

Seeking, Solving and Growth

in

The Angler's Catch

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THESIS:

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Chapter 1

Could do better. Three words that had haunted Amos Jackson for nearly thirty years. Inscribed in shaky blue ink by old 'Perky' Perkins, Dean of the Senior School, the phrase had ruined an otherwise passable end-of-year report. It had taken Amos a very long time to convince his mother that Perky's intention had been to encourage rather than admonish.

The words came back to Amos now as he paced along the main street of his home town. On past the darkened windows and deserted shops. Commerce, it seemed, had gone to bed for the night... for good, some said. If old Perky was still alive, his report on the town of Oamaru would likely employ the very same phrase – *could do better*.

On Amos pressed towards the warm yellow glow of the Famished Farmer restaurant. He stopped at the entrance, confronted by his reflection in the tall glass door - a perfectly average looking specimen, average height and build with an average middle-aged paunch. His hair was less average, tied back in a short ponytail, twined streaks of ginger and grey. External manifestation perhaps, of the rich veins of untapped potential within.

The Famished Farmer restaurant was not busy, even though it was New Year's Eve. This was a good thing - less chance of being seen. Amos made his way directly to a secluded cubicle, sat down on the spongy bench seat and slid across to the far side.

He looked down, his eye drawn to a dusty patch on the knee of his trousers. Sticky and powdery to the touch... rosin from his violin bow most likely. He brushed it away and let his fingers run slowly back along his thigh, following the corduroy furrows. The fabric felt thin, as though there were not enough fibres remaining. A quick pass of his hand over his head produced a very similar sensation.

As he sat waiting, he scanned the interior of the main dining area. Two couples and one family group. His eyes rested on the second of the couples - Paul and Linda Mason. Amos shrank a little further into his cubicle and raised the menu to mask his face. If Linda Mason spotted him having dinner with a woman, the news would be around town before the end of his first course.

Amos considered his options.

Escape was out of the question, he would have to walk right past the Masons' table to get to the front door. Perhaps a subtle retreat to the Gent's rest room? That at least

would involve moving to the opposite side of the restaurant. He peeked over the top of the menu to plan his route.

No need. The Masons appeared to be leaving. Both still seated, but Linda was pulling on her jacket and her husband was waving for the bill. Amos began to relax, sensing that he was safe.

Funny thing, intuition.

The restaurant door opened and Rebecca Patterson floated in, billows of creamy-white chiffon over a long navy-blue skirt, the thick hem of which rode flush with the floor. Amos's mind threw up an image of winter fishing up the Waitaki Valley – puffy cumulus clouds drifting over the brooding depths of Lake Benmore.

Rebecca stopped at the bar and swept her eyes around the restaurant.

Just as her gaze settled on Amos's cubicle, he lowered his mask and waved, his hand only just level with his head. Rebecca sailed across the room as though propelled by a sudden change in the wind. She eased herself into his cubicle, gliding over the seat opposite with a whisper of wool on vinyl and a chattering of static. A second later, a slipstream of overpowering floral perfume engulfed the cubicle.

'Amos, *there* you are.'

'Glad you could make it.'

'Hope you haven't been waiting too long?'

'A wee while.'

Suddenly Amos was aware of two corks resting on the table beside the wine bottle. He discretely slid his menu over them.

'I adore eating out, don't you?'

Rebecca's eyes tracked around the interior of the restaurant. Her full dark pupils reflected tiny points of light, shimmering like mirrors in the night.

'Well I... sometimes do, yes.'

'It all depends on the company though, doesn't it?'

She leaned across the table and squeezed his hand for emphasis on the word 'company'. His hand frozen, Amos nodded, wishing she would stop finishing every utterance with a question. So *demanding*. His eyes flicked across to the front door, Linda Mason was looking directly at him, tugging at her husband's elbow.

'What's that saying in the Bible...' Rebecca continued, '...something about walking in the company of the wise?'

'*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Proverbs 13 verse 20, I believe. One of Mother's favourites. Usually dragged

out when she's talking about my friends at the Folk Club. Or when I've been a naughty boy.'

A crinkle flickered on Rebecca's delicate brow.

'Well that's not quite what I meant. Anyway, how are things with you Amos?'

By way of response, he raised his eyebrows and shoulders in unison, and reached for the wine. He angled the bottle in her direction.

'Glass of wine?'

As he spoke, the neck hovered over her empty glass, accentuating the quivering in his right hand. Amos clamped his left on top to steady himself.

'Lovely, yes, thank you.'

The wine tumbled into the glass with a velvety gurgle.

'Real Burgundy, rather a nice one.'

Rebecca smiled and lifted the glass to her lips, dark red and swollen like grapes after rain. She took a tiny sip and swallowed immediately.

'Beautiful! So... fruity. Now, you haven't really answered my question. How *are* things with you Amos?'

'Fine. Going well thanks.'

The blonde head tipped to one side, waiting, demanding more.

'You know... keeping busy. Well, the shop's not that busy, but I've got my music and my fishing.'

'I don't suppose you see much of Elizabeth these days?'

'Betty? No not much. Just meetings with the lawyers.'

Rebecca's dark green eyes brightened.

'I see... it must be very hard for you both.'

The waiter appeared at Amos's side, order pad in hand and eyebrows at the ready.

'Sorry to interrupt sir. Are you ready to order?'

'Yes we are' said Amos quickly. 'Rebecca, you first.'

She gave a quick glance at the type-written card.

'Gosh, I don't know. I can never make my mind up when it comes to menus. What are you having Amos?'

'I thought I'd try the... porterhouse steak.'

Rebecca studied her own menu.

'Mmm, looks good. I'll have the same. I know I can trust your advice Amos, you're so clever when it comes to these *cultural* things.'

The waiter scribbled the orders on his pad and then removed the menus and himself. Amos took the opportunity to change tack.

‘Speaking of cultural things, I’ve got a concert coming up tomorrow night. Do you want to come?’

‘I don’t know Amos. I don’t really approve of hippies and all that dope-smoking.’

‘No, not the Folk Club. It’s an OOSO concert.’

‘Sorry?’

‘Oamaru Operatic Society Orchestra. It’s the New Year’s concert.’

‘Oh, the orchestra, yes I’d *love* to go to that!’ A beaming smile. ‘Tomorrow evening?’

Amos gave a slow nod. He had not expected such a positive response. Nobody else he knew ever showed much interest in the orchestra. In fact, most people would suddenly remember other engagements when he raised the subject. He pulled out his wallet and passed over a Complimentary Pass. Rebecca took it carefully to read.

Amos’s mind was in a turmoil.

Her enthusiasm had floored him. He had intended only to change the topic, now he was at risk of a second date. The waiter came to the rescue again, returning with bread rolls and a carafe of water. Amos nodded gratefully to him and reached for a roll. In a flash, the soft but firm flesh of Rebecca’s hands again encircled his.

‘Perhaps we could make a night of it? Go out for a meal or a nightcap afterwards?’

‘Perhaps... gosh these rolls look good! Better eat them while they’re hot. Don’t want to upset the cooks.’ He retrieved his hands and offered her the bread basket.

The evening proceeded in a similar vein. It began to feel like a fencing match to Amos - Rebecca advancing with well-directed probes and he parrying with whatever defensive moves he could muster. It was not until he had paid the bill and the pair were leaving that the topic of the concert resurfaced.

She turned to him on the front doorstep and took a hold of his left forearm.

‘So, that’s a date then?’

‘What?’

‘Tomorrow night.’ She waved her ticket in front of his eyes. ‘I’ll come along to the New Year’s concert, and we’ll head out afterwards for...’

‘After the...’

At last Amos saw his lifeline. The title printed on the ticket:

*New Year’s **Family** Festival Performance.*

‘...oh, didn’t I mention? The concert goes right through to midnight... it’s my weekend to have Jenny. I’ve got to do the good father thing and get her straight home to bed after the show. Don’t want to give Betty’s lawyers any more ammunition.’

‘Really? Shame... still, I’ve given my word, I’ll come anyway. You never know.’

As Rebecca floated away up Thames Street, Amos reflected on her parting comment. There was a lot of truth to it. When it came to women, Amos had to confess to being in a more or less constant state of ‘never-knowing’.

January 4th 1974.

Some eight miles off the East coast of New Zealand’s South Island, a Japanese fishing trawler sat riding on its anchor. A converted war-surplus vessel, with hull of equal parts rust and algae, the Shokai Maru had lost all power to its engines. The Captain was faced with a dilemma – would he send up emergency flares and thus alert the New Zealand authorities that he had been fishing well inside the 12 mile limit, or would he continue to wait while his engineer attempted repairs?

The Captain turned to his First Mate but before either man could speak, they were interrupted by a racket from the crew’s quarters below. Frantic shouting and screaming followed by a crash that could be felt through the Bridge floor. Then silence.

The First Mate reached the door in two bounds and flew down the ladder to the crew’s cabin. He landed with a resounding clang on the bare metal, his tall muscular frame dominating the cramped space. In the far corner, one of the crew lay in a crumpled heap against the wall. His head was twisted at a strange angle against the edge of a solid metal beam. Four men stood by, staring silently at the inert body.

After a moment, one turned to the First Mate and pointed across the cabin, saying only one word.

‘Takahashi.’

On the other side of the cabin, a lone crew-member sat at a small card table, his head in his hands. A pack of cards and a big pile of cash was spread out in front of him. In the middle of it all, three empty Saki bottles.

Takahashi saw the arm coming and was on his feet, clutching a few of the notes to his chest, his face defiant. But the First Mate’s powerful hand seized him by the shoulder

and squeezed with such force that his arm fell limp to his side, partially paralysed. His winnings slipped from his grasp and tumbled to the floor.

Ten minutes later, Ken'ichi Takahashi found himself adrift in the South Pacific in a small inflatable raft. He had been provisioned with a tin of cooked rice and half a bottle of Saki. He stared back at the trawler and studied the small figures on the Bridge. The First Mate's tall frame was clear, silhouetted against the light sky. The Captain beside him. The third man was one of the crew. Possibly Taiko, the Navigator... but that was not possible. Taiko was dead.

Reeling under the lingering effects of the alcohol and the numbing realisation that he had killed a man, Takahashi lay back and gazed up into the blue southern sky. The sun was at its height, intense and blinding. It seemed to glare at him in an accusing, all-seeing way. He reached for the Saki and took a deep slug. The liquor burned its way down his throat and caused him to sit up and gag. Almost at once, a pleasing warmth began to radiate from his stomach.

He relaxed a little and lay back again.

Soon he was asleep.

On awaking, the fisherman found his head had cleared considerably. He ran his hand along his cheek and jaw, his fingertips finding swollen flesh and a long bloody cut. Salt water from his hand got into the wound and stung like acid. He sat up and scanned in all directions. Under different circumstances, it would have been a pleasant day to be out floating on the ocean. The Pacific was calm and flat, though a light nor-east breeze ruffled the surface and pushed the rubber craft gently towards the coast.

Before long the castaway was lulled off to sleep again. The dinghy edged steadily nearer to the distant cliffs of Cape Wanbrow and the port of Oamaru.

Chapter 2

Oamaru. January 4th 1974.

In the Garden Bar of the Waitaki Club, Amos Jackson sat alone facing east, the direction of the sea. A bleached red tee-shirt hung from his sloping shoulders and ballooned out around his waist. He filled his lungs with the warm summer air. Across his chest, the words 'Save the Manapouri' were only just discernible, their blackness long since washed to grey. From a jukebox somewhere inside the club, Bob Dylan pleaded '...stay lady stay, stay with your man a while...'

Amos sang along softly, drumming his fingers on the wooden table. The wide splits of the sun-beaten surface were smooth to his touch, filled with crumbs of food and ash and other detritus left by nameless patrons and cleaners with better things to do.

The jukebox fell silent.

Briefly Amos was aware of the Post Office clock sounding across the park.

'I am Big Ben, I tell the time...'

Over the top of the booming one o'clock chime, a driving lead guitar riff blared out from inside the bar – *Satisfaction*, Rolling Stones. Amos smiled.

A second man approached the table. He carried two pint handles of beer gripped in one fist and two small paper bags pinched between thumb and forefinger of his other hand. His suit was plain black but neatly fitted, the cut suggesting an athletic build beneath. He walked with the careful pace of a hunter, maintaining his balance so as not to spill the beer.

'There we go Amos old man' he said, sliding a pint along the table. 'Mince or steak?'

'I'm not fussed. Either's good.'

The suited man took a seat and the pair demolished their pies. They made no sound, save for the rustling of paper bags and the periodic Hoovering of lips at the frothy head of the beer. The newcomer finished his pie first and nodded towards an empty whisky glass on the table.

'You been here a while then?'

'No, not that long. You were late Jack, thought I'd get a wee dram in.'

'Sorry about that. Crime and tide wait for no man.'

'So you keep telling me. What was it today? Shoplifting teenager or domestic squabble?'

The suited man took a long tip of his glass.

'That's Police business Amos.'

‘Uh-huh. Parking ticket then?’

‘Alright, one to you. Isn’t it about time you got rid of that old shirt?’

Amos flicked at stray flakes of pastry that had landed on his chest.

‘Why? What’s wrong with it?’

‘It’s not the shirt Amos, it’s the fact that you still want to wear it.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning it’s about time you grew up.’

‘Like you? In other words, it’s about time I signed up for the police force, or joined the National Party?’

‘Nothing wrong with that. There’s more to life than getting arrested with crowds of smelly hippies.’

‘It’s a free country.’

‘Oh yes, so it is. And the Police are fascist bully-boys right up to the point where you need them to move the Black Power along... then suddenly they’re your friends...’

Amos pursed his lips and slowly stretched a smile across them.

‘Got you’ grinned the policeman.

‘That’s one all’ replied Amos. He downed the last of his pint. ‘My round? Make it the best of three?’

‘No thanks, got to get back to work.’

‘Go on - just a wee dram of Glenfiddich to set your Friday afternoon off?’

‘Nah. I’m outta here.’ He glanced at his watch. ‘And so are you.’

Amos avoided making eye contact.

‘For God’s sake. I don’t need a babysitter.’

The policeman said nothing. He rose to his feet and nodded towards the exit. Amos likewise said nothing. He gathered his keys and wallet from the table and followed the tall frame of Detective Inspector Jack Greenwell out of the club and out into a blustery north-east breeze.

Amos scanned in both directions.

The Inspector had moved quickly. He stood twenty yards or so down the street, talking to a group of five young men. Amos recognised two of them. He had seen them in the Portside Tavern at darts night. Tongan immigrants – some of the several hundred who had come to Oamaru in recent years in search of jobs and a better life.

It appeared that Greenwell had put on his ‘business’ hat. Not wanting to interfere, Amos stayed at the Club’s entrance and watched.

The policeman stepped closer to one of the men and pointed an accusing finger at him. Closer still – the finger looked to be almost touching the Tongan’s chest. Voices became loud and shrill. Words carried to Amos’s ears on snaking gusts of wind. But the fragments of dialogue were too few for him to make any sense of what was being said.

Greenwell retracted his finger and held out an open palm.

After inspecting his shoes briefly, the recipient of Greenwell’s attentions reached into his pocket and held out a small booklet of some sort. The policeman took it and flicked through the pages. He shook his head as he read. Amos’s attention was distracted as an empty sheep truck lumbered along the street, spewing diesel fumes in its wake. When Amos looked back, Greenwell was leading the Tongan towards the Police Station. His four companions had not moved. They watched without comment or protest and were slowly enveloped by clouds of diesel exhaust.

Amos glanced at his watch. Late! He was due at Dominion Travel before 2pm.

He ran across the street and into Takaro Park. His mind raced too – for what crime had the unfortunate Tongan been apprehended?

Gasping, he burst into the travel office on the stroke of 2.

‘Cutting it a bit fine Mr Jackson!’

A middle-aged man sat at the service desk, holding a large white envelope in one hand. On the front was a bright red, white and blue logo, beneath which Amos could make out the words ‘Xth Commonwealth Games: Christchurch’.

‘You know me Bob – time is money.’

‘Busy in the book trade then?’

‘Not bad, we have our moments. Those my tickets?’

‘Certainly are.’

‘And the motel bookings?’

‘Yep, no problem.’ The salesman paused. ‘You’re quite sure you wanted two separate rooms, not a double?’

‘Uh-huh, Jenny’s too old to bunk down with me these days.’

‘Does she know yet, about this?’ He slipped the envelope into a plain brown manila folder.

‘No. Keeping it as a surprise.’

The salesman smiled and handed the folder over.

‘Good on you Amos. There’s a good father hiding somewhere behind that ugly mug.’

Amos took the folder and turned to leave.

‘Bugger off Bob... and thanks. You’ll send an invoice?’

‘You can depend on it.’

Oamaru Police Station

Greenwell closed and locked the door to the Interview Room and returned to the front desk. He summoned the Duty Officer and placed a faded crumpled passport on the counter.

‘Barrett, check this one out with Immigration.’

‘Yes sir. It’ll have to be on Monday now though.’

The Inspector nodded and swung about, his leather soles leaving black crescents on the grey lino.

‘Sir, there’s something else...’

‘Yes?’

‘There’s a man waiting in your office, wouldn’t take no for an answer.’

‘Who?’

‘Works for MAF I think. Seen him around the streets a few times. Wears an old tweed jacket that looks two sizes too big for him.’

Greenwell nodded.

‘Right, thanks.’

He took a few steps and then stopped in his tracks, looking first to the front door of the station and then to the corridor which led to his office. With a low grunt that signified a decision, he set off down the corridor, taking long deliberate paces. The door handle protested loudly as he pushed heavily on it. The sound forced his visitor to look up.

‘Greenwell.’

The man from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries sat in front of the inspector’s desk.

‘Hamill.’ The two exchanged a fleeting handshake.

Moving quickly, the Inspector rounded his desk and slid into his chair. Barrett’s description had been accurate to a point – he did look two sizes too small for his tweed jacket. But there was more to it than that, his body looked several sizes too small for his face in general and his facial hair in particular. Vast black bushes hovered over his eyes like storm clouds brewing and a small dead marsupial seemed to have taken up residence on his upper lip.

‘What can I help you with?’

The MAF man looked briefly out the window, his eyes narrowing in concert with the shutters of the half-closed venetian blinds. He met Greenwell's eyes.

'It's those damned farmers out at Kakanui again. They're not giving access.'

'Why would that be?'

'I thought you might know.'

'I see' said Greenwell, scratching his nose and leaning back into his chair. 'Why would you think that?'

'Well, they seem to be your mates.'

Instantly the Detective Inspector straightened his back. He folded his arms and leant forward, resting his elbows on the desk.

'What does that mean?'

The MAF man merely shrugged.

'I hope you're not suggesting favouritism?'

'It's been known to happen.'

'Not around here it hasn't.'

The two men stared at each other with faces like the limestone walls of the building in which they sat: Hamill's clean and smooth like the painted inside walls; Greenwell's weathered and pockmarked like the exposed external surfaces. The standard government-issue clock ticked loudly in the pregnancy of the moment.

Greenwell broke the impasse by fetching a green manila folder from the storage trays at one end of his desk.

'Here's what you brought me last time.'

He opened the folder and flicked through a thick sheaf of loose pages.

'December 12th... Smith farm at Kakanui. Andy Smith threatened to shoot you for trespassing. You recall that one?'

No response.

'I'll jog your memory - Complainant (that's you) disclosed he had not submitted the required amount of notice prior to attempting an onsite inspection. Mr Smith noted that the complainant had not only entered his property without permission and refused to leave when invited to do so, but had subsequently threatened to *put an end to his filthy practices and drive him off his land.*'

Hamill shifted uneasily in his chair, taking time over his reply.

'Look, if you knew what was going on at that farm... he's still at it, no improvement at all. Takes two or three times his irrigation quota, toxic waste buried all over the place leeching God knows what into the water table... *and* he starves and abuses his stock.'

Greenwell made no change to his expression.

‘The man’s a public menace’ Hamill continued. He’s mentally unstable. When I tried to see him yesterday he set his dogs onto me. One of the buggers got me on the arm.’

He slid up his sleeve to reveal a row of red puncture marks and a massive purple bruise on his left forearm.

‘Nasty! No cause for breaking the law yourself though.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Trespass. Threatening behaviour. Libel.’

‘Bullshit! None of that would stand up in court.’

Now it was Greenwell’s turn to shrug.

Hamill continued. ‘I don’t understand why you’re so bloody unhelpful. It’s as though you’re trying to get in my way.’

‘Not true. Remember who convinced Smith to drop his charges.’

The man from MAF shook his head.

‘I reckon you’re hiding something Greenwell. I know you went to school with a lot of these blokes. I know all about your old boys’ network.’

Greenwell rose abruptly.

‘Look, if you’ve got nothing to say other than idle speculation, I suggest you leave. Before I take exception to *your* attitude. And your half-arsed allegations. Falsely accusing a police officer is a serious offence.’

He held his arm out to the door.

‘Is that a threat?’

‘What do you think?’

‘I’ll be back.’

Hamill steamed from the office, a warship on the retreat.

‘Oh good.’

Greenwell returned to his desk and flicked the ‘Front Desk’ switch on his intercom.

‘Barrett?’

‘Yes sir?’

‘If that dipstick wants to see me again, I’m not available...clear?’

‘Yes sir.’

The manila folder was slammed shut and stuffed back into its tray.

Chapter 3

The conductor of the orchestra fully embodied the *appassionato molto* direction given at the top of the musical score. His whole body writhed and wriggled, causing the wooden platform beneath him to lift off the floor and wobble in time with the music. In the space around the podium, his arms failed and undulated like bull-kelp on the waves.

As the intensity of the music grew, Dr Sebastian Fischer threw his head back and closed his eyes. And when the *fortissimo* climax of a long rumbling crescendo finally arrived, he thrust his baton repeatedly into the air, sending showers of perspiration flying from the ends of his long dark hair.

At the back of the second violin section, Amos divided his attention between his music and the acrobatic antics of Dr Fischer. It almost looked as though the conductor was stabbing at something or practicing fencing moves. With a sudden twitch, Fischer turned his head towards the second violins. His eyes little red coals, probing.

An instant later, the baton cut a scything horizontal line in front of the conductor's throat. The orchestra stopped playing immediately. Amos clamped his fingers on the strings of his violin to mute the vibration.

Too late.

The grating dissonance of his stray *B-flat* reverberated around the bare walls and empty seats of the Opera House, audible and inescapable evidence of a *crime against harmony*.

'Who was it?' growled Dr Fischer.

Amos kept his head low on the pretext of pencilling something important onto his score. The stand rattled noisily under his furtive scribbling. His eyes flashed to his left, what was Coral up to? She had let him down. Missed the page turn and left him to play the next few bars from memory. Quite inaccurately, as it turned out.

'Amos Jackson... it was you?'

Fischer's heavy German accent made a simple question feel like an interrogation. Amos was reminded of the piercing voice of General Burkhalter in *Hogan's Heroes*. Trapped like a prisoner of war, there was no escape for Amos. He raised his head to meet the conductor's searing eyes and nodded slowly, acknowledging his guilt.

A loud grunt erupted from the conductor's rostrum.

'If you really believe you can improve on the notes written by the maestro himself, my friend, then please, commit your composition to paper and show me one day. For now however, we will stick to the notes as written – if you don't mind!'

An agitated rattling of baton on wood.

‘Letter C please everyone, the pizzicato section. Here’s a bar for nothing...’

Amos plucked and plonked his way through the remainder of the first movement without further incident. To his left, Coral gave her full attention to counting bars and turning pages. This she accomplished by staring fixedly at the score, her violin resting silently on her knees.

At the final chord, Fischer made a face that was midway between pain and pleasure. He slammed his score shut.

‘Let’s take five minutes ladies and gentlemen... no, make it ten. I need to relieve some *tension*.’

The conductor leapt from his podium and headed straight for the bar.

Amos groaned politely at the pun and then looked at Coral in search of explanation.

‘I really don’t like that man,’ she said. ‘He’s always picking on us... unfairly. And the way he prowls around amongst us, listening – no wonder we make mistakes. Honestly, last week he was standing there right behind me and just staring, I could practically feel it!’

‘Coral...’

‘I’m sorry Amos dear. Don’t know what’s come over me tonight. Feel a bit out of sorts actually.’ A dry wheeze accompanied her words.

With a twinge of compassion, Amos studied the face of his musical partner. Even allowing for her 73 years and constant procession of physical ailments, she looked peaky. More than usual. Thin straggly veins tracked down her temples and dark smudges highlighted the wrinkles under her eyes. She looked flushed and hot, and a red band ran from across her cheek to her right ear. The lobe was swollen around a small bauble of an ear-ring.

‘Mm – are you alright Coral? Are you coming down with something, do you think?’

‘I must be. I’ll pop down and see Hubert tomorrow, get my herbals restocked.’

‘If you think that would help, yes, good idea.’

‘You know, for a man who moves with the times, you really are rather conservative about some things Amos.’

‘Sorry. It’s just that... well, you know what happened to Mother.’

But Coral was not listening, busying herself instead with packing up her violin.

‘I’d better be off. I don’t think I could bear another hour of insults from our German friend.’ She paused and glanced towards the bar. A high-pitched cackle rang out

through the open door. 'Though, I'm sure there is some good in the man. Do you know, he came around to my place yesterday with a gift, an apology for telling me off last week about the Stockhausen scores.'

'Really, what was it?'

'A nice piece of jewellery. Nothing flashy or expensive mind, but a lovely thought. I put it on there and then - seemed the right thing to do...'

Coral struggled to her feet, placing a bony hand on Amos's shoulder for support.

'Goodness me, I feel quite giddy!'

'Would you like a lift? I've got the Humber here.'

'No, it's not that bad, really Amos. No doubt you'll want to stay on at the bar afterwards. A good sleep is what I need. I'll be as fit as a fiddle in the morning.'

Amos watched as she tottered away across the pitted Kauri floorboards.

'I hope so old girl, I *hope so*.'

The ten minute break stretched to thirty - one of the benefits of being a 'social' orchestra. When at last the conductor stepped back onto the rostrum he had an air of mischief about him. In fact he looked positively impish. He also had company. At his side stood Victoria Hyde-Jones, leader of the Cello section.

'Fellow musicians,' he announced, swaying noticeably, 'it has always been my goal, as you know, to develop talent within the orchestra. So it gives me great pleasure to inform you that Victoria, a musician of *considerable* talent, has agreed to take on the role of assistant conductor.'

Amos glanced at the faces around him. Expressions ranged from disbelief to dismay.

'I have, for some months, been tutoring Victoria in the finer points of the conductor's art, and I believe she is ready. The rehearsal tonight gives an ideal opportunity. So, without further fanfare, I hand over the baton and leave you in her capable hands. Please work hard. I will see you all next week.'

A chorus of groans and sighs washed around the assembly. Amos scrutinized Victoria's face for a few seconds, she looked just as surprised as the orchestra members and apparently did not notice their utterances. He swung around to see if perhaps Fischer was waiting in the wings somewhere, having a good laugh at their expense. But he was gone.

Out through the kitchen window the peach sky was fading to plum. Amos hung the soggy tea towel up in the hot water cupboard amid the drying plastic bags and strolled out to the lounge, his pace slowed by thought. He settled into his Lazyboy recliner and opened the book that had been resting on the arm.

But he could not concentrate. The book closed with a deep slapping sound. He ran a pensive hand around the back of his neck.

‘Mother, have you seen Coral recently?’

Dorothy Jackson looked up from the television, her face blank as she dragged her mind back from Coronation Street and the intrigue of Albert Tatlock’s lost slippers. She laid her knitting on her lap and swivelled to face her son. Archimedes, the ginger tom, took the hint and leapt to the floor.

‘No, not for a week or so. Why?’

‘Tonight at rehearsal, she was really off colour. Missing page turns, leaving out whole passages. She looked terrible - pale in the face, unsteady on her feet.’

‘Not unusual symptoms for Coral, surely – given her health?’

‘No, but ... maybe someone should look in on her.’

‘I presume you mean me?’

‘I didn’t say that.’

‘No my dear. You didn’t need to. Alright, I’ll drop over to see her tomorrow morning. I could use a few more jars of her honey. And I know she always appreciates a good chinwag in return. She’s a dreadful gossip really. Mind you, usually I can’t tell her much more than she could have read in the newspaper... in the Public Notices columns... Births, Deaths...’ She directed a probing glance at her son.

Anticipating what was coming, Amos quickly re-opened his book and buried himself in it.

‘... Marriages... *Engagements*...’

No comment from the Lazyboy.

The haunting trumpet of the Coronation Street theme tune filled the room, accompanied by the rhythmic click of busy needles. Seeing his opportunity, Archimedes leapt back up into his rightful place on Dorothy’s lap and added his grateful purr to the music.

A figure clad in a yellow parka lay motionless, curled on the floor of the rubber raft as it neared the shore. A few yards ahead of the raft, the gentle swell began to unfurl into sets of long foaming breakers. The first breaker picked the raft up and sent it skidding towards the beach. A second followed close behind and flipped the raft, tipping its occupant into the water.

Takahashi was instantly awake. He scrambled to his feet, coughing and spitting the seawater from his mouth.

The salt stung at his eyes and seeped back into the wound on his face. Covering both eyes with his palms, he screamed at the surf.

His words were Japanese but his meaning transcended mere language. Agony, emanating from the very tissue of his gut. Fury, clothed in robes of sheer bloody panic. He drew breath and screamed again, this time at the sky.

When, after ten or so excruciating seconds, he could see again, Takahashi noticed two things: one, the water was only knee-high, and two, he was standing in a totally strange and unknown place. He staggered out of the water and shook his head like a dog, desperate to wake himself out of the nightmare. But on re-opening his eyes the scene had not changed. He was still on the same alien beach. This was, he began to realise, not a dream. Not the white sand and crystal clear waters of Goza beach. Not even Japan.

Like the rivulets of sea water trickling down his back, cold slivers of memory began to snake their way back into his mind. The Saki. The win at cards. The fight. The gently rocking raft...

Hooking the anchor rope under his arm, he heaved the raft ten or twelve yards up the coarse orange sand. He tied the rope to a bleached tree trunk and took a more careful look around. The beach was not a long one, perhaps only two hundred yards across. Its width also was not great, the sand stretching about twenty yards from the foaming margins of the sea up to the foot of a tall bushy cliff. Rocky outcrops pushed out into the sea at both ends of the beach and around the sides of the cliff, the coast disappeared from sight. It dawned on Takahashi that he had landed on some kind of peninsula or headland, perhaps even an island.

Alone in this strange land, he felt isolated and exposed. He had a strong wish not to go near that raft again, and decided that the best way out was up. He directed his gaze at the cliff face. Low bush and scrub, something to hold onto and to hide under. Near the top of the incline he saw a gate and a fence. Perhaps he was not so isolated here after all.

Along the line of the fence, groups of sheep grazed. A clay track wove down the cliff from the gate. This was no sheep track, this was a manmade path with a handrail. Suddenly he felt uneasy. Clearly there was a farm at the top of the cliff, and naturally there would be a farmer. There would be dogs... guns...

His stomach growled.

On the other hand, there would also be a farmhouse. Most likely with plenty of food in it. The two sensations, fear and hunger, competed for a moment, then joined forces. A moment later he was clambering up the cliff, staying clear of the track and keeping low under the bushes where he could.

About two-thirds of the way up the fisherman froze.

Sounds rang out from above his head.

A voice. Gunshots. A car or truck starting and driving away.

Fear took the upper hand. There was no way of knowing what the locals would be like or how they would treat a foreigner, especially one of Japanese origins. He had seen pictures of the native Maori people in a National Geographic magazine on the fishing boat. They looked a fierce lot. And the local white people, descendants of colonists and sealers and whalers, were apparently a wild bunch too, dividing their time between hunting pigs and playing rugby. Takahashi decided to lay low until dark. He burrowed into the grassy slope and closed his eyes. Like a baby he discovered the best way to silence the hunger pangs and his parched mouth... sleep.

The weary castaway had meant to sleep until dusk only but when he awoke the sky above was pitch black, though the vast slash of the Milky Way provided enough light to distinguish land from sea. He picked his way to the top of the track and hopped over the gate, landing on a rough gravel road. Setting off at a slow run, Takahashi made his way up the incline. He continued on past several side roads that might have led to farmhouses. Best to keep well away from farmers and pig-hunters, the sound of those gunshots was still fresh in his mind.

Ten minutes later he cleared the brow of the hill and stopped for a breather. The lights of a town stretched out before him like a long sparkling caterpillar. He hesitated, unsure if heading towards those lights was a good idea. The matter was settled by another urgent growl from his stomach. He was off again. Now taking the precaution of keeping to the side of the road where he could jump into the long grass should any cars appear.

Chapter 4

A waft of steam rose up from the white enamel mug. Amos clasped it between his hands, soaking up the warmth. As he gazed out through the front window of the shop, the main street was quiet, with only the occasional motorist disturbing the crisp clean air. The day felt unusually cool for early January. Earlier that morning, on the walk across Takaro Park, the moist grass had soaked Amos's shoes and trouser cuffs. He could still feel the chill dampness against his legs.

Sunlit roofs were steaming too, but in spite of the brightening sun, dark shadows were hiding yet along the southern walls and narrow alleyways of Thames Street. Behind the buildings, trees and shrubs sat motionless, dressed in silvery necklaces of dew and web.

With a shiver Amos retreated to the office and switched on the electric heater.

'Just for a few minutes Dad, to take the bite off the air – for Mary,' he explained. JT Jackson's face glared down from the confines of an oak picture frame, short cropped ginger hair bristling out beneath a khaki lemon-squeezer.

From his father, Amos had learned the value of hard work and thrift; from his mother, the importance of keeping warm.

Mary always arrived at 10.05 and started work in the office soon after. Amos heard the front door slam and high heels clacking on the lino floor - right on schedule. She appeared at the office door a little breathless. Amos looked up from the litter of invoices on his desk.

'Morning.'

'Morning Mr J.' She hung up her coat and flopped into her own chair, busying herself with a few loose strands that had escaped from her otherwise neatly pinned-down hairdo. This done, she turned to give her boss a momentary smile.

To Amos, Mary's face looked tired. The red cheeks could be the result of rushing along the street to get to work on time. But it was more than that. Dark rings nestled under her eyes, plainly visible beneath a smear of lurid green eye-shadow.

'How are things? You look... a bit like you could use a good night's sleep.'

'Elvis hasn't been sleeping well. Last night was a complete write-off.'

'Teeth again?'

'And a bit of colic.'

'Poor wee chap. Is he ok now?'

‘Yeah, right as rain. When I leave him with Mum he seems to perk up. It’s like he saves all his problems and shit for me. Literally! After work, I pick him up, take two steps out Mum’s front door and wallop - he lets rip and fills his pants.’

Amos’s face contorted to resemble a dried grapefruit skin.

‘I knew there was a reason I hadn’t become a father – thanks for reminding me!’

Mary chuckled at this. ‘Sorry Mr J, I love him to bits really. It’s just the moaning and whinging really gets on your nerves after a while. Takes after his father in that way. Well, he would do...’

Amos reached out and rested a hand on her shoulder. ‘Look, if you’re really not up to it, go home, get some shut-eye for a few hours. I think I can *just about* manage here on my own.’

Mary’s eyes smiled back at him.

‘You’re very kind. But no, thanks, I’ll be fine once I get started.’

She flipped the cover from the typewriter and fed a carbon backed invoice form under the roller. The small office reverberated to the machine-gun fire of the new electric Olivetti.

Unlike Mary, phone calls hardly ever arrived at 10.05 – or at any other time come to that. Jackson and Son was a small bookshop. It survived, just, on a modest trickle of business from a loyal band of regular customers. Amos knew it. He told his customers that ‘slackness’ would be a better description of his operation. More often than not, the person hearing this would suggest that a reduction in prices might result in an increase in custom. And Amos would reply that, with all due respect, the person concerned had no idea of the overheads and expenses that a modern shopkeeper had to contend with.

Following such interchanges, sales transactions were not common.

On the whole, Amos’s customers seldom found it necessary to make phone calls. In the normal run of events, they came in through the front door, bought their books, magazines and other stationery needs and left by the same door. Communication, if required, was conducted face to face. Telephonic correspondence was reserved for bad news and emergencies.

He picked up the receiver with some interest.

‘Good morning. Jackson and Son.’

The sound of distant footsteps crackled down the line. A sudden breath inward.

‘Amos, it’s Mum. I’m over at Coral’s... she’s got no phone book... well I can’t find it... and I can’t remember the Surgery number... you’d better call Dr MacPherson... quickly.’

