes them.’

‘Where does he live Ingrid?’

‘I don’t know. On some island somewhere but I’ve got his email address and his phone number in my school bag. Mum says it’s OK to ring him up as long as I do it from school or from Grandma’s but not from home ‘cos Dad doesn’t like him.’

‘I guess it must be an expensive phone call from Jakarta. But do you reckon if I can git you in contact with this guy Danny Delaney your Mammy would fix up my cancer for free?’

‘I’m sure she’d do it if she can. But no one knows where she is.’

‘From what you tell me I got a feelin’ this Danny Delaney might know where she is?’

‘Mum’s been talking about going to this island Harry knows about and setting up a hospital there. I know it’s close to Danny’s island. At the hospital they’re setting up, they reckon they’ll only charge people for medical stuff if they can afford to pay, otherwise they do it for free.’

‘You mean that Ingrid? You sure?’

‘Yes, cross my heart, Uncle Danny told me the same on the phone.’

‘You said you had Danny Delaney’s phone number in your school bag. I’m thinkin’ if I can git you to a telephone you could ring him and he might know where your Mammy is.’

‘Have you got a phone Elsie?’

‘No but I know where there is one. If I do that fur you, would you check, for sure, your Mammy could fix my cancer?’

‘Yes.’

‘You do know Danny’s number don’t you. You ain’t kiddin’ me?’

‘Course I know his number. I ring him up from Grandma’s place. But sometimes he’s been drinking a lot of gin and he’s too sick to talk much.’

‘Do you know where this island is that he lives on?’

‘It’s in Papua New Guinea. But I don’t know where that is. I think I’d have to go on a plane to get there.’

‘Do we need a passport to go on the plane Ingrid?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ve got a passport from when I went to Mexico. Have you got yours with you Ingrid?’

‘No it’s at my Grandma’s house in her safe.’

‘In her safe!’ She paused before continuing. ‘Do you know how to get into the safe?’

‘Yes I have to type in the number 1637 and the door opens. Oh!’ Ingrid put her hand over her mouth. ‘I’m not s’posed to tell anyone the number.’

‘I don’t think anyone would mind you tellin’ me if it’s so we can get you safe and help find your Mammy would they?’

‘I don’t suppose so.’

‘My son Jake’s real good at opening safes. If he could fetch your passport for you then we could go and find Danny and your Mammy. How’d that be?’

‘Why don’t you just let me go back to my Grandma?’

‘It’s not that easy. I’m supposed to be keeping you here. If I let you go back to your Grandma those two dudes who brought you here would find out, kill me, get you back again and lock you up real good. If I help you get away, I go with you, or it’s no deal. And I won’t be able to come back no more. They’d be looking for me. You got that Ingrid? If I help you get to meet Danny we both go together or not at all.’

‘OK but how will we do it?’

‘This is the deal. If I take you to a telephone you talk to Uncle Danny. You tell him how I’ve looked after you real good. Then you put me on the phone and I’ll tell him I tricked them two dudes into leaving you with me. But if they come back and find you gone they’ll kill me. When you go away you got to take me with you and we’ll go

to that Island where your Mam can fix cancers for free. If Danny agrees to that then I'll tell him how to find you.'

'Yes Elsie. Yes I'm sure Uncle Danny will agree, Mum says he's got heaps of money. I bet he'll tell us how to get there and pay for our plane tickets.'

'Well if he don't it's no deal. You'll have to stay here with me till those dudes come back.'

'I'm sure Uncle Danny will say yes.'

'But that's not the end of it Ingrid. I'm going to need your Mam to fix up my cancer for free, cos I ain't got no money and the damn doc says I'm going to die if I don't get that therapy stuff.'

'I know for sure the island hospital is on a different island but it's near where Danny lives and it's being set up for people who can't get any other treatment. That's why Mum wants us to go and live there. Mum has been ordering all the medical equipment.'

Thirty minutes later Elsie's battered Ford Falcon pulled up outside a roadside cafe and Ingrid was dialling Danny Delaney. He answered as soon as the phone rang.

'Uncle Danny! It's me Ingrid.'

Tears welled up from nowhere and words stuck in her throat.

'Ingrid! Are you alright?'

'Will you help me escape Danny?'

'You jist try and stop me! What's happened to you?'

'Two horrible men in a stolen taxi drove off with me instead of taking me to my Grandma's house. I've got to get away before those bad men come back.'

'Where are you right now?'

'I'm in a cafe but I don't where it is. Elsie can tell you.'

'Who the hell is Elsie?'

'She's been looking after me. She tricked the horrible men into thinking she'd keep me hidden but instead she's brought me this cafe to call you. I'll put her on.'

'Hi. This is Elsie.'

‘Is Ingrid OK?’

‘Yep she’s fine. But I ain’t. If them two dudes come back and find Ingrid gone they’ll kill me fur real. This is the deal. You listen good. If I tell you where Ingrid is you come over here, fetch her and take me with you to see Ingrid’s mammy and get her to fix up my cancer.’

‘I can’t take you to see Ann ‘cos she’s bin abducted and there’s a ransom demand for her return. I ain’t got that much cash and the US don’t pay no ransom demands, no how. Ann don’t know this, but as I speak I got the “A” team on its way. You can trust old Danny to take you to see Ann at the first opportunity. I can’t say fairer than that. Now you jist put Ingrid on the line again.’

‘Hi Uncle Danny.’

‘Ingrid I guess you know your Mam’s been abducted, jist like you, and we ain’t total sure where she’s gone.’

‘Yes Danny. It was on the radio they said my Dad has gone missing as well. Do you know where he is?’

‘Ingrid I ain’t got no idea ‘bout him but if we find your Mam, for shore she’ll have a bunch of clues where to look.’

‘Do you know if Mum’s alright?’

‘I guess fur shore she is. ‘Cos your Mam’s real smart; she’ll outsmart them. You mark my words. And the good news is we’ve whistled up the “A” team. Old Harry has figured out where your Mam is and Harry, Susan, Jacques, Hemi and Rangi, right at this moment, are aboard *Rurenga* headin’ east at full-speed. Don’t you worry none ‘bout Mam we’ll git her fur sure. And I’ll let you into a secret. That smart shit Figgy, who works at the US Embassy and used to be a crook lawyer, has started up a ransom fund to git you and your Mam back jist in case we need a heap of cash. So don’t you worry none ‘bout her. Now you jist put Elsie back on the line an’ I’ll get all the facts an’ you can bet your sweet arse your Danny’s goin’ to be on his way to git you back real good.’

## *CHAPTER 17*

Half a world away, Ann lay on her bed. The darkness of her room was punctuated with the flashing of the Morse lamp that penetrated the curtain and her mind starving her of sleep. Was it true Ingrid had been abducted or had Karl invented it knowing she was powerless to either verify it or, if it was true, do anything about it? If Ingrid had been kidnapped Danny would know. Somehow this felt a comforting idea. Why did she have more confidence in Danny being able to help rather than her own husband? But she knew the answer, or thought she did. Her mind drifted back to the wild days nine-months before Ingrid was born when Danny was on the run. Was it just Danny who had been on the run or had she also been on the run from oppressive conformity. Initially it was Gary who said Danny could stay with them. How much had Gary worked out since then? Why did he make a point of never mentioning Danny?

Was it because he had no idea or because he knew? No he couldn't know for sure; she didn't even know herself – well, not for certain anyway. And she had no intention of ever subjecting Ingrid to a DNA test. Perhaps “suspecting” was the worst of the possibilities. How much had this affected Gary's relationship with Ingrid? Is that the real reason he had wanted to send her away to boarding school? Did Ingrid have any idea? Ann closed her eyes and Ingrid's face appeared. If Ingrid didn't know now, would she find out one day? Would she ever be able to piece together those parts of my life that would reveal something which might be best buried? Ann took a deep breath. Am I a reasonable facsimile of a good mother? How much of myself do I need to bury because it's what women are expected to do when they get a husband and a family? Is that what Gary wants? Or does he need my wild ways simmering on the surface to prevent the corrosion of his own spirit? Ann smiled to herself. Irresponsibility is probably the best reproductive asset a woman can have. Ingrid probably only exists because of my wanton ways. Ann finally fell asleep. But it was invaded by sweated dreams.

She could hear Ingrid calling out of the darkness. To reach her she needed to fly beyond the horizon and beyond the storm clouds where lightning flashes were spelling out Ingrid's name. But the updraft from thunderhead clouds was driving her into the electric heart of the storm. A flock of birds shone in moonlight above the storm. If only she could reach them she would be able to see beyond the giant curve of the horizon but her strength was fading in the storm gusts that buffeted her. The first rays of dawn illuminated the birds; they glowed in sunlight but in the heat of the sun they became fireballs and dived into the ocean where the flames hissed as they hit the water. She woke by shouting Ingrid's name above the malignant storm inside her head. Her pillow was wet with sweat or tears and her body was



shaking. Afraid the tormentors of the night would return she got out of bed and dressed.

Although the sun had not risen over the mountains the eastern sky was bright. Ann walked onto the balcony. All was still. The glaze on the surface of the sea seemed to be reluctant to respond to the first breath of wind that sneaked out of that hole in the sky she had fallen through. Her eyes scanned the empty ocean beyond the reef. She gripped the balustrade. The steel felt solid and tangible. It didn't belong in the twilight world where wild dreams lurked in dark corners. She took deep breaths. Refreshed by cool dawn air her eyes tracked along the water's edge. They lingered on sunburnt rocks beyond the reach of the tide's tongue.

First her subconscious and then her conscious mind became aware of music followed by a man's voice which completed the words of the song that his violin had implanted in her mind.

*...follow every rainbow,  
till you find your dream.*

Ann turned and smiled. He smiled back.

'Good morning Rud. I've been having a bad dream.'

Rud sat heavily in the wicker chair on the balcony. 'Yes I know. I heard you shouting Ingrid's name in your sleep.'

'Sorry! Did I wake you up?'

'Yes but it doesn't matter.' He paused as if wondering whether to continue. 'Ingrid was also my mother's name. It's quite popular in Germany.'

'Are your parents German, Rud?'

'My father was American, he's dead now but my mother is German. It was an explosive relationship. There were too many landmines on the road.'

It seemed Rud wanted to talk, and she had to get inside the heads of the two men holding her captive. Most men

couldn't resist talking about themselves especially if a woman showed an interest. She smiled. 'Why was that Rud?'

He hesitated again before answering. It made Ann suspect the ghosts from his past were not all dead. 'Who knows were anything starts. I guess the landmine, which finally blew them apart, was planted long before they met. But it affected all of our lives.'

'What was that Rud?' Ann asked as she wondered whether this usually shy man really wanted to talk.

Rud continued. 'In the Second World War my Dad was nineteen. He was one of the US soldiers in the Normandy Invasion. After a few days or weeks, I'm not sure which, German and American soldiers were scattered like deadly nightshade along the Normandy hedgerows. Evening sun was casting long shadows under the trees. A German soldier and my father emerged from the shadows. My father had his rifle at the ready and he pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The bullet must have been a dud. The German rifle was pointing at his chest. Death seemed inevitable. But the German spoke to him in English. "I think we are both human beings." Then he lowered his rifle turned and walked away. But my father had been psyched into a hyper killing-machine by the US Army. He proved the German wrong by ejecting the dud bullet and shooting the German in the back. As the soldier lay dying my father stole his wallet as a souvenir. After rejoining his platoon they passed the wallet round. It contained a photo of the dead soldier with his wife and an eight or nine year old daughter. It also contained an address in Frankfurt. They laughed about sharing her round as the main course and finishing up with the daughter for dessert. It became a joke that lasted for weeks.'

Ann interrupted. 'Your father told you all this? You must have had a very close relationship with him.'

Rud shook his head. 'He kept it to himself for very a

long time. When the war was over he was stationed in Germany where he met a German woman called Ingrid who had lost her fiancé on the Eastern Front. She became my mother. But they had a violent marriage. Dad kept his secret for years while Mum hid the bruises from his fists. Eventually when we were living in the States after a bout of drinking and in a blind fury he told us the story. I think he intended it as a warning to my mother about what might happen to her if he caught her playing up. It was something he always suspected and, as far as I knew, it was without any foundation in fact. He even showed us the wallet. That was twenty-five years after the war finished. I was fifteen at the time...'

He paused before continuing. 'My mother would tell you I was getting into bad company but looking back I'd say I was the bad company other parents should have been warning their kids about. Nothing encourages quite as much as getting away with your first burglary. I was out of control and proud of it. Perhaps that's why Dad told us his story. Whatever the reason Mum and Dad split up shortly afterwards but I don't think it was because of that directly. The memories had started as a pinprick of conscience but it had been festered in his brain until it dominated every brooding mood and bout of drinking. Eventually the mental load became too heavy and it slipped. But for Mum the problem wasn't what he had done in the war but what the war had caused him to become - a violent drunk. It was too late for my parents' marriage. When they split I went with Mum and my father took out our car and drove it into a bridge. It wasn't an accident.'

'What happened to you?'

'I was getting into deeper shit in the States. So my mother took me to Heidelberg where we stayed in a flat near her parents' house. But while we were in Germany eventually my mother managed to trace Klaus Nachtigal's widow. He

was the German soldier my father killed. His widow Greta had remarried and was living in a village near Stuttgart which was only about sixty kilometres from Heidelberg where we were living. We paid her a visit and returned the wallet. Mum insisted I went as well.'

'Was she worried about the reception you might get?'

'Yes but she thought she owed it to both his widow and to herself to give some form of closure to the whole tragedy.'

'What sort of reception did you get?'

'Gracious. Of course Greta had no idea of the circumstances of her husband's death but did not seem surprised when my mother explained it. She invited us to stay for dinner and also invited her, now adult, daughter Isabelle along as well. We stayed into the evening. When Klaus died Greta had received a letter from his commanding officer saying he had died in a single-handed attack against overwhelming odds as he defended the Fatherland. She read it and burnt it. As she put it, she knew it was lies because her husband wasn't that sort of hero. But until my Mum told her the story she had never known the truth.'

'Did she blame your Dad?'

'No, she said they were both victims of poisonous military indoctrination. Her husband became a victim because he didn't believe it and my Dad had become a victim because he did. She went on to say that Mum and I must have inadvertently become second-hand victims of the same poison.'

Greta and Mum were speaking in German. But my German was patchy and I couldn't catch everything which was being said and started deliberately displaying signs of boredom. That's something that comes easy to American teenagers. Greta's daughter Isabelle, who was now in her mid-thirties said she was driving into Stuttgart with her husband to a concert and invited me to join them. I assumed it was a rock-concert and jumped at the chance. To my horror when we arrived I discovered it was an orchestral

concert! But after the first few minutes I was listening not only with my ears but my mind was creating pictures of what I was hearing.

Back home that night I still had the music and the pictures circulating in my brain. But I was just sixteen and wore apathy as a badge of honour so there was no way I would admit to my mother that I had enjoyed orchestral music!

Nevertheless Isabelle and her husband took me to a number of concerts and on my seventeenth birthday I asked my mother for a violin! A year later I started studying music full-time.'

'And since then Rud I suspect music has been your life.'

'Yes Ann, resignation tells me it's my life.' He looked out over the sea and his voice lowered to little more than a whisper as he added almost to himself, 'I'd like to have discovered intimacy with a partner and children. Instead there's a void.'

Ann turned her head and looked across the empty bay. The lighter blue over the coral and deeper blue beyond the reef was starting to emerge as the sun cleared the mountain ridges.

Rud continued. 'Once I convinced myself the void in my life was only temporary but now my years tell me my violin is the closest thing to intimacy I'm likely to discover.'

