

AUT Masters of Creative Writing
Department of Communication Studies
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Exegesis

Introduction

According to Margaret Atwood, (1998) lecture *In search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction*, and using her special gift of humour, she states that ‘writer(s) of fiction are a suspicious bunch of people Consider what they do all day: concoct plausible whoppers, which they hope they can induce the public to swallow whole’ ‘Fiction writers do not pretend to be specialists or experts at anything except what Dylan Thomas termed as their “craft and sullen art.” About all they really know anything about is the writing of their latest book, they’re usually not even sure how they managed that, having done it in a sort of stupor; and if they know, they aren’t about to tell, any more than a magician will hasten to reveal exactly how he made the pigeon come out of your ear.’¹ (p.1503) If a writer such as Margaret Atwood has that experience in writing, then new writers on the above course certainly understand that process.

¹ Atwood, Margaret (1998) Lecture *In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction* delivered at the Bronfman Lecture, University of Ottawa *The American Historical Review* Vol 103, No 5, 1998, December.’

As the Bamboo Sings... is an historical novel that begins in South China, moves briefly to USA and then the mining fields of New Zealand. It is the story of the main protagonist Ah Chu whose childhood stamps its cultural lens into him. In the beginning he is a child but after many incidents, Ah Chu leaves school, works as a rice paddy farmer, marries and then one evening escapes his family and leave China. He boards a ship and ends up in America. Here he meets Mickey, an Irishman who befriends him, and Loong who is Chinese but from a different home village. Ah Chu works with both Mickey and Loong. All the men for different reasons, leave America and come to New Zealand.

In New Zealand, Ah Chu mines in Gabriels Gully, and eventually tires of working for James. Added to the growing disillusionment is that Ah Chu has witnessed too many incidents against the Chinese. Then by chance he receives letters from home. Circumstances dictate that he sponsor four village cousins to come to New Zealand. The village is at near starvation. Ah Chu decides to go to Skipper's Canyon and the new team struggle with making a living. The flush for gold mining is over. One man dies, another is run out of the village, one goes back to China and another sets up as an interpreter.

Ah Chu leaves and goes South to Roundhill, by Riverton where after thirty-five years in New Zealand is now one of the elders to the Chinese community. Life in Longhilly, as the Chinese call it, is good.

There is plenty of food, they live in relative peace with the white ghosts, but their hearts are empty..... (now read the novel)

The novel has been motivated by a strong desire to have Chinese New Zealand history interpreted through the eyes of an insider. Upon examining both non-fiction and fictional writing of Chinese in New Zealand, the seminal work of James Ng's *Windows of the Past* stands out as the basis for all research of this time and place. So much has been revealed by his thorough research evidenced by the volumes of footnotes, which makes its own fascinating read. It has been the basis for so much of the research for *As the Bamboo sings...* But history as a framework for an historical novel suggests the interaction of people includes the capacity to bring the facts to life. To this end, highly influential books read include Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Here the author describes the way Chinese interact with Chinese so that the smell the homes, that mixture of musty air and soya sauce, seemed present. Other books of influence have been Maxine Hong Kingston *The Woman Warrior* where the ghosts from the past returned and spoke as though present. It legitimised the place of ghosts and ancestors still present in the lives of many Chinese even today. Ghosts and ancestor worship are especially strong in *As the Bamboo sings...* from the perception of white people as ghosts, the regular visits to the joss houses to please the gods, and in the end with the tragic sinking of the SS Ventnor off the coast of the Hokianga robbing them of the annual celebration of *bi san*. Another ship would not be

commissioned. For the men too poor to return, the reality would be that they would one day lie in unwelcome New Zealand. Never to return home triggered a sense of profound abandonment.

The telling of Chinese stories in New Zealand is far from rich. In comparison to Pakeha, Maori and Pasifika, Chinese who have been in New Zealand since the mid 1800's have yet to publish many works. The literature is slim: Eva Wong Ng's self published, *Shadow Man* is a delightful collection of short stories about the her own life, Lynda Chanwai-Earle plays are published in *Foh Sarn/Ka-Shue*, Alison Wong's book *Cup and* Renee Liang's self published *Chinglish* are contribution in poetry. Last year the published novel by Alison Wong's *As the Earth turns to Silver* is a deliciously beautiful and carefully crafted love story set after the setting of *As the Bamboo sings*. One could hardly say that the personal perspective of Chinese history has been expressed in literature.

One has to question if there are any reasons why the fictional form has not been used. Difficult issues and incidents seem not to stop stories of hardship been told in Pakeha or Maori history. Is this more difficult for the Chinese? Having given this a great deal of thought and research, my attempt to understand the reasons suggests the presence of three main obstacles.

At the core are culturally bound factors. Michael Bond (1991) suggests that Chinese show greater aptitude toward memorisation which 'allows one to work within a set of given, logical rules; and weaker in psychology, which requires speculation about internal,

hidden processes and consideration of their possible effects on observable behaviour.’ (p 31) The writing of fictional writing requires the latter group of skills that find little reinforcement within the culture. Not only would an author not likely to achieve community expectations in the economic realm, but the expression of such writing is likely to make the community nervous. Culture in so many ways is tacit and physically lived rather than realised or verbalised. If the explanation of self is seldom vocalised, then the creation of characters will indeed be hard to do. However, even with great internal insights, this is not the only factor to consider. Social meaning is a personal view of self and is psychologically meaningful, while the social reality in which the writer lives is not within the writers control. (Maykel Verkuyten (2005) writes, in other words, how I feel about myself might be positive, but how the world feels about me might be very different and out of my control. (p. 61) Without a layered sense of understanding of how and why Chinese reacting within and towards the Other, writing about it is indeed difficult.

The next obstacle can be explained if we examine what is written. In Canada, both Denise Chong (1995) *Concubine’s Daughter*, and Wayson Choy (2005) *The Jade Peony*, and *All that Matters* are set in historical times, and the language is very formal in that the hierarchy of the Chinese ie oldest brother, third wife etc... has been faithfully portrayed. There are several aspects towards this content. Firstly, Chinese culture has been written as a direct

translation of the characters own perception and possibly of the author's own lives. Each grew up in a Chinese household. Secondly maybe the authors were writing for a readership that is Chinese, who need some kind of affirmation of their lived realities. And lastly, maybe the Canadian readership prefers a story written so that the 'exotic' is preserved and the distance between self and Other is maintained. This might also explain the popularity of Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* that depicts life under China's cultural revolution to be cruel and filled with suffering. It is a story told with distance, both the timeline, the political line and the geographical line from the writer in USA. It maintains the sense of the 'exotic.'

Edward Said's *Orientalism* explains the behaviour as having stemmed from the development of 'Otherness' supported by colonisation, using images in art. But art can be viewed in the safety of viewing space. It required little else than a tweak of the curiosity and some imaginative scope. It makes it easy to talk 'about' rather than understand the Other who live real lives. John Fitzgerald (2007) suggests when writing about Chinese in Australia, that 'many historians continue to maintain a clear and unequivocal distinction of dog-eared stories of timeless deferential tradition-bound Chinese sojourners who had to be kept out of the country to keep it (Australia) free and equal. Even today few Australians would concede that it was not possible to be (both) Chinese and Australian before the advent of multicultural Australia.'² (p. ix-x)

² Fitzgerald, John (2007) *Big White Lies: Chinese Australians in White Australia* University of NSW Press Ltd

Where the perception of Other is at the level of ‘stranger’ then the gap between self and Other is at its widest. The Other can equally be perceived with limitations that lock those perceptions into well known stereotyping. It is equally possible that such limitations in perception are somehow manifested within the Chinese themselves much like self-fulfilling prophecies. Early Chinese settlers in New Zealand are a good example of the widest gap created in the dualistic schema. From earliest times the variation depended on the whole range between negative and positive. At one end where the perception was locked into the fear of the unknown, the sense of the objectionable or the unimaginable and with it the human reaction of repulsion, the distance between self and Other made it possible to express extreme forms of racial harassment and abuse. After all the people in question were hardly human but more animal or ‘monkey’ like. For those who perceived the Chinese more positively they became the target of curiosity or the exotic. The gap not as wide but not necessarily inclusive. The Chinese were still the strangest of strangers and even ‘nice’ ones were never-the-less strangers. Such oppositional stances made it extremely difficult for a possible coalition with or into mainstream New Zealand. In each case the connecting humanity of individuals has a greater distance to travel. To identify with the strangest strangers is harder than those of individuals who seem only a ‘little bit’ strange, who at least look similar or speak the same language and therefore are more like the imagined self.

Before China became more interesting (and therefore slightly more acceptable) to New Zealand, politically as well as economically, Chinese did not have the freedom of expression they have today. Until the 1990's early settler Chinese certainly felt they had to choose, to be Chinese *or* New Zealander. To choose Chinese meant being the 'exotic' or the 'stranger'. To choose New Zealander was to sell out on your own cultural roots, to be assimilated. In anthropological terms culture can be defined as each person's lived life, what we do, how we do it, how we respond to the world beyond the front door step and how the world responds to the Other. This is a complex process because humans do not have just one set of culturally bound behaviour. Rather we all have multiple set of behaviours responding to the outside-of-self worlds. Some of the response is because of history, learnt, heard, seen, and/or felt. Benton's *Race* explains the power of colour and the strength that stereotyping has on the mind. People of colour are 'told' who they are, how they are different. Even the suspicion of difference can have an impact on one's behaviour. The power of these perceptions cannot be ignored because the space between the two cultures has to be shared to some degree.

The pressure to conform, on one hand is to be accepted. But if the weight of the racism is too much to bear, then the group that is victimised will develop a stronger in-group identity that is necessary for in-group support. Given that culture and history are closely linked to distinguish self from others, the Chinese miners are victims of this

dynamic and also of laying down a backdrop for all early Chinese living in New Zealand. It was clear that there was an inability to be perceived with a cultural identity that was in fact much more mobile and fluid, and often seamless according to the situation. Anyone who lives in different cultures will know that in our daily lives culture, and cultural identity is less about being locked into culture as a noun, and more about being culture as a verb. One could argue, if the Chinese in New Zealand lived their lives flowing in and out of different cultural arenas then why did they not express it. This brings me the last factors to explore. This being the largest and wraps around the other two layers.

It would be naive to leave out the ‘permission’ granted to the minority groups for the acceptability in what and how diversity is expressed. I would suggest that in this present environment of New Zealand that there are very few New Zealanders who complain about an ethnic festival, watching ethnic dancing or eating ethnic food. This is a way of perceiving difference without necessarily being engaged. It’s pleasing to the eye, or the taste buds. Its acceptable. Nor do the Chinese complain about such activities. Where there are easily recognisable difference, so the definition between self and Other is easy to realise. Frantz Fanon *Black Skin, White Mask* explains the way minorities place upon their own selves ways of fitting in as an effort to reduce being victims of racial abuse. But this works in both ways. What the community places onto a person might equally as strong as what the Other accepts.

Now it is time to examine the roles of communities. Feminist theory suggests that ‘the complex structure of literary form and language is perceived to undermine distance and otherwise call into question the fixed meanings of ideology. Sociological and psychological distance or closeness can be described as the human condition to repel or include. ‘This position frequently draws from a dualistic schema in which the subversive ‘literariness’ of certain high culture texts is contrasted to more popular works, which assumed a function as transparent bearers of dominant ideologies.’³ (Rita Feliski (1989) p 3-4) Like it or not, writing from both a literary standpoint and that of a different cultural viewpoint naturally creates a dualistic schema. Within the realm of the political there is the dominant and the minority, the powerful and the politically disabled. In New Zealand for example, none of the Chinese politicians in parliament are New Zealand born. The gap between the realities tend to be silenced, because the history of minority groups who have been victims for whatever reason, find speaking out or making voice so much harder than those who are psychologically supported by the mainstream. It is more comforting not to start any dialogues from a minority point of view. The speaker must consider the power of the community who wish not to be disturbed preferring to show their own standpoint of assimilation with a conservative viewpoint of eternal thankfulness and appreciation within a framework of a racist past. Chinese in New Zealand for decades have been a ‘model

³ Feliski, Rita (1989) *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: feminist literature and social change* The John Harvard Library

minority' showing more about their fear of non-acceptance rather than an expressive voice. Similar to being in a family it is difficult to be perceived as standing out against such a strong public sense of unity since it is there that reliance is made for one's psychological hidey-hole of life. The trust and reliance built up for possible support is hard to knowingly upset given that Chinese believe that it is their responsibility to keep harmonious relationship alive. Historical oral histories that tell of care and caution needed for survival may not be a logical reality in present day living, but lurk in the background of the memory. It is easy to fear 'I told you so' and sensing that disgrace or loss of face to self, family and community that locks small communities into the past rather than take steps to the future.

Perhaps there is another way of looking at the dualistic schema. Sandra Harding (2004) suggests that standpoint theory, developed out of feminist theory, certainly has moved towards a way known 'to empower oppressed groups, of valuing their experiences and pointing towards a way to develop an 'oppositional consciousness' as a philosophy for both natural and social sciences, an epistemology, a methodology, and a political strategy.'⁴ (p. 2) In the era of post-modernist thinking this was not just logical but an important step towards expression. Critics of standpoint theory are likely to argue that it is 'less about emphasis on the individual experiences within socially constructed groups than the social conditions that construct such groups.' Standpoint theory is in the end 'an interpretative

⁴ Harding, Sandra (2004) (ed) *The Feminist standpoint theory Reader: intellectual and political controversies* Routledge USA

framework to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power.’⁵ (Patricia Collins (2007) p. 375) The weakness is the effort to change the unjust systems of power. Not an overnight phenomenon, but step by step making a small contribution each time.

Now let us now examine the role of the author and reader and the dynamic between the two. Patricia Waugh (1984) suggests that authors construct fictional illusion in order to ‘break down the destructions between ‘creation’ and ‘criticism’ and merge them into the concepts of ‘interpretation’ and ‘deconstruction’.⁶ (p. 375-381) This idea is reinforced by Margaret Rose (1979) who write the point that ‘understanding the complex nature of communication between the author and readerand by analysing the act of communication between author and reader within fiction - ...set(s) up meta fictional mirrors to challenging the use of art to ‘mirror’ the outer world.’⁷ (p.13)

But the mirror is not like looking at an image in a mirror where the replication is the same. The mirror of a novel is defined by several factors. First lets look at the facts within the scope of the novel. Not all can be used. Peter Lamarque (1990) suggests that ‘facts can been viewed by a critic as ‘enquiry about meaning and value of particular works, or their themes and characterisations, or their truth from the point of view of the perceptiveness or

⁵ Collins, Patricia (2007) in *Signs* Vol 22 No 2 (Winter 1997) University of Chicago Press,

⁶ Waugh, Patricia (1984) *Metafiction: the theory and practice of self-conscious fiction* Methuen & Co, USA.

⁷ Rose, Margaret (1979) *Parody// metafiction: an analysis of parody as a critical mirror to the writing and reception of fiction*. Redwood Burn Ltd, UK

verisimilitude.’ (p.333) Layers of meaning are inevitable and offer to each reader different opportunities for a response. It is not just about exploring the facts but uncovering meaning. (p335)

A novel is never a finished piece of writing. It can never tell the whole story. That would be impossible to write. While the author has certain intentions in telling the story, the story itself is not like the world as it really is. Reading fictional writing demands that the reader fill in the gaps, to be able to suspend reality and accept that the subject and characters are unknown, until a time when the story itself makes sense. This does not suggest that all fictional writing will be read by everyone. That would be silly. Potential reader delve into books, peruse cover, read or listen to reviews, and often start reading the first chapter before considering if the book will appeal to them. But once there is a commitment to read then the reader offers their own learned stereotypes, their former knowledge and their own historical references. They will pass the writing through their own narrative filters, interpreting and reconstructing a new reality that joins the reader to the author, to assist us to make sense of our own worlds. Why we may even ‘want to acknowledge at least the possibility that an author might transcend commonly accepted attitudes and invite us to perceive human characteristics in a way not embodied in the collective beliefs,’ (p340) to identify human action both liked and disliked shows the difference between ourselves and others. To make us learn something about ourselves, or ourselves in another world. Or maybe it is a yearning to be taken to a new place,

far away, by the trigger in the fictional writing for what Peter Jones (1975) calls ‘creative interpretation’ where the text can take on being interpreted in different ways and finding different significance, all in the safety of our known environment. The imagination allows for sympathetic understanding or even a new way of looking at internal lives. It is one of the differences between fictional and non-fictional writing.

The last point I would like to make is about the different kinds of readers. I am certain that there is a readership for *As the Bamboo sings....* that certainly will be enjoyed by the Chinese community of New Zealand, Pakeha for the history of New Zealand, but also as a text for both English and History in NZ schools. The sector of Asians in New Zealand is now a significant number and ranks as third behind Pakeha and Maori. The numbers of Chinese in Auckland makes for a significant possible market. As potential readers each group come from different perspectives. Chinese may for example find the cultural information either interesting as it is affirming, or boring as it is already known, or fascinating because it is a life as once lived in an another era. Pakeha on the other hand may find the cultural information increases the understanding of people in the community, or they equally might not like the emphasis on the humanity of the people rather than the distant ‘exoticness.’ *As the Bamboo sings....* the facts are negotiated around images, noises, human interaction around a geographical setting. It is a story that has a different woven fibre.

The first draft of *As the Bamboo sings*.... needs many more edits to make it really work. Annie Proulx, perhaps explains the next step best through her own writing. ‘A lot of the work I do is taking the bare sentence that says what you sort of want to say – which is where a lot of writers stop – and make it into an arching kind of thing that has both strength and beauty. And that is where the sweat comes in. That it can take a long time and many revisions. A single sentence, particularly a long one, involved one, can carry a story forward. I put a lot of time in them. Carefully constructed sentences cast a tint of indefinably substance over a story. There is difficulty involved in going from the basic sentence that heads in the right direction to making a fine sentence. But it’s a joyous task. It’s hard but it’s joyous. ... It has it’s own satisfaction. It’s not seen as onerous, or a dreadful fate. It’s like building a mill or a bridge or sewing a fine garment or chopping wood – there’s a pleasure in constructing something that really works.’⁸ (p. 49)

⁸ Cox, Christopher (2009) Interview with Annie Proulx The Paris review 2009 Spring.

**As the
bamboo
sings**

Wong Liu Shueng

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As the bamboo sings

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Edit 4 Part 1 Chapter 1

1859 - The Wind of Knowledge

The steam rose in front of his face. Ah Chu gently blew on the rice porridge to cool it down. His mother had come into the room.

‘Today’s the day isn’t it?’ she said. She was traditionally dressed in black trousers, blue top with home-made buttons; practical clothes for work. She warmed him with her wide embracing smile.

‘Yes.’ He replied, the thought made him anxious. ‘I hope I’m lucky,’ he murmured.

‘You’ve studied hard. Don’t worry. Eat up.’ But the thought had stolen his appetite. He looked at the bowl, then rose from the table and poured it back into the pot, licking up the scrapings.

‘Off you go. You’ll feel better if you run to school.’ He paused at the doorway then stepped up onto the traditional raised threshold. It would have been flat when new, but the scuffing of almost a hundred years of feet upon its surface had worn its own shape. On a darkest moonless night it was possible to find home by a feel that was as familiar as family. Today he stood on the step to add height. It was good to feel tall.

Watching him mother said, ‘I’ll walk younger brother to school today. Go.’ And waved him off. Outside the wall of the courtyard Ah Chu called a farewell and ran along the path. It was only just wide enough for two men with shoulder yokes and two swaying baskets to squeeze past. Finding his way through the village meant meandering through a series of maze-like paths with ancient houses on either side. At the centre of the village he ran through the public square. Later the old men would be sitting around drinking tea. On his left was the all important Joss House and further along the school.

Ah Chu stopped running when he caught up with his clever friend, Ah Wak.

‘When are you leaving?’ Ah Chu asked.

‘Soon, hope you’ll follow next year.’

‘Well I’ll know today.’

‘Why yes, good luck.’ And the boys parted.

Ah Chu closed his eyes to gather his own inner strength. He really wanted to be in the elite class when school started again. He wanted the reputation of being clever. He was sure it would please his father.

There was a solid ancient feel about the school. It was built long before Ah Chu's father was born. Its large timber poles gave the building the feeling of solid strength. The clay-fired brick walls made the place feel like home. The roof had traditional grey tiles laid in straight lines from the roof-ridge to the lower edge, particularly capable of carrying the torrential rains of the monsoon season. It was the common design of the whole village and those close by. Nobody in the village, past or present had ever seen anything different. The only notable difference was whether a building was built for a richer family who could afford the auspicious animals along the roofline for good luck.

In the classroom a series of windows had been set high in the walls so gazing outside and daydreaming would not distract any child from the serious business of learning. Nor was there any other distraction, the walls that had once been whitewashed showed their age and financial state of the village.

Ah Chu was the last of the twenty students to arrive in the classroom. He nodded to the older ones, and the younger ones nodded to him. So polite. All were cousins of one kind or another. All had black hair although it was easy to see the variety of thicknesses. Ah Chu had the most unruly hair. It pulled out of the queue like an undisciplined child not walking in line. For years it looked more like a rat's tail.

The queue had been the hairstyle of all Chinese males, honouring the Manchu tradition. When Ah Chu was a youngster the front of his head above the temples was shaved and the rest of the hair was braided into a plait. His hair style demonstrated his commitment to filial piety. It was an outward manifestation of a Confucian value, the appreciation of his birth. He was still complete. To cut his hair was against Chinese tradition, against his parents, and against Chinese law. Actions of filial piety were the fundamental reason for living, marrying, and having sons. Understanding this equated with being an educated person.

Ah Chu's thoughts were interrupted by a hush descending upon the class. The teacher had entered the room, smiling. He walked in and then sat at the desk as the silence of anticipation rose. The teacher had a soft but low voice so everyone had to listen hard whenever he spoke. Ears had to be tuned.

'Three students will be selected from the first test. The second test will determine the other three places to make up the elite class.' All the boys nodded. Ah Chu could hear his heart beating. He wondered if the boy sitting next to him could hear it too, and glanced over. Ah Chu's impatience seemed to make his body lose its composure. He could hardly sit still. He had to concentrate to listen. 'I want to

congratulate...’ Ah Chu strained to hear his name. Before he knew it, the first test list had been read. The teacher went on, ‘In written work, many of you made mistakes. Most of you knew the character, which means you have all studied hard, but some of you wrote the character with the wrong stroke order. This is unacceptable. I need to remind you that how each character is formed reflects the art and skill of calligraphy, and the life and character of the writer. This is an essential part of education and of a person.’ The inner voice within Ah Chu wanted to burst out, his body wanted to jump up and say, come on, hurry up, hurry up, but he would never dare speak out. The teacher noted his movement and looked up. Ah Chu made a special effort to be still with controlled breathing. Around him sat the seventeen boys with clenched fists. Ah Chu broke out in a sweat. Everyone wanted to return home to tell their parents that the hope entrusted in them had not been in vain.

The second test list of three comprised the oldest student, the most unpopular student, and a student who had been sick for some time. Ah Chu tried to hide his disappointment as he looked through his scripts. In all, he had made three mistakes. Unfair! cruel! he could hear his inner voice cry. He looked up to make sure he had not said this aloud and was relieved that he had not publicly shamed himself. This was not a place to lose face.

As soon as he could, he handed back his papers, thanked his teacher and in the same slow motion to hide his impatience and disappointment, bowed low and respectfully before stepping back. At last he could excuse himself from the teacher’s attention.

The sun was high in the sky. The heat beat down on the hardened bare earth. He knew the village would be complaining about the lack of water, but at this moment he did not care. Ah Chu stood in the shade, kicking at the hard earth, filled with self-pity and frustration. He could feel the tears behind his eyes searching for the smallest of spaces to squeeze out. What would he say to his father? Would he be allowed come back to repeat a year? He felt such a failure, such shame.

Other students were leaving, passing the board where the names had been posted. ‘I’m sorry you’re not in the top six list.’ Ah Chu looked up surprised anyone could be talking to him. He hadn’t been aware of any movement around him. It was Ah Wak. There was a long pause before Ah Chu could think of anything to say.

‘I was careless.’

‘But you’re the next student on the list.’

‘How do you know?’

‘It’s on the board. Come and look.’ Both boys walked to the board where there were the six names, then Ah Chu (3). Ah Chu stared at the board.

‘Why didn’t the teacher say anything in class?’

‘You’re not the top six. The three shows you made three mistakes.’

‘Yes, three stupid mistakes.’

‘Well last year the next person entered our class because one of the students moved to the big city. He would’ve joined the class there of course.’

‘You mean Uncle Liu who joined the army?’ The opium wars had taken a whole group of men away from the village. None had returned.

‘Yes. You’ll see.’ Ah Wak looked at his friend in sympathy. Ah Chu stared hard, fighting tears.

‘I’d need lots of luck on my side, and I don’t see that right now.’

‘But it’ll change.’ And with that Ah Wak gently touched Ah Chu’s arm and turned to walk home.

Ah Chu returned to the shade, muttering to himself, absorbed in his disappointment. He had tried rehearsing things to say ‘Sorry father but I did not study hard enough,’ but it did not sound right. ‘I’m sorry.... But whatever he said was such a small part of the sorrow he felt within. Eventually he looked up and realised he was waiting for his younger brother to come to him. But Ah Fong was not to be seen. Once again he was in scholastic protest. Ah Chu sighed. Right now he had no patience for the boy, cursing him under his breath as he moved to search.

So many times he had said to Ah Fong,

‘Younger brother, you need to go to school,’ and so many times the reply was,

‘Ha, not for me.’ And then he would laugh as though he genuinely did not care.

‘Education’s special, you understand, don’t you?’ But it was as though Ah Fong was deaf and never heard the words. Before anyone could say anything more he somehow disappeared, out of the compound beyond the village. When he returned he seemed utterly undeterred. Sometimes Ah Chu could not believe they were brothers from the same family. Younger brother seemed unlike any of them. How could anyone not love being in class, he thought.

Each time his father found out Ah Fong had missed a lesson, he would vent his frustration on Ah Chu. With each thrash of the arm, each punch of the fist, each thud of a stick he would yell, ‘Forget that teacher, I’ll teach you a lesson. You’re not doing your job. You have not been responsible.’

After the first few beatings Ah Chu decided on a different way to ensure Ah Fong got to school.

‘Younger brother, I’ve got a rice ball for you if you make no trouble in going to school.’ Ah Fong understood what that meant. He would have to follow his elder brother in silence and not run away. He would not interrupt when his brother was talking to his friends. He would arrive at school and be rewarded. The food was exchanged once they were inside the school gates.

The family was fed, but always left slightly hungry. There was always a feeling that the body yearned to be filled up, to have that sense of completeness, from the joy of eating. It was seldom so. Father was fed first because he worked in the fields. The rest ate frugally. Ah Chu had to choose between the pangs of hunger and the pain of a beating.

But even these stratagems did not solve the younger brother puzzle for Ah Chu. Where did he go? It seemed that younger brother had this facility of evaporating into thin air. He simply could not be found.

Ah Fong’s teacher had taught Ah Chu for the first couple of years, before he graduated to the next class. Teacher, according to the gossip, had been to the High School in the next village, then Canton for teacher training. Ah Chu remembered when his grandfather and father discussed these matter. They were joyed by the news that old traditional Chen Wu’s grandson had returned to the village setting the best example of filial piety; to care for aged grandparents and aging parents. The men of the village nodded with approval and envy.

‘We need you to discipline our boys,’ they had told him when he went to the village square to talk with the old men. ‘They are a wild bunch and beyond us to teach.’ The teacher smiled.

‘The boys just need to be taught to remember.’ It set in the mind of each man listening a sense of possible success. Everyone wanted their sons to pass the exams and move into influential positions of power, money and authority. The teacher’s voice of authority to a group of uneducated village elders meant that he was immediately held in high esteem amongst them all. They were reminded of it when they looked at him.

He was born in the village so he looked like all of them, shaven head, with the longest shiny black queue. When it was cooler, he wound it around his head, but during summer, he let it hang loosely behind him. Such healthy hair showed that he had not suffered starvation. Another noted difference was that his clothes were both elegant and practical for the summer, for it was hot in the classroom even with the door open.

On the day when Ah Chu was not sure how he would talk to his parents, his own impatience and anger rose within. As Ah Chu thought about it, his own steps increased in slowness when Ah Fong suddenly appeared.

‘Where have you been all day?’ Ah Chu demanded.

‘At school, where do you think?’ Ah Chu stamped his foot.

‘You’re a liar, you weren’t!’ Ah Chu’s went to grab his brother but missed. ‘I had my friends look for you, and I realised you were not in the playground or the classroom.’ Fed up, Ah Chu said frantically, ‘where were you?’

‘You just didn’t see me, I was there,’ Ah Fong said in such a confident manner flicking his head in defiance. Ah Chu grabbed his brother by the arm and held it so tightly it hurt. He then raised his arm to vent his own anger when the teacher walked up to them both.

Ah Chu released his strong grip but when he opened his mouth not a peep came out. Instead the teacher grabbed younger brother.

‘Where do you go during the day?’ he demanded of the child in his hands. Ah Chu was shocked. ‘Where? Where?’ he shouted shaking the child.

‘I, I hide.’

‘Where?’

‘In the equipment cupboard’

‘Equipment cupboard? Show me.’

‘My parents are expecting us to go home.’ intervened Ah Chu weakly.

‘Don’t worry about that, I have just had a conversation with your father,’ and pushing his younger brother in the back, ‘now come, show me.’

All three walked back in silence, younger brother in front, and teacher walking on his heels and Ah Chu behind.

Once they entered the school area, younger brother went through the lower block, around the corner to the small equipment cupboard. Inside were some tables and chairs that were in different states of disrepair. In the corner away from the door, unseen, was an old basket, woven out of the willow canes from the trees close by. The basket had a broken handle and was sitting upside down.

‘There’ pointed Ah Fong.

‘You stay there?’ the voice of the teacher was raised in fury and disbelief. Ah Chu realised that younger brother would have snoozed on the sack under the basket for the two hours they were at school. The teacher was furious.

In his hand was the bamboo whip with which he hit his students. Before Ah Chu could say anything, the teacher had grabbed his student and was thrashing him over and over. The yelps and yells rang out in the empty schoolroom, but teacher did not care. He had only just learnt he'd been paid to give this child some education, and when the child had not appeared in the class, he assumed that his parents had withdrawn him. Today, he realised out of ignorance he had failed. The puzzle was pieced together.

'I am sorry, I am sorry,' yelled younger brother, but still the thrashing did not stop.

Ah Chu moved outside away from the sight of his younger brother getting a beating, but also worried about his own father's mood waiting for them at home. When he went around the back of the building away from the cries, sun and the public view. After a while, he realised that the voices had changed. He returned to the doorway he was surprised to see his father.

'Stop! Stop, my sincere apologies' His father had dropped to his knees. 'It is our fault. We have not taught this child well, we are at fault.'

At that the teacher stopped. Sweat covered his red face. He glared at younger brother in disgust. Pointing to the door he yelled,

'Go, and don't come back.'

'You are right,' said his father. 'He is not worthy of having you as his learned teacher.'

Younger brother whimpered as he walked outside. His legs had red welts raised to the surface. Blood flowed from the broken skin. Behind him was his father, striding with deliberate steps and the child knew he had to move quickly. No one said a word nor a glance exchanged.

Once inside the home courtyard, father went to the wood pile. His mother came out.

'Please, no more' Her voice was filled with a sense of begging. But that seemed to inflame the angry parent even more.

'These boys have shamed me. They have shamed this family, and you stand there and tell me not to do anything. How can we have pride in the village when our boys behave so badly?' and with that Ah Chu became the target of his frustration.

'I will show you how to take responsibility for the family. You, who think you're so clever, can't even get your brother to stay in the classroom. What a wasteful child you are, after my paying the fees. This is the end, no more fees.' Then in time

with each growing thud, he yelled, 'I will teach you responsibility. I am ashamed of you. You have shamed our family. Do you hear? You have brought shame upon us.'

Other things were said, but after some time Ah Chu suddenly found that his body had gone numb and shortly after he blacked out. When he woke up his whole body hurt, and he could not decide which bit hurt more, his head, his back, his arms or his legs. All he knew was not to move. Beside him sat his mother silently weeping. He looked at her, and she passed in silence a delicious dried plum and slipped it into his mouth, placing her fingers up to her lips to motion silence. He managed to give a little nod and closed his eyes. The dried fruit was a favourite of his father's, and out of bounds for all the children. The flavour was strong, a mixture of intensive sweetness with an overriding layer of tartness from citrus skin. It was made to delight the taste buds because it stretched the range of both extremes. The reaction was so sudden that Ah Chu closed his eyes tightly so as not to let out a squeal of delight. This was such a forbidden treat. His mother's hand took up his own and she leant over and whispered in his ear,

'Elder son, I know you tried your hardest.' Footsteps along the passage indicated that his father was coming into the room. His mother released his hand quickly, straightened her back and walked out in silence.

Ah Chu lay a long time on the bed looking towards the wall. His mouth made no movement so he looked as though he was asleep. It was by far the worst day of his life. After dark when the family were all in bed and he could hear his father's deep breathing, he decided that he needed to go the latrine in the courtyard. The human waste would be used in the fields as fertiliser during the next planting. When he sat up, the room started to swim around, and he had to lie down to stop the movement. The second time, he rose slowly, but when he stood his legs felt like agar agar and would cave under any moment. The pain in his body hurt so much he had to lean against the wall and wait between steps until he could bear to move again. The effort was so great he could not return to the house and sat on the courtyard step. It took some time for him to catch his thoughts and eventually he hobbled to the outer fields of the village glad that no one could see him. For the rest of that night he slept under the stars and waited there for the day's work to begin, returning to the house when he could spot his father in the field and knew it would be safe.

It took Ah Chu several days before he thought about school again, and when he did he found that his books had been burnt. The discovery brought him to tears, tears that he could not control until they silently rolled down his face.

Instead he went into the fields and worked as an adult. They would walk single file to the field, his father with his strong yoke and large baskets, and Ah Chu with smaller ones appropriate for his size. His father would give him instruction and Ah Chu would listen and do. He felt if he spoke any words they would be totally uncontrolled and invoke another hostile incident. His father spoke to him in a gentle voice but it did nothing to heal Ah Chu's sense of misery.

Each evening the ducklings were locked up in the compound so they were not eaten or caught by predators. Ah Chu was happy to take them out twice a day. He took them out to parts of the village where they could roam, and let them feed. Each day he would recite the five analects of Confucius to reassure himself he had not forgotten them. In the two months the numbers of ducklings had increased into a happy and healthy flock. For some of the families, he had to kill the duck and found no difficulty in bending the neck and head back, plucking some of the feathers out of the way, and slitting the throat, so the blood could be drained and caught in a bowl. This would then be steamed and eaten and loved by the whole family. Plucking and drawing the bird seemed not to bother him once his mother had shown him what to do. The best part was delivering a bird to the household and being paid. The coins would be held in his hand so tightly on the return journey home, and with such pride he gave the money to his mother. Funds increased and his father was clearly proud, overlooking the fact that the money was never handed to him. As time passed, Ah Chu started to train his younger brother to care for the ducks. Once when Ah Chu got the orders slightly mixed, an extra duck had been plucked and cleaned.

'Oh no, I have the orders mixed,' he exclaimed with horror to his mother.

'Let's eat it,' Ah Chu could not believe what he heard.

'But, father will....'

'Don't worry. I'll tell him I asked you to kill a duck for us.' She was clearly delighted.

It was on that afternoon that Ah Chu had seen his mother mix the finely sliced, soaked and softened mushrooms along with the washed and cut salted cabbage plus the rich and tasty sauce made of soya sauce, garlic and ginger and a splash of rice wine to add to the flavour. His mother used her hand sewing skills to mend the skin that had broken through unskilled plucking. As a cook what was important was that the duck could be sealed so that the mixture stayed inside to keep the bird moist. First the duck was steamed until tender, and then the skin was gently fried to become crisp.

On the day he was sent to the neighbouring village to get some clay-baked bricks for house repair, Ah Chu's teacher visited the home.

'I have come with such good news for you all. There will be a place for your elder son in the elite class.'

'What?' his father said in disbelief. 'He cannot go, I'm teaching him now.'

'You know your son has special talents. He is very clever, and would make you very proud.'

'That might be so, but he has not learnt to be responsible.' The sense of embarrassment at the behaviour of his sons continued to be an open raw wound within. 'His education is learning to contribute to our family. See the ducks? He has set up such a good little business.' The teacher could see the pride in the father, but in the teacher's mind it was not the same as the possibilities of education. 'No, no more education at the school,' said his father.

'I know you must do as you wish as his father, but you do know he is very clever, and could go a long way.' His father was unmoved. 'You do understand what it means if you do not accept his place in the elite class don't you? It is a special privilege you are turning down.'

'I know, but he can't possibly go. I'm the person who makes these decisions in this family, and I have made up my mind.'

'Is it possible to speak to him?'

'He is not here,' His father smiled at the good fortune of sending Ah Chu away that day.

The teacher closed his eyes in disappointment. There was something very wrong here, he thought. He wondered what had happened to Ah Chu and his father. Maybe the rumours he heard were true after all. Here was a child who was rare amongst the boys in the village of whom most had neither talent nor natural ability.

Ah Chu's father stood to indicate the visit had to end. 'Thank you for this visit.'