‘What’s wrong?’

‘She’s collapsed on the kitchen floor... she looks terrible...!’

‘Bloody hell - forget the doctor, call an ambulance... no, I’ll do it...’ He paused for a second, raising a hand to his forehead. ‘Are *you* alright? Do you want me to come up?’

Suddenly his mother’s voice sounded more her own.

‘No, there’s no need for that. You sort out the ambulance, I’ll be fine.’

Amos paced around the shop to settle his racing mind. The ambulance was on its way, he had heard the siren blaring out across the town. Somehow, this didn’t seem to help.

Mary appeared at the office door. ‘Are you ok? Can I do something?’

‘Just mind that phone’ he snapped. ‘Please.’

Mary nodded and returned to her desk.

‘Need to keep busy’ he muttered and launched himself into tidying the shelves and unpacking and pricing consignments of new stock.

He swept the footpath at the front of the shop, raising a small dust storm.

He wiped the front windows down, removing the fresh layer of dust.

He retreated inside and tidied the shelves again.

At last, a customer. Through the door came a middle-aged woman whose figure was hewn in the mould of Coronation Street’s Ena Sharples. One of their regular customers, Mrs Tinsley. Mary and Amos had taken to calling her Ena – just between themselves of course. It didn’t do to spread nicknames like that around. Not least because it implied that one actually watched Coronation Street. Amongst his friends, Amos would never have admitted to such a thing.

‘I’ve seen the odd few minutes’ he would say, ‘when Mother has it on.’

In fact, he watched most week nights, drawn by some inexplicable magnetism.

The Ena Sharples doppelganger approached the counter.

Amos gathered his wits, acutely aware that she resembled the redoubtable Miss Sharples in appearance more than in moral fibre. It was not that she was light-fingered, rather that she had a habit of putting things in her bag and forgetting they were there. His mother called it eccentricity – Amos called it theft.

‘Morning Mrs Tinsley.’

‘My word it’s fresh out there today!’

‘Indeed it is Mrs T. You’re after your *Woman’s Weekly*?’

‘That’s right dear. Is it in?’

Amos scuttled around behind the counter to a towering wooden magazine rack. He ran a hand across the partitions, his fingers sliding quickly through the alphabet.

‘R... S... T... Tinsley! Yes, here we are. Just in this morning.’

He slipped out the magazine and, with a practised flourish, rolled it and slid a rubber band around its girth. It was a skill his father had taught him. Mrs Tinsley looked unimpressed and held out her hand. Just as he handed the magazine over, the phone rang again.

A loud graunch of wooden chair legs from within the office signalled that Mary was answering. Her soft voice was just audible, drifting out through the half-open door.

‘Good morning. Jackson and ... oh, hello Mrs J. No! ... *really*? Are they sure? Yes, I’ll tell him. Now you take care of yourself won’t you? Ok, bye.’

Amos deserted Mrs Tinsley and planted himself at the office door, agog. Mary sat at her desk, the phone placed on the centrespread of her new copy of NZ Wrestler. The image of King Curtis applying the *sleepers* hold to an unfortunate victim distracted Amos for a moment.

‘Who...?’

‘Your mother, about Coral... I’m afraid she’s gone.’

‘Where?’

‘No, *gone* gone. Passed on... died!’

‘Shit - you’re kidding!’

The proprietor of Jackson and Son leant heavily against the door frame.

A soft cough. Mary’s head moved in a slow sideways shake. She was most definitely not kidding.

Amos was dumbfounded. He even failed to hear Mrs Tinsley making good her escape out the front door with the *Woman’s Weekly* in her bag and her cash still safely stowed in her purse.

‘Mary, how was Mother, how did she sound?’

‘Alright, I guess. Voice was a bit wobbly.’

‘*Where* was she?’

‘Back home I think.’

The wall clock read 11.30. Amos looked out into the empty shop.

‘Do you mind looking after the shop for a bit?’

‘Fine, except...’

‘What?’

‘Well, if you’re thinking of going home to see your Mum, I wouldn’t. She made me promise not to let you do that. Said she’s perfectly alright and you’re not to worry.’

‘Bugger it all, what’s a man supposed to do?!’

Mary watched his face for a few moments. ‘You’re not too clever with women, on the whole, are you Mr Jackson?’

Amos stared at her in disbelief.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Sorry. None of my business really but...’

‘You’ve got that right. Let’s keep it that way shall we? And on the topic of impossible women, can you put a Woman’s Weekly down on Mrs Tinsley’s account. She’s nicked off with another one.’

Dorothy Jackson, if shaken by the events of the day, showed little sign of it by the time her son walked in to the kitchen that evening.

He kissed her on the cheek. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes, fine thanks.’ She smiled as she stood stirring a pot at the stove. ‘Better than you, by the look of things. Busy day?’

‘In the end, yes. Big order from Collins came in, whole lot of new novels – including the new Ngaio Marsh, if you’re interested.’ He paused to hang his jacket on the hook by the back door, perhaps this wasn’t a good time to be discussing murder mysteries.

‘So, what about... you know?’

Dorothy rested her stirring spoon on the stove-top and met her son’s brown eyes.

‘Go and put your feet up by the fire dear. Dinner will be a wee while, I’ve only just put the soup on.’ She turned back to her pot. ‘I’ll come through and tell you all about Coral when it’s ready.’

Amos flicked on the tall standard lamp and fell into his Lazyboy, his arms flopping over the sides. A moment later he felt Archimedes’ head nuzzling and bumping against his open left hand, imparting a rattling purr with each touch. His eyes fell naturally to the warm glow of the open fire. A fire in January – J.T. would really have gone to town!

The flames had an immediate soothing effect. Not only that, they flickered in reflection on the bevelled panes of the sideboard cabinet – wherein sat several fine crystal whisky glasses. Seconds later one of them sat warming on the hearth. Empty.

‘Mother – have you hidden my Glenfiddich again?’

‘Would I do such a thing?’ A lilting reply through the kitchen door.

‘Yes’ said Amos, under his breath. He ran his keen eyes around the lounge. Where can she have hidden it now?

‘Good grief! I’m a grown man, I’m quite capable of...’

His mother poked her head through the door, a sly half smile on her lips. ‘Cup of tea?’

‘Oh for Christ’s sake... whoops... sorry! ... yes, thank you.’ Amos accepted the cup and saucer and tried his best to avoid his mother’s eyes.

She raised her arm and pointed to a square tin on the mantelpiece.

‘Language Amos!’

Suitably chastened, Amos rattled in his pocket for loose change and dropped a couple of twenty cent pieces into the tin. His contribution made little sound, landing lightly onto a thick bed of coins. The swearing and blasphemy business, it seemed, had more going for it than the book trade. As he shuffled on towards the kitchen, Amos noticed a bottle of Glenfiddich sitting at the far end of the bookcase. His eyes rolled. He had put it there himself the previous evening.

Over tea, Dorothy outlined what had happened at Mrs Simpson’s house that morning.

‘The back door was unlocked, as usual. You know what she was like, such a trusting soul. Saw the good in everyone. Refused to believe that anyone would ever break in to her place. And there I found her, on the floor in the kitchen, all rigid and white like a - well, like a ghost. No sign of breathing or a pulse... poor thing, her face was twisted... it must have been painful.’

‘Hang on, go back a bit. Why did you say ‘break in’?’

‘It’s only just occurred to me, but you know what a clean and tidy sort she was.’

Amos nodded, many a time he had been scolded by Coral for the dishevelled state of his violin case and the shambolic assortment of old strings, rosin and bits of pencil that dwelt inside it.

‘Well the kitchen was a mess, drawers open, jars and bottles lying around all over the place.’

‘Yes but she was unwell. That was clear last night at rehearsal. Maybe she just wasn’t up to doing the housework.’

‘No, it was more than that Amos. I can’t put my finger on it, but something in that kitchen made me think someone had been in there. Someone uninvited.’

‘Did you tell the police?’

‘No. I’ve only just been thinking about it again now. I suppose being in my own kitchen brought it to mind.’

She took a sip from her soup, in an effort to recall more.

‘Actually, the police weren’t there. Perhaps the doctor or the hospital called them later, do you think?’

Amos shrugged. ‘I don’t know really. I presume it would depend on the cause of death, if there were any suspicious circumstances, that sort of thing.’

Hot water streamed into the saucepan, liberating globules of fat from the sides. Amos gave a small squeeze on the detergent bottle and watched as streaks of detergent set out to seek and destroy. He pondered why it was that the detergent went after the fat – no doubt there was a scientific explanation, something to do with the chemistry.

The faint sound of the phone ringing reached him. Or was it just the telly?

‘Amos!!!’ His mother’s voice, muffled through two doors. He grabbed a teatowel to dry his hands and walked through to the hallway. Dorothy was standing beside the phone table, the receiver at arm’s length, her lips pursed like a lemon-squeezer.

‘It’s a woman.’ She snapped the teatowel from his hands.

Amos took the receiver, settled into the stool side of the phone table and drew a long breath. He waved for his mother to leave.

‘Hello?’

‘Good evening Mr Jackson, Sally here at Fleet, Finch and Golding... one moment please... ’scuse me Mrs Finch, Mr Jackson is on the line now.’

Amos felt his collar tighten. Could she not even take the time to dial the phone herself?

After about twenty seconds, another female voice spoke. To Amos, the voice was like sorbet: cool, sweet but ultimately lacking substance.

‘Hello Amos, it’s Elizabeth.’

‘Hello Betty.’

‘Look I’m sorry, we’re going to be late for Jenny.’

‘Clearly... if you haven’t left yet.’

‘Brian’s on his way to the office to pick me up, I’m hoping we can be with you by six.’

Amos glanced at his watch. ‘Got a private jet then has he?’

‘Who?’ the voice became yet cooler.

‘Brian. It’s nearly 5.30 now. When I last tried it, the sixty miles from Dunedin to Oamaru took a damn sight longer than thirty minutes.’

The line was still for a moment.

‘For God’s sake Amos, at least try and be civil will you? I’m trying to think of our daughter here, Jenny is up at the Cape with the Thomas’s anyway. She’s going to have dinner with them. She’ll be fine there until I get in. Unless...’

‘Let me guess, you want me to pick her up?’

‘Could you manage? That would be so lovely of you.’

Amos felt his resolve melting against the wall as he leant back against it. ‘Yeah, ok. I’ll give them a call after dinner, I... Betty?’

The receiver had been hung up at the other end.

He strutted back towards to the kitchen and the waiting dishes, making a short diversion in the living room to pour himself a scotch. Though she said nothing, his mother managed to communicate her disapproval. Amos ignored it. He stopped at the kitchen door and coughed to get her attention.

‘I’ve just remembered. It’s all-comers night at the folk club. I could be quite late.’

Cape Wanbrow sits on the gently curving East Coast of the South Island, jutting out into the sea like an oversized barnacle on the otherwise smooth hull of a boat. From the top of its cliffs, clear vantage is gained to all points of the compass, over land and water. For this reason, the Cape was chosen as an ideal site for military installations during the threat of Japanese invasion in World War II. Gun emplacements, lookout bunkers and ammunition stores were built at strategic locations around the promontory. Since the war, these had largely fallen into neglect, with one exception: the Eastern lookout bunker. This had been refurbished by the North Otago Folk Music Club in the 1960’s and used as a base for concerts, meetings and social occasions.

Whoever had come first up with the idea of playing music in a dank cold concrete bunker was either very hardy or very drunk. Amos was currently neither, though he was tending toward the latter. As a rule, he preferred to be scheduled for the tail-end of the evening when enough scotch had passed his lips to settle the nerves.

Living testimony to Baden Powell’s Boy Scout adage, Amos was a strong believer in being prepared. Especially when it came to his music. He tried to get at least thirty minutes of practice in each day. Quite often he managed to achieve this goal too, though the line between practicing and just tutuung around was frequently a faint smudge of a thing. And of his two preferred instruments, the guitar tended to get the lion’s share of

time, because it was more fun. The poor old violin, which really *needed* the practice, spent most of its time just looking impressive in its case on top of the piano.

As a rule, much time and thought also went into his choice of songs for performances, though his repertoire was not so exhaustive as to make that such a hard task. Generally he would aim for an even mix of early Dylan, Cat Stevens, Neil Young and James Taylor. His own favourites and mostly well-received by the punters too.

Rules, like hearts, are made for breaking.

For Amos, being really pissed off with Betty was just the occasion to dispense with his *be prepared* rule. He arrived at the club and immediately wrote his name up on the performers' blackboard. His guitar case and song-book jettisoned at the nearest table, he made straight for the bar.

This was the extent of his preparation.

Having settled back into his chair with a very large glass of whisky, he immersed himself in the music.

The three Powell sisters finished their set with their own arrangement of the Seekers' *Carnival is Over*. Their harmonies were cleverly worked out and beautifully rendered. Amos found himself singing quietly along, providing the missing bass line. The mood was sad though, he found his eyes quite moist by the end.

All-comers evening had an egalitarian, *Jack's-as-good-as-his-master* feel to it. Amos liked this a lot. The downside was that you frequently got completely opposing ends of the musical spectrum performing cheek by jowl. The next name called was Nick Sprott. Case in hand.

Amos felt the need of another whisky.

Nicholas Harley Sprott was at the 'hard-rock' end of the Folk Club membership. It was an end which he generally occupied on his own. Not because other members didn't like hard rock but more on account of his tendency to inject every song he attempted with at least ten minutes of meandering self-indulgent guitar soloing. In itself this would have been not so bad, if he didn't also try to sing over the top. And this in turn would have been almost bearable if he possessed any sense of *pitch*.

For his first number, Nick ground out a truly ordinary version of the Stones' *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. To his credit, he resisted the temptation to solo until the end of the first chorus. Then it began.

The bar did a roaring trade for eight or nine minutes. Sensing that he might be losing his audience, Nick returned to the title lyric:

‘You can’t always get what you waa-ant.’

Amos could stand it no longer.

‘Better stop trying then’ he yelled. A few people around him laughed, some looked rather shocked – it was not good form to heckle. Under normal circumstances Amos would have felt guilty. Tonight he didn’t care. Nick Sprott however, did. He gave Amos a withering scowl when he finally left the stage and wagged a long finger at him.

By the time his own name was called half an hour later, Amos was pleasantly mellowed. He sauntered onto the six-inch platform that did for a stage and set up his gear. He smiled and bowed grandly to the audience, which now numbered almost thirty.

‘Get on with it!’ moaned Nick Sprott.

To hell with preparation! Amos opened his songbook at random.

Blowin in the Wind. Classic Dylan number to start with. He croaked and rasped his way through the verses, evoking the Dylanesque vocal timbre with just the right amount of nasal intensity. The soft passive resistance of the nylon strings felt good under his fingers.

Perhaps his simmering emotions had given an edge to his performance. The crowd clapped and yelled in appreciation. This was not usual. He flicked to another page.

Something in the Way She Moves – *James Taylor*. Another favourite.

All went well until the second chorus when, without warning, his voice reverted to that of a ten-year old – just after the line:

‘I feel fine anytime she’s around me now, and she’s around me now, almost all the time.’

He cleared his throat and tried to carry on... still nothing but spit and boy-soprano whistle. Desperate to rescue the song, he started humming the tune and managed to limp through to the end, making out that he had planned it that way.

This time the crowd were not quite so enchanted. Applause was muted and Amos could see several whispering to each other. Rude bastards!

‘I’ll show you pricks!’ he muttered. He flicked the pages again.

A Man Needs a Maid by Neil Young.

Not one of Amos’s stronger numbers at the best of times. Young’s soaring falsetto range was generally at least half an octave too high for Amos. But with his usual sense of caution now floating on its back in a sea of single-malt Scotch whisky, he pressed on. His voice behaved itself, after a fashion, though it wavered and squeaked at times when he really wanted it to hold firm.

The final chorus delivered a fatal blow. A high pleading tone required for the line:

'A maaaa-iiii-d, a man needs a maid.'

Amos's performance descended into farce. Even to his own inebriated ear, the voice that echoed around the Bunker sounded like an audition for the Goon Show. Either through embarrassment or politeness, the audience watched quietly, with one notable exception – Nick Sprott.

'You need more than that mate!'

Amos struggled on, determined not to be put off.

'I fell in love with the actress. She was playing a part that I could understand.'

'No wonder you can't find a woman then.'

That tore it. Amos grabbed his guitar and stormed off. By the time he returned to his table from the bar, Sprott was nowhere to be seen, which was a good thing for both of them. Amos returned to his seat and vowed to divide his attention between polishing off his whisky and mercilessly taunting the rest of the performers.

Revenge is an ugly concept. Karma is so much nicer and so much more hip. Either way, he was dealing with a vast and all-powerful force. Who was Amos to resist? A mere pawn, a tiny cog in the great wheel of divine retribution. And if the means of retribution was by heckling the other performers, then so be it.

Another glass of whisky. A bag of chips. Another wee dram.

With each glass, the image of Betty's face blurred a little more.

But every now and then, the echo of her voice was there, in his head. As though she was managing to get the last word in by some inexplicable, almost supernatural means.

Mercifully for Amos, Sarah Brown took to the stage at the end of the evening and promptly snuffed out these ghostly apparitions. Sarah was a vigorous beefy young woman with aspirations to stardom and a voice like an asthmatic donkey. She took to Carole King's *Tapestry* and pulled it apart, one thread at a time.

Betty's fading etheric presence disintegrated along with it.

Chapter 5

The narrow road from Oamaru to Kakanui hugged the coast tightly. In places, too tightly. Over the years, great chunks of land beside the road had been eaten away by the relentless action of the open sea and had dropped down onto the coarse sand and seaweed. In recent times, more than one car had taken that plunge too, usually as a result of inexperience or a moment's inattention from a weary driver.

The driver of the tan 1960 Humber Super Snipe was neither inexperienced nor inattentive. Amos had travelled that stretch hundreds of times. Even in the pre-dawn blackness he could navigate the sweeping bends and keep a steady eye out to sea with consummate ease. Not that there was much to be seen out there, just a few stars near the horizon and the faint glow of lights from Japanese fishing trawlers far out beyond the 12 mile limit.

The lights were a common sight and had been for several years. But this morning there was something different. Amos applied his brakes and pulled the Humber into a layby at Halfway Creek. He stepped out and peered out towards the East. There was just one glow, a single trawler. Odd, considering that they usually seemed to hunt in packs.

Amos sucked in the ozone-laden air in an effort to force out the after-effects of the previous night's over-indulgence. His head cleared noticeably and he focused again the horizon. Above the light of that single trawler, a barely perceptible brightening was taking place. Dawn was on the march. Amos checked his watch and swore – late again. He jumped back into the Humber and kicked the accelerator pedal hard against the floor, relishing the chance to unleash the throaty roar of the 3 litre straight-six.

The car sped southwards, travelling well above the speed limit. Amos was late and Jack would be waiting. Either way, speeding ticket or grumpy friend, he was in trouble with the law.

At the Kakanui Bridge car park, Jack Greenwell was indeed waiting. His fly rod already made up and his tackle bag resting on the bonnet of the grey Holden HQ police car. To Amos's relief, the Inspector was sitting on the front bumper and looked relaxed. He pulled in alongside the Holden and leant out the window.

'See you've got the work car.'

'Yeah, Jag's in the panelbeaters. See you've got the tank!'

Amos ignored the gibe. He had heard it so many times that it had lost its sting. He stilled the Humber's engine and reached into his tackle bag. Unusually, he had not

tackled up in advance. Under the dim glow of the internal light it was not easy finding the eye of the hook. His foggy head didn't help matters.

After a few moments, Jack appeared at the car door, whipping his rod back and forth.

'Did you notice the Japs this morning?' Amos asked, pulling his knot tight and spitting a short filament of fly-line from his lips.

'No, came down the main road, through Maheno.'

'I stopped to have a look, there was only one. Ever seen that before?'

'Maybe it was a local?'

'Yeah, maybe. Hadn't thought of that.'

He pushed the Humber's doors shut and shouldered his bag.

'What've you put on Jack?'

'Started with a nymph last week, with no joy you might recall. Thought I'd go straight in with a dry this time.'

'Greenwell's Glory?'

'What else!' With that, Greenwell pulled his black woollen balaclava over his balding head and flicked on his long silver torch. Amos felt a grin stretch his dry lips – the Inspector looked more like a burglar than a policeman.

The anglers made the long trek up the river bank without talking at all. This was intentional, a habit formed over the years for two reasons: first, it was a part of the whole 'stalking the fish' procedure. One had to be stealthy in pursuit of the elusive prize.

'You can never be too careful with trout, Mossy' his father had advised. 'Flighty little beggars!'

And it was true. Often they would often hear the sound of a fish slurping a fly from the surface long before it was light enough to see any movement on the water.

The second reason: the walk was a good twenty minutes worth. Given that amount of time, their conversation would inevitably turn to the war in Vietnam, or nuclear testing in the Pacific, or to the old Labour vs National debate. Just as inevitably, disagreement and argument would ensue – neither of which were conducive to good fishing. So Amos and Jack kept quiet and merged their thoughts with the natural world.

They came to a halt just below the second rapid. Braids of water surged and rumbled over the worn river stone, undulating black sinews. In the places where the surface tension broke, white foam was stained pink by the growing bloodiness of the eastern sky.

At last it was time to speak.

‘Bit of a *fresh* been through’ said Jack. ‘A lot more flow than last time.’

‘Yeah, good downpour in the hills last weekend. Stuck in my memory ‘cause Mum wanted to take a drive up to the hut on the Sunday. We only just got to Dad’s grave and then wham, the heavens opened. We both got drenched.’

‘I’d say she’s up a good 50 percent just here.’

‘Like the old days eh? Before those bloody farmers started pumping half the river out.’

Jack made no reply. He was already stalking towards the tail of his favourite pool. Amos gave him a wide berth and moved further upstream to the next stretch. High above, the red dawn grew steadily whiter.

By the time the pair met up again for morning smoko, the sun was fully above the line of willows and shards of light flickered playfully on the rippling waters.

Jack set up his thermette in the lea of a grassy bank, cramming handfuls of driftwood down the hollow funnel. He crouched down low and fumbled for matches in his fishing bag.

‘Not much of a rise this morning’ he said, striking a match, ‘few little moths and mayflies about though.’ He dropped the match into a tinder of twigs and dry pine-needles at the base of the thermette.

Amos repositioned his buttocks on the unforgiving shingle. A futile search for comfort.

‘Nah, tried a nymph for a bit. Nothing doing, couple of nudges, that’s all... you?’

Flames began to leap from the metal water heater, forcing Jack to sit back on the grass. He flicked open his fishing knife and tested the edge on a dry willow leaf.

‘Much the same. Landed a little one mind you, barely a pound I reckon. Slipped him back of course.’

Amos smiled. When they had first gone fishing together, Jack would keep each and every trout that happened to find itself snared on the end of his line, regardless of condition or size. The undersize thing had rather surprised Amos, given that in his daytime existence Jack Greenwell was an upholder of the law and Head of the North Otago CIB. But these days Jack was a confirmed catch-and-release man (when it came to trout that is, with criminals he took a different line). On the river bank, he took only fish of legal length and even then kept only what he could eat himself or give to friends

and family. Amos had taught him well. Perhaps those years of teacher training had not been in vain after all.

In return, Jack had taught Amos to whittle.

For a good ten minutes while they waited for the thermette to boil, the pair of them whittled away at lengths of fallen willow and pine. As he worked, Amos felt the stress and worry of the world drop to the ground along with the chips of wood. The setting was idyllic, though hardly quiet. The crackling of the wood burning inside the metal boiler provided a rhythmic counterpoint to the babbling of water over stone and the steady chug of a distant irrigation pump.

Once the water had boiled and the tea brewed, the whittling ceased. The two men switched their attention to scalding hot mugs. Conversation returned.

‘How was dinner with Becky the other night?’

Amos smiled, though he was not pleased. ‘Rebecca.’

‘Becky... close enough.’

‘How did you find out about that?’

‘I’m a detective Amos.’

‘I hardly think the District Commander is paying you to investigate the personal affairs of law-abiding shopkeepers.’

‘Affairs...?’

‘I’d have thought your time would have been better spent tracking down the burglars and thieves that seem to thrive around here.’

The pair settled into quiet contemplation, neither venturing to take the matter further.

Almost immediately however, their serenity was disturbed by a tractor working the slopes on the other side of the river.

‘There’s one of the culprits now’ Amos muttered.

‘What? Who?’

‘Thieves... water thieves.’

The Head of the CIB sat up, squinting his eyes at the alleged felon.

‘That’ll be Thorny, ploughing in after his big gorse burn-off. *He*’s alright, takes what he’s allowed, no more.’

The pair watched the farmer weave back and forth across the charred black paddock for several minutes. It was one of those fishing days where the main entertainment was provided by anything and everything *except* the catching of fish.

‘Did you hear about Coral Simpson?’ said Amos, out of the blue.

‘What?’

‘Mum found her dead at her house yesterday morning.’

‘The Sergeant mentioned it... you knew her quite well?’

‘Yeah, through the orchestra. Mum and she were old school friends too. So... the police are not involved?’

‘We’d only be called in if there was something suspicious.’

The Inspector opened the leather lid of his watch.

‘Bugger. It’s nearly nine. I should head off.’

‘Really? Yeah, fair enough, I should be off soon too – might have a few casts down by the first rip before I go.’

‘You never know when to give up, do you Amos?’ Greenwell heaved his bag over one shoulder and turned to face downstream. ‘See you next week at the Club?’

‘For certain. Wouldn’t miss it.’

The detective scrambled up the bank and trudged away across the paddock.

Amos packed away the thermette and gathered up his gear. He set off downstream following the riverside track.

The first ripple however, was barely fishable. He decided to keep on walking and try the blood-hole instead. But even there, as best he could tell from a distance, the water did not look promising. The river was swollen and broad at the base of the cathedral-like limestone cliff. There seemed to be very little flow.

Directly below the cliff, the river bed descended into a deep deep pool, dark and murky and home to legendary fish life. Amos stopped walking and stared towards the pool. As he did so, thirty-five years evaporated like early morning river mist.

It is 1939, the year before JT Jackson signs up and goes to war. A clinker dinghy glides over the inky water beneath the limestone cliff. Sounds of water moving - a faint gurgle as painted hull splits the flat surface and drips cascade from oar blade tips. The oars are held still, stunted featherless wings poking out to each side. In the dinghy, a man and his young son peer into the depths.

‘A lot of history in this pool Mossy’ says the man. ‘Last century, an abattoir worked at the top of the cliff there.’

‘What’s an abbertwar?’

‘A meat works, like the freezing works at Pukeuri only smaller... and a bit less hygienic. Anyway, all the offal and blood and leftovers got sluiced down a race directly into this pool. That’s how it got its name. People reckon the trout and the

eels got really big, feeding off it. Some people reckon they're still in there, great big grand-daddies. Trout the size of dolphins. Eels like trees-trunks.'

The boy leans back towards the middle of the dinghy and pulls his hands away from the water.

'It's not true is it Dad? They couldn't still be there, fish don't live that long do they?'

The father puffs out his cheeks. 'Who knows son, who knows...?'

It was the last time Amos had gone fishing with his father.

For old times' sake he decided it was worth a closer look at the blood-hole, though the signs from the track were still not that encouraging.

On another day, he might never have taken that closer look. And that being the case, he would never have tripped over that large clump of bulrushes and landed face first in the muddy grass at water's edge. And he would not have found the knife.

A smallish black fishing knife with a fold-out blade. Just like the ones that he and Jack used. But they had been whittling with their knives only minutes earlier. Some other clumsy fisherman must have dropped it. Amos folded the knife shut. The action was still quite smooth, only a little rusty. It can't have been lying there in the grass for very long. He slipped the knife into the front pocket of his bag.

Out on the river, below the cliff, a breeze was starting to rise, chopping up the surface. Casting a fly against that breeze would be no fun at all. The descendants of the grand-daddies of all trout would have to wait. To top things off, Amos got a whiff of the layer of decomposing river bank that he was now wearing on his face like a mud pack.

It was time to head home.

Chapter 6

In the world according to Amos Jackson, Saturday morning, a fresh pipe of Port Royal and a cup of real brewed coffee were among the most exquisite experiences a person could have. Enjoyed together, in the serenity of one's back porch, they were unsurpassable. Showered, shaved and decked out in his old cords and turtle neck sweater, he unrolled himself onto the old cane chair and surveyed the world. His number one pipe, affectionately dubbed 'Dad's Favourite', crackled cheerfully as he drew at the worn Bakelite mouthpiece.

A deep stillness settled upon the smoker.

The vista before him was one of verdant prosperity. The lawn was lush in spite of the drought and the kitchen garden was flourishing in all departments. In particular, the last of the summer lettuces and carrots were well on their way to being prize-winners at the A & P show.

A hopeful thrush landed on the bean trellis in search of worms.

'You're a bit late' Amos called out, setting the thrush to wing. It was, after all, nearly 11 o'clock.

The flutter of its wings blew a realisation into his mind.

'Early bird... early *Bird*... I wonder...' He rapped his knuckles on the weatherboard wall behind his chair. Dorothy pushed open the kitchen window.

'Yes?'

'What's that clue to 12 across again?'

She read from a folded newspaper. '12 across? Let's see... *style of the early bird, we hear*, 5 letters... I thought worms or wormy, something like that.'

'What if it's *Bird*, with a capital B. As in Charlie Parker?'

'The saxophonist? Mm, maybe. What's the early bit then?'

'Come on Mother, style of music...'

'Early jazz... swing? No, that's too early - bebop!'

'Does it fit?'

'Yes, it does. Well done Amos. More coffee?'

Amos stretched his arm over his head and passed his mug up to his mother's waiting hand.

Bliss.

Habits and traditions.

The more years that passed, the more he felt drawn to traditions – and to history.

‘Best not let Jack know’ he mused, ‘he’ll think I’m turning into a conservative.’

The Otago Daily Times weekend cryptic had been a family tradition as far back as Amos’s 45 year old mind could reach. Even his father JT Jackson had been a fan, right up until his untimely death in Crete in 1941. Some years after the war, a military mate of JT had visited the Jacksons. He told them stories of bravery and hilarity, and of J.T.’s predilection for working away at crosswords while shells whistled overhead and green commanders sent waves of young men to their doom.

Amos ran his fingers over the hickory bowl of his pipe and traced the pad of his forefinger around the letters J.T.J.

In some ways, the weekly ritual of the crossword was something of a memorial to the elder Jackson. Perhaps that was why it was taken so seriously.

Dorothy appeared at his side with a tall mug of steaming coffee.

‘Thanks.’ Amos put his pipe aside and cradled the mug.

His mother sat alongside in a matching cane chair. She adjusted her glasses, frowning at the crossword puzzle which was now on her lap.

‘Hmm’ she said.

‘Which one are you looking at?’

‘Nine down, eight letters - now has a ‘b’ at the end.’

‘Give me the clue again.’

‘... ‘a pungent aroma from a lifeless thing.... oh!’

She clapped a hand to her mouth as though trying to stop something from escaping.

‘What?’

‘That’s made me think of Coral. Oh my...’

‘It’s hard to believe she’s gone, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, but I was thinking of something else. That clue has brought it all back.

Remember when I found Coral, I had that feeling that someone had been in her house?

There was something else - a strange smell around where she was lying. I wonder if it was... oh, now that’s a *truly* unpleasant thought.’

Before Amos could respond, the front door bell rang. He leapt from his chair.

‘I’ll get it Mother. Maybe we should leave the puzzle for a while?’

Dorothy folded the puzzle and placed it on a wooden apple-box that sat between the two chairs. Amos’s attempt at an occasional table – woodworking never had been a strong point. She looked up to see Archimedes making use of the open door and

pouncing out into the porch. He headed directly for the back door and sniffed at the contents of his food bowl. A few lazy mouthfuls were gobbled up before he became aware that Dorothy was sitting watching him. He bounded across and leapt onto her knees, his breath reeking of tuna-flavoured Jellimeat. Too much! Dorothy placed him firmly back on the floor.

She rose to her feet, pre-empting any further approaches, and gazed out at the back yard.

The lawns needed mowing and the veges were disappearing under a blanket rampant weeds. Probably just as well - what on earth were they going to do with thirty-six lettuces and six rows of carrots anyway? Amos and his competitions!

Still, there were worse things a man of his age could be up to. And of course, there were also much better things. Getting married for example.

The eligible bachelor appeared at the back door with their visitor.

‘It’s Jack. Any coffee left in the pot?’

‘I’ll brew some fresh.’ She rose from her chair with a jump. ‘Hello Jack, lovely to see you dear. Do have a seat.’

‘No I couldn’t Mrs J, that’s your place.’

‘Nonsense,’ she mumbled as she scuttled back into the house, ‘I know my place.’

She returned some minutes later, carrying a large tray which she set onto the apple box. The two men were deep in discussion about the relative merits of spray-on dressings for the dry fly. The debate came to a halt while Dorothy poured the coffee, and Jack got around to the reason for his visit.

‘I’m here on business. It’s about the death of Coral Simpson.’

‘I thought you said the police weren’t involved’ said Amos, blowing the steam from his mug.

‘We weren’t. Doctor MacPherson was of the opinion she died of natural causes.’

‘If it was natural causes, why even speak to a Doctor? And what have *we* got to do with it?’

Inspector Greenwell let a mouthful of coffee slip down his throat. ‘I spoke to the Doctor because the station received an anonymous tip-off this morning. An elderly woman claiming she had evidence that Mrs Simpson had been murdered.’

His eyes flicked across to Dorothy.

‘How interesting,’ she said, without changing her expression at all.

‘As a result of which, I am required to launch an investigation and a post mortem. And I’ve come to see you Dorothy because of course you discovered the body.’

‘You’re going to question me?’ asked Dorothy, her face brightening.

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘Ooh. How exciting. Just like on TV, like Lieutenant what’s his name – Columbo.’

‘Perhaps’ the Inspector looked doubtful. ‘I’m afraid I’m no Columbo Mrs J.’

‘No? Kojak perhaps?’ said Amos, eyeing the Inspector’s shiny skull.

His comment was ignored.

‘Before I begin. I need to check one thing. I don’t suppose either of you know anything about the tip-off call do you?’

Amos’s grin vanished. ‘How could I? I was out fishing with you this morning.’

‘True. Mrs J?’

‘Really Jack! Do I strike you as the sort of person who would do such a thing?’

Greenwell paused, not sure of where to go with this.

‘Right. Never mind, forget I raised the matter. Now, tell me what exactly happened when you arrived at 46 Wansbeck Street yesterday. And what your purpose for visiting was.’

Dorothy leaned forward in her chair and clasped her hands in her lap.

‘Well. It was mid-morning, I popped over to see how she was.’

‘She’d been unwell?’

‘Yes, so Amos thought anyway.’

The detective turned a quizzical eye towards his fishing associate. Amos obliged.

‘Yesterday, at the OOSO rehearsal, she seemed really off colour... off-key you might say.’

Jack Greenwell smiled, but not at the pun.

‘Ah yes, the famous Oamaru Operatic Society Orchestra.. What is it you’re putting on this year Amos? Sound of Music again... the Mikado?’

‘South Pacific actually. Anyway, the point is, Coral was not at all well at the rehearsal.’

Inspector Greenwell’s eyes became slit-like. ‘In what way?’

‘She was pale looking, wobbly on her feet. No concentration at all. Seemed a bit breathless at times too.’

‘I see.’ A few words were scribbled into the regulation issue notepad. ‘And at the house, Dorothy, tell me what you found.’

‘The door was open.’

‘Front door?’

‘No, the back. I walked straight into the kitchen and there she was, spread out on the lino. I thought perhaps she’d just fainted or had a fall. But I couldn’t find a pulse, no sign of breathing.’

‘Did you notice anything unusual about the house?’

‘Not physically. But something there gave me the creeps. I don’t mean Coral’s body, something else. It felt like the house had been disturbed, violated even.’

‘And the smell...’ Amos added.

‘Yes, that’s right, there was a rather odd smell.’

‘Of what? Did you recognise it?’

‘Mm. I’ve been trying to place it. Bit like rotten meat or compost. You don’t think it was Coral...?’

‘No’ the Inspector said quickly. ‘Far too early for that. And then?’

‘I made a quick visit to the toilet – upset stomach – and then I phoned Amos.’

‘Why Amos, rather than the doctor?’

‘It’s silly, but I couldn’t remember the number and I couldn’t find a phone book anywhere. Just wasn’t thinking straight. I suppose I was a bit flustered by the whole situation. I know the number to the bookshop off by heart of course.’

‘You could have just phoned 999’ said Greenwell.