He said it with a dismissive finality that made Ann turn to face him but as she did so she noticed his eyes were now turned out to sea and focused on the horizon. But the two of them were looking at different horizons. The horizon of his imagination would be forever empty, but her imagination was inventing a puncture wound in the continuous line of sea and sky that would expand to form a sail. Did he suspect why her eyes kept drifting towards the open ocean? Perhaps his interest in the waters beyond the bay was just fascination with the spectacle of moving light and changing colours. Or did he suspect? Setting up a rapport with Rud had not been as difficult as she suspected; he was lonely and confused.

Now she had something tangible to work with.

‘There’s a challenge for you Rud to compose a piece of music describing the changing tones of the ocean as the sun lifts over the mountains and the clouds fold round the peaks. You’re lucky even if you don’t realise it. Many people don’t ever discover a substitute for loneliness. But your loneliness is to be envied. Yours is the type only truly creative people experience. It is the loneliness of a man who holds in his hands a treasure the world has yet to discover.’ She brushed her hand against his before continuing. ‘But you can’t have always been lonely; didn’t you say you were married once.’

Rud nodded. ‘Yes! But some marriages make you feel your loneliness more intensely. Our marriage had every accoutrement a credit card can provide. But it was a hoax, which only lasted till the credit ran out. I don’t blame her. At least half the problem was mine. I was away a lot with the orchestra and spent my spare time trawling through bars and massage parlours for the satisfaction my marriage was lacking. Of course I never found it. Jenny and I never agreed whether I gave her a sexually transmitted disease or if she passed hers on to me. As a source of contention it was a no-brainer because, despite all the denials, we both knew we had enthusiastically earned it. Modern medicine can cure the disease but not the disillusionment that was the cause.’

Ann took a deep breath this was harder than she anticipated. ‘It sounds as if that’s how your marriage ended but what was it like at the start?’

‘At the start? We had sex at eight-thirty every Sunday morning so she could change the sheets by nine-o’clock gather up all the rest of the week’s dirty washing and put it in the washing machine before breakfast.’

He was still smiling as Ann raised her eyebrows and asked, ‘Really?’

‘No but that’s what it felt like!’

‘It sounds like you needed a holiday. Cities can be oppressive and lonely places to live. We’ve got a friend who

has recently written a book that got everyone associated with him into a lot of trouble. But in there he reckons that if a community is so big that if someone leaves and the loss isn't felt by everyone else then that community is too big.'

Rud looked glum and shook his head in despair. 'I don't believe anyone would miss me if I took a step into space off the edge of this balcony.'

Ann smiled and rested her hand on his shoulder. 'I've only known you for a few days Rud but I'd miss you and your music. I didn't ask to be brought here but at least it has given me the opportunity to hear your music and try to understand where it's coming from.' She hesitated. Was she overdoing it? Where was this conversation going? He'd be expecting her to go to bed with him if she carried on like that!

Rud rescued the situation for her. 'How did you get here? All I know is that you arrived and Karl and I were paid to keep you here.'

'I assumed you knew the full story, Rud.'

'All I know is that we're supposed to keep you here and keep you safe. I've no idea why. They didn't tell us anything.'

'Then you know about as much as I do. I was attending a medical research conference in Singapore. I presented my paper and was at my hotel when two Australian men contacted me and said they were interested in providing me with research facilities in Cairns in Queensland because my facilities in Jakarta were in jeopardy. They took me out for a meal to discuss it over dinner and offered to pay for my return air fair to Cairns. Naturally I was very interested, as it would cost a lot to set up the necessary research facilities myself. They explained that, before they could make a firm offer, they wanted me to look at an area of the Great Barrier Reef where they said there were large numbers of the shellfish which had been the focus of my research. So when we arrived in Cairns they took me to the harbour and we left

in a thirty-metre launch complete with a chopper on the afterdeck. They must have spiked my drink and then kept me sedated because the next thing I knew I was waking up here in bed with a sore head and not a clue where I am.'

'All I know Ann, is that you arrived here in the back of a van. Karl and I carried you into your bedroom and laid you on the bed. You were a damn sight heavier than I expected. I went out to collect your bag out of the van and put it in your room. But when I returned Karl had locked your bedroom door from the inside.'

'Why?'

Rud looked away. 'I've been wondering whether to tell you this. I can only guess what happened. Three quarters of an hour later when he came out again you were still unconscious?'

'Do you think he...'

'I've no idea Ann. But I guess if you didn't know about it there ain't much harm done.'

Ann's eyes flashed like broken glass. 'That's a hell of a male attitude. Do you think women...'

'I don't think anything Ann. I thought you ought to know. Probably I was mistaken. It wasn't easy for me to tell you. Probably you'd have been happier not knowing. Should I have kept my mouth shut Ann? Is that what you'd prefer?'

Ann hesitated. 'No! It's not what I'd prefer. Thank you for telling me. You're right, I do need to know.' Thoughts stumbled and tried to regain a standing position. I'm not being fair to Rud. Logically he is quite right. If I don't even know if anything happened it can't have done me any harm. And yet... Hell! Be practical Ann it hasn't done me any harm as far as I know. I've had a period since then so... 'Sorry I snapped Rud. It came as a shock that's all. Women sometimes think differently to men. It's not your fault. You're not responsible.' Ann saw a flicker of relief slide across his face. Rud must care what I think of him!



Rud's eyes looked defensive as he replied. 'I'm being paid a thousand bucks a week to look after you and that's what I'm doing. I've never touched you and I don't know for sure that Karl has either. I've no idea why you're here except that Karl reckons there's a ransom demand out for five million dollars for your safe return.'

'Five million! Someone must have fallen out of their tree! I'm not worth that much to anyone. It will never be paid. But what worries me more is the fact that Karl reckons my daughter Ingrid has also been abducted. Do you know if that's right? Might he be bluffing and trying to undermine me?'

'I've no idea. Karl tells me nothing. What did he say to you?'

'He told me "they" were holding Ingrid in the States. It could be bluff but, without me telling him, he knew her name and the fact she is in the States.'

'How old is she?'

'Eleven.'

'I can't imagine why anyone would want to abduct an eleven year old girl.'

'Can't you? I can and so could every other mother. Do you want me to list the reasons? Contemplating them is enough to tip the scales of sanity. To make it worse while you're earning a thousand dollars a week holding me here I'm totally powerless to do anything to help her. Have you any idea what that feels like? You know as well as I do young girls all round the world are being abducted by sexual predators or sold as sex slaves, some are tortured and murdered. What do you think goes through a mother's mind at three o'clock in the morning when dreams and panic launch an attack? What you've just told me doesn't inspire confidence does it?'

Rud shook his head in dismay. 'The only instruction Karl and I have received is to keep you safe and even you

must admit that's what I've been doing. If Ingrid has been abducted the most likely thing is that she is being kept safe as well.'

Tears appeared in Ann's eyes as she asked in little more than a whisper, 'The words "most likely" imply the reverse is a possibility. Tell me; what's the point in kidnapping someone just to keep them safe?'

'Perhaps to get ransom money.'

'And if the ransom isn't paid what happens next? Will they just say, "Never mind it was a good try." and send us home? Do you think that's likely?'

'Sorry Ann, I've no idea about long-term plans for you, or even if there are any plans. All I know is that Karl and I are supposed to be looking after you. I've no idea why you're here.'

'Are you Islamic? Or do you have any Islamic connection?'

'Islamic! I'm not religious Ann, unless you count music as a religion. Why do you ask?'

'In Jakarta we've a friend, no not a friend, an acquaintance called Figgy...'

'That's an unusual name.'

Ann smiled. 'His real name is Franklin I. Goldberg but we call him Figgy. He warms to the close relationship the nickname implies and simultaneously criticises us for using it in public. He used to be a criminal lawyer in the States and if he's to be believed he still owns a law firm and a delinquent wife in New York. But right now he works for the US Embassy in Jakarta. He warned us that intelligence reports predicted a probable Islamic threat to us personally. I've always suspected the intelligence industry of inventing most of their threats just to keep themselves in business. We ignored his warnings, we even laughed at him, and called it a bit of "Figgy Fiction" until Jacques wife Yvette was murdered and now Ingrid and I have been kidnapped. I reckon he must have found out something. Too late I've

come to the conclusion his warning was genuine. And I also believe you when you say you've no idea why I've been abducted.'

'Do you know why anyone would want to pick you out for special attention?'

'You tell me Rud. You're the one who's kidnapped me.'

'I'm just being paid to look after you and keep you safe I've no idea why you're here. You must have some clues why you're here.'

'I can only guess. Our friend Jacques wrote a book about the evolution of modern thought and some religious clerics thought it was a blasphemy against Islam. Several of us helped Jacques with his book and were named in the credits. Also I went on television in support of Jacques.'

'Is that why you were brought here?'

'It's what prompted Figgy to warn us.'

'If he had intelligence reports why didn't he take them to the Indonesian Police?'

'According to Figgy he couldn't risk exposing the security agent who had infiltrated an Islamic religious order. And I suspect the Indonesians lack the bureaucratic courage to confront Islamic clerics.'

'So that's why you're standing on this balcony talking to me at a time when most people are still in bed!'

Ann ran her fingers through her hair. 'I don't know Rud. It's probably related. Malignant dreams have been hunting me all night. I can't think rationally. Nothing makes sense any more.' Her voice dwindled to a whisper. 'A lifetime ago I presented a research paper on a non-invasive treatment for cancer.' Accusation dominated her voice as she asked, 'Do you think anyone would be likely to kidnap me because of that?'

She paused and looked out towards the empty horizon and sighed. 'I'd love to develop my research further but my funding has been cut. I've been to Switzerland and Germany to price the equipment I'll need to complete

my research and it's going to cost over twice my original estimates. I couldn't possibly raise that much under normal circumstances and now that a ransom is being demanded for my release it looks even less likely. So I guess some multinational company will take over my work and, as always, exploit a monopoly market to the detriment of all but the richest patients. They could be behind my abduction. I've never trusted multinational pharmaceutical companies but I can't imagine even them sinking low enough to kidnap my daughter!' She looked back towards Rud and spoke decisively. 'I think it must be because of Jacques' damn book.'

She hesitated and added, 'No that's not fair. It's not Jacques' fault. It's the biblical bigots, Islamic zealots and bureaucratic cowards who are the problem.' Ann hesitated and smiled before continuing. 'Jacques' book encourages people to be non-judgmental but here I am being judgmental about judgmental people!'

'You say your friend Figgy had information and didn't do anything positive to help you? What sort of a friend is he?'

'What sort of a friend? I don't know Rud. I really don't know. I wish I did. He has a lawyer's love of mischief. In the States he defended some very wealthy clients and I suspect he fed on litigation like a crayfish on a corpse. The way he talks you'd think laws are made solely for the benefit of lawyers so they can keep the vulnerable in their place. I guess it worked for him because when he came to Jakarta he had enough money to spend millions on an ostentatious motor-yacht, which he uses as a floating bar to entertain influential crooks and seduce young women.'

Rud raised a questioning eyebrow and Ann continued with an explanation. 'Young females seem to feel sufficiently unsafe in his presence to ensure a wedge of willing women converge on the gangplank to his boat. It is

also acknowledged among whispering-women during war-games at cocktail parties that certain husbands enhanced their professional careers because their wives knew what was “required”. Some of it is probably true. He flaunts his diplomatic immunity like an amulet and wears a grin as wide as a rainbow every time he steps ashore. His boat has more female visitors than the Taj Mahal. He has even named his boat *Diplomatic Immunity*.

Rud grinned. ‘I bet it never leaves the dock.’

‘You’re right Rud. I don’t think he’d have a clue how to take it to sea by himself. One evening, at the nightclub, he explained how he was intending to install a billiard table in his boat! Think about it Rud, a billiard table in a boat! We’ve never let him forget it! Susan even composed a song about it and sang it in the club. He’s one of those men who never do anything for free and very little for a thousand dollars. I can’t imagine him doing anything to help either Ingrid or me.’

‘I hope you don’t feel you’re in any danger while you’re here Ann. Karl and I, are being paid to keep you safe. I’m sure the same would apply to your daughter. Someone will be keeping her safe as well.’

Anger crackled inside Ann’s head. ‘Ingrid had been abducted; I’ve been drugged and kidnapped. And you’re telling me we’re not in any danger!’

‘I didn’t drug you or kidnap you Ann and I don’t know who did it, or why. I’m just doing my best to keep you safe. And while I’m on the subject I get an uneasy feeling about you going swimming alone with Karl. I’m sure you’ve got your reasons and I don’t believe it has got anything to do with wanting to go for a swim. Karl is a bully and as treacherous as a car without brakes. He’s been arrested twice for rape but on both occasions it seems the women were intimidated by someone, possibly Karl’s lawyers, and wouldn’t go through with the prosecutions.’

Ann snapped. ‘So am I supposed to be grateful I’m not currently being raped and have only been drugged and kidnapped?’

Rud flinched and Ann instantly regretted her outburst. Snapping at Rud was one of the least productive things she could do. ‘Sorry Rud. You haven’t done anything to me. All night the prophet of doom has been hammering the inside of my brain. I’ve never felt so emotionally fragile.’ She smiled and touched his hand. ‘I should be thanking you for looking after me, not snapping at you.’

Ann saw hesitation brush across his eyes. ‘I’m a poor swimmer Ann, but as long as you don’t misinterpret my motives I was going to offer to join you on the beach when you go swimming with Karl.’

Ann grabbed the opportunity. This was her chance to repair the damage she had done in her unnecessary outburst. ‘Yes Rud! Please come as well. I’d feel safer with you there and if you don’t feel like a swim you could bring your violin. An evening swim to your music would be a rare delight.’

‘That’s kind Ann. I’ve been playing my violin while you’re on the beach to remind Karl that I’m not far away in case he’s tempted to think otherwise. But when I saw what you weren’t wearing I sent you a musical warning. I don’t know whether you recognised it or not but I played a particularly dark piece of Tchaikovsky’s. It could have been a mistake because I think you fainted on the beach.’

‘No I didn’t recognise it but I think I must have become aware of your subliminal warning. It’s probably one reason why I fainted. You’re a thoughtful man Rud. I shouldn’t have snapped at you. Sorry.’

Rud smiled back and heaved himself out of the wicker chair. ‘How about I go and get you some breakfast Ann? Things always feel better on a full stomach.’

As he stepped inside the house Ann looked out to sea. Beyond the reef the morning breeze was picking up. The inshore fishing fleet was heading south, as always at this

time in the morning. She was even beginning to recognise the individual boats. Usually fishermen liked to be back before dark. They didn't pass the bay till about two hours before sunset. This not only confirmed the direction of the nearest harbour but assuming the speed of the boats was about eight knots that harbour could be about sixteen nautical miles to the north. Ann sighed and rested her hand on the balcony staring out to sea as she had done every day since she arrived. This morning no gulls trailed the boats. Strange how gulls had worked out there was no point in following fishing boats on their outward journey.

But it wasn't fishing boats or gulls that focused her attention. Several times a day her pulse-rate rose whenever a sail appeared beyond the southern headland. She held her breath and checked the bedroom curtain. But her eyes had been brushing past the window all day. There was no possibility it wasn't displaying her International Code "V". But checking had become addictive. For too brief a moment anticipation sparkled like wine. Bubbles of excitement filled her glass until, with the realisation that the boat was continuing on its course, the wine turned sour. Then her spirit became sullen and the colour of her mood turned as black as if the ocean had doused the sun.

## *CHAPTER 18*

While Ann's eyes remained focused on the distant horizon her mind explored the endless eddy of questions without answers that she had been asking herself every day since she arrived. Had Harry understood the clues she had given in her video message? Had he even seen the video? Was he on his way to rescue her or was she waiting for something that wasn't going to happen?