The teacher stood to leave,

'I tell all my students, that there is no shame to come back into the class even if they have left it for a year or so.'

'That will not be necessary, but thank you.' They both bowed to each other, then stepping carefully through the ducklings, trying the impossible task of avoiding the poultry poo, the teacher made his way out in disgusted silence. When he reached the pond, he took his shoes off and washed them. He screwed up his face, the stench was more than he could tolerate. It had made a bad taste in his mouth.

Edit 4 Part 1 Chapter 2

1861 - The Winds that carries Sound

‘Young Ah Chu, tell us what we should do to get the rains to break.’ Ah Chu laughed and paused to hear the birds. They often announce the coming of the rain, but right now they were silent.

‘Uncles, I can’t answer that,’ he was amazed that they were serious in asking him for such knowledge ‘why, you’ve all lived in this world longer than I.’ he said, deferring to his elders.

‘Yes, but you’re a lot cleverer than any of us.’ Ah Chu hardly wanted to hear such a compliment. When he was by his father he made sure he did not respond. His disappointment was only bearable by keeping a silent distance. But his father had less influence over the village cousins so they controlled their faces to hide their laughter. Since the teacher had visited his home, the news had been discussed throughout the village.

Ah Chu knew his father had decided the way to keep Chinese culture strong was to teach sons not to challenge authority. Being firm was the only possible way to teach the young. When the men around him disapproved of his methods, it set off an alarm in his head that rang like the clang of a gong.

Ah Chu had overheard men commenting, sometimes wishing that they were in the same position, ‘He should go back to school, you know,’ and each time without any change in tone or force father would answer,

‘He’s not and that’s it.’ And with that father always walked off grumpily. Ah Chu was amazed but secretly pleased that the men persisted. When they were told by his father that it was none of their business, they made it so. When they were told that nothing would change his mind, the men would tease him of being a stubborn old buffalo or a sad blind dog who smelt his way through the world rather than open his eyes. Every time they started the predictable argument, the men developed greater enjoyment in the banter. Ah Chu watched as his father was pushed each time a little further out of the group. Only when he was using the water buffalo would he get some peace. It was the moment Ah Chu could not wait for. He would wait until the sun was hot and high, or the rain was thundering down and sit with the other men listening as they would tell him stories of the past. It was a different kind of education and he loved it.

As Ah Chu grew older, taller and stronger the men would joke with him ‘Soon you’ll start smoking.’ Overhearing this, the authoritative voice of his father informed them.

‘Not if I have anything to do with it.’ The men would mock a seriousness knowing that in the future they would sneak tobacco to Ah Chu if they had half a chance. Why they might even try opium too.

‘Let’s give the child a break from this hard life,’ they would say and nod in agreement.

Over the past weeks Ah Chu had been getting the field ready for the rains, breaking up clumps of dirt, pulling out every demanding weed that would steal the nutrients, and building up the bund that separated each field, that would contain the water so necessary for the rice to grow. As he worked he would visualise the water running over the field, soaking it up like thirsty children.

The first year Ah Chu’s work had not been perfect, and the bund broke. As soon as his father saw it, his fiery temper was triggered and he was outraged.

‘Get back out there, fix it’ the men overhearing this looked at his father, said nothing but raised their eyebrows. His father walked away and Ah Chu, dejected returned to the field to mend the wall. Luckily it was early in the season, so the paddies above could be re-flooded. After that Ah Chu felt the pressure to watch for the first signs of cracks. Water would run over them down into the lower terraced fields like a controlled waterfall. It was the bund that kept the water in. It was the bund that was opened so the water could be drained to the lower field. It was the bund that formed the footpaths on which everyone walked so as not to disturb the rice growing. Building them was an art unto itself, strong enough to withstand all those functions, but adaptable enough for an opening to be made and remade as the thirsty plants drank the field dry. How he wished the clouds would break and release their welcome load heralding the arrival of the monsoon season.

Of the group of men, Ah Chu’s favourite was Tien-Tze. He owned the neighbouring field as well as living next door. Their small business was basket weaving from the willows that grew on the other side of the village. When Tien-Tze’s wife had woven enough trays, small egg baskets with their strong handles, and baskets large enough to transport a small animal like a dog, a goose or a piglet, ready for a meal, they would be seen going to the neighbouring village. They looked like a basket tree

on legs as they made their way by weaving along the paths. Others were forced to walk around them, children, adults, donkeys, and people pushing carts. It did not matter.

‘Maybe it is none of my business like your father told me,’ he had told Ah Chu ‘but if you were my son, I would have you educated.’ Tein-Tze was much taller than his own father and when Ah Chu’s looked up he was met with the widest of smiles and the warmest momentary look.

As Ah Chu’s heavily calloused hands grabbed the handle of the hoe and worked away, he would periodically stretch upright, arching his back so that it could be relieved of the tension of constant bending. He would also look around and see what the other men were doing. Sometimes his awareness was held by the song of the birds. He wondered what they saw as they flew from the cooler places to enjoy the heat they shared with the humans. He envied that birds had the freedom to come and go.

It was while he was hoeing the land, that sometimes he would get into conversation with Tien-Tze.

‘Young Ah Chu, are you calling the gods to drop their rain on our fields?’

‘Uncle, I call them everyday.’

‘Call harder then, the rains are late and, and...’

There was something in the man’s voice that was different, a tone that lacked the usual conviction and energy.

‘Do you think you’ll finish weeding that field today?’ Ah Chu asked.

‘I certainly hope so’ and away the two went, in their separate fields hoeing in a kind of unison both aware of each other and the noise of the birds above. Birds and men both complained for more water. In the solitude of working, Ah Chu would sometimes wish he had a father more like Tien-Tze. Such a moment consumed him with guilt, but he also found he could not stopping thinking of such a possibility.

As the sun rose in the sky, and the heat beat down on the farmers, many had retreated to the shade to drink hot strongly brewed tea. Ah Chu wanted to finish the row, at least that way he would feel a sense of satisfaction. When he looked up in reaction to a strange noise, he could see Tien-Tze slumped to the ground.

Ah Chu bounced over the boundary bund and ran to him calling out his name. The men from their shaded places stood, some came running. One yelled out Tien-Tze’s name as though his spirit would hear him and avert danger. But Ah Chu was first to help the groggy man to his feet.

‘I’m okay, I’m okay,’ Tien-Tze said in a quavering voice. A cup of strong tea was placed in his hand; he drank it, reacting to its strength by blinking, and then

unexpectedly slumped again. Ah Chu was holding the man upright, well as upright as possible, and without making another noise, started to walk him over the field. Many of the other men tried to put his other arm around their shoulder, but Tien-Tze's arm would not cling. It seemed not to have any strength. He only had enough strength to mutter in a drowsy manner,

‘Let Ah Chu, Ah Chu....’

‘Get the acupuncturist, immediately’ called one of the men, and someone went off to the other end of the village. ‘He needs treatment straight away.’

Together Ah Chu and Tien-Tze hobbled their way back, and by the time they arrived at his house, his wife was ready with hot water, and their child Meng was placed in the basket he played in when his mother was weaving other willow baskets ready for sale. Tien-Tze's wife face was white. If anything happened to her husband she would be doomed. Unable to return to her own clan, she would have no place to go but stay in the clan village to care for his child. Wives in this situation often became literal slaves to the deceased husband's clan family who often resented the bowl of rice she ate, and the room she took in the house. She glanced at her little son who was full of smiles and laughter and thanked her luck; at least she had produced one son. If only she could produce more.

Within few minutes the acupuncturist arrived with his set of needles, and feeling Tien-Tze's pulse immediately pierced the tips of his fingers to release the pressure, then with less urgency, pierced his toes, ankles and neck. The impact of the stroke would be minimised.

‘Will he be alright?’ asked Ah Chu.

‘I think so; it is good to do this so soon after slumping as possible. He was lucky that he was not left lying on the ground for long. You did well to get him home.’

Ah Chu smiled, nodded then left the room. As he made his way out of the house, he passed Meng who had thrown some of his toys out of his basket. Ah Chu bent down to pick up the wooden toy someone had carved for a child. He examined it, and wondered if it was the creative work of his mother or father, or maybe Meng's grandfather who lived in the compound.

‘Ah Chu, Ah Chu’ it was the voice of Meng's mother. ‘Can you run to the village square and tell Grandfather to come home. Sometimes he is forgetful, so make sure he brings his bird home.’ She paused and looking at her son, she asked, ‘Can you take Meng with you?’

Ah Chu was happy to do as asked. It was a lovely break from working in the field. Meng was surprisingly light in his arms. Ah Chu ran down the path towards to village pond where the water buffaloes grazed, and then slept. They were both out in the fields today, so he made a short cut and ran through their compound, pass the Joss House in view of the school that normally filled him with sadness. Today he moved with urgency. More education would not help, fast feet would.

The group of men had already assembled. Ah Chu was surprised to see the new ones. As a youngster, before school age, he came to the square and sat with his own grandfather. Here he learnt to sit very still, to be seen and not heard.

Today there was enough of a group for Ah Chu to stop running and look at each of them one by one. He made a nod to his own grandfather, and smiled. Grandfather was such a special person in Ah Chu's life. He tried hard to get time to talk with him, although for some time now, grandfather said very little, and kept a wary eye out for his father. At this moment though, he was smiling, and next to him stood the beautiful birdcage he had spent hours building. In it was his favourite mynah bird, that had learnt to make certain sounds. When they were repeated, grandfather would laugh with glee, showing all the wrinkles in his face, and his eyes shone and twinkled. Such was the pleasure. In his hand was the familiar and favourite Chinese porcelain cup.

'Gong Gong?' he called, 'Where is Meng's Gong Gong? Meng's father collapsed in the field today and is now at home. He's needed there.'

Ah Chu's grandfather pointed to the man on the far side. Together with Meng still in his arms, who started to wriggle and make noises, he ran around the man who was singing a folk song, and stepped to one side to avoid the man who was playing the *er ho*. Immediately, upon hearing the news, the old man grew serious, stood up and gave the commands.

'Fold my chair and put it away. Bring the birdcage to my house' and with that he ran across the courtyard. Ah Chu stood and watched. It was the fastest he had ever seen him move.

Ah Chu bent down to pick up the chair when he realised that the front of his shirt felt damp. He lifted Meng up and away from him and quickly turned him around so the rest of the urine missed his clothes. The men, who were watching, laughed.

'You'll need to be faster!' they called out in laughter. And Ah Chu grinned. It was true. The wet spot on his shirt would dry. The best part of it all was to see the old men laughing, showing their gummy mouths, and the massed of wrinkles on their faces. Ah Chu laughed. He had not laughed for quite some time; it was a good feeling.

After that Meng became attached to him, and if he heard his voice, would wander over. Without any siblings yet, Meng sought out company, and Ah Chu was willing. Ah Chu, who found his own brother tiresome, found Meng charming. So most evenings after dinner, Ah Chu sat with Tien-Tze in his courtyard, exchanged gossip, and then he would take Meng for a walk around the village. Meng had no ideas of social boundaries, welcomed everyone, and won the hearts of most of the village. It took only a short time before people assumed that Ah Chu and Meng were the best of friends.

Edit 4 Part 1 Chapter 3
1865 - The Winds blow beyond.

If *Tsao Wang*, Kitchen God were a human being he would have smiled at Ah Chu's family. He would have little to report to the judges of the Other World. They had cleaned their house, paid up their debts and mended wrong doings. The new hand stitched clothes were ready to wear. This year there was enough money for the lucky red envelopes which were filled for the children.

The old hand-written signs crafted by Grandfather that hung around him had been burnt with a little straw for his horse, and some honey for himself to help persuade him to forget the family's ill deeds that he might have seen or heard. This was a year when the family needed to care what *Tsao Wang* would report. When New Year arrived, new paper pictures and messages would be once more written asking for another year of blessings.

Ah Chu's mother had this once a year experience of returning to her own family. On the day before New Year's day, she and others from the same village would walk for most of the day to the hills in the far distance to reach her village snugly situated in the valley beyond. On the way they would meet others walking back to the village they had left and soaked up news from each other. They acted like starving children at the table. She had already asked Ah Chu for two ducks to take with her.

'I'll find the fattest ones,' he said. But Ah Chu could feel something else, something extra in the air, some excitement that he had not felt before. Even the birds seem to be calling out louder than usual. He had observed his parents talking together and when he entered the room, they would stop. Something was up. 'Why such excitement?' he asked his mother.

'This year I am going to start enquiring about a wife for you.'

'For me? Get married? No.' Ah Chu was shocked.

'Don't worry, we will choose well.' Ah Chu shrugged his shoulders, squinted his eyes and looked at his mother as though she were a stranger, then wandered off to see how his brother was caring for the ducks. Something told him they were being starved, and he needed plump ducks for Chinese New Year. Everyone would want poultry on their table, chickens or ducks and best if both. As Ah Chu walked past the village, he could see his brothers and the ducks. Naughty Ah Fong was at the back to

make sure that none of the ducks went truant. Those who wandered off were hit with the long thin bamboo stick. Over time the troublesome duck would have a strip of cloth tied around its neck. That one would be targeted at the next killing. The numbers of ducks had increased until at night the compound was full. Ah Chu also looked at the two ducks that had gotten their legs caught in a trap. He had spent some time making a splint out of bamboo for each bird. He would use *ma yeuk* a herbal remedy made from cannabis used for breaks and strains on animals, humans and birds. Ah Chu broke the table tennis sized wax ball and smelt the herbal ball. The strength of the smell made him pull a face. But it was known that once heated and mixed with some herbal liquid, he could rely on it to mend the fractured bone and the bird would once more walk as before.

‘Take the ducks further outside the village.’ Ah Chu called to his brother.

‘Nah, this will be alright,’ the ground had little for the ducks to feed on.

‘You,’ he said grabbing Ah Fong ‘You are the laziest person I know.’ Ah Fong pulled a face poked his tongue out at his bossy brother then started running away. So did the ducks. When Ah Fong was caught he realised this was a mistake. After the school incident, he had to remember that Ah Chu would be happy to treat him badly. He did not like him, nor was willing to care for him.

‘You are stupid, dumb and uneducated,’ Ah Chu enjoyed telling him. Ah Fong knew when to give up.

‘Stop, elder brother, let’s get the ducks together. Yes I will take them up the valley.’ Ah Fong had to run and catch the ducks that had wandered off.

Along the shared alley way it seemed everyone was doing house improvements. It was another sign that things were well in the village, that the monsoons had come when they were calculated to come, and the crop had been plentiful. With the Opium Wars happening close by, Little Pond Village was lucky to have escaped bloodshed although there was a group of men who had started the habit. Had they been several miles closer to Hongkong they would not have been so lucky.

The Joss House that year was to be extended. When Ah Chu’s grandfather was a young boy it was but a small room heavy with incense. In front, the alter was draped with a skilfully embroidered cloth. At the very back were the artificial flowers while towards one side was a small burning lamp with smouldering incense. On the floor were two mats laid out for kneeling before the gods. People came in and out of the Joss House for whatever reason, and the lamp seemed never to be extinguished. As the

population had increased extensions were needed. After this New Year all village hands plus those of the neighbouring villages were to arrive, so brothers of wives would return with their sisters, and collectively help in the building project. Such fun.

It was a time with so many new people around, new ideas would be introduced with the sharing of news from here and there. At the end of the day, Ah Chu was happy to sit and listened to men talking in the village square. So often the talk was about the people who had left the village and gone over to other places. According to the stories told, some had boarded on a ship that had rocked them like uneven soil here and there all the way to another land mass, firstly to America, the Beautiful Country, and later to Gum Sang, New Zealand, the New Hills of Gold. There was so much excitement, but most when they were told of the money that was sent home.

Silence descended on the group when one of the older visitors got up and talked.

‘I tell you, send your sons away. My son went off and came back just after three years with enough money to buy land.’

‘Land? Enough money to buy land?’

‘Plus extensions for the house.’ There was a pride and smugness about how he talked. ‘We are so proud.’

The whole village could not contain themselves everyone spoke over everyone else. The quiet spoke up, the elderly had an opinion. One of the oldest got out of his chair with the help of his daughter-in-law.

‘Did I hear you right? You send your sons away and they come back with money. Is that right?’ The visitors nodded.

‘Then what happens for the ones that do not come home? Are there any of those?’ Another man from a distant village spoke.

‘Yes, it sounds perfect, but there are other things that seem to happen as well. My son was killed, and we are trying to get his body home for the ancestral burial place, but we are not sure if that will happen. It is hard to find out who to talk to, they are not organised like we are here. My heart aches.’ As good hosts one of the Little Pond Village elders quietly stood.

‘We offer you our thoughts. This must be hard for you and your family, thank you for telling us about this as we need to know more. Are there other stories to tell us?’ Another person spoke.

‘We had some money to buy land, but we do not have enough to break the land in, so we do not know when we will be better off.’ A more hopeful person rose to speak.

‘Our family has had poor health and we got money for medicine. I am thankful that my wife has not died, so we are happy even though we do not get a lot of money from our son.’ Everyone nodded. They could understand what it meant. One of the visitors asked.

‘Have you not sent any of your sons away?’ The very oldest elders of the village got up. He seldom spoke in public.

‘We have talked about it, but no, we need our boys to work in the fields. This is their first responsibility. Without rice, we all starve, so we have not agreed that our boys should go.’ There was a murmur around the square. No one even knew about it. No one as far as they knew had heard a word. One of the younger brothers-in-law rose.

‘They say its hard work, but what is hard when they can send us so much money! I say I can do that kind of hardship,’ and all the men smiled in agreement.

‘What could be harder than working in the rice fields anyway? What could be harder than carrying the loads we carry here?’

‘Sound like an exaggeration to me.’

‘Yes, to impress us families.’

‘Well I think all they have to do is to walk along the path and pick up the gold.’ One of the old men got up and mimed what he thought happened exaggerating a sore back and before anyone else could get up to speak, he burst into song, using a well known folk song tune but singing new words.

‘It’s good to be young and not too old,

It’s good to be bold, and pick up gold

To ease the distance send gold home

To think of us as you roam.’

Ah Chu’s grandfather got up and added to the impromptu song. By the last night of the building project, the song had been sung not just once, but over time it had grown, humour was added, the story longer, and more enjoyable. By the end of the collective time together, the whole village, men and women laughed until tears came to their eyes. What merriment, what a wonderful time. What a treat.

On the last evening, the whole village turned out for the last evening meal, and the village elders rose to thank them for their strength, help and advice in extending the building of the Joss House, as well as their grand news and humour. The men stood and a drink was sipped in honour. The following day, the villagers with many tears in their eyes waved them goodbye. Sadness covered the village for a while knowing that such a project was not likely for sometime, and the following year another village would need

help, so their men would travel away, and the wives would stay with the children and the elderly. It was not much fun.

In Ah Chu's house, the sadness did not last long. The rice plants were doing well, a sea of swaying emerald green plants yet to seed.

'I think I have found you someone.' Ah Chu's mother told him

'What?'

'Ah Chu, I met a family that I know you will like, the girl has some education, is bright, cooks and sews and her mother keeps a very organised house. I think she will be very suitable.' Ah Chu heart sank. 'Cheer up; I went and visited their place. All good signs, clean house, well made clothes and delicious food. We are going to hire a 'go-between' to make formal enquiries. This is so exciting.' Ah Chu just stared at his mother. He could not think of one word to say except to tell her that the bride-to-be was probably already sold to pay for some debt. But he knew if this was true his mother would not want to hear it from him, so he remained silent. 'Just think my elder son; you could be married in two years. You will have plenty of time to get used to the idea.'

Ah Chu had lost all interest in the idea of marrying, but the idea of going to another country excited his imagination. Since he started the duck farming, he decided that his father was not going to receive all his hard-earned money. For that reason he gave the money to his mother, and while she knew, it was an unspoken secret between them. He had made a hidey-hole large enough to hold a small tin where the coins were collected. While he resisted in taking the money out to count it, feeling that it would tempt fate, he just kept on saving. From time to time, his mother helped him by distracting his brother so he had time to hide his caash. In the beginning he would wink at her as a sign of what they shared, but over time, his mother would ignore all signs so his father would not grow suspicious. As his father did not count the ducks he had no idea how many ducks were sold in any week, although several times when his mother gave him the money, he looked at it, and the flock and said.

'More ducks were sold than this!'

But his mother would defend the children and tell of some ducklings that got trampled upon, or a hawk that stole some ducklings while the boys were in the fields, at which time the father would want to yell at his children. His wife would plead with him not to. Since the incident with Ah Chu, the neighbourhood had ostracised the family, and she had spent considerable time mending bridges that were broken, assuring them

that her husband had reformed and knew that he would not beat another child so harshly. In order for them to believe her, she had to make sure he did not beat his children in that way again. A few ducks was hardly an excuse. She reasoned with him, that when he was young and caring for ducks, did he not lose a few ducks through no real fault of his own? He had just forgotten, and needed reminding, and she did it with a lightness of voice and softness to appeal to his better nature.

'Suppose you are right' he'd grunt. And it was only when she had stopped talking that she realised she was holding her breath, and let out a soft sigh. As a mother had multiple roles to be played.

Edit 4 Part 1 Chapter 4

1866 - The Dry Wind that turns to Gentle Laughter

Ah Fong saw grandfather pick up his favourite small four legged cane stool.

‘Quick *Gong Gong*, you’ll be late to the square!’

Grandfather looked fondly at his grandson.

‘No, this drought stops everything.’

‘Don’t you miss it?’ But grandfather was glad. He could spend more time overseeing the family, a roving eye on his own son. The drought also brittle people’s emotions. Tempers flared, nothing got done. No water for cleaning. No water for the plants. Just enough for tea.

Ah Fong wandered off with Ah Chu. Grandfather heard him call, ‘Come on ducks, *loi la, loi la*, come here, come here. Let’s go.’ and he smiled. The boys went away from the village in search for food for themselves, trees for fruits and berries, or roots to eat. They had told him of the time when they found a bee’s nest and even though they got stung, they ate the honey greedily and could not bear to share it with any of the family.

The atmosphere around the house over the past weeks had become as bitter as the after-taste of herbal medicine. Talk between adults had reduced to the practical. Young children could be heard protesting, unhappily hungry.

Father was not the only man to be ill-humoured and sullen. Many would wander around the village, sometimes alone and other times in small groups. The fields lay bare, too hard to dig, too dry for weeds to grow. The pond was drying up; the rice seedlings needed urgent planting. Every so often the villagers would look up at the tirelessly blue sky as though wishing might bring the clouds and then the rains.

Mother became more and more gloomy as the days and weeks progressed. Feeding the family felt like a daily miracle, eking out the dried vegetables; supplies that might have to last for the following year. If that happened, it would be a sure road to starvation. If only the rains came all would be well. If only. When the boys returned to the compound grandfather called his grandsons.

‘Come here, the house must be kept quiet, your mother is unwell.’ After three days Ah Fong looked at his grandfather,

‘What’s wrong with mother?’ Ah Fong was relentless once he started.

‘She needs to rest.’ He could not tell him that she was hoping that the herbs she had taken would produce an abortion. ‘We all have to help her.’

‘Is mother going to die?’ Grandfather gulped the air around him.

‘Let us not displease the gods.’

‘If she dies, will you look after us?’ Grandfather gulped again.

‘Of course I will,’ all too aware of his own frail body, his failing eyesight and his lack of influence. Since his wife died, life had been filled with an endless sense of hollowness alleviated by the company of others, but now even that had ceased. As he looked at his two grandsons he remembered a time when he wished so many things for them. But now he felt little else but a deep sense of helplessness. Today he picked up the small knife and continued to carve his small wooden figurine. He would start a Kitchen God.

Everyday, more people in the village died, the old and the young, those who had health problems and some who suddenly found that their life was over. So many funerals were small family affairs and the villagers looked on. Everyone feared they could be next.

While the heat baked everything in sight and there was not a cloud on the skyline, Ah Chu’s mother waited for the first sign of blood, but nothing happened. The longer she waited the more tension she felt as though this baby was displaying its first determination against the wisdom and will of its parents. This was not a good sign that the child would have a high sense of filial piety. But the weeks went by, and Ah Chu’s father blamed her night after night.

‘Useless, you’re useless,’ he would rant. ‘Why you can’t even abort after spending money for the herbs.’ As the days got gloomier, father changed his tune.

‘Maybe it’s a son, a strong son who would not end its life. Yes, this is a good sign.’ No one dared respond. Ah Chu’s mother did not have the strength to reply.

Nor was Ah Chu that happy either, ‘Grandfather, mother tells me that the ducks have to be killed.’

‘Right now she cannot bear the smell. It makes her want to vomit.’ Grandfather spoke gently knowing that this was not what his grandson wanted to hear.

‘But you know what that will mean? I won’t be able to go to the other villages to sell the ducks. People know me. When I walk through their village with the ducks in my willow baskets, the children come out and look at them. When I am unable to sell

them, I have been able to barter for vegetables or other food. Isn't this a good thing?' The thought of not leaving the village meant Ah Chu was trapped. His sense of resentment had risen in the past weeks. The sense of despair of not being able to leave the village infuriated him. And throughout, Grandfather knew that he must remain calm. 'I hate this place!'

Grandfather looked up. He stared directly at his elder grandson, his face was serious. 'This is your home, and it's important you do not hate this place.' He paused, and went to grab the child, but Ah Chu pulled away. 'It's the place where you belong, where your feet stand in the world. Wherever you are, you will think of this place, and want to return. This is more than your home, it's your ancestral home. Life is hard right now, but it will pass.' Ah Chu looked at his grandfather, and knew that if he opened his mouth whatever came out would not be what this old man would want to hear. Instead, he shrugged his shoulders and walked out to look for his brother. He could not bear to be around these people.

When clouds began to appear in the sky, the heat and humidity increased. It was like teasing the population, never knowing exactly when they would find relief. They sat and waited, often in silence, privately praying to the gods to look upon the village with compassion. And then, one evening, the rain started to fall. Everyone rushed outside with as many containers as they had to fill with the welcomed water. Ah Chu was given the job of keeping the last three ducks out of the containers; they quacked in protest, complaining about their own need for water as well.

Within three days, the rain really had arrived, pouring from the sky in large quantities. All available people regardless of age or gender went into the fields to hoe, plant and organise the bunds. Only mother could not go. School classes were cancelled to release all able hands. They worked in silence and as fast as possible from day break until dark fell upon them and they could no longer see, then collapsed with exhaustion. Shoes were abandoned and trouser legs were rolled up to the knee, so their feet could mush up the soil and make the rice field thick and muddy and perfect for the rice. Squelch, squelch such a delightful sound and such a soothing feel. Even though the rice plants looked a sorry sight, everyone hoped it would not be too late and they would recover once planted.

As the fields began to flood, each compound latrine was emptied of its human waste and taken bucket by bucket to the fields as fertilizer. Their best chance of not starving was to help the rice to grow. As more rain fell, the hopes rose with the water level. Before long, they dared to be happy and hopeful.

In a more relaxed atmosphere Ah Chu's parents decided that it was time for a marriage. Now the ducks were allowed to sit on their eggs so there would be plenty for the feast. Planning ahead allowed the whole family to feel excited at the impending happy event. Mother looked forward to having someone to help her with her tasks. Father, now in a more hopeful mood, liked the idea of having a newborn son, and a daughter-in-law. Ah Chu shook his head and wondered what it all meant. He hoped that his new bride would at least look appealing, but he would not see her until the marriage day and then it would be too late. He thought of his own parents and wondered how they felt at the same event in their lives. When he thought of his own parents when they were younger, he thought of them as being happy and beautiful. Life seemed to have obliterated so much of that happiness. Toughness and hardship had worn their beauty away.

In the middle of harvesting, Ah Chu woke up to his mother moaning.

'Go and get the midwife' she called out. Ah Chu had known that this would be his task and had worked out the quickest way to her house, down a small lane, only wide enough for people. It was even too narrow for anyone with their baskets, so children loved running through the short-cut. Ah Chu had wondered why the lane was left, and why the house walls were not placed next to each other as was done around the rest of the village. There was a tale that the inhabitants of one of the houses had once had a huge argument with the neighbour. When they built onto their house, they refused to build the walls so that they were touching the neighbour's house since it would indicate a closeness.

The midwife was much loved in the village because she had been present at the birth of most of them, giving her a status of a kindly grandmother. When children saw her, working in the vegetable patch, they often spoke to her, or helped her when she was carrying a load to her house. She in turn would talk to them about their own birth, or what she remembered of that time. When women in the village were pregnant, they visited her before the birth, and when the waters broke, she was called. She always hoped that the fire would be lit, and the water placed on to boil. She carried her own bucket and all the things she would use but she certainly needed hot water for both the mother and the washing of hands. Standing from the doorway, Ah Chu called, '*Tai Tai*, come quickly, it's mother.'

‘Oh Ah Chu, let’s walk together.’ She picked up the bucket, and immediately, he took it from her. ‘Now tell, me,’ she said in her typically soft and kindly voice, ‘how is school?’

‘Um, I help father now.’

She was silent for a while, ‘and your ducks?’

‘Only three and some young ducklings newly hatched.’ She turned and stared at him, but said nothing more. When they reached the house, they could hear mother moaning.

‘About time,’ said Ah Chu’s father and ducked out, through the compound, and out of the village. He could not bear to watch the process of childbirth. The midwife was not surprised. It had been his reaction when all his children were born.

Ah Chu sat in the compound. His brother wandered around aimlessly. Ah Chu caught one of the female ducks and sent the rest out with his brother. Then he started to prepare the gift for the midwife when she left. As the duck blood was caught he added the seasoning and thickening, stoked the fire to steam it for his mother, reasoning that after the birth she would need some food. She loved the blood from the poultry, as though her body called for it in hunger. Sitting outside he realised the duck was easy to pluck, separating the heavy feather from the down, saving the down for the blanket he was making for the new baby. When he heard his mother scream, he would freeze his action, trying to imagine what was happening. Then he would continue to separate the feathers. After he would sew the blanket up. His mother had always been practical and said,

‘Learn to sew and you will always be clothed.’

With the feathers all gone, Ah Chu then blew down the neck so the skin separated from the body, pumping it up so it was large and fat. He always laughed when he looked at the duck and slowly let out the air. This duck had been plucked beautifully, and he smiled at his own ability. When he first started all those years ago, he would get so annoyed when he broke the skin. It was because he was in a hurry, but as he had learnt to be patient he understood that undressing a duck of its feathers was a slow process. They did not give up their feathers easily.

Sitting quietly sewing up the blanket, he heard the cry of the baby. He stood up, wanting to run into the room but refrained from doing so. The midwife came to the door,

‘Go find your father.’

‘*Baba, Baba* come quickly.’

‘Is it a boy?’

‘I don’t know, the midwife did not tell me.’

The men around nodded their heads, they knew. Ah Chu’s father wiped the sweat off his forehead, and as he walked inside he yelled ‘Well? A son?’

‘Shhhhhh please, your wife is very weak, and needs to rest,’ the midwife warned.

His wife was propped in the bed, dozing. She looked exhausted.

Her husband picked up the baby and opened up the cloth that wrapped the newborn.

‘How dare you give me a useless girl!’ He spat on the floor. ‘You are so stupid you can’t even give me a son. A daughter! What makes you think we need a daughter? Another mouth to feed, a dowry to save for and then she’ll go off. What a waste, a big mistake. I do not want a daughter.’

His wife listened to the words, and closed her eyes. As he walked into the compound he spotted Ah Chu.

‘When your time comes, you had better give me a grandson. I don’t want either a daughter, or a granddaughter. Do you hear me?’ Ah Chu sat stone still. He just stared at his father. He hoped his father would wander off, and sighed when he did.

Then Ah Chu, as quick as he dared, darted into his mother’s room. Without saying a word, he picked up the little bundle and sat looking at his new sister. Hoping that he would not to be overheard by the gods for it was unlucky to say positive things to a child, he whispered,

‘Oh she’s gorgeous, how small she is with her tiny little nose, miniature eyelashes and mop of the blackest hair.’ Her small hand grasped his calloused finger. He had not felt anything so soft. Then to the baby he said, ‘I am your *Di Gor Gor* and I have just sewn up your blanket for your bed.’

His mother laughed. ‘Have you?’

‘Yes, this morning, after I plucked the duck that I gave the midwife.’

‘Oh, thank you. How grown up you have become. Your little sister will learn a great deal from you.’ They both nodded as Ah Chu handed back the baby to mother for feeding.

For the next two years whenever his father looked upon the girl child Ah Chu would hear his father rant at her.

‘You are worthless in our family, ha, such a good-for-nothing. What use are you?’ Mei Mei would look at her father then burst into smiles. At her first birthday held

one month after her birth, the child moved from adult to adult unperturbed. She won hearts. The following year when it was her birth date and she was officially two years old, she was once more the delight of the room. Nothing seemed to stop her from being happy; her smiles were contagious. Ah Chu's father would glare around the table until all the smiles had disappeared, but for that of the toddler. If on the other hand, when his sons thought father would explode into more intensive behaviour, they would look at him, and knowing that the words would change nothing would nod their heads and respond with 'Aye ya! Aye ya.' As the child grew she also would join in the chorus of 'Aye ya! Aye ya' that made the rest of the family laugh.

Edit 4 - Part 1 Chapter 5

1867 - The Winds of Union

The morning had started with rain so the dust had settled and the air was fresh. The courtyard looked like it had been deliberately cleansed for the big occasion. Round tabletops were laid over smaller tables that would allow ten people to sit together. The chairs were an assortment of boxes. In honour of the occasion two elegant red chairs were borrowed from a family that lived on the other side of the village. The family was delighted that their chairs helped to bring all newly weds good luck.

Inside was the prepared food, the dishes of ducks and cleaver-chopped chicken lay on the dish as though it was whole. There were bowls ready for the soup, and the rest of the meal was ready to fry. It would be served by the daughter-in-laws from the same village as Ah Chu's mother – a sisterhood who came together for such rituals. This was not so much the celebration of marriage but the introduction of the bride to the clan. Born into her own clan, she opens the possibility of sons to provide future generation.

The night before the whole family washed themselves, not just their skin, but their hair as well with the special comb that was made out of some kind of shell. The long strands were then carefully plaited into the traditional queue. The plait was tied with a long narrow strip of cloth impregnated red dye; red because it was the all important colour for marriage. Ah Chu took the end in his hair and looked at it. The ribbon had been wound in such a way that the end of the queue for the length of his thumb was solid, with the ribbon so carefully intertwines in it. It was the first time he had ever had his hair dressed with such care. Not a strand of hair was out of place, and to make sure, oil was placed over the plait to make it black and shiny.

His mother's hair was so unusually tied in loops that sat over her ears. He had never seen his mother look so beautiful. The new clothes she made for herself were a new design, with the area around the neck oversewn, slightly padded with some strips of ribbon sewn to catch the eye. Under the red shirt was a new pair of black trousers, the first she had made for many years. His father and brother had new outfit, shirts made of the new blue. There was a lightness in the colour, a sense of gaiety. The baby had a gay red jacket and pants with a slit to ease toilet needs. Her hair was tied up with strips of red cloth into two brushes, one on each side, and she laughed at the feel of the

air around her neck and the feel of the hair brushing against her head when she moved in quickly.

As the drums were heard, the excitement rose within the family. For the first time, Ah Chu felt nervous. His heart started to beat loudly, and his hands began to sweat. What would she look like? Some of the young children had escorted the procession along the narrow paths close to the house.

The bride's brothers led the group and banged either cymbals or drums. Villagers lined the pathway to the family's house. Behind the men was the red chair in which the bride sat. It had a small roof over it, and curtains that covered the windows. It was carried by a group of men who changed places with each other when they tired. Behind were carriers of a large wooden basket with a very strong brass fitment that allowed a shoulder yoke to be threaded. Inside were her clothes, a few personal items and maybe some jewellery. The bolts of cloth were carried by the last person in the procession. They were all poor villagers. It was all the family could afford. If Ah Chu's family had demanded more then they would have had to find another bride, but they knew times were hard, and if the roles were reversed they themselves would not have been able to afford more.

When the music stopped the sedan chair was lowered to the ground, and everyone around fell silence to hear the all important three taps. This indicated time to exit. The bride pulled at the curtain but something had stuck. One of the men helped her. As the bride stood to take a step it seemed that she froze. Ah Chu looked at the young woman, her face still veiled. She looked so small, alone. He realised that she had earlier in the day farewelled her own family and was about to enter a family of strangers. Ah Chu saw her lift her head and look at the group of people. Then she stepped onto the ground that would her new home, and everyone clapped including those out of view. They could all visualise what was happening inside. Every bride had had to endure this terrifying experience. All had survived it.

Ah Chu walked up to the young woman. He had never talked to or touched a girl in his life. Not wanting to frighten her, he made a coughing noise, and realised that she could see him better than he could see her. His hands nervously touched the fine material of the veil and as he lifted it carefully her own hands helped him to drape the veil over her head. She was too embarrassed to look at him, and focussed on the ground. To Ah Chu's surprise, she was the most beautiful girl he had ever set eyes upon. She had large almond shaped brown eyes, with the whites clean and clear. Her face had the smoothest of skins and although she looked terrified, he smiled at her. Not a word was

spoken. He took a step to the side, when she looked up and saw him. A small nervous giggle was heard.