Dorothy grimaced, her cheeks reddening.

Amos noticed her hand was gripping the arm of the chair. Her knuckles protruding like small white rocks amid the folds of pink flesh. He placed his hand over hers.

‘She wasn’t thinking straight Jack. Anyway, I called the ambulance straight away.’

Greenwell spent a few moments adding to his notes.

‘Now... motive. Do we know of anyone who would have wanted to harm Mrs Simpson. Did she have any, er, enemies?’

The expressions on both Jackson’s faces reflected their disbelief.

The detective continued. ‘As odd as it may sound, that is a serious question. And an important question. I am assuming for the time being that there was foul play involved in her death. Of course, by no means do we know that for sure, nor will we until a post-mortem has been conducted. But if she was murdered, we will have to consider possible suspects and motives.’

‘MMO’ said Dorothy.

‘Pardon?’ The Inspector looked up from his notes.

‘MMO. Isn’t that what you detectives call it? Means, Motive and Opportunity.’

‘Oh I see. Columbo again. Yes, I suppose you could put it that way – we’ll be looking for suspects with the MMO. Getting back to my question, can you think of anyone who might have held a grudge, or wanted Mrs Simpson out of the way?’

Amos shook his head. ‘No. Impossible, no-one could have wanted to do away with Coral. She was such a sweet old thing.’

‘Except...’ began Dorothy, ‘there was that old feud of hers with Victoria.’

‘Who’s this?’ the Inspector turned a page in his notebook.

‘Victoria Hyde-Jones. She and Coral were old school friends, but they had a falling out at some stage. They’ve been at loggerheads ever since.’

‘What sort of a person is she - this Hyde-Jones?’

‘She’s a snob, claims to have royal blood... load of nonsense of course. She can be really nasty and vindictive when she wants.’

Amos interrupted. ‘Steady on Mother. She’s not that bad.’

‘Really! What about that business at your orchestra rehearsal last year?’

Amos could feel the Inspector’s eyes on him. ‘That was just words. Nothing serious.’ Greenwell’s brows rose.

‘This was back in November, it was the first rehearsal for the New Year’s show. Victoria made a huge fuss about Coral and I being in the orchestra. She reckoned we weren’t up to scratch.’

‘Not true?’ asked Greenwell, his eyes glinting.

‘Well, we’re not perfect of course. But then neither is Pooh-face.’

‘Sorry?’

‘Pooh-face. It’s our nickname for Victoria. Anyway she shouted and screamed and ranted, basically saying that she’s better than the rest of us.’

‘And what happened, after this outburst?’

‘She told Coral she’d get rid of her, get her out of the orchestra.’

‘In those words?’

‘Yeah, near enough.’

‘And did anyone else hear her say this?’

‘The whole orchestra did.’

Greenwell parked his pencil between two pages.

‘I see.’

He folded away his notebook. ‘I think that’s enough for the time being. I’ll need to hear back about the post-mortem before much more can be done.’ He took a long noisy sup and finished his coffee in one. ‘I must stress the importance of keeping our little

conversation this morning to ourselves. If this is homicide, we don't want the perpetrator to get wind that I'm investigating. Do you understand?'

Amos and his mother nodded solemnly, as Greenwell got to his feet.

'Would you like to stay for a spot of lunch?' Dorothy asked.

'Thank you kindly, but no. I'm expected back at the station.'

Amos escorted the Inspector to the front door and Dorothy settled back into her chair on the porch. She looked thoughtfully out to the back garden. A thrush was pulling and tugging at a very large brown worm. On the trellis, a second thrush watched on with interest.

Arriving at the Police Station the following morning, the Inspector was looking forward to the opportunity to sit down at his desk and ponder the case. However, the moment he stepped through the swinging doors he was pounced upon by a red-faced duty Sergeant.

'Where have you been?'

Greenwell stopped in his tracks and turned to face his questioner.

'Tell me Barrett, when did your promotion to superintendent come through?'

The Sergeant faltered. 'I... it...what?'

'...where have you been?...'

'Sorry sir. I apologise. It's just that it's been bedlam in here this morning. I've been running around like a headless chook.'

'Perhaps not such a bad thing' remarked the Inspector, casting a critical eye over the bulging uniform and multiple chins that stood before him.

The Sergeant either missed or ignored the comment. He thrust a clipboard in front of his commanding officer.

'The duty log sir. Five walk-ins and eleven phone calls. And there's someone from MAF waiting to see you in your office. And we've got a bit of a *situation*.'

'I thought I said not to let that idiot Hamill... oh never mind' replied the Inspector, scanning down the list. 'So what's this *situation*?'

'The 4th entry... there... a call from the Yee farm up on the Cape.'

Greenwell attempted to read the entry aloud.

'Salivation... Tea cage...'

His eyes squinted.

‘... Introduce... Fine aim... something. What the hell is this Barrett? Makes no sense at all. It would help if you could write in a language I know – English for example.’

The Sergeant took the duty log back.

‘Like I said, I was rushed off my feet. I don’t work well under pressure, my handwriting in particular suffers... reminds me of Miss Beatty in Standard Two.’ He massaged the calloused palm of his left hand. ‘My God that woman had a swing on her, should’ve been a golfer.’

‘The point, Barrett, get to the point.’

‘Sorry sir. What it says is - *Situation. The Cape. Intruder. Firearm.*’

‘Who made the call?’

‘Mr Yee himself. Reckons there’s an intruder with a firearm on his land.’

Jack Greenwell paused. If true, this could indeed be a *situation*.

‘Not the world’s most reliable informant, old man Yee. Still, we’d best play it safe. Send a couple of men up to check it out. Tell them to take it easy, if this is for real we don’t want to wade in with guns blazing. And we’d better notify the AOS boys in Dunedin too.’

‘Yes sir.’

‘Give a few minutes to get rid of this time-waster and I’ll be back with you.’

The Inspector strode off to his office. He stopped at the door and drew a calming breath. Another visit from bloody Hamill, just what he didn’t need.

In fact a visit from Hamill was just what the Inspector didn’t get. The man sitting in front of the desk was a different fish altogether. Hearing the door and Greenwell’s footsteps he rose, turned and offered his hand. He was a tall well-fed man of at least 50 years. His suit was black and well cut, and looked expensive.

‘Detective Inspector, I’m Gary Campbell, manager of the Otago Regional office. Ag and Fish.’

‘Please, have a seat’ Greenwell moved around to his own seat.

‘Thank you. I’ll get straight to the point, I believe you are acquainted with our man up this way, Hamill.’

‘Uh-huh. We *have* met a couple of times.’

‘When did you last see him?’

Greenwell hesitated, not used to being on the receiving end of an investigation.

‘About a week or so back I’d say. Why?’

‘He’s gone AWOL. We haven’t heard from him for five days now.’

‘I see. And no-one else has heard... friends, family?’

Campbell shook his head.

‘So, you’d like us to investigate?’

‘No, well - not yet. To tell you the truth this isn’t the first time he’s pulled a stunt like this. He has a bit of a track record for bailing out and going bush when the going gets tough.’

‘He certainly was finding things a bit challenging up here, that’s true. But I wouldn’t have taken him for the type to run away.’

‘Oh, he’ll come back, he always does.’

‘What would you like us to do? I’m not clear about the *purpose* of your visit Mr Campbell.’

‘Just keep an eye out for him I suppose. He might be a bit of a zealot when it comes to his job, but he is one of our best men when it comes to getting results – in spite of his tendency to go walkabout. To be honest we need him back on the job, I’m feeling the heat from the Minister. He’s got a bee in his bonnet about ‘cleaning up’ the farming industry. In his last report Hamill seemed to be onto something. We need him to bring in a result on this.’

‘Well, I can sympathize with your position, I certainly know what pressure from above is like. Tell you what, I’ll get the boys to make some enquiries, see what we can find out... we’ll be in touch if we hear anything. Now you must excuse me, it seems I have a crisis to deal with.’

‘Thank you, much appreciated.’ Campbell took the cue and made his exit.

Detective Inspector Greenwell watched him go. A faint smile appeared on his face. Having Hamill out of his hair was a major bonus. The longer the stupid prick stayed AWOL the better. The Oamaru CIB was not going to go out of its way to look for him.

Chapter 7

Carl Thomas lay spread-eagled, face-down at the brow of the hill. Save for the rise and fall of his chest he was completely motionless. In the fuzzy half-light before dawn, shape and form were hard to discern, but movement was easy to spot.

At the edge of the paddock, where the bush started, something stirred in the sights of his rifle. He could just make out the vague line of the fence that was supposed to stop the stock from wandering into the bush and off the cliff. And the definite form of one of the fence posts.

The shape moved again. It was most likely a rabbit. Though the light was playing tricks on Carl's eyes. The animal looked almost yellow to the naked eye.

'What's that?' he whispered.

Beside him, Jenny Jackson raised her binoculars.

'Bunny' she said, 'I think. Funny colour though.'

Carl felt his finger automatically begin to squeeze. The animal did not move.

He prepared himself for the recoil. As a farmer's son he was no stranger to a firearm, but knew that the jolt of the 303 against his bony 13 year old shoulder had the potential to do a lot of damage. He pulled the stock hard in against his shoulder and chest.

'Wait a minute' hissed Jenny, elbowing him in the ribs.

This had a dual effect. Firstly, he flinched. Secondly, he fired the rifle.

Fortunately for his target, the flinch was enough to put Carl's aim out by several inches.

'Bloody hell – what did you do that for?'

'That's no bunny' she said, straining for clarity through the binoculars. 'I think it's a person.'

A long stream of screaming and yelling confirmed her assessment. Definitely a human voice, but practically unintelligible.

'Run!' she hissed.

Reaching the shearing shed in a matter of seconds, the two cousins collapsed on the timber floor, their hearts pounding and their lungs heaving. After a few minutes, they had regained their breath enough to start arguing.

'Told you it was dumb idea to come out so early' said Jenny.

'Early bird catches the worm. That's what Grandma always says.'

‘I don’t think she was talking about hunting rabbits with dodgy old army surplus rifles. And she definitely didn’t mean taking potshots at passing strangers either. What would she say now? God – come to think of it, what’s Dad going to say? He’s coming to pick me up sometime today. What if he finds out?’

Her questions were left unanswered.

Carl was on his feet at the door post, peering through the open entrance out into the half-light. ‘I can’t see anything out there, the rifle or that guy. You had the binoculars... who was he anyway? I reckon he was foreign.’

‘How should I know? And what do you mean ‘foreign’? Jeez Carl, according to you anyone born north of the Waitaki is a foreigner.’

‘Well what was that language then? It sure as hell wasn’t English.’

‘Could have been, maybe he’s got a speech impediment or he’s kind of retarded or something.’ Jenny was now standing alongside.

Carl looked at his cousin. ‘You’re the retarded one...’

This earned him a solid punch in the stomach. ‘Ooh, that was a killer – you got me!’ He doubled over in pain that was only small part pretence.

‘Shh, what was that?’ Jenny clamped a hand over his mouth. There was a faint metallic click from outside. Both backed further into the shed and stared at the entrance.

Behind the shed, unobserved, Takahashi slipped off his yellow parka and let it drop to the ground below the window. He heaved himself up and slid noiselessly in through the empty window-frame. He had the 303 trained on the backs of the two teenagers even before his feet hit the floor. At the sound of his footfall the pair whirled to face him. There was still not much light, but enough for the cousins to see his face.

‘See, told you he was foreign’ said Carl, his eyes fixed on the man.

The Japanese fisherman made no attempt to speak. His eyes were hidden beneath a heavy brow and a mass of tangled matted hair. A crusty scar ran along one side of his jaw, clearly visible even beneath a carpet of black stubble.

‘Hey, that’s my rifle’ said Carl, pointing.

Takahashi gave a warning growl and raised the rifle butt to his shoulder.

Carl’s hand fell to his side at once.

The fisherman motioned with the barrel of the 303, directing the two teenagers across to one of the stock pens. He pointed for them to sit down inside. With nautical efficiency he gathered a length of rope from the floor and lashed the teenagers’ arms behind their backs. Then he fastened the lashings to the timber slats of the pen. By the time Carl and Jenny realised that he had put the rifle down, they were secured fast.

An instant later Takahashi had a hold of the 303 again. He propped his back up against a thick wooden post.

‘Food. Water’ he barked in a vaguely American accent.

Jenny raised her head.

‘Who are you?’ she stammered. ‘Let us go, you’ll be sorry. My father’s friends with Inspector Greenwell... he’s... ow!’

Carl’s elbow had jabbed the side of her chest.

‘Food – water – house,’ the fisherman said loudly and slowly. ‘Go house,’ he nodded in the general direction of the Yee farmhouse, turned and stumbled away out the shed door.

Two trophy salmon and a mounted stag’s head were not standard issue furniture for a regional chief of the CIB, Amos suspected. But they were impressive. He wondered if they were there to send the message that DI Jack Greenwell was a hunter who liked to bag his quarry.

Certainly he had the powers of concentration of a hunter. As Amos sat and filled the office with pipe smoke, Greenwell was the picture of attentiveness, perched behind his desk with pencil poised and phone receiver clamped to his ear.

‘Yes. Yes. I see, yes. Spell that for me.’

A sudden burst of writing.

‘Anything else? No, no, quite so. Thank you Doctor. Good bye.’

He fumbled the receiver onto its cradle. Amos coughed.

‘News?’

‘Mm. Results of the post mortem. It’s *clear* that Coral Simpson died as a result of poisoning. A toxin called Botulinum.’

‘Is that what causes Botulism... like you get from badly tinned food?’

‘Yes.’

Amos drew briefly at his pipe. ‘So her death may be accidental after all, food poisoning. Just a bit of bad luck.’

‘That is one conclusion.’

‘Is there another?’

‘There may be several.’ He expelled a long breath. ‘In this game it pays to make no assumptions. We now have no doubt that she died of Botulinum poisoning. What is less certain however, is how she came to be infected.’

‘You mean someone could have poisoned her on purpose?’

‘Exactly.’

‘Bit unlikely isn’t it? I mean, we’ve already established Coral had no enemies, who the hell would go to the trouble and risk of poisoning her, and why?’

Greenwell smiled broadly. ‘Very good Amos. Those are precisely the questions we need to answer.’

‘What do mean, *we*?’

The detective slid back into his chair and clasped his hands behind his neck, his arms spreading like wings. ‘That’s why I invited you here today my friend. I want to enlist your help.’

‘My help. What sort of help?’

‘We both know you’re an ace at puzzles – crosswords, maths problems, IQ tests, all that sort of thing. And you’re good with people, good at listening, got an eye and an ear for detail.’

‘So?’

‘I think you know we’re short-staffed here. And some of the staff we do have are quite, ah, limited... not really CIB material at all. Take Barrett for instance, just keeping the duty log up to date proves enough of a challenge for him.’

‘But you have other staff, I seen them in the shop.’

‘Uniformed staff yes, but I need someone to make some discrete enquiries. Someone who isn’t known by the whole town to be a cop.’

Amos stared blankly for a few moments. His head rocked slightly to one side.

‘You’re not having me on? This isn’t one of your little jokes?’

Greenwell shook his head solemnly.

‘Is it allowed? Sounds a bit dodgy, I mean, I’m not a police officer. I’m the aging hippy protestor, the trendy liberal who needs to grow up, remember?’

‘All the better, people will trust you. And don’t worry, you wouldn’t be *working* for the police as such, you’d just be assisting the police with their enquiries.’

Amos’ mouth opened but no sound escaped.

‘Is that a yes?’

‘I... I suppose so. Yeah, go on, why not?’

‘Good man. There is just one thing, I need you to sign a confidentiality declaration.’

‘Why? Don’t you trust me?’

‘It’s not that, it’s regulations. You have to confirm in writing that you’ll keep the details of the case to yourself. No gossiping.’

‘Sure. No problem.’

‘Which means you can’t discuss it with anyone, not even your mother.’

‘Mm. That could be tricky, what if she wants to talk about Coral?’

‘Anything that’s already public knowledge, that’s fine. But any new evidence, or leads, or information about suspects is out of bounds.’

‘Fair enough.’

A form was pushed across the table. While Amos read, the Inspector spoke into his intercom.

‘Barrett. Tell the fingerprint boys to get around to Mrs Simpson’s. Wansbeck Street, number 46. Yes, near the top of the hill.’

‘So, boss...’ Amos grinned widely as he scrawled his signature ‘...where do I start?’ DI Greenwell returned the grin, with interest.

‘With someone you know, as it happens.’

The lashings were testament to the Japanese fisherman’s training. No matter how much Carl and Jenny twisted and wriggled and writhed they could not get any sort of movement in the ropes at all.

They slumped against each other for a breather.

‘You’re the boy scout’ said Jenny, ‘where’s your knife?’

‘At home.’

‘Not much use there, is it?’

‘Sorry, oh perfect one! Any more bright ideas?’

‘Yes, actually. This board we’re tied to, maybe we can rip it off the pen... if we pull at it together.’

Carl turned and ran an eye along the timber structure. ‘You’re joking. These things are built to hold in thrashing panicky sheep. They’re bloody solid.’

‘Bloody smelly too. What’s that stink?’

‘Most likely the wool, well lanolin - the grease in the wool.’ He nodded towards a row of fleeces hanging from the wall. ‘And of course that pile of daggs behind us might have something to do with it.’

‘Daggs?’

‘Bits of crusty wool from the sheep’s bums.’

Jenny’s face crumpled. ‘Ewww!’ But then a limp smile followed. ‘Or should I say ewe... get it... Carl...?’

Her cousin gave no reply. He was looking hard at a fleece that was draped across the gate of the pen. With a sudden lunge he stretched out towards it as far as he could with his legs.

‘Owww... don’t! Every time you move it digs into my wrists too you know.’

‘We need that fleece’ he answered, legs flailing like deranged scissors.

‘We do? I don’t.’ Then, feigning realisation. ‘Oh dear, does wee Carl want his blankey?’

With a grunt, wee Carl finally managed to get a corner of wool clamped between his shoes. He flicked his legs upwards. The fleece sailed into the air and landed flat on their heads.

‘Brilliant!’ came Jenny’s muffled voice. ‘Now the stink is totally unbearable. When I throw up I’m gonna make sure it goes all over you.’

Carl could not speak. He had the fleece between his teeth. Leaning away and twisting his neck, he dragged it down between them and then proceeded to rub his hands and wrists all over the wool and the skin.

Jenny watched with a mix of curiosity and concern.

‘The sheep fat, and the lanolin’ he explained, noticing her face. ‘It’s as slippery as hell. If I can get enough on my skin...’ His face glowed crimson with the exertion and burning pain.

‘Got it!’ He was free.

Carl jumped up and massaged the raw skin on his hands. Grazes from the rope streaked his knuckles and wrists. He fired a triumphant pout towards his cousin.

‘Nothing to say now?’

‘Alright, I’ll give you that one. That was quite good.’

‘Quite good? Brilliant I’d have said.’

‘Alright then... *brilliant*. Just untie me will you!’

Chapter 8

It was just the sort of house that Amos would have expected Sebastian Fischer to live in. Set among neatly trimmed lawns and a monolithic macrocarpa hedge, this was clearly a house for the aesthetically inclined. Five triangular buttresses of corrugated iron soared into the air in exactly the place where a roof should have been. Each veered off at its own unique angle, the one apparently oblivious to the others.

Beneath these jagged metallic peaks, slabs of grey concrete and glass brooded. Nothing organic. Nothing natural. Though here and there, a few traditional features caught the eye. The front door for example, an enormous timber slab that must once have been part of a mighty Rimu tree. And on the otherwise flat surface of this door, a polished brass knob and keyhole stood out like immigrants from another time and place.

Amos raised a finger to the bell-press. In response, strains of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* burst forth from speakers above his head.

He was in the right place alright.

The door remained shut. It seemed that no-one was home. The Stravinsky played for quite some time and then cut out on a particularly dissonant chord.

'Tut tut, that's a bum note Sebastian.'

'No, it is Stravinsky.'

Amos felt his whole body jump. There, only a few yards to his left, the conductor straightened up amongst the rose bushes. With his hands enclosed in bright yellow gloves and his feet in matching yellow gumboots, he stood in the midst of several piles of pruned rose stems.

'Good heavens! You nearly gave me a coronary there Dr Fischer!'

'Very sorry Amos, I was being *der Rosenkavalier* in the rose bushes. Perhaps you did not see me?'

'No... perhaps not.'

Amos tried to catch Fischer's eye, without success. The conductor's gaze remained focused on his pruning work.

'And how may I help you?'

'Actually, I've come to ask for your advice. With a *musical* matter.'

This did the trick. The conductor stepped out of the flower bed, pulling off his gloves.

'Now that is a surprise. A most welcome surprise I might add. Perhaps we should go inside and take some tea or coffee? It is that time of day, I think.'

Fischer held his arm out towards the door, accidentally brushing his soft white skin against a stray rose stem.

‘Ouch, that hurts... little prick!’ He squeezed the injured finger to force out the offending thorn tip, and sucked away the droplet of blood that was starting to form there.

‘Never mind, occupational hazard I suppose...’ He opened the door wide and ushered his guest in.

The house was open plan and the furnishings austere. Sebastian led Amos through to the main living space. He stopped at what was clearly the entertaining area – a U-shaped collection of large block-like sofas with a glass coffee table in the centre.

‘Please, take a seat. I’ll just put the kettle on, it will still be quite warm I think. Breakfast was not so long ago for me.’

Amos settled into one of the sofas and slid his hand across the black material. The grainy texture of real leather felt cool beneath his fingers. He looked around the room. The conductor was busy at the kitchen bench, which was situated at the rear of the space. The kettle, rattling gently over the blue flames of the gas hob, was already spouting plumes of steam.

‘Tea or coffee?’

‘Coffee thank you, if it’s not too much trouble.’

‘No trouble at all, though I shall have tea myself. Bit of a tea-aholic you see, love the stuff.’

‘You’ve kept the gas on then Doctor.’

‘I’m sorry about that, it’s the beans and garlic you know.’

‘No, I meant the gas supply, for cooking...’

‘Yes Amos... that was just my little joke. I know what you mean of course.’

Amos obliged with a polite laugh.

‘A lot of people have changed over to electric stoves these days.’

‘Indeed. I am not a lot of people. I like the old-fashioned things. I like the gas for cooking and for heating also.’

Fischer turned away to fossick in a pantry cupboard. Amos took the opportunity to inspect the items on the coffee table – a copy of the Yates gardening guide, a book of *The Times* cryptic crosswords, and an architectural design magazine. To one side was a newspaper, folded to reveal the crossword section. He flicked a glance towards the conductor - still busy in the pantry. Amos picked up the newspaper. It was the weekend Otago Daily Times, the crossword was the very same one he had been working at

himself the day before. In the crosswording world, the ODT puzzles were not a patch on those to be found in *The Times*, but good enough for the average weekend puzzler. Amos ran his eye over the grid. Dr Fischer had done very well, only two or three words left unsolved.

In the book of *Times* crosswords, the grids were nearly all complete too. Amos read a few of the clues. Talk about difficult! To do well at this kind of crossword would require an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Arts and Sciences, not to mention the names of rivers and small towns right across the British Isles. The Doctor clearly was no slouch when it came to this sort of thing.

Seeing his host loading the hot drinks onto a tray, Amos replaced the crossword book where he had found it and flicked through a few pages of the architectural magazine - *Box*. It was very avant-garde. Dr Fischer's preference for the traditional ways did not extend to his taste in architecture or furniture.

Nor to coffee. Amos perceived the unmistakeable odour of instant coffee as a steaming mug was presented to him.

'You're a bit of a whizz at the crosswords I see, Doctor Fischer' he said. 'You must have spent quite a bit of time in the UK, to be able to take on the *Times* puzzle so well.'

The conductor shook his head. 'No. I have never been there. In fact, before coming to New Zealand I spent all my time in Germany and Switzerland.'

He placed his tea cup and saucer on the table and smiled.

'Now then Amos, and please, you must call me Sebastian, I am not your physician after all. Unless it is your bad notes that you wish to be healed?' He supplemented his comment with a muted Teutonic cackle.

Amos returned the smile.

'In a way Sebastian, yes, it is my bad notes that I've come to see you about.'

The conductor adopted a pedagogical tone. 'Well, it comes back to practice. It always does with you people. Nobody does enough practice. How many times do you practice your fiddle each week Amos?'

'Yes, point taken. Not many, I admit.'

A nod of vindication. 'I thought so...'

'But you must remember we're not professionals, not like you.'

'I remember this, don't worry. Every rehearsal I remember it.'

'And some of us are no spring chickens any more – take Coral Simpson for instance. Surely you don't expect people of Coral's age and, *condition*, to be playing things note-perfect?'

‘No, of course. What you say is true Amos. But you must recall why it was that the Society hired me. They wanted me to get as professional a sound as possible from you people, and if this is to happen then I must push you along. I must not allow any excuse.’

‘Fair enough, I appreciate that. But you end up putting people’s noses completely out of joint and then they play even worse. Take Coral, at the last rehearsal. She was plainly not well and you were very hard on her.’ Amos watched his host carefully – had he heard about Coral?

Dr Fischer splayed his hands and raised his eyebrows.

‘I did not know that. But never the less, as musical director I must point out when things are not right and I must take steps to correct them. This is my job you see. In this way I am like a policeman, like your friend Mr Greenwell.’

Amos paused, perhaps the reason for his visit had been tumbled. He elected to continue.

‘I suppose so. What I’m saying though is that you might try ‘correcting’ us in a less confrontational way. It does nothing for morale to be criticised all the time.’

‘I’m sorry if you think this. But really, I must act in the way that is natural to me. Surely this is human nature. It is not possible to change human nature I think.’

Amos decided it was time to change tack. ‘Speaking of Coral, have you heard the news?’

‘I try not to follow the news. It is so negative sometimes.’

‘Negative for Coral alright. She’s dead.’

Fischer’s mouth dropped as he took in a short sudden breath.

‘Excuse me – you say she is dead?’

‘I’m afraid so.’

‘How? When?’

‘Don’t know how... a couple of days ago.’

‘My word. How... how, distressing. This is terrible news. I am astonished, to say the least!’

He lowered his head and stared at the tiled floor, his wiry hand clasped to his mouth.

Greenwell leant across from the wheel and opened the passenger door. Amos hopped in and a moment later the XJ Jaguar purred in response to the driver’s gentle pressure

on the accelerator. The Jag surged away, causing Amos to slump back into the leather seat.

During the short drive into town, Greenwell quizzed him about his meeting with the conductor.

‘And he looked genuinely surprised, when you told him about Coral?’

‘I’d say so, yes. He certainly sounded surprised. I couldn’t see much of his face at that point though, he was looking at the floor.’

‘Notice anything unusual, about this Doctor Fischer?’

‘Bit of an odd fish at the best of times. But no, nothing major.’

Greenwell parked on Marine Parade and looked out into the harbour. ‘Nothing major... so, there was something minor?’

‘I don’t know, maybe it was my imagination, but there were things about him, and his house, that didn’t add up, didn’t match.’

‘Such as?’

‘The gas.’

The Inspector’s gaze shifted to face of his new assistant. ‘What?’

‘He went on about liking old technology like gas stoves and heaters, but then on the coffee table was a copy of *Box* – it’s a really trendy architectural design magazine.’

Greenwell stared out to sea, his face showing little expression.

‘And he seemed unusually good at the *Times* crossword,’ Amos added.

‘That was it?’

Amos nodded, wishing he hadn’t spoken at all.

‘In that case yes, I think perhaps it was your imagination Amos old chap. A person is allowed to like gas appliances and modern architecture and crosswords. Doesn’t make him a killer.’

Amos accepted the offer of an Oddfellow peppermint and popped one into his mouth. Greenwell continued.

‘You mentioned that Fischer had been hard on Coral Simpson. How hard?’

‘He seemed to single her out, well both of us really, anytime anything went wrong at rehearsal.’

‘Unfairly?’

‘I suppose there was good reason most of the time. But still...’

Greenwell exhaled a stream of cool minty air. ‘You don’t think you might just have a personal gripe against Dr Fischer?’

Amos sucked at his peppermint for a moment. ‘No, not really. I mean, it’s true I don’t like the way he treats the orchestra players at times, and he can be a bit of a fascist – maybe it’s that German accent.’

The Inspector nodded, and then shook his head.

‘Amos, I think you watch too much TV. The war ended nearly 30 years ago.’

‘You’re accusing me of prejudice? That’s rich!’

‘No I’m not accusing you of ... look, we need to move on. Let’s leave Fischer for the moment shall we?’

He flicked back several pages in his notebook. ‘This Hyde-Jones woman, the one with the long-standing feud with Coral, I’m interested in her.’

Amos looked at him and grinned. ‘Good luck!’

‘Don’t be smart Amos, you know what I mean.’

The Inspector glanced at his watch. ‘I’d better get going.’

He restarted the Jag’s engine and pulled out, turning towards the town centre. ‘Where can I drop you?’

‘Empire tea-rooms. I’m meeting Betty.’

‘Really? In that case it’s you that’s going to need the luck my friend!’

The Post Office clock rang out its quarter past the hour chimes. The face showed 4:15. Amos was fifteen minutes late. Betty would be livid, she hated waiting. This brought a faint smile to his lips.

The warm blast that struck as he entered the tea-rooms was soon dissipated by the icy atmosphere at Betty’s table. It was like taking a cold plunge after a sauna. Amos noted that Betty was dressed in a dark grey business suit ensemble, in spite of the fact that it was the weekend.

‘Sorry I’m late’ he said, bumping the table with his knee as he flopped onto the old wooden chair. Betty’s cup jiggled in its saucer. ‘I’ve been helping Jack out.’

‘Is it about Coral Simpson’s death?’

‘Can’t say.’

‘I heard it was a case of food-poisoning.’

‘Who did you hear that from?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘Who told you it was food-poisoning?’

‘I don’t recall. I think it was on the radio.’

‘Oh. Fair enough.’

Betty pushed her empty cup and plate to one side. ‘Why was he questioning you? Are you a witness?’

‘Me? No, he wasn’t questioning me, he did that yesterday. I was just giving him a hand.’

The scornful shake of the head was a gesture with which Amos was only too familiar.

‘Short-staffed again is he? Maybe he could give you a *real* job.’

‘What did you want to see me about Betty?’

‘About Jenny, of course. I think it’s time she stopped coming up here, it’s becoming far too disruptive. Her schoolwork is beginning to suffer, I had a call from her form teacher Mrs Binns at the end of term. She’s really quite concerned.’

Amos looked through the window at the front of the shop for a moment. ‘How do you know it’s her visits up here that are the problem?’

‘There’s no need to get defensive Amos, I’m not accusing you of anything.’

‘Really? Not what it sounded like to me.’

‘I hope you’re not going to let your imagination run away with you.’

‘Heaven forbid. We wouldn’t want that would we? Not when we can all be lawyers and accountants and save the world with legal reasoning and profit and loss accounts. No, we wouldn’t want childish notions like creativity and emotion to gum up the system would we?’

‘Oh for goodness sake!’ She snapped open her purse and fished out a folded type-written sheet. ‘Look, here’s her final report from last year. Read that and then tell me she doesn’t have a problem.’

Amos browsed through the grades and comments.

‘Well, that’s not *too* bad’ he lied.

‘She could do better, so much better.’

‘Now you’re sounding like a teacher, you should have trained, you’d have made a good one.’

‘At least that would have made one of us!’

The words hung over the table for a few seconds. Amos could feel the eyes of the other customers on his back. He hushed his tone. ‘This isn’t about school at all, is it? You’re still on about her ears.’

His ex-wife’s eyes flared wide open. ‘I told you Jenny was too young to have her ears pierced. I expressly forbade it. Even your mother agreed with me. And what did I find the next time she comes back from a visit up here?!’

‘You found a girl on the cusp of becoming a young woman. A girl who wanted to express herself and to take a first step into the adult world.’ Amos paused as two other patrons pushed past his chair. ‘Maybe that frightened you Betty... maybe that’s what you found.’

Betty stood up suddenly and leant across the table. ‘Maybe it *should* frighten me Amos, because if her first steps into the adult world are anything like yours... heaven help her!’

She marched out through the open door. Amos’s eyes followed her for a few moments, and then his attention was drawn to the pub across the street – the Fleapit. Word was that they had got in a fresh stock of single malts. Only one way to find out.

Amos hesitated at the door to the Fleapit, Don Pullman was sitting at the bar.

This in itself was not surprising. Pullman spent most of his time at one bar or other, punctuated by sporadic trips out to see how sales were going at his car yard. Amos weighed the pros and cons as he stood teetering on the threshold. On the one hand, a glass or three of some of the finest malt whisky available outside of the Scottish highlands. On the other, a mind-numbing session with Don Pullman in his ear.

Scotland won. He stepped in.

‘Amos you book-selling bastard, come and have a drink with your old buddy!’

Fortunately the car salesman was already three-fifths plastered and Amos had no trouble steering conversation away from the minutiae of the second-hand car industry. Politics however, was not a comfortable topic. Pullman assumed a position somewhere just right of Genghis Khan on the political spectrum. Amos began to feel positively ill as he extolled the virtues of the up-and-coming Deputy Leader of the National Party – one Robert Muldoon.

Sport was safer ground, on the whole. Though the pair of drinkers failed to reach any form of consensus about their country’s prospects on the eve of the Commonwealth Games, at least they didn’t come to blows. And on the topic of rugby they were unified in their condemnation of the controversy from the All Blacks’ tour of the UK the year before.

‘Murdoch should never have been sent home’ said Amos, shaking his head. ‘Even if that guy was a security guard.’

‘Just a little tap on the noggin’ said Pullman. ‘Any of us would have done the same.’

‘He’d a got man of the match, if it was on the field.’

‘True.’

Cricket next. The two bar-side commentators spent a good fifteen minutes debating the prospects of New Zealand beating Australia in the upcoming Third Cricket Test. Here they managed to disagree on all points except one – that the new boy Richard Hadlee looked to have a great future.

During a lull in the debate, when Pullman had removed himself to the Gents, Amos cast his eyes around to see who else was drinking in the Fleapit at this hour of the day. The only other patrons, a pair of men sitting at a table at the far end of the bar, were an unlikely looking combination. One of them Amos knew – Smith, the farmer from Kakanui. The other, looked familiar but Amos could not place him.

‘Who’s that bloke, talking to Smith over there?’ he asked, as Pullman slid back onto his stool.

‘Yeah – I know him. He’s a cop isn’t he? Big man, from Dunedin. Bugger hauled me over the coals a few years back for selling hot cars. Not my fault, how was I to know they were nicked!?’

Amos nodded slowly and took a deep draw on his pipe.

Pullman continued. ‘Thought you’d know who he was, given your past record with the cops.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Come on man. Everyone in town knows about it... you were on the bloody front page!’

Dunedin. April 7th 1971.

George Street, north of the Octagon, is overrun - an undulating forest of earth-toned corduroy, crumpled blue denim and tie-dyed pastel cotton. In the middle of it all, a bright red tee-shirt stands out like an inflamed pimple. And across the shoulders of the shirt, in black poster paint, the words ‘Out of Vietnam now’ scream their protest.

The wearer of the shirt marches on with one arm pumping in the air, keeping time to the slow rhythm of hundreds of feet while the other arm nurses a battered black guitar case. From behind he appears as just one more hairy student. From the front, his face shows the wear and tear of a man in middle-age, though his eyes burn with the same youthful fire as those around him.

The procession tramps on towards the centre of the city. Calls of ‘Peace’ and ‘Freedom’ echo out around the shop verandas. From the ribbons of onlookers along the pavements, cries of ‘Bollocks’ and ‘Get a Job’ rise in response.

At the Octagon, the stream of protestors coalesces into a tightly packed crowd. Guitars strike up and the mumbled words of *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Masters of War*, and *Hard Rain* sound out, summoning the presence of Bob Dylan: the spirit voice of the generation, the high shaman of protest. When Dylan's actual voice fails to materialise, megaphones appear and chanting supplants singing.

'One, two, three, four – we don't want your bloody war.'

The volume rises and adrenalin begins to flow.

From Princes Street at the south end of the Octagon, a surging wave of black tee-shirts and leather jackets rolls in and breaks against the throng of protestors. It is not clear who throws the first punch, but minutes later, a free-for-all has broken out on the lawn facing St Paul's Cathedral. The police move in. Dozens of arrests follow. The red shirt, though not involved in the brawling, is bundled into the back of a large black police van.

'Fascist bully-boys!'

Amidst the shouting, swearing and defiant singing of 'We Shall Not Be Moved', his words are lost.