Now more sinister thoughts overlapped the old ones. Was Ingrid being mistreated? Might another convicted rapist be "keeping her safe"? Government institutions might keep captives locked away indefinitely but kidnapper's plans were inherently more volatile. What would the terminating solution involve for her and Ingrid? Would she ever see Ingrid again?

A hand touched her shoulder. 'Good morning Ann.' She gasped. Her saturated mind had obliterated his footfall and



she had been unaware of his presence. She turned to face Karl and garbled a startled return greeting. Karl's facial features seemed to have changed. What did he do to me while I was unconscious on my bed? The lines round his eyes had become more sinister. An involuntary shudder shook her as she thought of the careless way she had gone skinny-dipping. Why did he creep up on me? Why didn't I hear him approach? Had he deliberately tried to startle me? That too contained an element of control.

Karl continued. 'I've been watching Aljazeera News. They've just run a programme on you and most of the other stations are carrying the same story about you and your daughter Ingrid. Seems like you're a celebrity.'

She looked at his face trying to disseminate what was going on inside his head.

"Is he mentally undressing me?" Strain showed in her voice but the question was urgent. 'What did they say on TV?'

'Nothing much that you don't already know. They said you're an American citizen and have been kidnapped. Then they showed a recording of you presenting a medical research paper in Singapore about a cancer cure. And followed it with and a couple of still photos of Ingrid with her grandmother in the garden of her house in Chesapeake Bay. They showed her boarding school and did an interview with Ingrid's headmaster. I got the impression she is a vivacious young girl.'

Ann's eyes narrowed to slits. What did "vivacious" mean to him?

Karl continued. 'If you want the bad news first the US have refused to pay any ransom for your release and a spokesman was interviewed and said they automatically refuse all ransom requests on principle in case it encourages other kidnappings. Apparently your husband Gary has gone missing and they are trying to locate him in Jakarta. But if you want the good news, someone has opened a lawyer's

trust fund to collect money from the public to pay for your release. Then they showed several families of cancer victims who have made large donations to pay your ransom. So it looks like you might be going home some time.'

'Did they say what had happened to Gary?'

'Only that their enquiries have drawn a blank and they are requesting sightings of him. They showed a head and shoulders picture of him.'

'Do you know what's happened to Gary?'

Karl walked away as he answered. 'Why should I know? I didn't even know you had a husband till you told me.'

Alone on the balcony Ann turned and looked out to sea. She suspected Karl was telling the truth. Probably he had no idea what had happened to Gary. Might Gary have decided to go into hiding? Yvette was dead. Harry, Susan and Jacques had escaped by sea and she and Ingrid had been abducted. Might he have been abducted as well? Like a ghost emerging out of the mists of her subconscious an unthinkable thought was trying to mount the battlements of her consciousness. "Yvette had been murdered, might Gary..." No she hurled that spectre back into space. She spoke the words out loud. 'I know what's happened to Gary. He's on his way to rescue Ingrid and me. I won't believe anything else. I won't. I won't. Gary is safe.'

Returning to the balcony with both their breakfasts on a tray Rud replied, 'What was that Ann?'

Feeling foolish Ann answered. 'Oh nothing Rud. I was just talking to myself. It's supposed to be the first sign of something isn't it? Karl was here a few minutes ago and told me my husband Gary is missing. I was just... Oh! It doesn't matter.'

Placing the tray on the table Rud walked to the balcony and rested his hand on hers, 'I guess it won't help you none but an innocent explanation is the most likely reason.'

Ann pulled her hand away. ‘Ingrid has been abducted; now Gary is missing. I’ve been clinging leech-like to the idea that Gary might be able to help.’

‘Maybe he is. Maybe that’s why no one knows where he is.’

Ann ignored his reply. ‘As long as I’m stuck here. I’m powerless to do a damn thing.’ Ann sighed and the sigh sounded to her like the sound of a woman going mad. ‘I can hear him now. Whenever I get depressed and confused Gary tells me I’m a perpetual motion machine going nowhere.’

‘I’ll tell you that as well Ann if you think it’ll help.’

‘It won’t unless you can follow it by suggesting a route through my inner wilderness.’

‘Try eating your breakfast and having a cup of coffee.’

Ann smiled as they sat at the table facing each other. ‘That’s the best advice I have all day Rud.’

She sat facing the bay and it wasn’t a chance decision. She would have liked to be able to look at her breakfast or at Rud when he was speaking to her, but instead her eyes kept drifting back to the bay. Doubt lingered about what she thought she had seen. Forcing her brain to replay the image she had casually witnessed about fifteen minutes ago. Then she had dismissed it as irrelevant but now it was becoming relevant. Distracted by what she had seen she started only answering Rud with the occasional “yes” or “no” at appropriate times judged from the tone of his voice not what he was saying.

It had to happen. She may have given an inappropriate reply. Facial features may have betrayed her. Perhaps he was simply following the line of her eyes. Whatever the reason Rud turned in his chair to see what was absorbing her attention. Unless he had seen the same thing she had observed a quarter of an hour ago he would not have understood the relevance. Obviously he didn’t understand because a puzzled frown brushed across his forehead.

The more she thought about it the more convinced she had become. The large sailing vessel, which had passed between the two headlands a short while ago, had turned and was now standing off the bay beyond the reef. She had never seen *Rurenga* but this scow was much larger than she had expected. She had imagined it about the same size as Harry's boat, *Fool's Gold*. It was too far away to be able to read the name but aboard the vessel they did something which made her gasp with excitement. A yellow and blue signalling flag was being run up the mast. She recognised International code K. "I need to communicate with you."

The scow was moving slowly ahead half-a-mile offshore and well outside the reef. Ann could just make out people moving on deck. Had they seen the curtain in her window that she had modified to a code "V" signal? (I require assistance). Might they have binoculars trained on the house right now? An involuntary frown puckered her forehead. They wouldn't be able to recognise her at that distance even using binoculars.

Ann swallowed her coffee. It was still too hot and she could feel it burn her throat. She hit Rud with a smile. 'I really needed that coffee Rud I didn't realise how thirsty I was this morning. I think I must have been sweating a lot. It's probably stress and I've got a headache. Would you be an angel and get me another cup please?'

A little surprised, he stood up instantly. 'Sure thing, no problem.' As soon as he had left the balcony she climbed onto the table and, looking out to sea, raised and lowered both arms together. If they had binoculars trained on her they would probably see her "distress" signal even if they couldn't recognise her. She sent the signal for about fifteen seconds before she climbed down and sat back in her chair with her elbows on the table and resting her chin in her hands waiting for Rud to return with her coffee. Frozen in that position and bubbling inside like a whistling kettle she had to wait for two minutes before he returned. Her

mind was half a mile out to sea. Harry would be looking for a response. Even if his eyesight had deteriorated Susan should be able to read that message without binoculars. Rud placed her fresh cup of coffee on the table.

She touched his hand. ‘Thank you Rud, that was very kind. I owe you one.’ But, as she said it, he gave her a glance that she didn’t understand. It contained both surprise and puzzlement. But her mind and her eyes were preoccupied elsewhere. The scow had hauled down the code “K” signalling flag and replaced it with a red, white and blue striped flag. International code “C”! (Affirmative) Yes! They had seen and understood her hand signals. She glanced back at Rud. He was looking at her. Convinced her eyes were betraying her subterfuge she looked away. Reluctant to turn her eyes seawards again she focused on her coffee. Seconds passed and when she looked up again he was still looking at her. No he wasn’t just looking at her; he was interrogating her eyes. She picked up her coffee but her throat was so choked with apprehension she couldn’t swallow. She had to say something, anything providing it wasn’t related to the scow.

‘I always think “first thing in the morning” is the best time for coffee. It sets me up for the day but if I drink it in the evening I can’t sleep at night...’ God! That came over as lame as one-legged sailor! Now he’ll know I’m up to something.

Rud smiled and nodded. ‘But if the machinations of the night don’t include sleeping, coffee in the evening could be advantageous couldn’t it Ann?’

Ann bit her lip. He seemed to be burrowing his way into her defences. What the hell did he mean by “Machinations of the night”? It wasn’t a casual conversational comment. Had he guessed she was planning to attempt a night escape? Deciding her best response would be to fail to understand his probing she gave him her most demure smile. ‘Oh I did use coffee to keep me “physical” when we were on our

honeymoon but now Gary and I have both been married long enough to discover sleep as being the most satisfying bed-time activity.'

She started to drink her coffee, which gave her the opportunity to look over the top of her mug and obtain a seaward glance. The scow was continuing on its way; soon it would be out of sight round the headland. But she had seen what she wanted to see. The scow had a dinghy hanging from davits on the stern. A canoe was lashed on deck, together with an inflatable dinghy. Harry must have seen the white coral sand on her video clip and had come prepared to cross a reef.

The coffee going down her throat seemed to collide with excitement and apprehension rising from somewhere close to the pit of her stomach. Harry had located her. He had done his bit but the scow was out there beyond the reef heaving gently to a smooth swell which must have originated a long way off and she was ashore behind a security alarm with two men guarding her. Between them the swell was turning into breaking combers on the outer edge of the reef with deadly tidal flows surging through gaps in the coral. It was an almost impossible stretch of water. Probably that's why they had chosen this place to keep her captive. There was nothing more she could do out here on the balcony; she needed to return to her bedroom.

'I'm busting to go to the toilet, Rud. It must be all the coffee I've been drinking. Also I haven't had a shower this morning so I'll slip back to my room to get cleaned up and perhaps we could indulge in a bit of music later on. It might help with my headache.' She was pleased with the way she said that. It was about the first thing she had said that morning that didn't sound contrived. Perhaps that was because it contained a hint of truth. Yes, it was true, the more she thought about it the more she realised she did need the toilet and she hadn't had a shower.

Back in her room she pulled out the bottom draw of her dressing table. Behind the back of the draw she had Sellotaped an envelope. Opening the envelope she removed the chart of the bay she had made following her evening swimming excursions and her observations from the balcony. It was hardly an Admiralty chart and was by no means complete but at least a general pattern of the topography of the seabed was emerging. Also she had pencilled in a guesstimate of the tidal flows through the deeper channels. When she combined this with the set of tide-tables she had made, she knew which parts of the bay she could trust. Even her tide-tables weren't exact because of the difficulty of determining the precise time of high and low water but she was reasonably sure they would be correct to within about a quarter-of-an-hour.

She was certain slack-water was the only time Harry would attempt making a passage across the reef to avoid being swept onto coral. Obviously it would have to be slack water at the top of the tide not low water. Night was the only time she would stand any chance of escaping unobserved. Her tide-tables indicated any rescue attempt would have to be made at about three o'clock tomorrow morning. She was reasonably sure Harry would have worked that out and come to the same conclusion.

She glanced out of her window. Right now the scow had crossed the bay and was beyond the left-hand headland. Hopefully Harry would have been reading the reef to find a gap where they could get a canoe or an inflatable through the broken water and into the lagoon. That would have to be a daylight operation. Ann consulted her tide chart. High tide this afternoon will be at about three-thirty. If he can find a suitable gap and take a boat across the reef he'll probably attempt it shortly before the top of the tide. Then he'll need to mark the channel through the reef with a hand-held GPS and set up enough waypoints to enable him to retrace his

route in darkness through the coral in the inner reef and back round the headland from a pick up point in my bay. From the state of the tide he's not likely to be here before about four o'clock this afternoon.

He'll need to appear innocuous. I wonder how familiar Rud and Karl are with Island fishing techniques. The faces of the two men materialised in her imagination as she thought about them. She came to the conclusion based on nothing that Rud could be more of a problem than Karl.

She tried to think like Harry. In his position I could set a gill net as if I'm going to leave it in place overnight. She bit her lip. The net would take a lot of room in the canoe or inflatable and could be a hazard when attempting to cross the outer reef. Also it doesn't take long to set a net. So it would be difficult to stay in the bay very long without a casual observer wondering what was happening. She smiled to herself, I think I could rule out gill net fishing. Line fishing would be easier and would enable Harry to stay longer in the bay without attracting attention. However long he stays it's the only opportunity I'll get to try communicating with him and arrange a night-time rendezvous. To avoid suspicion he'll need to be seen leaving the bay. If I were Harry when I moved out of the bay I'd wait behind one of the headlands for the top of the night tide. But it would be cramped and tedious sitting in a canoe or an inflatable for about ten hours. But it would be too risky trying to get back over the reef on a falling tide instead of at the top of the tide. So once inside the reef he'll probably want to stay there until the next high tide. Beyond the headlands there could be other bays. Should the next bay be suitable he'll probably try going ashore to wait. If so, I guess he'll try climbing the headland to find a position where he can look down on this place and see what's going on. The scow had disappeared behind the left-hand headland so Harry will be crossing the reef from that side. But if he wants to view the bay from a headland he could use either the left or the right



headland. If he comes at about four o'clock it will be about two hours before sunset. The sun sets behind the right-hand headland. So if he used that headland he would have the sun behind him and anyone who glanced in that direction would be less likely to see him, as they would be looking into the setting sun. So I'll guess he'll enter the bay from behind the left-hand headland. Then he'll do some line fishing in the bay and continue on past the right-hand headland gathering more GPS waypoints as he goes. I imagine he'll land in the next bay and climb to a vantage point where he can look down on us. If he uses binoculars he will be able to hold them steadier on land than on a boat. Also in the evening the sun will be behind him and there will be no chance of a flash from the lens giving away his position. The right hand headland also has the advantage of being the closest to the house.

This is the first time Harry will have seen this place. He'll want to assess it and try guessing how I intend handling my end of it. I'll only get one shot at escaping so I'll need to give him all the help I can. In the meantime I'd better have a shower or Rud might be able to smell the fact that I haven't had one and start wondering why I needed to go back to my room.

## *CHAPTER 19*

Ann returned to the balcony. Rud had gone; his wicker chair was pushed aside and the bay was empty. She scanned the ocean out beyond the reef but only newly formed white flecks on the sea's face winked back at her. She sat in Rud's chair and watched the clouds as they started their day lingering on hilltops and submissively conforming to the contours of the mountains. Gaining the confidence of the morning breeze they started slithering down the hills, filling the valleys and casting a moving patchwork of shadows across the sea as more white clouds closed in to fill the sky. The blue patches dwindled. Gust by gust the wind was rising and foaming fingers clutched the outer reef more firmly.

Her mind juggled with the possibilities for crossing the outer reef. She tried imagining the conditions. Would Harry choose an inflatable dinghy and outboard or use a canoe? What would the conditions be like twelve hours later at

night when they went back out to sea? There was nothing special about today. Might Harry decide to postpone the attempt and wait for calmer conditions? She was in the process of working out times for tomorrow's high tides when Rud returned to the balcony clutching his violin.

'The wind seems to be picking up today Ann.'

'Yes! Have you heard the weather forecast Rud?'

'I don't bother with weather forecasts. The forecasters never seem very good at looking out of the window. And the weather don't make much difference to me. If it's fine I can sit out here in the shade, if it's raining I sit inside and if I'm too hot I turn the air conditioning on. Someone else is buying all my food and drink and paying the bills.' He smiled. 'Looking after you is the best job I've ever had. No one else has ever paid me to sit in the shade all day, talk to a beautiful woman and play music whenever I want. If Karl weren't such an arrogant pig this job would be perfect. I'd be happy if my time here, with you, lasted forever. I guess it ain't too bad for you is it?'

'I'll never afford to live in a house like this. The meals you've cooked for me have been great.'

'When I was in the slammer I worked in the kitchens. All I know how to do is prison food.'