‘Let’s walk to the altar.’ She nodded. Ah Chu and his new bride went into the house where the ancestral altar was too pride of place. Together they knelt in front of it and bowed three times. Slowly, solemnly and with reverence they prayed to the gods of heaven and earth. Then they rose and once again knelt and bowed three times this time in honoured of the ancestors of Ah Chu’s clan, all those for generations before who had survived through the good and bad times of rice farming, through good and poor health, and through the birth of sons. Today both Ah Chu and his bride knew that they were there to start another generation, to keep the clan intact, to keep history alive. Ah Chu’s aunt was discreetly standing behind, with a tray of tea cups. The couple once again bowed three times to each member of the family, then offered to each person a small cup of tea held in two hand as was traditional. In turn it symbolised the simple gift of honour and respect. Ah Chu’s father sat first in line, followed by Ah Fong. It was the first time that Ah Fong had received such reverence and throughout the little ceremony he was transfixed by the couple. He knew of course that sometime it would be his turn to do the same. The last of the family were the females; mother who was holding little Mei Mei. She reached out to the new bride, and the feel of the small chubby hand was enough to break the tension. The friends that were in the courtyard some peering in through the doorway, burst into another round of clapping. ‘What a joyous occasion.’ ‘We bless them with happiness.’ ‘May the gods be kind to them.’ Then in the courtyard the firecrackers were lit, and the staccato banging was heard to scared away any lurking evil spirits. Ah Chu stole another glance at his bride. Yes, she was beautiful, what a relief.

Everyone sat down to the feast that followed. Ah Chu gave an nod of acknowledgement to Tien-Tse, his pregnant wife and Meng. Ah Chu had killed four of his ducks, one for each table and prepared them for cooking. The vegetable garden was nearly bare. Ah Chu’s father had made the trip to the next village to purchase some supplies and returned with tins of treats Ah Chu had never tasted before. The mere sight of them made his mouth water. Such luxury.

The meal was a happy occasion. Bowl after bowl of rice was eaten. No one was refused. And when the bridal couple rose and went around each table the alcohol flowed so that the young bride just pretended to drink. The merriment went on, Ah Chu’s wee sister was held by so many strangers and gained so much attention that all she could do was smile. Even Ah Fong was responsible, and helped where he could, talked politely

to the elders rather than running away. Ah Chu's father became more and more relaxed and as the alcohol warmed him he felt the sense of well-being to entertain his guests. Under the stars and in the perfect temperature of the evening air, he told stories especially for his daughter-in-law to hear, to tell her of the clan she had joined. Ah Chu took hold of his own courage and held his bride's hand. The dampness reduced as the evening wore on. Then Grandfather who after only a little encouragement began to sing songs and the *er ho* that belonged to one of the cousins was brought out to accompany him. Ah Chu sat and wished that this evening, the evening of his marriage, could last forever.

Later that evening, when the courtyard was put back to working order, Ah Chu and his bride went into their tiny room, enough for a bed, and a small space where the wooden basket stood.

'I peeped out' she whispered. In ancient times the windows of the sedan were papered over so that there was no peeking. But in this case, there was a curtain drawn, and as the men walked there was a rocking movement so that the curtain would move, allowing her the occasional glimpse. Ah Chu had not been to her village either, but now he was married he would help her villagers when they asked for extra labour for a building project. He looked forward to it.

'I think I may have passed another village.'

'Yes, it's where we do our shopping,' and he drew a map out on the silk duvet so that the smoothness of the duvet was replaced by a crumpled look. 'I'm glad your family agreed for you to marry me.' Reluctant to start undressing, she nodded.

'I hope I will be able to serve your family well.' Ah Chu sat on the bed looking at the young nervous girl in front of him with her back to him only showed glimpses of her body as she took off the red robe and slipped on her nightwear. Her body was so pale, with skin that looked like porcelain. It made him feel old, his skin sun-browned and rough, his hands calloused. When she turned around Ah Chu had undressed and was under the covers. By the time she moved to share the covers, her nervousness was so apparent that she lay shivering. Ah Chu reached for her hand and held it then willed himself to sleep.

Over the following weeks Ah Chu's mother so enjoyed having a young woman around her. It was known that having a young daughter-in-law was so much better, to mould her in the ways of the family in which she would live for the rest of her life. This was the person who would carry the clan's ways on to the next generation,

producing and caring for sons, who would over time marry and it would be her responsibility to train them as she was being trained.

Ah Chu's wife had been well informed of her role. She woke early to have the food ready for the workers in the field. She cared for Ah Chu's little sister, and her mother-in-law for whom she brewed up medicine to increase her energy. She also learnt to listen carefully to her in quieter moments, and to carry things for her to save her strength. Over the months, Ah Chu's mother's health improved, and the whole family showed their appreciation to Ah Chu's wife. She knew it was working out well when she overheard her mother-in-law speaking to Meng's mother, 'My daughter-in-law is a credit to her mother.' Ah Chu's wife smiled when she heard that. Praise indeed.

The relationship between Ah Chu and his new bride was snatched between exhaustion from working in the fields and his bride's duty to be the last person waiting to serve her in-laws. So many times she would long for her father-in-law to go to bed; instead he would squat out in the courtyard and smoke endless cigarettes, drink tea and mutter to himself. She made sure she was respectful to him, and was happy to realise that her relationship with him was one of prescribed distance. So she would busy herself with small quiet tasks, cleaning here and there, sweeping the courtyard, folding clothes that she had washed earlier in the day. There seemed no end of tasks to do, but she would wish that the time was spent with her husband, for as time passed, she wanted to tell him so many things about the day. When everyone was in bed, she would tiptoe into her own room, and slide into the bed where her husband was sound asleep even though she could hear her mother telling her, 'holding back your own desires is a part of being an adult.' She would sigh and she roll over to curl with her husband. Only too soon, did her husband wake her as he was readying for work in the fields and her day would begin.

As the weeks merged into months, and the rice crop called for all hands in the fields, Ah Chu's wife was commended for her industrious hard work. Ah Chu's father seemed to start enjoying having a daughter-in-law, and stopped ignoring his own daughter telling her, 'one day, you must grow up like daughter-in-law and be a good reflection on this family.' The young toddler who seemed to have endless happiness inside her, would just giggle.

It was in the middle of the harvest season, when everyone was out in the fields that the young child started to sleep a lot. No-one thought about it much, and her mother tied her onto her back and walked to the fields like all the villagers. But the heat

on her mother's back was concerning. When Ah Chu's mother asked for some money to buy some herbs for her, Ah Chu's father did not believe in the child's sickness. That evening the whole family was kept awake by the constant crying of the baby, and when there seemed no solace with either mother or daughter-in-law. Ah Chu told his mother to lie with the child in his own bed, while he slept in the main house. All night either one woman or the other was up, bathing the hot little body with cool water, coaxing the child to drink. In the morning one less set of hands was in the fields, much to Ah Chu's father disgust. By midday, the daughter-in-law went to the fields to tell Ah Chu's father the news to which he just nodded and continued to build the walls of the fields. It had to be completed before the fields were to be flooded that evening.

At dusk, Ah Chu's father walked into the compound. Both women had been crying, and in front of the ancestral altar, inside a box, lay a light little bundle wrapped in cloth. She had failed her father's test. In the morning, the family went to the Joss house with the baby, bowing to the gods, burning joss sticks, some paper gold ingots, and some paper food for her. Then she was laid to rest. So little ritual, so little fuss because she was a girl. Ah Chu reflected upon this as he joined his family in walking behind the small coffin. Tears came to his eyes, for he knew how much he would miss the little girl, how much he pretended that she was his child, not his sister, and how different this would have been if it was one of his brothers.

The death changed the family once more. Grandfather went off to the village square, as though to escape the family. Ah Chu's brother became more and more adult with the work he was required to do. Ah Chu's mother would quietly weep from time to time. Daughter-in-law stopped trying to cheer anyone up. Ah Chu's father became moodier.

As seasons of the year came and went on their regular basis, another year looked grim. The rains were late again, and Ah Chu decided that the ducks had to go. It took too much time to take the ducks to a place where there was food, away from the rice fields. So without letting this discussion develop, he slowly sold the flock, one by one. It was during this time there were only a single file of ducks left. Each week there would be one less.

Ah Chu had come home one day from selling a duck. He had just arrived back when he was about to give the money to his mother as usual. His father intervened.

'I'll have that,' and Ah Chu handed over the money. 'This all, where is the rest?'

‘It is hard to sell the ducks right now and I have had to reduce the cost so they can be sold.’

That enraged his father. He threw down the coin in the courtyard, and went to his son punching him in the body. Ah Chu was so surprised, and remembering the last time he was so severely beaten by his father, slowly rose to his feet and lunged at his attacker.

‘You are a thief, a thief to your family. I know it, I have suspected it for a long time. Now where is the money?’

Ah Chu remained resolute at his father, ‘There is no money.’

‘I know there is, now, where is it?’ he looked at his daughter-in-law. ‘Where does he put the money?’

‘Please (**Chinese term for father-in-law**) he has no money. I know he would have told me, and he has never mentioned it. He gives all the money to this family...’ but before she could finish, Ah Chu was on the ground, and his father was kicking him. Ah Chu’s hands were protecting his face and head, and the kicks got stronger and strong.

‘Tell me, tell me,’ raising his voice, ‘you will obey me, and tell me.’ Ah Chu said nothing but the raised voice brought Meng’s parents to the courtyard opening, and other villagers crowded around. As Ah Chu’s father went to pick up his son, he suddenly realised that he was inert. With his other one hand he formed into a fist and hit his face so that the crack could be heard by all.

‘Leave the boy alone.’ Ah Chu’s mother and wife stood clinging onto each other. Their tears prevented them from saying anything else. Ah Chu’s grandfather walked in.

‘Stop’ he yelled as loudly as he could, and when Ah Chu’s father heard he dropped the boy like a rag doll, and walked out while the assembled crowd moved aside in silence and watched him walk away.

The next day, Ah Chu was not able to work. The bruising around his body was large and sore, and his face was so bruised he could no longer see out of one eye. He spent his waking moments talking to his wife.

‘I have to go, I cannot live here.’

‘Where will you go?’

‘I want to go to New Zealand.’

‘Can I come with you?’

‘No, you cannot go. In a couple of years I will be back.’

‘Please don’t go, I need you.’

‘I cannot live with my father, I have to go.’

‘I know, but don’t leave me here, please.’

‘It won’t be for long, in three years I will be back and just think, I will bring back lots of money and then we will all live so much better.’

‘What will I do without...’

‘It’s not without, it’s just for a short time.’

‘You will come back? Promise.’

‘I promise, I will be back in three years with lots of money for us all. You must let me go.’

‘Please, please’ and as he held her in his arms, he closed his eyes unable to bear watching her cry.

‘I will come back, my dear. I won’t leave you, I will be back.’ Her sobs reduced as they spent the night in bed. The next day when his father came to get him to go to the fields his daughter-in-law looked at him. Ah Chu was still in bed and pretended to be asleep.

‘He is not well. He cannot work today.’ Once everyone had gone to the fields, they spent the day together. Ah Chu’s realised his love for his new wife, and her love for him. There were moments of the day when he had never felt so connect to another person, so much love and throughout the day he considered changing his mind. But he dug out his secret stash of money, and counted it. In the middle of the night he left, the money in his pocket and in his hand the gold jewellery she had given him. The most valuable part of her dowry. Ah Chu initially said no but she said, ‘Gold will be luck for more gold. Take it and make lots more quickly so you can come back. Please don’t leave me here. Please, your father frightens me.’

‘I know, but I have to go’ and with that he crept out of the house compound.

The next morning when his father came to look for him, he found a tearful wife sitting on the bed. In her hand were two pieces of paper. One was a letter.

Dear Father

Confucius has instructed that a child should only endure light physical punishment. I know that I am now an adult, and I have been thankful to you. As my

father you are my most significant and meaningful person in my life. According to Confucius this must be maintained for harmonious relations to continue.

I have decided to go to New Zealand. My blessings to everyone in my family.

Respectfully

Ah Chu

Ah Chu's father stood in silence. He could not believe what he had just read and wondered if he had read it correctly. He went to his own father and asked, 'Baba, read this letter and tell me what you think?'

The old man took the letter, and read out the words, one by one. When he reached the end he took a deep breath, and handed the letter back to his son without a word. Walking away, Ah Chu's father looked at the letter again. He could not believe that his eldest son had left him to do all the work, that he was left him to care for his daughter-in-law as well. He regretfully thought of how useless she could be because as yet there was no sign of a child.

He left the letter on the table and walked out, and then realised he had not read the second note. Opening it up, he saw that it was a diagram of how to get water into the fields. Both men had thought of this same scheme and without a word to each other had come to the same conclusion. He shook his head in disbelief. A pain ran through his body, of regretful missed opportunities.

Part 2, Chapter 6 America

1869 - The Wind to forge ahead

Ah Chu moved as fast as he could. His greatest fear was that his father would find him. 'Keep moving, keep moving, do not stop,' he told himself. In Hongkong, he wove in and out between the crowds, determined to find the port.

'Where do I buy a ticket to New Zealand?' The men on the wharf laughed. 'What's happening there?' they asked. 'There're so many people asking.' Ah Chu hurried along. The fare took most of the money. He fingered the gold chain which his wife had pressed into his hand as they hugged goodbye. Cashing up, would be like cashing her in. The cheapest fare would be fine.

Somewhere only known by the moon, the salt air of the wide blue sea blew land-life away. It was replaced by the wonderment of a huge watery open spaces as far as the eye could see. Above were the fluffy white animal shaped clouds that marched by. Ah Chu felt like he was in a giant lampshade with the sky meeting the sea at the horizon. Each day he spent most of his time leaning on the deck railings whiling away his time as he watched his new world. This was so much better than working in the paddy fields. Ah Chu found a small sheltered spot to sleep jammed between stacks of cargo. Those who paid for a bunk had a place downstairs. He had only bought cargo space.

When the wind blew harder, the soft warmth so comfortable on the skin suddenly had ice in its breath. Temperatures plummeted, men put on all their available clothes. The ship rocked so it felt as though it would tip over. Ah Chu wedged himself into his hidey-hole using his feet to stabilise his body. Water washed over him and everything else. Around him, men moaned, pleading to the gods to stop the torture. But nothing stopped the rocking, nor the wind that increased in strength. The noise was so loud that hearing anyone speak was impossible. The waves rose, as did the ship, and then in the next trough, the ship would slam down as though it might break up in a thousand of pieces. Minutes turned into large sections of the hour, and hours turned into days. Nights felt like weeks and daylight hours were only slightly faster. Day after day it continued, the motion, up to the top of the wave, then the smash down. The movement repeated, over and over despite those on board wishing otherwise. Men crawled like children on all fours, others moaned for the gods to let them die. After so many long days that Ah Chu had lost count, the sea looked as though it might be calming. Men emerged and bucket after bucket washed down the decks of the putrid

smell of sick. Those down below were encouraged to come on deck to breathe fresh air, and in a couple of days, food was once more prepared, even if it was but a spoonful or two of rice. Old salts told them that the first storm was always the worst, but then again they had developed sea-legs and seemed not to be worried by the motion.

Before long, the captain announced that the ship had been blown off course. The nearest land was *Mei Gok*. The moaners moaned, the complainers complained, the uncertain did not care and the rest jumped for joy. They did not have enough money for the fare to America. The gods were on their side. Ah Chu was amongst them.

Three months earlier Loong ended his journey over the same ocean. He was born in Lonely Stone village (**translation to come**) a three days walk west of Ah Chu's village. Once he left his village for more education everyone knew he would never return. His new world blew oxygen into a life that had become increasingly restrictive. Instead he made up his mind to keep on exploring. The horizon just tempted him to find out what was beyond. When he reached *Mei Gok* America and stood on the land, he stretched his arms wide, breathed the air deeply into his lungs and decided that this was his place on earth, his place to settle. *Mei Gok*, the Beautiful Country was just that. He could not remember when he last felt so happy and hopeful.

Loong headed to Chinatown, San Francisco. It was easy to find the place, the familiar tones of the language, the smell of the food drew him there as though he was pulled by some invisible thread. There he was directed to the goldmines. Loong couldn't wait. He had a purpose in mind. To make money.

In another country, on the other side of the world, Mickey learnt to wield a hammer, a skill developed in his homeland, until the potatoes started to rot. After that the thought of fleeing his homeland was easy, so he hopped on the first available ship and arrived on the east coast glad to be free of his fellow countrymen, exhausted women and those screaming children. Families were relieved to be on terra firma but Mickey wanted to see more, to see the land that others had told him that was wide and flat as far as the eye could see, and some extraordinary things like large waterfalls where millions of gallons of water moved a minute, or where rivers were so wide it was hard to find a way across, or canyons so deep it looked like climbing down would be a sure death. He would like to find the very strange rocks poking out of the land that looked like people, or animals carved by nature's wind. The leisurely adventure of working here and there, enough to eat and some money to move on was a welcome change in his life. He found

the friendship amongst an immigrant nation easy, flexible. They shared the love of the new, the adventures and the hard work of it all; plus the food, some very different from Ireland, grown by the gentle people of the land. Home brewed beer, a pipe of tobacco after a day of hard work was a way of living beyond Mickey's dreams. All was suddenly interrupted by the news that there was gold on the West Coast. After that Mickey sat on anything moving to make the trip as fast as possible.

He set himself up, and enlisted men when approached. Those that made trouble, he moved on. His sheer height and strength meant no one argued with him. When Loong arrived, he roared at the little person who had fronted up. And when Loong said,

‘You teach me *Inglishee*?’

‘Me? Hardly-been-educated-me-self.’ Mickey towered over him at six foot four inches, with shoulders that were wider than any other part of his body. Loong thought of Mickey as a special species of giant, tall and strong with a booming voice and enough laughter to fill a room.

‘Me, work. Okay?’ Mickey just laughed. He could pick up the man with that ridiculous hairstyle, with one arm. What use was such a person on his team?

‘You show, I work’ said Loong with his most charming smile. It was the earnestness he liked, and as though he did not really understand why, he agreed, starting him off by breaking the rocks into the smallest bits before they went into the sluice box. Most men were not very methodical, and Mickey suspected that this was the place of the greatest wastage.

Over the weeks, Mickey could see that Loong spent many hours examining the wooden sluice boxes. On Sunday Mickey went to church and Loong found it strange that everyone stopped work to go to talk to their gods. He noticed Loong had taken broken sluice boxes apart and was working on new designs.

Whenever the rains were so great making it too risky to work they both took a few days off. Several miners had already been swept to their death as a warning. No one had time or energy to go to the rescue. Mickey and Loong went about developing their new design sluice boxes changing the way they secured the matting through which the gold was filtered. It meant a lot less messing around and more time directed towards new loads of rocks so they might catch their golden treasure. Before long Mickey and Loong's business had been set up. Mickey hired his countrymen, and took off mining, leaving Loong to sort out those who constantly wandered off by themselves. He knew this was far from ideal, as he could see Loong shake his head muttering something about *Mei Gok* being the land of opportunity but the workers had no

appreciation or commitment. Loong's own discontentment grew especially during good weather when the business was taking him away from that big dream, that large nugget of gold.

'Men hopeless,' Loong complained to Mickey. 'Find better ones. Need men to work, not smokee smokee not talkee, talkee. No good Mickey.'

'Well you find them then.' After all he much preferred to mine than run the business.

'Okay,' Loong said delighted with the moment. 'No, wolly' he said. Before long the workers and their customers filled the workshop, making and buying sluice boxes, large and small, lighter and heavier, made for individuals or teams, two or four handled for easy cartage, or even larger ones so strong that men could stand and grind the rock. When Mickey returned in a few weeks the workshop had changed.

'Hey Loong, you old Mouse what have you done?'

Loong looked at Mickey and said proudly, 'I find Chinese, they learn. Okay?' Mickey who had never seen a Chinese wield a hammer, shook his head but in the corner was a growing heap of finished sluice boxes ready for sale. Business was booming. He looked around at the Chinese men.

'Who's that?' pointing to one of them. Loong turned around to look at who was being pointed out.

'He's Ah Chu.'

'Ah Chu, does he work well?'

'Yes, velly good Mickey. No wolly. He not know *Inglishee*. He not even know my kind of Chinese. Ha.'

'From your village or whatever you call it?' Mickey asked. Loong laughed, he knew not to get offended at what was said. Mickey knew nothing about the Chinese. Uneducated.

'No, Mickey, different village, different kind of Chinese.'

'You teaching him Chinese, then?' Mickey looked at Ah Chu and made up his mind to talk to him when Loong was not there. There was something interesting about him that had caught his eye.

'No, we learn each other Chinese. I teach him *Inglishee*.'

'Gotta hand it to ya Loong,' said Mickey satisfied. After a considerable pause he said, 'by the way the mining team needs a few more people, how about you bring, the other Mouse along eh? Um, what's his name?'

‘No Mickey, I want Ah Chu to look after the workshop.’ But Mickey looked at Ah Chu.

‘No, Loong I want him in the mining team. Bring him tomorrow.’ Loong turned around and pulled a face that Mickey could not see. Mickey took a couple of steps away, then turned and said,

‘Make sure Ah Chu comes tomorrow. See you both in the morning.’

When Ah Chu wandered over to Loong he asked, ‘Mickey eh? What does he want?’

‘He wants you to go on the mining team. Says I’m to take you there in the morning.’

‘Really?’ Ah Chu beamed with excitement. ‘Hey, Loong the gods must be giving me good luck.’ Loong screwed up his face. ‘Something wrong?’

‘I, um, I wanted you to run the workshop, hire the men, make sure they do everything right, check on the sales. You’re a natural at this sort of thing. You’re very good with men.’

Ah Chu smiled. ‘Loong, we all came here to mine gold, all of us. Some men are better at it than others. Those who don’t like it, should come and work in the workshop. But me, I want to mine. I need to send money home. They’re waiting for me to do so. I must learn Loong, and become good at it. I must work hard. It’s not just for me, but my family as well.’ Around his neck was the gold chain. He touched it. ‘My wife is waiting for me.’

In front of Loong was a man, his own parents would have wished to be their own son. He sighed at the thought. He hadn’t told anyone, but he decided never to return to his village. Those old men that told him what to do all the time, drove him crazy. The family feuds that went on for generations seemed so pointless. The praying for rain was so monotonous. Through education he had escaped working in the fields. No, he was never going back. As he turned to leave he reminded Ah Chu, ‘Be ready in the morning before day break.’

Ah Chu smiled and bowed with respect to his Chinese boss.

The mining team was a decent walk away from the workshop, and Ah Chu followed James. When they reached the area, he noted that all the other men were like Mickey. They were big, their hands enormous.

‘Loong, they’re so big!’ Ah Chu could not see how he could work with them. The very sight of them made him nervous.

‘They’re okay. Don’t react to things they say. To begin with *Inglishee* is hard, but you’ll pick it up. Look over there.’ The two Chinese men turned and walked towards Mickey. They had their shoulder yokes and Loong had put both his baskets at one end and a new sluice box tied on the other. Ah Chu packed the other equipment. In the padded basket was the crockery teapot which had been recently filled with hot water. There was the cold rice from the night before, some left-over food and a tin of salted fish. Amongst it all were the rice bowls and chopsticks, spades, picks and more clothes. It looked like they were planning to stay for a few days.

‘Hi Mouse, glad you brought Ah Chu.’ Mickey surprised Ah Chu by picking up his hand. He watched while Mickey somehow wrapped it into his large paw. Such a strange thing to do, thought Ah Chu. This is not Chinese, he said to himself. Then Mickey pointed to something and Loong nodded. Before long the two small men weaved past others who shouted at them both. He had no idea what they were saying. Everything was so strange. Ah Chu could see Loong was not reacting so he did the same. I’ll need to learn *Inglishee*, thought Ah Chu. I need to learn one word here and one word there. I need to learn like Loong.

The men set to work on the far side of the claim. In the evenings when it was too dark to work, the two men huddled together to eat their simple meal.

‘Do we always stay here at the mine?’ Ah Chu asked.

‘Yes, unless you want the gold to be stolen.’ Loong was working the last of the spade load before he stopped.

‘What happens?’

‘Fights! I tell you Ah Chu, these white devils like to fight. They’ll fight other white devils, even their own countrymen.’ Ah Chu stood up and walked around Loong.

‘So what are we suppose to do, eh?’

‘They’re too big for us so we have to be one step ahead. I’ll tell you the first trick. We work an area, then after the day, we scatter some of the rocks over that area. I have marked it by that big rock. Tomorrow when we begin, we throw the top rocks out.’

‘Smart!’ Ah Chu smiled. He liked smart people.

‘Either that or you will always be poor.’ Ah Chu nodded.

‘Loong, can you tell me. The men say something like ‘be jeesizz’ and they say it all the time. What does that mean?’

Loong thought and laughed out loud. He had thought the same a few months ago.

‘You know these men are Irish.’

‘Irish what?’

‘No, Irish are from Ireland.’

‘Does that make them strange?’

‘No, but their English is different.’

‘Like our Chinese dialects?’

‘Well I think more than that. This is not the English I learnt at school. It’s different. It’s harder to understand.’

‘So what is ‘be jeesizz’?’

‘I think it’s something to do with their gods.’ Ah Chu sat in silence, thinking.

‘You mean that they are praying to their god?’

‘Um, something like that.’

‘Then where are the joss sticks?’

‘They don’t use them, but Mickey told me they have something in their temple. Oh Ah Chu I don’t know. Everything’s so strange.’

‘But it is sort of like us too.’ And Loong nodded.

‘That’s why I keep asking Mickey questions. I think they might be sort of outsiders too.’ And both of the men lapsed into thoughtfulness.

‘Outsiders eh?’ But Loong did not reply. He knew Ah Chu would know what that meant as time passed. He knew he could not explain, or recall. Sometimes experience was the only way.

Every so often when a new load of wood had been ordered, Mickey and Loong sat around with a drink. When Loong drank whiskey or gin, his face immediately lit up red.

‘Put ya in the corner Loong so ya can light up the room, eh?’ he joked. Loong had no idea why it happened, but it did not take him long before he learnt to small sip his nip. Ah Chu’s face didn’t go red in the same way, so he also looked at Loong and wondered why. Whenever he asked, Loong would say.

‘Maybe I should just drink tea.’ And Ah Chu would roll his eyes.

On a morning when the wind was howling outside and Mickey was in the workshop relaxing, Mickey leant forward and looked at Loong who had just poured a cup of tea for Mickey and himself.

‘By the way I can’t understand why you put up with all those kids making fun with you?’

‘They children, I take no notice,’ said Loong with a defensive tone in his voice.

‘Just change your name.’

‘What? Name velly important, name tell me who I am.’

‘Yeah but your name’s a big hassle.’ Loong thought about it. The children had got into calling him Loo Poo, Looney Loo, and other rhymes. They would gather in a group of around six children chanting such variations then one bolder child would try running up and pulling on his queue. While he didn’t like it, he also pondered what he could do about it. Somehow he hoped the children would just tire of it, but he had his doubts. He talked to Ah Chu about it as well, but they all had the same experience. It seemed once the children saw the long plait, it was irresistible, like a bell waiting to be rung.

‘What new name?’ he asked. Mickey had thought about this for a long time and looked forward to the moment.

‘James.’

‘James?’ at least Loong could say it.

‘James Young.’ Loong thought about it, and the next morning he said to Mickey,

‘Mickey, okay. I call James Young.’ He was so pleased with this decision. When he told Ah Chu and the team they were horrified.

‘What will your parents say?’

‘Won’t tell them,’ replied James.

‘Don’t expect us to call you that?’

‘Na, just the white devils, but if they call in here asking for James, then it means me.’ James’ voice had a determination in it. The men shook their heads. Most walked away but Ah Chu walked towards him.

‘Loong, I do not think this is a good idea.’ Ah Chu knew that Loong had had more education than himself. ‘No, you must not change your name. This is not right.’

‘Well, in a way I’m not, it’s just for this situation, and who knows, might be easier to do business.’

‘This is not about business Loong, it’s about us being Chinese!’ Loong paused and thought. He nodded to Ah Chu and said nothing. Ah Chu returned to work and the men gathered around him.

‘What nerve!’ said one. ‘Names can’t be changed just like that, they are a gift at birth, each generation shares something common in the name, they are designed to show our heritage, it’s not like changing your clothes!’

‘Yes, it seems like trouble to me, I mean isn’t this disrespectful?’ asked another of the team. The men nodded.

‘You know this would never happen at home,’ and they all agreed. ‘Is this what it is like to be in another country?’ Then they looked at Ah Chu.

‘You tell him he can’t do this.’ Ah Chu hesitated. ‘I tried but you know he is better educated than me, and he is also our boss, so what can I say? I did try, but he is not a man who likes to be told, you know that.’

‘Well I hope the gods will look upon this in a good light.’

‘Yes, let’s hope,’ and as the men dispersed, Ah Chu thought that maybe he should not have spoken about James in such a direct way. Many of the other men muttered his new name, Jay-ma-see they would say. That way it stopped that strange hissing noise.

The following day James arrived in the morning having cut his hair. All the men stood and stared in horror, some with their hands over their mouths, stopping something impolite from come out.

‘What have you done! You know you can’t go back to China. You’ve broken the law! Oh no, this is bad.’

James looked at the men, he knew they would react this way although he was surprised they were *so* shocked. It was after all just hair.

‘And what are you going to do when you die? You know your hair needs to be buried with you.’ James had thought of this before he lifted the knife to cut off the queue.

‘I know, but I’m not going back, and when I’m dead what happens, happens.’

The men were even more shocked. How could a Chinese person stray from Confucius, could stray so far, they thought. What was happening? Was this something that would happen to them all now they were in *Mei Gok*. The sheer outcry showed Ah Chu that he would not be doing the same. It would be trampling on his very nature, all that he held true to himself.

When the men calmed down a little, one of them asked James, ‘what about your wife?’

‘I’m going to get her to come out here.’ James replied with a voice of authority.

‘But...’ they could only see problems, barriers, cost. James put up his hand to stop the commotion, and shook his head.

‘I know, I know, I’ll earn enough to bring her over.’

‘How?’

‘By making money, of course. If *Mei Gok* is not the place then there will be another.’ The men stood and stared in disbelief. There was something about their village cousin. He was certainly different.

When James worked in Mickey’s mining team he was glad he was not wearing the queue. It lowered temptation. Ah Chu made sure he never complained when his queue was tugged.

When Mickey heard that either of the little men were being harassed, he’d yell ‘Leave them alone, they’ve got brains.’ But when James appeared with the new design of sluice box that was so much more efficient, the men stopped making so much fun of him. Not all, just not so much.

Learning English was really hard. Only through his own perseverance was he able to make the strange words, noises with all the swishy sounds. He called it a snake language lacking the sung melody and the exact tones of his own tongue. He had to remember to say so many words in a group that the Chinese language used in economy. Speaking English left no room for silence and thinking.

‘My head buzz when I think in English’ complained Ah Chu. Same word different meaning, the nouns and verbs are all mixed up. Stupid. Then I have to make a new word if gone yesterday.’ He could hear himself complain. It was like doing a jigsaw puzzle blindfolded without a picture, with unknown shapes to say something he was never sure if it would be right anyway. ‘Makes me crazy,’

James smiled. He had studied English for a couple of years at school and it make him crazy as well.

‘Just keep at it, my friend. You will surprise yourself, just give it a few months.’

‘*Tow toong*, (**look up Cantonese**) headache’ he said tapping his head, and they both laughed.

When the men all gathered together in the workshop, James announced, ‘Tonight Mickey is coming for a meal.’ The men were up in arms.

‘Here?’

‘We can’t have him here.’

‘He’ll plot against us, like the others.’

‘And he can’t speak Chinese, for goodness sake?’

‘Makes me nervous seeing him here.’

‘This is not the place for white devils, this is our place.’ But James was unmoved.

‘He is coming here because he is my friend,’ James said forcefully.

‘A friend? Nah, he’s a white devil!’ After that the men all referred to the pair, as Loong and his white devil, and James was happy he did not have enough English to translate.

Mickey enjoyed being a teacher, with no intention of learning Chinese. He was just curious about the pigtail men. What he loved most was Chinese food. The first time he was given a pair of chopsticks he took one in each hand, and all the Chinese men laughed. Not even their children had done that. The Mickey man was silly and stupid. Ah Chu looked on. James seized his new role. He liked to be a showman.

‘No, no, look at me.’ he said. ‘Put both sticks in one hand, with the top one like you are holding a Chinese calligraphy pen, and the bottom one is like the foundation of a building. Keep it still and do not move it.’

Mickey looked at him stunned.

‘What?’ he roared like a lion and laughed so heartily all in sundry could hear him. Only then did James realised he must have spoken in Chinese. James placed his right hand in front of Mickey.

‘Look me, Mickey’ Mickey looked. His friend had such small hands, so nimble. His own hands suddenly looked twice as large, with thick clumsy fingers showing little control. When cramp stopped him eating James laughed, and gently tapping at his wrist and said in Chinese,

‘Relax’ and showed him the difference with his own wrist.

It took a while but once Mickey had mastered the art of using chopsticks, the crowds stopped staring at him, and left him alone.

When James visited Mickey at the Irish camp seeing the small Chinese man next to their own leader, they called them Mickey and his Mouse. If there were two of them they’d call them Mice ‘n Mickey. But Mickey never translated that bit either.

One evening Mickey showed up at the workshop. He called James aside out of the hearing of the others.

‘Look Old Mouse, I’m off to San Francisco. Need you to oversee the mining team.’

James laughed. ‘Me? Your team? Your team, no take notice of me. No can do Mickey. I work, no big boss eh.’

‘I’ve told them you are the boss, and everything is set.’

‘Me no speakie Inglishee, Mickey.’

‘You’ll be alright.’

‘I not like, Mickey. I stay here in factory and work okay?. Maybe Ah Chu and I not go and work in mine. Men not like us. I know. It okay you there. We not do without you.’

‘Bull shit James. You’ll manage. I’m away for about two weeks. See you when I’m back.’ James stood and watched Mickey walk away. A headache seemed to be coming on.

The next day James and Ah Chu fronted up to the mine and went off to work around their area. Some of the other men came over. James knew this was his moment.

‘Hey James what do we do, eh?’

‘I think Ah Chu idea velly good.’ Ah Chu pretended he was not even present. ‘He work in rice fields. He know about water. Look,’ he directed, ‘four men together, two make wall, water go away, two dig up, box by water. I think easy.’ The big burly men looked down at the overexcited mouse telling them what to do and shook their heads. They had been working as individuals and of late not doing well. When Mickey said he was off, they planned to get rid of the mice. ‘You try eh?’ At the end of the day they decided they had something in working together.

‘Smart little buggers those Chinks,’ they’d say behind their backs. ‘Something about them, they’re always one jump ahead of us. How come?’ but none of them had an answer to that.

After the first week, the police came around looking for Mickey. The Irish team became unusually quiet. They kept their heads down trying not to be noticed.

‘Who’s the boss of this team?’ yelled one of the Police.

‘Me,’ said James. The police laughed.

‘Nah, we’re looking for Mickey.’

‘Mickey not here. Gone east.’

‘East?’

‘Gone last week. Not say when come back.’

‘You, you Chink, you tell him that we’ll track him down.’ James did not understand what that meant.

‘Okay’ he said. Usually that stopped the talk, and it seemed like this might be one of those moments. In his own culture, he would stop and bow but he knew not to enact what he instinctively wanted to do. He let himself show a strong look of authority, limited by five foot three inches. ‘I tell him,’ although he was not sure what he would tell. The team of four police walked away and James wandered over to join the team.

They were laughing themselves silly, having heard what had happened and before long they were talking so quickly that James understood even less. When they stopped to eat, James asked, 'Mickey, he in trouble? Police?'

'Yeah, big trouble.'

'What kind of trouble?'

'Mickey, too much drink, too much fight, killed someone.' James could not believe his ears.

'Mickey, kill man? Not good. Velly silly.' He shook his head and the men smiled.

'Yeah but Mouse, he knew to get you to front for him here. So not so silly.' James smiled.

'And you clever bugger, you told them he had gone east. That will slow them down, so he has more time. Good for you.'

Four weeks later James was startled by, 'shhhhh.' It was Mickey trying to be quiet. He had never heard Mickey whisper before. 'Mouse, I need to stay here for a few nights.'

'Mickey, you big trouble. Police come.'

'I know, just let me stay here for a couple of days.'

In the morning, Mickey did not leave the workshop. When he sat around the table eating hot congee there was something on his mind.

'Mouse? In San Francisco I went to Chinatown. Hundreds and hundreds of Chinese men all dressed in black with their silly tails and a hat on. I sat down and ate something called chop suey. Every night I ate chop suey. It is the best food I have ever eaten. Can you cook that?'

'Chop suey? Not know.' Mickey was puzzled. How could this be?

'Look here Mouse I ate it in Chinatown. Can you men cook it? I'll get the beef. Okay?'

'Mickey, I not know chop suey.' James turned to his team and asked them. Mickey watched the men talking and gesticulating, pulling faces and offering their opinions. When Ah Chu joined in some of the men fingered the Chinese characters on their hand as they spoke so Ah Chu could understand their dialect. When they stopped talking, James turned to Mickey.

‘Lai Huk cook in San Francisco. He cook chop suey, just for white people, not for Chinese. Chinese not like it. Chinese say bad Chinese food Mickey. No taste Mickey. Lubbish Mickey. You get cow, and we cook better.’