The purpose of the peace march seems lost too, for the images and headlines that make it into the media the following day are ones of feckless youth and pointless violence. And the photo on the front page of the Otago Daily Times carries the caption:

'With Friends like These... Amos Jackson, retailer of Oamaru, is arrested by Senior Sergeant Jack Greenwell of the CIB. Mr Jackson was one of 47 protestors and gang-members arrested yesterday amid scenes of violence and mayhem. Reliable sources indicate that the two men are old school and university classmates.'

In the Fleapit, Amos was dumped back into the present with a lung-emptying slap on the back. Pullman's parting gift.

'See you later mate. Gotta go and see a man about a car.'

Amos mumbled a farewell comment and drained his glass. His eyes flared as he spotted the clock behind the bar...

'Shit – I'm late for Jenny!'

Chapter 9

The old Bedford clanked its way across the cattle stop and onto the gravel road. Takahashi lay hidden behind the wood shed until the last of the dust had settled back to earth and the sound of the truck had faded to a low murmur. He poked his head around the side of the shed and studied the farmhouse for some minutes.

Judging that no-one was left in the house, he made a quick dash for the rear of the brick and tile bungalow. Finding the back door open, he slipped in and pulled the door closed behind him. Perfect – the kitchen! He wasted no time in opening the fridge.

Ham. Bread. Orange juice. European food, but plenty of it. More than one man could easily carry in his hands.

He scouted around the room and found an empty carry bag with a colourful red, white and blue logo emblazoned around the outside. Highly conspicuous and rather too much like the Union Jack flag for his liking. But the starving fisherman was in no position to waste time looking for an alternative. His hands trembled and fumbled as he filled the bag. Bread, fruit, a handful of eggs miraculously made it in unbroken. On the opposite wall he spied a tall set of cupboards.

Jakkupotto! Tinned sardines. He swept tin after tin into the bag until no space at all remained.

Fleeing back down the hill to the shearing shed, the fisherman made very little effort now to keep hidden. He was beyond caring, the smell of the bread was driving him crazy. He had to eat. But at the edge of the stock yards he slowed suddenly. Something was not right.

Near the shed door, there were fresh imprints in the soft mud.

Inside the shed, disaster – the children were gone! So was the rifle. Shredded rope bindings lay on the ground alongside a crumpled sheep fleece. In an effort to remove the evidence, he threw the pieces of rope into a dark corner and stuffed the fleece into his provisions bag.

Clasping the bag tight to his chest, Takahashi bolted. Back down the hill to the bushes at the edge of cliff. He soon found the fence, put a hand on a post and vaulted the slack number 8 wires. But his forefinger remained for a moment too long on the wooden post and picked up a splinter. He cursed and kicked the fence.

Then he stepped closer and stared at the offending post. The splinter had been ploughed out of the wood by a bullet. At the end of a shallow furrow he found a flattened 303 round. Where was that rifle?

Fearing another shot in his direction, he leapt away and scampered under the cover provided by thick clumps of toitoi and gorse. He stumbled onto a sheep track at the edge of the cliff and eased himself over, his bag of provisions dangling from one arm. Feet first, he slid downhill, coming to rest on a ledge several yards below. A pair of nesting penguins took fright and beetled away down the cliff.

Takahashi lay dead still and listened. Nothing but the sound of the sea on the beach below. He relaxed a little. Perhaps he had got away with it, perhaps the penguins were the only living beings aware of his presence on that cliff.

As soon as Amos turned into the drive at the Thomas' farm, he sensed something was wrong. Light streamed out of every window into the dark. At the end of the drive, the garage lights and the outside floodlights too were blazing. A pang of guilt. Perhaps he should have come earlier, as he had promised Betty. Then a surge of rage courtesy of the craftsmen at Glenfiddich distillery. No, why the hell should he keep his word after the things she had said? And implied. Worse than the outright insults were her smirking insinuations and holier-than-thou implications.

'Fuck you Betty!' he muttered, swinging the wheel. The Humber skidded around the bend to the parking area. Amos felt the car buck and bounce wildly beneath him.

What was going on? The place was full of cars – four, five, six of them. And another right by the back door – Jack Greenwell's Jag. Amos stamped on the brakes.

Greenwell was at the driver's door in a flash.

'What the hell are you playing at?' His words were visible if not completely audible through the thick safety glass.

Amos wound the window down. The anger of a moment earlier turned to confusion.

'Jack? What's... what do you mean?'

The Inspector heaved open the door and pulled Amos out by the arm. He led Amos around the back of the car.

'That!'

The trajectory of the Humber through Mrs Thomas' prize flower beds was painfully obvious. Two great black strips of churned soil through the centre of the beds and heaps of decimated green, red and yellow on either side.

A vice-like grip on Amos's elbow propelled him around the other side of the car, away from curious eyes.

'Have you been at the turps?' fumed Greenwell.

A weak nod was all Amos could muster. 'Just a couple... what's going on?'

The vice released its grip and the Inspectors face softened.

'Bloody hell Amos. You don't know? Where have you been? It's Jenny – she's been held hostage. Her and the Thomas boy.'

The world went into slow motion. Amos felt as though he was watching himself from outside his own body. Disjointed words bounced inside his head, like ping-pong balls in an empty box.

'What do mean? Jenny... my Jenny?'

Greenwell opened the passenger door and pushed Amos onto the seat.

'It's alright. She's safe now, Mrs Thomas is looking after her. If you can sit here for a few minutes and get your act together I'll take you inside.'

Above the vast kauri dinner table a bare 150 watt bulb burned alone. It drenched the room with white light, leaving no place at all in which to be inconspicuous. Sobriety began to return to Amos with a rush. Seated around the table were Jenny, Mr and Mrs Thomas, Carl Thomas, Mr Yee, Sergeant Barrett and a constable that Amos did not know.

His eyes met his daughter's.

'Jenny...'

'Dad!' She looked pointedly out the open door at the Humber.

Mrs Thomas draped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her niece to her bosom. She glared at Amos, who was now clear-headed enough to refrain from challenging his big sister in such a circumstance.

'Sit down Amos' instructed Greenwell, seating himself at the head of the table. 'I'll give you the full details later on, so just a brief recap now. As you can see the two young ones are back with us and they have not been physically harmed. It seems that they surprised a man down by the cliff this morning when they were out rabbiting. They ran off to the shearing shed on the Yee farm and hid. Unfortunately, the chap followed... found them and tied them up in the shed. After which he evidently raided the Yee house and took food.'

Mr Yee, an elderly Chinese, butted in. 'Dirty pig. Emptied my fridge.'

'Do we know who he is?' asked Amos, his mind now clear.

'No. A complete stranger. Oriental the kids here think. Japanese, Chinese, Korean perhaps.'

‘Japanese’ said Mr Yee in a low voice, but loud enough for all to hear. ‘I know the smell.’

Greenwell ignored him. ‘Either way, his behaviour suggests he is on the run, possibly from the police.’

Mr Thomas, a large hulk of a man, had a voice that croaked from long days of yelling at sheep dogs.

‘I reckon we should get after him, right now. Catch the little bastard and give him a taste of his own medicine.’ His face reddened as he spoke and his hands tightened around a stock whip that sat in his lap.

‘Settle down Rhys. We do this thing by the book. I agree we need to scout the area – at once. Just in case he’s still holed up somewhere close by. But you can leave that bloody whip here, there’ll be no vigilante justice on my watch.’

Ten minutes later, the three policemen, Rhys Thomas, old man Yee and Amos commenced searching the paddock by the cliff. Each had a torch and a police walkie talkie. The plan, as explained by DI Greenwell, was to comb the area in the fashion of an emu parade and to stay within a few yards of each other. The walkie-talkies were a precaution, in case anyone got lost in the dark.

It was in the bush at the cliff’s edge that things got interesting.

‘Sardines’ old man Yee shouted into his walkie talkie, without pushing the speak button. ‘I smell sardines.’

‘It’ll be the penguins’ said Thomas. ‘This cliff’s got dozens of the little buggers all over it. Their nests stink like nothing else – rotten fish and penguin shit!’

Lying on his ledge just a few yards below the two men, the Japanese fisherman was none too enamoured with the penguins either. A half-empty can of sardines that he had carelessly tossed to one side had attracted the attentions of several young males. Every few minutes he had been lobbing rocks at them to scare them off.

Then he had seen the torch beams moving closer, lighting up the bush at the clifftop. He crouched low in front of a bush and curled up into a ball, pulling the sheepskin over as cover. From above, all that could be seen was the apparent carcass of a sheep that had ventured too close to the cliff.

Old man Yee’s voice sounded out from above again.

‘No over here – not penguins. Smells like sardines, no doubt about it!’

Unfortunately for the hiding fisherman, two of the penguins chose that moment to start a fight over the last remnants in the sardines can. They scrabbled and pecked and

squawked. Before Takahashi could do anything about it, they had knocked the tin right off the ledge. It clanked and clatter all the way to the shingle beach below.

Seconds later, six strong beams converged to light up a strange shape lying at the base of a gorse bush.

‘What the hell is that?’ asked Greenwell.

‘Probably one of my ewes’ muttered Thomas, without looking too closely. ‘Had about half a dozen go missing in that big storm last month. Useless animals get spooked by the lightning and go over the edge. Most years I lose a few that way.’

‘This one’s not dead’ observed Sergeant Barrett. ‘I’m sure I saw a movement there.’

Amos got as close as he dared to the cliff edge and trained his night-fisherman’s eyes on the shape. ‘You’re right, it looks like it’s breathing... and... hang on... it’s wearing boots!’

Following a nudge from his superior officer, Barrett edged forward and proceeded to slide down the slope to the ledge. He handled the descent with some skill. Remarkable agility for one with the general shape of a beer barrel. The Sergeant dragged the sheepskin to one side.

‘Here we are – a wolf in sheep’s clothing by the looks.’

Greenwell shone his torch on the face of the petrified fisherman.

‘Perhaps. Well, a woolly bugger at least.’

Chapter 10

Amos peered through the shutter into the cell. The prisoner was devouring a plate of plain white rice, oblivious to watching eyes.

‘Japanese eh, how can you be sure?’

Inspector Greenwell pointed to a yellow parka hanging on the wall opposite the cells.

‘Barrett found it round the back of the shearing shed. We had old man Yee have a look at the markings on the label. He says they’re not Chinese, pretty sure they’re Japanese. It certainly doesn’t belong to anyone on the Thomas farm so it has to belong to our woolly friend here.’

‘Does he have any English?’

‘Some’ replied Greenwell. ‘Coca cola. Blue jeans. Smattering of Beatles song titles.’

‘I see. Do you have a translator?’

‘Give me a break Amos. This is Oamaru CIB we’re talking about. Small town, small budget. The desk-wallers in the city think we only have petty burglars and pub brawlers to deal. A translator? Shit, we have a hard enough time getting a puncture fixed on the Sarge’s pushbike!’

Greenwell slid the shutter down and led Amos back out to the reception area of the station.

‘So what are you going to do with him?’

‘Not sure. Let him stew in the lock-up for a few days. Maybe he’ll start to remember a bit more English after that.’

‘And if he doesn’t?’

‘That’s where you come in.’

‘Eh?’

‘You’re good with languages. I remember you getting the prizes at school.’

‘Jack... that was nearly 30 years ago. It was also for *French*. I’d wager the similarities between French and Japanese amount to approximately none.’

‘You’ll sort something out Amos, you’re a clever bloke. I’ve seen that library of yours at Towey Street. I bet there’s a Japanese dictionary there somewhere.’

Amos stopped on the front door step while the Inspector gave instructions to the duty officer. As he waited, he prepared a better counter-argument to Greenwell’s suggestion.

‘I’d like to help Jack, but don’t you think you need someone more qualified? *Near enough is not good enough when you’re speaking a foreign language*. That’s one thing I

do remember from old Basil Bowden's French classes. God, he used to beat that into us.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning, translating out of a dictionary when I have no real knowledge of the language, there are bound to be mistakes. I would have thought, for a police case, you'd be concerned about accuracy. About getting the right information.'

The pair set off along Severn Street to the police car park.

'Look. I'm not asking you to testify in a court of law about this, I just want to get a few simple questions answered. Basically I need to know if this guy warrants further investigation, or if he's just some low-life, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

Amos stood at the passenger door of the Jag, offering no comment.

'Look mate, I also need to consider my future. A 'D' in this little town doesn't get a lot of career opportunities. If I can sort this Jap out on my own, without requesting assistance from Dunedin, I get another few brownie points towards my promotion.'

'What promotion?' asked Amos, over the solid clunk of the two doors closing in tandem.

'I've told you about it. Assistant Area Commander for the Otago region. Position comes up at the end of the year when John Galbraith retires.'

Amos sighed. 'You're not going to take a *no* on this, are you?'

The Inspector shook his head, pulling his Jag out into the empty street. 'There's something else. You owe me one.'

'What for?'

'Tonight. When you steamrolled Mrs Thomas's flower garden. You were well and truly DIC old boy. Rhys Thomas wanted your plums on a stick and your arse in a courtroom. I gather he's not particularly fond of you, your brother-in-law. Took me a bloody age to calm him down.'

The street lights flickered by as they drove up Severn Street to the South Hill. Amos said no more. His friend had him by the short and curlies. And both men knew it.

'How is she?'

Dorothy pulled door of the spare bedroom closed and smiled. 'Sleeping now. She was pretty worked up though, poor wee thing.'

They settled into their chairs back in the sitting room. The smile had gone. ‘Why was Jenny up there still? I thought she was meant to be with her mother.’

‘Communication breakdown.’ Amos picked up the crossword, not wanting to meet his mother’s eye.

‘Whose?’

‘Both of us I suppose. Isn’t it always the way?’

Dorothy reached for her knitting. ‘I wish you’d stop protecting that woman Amos. How many years has it been? You need to move on.’

Amos moved on, but only as far as the back end of the room and the drinks cabinet. He squeezed a half-glass out of the emergency bottle of Johnnie Walker and stood facing a bookshelf that stretched from floor to ceiling across the entire length of the back wall.

‘Mother, is Jim’s Japanese travel book still here?’

‘I think so, near the atlases.’

‘Yep – here we are. *50 useful Japanese Phrases for the tourist*. That should do the trick.’

He pulled the narrow booklet from the shelf, dislodging a black photo album in the process. Several snapshots escaped from the album and fluttered to the floor. As he knelt to retrieve them, Amos glimpsed the images and smiled... the flat in Dunedin, student life, protest marches, Jack... and Zoe. Even after all this time, her smile had the power to unsettle him... what if?

No. He was over that. Amos slipped the photos between the black pages and pushed the album back from whence it had come. Time to move on from Zoe as well.

He returned to his chair and immersed himself in beginner’s Japanese.

After a few moments, Dorothy spoke.

‘Amos, did you know the post mortem says Coral was poisoned?’

‘I’m not allowed to discuss it.’

‘Quite right too. Food poisoning by botulism is not uncommon, I suppose.’

‘More common than we realise, according to Jack’s lab people. Especially for old-timers who do their own preserving and bottling.’

Dorothy turned her head away for a moment and then suddenly flicked back.

‘No... I still can’t believe this business about Botulism. Coral was always a stickler for hygiene. Anything she preserved was boiled to billy-o, I know that for a fact. Is Jack sure there isn’t another possibility.’

‘Mother - I’m not allowed to discuss it!’

‘Sorry dear.’

Amos returned to his Japanese lessons. As he read, it was difficult to get his mother’s words out of his mind. She had a good point about Coral.

Chapter 11

Sergeant Barrett sat in Detective Inspector Greenwell's office and frowned at the piece of paper that sat in front of him on the desk. He turned the document over but found the blank reverse side offered no relief to his perplexed state.

'I'm sorry sir, this makes no sense to me at all. Mind you, not much does at four o'clock in the morning! Who's it from again?'

Greenwell looked up from his copy of the same document.

'Area HQ. From the AC himself.'

Barrett stabbed his finger at the bottom of the document. 'I don't see Stevenson's name anywhere, no signature. How do we know it's for real?'

'It's for real alright, don't worry about that.'

'Why the secrecy then?'

'Presumably Stevenson doesn't want to be associated with it. In case it's a cock-up.'

'Sounds dodgy to me. What's this bit here 'conducting targeted early morning exercises'? I gather we're not talking about twenty push-ups and a jog around the block.'

'No. It's a euphemism. In other countries they're called Dawn Raids.'

'But why us? Sure we've got a few Islanders in town. Who knows, maybe some of them are overstayers, but there's a hell of a lot more up in Auckland!'

'I believe that's the point. They want to trial this in the backwoods, on the small scale. If it works alright here then they'll roll it out in the big cities.'

'Not sure I like being a guinea pig. Why don't they use their own small towns up north? There's no shortage up that way.'

'I'm picking it's Stevenson's idea. He's always on the lookout for ways to brown-nose the Commissioner. Any chance to impress the boss... he goes for it.'

'And we end up doing the donkey work.'

'Exactly.'

The Sergeant let out a long breath. 'Right. Where do we start?'

DI Greenwell passed another sheet of paper across the desk.

'Out the North End. There's three families out there across the road from the Confectionery factory, Tongans. You'll remember I brought one of them in a few days back. Same family.'

'Sir. That fella was clean though. His papers checked out fine.'

'I know, Barrett. Doesn't mean they aren't hiding someone else at home, does it?'

Barrett rose suddenly. 'Alright, lets' just go and get on with it.'

'That's the spirit. Take Evans, Collins and Teague with you.'

'Is there a warrant?'

'No. You're not *searching* the house as such, we just want a head count and to see their passports and visas. Tell them it's a Civil Defence drill or something.'

'Head count – how's that going to work? If there are any overstayers, aren't they going to scarper as soon as they hear us?'

'You need to use a bit of cunning Sergeant. Look - one of you goes to the front door and beats the shit out of it. The other three go round the back and the sides and wait. If you're loud enough and make it really plain what you're there for, those with something to hide will be out the windows like a flash. And you'll apprehend them and bring them in.'

Barrett was asleep in the staff room and rumbling like distant thunder when Amos walked through later that morning. The clock read 10.30. He saw no reason to wake him and made his way directly to the Interview Room. He pulled Greenwell's key from his jacket pocket and unlocked the door.

'Koneesheewaa.'

Takahashi looked at Amos and nodded.

The unwilling interpreter took heart, so far so good.

'On-a-may-waa?'

A puzzled look came over the face of the fisherman.

'What-a-shy-no-yukky-toga-wocka-rima-sucka.'

Amos could see a flicker of recognition. But he knew enough to know that his pronunciation had been appalling. He reverted to English.

'Do you understand me?'

He pointed to the appropriate sentence in the phrase book.

Takahashi took the book and flicked from page to page, pointing to various characters and their English meanings as he went.

The would-be interpreter jotted the words down, to form a sentence of sorts.

No you nonsense but me understand book.

Using a similar approach, Amos managed to ask two questions: *Where are you from?*

Why were you at the farm?

Thirty minutes later he emerged from the cell with several pages of transcription and a sore head. Greenwell was waiting for him.

‘You got a drink round here?’ gasped Amos, ‘it’s like pulling teeth with a toothpick in there.’

‘Sure.’ Greenwell called out to the Sergeant who was now apparently on duty the front desk. ‘Two coffees Barrett, to my office.’

‘No I meant...’

A cutting glance from the Inspector.

‘No, you didn’t.’

He closed the office door and the two settled into their seats.

‘How did you get on?’

‘Quite well, once we worked out a system with the phrase book. Let’s see...’ He flicked back to his first page. ‘Name is Takahashi, comes from a small fishing village in, well, somewhere in Japan. On one of the smaller islands I think. Youngest of a family of five, he’s married, no children yet...’

A rapid drumming of fingers on the desk. Amos looked up.

‘Yep, I know, get to the point. Ok. He says he was here on holiday, got mugged down south, lost all his papers and money. He’s been trying to hitchhike his way north, says he knows someone in Chrsitchurch. Not much luck though, apparently no-one wants to pick up Japanese hitchhikers around here.’

Greenwell rubbed his brow with his fingertips. ‘Do you believe him?’

‘I don’t know. It’s possible, what he says. Isn’t it?’

‘Many things are possible Amos. In this game we need to do better than possibilities. What I need are certainties, or failing that, strong probabilities.’

‘So...’

‘So we know enough about his family life now, this isn’t a story for the Woman’s Weekly. You need to go back in there and ask better questions.’

‘Such as?’

‘You might start by asking how he got those scratches on his face.’

‘Alright Guv, I’ll give it a berl.’

‘What?’

‘Just a bit of humour mate, take it easy. Cockney accent... British cop shows...’

‘Right. Fair enough. Look, I’ve got some other things to attend to. Get yourself back into that cell and see what else you can dig up eh? I’ll catch up with you later in the day.’

There was a tense urgency in the Detective Inspector's stride as he disappeared along the corridor. Amos watched him intently. His old friend did not seem to be wearing the stress of the situation very well at all.

Meetings of the St Thomas's Floral Committee were not occasions that Dorothy looked forward to. For one thing they made no difference whatever to the floral arrangements that ended up in the church each Sunday. And for another, they were always long, drawn-out, bad-tempered affairs. Largely on account of Victoria, or Pooh-face as Amos rather cheekily (but accurately) called her.

Whether it was by design or just a natural gift, Victoria Hyde-Jones always managed to transform even the most agreeable of social gatherings into a ferment of bickering and dissent. She was a catalyst for bad feeling, a bacterium that never failed to produce vinegar instead of wine.

At times, Dorothy caught herself silently praying that Victoria would meet with some form of mishap or accident on the way to the meetings, in the hope that she would not turn up at all. To date however, the Almighty had not been disposed to respond to such petitions and her prayers gone unanswered.

On this occasion, the regular Monday morning planning meeting, Victoria had not yet arrived and neither had her negative influence. Dorothy and the three other floral artists were seated in the kitchen at the church hall, sharing a well-earned cup of tea.

'Typical of that woman to not turn up until after all the hard work's been done' said Enid.

'Yes. Mind you, it's been much nicer without her' said Dorothy as she finished pouring their first rounds from the great aluminium teapot. 'Sugar anyone? Honey?'

'A dash of honey would be lovely thanks Dot. Do we have any?' asked Margaret.

'I came prepared this time.' She drew a jar from her bag and prised off the cellophane cover, sending a rubber band flying.

'Oh Lord. I know that writing' said Enid, studying the jar's label. 'Is that...?'

'Yes it is, it's my last from Coral's Maheno hives. Here.' She passed the jar of golden honey across the table.

Margaret shook her head as she took a large spoonful. 'Terrible business that, I still can't quite believe it, can you?'

Dorothy did not reply. As she had passed the jar across, a strong, almost acrid smell had struck her olfactory glands with force. What was that?

All the way home, as she walked, Dorothy struggled to place the smell from Coral's honey. It was not easy, in the midst of the competing and at times overpowering aromas: the familiar salty tang of seaweed rotting on the shore; the sweet cloying fragrance of the roses in the RSA Memorial Garden; and the pungent stink of sheep trucks as they crawled up Severn Street leaving their long brown trails of liquid sheep manure.

Once home, standing over the kitchen bench, chopping up the stewing steak, she got another whiff. She looked at the squares of red flesh heaped on the chopping board. They did look a little grey, now that she had her glasses on. She lowered her head and sniffed. No, the meat was not off. Her eyes drifted to the newsprint in which the steak had been wrapped. She bent over and inhaled lightly through her nose. Phew! There was the source of the stink. How old was that piece of paper? It was not quite the same as the odour from Coral's honey jar, but very similar.

Having disposed of the offending wrapper, Dorothy finished preparing the ingredients and slid the casserole dish into the oven. She poked her head into the lounge. Amos was nowhere to be seen, though she had heard him bumping about not long before. Dorothy frowned, the new Philips K9 television was flashing and hissing to itself in the corner.

'What a waste of power!' She went to switch it off but stopped a few yards in front of the set, intrigued. The image on-screen appeared to be that of a person sitting at a desk, though the picture was so poor it was impossible to tell who. After a few moments she recognised the shape – Norman Kirk.

'He needs to go on a diet, that man. It can't be healthy being that big' she said out loud, as the abundant frame of the Prime Minister flickered briefly into focus on the screen.

'Give him a break!' Amos's voice came from the heavens and made Dorothy jump. His head and shoulders suddenly appeared, upside down, dangling from the manhole in the hall. 'Is that better now? I've shifted the aerial as high up as it can go.'

'Well. It's hard to say. The ghosting has gone... but...'

'Good. But what?'

'Well... I know this is one of the first colour sets in town dear, and I'm no expert... but should the sky be green like that do you think?'

Her son clambered down the ladder and came into the room to stand beside her.

'Ah, no. I suspect not.'

Together they watched as Mr Kirk announced that New Zealand was to send a frigate to Mururoa atoll, in protest at the French nuclear testing there. As he spoke, the Prime Minister's face transformed from purple to orange and then blue.

Dorothy made a squeaking sound between her lips.

'Shall I call the Tisco man again?'

'I don't think he'll make a house call to Mururoa Mother.'

Amos dodged an incoming cuff to the back of his head.

'I suppose we could call him. I can fix it of course, it's just that I don't have the time right now. I've got to get back to the shop and then I have to help Jack with interrogating his Japanese prisoner.'

After lunch, when Amos had gone, Dorothy was revisited by the mystery of that smell. It seemed to have taken up a permanent residence in her nostrils. She resolved to do something about it that very afternoon.

The house at 46 Wansbeck Street was just as it had always been. Though now of course it had no-one living in it. And it was locked. For some reason, Dorothy had not even considered that the place might be locked up. Certainly it never had been when Coral was alive.

Both the front door and the back were firmly secured. Peering through the lace netting of the more accessible windows, Dorothy soon found that the window safety latches too were all fastened shut. Whoever had closed the house up, the police she presumed, had been very thorough. But had they known about the spare key? She raised a hand up into the hanging pot on the back veranda and fossicked amongst the foliage of Kevin, the African violet. Dorothy gave a fond chuckle as she recalled Coral's habit of giving names to her favourite pot plants. Kevin had been a special favourite. Special enough to be granted care of her spare back door key.

No, the police had not been that thorough. Or, more likely, they simply had not thought to search through Coral's sizeable pot plant collection for spare keys. Dorothy felt a thin metallic shaft amongst Kevin's dry roots.

'I must give you some water Kevin' she muttered, 'no-one else will now.'

She slipped the key into the lock and let herself into the kitchen.

The house smelt musty but there was a faint chemical odour too. Dorothy supposed that it was something that the police investigators had used. Putting on her specs, she

could see patches of white dust around the furniture and door handles, interspersed by clusters of wavy striped lines - fingerprints.

She headed directly for the pantry.

It was shut. Not wanting to upset the fingerprint dust with her own prints, she levered the door with the flat handle of the back door key. The pantry door swung open easily.

As it did, a flood of scents came with it. Spices: ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon. Herbs: thyme, basil, rosemary, all very familiar to Dorothy. On the back shelves she spied what she was looking for, row after row of glass jars. Jams, chutneys, and one whole shelf dedicated to Coral's own honey, collected from various locales around North Otago and systematically bottled and labelled.

Dorothy moved closer and sniffed along the shelf. Nothing out of place, no smell of rotten meat, but then the jars did appear to all be unopened. In the very corner though, was something that grabbed Dorothy's attention. A collection of recipe books. Covered in white dust, which Dorothy quickly realised was flour rather than the result of fingerprinting. She thumbed through spines of the books. One in particular stood out, a smaller book about the size of a personal diary. Dorothy slid it from the shelf and read the hand-written cover title:

Honey Log Feb 1973 –

No finishing date was given. This had to be Coral's most recent record of her honey-gathering activities.

With a squeaky graunch the back door swung shut, propelled by a gust of wind. It was enough to give Dorothy quite a start. It occurred to her that she probably shouldn't be in Coral's house, and that she certainly shouldn't be seen in there. She slipped the Honey Log into her bag and hurried outside, taking the time to re-lock the door and return the key to Kevin's care.

The Westminster peels of the Post Office clock caught Dorothy by surprise. She glanced at her watch. It was quarter past five, time to be getting home. Amos would be back for dinner in half an hour. She quickened her pace as she passed the St Luke's Church Hall. But a glimpse of something odd caught her eye. She stopped and turned towards the hall. A young woman was just letting herself in the front door. In itself not so unusual, but that red dress...

Mary?! This made no sense. Mary was not the church-going type. Dorothy turned away and moved on. It was probably someone else entirely.

She had only taken a few more steps when a prolonged scream stopped her in her tracks. A female scream. It seemed to have come directly from the church hall. This was no little girl play-acting in the back yard, this was the scream of a grown woman – a full-blooded cry of pain. Dorothy was up the path and in the hall door in seconds. The sight that greeted her was so unexpected it was comical.

In the centre of the hall, on a platform of gym mats, two women stood grabbing and grappling each other. One a tall stocky woman who looked as though she might run on as a front-row sub for the North Otago rugby team, the other a smaller but athletically built redhead. Around the perimeter of the mats, five or six other women cheered and egged them on. The larger of the two combatants gave what could only be described as a war cry and kicked her opponent's legs out from under her. The pair ended up in a pile on the floor, the larger woman lying fully across the redhead, pinning her shoulders to the mat. The trapped woman gave another eardrum-tearing scream. In response, one of the spectators stepped forward and began the count to ten. A referee.

On seeing the referee, it dawned on Dorothy that this was organised fighting - wrestling. Known to some as a sport but in her books, just another excuse for violence – gratuitous violence at that. She was unsure what was more shocking - that this barbaric nonsense was going on in a church hall or the fact that the wrestlers were women.

A voice from her side. 'Hi Mrs J.'

It was Mary, red dress folded under one arm and now almost unrecognisable in her black leotard and matching leather headgear.

'I expect you're a little surprised to see me here?'

'Mm.' Dorothy managed a polite smile.

'I know wrestling's not very ladylike, but I just love it. It's a great way of keeping fit.'

Dorothy cast her eyes around the collection of wrestlers. 'Fit' would not have been her word of choice for most of them.

'I suppose it must be. How long have you been, er...?'

'Couple of years now. I'm quite good, number two on the ladder. Yep, there's just Sister Sally over there between me and top rung.'

She pointed to an enormous woman who was engaged in bellowing in the ears of one of the wrestling pair.

'Sister Sally??'

'It's her wrestling name. Means you're likely to end up in hospital if you take her on.'

'Charming! And your name?'

‘Queen of the Night. I have a special talent for putting people to sleep, and I don’t mean babies.’

Dorothy looked away, bewildered by tangled breasts, thighs and limbs – a scene that overshot Rubenesque and descended into grotesque.

‘How is little Elvis?’ she asked, desperate for a change of topic.

‘He’s ok. Still a little inclined to get colicky, but pretty good at the moment.’

Dorothy looked around, half expecting to see Elvis wrestling other babies in a playpen.

‘He’s at Mum’s’ said Mary, reading Dorothy’s thought.

A loud thump and accompanying yell from the ‘ring’.

‘Well, I don’t want to hold you up Mary. I’ll let you get back to your… training.’

Waving politely to the other women, Dorothy scurried from the hall. She had seen more than enough of Heather Foster’s behemothic buttocks for one day… for a lifetime in fact.

Chapter 12

From the crest of Taipo hill, the course of the Kakanui River was clearly discernible, meandering through the rolling North Otago countryside. Willow-lined banks highlighted the river's serpentine passage through fields of green and gold and brown, and the borders of the patchwork paddocks were marked by long gravel roads and shelter belts of poplar and macrocarpa.

Dorothy opened the door of the Humber and took a few careful steps onto the road. The coarse grit of the Ngapara limestone surface crunched underfoot like a bed of cornflakes.

'Are you sure you'll be alright?' Amos asked, appearing at her side. He closed the car door and handed over her backpack. 'I don't know why you couldn't just have drawn the place from memory, we've been out here often enough.'

'I've *told* you why, my dear. Those jars of Coral's really do need labels, and what better subject than a watercolour, an accurate one, of her hives beside the river. I'm sorry Amos, my mind is quite made up about this. I feel I owe it to her, in a funny kind of a way.'

'Alright... you've got your parka? There's a front coming.'

She nodded, following his gaze to the dark curtain of cloud topping the southern ranges.

'I'll be back to pick you up by noon, ok? And Mother – do try and keep away from Smith's place, you know what he's like about trespassers.'

'Yes dear, I will.'

Dorothy felt like a small girl receiving instructions from a strict but loving father. It was a feeling she rather liked.

She watched the Humber speed back up the hill towards Prohibition Road. Amos was apparently in a hurry to get back to town. He was a good son, she reflected, in spite of his little idiosyncrasies.

At the gates of the Kakanui College for Girls, she paused for a moment to admire the grandeur and the incongruity of the pseudo-Spanish architecture. A lavishly-resourced private finishing school for young ladies, it had not been used for its intended purpose for years. Somebody's 'big idea' that had fallen victim to changing times.

Dorothy carried on along the road, away from the college and down into the valley where the river followed a long curving sweep and nibbled at the feet of tall limestone

cliffs. Reaching water's edge, she slipped her shoes off and picked her way carefully across the weed-covered stones to the opposite bank. On this side of the river, the paddocks were green enough, but an air of neglect blew across them. Fences lay half-collapsed among piles of concrete rubble and felled willows. On a hill about a mile from the river, Smith's hut presided over it all.

Dorothy knew approximately where Coral's hives were situated, as youngsters they had often come out to the same spot to swim. In those days, the river ran high and clean and the cool water made an ideal escape from the hot dry breath of the nor'wester. And there had been beehives back then too, making sunbathing a risky pastime if you lay down too close.

The Honey Log led Dorothy directly to the place, with the simple description: 'under the hill at Taipo, just beyond the big pool'. The pool was not what it once had been, lacking now for water, but six beehives still sat in a semicircle in the midst of gorse and river stone.

Dorothy wondered how she was going to get close enough to the hives to investigate. Bees came and went in steady streams. She set off in search of a stick or willow branch with which to shoo them away. Under one of the larger willow trees she found several suitable branches all piled up together, and under those she found a shoe. A plain black shoe. She picked it up and looked inside for a name. But there was none, just a manufacturer's label 'McDiarmid's Quality Leatherware'. So it was a local shoe.

That there should be a sock poking out of the dirt nearby was not so much of a surprise, having found the shoe. That there was a foot inside the sock was a considerable surprise. With a sense of curiosity more than horror she scraped away at the loose earth. A few minutes later she had uncovered one corner of a tatty-looking tweed jacket and the fully-clothed legs of a man's body. She presumed that the rest of him was buried there too, as yet unrevealed. She dug a little more and found her fingers rubbing across the cold waxy surface of the man's nose and cheek. Suddenly her mind latched onto the fact that here was a human face, staring at her from out of the dirt. Small white worms were crawling around his closed eyes and into his dirt-encrusted nostrils.

Now the horror came.

Dorothy looked at her hands and realised that the dark black mud was a mixture of soil and something moist that she did not want to think about.

Now the nausea.

She scrambled to her feet and staggered to the trunk of the willow. Steadying herself with both arms against the trunk she vomited. The air filled with the sound of insects, bees and flies drawn to the twin attractions of fresh sick and rotting flesh.

The road leading to Smith's farm was overgrown and peppered with potholes and slushy puddles. Not the ideal terrain for a Mark 2 Cortina.

'Should have brought the Jag', Greenwell muttered. But the Jag would have been too distinctive. The Cortina was pleasingly anonymous, if not a cross-country vehicle.

As he juddered and shuddered along the track, he wondered where all the moisture had come from, they had had no rain for some days. His question was answered a few yards further along where, emanating from an enormous irrigation sprinkler in the adjacent paddock, a great wall of water inundated the track. Only after enduring five of these deluges did the Cortina, drenched inside and out, slide to a halt at a wooden stock gate.

Andy Smith, a man loosely connected to his bones, stood at the open gate and waved him through. To one side of the track, on the crest of the hill overlooking the farm and the river, a small crumbling stone building stood. Originally a shearer's hut, then a crib, it was now home to Smith and his fourteen dogs.

'Giddy Jack. Coming in for a cuppa?' he asked as Greenwell extracted himself from the Cortina.

'Don't have a lot of time... but yeah ok, just a quick one.'

The Inspector's hesitation was borne of experience, he had been to Smith's place enough times to know the code. 'Cuppa' referred to a dangerous, potentially lethal, serving of Smith's dubious home-brew, a concoction of which the brewer himself was fiercely proud, naming it North Otago's best. Completely unjustifiably so, in Greenwell's view, unless it was in reference to the purgative qualities of the vile brew.