'Then you must have learned well. And what's more I've enjoyed talking to you Rud and listening to your music but my Ingrid has been kidnapped, Gary has gone missing and I'm powerless to help them. That thought dominates every waking moment and invades my sleep. I've got research work waiting and people relying on me. You've made me comfortable but I'm still a captive. I'm a ship caught on a rocky lee shore. I can't get off and if I stay here much longer I'm fated to become more of a wreck than I am now.'

'You're not a wreck Ann. You've done a lot for me.'

'I can't think what that is Rud.'

'Then I'll tell you. You haven't made derogatory comments about my weight. You haven't criticised my

music. You haven't doubted my ability to earn a living. You haven't made me explain why I did time in prison. You haven't told me I'll never make a satisfactory husband or father. You haven't debased my masculinity.'

'Debase your masculinity! How could I Rud? I haven't had any intimate contact with you.'

'That limitation wouldn't stop some women.'

'If they do those things Rud they debase themselves not you. If I ever get away from here I hope to help set up more medical facilities on Sentinel Island. But it's more than that. It's setting up a new community. The people are all new arrivals and their backgrounds are so diverse it will only work if we can show respect and be non-judgemental.'

'If that happened it would be an unusual place to live.'

'You're right Rud but respect is the only thing which will work or make life worth living. I think the German soldier you told me about knew it. Respect and being non-judgemental is supposed to be the relationship between doctors and patients. Mutual respect within a marriage will probably make the relationship succeed. I know it sounds idealistic but wouldn't it be an achievement if we could extend it further?'

'Extend it further?'

'Yes beyond normally accepted limits. Imagine a business putting respect for other living things ahead of profit. Imagine a prostitute and her client showing respect for each other. Imagine a wife being both respectful to her husband's mistress and non-judgemental with him.'

'I'd like to imagine it. But I can't. That sort of consideration only happens in literature and music.'

Rud was right of course. Ann's mind flipped back to the time Ingrid was conceived. Twelve years later! And I still haven't forgotten the overpowering urgency of the lust that controlled me. I didn't consider the consequences then and if I experienced the same irrepressible desires again I'd probably make the same mistakes and hope for

a non-judgemental response from Gary. But did I make a mistake? No, no, no, I could never face Ingrid and say I made a mistake.

She looked at Rud and smiled at his round face and double chin. 'You're probably right Rud. Let's resort to music and let our mistakes stream away on the wind. The wind at least is non-judgemental.' Picking up Rud's violin from the table she handed it to him. But as she did so she glanced at the bay. Waves bursting across the reef were throwing spume into the air for the wind to turn into runnels of froth. If this wind holds there'll be no rescue boat coming today. Would *Rurenga* even stay anchored outside the reef? In Harry's position I'd find deeper water well away from the reef.

As Rud's bow danced over the strings Ann considered the irony of waiting and hoping for weeks in calm weather and now, on the eve of a possible success, her hopes were being blown off course by wayward winds. As if to enhance her melancholic mood the strains of Rud's music moved with the rapidity of willi-waws swirling across the bay. Had she been an observant student of behaviour she might have deduced something from Rud's twitching lips and the way his eyes kept drifting in her direction. Waves of music broke upon the walls of her subconscious and fell back having failed to broach her blockade.

When he played the same tune a second time a few notes penetrated her subconscious. They swept on past her like the scent of heather on a hillside. They gurgled between lichen stained rocks before spilling into burns of bog-brown water. Closing her eyes she watched a Scottish Highlander swinging down a goat track through broken rock and bracken. Forgotten words of an old Scottish ballad hovered like a hawk on the wind. "Lord Jamie Douglas" came to her as the wind across the bay ruffled her hair. Strains struck like blown spume. What is Rud saying to me in music that he couldn't say in words? The part of the ballad he was playing was called "The Water is Wide". As he played she

sang silently to herself, tapping her finger on the table to the tune helped her remember the chorus. As the words spilled out of her memory the full significance struck like a tsunami. Was there any point in trying to hide her plans from Rud? Playing for time she sang the words out loud. As soon as she started singing, his eyes met hers. Rud hadn't played this accidentally. She sang the chorus. It was all she could remember of the song.

The water is wide, I can-not get o' er  
 Neither have I wings to fly,  
 Give me a boat that can carry two  
 And both shall cross  
 My true love and I.

He can't know, but he's speculating I'm planning to escape by sea. He's asking if I'll take him with me. She glanced up at his face. She saw a sad and lonely man watching and waiting for a reaction. How should I react? Is this a trap and will Rud be running to Karl if I admit anything? If its not a trap would it be easier or harder to escape if Rud came with me?

Ann decided to hit him with a smile. She had enjoyed talking to him and listening to his music. To be fair it had seemed a friendly relationship rather than submitting to being kidnapped. But it had come as a violent jolt that he would contemplate using words like "My true love", even if he did it by music.

'I'm a married woman Rud. I know it might sound boring to some people but my husband Gary is my true love.'

A shadow hovered behind his eyes as he spoke. 'Of course Ann. It's only a tune, just like your "Pirate's Song" That's only a tune as well isn't it. You're not really expecting a boat to pick you up in the bay before dawn are you if I were to play the "Pirate's Song" on my violin?'

Panic showed in Ann's voice as she asked. 'What made you think that Rud?'

Rud smiled and rested his hand on Ann's hand. 'What made me think it? It was something to do with seeing an International code "V" hanging in your window instead of your bedroom curtain. Seeing your name being flashed out to sea in Morse every night.'

'You saw them and recognised them?'

'I worked in the orchestra on a cruise liner for ten years and the captain insisted all the crew including musicians had to learn to read marine signals and be able to assist launching the lifeboats and distribute life-jackets.'

'For musicians on a cruise liner! That's unusual isn't it?'

'I've never heard of it on any other cruise ship. But you can't argue with the captain.'

'Do you know why he wanted it?'

'Yes he told us ad nauseam. He was British. Apparently during the war he was on the North Atlantic convoys and his ship was saved from being torpedoed because, during a period of radio silence, a cook read a Morse signal which was being flashed on an Aldis lamp from one of the escort destroyers.'

'So you all had to learn Morse as a result.'

'The captain's mind was still fighting the Second World War decades after it had finished. I suppose it made sense to him even if it didn't to us. But don't worry Ann, I won't say anything to Karl.' Rud squeezed Ann's fingers for no better reason than he was nervous before he added, 'Providing you let me come with you.' Looking into her eyes he continued. 'You can trust me Ann.'

Ann smiled back. 'Yes Rud I believe I can. Of course now you've figured out what I'm doing, I haven't much choice have I? Thank you, I'd welcome your assistance to help me escape.'

'There won't be any future for me if I help you get away. Some bastard will make sure of that.' Rud shrugged.

‘Not that there is any future for me anyway. People like listening to music but only if it’s free. Would there be room for me on the Island you told me about where people ain’t judgmental?’

‘Yes providing we contribute to the best of our ability there would be room for both of us. But that’s where the “Us” will end. I admire you as a musician and I like you as a person Rud but please don’t even hope our relationship will ever develop into anything more intimate because it won’t. I’m a mother and a married woman and want to stay that way.’

‘If I can just see you sometimes and talk to you, I’ll respect that.’

‘That’s fine but if we ever manage to escape from here I don’t want you to think I made you glittering promises and you later found out they were just Fool’s Gold. I like you and admire your ability but that’s all.’

Rud’s face lit up. ‘All! That’s more than anyone else has ever said to me. I’ve always been an outsider wondering what it must be like to join the human race.’

‘Well I mean it Rud. I do like you and I do admire your ability.’

Light flickering in his eyes as he replied. ‘There’s one thing I don’t understand Ann. How does anyone else know where you are?’

‘Remember the video message Karl sent to my husband. I left enough clues in that for a friend to work out where I am.’

‘I saw that video and I didn’t notice anything unusual.’

‘You weren’t supposed to, Rud.’

‘If we’re going to get picked up from the bay there is the problem of getting past the alarm on the track. If that goes off in the night it will wake Karl. He’s got a gun and might be mad enough to use it.’

‘Do you think that’s a risk Rud?’



‘He wouldn’t use it on you. About the only instructions we’ve been given is that you must be kept safe. If you’re harmed in any way he won’t get paid. But if the alarm goes off and he sees me helping you escape I not convinced I wouldn’t become a target.’

‘Then I think the risk is too great Rud.’

‘Not necessarily...’

‘Do you know how to isolate the alarm Rud?’

‘Sorry Ann, Karl’s made a point of keeping the security code to himself.’

‘Could you ask him?’

‘He wouldn’t tell me; and asking him would just make him suspicious. If he’s the only one who knows the code it could be an advantage to us, not a disadvantage.’

‘Why? What makes you say that Rud?’

‘Because he’s arrogant enough to believe he has everything under control.’

‘And that won’t be the case?’

‘I wouldn’t like you to think I wasted all my time in prison. What we’re sitting behind is an Octopus Mark Three security system. It beats me why the owners must have spent millions building this place and decided to protect it with such a crappy security system.’

‘So you know about the alarms here, Rud?’

‘Sure do. For a start they were installed to prevent people breaking in, not breaking out.’

‘Does that make a make a difference?’

‘It sure does Ann. Unless you’ve got wings there are only two ways to get into this place, either up the cliff path or via the causeway. So they have laser beams and video cameras on both places. Cut one of the beams and the cameras start recording, the floodlights go on and the sirens shriek as loud as a gaggle of girls at a pop concert.’

‘So what can we do about it Rud if we can’t de-activate the system?’

‘All it needs is a ten-cent coin. If you haven’t got one I know I have.’

‘There’s probably one in my purse. But how does that help?’

‘I’m not as agile as I used to be, so it might be a bit beyond me but could you climb up onto the balustrade, Ann?’

‘I guess so Rud, if I had to. Why?’

‘See that flood light up there. If you can stand on the balustrade you’d be able to reach it wouldn’t you?’

‘Probably providing I don’t look down. But it’s a hell of a drop onto the rocks.’

‘For God’s sake don’t do it Ann if you think there’s a chance you’ll fall. I know I couldn’t do it.’

‘If there wasn’t a twenty metre drop I wouldn’t have a problem.’

‘Would it help if I held a broom handle up for you to hold and keep your balance?’

‘I’m sure it would especially in his wind, but what do you want me to do up there?’

‘I want you to take out the light bulb. Put the ten-cent coin into the bulb socket and replace the bulb. You might find it a bit tricky getting the bulb back in again because of the extra thickness of the coin, but it should go if you force it.’

‘Will that prevent the alarm from going off, Rud?’

‘No it won’t Ann. When we cut the laser beam the alarm will still activate but as soon as the contactor closes, to switch on the floodlights, the short circuit caused by the coin will blow the circuit breaker and kill the whole of the system. Octopus mark threes don’t have any battery back-up, they are totally mains powered.’

‘You make it sound very simple Rud.’

‘It is. Providing you can get to that floodlight up there. Out of the eight floodlights it’s the only one we stand any chance of reaching without a ladder. But of course someone

trying to break in wouldn't have access to the floodlights. What we're doing only works because it's an inside job.'

'And providing we can do it without Karl seeing us.'

'Yes Ann I've been thinking about that. Every afternoon Karl spends at least fifteen minutes in the shower. We'll need to be as busy as blow-flies in a kitchen but if we're ready to go and we don't hit any snags you should be able to fix that light fitting in five to ten minutes.'

'How will we know when he goes into the shower?'

'I'll go inside and read in the lounge, I should be able to see when he goes in. As soon as I hear water running I'll come out and tell you. We'll need to have the broom and the coin ready. Also we'll need to have the table pushed up to the edge of the balcony so you can get on that to step onto the balustrade. Do you know what shoes you will be wearing to walk along the edge?'

'I'd prefer to do it in bare feet. I shall have to pin up my hair and wear tighter fitting clothes so there'll be nothing, other than me, to flap.'

'We mustn't waste a moment getting that bulb back in. It could be tricky.'

## *CHAPTER 20*

The wind increased all day. With their eyelashes wet with salt-spray Ann and Rud retreated indoors abandoning any attempt to stand on the balustrade. By evening, spray stripped from the reef had turned the windows of the house opaque with salt. Beyond the balcony spume merged with a doom-laden sky and the reef vanished. Anxiety sluiced through Ann's mind like a flood tide through a hole in the reef. Would the scow be heaving on her anchor chain out there in the grey nothingness off a lee shore? She tried guessing who'd be on anchor-watch trying to peer into the grey void through rivulets of water running down the wheelhouse windows. At risk of their anchor dragging might they have moved away looking for sheltered water over better holding ground? Were their lives hanging from a single anchor chain?

Throughout the following night, rain drummed on the roof and the waterfall beneath the balcony developed a deep-throated roar that combined with the hollow boom of colliding boulders ricocheting off each other. Unable to sleep Ann lay in bed listening to the crack of rocks shattering as they burst apart at the base of the waterfall while she imagined herself falling from the balustrade. Splitting the night, flashes of lightning illuminated her bedroom like the talons of a hawk swooping onto a fresh road kill. Her brain had too much company for sleep, and her mouth felt as dry as a sloughed snakeskin. Needing a coffee she slipped on her dressing gown and walked down the corridor towards the kitchen pursued by the crack and roll of thunder.

Light from the lounge was leaking under the door. Someone else was awake. Was it Karl or Rud? She hesitated outside the door. If it's Karl I'm going straight back to my room and bolting the door. But it could be Rud. Should I risk it? Answering her own question she tentatively reached for the doorknob. On the opposite side of the room clutching an empty coffee mug Rud was sitting away from the foam-flecked windows and had curled himself into a ball on the sofa. Entering and crossing the room she took a deep breath hoping it would have a calming effect on her shaking limbs. Knowing fear would tighten her vocal cords and betray her emotions she smiled and sat with Rud on the sofa. Uncurling, he half-turned to face her. The ghost she saw in his eyes flinched as if in pain. He's scared of the storm as well! So it's not just a feminine thing! Despite their bravado, men get frightened just like women. She took another deep breath.

'It's hard to sleep isn't it Rud with that noise.'

'Yes Ann, it feels as if an excavator is working inside my chest. I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd get up and read for a bit.'

His book lay unopened on the table! He was just sitting there listening to the cacophony of sound invading the building. Ann smiled. 'It's less scary isn't it when there are two of us?'

Ann's mind clung to the thought and examined it. For the first time since I was abducted I not only have someone on my side but someone whose emotions run parallel with mine. I'm not alone and the odds are moving in my favour. I wouldn't have had a clue how to castrate that security system if Rud hadn't told me, and he did it without wanting anything from me in return. Heaps of guys would demand sexual favours in exchange and in advance. How would I have responded if that had been the case? Her eyes drifted down to his leather belt and noted the line of strain holes progressing towards the only hole left to go. He looks about as sexy as a steak and kidney pudding! On the other hand... Damn it there is no other hand. I'm a married woman. Instinctively she pulled her dressing gown more tightly over her knees.

With a crack of lightning that illuminated the whole room a shock wave shook the whole building. The lights went out. The explosion was still trying to escape from inside Ann's head when the lights came on again.

While Rud was explaining that the stand-by generator has just kicked in Ann realised she and Rud were holding hands. She pulled her hand away. "Did I grab his hand or did he take mine?" She wanted to know but couldn't ask. Perhaps neither of them knew!

Hell! I'm making a fool of myself. I'm supposed to be a married woman. What am I doing, grabbing Rud's hand in the darkness! At least I'm safe ashore inside a house. What must it be like for Harry and the rest of the crew hanging on an anchor beyond the headland trying to ride out this storm? And they're out there for me and not for any other reason. Pull yourself together Ann.