When the ingredients were assembled, Mickey sat down to a stir fry beef dish that was delicious. The cabbage was finer and still crisp, the sauce flavoured with something that balanced the taste of the beef. There were also other little bits and pieces in the dish that Mickey had no idea what they were. All he knew was that it teased and satisfied his taste buds.

‘You like?’ asked James

‘Yes, yes, yes’ responded Mickey enthusiastically. ‘You know what Mouse, how come you guys know us whites so much better than we know you Chinese?’ James heard what he said and smiled. All that watching, all that listening, all that thinking always paid off. It was why he was Chinese. James laughed .

‘Oh Mickey, we not big, we can’t fight like you, we have to use our brains. Good to think Mickey before do.’ Mickey smiled,

‘You clever cunning little bastards.’ James glanced a knowing grin to Ah Chu, neither asked for a translation. They knew better.

After a week in the workshop the Chinese men were restless.

‘Hey Mickey, you not stay here.’ Mickey had been hiding in the corner of the workshop and had gradually taken up more and more space.

‘Why?’

‘Men not happy. They say this their space, not your place. You too big Mickey, you take too muchee room. Men have to move things, walk around you. They unhappy.’

‘Me?’ he was about to say ‘too big?’ then he roared with laughter. He had neither thought of his size, nor the sense of ownership of space.

‘I solly Mickey, but men want workshop for Chinese. They say you go back to your people.’ James was glad Ah Chu was not around listening to this conversation. He was anxious not to offend his friend. The gods would not like such behaviour for he knew he must always make harmonious relationships. Mickey nodded. He looked around the room at the men measuring, sawing, hammering all of them diligently working pretending they were not involved with the conversation in the corner.

‘Look Mouse, I knew this would happen. I just needed to hide out for a while. Time to go to Australia. Thanks. See you around Mouse.’ He looked around to see Ah Chu and caught his eye. ‘See you Ah Chu.’ James felt a concern for his large friend.

‘Good luck, Mickey. I pray to our gods you safe. Mickey, you think before you do, eh?’

Edit 4 Part 2 Chapter 7

1871 - Off shore winds

Once Mickey left, James' and Ah Chu's life in the mine changed.

'Those Chinks, bet they're getting more than us.' The men muttered to each other. 'Hey' they yelled out, 'With Mickey gone off, you Chinks, bugger off.' James did not move although he did look up. When he did not move immediately, two of the Irish with large menacing looks, picked him up ignoring his screams. 'See if a mouse can swim eh?' It didn't take long for James to yell.

'Alright, I'll go, right now.' Once they put him on the ground Ah Chu and he fled. They left their tools, and some of the gold. The rest had been tied to their bodies.

'Without Mickey I don't know how to get another patch right now, but you'd better find another team,' James told Ah Chu. 'I'm sending money home and then I'll take over the workshop for a while.' James' letter included several sovereigns. He knew it would take up to four months to get there.

Father,

I hope you are all well and that the gods are looking on you favourably so you are all in good health.

I am learning more English so my life here is good. The gods are looking on us with luck. The Chinese from our village are in other teams but we all live together. There are also others from different villages. We have had to learn each other's dialects. *Tongyung Gai* is what we call ourselves. It reminds us of home.

We are able to buy rice, and food from China. One of the men who was hurt while mining now cares for our village and grows us excellent vegetables. Please tell other men to bring seeds with them. The seeds here are different.

Your filial son
Yuen Loong

Ah Chu looked for another team. There were all sorts of people, but wherever he tried to join, the fees to start were high and he would have to buy another cache of food. It was complicated. As soon as he sent his letter home with his money he left for San Francisco. It was the first letter since he left home.

Father,

The gods have offered me their blessings. After a storm at sea we were blown so far north we came to *Mei Gok*. It is such a beautiful country and so much water I wish I could get it to the rice crops. I am so happy to be sending you this money.

I miss you all, and especially my wife. May the gods give you all good health, and regular rains for the crops. I hope the ducks are well cared for by younger brother.

Your elder son,

Ah Chu

San Francisco was a touch like Hongkong. Chinese tones filled the ear. The aroma of ginger, garlic and soya sauce filled the nose. Men in black, with their queues hanging down were an all too familiar sight. Gambling houses released shouts of glee or despair. Opium houses oozed the distinctive smell of darkened dens. Men with carts moved supplies, yelling at people in their way as they pushed up the hills into narrow land the width of a single animal. Beggars sat on the pavements. The rich haggled over

gold. Prostitutes paced for clients. It was all here. Life in a big city. Ah Chu's workshop friend, Lai Huk had given him the name of the restaurant he had worked in.

'Lai Huk told me to come here. I need a job,' he told them at the door. The man looked him up and down.

'Your village?'

'Lonely Pond.'

'Eee ya,' he said enthusiastically 'come on in. Which is your family?' and the two men sat at a table, over a cup of tea and exchanged village histories. Then the all important news. Different men were called over to fill in the gaps. One man, newly arrived brought Ah Chu the news that he had a son. The whole restaurant stopped, men clapped and dishes were cooked. Before the restaurant opened to the public a small feast was arranged, and Ah Chu was able to thank them all for his good fortune. That night he slept at the back of the restaurant with the cooks.

'Have you worked in a kitchen before?' one of the chefs asked looking at the hardened calloused hands of a miner. Ah Chu wondered if he could learn kitchen skills well. 'How about we give you two weeks and see if you fit in. There are two shifts here. Times are 7.00am to 10.00pm, and 4.00pm to 2.00am seven days a week. If you're late, you're sacked. When there are no customers, food is prepared. You need to learn to chop with skill and speed. We feed you, and you sleep where you slept last night.'

The noise in the kitchen was loud and fast. It was as well they shared the same village tongue. In the hive of activity, cleavers chopped and cut so as to form a drum-like rhythm. Vegetables were cut in the same width to ensure they would be cooked to perfection. Poultry were killed, plucked, gutted and sliced. Meat was sliced or diced. Bones were organised into soup along with salted vegetables, carcasses and something sweet like carrots. Offal was prepared for delicacies. Pig intestines and stomachs were washed, chopped and marinated ready for the tenderising slow cooking process. Pastry, breads, steamed buns and cakes were made for take away options. Cooks, so many of them, shouted orders. Men rushed by. No-one had time to be polite. Before Ah Chu could take in the scene, he was set to work on the poultry. At least that was familiar. He knew he could do it efficiently. His hands would soften for more delicate tasks. The cooks who folded the small dumplings did it so fast that their hands were a blur to the eye.

At meal times designated chefs assembled meals together, a scoop of marinated meat, handfuls of a variety of vegetables here and there. The flame under the hot wok

made sure of the fast cooking process so the food was stirred, under to over, to keep the vegetables whole. To break them would be careless. Splashes of soya sauce and water hissed in the pan. Dangerously blue vapoured oil was ladled over piping hot food to a sizzle. Pinches of chopped spring onions made a final garnish, bowls of steaming soup to clear the palate and start the meal. And most important heaped bowls of white rice, hot steaming and delicious to clear the tastebuds after each mouthful.

The meat chefs cleavered brown roasted ducks, white soaked chickens and barbeque crispy skinned slabs of pork so each delicate piece could be picked up with chopsticks, and hungry mouths could gnaw around the bones where the sweetest meat lay.

At the end of a shift, Ah Chu's found his legs, back and hands ached. Too busy to even talk, he fell into a bed and slept. It took him two weeks to get accustomed to it all, two weeks to start talking to the other men and four months to have enough. Any more chop suey and he would be sick. How could anyone eat it.

The restaurant was a good place for the winter. He was both warm and well fed. He even managed to put on some weight so that his skin no longer hung on his bones and a little padding around his cheek bones no longer made his face look like a piece of sculpture. But he would never be rich. His family demanded more. He knew he needed to leave for another place.

It took many months for the return letter to arrive for Loong.

Eldest Son,

We were delighted to receive your letter. The money has been really appreciated. We spent most of it on food, for the rice crop has not been good since you left. The rains are still not regular.

We miss you. This is where you belong. It has been too long since you were with us. Please come back.

Thank you generous son. We are all well.

Our blessings to you.

Father

Ah Chu's letter arrived around the same time.

My elder son,

It is hard here without you. The crops have not done well. We need to buy more land. This would help the family. Please send more money.

You have been away for so long. Your son is healthy. Your wife takes very good care of him.

We miss you. Please come back quickly and send us more money as soon as you can.

Father.

By the time the letters arrived, both Ah Chu and James in their different ways were wondering what would be new in *Xin Xi Lan*, New Zealand.

When Ah Chu boarded the ship, and saw all the white devils, he realised that his English had been lost in the kitchen. He had forgotten how uncomfortable he was around those unpredictable people. The time in the kitchen had been a return to the familiar, away from that kind of difference where every fibre of the body had to be on alert.

Like the last ship journey, Ah Chu had organised his own food. Rice with a sprinkle of soya sauce was acceptable. Rice and salted fish was an alternative. Rice and fresh fish was a luxury, a gift from the gods. This time he had organised some fishing equipment, hooks, line and patience.

Leaning over the railing, waiting for a catch, Ah Chu was using up the last of his bait. He wondered what else he could use. Maybe he could get one of the white devils to bring him a piece of meat that they were served in that greasy, foul smelling unappetising grey stew, a melting pot of goo.

‘Got a bite?’ asked one of the white devils. ‘Name’s Joe,’ and then he did that strange ritual of enveloping hands, something Ah Chu felt so peculiar.

‘No, not yet.’ And the two men gazed out to sea occasionally looking at the fishing line trailing behind. ‘What’s the bait?’

‘Some fish from the fish market. Something they were throwing out. Had to use it up. It now smells.’

‘Good bait though, eh?’ Ah Chu had no idea what to say. He had not really fished before. Joe looked at the line.

‘Good to make a brake for your line, ya know. Rip your hand if ya catch a big one.’ Ah Chu smiled. He had no idea what Joe was talking about, but before he could respond, Joe had some strips of cloth, was looping it around the line, and making a way of braking the sudden pull if a large fish were to take to bait. Ah Chu watched in silence.

‘There, that will be better.’

‘You catch fish?’ Ah Chu enquired.

‘Yeah, silly eh. Never thought to bring some gear with me. Too much of a hurry to get away.’

There was a great deal of excitement on deck when a fish took the bait. Joe took over, pulling and releasing in the line, over and over again, each time pulling in a little more and wanting to release less. With such a commotion, the crew came and helped, and soon on board was a welcome fish. The fisherman yelled.

‘Give me the line, quick quick,’ and threw it out again.

‘Damn, damn,’ he sighed after a while. But Ah Chu was too busy watching the fish on board as it changed colours as it died, from yellow to blue to shades of red. When he looked up Joe looked annoyed.

‘What the matter Joe?’ asked Ah Chu.

‘Could have got another one. When one mahi mahi dies the mate comes around. If you’re quick you can get it. Too slow Ah Chu, I should’ve got the bait ready. Mining’s slowed me down. Silly.’

‘No matter Joe, we cook up and give you some to eat.’

The Chinese on the ship pooled their food, some garlic here, some ginger there, even a few rather bedraggled vegetables arrived, along with some dried vegetables and dried salted black beans. Ah Chu offered the soya sauce. And as a gift from an anonymous person, a little Chinese whisky. Men’s mouths watered as seasoned cooks cut up the fish. The rest made soup, for another day. Rice was cooked. The Chinese sat down to the meal. A sense of satisfaction fell upon the group like a soft wind. It was a good sign. The gods were looking after them all.

When Ah Chu was handed some fish to use for bait he handed it to Joe.

‘You, the fisherman Joe. Try again eh’ and Joe laughed. In all his days he had not eaten fish cooked in this way. It had a flavour he had not tasted before.

‘For another meal, sure thing.’ But that hope disappeared as the weather closed in and the ship rocked over the rough waters once more. Those who had had a rough journey to America now knew what to do. A small stash of cold rice, a good place to wedge into, a mind set to hang on for as long as it took for the storm to pass.

James boarded another ship. On his ship there were a number of Chinese but many more white devils. James found himself with a small group of Chinese from his village all squeezed together with their charcoal cooker, food and belongings. They had to leave so much behind but one had his mandolin, (**find Chinese name**) and another had his *er ho*, and several men had their simple bamboo flutes. On fine days and nights, the small band of men played music, often singing folk song of their past. The most popular was the jasmine song of friendship. Here on the ship, strangers had to offer each other friendship to form into new groups that replaced families. The sound of the bamboo flute floated over the deck and drew the men together. It was a call from home.

‘Whenever I hear that,’ said one of the men, ‘I cannot help but think of home. Oh, to go there,’ he said wistfully.

The men had all brought some food, for they knew that the ship-food smelt bad, and looked like vomit. None of the men could even think of eating it. They would rather eat less but eat their own food.

After a big storm when no one ate, the sea calmed, the air was warmer, more like being at home. The white devils complained it was too hot, and took off their shirts. James found it hard to even look at them. Chinese would never expose all that skin, not to a doctor, or when bathing, and especially not in such close confines.

On one calm evening at sea, when James was listening to the Chinese orchestra playing, he froze when he heard a familiar voice.

‘Mouse! I’ve looked for you, but you Chinks all look alike. I had hoped that you would be here. Come here my ol’ friend.’

‘Mickey,’ said a somewhat confused and startled James. He could not believe his eyes. ‘I thought you gone to Australia?’

‘Yeah, I bought a ticket for Australia so if the cops were looking for me they would look on that ship. Then I swapped it to get on this ship and I hid until we left port.’

‘Good move, Mickey.’

‘Mouse, you got any food?’

‘No, Mickey I velly solly, but food on ship not same as food on team. When we get to New Zealand, then I cook for you, but not here.’ When he heard himself speak he knew he had not spoken English for a while.

‘Oh well, the muck they give us here is making me lose weight, Mouse.’

‘That’s okay Mickey. In New Zealand eat again. Here no work, no do, not eat much okay.’

‘You’re so bloody practical Mouse.’ And they both laughed. It had been nearly a year since they had seen each other.

‘What you do in *Mei Gok* Mickey?’ And Mickey talked about the other mines, other fights, and meeting a prostitute and wondering if he might have fallen in love. He’d walked through the mountains, met people in hideaways, sometimes helping them to do some of the heavy work. He’d nearly fallen in love again but driven out by the fear of the law, he’d become tired of it, and realised he could never settle. Like so many others, for whatever reasons, he’d decided to leave.

James told him of the workshop he eventually closed down. He told of their last profits that were considerable.

‘Gosh’ said Mickey, ‘could you give some of it to me now? I’m broke.’ James thought about it.

‘Mickey I give you some, but not now. Now I have to start my life in *Xin Zi Lan*.’ Mickey nodded.

‘Okay Mouse, that’s okay.’

James talked about the men who had moved off to work on the railways as it was good money. Some went to the cities to cook like Ah Chu.

‘You mean he’s cooking that chop suey muck?’

‘Whatever you white devils want Mickey.’ And they felt that familiar understanding between them.

At another time, Mickey asked, ‘what are ya going to do when you’re in New Zealand?’

‘Make money Mickey. You know me. I hear there’s a place called Gabriel’s Gully and I’m going there.’

‘Yeah, can I join your team?’ James said nothing. He was shocked at being asked. Mickey sat silent.

James figured his Chinese team would not work with Mickey simply because he was a white devil.

‘It’s okay, Mouse. Let’s make our own way. I’ll never be Chinese eh?’

‘No Mickey, you too big.’

The arrival in the harbour of Dunedin, New Zealand brought relief. Boats as far as the eye could see. People disembarked as fast as they could. There was nothing to slow them down. No officials, nobody to greet them, no help but then again no hindrances either. James looked at the hordes stretching as far as he could see. He wondered if Ah Chu had already arrived. The people were so like the groups he had been with in *Mei Gok*. When the movement was slow it was good to listen to the world around him. He could hear familiar dialects and others that were strange. He listened for the Germans but they did not seem to be amongst the people around him. He listened for the soft tones of the Native Americans and realised that they were not here either. But people like Mickey, the Irish, were here, and the Scots with their distinctive tones were certainly around, although he was not sure if he really understood what they were saying.

He also once more pondered the many ideas and schemes he had thought of, and now wondered if they would work in New Zealand. New Zealand, thought James, new, not contaminated by the ghosts of the past, not stained by bad luck, new, new beginnings, new life. He liked the name; there was a feeling of good luck in it, like being in a new house or wearing new clothes at Chinese New Year. When he wasn’t thinking about newness, he had a list in his head of what needed to be done:

Men.

Tools.

Food (lots).

Liquor.

Tobacco.

Tea.

Once on the new land, he made his way to Dunedin city, simply by following the Chinese. They stood out, not just because of their clothing, but by the way they walked, and talked. Even by the way they gathered and waited, crouched on their haunches, arms folded for balance, happily chatting to each other. It made getting to *Tongyung gai* easy with its sense of the familiar in an unfamiliar land. It was simple to find one's own clan, for the dialects of the Chinese called like homing pigeons.

'I knew I'd find you.' James and Ah Chu had met.

'Ha, why yes. I have just come from Gabriel's Gully for a few days. Sent money home, came in to buy some provisions, and getting a claim.'

'Successful?'

'Na, think I need to get a whites ghosts to do it for me. They say they don't understand me, but I do not think that is the problem.' Ah Chu was shaking his head. He had done so a great deal since he arrived in New Zealand.

'That's a tough one. Been trying myself. Think you might be right. You know Mickey has arrived here, on the same ship.'

'Mickey! Really! Thought he was off to Australia.'

'Yeah, well plans change. You know Mickey.'

'Shall we get him to buy a claim for us then?' and James smiled.

'Sure, great idea.'

Before long James connected with the Chinese. There were less of his clan's people from his village in New Zealand, and many more from neighbouring villages. He wondered how trustworthy they would turn out to be. The word went round.

'Looking for men, but no-one who owes anyone money for their passage.' Many men could not join, for their passages had been paid by others and they would need to pay back their debt. James wanted men who were free to earn their own money. Experience had taught him that these men worked harder than the others. They were much more likely to make money, or find a way of making money that suited their skills and toughness.

‘I need about ten people and then I’ll be off. Meet us here at 8.00am tomorrow, right here. I buy the equipment. You buy your own clothes.’ It was the standard rules.

When James met up with Ah Chu, he told him he had bought up a claim.

‘Did Mickey do it for you?’

‘He came with me and then left. I bought it myself. Come and work with me.’

Ah Chu looked at James. It was not what he wanted. He knew James as a boss, and did not like it, but on the other hand, he had to earn money.

‘Okay,’ he said reluctantly.’ James smiled.

‘Good, Ah Chu. You’re such a good worker, you’ll be able to teach these new chums.’ Ah Chu said nothing. Sometimes it is better to keep silent.

That evening the weather turned. The winds from the South had the bitter feel of ice; the rain was so cold that even a weatherproof coat did little to keep the plummeting temperatures at bay. Ah Chu made sure he bought woollen trousers and shirts, thick Wellingtons and a pair of tough leather boots, hat, two coats and extra tea and tobacco. It took four days until James was ready to leave but by that time there were six horses to pull a wagon heaped with gear and on top as many men as could sit, squashed here and there until it not only looked full, but there seemed not a place for one more person. Ah Chu was surprised to see so many men, but it did not take him long to realise that everyone had paid for their passage, so James’ hire out fee was covered.

‘Mickey!’ Ah Chu was so pleased to see him. ‘Long time no see Mickey.’

‘Ah Chu, how are you, you ol’ mouse! Come sit by me and tell me your news.’

So the two old friends talked, while James ordered the driver to go this way and that. The new chums sat and watched tide after tide of humanity moving in any way possible to get to the same area.

When Ah Chu told Mickey about catching the fish, he roared, loudly and heartily.

‘Mouth watering, Mouse.’

‘We’ll cook you a meal when we get to the camp. My place is set up. I’ve been here for a few months.’

When the wagon was stuck, the men jumped off. Mickey won their hearts by his good humour and his sheer strength. They pushed the wagon out of the mud often becoming covered with it themselves in the process. Around them like a swarm of bees to the honey pot of gold, were men on foot, on horses, on other wagons. On the edge of the road were the ones resting already worn out, struggling with the effort of carrying

heavy packs, wishing they had the good fortune to have a horse to carry for them. Men who had caught gold fever like a passing virus, without much thought of what it might involve. They saw themselves as a part of the excitement and chaos of gold fever. The sound of horses hooves, men shouting, wagons creaking, the sheer numbers made the journey bedlam.

The sight had the new chums watching with their mouths open in surprise. What a strange way of carrying a load on their backs; rather than in baskets hung on a yoke. Soon they would not be able to breathe well. ‘Why use a shoulder yoke?’ he asked, but the experienced miners all shrugged their shoulders as well.

The sky was so clear and blue that on this day the hills looked like they touch it. Ah Chu had seen so many different ways the earth connected to the sky since he had left China –the buildings touched the sky in Hongkong, the sea touched the sky on the rolling ocean, and now the hills, with the tops sprinkled with rice flour. Such beauty took his breath away.

‘Is the wind always cold?’ some men asked as he put on more clothes. The experienced men, did not reply, just nodded.

At one food stop James reminded them all.

‘Right, I’ve bought us a claim, and we will start once we get there. When we are on the claim, I will expect you all to protect it. Defending thine and mine are important markers amongst miners. If you have to fight, fight. And by the way, my Chinese name is Loong, but I want you all to call me James. Okay?’ The Chinese men hid their shock. Who was this man they asked. How come he has this silly name?

James stayed long enough put Ah Chu in charge. They unloaded the wagon.

‘Hey, Ah Chu, I see ya around, said Mickey’

‘Okay Mickey, I here, you come back, we cook you another meal eh?’

‘Sure’

All the team were smaller in stature, they had to learn to fight in different ways. Kung Fu moves were excellent, because it took others by surprise. Waving a knife or cleaver made others back off. The group arriving to give support by making huge amounts of noise, yelling at the top of their voices in Cantonese also seemed to scare people off. But it was not what they wanted. The thieving of gold became a common occurrence until the Chinese found ways of hiding it so it was very difficult to find. When the mining was good, the miners tended to not to fight.

With each new boat over a hundred Chinese new chums arrived. Ah Chu reported to James and handed over the claim fee and the commission.

‘Thanks Ah Chu. You’re a great leader.’ Ah Chu would never reply when James spoke like this. He could never quite believe him.

The new team brought news from home; who had been born, who had died, who had married, who was left behind. It became obvious that the villages were emptying out, by death or men leaving to make their fortunes elsewhere. The Opium Wars had decimated some villages, and hunger to near starvation was more common than not.

‘Where’s James?’

‘Don’t know, he’s never here these days.’

‘Heard he was mainly in Dunedin.’

‘To make money eh?’ the men laughed.

‘I heard he is going to bring his wife out here soon. Have you heard?’

‘How can he do that?’ The miners all shook their heads. It seemed that James was able to do things others could only wish. Was it because he could speak *Inglish* or was it because of other reasons? Before long, one of their favourite topics of conversation was James. There was something about him that fired the imagination of the men, something both strange and different.

Edit 4, Part 2 Chapter 8

1860 - 1872 White Gold blowing home

The MacKenzie boys like many others were plain ordinary middle class folk in Scotland, hard working with some education. They desired more for themselves and their children. The decision to emigrate to New Zealand meant sons working together, building houses, farming land and you never knew what might eventuate.

Upon arrival they stared at what was in front of them. The landscape was by any range of imagination, a surprise. Affordable land was far too high, too bumpy, and had way too many trees. The undergrowth was impossible to move through. They tried imagining what was at ground level, like the jawline under a face covered with whiskers.

Many gave up, seeing that such a project was far too large, too hard and took too much energy, but Stuart and Robert MacKenzie did not. They looked like twins even although Robert was two years older but they knew how to work together as a team. They were excited at the possibilities. The MacKenzie clan depended on their success.

The working class clamouring to rise in status, bought large holdings and soon gained the welcome titles of landowners, runholders, flockmasters, sheepowners, and before long, wool lords.

Moving to affordable land the MacKenzie boys could see what had to be done, either burn to clear the land, cut down massive trees to let in the daylight and build a simple two-roomed cabin. Robert met a young lass, Flora McNeill whose family had recently migrated. They were married in the newly built church in Lawrence a quiet small township where everyone knew everyone else. Robert built a larger house on the landholding for his wife and their family to be, while Stuart stayed in the simple cabin.

Resenting Robert's good fortune in marrying such a wonderful woman, and developing a simple life style, Stuart realised that he needed to socialise more. Having a natural steady eye, he joined the groups of stylish wool lords to ride horses, shoot both birds and animals, drink whiskey and best of all after a day of competitions, to dance in the wool barns with the opposite sex. Wood chopping suited Stuart well, given his six foot five inch advantage. A man with a mass of hair, long arms and legs could display his great arc of his axe as he competed in wood chopping and log sawing. At the more formal local balls where he would borrow his brother's dress suit, everyone dressed to

resemble the dukes and duchesses of home. It was another time to show talent, by playing the bagpipes and dancing with a nimbleness of forest fairies. It did not take long for Stuart MacKenzie to gain a reputation as being one of the most eligible bachelors in town.

‘My passion is to ride horses and sew.’ Mary Loftus, newly arrived from rural Edinburgh would tell her new-made friends.

‘My passion is to marry’ laughed others high with hope. Mary had some advantages, she was a tall, thin, strikingly good-looking woman, aged around eighteen years. Her life in New Zealand had been limited to a small farm holding on the Taieri plains outside Dunedin. Her father was a lawyer in town but Mary stayed on the farm, studying music, literature, and art. She had exceptional taste in dress, and spent many of her days sewing beautiful costumes for herself and her sisters. When Stuart proposed and she accepted the whole social group were delighted. Celebration parties were held, bringing the new pair together while Stuart discussed a good location for a house. It was decided that the best place was on the next ridge, where the sun caught the house for warmth and the trees behind gave some protection from the harshest weather and a vista over the rivers of the gorge that curved around the headland. He then set to build a large house, around which were the well maintained lawns, and while it may not had all the trimmings of the Lords and Ladies of home, it certainly had enough to remind others who had not done the same, of their new status. When the house was fit for habitation, but not yet completely finished, Stuart and Mary were married in the same church as his brother. Stuart returned to working from dawn to dusk on the land, breaking in the next bit, ploughing the next paddock, caring for the sheep. Mary would ride with him and worked with him as hard as she had ever done in her life. When loneliness came over her like some kind of sickness, she would catch the coach and go and visit her family. It was at those moments that Stuart would wonder what Mary said about him. He guessed that he was not as much fun as she had initially thought, but he reasoned that she would accustom herself to that once she had lived on their land for several years. When she returned she said,

‘I want to go to the ball in Lawrence next month, and I have brought back from Dunedin the most beautiful Chinese silk.’

‘In a month we’ll be bringing all the sheep down ready for shearing. It’ll be too busy and I’ll no time to go dancin’, you hear me, lassie? It will be time to shear the white gold to go to the woollen mills in Britain.’

‘Oh Stuart, it is only an evening. We can wash and dress and then go into town. All you do is work, work, work, one day won’t hurt. Surely the sheep can be left standing for one day. Anyway, I have started on my new dress, Mother helped me when I was in Dunedin. It will be beautiful, you’ll love it, I know you will.’ Stuart said nothing more, but as he did not say an outright ‘no’ Mary went ahead and sewed her dress. Just before the day, he walked into the room where she was sewing on some ribbons as finishing touches, stood in the doorway looked at her for a while then said, ‘Time to cut my hair lassie.’ Mary hugged him and happily obliged.

With each child, they increased the help in the home. Mary divided her time riding her black stallion, over the land, so she knew each part intimately. She loved the grasslands with the sheep, or higher up the rolling tussock grasses that waved and shone in the sunshine reminding her of her son Alistair’s hair. The rest of the time she organised the help in the house and sewed clothes for everyone. Using their funds from overseas they imported a Singer sewing machine. It ensured that they were the best turned out family in church. It was Sundays that saved her, talking to the women after service, or going to their friends Duncan and Edna Campbell who lived in a well-appointed house overlooking the township. Duncan was a member of the parish council and the local lawyer. They had organised for themselves a lovely arrangement. The MacKenzie’s supplying the mutton and the Campbell’s supplying the news and hospitality. The children were fed and cared for by the nanny, although Alistair often sat with them after the meal.

‘Chinese miners coming to town, lots of them.’ Edna somehow liked the little men. ‘I like the name **Celestials** for them, reminds me of their home country.’

‘Any trouble?’

‘No, seem to stick together, but that is probably because of their language. Sounds like a group of squawking birds to me, really you can’t make a word out. Such an strange language I wonder how they learnt it.’ And they all laughed.

‘Stuart’s seen a few down at the gorge, but not many. Hope they leave us alone,’ and everyone agreed. On their trip home, Mary asked Stuart if he’s seen many Chinese.

‘Don’t think they will go up the gorge. It’s a long way from Gabriel’s Gully. That seems like their favourite place.’

In the following month Stuart and Mary watched the miners arrive in the gorge. Stuart took his family to Robert’s house and the two men went into Lawrence to talk to

the Police, but they had to admit that there was little they could do. Men in hordes were arriving and went everywhere. What could two policeman do in the face of hundreds?

One morning when Robert looked out the window, he packed up his family and headed for Dunedin, leaving the land. Stuart woke up to their land being overrun by the unwelcomed. Tents were everywhere, men built fires by cutting down their bush. Land eroded under the miners' determination to get to the quartz rock. The quest for gold had reached fever pitch. Chinese men were everywhere, and while they were not in the majority, it was their visibility that Mary noted.

Stuart and Mary had decided that to leave their land and go to Dunedin would be as abhorrent as to dig amongst the water, mud and rock. It was however not what the farmhands had in mind. Before long the farmers were left worrying about getting people to work and how to keep stable the life that they had hewn as pioneers. Within months the society in front of them changed, from the stable to the unsettled, from the ordered to the awry

'Got any work?' It was Mickey who had turned up. He had become tired of mining, wary of the fights after his experience in America. Whenever he had felt his anger getting out of control he remembered Mouse telling him to think before he acted.

Stuart who had come to the door looked the man straight in the eye. They were roughly the same height.

'Well how long are you intending to work for? Everyone else has gone off mining. Why not you?' He was sorry the man was Irish. He would have preferred someone from his own home country. But at least this one could speak English although it had a strange tone to it. Most of all he did not want to start relying on someone only to find in a week or so, they had come down with the gold fever.

'Did that in America. Tired of it. Want to learn how to farm, how to care for animals.'

'Plenty of that experience here.' So Mickey got the best of the housing for workers, seeing everyone else had left. Each morning he reported to the MacKenzie household and was given instruction. Before he knew it, he was given the responsibility of caring for the sheep. On the days he had off, he would go into Lawrence with his boss, go to his church, and then visit Ah Chu and James. When he turned up with mutton, Ah Chu smelt it and pulled a face. He told Mickey it had a funny smell. After that he shot a pig which certainly impressed the little men. Other times he shot rabbits as a gift. He came to realise that Ah Chu's team looked forward to his coming, and the meal they ate was always so delicious.

‘Pity they don’t let Chinese women into this country like in America eh?’

‘Why is that Mickey?’ Ah Chu asked.

‘So I could marry one. Just think of the meals I would eat.’ Ah Chu translated that for the men, and they all burst out laughing. Over time the men got to enjoy Mickey’s company, and if he was seen in the township the news would pass through the camp like wild fire.

Mickey did not join the farmers when they gathered in Lawrence, and watched the hordes of miners arrive, depart, churn up the road, and turn the quiet township into a fever pitch. The farmers grew more anxious as they could see that without any way of control over the masses, land that was once the dinner plate for their sheep, could be raided overnight, dug over, disfigured beyond recognition and then equally as fast, be left in a ruinous desolate state with rampant disregard for anything except the hope that gold might be somewhere beneath it.

On the farm when this was happening nearby Stuart asked,

‘Mickey, what do you think? Do you think the miners will get to our part of the gorge?’

‘They might. I went down one day because some silly sheep wandered off. No brains those sheep, and I looked at the rock. Just as well I didn’t find anything, or I would have been off.’ Stuart laughed

‘Well glad to hear that there aren’t any gold nuggets lying there just waiting for you to pick them up.’ But within the next month that all changed.

‘Do something Stuart, get those Chinks off the land,’ Mary pleaded and under pressure from his wife, he went out and upended every tent and threw everything into the gorge. Within two days their chickens were stolen, pigs were killed and the vegetable garden harvested out.

‘Get those Chinkies out of our place Stuart, I heard them last night. They raided our place.’ She pleaded with her husband for her own sense of safety.

‘Now Mary, they are not all Chinese.’

‘They are, I know. They weren’t speaking English, Stuart. I swear to God they were Chinese.’

Stuart managed to get the police once, and they were moved on, but after a fortnight a new group assembled, or maybe they were the same ones, as Mary had decided that they all looked the same.

‘I want to go to Dunedin,’ she demanded.

‘No, your place is here with the children. Right now we cannot afford for you to make such a trip. I cannot make an income with what is happening outside.’ Stuart, who was exasperated at the situation himself, could not bear to see his wife and children leave.

‘Please Stuart, let us go.’ Mary was terrified. She lost so much weight that she looked worn and thin. But Stuart was adamant that they should stay.

From time to time, Stuart and Mickey would talk together surveying the miners in the gorge.

‘Look Stuart, there’s a pattern here. The miners like us come and then they go. Then the Chinese come and they tidy up. Just let them be. They only have low technology. They won’t do much damage. Anyway the way things grow here, give a few years and you won’t be able to see where anyone has been.’

‘But they are trespassing, Mickey. I want them off my land.’

‘Ah, the fever is here, and there is nothing you can do. Just relax. I’ll plant another garden for the mistress. Let’s put it over the far side. It’ll be easy enough to catch another pig for the pen. No one will hurt you if you don’t start a war in your head. It does nothing for your health.’ Stuart could not believe Mickey could be so relaxed.

‘He’d think differently if he owned the land,’ Stuart consoled his wife. And when Mickey told stories of his contact with the Chinese, Mary stopped inviting him into the house for meals.

Mickey set to work digging a home garden, well away from the river and gorge. On a misty morning when the water vapour hung in the air, Mickey went off to look at the miners, hoping that they in fact had moved down the river. To get there he wandered through an area where the native trees had been preserved. How the ferns liked the weather, as they sheltered under the grove of tall kahikatea. Whenever he walked through the area, he would clear a little more of the bush for an easy track. Mistress liked that. This one morning though, as he walked through there was a strange feel in the air. Then he walked to the edge of the gorge and saw a woman’s shoe. Below was mistress’s favourite black dress. Picking up his feet, he ran as fast as he could to the farmhouse but the boss was not there, only nanny. By the time Stuart was located, Mickey was out of breath.

‘Stuart, come here immediately. Quick.’

‘What is it that makes it so urgent?’ he asked.

‘Just come and see,’ and the two men retraced Mickey’s footsteps. Once they scrambled down the cliff face Stuart ran and picked up the limp doll-like figure.

‘Oh no, my darlin’ no,’ and Stuart burst into uncontrolled sobs.

Outside the church after the Sunday service, groups of the new Lord and Lady class stood around chatting. The men in their top hats and beautifully tailored suits, and the women, in the finest imported materials stitched into the latest fashion. They would assemble outside to discuss their collective concerns, highlighted this day by the notice many had read in the *Otago Witness* ‘Distressing suicide of an Otago Lady.’

‘Did you read about Mary MacKenzie?’

‘Who? That lovely tall good looking woman who dresses beautifully? Is she the one with her husband, that gorgeous Stuart MacKenzie and their children who usually sits two pews from the front? Is that the woman we are talking about? Her family is always so well dressed. I noticed that they have not been to church of late. Has she been sick?’ The women looked around to see if Edna Campbell was present, knowing the two families were friends but she was also absent.

‘I wonder if she had been sick?’

‘Heard that the police went up there on their land because so many miners were trespassing.’

‘I heard it was the Chinese miners.’

‘No. I suspect not because the Macandrews who live in the same area says that he is having the same problems and they are every kind of miner imaginable.’

‘Anyway, what happened to Mary?’

‘Committed suicide.’

‘What? No?’ They fell into silence with shock.

‘Poor thing.’

‘Why?’ asked one of the younger women.

‘According to the paper, she dressed in her best garb of black silk and mantle, climbed to the top of the cliff and jumped.’

‘I wonder if that is the dress she wore at the ball last year. I mean she looked gorgeous.’

A silence fell upon the group as they visualised her, in her elegance doing such a thing, questioning if they would have had enough courage to do the same even if they were to wish it.

‘Poor thing, may God rest her soul.’

In the weeks after, the new Ladies of the colonies thought about Mary, for they knew what drove her over the cliff. The despair of a sense of imprisonment, and the thought of a reduced income. Poverty was something that Mary could not consider. Limitations on dressing the family, the idea of a return to the lower classes brought memories of her early school days when her family was poor. The whole point of coming to New Zealand was to save her family from such shame. It was a fear and an anxiety shared by those who moved through to the elite class. How could she hold her head high knowing that they were poor? Mary Loftus/MacKenzie who was highly educated and of amiable character made a decision to free herself of such a dismal future. It was as simple as that.