He also knew that the vessel into which the so-called beer would be poured would be a tea-stained enamel mug (hence the term 'cuppa') that had not seen hot soapy water for several decades. And he knew that the sofa would be leaping with fleas and other creatures that would keep the forensics boys in Dunedin busy for weeks. Above all, he knew that it was imperative not to accept an offer of cake.

Yes indeed. A cuppa at Smith's place was equivalent to a game of Russian roulette.

Not that the environment seemed to do Smith himself any harm. Greenwell ran a professional eye over him as he stood at the sink bench filling the mugs with dark

muddy fluid from a half-gallon flagon. About five foot ten, late fifties and greying, but with evidence of a lean frame and gangling muscular limbs beneath his black singlet and baggy khaki shorts.

‘What’s up?’

Bile was the first word that sprang to mind, but Greenwell restrained himself.

‘MAF. That Hamill fella. When did you last see him?’

‘Ooh, last year. Early December wasn’t it? Thought *you’d* remember, given all that bullshit he stirred up.’

Inspector Greenwell craned his neck to peer over towards a tall cupboard by the front door. ‘And where’s that gun of yours?’

‘In the cupboard, where it belongs.’

‘So you haven’t seen Hamill since then... you didn’t see him around say, Thursday the third of January for instance?’

A shake of the head.

‘Funny, he reckons he came here on the third, and you set your dogs on him.’

‘Look, I didn’t set the dogs on him, he brought that on himself.’

‘How?’

‘By not telling me he was coming. The dogs are out there to guard the house, if he doesn’t tell me he’s coming... well, the dogs are just doing their job.’

Greenwell shot a glance around the dim interior of the building and wondered just what exactly it was that Smith thought was worth guarding. Aside from a small television in the corner, most of the furniture and fittings were from the wrong side of WWII, probably gleaned from deceased estate sales or from the council dump. Certainly nothing to entice any self-respecting burglar to commit an offence.

Smith perched himself on the bare wooden arm of the sofa and stretched across to kick one of his dogs, a scruffy border collie which was helping itself to something brown in a tin under the table.

‘Got a phone on here yet?’ asked Greenwell.

The farmer shook his head. ‘No need.’

‘How often do you clear your PO box?’

‘Once a month, usually.’

‘So if he had posted you a letter giving the required 10 working days’ notice, and you hadn’t cleared your mail...’

Smith glared at him. ‘Whose side are you on anyway?’

‘Just doing my job.’

Smith thought about this for a moment and belched expansively. ‘You forgotten about something Jack, something about looking after your old school mates?’

The Inspector rose to his feet, intentionally spilling the remainder of his beer.

‘I’m just telling you, I can only protect you so far. You’ve got to pull your finger out – fix up some of the problems. If that pratt Hamill takes it to the next stage...’

‘He can’t prove anything, he’s just guessing.’

‘He’s got photos. Smithy, just do something will you, give him a teaser. Doesn’t matter if it’s only superficial, at least then you can say you’re doing what you can.’

Greenwell thrust the list of complaints from MAF onto the table.

The farmer barely glanced at the sheet. ‘I don’t know why you’re so worried about him. Just tell the prick to bugger off. I would.’

‘I imagine you already have. So you’re sure you haven’t seen him recently, since New Year?’

Smith shook his head. ‘Why?’

‘Seems he’s gone missing. His boss hasn’t heard from him for over a week now.’

Smith’s eyes looked over Greenwell’s shoulder and out the window.

‘Nothing to do with me. Wouldn’t surprise me though if someone had taken a real dislike to the bastard. Serve him right, given he spends his whole life going around making trouble for honest hard-working farmers.’

‘Look mate, I’ve seen Hamill’s type before. You can’t ignore him anymore. He’s got the power to make things bloody difficult around here. Not just for you, for a lot of people. Have a look at that list and do something about it.’

He turned quickly, picked his way through a carpet of sleeping dogs and headed for the Cortina.

In the house, Smith reached into his pocket and pulled out a black fishing knife. He flicked the blade open and lightly ran a fingertip across the edge. Then he took the MAF list and slowly sliced it clean down the middle. The two halves fluttered to floor, raising a flicker of interest from the nearest dogs.

Greenwell decided to take the back roads into town – an opportunity to have a look over the property and see if things were as bad as Hamill had been making out and if Smith really was the *bête noir* of North Otago farming. His behaviour today had certainly done nothing to improve Greenwell’s opinion of him.

Driving up the hill out of the valley he was struck by the lushness of the pastures, though the few sheep he could see were straggly looking specimens. Jack Greenwell

was no farmer, but it did appear that the animals were badly under-nourished. And they seemed to free to wander all over the farm – pasture and crop paddocks alike.

He spotted one sheep at the far end of the road that had got through the fence and was apparently making a bid for freedom. As Jack watched, the animal began to behave in a most un-sheeplike manner, standing up on its hind legs and waving a black jacket in the air.

Greenwell drove closer, squirting the windscreen washer to clear the dust and mud from the glass. Now he could see. The extraordinary creature was, in truth, not a sheep but an elderly lady. One he knew. He pulled the Cortina over to the side of the track and wound down his window.

‘Dorothy, what on earth are you doing way out here?’

‘Oh my goodness, Jack, am I glad to see you! Let me have a sit down in your car and I’ll tell you. It’s a jolly lucky thing that you’ve come along actually.’

Chapter 13

Sergeant Barrett pushed the duty roster book across DI Greenwell's desk for signing off.

'Pretty straightforward sir, same as last month.'

His commanding officer flicked the roster open and scanned the entries.

'The same? You've remembered to allow for Chisholm's leave I hope?'

Barrett leant over and peered at the roster.

'Yes, and no... that is, I've remembered it but I haven't quite allowed for it in the roster... yet.'

Greenwell gave a sigh of exasperation.

'Show me when it's done' he said, pushing the book back across the desk. 'And Barrett, shut the door as you go will you, Mr Jackson and I have confidential matters to discuss.'

This task the Sergeant accomplished without difficulty. The Detective Inspector turned his attention to Amos.

'She's developing something of a knack for discovering dead bodies, your mother.'

'That's in poor taste Jack, she's really upset by this.'

'Yeah, sorry. But you've got to admit it's a bit comical. Your Mum, who up until a week ago would have classed the Flower Show as the high point of the year, and now she's discovered two stiffs and found out her son's involved in homicide investigations.'

'So you think Hamill's was a homicide too?'

Greenwell inclined his head. 'It's a wee bit hard to see it as anything else. As a rule, people who suicide are not too flash at burying themselves afterwards. And I think we can rule out accidental death, for similar reasons.'

'Do you think they're connected, the two deaths?'

'Don't know yet. Seems unlikely. Either way, we now have two investigations on the go.'

Amos's eye was drawn to a folder in Greenwell's hands, it was just a little far away for him to be able to read the label on the front. But he could see that there were only one or two sheets of paper inside.

'Is that Hamill's file?'

'Yes. Did you know him?'

‘No, not really. He’d been in the shop once or twice, that’s about it. Worked for MAF didn’t he?’

‘That’s right. You heard any gossip around town about him?’

‘A little. Not too popular with the farmers I think.’

Greenwell exhaled slowly through pursed lips, making a faint whistle. ‘That’s putting it mildly. Some of them hated his guts.’

‘Smith, for instance?’

‘Yeah. Smith in particular.’

‘Is he a suspect?’

‘Could be.’

Amos got the sense that the Inspector was holding something back. He changed tack.

‘Do we know how he died... Hamill?’

‘Knife wounds. Directly to the heart.’

‘Knife... what sort of knife?’

‘Hard to know, according to the doctor it was most likely a short blade rather than a big kitchen-type number.’

‘Like a fishing knife?’

‘Could be, why?’

‘It’s just that I found one out at the river, at the blood-hole. Last Saturday remember, you went home early and I stayed to fish on.’

‘And you found a knife?’

‘Yeah, one of those little black fishing knives we use. You don’t think it’s the murder weapon?’

‘It’s possible. Could be just a coincidence. Where is it now?’

‘At home somewhere. Do you want it?’

‘No, not at this stage. I’ll let you know if I do.’

The Inspector reached into small cardboard box at the end of his desk and pulled out a half-full fruit can. He placed it on top of Smith’s file, which was now lying flat on the desk.

‘What would you say is in here Amos?’

Amos hesitated for a moment, aware that the obvious answer was almost certainly not what was sought. He read the label.

‘Peaches... sliced peaches.’

‘Good... and?’

‘Peach juice?’

‘More than that. How about a slow and painful death, for anyone who swallows even one slice.’

‘What, you mean it’s poisoned?’

‘Botulinum toxin, to be precise.’

Amos frowned. ‘I thought you’d gone off the food-poisoning theory?’

‘Haven’t gone off it at all. Just pointing out that we can’t jump to conclusions. The obvious answer is not always the right one.’

‘And your point now?’

‘I’ve got the Area Commander from Dunedin on my back. He wants this file closed as soon as possible. His view is that Coral’s death was a simple case of food-poisoning. An elderly spinster, living alone, failing eyesight, picks up an old, infected tin of peaches from her fridge by mistake. Puts them on her corn flakes - bingo!’

‘Except that Coral’s eyes were as sharp as tacks and she was a cleanliness zealot, even by my mother’s standards.’

‘I know all that. But I need something more solid. Some form of evidence that the Botulinum that killed Coral couldn’t have come from infected food.’

‘What about the post-mortem, surely they looked at the contents of her stomach and suchlike?’

‘Yes, and the stomach contained, among other things, cooked peaches. And the dust bin in her kitchen contained an empty peaches tin.’

‘Which you had tested?’

‘No sign of Botulinum. But it had been washed... a negative result proves nothing.’

The Inspector exhaled slowly and then looked with raised brow at Amos. ‘I have another job for you old man. We need to know more about the science of botulinum poisoning.’

‘Look Jack, I went along with this Japanese interpreting thing, fair enough – I do have a bit of a knack for languages. But chemistry is definitely not my forte. You’ve got the wrong man.’

‘I wasn’t thinking of you this time.’

‘Who then?’

‘Zoe O’Malley.’

‘Zoe – our Zoe? Isn’t she still in the UK, at Cambridge?’

‘No, she’s here in New Zealand. I bumped into her a month or so back. At a forensics conference in Dunedin.’

‘Really! What’s she up to?’

‘Working at the Uni. Researching bio-chemical pathogens I think she said. Something to do with food science and food safety.’

‘So, you’ve got an expert, going to interview her?’

‘I’d like to, but I can’t leave town and I can’t be overtly involved in this investigation any more. The AC would blow a gasket if he found I’d been following up on a lead that he had already discredited. I need someone ‘unofficial’ for this little task.’

Another raised brow. This time with the addition of a tilted head.

‘Well, I suppose I could pop down. I do have to return some of Jenny’s things to her mother anyway.’

‘Good. That’s settled then.’

An odd sensation came over Amos as he passed the open road sign on the outskirts of Palmerston and opened up the Humber’s throttle. Driving south, it was as though he was driving back through time. Back to 1950. To his second year at Otago University and his flat up the Woodhaugh Valley. To those feelings of being young and boyish and embarrassed in the company of the opposite sex, and of his flatmate Zoe O’Malley in particular.

Memory washed over him like old wine. Intoxicating, rich with flavour and nuance, but with a bitter finish. For nearly 20 years now he had all but forgotten that day at the end of the university year. Now it was back, right there at the front of his mind. That day when he had professed his love for her, in his own self-effacing roundabout way. And she had replied:

‘I love you too Amos, of course I do. As a brother, and a very dear friend.’ She had kissed him on his forehead like his grandmother used to do.

There had been no need for further talk. The meaning of her words was clear, more so the meaning of her actions. In any case he had no voice with which to reply.

Amos needed to stop thinking about this. He switched on the radio and tuned in to 4ZB. The soaring tones of John Hanlon’s ‘Damn the Dam’ filled the car. Amos sang along at the top of his voice. It was a song he knew well.

Next up was Hogsnot Rupert with ‘Aunty Alice bought us this’. Amos was starting to enjoy himself, swerving erratically as he careered down the steep incline of the Kilmog hill. By the time he passed through the flats of Blueskin Bay and drove back into the

hills, the radio began to lose reception. For the other users of the road, this was probably a good thing. Soon it was impossible hear anything but static. He switched the radio off. Silence.

At once he was back in the early 50's again, flatting with Zoe and Jack. There had been good times of too course. A lot of fun in fact.

Amos told himself that it was going to be fun to catch up with her now, after all these years. See what had become of her. Compare notes. Own up to what a naïve fool he had been in those days.

Was she married?

He knew that she was still using her maiden name – but that didn't guarantee anything. She could have been married and divorced four times over for all he knew. And reverted to her maiden name in disgust. She might be a radical feminist. Or she could be shackled up in a commune with a struggling artist. Most intriguing of all, she might be available and interested. How would he deal with that?

By the time he was descending the steep winding hill into North Dunedin, Amos was feeling altogether less keen on this reunion. One glass of that particular wine went a long long way.

The office was on the third floor of the Sciences Building. Walking along the corridor, Amos felt like he was lost deep in the bowels of a passenger liner. Except that it smelt like a hospital. He stopped at number 307. Beneath the number, a nameplate: 'Dr O'Malley. Food Science and Safety'. He raised his arm and his hand went through a knocking motion without the knuckles actually touching the door. Nerves.

'Come on boy, commit!' JT Jackson's voice resounded in his head. It was the phrase he always used when trying to teach his son to tackle. Tackling was never one of Amos's strengths. In fact, the whole game of rugby had never been a strength. His father tried to hide his disappointment but Amos knew – he could hear it in the tone of voice.

With those words returning now, urging him on, he rapped on the door with more force than originally intended. The door swung open in response, it must have been off the latch. A woman in a white lab coat sat with her back to him. She looked young... very young. To Amos it looked as though Zoe had not changed at all from her undergraduate years. He cleared his throat.

The woman turned her head.

'Hello, can I help you?'

Words failed. This was not Zoe at all, this really was a young undergrad student. Then a movement to his left. Another woman entered the room from a side door.

Tall, slim, elegant. Zoe had changed, but not much. A sprinkling of ‘salt and pepper’ in her long dark hair the only real concession to the passage of twenty-something years.

‘Hi Amos. Jack said I might be seeing you.’

Cigarette smoke, candles and toasted sandwiches. The main features of the *Ploughman Poet* were much as they had been in 1950. It was still a favourite haunt for students and Dunedin’s bohemian fringe. And it still served toasted sandwiches and banana splits in the near dark to customers whose judgement was impaired by various means (alcohol, dope, acid, or other chemicals), and some who were just naturally a bit different.

The music had changed. Piped-in seventies rock in place of live jazz or folk music. Amos found himself a little disappointed by that.

‘God knows what’s in this’ said Zoe, gingerly lifting one corner of her sandwich. ‘I could give you a list of likely pathogens longer than the Clutha River.’

‘Come on, we used to eat here nearly every week and we all survived didn’t we?’ said Amos, now regarding his own sandwich with suspicion.

‘We did, but we were young and fit in those days.’ She looked at him full in the eyes, darts of yellow flame swaying to and fro in the mirrors of her dark round pupils.

‘And we’re old and feeble now, I know. Well, some of us are... you look the same Zo, you haven’t aged.’

Zoe gave a smile that did not look comfortable on her face.

‘What did you want to see me about Amos? Jack didn’t say much on the phone.’

Amos looked around the murky interior in an effort to check that no-one would overhear.

‘Botulism.’

‘Lovely! What are old friends for eh? If I’d known we could have dropped by the lab, I’ve got some lovely samples in storage. Might even be able to scrape up a bit of anthrax if you’re interested!’

He chuckled, Zoe’s wit was as sharp as ever. ‘What we need is information, Jack says you’re an expert in things like – well, botulism.’

‘Amos, can I clear something up, we’re both talking about the same man aren’t we? Jack Greenwell the cop, our ex flatmate?’

‘Uh-huh. He said he’d run into you recently.’

‘That’s right, I met him at the forensics conference last month. But, are you two actually talking to each other? I thought you were, you know, mortal enemies after that debacle in the Octagon. Didn’t he arrest you?’

‘He did, but that’s ancient history Zo. We settled our differences long ago. Best of mates now. Even go fishing together.’

He took a sniff of his sandwich and nibbled at one corner before continuing.

‘Look, Jack’s the reason I need to find out about botulism. And about food-poisoning in general. As you know, he’s a detective now, quite a successful one. Head of the CIB in Oamaru.’

‘So what’s he investigating?’

Zoe leant forward, her arms on the table and her head cupped between her hands. Amos began to unfold the story of Coral’s death.

His old flat-mate was clearly enthralled with the story. So much so that, without thinking, she took a bite of her cheese and onion toastie. She spat it out onto the plate a moment later.

‘So you want to know how Botulinum could be introduced into someone’s body, other than eating infected food?’

Amos nodded, encouraged by her quick uptake of the situation.

‘I’ll have to get back to you on that. I’d need to do a bit of research. And I’d need to see some details around what her symptoms were, and the post mortem report too.’

‘Oh... I was hoping maybe you might have a few ideas, off the top of your head.’

‘I could make a few educated guesses. But if this is for a homicide enquiry and needs to stand up in a court of law, I think you’ll need more than guesswork.’

‘Alright. But, just for now, just for me – what do you think?’

‘I think there are many possibilities. For example, Botulinum spores are naturally present in honey, though it would be unusual for the spores alone to affect an adult... a young child perhaps. Really it’s the toxins produced by the spores or bacteria that are the real culprits.’

She raised her hot chocolate to her mouth, took a moment to inspect the frothy surface, and quickly returned it to the table.

‘There are several obvious ways to introduce toxins into the bloodstream. By injection for example. And of course it’s quite common for a person to become infected through an open wound.’

‘How can I help Zoe? What else do you need to know?’

‘Nothing yet. I’ll go away and consult a few books, give it a bit of thought. If you can get that information about the symptoms for me, and the post mortem, I should be able to come up with a more definitive answer.’

On the long drive back up the coast, Amos’s mind seethed with disturbing images. People dying of food-poisoning, druggies injecting themselves, suspect toasted sandwiches from the Ploughman Poet, and Zoe’s face smiling. His foot pressed down on the accelerator. On the flat straights coming out of Palmerston he noticed he was doing well over 60. He made no effort to slow. After all, he had an appointment to keep with the head of the CIB.

Chapter 14

Detective Inspector Greenwell was evidently in a very good mood. His teeth gleamed as he greeted Amos and there was a crisp decisiveness to his step as he led the way through to his office. He sat upright at his desk, fair bursting with some piece of news.

‘All right, what’s up?’ asked Amos, finding himself infected by the Inspector’s good spirits.

A hand-written sheet was passed to him. Feeling rather like a child at school, Amos read aloud.

‘Semisi Viserio. Twenty three years of age. Male. Single. Convicted of burglary and receiving stolen goods, 24 March 1972. Sentenced to two years imprisonment. Served eighteen months, released on parole. 26 August 1973.

Report from Immigration Service: Semisi Viserio, known as Sammy.

Status: work permit expired 1 January 1973.’

‘Who’s this?’

‘Coral’s murderer.’

‘Eh? How do you get that?’

‘We’ve matched his dabs to prints left on the back door handle at the Simpson house. And he’s an overstayer. It’s perfect!’

Amos was more than a little stunned. ‘So, what about the Botulinum poisoning angle? Don’t tell me that’s all been a waste of time!’

‘Hardly, I’d say you rather enjoyed meeting up with Zoe again...’

‘Well, maybe. That’s beside the point. Anyway, what’s this Viserio chap’s motive?’

‘You’re getting good at this game aren’t you? That’s one of the questions I have for him as it happens.’ He rose abruptly. ‘Why don’t you come and sit in on the interrogation?’

‘Don’t tell me, you want to do the ‘good cop bad cop’ thing?’

‘No. I want you to observe. See how a professional handles a suspect.’

The suspect in question sat with his back to the door, his head directed to the small barred window at the top of the limestone block wall. Through the bars, a glimpse of blue sky was just discernable above the grey walls of the building next door.

Greenwell and Amos had entered the interrogation room and had both taken their seats before the prisoner turned around. Viserio's face startled Amos, he almost looked pleased to see them.

'Sammy. I'm disappointed to see you back here again,' started the Inspector.

'Yeah.' The face fell immediately.

'What you been up to?'

'Not much.'

'I see, that might be a matter of opinion eh? Where you been staying?'

'Wansbeck Street.'

'With?'

'Cousin.'

'Name?'

'Sione.'

Greenwell leant across the table in an attempt to stare his suspect out. But Sammy dropped his eyes at once.

'Look son, you're only making things harder for yourself. Don't play the hard ball with me.'

It was a line straight out of a TV cop show, Amos made a mental note to ask Greenwell if watching B-grade American crime series was an integral part of training for detectives in New Zealand.

Sammy appeared relatively unaffected by this threat and continued to stare at the floor.

The Inspector tried a fresh line. 'Where were you on the night of January the 10th? Last Thursday.'

'Went to the club for a few beers.'

'Club? What club?'

'Rugby League club. Oamaru Green.'

'And the clubrooms are where...?'

'Tyne Street.'

'What time did you leave?'

'About ten, or half-past.'

'And you went directly home?'

'No. We went to Sione's sister's house for a feed.'

At last Sammy looked up. Greenwell's face demanded more detail of him.

'She lives next door to Sione. I stayed there till after midnight. Then went home.'

‘Alone?’

‘Yes’ Sammy’s voice had become very soft. To Amos it seemed that he had at last realised he was in some kind of trouble.

The Tongan’s head lowered again. ‘Why am I here? What do you want?’

Greenwell leant forward, bringing his face to within a few inches of the Tongan’s.

‘We want to know why you broke into the house at number 46 Wansbeck Street.’

‘I didn’t break in.’

The Inspector sucked in a short breath. ‘You’re a liar. We have your fingerprints on the back door handle.’

‘I didn’t break in.’

He fell silent. Subsequent questions were ignored, or went unanswered. Stalemate.

The interrogator and observer held a brief conference outside the room.

‘You see? He’s lying. And he’s hiding something, have you noticed how he won’t look me in the eye? Classic guilty conscience.’

‘Maybe. Or a classic culture clash. How much do you know about Pacific Islanders Jack?’

‘As much as the next man. I know they’re good at sports, and manual jobs. And they can get seriously out of control with a bit of liquor in them. A few of those Tongan rugby league boys are regular guests around this place on Friday and Saturday nights. What are you getting at? You’re not going to go all lefty-liberal on me are you?’

‘The point is... his not looking you in the eye. It’s a cultural thing. A matter of respect. In the islands it’s considered bad form to look someone directly in the eye who’s above you in the social pecking order.’

Greenwell paused, but only for a few seconds. ‘That aside. He’s avoiding my questions, and he’s lying.’

‘Let *me* ask him some questions Jack. I’ve had a bit of experience with the Tongan community, at the folk club and the bookshop.’

‘I didn’t know any of them could read.’

‘I’ll ignore that. Let me have a go?’

‘Yeah, alright. But look, don’t beat around the bush. If he reckons he didn’t break in, how come his prints are there? Ask him to explain that. I’ll leave Barrett at the door, in case you need him.’

‘Are you going somewhere?’

‘Yeah, I have another fish to fry. A Whiting in fact.’

‘You mean the Herbalist?’

‘That’s the bloke.’

‘Why are you interested in him?’

The Inspector fished a folded brown paper bag out of his pocket and held it up for Amos to read the label.

‘ENFIELD SPECIAL’ – GREEN TEA

HUBERT’S HERBAL HAVEN

‘What about it? You’re not still on about that time he sold you that...’

‘No.’ Greenwell cut in. He opened the bag and held it under Amos’s nose. ‘Take a whiff and tell me what you think has been in there.’

The bag was empty but reeked of marijuana. Amos had dabbled with smoking dope as a student but now preferred pipe tobacco as his smoke of choice and Scotch whisky as his favoured recreational drug. The bitter-sweet aroma was unmistakeable though. On cold winter’s night the Folk Club Bunker would be thick with a blended tobacco-dope smog.

‘You think Whiting’s dealing?’

‘Maybe. Or someone who buys his stuff is, and re-uses the bags. Plus, we found several packets of his so-called remedies in Coral’s kitchen.’

Amos’s eyebrows shot up. ‘Not this one...?’

‘Ha! No, this came from one of those hippies out at the old Carson homestead. Anyway, our Mr Whiting is definitely a *person of interest*.’

The Inspector pocketed the bag and patted Amos on the shoulder.

‘Good luck with the Tongan chatterbox in there.’

Four sides of his refill pad later, Amos set down his pen. Sammy Viserio’s story had been a lot longer and more complicated than he had expected. A simple nod passed between interviewer and interviewee as Barrett led Sammy from the room.

On the front steps of the Police Station, Amos flicked through his notes. How much of this, he wondered, should he share with the Inspector? A quick glance at his watch showed the hour hand creeping towards 4pm. Time for a quick snort at the Club before he headed back to relieve Mary and close up the shop.

To Inspector Greenwell, a man with the sharpened senses of a hunter, Hubert’s Herbal Haven was a sensory battleground.

First and foremost it was an attack on the nasal passages. Even before entering the open front door of the shop, his nostrils hinted that something lay dead and decomposing somewhere in the vicinity.

Then, as he stepped inside, his eyes were assaulted by shambolic arrays of alleged cures and treatments stored in bottles, jam-jars and brown paper bags. Seen through glass, the contents appeared to be nothing more than matted bunches of dried grass clippings and the sort of detritus one might find on the beach after a storm. For a man who admired law and order and systematic tidiness, the shop's appearance was visual anarchy.

Lastly, the aural attack. An incessant droning and wailing of classical Indian music trickled out from an old stereo near the counter, sounds that the Inspector initially mistook for a goat or pig dying a painful death under the floorboards – a situation which would have explained the smell too.

H3, as the shop was known to its customers, was also a focal point for the hippies and other alternative lifestylers who dwelt in the semi-rural outskirts of town where the fringes of the law were frayed and indistinct. As a result, Hubert Whiting was of interest to the police on several fronts. In recent years, Greenwell and several of his predecessors had conducted raids in search of drugs and stolen goods. To date without success. Whiting was not stupid and somehow managed to stay just a step or two ahead.

Greenwell moved further into the shop and scanned the interior.

There were no customers in evidence, no Hubert Whiting either. At the rear wall of the shop, a long counter sat in front of a huge display cabinet. A doorway bisected this wall, and a dangling screen of plastic strips created a partial barrier between the shop and whatever lay behind. The Inspector strode up to the counter and shook the bell.

A scurrying of feet from behind the screen. Whiting's head and bushy brown beard poked through first, followed a few seconds later by the rest of his scrawny body. Greenwell studied the pale spotty face. Typical hippie, probably a vegetarian as well.

'Mr Whiting, hello.'

'Superintendent. Nice to see you.'

Greenwell knew the second half of this greeting was a lie, albeit an everyday customer service kind of lie. The first part, with the use of the inappropriate rank, was very likely intended as an insult.

'Another busy day?' he asked. This was about as close to 'up yours Whiting' that he could allow himself.

'What'll it be – one of these nice smoking-pipes?'

Whiting brought a large ceramic hookah pipe out from under the counter. ‘This one you can share with a friend, look, it has two separate tubes. Or perhaps you would like the same as last time, something to put a bit of lead in your pencil?’

Greenwell was determined not to bite. Buying those impotence herbs had been a major mistake on his part, bought in a moment of weakness. They had been expensive, nausea-inducing and they had not worked at all. Except that they had provided considerable amusement for the woman who was the intended beneficiary of his revitalised masculinity.

‘Tell me about your training, Whiting. What medical college was it you went to again?’

‘I didn’t.’

‘That’s right. And yet you claim to be able to cure people of everything from halitosis to rheumatism to heart disease with your little bags of twigs and weeds.’

‘You know very well I make no such claims. Cures can only be effected if the person concerned is open to the principles of herbal healing. Cynics and non-believers alas, mostly cannot be helped.’ The herbalist held Greenwell’s eye for a moment.

‘Was Mrs Simpson a believer?’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Coral Simpson. She was, I understand, a regular customer?’

‘I’m sure you of all people will appreciate, it’s not ethical for me to divulge information about a patient.’

‘Patient?’

‘Customer.’

‘You confirm then, that she was a customer?’

Whiting’s eyes narrowed to small dark bullet-holes.

‘Perhaps you had better tell me why you’re here, other than to waste my time. I am a busy man you know, Colonel.’

The Inspector took a moment to reply.

‘I am here to ask you some questions with regard to the death of Coral Simpson. Should you prove to be unwilling to answer, I will simply arrest you for obstruction and take you down to the station. That’s an awful lot of fuss and *paperwork* that at least one of us would want to avoid, I would have thought.’

Suddenly the herbalist’s demeanour changed.

‘Alright, yes, Coral Simpson was a customer here.’

‘What did she buy?’

‘A range of general wellness preparations – tonics, immunity boosters, treatments for constipation – fairly typical fare for my older customers.’

‘And when did you last see her?’

Whiting pulled a receipt book out from beside the till. He flicked back a few pages. ‘Here we are. Thursday 10th of March. Yes that’s right, I remember seeing her that morning. She was looking quite poorly, I recall.’

‘What do you mean - ‘quite poorly’?’

‘She seemed to have the flu or some sort of similar bug. Vomiting, abdominal pain, general weakness, problems with her throat – the usual sorts of symptoms.’

‘And you prescribed one of your... concoctions?’ Greenwell poked nervously a finger at the paper bags on the counter.

‘Certainly not. I do not *prescribe*. Allopathic practitioners prescribe. I am a but a humble herbal remedies retailer. I sell goods – *legal* goods – to my customers, according to their needs.’

‘Tell me, if you have no training, how do you know what they need?’

Whiting shrugged.

‘I match symptoms with those listed in the Bencao Gangmu – the Materia Medica of Chinese medicine.’ He pulled a massive tome out from under the till. ‘It’s not a complicated process really. Any *reasonably* intelligent person could do it.’

‘And what was the result of this process, on this occasion?’

The herbalist glanced back at his receipt book.

‘I gave her some Yin Qiao San, it’s a classic Flu and Cold formula.’ He turned and opened a draw in the cabinet. ‘Would you like some?’ In his right palm he dropped small heap of dried vegetable matter and then thrust it in front of the Inspector face.

The odour forced a backstep. ‘No, thank you. What the hell’s in that... stuff?’

‘Forsythia, Honeysuckle, Platycodon, Mint, Bamboo Leaf, Licorice, and a few others.’

Greenwell shook his head in disbelief. He turned a page of his notebook.

‘Did you notice anything unusual about Mrs Simpson, other than her flu symptoms?’

‘She was having a bit of trouble getting around, and seeing where she was going. The old dear bumped into the crystals stand on the way out, knocked the whole thing over. But I’d say that was just effects of the flu. I’m the same myself when I come down with a bad dose of it.’

‘So you do get ill yourself, in spite of all these extremely effective potions?’

‘Occasionally yes. I send whatever it is packing pretty quickly though.’

The notebook slammed shut.

‘Very well. If you remember anything else about Mrs Simpson on that day, let me know. I’m sure you’d want to help in the clearing up of this whole business.’

Whiting accompanied the Inspector to the shop door and held it open.

‘You haven’t told me what this business actually is. What is there to investigate? Was she poisoned or something?’

‘What makes you say that?’ Greenwell turned suddenly on his heels.

‘It’s just that you seemed rather interested in my remedies, and I know how you cops think. Just because one treatment didn’t work for you doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with them. These remedies have been tested over thousands of years. Used as directed they are neither toxic nor dangerous.’

He stopped in the doorway. ‘You haven’t told me, what was the cause of death?’

‘At this stage that’s a police matter. And I’ll warn you to keep the content of our discussion to yourself. In your position you want to keep me on your side!’

Whiting closed the door without replying and disappeared back into his shop.

Detective Inspector Greenwell walked to his car with the distinct impression that the proprietor of H3 was hiding something. And not just the pungent aroma of marijuana that had been seeping out from the back room as they spoke.

‘Jackson and Son. How may I help you?’ Mary’s voice sounded tired and bored.

‘Mary, it’s Amos. Look I’ve got held up with this investigation thing. Can you cash up and close up shop for me tonight?’

There was a long silence before Mary replied. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes of course, never better. I’ve just got some things to attend to.’ He pulled the phone booth door tightly shut in an effort to muffle the tell-tale sounds of the bar. ‘Oh, and Mary – would you be a dear and call Mrs Jackson for me? Tell her I’m eating in town tonight.’

‘Sure, I’ll tell her.’ The phone suddenly cut off. Amos was not sure if Mary had hung up or if he had accidentally bumped the receiver cradle. No matter, he had got his message through.

The booth door swung open and the swaying figure of Don Pullman appeared, bringing a warm fug of beery smoke-laden air with him. He thrust a pool cue into Amos’s hand.

‘Come on bugger-lugs, you’re up!’

Amos approached the pool table and surveyed the state of the game. Pullman had done well. Just the number 3 ball to sink and then the black. In spite of his best John Spencer imitation, Amos went in-off the black and lost the game. Pullman was inconsolable and Amos was promptly banished to the TV lounge.

The news had just come on. The story about the Middle East was barely news at all, apparently Israel had agreed to withdraw from the Suez Canal.

‘It’ll never happen, we’ve heard it all before’ said Amos to Doug Fisher who was stretched out on the couch opposite, insensible.

The second story was at least a little amusing. An American tourist by the name of Marshall Butt had developed such a liking for the Moeraki Boulders that he had turned up in the dead of night with a hired truck and taken one back to his hotel in Dunedin. In his defence he had claimed to be acting under instruction from aliens that had abducted him some weeks earlier. The boulders, he explained to the camera, were not sandstone concretions, as commonly thought, but eggs. Eggs of another, less friendly alien species who made a habit of leaving their ova scattered around the galaxy for safe-keeping. The case was thrown out of court pending a full psychiatric report.

It was the third story however that caused Amos to suddenly surface from his alcoholic haze. According to the caption, the face on screen was that of Senior Sergeant John Galbraith, Assistant Area Commander of Police. The camera zoomed in on his wrinkled weathered features.

‘At this stage we have no reason to suspect foul play. The body was found two days ago on a remote area of coast, near the mouth of the Waianakarua River. It appears that the man had gone swimming, alone, and had got himself into difficulty. Now that the next of kin have been informed, I can confirm that the victim was Dr Sebastian Fischer of Oamaru.’

In the lounge at Towey Street, Dorothy and her two grandchildren had moved into the games part of the evening. Carl stood alone in front of the TV, which was switched off, and stared out the window. On the sofa facing him, Jenny threw her hands up in frustration.

‘Carl. It’s your turn, come on!’ she pleaded.

‘Can’t someone else have a go?’

‘Gran and I have both had two turns each now.’

‘Yeah, but I’m giving my turn to you. I don’t want it.’

‘Look, we all agreed. One turn each. You can’t go changing the rules now.’

‘We didn’t all agree. I was outnumbered that’s all. You two ganged up on me. I didn’t even want to played blood... I mean jolly charades.’

‘Come Carl’ said Dorothy. ‘It’s not all that bad is it? You used to love it as a little boy.’

This did nothing to improve Carl’s opinion.

‘You’re just afraid of losing’ said Jenny softly.

Carl hauled himself out of his chair with a groan. ‘Alright. What’s the topic?’

‘It’s up to you remember – free choice round.’

‘Alright...umm...’ he started into his miming.

‘It’s a book... three words... first word...’the’...’ Dorothy quickly dealt with the preliminaries.

‘...the Wooden Horse’ said Jenny without blinking. ‘Carl, you always choose that for a book. And when it’s a movie, it’s always the Sound of Music. Can’t you use your imagination a bit?’

‘Why? It’s a stupid game. What’s the point?... sorry Gran. I know you like it but, well, maybe charades is a bit of a girl’s game.’

‘Perhaps you’re right. What sort of game would you prefer dear?’

‘I don’t know – pool or poker or blackjack?’

‘I see. You know I don’t approve of pool halls or gambling Carl’ replied Dorothy. ‘I do like a good game of cards though. How about Five Hundred? Your Granddad always liked that.’

‘Yeah, that’d be good. Won’t it be a bit tricky with only three of us?’

‘True’ Dorothy looked at her watch. ‘I wonder what’s happened to your Dad, Jenny. He could have been our fourth.’

‘We could play Cluedo’ suggested Jenny. ‘That’s fine with three players.’

Carl nodded. ‘Alright, anything’s got to be better than charades.’