There was a slight tremor in her voice as she stood up. ‘If the electric jug is still working I think I’ll pop along to the kitchen and make myself a coffee. Can I get you anything else Rud?’

‘There’s an opened packet of chocolate biscuits in the fridge. Why don’t you bring them back and we could sit here together and share them.’

Ann smiled to herself. It isn’t biscuits he wants to share. It’s intimacy with another human being in the middle of a storm, and it’s what I want as well!

With the biscuits finished and empty mugs sitting together on the coffee table, the storm moved out to sea. The sounds of the night diminished and by dawn only the roaring of the waterfall, the brown stain in the bay and the flotsam along the water’s edge remained. None of the debris was from a boat.

Ann stood on the balcony with her hands resting on the balustrade and her hair blowing in the dying wind. There was a pencil-sharp line in the bay where muddy river water met the salt. Ann watched fascinated. The ebb tide was dragging stained water out of the bay, not directly out to sea over the reef, but along the coast past the southern headland. The storm has had its uses. That’s the best indication I’m ever likely to get of the direction of the ebbing-tide. It’s what I suspected. Now it’s been verified. Thank you storm! If the water is draining out of the bay past the headland there must be a sizeable hole in the reef in the next bay. Assuming the scow is still out there that’ll be where Harry will cross the reef. If he does it before the top of the tide he will be able to use the incoming tidal flow through the gap to get in and later he might be able to use the outgoing flow to get us back out to sea.

Four hours later Rud sat alone in the lounge. An open book lay on his lap, but a sleepless night and the fact he wasn’t wearing his reading glasses ensured his eyes would fail to focus on the words should he have been inclined to

read. But his interest was divided between the empty corridor leading to the bathroom and Ann. She was wearing shorts and an open-neck blouse while sitting barefoot at the table on the balcony. Her calves appeared to glow in the sunlight while her thighs remained in the shade beneath the table. As the sun moved across the sky he figured the sunlight would climb further and further up her legs illuminating more and more of her thighs. She crossed her legs and looked in his direction. Refocusing his eyes he glanced at his wristwatch for the fourth time in the last half-hour. Karl was late taking his shower.

The balcony broom handle still leaned against the balustrade where he had placed it. He had removed the brush as it might get in the way. They only needed the handle. Anything else was a hazard. Luckily he had retained the small piece of Blue tack that he kept in his violin case. He hadn't used it in years, for the obvious reason he seldom used sheet music let alone on windy days outside. He had kept it "just-in-case". Now it was about to perform the task of holding the ten-cent coin onto the terminals of a replacement light bulb. He had decided it would be too risky for Ann to place the coin into the light fitting and then put the existing bulb back in place. That would require using both hands to complete the operation. With a twenty-metre drop onto rocks she needed one hand free at all times to steady her-self by holding onto the wall-bracket. He couldn't contemplate her needing to let go, even for an instant. They had revised the plan. Once she had climbed onto the marble topped table she was going to walk the three or four steps along the top of the balustrade holding one end of the broom handle with both hands while he held the other end. Once she reached the wall she would let go of the broom with her left hand and transfer her grip to the wall bracket. She would then let go of the broom and use her right hand to remove the existing bulb from its socket. Then she'd drop it onto the rocks and remove



the replacement bulb from her cleavage. The coin would already be secured to the bulb terminals with the Blue tack. They had decided, if the coin became detached they would abandon the attempt rather than risk Ann having to let go of the wall bracket. But assuming everything went to plan she would insert the new bulb, complete with the coin, into the light socket. With her right hand she would then take hold of the broom handle and once firmly balanced would let go of the wall bracket and transfer her left hand onto the broom. Shuffling backwards along the balustrade she would return to the table and get down. Success seemed dependant on Ann meticulously carrying out the plan and on Karl staying in the shower long enough to enable the job to be completed.

In a single bound a Chinese acrobat could have leapt from the floor of the balcony to the balustrade and walked on her hands along the rail while juggling the light bulb with her feet. A ballerina from the Bolshoi would probably have been able to pirouette on the rail. But Ann was neither an acrobat nor a ballet dancer. She was a scientist and a university lecturer.

Adrenaline started pumping from the moment Rud hurried onto the balcony with the news that Karl had started his shower. Blood pressure rose; Ann's mouth went dry and her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. Sweat ran down her forehead and into her eyes and her arms started shaking. The light breeze attacked her. The rocks twenty metres below seemed to be jeering at her and daring her to fall.

Five and a half minutes later she was ready to step from the balustrade back onto the table. The broom handle fell with a clatter onto the floor. The job was complete and Karl remained in the shower. Her legs were shaking and tears appeared in Rud's eyes as he held up his hands to support her as she jumped from the tabletop back onto the balcony floor. His outstretched hands were round her waist ostensibly to support her descent to the floor. But as her toes

touched the floor she wrapped her arms round his neck and his hands still encircled her waist. The focus of the plan was changing. He could feel her heart pounding as they drew closer together. Lips touched and remained touching.

Ann pushed herself away from him. ‘Sorry Rud, I think some of that adrenaline must have gone to the wrong parts of my body.’

Rud raised his eyebrows. ‘Did it?’

‘Of course it did Rud. I’m a married woman.’

‘I understand Ann!’

God! I wish I did, Ann thought to herself as she turned away and, resting her hands on the balustrade, looked out to sea. The ocean was empty and combers were still breaking on the outer reef leaving a hostile rim of white water. By early afternoon the line of broken water had narrowed and gently heaving gaps were appearing in what had formerly been an unbroken line of foam.

It was four o’clock in the afternoon when a canoe rounded the headland from the south. Every molecule she possessed strained to focus on it with orgasmic anticipation which steadily grew in intensity as the vessel entered deeper and deeper into the bay thrilling more and more of her body sending ripples of excitement through her, until her mind climaxed into a shuddering explosion of realisation. It wasn’t just three people in the canoe it was Harry, Susan and Jacques! Paddling into the centre of the bay they seemed to be fishing but Ann could see Harry feeling his way over rock and beds of coral hunting out deeper channels. He’ll be marking the position of the channels on GPS and plotting a route to use in darkness.

She watched a gannet rise out the sea and climb higher and higher soaring on the updraft from the cliff. She caught glimpses of it’s shadow rippling across the sunlit sea. Circling the bay it swept over the water as its eyes tried penetrating the surface searching for promising tell tale signs of prey. Its dive was vertically down with wings

partially folded. It plunged below the surface but popped up again. The oil in its feathers prevented it from staying below the surface for more than a fleeting moment. It had caught nothing.

At that precise moment Karl came onto the balcony. From the ecstatic heights of anticipation Ann's spirit dived. Timing was critical. Damn! Karl was seldom on deck at this time of day. Why did he have to turn up right now? The canoe was in the bay she had to make contact. If she could recognise them, they would be able to see her. But with Karl there...

Rud picked up his violin.

'Do you know this tune Ann? It's a piece I've often been requested to play in the past. I believe its called, "The Pirates Song" and...'

Ann smiled. 'I'd love to hear it Rud.'

Rud decided to ignore the disapproving growl they heard from Karl and started to play. In Ann's imagination she heard Harry and Susan singing the words of the tune as the notes drifted towards them across the bay. Susan and Harry couldn't possibly sing these words and be in any doubt about my escape plans. The words rippled through her consciousness.

My ship's past the cliff. But my boat's in the bay  
And both must be gone by the dawn of the day.  
The moon's in her shrouds, and to light the afar  
On the deck of my boat's a lamp like a star.  
So wake lady wake, I'm waiting for thee  
On this night or never we both will be free.

Judging by the scowl on Karl's face his mood was as black as a decayed tooth. Ann recognised the intake of breath. It was Karl's prelude to telling Rud the damn violin would go over his balcony if he played one more note. But Ann got in first clapping her hands in delight. 'That was

lovely Rud would you play it again!’ Karl growled.

Damn! This is a critical moment; Harry’s in the bay, I have to communicate with him. I can’t let Karl bugger it up with one of his tantrums. Nauseating as it may be, I think I’ll have to play the “smouldering temptress”. Wish I knew how to do it! I guess Karl’s experienced “Working Girls” doing this professionally. Hell! I’m just an amateur. Hopefully Rud will understand my motivation if I... She checked her reasoning. Gary is the only person I should be concerned about, not Rud! Turning her head so Karl couldn’t see she gave Rud a stage-wink before pouring herself onto the arm of Karl’s chair. Still wearing her shorts she reclined her legs over the arm and swung her ankles. Her elbow pressed against his shoulder. Am I overdoing it?

‘Don’t you find that music sends little tingles down your spine Karl?’

‘I don’t know what the Hell you’re on!’

‘What am I on? Music, Karl, Music!’ She gave a schoolgirl giggle. Thanks Ingrid, I’ve just borrowed that giggle from you!

She turned to face Rud. ‘Would you mind playing that same tune again for me please Rud? It sends tingles all down my spine.’

As Rud started to play she generated a quiver at the base of her skull and encouraged it to track down her spine through her abdomen, buttocks, thighs and calves until it squiggled out of the tips of her toes. Gee! That felt great; now I’ll try that again with Gary.

Rud glanced at Ann. Their eyes met. Was he asking whether it would be safe to play anything else? Ann blinked twice; it was a long blink followed by a short one. The Morse letter “N” signifying “No”. Rud’s bow remained poised over the violin waiting for the signal.

She smiled at Karl. ‘Did you find that Karl? A little thrill started right here.’ She touched the back of his neck to indicate the spot while her fingers searched for the erotic

region at the base of his skull. Ann looked directly at Rud and blinked four times, long, short, long, short. This was the letter C (for affirmative). At the same time she used her fingernails to stimulate the nerve endings in his spine. As Rud started playing, "The water is Wide." Ann watched Karl's eyes glaze over. She smiled to herself. Perhaps I could have had a career as a "Working Girl" after all! The words of the chorus ran through her head as Rud's music drifted out to sea.

The water is wide, I can-not get o'er,  
Neither have I wings to fly,  
Give me a boat that can carry two  
And both shall cross my true love and I.

Ann bit her lip. Hopefully if Harry doesn't know the words, Susan does or they won't be expecting to find two people on the beach tonight. Now all I've got to do is extricate myself from Karl.

## *CHAPTER 21*

Ann looked at her watch. It was nearly five-thirty and the canoe was disappearing round the northern headland. Little more than an hour remained before sunset. Karl was slumped in the recliner while Rud packed his violin back in its case and announced he was going indoors to cook dinner. Her stomach muscles felt as if they were knotted in a clove hitch leaving her certain she wouldn't be able to eat any dinner even if he cooked it for her. She looked up. Karl's eyes were in "fixed-focused" mode on her thighs making her even more uneasy. I suppose I asked for that by draping myself all over him. No! Damn it I don't have to put up with this. Standing she walked to his recliner and stood over him.

'Karl I don't like being mentally mauled.' She intended spinning round on both her heel and her dignity, walking

inside and shutting the door behind her. She didn't get as far as the door before she heard Karl.

‘Wishful thinking love. Getting desperate for it are you?’

Caught fresh out of sarcasm and robbed of her intended haughty exit she felt both naked and vulnerable to the laughter that pursued her across the balcony. Without even shutting the door behind her, she ran to her room threw herself across her bed and sobbed into her pillow.

Five minutes elapsed before she was able to whisper to herself, “Zip on your protective coating Ann. Hell! I'm supposed to be on the point of attempting an escape and I'll only get one shot at it. The last thing Rud, Harry and the others need is for me to collapse like a simpering schoolgirl.”

She stood up, straightened her blouse and went to the bathroom washed her face, combed her hair and, looking in the mirror, smiled at herself. Perhaps tears are a solvent, for the knotted lump in my guts. I think I'll go and help Rud prepare dinner.

Daylight leaked away as Ann and Rud set the table and carried their dinner onto the balcony. Switching on the overhead lights they sat at the table eating their meal and looking out across the bay. Ann smiled to herself as she imagined Harry, Susan and Jacques on the headland looking at them through binoculars. Initially they had been hundreds of miles away with no idea where she was. They had correctly interpreted her message and found her. If all went well, by dawn they should be together.

After the meal Ann and Rud sat in silence. Blackness pressed in on all sides trying to crush the bubble of light on the balcony. Somewhere out there the night air was muttering to the ocean as the flood tide gurgled a reply from the water's edge. Winged insects of the night closed in on the balcony as they sacrificed themselves to the alien Gods of electric light.

Rud spoke in a whisper. ‘If we turned off the balcony lights we should regain our night vision.’

Ann stood up, walked to the switch and instant darkness swamped the balcony. She returned to her chair in darkness. Within minutes the black outline of the headland emerged fringed with a phosphorescent rim of water. At first individual stars emerged and within minutes the Milky Way painted a glow across the sky that stretched to the horizon.

Rud moved his hand across the table and touched Ann’s fingers. She didn’t draw her hand away. Out in the lagoon individual stars shimmered on the mirrored surface of the sea. An hour later the rim of the mountains inland glowed as the moon rose above the hilltops. As moonlight spread across the balcony Rud became convinced Ann’s hair was glowing in a white light. They spoke in whispers. Anything louder than a whisper would have been an intrusion into the intimacy of the night while they waited for the flood tide to cover the rocks and open a deep-water channel through the coral. Ann checked for the third time that evening that she still had the purse containing her passport and credit cards in the pocket of her shorts. She’d put her passport inside a plastic bag, hoping it would stay dry until they boarded *Rurenga*. Assuming they made it Karl was welcome to keep her suitcase and dirty undies. They might be the only thrill left to him!

The moon was far out over the ocean by the time a single white light rounded the Southern headland. The boat trailed a fiery arrowhead of phosphorescence and the paddles left ghostly footprints across the lagoon. From the centre of the bay a torch flashed four times:- short, long, long, short. The letter “P” in Morse! (All personnel ashore should return to their vessel immediately.) Using Rud’s torch Ann flashed back:- long, short, long, short. (“C” for Affirmative.)

Ann and Rud stood up quietly to avoid scrapping their chairs on the balcony. Before Rud picked up his violin case he put his arm round Ann and kissed her whispering.



‘Good luck Ann.’ She kissed him back and Rud squeezed her fingers as they moved towards the cliff path and the laser beams.

The siren gave a brief blip, as they cut the beam, then remained silent. Nothing else happened. No floodlights switched on. Rud whispered, ‘You’ve fixed it Ann.’ Switching on their flashlight, they clambered down the cliff path with their ears straining to detect any sound coming from the house. Might Karl have heard the single blip from the alarm? Would he get up to investigate? Might he spot the little pool of light from their torch as it punched a hole in the darkness surrounding the track? Not only was Rud slow, and his steps ponderous, but it was the first time he’d been down the path and the ground was slippery after the storm. Urgency pounded a drum inside Ann’s chest. How could the man be so slow? But no lights appeared in the windows of the house. Ann took Rud’s hand unsure, at first, whether it was because of the slippery terrain, or for other reasons. She decided it was simply because of their need for haste. At least that seemed to be the only reason. Nevertheless she was glad she wasn’t walking down this track alone in the dark. The vessel’s riding light was stationary in the centre of the bay beyond the rocky ledge dividing the lagoon. She guided Rud over the steeper bits of the track and even offered to hold his violin case to enable him to get better handholds on the bushes and branches clinging to the rock face. But he refused to let go of his precious case. So Ann continued holding his free hand as he cautiously placed each foot. The tune of the pirate’s song ran through her head. She changed a few words and sang them softly to him.