Edit 4 Part 2, Chapter 9

1881 The ill Wind

A group of farm workers were standing around wearing trousers that looked a few sizes too large, worn at the cuffs and covered with dirt. A motley lot, who had come into town to get away from it. It, being the endlessness of work, dawn to dusk, breaking in the land, hoping it wouldn't in the end break their backs. They were reading a notice. The Chinese Meeting to be held at the Town Hall on Saturday 18th signed by Horace Bastings, Mayor.

'Going?'

'Nah, go to a meeting with those Chinks?'

'The meeting's not for them, it's about them.'

'Now that's more to the point. Like a swarm of bloody ants.'

The group of men crowded around closer, and read the notice more carefully.

'Yip, count me in.'

'Hey, is that like the meetings in Westport?'

'Heard that there was one in Dunedin as well.'

'What goes on?'

'Trying to stop the Chinks, before its too late.' The men as a group added their agreement and parted.

Next to the hotel was the blacksmith. Outside there were hitching posts for horses to recover from the manicure. The horse owner would be at his own watering hole next door. Today there were no horses waiting. Instead they were hitched outside the hotel and along the main road.

Further along the road was cleared land and in the middle stood a rimu church with its steep red roof, an elegant spire and a beautiful stained glass window. Inside it resonated when hymns of glory were sung encouraging the congregation to come closer to their Lord. Equally as glorious were the opportunities the town made to sing the National Anthem seeking love, shelter and safety. It was an excellent combination, a prayer to God, and a collective bond to form a free land. It also celebrated the composer, John Joseph Woods, a local man, who was usually in the congregation. Around the corner outside the church vestibule was another group of men reading the same notice. This time they were landowners.

'That meeting's worth going to, what do you think?'

‘It’s important we have our say. Something needs to be done about the Celestials. This is a British colony after all. We’d better protect it.’

The men nodded in agreement.

Janet Lawson, a farmer’s wife, stood on tip-toes trying to see the notice. ‘What’s this?’ she said. ‘What’s going on?’ Someone turned the paper so she could read it. ‘Oh, I’d like to go to that. I’m curious about those John Chinaman.’

‘You’ll do nothing of the sort,’ retorted her burly husband. ‘This is no meeting for ladies.’

‘But, Freddy, I want to know what’s happening. And so many people will have so much to say.’

‘This is out of bounds for ladies, m’dear.’

The men nodded and chipped in, ‘That’s right, that’s right.’

‘Don’t worry, dear,’ said Lawson. ‘I’ll tell you what happens.’

She shot him a glance. ‘I’d rather go.’

‘No,’ said her husband firmly. And with that the small crowd dispersed.

It was an easy place to find. The noise caught the ear. In the middle of Lawrence was the hall filled to the limit. Mickey walked into the room. He looked around surprised that he saw no-one he knew. He saw no-one from his church, nor any of the miners from Gabriel’s Gully. These were another sector, farm workers off farms he did not know, landowners who probably knew his boss. When he read the notice he had talked to Ah Chu about the meeting.

‘What, a meeting about us? Why? Mickey, you go,’ said Ah Chu.

‘Maybe,’ and Mickey walked off to think about it. He had taken a few days off and was off to Dunedin for a break, to visit a whore house, to find some of his Irish mates and drink with them. It so happened that the day of his return was the day of the meeting.

When Stuart MacKenzie, calmly strode in, Mickey was sure he did not see him. Stuart was immediately identifiable by his mop of wild hair that had suddenly turned white since his wife had committed suicide. Mickey had treated him with added respect. They spoke of little else than things that needed to be done on the farm. He never set about disagreeing with him.

The room was packed with people in a haze of tobacco smoke that was enough to make eyes smart. Mickey watched as MacKenzie stood at the back of the room. He was not surprised when he heard Stuart being called.

‘MacKenzie, come on up to the front,’ and others who were sitting on a front bench seat moved along. MacKenzie sat on the end. At the front of the room sat the Mayor Horace Bastings, a portly man with a well-groomed moustache. He was particularly pleased to see that the men had read the posters and consequently turned up. He was not expecting such a large crowd. The men were restless, so he was slightly worried when he called the meeting to order.

‘Gentlemen, gentlemen’ he banged the gavel a couple of times, and the din did not ease, so he stood up

‘Gentlemen, quiet please’ He paused and looked around the room. There were still men taking little notice. ‘This meeting was been called so we can talk about the Chinese coming into our township.’ The noise rose, and he put up his hand ‘Quiet’ glaring to the right hand back corner. ‘There will be time for opinions. It is obvious that each day more and more Chinese are arriving here and I thought it would be a good idea for us to discuss this matter. Who would like to begin?’ Before he could sit down in the finely carved wooden chair with a rounded back and a leather padded seat. He banged the gavel again, ‘Gentlemen, one at a time, who will begin? Henry why don’t you start?’ and sat down. Henry Macrae, a devout man was one of the Church of England vestry and owner of the general goods store. He stood to speak, being just five foot six.

‘I note the increased numbers of the Chinese arriving here. Last week I was talking to James Young, and he told me that 120 had arrived and on the next boat he was expecting another team of about the same number. This represents a great deal of business in our township, and needs to be encouraged. Without these miners, our town would shrink to nothing.’ Before he could sit down men were standing up and shouting.

‘Hordes, hordes are coming over eh.’

‘No, I say no!’

‘They’ll be over us like a army of ants.’

‘It’s the yellow peril.’

‘We need to control this.’

‘If we can’t control them then let’s get rid of them,’

Men jumped up and shouted.

‘I agree.’ Others nodded in agreement. Mickey looked around with astonishment. He wondered if they really knew any Chinese people. Henry turned and looked at the crowd. He had not expected such a response either, the town had started with nothing, and now it was a thriving place serving not just the Chinese but all the miners no matter where they came from: America, Australia, Britain, Ireland, Scotland

it did not matter. The Chinese were only a small proportion of miners arriving. Henry turned to catch the eye of the chairman but he was holding the gavel and pointing to one of the men at the back who stood to speak.

‘Did you see that last lot? They were wearing wooden shoes with toes turned up. That shows how they don’t belong here nor do we want them to belong here either.’

‘Yeah, they’re aliens,’ The room seemed to explode with voices with men shouting over each other.

‘Have you seen the way they live?’

‘In hovels, it’s obvious they don’t even build a house if they don’t have to. Those buildings are wedged far too close together, why there isn’t enough ventilation. This is unhealthy.’

‘The sanitation! Why you can smell where they live. Gentlemen, there is no need for a sign post, your nose will tell you where to go.’ Applause rang around the hall.

‘And that food they eat, you know it’s imported for them. They’re not supporting our economy. They aren’t buying our stuff. They aren’t eating our mutton or potatoes ya know.’

‘That’s right.’

‘They’re weird.’

‘Scum, that’s what they are.’ Basting was on his feet again trying to restore order.

‘Gentlemen, quiet, can we have one person speaking at a time.’ In the next second up stood Alan Ward, another store owner known for his much softer voice. The meeting fell silence. Before he could speak, a group of children could be heard chanting getting louder and louder as they neared the entry to the hall.

‘Ching Chong Chinamen,

Born in a jar,

Christened in a tea pot

Ha, ha, ha.’

The men inside upon hearing this looked around to see how the group would react. Seizing the moment Alan Ward said, ‘Your honour, your child is out there chanting this absolute rubbish. You should be ashamed of yourself.’ The Mayor stood.

‘Now, calm down there, they are just children for goodness sake. I’ve talked to my son and he tells me that it’s just some harmless fun. Remember, they are just children, young children.’ Everyone in the room had seen this day after day and many

of the men knew whose children enjoyed this torment. No one said a word. Bastings continued, ‘what is much more important here is that, ahem, now I know that these Chinese are very strange but what I object to is that they are heathens. If you look inside their church, there are idols standing there, and they burn those incense sticks. These are not God fearin’ people and they’ll never share our values. I needn’t remind you, that the values of the ten commandments are paramount to the building of this young country and I cannot see how these men will include our values into their heathen ways.’

‘And what about the gambling? Have you heard them?’

‘It’s not in English,’ and the men broke out in laughter.

‘It’s gibberish, I mean the least they could do is learn English. It’s not that hard. Where do they think they are? This is an English speaking country.’

‘But it’s that intensive high pitch screeching I can’t stand. What do others think of that eh?’

‘Let’s get rid of them, they are packs of rogues and vagabonds. If we can get rid of them that’ll stop the opium as well. Have you looked inside one of those dens? Disgusting, the smell, the men lying around like a bunch of sleeping animals.’ Once more there was an eruption of people shouting over each other. The chairman banged the gavel, once, twice, three then four times, but no-one was listening.

‘They are animals, I tell you.’

‘What do you expect, from animals? I used the tail of one to hang him up. You should’ve heard him squeal. Teach him a lesson.’

‘They’re the devil.’

‘My dog, it went missing, and I know one of those Johns got it.’

‘As a pet?’

‘Come on, to eat!’

‘What about my neighbour’s cat, where did it go to eh? Or Joe’s hen house, that was pilfered. Who did that eh? I say those Chinks, when they see stuff they want they just take it, no conscience, no sense of ownership just take what they want, when they want.’

‘We can’t have that, for goodness sake. Standards, when will they ever learn our standards.’

‘And no commitment to stay in New Zealand.’

‘Just as well their women are not here. Breed like rabbits I bet.’

‘All they want is a China here and that is totally unacceptable.’

‘Totally untrustworthy.’

‘Superstitious, sly bunch. Never seen the likes of it in my life.’

‘Mark my word, there’d be less crime if there were less of them.’

‘And there would be more order out on the fields. So often we see them jump a claim and plunder tail races.’ The hall erupted into applause. Stuart MacKenzie stood up and silence resumed.

‘Mr Chairman, I suggest that we ban them from this town, let’s move ‘em on from the township of Lawrence?’ Mickey stood up. With his strong Irish accent, the mood in the room changed.

‘Know him? Bloody Catholic.’

Mickey cleared his throat. ‘Surely there is no good reason why the Chinese need to be moved out of the township. There’s unreasonable people everywhere, it does not matter what colour, white people, brown people and any other colour. Chinese too. But I have mined with these people. I have set up a business with James Young who someone mentioned. The Chinese are not unreasonable. They live their lives in peaceful ways. Surely to have them inside the township would make an excellent example of good citizenship.’ From behind Mickey came a voice that said.

‘You can go too, bloody Catholic. There’s no place for you either.’ Mickey’s temper rose, he swung around and grabbed the man, and before anyone could stop him, hit him with a closed fist in the jaw. The crack was audible to those around and so was the cry of pain.

‘That’ll shut you up!’ he yelled and as he turned around he saw a group of men moving closer.

‘Don’t even think about it!’ yelled Mickey and he glared menacingly at each man as they backed off.

No-one took any notice of the chairman calling, ‘order, order.’ As Mickey walked out of the hall many of the others sighed with relief. This was not the place for a brawl. After a period of talking, the meeting was brought to order again. Another man intending to be reasonable stood up.

‘I would like to comment about not allowing the Chinese to live within the town. Where would they go? Don’t they have any rights?’ Another stood.

‘Rights? We have rights, not them.’

‘How about outside the town limits? It’s about a mile from the centre of the township.’

‘But that land is a swamp. It floods in winter in and is infested with mosquitoes.’ Objected the reasonable man.

‘Perfect, let the mossies eat them instead of feasting on us.’ Laughter broke the tension.

The chairman stood, banging the gavel.

‘Do I have this right? Quiet please,’ and he waited for quiet to fall upon the crowd.

‘Thank you. Now can we do this in an orderly fashion? Are you saying that we make a by-law to say that the Chinese will no longer be allowed to reside within the township of Lawrence?’

‘Hear, hear,’ . Councillor Tolcher stood and said

‘I move that’.

Next to him sat Councillor Jeffrey who stood.

‘I second that.’

‘All those in favour say ‘aye.’

The room chorused, ‘aye.’

‘Against?’ Silence.

‘Passed.’

The room erupted.

‘Gentlemen,’ it was the quiet voice of MacKenzie who had risen to his feet. ‘If there are more Celestials, then we are likely to jeopardise the prospects of being a British colony. This is our land.’

‘Hear, hear,’ echoed through the room.

‘ I am sick and tired of feeling like a stranger in our new land.’ he continued. More clapping followed.

‘Hey, but what can we do?’ someone asked. McKenzie was still standing ‘I say, tax ‘em. If Victoria can put on a £10 Poll Tax then so should we. But I am suggesting Your Honour, that we do this properly and make it £100. That’ll stop ‘em,’ Laughter followed in agreement. McKenzie remained standing

‘Mr McKenzie, can I ask if you are putting something for this meeting to agree to?’ McKenzie nodded. He looked around the room. Silence descended on them all.

‘I move, that we send to Central Government endorsement of a £10 Poll Tax But it should really be £100. We do this because we endorse that this country is a British Colony.’ The men in the room made such a din. One of the men stood on his chair and yelled.

‘I say, this is the right message, bugger off,’ to which another man stood on his chair and said,

‘Hell’s a good place.’

The men agreed.

As they walked out of the hall, there was such an excitement in the air.

‘Good thing you spoke, MacKenzie’

‘Good solid idea MacKenzie,’ and as they moved into the pub next door a line of beers waited for him.

In 1882 a £10 Poll Tax was imposed. In 1896 it increased to £100. All other immigrants came into New Zealand free.

Edit 4. Part 2. Chapter 10
Mining and mining techniques
1872 The Wind of Greed

Gabriel's Gully was a large valley of mainly alluvial stone. The river bed had been moved shovel by shovel and now looked like humps and bumps of disturbed gravel.

'Mining, what do we do?' the Chinese new chums asked.

'There's a technique to this so watch carefully.' Ah Chu was handing down what he had learnt. 'Here's the equipment you'll need; pick, shovel and pan. Make sure you keep track of your own things. Tools lying around are just picked up by anyone.' The men nodded. 'Now, the technique is to fill the pan around three quarters of stones, clay, moss anything that's there, then carefully submerge the pan to just under the surface of running water. The trick is to move the pan back and forth and side to side so each and every rock gets thoroughly washed.'

'Where's the gold?'

'The gold is captured amongst the dirt, so make sure you only throw out the cleaned stones and leave the dirt until the last. You work the largest stones out first swishing the water around until you find sand and mud.'

'You mean washing, washing, washing?'

'Yes, but make sure the pan is held so the mud can be tipped away without losing the bottom paydirt. Here, look, can you see?' Ah Chu stopped and placed the pan away from the water. A flake of gold stuck to his finger. He picked up the small specimen bottle and dropped the flake into it. The men watched it slowly sink to the bottom. A sparkle of gold. Men changed instantly. Their eyes lit up; they handed the bottle around. Their silence was broken. Sighting their first flake of gold turned their minds and dreams to hunting those precious flakes. Ah Chu looked at the men and smiled. Yes they would be bitten by the bug, and thank goodness because gold mining needed both passion and determination. When the excitement died down, each new chum was partnered with an experienced miner. Ah Chu knew that the tailings in the area would be worked over, but if his team worked quietly and methodically they would find what others had carelessly left. He might even be able to pay James for the claim, and everyone would be much happier.

Just after 'Black Peter' discovered the gold, fortunes were made. It did not take many years for the sudden riches to disappear. At that time there was so much gold at Gabriel's Gully it was said that it shone in the pan like the stars of Orion. Ah Chu was convinced that the person who said that was drunk, but on a winter's evening when the team had made a dam of water that had settled like a mirror because the wind had taken a holiday, he saw the reflection of the stars themselves. He had never seen gold shining out calling him like that. But the stars were so bright they made the man in the sky with a belt around at his waist lie in the water. More like a large God in the sky he thought. A few days later Mickey turned up.

'Hi Mouse? where's James?'

'Thought you called him Mouse?'

'Oh,' thought Mickey 'but you are the real mouse, you have the tail,' and they both smiled. Ah Chu liked Mickey's humour.

'Mickey you stay here. James will be here soon maybe tomorrow, or next day. We never know for sure.'

'I love your Chinese food, Ah Chu.' Ah Chu smiled. He found Mickey charming.

'Good. You stay and eat.'

Sharing tobacco everyone relaxed. Mickey leant back and studied the group intently.

'Mouse, did you hear about the meeting in town?'

'Of course,' said Ah Chu, 'they could not tell us fast enough that we were not to live in Lawrence township.'

'What do you think of that?'

'Oh Mickey. The white ghosts don't like us. It was bad in America, and I thought coming here, a small place it would be fine. But no, the longer I am here, the more I know they don't like us.'

'How does James get on?'

'Oh James is different. The longer I know him the more he is like them. He has a *Inglishie* name, and he's cut his hair, and he talks to the white ghosts. He has learnt the white ghost's ways. I can see the white ghosts he talks to are happy to have a Chinaman they know. James likes that sort of thing.'

'And you?'

‘Oh, I’m a miner. James has made his money from people like me. Me? Why, I think like Chinese, I dream like Chinese. I want to go home,’ and with that Ah Chu touched the chain around his neck.’

‘Yeah,’ and Mickey sat thoughtfully thinking of his own situation.

‘I heard Mickey,’ said Ah Chu, ‘that they are thinking of bringing in a Poll tax that we Chinese will have to pay when we come into New Zealand.’

‘Oh, when I heard it, I didn’t believe it at first. I went to the meeting Mouse, and I nearly started a big big fight.

‘Why?’

‘The people, they do not understand you Chinese. It made me so angry to listen to what they were saying about you all. It’s not like the way I know you all.’

‘Yes, but Mickey, you are our friend, so you must be nurtured.’ Mickey smiled, why the Mouse was sentimental.

‘I’ve been farming and I really like it but I had to leave. The boss and I did not get on. Now I’m off to Westport, after I have seen James.’

‘He’ll turn up soon.’ Mickey sat around and helped the team build their huts, making a table and some chairs.

When James turned up Mickey and James were seen having a highly animated serious talk after which James got onto the wagon and drove away without a goodbye to anyone. Ah Chu watched James go, and looked at Mickey.

‘I’ve come to get some of my money he owes me, left over from our days in America.’ Ah Chu nodded and said nothing. Mickey now understood those silences. They were always a bad sign.

‘What is this about money and James?’ he asked in a quieter voice.

‘James not velly good giving money, but velly good taking money.’ Mickey tapped Ah Chu on the shoulder.

‘I agree. He’s changed since we first met. You’re right Ah Chu. I’ll be back, I don’t let these things go you know.’ Ah Chu nodded. Mickey stayed the night and early in the morning as he left Ah Chu said,

‘You be careful Mickey. Think before you do.’ As his friend Mickey walked away Ah Chu could see that he looked more like the Orion God in the sky.

The men were sitting around in a group as they did each evening, drinking tea and smoking their pipes. It was a scene that was so familiar.

‘Move? Again?’ Law Kee sighed with exhaustion. He had hurt himself in an accident when he first came to the mine. A cliff came cascading down and Law Kee did not respond fast enough to the sound of moving rock. He was caught under the pile, and was lucky to be dug out. But his leg had been broken even though Ah Chu had set the bones using the herbal poultice made from cannabis. Law Kee had a permanent limp, and one arm was damaged. Once he was well enough to walk around the camp, he became the camp caretaker, raising the chickens, growing the vegetables, collecting human faeces and using it for manure. Each man paid him for his efforts, a little each time they cashed up. Added to this he had extended his hut to establish a tiny store, with just a few essentials for the miners, some rice, soya sauce, tobacco, alcohol, matches, a few pieces of mining equipment, watertight boots, and any equipment that had been left, that he had mended for resale. He had cut down handles that were developing cracks, sharpened shovels edges to make life easier, mended wooden wheelbarrows so they did not collapse on the mine fields and the never ending mending of sluice boxes. He learnt to sharpen knives, mend picks, and shovels along with the over abused long toms, those shovels with the long handles and to catch both water and rocks. He learnt to sew up clothes, mend patches. The Chinese had moved their claim down at the lower end of the river, abandoned by European miners who moved en masse to Westport.

‘I suggest we split our village for a while and have your small one in the field, and then there will be a larger one outside the boundary at the Lawrence Camp. You know we have to move now with that new law. The white ghosts are more and more hostile to us. I notice that none of us are able to avoid their abuse.’ Everyone nodded in agreement.

‘Oh it’s just that to move takes such a lot of energy.’ Law Kee moaned. ‘Maybe I will let the men live on the other side of the mine, and I will stay where I am. The gardens are now established and so is the store.’ But the men laughed. They knew that it was not possible.

‘No, no no. By the time we help you, the garden would be eaten out. We will help you dismantle your hut sheet by sheet and reassemble it close to the cave. Quite simple, Law Kee, you would not be safe alone. Given half a chance, someone would come and ring the necks of the chickens, steal the vegetables, and burn down anything left.’ The team agreed.

In the following weeks, the new home for the chickens was built and the poultry carried over in baskets. Then the new vegetable garden was re-established and the team

split between where they slept each evening, until Law Kee was fully settled close to the new area.

Law Kee sighed. He only lived frugally, as he so often gave the miners things if they were also out of luck. He appreciated their company and his role, and even though he often thought it would be lovely to open a larger store and make more money, he knew that he could not live without the closeness of the village cousins. Arriving back after several days of work on the claim, they viewed him as an essential part of what it meant to be at 'home' as temporary as that might be.

'Shall we go for them?'

'Why not.'

The group of European miners were agitated. They had not found mining easy, nor had they been able to find a good claim. They saw many men working away and succeeding, and found the whole adventure turn into something they no longer found acceptable.

'When is the best time?'

'Let's wait for the full moon, there'll be good light and we can try creeping up over the hill to the cave.' Over the past few weeks, no Chinese had been spotted going to the village, so they reasoned that the gold must be in the cave. They smiled with glee at the thought of how they could steal their share. They planned to overpower them one by one, cut off their stupid pigtails that made them look like monkeys and tie them up. They had three guns so they would surely be safe. Then they would search for their loot.

Before the day of full moon, the men moved towards the hill. Creeping around, they did not realise there was a hut by the hill. The door was closed, so they felt safe to wander by. Trying to be as quiet as possible, they walked slowly. From somewhere undetermined came the loudest honking noises. They had set off the goose alarm.

'Shit! Run!' but before they could break into a trot the bird was stretching its neck and hissing with such a racket. They hid behind some trees waiting for someone to come but no one did, so they relaxed. Tomorrow night they would take a different path.

Inside the cave was a hive of activity. Ah Chu and his team worked steadily away while the other team were sluicing the rock by the water. They had been very productive, having found a continuation of a schist seam. From the entrance the cave opened into two branches, each arm made the ability to get the quartz a lot easier. They

had also widened a hole that fell to the river bed. From a wheelbarrow, the rock could be poured through the hole, down to river level.

On the day of the full moon, Ah Chu and his men had thought about stopping for a break but decided to keep on working while everything was going so well. However, Ah Chu noted that the cave was getting more and more damp, slippery.

‘Why is this changing?’

‘Got to be water, coming from somewhere.’

‘Must explore this now, come on.’

Outside it was easy to see. It seemed that some of the snow had melted forming a small stream so the water ran down dripping to the entry of the cave. The men stood around looking at the water, and discussed the possibility of building a diversion. They decided they would do that as soon as they had finished the area they had already dug up. One of the things the Chinese liked to was to work in methodical ways getting a certain area completed. The area dug was filled with other rubble which saved moving the mountain of soil and clay out beyond the entrance. Towards the end of the day, one of the miners called his team to examine something.

‘Hey come here look!’ The men stopped work. Close by was a large footprint away from the cave entrance but close enough to be unusual. It was not a Chinese footprint. It was too big.

‘Someone must be snooping. It is not a good sign.’ That evening, when they built a fire to warm themselves and cook their food, they relaxed once more. They also made a plan. Most of the men had already experienced European raiders. Some had lost their gold. It had been stolen off their bodies, or their homes had been dug up and their stash had been found. Now they were all much more careful. On this cold evening, they also built a smaller fire inside the cave, a fire to sleep by and to keep the cold of winter at bay. If anyone woke they would add more wood to keep the fire going. Outside it was freezing. A year ago one of the Chinese miners had frozen to death. In the spring he was found and they gave him a funeral. A fire in the cave was to guard against such a tragedy happening again.

The night of the full moon, the men moved inside, taking the burning wood to set an inside fire. Other men were getting their bedrolls out ready to sleep. They would be up before daybreak, enough time to have something to eat, and be ready to work once there was enough light.

In the middle of the night when the raiders decided they would attack, they had managed to sneak up to the entry of the cave. The entrance looked fine and then to their

shock, they saw that there was another entrance of a reduced size. The roof was lower. For the raiders to enter, they would need to slide in on their stomachs. The ground was wet and slippery. When the first person backed back, the others could not believe what was happening. In loud whispers, ‘Can’t do it. Too small.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘If we slide in one by one, we don’t know what they will be doing. There isn’t enough room.’

Bending their bodies to be more upright they suddenly realised that they must have woken the Chinese. In front of them they had silently gathered with red hot branches in their hands. At any moment they would be burnt. The leader of the raiders looked for an escape. He dropped his gun, hoping that they might stop and give him enough time to get away. The others were already fleeing across the hill yelping in fright and pain. The Chinese added a cacophony of noises for they knew every inch of the ground and could run faster, even with the hot branches in their hands. Raiders screamed when burnt on their bare skin. Experience had taught the Chinese that they only needed to injure a few to send a message around the neighbourhood without instigating revenge. After that, they were left alone.

‘*Goal la*, **check spelling** enough!’ yelled Ah Chu as the team leader. Typical of a man of moderation, the team was often exasperated at his conservatism. Ah Chu was surprised by the noise on the river bed. There two of his men were still chasing the raiders.

‘Stop!’ yelled Ah Chu in the loudest voice his team had ever heard. ‘Enough!’

‘Enough!’ yelled some of the other men not nearly as enthusiastically as Ah Chu. It took some time before the two men stopped the chase.

Ah Chu picked up the gun. He laughed with glee. He had not used one before, but had always wanted to learn. After all, he knew he would need one when he went food gathering. The rabbits looked so delicious to eat.

The men were joined by Law Kee as they reset the fire and sat around laughing until tears ran down their faces. They thanked Law Kee who had been alerted by the goose and observed the men. They were ready and congratulated themselves in the design of the entrance to the inner cave, better for small people, but also they knew that the Europeans would not like it. They had observed that one of the differences between the two races, was how they moved their bodies. Chinese were taught to be compact, to bring arms and legs to the centre, while the Europeans spread themselves out, like an

uncontrolled tree in the wind. You could tell by the way they used their bodies when they talked.

This time not only did they keep their gold, they gained a gun and sent a message of outwitting raiders. Satisfied was the look on their faces. It was good to outwit the Europeans who used their greater height and strength to bully the Chinese. To survive as a group they had to demonstrate that they were both cunning and clever. It was their best tool. The next time they went into town they would all go to the Joss House to give thanks to the gods for keeping them safe.

With lighter spirits, they worked well for the next few weeks. The days merged twenty four hours after the next twenty four hours. Once they got into a rhythm they happily worked on. They knew that they should have gone to convert their gold into cash. They really had too much in the cave, but they had also divided it, so that it would not be all in one spot. The snow stopped falling, and the temperature rose slightly. The water in the cave increased, and a plan was made for one group to build the water diversion. In the middle of the day, the cave rumbled.

‘Out, get out quick, out!’ they yelled and repeated it over and over as they scrambled up and through the entrances. Several of them managed to escape through the hole, holding onto the rope they’d grab and slide down. But not everyone got out, and as they did the head count they started calling for two of their team.

‘Wing Lo, Ah Woo can you hear us? Where are you?’

When there was no reply, they waited for a while then started calling again. The collapse affected one part of the cave that seemed still to be moving.

‘No, wait, wait until the rock and cave has stopped falling.’ Ah Chu directed.

‘Should have diverted that water!’ shouted one of the miners. Ah Chu knew to remain silent. More important was to find ways to restore harmonious relationships. They sat outside and comforted themselves with cups of tea and called out to the two who had been trapped.

By mid afternoon, Ah Chu gingerly crept into the cave. One side had collapsed. Ah Chu got one of the men to dig out the three stashes of gold. When they heard the men groaning, they were delighted that they could be heard and also concerned at their injuries.

‘Keep talking, tell us where you are?’

It took a little while to get organised, the men all lining up with basket after basket of debris which once filled were passed up to the entrance. The soil would form

the basis of the diversion stream. ‘Bit late!’ others grumbled but they also knew that it was a good use of the time, a task long overdue.

The injured men had displayed a calm sense of mind. They had used their baskets to protect the airspace around them so they did not suffocate. Wong Lo had a huge rock on his leg. He could not move, and when Ah Chu and his team managed to move it off, it was easy to see that the man’s leg was broken. While the other men worked to free Ah Woo, Ah Chu set to work setting the bones like he had done with his duck when he was a child. The ground cannabis in its wax ball had been given to him by Law Kee. It would be as good as anything. Ah Woo had injured his shoulder. He needed urgent acupuncture. None of the men had this knowledge, they would need to walk through Lawrence township to the Chinese camp outside the town boundary.

As night fell, the team used Manuka branches and flax lashing to form a stretcher with two shoulder yokes on the outside. Over the top they lay a blanket. Two men would carry the injured. They hoped that the Chinese doctor would be at the Lawrence Camp.

‘Come on you must come to the camp as well.’ Ah Chu had walked over to Law Kee’s hut. You must not stay here alone. So the Chinese men moved, two walking with the stretcher and the rest with their usual shuffle formed a line with their baskets swaying.

Lawrence seemed very busy. Men in dark suits some with tall hats stopped talking and stared in silence as they walked along. Women, in black dresses wore shoes that were visible under their wide skirts. The Chinese men yelled at each other and pointed at what they saw, slowly coming to a stop.

‘Keep walking,’ yelled Ah Chu, ‘don’t stop here. This is not a good place.’

‘But do you see those shoes?’

‘Feet so large.’

‘Like boats.’

‘Ha, the underclass.’ They simply could not help themselves staring.

‘Keep walking,’ yelled Ah Chu as one wagon after another passed them by.

‘Keep walking,’ yelled Ah Chu when one of the wagons looked like stopping.

‘Keep to the plan,’ he yelled as the wagon driver stepped onto the road. The men walked to each side of the stretcher. ‘Don’t stop, just keep on walking even if it is slower.’ There was panic in his voice. ‘I’ll talk to the man.’

‘Like a lift?’ asked the wagon driver. You can put the stretcher on the back of the wagon. I’ll take you to the Camp.’

‘No, it’s okay, okay,’ spoke Ah Chu. ‘We okay.’

‘Come on now, I’m only trying to help.’ As the team of Chinese moved past the wagon, they closed around the stretcher and stopped the driver from coming closer. The injured men, who had started to make a noise had now made it their business to make more. Right on cue they opened their eyes and they yelled in Chinese, ‘white ghosts, white ghosts, no, no, no’ The wagon driver frowned.

‘Keep walking,’ yelled Ah Chu to his team. Then he turned to the wagon driver and said, ‘Thank you but we okay.’

‘Ungrateful bunch. Don’t you see I’m only trying to help, you ignorant lot!’ and with that he mounted his wagon and drove off. Little did he know that the stretcher was a lot heavier than the two thin miners. They were lying on all the gold.

Edit 4 Part 2 Chapter 11 (Naseby)

1874 - The wind that blew through Milkman's Gully

'I'm amazed we've become such good friends.' Ah Chu and his friend Wong Tai were drinking tea and smoking pipe tobacco. Wong Tai smiled but said nothing. 'Friends are hard to replace. My grandfather used to say, that a man can re-marry and have another wife, he can have another child, but he cannot replace a friend.' Both men continued to smoke their pipes enjoying the ambiance they shared. No more words were needed. The silent language of understanding always provided precious moments.

The winter had been relatively mild and the gold mining excellent. The whole team had been very happy, and as the season ended. The men had decided to move here and there.

'I've enjoyed being on your team. Learnt so much about mining so now I can go to other places.' Wong Tai told his friend.

'Have you thought where you will go?'

'It's too hectic here in Gabriel's Gully, and I don't like the treatment we are getting in Lawrence. Walking through the town is very disturbing. I am so tired of the children pulling on my queue. I am tired of the adults yelling at me telling me to 'bugger off'. Do you know what 'bugger' really means? It is so rude, humans acting like animals.' Ah Chu nodded. He knew of that treatment, but some people were better at ignoring it than others. Those who retaliated either won for the moment and the white devils backed off, or they were beaten up. Walking in groups was sometimes helpful but nothing was tried and true for safety.

'I know you like to be alone, but you know the dangers of doing that don't you?'

Wong Tai laughed. 'You know me too well. I have often thought of finding a small claim and working at it quietly by myself. There is something wonderful in listening to the birds sing. They sing like I have never heard before. I love it.' Wong Tai looked at his friend and smiled with a sense of contentment.

'Yes, I agree with you, but there are dangers as well.'

'In Lawrence, but perhaps in other places it is not so bad.'

Ah Chu did not share his friend's optimism, his own sense of caution never left him, watchful of what men might do, rather than what they usually did. 'Well, be careful then.'

‘Of course, my friend. I’ll miss you as well.’

‘You have been an excellent student and learnt so quickly. One day you should become an interpreter.’

‘No, I don’t think my English will ever be that good.’

‘Just practise, that is all you need,’ and both men laughed but Ah Chu smiled with satisfaction. This man had higher status than he, from a learned family yet here in a land far away from home he was treating him like an equal.

‘Yeah, I understand. I’ve appreciated your knowledge and education.’ Ah Chu’s sense of deprivation of his own education was a lot less when he was learning new things, new ideas, thinking in new ways of the world.

It took several weeks before Wong Tai was sufficiently organised to move. He had to pack up his personal things and dismantle his hut. It was easier to rent a wagon and move everything than to have to start again, picking up a piece of timber left here, or find a tin to flatten so as to stop the rain spoiling a dry bed.

When men were on the move it was like another kind of fever, contagious, it never took long before everyone was into it. Especially after a lucrative year, so many of the men returned to China. No-one argued with them, everyone understood.

Others wanted to move off to other places in small groups, to get their own claims, or as the law had changed to find new tailings of the Europeans and go through them methodically. Some had planned to go to Westport where there were new large mines opening up, while a few went south where a small Canton had been established. It was rumoured that it was warmer because it was closer to the sea, and the gold was in fine beautiful flakes. With people here and there it was hard to track anyone until they settled down.

Wong Tai was nearly ready to leave but he started to fret. He had ordered some books and papers from Hongkong. Reading material was like gold to the mind, and in the last two shipments, the mail had not arrived.

‘I’d like to go, but the parcel has not turned up. It may not find me at my new place.’ Ah Chu could see that Wong Tai was worried but he also knew that sometimes parcels did not turn up at all.

‘Can you send word as to where you are, and look, if it turns up, I’ll come on over.’ Within the mining community, people were very hospitable, calling in on anyone’s hut for shelter. There was always some food to eat, a seat at the fire, and a space on the floor for sleeping. Even those who did not come from the same village,

providing they were Chinese, they would be treated with generosity. In a tough life, a little hospitality was certainly appreciated.

After two months the parcel arrived at Ah Chu's team. He sighed. Someone had told him that Wong Tai had gone to Naseby. He looked at the box. It was a lot bigger than a few books, and it was heavy. On closer inspection there was straw packaging which probably meant something made of porcelain. These were expensive and precious. Ah Chu had missed his friend since he had left and decided that a personal visit might be a good idea.

Ah Chu's own team had settled in. Since it was his claim, he would still receive a little income from the mining. All the men could have bought a mining licence but they liked to see if they could save that expense. The police seem to think all the Chinese looked the same so some hid, and one would say they were Ah Chu and show his piece of paper. They had done it before, so they would try again.

Ah Chu legs seemed to have run out of energy. They were beginning to ache and Ah Chu had wished he had not given up so many precious days for this visit. The load seemed to have gotten heavier each day.

When the Chinese went from one place to another, they would first find *Tongyung Gai* Chinese Street. There was one wherever the Chinese had established themselves; maybe only a simple row of huts, and if the miners looked as though they were staying, something more substantial. This one was very new and basic.

'I'm looking for Wong Tai,' Ah Chu enquired.

'He will be pleased you have arrived. You know he's not here; he has his own hut. To get to him, you need to take the track on the other side and make your way up the hill. There is a small clearing and he has built his hut there.'

'So he's well established is he?'

'Well some of us have been amazed. He unloaded the wagon of building materials and slowly piece by piece he walked them up to the clearing. He's made a good job of his hut. The other month when he came down to buy some provisions, and invited us to a meal. When we went he had caught a rabbit, a couple of pigeons and gathered some vegetables from the forest. Now he has an garden growing that is producing well, and the last we heard was looking for chickens to rear. Resourceful one, that one.' Ah Chu agreed. That sounded like his friend. 'But he's a loner.'

Ah Chu left *Tongyuan Gai* and found the track. It was hard to find the beginning of it, but further on it became quite an established path. Sure enough

hugging close to the cliff was Wong Tai's hut, positioned to catch the sun. Behind were the mountains, shaped like the backbone of a dragon. Perfect feng shui. On one side was the vegetable garden with a very good crop of cabbages and in front a goose that acted like a guard dog.

'I was expecting you, sit down and rest. I'll make tea.' Wong Tai was filled with smiles. Ah Chu slumped onto a stool, and then moved to a box because he needed to rest his back.