‘Done’ said Dorothy. ‘You two set up the board and the murder, and I’ll fetch the supper.’

Some hours later, a taxi pulled into the drive at 36 Towey St. The time was around 9.30, quite a respectable hour for a gentleman to be returning home from an evening out. So Amos might have thought, had he been capable of thought at the time. He garbled some nonsense to the driver and proceeded to fall out of the door and onto the gravel driveway. The driver slowly edged his car back out onto the street where he

paused for a moment to check on his recently ejected passenger. With a shake of his head he accelerated away.

‘You’ll pay for this tomorrow Amos, Christ what a shambles!’

The shambles crawled towards the front porch and attempted to haul himself up the stairs. This he achieved, with an extreme effort, and he even managed to raise himself up into a semi-standing position with the aid of a helpfully placed deck chair. Sadly the chair’s assistance was short-lived. Under the weight of Amos’s swaying body, it folded and collapsed onto the hard decking timber with a clatter like thunder. Amos found his arms and legs sandwiched irretrievably between wood and canvas. He tried to move but the thing had a mind of its own. For a few moments, he thrashed and bashed like a fish in a net, trying to break free.

This only seemed to make matters worse. He lay back and gathered his breath.

At his left side was the railing that ran the length of the deck. Perhaps he could haul himself up on it and somehow wriggle out of the trap. He grasped the railing with both hands and heaved mightily at it. For a moment it seemed that he had succeeded. He was vertical against the rail and his legs had pulled partly free. A second later he was falling head first over the rail and the crumpled deck was sent flying to the far side of the deck.

The sound of the chair colliding with the pot plant stand coincided with Amos landing head first into the flower bed below. Consequently, he did not notice the noise of the big terra cotta vase crashing to the deck and smashing into a pile of rubble and shredded geraniums.

Those inside the house, however, did notice.

Suddenly a bright light hit Amos in the eyes, shining through the cavity of the open front door. He attempted to extract himself from the garden but promptly fell over again. Standing looking down at him in their pyjamas were Jenny and Carl. Amos waved amiably and attempted to speak. What came out, though intended to be a cheerful greeting, was less intelligible than his efforts to communicate in Japanese.

Carl started giggling but Jenny shut him up. She hissed at her father.

‘Jeezus Dad. Look at you, what an embarrassment. What kind of a father are you? No wonder Mum left!’ Her voice cracked on these last words. She turned away, only to step on the broken vase.

‘Shit! That was the vase I gave you for Christmas!’ She stormed back into the house.

Dorothy appeared in her place and stared for a second or two at the tangled inebriate attempting to crawl up the deck stairs. She said nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

Carl was pushed inside and his grandmother quickly followed. The door slammed and the lock was snibbed shut from the inside. Even if Amos had been able to find his key and get it into the lock, a most unlikely eventuality given the state he was in, he would not have been able to turn the key. He was locked out.

Just as he gathered enough clarity to realise this fact, the hall light was extinguished and the porch plunged into blackness. Amos felt the world begin to turn invisibly around him, as though he was tumbling in the blackness of a gigantic clothes dryer.

When he awoke, two things struck Amos. One, his face was wet, he was lying with his face in Archimedes' water bowl, which was empty, now. And two, he had a nagging recollection that there was some reason for his uncomfortable situation. As he slowly began to regain feeling in his aching limbs, snippets of memory began to play in his mind.

The club. The pool table. That darts game... something about a drinking game with Don bloody Pullman.

A taxi ride. Fischer dead?! No, he must have dreamed that.

The porch, that bloody chair... and then Jenny. The look on her face. Her voice, the complete and utter shame in her voice. Though he had been in no state to notice anything at the time, some part of him had faithfully recorded the scene. And now it was playing back over and over again.

It was there in the quiet of the front porch, with only a few passing moths as witnesses, that Amos took a solemn oath. This was the last time.

Never again. Never, never again.

He remembered Jenny's words. 'No wonder Mum left you.'

Each word now jabbed at his heart with more venom than Betty herself had ever managed to inflict. Guilt and remorse coursed through his veins along with the poisonous remnants of the alcohol. Every ounce of self-respect seemed to have drained from his system.

He fell back into oblivion, spent and empty.

Could do better.

Chapter 15

Somewhere in the abyss of the early morning, Amos awoke. Sober and cold, he stumbled around the side of the house to the back door. Mercifully it was open. He crept to his room, dropped onto his bed and lay staring straight up at the ceiling. Sleep was impossible. For, although the house was deathly quiet, cries of dismay and regret bellowed for attention inside his head.

Amos thrashed from side to side under the bedclothes. On the one hand, he longed for the light of day and an end to his self-inflicted torture. On the other, he dreaded the inevitable ‘morning-after’ apology scene that drew closer by the minute.

It was with some surprise then, that he found himself waking up from a deep sleep. He had slept after all. Light streamed in through the still open curtains. His alarm clock read just before 8am.

Had he dreamed it all, the whole drunken fiasco? He sat up and lowered his legs over the edge of the bed. The state of his clothes and a pounding pulse in his head suggested otherwise. Two words began to echo in time to the beat – never again... never again.

Another pounding. This was outside of his head however. Someone was knocking at the front door. Amos staggered out of his room and into the hall. No-one else in the house seemed to be stirring. He staggered on and stopped before the front door.

A dark bulky outline filled a large portion of the glass panelling. It was a shape that Amos partly recognised, but the person’s face was unidentifiable through the frosted glass. He fumbled with the lock snib for some time before getting the door open. Genuine surprise lit upon his face.

‘Mr Jackson. It’s Sergeant Barrett, from the Police.’

As he surveyed the Sergeant’s bulbous sweaty face, Amos began to gain an appreciation for Greenwell’s assessment of him. The man had seen Amos in the Police Station ten or twelve times over the past few days. Why the hell was he introducing himself?

‘Yes Barrett. I know that. Are you looking for the Inspector?’

‘No. Well, not exactly. Can I come inside sir? I have some rather unsettling news.’

‘By all means.’

The pair sat in the front room, a space generally reserved for antique china, Aunt Bathsheba’s floral lounge suite and other mothballed relics of days gone by.

‘Tea?’ Amos offered, knowing full well that in his condition he would not have been able to make it to the kitchen, let alone carry a tea tray back.

‘No, thanks. I won’t keep you long. I have to get back to the station.’

‘And what is this news? You have me interested.’

‘It’s about the DI, Inspector Greenwell.’

‘What about him?’

‘He’s... he’s been arrested.’

‘What!?’

‘I know, it’s hard to fathom, but it’s true enough.’ The Sergeant reached inside his jacket and pulled out a folded sheet of police letter paper. ‘He asked me to give you this and, er, I didn’t give it to you, if you don’t mind sir.’

‘Pardon? Oh I see, under the counter, very well. But Barrett what’s this all about, I mean...?’

A series of horn blasts sounded outside the house. Barrett was on his feet immediately.

‘Sorry, I have to go. Read the letter Mr Jackson, it will explain the situation, I expect.’

Amos sat with his head in his hands, trying to sort out what was real and what was nightmare. He picked up the sheet of paper and unfolded it. As his eyes slowly began to focus, he could see that the writing, though apparently written in a hurry, was recognisably that of Jack Greenwell.

Amos, the balloon has gone up. Someone has framed me. Sent home by AC, under house arrest. Up to you now. Follow up on the Jap, the Tongan and the hippy. Get case notes from green folder on my desk. Be careful, something’s going on here I didn’t know about. J.G.

Suddenly Amos became aware of a presence at his back.

‘Who’s the hippy?’ asked Dorothy, peering over his shoulder.

‘Usually it’s me. In this case, I think he means Hubert Whiting, the herbalist.’

Dorothy placed a firm hand on his head. Instantly, the plight of Jack Greenwell was swamped by waves of guilt surging through Amos’s mind.

‘Mother, about last night, I... I don’t know what to say. I promise it won’t happen again.’

‘I hope you’re right Amos. If not for your sake then for Jenny’s.’

‘I don’t mean to do it. I just lose control. I set out meaning to only have a couple of drinks and before I know it... well, you know what happens. It seems like there’s this part of my nature that lies waiting to ambush me whenever it gets the chance. I suppose *you’d* call it the Devil.’

Amos could say no more. Words seemed inadequate. Whatever he might say by way of contrition or apology, his mother would be quite justified in saying she had heard it all before. Instead, Dorothy squeezed his shoulder and perched beside him on the arm of the chair.

‘Funny thing human nature’ she said. ‘Some say you can’t change it.’

Amos nodded slowly, wondering what his mother was driving at.

‘But you know, a very wise man once told me, ‘you can’t change human nature, it’s true, but you can change yourself’... I’ve never forgotten that.’

‘Is that one of your biblical quotes Mother? I’ve never heard you use it before.’

‘No, at least I don’t think so. Actually the wise man in question was JT Jackson, your father.’

This floored Amos for a while. ‘I didn’t know he had an alcohol problem...?’

‘He didn’t. But he had a few demons of his own to deal with as a young man. And, I’m pleased to say, he dealt with them. He just set his mind to it and went ahead and changed himself. He was a man of action your father, it was one of the reasons I married him actually.’

A flood of questions filled Amos’s mind.

But Dorothy was going to say no more on the topic. She took the note from his trembling hand and studied it briefly.

‘The herbalist you say, well, that figures. And I know Coral was a fan of his remedies. But what on earth’s all this about Jack being arrested? Do you know what he’s been accused of?’

‘No. But I’m going to find out.’

Amos found himself filled with energy. He was out the door and had turned over the Humber’s engine in the time it took for his mother to make it to the front doorstep.

‘What do you mean they’ve been released?’

Amos felt his temperature rising in the way that it used to in the classroom. The short drive to the police station had given him just enough time to gather his wits and Dorothy’s words had given him a fire he had not felt in a long long time.

Barrett did not look happy about the situation himself.

‘It was from the AC’s office, direct orders. Nothing I could do about it. Said there was no cause to detain them, that no crime had been committed and therefore there was no need for an investigation.’

‘Do you know where they’ve gone?’

‘I imagine Viserio has gone back to his digs. As for the Jap, God knows, probably trying to hitchhike his way back to Toyota land.’

Before Amos could glean any information that might actually be useful, the phone rang and ended their conversation. While the Sergeant dealt with the call, Amos quietly slipped into the corridor.

The Inspector’s office was locked. Amos looked around for some other way in, but the solid stone walls and kauri door offered little hope in that regard. He sneaked into the staffroom and checked Greenwell’s locker, finding it wide open and empty save for a screwed up gum wrapper. There had to be some way to gain entry to the office, and to find that green folder.

The garage at 38 Wansbeck Street was remarkably well disguised. From the outside it looked nothing more than a standard timber garage. Inside, it was a fully equipped flat – with kitchenette, shower and toilet facilities. The rear window, not visible from the road, was much bigger than might be expected and the view it framed was bigger again.

Perched on the hard lumps of his kapok mattress, Sammy Viserio gazed out through this window at the Oamaru Harbour and the broad flat expanse of South Pacific beyond. Something was going on at Holmes Wharf, and it wasn’t the loading or unloading of cargo. No ships were berthed.

Better go and have a look. He stood suddenly and made for the side door, but got no further than pulling it open. Standing in the door-frame was his cousin Sione, his great slab of a fist reaching for the door handle.

‘Where you going Semi?’

Sammy gave an involuntary yelp. ‘Aie! What you doing sneaking up on me like that for?’

‘I asked first.’

‘Thought I’d go for a walk, been locked up like a dog for days at that Police Station.’

‘You forgotten what we agreed?’

‘Nope’ his head drooped and swung from side to side a little. ‘Anyway... I never agreed, you just told me.’

Built like a piece of heavy machinery, Sione bulldozed his way into the garage and shunted his cousin to one side. He shut the door with a well-aimed kick.

‘You know why, it’s too risky.’

‘Too risky for you. The cops aren’t after me, I was released remember?’

‘Doesn’t matter. We don’t want you out there getting noticed. You just got to keep out of sight for a few weeks till those Immigration fellas stop nosing around.’

Sammy shuffled back to the window and pointed down towards the harbour.

‘What’s going on down there?’

‘Don’t know.’

‘Bullshit.’

The older cousin paused and seated himself in a brown vinyl-covered armchair.

‘Nothing that you need to worry about boy. They’re reading the list of the fellas who get to keep their jobs. And they won’t be picking no Tongan overstayers, will they?’

Sione stared at the back of Sammy’s head. The neck muscles were tensing as though he was moving his jaw. ‘You trying to say something?’

‘Yeah’ the younger man swivelled, his eyes flared open wide, dark opals against the light blue of the sky beyond. ‘I said they would be picking me if it wasn’t for you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It was you that wanted to do old Mrs Simpson’s place.’

‘You should’ve kept out of it then. You should’ve stayed at home with your bloody tutu, you big girl!’ He kicked at a partly-completed length of tapa cloth.

Sammy faced the sky again, his words fading with the steam of his breath on the cool glass. ‘At least you got one thing right.... I should of stayed at home. My real home, and my real family. I came here to help our family you know, just like you. At least I still send most of my pay home Sione, how much do you send home?’

‘None of your business. Anyway, this is my home here, I’m a Kiwi now. Who wants to be a Tongan these days?’

Two pairs of dark eyes met. ‘If you’re a Kiwi how come you can’t get served at the Provincial, how come you can’t get a loan at the Palangi bank? You’re not a Kiwi, you’re a coconut boy, a darkie. But I know you are Sione, you have the blood of our fathers in you. You can’t escape who you are.’

‘Watch me, little cousin, just watch me! Maybe you’re the one who needs to think about that question – who are you? Or even better, what are you? That’s easy – you’re a thief!’

His cousin stormed out, slamming the door with such violence that Sammy's hula girl thermometer was toppled from his bedside table. The glass tube smashed and spilt bright red fluid onto the dark concrete floor.

The younger Tongan sat on his bed and looked back out into the blue sky. Not so peaceful now, a frontal change was rolling in from the south. Already the wind was rising, shuffling the leaves of the cabbage trees, slapping them against each other.

'I know who I am, and I know what I am' he muttered. 'And I know what I am not. I am not a thief, Sione – I am not a thief!' His voice had risen to a high pitch. Suddenly he remembered the neighbours, the Frasers. Old Mr Fraser was out in his vege garden. Sione could see the old man's hat poking up behind the wooden palings of the garden fence. The young Tongan's voice dropped to a bitter whisper.

'I am an honest man.' His eyes turned again to events down at the harbour.

Milky seawater surged around the piles, pushing Carl's line under the wharf for a few seconds. He felt a gentling tugging at the end of his rod and reacted at once, heaving the top tip skywards and winding rapidly. The reel whirred like a distant motorbike engine. He stopped winding as soon as the hooks and sinkers were hanging free from the water.

No fish... no bait left either.

'Nice work' said Jenny, without shifting her gaze from the point where her own line sank into the olive green murk.

Carl said nothing and rebaited his hook. He dropped his line back into the water and gazed out across the harbour. A handful of small yachts were racing between two large buoys.

'Club race day' he said. 'Intermediate grade. Hey, isn't that Graeme Smith at the front?'

Jenny followed his pointing finger. 'Can't tell from here. It's the right coloured sail though. Black and yellow stripes, like a bumblebee.'

The cousins watched the young sailors for a few minutes.

'Hang on, I think I've still got Dad's old goggles here' said Jenny. She rummaged in her bag and produced the binoculars. Wedging her rod under one leg, she trained the binoculars on the leading yacht. 'Yep it's him alright. Amazing, he looks quite professional up close, almost as though he knows what he's doing.'

Carl's attention had shifted to the backdrop of the race, a long timber wharf on the opposite side of the harbour. 'Jenny... while you're at it, have a look over there on Holmes's Wharf. There's a whole bunch of people. What's going on?'

'By that shed? Yeah, there's a big crowd. Harbour workers I guess. Couple of men in suits talking to them.' She scanned further along the wharf. 'And... shit... Carl, it's him, it's that guy.'

'What guy?'

'The Japanese fisherman, the one who tied us up.'

'Can't be, he's in jail.'

'See for yourself... at the other end of the shed, climbing down into a dinghy.'

Carl took the binoculars and focussed in. 'Bugger me, you're right. How the hell did he get out?'

'We should tell Dad, or Inspector Greenwell.'

'We could, or...'

'Listen, don't go having one of your bright ideas Carl. The last one was going rabbiting at the Cape... remember?'

'This is different. Look, by the time we find your Dad, that guy will be miles away.'

'So... what's the alternative?'

'We follow him. Keep well back so he can't see us. We'll see where he goes, then we'll have something useful to tell your Dad or whoever.'

'I don't know...'

'Come on, don't be such a girl.'

Carl ducked, but not quite quickly enough. The duffel bag, still half full of lead sinkers and bait, hit him on the shoulder and grazed the side of his head.

'Alright' said Jenny, 'but if he sees us, I'm not hanging around.'

The Japanese fisherman made good time across the water, rowing with the smooth strokes of one well acquainted with handling a pair of oars. He beached the dinghy at the easternmost end of the harbour near the breakwater and headed towards a flat area at the base of Cape Wanbrow. He paused for a moment at the beginning of a narrow track which skirted the cliff just a few yards above the sea. Turning briefly to look behind him, he clambered over the fence stile and set off along the track.

Carl and Jenny were not far behind, scurrying from bush to boulder. By the time they reached the stile, the fisherman had disappeared around the curve of the cliff. They stood at the stile for a few seconds and contemplated the sign that hung from the fence.

Graves Track.

DANGER!

Unsafe Terrain. No Public Access.

‘I wonder who the hell thought of that name?’ said Jenny. ‘It doesn’t exactly inspire confidence, does it?’

‘I think it might be names after a Mister Graves...’

‘Anyway, we can’t go on it – it says No Public Access!’

‘Course we can’ said Carl, ‘we’re not public, we’re locals, near enough. The farm is just over the top of the hill there.’

Before his cousin had time to reply, he was over the stile and striding along the rocky track. Jenny had no option but to follow. The pair edged along the thin ledge as it angled steadily upward. Jenny willed herself not to look down, but still she was acutely aware of the rocks and pounding waves below.

Rounding the first bend, they caught sight of Takahashi a good hundred yards ahead. He was moving at pace and did not once pause to look behind. Then he was gone around another bend. His pursuers followed on around a near 90 degree corner and found themselves facing directly south, looking out across Bushey Beach. They could see the track ahead for hundreds of yards – but there was no sign of anyone at all.

‘Where is he?’ hissed Jenny. ‘He can’t have got that far in front of us.’

On a hunch, Carl looked the only direction that they had not been watching – straight up. There was the answer. Nestled neatly into the clay cliff some thirty or forty feet above, a long concrete slab jutted out.

‘The Bunker’ he whispered. ‘I bet he’s hiding up in the old lookout bunker, the one that your Dad’s folk club uses. Look, there’s a bit of a track running from that last corner right up there.’

Jenny took one look at the crumbling cliff face.

‘Ok. This is the point where I turn around and go find my Dad. *No way* is it safe to go up there.’

Carl took this as an invitation and leapt onto the cliff. Before Jenny could do anything to stop him he was clambering upwards, sending tiny avalanches of clay and dirt down on her as he went. He reached the concrete pad of the bunker in no time and disappeared from sight. Jenny prepared herself for the run back to town. What would be quickest, she wondered. There was a phone outside the dairy on Itchen Street....

Before she could plan further, a cloud of dust and dirt cascaded down the slope, Carl in the middle of it. He landed at her feet in a clay-coloured heap. Beneath the dust, his face brimmed with pride.

‘He’s up there. I think he must be living in there, he’s got a sleeping bag and food and everything.

‘You idiot, why did you go so close? You could have... did he see you?’

‘Nah, he was fiddling around with a radio, trying to get Radio Tokyo I suppose.’

As Carl spoke a squealing electronic sound came from the direction of the Bunker.

‘Sounds like he’s got something...’

Jenny too had got something - her cousin by the elbow, and she was already on her way back into town, dragging Carl behind like a stuffed toy.

Chapter 16

Mrs Parsons, the proprietor of the Empire Tea-rooms, was evidently a traditionalist. On the back wall, a portrait of Queen Victoria hung, sternly expressing her sovereignty over all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland and India. Judging by the proliferation of Victorian era crockery, silverware and Union Jack flags adorning the walls, the former monarch's influence was alive and well in the 1970's, even in the far-flung colonial reaches of her former dominion.

Victoria Hyde-Jones approved. She raised an empty teacup to toast her regal namesake.

'I must say Dorothy, I was delighted, and a little surprised, to receive your invitation. I rather had the impression that you didn't like me very much.'

'Really?' Dorothy silently reminded herself not to use the 'pooh-face' nickname as she looked up from the crossword page of a neatly folded Otago Daily Times. She had nearly completed it during the twenty minutes she had been waiting. 'Sorry if I gave that impression Victoria, it was not intentional of course.'

'Do you eat here often?'

'On occasions – yourself?'

'Good heavens no. Well, what I mean is, one has certain standards, you know. Though, I must say I do rather like the décor and the atmosphere in here.'

Dorothy raised her menu. 'Are you going to have something to eat with your tea? I can recommend the sausage rolls – delicious!'

'Mm. Perhaps not for me. I'll go for a croissant.'

Mrs Parsons appeared from nowhere and took their orders. She was a large cheerful woman in spite of the fact that she walked with a level of discomfort that seemed greater than her years. Victoria watched her waddle back to the kitchen with clear disapproval.

'Spent far too much time in the bedroom that woman. No self-control.'

She paused to engulf the remaining half of her croissant in one mouthful, leaving a corona of pastry flakes encircling her lips. These she despatched a delicate brush of her napkin.

'Now dear, what did you want to talk about? The Floral Committee I presume?'

'Actually, it's the orchestra I'd like to discuss.'

'Goodness, what on earth could interest you there?'

Dorothy rested her cup in its saucer and looked directly into Victoria's eyes.

'Your feud with Coral Simpson. Amos has told a few things but I'd like to get to the bottom of it.'

'Why?' Victoria straightened in her chair, her expression passing through cool to icy.

'For Amos, he's been hit rather hard by Coral's unfortunate passing. We both have, to be honest. Anyway, he's been in a funny mood ever since. I'm sure it would do him the world of good to know that you and Coral were not really such bitter enemies. He thinks so highly of you both you see.'

Dorothy sat wringing her hands under the table, she had never told so many lies in her whole life – let alone all in one sentence. Still, it was for a good cause.

'I see.' Victoria appeared unconvinced. But she obliged. 'Well... it all started in Standard Three, we were both in Miss Kelly's class ...'

The story was as long and the reasons for the feud every bit as petty as Dorothy had been expecting. After feigning due interest for a time, she subtly turned the topic in a new direction.

'Amos often said that Coral felt picked upon by that conductor, what was his name... terrible business about him drowning though, isn't it?'

Victoria fired a withering look at Dorothy. The words that followed were delivered in a measured even tone.

'Sebastian Fischer, my dear Dorothy, was a remarkable man. A genius in his own right, musically and artistically speaking.'

Now her voice picked up in pace and intensity. 'One simply can't imagine how dreadful it must have been for him putting up with the *less accomplished* members of the orchestra. He had a doctorate in Music you know.'

'Yes I had heard...'

'And he was such a cultured and well-educated gentleman. Even though he was from Germany, he knew all about art and countries and geography the world over. I remember one day when we were rehearsing Grainger's Handel in the Strand, he told us all about London and a whole host of small towns and locales in the south of England – just to set the scene. If you didn't know better you'd have sworn he was as British as Grainger or Handel themselves.'

For a moment Dorothy resisted correcting her, but out it came. 'That's interesting, except of course Handel was German and Percy Grainger an Australian, I believe.'

Pooh-face applied the expression that had given birth to her nickname. 'Are you sure? Well, never mind. My point was about Sebastian and his genius.'

'Of course. Would you say he was, like many geniuses, a little temperamental perhaps?'

'Of course. It goes with the territory for those of us with real talent, doesn't it?' Victoria raised her cup to her lips, her little finger inclined at just the right angle. She sipped at the tea, making a soft but genteel vacuuming noise.

'I couldn't say, my dear. But I have heard tell of such – the artistic temperament I think they call it. So... did you ever see Sebastian vent his *temperament* at anyone other than Coral and Amos?'

'Certainly. He was not reluctant in that department. In fact, I often wonder if he didn't have a little of the Latin blood mixed in with his German genes.' She paused and stared into her cup, as though recognising a memory floating there. 'There was this one occasion, quite recently, when he really went to town. But no... I shouldn't gossip.'

'I'm sure you know I'm the very essence of discretion Victoria.'

'Yes, so you are' she leant forward and dropped her voice to a loud whisper. 'Well, it was after the OOSO concert earlier this month. The New Year's concert, in the Opera House... oh, but you were there too weren't you.'

'Yes, for a while,' Dorothy nodded encouragingly, 'do go on.'

'We were all at the bar, having a few celebratory drinks. Sebastian was right down the other end of the auditorium, talking to a man. A stranger, well I'd never seen him before. Anyway, they'd been talking for some time when suddenly there was a dreadful row. Both of them yelling at each other at the top of their lungs. It was shocking really. Then it stopped, as abruptly as it had started. The other man stomped out through the main doors and Sebastian came thundering down towards the stage. I remember it vividly, it was so theatrical.'

'How exciting! Who was the other man, did you recognise him?'

'Not at the time. But come to think of it, I did see him on Thames Street a few days later. Hard to miss him, he was such an uncommonly *common* looking man, if you know what I mean. Wore a frightful old Tweed jacket, I remember, along with pinstripe trousers. Clearly no fashion sense whatsoever. But no, I've no idea who he is I'm afraid.'

'And no-one else in the orchestra knew of him?'

'No, though we didn't really discuss it at the time. Poor Sebastian was in such a state, he sent us all packing so he could lock up.'

‘I see. Tell me, when you saw this man on the street, you didn’t happen to see where he was going?’

‘Why would I be interested in such a non-descript individual?’ Victoria stopped at that, her eyes widening with a sudden recollection. ‘Actually, funnily enough, I do remember something, now that you mention it. He wasn’t going *anywhere*. He was standing outside The Brydone Hotel talking to another man. A rough, seedy looking character – I’ve seen him around town before. Farmer I think. Yes, that’s right, he had his photo in the paper last year sometime. He’d been had up for mistreating his stock, or something like that.’

Dorothy sat with her pencil poised. ‘Name?’

‘Really I don’t know Dorothy. These are not the type of people that I generally have anything to do with, unless they’re delivering the coal or collecting the rubbish. Why all the questions? I feel like I’m on trial.’

A frown struggled for freedom under the layers of moisturiser on Victoria’s brow. She had just noticed that Dorothy appeared to be filling in answers on her crossword puzzle. ‘Am I boring you my dear?’

‘No, not at all. Sorry about that, sometimes an answer will just come to me right out of the blue, and I know I just have to write it down straight away, or it will vanish as quickly as it came. Do you find that?’ Dorothy folded the page to cover over the notes she had been taking.

‘No, not at all. But then crosswords are not my thing, especially those cryptic ones. Products of sick minds if you ask me. I don’t know what you see in them.’

Dorothy put the paper away in her bag and refocused her attention on her guest.

‘Just a way of keeping the mind active. Getting back to that argument, I don’t suppose there anyone else around, closer to the two men, who might have overheard something?’

This gave Victoria cause for some thought. ‘Hmm, yes, there was someone sitting in one of the seats near the back of the auditorium, in the shadows. I didn’t notice until the other two had both stormed off in their opposite directions.’

‘Who was it?’

‘Coral. She sometimes took a rest back there out of the glare of the lights. I expect she was tired after the performance. ‘

‘So she could well have overheard what they were discussing.’

‘I suppose so. But don’t ask *me* what they said, I didn’t hear them.’

‘I’m sorry Victoria. Just trying to understand you know, it’s like a puzzle you see.’

‘What is?’

‘Coral’s death.’

‘Oh yes, that’s right. I’d quite forgotten that’s what we were talking about.’

Across the street, the Post Office clock ran through its paces in preparation for the hour chimes. Victoria glanced at her gold watch. ‘Goodness, look at the time.’ She stood up in a rush, pushing the chair away with the backs of her legs. ‘I must dash. Thanks for the tea Dorothy, it’s been lovely catching up like this. My regards to Amos.’ With a smack of rouged lips on powdery fingertips she was gone.

Dorothy was left gazing out the café window, pondering a trio of puzzlements.

One: what had that argument been about and what, if anything, had Coral overheard?

Two: how had Fischer and the man in the tweed jacket known each other?

And three: why had Jenny and Carl just run past the tearooms looking like Death himself was chasing them?

There was no free space left on his desk. Amos shuffled the invoices together and plonked them on top of the tax folders. Bloody paperwork! It was bad enough having to work in a capitalist system without then having to spend half your waking hours convincing the government that you hadn’t made any profit at all. Surely he had more expenses receipts than this?

‘Are you sure there aren’t any more?’ he called out through the open door.

‘I’m serving.’ Mary’s curt reply was followed by the shop door slamming and the sound of customers’ feet. Under other circumstances he would have been happy to hear them.

‘Damn it all’, muttered Amos. ‘Damn the IRD, damn the system, and damn Jack Greenwell for dragging me into this ridiculous playing at detectives nonsense. If I’d got onto this lot earlier...’

He tugged at the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet. A wee dram at a time like this couldn’t hurt. First out came the bottle of Lanes Ginger Ale - a crime really, despoiling perfectly good Scotch with fizzy sugar-water, but a necessary disguise in case he should have company. He placed the full glass bottle on the desk in between two bulging receipt books and reached back into the drawer for Granddad Jackson’s hip flask.

A breathless presence at the office door stayed his hand. Instinctively his fingers relaxed. The flask dropped back into the drawer with a tell-tale metallic clank. Jenny and Carl stood at the doorway, red in the face and panting. Seconds later, his mother

appeared behind the teenagers, looking even redder. This was no social visit, this was a deputation.

‘News’ gasped Jenny.

‘Me too’ added Dorothy.

Once his three visitors had regained their breaths, and made short work of the unfortified Ginger Ale, Amos attempted to make sense of what they were prattling on about. The youngsters first, his mother could wait.

‘You think it’s the same man, this Japanese chap you followed? It’s Takahashi, the one who tied you up at the farm?’

They both nodded, mouths now full of potato chips.

‘But you only saw him through the binoculars and later from behind, are you absolutely sure it was him?’

‘It was him alright Dad, Jeez, we’re not blind!’ spluttered Jenny, rough-casting Amos’s new Accounts Ledger with a ginger-flavoured potato slurry.

‘We’d better let Sergeant Barrett know straight away’ said Dorothy. ‘What do you think he’s up to, hiding in the Bunker like that? Sounds awfully suspicious to me.’

Amos gave a slight shrug. ‘Perhaps he simply has nowhere else to go. You do realise he’s been officially released?’

‘No, really? By who?’

‘The Area Commander. According to Barrett, when the AC arrested Jack, he also released Takahashi and what’s his name, Sammy, that Tongan chap. Said they were being held without cause.’

Jenny and Carl’s jaws dropped in near unison and Dorothy shook her head, muttering something about the younger generation. With some effort, Carl managed to get his jaw moving sufficiently to speak.

‘Are you serious? Inspector Greenwell’s been arrested?’

‘Yes, but you’re not supposed to know that.’

Jenny looked her father square in the eye, her eyebrows hunched in puzzlement.

‘Dad, what’s this got to do with you? How come you know all about it?’

Amos sighed, and placed a hand on her shoulder.

‘I suppose I should have told you earlier, but I wasn’t allowed to. Strictly speaking I’m still not allowed to, but, under the circumstances... you see I’ve been helping out Jack with his enquiries into these two deaths. Nothing too exciting mind you, just interviewing a few people he didn’t have time to deal with himself.’

‘Really?’ This was too much for his daughter to take in.

‘Cool’ said Carl, ‘can we help too?’

Amos gave no reply, he appeared to be thinking over this proposal.

‘Hold on just one minute’ said his mother. ‘One thing at a time. What are we going to do about this Japanese fellow?’

‘I don’t know if there is much we *can* do. We could tell Barrett, for all the good that would do. But look, if this chap’s been released, he has a perfect right to be up there on the Cape. It’s public property, as you know mother. Plenty of people camp there in the summer.’

‘In the camping area’ pointed out Carl. ‘Not in the bunker.’

‘True, but the point is there’s no law against sleeping up there if he wants to.’

‘What about the Folk Club?’ asked Dorothy. ‘Surely they don’t want him in there?’

‘Perhaps not, but the bunker’s public property too. The Club has no more right to it than anyone else, we just have a loose arrangement with the Council to use it a couple of nights a week. Admittedly it’s a little odd for him to be sleeping there, but it’s not illegal, as far as I know. If he’d gone into the restricted area, the Defence Reserve, that would be a different matter.’

Dorothy flopped down on the chair beside her son.

‘I’m not happy about this Amos. If that Area Commander is stupid enough to suspect Jack of whatever it is he suspects him of, then I wouldn’t trust his judgement any more than I trust your accounting skills.’ She cast a disapproving eye over the paper wasteland that her son rather optimistically described as business records. ‘And if Jack arrested the Jap in the first place, he must have had good reason to do so, don’t you think?’

‘Yes he did have good reason. Largely because he’d tied up our two rabbit-hunters here and was suspected of being in the country illegally. I don’t know if he thought Takahashi had anything to do with Coral’s death, we didn’t really discuss that.’

‘What do *you* think then my dear? You interviewed him didn’t you?’

‘After a fashion.’

‘And?’

‘I got the impression that he *had* been near Coral’s place, possibly more than once. He gave a pretty accurate description of her part of Wansbeck Street. And, if he had his dates right, I think he was there on the day before she... before you found her.’

‘That still makes him a suspect, doesn’t it?’ asked Carl, who had been following every word. ‘Do you know he was there for certain?’

‘Not really, that’s the problem. I couldn’t get that clear an answer with my... *limited* Japanese skills. I don’t even know that my questions made proper sense.’

‘Why don’t we go and ask him again? We know he’s up there. I don’t think he’s going anywhere, not with all those supplies he’s got,’ suggested Carl.

This was too much for Jenny. ‘You must be joking! I’m not going anywhere near him. Have you forgotten you nearly hit him with your 303? I bet *he* hasn’t forgotten!’

Amos chimed in. ‘Good point Jenny. On the other hand, Carl’s right too. We have to question him again. I still think he’s holding something back.’

‘You’re not going to go and do something silly are you Amos?’ Dorothy rose to her feet to assume a more dominant pose. ‘I’ve had enough embarrassment over the years with all those silly protest marches. I really couldn’t stand any more public humiliation. What would your father think?’ She nodded towards the photo of JT. The founder of the business looked on with his usual benevolent but severe face.

Like his father, Amos was not so easily put off.

‘Relax Mother. If we all go, we’ll be quite safe. Anyway, he’s not dangerous. If he was, he would have done something more drastic than just tying up these two the other day. I spent a lot of time alone with him in that interrogation room. He didn’t strike me as anything other than scared and confused.’

‘He is Japanese though’ said Dorothy. ‘You’re too young, I remember only too well what they were like during the war. I saw our boys when they came back from those awful prison camps. They’ve got a vicious streak running deep in their veins those Japs.’

‘For goodness sake mother, you’re starting to sound like a Party Political for the National Party! Look, if you’re that worried about it, I’ll ask Sergeant Barrett to come along. He should keep Takahashi’s kamikaze tendencies at bay.’

The Sergeant was only too pleased to accompany them. He slammed the duty roster shut and arranged for Constable Watson to take over reception.

‘It’s no trouble at all Mr Jackson, I like a good outing. Don’t often get away from that front desk nearly enough,’ he explained as Amos drove the five of them over to the harbour. ‘Plus – I never was too happy about him being released. Not after what he’d done to Jenny and Carl.’

Given the presence of a police officer in the vehicle, Amos made sure to keep his speed low. This also had the effect of minimising the dust trail that rose from the dry

gravel road. He pulled the Humber in as close as he could manage to the start of Graves Track.

‘Here we are for where we’re going...’ he said.

‘...all in here for there get out,’ chimed Jenny and Carl.

Only four of the five passengers disembarked, however.

‘Think I’ll stay in the car’ said Dorothy. ‘I won’t be any good getting up that cliff, and if there’s any sign of trouble I can be the getaway driver.’

‘Mother, you haven’t got a licence.’

‘Never stopped me before’ she whispered, avoiding Barrett’s eyes.