The ship's past the cliff. But the boat's in the bay  
 And both must be gone by the dawn of the day.  
 The moon's in her shrouds, and to light us afar  
 On the deck of the boat there's a lamp like a star.  
 So hurry Rud hurry, I'm waiting for thee.  
 On this night, or never, we both shall be free.

As they crossed the sand at the top of the beach Ann explained in little more than a whisper. 'We're going to have to wade out. I've been mapping the bay on my swimming trips. There's a snag. We've got to get out beyond the rocky reef that's between the canoe and us. You'll have spotted it from the balcony. It dries to over a metre. The bottom's a mess of jagged rock with staghorn coral in the crevices. There's no way Harry could get the canoe through that. And it would tear our ankles to shreds if we tried wading across it. That's assuming we could find our feet, especially in the dark. After that storm there'll be even more rocks to stumble over.'

As they reached the water's edge Ann continued. 'Follow me I've been over this bit of the sea bed heaps of times. Our best bet is to wade out keeping close to this northern headland. We'll be on sand most of the way, until we get to a rocky bottom with soft coral and clumps of brain coral. It could make us stumble but, once over that, the bottom drops away and the canoe could paddle over and pick us up. Harry will be watching our light to plot our progress through the inner reef.' Ann held out her hand to Rud as they waded out through the water leaving a phosphorescent trail behind them. Somewhere out in the bay fish scattered on the surface. Ann could hear the rhythmic sound of paddles as the riding light on the canoe moved towards them. A thrill, like a shiver, passed down her spine. Tears distorted her vision as, in the glow spilling from the light, she recognised the figures of Susan, Harry and Jacques. The canoe's wooden gunwale was illuminated but, darker

than the water through which it moved, the black bulk of the hull trailed an afterglow in its wake while widening phosphorescent wings spread out from the bow. Whispers came across the water. Although she couldn't hear the words Ann recognised Susan's voice and Harry's reply.

Moments later the canoe was being back-paddled. Standing on a clump of brain coral in chest deep water Ann's hands locked onto the gunwale. Jacques and Susan's arms were under her armpits. The dugout heeled. Water splashed into the hull as she was partially dragged over the gunwale. Then, for what seemed half a minute she was stuck balancing on her ribs while Susan and Jacques tugged at her armpits. Fingers from somewhere closed on her belt below her spine and tugged; Rud's free arm encircled her thighs and lifted. The gunwale briefly scraped her legs, a hand pushed her bottom, the canoe rocked and she fell face forward into the bilge with one foot hooked over the gunwale and the other twisted beneath her. With her face in bilge water she lifted her head. Using her hands and arms and assisted by Jacques and Susan she managed to regain a vertical position. Sitting on one of the thwarts she wiped her face with her hands. In the light coming from the hurricane lamp she looked for Rud.

Seconds later she was reaching over the side to accept Rud's violin case while announcing, 'This is Rud. He was one of my captors but has helped me escape. He's coming with us...'

Susan interjected. 'There's no way we could drag him over the side; he must be twice your weight.'

Ann cut in. 'Get him in shallower water and he'll be able to climb in.'

Harry asked, 'Hi Rud! Are you wearing shoes?'

'Yes.'

'Good! Can you swim round to the stern and hang on. We'll try and tow you into shallower...'

Ann cut in. 'I know this bay. I've been swimming here most days. We're on the seaward side of a rocky ridge that extends across the bay. It's not navigable, even at the top of the tide, and right now the tides falling. It's dry at low water. If we head back in, I think I could find it, even in the dark. We mustn't get too far into the reef or we may ground on an ebbing tide. But if we approach it from the seaward side Rud could get onto it and, with a bit of luck, he might be able to climb aboard.'

A light switched on in one of the windows in the house.

Ann swore. 'Damn! What's Karl doing awake at this time?'

'If he has a gun is it safe to go further inshore?' Jacques asked.

No one questioned the commanding tone in Ann's voice as she answered. 'No, but I'm not leaving without Rud. Douse the riding light. We're going in.'

The hurricane lamp was hanging from a forked stick that was fastened to the forward thwart with a square lashing. Harry lifted the lamp glass and blew out the flame. The pool of light vanished. The glass snapped back in place and there was a brief smell of kerosene before the night wind swept it away.

In the darkness no one saw tears appear in Rud's eyes and even if they had they would have assumed it was just seawater, and not understood the explosion of emotions when he heard Ann's words, "I'm not leaving without Rud." There hadn't been a single instant in his life when anyone had said anything resembling that.

With a silent "Thank you Ann." he grasped the gunwale with both hands and pulled himself hand-over-hand towards the stern. His body trailed in the water as the canoe moved further inshore towards the rocky inner-reef. Scrambling over the others Ann worked her way up to the bow and hung over it searching the black water for the first indication they were approaching the rocky ridge.

Another light switched on in the house.

Ann whispered, 'I think I can see rock beneath the surface.'

The canoe edged in and slowed as the paddlers back-paddled. A light swell caused the canoe to rise and fall.

A third light switched on in the house. The curtains of the room were drawn and with rear illumination there was no mistaking the red diagonal cross against the white background. It was the first time Ann had seen it from the sea. She announced, 'That's my bedroom window. If Karl's got half-a-brain he'll have realised we're escaping.'

The canoe slipped astern into the rocks, with its bow facing the open sea. In the stern Jacques held out his hand attempting to steady Rud as he started to clamber up the shell-encrusted rock. He slipped. The canoe bumped on rock and heaved in the swell. Rud fell forward emitting a cry of alarm. His full weight hit the canoe pushing it away and leaving him splashing in water unable to touch bottom.

A flashlight started winding its way down the cliff path.

Harry spoke calmly. 'Sounds carry well over water. Take it quietly and steady Rud. Don't worry about the light on the cliff. It's damned hard to see a darkened boat at night.'

But Rud was unaware of the light and more concerned with trying to find something tangible to touch.

Back-paddling the canoe again Ann held her paddle for Rud to grasp. She pulled, and reaching into the water, grabbed Rud's wrist and placed his hand on the gunwale. In an instant he was hanging on with both hands. They back-paddled again, but this time they brought the canoe alongside the rock rather than stern-on. Both Susan and Jacques could now hold his hand as he again clambered up the reef, breathing hard. The canoe bumped on rock. Placing one foot on the gunwale he transferred his weight. The canoe lurched. Water poured in and he fell forward on top of Jacques and Susan knocking them over and at the same time striking his head on the other gunwale. Ann and

Harry used their paddles to push the canoe away from the rock while the tangle of limbs and torsos in the bottom of the boat sorted themselves out and found their respective owners. Once in deeper water, away from the rock, Susan unlashd the wok they used as a bailer and started bailing.

The flashlight had reached the beach and its beam began searching the bay. The canoe was still wallowing, heavy with bilge water. They paddled across the bay attempting to follow Harry's GPS route to round the southern headland. Susan bailed all the way. Having rounded the headland they were out of Karl's line of sight and heading towards the hole in the outer reef and *Rurenga's* lights. The tide was ebbing strongly. Fingers of fear tightened on their stomachs. The rollers, that were the legacy of the storm, were smashing on the reef. But within the gap the ebb tide ran contrary to the incoming waves. With two extra people aboard the canoe was more heavily laden, there was less freeboard and the waves shorter and steeper. The rollers in the gap curled and broke. They'd have to paddle through breaking surf. With the tide change conditions had deteriorated.

Beyond the reef *Rurenga's* lights beckoned. Only a few hundred metres separated them.

Harry shook his head and put into words what each of them already knew. 'I've been worrying about this all night. Things could be clearer in daylight but we're not going to make it through the gap on this tide. Capsize out there and we're all finished. We'll have to wait for the tide while we're safe inside the reef. Sooner or later the sea will settle.'

Harry turned to face Ann. 'We were undeservedly lucky when we came through yesterday. Conditions looked better from the seaward side. They always do. I was overconfident. By the time we recognised the danger we were committed to go through. We'd got to the point of no return. We surfed through on the front of a single roller. Our luck held but we can't chance it a second time. We'll have to wait for the sea to settle.'

‘That could take hours, days even.’ Jacques replied.

Harry nodded. ‘Yes! Do you fancy the alternative?’

No one answered.

Harry continued. ‘What’s the hurry? Ann and Rud are safe. We still have a little food and water with us. There are scores of bays along here where we can find rest and shelter. The lagoon is full of fish. After all that rain there’ll be fresh water, fallen coconuts and firewood ashore. It won’t be the first time we’ve used our bailing wok for cooking. We can wait as long as it takes for the right conditions but I don’t think we should risk the gap right now.’

‘If Karl’s got a gun might he follow us along the shore and...?’

Ann interrupted. ‘This is a rugged coastline. I’d say impenetrable, with steep gorges which is probably why the road finishes at the house.’

‘Might he get someone to follow us by sea?’ Susan asked.

‘I’ve no idea what contacts he’s got through the people who abducted me. Do you know Rud?’

Rud shook his head. ‘Sorry, no idea. Karl tells me nothing. I suspect he knows very little. I doubt whether, who ever organised Ann’s kidnapping, would have given Karl their genuine contact details. Why would they?’

‘We’ll have to consider the possibility, that Karl has some means of direct or indirect communication with them.’ Harry commented. ‘We should also maintain radio silence and not give away our position. We’re in a dugout canoe that, to a casual observer, is indistinguishable from dozens of other fishing canoes along this coast. If I were one of your kidnapers I’d arrange for a boat to be keeping watch on that gap through the reef tomorrow. In the meantime I reckon it should be safe to go ashore tonight.’

Paddling south-east, they kept the phosphorescent glow of the reef to starboard and the black outline of hills to port. For the second consecutive night they had been deprived of sleep. The flood of adrenaline during the rescue had

gone over the side along with the bilge water. Their skin and clothes remained wet. The night-wind clawed at body-heat. Muscles and joints ached. Dawn broke upon the mind-numbing rhythm of paddles rising and falling as the canoe heaved and slid forward over a grey sea. As the water drained out of the lagoon they needed their paddles more frequently to push the canoe off clumps of rock or coral.

The stars faded, the sky lightened and details of the shoreline emerged. They were off a tree-lined beach devoid of any sign of human habitation.

Harry's words came wearily as they pushed the canoe off another lump of brain coral, 'We're running out of water. If we want to avoid getting stuck out here by the ebb tide we'll need to try and make it onto the beach.'

They turned towards the strip of white sand behind a rocky headland. The canoe touched bottom. With cramped legs from sitting in the same position too long they untied the knots in their spine and clambered over the side into calf-deep water. They didn't see the sea snake slide away. Between them they dragged the canoe until the tongue of the ebbing tide just lapped the hull. Jacques carried the anchor line up the beach and set the fisherman-pattern anchor in sand behind a lump of dead coral. With stiff joints they stumbled up the beach towards dry sand above the tidemark. Palm fronds rattled in the light breeze. Morning shadows swayed to-and-fro across the prone figures. But within an hour the shadows slid back into the trees as the furnace door of the sun opened on five sleeping figures and one violin case. Tiny hopping things moved in the dry sand. And one sleeping hand resting on Ann's shoulder.



## *CHAPTER 22*

As the party awoke they moved further up the beach seeking shade under the palms while they waited for the tide to return. By late morning, instead of looking across the lagoon, they were confronted with gullies running through a bedrock of dead coral. Waves breaking on the outer reef seemed to mock the canoe as it lay abandoned by the tide at the head of an empty lagoon. Crabs in their burrows were hurrying to create their twice-daily sculpture of sand balls ready for the incoming tide to sweep the beach clean.

Leaving the others in the shade Harry wandered off along the top of the beach. Ann watched him pick up a shell, examine it, and put it in the pocket of his shorts. Then he picked up a handful of sand from the beach wrapped it in a handkerchief knotted the cloth and put the bundle into the other pocket of his shorts. Soon he moved out of sight into the line of palms. Her eyes drifted back to the outer reef as

she tried to decide whether the breaking waves were getting any smaller. Hearing Harry's footfall on the sand she turned and saw him returning carrying a coconut. Crossing the dry sand he walked towards the canoe and kneeled alongside the fisherman-pattern anchor. Holding the coconut with both hands in a single movement he drove the coconut husk onto the upturned point of the anchor. From her position under the palms she heard the sound of tearing as he started twisting off the husk. With half a dozen more strokes onto the anchor the last of the husks were discarded on the beach. Carrying the coconut back to the shade under the trees he took his rigging knife from his pocket. Placing the coconut on the ground he drove the point of the marlinespike into the eye of the coconut and repeated the exercise with the other eye. Satisfied with the two holes he handed the nut to Ann. Some of the milk ran down her chin as she drank. When it was finished he took the nut from her and cracked it into two halves on a rock. Taking the seashell from his pocket he handed it to her along with the two halves of the coconut. While she scraped out the white flesh Harry disappeared into the palms to collect more fallen coconuts for the others.

By the time they had finished breakfasting on coconut, a pile of coconut husks and shells littered the sand. The water, in the gullies between the clumps of coral-rock, was getting noticeably wider. Further out instead of a horizon of grey rock now only points of rock were sticking out of the incoming tide. Beyond the outer reef long-liners and stern-trawlers from Port Moresby were heading south. Ann was convinced she recognised some of these boats from the ones she had seen from the balcony. One by one rocks, previously jutting out of the bay, vanished as the tide crept across the sand towards the canoe. The dark silhouette of an island dugout moved out from the beach half-a-mile or so to the south. There seemed to be three people aboard. From a standing position one of them was poling the craft across the shallows inside the reef. A net was bundled in the stern.

As if restless with the delay, sand moved beneath the canoe and the anchor line became taut. Harry's eyes drifted from the canoe to the waves breaking on the outer-reef, 'If we hit the gap in the reef just on slack water we'll avoid paddling against the tidal-flow, and there'll be no tidal outflow to make the waves steeper.' He glanced at his wristwatch before continuing. 'We'll have a light headwind and it'll take us an hour to paddle round the headland to the gap. We need to leave.'

As the canoe nosed round the headland a gasp escaped from Susan. Within the last few paddle strokes their future had become uncertain. Simultaneously they stopped paddling. The canoe slowed. Back paddling they turned in towards the shelter of the rocks below the headland. Beyond the gap sunlight glittered on polished deck fittings. Looking like a floating block of flats a motor vessel lay at anchor in deep water beyond the reef only a hundred metres from *Rurenga*. Ann seemed to be viewing the vessel through the lens of a magnifying glass. Her mind focused to a single point of light. Was this the boat that abducted her in Australia? She tried recapturing the boat's deck plan but the door to her memory remained locked.

Harry reached into the dry-bag and took out the binoculars. Stars-and-stripes fluttered in the light breeze. People moved on deck. The canoe rose and fell with the swell. He couldn't retain the image.

'That boat looks familiar.'

The vessel's name was written across the stern and on the bulwarks. It was two words. Both were long words. Harry handed the binoculars to Susan. 'Your eyes are better than mine. Can you make out the name of that boat? If it's the boat I think it is I've only ever seen it tied to the wharf.'

After a few moments Susan replied. 'Yes I think I can read it.' She handed the glasses to Ann. 'See if you can recognise either of the men on deck.'

As Ann took the glasses she commented ‘I don’t think I will. It’s not the same boat that abducted me. This one is bigger and has a flying bridge.’

As Ann looked through the glasses and tried re-focussing them Harry asked, ‘What’s the boat’s name Susan?’

Susan turned round, leaned back in her seat so that Ann couldn’t see her grin as she whispered in Harry’s ear. ‘*Diplomatic Immunity.*’

Harry cut in. ‘Can you recognise either of those men on deck Ann?’

‘One has disappeared into the cabin and the other one has his back to me. I’m not sure I’d recognise them from here anyway.’