'Your mail.' Ah Chu pointed to the basket from his pole. 'How are you? Tell me your news.' He walked into his hut. It was made to fit him snugly better than how he had constructed the last hut at Gabriel's. The doorway was only tall enough for his small frame, the bed only wide enough for him to lie down and there were no windows. There were a series of red paper inscriptions bearing learned phrases of poetic composition on the walls and the door. It showed that this house had a learned scholar. The one over the meat safe brought a smile from Ah Chu. 'Yellow Gold come abundantly,' and the one over the door read 'The five blessings come here.' His adherence to the ideals of Confucius was not missed. Ah Chu saw his learned friend at his best.

To one side of the wall was the urinal, a bottle with the base broken off, set in the wall with a bucket outside to catch the night dirt ready to be diluted then used in the garden. Ah Chu smiled when he noted hanging on the wall, a long thin stick that would be used as a check that neither cheeky nor naughty children had blocked the bottle-neck with dirt. Maybe this was the reason Wong Tai wanted to be alone, away from small daily harassment of being Chinese, children targeted them for what they called 'high spirits' and 'playful pranks' or 'just for fun.'

The luxury was the fireplace, with a small chimney pot on the roof made from flattened tins, that once held delicious things to eat. Chinese peanuts that had been boiled then dried and did not go rancid. Or sweets, that so many of the men carried around with them all the time, rotting their own teeth, but also calming some of the children who harassed. Or maybe there was a tin of luxurious dried mushrooms, ready to flavour any meal or offer a texture so important to Chinese cooking. Now empty, and beaten flat and showing signs of rust, it was impossible to tell. But a house always bore the food print of every owner, their favourite foods, their priorities. The tins were such a good source of building material to cover a hole here or there, or curve around between the roof and the chimney. Wong Tai was not a great drinker for the house site lacked the heaps of empty bottles, nor were there many other bottles, clay ones with a small spout

ready for pouring, a tablespoon at a time, into the precious meat, or to flavour the sauce with which to coat the vegetables. He must have been using it sparingly.

‘Thank you for coming to visit. I have found a small mining spot up on that river, but I have made my hut here. The water is close by and this spot gets the warmth of the sun and the shelter with the trees. I would rather grow vegetables than mine these days. I am surprised you found me.’

‘I had to ask the men in *Tongyung Gai* and they knew where you were. Have you not thought it would be better to live with them?’

‘No, I love being alone.’ The two friends drank cup after cup of tea, and smoked tobacco with a sense of contentment as they talked about the familiar. From time to time they even broke into their favourite Jasmine Flower Song that expressed a sense of appreciation of something beautiful and shared between friends.

‘Hao yi mei li mo li hua

Oh good beautiful jasmine flower

Hao yi mei li mo li hua

Fen fang mei li man zhi ya

You xiang you bai ren ren kua

Rang wo lai jiang ne zhai xia

Let me pluck you down

Song gei bie ren jai

Give to someone

Mo li hua ya mo li hua

Jasmine flower (*translated into Cantonese*)

Long after the first star had risen, the men eventually slept. When Ah Chu woke, he realised that Wong Tai was up. The household fire inside and outside were both cold. The teapot had not been filled, a most unusual sign. Ah Chu thought of starting up the fire, but decided that since Wong Tai had not responded to being called, he would wander over to the little village. Here some of the men looked like they were suffering with a hangover, others looked like they would be sleeping for the whole day. The heap of empty bottles told of many previous sessions.

‘Is Wong Tai here?’

‘No, not seen him. Come have a cup of tea with us. We have not seen you for so long.’ So Ah Chu settled down to share news, and talk about life and enjoy the company of men he already knew.

‘Wong Tai comes and goes. Maybe he is selling some vegetables, or checking a trap or something. He will return later.’ And there were nods of agreement. Ah Chu did not give it another thought, until another hour or two had passed. When Ah Chu returned to Wong Tai’s hut, there was no signs of him, nor any response to calls or any signs that had anyone had recently walked where Ah Chu’s feet were placed. Eventually Ah Chu decided to return to the Chinese village and get some of the men to help him look.

‘Maybe he has gone into town. Is that very far away?’

‘No not far if you go over the hill.’ It was Sunday, so they all knew that the town would be quiet until after church around 11.00am.

The path that the Chinese took to Naseby had been well worn but was also well hidden from the township. No-one would spot a John Chinaman until they were close into the town. As the men came closer they could hear a commotion, lots of noise, yelling. As they got closer, the men not wanting to be seen to create even more trouble, hid behind the trees and watched. They could hear the children chanting their usual song.

Ching Chong Chinaman,
Very very sad,
Pissed on his cabbages,
And they all went bad.

This day there was another sense to the taunts, another feeling in the air. In front of the children was Wong Tai and knowing that he would often hand out a sweet or two to the children, they waited.

‘This does not look very good,’ Ah Chu whispered.

‘Shhhh’ and they all watched without believing what they were seeing.

Older children had joined the group. The taunting got louder and louder. Ah Chu’s concern mounted when he saw one of the older children flashed a knife blade.

The group started to change as the young children dropped out, overtaken by young adults. When Wong Tai started to run they crowd let out a cheer and ran after him.

‘Get him, get him,’ some of the older children called, while the younger children turned this into another rhyme.

‘Let’s get him,
Chinaman head in a pail,

Let's get him,
Cut off his tail'

At this Wong Tai went to grab his own queue, but it was too late. Someone behind had caught him and before he knew it, he was on the ground surrounded by a group of children with gleeful expressions. Then as the adults grouped around the children moved away and before Wong Tai could pick himself up he was pelted with a host of objects, some hard, some sticky some that looked and smelt like rotting fruit. He ended up curling into a ball.

'We have to stop this, come on all of us together.' Ah Chu was so nervous he could hardly speak.

'No, no, there aren't enough of us, they'll get us all. We can't do anything.'

'This is wrong, we have to fight back.'

'Well do it yourself.' Ah Chu felt sick and started down the slope and suddenly somehow his courage evaporated. When he realised that he could no longer see what was happening he walked back to the original lookout. 'I am a coward' he thought, 'I do not have enough courage to help my friend and relieve his suffering. What kind of friend am I?' he wondered.

Youths were being replaced by men who had gathered around Wong Tai. They were not showing any sort of compassion, standing and laughing although Ah Chu wondered what they were laughing at. He could see that they had rolled Wong Tai over with their feet as they might a hedgehog followed by a kick here and there. The more noise Wong Tai made the greater the delight of the men around and Ah Chu stood feeling more and more of a coward. When Wong Tai started to scream, several men held him and despite him lashing out with his legs, they quickly pinned him down and stripped him of his clothes. As the squirming increased, one cut off his queue, pulled his hands away from hiding his private parts and tied them behind his back, laughing at the Chinaman's embarrassment. One of the men arrived with a barrel that was outside the general store. They then broke both ends and as Wong Tai was now a tight ball it was easy to place him into the crate.

In the township the bells of the church had been ringing for some time covering up the crowd noise. Unaware of the commotion, men and women walked to join others milling around, chatting or passively watching. Men were gathered around ready to go to the pub. As they glanced up the road, they stopped to look. Before long a group of people were rolling the barrel down over the gravel of the main road. Increased numbers of people continued to jeer and throw whatever was at hand at the victim inside. All

Wong Tai could do was to scream and yowl like a cat. All his village relatives could do was watch with horror, riveted by their own sense of fear and helplessness.

At the end of the road they turned around and rolled the barrel for a return journey then once more down the road. There Wong Tai was left. The entertainment value was over. The village relatives could no longer see, and also were too frightened to walk out into the street. Instead they watched the local populous promenade up and down talking in groups, acknowledging others, while more men arrived by horseback and in that fluid movement flicked themselves off their horses, hitched them up and walked into the pub. The town was all a buzz without a thought that anyone could have stopped such an incident. With consciences not moved to do anything, they returned home for their Sunday mutton roast.

‘We have to get him.’ said one of the Chinese.

‘Not until it is quiet,’ said Ah Chu.

‘This is worse than a nightmare,’ and the men fell silent with their own thoughts. There were no words to explain the behaviour to such a mild mannered man. Ah Chu and his team crept down to the township and still hiding in the trees made their way closer to the barrel. Not a sound was heard, and they wondered if Wong Tai might be badly injured or even dead. But they stopped all movement when they saw a man walking over to the barrel. From his clothing, they could identify him as a man from the church.

‘Yesu, Yesu, help my friend,’ called out Ah Chu.

Carefully they got on all fours to coax Wong Tai out. The smell of urine was particularly strong, and Ah Chu wondered if men had urinated on him as part of the humiliation. Yesu untied his hands and handed the severed queue to Ah Chu, then helped Wong Tai out. When Wong Tai looked around he looked like he no longer recognised anyone.

‘Wong Tai, come home with us,’ but in front of them was not a man, but a wild animal. The terror in his eyes, the throaty growl he gave off, the smell, his matted hair covered with faeces and urine. ‘How could anyone do this to you? Come.’ But Wong Tai grabbed the clothes from Yesu and fled into the bushes.

‘We must get him, and wash him down and care for him.’ Ah Chu and one other cousin stayed behind, while the rest returned to their village to boil water, make food. They were glad to be away from the scene.

Once more Ah Chu tried to find his friend. This time they called him in soft voices hoping that might assure him that they were not going to hurt him.

‘How I wish we were allowed to have women in New Zealand. This is a time for his wife to be here, she is what he needs.’

‘Well you’ll have to pretend to be his wife then,’ and the two men laughed breaking the tension.

When Wong Tai surfaced again, he was sitting on a large stone. Ah Chu trod gently as he called ‘Wong Tai, I’m Ah Chu, remember?’ Wong Tai was silent but the closer they got to him the more he looked like he would bolt. They had to get to him.

The two men broke into a quiet song, ‘Oh good beautiful jasmine flower’ the two men sang quietly. ‘*Hao yi mei li mo li hu, Fen fang mei li man zhi ya*’ they sang softer and softer the closer they got. Wong Tai looked at them, still not showing recognition, but at least calmer. When they reached him, they continued with their song, and walked to the beat of the music.

At the Chinese village where the other men had boiled the water and made prepared some food one of them said, ‘Look what we found.’ Wong Tai’s pole and basket had been carried back and left by one of the huts. The baskets were filled with cabbages for sale. Ah Chu wondered if he had already found someone to buy them, and maybe expected them to be delivered the night before when he happened to turn up. The Chinese could not bear to touch them and after many days, threw them into the bushes.

Wong Tai did not flinch when they sluiced him down with cold water, then soaped him up and dipper-full by dipper-full of warm water, they rinsed him off. Ah Chu dipped the queue into the warm water washed it with soap and laid it out to dry. Wong Tai would be need it to be buried with him when he died.

That evening, Ah Chu had to spoon food into Wong Tai, but he started to refuse food after half a bowl. At that point they decided to walk him back to his own hut and lay him down in his bed to sleep. Ah Chu went off by himself and sat on a stone, meant for appreciating the sound of the forest, wind and water. Tonight everything was bursting into messages but Ah Chu was too confused to listen. Since he had been in New Zealand, he had never felt the real physical distance between him and his wife. He touched the chain around his neck. How much he wanted to talk to her, discuss the incident and try to make sense of it, and to share with her his overwhelming sense of guilt for not going to help. Ah Chu who seldom drank, found he had sipped most of the bottle of whiskey that was in Wong Tai’s hut. Eventually he collapsed with exhaustion and slept on his mat. During the night he woke several times to Wong Tai’s screams. Each time he sat with his friend to calm him, and returned to his own bed even more exhausted than the hours before.

In the following week even though Ah Chu desperately wanted to return to Gabriel's, he sat by his friend, coaxing him to eat. But as the days passed Wong Tai would run off if a European was seen. When they offered him food, he sometimes would not eat, other times he'd shovel the food into his mouth, and sometimes would start to eat and then yell 'poison, poison' and throw the food at his cousins. He started hearing voices, screaming for no apparent cause. Other times he seemed unable to walk outside his hut. Most of the days he just sat staring at a blank space.

Then when Ah Chu felt like he could leave Wong Tai alone, he went into Naseby to find the Constable Finnigan, the local policeman.

'You hear bad men hurt our cousin,' he said staring the policeman in the eye.

'Yes, the minister has told me.' The men looked at each other.

'Minister?'

'He's the man from the church.'

'Oh Yesu, he helped.'

'Bad men need to go to court.'

The policeman sighed 'There were so many men that I am not sure if this will happen.'

'Why?'

'Too many people.' Finnigan had never found the Chinese that difficult, but in this case he really did not know what to do. Getting witnesses and signed statements would all take so much time. 'I'll look into it.'

'I'm at Gabriel's Gully. You come over and tell me. Wong Tai was my best friend.' But as Ah Chu turned he knew that probably nothing would happen. The final 'yes, yes' was said with no meaning or intention. Ah Chu walked out of the police station and as the group of them walked back, they expected not to hear anything of this most shameful incident.

After a few more days, the group decided that Wong Tai needed help beyond what they could offer. What he needed was his daughter-in-law to care for him, but that was not possible in New Zealand. Many of the miners had paid into the *Cheong Shing Tong* the Splendid Goodness Society set up with the express purpose of caring for the single miners. Two of his cousins would accompany Wong Tai to Dunedin. As they packed him up to leave, just before his cousin came to walk away, Ah Chu looked at his friend, and lowering himself onto his knees, bowed deeply to his friend.

‘I am so sorry, my friend. I am so sorry I never had enough courage to rescue you. I feel such a coward.’ Then he rose and standing in front of him said, ‘Look after yourself and come back when you are well.’ Wong Tai just stared at him. Not one word had he spoken since the incident.

When Ah Chu returned to Gabriel’s Gully he told of the incident. So terrible was it, that they all hoped that Wong Tai might be saved by death. No-one even a braver person could withstand that kind of humiliation.

‘We must stop this happening!’

‘I do not have enough courage to stop this sort of thing,’ said Ah Chu.

‘You cannot be expected to do so. Either we as a group must do something, attack together or some other way.’

‘How?’ and the men fell into silence. They had sent a letter to Dunedin whose invitation to the Chinese to come to Gabriel’s Gully, assuring them of safety under the law, and yet it had not protected them. ‘We must keep together as a group, we must work hard and not make trouble, we only fight if we are provoked....’ and so the lists went on, true or not. The old miners had heard it all and already knew it was just talk. Some of the old miners decided that the new chums were increasingly like the white ghosts, more and more talkative each day. ‘*Sai hee*, waste of breath,’ they would mutter and walk away. Resigned, they could hear their fathers telling them that ‘suffering and pain is what life is about.’ It was fate. It just added to the urgency to return home as the only avenue of escape.

Edit 4 Part 2 Chapter 12. Lawrence

1880 - The Wind of Welcome

The Chinese camp at Lawrence was an ideal midway place. Chinese had come from mines far and wide. It was a meeting place for old and new.

‘Going home?’ asked Ah Chu to an old team mate who left Gabriel’s to go to Westport.

‘Yeah, I’ve had enough. Life is so hard here, and I promised the family I would return once I had enough money.’ Ah Chu paused in silence. He had made the same promise yet he made no move to go home. After a while he had decided it was only possible if he had enough money although he was not sure how much that would be.

‘When do you leave?’

‘Next ship leaves in ten days,’ the man’s eyes glazed over. ‘I have missed my wife so much, I no longer remember her voice. My children do not know me. The last one is, um, four years old. It’s time to return.’ Ah Chu nodded in agreement. He had not yet seen his own child. Over time he had stopped thinking of the situation. So many men fell into depression with such powerful thoughts as though they were pulled along like a kite, their souls buffeted in the wind and in the end even the strongest men fell to the ground, spent.

‘If you are staying, here are some tools. I have found this sluice box very good. It’s that new design, by James Young. You know him don’t you?’ Ah Chu nodded in silence. He looked at the tools.

‘Hey thanks,’ and he moved to tie the new gift onto his shoulder yoke ready to leave. ‘Good luck!’ he called to his friend as he walked away. A feeling of envy ran through him. Maybe he should go home as well and he sighed at the thought.

Lawrence camp had certainly changed. Once it was a mass of temporary buildings. Now the buildings were permanent. The hotel and main shop were built of handsome red bricks, carried in by the wagonload. The interior walls had been lined with wide rimu boards that gave off a lovely warm feel. It was so much more inviting than the newspaper that covered the mud huts.

‘Look at the improvements!’ It was the Reverend Don. All the Chinese knew him as he visited most of the mines. He was memorable because he was the only white ghost who spoke Cantonese. When Ah Chu first met him, he was fascinated. It made a

strange picture in his mind, a white man standing in front of him and out came fluent Chinese. It didn't look right.

'Long time no see, Ah Chu?' It was a direct translation from the Chinese word order.

'Oh Yesu Don, I velly busy.'

'Ah Chu, I have never known you not to be busy. Here's an apple.'

'*Pung gor (check Cantonese spelling) aye ya.*' Ah Chu had not tasted an apple for some time. The hard outer layer of the skin gave a texture to the distinctly sour interior. 'Wow,' his mouth was instantly cleared as he crunched. 'What are they called?'

'Peasgood Nonesuch.'

'What?' Ah Chu could not believe something so simple could have such a complicated name. 'Pee-zee-good-nun-suchee'

'Hey that's good, Ah Chu. Your English is getting really good.' Ah Chu never heard that, he was still baffled by the name. Such a contrast, ying yang.

'Yesu Don, I call peasee-velly-good.' Both men laughed and continued to eat their apples.

'Come to church on Sunday, Ah Chu.'

'Oh I back at mine by then. If I in Lawrence, I see you eh?' Ah Chu had been to many church meetings. Many went, Yesu Don would talk, they listened, but the best was after when they were given food between bread to eat. Sometimes they even had English lessons.

As the two men strolled past the next store Ah Chu entered the following one. Inside smelt and looked as familiar as family. Entering the store was always a challenge as to what to look at; the sealed glassware with strange roots and fruits inside. There were the long line of porcelain jars with mysterious liquids like soya sauce and oils for cooking or sauces for different mixes for different dishes. There was the familiar alcohol in glass bottles, popular to drown the aches and pains of a hard day or a week's work. Funeral paraphernalia was also in a muddled heap, paper money, paper gold ingots to be burnt for the ancestor to enjoy in the life that followed, fireworks to chase away the nasty spirits, red paper for writing messages, white scarves for the mourners, things that made sense in a confusing world.

There were also some of the everyday items, soap for washing, matches, tobacco by the box, utensils and occasionally items of memories – a Chinese statue, a bowl beautifully decorated with Chinese characters, a teapot with its padded basket, Chinese

crockery, frypans, woks, cleavers, knives, chopsticks, toothpicks, and bolts of silk cloth that the Europeans particularly loved if they had the courage to come into the shop. Everything for the practical and the aesthetic.

There were tea chests stacked to the ceiling, and bags of sugar. The sacks of rice competed for space to the ceiling and waiting under the floor boards and in the walls, rats and mice waiting to be fed, or a cat or two ready to pounce. In one area where treats were stored there were tins with special dried peanuts, sugar sweets wrapped in paper, and special dried fruits first wrapped in cellophane then and then outer paper sheet with the advertisements in red or blue ink. Squeezed in front of the food, or behind or around it sat the long handled shovels, the picks essential for breaking up the rocks, and a few sluice forks that assisted the miner in getting the rock into the sluice box. The air space around the head was filled to the brim, with fitches of bacon, nests of buckets, water tight boots tied in their pairs, oilskins coats and general warm clothing. Anyone over five feet six inches had to duck.

There were two places where the storeowners sat. If the store offered the services of a bank then one would be in the securely built area with its lockable door. A small sliding window through which the transaction was made was designed to reduce the temptation of stealing either the money or the gold.

The other area was the familiar section of small drawers with a variety of herbal medicines weighed on a selection of scales according to the quantity sold. The smallest was the tiny pan no larger than the top of a Chinese tea cup, reserved for the all important opium.

Lawrence had several stores so competition was reasonably fierce. Each had supplies from different companies in Dunedin. One was direct from James Young. Customers were often divided according to clan lines, but not definitely. Many people just went for the cheapest price. Many people went because the rest of the team preferred to go to one shop over another or the nominated cook of the week insisted the best ingredients could be bought from here rather than there. After a purchase, a cup of hot liquid, that had been sitting over the stove, bubbling away, was offered to the customers. The strength of the tea had enough caffeine to jolt the senses into action.

At the back was a small area for the storeowner to sleep. All his waking hours he was available for business, for his store was treated like his own home. Shopkeepers tended to be of a similar personality, fountains of local gossip and wonderful story tellers in their own right. Some people went to the store where the news was known to

be the best. Many cups of tea later, having satisfied the need to be together, teams would plan the next trip because this was the real reason they came to Lawrence camp.

‘Good business?’ Ah Chu had made his way to the resident Chinese doctor. There were men sitting around, none looked like they were dying. All were either drinking hot water or tea.

‘You did an excellent job on the leg, where did you learn?’

‘On duck legs when I was a child.’

‘Duck legs?’

‘They can be stupid birds you know, but if they injure their legs then it was either mend them or kill them. Sometimes we could not afford to kill them, so I got to mend them.’

‘You have a good feel.’ A surge of pride went through Ah Chu ‘Wong Lo should be okay, although as he is quite old, he might have a limp. I suggested that he return home and I think he also feels like it’s his time.’ It was the fourth man from the team to tell him they were going home. He might as well call that five, because Ah Woo would also go as well. He and Wong Lo were like brothers. One would not stay in New Zealand while the other return to the village.

The restaurant next to the hotel was very busy. Ah Woo’s shoulder did not stop him eating.

‘You okay?’

‘I got the treatment but then he pulled my arm and I thought he was going to pull it out of the socket. Suddenly he let my arm go, and after the second treatment and a massage, I think it will be alright. Come eat with me.’ Ah Chu sat down. ‘I think it might be time.’ Ah Chu did not let him finish.

‘Yeah I know, you’re off home. Heard Ah Woo wants to go as well.’

‘Yes, in three months, when Ah Woo can walk unaided, we shall go. We have talked to Law Kee and will build another hut next to him and stay there. Both of us have enough funds to live on, and we can help Law Kee as well. We need to show him our gratitude.’

The two men shared food, and as others of the team walked past they were joined until they took over one table then a second. The food and alcohol flowed. Men were congratulated on their good luck, men shared their news, men declared they were leaving and were farewelled. Ah Chu knew that in times of change more men would

come to him. He just wondered how much longer they could mine the cave. He needed to think through a new plan.

Ah Chu walked back to the cave with some of the men. He was unusually quiet, toying with leaving or staying. Usually it did not bother him, but this still evening, after the company of so many good men, he was loath to see them go. They were being models of filial piety and respected to him as their leader.

Three months later when James came to Gabriels, he gave Ah Chu a bundle of letters. Once the world had quietened, Ah Chu took them out and started reading. The first one was from his Father. *Please help. Can Ah Fong come to you?* The note was unusual in that the writing was weak, the ink was poor, the form of the characters uncertain and the paper looked like it had fed a couple of rats. Ah Chu stared at the writing and feelings of concern made him realise that life in the village might have been harder than he imagined.

With a sigh, he opened the next letter. It was from Tien Tze. He smiled when he read his name, as memories poured back to him. *Ah Chu, I am very reluctant to be writing this letter. We are near starving. I wondered if you could sponsor Meng and Fok to New Zealand to join your mining team. I do not know what else to do.* Ah Chu stared at the letter. In the months between letters to and from New Zealand, such a lot must have happened in the village. The latest arrivals had left before the last monsoon season. There was a brief note from the midwife who delivered his sister. The next letter was from the parents of Ah Wak, his friend from school, one class ahead of him. *Ah Chu, our filial son came home when he heard of our situation. This was not a good solution. We do not have enough food to feed him. Can he come to you as his old friend. He will be angry if he knew I am writing to you, but I do not know what else to do.* Ah Chu could not believe his eyes. How many of the other letters were like this? The next one was from someone whose writing he did not recognise. When he opened the letter he gasped. *My dear elder son. I am now weak and writing to say goodbye. Your Mother.* He read the letter several times. He wondered if his father even knew about the letter. Immediately he made up his mind that he must help his relatives. If they all died, the ancestors would have no-one to attend to their graves for the following generations. If the village died, the ancestors would also die again. That would never do.

At daybreak, Ah Chu went over to another little Chinese village to look for James, but it seemed that he had left and was not due back for at least two weeks.

When Ah Chu returned to his own claim, he re-organised both men and equipment. Chinese teams had to work collectively, not just for efficiency, but also for safety, each praying to the gods to show them enough luck to strike that magical large pure nugget.

Ah Chu turned his mind to finding James. In Lawrence township, he decided that he would buy a ticket on the next coach to Dunedin. The European men in the shop parted, conversations stopped, and people stared. Ah Chu had to take a big breath. Courage took energy. He would not do this if he was not in a hurry. Paying for the cheapest ticket, he would sit outside away from the Lords and Ladies in their finery, or others who sat on the seats at the back. He would sit on the wagon tray even if it was uncomfortable. When the coach pulled up from Queenstown, everyone got on, one by one. When the coach driver saw Ah Chu he called out,

‘Do I have to take him?’ Ah Chu gave him his ticket.

‘I pay for seat, I come.’

‘Like hell, no Chinks on my wagon.’

‘No’ Ah Chu called as loud as he dared. The man who had sold the ticket walked outside, and Ah Chu quickly jumped on the back of the wagon. Meanwhile the two argued on the footpath.

‘It’s not just me, the other passengers don’t want a Chink on board.’

‘He’s paid, and he’s to go on the coach.’

‘I’ll give him back his fare.’

‘No, you’re to take him.’ The other passengers looked out of the coach and pretended that nothing was happening, although they showed concern on their faces.

‘Don’t want to catch some kinda disease from him,’ one was overheard saying.

‘Bloody Chinks, the sooner they go the better,’ and inside the coach they all agree with each other while psychologically clinging together like lost monkeys on their surrogate mothers.

Ah Chu pretended not to hear. His English was not that good, but he got the gist of the conversation. He had been on the edge of so many similar conversations in the past and reckoned that about 85% of the time, just sitting quiet trying to be invisible, got him what he wanted. The other 15% was a hassle, but today he had no time for a big hassle, he had to find James. The grumpy coach driver mounted his seat, muttering how he hatred Chinks, and glaring at Ah Chu as he passed waving his finger at him, like the finger of God.

‘Any trouble, you’re off. You understand?’ Ah Chu had long figured that nodding in agreement could make things worse, so he stared into the horizon, way past

anything close, over to where the land met the sky. His ears had been turned off. He sighed when the coach moved.

There were two white ghosts on the back of the coach. They staring at him for a while. At the next stop, Ranfurly, one person got off, and none got on. At Middlemarch a group of men wanted to get on, one into the main coach and two at the back. The two looked at Ah Chu.

‘What’s that Chink doing here?’

‘Leave him alone, he’s paid his fare.’ Ah Chu looked up, the first passengers stood up and came over to where he was sitting. They sat next to him. ‘You find your own seat and leave this bloke alone.’

The new passengers looked at each other, and jumped onto the back, then took the places which the first couple had vacated. For the rest of the trip Ah Chu felt protected, and even exchanged smiles with his protectors from time to time. Before they arrived in Dunedin, Ah Chu found several preserved plums at the bottom of his pocket. He put them into his hand, and offered them to his protectors.

‘You like?’ he asked.

‘Oh, I love these things,’ one of the men said with glee. He grabbed a preserved plum, unwrapped it from its layers of paper and popped it into his mouth. ‘Great taste,’ he said knowingly. ‘Have you tried one?’ he asked his friend.

‘Nah, bit weird.’

‘No try, they’re delicious, a little sweet and sour.’

When he tried it, the expression on his face made Ah Chu laugh, a look of complete surprise, a discovery.

‘Where can you get these?’ he asked.

‘Ask at any of the Chinese grocery shops, they’re in big tins. Just have a look and you will find them.’

‘How come you know about this stuff?’

‘Been hanging out with these guys for a while now. They are great, generous, always offering food. I can’t speak their language but they always want to communicate and we get the hang of each other.’ It was food for thought.

‘My name’s John.’

Ah Chu burst into laughter

‘Like John Chinaman!’

John laughed, yeah, John Walters.

‘Me? Ah Chu.’ Then Ah Chu remembered that they had to do that strange thing, of grabbing the hand of the other person, as though helping an elderly person out of a chair. It was very strange, but he had learnt that a bow generated laughter rather than respect.

‘Off to Dunedin? You know James Young?’

‘James? I must see him, quick, quick.’

‘Urgent eh?’

‘Urgent?’ it was a new word.

‘Like quick quick.’

‘Oh’ said Ah Chu.

The two new passengers watched this conversation. They glared, and when eye contact was made they made faces, raised their fingers in rude gestures, or called out abuse, ‘filthy monkey, bugger off.’ Before very long the sense between the two groups amounted to a stand off.

‘No, no, calm down,’ said Ah Chu to John and his friend. ‘This won’t help.’ But before anyone could say anything, the wagon was slowing to go around a corner. Then Ah Chu found himself the subject of a heavy kick, and he fell off the wagon. At the same time, John grabbed one of the men, while his friend grabbed the other. The wagon stopped, and the driver got out.

‘What the hell, I told you,’ but he stopped when he did not see the Chinese man. Instead there were two men with their to tied behind their backs.’.

‘You can throw them off,’ John said gleefully and rather than ask questions the two men were rolled onto the road. The on coming traffic had to slow to a stop and John saw James at the helm of the wagon. It was full with groceries.

‘James stop!’ James saw John and waved. ‘Stop for Ah Chu. He’s along the road. He needs to talk to you,’ and he paused. ‘It’s urgent’.

‘Ah Chu? Okay. Where?’

‘Back along the road.’

‘Okay.’

Both wagons started up again and each went on its own journey. Along the road James saw Ah Chu, and stopped. There was an empty seat next to him.

‘What happened?’

‘Did you see those men on the wagon? Friend John, tied them up.’

‘They were on the road.’ Ah Chu laughed, at the image of the men being thrown off. Why even the bruise that was made when he was kicked seemed to mend immediately. ‘Was the driver out?’

‘Yes, he was red in the face yelling at John.’

‘I think he expected me to be there, because he really wanted to blame me.’ The more Ah Chu thought about it, the more delighted he felt.

‘Don’t worry, John is such a good man. He’s a friend to the Chinese,’ said James.

‘James, I need to sponsor a group of men from my village to come over here. Can you help me. It is urgent.’

‘How many?’

‘Four.’

‘Do you have a list of their names and villages?’

‘Yes here it is,’ and he handed over the sheet of paper.

‘That’ll be expensive you know. Let me think four men, um passage, poll tax and arrival into New Zealand. £100.’

‘We have been talking and discussing this in the team and we thought it would cost no more than £80 and that was considered expensive.’ James thought for a while. He knew he would have to pay the £10 Poll Tax, but he could probably get cheaper passages but... ‘That may be so, but I have to have a commission from this.’ Ah Chu was shocked.

‘James, I have learnt so much from you, and I have set up all these teams for you, and you get a commission from us all from our earnings from the claim. I have been working for you for years. Do you not think...’ but James was not listening.

‘Ah Chu, business is business. I make it a rule to take a commission on everything. But I will get passages as fast as possible and get those men out of the village. Have you got the money here?’

Ah Chu had the sovereigns already organised in a small bag and reached for an extra one.

‘I’d hoped you might find a way for this to be cheaper. If you do, please can you give me the change when the team arrives.’

‘Sure, of course I will.’ But they both knew he did not mean it. Ah Chu frowned and for the next few miles they rode in silence while he considered how his friend had

changed. He did not sound the same as when they were working together. He remembered what Mickey had said as well.

Edit 4 Part 2 – Chapter 13

1892 -The Wind that connects a fine thread of silk

When Ah Chu turned up at Gabriel's Gully everyone wanted to talk. Some news moved at the speed of a snail, and other news had a life like a tongue of fire. The most urgent piece of news was from Naseby.

'Heard about Wong Tai?'

'He's in hospital isn't he?'

'He was admitted into Seacliffe Mental Hospital.'

'*Mental* hospital?' Many were horrified.

'You know he never spoke in conversation again. I heard that his silence was only broken by loud screams of 'white ghosts!' 'devils!' 'poison!' and sometimes a high pitched piercing scream that went on and on until he was sedated.'

'Gosh, I hope they gave him opium.'

'That poor man suffered so much. You know it has only been six months.'

'And he has died.'

That prompted Ah Chu to say, 'I hope they buried his hair with him,' but no one knew. The gods would though.

Ah Chu rose from his seat, and walked into his hut. Here he found some joss sticks, lit three, bowed to the memory of his friend, and placed them in front of *Fook*, the God of Wealth, *Look*, the God of Prosperity and *Sow*, the God of longevity. (**check this out**) They were in the box sent to Wong Tai that the cousins insisted that Ah Chu take back to his own home. 'I am so sorry Wong Tai. You were such a precious friend. May you be in peace now.' Tears welled up to Ah Chu's eyes, as he thought of his friend. He was reminded of the incident and the guilt he felt. 'I am so sorry. I still have that feeling and I think I always will,' he said quietly. As he turned to leave, he touched the set of books and the porcelain figures. They had given so much information and pleasure, the ever popular set of classical texts; Ancient Matter- a forest of gems, The Concise Herbal Medicinal Guide, two books on acupuncture with numerous diagrams of the human body and the well used bilingual dictionary. Tomorrow he would go to the Joss House.

Now that Ah Chu had returned to Gabriel's he was determined to stop paying money to James. He would need to go somewhere else.

Law Kee had sold everything in his shop, his fowls and all the vegetables. It was only a little money but he needed to return home with his neighbours. Ah Chu decided to keep the goose. He could not bear to eat it, and he felt it had saved them once. It would be left in the vegetable patch to eat to its heart's content and he would take it with him to the next camp. He made arrangements for the wagon load, and goose, to go to Naseby and he would collect it on his way to Skippers.

All the departing men and Ah Chu left for Dunedin. This is where he would say his farewells and welcome his new team from his village. When he arrived he was pleasantly surprised. Everything had changed. Ah Chu wandered the area he had already walked around on his first trip. There were so many more houses, moving up on the hill where the dwellings were larger, grander and with such huge gardens. Ah Chu looked for vegetable gardens but had none been planted. It seemed such a waste of space.

In the city centre were banks, post offices, stores that sold machinery for farming, merchandise stores with women's and baby clothing. There were stores selling stoves and other things for the home and stacks of books in English. When he picked one up, he realised he only knew one word in a line. Not enough, so he put the book back. The church took his eye so he walked inside to view the high arched wooden ceiling and stained glass windows. When he sat at the back to gaze he wondered why people would build such a building and decided that the white ghost's gods must be rich. This would not be his place. He knew that. It had a strangeness, something he did not understand, something that got in the way so he could not relax and enjoy. When a white ghost dressed in black, walked past, Ah Chu sneaked out.

Tongyung Gai had also extended beyond recognition. There were now several Chinese grocery stores, and Ah Chu walked into each. He bought just a few luxuries, a tin of tobacco, a bag of salted plums that lasted longer because of the strength of salt/sweet flavour jolted the taste buds into a kind of taste shock. As he entered James' store he immediately realised why he no longer worked in the mines. Behind the counter of a very large store, were two Chinese men, probably his cousins, a woman with her tiny feet, probably his wife, and a baby, who clearly loved people and delighted the customers. Next door, Ah Chu paused to look at the men making sluice boxes and watched while they were doing a roaring trade to the new chums. Old seasoned miners came out muttering at the price. Next to the workshop was the restaurant and above both of these extensions was the accommodation for Chinese men. The second time he entered the store James was behind the counter.

‘Ah Chu, you must come eat and stay here. The ship is due tomorrow. Perfect timing.’ Ah Chu was happy to accept. Just before they were to leave for the ship, Ah Chu asked if there was any money left over from the fee he had given James. James just laughed.

‘Gosh, no. Why...’ and he paused. He thought it best he did not say he had been generous and offered hospitality to Ah Chu, and that he had accepted the gold as the last claim fee from him. ‘um, no but I will look it up again. How about buying your supplies from me tomorrow and I’ll give you a good discount and take you all back to Gabriel’s free.’

‘Sure,’ Ah Chu nodded but he neither felt any sense of gratitude nor generosity.

That evening Ah Chu wandered off along the street. Most men about to leave New Zealand were anxious to say goodbye to their friends knowing they may never see them again. Many including Ah Chu had visited the Joss House to give thanks.

There was something special in testing out the gods. Gambling gave such an opportunity. Luck was as important as food, woven into the very fabric of life.

The gambling saloon was a dingy establishment with no furniture other than the necessary tables. When it was busy as many as a hundred men could be squashed into a room without any complaints. The closeness of body to body gave a sense of community, belonging and atmosphere.

In the centre of the Fan Tan table was a square divided into four equal quarters numbered one to four. The banker would place a handful of small buttons, beads, coins, dried beans, pebbles, anything and cover them with a metal bowl. Players would bet on how many would be left after they had been withdrawn four at a time. The number left meant those bets would win the money of which a percentage went to the house. It was a quick, simple game of chance, a relief from the laboriousness of mining. Mild-mannered miners who avoided trouble and confrontation, turned out to be well nigh frantic with delight, yelling at the top of their voice, throwing up their hands, clapping, jumping up and down with excitement. Fan Tan was a simple game of chance and delight.