Scaling the clay cliff was no problem for the two teenagers, Jenny spurred on by the fact that Carl had already done it. But the steep crumbly terrain proved a major challenge for Amos and Barrett. A good three minutes after Jenny and Carl, the two middle-aged men hauled themselves onto the grassy knoll at the front of the Bunker and collapsed, wheezing and spluttering.

‘You folk-singers sure know how to pick a location’ gasped Barrett. ‘It must keep you pretty fit, heaving your instruments and suchlike up and down this slope!’

Amos gave a dry laugh.

‘This is the back way. We normally drive down from Lookout Point, there’s a well-formed track through the trees.’

The Sergeant looked at him in dismay, his face growing even more flushed. ‘Now you tell us!’

‘I don’t have a key to the gate... this was the quickest way.’

Carl, who was huddled against the concrete wall, gesticulated wildly for them to be quiet.

‘He’s in there’ he mouthed silently, pointing towards the slit-like window on the front wall. ‘I heard something.’

At this, Amos and the red-faced policeman rallied. The four gathered together, kneeling beneath the window opening.

‘You go in first Mr Jackson’ whispered Barrett, ‘you know the layout in there. Hopefully he’ll recognise you and see you don’t mean any harm. Once you’ve told him what’s happening, give us a whistle and we’ll come in.’

‘What if he reacts... er, otherwise?’ asked Amos.

‘Same thing, whistle and I’ll come in.’

The churning in his stomach told Amos that entering that bunker was the last thing he should be doing. But he ignored it, there was no way he could bail out now with his daughter and nephew watching on. He took a breath and started towards the side door.

‘Hang on Dad, you might need this.’ Jenny handed him the Japanese phrase book.

‘And this’ added Carl, passing him his pocket flashlight. He pointed to the dark window, indicating the absence of light within.

Amos sidled across to the entrance and cleared his throat.

‘Hello. Mr Takahashi, are you there? It’s Amos Jackson, remember me from the Police Station? I’m a friend.’ He stepped inside the bunker.

Time passed. The window remained unlit.

‘Should it be taking this long?’ asked Jenny.

‘That’s a good sign’ whispered Barrett. ‘If he’d whistled straight away...’

At that precise moment, a high-pitched whistle came from inside. It was an odd noise, not an ordinary whistle by any means. The sort of sound that a person makes when they can’t get enough air. Barrett leapt to his feet and lunged in through the dark opening, the two cousins right behind him.

‘Damn it’ muttered Amos, two fingers still jammed in his mouth ‘never did master that sheep whistling trick. It’s alright, our friend here is happy to talk.’

Sitting against the concrete wall with his arms wrapped around his legs, the Japanese castaway looked more like a rabbit frozen in a car’s headlights than a dangerous fugitive.

‘Not shoot’ he said, recognising Carl’s face in the light of the torch. ‘I not bad man.’

Barrett shone his large Police issue torch around the interior of the Bunker. He could certainly see what the youngsters had meant about Takahashi’s supplies. There were boxes of food, blankets and newspapers, and he had been obviously making use of the gas hob in the ‘kitchen’ corner of the Bunker.

There was also a rather heady smell of fish.

‘Let’s go outside’ said Amos, ‘it’s warmer out there, and the air is fresh.’

After reassuring Takahashi that he was still a free man, and that Barrett was only there to act as a witness and not to arrest him, Amos started into his questions. His communication was not quite as clumsy as the first time and in addition, Jenny proved very able at interpreting the Japanese fisherman’s half-mimed messages.

‘Told you charades was a useful skill’ said Jenny.

Carl made no reply.

As the two Jacksons made sense of Takahashi's explanations, Barrett recorded the main points in his notebook. After a good twenty minutes, he had noted down the following:

- T. thrown off trawler Fri 4 Jan at noon. Caught cheating at cards, set adrift
- Reached beach c.3 days later (he thinks) = Mon 7 Jan
- Wandered around town late at night all week, scrounging for food
- Returned to beach Sat night. Incident with C and J at dawn on Sunday

'You put me in jail now?' The fisherman asked when the questioning was over.

'No. You are a free man, you've done nothing wrong. You're quite welcome to stay here,' Amos informed him. He paused while Barrett whispered something and then turned back to pass the message on.

'Sergeant Barrett says don't go into town again. It is too dangerous for you in the town. Stay here in the bunker.'

Takahashi smiled, pressed the palms of his hands together as if in prayer, and bowed. 'Thank you, for help.' A thought appeared to strike him at that moment. 'You help Takahashi get home? Japan?'

'Perhaps, if we can. Not right now,' replied Amos.

In an expression of gratitude, the fisherman's grimy hand extended towards Amos. In it he held an open tin of sardines. The tiny fish floated in a sea of oil, their skin crusty and discoloured.

'Thank you no, not like fish' Amos lied.

Back at the Police Station, Amos managed to convince Barrett to provide access to Greenwell's office.

'Not the young'uns though' he said, as Carl and Jenny headed for the door. 'Just you Mr Jackson.'

'That's alright Sergeant' Dorothy intervened, having noticed that the two teenagers were about to protest, 'Jenny and Carl can walk me home. I have a couple of messages to do and I could use some extra hands.'

She shooed the two rather disgruntled youngsters from the station.

Barrett opened the door to the office and the two men filed in.

'What do you make of that Jap? Do you think he's on the level?' asked Barrett.

'For the most part, yes. I didn't really think he was a crook the first time I met him. Now I'm sure he's not. What about you?'

‘Not sure. They’re hard to read these foreigners, specially when they can’t speak the lingo very well. I know what you mean though, he doesn’t seem the violent type. Mind you, put a mild-mannered man in a tight situation, who knows what he’s capable of – everyone has their breaking point. That’s one thing I have learned in this job.’

Amos looked at the Sergeant with some surprise. An insightful comment.

Barrett continued. ‘The dates and times match don’t they, he was in or around town at the right times. He even admitted he was near Mrs Simpson’s. Maybe he broke into her house looking for food and she caught him at it.’

‘Maybe. But Coral was poisoned by Botulinum toxin, remember. Where would he have got that from? And why such a complicated plan? Surely a knock on the head would have been the simpler option.’

Barrett pondered on this for a few seconds. ‘Them sardines looked pretty poisonous.’

Amos nodded, the smell was still in his nostrils.

‘True enough. Still makes for a rather unlikely murder scenario doesn’t it? Having been caught red-handed burgling an elderly woman’s house he then invites her to have some sardines – which she agrees to?’

Barrett nodded thoughtfully. ‘Well, it was hypothetical... just an idea.’

‘Fair enough, worth exploring. I’m sure the Inspector would have been impressed,’

‘Thank you sir.’

‘Sergeant... I’ve just had an idea of my own. Do you have a file of the first interview I did with him?’

‘Yes of course. It’ll be in the safe room. Why?’

‘I’d like to read my notes over again if I could. Compare what he said then with today.’

The Sergeant rose slowly. ‘It’s a bit irregular, but... alright ... I’ll need to put it straight back when you’ve finished with it.’

‘Of course yes, I quite understand.’

As soon as Barrett had left the room, Amos set to searching the Inspector’s desk. Nothing on the desk itself but there, in the top left drawer was the thing he was after – a green manila folder with the name ‘Simpson’ written on in Greenwell’s hand. Before he could open it, Barrett’s head poked around the door again. Amos dropped the folder into his lap.

‘There’s one thing that’s been puzzling me about the Jap’s story though.’

‘Yes?’ Amos could feel papers starting to slide out of the folder. He clamped his hand down.

‘That bit about why his Captain set him adrift in the first place. Seems like mighty harsh treatment for cheating at cards. I wonder what the real reason was?’

‘Who knows? I don’t think it’s important Barrett, do you?’

“Maybe not. Just thought I’d mention it.”

To Amos’s relief, the Sergeant disappeared back through the door just before the contents of the folder spilled all over the floor.

Hubert Whiting was a paid-up member of the Folk Club. Amos had seen him at the bunker on many occasions, he had even traded song sheets with him. This connection, he decided, provided an adequate pretext for a *social* visit.

Stopping at the front window of 3H, he was struck by the shambolic state of the items on show – a mess rivalling ‘Little Armageddon’, his mother’s term for the workshop at Towey Street. Whiting’s lack of display skills aside, Amos was amazed at the array of pipes, bongos, hookahs and other paraphernalia normally associated with the smoking of illegal substances. How did he get away with selling such stuff? No wonder Jack Greenwell was interested.

Inside the store, Whiting was behind the counter, hand-writing price tags.

After a fairly short and disjointed conversation, Amos was none the wiser. Whiting had been guarded, almost secretive in what he said. Why was that? Clearly there were some ‘herbal preparations’ on the counter that he would rather not be brought to the attention of the police, but Amos had not mentioned his arrangement with Greenwell. So what was Whiting’s reason for being so protective?

He pondered these questions as he walked back towards town. It was fairly evident that Whiting was a man prepared to bend the law, when it came to cannabis and possibly other substances, but Amos could not see him as a killer. Unless perhaps, he had become mixed up with gangs or organised crime as part of his business operations. Ordinary people got up to quite extraordinary things if placed under enough pressure, as Barrett had so astutely observed.

However, there was at least one undeniable fact that implicated Whiting: Coral had been a regular customer at 3H and, on the evening of that last rehearsal, she had talked about going there to get something for her flu.

A thought suddenly ploughed into Amos’s mind like a charging rhinoceros. Whiting was clearly hugely disorganised and untidy, that was obvious from the state of his shop. What if he had simply given her the wrong remedy? What if he had mistakenly given

Coral some poisonous mixture of substances without intending to? Or even some genuine concoction that just happened to react badly with her frail system or other medications?

But that didn't quite fit either. Surely the post mortem would have picked up any such substances? And what about the Botulinum? Amos began to tease and test the possibilities in the same way that he played with cryptic crossword clues.

It seemed possible that Whiting could have had access to Botulinum toxin, through his 'business' contacts. Perhaps he had some lying around and spilt it... somehow transferring a few specks to the unsuspecting Coral.

Or, even simpler, maybe he prepared one of his usual herbal concoctions with contaminated equipment – quite on the cards given conditions inside his premises. He could have infected the unsuspecting Coral without even knowing it. If so, Coral's death was nothing more than an accident. Possibilities.

Chapter 17

In the five days since Coral's death, the pot plants on her back veranda had really started to dry out and wither. Dorothy made a show of watering the plants that were in easy reach.

'In case the neighbours are watching,' she explained.

With her grandmother happily whistling and watering away, Jenny climbed up onto Carl's shoulders and began fossicking around in the pot containing Kevin the African violet. Moments later she hopped down, the back door key safely in hand.

'Are you sure this is legal Gran?' asked Carl.

'Yes I'm sure. Coral and I were old friends.'

Dorothy slipped in the key and let them in.

'Why have we come inside?' asked Jenny, looking around the kitchen. 'You said you just wanted to water the pot plants... there aren't any in here. They're all out on the veranda and you've already watered them.'

'I wanted to have a good look around. I haven't forgotten that odd feeling I had the day I discovered Coral. The more I think about it the more I know it wasn't just that she was dead. There was something else. It felt like - *violation*.' She walked into the hallway. 'Here, you two take a bedroom each and I'll start on her front room.'

'What are we looking for?'

'Anything odd, unusual, missing...'

'How are we supposed to know if anything's unusual or missing?' asked Carl.

'Use your eyes boy – they're younger and sharper than mine! An open case with nothing in it, an empty container or drawer, that sort of thing. If you see something, let me know, I've a pretty good memory of this place. I helped Coral last year when she was totting things up for the insurance company.'

Twenty minutes had ticked by on the grandfather clock in the hall when the three sleuths gathered back there. Between them they had made a few discoveries:

- In the master bedroom, a drawer in the bedside dresser had been emptied onto the floor
- In the front room, a torch was sitting on a crockery cabinet, its batteries dead
- In the hallway, Jenny found a single ear-ring lodged in the carpet

‘We better get moving’ said Dorothy as they considered their finds. ‘For one thing we don’t want to hang around in here for too long, and for another, I don’t know about you two, but I’m starving. Who’s for a feed of fish and chips from the Junction?’

The two teenagers were out the door before she had finished speaking.

At the front gate, in the grass beside the letter box, Carl made one more find... with his toe. A tin can shot out through the gate, bounced onto the street and clattered along the tarseal.

‘Carl, that’s littering’ said Jenny.

‘No it isn’t, it was already littered. I just shifted it a bit.’

‘Still littering.’

‘No way.’

‘Children please! It doesn’t matter what you call it, the point is that you can’t leave it out on the road there. It’s not right.’ Dorothy scuttled onto the street and scooped up the crumpled can. Back on the pavement she held it out for the two youngsters to see.

‘Seamaster Sardines’ said Jenny, reading the tiny writing on the side of the can.

‘And who do we know who likes sardines?’ said Carl.

Dorothy slipped the can into her bag. ‘I’m sure Mr Takahashi is not the only person in town partial to sardines. But on the other hand, I know for a fact that Coral couldn’t stand them. Something she and Amos had in common. Yes, perhaps we should pay another visit to our fishy Japanese friend.’

She turned the corner and set off up the steep rise of Wansbeck Street.

‘But not right now. Right now the only fish I want to investigate is a piece of blue cod wrapped in hot fatty batter.’

Amos could not resist. On his way back to town from 3H, he diverted past Jack Greenwell’s house in Wharfe Street. A grey police Holden was parked in the driveway and a uniformed officer stood at the front door of number 4a. No future in trying to contact Jack that way, he concluded. He continued on down the street towards the centre of town.

Mary was in quite a state when he arrived back at the bookshop.

‘Where have you been? I’ve been rushed off my feet!’

Amos looked around the shop. There were no customers at all.

‘Well, not now obviously. Oh, and there’s a lady waiting to see you. Said you were expecting her,’ she added, nodding towards the office.

It was the tone that Mary usually reserved for his ex-wife. Amos felt a powerful urge to leave, but resisted, telling himself it was best to face the music. And for once, he was quite right. A voice came from inside the office.

‘So this is the nerve centre of the Jackson empire.’

Not the voice he was expecting at all. Out through the office door stepped the trim, tall, scientifically precise frame of Dr Zoe O’Malley. A sense of relief engulfed Amos. For a moment he had no words, though his smile said more than enough.

‘Right, I’ll leave you to lock up then shall I?’ asked a small voice from behind the counter. Mary did not wait for a reply. She had walked the length of the shop before her boss had even registered that she had addressed him.

‘Fine’ he replied to the closing door.

‘Nice girl’ said Zoe, watching Mary march off into the blustering wind.

‘Yes. Is she? Yes, definitely... very capable.’ Amos was floored. Visiting Zoe in her patch at the university under his own volition was one thing – her turning up unannounced like this, in his shop, was something else altogether.

‘I got that impression too. We had quite a little chat. Did you know she was into wrestling?’

‘She must be, gets that American magazine, *Wrestling World* or whatever it’s called.’

‘No, I mean really into it. She actually wrestles, at the church hall every Wednesday evening.’

‘Who, Mary? You’re kidding!’

Zoe shook her head firmly. ‘No, I’m not. She even showed me a few moves. She’s very good.’

The day was taking on a very strange shape for Amos. ‘So, anyway...’

‘Would you like a hand, closing up shop?’

‘That’s ok, I can manage. What brings you here?’

‘I have some news, information about your Botulinum question.’

‘Oh right,’ a slight twinge of disappointment. ‘Shall we go into the office?’

Zoe turned and glanced back towards the door. ‘Well... I wouldn’t like to upset whatever delicate administrative operations are going on in there...’

‘Oh that, that’s just my tax return.’

‘Is it...? Actually I was thinking we might discuss this somewhere more private. Say in a quiet restaurant with a nice bottle of red to keep us company?’

Amos tried not to look too delighted. ‘Mm, yes. Good idea! I know just the place. I’ll just give Mother a call and let her know I’ll not be in for dinner.’

He dashed to the office phone and dialled Towey Street. Ten, twelve, fifteen rings. No reply. Strange for this time of day – probably she was out doing something with the kids. A few fumbling minutes later Amos was turning the front door lock of JT Jackson and Son. For the first time in... a very long time, he was going out to dinner with a woman who was not the daughter or niece of one of his mother's church cronies. It felt good.

Sean Grater, the head waiter at the Famished Farmer, owned and operated a remarkably communicative pair of eyebrows. They sat neatly above his eyes in two thick black rectangles, seldom moving from horizontal alignment. In this way, he managed the discretion and diplomacy required of his position. When the brows did move however, no matter how imperceptible or tiny the movement, vast volumes of information were communicated.

On greeting Amos and Zoe, Sean Grater's left brow lifted just a twinge at the end nearest the bridge of his nose. It dropped back to the horizontal almost immediately, once again forming a united front with its brother. The head waiter's voice meanwhile, was steady and evenly-modulated, as it was for all customers and all situations.

'Yes I do have a table free as it happens Mr Jackson. For how many?'

Amos beamed. 'Two, of course.'

Zoe spent a few moments studying the modest selection of main dishes on the menu and then ordered something called *Brodetto*. Though he had eaten many times at the Famished Farmer, Amos had never tried that particular dish. Still, if Zoe was having it... in a show of unity, he followed suit and ordered the same.

The traditional Kiwi 'meat and three veg' rule had always served him well in the past and had been enough to impress Rebecca, but it would not do on this occasion. He knew that Zoe had lived and worked in London and Paris. Probably she had lived in Italy too. Brodetto he assumed was pasta of some sort, as the word was clearly Italian and he did know that the Italians ate a lot of pasta.

Had Amos thought back to his Latin lessons at high school, he might have recognised some familiar words in the description of the dish. He might have noticed, for example, words very similar to the Latin for mussels, scallops and a host of other molluscs and shellfish. And a few warning bells would perhaps have sounded. But Amos was not

thinking about schoolboy Latin. Amos was intent on trying to impress Zoe and to conceal his limited knowledge of European cuisine.

He did a rather better job with the wine list, ordering an imported Chianti to which Zoe gave a nod of approval. When the wine arrived, accompanied by Sean Grater's inscrutable eyebrows, Amos made a great show of smelling the cork and swishing a mouthful of wine in his mouth. He nodded knowingly to the eyebrows.

When both glasses had been charged, Zoe breathed deeply at the 'nose' that filled the deep well of her glass. She smiled. 'Good choice Amos.' She tipped the glass and spent a few seconds savouring the flavours.

Giving Amos a few seconds to do likewise, Zoe began to explain her news.

'I've had a chance to look at the post mortem report and the toxicology analysis' she said, opening her brown leather satchel and sliding out a sheaf of papers. 'The Botulinum toxin is clear enough, but... there's something odd about it.'

'The whole business is pretty odd in my book. What do you mean?'

They were interrupted by Grater serving their bowls of seafood broth.

'That was quick service,' said Zoe when the waiter had left their table, 'I suppose they must have pots of it pre-cooked out the back – I hope it's been thoroughly heated.'

Amos felt his stomach turn as he saw the floating mussels and got a strong whiff of shellfish. He glanced at Zoe, who had already started hers. He toyed nervously with a piece of something white that he thought might be crabmeat.

'Well, the strain has been identified as Type E.' Zoe continued. This was clearly significant, she looked across at Amos as though he too would find it fascinating.

Amos shook his head. 'Unless you're talking about Jack's E-type Jag, I'm afraid you've lost me. You might recall that chemistry and biology were never my strong points.'

'Sorry. Botulinum Type E. The odd thing is that Type E is not proteolytic, in other words it doesn't digest animal proteins and thus can't produce the sort of putrescence or off-meat smell usually associated with the other types.'

'And...'

Throwing caution to the wind, Amos scooped up half a dozen mussels in quick succession. Fortunately the look on his face did not put Zoe off her stride.

'I remember you mentioning that your mother picked up on a smell of bad meat, at Coral's house.'

'Yes. And that's what started the police thinking it was Botulism I think.'

‘Well that’s the problem. It’s the wrong strain. Type E wouldn’t have made that smell.’

‘So, how did she come to be poisoned, and where did the smell come from?’

‘We come back to the scenario that someone has injected that toxin into her, and then taken measures to create that smell.’

‘And... who could have done that, and why?’

Zoe’s eyes startled to sparkle now. ‘Practically anyone could have arranged the rotten meat smell. But to have access to the Type E toxin, and to know about all of this in the first place, it would have to be someone with a background in toxicology or microbiology and quite possibly with access to a lab.’

For a moment, Amos’s mind flicked to Whiting’s herbal brews and concoctions. But he dismissed the thought. It was too a long stretch to describe the premises at 3H as even distantly resembling a laboratory. He held his wine glass under his nose and inhaled the bouquet, attempting to look thoughtful as he did so. Although he was just trying to counteract the smell of fish, another question percolated.

‘Zoe, you didn’t answer the ‘why’ bit. Why go to all that trouble with the smell? Why not just use the toxin as it was?’

Zoe shrugged. ‘I presume the killer wanted it to look like a case of food-borne botulism, to give the impression of accidental poisoning.’

‘The next question is, what do we do with this information?’

He prodded at the remainder of his Brodetto, his minimal interest in the dish dwindling yet further with all the talk of rotten meat and botulism.

Amos became aware that Zoe had pushed her empty bowl aside and was staring at him. It was a look that he had known well, twenty years ago. That look when she was about to suggest something ever so slightly illegal. Like the time they had broken into their landlord’s flat and spread black Nugget over his black toilet seat – an entirely reasonable retaliation for an unjustified rent hike. The prank would have been a successful operation too, were it not for Amos’s little mishap. He could still almost feel the searing pain when the knife he was using to prize open the latch had snapped and gouged his hand to the bone.

He turned his palm face-up on the restaurant table, the long scar a lasting memento.

Zoe reached across the table and ran a finger along his palm. ‘How are your breaking and entering skills these days?’

‘Rusty... why?’

‘Do you know where they’re keeping Coral’s body?’

‘Probably at Beadle’s... oh God, you’re not thinking...’ His question was curtailed by a loud burp and a volley of intestinal gurgles. He really should never have eaten those mussels.

As it turned out, the security at Beadle and Sons Undertakers presented too great a challenge for Amos’ burglary skills, rusty or otherwise. The back door was fastened with an aging Yale rimlock. Old but solid. No way a knife blade would get that open. Short of breaking the door down or smashing a window, there was no way in. He tried a half-hearted shoulder barge, knowing there would be no result. Actually there was a result, a dull ache in his shoulder and the suspicion that he had put his back out. Combined with an increasing queasiness in the stomach, Amos was beginning to wish he was sitting at home in front of the fire with a glass of Scotch.

‘You’ve lost your touch’ remarked Zoe.

‘Don’t get enough practice, and I’m getting old... mind you, with age comes wisdom... and failing that, sheer cunning. Come on, the police station’s just around the corner.’

Barrett was reluctant to provide them with the skeleton keys.

‘How do you know about these anyway Mr Jackson?’

‘Let’s just say that there advantages to having a detective as your fishing buddy.’

‘I see... I shouldn’t... these are only supposed to be used in case of emergency, and even then only by sworn officers. If you were to get caught with them...’

‘Who’s going to catch me? Any rate, I’m sure the Inspector would understand. Especially given that we are using it to solve his case for him.’

The Sergeant finally agreed. But he would not hand the keys over himself. Instead he directed Amos and Zoe to the staff room and pointed to a metal cash box. Then he turned his back and walked to the other side of his room while Amos lifted out the keys.

‘If anyone asks’ said Barrett, ‘you took these without my knowledge.’

Even with the keys it took a good ten minutes to gain entry. Amos had to jiggle and jemmy each and every key several times over. At last, on the third run through the set, one of the keys turned. The lock gave out a loud clack.

‘Don’t give up your day job Amos’ said Zoe.

‘I don’t feel good about this’ said Amos, ‘someone’s bound to notice we’ve been in here.’ His ill-feeling found its way to his stomach and he belched loudly again as the pair stalked into the building, finding their way under the dim glow of the night lights.

‘We’ll be fine. We’ll have the keys back to the station before morning change of shift. No-one will ever know they were gone. Relax Amos, you worry too much.’

For a while Amos did relax, as his mind played with the thought that he was alone in a darkened room with Zoe. The purpose of their visit temporarily forgotten, his mind raced. Then he started feeling light-headed and dizzy. He stumbled and collided with a metal shelving unit. Zoe reached across to grab his shoulder.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Fainting...’

He slumped to his side, with Zoe managing to break his fall only a little. The bony point of his elbow dug into her hip and then he collapsed fully, his head hitting the tiled floor with a sickening thud.

‘Wakey wakey.’ Zoe was shining a torch in his eyes. She slapped him lightly on the cheeks. ‘Are you alright?’

Amos’s mouth would not work, but his neck did. He nodded.

‘Elevated pulse and temperature, clammy skin, disorientation... could be botulism.’

‘Wha...’

‘Take it easy, I’m just pulling your leg! Actually it looks like food poisoning or an allergic reaction. But you had the same as me for dinner and I feel fine. Any allergies?’

‘Shellfish,’ came the feeble response.

‘What the hell did you order seafood broth for then?’

‘Don’t know. Seemed like a good idea at the time.’

‘What a plonker! You’ve been out cold for five or ten minutes. How are you feeling?’

‘Improving.’ He managed to haul himself to his feet, using Zoe as a counterbalance. She slipped an arm around his waist and they stood still together for a few moments.

‘Yeah, that’s better. I’m ok now.’

‘Well let me know if you’re going to keel over again, maybe I can do a better job of getting out of the way next time.’ She rubbed her hip and winced.

Amos had no idea whether she was kidding him again or not, his brain still functioning at half-mast. All he could manage was a muted ‘sorry!’

‘Come on, while you were sleeping on the job, I found the cool store.’ She led him down a short passageway and stopped beside a large double door. Fastening the two sides of the door was an industrial size latch.

Amos took one look at the latch and began shaking his head.

‘Don’t panic’ said Zoe, it’s open.’ She pulled the latch down and gave one of the doors a shove. A long row of fluorescent tubes flickered into life.

Immediately Amos was plunged back into the harsh reality of the situation. Five corpses were laid out on a stainless steel trolleys. A busy week for Beadle and Sons evidently. An awful stench permeated the cool air. He was on the point of throwing up when Zoe, standing beside the nearest cadaver, pulled back the covering sheet a little.

There was Coral’s grey old face. Sadder and more wrinkled than Amos remembered, the skin looked taut and thin, with a kind of wooden translucence to it. A strange curiosity overpowered his nausea.

‘How did you know it was her?’

Zoe pointed to a label on the trolley just in front of Coral’s shrivelled feet.

‘Right. Look, this whole exercise was your idea Zoe. What do we do now?’

‘Look for puncture wounds, something to indicate a needle has been used.’ She pulled on a pair of surgical gloves and switched on an overhead lamp.

‘It’s alright, I did three years of med training before I switched to Biochem.’

It may have been alright for Zoe, but thirty seconds more was about as much as Amos could handle. And it was not just the urge to vomit, somehow the whole situation seemed completely inappropriate. Coral was an old friend after all.

He tapped Zoe on the shoulder.

‘I think it’s best if you do this bit. I, need to go... out...’ He pointed to the cool store door. Once outside he found a chair and sat with his head between his hands.

Mercifully the nausea faded and his head began to clear a little. He had no idea of how much time was passing but it felt like hours as he sat there outside the morgue, trying not to think about what was going on in the cool store.

Eventually Zoe emerged, rubbing her hands to warm them up. She shook her head.

‘It’s a puzzle. I couldn’t find anything at all, no obvious signs of skin puncture anywhere.’

‘Wouldn’t the police doctors have found something, when they did their initial examination?’

‘Perhaps, perhaps not. They might not have been looking for a puncture, if they were working on the premise that the botulinum derived from infected food.’

Once outside the building, the fresh air helped to further clear Amos's head. He relocked the door.

‘What’s the time Zoe?’

‘After midnight. We better get those skeleton keys back to the station now, save an early trip in the morning.’

‘Good point. And after that, where are you staying? I’m sure mother wouldn’t mind if you wanted to use the spare room at Towey Street. Tiny little bed in a tiny little closet of a room, but it’s quite comfortable. Used to be mine when I was a boy.’

‘Sounds lovely Amos. If you’re sure your mother wouldn’t mind?’

‘As a matter of fact I do mind!’

Dorothy grabbed her son by the elbow and tugged him back into the Towey Street hallway as Zoe followed Carl and Jenny through to the living room. The door swung shut behind them.

‘I mind a lot actually. It’s not right, she’s a single woman, and you’re a, well...’

‘Hell’s teeth mother, this is the nineteen seventies, not the nineteenth century! Anyway, there’s the spare room, or I can sleep on the sofa. It’s not as though she’ll be sharing my bed!’

‘No there *isn’t* the spare room or the sofa Amos. I’ve got Jenny in the spare and Carl on the sofa. I wish you’d asked me first!’

Her fingers nipped into the gristle around his elbow joint.

‘Alright, look, I’ll put the power on in the caravan,’ Amos replied. ‘The kids can sleep out there, they’re used to bunking down together anyway.’

‘I suppose that will be alright.’ The vice grip released. ‘So, is this the Zoe you flatted with in Dunedin? The sciencey one?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Oh.’ Amos could sense the disappointment in his mother’s voice. He knew what would come next – a condemnation of modern life with its over-emphasis on science and dissolution of traditional Christian family values. He broke free of his mother’s grasp and pushed past her into the living room.

‘About the sleeping arrangements’ he announced.

The following morning, breakfast at 36 Towey Street was an event of military scope and precision. Those wishing to eat had first to wash their hands, then collect a plate, and then line up in an orderly fashion for their bacon, eggs and mushrooms. And everyone had to be seated at the table before anyone started.

‘Reminds me of dining at college’ said Zoe, ‘only much nicer of course. Where did you learn to cook so well Mrs Jackson?’

‘Me? From my mother I suppose. I’m a farm girl you see,’ replied Dorothy, keeping a close eye on her plate as she attempted to saw through a piece of bacon rind. ‘My mother was of the opinion that being able to feed the hordes was an essential part of a girl’s education. Though we were only seven, quite a small family really.’

‘So’ said Amos, ‘Carl, Jenny, I hear you had a look round at Coral’s place last night? We did a bit of sleuthing as well.’

The five compared their finds. Zoe was particularly interested in the ear-ring that Jenny had found. ‘It’s pretty.’ She pinched it between two fingers and held it out in front of them all. The ruby-coloured glass bead dangled down, sparkling in the morning sun that was now reaching through to the kitchen.

‘Wait to you hear what we found!’ started Amos. He got a short distance only into his description of their adventure at the undertakers before Dorothy butted in.

‘Thank you Amos, I don’t think these two need to hear about that!’

Her son nodded in reluctant agreement, though he could see in the teenagers eyes that their disappointment matched his own.

After the washing up, the amateur detectives decided that they needed to split company: Zoe had to return briefly to Dunedin to give instructions to her research assistant; Carl and Jenny were to go back to the Bunker on the Cape and quiz Takahashi about the sardine tin; and Amos would head to the bookshop until Mary arrived at 10.15. After that, he planned to track down Sammy for another chat.

‘I’ve got this hunch he knows more than he’s letting on as well.’

‘Do you think Mary is ready to look after the shop for a whole day?’ asked his mother.

‘Yes, why not? A bit of responsibility will do her good.’

Dorothy ruminated on this for a moment or two, but seemed to dismiss it from her mind, distracted by a sound outside. She opened the door to the back porch and let Archimedes in.

‘While we’re on the topic of responsibility Amos, this back porch has become a death trap. If it’s not garden implements and pots of seedlings, it’s waders, rods and fish-hooks. Can you give it a tidy up please? It’ll only take a few minutes.’

His mother’s timing seemed bizarre, given the other more important tasks that were waiting, but as Amos cast an eye out the door, he had to admit she was quite right. The place was a foster home for unwanted tools and fishing gear, and a halfway-house for half-finished projects. It was a marvel he had managed to stagger through the previous night in his intoxicated state.

Where to start?

He stretched one leg out onto the deck, carefully avoiding the upturned hedge clippers and feeling for the gumboot that he was sure was there somewhere. His sock-covered foot landed instead smack in the middle of a tray of newly spouted runner beans.

‘Shit!... sorry mother!’ He pushed the door closed, located the missing boots and fetched the wheelbarrow from beside the woodshed. Working quickly, he ferried the offending items out to his workshop. Ten minutes later the porch was spick and span. The workshop however, was now even more impassable than before, apart from a narrow path to the bench. The bench could wait. Amos placed the last boxes of fishing tackle on the shelf with the nails, light bulbs and derris dust, and turned to leave.

Something stopped him. There on the shelf, nestled among jars of recycled nails, was a small black fishing knife. Slightly rusty. It was the one he had found on the riverside at the blood-hole the morning that Jack and he last went fishing. He picked it up and switched on his powerful fly-tying lamp. A quick rub with a turpsy painting rag soon removed the remaining dirt and rust. There was a rough section on the handle. He held the knife under the magnifying glass that was attached to the lamp. Two letters had been scratched into the black paint: J. G. ...could be hundreds of people with those initials, including Jack Greenwell.

A number of ridiculous notions flitted through his mind. Amos dismissed them and tossed the knife onto the bench. After all, he had seen Jack whittling with his knife that last morning fishing. There was no way this could be his knife.

Chapter 18

Mary's sole-charge abilities were not called upon. Amos arrived at the shop a little late, at ten past nine and found someone was waiting for him, pacing back and forth in front of the shop window.

'Go easy Sammy, you're wearing the footpath out.'

'Mr Jackson' the Tongan glanced over his shoulders, 'can we go inside? I'm in trouble.' His face was an alarming dark purple colour and he was puffing as though he had just sprinted to the top of Tyne Street.

Amos got the door opened and showed his visitor through to the office.

'Have a seat. Take it easy, things can't be that bad. I'll be back in a moment.'

He left Sammy under the watchful eye of JT Jackson and quickly put out the open sign and set up the till. When he returned, Sammy was looking a little less puce.

'Now, what's the problem Sammy?'

Amos leaned up against his desk, remaining on his feet to keep one eye on the shop through the striped mirror-glass.

'I'm not a thief Mr Jackson. I'm an honest man. If my family found out...'

'Whoa back. Calm down Sammy. What do you mean, have you been stealing again?'

'No, not me, my cousin Sione.'

'Sione – I don't think I know...'

'He works at the Foundry. I've been staying in his garage since I got out of jail.'

'And he's been stealing from the Foundry, is that it?'

'Yes, but more than that – a lot more.'

As the comprehensive nature of Sammy's confession unfolded, Amos found it necessary to sit at his desk so that he could write details onto his workpad. Sammy spoke for over ten minutes and the resulting notes spread over the entire surface of the pad. Finally Sammy fell silent, his head hanging low between his shoulders. Amos whistled and rested his pen on the pad.

'The way you describe it, your cousin is responsible for half the burglaries in the district.'

Sammy shrugged. 'I don't know about that, but he's been pretty busy for a couple of years. He's got this idea he's a Kiwi now, wants to live in style. He doesn't get much pay at the foundry, so he makes up for it with these other... jobs.'

‘If you don’t mind me asking Sammy, why are you telling me this? Why have you come to see me? It sounds like you’ve been involved in a lot of his ‘jobs’ - you’ll probably end up in prison again if I pass all this on to the police.’

‘I think you are a good man Mr Jackson, you helped me with Inspector Greenwell.’ He struggled to raise his head a little, but could not make eye contact. Guilt was etched into the deep furrows on his brow. ‘One of the houses we robbed was Mrs Simpson and, I know you were her friend.’ He reached into his duffel bag and pulled out a tightly folded flour bag. ‘I want to return these. I am an honest man.’

Amos emptied the contents of the bag onto the pad on his desk. A paper package dropped out. He unfolded it to reveal a small collection of rings, brooches and what looked like old war medals.

‘These are from Coral’s house? When were they taken Sammy? Was she there at the time?’

‘No, she wasn’t there. It was Thursday night, last week. Sione had been watching her house for months, he said she always goes out on Thursday nights.’

Amos nodded. Thursday night was OOSO rehearsal night. The burglary had happened that same night that Coral had been unwell at rehearsal and gone home early... and been found dead the next morning. He studied Sammy’s face.

‘How long were you in her house... what was the time? Do you remember?’

‘Fifteen or twenty minutes. Somewhere between 8.30 and 9.00. Sione asked me to keep an eye on my watch. He wanted us out of there by 9.00.’

Amos considered this. If what Sammy said was true then he and Sione were unlikely to have been involved in her death. Coral was at the rehearsal for the whole time the two Tongans were inside her house, even allowing for the fact that she went home early she would have been home no earlier than 9.30.

‘Does your cousin know you are telling me this?’

‘No. Of course not.’