Susan grinned. ‘You surprise me Ann. Most women can recognise their own husbands without any difficulty.’

‘Eh!’

Susan continued. ‘The name on that vessel is *Diplomatic Immunity*. And the two men I saw on deck were Gary and Figgy. Now you know why Gary had gone missing from Jakarta. Somehow he must have persuaded Figgy to, not only untie his boat from the wharf, but come and find you.’

‘How did they find me?’

A frown creased Harry’s forehead. ‘I’ve no idea Ann. I suggest we go and ask them, I’d be interested to find out because *Rurenga* hasn’t been in contact with them, and I presume you haven’t.’

Pushing the canoe away from the rocks on the headland they headed for the gap in the reef and slack water. Waves broke in white water either side of the gap but inside the gap the canoe heaved to the incoming swell and passed through. Once in deeper water beyond the reef the canoe rode the incoming rollers towards the hull of *Diplomatic Immunity*.

Ingrid and Gary were waiting with outstretched hands at the top of the ladder as Ann climbed aboard. In an intimate huddle in the shade beneath the canvas awning none of them noticed Rud standing alone on deck clutching his

violin case. Harry and Jacques were securing the canoe's painter to a rail on the boat's stern.

A woman, probably in her early thirties, emerged from the saloon. As she stepped through the sunlight the outline of her figure, viewed through her dress, left nothing to Rud's imagination. She carried a tray of wineglasses and a bottle of wine. Placing the tray on an empty table she held out her hand inviting Rud to join her.

Her appearance made him hesitate. The casual fluidity of the movements seemed alien beneath the premature stress lines etched into her face. Olive skin and black eyes contrasted with blond hair drawn back into a bun. Exposed roots outlined her hairline in black. Accidentally or deliberately she presented a severe face overpowered with black eyebrows.

She spoke American-English with a Spanish accent. 'Hi! I'm Katarina Derval. You must be Rud. Can I pour you a drink?' Without waiting for an answer to her question, she filled a wineglass with red wine, handed it to him and poured one for herself. Sitting on the bench her body language invited him to join her.

Placing his violin case on the table Rud sat next to her. Like a woodpecker tapping a dead tree questions were tapping the inside of his brain. "I wonder why she introduced herself as Katarina Derval? Katarina seems more appropriate for a casual situation like this." His mind replayed her accent. "Originally she was probably Spanish speaking, and has learned American-English as a second language."

Contrasting with the casual fluidity of her movements her hands were nervously fingering her wineglass. "She's wearing a show-case of rings. One of them could be a wedding ring. The name Derval sounds French not Spanish. I suppose it's her married name."

Rud smiled. 'Thanks, Katarina. How come you know my name?'

‘Figgy told me.’

Remembering what Ann had told him about Figgy’s dubious relationships Rud asked, ‘Have you been on the boat long?’

‘Since we left Jakarta. That was about a week ago.’

Rud nodded. ‘Gee! And you’ve been at sea all that time?’

Katarina forced a smile, but it came from her mouth not her eyes. She looked away as she answered, ‘Yes.’ Strangely she added nothing to qualify or enhance the experience of a weeklong sea voyage. Her simple “Yes” sounded hollow and incomplete, as if there was something vitally important she dare not mention. Something was amiss!

Conscious of his own body language Rud sipped his wine trying to assess the situation and fill in the unnatural gap in the conversation. Damn! I’m not very good at this. ‘Have you had rough weather, Katarina?’

‘Today’s the first day I’ve not been vomiting.’

Rud nodded. Again there was an unqualified pause in the flow of conversation. Perhaps that’s it; perhaps she’s just suffering from seasickness. Maybe she had just felt a wave of nausea well up inside her and she thought she might throw up. Conscious of an ongoing pause in the conversation he asked, ‘Have you known Figgy for long?’

‘No, not long just a few weeks.’ And in what seemed a contrived change of the subject added. ‘Are you from America?’

Rud nodded. ‘Guilty as charged. I spent a few years in Germany and apart from my time at sea I’ve spent the rest of the time bumming around on the Eastern Seaboard and getting into trouble.’

‘And playing the violin?’

‘Yes how did you know?’

‘Figgy told me you’re a violinist.’

Rud shrugged. ‘I dunno how he knows that. I met him for the first time just a few minutes ago. Maybe he saw my violin case and decided only violin players, and your

average gun carrying high-school students carry violin cases.’

Suddenly he was conscious of her black eyes interrogating him. Her words were snapped out as an accusation. ‘What do you mean by that?’

Puzzled by the harshness of her voice Rud shrugged. ‘Oh! Nothing really. It’s just a comic-book-cliché about serial killers carrying their guns in violin...’

She yelled, ‘Damn you to hell!’ and deliberately knocked his glass of wine into his lap and ran into the saloon. Bewildered Rud stood trying to brush the wine off his clothing and gradually became aware everyone on deck had turned to look at him.

Figgy walked over to him and together they strolled over to the bulwarks and looked over the side. ‘What was all that about Rud?’

‘I wish I knew. I made a flippant comment about carrying guns in violin cases and she exploded like a hand grenade.’

‘Was it just a casual comment?’

‘Of course, I was just trying to make conversation. I guess I must have said something wrong.’

‘You did. This is getting messy. I guess you’ve bin talking to Ann. I don’t know how much she’s told you about any of this.’

‘I’ve no idea what you’re talking about.’

‘Then that’s a good start. Did she tell you Jacques’ wife Yvette was murdered?’

‘Yes she said it was some Islamic thing about a book Jacques had written.’

‘Yes! Well! That’s only part of the truth. Jacques did write a controversial book. But if his goddamn book was the reason, it don’t seem likely Yvette would be murdered ‘stead of Jacques. Sometimes we can be too damn quick to blame the Islamic world, when the problems are closer to home.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I guess it don’t matter too much no more. But you gotta keep your mouth shut bout this. Right!

Puzzled Rud replied, ‘OK.’

‘Jist OK ain’t good enough. I need a guarantee. And my guarantee says my law firm knows enough ‘bout you to put you back in the slammer. Do you still wanna hear it?’

‘Yes you can trust me.’

‘I know damn well I can, ‘cos you know the alternatives. But first things first. Let’s get back to Jacques’ wife Yvette. She liked painting pictures of Jakarta harbour. But she weren’t the only one. It’s a popular seascape and I often see artists on the wharf from aboard *Diplomatic Immunity*. Yvette became friendly with another artist Marcel Derval who also frequented the wharf. Having seen and heard the two of them discussing painting I’m inclined to believe it were jist a friendly relationship ‘tween two artists and nothin’ more intimate. I’m fortunate enough to git a few visitors on my boat. Katrina Derval who jist christened your balls in wine became one of them. As you’ve probably noticed ‘neath that translucent dress she’s wearing, there’s a highly flexible figure. But it’s about as stable as the San Andreas fault-line. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t making full use of what she had to offer but she was also using me. I don’t like being used.

As things progressed it ‘came apparent her visits aboard were less to do with our relationship and more to do with observing Yvette and Marcel from behind the tinted windows on my boat, if you git my drift. I guess paranoia evolved into an obsession. With me, she come over ‘bout as sensual as a lump of plasticine. Not s’prisingly I found satisfaction elsewhere and gave her the “don’t come Monday” message.

As things turned out I guess this could have bin an error of judgement. Without her regular visits aboard, the reality she imagined grew to monstrous proportions. She went insane. The woman’s a bloody time bomb. Eventually the bomb exploded; and Marcel, who can’t swim, was pushed



off the wharf. ‘Course no one saw it happen. That afternoon Yvette received a bullet in her head and the painting she had almost finished got slashed. Now this is the int’restin’ bit, the picture was a seascape of the wharf with Marcel, complete with his easel and paints, in the foreground. It weren’t hard to guess what happened, nor the likely outcome for Katrina when the police git their act together. Justice in Indonesia ain’t gentle, and neither is the US diplomatic service when diplomats inadvertently get involved in... This needn’t bother you Rud. Katrina was born in New Mexico and is a US citizen. I’ve got a career in what is commonly called the diplomatic service. But it’s got damn all to do with diplomacy. Politics and law sleep in twin beds, not in a double bed. Instead of “helping police with enquiries,” Katrina’s “gone missing” and is going to have to stay “missing” for a very long time. As you’ve realised she gits a little jittery when people talk ‘bout serial killers. I guess she’ll calm down in time.’

‘Ann seemed to think Yvette was murdered because Jacques’ book was seen as a blasphemy against Islamic teaching.’

‘I guess it’s true the Islamic world found Jacques’ book disturbing.’

‘Ann seemed to think everyone involved with the book was in danger.’

‘I s’pose it could have bin a possibility. Even if it ain’t true it makes a plausible story. It’s jist the kind of speculation that gits the media all wound up. But with Harry, Susan and Jacques on their boat and Ann and Ingrid safely out the way, that only left Gary who has been with me on *Diplomatic Immunity*.’

‘They were kidnapped! What do you mean, Ann and Ingrid were safely out of the way?’

‘Exactly what I said. They were safely out the way. You made sure of that didn’t you Rud? It’s what you were paid a thousand bucks a week for.’

‘How much do you know about their abduction?’

‘I jist work at the US embassy; I don’t know nothin’ ‘bout abductions.’

‘But you knew about my thousand bucks a week!’

‘Ain’t your balls dropped yet? My law-firm specialises in legal defence. We’ve got branch offices all along the Eastern Seaboard. Your profile was on our books. I didn’t deal with you personally but the firm handled your case fur god’s sake. Unfortunately it seems we didn’t serve you too well ‘cause you got eighteen months. And if you don’t keep your mouth shut you could do more. I guess we gotta lose a few.’

‘I don’t get this. Did you get Ann abducted?’

‘You’re bein’ real slow today Rud. Ann figured out this cancer therapy stuff, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘And she needs at least five million to set up her research facilities.’

‘If you say so.’

‘I can assure you that’s the figure I heard.’

‘OK.’

‘As soon as she was abducted Gary received a ransom demand for Ann and Ingrid’s release. By coincidence the ransom demand was fur jist that much.’

‘Coincidence?’

‘Coincidences always need a bit of a nudge. There’s only one road to heaven Rud, and it’s lined with greenbacks.’

‘But the US government refused to pay the ransom.’

‘Too right they did. Refusing to pay ransom is ‘bout the only thing you can rely on from the States. That’s assumin’ the goddamn public knows ‘bout it. Course it’s a different story when there’s a big deal on the table. But the state department ain’t the only source of finance. There are also private donations, for God’s sake. I was aiming for the big private bucks. In this case eight-and-a-half-million of them. I ain’t made a dime out of it. And do you know what?’

Thanks to my law firm, it's already in the Sentinel Island Research Fund's bank account with my personal guarantee no one can trace how it got there.'

'Why was her daughter Ingrid kidnapped?'

'Use your brains Rud. To get the sort of bucks I was looking for we had to hit the headlines big-time right round the world. Who gets most sympathy in a kidnapping case, a thirty-five-year-old scientist or an innocent looking little schoolgirl? I needed Ingrid to pull the big bucks. But by putting 'em both on the slab we hit the jackpot. Didn't you read the headlines? "Mother and daughter kidnapped by Islamic militants?" The States wanna believe any goddamn shit 'bout the Muslims. Gotta tell 'em what they wanna hear. And the headlines kept comin' in. "Cancer cure jeopardised by Islam."... "It could be your kid next."... "US refuses help."... "New York law-firm sets up fighting-fund."

'Does Ann know any of this?'

'Hell no! But if bloody Ingrid hadn't been so damn smart and escaped I'd have raked in plenty more. But now, as far as the media is concerned once I had enough cash in the fund, I was able to secretly negotiate the ransom payment to her captors and I got them both released without a drop of blood being spilt. So the mugs, gullible enough to send in their donations, came across as the good guys and I'm a bloody hero for my negotiating skills and achieving Ingrid and Ann's safe release. But I've had to close the fund. My law-firm even sent back late donations that were still in the pipeline when Ingrid's release hit the headlines and my press release announced that I was taking Ann's husband with me aboard my boat to a secret rendezvous to collect Ann from her captors. It's a good-news story so the media will drop it within twenty-four hours and get on with selling newspapers and adverts. Ann and Ingrid are safe and Ann's cancer research can go ahead. That's why the mugs sent in their cash.'

‘Do you own that house on the cliff we were in?’

‘No way Rud!’

‘Then who does?’

‘A syndicate.’

‘Who owns the syndicate?’

‘I guess you don’t know how things work in the States. You git the best accountants and I guarantee they can’t trace one cent back to my law-firm.

‘What do you want it for, apart from keeping Ann safe?’

‘What do I want it fur? It’ll be the best damn investment I ever made.’

‘Why?’

‘You gist wait and see. How much do you know about Papua New Guinea?’

‘Only that everything in it is bugged up.’

‘That’s not necessarily a disadvantage Rud. In many ways it’s an asset. Think minerals Rud! Minerals on shore and offshore! Think a-dollar-a-day wages! And if that ain’t enough, think disposable girls!’

‘I’d prefer not to think about it. It sounds like exploitation to me.’

‘Crap! It’s jist using what’s available. If I don’t use it, some other bugger...’

Looking up Figgy met Ann’s eyes across the deck. Had she heard any of that? Her glance was sufficient to persuade him to leave the rest of his sentence hanging in the air, unfinished.

Ann, Gary and Ingrid were crossing the deck towards them. Speaking over his shoulder to Rud Figgy added, ‘I guess I’ll go and check on Katrina. She looked all fucked up just now.’ He disappeared into the cabin shutting the door behind him.

Ann spoke first. ‘I heard you getting an example of Figgy’s, “Double Negative Speak”. He uses that when he’s trying to convince you that he’s “One of the Boys”. How much did you glean from it Rud?’

‘Only Figgy’s version that seemed to contain undertones of falsehood. I guess he arranged for you and Ingrid to be kidnapped and he’s been collecting private donations which he tried convincing me were to pay for your release. But I don’t know why he turned up here.’

‘I can tell you Rud.’ Ann squeezed Ingrid’s hand. ‘Ingrid escaped with the assistance of both Danny, who’s an old family friend, and Elsie who was supposed to be looking after her.’

Gary interjected. ‘Danny personally brought Ingrid and Elsie back to me in Jakarta. I guess he earned his gin that day.’

Ann continued. ‘When Gary heard Ingrid’s story he started piecing things together.’

‘How did you do that Gary?’

‘With a lot of help from Elsie and Danny. Elsie was able to supply the names of the two men in the stolen taxi who kidnapped Ingrid. Also she gave Danny a few leads on them. Then Danny hacked into several computers and guess what? Both men had criminal records and, more to the point, they had both been defended by Figgy’s law firm. The same applied to Elsie’s son Jake. The same branch of the same law firm was collecting the ransom money. Then Danny dug a bit deeper into their records and emails.’

Rud grinned. ‘I can guess what you discovered.’

Gary added, ‘At least Figgy didn’t insult me by trying to deny it. I was frantic about Ann’s safety. I could imagine them... It doesn’t matter what I imagined. I gave Figgy an ultimatum, either we come here and get you safely released or Danny starts publishing on the net.’

Ann put her arm round Gary’s waist. ‘Gary guessed, but didn’t know for sure, that *Rurenga* was already at sea coming to rescue me. Of course he had no idea Rud that you were helping me get away.’

Gary continued. ‘I’m very grateful for that Rud.’

Rud grinned. ‘And I’m very grateful to Ann. She did a lot for me.’

‘What did I do for you Rud?’ Ann asked.

‘You helped me regain my forgotten confidence.’