There were a group of Europeans who were present in the gambling hall. Ah Chu was surprised to see them here, but he could see that they had no problems in understanding the rules of Fan Tan. They too could add to the noise, and the more noise they made, the happier the Chinese seemed.

In one corner was a more serious group of players. Their game was Mah Jong. Ah Chu had not played Mah Jong for a while but he loved watching it. The ivory tiles were stacked to represent the Great Wall of China. It was a game of skill and chance. The four men playing were unknown to Ah Chu. Three were elegantly dressed. They did not speak the same dialect as Ah Chu but he could understand them well. Working in the mines with such a variety of home-landers had expanded his knowledge of Chinese dialects. A conversation started with the men.

‘Been here long?’

‘Mmmm, too long really.’ Ah Chu smiled. Most people were not interested. Long ago he realised that mining was very self-focused.

‘Oh that means you must be tenacious.’ Ah Chu liked that compliment. ‘Must have worked with lots of teams. How do you do it?’ When Ah Chu did not answer, the men around the table started to discuss the value of patience. They continued to talk about what they had seen with the Chinese in American. Ah Chu listened intently. The only times he had these kinds of conversation was with Wong Tai. How much he missed them.

‘Will you take this hand for me? I don’t want to stop the game,’ asked the fourth player. The other three all nodded and looked down as the tiles were shuffled by players pushing them into the centre. The fourth person stood and before he realised it Ah Chu sat down.

‘Ah, ah, ah,’ he said in hesitation.

‘Be back soon.’ It happened with such a smooth action that Ah Chu hardly noticed. The first round was lucky as often it is for a new player. He had a group of three north wind tiles being the wind of the round. He also had two the west wind tiles which was the wind for his position at the table. He just needed another tile and there it was. Before they had time to settle in, Ah Chu had ended the game. Money flew over the table as looks were exchanged. Everyone sat up to take note and add some extra concentration. Who was this guy? Ah Chu looked at the money. In this way he could win enough to take home. This was a lot easier than mining. He wanted more than money to live off and buy some land. He wanted to buy status for himself and most of all he wanted money to win over his father. Maybe this was a new way, a faster way. In a flash he visualised himself returning truly rich.

Ah Chu expected the fourth person to return, but it became apparent that after a few more rounds, this was not to be. As he thought of trying to leave, the heat of the game rose, and more money was moved around the table. No one else seemed to think

anything of it. As his anxiety increased, it seemed that he won a round and relaxed a little more. After a couple of hours Ah Chu had had enough.

‘Need to go, have to stop.’ But one of the men waved to someone in the room. A bottle of liquor was brought to the table and they paused to drink a round. When Ah Chu became agitated and wanted to leave, he would win a hand, and with the effect of the alcohol his world was becoming fuzzy.

‘Ah Chu!’ he looked up, someone was yelling his name. It was that familiar voice. Where had he heard it before? Mickey. He blinked, was he seeing correctly? Mickey walked over. ‘Pick up your money.’ He said in a voice which turned the whole gambling hall silent. Ah Chu was surprised. ‘Gentlemen, this game stops now. I’m taking my friend out.’ The whole room looked, and they parted to make a path for them to leave. The three men stood but when they looked at Mickey’s height they looked at each other and put up their hands.

‘Okay, okay, okay,’ they said backing off.

‘You bloody blood suckers, don’t you dare take advantage of my friend.’ And with this Ah Chu found himself being nearly lifted off the floor and marched out the door. The men who had lost their savings in a pursuit of a change of luck clapped for Mickey and erupted into laughter. They had never seen a big white ghost help out. For those men the realisation that the God of Luck was not smiling, was all too late. They were more likely to go the anteroom, step up onto the raised floor and having bought or been even given a ball of opium the size of a matchstick head, squat down, and inhaled the noxious vapour. By degrees as the effect took place, they would reclined in sleep and dream usually for two or three hours of bliss free of pain and guilt.

Ah Chu was not sure what happened for the rest of the evening, but he did remember that Mickey bought him food, and took him to James’ accommodation. Mickey could not stay there, the bunks were all far too small. In the morning, Ah Chu looked for his money, there were only two sovereigns left. He shook his head and did not believe it. Someone must have stolen some. No-one could lose that much money. Carefully he went through the different places money was stored on his body. The only bits of gold he had not cashed in, were in the heel of his boot. They were only worth around £50. He had lost more than he could think about. Enough to buy a piece of land and cover the cost of daily living.

Then he touched his neck and realised that his gold chain was not there.

‘Oh no!’ he called to himself. ‘What foolishness. How could I do such a thing? You fool, you stupid fool,’ he said over and over again. It showed him his personal

weakness of greed and flattery. He had despised so many men he had seen in the same situation. When Mickey went to find him, he was not to be found.

Edit 4 Part 2 Chapter 14

Skipper creek.

1893 - The restless wind

It took a long time for Ah Chu's humour to return. In Dunedin Ah Chu met his new team. Now there were five, his own brother Ah Fong, his clever old school friend Ah Wak, his neighbour Meng and Meng's young brother Fok. Of all the news Ah Fong brought the most treasured.

'Your son Chu Ling is doing really well.'

'How tall is he?'

'About waist height, a lovely strong healthy little boy.'

'What does he look like?'

'Oh he looks very like his mother,' Ah Chu laughed.

'Well he looks better than me then. I am glad.'

Ah Chu felt the surge of pride for a son he did not know. It was hard to think of the child he had neither held, seen, touched nor smelt. It was easier to ignore. Living on the other side of the world seemed not a very fatherly thing to be doing. With feelings of guilt he realised how his plans had never included him. Of course he could come to New Zealand when he was older, but that would mean paying the £10 Poll Tax and it looked like it would be raised to £100. The government was both racist and greedy.

'What's life like in the village?' Ah Chu asked.

'Bad, worse than we've ever seen. This is about getting away.'

Ah Chu thought for a moment, then tentatively asked,

'So who's died?' The men looked at each other. Who would break the bad news. Meng spoke.

'We are sorry to bring you the news that your grandfather has died and...'

Ah Chu nodded and said nothing while he listened to the list; Meng and Fok's mother, the basket weaver next door, parents of class mates, most of the lovely old men who sat in the village square with their prized tamed mynah birds were all gone. The village had emptied itself of its history and maybe even its future.

The sick were left to die, while others sat and waited for something to happen. Young men were sent out of the village if at all possible. Marriages were delayed. Celebrations stopped.

So much of life relied on money being sent home. It was a lot more reliable than waiting for the rains. Survival. The hope was that the present generation would not completely die out.

Ah Chu thought of the money he had lost gambling, and closed his eyes in shame. He could have sent it all home.

His new team had a sense of renewed energy although he sometimes wondered if they would withstand the hard labour of mining. They were all older men. Their bodies have never been well fed. The sooner the men were mining, the sooner they would eat better, and he'd get paid for sponsorship. It was a huge outlay.

The team had a couple of the largest sluice boxes that allowed them to stand to grind down the rock. Then there were the building materials that had been delivered to *Tongyung Gai* in Arrowtown that would be re-used; wheelbarrows, tools plus the overfed goose. Law Kee had given him several things from his shop that would be good stand-bys: clothing, buckets and even a pair of weatherproof boots. Someone would lose one sooner or later. In his experience former team members would talk as though boots walked off on their own.

Fok was missing when it was time to leave.

'Where is he?'

'Said he was off to Queenstown township. We are passing through aren't we? Let's pick him up on our way out.'

'Yes, and let's eat there as well,' said Ah Chu generously.

But Fok was not to be seen, so they ate and were about to leave when he turned up with a certain smug look on his face.

'Where the hell have you been?' demanded his brother.

'Busy,' he said with a light air. Ah Chu looked at his own younger brother, who laughed. They all recognised that attitude. Meng was furious.

'How could you afford her?'

'I won some money.' The team was a bit shocked, all that in less than four hours. Fok would need watching.

As the wagon wound up the mountain it seemed like they were travelling to the sky as the flat top of the canyon exposed a whole new vista of New Zealand. Ah Chu was fascinated. This was like moving to a new country. He could not have imagined

such a different world. The flat area of the canyon was covered with the blond swaying tussock grass as far as could be seen. The sky looked a bluer blue with wisps of cloud scurrying by, and the roar of the water louder than he had ever heard. There was an emptiness that felt more like being on the ocean than on the land while the birds seemed to be telling them the language of the area. A hawk circled above to check out the new visitors.

Beyond the empty schist huts lay. With help from the whole team, the horses were coerced to pull the wagon closer until they reached the point where the wagon could be emptied. The men carried their precious resources to reconstruct old *Tongyung Gai*. Goose was happy to be walking on the ground, with a long rope tied around her neck. The area around the huts had an old vegetable garden that could be dug over. Ah Chu had seeds; turnips, cabbages, Chinese cabbage and melons, potatoes and carrots. In front of the vegetable garden was an old Chinese oven, accidentally found when some stones were removed for the goose's house. Some miners in the past had dug a deep hole, and lined the straight sides with the rocks. A fire could be lit at the bottom, to heat the stones and then when very hot, a beautifully marinated pig could be hung from a bar. The oven was then covered for cooking. The crackling would have been keenly awaited.

‘Has anyone shot a pig?’ they asked Ah Chu.

‘No, but I do have a gun and bullets.’ The men smiled.

‘Well I suggest we do that on the first break.’ Ah Chu was delighted that their mouths were already watering. Everyone was smiling when the oven was covered with the wooden boards, then a sack over that and rocks to hold it down.

The first morning of work would be the same for the next four years although after a while they no longer saw their environment so clearly. On each side of the deeply cut canyon were rocks, layer upon layer, each with slightly different tones like generations of stories both told and untold. The canyon had been nearly deserted by the white ghosts, who were off to different parts of New Zealand, and Ah Chu had managed to get a claim of the tailings that had been left behind in their haste.

It did not take the men long to study the river. After a storm or when the snows melted, gold would be caught in the river bends. When the water was forced to change direction the heaviest load was likely to be dropped. Such a place was good for panning gold.

At other times when the water was low, and the men had accustomed themselves to endless sandfly bites, the whole team would collectively organise a move. First

many hands and backs were needed to dig around the monster rock using their long handled toms, crowbars and whatever they could lay their hands on to form a fulcrum forcing the rock to give up any gold that may have been compressed underneath it. It took a long time to organise. A few times they even managed to buy dynamite having learnt about explosives in China. All of them as children had rolled red Tom Thumbs for annual celebrations. They felt such satisfaction in hearing gunpowder light with enough noise to frighten themselves as well as any ghosts.

‘Let’s work slowly, methodically and consistently. One big haul does not make up for the days we earn nothing. *Mang mang*, slowly with thought, is better than a rush then rest.’ But the team just thought he was old fashioned. They dreamed that under some rock lay a nest of nuggets as large as pigeon eggs. After that they would all quit.

‘Who wants to be a miner for goodness sake,’ they would complain.

The first trip out of the canyon was to the small group of shops on the main road. Ah Chu and Meng stayed behind. Ah Chu did not want to be tempted again and Meng rather enjoyed the silence of Skippers. Ah Chu sent out his share of the gold with his brother to turn into sovereigns. There would be enough to pay for his share of the food, and the sovereigns be sent home. Meng was ashamed that he could not rely on Fok, so Ah Wak was given the same task.

‘I took twice the money from your savings for home, because Fok didn’t give me any money. He simply disappeared after we bought the food.’ Meng was agitated. When Fok returned to the camp, Meng still furious, stood over him.

‘Where’s the money? I sent twice the money home to our family. That has to be our first consideration.’

‘I’ll pay you back.’

‘But you never do. You’re so wasteful spending on women and gambling. It shows your weakness of character.’ Fok screwed up his face.

‘You don’t know what you are talking about. There are no women at the small village.’

‘Then you spent it all on gambling. Terrible. Do you hear me, you shame our family.’ Fok walked out of the hut and stayed out for the next few nights.

After several months a trip was planned to the Arrowtown. The three younger men went off together. The atmosphere was so more exciting than Ah Fong seemed to remember. Maybe he’d been at Skippers for too long. A welcomed change. The main road seemed to squeeze people together with only enough room for a horse and cart. Luckily there wasn’t a horse or cart to be seen. People milled everywhere. Chinese with

a smattering of white ghosts. Ah Fong and Ah Wak wanted to wander, gaze and drink in the activity, but Fok was motioning to them at an uneasy hurried pace.

‘He’s such a city boy isn’t he?’ Ah Fong remarked.

‘Afraid so.’ Agreed Ah Wak.

‘So confident eh?’

‘Wish I had more of that myself.’

Fok strode ahead and only because he was taller than his team mates could he be seen with his arm raised to beckon them along. Fok had entered a shop, a tea house. When the others arrived, they were a little puffed from the exertion. Most of the tables were filled with men sipping tea and eating bowls of hot steaming delicious smelling food. Close by the door, Fok was talking to someone. What they had not seen was how Fok had waved to the shop-owner and ordered their food. After brief introductions, they wove their way through the cafe while Fok continued to nod or speak to several others.

‘This must be where he goes when he disappears from the team.’

‘Yes, he seems to know so many people.’ There was every evidence that the quiet Fok on the team was both well known and popular. As soon as they sat down, Fok’s eyes were glittering, his smile was beaming and he started to burst into laughter.

‘Now, you two, sit down, relax and enjoy yourself. I so look forward to coming here, it is a break away from working in the mine.’ There was a pause. ‘Oh come on, I know I don’t work as hard as all the rest of the team, but I don’t earn as much either. Come on, let’s have a wonderful time. It is such a pleasure to bring you here,’ he said with enthusiasm. The tea and food arrived. Fok tapped the table with his fingers as an expression of thanks. Fok poured the tea for his guests and for himself. Then they all picked up their chopsticks and Fok motioned to his guests to start eating. For one shilling there were considerable amounts of vegetables; finely sliced cabbage, small broken stems of watercress, turnips and potatoes cut in long thin strips, and a few delicious peas still in their pods. The vegetables were flavoured with a little pork. There was also a huge bowl of rice. It was a pleasant change to have food hot, fresh and flavoursome. Between mouthfuls of food, they took sips of hot tea. The tea had the familiar smoky taste. It was grown in the south west of China. A real treat.

Occasionally men came to the table, and spoke to Fok. Their conversation tended to follow the same pattern, their luck in goldmining, any accidents, the health of the team. Both Ah Fong and Ah Wak marvelled at how Fok had made so many contacts with so few visits.

Such interruptions slowed the meal down. Suddenly Fok lifted his head and smiled, then waved. The other men were sitting with their backs to the door and could not see who had caught Fok's eye. But something important was happening because Fok stopped eating, placed his chopsticks down, and said hurriedly,

'Look, got to go. How about we meet at the hotel tomorrow morning and walk back together? I'll see you soon.' There was urgency in his voice. Not waiting for a reply, Fok walked away. Ah Fong turned around to see Fok hurrying to the door. He had to blink to believe what he was seeing. To his horror he saw a woman had beckoned Fok. It was the first woman he had seen for some time but this was a non-Chinese woman. He nudged Ah Wak who also turned to look. The woman was dressed in a lantern red top with a low cut neckline. Her long black skirt with ruffles was most attractive. But her appearance was so different from a Chinese woman with a bush of long black curly hair, framing her facial features with her prominent large nose, and her lips covered with bright red lipstick. Yes, she looked stunning, and both men's mouths opened as they gazed.

Once they walked out of sight, the men realised that the whole café had also witnessed this same scene. Ah Fong immediately felt embarrassed for he knew Fok was married and his wife was waiting for him in the village. One of the men in the café came over and sat down on Fok's vacated chair.

'Did you two not know?'

'Know what?' asked Ah Wak.

'His girlfriend?'

'Is that what you call her?'

'Do you know her too?' He really didn't want to talk about it.

'Don't be silly, I can't afford such luxuries.'

At that point Ah Fong and Ah Wak looked at each other.

'Would you like to join us and eat?' knowing that they needed to change the topic or move out.

'No, I have my own food at my table,' and he moved away.

'Surprised?' Ah Fong said in a quiet voice.

'Sure. No wonder Meng and he argue so much. I would too if that was my brother.' Both were in agreement about that. There was something very distinctive about Fok and both men were thinking about this as they hungrily ate. They could not consider leaving even a drop of food, the gravy was poured over the rice making sure

they did not leave even one grain of rice in recognition of the effort it took to get it from plant to table.

As the men rose and walked to the door, they had no doubt that the others in the cafe were laughing at them. By the time they reached the street, both were swearing under their breath. Fok was such a shame to the team. At moments like these they were seen a family.

Both men slid into the crowd hoping that they could hide. Clothing was restricted by importation. European clothes, with thick warm trousers, and the customary thick leather boots. The jackets were all of thick material for warmth, in a selection of greys or standard black. Under the standard jacket was a waistcoat that seemingly everyone wore, fully buttoned, and from the front pocket hung a fob watch on a thin gold chain. Everyone seemed to have one; never had Ah Wak seem something so popular.

‘Need to buy a new hat,’ Ah Fong announced.

‘Come on, let’s have a look.’ So the men tried on all the different styles and in the end decided not to buy any.

After the night in Arrowtown the two of them made their way back getting a ride on a wagon that went to Queenstown. Both Ah Chu and Meng did nothing to hide their fury when they heard the news. But the weather had improved and the team started mining from dawn to dusk. Fok did not turn up for a few months.

Part 2 Chapter 15

1894-1896 The wind that warned the long arm of the law.

When Fok arrived he charmed his way back into the team by telling stories. When the sense of disgust at his behaviour had lifted like a cloud turning the landscape into sunshine, and on full stomachs, Fok told stories of people he had met and things he had done. He told stories with humour, laughter and information. He had learnt enough *Inglishee* to understand the local farmers.

‘You know uncles, they are really interesting people.’

‘Only if you are interested,’ piped up Ah Chu.

‘Yes, but they can teach us things, like how to care for animals. We can learn.’

‘What for? We all need to go home.’

A silence fell upon the men. They had all discussed how they thought Fok would never go home. His sense of filial piety was very low. Embarrassingly low.

‘They come from a very different place to us. They do not plant rice, because the people from their land need to be very very rich to own land. Most of these people who are here came from big buildings where they worked with machines, and made cloth. It sounds like a huge big place and rows and rows of machines and when the day is over, they have made more cloth than our families would produce in a life time. Some of that cloth is made of cotton as at home, none of it silk, but lots with wool. The farmers here farm the sheep, cut the wool off and send it over to their homeland.’

‘How do they cut it off?’

‘With a very sharp pair of scissors, that they hold in their hand.’ He motioned by his hand opening and closing, knowing that his small hand did not match the size of the hands of the farmers he had been talking about. He continued, ‘and while they do it, they sort of wrestle with the sheep so it will lie down to get a haircut.’

The men burst into laughter thinking of their own hair. One chop and it was all over, just one plait of various thickness. Quick and easy, not wrestling with a body, but a wrestle with the soul.

‘Do they give you food to eat?’ natural hospitality was inclusive amongst the Chinese. The Chinese often left notes on their doors, welcoming people to come in and help themselves even when they were not there. Those walking by were always welcomed to the table even if they had just eaten or were ravenous. Nobody was excluded.

Fok went quiet. 'Sometimes,' he said quietly 'you know some people are really wonderful and treat me like one of them. Those people have invited me in.'

'How many then?' asked Ah Chu who sat up in his chair.

'Um, two'

'Two? What do the others do?'

'Some give me a plate and I eat outside.'

The Chinese could not believe their ears. Ah Chu stared at Fok and with a voice of authority said, 'I cannot believe you think this is good. Can't you see that they feed you like I fed the pig in our courtyard. These white ghosts do not know how to be civilised. They have no manners. In the end, we Chinese always come off second best. I have been here for years now, and I have seen some terrible things. Take it from me, don't mix with them.' Ah Chu was red in the face, near breathless. The men sat in silence. One picked up the tin billy that had boiled and filled the tea pot.

'You, you are all old fashioned. You are all stupid old men,' Fok yelled in disgust. Meng jumped up.

'Stop talking like that at once. Where is your respect! How could you, it is uncle who sponsored you to this place so you did not starve in the village. How could you forget.' Fok glared in silence.

In the morning Fok had left the team. Meng was quietly worried as to what he would do, but he could not show Ah Chu his anxiety. The rest of the team were all glad he had gone.

Later that week as the team were mining, Ah Fong looked up. A man on a horse was riding towards them.

'Hide, now.' Ah Chu spoke as quietly as he could. Men walked off as fast as they could, taking their tools and climbing up the hillside and sliding behind stacks and mills of schist rock.

'Ah Chooooooooo' the call had echoed down the valley. Ah Chu froze. No way was he going to front up. Experience had told him to avoid white ghosts if at all possible. 'Ah Chooooooooo poooooice.' The whole team froze. They instinctively knew that the man on the horse was probably looking for Fok. Meng made sure he never said a word.

The policeman tied up his horse by the plum tree, sat down in front of the huts and lit a small fire throwing some food at the goose that was honking on and on. When the water boiled O'Donnell made himself some tea then walked into each hut and looked around.

Ah Chu mimed to the men to stay where they were, not to move because the noise travelled so clearly in the gorge. Alone he made his way up to the huts, startling O'Donnell. They had seen each other at Gabriel's. O'Donnell was always treated with respect, but recently something had changed, as he was a lot more friendly than before. He was a man as large as Mickey. Ah Chu instinctively did not like the big brute.

'O'Donnell, long time no see eh?' he announced as he got within hearing.

'Ah Chu,' O'Donnell sprang to his feet. He had dozed off in the sun.

'What you want, eh?'

'Looking for Fok.'

'Trouble?'

'Owes money. People in Naseby want him to pay them back.'

'Eeyaaa,' Ah Chu sympathised 'velly bad. Fok velly bad.' Then he looked up shaking his head. 'No, Fok not here. He come back big talkee talkee and then he go. I not think he come back. Too much talkee talkee.'

'Where'd he go?'

'Not know, maybe South to Longhilly. Chinese like Longhilly. He not say, he angry so he just go.'

O'Donnell's impatience started to show. He sighed. 'If he comes back, you tell him to come to me. I'm at Queenstown. If the men catch him first he'll be in big trouble. Best he comes to me.' Ah Chu nodded.

'Okay' and deliberately walked away into the vegetable patch to do some gardening.

'How's the mining?'

'Okay, some here and there.'

'Bought a claim?'

'Yes, you want to see?' Ah Chu dropped the spade

'No. I believe you.' O'Donnell untied his horse. 'I'll be back you know.'

'Okay,' and Ah Chu picked up the spade and leant on it watching the policeman ride away muttering 'cunning little bastards,' over and over again to himself.

Once O'Donnell was out of sight, Ah Chu started to boil water and waited for the others to return. They would have seen O'Donnell leave. It was time to think of a few plans to keep themselves safe and what to do if Fok turned up.

Although he tried hard to work with the Chinks, Constable O'Donnell found them incomprehensible. The distant mining groups were the worst, hard to find, on the

move, often away from their houses. They could hardly be called a house; hovel was more like it, and for some not even that. He wondered how they even survived in such conditions. He thought they were probably deported from China just as the British had settled like Australia. They were convicts or scum, take your pick. Bloody Chinks. It was a term he would mutter a great deal. When he spoke to his bosses though he knew to be polite and call them Celestials.

Upholding the law was his job having trained in the Irish constabulary. Here he learnt that bad people were born bad. At home it was a lot easier. Certain families had bad people and true to form reproduced like themselves. He did not want to leave but his own family was growing by a child every year or so, and his lovely tribe needed to be clothed and fed. The potato famine turned life from joyful to hard survival.

When he saw the advertisement for New Zealand he knew he would get a job. It was worth the move. His family would be fed. The job went really well in Dunedin. Others at the police station were mainly Irish. At least they all spoke English, and their training was similar. As a group of strangers they got on well, sharing a friendly pint or two at the local then off to their own homes.

The bubble was broken when he was sent out to the gold mines. Being of a lower rank, he couldn't refuse the posting. In the city when complaints came in, there was usually enough evidence to find the perpetrators. Even the Celestials turned in their own but not out at the mines.

Now his life seemed like an endless journey of finding Chinese suspects. It was a full time job. His bosses would ask him for evidence that he was doing his job, and that would pressure him to go on what always ended up as frustrating man hunts. He'd try to guess the best day but many a fruitless journey was made on a Sunday, during the worst weather, even during a Chinese festival, to find that they had moved on. Looking at the mine was even harder, like finding a needle in a haystack. Their physical features; brown eyes, wrinkled and weathered olive skin, black hair and similar height made them seem all alike. He was never sure exactly to whom he spoke. Not a smile, nor a word with those around pretending not to hear. His presence did not seem to stop anything, not a step off the pace, not a disturbance of the constant rhythm. It made him wonder how they viewed the force of the law. But these things were still a puzzle to him. The rules and skills he'd learnt in Ireland no longer worked.

He had given up asking for names, because he was sure they gave him different names each time. When he told them they were wrong, they would say the other person was along the road. He hated his sense of uncertainty.

When the pressure was to bring someone to court, O'Donnell concentrated in bringing in a woman, a half caste or European prostitute turned wife for one of the Celestials. Fancy shacking up with one of them, must be mad, he'd think. Another method when a European made the complaint was to make sure he could identify the villain.

The last Chink he took into the cells yelled in that language, made so much noise, would not be quiet, and after a couple of warnings O'Donnell grabbed him out of exasperation. The Chinkie fought, kicked and spat like an animal. He was only small, but he could pack a punch, so O'Donnell grabbed the little animal's plait, wound it around his hand then using a baton hit beat him into submission. That would teach the little bastard a lesson, he said after the fracas. In the morning, when he looked into the cell, the man was dead. That complicated everything. It took a day to get a doctor to come and write a death certificate, and two days for his mates to claim him. One of them was furious, yelling at him saying he was a racist. Racist? Nah, nothing like it mate. All he expected was reasonable behaviour. The laws in New Zealand were to be upheld, even by the Chinese .

When they carted the dead body away, he was glad. Chinese funerals were so weird. The person in front threw small squares of red paper on the road to make the last journey. Men would walk in silence behind the cart, wearing white strips of gauze on their hats. At the grave site, these bands would be removed from the hats and burnt. Smoke from the joss sticks would fill the air. Men would bow at the foot of the grave, some getting on their knees to do so. Food and drink was laid out, then later was passed around, but this one had little food. O'Connell sighed with relief. The man was poor, no one would complain. Instead this would set a good example. One thing was for sure, they were capable of learning, smart cunning little buggers.

O'Donnell turned to the growing mountain of paper work on his desk and buried himself in it for the next few days. He did a double take when his bosses called him to Dunedin. They had heard about it through the doctor, who had written 'by accident' on the death certificate and also made a report to the boss himself. Later O'Connell was to find out that they were good friends. Just his luck, he thought. That trip did not go well. The weather was wet and cold, the coach got bogged down and he had to help push it out several times. The stops were slow and endless. All the time he thought of what he could possibly say to his boss.

When he arrived at headquarters, the first thing he did was to apply for a transfer. When his boss heard about it he was furious. He called it cowardly, not facing

up to his own behaviour. Under pressure he realised that the boss wanted him to treat the Chinese the same as the Europeans. By the end of the dressing down, he came to understand that to his horror the boss was a Chinkie lover. This shocked him, knowing the numbers that were now living or at least passing through Dunedin. They were everywhere. O'Donnell saw them as being a blight on the landscape, and his boss stood there and told him that they were an asset in the community. O'Donnell knew instantly that his boss had never seen the way they really lived. But he knew better than to answer back and spent his time controlling his disgust. When he left he was put on notice of the incident, and was threatened with a demotion. Rather than lose his job, they had decided that another constable would be sent out to join him. All of this happened over two months ago and he was still waiting.

Since then he had not gone out looking for any Chinese. O'Donnell's motivation to find Fok was that so many people had complained about him. He was a natural cheat and if O'Donnell didn't act now it would develop into something big. He could hear his bosses in Ireland say, 'catch them early can save you a heap of trouble in the future.' Plus in this case, O'Donnell was pleased with himself. He could identify Fok who was a little taller and he had heard his queue had been cut off during a fight. Fok was more European than the other Chinese. He would look O'Donnell in the eye. Finding Fok was not just his job, it would be his mission. Surely it would not be that hard. At least Fok could speak some English.

That 'me no speakee da Inglishee' bullshit drove him mad. Firstly he did not believe them, it was their excuse; and why didn't they learn English, for Christ sake. Yet he couldn't say that they were stupid, far from it. Without a doubt, they were cunning to clever, seemingly honest yet devious at the same time, thick as thieves. The feeling that he was the butt of their jokes was something he wanted to stop but did not know how.

As dark fell onto the camp, the team was surprised when Fok turned up.

'You're lucky. Police after you.'

'I know. I saw him, I hid in the cave. Watched him leave so decided I'd come back.' Ah Chu was not amused.

'You know you can't stay here. I spoke to O'Connell. Told him you were likely to go to Longhilly thinking you would be more likely to be going the other way.'

Fok's eyes lit up.' Oh good then I should be okay here.' Meng was furious.

'No, not here. You go, and don't come back.'

‘Alright, alright just let me pick up a few things and I’ll go.’ The others shrugged.

Ah Chu was the early bird in the camp. He usually woke as dawn was sneaking over the horizon. He looked up and far away he could see a man on a horse.

‘Quick, wake up, O’Donnell has come back. You all know what to do.’ Fok who could sleep through a thunderstorm had to be woken. The others milled around the fire outside. The congee had been thickened as it cooled in the night, and could be reheated. Other leftovers were taken to sit by the fire ready to be added at the end. Teapots were emptied, and fresh tea measured, rice boxes for lunch were slowly organised. No one spoke a word. Ah Chu looked around to see if they could see Fok. Meng came into the group.

When O’Donnell turned up he saw a typical domestic scene. Ah Chu greeted him, ‘This is an early visit Mr O’Donnell. You like a cuppa tea? We have just made a fresh pot.’ O’Donnell walked to the group of men.

‘Well where is he?’

‘Who?’

‘Come on Ah Chu. You know who I mean.’ Ah Fong handed O’Donnell a cup of tea.

‘You mean Fok? How would I know? I told you yesterday he not here.’

‘Now Ah Chu, I heard from reliable sources he was seen walking back.’

‘Mr O’Donnell, that might be so. But he’s not here. Maybe he had an accident on the way. Maybe he’s in the caves at the turn off. We’ve not seen him.’ The men could hardly contain themselves.

‘No, he not here,’ said Meng. Ah Chu looked up and stared at Meng. Meng caught his eye. It meant ‘shut up’ but he couldn’t help himself. ‘He my brother. I go help look for him.’ Ah Chu stared at him again. Meng walked into the hut to find another tea cup.

‘I’ll look around here,’ said O’Donnell.

‘Sure.’ Ah Chu’s voice was completely calm. ‘Look around but you won’t find anything.’

O’Donnell walked into the huts. The stench was more than he could bear. He wondered how they slept in the place. As usual it was a right mess. At one area the smell of human faeces and urine was particularly strong. He pulled his face in disgust. Then he walked around the vegetable garden, gave the honking goose a wide berth and continued around the whole camp. Nothing looked like a place to hide anyone. He had

already planned to ride the horse past the point, tie it up and walk back to count the men mining on the river bed. He had that sixth sense that Fok was around somewhere. Somewhere close.

‘Well, I’ll be back’ he told the group when he could not find any trace of Fok.

The team knew that they had to keep talking and working as usual. An extra bowl of food was given to Meng who wandered off returning by way of the vegetable garden. He had cut a cabbage.

‘Dinner,’ he called. How he loved the garden. He had often said he had been thinking he should just grow vegetables to sell. Mining was too hard.

‘Fantastic,’ said Ah Wak. He loved to eat cabbage to eat, his favourite vegetable. Meng moved away lifting the night soil and mixing it with water, poured it around the roots of his vegetables.

The rest of the team, like every other day readied themselves to go mining, and together made their way down the valley. Ah Wak had seen the horse go past the first view point and was looking for the policeman to pass the second one. When the horse did not appear, he had guessed O’Donnell was counting them going to the mine. Everything was going to plan. They took turns to look for the horse to pass by, and after a few hours, Ah Fong announced it had been seen. When the sun was highest in the sky, Meng went back to the camp.

Fok squinted at the light as his brother lifted the wooden boards. His brother helped him out of the black hole. The soot had covered him.

‘Has he gone?’ feeling pleased with himself.

‘Go wash your clothes in the river by going the other way.

‘If he’s gone, then I’ll follow you down the usual way.’ It was the easiest path. Meng took a deep breath. ‘Do as I tell you. Go the other way, wash yourself, and your clothes. Pack up your things and get ready to leave.’ Fok could see his brother was not to be argued with. Meng didn’t hear Fok say ‘okay.’ He went to his garden and fussed around the plants.

Later that evening when only a few stars were shining through the cloud cover, Meng made a meal. While no-one said it, it was a farewell meal to Fok. Everyone knew he would leave early in the morning. They suggested he take the long road up and over the steep hill to avoid Queenstown and all the other townships nearby. Meng sorted out some food for him and they all bade each other a good night.

When it was still as dark as the soot that had covered Fok, Ah Chu was woken to screams from the next hut. Ah Fong was holding Fok on the ground. Ah Wak was

searching him. To their disbelief on his body were four small bags of gold. When Meng saw this he reached for the cleaver, and Fok gathered himself and started running. 'Get out, go. Don't come back,' Meng called.

'Meng, no. Meng stop,' Ah Chu was running behind. The two younger men were chasing Fok. Ah Chu picked up the bags of gold, some had sovereigns in them. He shook his head, 'How could he even think of stealing from his own family?' And he gave the bags back to the men. All were intact except for the bag belonging to Meng. When the men gathered, Meng had tears streaming down his face.

'Oh no, he has taken my fare to go home.' The men looked on, speechless. 'I am so sorry he tried to steal from you all. My apologies, and he bowed to each of them.' It was nice to hear an apology, but they all were all so sorry for Meng's plight.

'Uncle don't worry about us. We are so sad this has happened to you.' Meng nodded. From then on, he refused to go back to the mine.

Each day, Meng would move slower and slower. Nothing they could do seemed to help. They killed a fowl and boiled up some special soup. Yang food to lift the spirits but nothing changed. Ah Fong and Ah Wak walked to Arrowtown looking for the Chinese doctor but he had gone to Dunedin. They left him a message. Then they returned with some special treats, but even the preserved fruits, the sweets and the yummy peanuts did not bring a smile to Meng's face. Ah Chu moved into Meng's hut and each night Meng moaned. It was the same sort of sound he had heard when he was with Wong Tai. He talked to the team about whether they should take him to Dunedin, but suddenly Meng seemed to brighten. Two days later when Ah Fong returned from the mines, he screamed on the top of his lungs. The men dropped their tools and ran up to the huts. Ah Fong was trying to cut the rope from around Meng's neck. When they lay him down they knew Meng was dead.

Meng was laid in a calico body bag. The young ones had dug him a grave in a cave and prepared him for his simple funeral. As they stood by the cave entrance, they lit all the joss sticks they had. The cave was filled with smoke. The fireworks were lit and as they banged away, a visitor arrived. It was the doctor. All he could do was to join in the funeral rites. The men took off their white cotton scarves and burnt them, along with the paper money and paper ingots of gold.

'Meng, I am so sorry. I remember you as a child, coming to me as we went for our walks. You were my first friend. We have burnt you lots of money so you will no longer want.' Ah Chu was deeply sad. The other men came one by one and said their farewells, remembering the most gentle of men. After the body was buried, the food

that had been prepared for the funeral was eaten. All of them drank all the alcohol they had.

‘I think this might be the time for me to start up as an interpreter and a writer of letters.’ Ah Wak announced. Ah Chu was not surprised. He knew the men wanted to leave. Incidents were often a trigger point. Ah Fong, looked around.

‘It’s okay brother, I’ll stay with you.’

‘No, between you and I we have enough money for you to go back. I have put away the money you have all paid me for your passages, and I have a little more. It must be enough.’ Ah Fong was surprised.

‘But brother what will you do?’

‘I will go south. I cannot go back to China. When I wanted to go back I did not. Now I am too old. I will go to Longhilly and make a life for myself. It will be okay. Everyone tells me it’s like a real Chinese village. Why they even call it Canton. I can live simply.’

It took a few days but the men worked silently to dismantle their village and mine. They divided the material where the road forked, and had arranged for a horse and cart from Longhilly to be returned. It was all Ah Chu needed. They gave him anything they thought he would need, the cooking things, the little food they had. They had carefully packed the special things from Wong Tai. Then sad at heart, hesitant in step, they parted ways. Ah Chu stopped to check he had two things, his gun and the note that Meng had written to him.

May my descendents be able to pay for my debts on this earth. Meng still owed Ah Chu for his Poll Tax and fare to bring him over.

Chapter 16

The Ancient Winds of the Past

At first he was frightened of the horse, as old and tame as it seemed. The horse belonged to the store shop owner, Ly Wah at Round Hill. As they travelled together Ah Chu talked to the animal. He certainly showed no sign of surprise at Cantonese. Ah Chu loved the pace of travel. *Mang mang* was how Ah Chu would like to live, gently with consistency and arrive in the best condition, humans, animals and materials.

Conveniently the streams and rivers they navigated across were splendid times for satisfying the thirst. Longer periods of time were needed when Ah Chu needed to rest, make a small fire and find a place to settle for the night. Then the horse needed a paddock for grazing.

When he started the journey he had a sense of urgency but the scenery had calmed him. He would look into the distance and let himself drift into that dream state, a place where he no longer felt guilty about his lack of filial piety, at no wanting to return home. Paying for some of his brother's fare to get home, and giving him some of his own money had lightened the load of obligation. Instead he would remember the family at their best, full in stomach, happy in heart. He would let himself think of things that were never likely to happen, but made him happy at the thought.

Rounding a corner, watching the clouds on the horizon, and seeing the mist on the water, he marvelled at every changing hue of colour. The richness of the scenes in front of him was so much nicer than anywhere where he had been mining. There the land was bleak and ugly, violating.

One morning when Ah Chu walked the horse over to begin his journey he could see that there was a person seated on the wagon. 'Who's that? Is it someone I know?' But the closer he got, and the clearer he saw the person it was obviously a stranger. His anxiety and confusion increased. Not knowing quite what to do, he focussed on the well worn and near docile horse, bringing him around and hitching him up. The horse whinnied as though he too was aware of the stranger.

'Will you take me South?' the man called out as Ah Chu got within hearing distance. Ah Chu did not answer. The man was certainly not a white ghost he looked more like a black devil. He wore a mask. Ah Chu stared at him.

'No, no, go. This my wagon, you go.' He used his hands and arms to emphasise his words.

‘No, mate, give us a ride. Come on.’ Ah Chu climbed up.

‘You go,’ and as he stood he waved his arm to indicate a movement off the wagon. The man remained seated, and said nothing. Instead the stranger folded his arms, looked ahead as though he was made of stone. Ah Chu stared. On his face, the side close to him was a mask, but it seemed not to reach over the other side. He had seen masks in Hongkong on his way out to New Zealand and the Chinese mask master was like a magician. He would dance to music and tell a story then wave his hand across his face and bring different people into his one man show. He would change, to be a woman, a servant, the mistress of the house, a beggar boy, and the whole audience would watch in concentrated silence as the story was revealed and through the mask the next person would appear. Ah Chu had been there, and watched in awe. Maybe, he thought, this man might be another magician. It would be bad luck to make him angry.

With that thought Ah Chu sat on his seat, folded his arms and wondered what to do. Sometimes doing nothing was the best strategy. The horse however did not wait for any directions, he just moved onto the dirt road heading South. Every so often Ah Chu looked at the black devil to see if the mask had changed. After many minutes nothing happened. After many more minutes still the magician had not worked his magic.

‘Why?’ he asked himself. Why did he not show me his skill?

‘Kia ora’ said the man in a soft voice. ‘I’m George Tomoana. Kai Tahu.’ Then pointing to his leg he said, ‘I have a very sore leg and walking is hard.’ Ah Chu said nothing. ‘You been mining eh?’ ‘Where’re ya going? I need to get to Riverton. You going there?’ Ah Chu remained silent. The horse moved at a steady rate. ‘You Chinese eh?’ he said, trying another tack, thinking that saying the obvious might help. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Ah Chu.’

‘Ah Chu, ha like a big sneeze eh? Ah tish Chooooooooooooooooo.’ Ah Chu didn’t move, not even blink. Instead he took a slow deep breath and realised in the past twenty six years in New Zealand, nothing had changed. He had learnt that the people in New Zealand were ignorant. They liked to laugh at people, they delighted in humiliating them. It was their way.

‘Whoops,’ George thought, perhaps another tack needed. ‘You from China?’

Ah Chu nodded. What a silly thing to ask he thought. Wasn’t it obvious?

‘You from England?’ he asked, seeing the man spoke English.

‘Nah, this is my country.’

‘This country?’

‘New Zealand’s my country. We’ve been here for hundreds of years. We are born here and we die here.’ Ah Chu nodded. This he understood.

‘You are lucky. I leave my family, if not they’d starve.’

‘You mean not enough food?’ Ah Chu nodded. George stared at Ah Chu.

‘Wow,’ he paused, ‘well that would never happen in this country.’

‘Why?’ Ah Chu had seen miners who were near starving.

‘There’s food everywhere here, just everywhere.’ Ah Chu looked at George. He really had no idea of what this man was talking about. Perhaps it was his English.

On-coming was another wagon filled with people. Ah Chu became nervous, but the horse knew what to do. The wagon passed, and George waved.

‘You like white ghosts?’

‘White ghosts,’ George laughed, ‘what a great name for them. Or maybe pink ghosts that turned red in the sun.’ Ah Chu remembered the men on the ship. He laughed.

‘In America we called them white devils.’ George was delighted. White devils fitted the way they had cut down trees. Devils never think of anyone but themselves.

‘We call them Pakeha,’ said George.

‘Paar-key-ha, is that right? What does that mean?’

‘People who are not Maori like me.’

‘Am I paar-key-ha?’

‘No you’re not white.’

‘What then?’

‘Brown-ish.’ George gazed at the little brown long tailed feral looking man. There was something rather delightful about him.

‘Some paar-key-ha told me I’m yellow; you know who they call us? Yellow peril.’

‘Nah, you’re not like a kowhai flower. You’re brown.’ Ah Chu laughed and looked at the skin that was showing. It was very brown. Underneath where the sun never glimpsed, the skin was pale, not quite white, but he thought it best not to tell George. He might call him that strange word, paar-key-ha.

‘Ha, George you’re very funny.’ and both men laughed.

‘I’m going LongHilly.’ Ah Chu said looking seriously ahead. George wondered what he was talking about then he realised,

‘You mean Round Hill? Timber mills.’ Said George in realisation.

‘No gold mining?’

‘Only a little bit. But those trees, those kahikatea, beautiful tall trees hundreds of years old. Cut down, just like that. It’s not right. Can you take me to Riverton. Is that okay?’ Ah Chu did not reply to the question instead he asked,

‘Why are you going to this place?’

‘To a tangi.’

‘Tangi? What’s that?’

‘Funeral, you know after someone has died.’

‘Not too late?’

‘No a tangi goes for several days, often five days.’

‘Five days!’ Ah Chu thought of the short ceremonies they had for their fellow miners. Even in China when they took longer, but not five days. It would be far too long to leave the rice fields. ‘What do you do in that time?’

‘We tell stories, we laugh and cry. We remind ourselves of family. It’s very important.’

‘Yes, I know, very important.’

‘Then the person is buried near their marae.’

‘Marae?’ Ah Chu was beginning to think that every other word was different.

‘The home for each big family.’

‘Oh big family, a village.’

‘Village? Suppose so, Yes like that.’

‘They buried there?’

‘Yes, it’s their home for everyone in the Iwi, the village. After someone dies it is important to return home.’

‘Oh, yes, yes yes.’ Ah Chu’s eyes lit up. ‘We are doing the same.’

‘Same?’

‘There’s a boat coming, the *Ventnor*. The bones will leave Dunedin go to Westport and then onto the big ship.’ George imagined all the boxes being loaded and unloaded. ‘Then they all go to China, George. China!’ Ah Chu was beaming, so happy and then he sighed like the sigh of relief after a long journey. His grandfather had told him. This is the place when he belonged. The men would at last feel they were in the right place. They could never do that in New Zealand.’

George frowned ‘‘You’ll *touch* the bones?’

‘It’s okay. We’ll dig then up and clean them, then put them into a special box with the name and village written on it. Different people, different villages. Most from my village.’

‘Where are all the people now?’

‘Some are in the place where the white ghosts bury their people.’

‘Cemeteries?’

‘Yes.’

‘And some are buried in other places. It depended on where they died. If they died at the mine, some were buried close to *Tongyuan Gai*. Or maybe in a cave or some place like that.’ Ah Chu knew he would have to lift the bones of Meng to be sent back to the village. That would be the least he could do for his very good friend, yes, it’s not a problem.’

‘Are you frightened to do this?’

‘Oh no. We are very careful. We count the bones, then wrap them up.’

‘Count? How many?’

‘Sixty bones for an arm and hand, and sixty bones for a leg and foot.’

‘I couldn’t do that. Oooooo, no, not for me.’ George pulled a face to show his repulsion at the thought. Ah Chu laughed. ‘No problem George. No problem. I do it so the ancestors can make my life happy. Every year we remember them.’

‘How?’

‘Oh, it’s very complicated. Um, we go to the grave and we burn *heng* and we bow and we burn paper money and paper gold for the ancestors.’

George was about to get a translation on that strange word he’d heard, but then he thought about that other word ‘ancestor’. ‘Ancestors important eh?’

‘Very very important’ and both men fell into a silence of understanding. There was something about ancestors that stopped both men wanting to talk about it, more in reverence and respect for those who had passed on.

The view in front of them had changed. The lake had been passed and before them was a low valley covered with grasses, and trees on each side.

‘How do you know all of this?’ asked George.

‘Chinese news. We have Chinese news. You have Maori news?’

‘Yes, but not for something like this!’

‘You have no need. We Chinese need this, this is not our land, this country does not like Chinese people.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I don’t want to talk about it. Very bad. Make us very angry.’ And Ah Chu closed his lips with a determination that George could see was probably not going to let him talk. Maybe, another time. Another tack, thought George.

‘Hey, Ah Chu you hungry?’

‘Oh, I sorry, I have no food. Last night I ate all the rabbit.’

George laughed. ‘We’ll get another one. How about stopping over close to that bush, and we’ll go and have a look and see what we’ll find.’

‘The horse?’

‘We’ll find a place for the horse.’ When the next grazing spot came up, George pointed and the two of them unhitched the horse and led him off to eat after taking him down to the river to drink. Ah Chu spotted the watercress and picked enough for a meal or two.

‘Good food eh?’ said George.

‘I like this. It’s very good.’

‘Come on, let’s go into the bush. Bring your spade and a sack eh?’

‘A spade?’

‘We’ll dig up a few fern roots.’ Ah Chu had no idea what he was talking about, but found a spade.

‘I don’t like the forest.’ He told the great adventurer.

‘Why?’

‘Ghosts, I can feel them, ghosts in the trees.’

‘That’s Tane, God of the Forest.’

‘You have a God in the trees? I follow you then,’ and before he could turn, both men entered the forest as the sun was going to set. George limped along.

‘Your leg, something matter?’ asked Ah Chu?

‘Yes, I had an accident and now I cannot walk very well.’

‘After we eat, I have a look at it. Okay?’

Ah Chu’s attention was taken away by the sounds of the forest. The birds were singing; the high notes of the bell bird, the melody of the tui, the soft chirp of other birds all showing their vocal skills and beauty. The piwakawaka accompanied them as they walked along, catching the insects the humans disturbed, the little robins hopped from branch to branch like they were holding hands with the humans. Ah Chu who did not like going in the forest alone, suddenly saw a new beauty, heard new melodies. He stopped walking, smiled in wonderment as he thought of his grandfather and his pet mynah bird and wished he could have heard and seen this forest.

George stopped and smiled when he saw his friend. It was good to watch someone in their wonderment at something he had taken for granted. It helped him appreciate the usual making it for one brief moment, unusual again.

A large bird flew low, crashing into the lower leaves and branches. ‘Kereru,’ said George.

‘Fat bird,’ said Ah Chu.

‘Yes, and this is miro season. The birds are so big that they can swallow the miro berry. Inside is a nut filled with oil. They grow fatter and fatter. Now they can’t fly high or fast so we can catch them.’

George pulled a knife out of his pocket, cut some flax and separated some fine threads. Then he proceeded to weave a circular net. Ah Chu rested on his haunches and watched in silence. He had used flax as well, but never with so much skill nor with such speed. As George worked he started to sing, not quite like the birds, more like a row of words on the same note. It went on and on like a long piece of string. When he was ready, he looked up at the tree. ‘Hey Ah Chu can you climb the tree and see the berries, put it there.’

‘How?’ and George stood the snare up so it could be placed in the ‘v’ of a branch. Ah Chu climbed the tree and chose a spot by some red and ready berries. The snare was set.

‘Let’s keep on walking, if a bird is caught, we will hear it. It will protest.’ So the men walked along, and Ah Chu would occasionally look back at where the snare had been placed wondering if it would work. ‘Hand me your shovel.’ And he began digging having forgotten about his leg.

‘Ouch’

‘Let me do it, what are we digging for?’ offered Ah Chu.

‘Fern roots,’ uplifting some of the roots from each plant but leaving enough to keep the plant growing. They put them into their sack. And so the adventure continued, a collection here and there, and lastly some kawakawa leaves to make into tea. As they returned a kereru had pulled the snare onto the forest floor. It looked far too plump with overfeeding that it seemed not able to move. One quick twist of the neck, and it was dead. Ah Chu picked it up admiring the beautiful colours of the feathers, the blue green of the water, the white of the clouds, and the brown of the earth.

The two men worked well, and when George’s leg hurt, Ah Chu was happy to break small branches, carry the stones in his basket using his familiar shoulder yoke. From time to time, George would start up his monotonous singing.

‘What are you singing?’

‘I’m singing to the gods, to thank them for this bountiful harvest we have had. And I am singing because I like singing.’

‘You like a bird eh?’

They dug a shallow pit, picked up the stones from the river, and lay a fire on top. The water needed to be heater before the bird could be plucked, although Ah Chu took the pretty feathers and placed them inside an empty tin. They were too nice to wet and destroy.

They ate the wood pigeon, roasted over the fire so the fat on the bird seeped out and the skin became crisp. The meat was sweet, like a sweet duck, the oil dripping down the chins of the men. It was a feast of fern root, roasted over the same fire, and when the outer skin had been charred, the root was beaten with a large stone. The inner was a thick pulp between fibrous parts that needed to be spat out. In the end, Ah Chu had to cook some rice and added the watercress and some salted fish. George tried it out, but he found the salted fish far too salty.’ His tastebuds were not used to being stretched. It was towards the end of the meal that Ah Chu gained enough courage to ask George about the markings on his face.

‘Why have you got that on your face?’

‘I have had it specially made. It tells a story.’ Ah Chu was fascinated ‘This side is about my father, and later I will get the other side done about my mother. Ah Chu had never thought of such an idea.

‘You mean you were born as a baby with those markings?’

‘No, my family has told me that I am not old enough to get some of it done. Later, as I learn more I will get more done, and in the end, my whole face will be covered. It was very sore to get this done. A little done a time. Not all on one day.’ Ah Chu without thinking lifted his hand, then realised that maybe he should not touch him.’

‘Is it sore now?’ Ah Chu thought it strange that someone would do this to their skin. He could not think of letting anyone do that to himself.

‘Will it wash off?’

‘No, it is here for the rest of my life. I cannot change the past, I carry it with me.’

‘So do I.’ and with that Ah Chu stood up and reached for the next branch, poked the fire to startle it into life and laid the branch to burn.

‘Ah Chu, would you like to meet my family? They will be at the tangi. Come with me.’

‘Oh no, I cannot do that. No, that would not be right.’

‘It’ll be okay. You sure?’

Ah Chu nodded assuredly. 'How could I meet people when they are at a funeral? No this is not right.'

George, thought it an odd response. It would be so easy to include him into the family. They would enjoy him. He had a sense of humour.

'Maybe another time, perhaps.' Ah Chu said cautiously. He did not want to say an outright no, as that might offend.

Edit 4 Part 3 Chapter 17b

When the wind has been removed from the sail

Ly Wah was forty years old, the local store owner and elder of the Chinese in LongHilly. He had given up mining even though the gold flakes were more pure. It made mining more worthwhile for many men. 'Too hard, too cold, too lonely and my joints ache,' he'd tell anyone who asked. 'I'd rather sell vegetables and Chinese treats to the people in the village and over the hill at Colac Bay.'

'So many of the men here have taken on English names. Why are you called Dickie?' asked Ah Chu.

'I'm not sure, but it's easier. Now I like it, so no worry.' Ah Chu started calling him Dickie.

Ah Chu and Dickie wandered around Riverton Cemetery on *Ching Ming* to clean the graves, and celebrate *Bi San* the ceremony for the dead, feeding them, forgiving them for their weaknesses and acknowledging their contribution in life. It is through the ancestors that the descendants asked for the following year to be one of health and happiness.

'When will the *SS Ventnor* leave?'

'After the Chinese New Year celebrations before everyone disperses, we will make a plan and set to work. We must make sure all the bones will be lifted.' The coffins will be stored in the market garden shed in Kaikokorai Valley Road, Dunedin. I'm using my horse and wagon. Like to come?'

'Yes, of course. That will take most of 1902 won't it?' Ah Chu thought hard. 'Nineteen hundred and two, sounds a good year for the souls to make their last trip.' Both men hoped the feng shui would be right.

Men would have to go to the regular cemeteries where the Chinese lay in some back corner away from the rest of the population. Health inspectors would oversee the activities. Then there were the informal burials; in caves and in areas close to *Tongyung Gai* often marked by a pile of stones. Each man knew wherever they lay would be but a temporary place prior to the long trip home. Well decomposed bodies would be easy to lift. Bodies that were in low-lying graves were difficult. In one area despite fruitless protests the Chinese had dug drains so the water would be diverted from around the coffins. A dry grave meant the body would decompose as nature decreed. Dried bones were counted to ensure every single bone had been lifted, soil sifted if necessary. The

recently dead meant that their bones needed to be cleaned of the black mildew of decaying flesh before being wrapped in the usual way. Most of the kauri coffins would be lead lined and would be completely sealed.

When the time came for Ah Chu and Dickie to lift the bones in Riverton Cemetery Ah Chu pondered

‘Look at this one, he must have been killed in an accident,’ Ah Chu commented on the dent in the skull.

‘I wonder if it was a rock or a person who did that.’ Dickie was also tired of the abuse the Chinese had suffered.

‘It is good that the final resting place will mean their efforts will be acknowledged.’ The two men worked away quietly and methodically disinterring body after body. Some had died young. Some died of disease. Some died of sad souls of separation from families and home. Some died of starvation. In each case the name of the person was written on the box, the village they came from, the age of the person and the date of death.

Ah Chu and Dickie moved from Riverton, Mataura, and Nokomai. With a full wagon, they then went to Dunedin, and on the second load, they returned through to Skippers.

‘Long way off our area,’ complained Dickie.

‘I know, but I owe this to my best friend. My last gift.’ And Dickie nodded. Then the two men wove their way south finding grave sites they had been told about. Other teams had been to other groups of settlements, Gabriel’s, Lawrence, Macetown, Cardona, Bendigo. After so many months the lists were reduced at last. Hundreds of coffins were to be stored.

Thousands of miners had contributed into the *Cheong Shing Tong*. The Chinese knew it as the Splendid Goodness Society, a direct translation, but the Europeans called it the Chinese Benevolent fund. Over the years the lucky ones paid more, and when their luck changed they paid less. The sick received care, those in hospital had fees paid, nobody minded. It was common knowledge that the *Cheong Shing Tong* would pay for the cost of the coffins etc, and the commissioning fee for the *SS Ventnor*. To be left in New Zealand would mean an endless restlessness. The only way to peace was to be home. The president of the *Cheong Shing Tong* had died during the year and his whole undisturbed body was loaded on the *SS Ventnor* as was the body of the treasurer Kong Cheung Ling. Earlier in the year he had spoken to Ah Chu.

‘We need four people to care for the spirits of the men in the coffins. Would you like a free passage?’ Ah Chu was shocked. He felt he was hardly qualified to do such spiritual work, but he would get home.

Oh *Ah Sook*, Uncle I cannot do that. Someone better qualified than I needs to be given such an opportunity.’ Ah Chu walked away surprised at his refusal. ‘Why did he refuse?’ he asked himself. When he asked Dickie, Dickie told him,

‘Must mean you are meant to stay here Ah Chu. Like me. I’ll never return.’ But it never quite made much sense to Ah Chu, and he hoped that this was not another wrong decision like going to the gambling den.

By the beginning of October the miners were restless. Having spent time preparing the coffins, the men only thought of home. Many sold everything they owned and returned in any way they could. Ah Wak closed down his business as an interpreter and letter writer. With smaller numbers of Chinese miners his business was no longer very profitable. He bought a passage on the *SS Ventnor*.

Ah Chu and Dickie returned to LongHilly. Ah Chu sighed with relief when he turned the corner and saw the small township with the wooden planked road that covered the endless sticky mud of winter. The Europeans called it Round Hill. They worked at the mill, their children walked to and from school. Over the years the two groups had learnt to live together although many of those old timers who had lived in the small township for many years had stories to tell.

Foo Ling was a real old timer. His smallish eyes and a slightly pointed nose, gave him a distinctly feral look, especially since he wore a fur jacket and hat. It was not surprising that he was called Possum. Everyone had long forgotten his real name.

‘Good name,’ he’d say, ‘everyone remembers,’ and he’d show his gummy smile and laugh with the delight of a child. His hut reeked with the pungent oily smell of the animals, having held little else. Skins hung drying from the ceiling on their frames, fur covered the floor and his bed. Clothes hung ready for sale, a whole array of jackets with or without sleeves, jackets for working in, and jackets for leisure. Most important were the hats, with and without flaps, and made to shield the head from the cold winds. He could make them for whoever wanted them in whatever style they wanted.

‘I looked around and could see people who shot rabbits. But no-one was trapping opossums. Oh so many, so I did it. One of the people at the mill gave me a trap made from things used for horses, and after that I made the traps myself. So easy, so much fur!’ and he rubbed his hand over his own jacket. Ah Chu looked at the

opossum looking man. 'Come on Ah Chu how about I make you a hat?' When winter and the wind of the south arrived, Possum would go around Roundhill, Colac Bay and Riverton selling his hats and jackets. After one trip he decided to make some for children. 'Warmer than rabbit skin, not as bulky as sheep skin. Best fur,' he'd tell anyone who would listen. Ah Chu found out it was true.

Chong Lim could be seen sitting in the sun outside the gambling den and opium house next to the hotel. He loved cats, and it looked like generations of cats loved him as well. His illegal fan tan gambling den stank of cats pee but it seemed no-one was upset by it. The only people who were upset by Chong Lim's business were the police who found that raid after raid they never caught anyone. They could never find out how the forewarning happened and they gave up after one incident when they arrived and Chong Lim was holding a sack.

'What's in ya sack, Chong Lim?'

'Cats,' he told them and indeed the sack was wriggling. 'I take them down to the river to drown. Too many cats here,' he told the police in all seriousness, and they left. Under the cats Chong Lim had bundled all the gambling paraphernalia, and the patrons were all sitting around drinking tea.

After pay-day at the mill, drunk men would start by throwing stones onto his roof to be annoying, then others would climb on his roof and dance on it, yelling horrible things to him and a few would pee on it. Chong Lim would yell in protest, but being so very small he dared not go outside fearing the men would manhandle and grab him, then throw him into the air. Instead he would dream of revenge. One evening a young man decided that he would squat on the roof to relieve himself, and to his horror found that the prongs of a pitch fork pierced the skin of the backside of the prankster. When Dickie wanted to be cheered up, he would ask Chong Lim to tell this story.

'I told them, opossums always dance on my roof and I'd get my fork and chase them away.' He would say it with such a straight face and in such an innocent tone in his voice that those listen would fall about laughing. 'The next day when I saw the father of the boy, I told him, 'Your son, think he clever, but he not clever enough.' After that Chong Lim's house was left alone.

Long Hilly had so many smells. The old Chinese man at the far end, was so smelly others could not bear to be around him. He'd be banned from some shops, and others found it hard to stand next to him.

'Why doesn't he wash, he stinks?' they would ask Ah Chu.

'Yes, but he really believes that to wash will be bad for his health.'

‘Well is it?’

‘Never been sick,’ said Ah Chu with a smile, ‘so we’ve never been able to convince him. Can’t hardly argue with that eh?’

As the numbers of Chinese reduced, those left would gather around to smoke tobacco, drink tea. Ah Chu realised that he had joined the old men of the village. When it was not raining, they would share food outside. There was always enough food. Rabbits were plentiful, kereru in miro berry season, kaka tastier than chicken, ducks were easy to catch, pukeko made the basis for good soup, tree fern shoots tasted more like bamboo shoots, sea weed collected from the beaches washed and dried were welcome additions. The hens laid eggs, and provided a supply of poultry for the table. Piglets were caught, fed and penned, then killed for Chinese celebrations. Ah Chu found a rare wild beehive and managed to bring it closer to the village. When a white ghost wanted to buy it, he refused, and hid the hive in the Chinese oven only to be woken by the screams of a thief who emerged blackened and stung. After that the hive was left to the Chinese.

The garden flourished with sweet swedes, beans, peas, leeks, garlic, onions, potatoes, carrots, spring onions and cabbages for most of the year. The men would have loved to have had seeds for Chinese melons, snow peas, bitter melon, snake beans, and most of all. Chinese parsley.

Even the teasing of them by the children was reduced as the parents were seen to punish them, in public and with great force. One time Ah Chu recalled his own experiences and winced when he saw a father hitting his child with supplejack and the child limped away. But year after year the village of Round Hill had developed a kind of peace between the mill workers and the Chinese.

When Ah Chu tired of company, he’d take his pan and go off for a few days of mining. The flecks of gold were in fine flakes, so that the final wash had to be done even more carefully after which it was separated by being mixed with mercury.

Other times Ah Chu helped Dickie to run his shop and volunteered to over the hill. The Chinese who used the main track to go to Colac Bay had spent considerable time diverting water off the path, and cutting down trees so it could be dried out.

Colac Bay was where Dickie bought stock for his store, so he never came home empty handed. But more often when Ah Chu went to Colac Bay, he’d try to meet up with George and go fishing or shellfish gathering. When George’s family arrived back from mutton bird hunting, they traded a bucket of them for Chinese food. In all of Ah Chu’s life, he had never had such riches in food, such variety of supplies.

Yesu Don lived in RoundHill and preached each Sunday. Some went because they appreciated the way he had learnt Cantonese and he would tell them news. He had even gone to China and taken letters to their families and brought messages back to the miners. He was clever, and wrote in his book the names of people he visited using Chinese characters. The Chinese men liked that. He was lucky, he did not have to pay the Poll tax. Ah Chu thought this was such a good sign.

As a sign of gratitude, the Chinese miners treated him well, although they stopped at taking on the idea when he talked about his one God. It didn't make sense. What about all the gods for each occasion, that covered all the dilemmas in life? They thought that turning up on Sunday would make *Yesu Don* happy and over the years they realised he was unhappy with them. They would have liked to fix this but then they realised it was because of his concept of God. They'd talk amongst themselves,

'Silly, to ask us to believe in something so limiting,' they would say.

'Confucius lived a long time before the Jesus ghost. To have many gods was useful. Life was so complex. Surely believing in one God would reduce your options for luck.'

On a weekday *Yesu Don* called an important meeting. All the miners came.

'I am sorry to announce that I have just received the news that the *SS Ventnor* has sunk up north, off the coast of New Zealand.' The men in the room gasped at the news.

'That could never happen! What about the coffins? How many were there?'

'I am told there were, um,' and he looked at his piece of paper. 'It says there were 499 coffins.'

'Five hundred! Five hundred men! How can this happen!' and the men started to weep that turned into a collective moan of grief. Waiting for a moment of silence he said wanting to divert their attention,

'There has been a ship sent out to look for the *SS Ventnor* but they have not found anything.' *Yesu Don* could see the men's concern.

'How come she sank?'

'She went into New Plymouth to pick up some *mook ye* and when she came out of the harbour, she hit some rocks. The ship was holed, but continued onwards. We think the intention was to go to Auckland harbour to get repairs but they never made it.'

'Where is this place?' *Yesu Don* brought out a map and all the men crowded around. Many men had never seen a map before.

'Where,' they asked, 'where?'

‘Well I’m not sure,’ said *Yesu Don*, I think it’s in this area and he circled an area on the west coast north of Auckland.

‘Where are we?’ and *Yesu Don* pointed to the very bottom of the South Island of New Zealand.

When *Yesu Don* told them the little information he had, the men crowded together to talk.

‘How can this happen to us? Why do we have such bad luck? Maybe the two whole bodies had argued with each other, and their disharmony had caused such a dreadful accident to happen.’ But most of all the most pressing concern was that the coffins had gone down, and now lay at the bottom of the sea, never to get to China.

‘Oh Meng, now you lie at the bottom of the sea, and you have died a second time. This is so unfair’ cried Ah Chu.

When *Yesu Don* asked the men to join him in prayer, the men walked out and went to their Joss House. For weeks they all felt, and looked miserable. This was the worst news they had ever heard in their lives.

The men in the village stopped complaining about the Poll Tax, and later they stopped talking about the *SS Ventnor*. That subject made the men so mad they often would fly into a rage. Who was to blame? Who would help? What should they do? All questions that had no answers. Instead they felt trapped. Another ship would never be commissioned. They would never go home. They talked more and more about their families. The dead were spoken about as though alive. Sons unseen were spoken about as though the absent father had been with them. Men talked about the time in the village as though it was yesterday, yet all the men had spent more time in New Zealand than in China. And in the end, the conversations invariably finished with a sadness and emptiness of heart. There was something beyond gold, money, and food. They would dream to bring their wives and families over. They would wish that they could have in earlier times. They could see what that meant. Here the Europeans had their families, and children who ran around. When the old Chinese men watched the children play, or heard them learning by rote, their hearts often ached to be with their own. Here wives washed and cooked for their families. They cooked cakes and scones for the children’s lunches which the then Chinese bartered for treats. Wives made a family. The Chinese only had themselves, now stranded. Along with many of the men, Ah Chu cut off his own queue and decided he should change his name to Charlie. From time to time he wondered what might have happened to Fok, and whether he knew he dreadful news

about his brother. He also wondered if Ah Fong got home, or if Ah Wak died at sea as well. Not knowing gave the most dreadful sense of helplessness, that made the longing greater. He could feel his heart breaking.

One evening when all was quiet close to Christmas time, Ah Chu looked up. Behind the houses, and the school looked like a bright light.

‘What’s that?’ he asked Dickie.

‘Fire! Fire! Fire! Mill’s on fire!’ shouted Dickie. ‘Get the waterwheel going.’

The Chinese men ran down to the mine where they had built a waterwheel. Other men grabbed the hoses and pulled them up closer to the village. Two men at a time, stood on the wheel and turned it with their feet, faster and faster like they were running. The faster they could turn it the more water could be pumped up to the township. They lined up to relieve each other as they became tired. Other men were at the other end, filling buckets of water that they handed down in a chain and threw on the fire. But the flames leapt higher and higher, higher than the houses, leaping in the air so the tongues were visible for miles, the plumes of grey-black smoke blowing over the area covering it like a thick fog. The crackle could be heard well beyond the village and the heat was so hot that the men could not even get close. Eventually the call came.

‘Stop! Stop the water!’ and the Chinese men stopped. Every available bucket was filled, but no one could get within throwing distance.

‘The school!’ and they stood helplessly watching the flames leap over that way. Then suddenly the wind changed, and now the Chinese huts were at risk.

The Chinese watched in horror. Possum ran into his hut, and Ah Chu called, ‘No, Possum, no,’ but Possum would not listen. The flames leapt around his hut. They watched in horror realising that he would not come out.

Dickie called in his loudest voice, ‘Leave your huts alone. Leave everything. Your life is more important.’ But some of the other men would not heed.

‘You cannot beat this fire,’ the European men told the Chinese. But the frenzy amongst the Chinese men rose. Voice called to the gods. Others tried to run back to their huts.

‘I have nothing to live for.’ Chinese men ran here and there. Some Europeans caught the men and would not let them go. One had his hand bitten.

Red hot pieces of wood were picked up by the wind and blown into crowds. Pieces of heated tin flew over the watching crowds. Women and children were herded to the path over to Colac Bay and still the Chinese men refused to go. They stood in groups watching, mouths open, tears streaming down their faces.

‘Please come, there is nothing we can do,’ pleaded Dickie and Ah Chu. Men walked like children, their hands needed holding. They looked like they were entirely lost in every possible way.

In the morning when the fire had died down they returned. The village mill was a sea of grey ash and smouldering wood. The school was scorched all on one side but still standing. Many of the European houses had been burnt to the ground, and one end of the Chinese village had been engulfed by flames. One of the hotels had been completely destroyed, while the hotel that sold the beer was still standing, untouched. The Joss House was untouched as was *Yesu Don’s* church. Dickie’s house was untouched although the garden, hens and pigs were all gone. Ah Chu’s house had been scorched, but the rock had saved the hut and the things inside.

‘What’s the point of starting again?’ the Chinese said to each other. ‘Too old, too late.’ No matter what happened, their souls would never be fed at *Ching Ming*. No flowers, no nip of whiskey, no food and no money.

Thirty-seven years Ah Chu had now been in New Zealand, that was twice as long as he had lived in China. In his dream state he would recall being at home, dreaming about rice paddy fields, or the ducks wandering around. Other times he would get flashes of his parents. They did not look at him in his dreams, but they loomed in the background and over the years his father seemed to shrink in size. His grandfather would also appear, but he only smiled. No one talked they were like ghosts. After a dream, he would wake and spend the next day thinking about them all. His heart would get heavy. His body seemed to be weighed down like he was carrying invisible baskets of rocks on his yoke. But after a day or so, the mood left and he returned to his simple life.

‘Only a lazy person would starve here,’ they all knew. No one could call them lazy. ‘Now we know how this place works, it’s not be so hard,’ and the men would laugh and talk about the dream house they would build for their families and wonder how their children would adapt to the New Zealand education system. They disagreed about their wives settling in, but they never disagreed that the children would need to be educated in Chinese values. They nominated Ah Chu as teacher. He had educated himself all his life. How much he appreciated such tiny moments in the group’s eyes he rose in status.

Winter was coming on. The wood had been stacked and slowly used up. Some of the miners came into the township, built themselves new houses or fixed up partially burn-out ones. Men gathered around a fire, or in a house or at Dickies. An *er ho* had

been left along with a couple of bamboo flutes. The music would sing through the town just as the birds had done during the day. The music comforted the souls of the men. Ah Chu had built up a library of Chinese literature that was well used. He even held readings from the Analects of Confucius.

Then there was the month of fog. Every horrible day, all day, was cold and damp. Ah Chu would sit in Dickie's shop and stoke up the fire.

But this day it was all too cold. The fog was so thick that a hand was hidden from a stretched arm. The men all became restless, and set about the task of gathering more firewood, a relatively simple job of walking to the new mill and picking up the wood ends.

Ah Chu had returned with the second load when he had stopped to stretch his back. He could hear Dickie sawing the wooden plank to make a shelf. Through the fog he thought he heard voices. When he turned around he was shocked, and slumped down. 'Oh, no, no' and wanted to flee but the image that seemed to emerge from the fog was a man, familiar but maybe not, and another who looked like....'

'Oh no, wife, oh no, no sorry, sorry. But the moving figures moved slowly forward.

'Ah Sook Uncle, Ah Chu, it's me!'

'Who?' and there in front of him was Fok. Naughty Fok now a mature man.

'Fok?'

'Yes, but look who I have brought to you?'

A tall youth stood behind him, 'Baba? Baba?' And without any thought the two hugged each other with tears in their eyes.

There was little to take with them. A little crockery, the solid cleaver, his books. As he stacked them into his baskets something dropped out of the Book of Filial Piety. He bent to pick it up. It was Meng's note. 'I can throw this away now,' he thought smiling.

It was the longest trip Ah Chu had done, but it gave them lots of time to talk and catch up. Then over the water to the North Island. The weather was warmer. Eventually they stopped at a market garden, near Otaki, with rows and rows of vegetables, healthy looking cabbages and cauliflower, tall elegant leeks, carrots, swedes, parsnips and large grey pumpkins. Close to the house was a special plot, Chinese parsley, snow peas, bak choy and other vegetables for the household. Fok's wife Hine was a female version of George.

In the big shed where the vegetables were trimmed ready to sell, preparations were being made for a celebration. Wooden boxes that once held fruit and vegetables made the seating, and long tables, with planks placed on top of a stack of empty boxes, nailed down so as to keep the surface stable. Newspaper covered the planks, clean and practical. Bowls and chopsticks were all laid out. At one end there were tanks of gas, and large commercial style woks. The food was beginning to sizzle and the smell was wonderful. A special meal with white soaked chicken had been cut with the cleaver and placed on the table to eat cold. Next to it was a plate of finely chopped spring onions, salt, ginger and oil. It had been years since Ah Chu had tasted this combination. In one wok the chicken and stir fried vegetables were cooking. In the second wok the fish was being fried to a crisp. There was a huge pot with soup, made of beef bones, salted vegetables and sweet carrots. Another huge pot had the rice. In the middle of the room was a recently killed domestic pig reared on the land. It had been roasted in a Chinese oven in the ground, and the skin was crispy brown. The smell alone was enough to make mouths water before a morsel had passed anyone's lips.

People arrived, some on horseback, some on wagons, some by foot. A horse pulled a trailer filled with people. Members of Hine's family reminded Ah Chu of George, although none had the facial mask. Chinese from around the district had come, and Ah Chu knew a number of them because they had been miners at one time in their lives. A few had wives from China, and young children. Others had married Maori women and brought their families. There were Chinese men who had started fruit shops or laundries. The buzz in the room rose, Ah Chu could not remember when he last felt so excited. It was such a surprise to see everyone. So much news to share.

Then there were the Europeans. Fok was having a wonderful time. He had made so many friends. Some were the shop keepers from the township, others were farmers from neighbouring areas. It seemed everyone was there. The noise rose so it was getting harder to hear. Then a booming voice was heard over all the noise.

'Hi, Mouse, long time no see.'