Gary nodded. ‘Ann has that effect on people. But there’s more dirty weather brewing. We don’t want to be caught on this coast when it arrives. We need to be well out to sea so I want to get us all, including Katrina, off Figgy’s boat and aboard *Rurenga* at the earliest opportunity.’

Rud raised his eyebrows. ‘Why Katrina? Figgy’s been telling me about her.’

‘I bet it wasn’t the truth. Did he blame her for murdering Yvette?’

‘He implied it.’

‘That doesn’t surprise me Rud. But it’s not true.’

‘Then who did?’

‘Let me tell you the background story. Yvette was an artist and specialised in painting seascapes.’

‘Yes! Figgy told me that much.’

‘She spent a lot of time on the wharf painting. Some people would say too much. I think there must be more artists in Jakarta than customers. Perhaps you can’t have too many artists! But fortunately Jacques salary from the university was adequate to keep the two of them. Perhaps I should say “just adequate” because there was seldom any discretionary money left. But they managed. Selling her paintings wasn’t a financial imperative for Yvette. But it was an emotional one. Selling a painting meant someone had recognised her work. Yvette would mock her own obsession with painting but still be captivated by it. On this occasion she needed the dawn light. Apart from one other artist no one else was around. The wharves were deserted. She always said only by “being there” could she capture the ambience of the scene, but daybreak is swift. So she usually took a digital camera to enable her to fill in detail back home in her studio.’

‘Yes.’

‘Yvette had become friendly with Marcel who was the other artist on the wharf that morning. She respected his work and often discussed the differences between their techniques.’

Susan interjected. ‘When we were all in the night club Yvette had mentioned to me that Marcel’s wife Katrina was going to stay with her sister for a week to help after the birth of her baby. In the meantime Marcel was going to get on with his painting. It seemed strange to me, as Katrina doesn’t normally get on with her sister. But I thought nothing more about it.’

Gary continued. ‘But as we have subsequently discovered Katrina wasn’t going to her sister’s place; she was with Figgy on *Diplomatic Immunity*. By chance when Marcel was on the wharf painting he saw Katrina in the cockpit having a champagne breakfast. When Katrina realised she had been seen she leaped ashore and ran back along the wharf and didn’t stop running. In the ensuing confrontation on board there was a great deal of waving of arms in the air and presumably shouting. But as Marcel turned to leave he was hit over head with the champagne bottle by Figgy. While he was unconscious Figgy dragged him across the deck and pushed him off the boat into the sea.’

‘How do you know if no one else was around?’ Rud asked.

‘We know about the argument because we’ve got Yvette’s digital camera. The pictures, complete with date and time, were taken across the water from another part of the wharves at a distance of about a hundred metres, but she used the zoom. I can only speculate on what happened next. Knowing Yvette I’d guess she would have run along the wharf to try rescuing Marcel. Although the distance over the water was only about a hundred metres the distance round the wharves to get to the place where Marcel went in would have been at least three hundred metres. She must

have arrived too late because his body wasn't discovered until three days later.'

Rud nodded. 'Do you know what happened when Yvette arrived at the wharf?'

Gary continued. 'The water there isn't the cleanest in the world but I'm certain she dived, fully clothed, into the harbour in a rescue attempt because that evening the clothes she had been wearing were in the washing machine at home. Also the driving seat of her car was still stained with seawater and oil from the harbour. Of course Figgy would have realised she had witnessed the event but I guess he didn't know about the pictures on her digital camera. Neither did we until weeks later. Had it not been for Yvette's pictures, like everyone else, we would have assumed Marcel and fallen into the sea struck his head on a wharf pile and drowned. Before Jacques got home from work Yvette had been murdered and rumour started overtaking facts. Because of the explosion of publicity about Jacques' book everyone assumed the book and Yvette's murder were related and the incident at the wharf was a case of accidental drowning. But after Yvette got home she must have got cleaned up and changed. Knowing the importance of her photographs she went to the university to look for Jacques. She couldn't find him. He was probably at a meeting or a lecture so she left the camera in his office with a note asking if he could print off copies of the pictures. But that afternoon Yvette was murdered and in the chaos that followed the camera was forgotten. Weeks later when Jacques was safely out at sea with Harry and Susan I went into his office to clear up and sort out his private belongings. Then I discovered Yvette's note to Jacques and the camera. If it hadn't been for the pictures on Yvette's camera we might have assumed Marcel's drowning was accidental and unrelated to Yvette's murder. But we had photographic evidence of Marcel's murder. Katrina was the only living witness and she had guessed who killed Yvette. Self-preservation kicked in.



Someone who had killed twice wouldn't hesitate to kill again. Katrina disappeared into the backstreets of Jakarta and stayed hidden. Trying to find a woman who was determined stay hidden was like searching for a mouse in a hayloft. Finding her constituted a story in itself. But it's enough to say it took Danny and me a great deal of investigation and disappointment before we found her. But that was just the start of our problems. She's still emotionally fragile and frightened. I'm convinced if we hadn't intervened she would have pursued her peroxide way and ended up either being murdered herself or would have been arrested and convicted of murdering Marcel and possibly Yvette. She was a very frightened woman. Discovering where she was proved hard enough but after that we had the task of finding a way of getting inside her defences. That was even harder.

'Why did she have anything to do with Figgy in the first place?'

'It's not hard to imagine. She was married to an artist. Not many people, however good they are, can make a living out of paintings. Whether she had anything to eat depended on whether Marcel was able to sell his latest picture.'

Susan cut in. 'I doubt if you know this Gary. Yvette tried to keep it secret but there's not much point now. She felt real bad when she sold a painting in case it was a potential sale that Marcel might have missed out. On one occasion I know for a fact a customer chose one of Yvette's pictures instead of Marcel's. He desperately needed the money and she didn't. When Yvette sold a painting often she'd keep the money she'd spent on paint and canvas and give the rest to Marcel. He hated being patronised by her. It made him feel even more inadequate but he still gratefully accepted the cash. I believe this was a secret kept from both Jacques and Katrina. So there's no point in telling Katrina now, it won't achieve anything.'

'You're right Susan. I didn't know anything about that. But in answer to your question Rud, Katrina had been living

in perpetual poverty. Figgy was offering an opulent lifestyle for a week. Think what that means. For one week she could have respite from the desolation of poverty. All she had to do was open her legs and receive. She could have had no idea of the consequences.'

Rud nodded. 'Did Figgy kill Yvette?'

'I'm damn sure he did. But if anyone starts investigating he'd blame Katrina and have as much legal and diplomatic backing as he wants. Katrina would be on her own and vulnerable, except for one thing. We've got Yvette's photos. I've shown copies to Figgy and given him an ultimatum.' Gary reached out and squeezed Ann's hand. 'First I needed a guarantee that you were safe, love. It still gives me nightmares about what might have happened to my Ann and Ingrid if the private donations had stopped coming in. As far as Figgy was concerned you would have been disposable. He has murdered twice. Why would he hesitate when he could keep the donations he had received to pay for his ransom demands? It wasn't the Islamic clerics who were a threat to you. The danger was much closer to home. I wasn't going to let Figgy out of my sight until I could verify your safety and that meant coming here with him aboard *Diplomatic Immunity* to ensure your release. As far as I was concerned his promises were and still are worthless. Then in exchange for transferring all the ransom money from Figgy's law firm's bank account to the Sentinel Island research fund, Danny would refrain from publishing all nineteen photos on the Internet. Figgy knows if anything should happen to us, Danny is ready to publish. Also Katrina is a witness to Marcel's murder, so I've insisted, she needs to come with us. I wasn't going to make the mistake of leaving her behind to be convicted of something she didn't do and letting Figgy off the hook.'

Susan added. 'Now we're all together it's important to get her, and us, off his boat and aboard *Rurenga* as soon as possible. Back in Jakarta Katrina would be a widow with

little means of earning a living and possibly be on the run for something she didn't do. From what I've seen of Sentinel Island we desperately need more help at the hospital with everything from kitchen work to cleaning.'

Gary put one arm round Ann's shoulder and the other round Ingrid. 'Now I've got my family together I'm damned if I'll ever let them out of my sight again! And anyone who has helped my family is doubly welcome. And that includes you Rud.'

Rud grinned. 'I can think of nothing better. What's going to happen to Figgy now? Is he going to get away with murder?'

'That's a good question Rud. The only reason Figgy was able to bring *Diplomatic Immunity* here was because Katrina and I ran the boat for him. He hasn't the faintest idea about navigation and I doubt if he even knows how to run the engines. On the way here he just stayed in his cabin and left it all to Katrina and me. But I'm sailing to Sentinel Island aboard *Rurenga* with all of you and we're staying there together. I'm not taking Figgy and his *Diplomatic Immunity* back to Jakarta or anywhere else. As far as I'm concerned he kidnapped my family and murdered Marcel and Yvette so now he's only got his diplomatic immunity to protect him from a treacherous coast.' A hangman's smile broke out as he added, 'And there's dirty weather brewing. I think we should leave the ocean to be his judge and jury.'

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*Rurenga* heeled on the frisky tail of an offshore wind. The reef slipped astern, then *Diplomatic Immunity* and the house on the cliff disappeared into a darkening horizon. In the galley Rud, Elsie and Katrina prepared the evening meal. With Ingrid between them Ann and Gary stood in the stern leaning on the taff rail as the ocean turned coral pink and waves whispered to the hull. In gathering darkness Ann put

her arm round Ingrid's shoulder as a forlorn sea-bird's call, for an instant, transported her back to that night on the cliff when wild dreams slipped free of their chains and hunted at will. Her subconscious pulled Ingrid closer. Perhaps at that instant a subliminal message passed between them or maybe it was just coincidence. Nevertheless, as if in response to her mother's thoughts, Ingrid slipped one arm round her mother's waist, and with the other reached out for her dad's hand. Something had happened to Ingrid in the intervening weeks; she was no longer a dependant child.

She tugged at her mother's waist. 'There's nothing to see back there Mum, let's go for'ard'. They did and all three of them stood in the bow. Salt spray touched their lips as the dying day streaked the western sky with gold. They watched the evening metamorphous transform the horizon from a strawberry glow to a purple dusk. Beyond the bowsprit the evening star peeped round the edge of the headsail. But Ingrid's eyes were still moving on. She pointed to a prick of light sliding past the stars.

'Look there's a communication satellite. That's a LEO.'

'What's a LEO Ingrid?' Ann asked

'We learned about them at school. It's a Low Earth Orbit satellite. Mrs Stewart reckons everything we need to know could come through them. Because of them where ever we are in the world we can always be in touch.'

Gary nodded. 'Yes your teacher's right.'

Chilled by the night wind they went below to join the others in the saloon, but Ingrid's words still resonated inside Ann's head. "There's nothing to see back there Mum, let's go for'ard." During the remainder of the voyage, and beyond, Ann pondered whether Ingrid's suggestion had been a comment about past lives and future hopes or simply a recognition that the eastern hills had faded into blackness.

## APPENDIX

## SENTINEL ISLAND

An incident occurred, four years later during the floodtide on the night of the full moon. On that tide the water over the inner reef was deepest. Taking advantage of the big tides, the off-duty staff from the hospital travelled by canoe to the village to gather, with the rest of the islanders, under the flame-tree that served as a meeting-place in the evening and a schoolyard during the day. These monthly meetings were an important event in the life of the island. Long ago they had realised discontent and aggression only occurred when people felt powerless and lacked the opportunity to change a situation. This was an evening when anyone with an opinion expressed it. Speeches were interspersed with songs and feasting during which the speaker's suggestions were considered and a consensus usually evolved.

The hospital was busy with patients who had travelled long distances to take advantage of the new cancer facilities. As a result Elsie and Rud were later than the other workers leaving the hospital. Having finished cooking the patients' evening meal they were now loading food (and Rud's violin) into the long boat to take to the village feast. On that tide an outrigger entered the inner harbour. Hand-in-hand Rud and Elsie waited for it to reach the jetty. Later it was confirmed that the five visitors were a husband and wife with three girls. The youngest appeared to be about five years old and the oldest had a striking resemblance to Ingrid. All of them had reached the limit of their endurance. Salt sores covering their arms and legs implied long exposure to ocean spray. Neither Rud nor Elsie could understand a word of their dialect, but the way they grabbed at Elsie's bread rolls needed no translation. Had the family arrived on any other evening, they would probably have been admitted into the hospital and their strange story would have percolated

through the island over the course of days or even weeks. But on that particular night most of the medical staff were attending the village gathering. Only a few nurses remained in the wards. Food and medical attention was an obvious priority and on that particular evening both would be found at the gathering. There was also a chance one of the villagers might understand their dialect or speak enough Pidgin to know what they were talking about. The family was hesitant to get into the long boat but, encouraged by smiles and the obvious supply of food, they climbed aboard.

They were in luck. Two village boys spoke their dialect and, as a tragic story emerged, the whole island listened. They had come from the central district of Papua New Guinea, and from the description they gave it must have been a few miles inland from the house and beach where Ann had been kept captive. Their village had been bulldozed. Some of the villagers resisted and had been killed by the mining company guards. The mining company had the backing of a firm of New York lawyers. Without land they were destitute and allowing their girls to be “used” by the miners seemed inevitable.

Harry interrupted the translation. ‘Ask them if their village was situated on the inside of a bend in the river.’

They replied, “Yes!” and Harry nodded as the story continued.

The family fled, and sought the help of an American called Danny. He was someone the girls’ mother had once known. He had been a journalist and had taken an interest in the family. Now he was a drunk but from him they heard about an island with a hospital many days journey towards the setting sun where an old man lived and collected seashells. Danny had told them, if they could find the island, the man and his friends would help them. Somehow Danny had acquired the outrigger canoe for them. Without any concept of what was entailed or where they were going the family had put to sea. They had hugged the coast and

gone ashore at night to feed on coconuts and fish. Without any idea how to return or where they were going apart from the general direction of heading towards the setting sun they kept close inshore. By speaking Pidgin eventually they received directions to the hospital and now wanted to meet the man who collected seashells.

Harry introduced himself. ‘Tell them I think I can help them. But first they should partake in the village feast.’

As they stood by the long table helping themselves to the food Ann asked Harry, ‘How are you going to help that family?’

Harry smiled. ‘Didn’t it seem strange to you that the house on the cliff where you were kept captive should have been built there, at that exact spot. Why do you think it was built?’

‘I don’t know Harry. It must have been expensive building it over the top of the waterfall. I suppose it was something to do with wanting access to the beach. The syndicate must have had more money than sense.’

‘I don’t agree Ann. I believe I now know exactly what they were doing and why.’

‘What’s that Harry?’

‘Did you hear me ask that family if their village was built on the inside bend of the river?’

‘Yes but what’s that got to do with anything?’

‘Gold Ann! Particles of gold are washed out of the mountains and carried downstream by rivers. Gold, being dense, settles in the slack water on the inside of bends in the river. So where would a mining company be likely to start their operation?’

‘And the house on the cliff is directly above the waterfall.’

‘You’ve got it Ann. The particles of gold carried downstream end up on the private beach directly below the waterfall. And who owns the house and the private beach?’

‘Figgy’s law firm.’

## OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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A wounded family returns to the sanctuary of the ancestral whare. As family secrets become revealed, seemingly unrelated events conspire to become a gathering storm. Dark secrets within the bush and estuary expose the scar tissue of human frailty. Like driftwood, emotions are swept in directions neither planned nor imagined. But those that conspire have no concept of the tenacity of the new liaisons, nor of the influence of a tiny bronze mermaid on the minds of social castaways. On the river and in the lagoon counter plans form and gather momentum as a scow is refitted. As time runs out, the final conflict uses the whole of the Pacific for its resolution.

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