‘Well, thank you, I suppose. I must admit I’m not sure what happens next. Do you want to confess to the police as well?’

‘Yes.’

‘Like I said, they’ll probably arrest you again.’

‘I know that. I’ll be safer in the jail, once Sione finds out.’

As they waited for Sergeant Barrett to arrive, Amos sifted through the stolen goods again. Though he was no expert, he judged them to be hardly worth the effort of

stealing and certainly not worth risking a stretch in jail. Apart from the war medals, which looked like they might be worth something to a collector.

The paper in which the jewellery had been wrapped puzzled him: thin newsprint covered in names, addresses and numbers – pages of a phone book.

‘Sammy. What’s this paper? Was the jewellery already in it or what?’

‘We were in a hurry. Sione ripped some pages out the phone book and told me to wrap the stuff in it. When we left, I thought the phone book would look suspicious, so I took it with me and threw it into her chicken coop.’

A look of realization broke across Amos’s face. On the morning his mother had discovered Coral’s body, she had been unable to find the phone book to find the emergency numbers. No wonder.

The Sergeant loaded Sammy into the grey Holden police car, which was parked at the back of the shop at Amos’s request. He closed the passenger door on a very dejected looking individual. As Barrett circled to the driver’s door, Amos signalled to him for a quick word.

‘What’ll happen to him?’

‘I’ll lock him up for the time being, until the new DI arrives.’

‘New DI?’

‘Supposed to be someone coming up from Dunedin next week, to replace Mr Greenwell. Not a DI as such though, I heard a whisper it’ll be Galbraith himself, the Assistant AC.’

‘What – for good?’

‘Don’t know that, sorry.’

Amos stroked his chin thoughtfully. He pointed to the bag of loot that was sitting on the passenger’s seat. ‘So, there won’t be any need for you to have this lot, just yet?’

‘Strictly speaking I should take it all with me, but as it’s you Mr Jackson... you’re kind of an unofficial member of the Force these days aren’t you?’

Amos made no reply, realising that Barrett thought he was giving a compliment. He nodded his and smiled.

‘That should be alright then.’ He passed the bag out the window. ‘You will keep them safe sir, and be sure not to put any fresh fingerprints on the items? They’ll likely be needed as evidence at some stage.’

‘Of course, Barrett, you have my word. And thank you, I’m sure my mother will be thrilled to know these treasures have been recovered. Lovely reminders of a dear friend.’

Double Swoop: Area Commander nabs two murderers - praises local Sergeant.

The headline glared at Amos the following morning when he stood at the letterbox and unrolled the Otago Daily. He stood there for some minutes, reading and re-reading the front page story.

Area Commander Brian Stevenson last night announced that two arrests had been made with regard to the recent deaths of two Oamaru residents. Though much of the information cannot be released publicly at this point, he confirmed that one man, a Tongan overstayer, is being held for the murder of an elderly woman, and that a member of the local CIB has been charged concerning the death of a government employee. Commander Stevenson would not comment as to whether the suspects were implicated in the death of local musician Sebastian Fischer.

‘That complete and utter dipstick!’ seethed Amos, thumping the kitchen table for emphasis. ‘I knew Barrett was thick - I didn’t know he was a self-serving one!’

‘For pity’s sake Amos. What on earth possessed you to hand Sammy over to him in the first place?’

‘I don’t know mother, he wanted to give himself up. He wanted to confess. What could I do? I suppose I thought he’d only be charged for the burglary.’

‘Why?’

‘Look, I’m certain Sammy and his cousin had nothing to do with Coral’s death. Damn it all, she was at orchestra rehearsal the whole time they were in her house!’

‘Do they have any proof of that? Any witnesses?’

‘I don’t know, I didn’t ask...’

Dorothy waited a moment before replying. ‘Never mind. It’s done now... by the way, I nearly forgot, I’ve got some news too. Something we found out from our Japanese friend yesterday. Maybe we can turn it to our advantage.’

‘What?’

‘It seems our hunch was right. Takahashi did drop that sardine can at Coral’s place.’

‘So, you think *he* killed her?’

‘No, I don’t. He was only after food. But he saw something, or someone, while he was there.’

‘Really? Who?’

‘He doesn’t know of course, but he saw several people coming and going from Coral’s, and this was on the Thursday night, the same night Sammy and his cousin broke in.’

‘Can we believe him?’

‘I think so. I don’t see what reason he could have to lie about this.’

‘So he saw the two of them breaking in?’

‘Yes, and he saw a third person too. Later on.’

‘Where was Takahashi then, to see all this?’

His mother looked across the table where Jenny and Carl were quietly listening between spoon-loads of sugar-coated porridge.

‘Come on kids, you wrote it all down, your go.’

Jenny swallowed and took up the narrative.

‘It was the day after he was washed ashore, at Bushey Beach’ she began. ‘He’d been in the raft for days and sleeping rough on the beach. Nothing much to eat and only Saki to drink. So he was desperate for food and water. After dark he made his way into town, somehow he managed to miss the farmhouses on the Cape completely.’

‘And he ended up on Wansbeck Street’ continued Carl, looking up from a small mountain of porridge which he had just given a second coating of sugary snow. ‘He’d been watching a few houses, lying in the little park across the road. He saw Coral go out and tried to break in, but he couldn’t manage it. Then he found her greenhouse and henhouse and helped himself to her tomatoes and lettuces and eggs for a while. But before he could have another go at getting into the house, he realised someone had beaten him to it.’

Dorothy took over. ‘He saw a man in the house, flashing a torch about. And he heard a commotion, raised voices... not an old lady’s voice he said. So he kept low and watched. A second man arrived and went in through the back door. They were inside for quite some time and then there was another ruckus, he guessed that the men were arguing. Both left soon after. As they left, one of them came over to the henhouse and threw a book in – a phone book – very odd thing for a burglar to do.’

Jenny, who had been scraping the last of her porridge from her bowl, picked up the story. 'Takahashi stayed put in the henhouse, worried that the men might come back. He ended up falling asleep. But he was woken up, not much later he says, by the chooks. He looked towards the house and saw someone else.'

'A smaller, older man,' said Dorothy.

'I don't suppose he gave you any times?'

'We asked but, his watch had stopped working. The seawater must have gummed it up. It was still light though, before sunset.'

Jenny continued 'Anyway, this other man went from room to room like he was searching for something, his torch kept flashing out through the windows. At that point Takahashi decided that it was time for him to go. He tiptoed along the side path and then ran more or less the whole way back to the beach.' A cheeky smile crept over her face. 'What with that and Carl shooting at him the other day, the poor guy thinks we're all thieves and homicidal maniacs around here.'

'So who was this older man?' Amos voiced the question that was on everyone's mind. No-one seemed to have an answer.

Dorothy responded with another question. 'Amos, you mentioned the loot from Coral's, that Sammy gave you – can I have a look?'

He pulled a small cloth bag from his pocket and unfastened the drawstring.

'Hey, that's my marbles bag' said Jenny.

'I needed something in a hurry' her father explained. 'Don't worry, you'll get it back.' He emptied the bag onto the kitchen table and, with the bag over his hand as a glove, he sorted the items into piles: rings, brooches and the war medals. 'Mother, you knew Coral pretty well, does anything strike you as odd about this lot?'

Dorothy slipped her glasses on and went to pick up one of the rings. Her son reached out and stayed her arm.

'Sorry, we can't touch them, police evidence. Here, use this' he handed her the pencil from the crossword tray. She pushed and prodded at the exhibits gingerly, as though they might explode in her face. Having examined them all in turn, she came back to a large gold medallion.

'Well this thing for one. There's no way this is Coral's, unless she had an affair we didn't know about with Tom Jones or Elvis Presley.'

'What is it do you think, a war medal?' Amos picked the shiny disc up, slipping a spoon handle through the thin gold chain and dangling it in front of them all.

His mother cupped the swinging medal in her palm, which she had covered with a table napkin. She squinted through her glasses at it.

‘It’s like no medal I’ve ever seen before, but I suppose I’m no expert. And these markings look significant, almost like letters and words. Not English ones though.’

Amos and Carl, who were at the same end of the table, leaned across for closer inspection. Dorothy continued her appraisal. ‘The chain on this thing is fascinating – look, it’s been broken and joined back together - by an amateur I’d say.’ She pointed a blunt fingernail at the midpoint of the chain, where two gold links had been joined with what look like a piece of ordinary copper wire.

All eyes focused on the link in question. No-one could suggest what the mystery object might be, but they all agreed that it seemed out of place with the rest of the collection.

‘There’s something else’ said Dorothy. ‘Jenny, where’s that bauble you found last night?’

Her granddaughter reached into her jeans and produced the small imitation ruby earring. She placed it on the table alongside the other objects.

‘What do you notice?’

‘There’s only one?’

‘Yes, but amongst this little collection, which I’m fairly sure is sum total of the jewellery Coral owned, there are no other ear-rings. None. And I’ve only just realised something. I can never remember seeing her wear ear-rings, never, in all the years I’ve known her. She hated them, thought they were a sign of cheapness on a woman. In fact, I’m pretty sure she’d never even had her ears pierced.’

They were interrupted by a knock at the back door. It was Zoe, back from Dunedin. While Jenny and Carl filled her in about Sammy’s confession and the jewellery, Amos got up to the kitchen bench to help his mother making the tea. Dorothy glanced back to the table to make sure that the teenagers were not listening.

‘There’s something else’ she whispered. ‘Something our Japanese fisherman said that, if I understood him correctly, could be quite important.’

Her son looked expectantly at her.

‘What reason did he give you for having been thrown off his trawler?’ she asked.

‘Said he’d been caught cheating at cards, something like that.’

‘There’s more to it’ Dorothy continued, turning away from the others. ‘And I haven’t let the kids know, they didn’t pick up what he meant at the time. He was miming you see, fortunately not very well.’

‘What?’

‘I think he was thrown off the boat for killing a crew member.’

‘You’re kidding!’

‘It was plain enough to me. And he looked the picture of guilt when he’d finished miming it.’ She picked up the tray and made her way back to the table. Amos followed with the milk jug, his mind seething. Barrett had been onto something after all!

Over her cup of tea, Zoe inspected the items on the table with great care. She gave special attention to the ear-ring.

‘Well, this is all very very interesting. Because last night, when I was examining Coral at the undertakers, she was definitely wearing an ear-ring. And I’d say it was the twin of this one,’ she pointed at Jenny’s find. ‘Tacky little number isn’t it. Not really something a woman in her seventies would choose to wear.’

A puzzled silence settled over the table. After some time, Zoe piped up again.

‘Amos, send that medal over this way’. He obliged, hooking his spoon under the chain again and passing it down the table. Zoe laid it out flat on the cork tablemat.

‘I think you’re right, this is no military decoration. But it is a medal of some kind. And these markings are very familiar. I’ve seen them somewhere before... I wonder... Dorothy, do you have any greaseproof paper?’

‘Yes, of course,’ she fetched a roll from a drawer at the bench.

Zoe tore a square of the paper from the roll, placed it over the face of the medal, and began to rub with the pencil. A replica of the surface markings began to appear. Once finished both sides, she slipped the paper into her pocket. ‘What day is it?’

‘Thursday’ replied Amos, more than a little perplexed.

‘Good, the library should be open. I have a little research to do. I’ll see you all later on.’

She disappeared out through the kitchen door her cup of tea untouched. Amos followed a few steps behind.

‘Come on you two kids, finish up your porridge’ instructed Dorothy. She shunted Coral’s things back into the marbles bag and the ear-ring into an old brown envelope.

Jenny gave a long sigh. She was full. Carl however, was always happy to oblige when it came to finishing off food. He took an enormous spoonful of his sugar-porridge-mountain creation.

‘Bleerrcch!!’ Carl’s voice contorted into a tight ball. He covered his mouth and made a dash for the back door. A few seconds later he could be heard retching in the back yard.

Jenny stared after him in bewilderment and she looked to her grandmother for explanation. Dorothy was just as puzzled. Her eyes, wide at first, narrowed as they fell to the porridge bowl. She moistened a finger in her mouth and touched the top of the white ‘snow’ that Carl had been heaping on throughout the telling of their story. She dabbed a little on her tongue.

‘Ah, that explains it...’ a small smile flickered ‘... salt...! That’ll teach you for being greedy!’ she called though the door. Carl’s only response was a feeble groan.

Dorothy turned to her granddaughter and curled an arm around her shoulders.

‘A lesson for all of us actually – adults included – be careful what you eat!’

Chapter 19

Down at the back end of Andy Smith's property, as far away as possible from public roads and prying eyes, sat a ramshackle assembly of barns and sheds. Squatting on the land like alien invaders, as out of place on the green farmland as stoats and weasels in native New Zealand forest. Directly behind the buildings, the Kakanui River glided sluggishly between banks of huge overhanging willow and rampant gorse. More foreigners.

Smith stopped his Toyota ute at the front of the largest barn. He hopped from the cab and strode in through the open doors. Three of his dogs followed a few yards behind him, tails and ears down, slinking.

Several minutes later he emerged with a wheelbarrow, laden with white PVC containers. These he loaded into the tray of the ute and covered with a hastily thrown tarpaulin. He yelled at his dogs to send them back to the house and then he was off, the vehicle squelching and sliding through the rutted quagmire that served as a thoroughfare. In the tray, Butch the Jack Russell lay low, huddled in the folds of the tarp, keeping well out of his master's sight.

The ute climbed out of the muddy track and bucked and bounced across three paddocks before reaching the tar-seal road. By this time Butch was completely buried, the tarp pinned down by the PVC containers which had rolled and tumbled all around the tray before settling against the back flap. Once on the smooth open road, Smith opened the Toyota engine right out. The ute sped along the deserted road, shedding lumps of mud and rust as it went.

After about two miles, he slowed and swung onto a concrete driveway. The back end of the tray missed the letterbox by a fraction of an inch, leaving the metal name plate swinging back and forth in its wake. Imprinted in bold gold letters on the black of the plate was the name *Thornton*. Smith followed the driveway to a large two-storey farmhouse. In complete contrast to his own dwelling, this house was extremely well appointed and well maintained. Spotless white roughcast over deep red bricks. At the front of the house, the grounds were well-kept too. A close-shaven lawn, populated liberally with large camellia and rhododendron bushes, surrounded a large spiral rose garden. A swirl of colour resembling a rainbow that had curled up and caught its own tail.

The Toyota rattled on beyond the Thornton farmhouse, past the shelter belt of tall spindly poplars and drew up outside a gleaming tractor shed. Even this simple structure

would have put Smith's house to shame, had anyone been of a mind to compare them. Smith, of course, was not of that mind.

A short red-faced man in a checked bush-shirt, black shorts and gumboots came out from inside the shed. Smith opened the driver's door, slid out and landed with a crunch, his boots depositing clods of river bank and sheep shit on the neat white Ngapara gravel. Neither man offered a handshake.

'Thorny.'

'Smithy.'

'Missus not in?'

'Nope. Downtown shopping.'

'The girls?' Smith's head turned towards the rear of the brick farmhouse.

'At school of course, as you'd expect... at their age.' He placed a slab-like hand on Smith's bony shoulder and propelled him towards the rear of the Toyota. 'You got the spray?'

Smith grabbed one end of the tarp and heaved, sending PVC containers rolling again. The tarp landed at the men's feet and a limp black and white shape rolled out. Butch, the dog.

'What the fuck? What's he doing there?' said Smith rather pointlessly.

Thornton squatted and felt for the animal's heartbeat. 'Not doing much mate, he's dead.' He ran his hands over the dog's rib cage. 'Chest crushed, by those containers I'd say.'

Smith gave a shrug. 'Bloody stupid mutt. Little bugger must've jumped in without me knowing.' He bent over and grabbed Butch's hind legs and heaved the lifeless body back into his truck. 'Never mind, didn't like him much anyway. Jack Russell's are about as much use as tits on a bull at my place. No doubt his buddies will like him tonight though.'

The other farmer shuddered, realising the fate of the little dog. 'Jeez Smith, you really are a rough bastard aren't you?'

'*Practical*, Thorny. No room for sentimentality on a working farm, you know that.'

'What about the spray. How much have you got?'

'As much as you want.'

'Same price?'

'Like I said. Five per gallon.'

Thornton lifted one of the containers to the ground. 'You've never told me where you get this stuff from. I thought it was a controlled poison?'

‘You probably don’t want to know. That way you’re not implicated if the shit hits the fan. Which of course, it never will.’

‘Fair enough. Give me four then. That should keep my going for a bit.’

‘I saw you burning off the other day. That first batch did the trick then?’

‘Hell yeah. Not a green sprig or gorse flower between here and the South Pole. It’s bloody effective that brew of yours, I’ll give you that much.’

The men lugged the four containers into the shed. Sweating profusely, Thornton pulled out a roll of twenty dollar notes and peeled one off. Smith wasted no time in pocketing it and hopping back into the Toyota. He cranked up the engine and poked his head out the window.

‘Nearly forgot – want any petrol or diesel?’

‘Nah.’ The answer came very quickly.

‘Cheers mate. Pleasure doing business.’

Thornton waved him off, watching the ute tear away up the track, containers rolling and pitching around the tray. The state of that poor dog’s body didn’t bear thinking about. Thornton strode into his shed and spent a good four or five minutes washing his hands.

The Oamaru Public Library was housed in the Athenaeum, a grand two-storied Victorian edifice constructed of the creamy-white limestone to which the town had given its name. The building held the cultural and intellectual high ground on the main street, standing aloof from other similarly impressive Oamaru stone buildings which housed mere banks or hotels. Zoe let herself into the library through the massive wooden doors and followed the signs to the catalogue drawers. A few minutes later she had loaded both arms with as many reference books and histories as she could find.

Setting up camp on a long oak work-table, she started to trawl through the books one by one, quickly locating the appropriate militaria sections and stopping mainly at those pages which sported photos or illustrations. She heard the town clock run through its paces two or three times as she worked. Though she saw many medals that looked vaguely similar, she could find none with the distinctive markings and letters of Coral’s medallion.

Zoe slammed the last book shut in frustration. As she did so, the resulting wind sent her piece of greaseproof paper fluttering across the floor. It landed right in front of a

pair of sensible black shoes. Zoe followed the stockinged legs and black dress right up to their owner's face. The librarian.

She picked it up and padded across to Zoe. 'Excuse me, I believe this is yours...'

Zoe held her hand out with a smile, but the librarian suddenly withdrew hers and looked very hard at the pattern on the paper. 'Oh, you're a collector then?'

'No, not me, it came from – an old friend.'

The librarian glanced at the tomes Zoe had been searching. 'I thought not. If you were a collector I'd be a bit concerned, you're looking in the wrong place altogether. This is not a military piece.'

Zoe perked up. 'Really? What is it, do you know?'

'Not exactly. But I know enough to know what it isn't. You'd have to show this to a real expert if you want to find about more than that.'

'And do you know of any such experts?'

'In Oamaru?'

'Preferably.'

'I suppose you could do worse than Arthur Livingstone, he's the curator of the local museum, a great collector of militaria and antiques. If anyone in this town knows about this sort of thing it's Arthur.'

'Where would I find him?'

'Two doors up, in the Early Settlers Hall. It's where the museum is based.'

The Curator sat behind a long glass cabinet, carefully polishing a collection of rather gruesome looking knives and bayonets. Going by his frail appearance and the age of his clothes, Zoe judged that he was of the same vintage as many of the exhibits under his care. He was immediately fascinated by her carbon copy of the medallion.

'Quite extraordinary, I've never seen the likes' he said, peering through an enormous magnifying glass that made his eye the size of a tennis ball. 'I should very much like to see the original...'

'Sorry, I can't bring it in. It's being held as... it's in a safe place, that is.'

'Oh well, that's a shame.'

'Could you tell me what you think it is? Where it might have come from?'

'As I said, I've never seen anything quite like it, but I have read descriptions of something similar.'

'Where?'

'Do you know, I really couldn't say, it's only a faint memory.'

‘Might it have been in an archaeological journal, or the like?’

‘I’m really not sure, let me think.’ The Curator scratched his jaw, apparently in an effort to stimulate his memory. Long sinewy fingers pulled the thin skin down over his protruding jaw-bones, as though he was trying to hone his chin to an even finer point. Whatever he was trying to do, it worked.

‘Oh yes, I remember now. It was in a history of European universities. That’s right, I was researching an article for the Settlers’ News – that’s our monthly magazine. I’m the editor you know. Actually I’m the reporter and the printer too, truth be known. Still, it keeps me out of mischief in my old age I suppose...’

‘That’s wonderful. Sorry to interrupt Mr Livingstone, but I’m in a bit of a hurry. Would I be able to have a look?’

‘Certainly, if you think you can fit it in.’

‘Pardon?’

‘You’d have to take a trip to Dunedin my dear. The book in question is not here, it’s in the Hocken Library. Do you know it?’

Zoe gave a small chuckle. ‘Know it? I practically live there!’

Chapter 20

‘Yabba-dabba-doo’ bellowed Fred Flintstone for the twelfth time. Dorothy was trying not to count. In fact she was desperately trying not to listen at all. She looked in wonder at Amos, who possessed a remarkable ability to switch his ears off at will and was deeply submerged in a book, happily oblivious to the ongoing domestic problems of Wilma and Fred. The two teenagers of course, were glued to the screen, equally submerged.

The ringing of the phone came as a blessed relief to Dorothy. She leapt to her feet and escaped into the hall, just as Fred was warming up for another of his tiresome yodels.

When she returned to the lounge some minutes later, telephone notepad in hand, the Flintstones had given way to the Jetsons – different setting, identical plot. Jenny and Carl were still sitting in the same goggle-eyed position. Enough was enough. Dorothy planted herself right in front of the screen and pushed the off button. Ignoring the indignant howls of her grandchildren, she announced that Zoe had just been on the phone from Dunedin.

This gained Amos’s attention too. His ears had not been switched off entirely.

‘The gist of what she told me is, that the medal – actually she called it a medallion – is almost certainly not Coral’s. Not likely to have belonged to any of her relatives either, or anyone in New Zealand. It’s not even awarded in this country,’ she explained.

‘So, what does that mean?’ asked Carl.

‘Assuming Coral was not a collector of such artifacts, and I know for a fact she wasn’t, I think we can safely assume the medallion was left by someone who visited her house. Very possibly the same someone who killed her.’

‘It looked valuable, why would the killer leave it?’ Carl asked.

‘Not on purpose, obviously. Perhaps Coral surprised someone, and there was a struggle and the medallion was torn off?’ Dorothy suggested, though not with any confidence.

‘Except, we don’t know for sure she even met her killer that night’ replied Amos.

‘Remember Coral was at rehearsal with me for most of the evening. And Takahashi said he saw the first two men leave before the third man arrived. And all three of them were gone before Coral would have got home. Seems to me the first two would have been Sammy and his cousin. They stole the jewellery, medallion included, and disappeared before this other chap arrived. So Coral must have already had the medallion at her place prior to that evening.’

‘I wonder where it came from?’ asked Dorothy. ‘And if it has anything to do with the killer or not?’

‘I reckon, no matter how that medallion got there, we need to find out who owns it,’ said Jenny. The others nodded in agreement. ‘But how?’ she added.

‘Fingerprints’ said Carl. ‘Couldn’t the sergeant help us with that?’

‘Difficult’ said Amos, ‘he’d never get it past the Jack’s boss, Galbraith, he’s watching the station and Barrett like a hawk now. He thinks both cases are done and dusted. Anything new like this would be jumped on and smothered.’

‘Actually it’s dead easy’ said Jenny. ‘We put a lost-and-found ad in the Oamaru Mail, never fails. Eh Gran?’

‘It might work’ replied Dorothy, ‘but who’s going to put their name to the ad, it can’t be Amos or myself, we’re too obviously connected with Coral. The killer would be suspicious. We could ask Zoe, but she doesn’t have an address in or phone number in town.’

‘How about Mary?’ said Amos, ‘she’s neutral.’

‘Good idea, Uncle Amos’ said Carl. ‘What do we say, in the ad?’

‘Hold on a minute.’ Dorothy wore an expression that was normally reserved for the nastiest clues in the ODT cryptic crossword. ‘Never mind about what we say in the ad. The question is, what will we *do* when this person turns up looking for the medallion? Or more to the point, what will poor Mary do, assuming that she actually agrees to take part in this crazy scheme? If the owner of the medallion really is the killer, Mary could be in very real danger.’

This brought a halt to the flurry of planning.

‘Shame Detective Greenwell is out of the loop’ said Jenny.

‘Yes, so near and yet so far’ said Amos. ‘I drove past his house yesterday. The irony is, he’s probably sitting inside dying to get in contact with us.’

‘Maybe we could try smoke signals, or semaphore, or carrier pigeons’ suggested Carl.

‘Nice ideas Carl, but I think all of those just might be noticed,’ said Amos. ‘According to Sergeant Barrett, food and drink are the only things that would get past the officers on guard.’

‘There must be a way,’ muttered Dorothy, tapping her pen on the notepad.

‘Yes – of course!’

Her son dropped his book to the floor. He snatched the pad up from his mother’s hands and stared at it, his eyes scanning rapidly from side to side.

‘This is it. Well done mother. A brilliant idea!’

All gathered around him, anxious to see just what this great idea was – none more so than Dorothy herself. Amos held the pad out flat. The top page was covered with a seemingly random assortment letters and words – workings from the previous weekend's cryptic crossword.

'We write Jack a crossword' he explained. 'A very special sort of a crossword.'

The Constable at the door of number 4a Wharfe Street looked supremely bored. In fact it was not clear that he was even awake. He sat perfectly still on a wooden deck-chair with his helmet riding low over his eyes. Dorothy cleared her throat loudly as she approached along the concrete pathway. The helmet tipped up and the eyelids follow a moment later.

'Oh, hello Mrs Jackson. Sorry, I was just, er...' The policeman struggled to his feet. '...I'm afraid you can't visit Mr Greenwell, he's not allowed any visitors.'

'What a shame, and I've gone to all this trouble. Perhaps you'd be so good as to take this lot inside for him Constable Evans?' Dorothy said, tipping the wicker picnic basket toward him and lifting a corner of the tea towel to reveal the contents. 'There's just some fresh cheese scones and hot vegetable soup. I cooked it all myself, so I can guarantee there are no files or radios hidden in there. And you'd be welcome to try some yourself of course.'

Constable Evans found himself in two minds, one of which had a very direct connection to his stomach. He was under strict orders that no-one was to enter the premises or to communicate with Detective Inspector Greenwell. On the other hand, those scones smelled fantastic, not long out of the oven and wafting an irresistible aroma through the weave of the basket.

'I'll leave them with you' said Dorothy, placing the basket at his feet, 'don't let them get cold will you?' She turned and made her way slowly back out to the waiting Humber Super Snipe.

As Amos pulled away from the kerb, he observed with satisfaction that Evans was disappearing through the front door, the picnic basket in hand.

'Bingo. The fish takes the bait. Well done Mother.'

'Thank you. Now we just have to hope that Jack gets right to the bottom of the basket and finds your puzzle' said Dorothy.

'And that he feels like doing a crossword' added Jenny.

‘And that he can actually decipher those fiendish clues of yours Amos,’ said Dorothy. ‘I do think you could have made them a little more straightforward. He’s not really much of a cryptic man our Jack, is he?’

‘They weren’t that hard’ said Amos, somewhat defensively. ‘A child could work them out.’

‘In which case, we run the risk that the officer on guard will pick up the paper and have a go himself’ his mother pointed out.

‘You’ve met Constable Evans mother. Somehow I don’t think he’s the crossword type, do you?’

An hour later, Dorothy returned to Greenwell’s house on the pretext of retrieving her basket and soup containers. Evans greeted her at the front door step, his lips and chin still shiny with melted butter and jam. The basket under his arm.

‘Thanks very much Mrs Jackson. Those scones were absolutely delicious, and the soup. Mr Greenwell seemed very pleased too.’

‘You’re most welcome Constable. Perhaps I could drop back again tomorrow?’

‘Only if you want to. If you think it’s worthwhile,’ he said, handing the basket over.

‘Oh yes, I think it’s *definitely* worthwhile’ she replied, smiling. She had caught a glimpse of the familiar black and white pattern of a crossword puzzle sitting in the bottom of the basket, partially covered by the tea towel. Even better, flashes of blue pen strokes were clearly visible filling the white spaces of the grid.

The driver of the Humber barely made it around the corner before pulling over and demanding to see the puzzle. Dorothy made a swift check over her shoulder. Yes, they were out of sight of Greenwell’s house. She handed the puzzle to her son.

‘You’re like a small boy on Christmas morning,’ she said, noticing the glee in his eyes.

Amos said nothing and he stared at the page, his eyes flicking from one answer to the next. He scratched his forehead with the rubber on the end of his pencil. Then he turned the puzzle upside down. This was not a good sign.

‘You have a look’ he handed it back to his mother.

She too was perplexed.

‘Well he’s answered them, but these answers, they’re gibberish! I told you they were too hard.’

Amos started the car and planted his foot hard. The car rocketed along the back roads of the quiet South Hill suburbs. Pedestrians scattered. At the intersection of Wansbeck

and Greta, Miss Burton was left tottering at the side of the road. She shook her head and tutted her disapproval. ‘Young hooligans! What’s the world coming to George?’

George Burton, her brother, had been dead three years. But he too would have disapproved. As did Dorothy Jackson.

‘Slow down Amos, what are you doing?’ She pleaded, both her hands planted on the dashboard.

‘Driving helps me think.’

‘Helps me to pray’ muttered Dorothy, closing her eyes. Amos slowed a little to round the corner into Towey Street. As they careered past the Tennis Courts he suddenly jammed on the brakes, sending Carl and Jenny sprawling off the back seat and onto the floor.

‘Let me see that again’ he grabbed the puzzle and glared at it. ‘Look, if Jack’s gone to the trouble of writing answers in... he must have realised we were trying to send a message, but... damn it! These answers still make no sense. You must be right, he just hasn’t understood the clues.’

‘Or, perhaps he used some sort of code,’ suggested Carl, picking himself up from the floor. ‘You know, like the codes they used to use in the war. Wouldn’t they have taught them some of that stuff at Police Training School?’

It was over afternoon tea that Jenny finally stumbled on the key. Her father and grandmother had long since given up trying to fathom Greenwell’s obscure communications.

‘That’s interesting,’ she said, ‘look how he’s used capital letters in the answers, but only for the first letter of each words.’

‘Well, all that tells us is that he doesn’t know much about crosswords’ said Carl. ‘You’re supposed to write *all* the letters in capitals, aren’t you?’

‘That is the usual thing’ said Amos. ‘What are you getting at Jenny?’

‘Look!’ She circled all the capitalised and wrote them in a line on a clean sheet of paper.

A B E R N E T H Y D I S T R I C T C O M M A N D E R I S F R I E N D

Chapter 21

Superintendent Abernethy, District Commander of Police for the lower half of the South Island, was not an easy man to track down. Amos spent the best part of two hours on the phone, being shunted from police station to police station, office to office, and city to city. It was after 6pm when he finally heard the words ‘Hello, Abernethy.’

Amos introduced himself and explained his purpose for calling.

The Superintendent’s voice carried an air of professional indifference.

‘Jack Greenwell is an old acquaintance of mine, but I have to tell you that I have complete confidence in the Area Commander. Brian Stevenson is a very experienced senior officer, I’m sure he has very good justification for his actions.’

‘You surely don’t believe that Jack was involved in these murders?’

‘I would be very surprised, it’s true, but in my job one learns not to let personal feelings impinge on the facts. Until such time as evidence, concrete evidence, is produced to either prove or disprove Jack’s innocence, one cannot draw any conclusions.’

‘I thought a man was presumed innocent until proven otherwise.’

‘Quite so. But if that man has been arrested and charged with an offence, then the onus begins to shift to him or his legal representation to prove his innocence.’

Amos exhaled heavily. ‘Rather hard for him to do that if he’s locked up in his own home and not allowed to leave or contact anyone, don’t you think?’

‘I assume he has contacted his lawyer.’

‘I don’t know, but even if he has, it would only be Paul Murchison.’

‘Murchison... is that the Murchison who...?’

‘Yes. That’s him.’

Abernethy fell silent. Static crackled on the line intermittently, then he spoke again.

‘Very well Mr Jackson, there might be something I can do, but let’s be clear that I am not taking sides in this matter. Justice must be permitted to take its course. On that principle our continued existence as a free democracy depends.’

‘I quite agree... so, you can give us some help?’

‘I’ll contact Sergeant Barrett and instruct him to help you with this little ambush of yours. But his involvement will be strictly limited to ensuring the safety of those concerned. He will not have authority to carry out any investigative work or other... *subterfuge* on your behalf. Do I make myself clear?’

‘Perfectly. Thank you Superintendent. Can I ask when you will be contacting Barrett?’

‘I’ll call him this evening. You should have his services from tomorrow morning onwards. And please be aware that he will have instructions only to assist with this one activity and only when he has time and relief staffing. He has a job to do and the station is already short-staffed with Jack out of the mix.’

‘Thank you again. Er, there is one other thing...’

‘Very well, make it quick.’

‘The Sergeant mentioned that a replacement officer, the Assistant Area Commander, is being sent from Dunedin, to cover for Jack’s absence. Galbraith I think his name is.’

‘And what has that to do with you?’

‘I believe there is some personal history between Jack and Galbraith. I don’t think it would be appropriate for him to be sent as a replacement.’

‘I see... Galbraith... can’t place the man. I’ll look into it.’

Mary’s flat was a small roughcast bungalow situated opposite the RSA on Itchen Street. She held the lease on her own and lived there alone with Elvis. Though she was proud of her independent status, she was also thrilled to have visitors at her front door.

‘Mr J., Sergeant, come on in. Can I get you a drink?’

Both men refused, politely. Barrett because he was on duty and Amos because Barrett had. Amos explained their plan, and her part in it.

‘Sounds cool. Count me in’ said Mary, barely taking a moment to consider the proposal. ‘What do I have to do?’

Amos handed her a handwritten note. ‘This is the ad. We need you to go over to the Oamaru Mail office and arrange for it to run for two weeks, starting with tomorrow’s edition.’

‘And then?’

‘Then we wait.’

‘For?’

‘Until someone contacts you about the medallion.’

Mary’s eyes were gleaming. ‘How long do you think it will take?’

‘Impossible to say. We might be barking up the wrong tree altogether with this. You might not be contacted at all. It could turn out that the medallion was simply a memento that someone gave Coral, an unwanted gift that she never mentioned to anyone.’

‘Or’ said Barrett, leaning across the desk, ‘the murderer, desperate to get it back, might contact you straight away. Maybe as early as tomorrow.’

A pale cloud hovered over Mary’s face.

‘Murderer? I thought Mrs Simpson was poisoned?’

‘The point is’ said Amos quickly, ‘if you *are* contacted, you arrange to meet whoever it is here, at least a full day later, longer if possible.’

‘And then call me to let me know the details,’ said the Sergeant. ‘Here’s the walkie-talkie, you can reach me anytime on this. Keep it somewhere safe though.’

Mary eyed the machine. ‘I’ve never used one of these... what if I can’t get it to work?’

‘It’s not complicated. We’ve preset it to our emergency frequency. All you have to do is push this green button to speak and this one to listen. Oh, and this is the on-off switch. You can leave it on the whole time if you like, the batteries are new.’

Mary carefully carried the walkie-talkie through to her kitchen and stowed it on the bench beside her radio. She returned to her guests, who were still standing on the front porch.

‘Are you sure you won’t come in for a drink?’

Amos was on the verge of accepting, when a plaintive cry came from the far end of the house.

‘That’ll be Elvis’ said Mary. ‘Time for his supper. Sorry gents, maybe another time.’

The seductive aroma of bacon wafted out from the kitchen at 36 Towey Street. In the still evening air it drifted slowly across the back lawn. Amos was practicing his fly-casting, an activity which he considered superior to yoga for the purpose of relaxing the body and focussing the mind. Not that he had ever tried yoga – just knowing that Rebecca Patterson liked it was enough to put him off for life.

‘Come on Amos, how do you know you don’t like it if you’ve never tried it!’ she had said. A saying of his father had come to mind: ‘no need to try bamboo shoot soup if you don’t like bamboo.’

Fortunately she had not asked him to explain what this meant or what it had to do with yoga. Amos had no idea what it meant, and he suspected his father didn’t either.

To make his casting practice as authentic as possible, he had tied on a real fly – a brand new Black Gnat. Unfortunately, thanks to a rogue gust of wind and a moment’s

inattention caused by the bacon, the line brushed Amos's neck and the hook caught firmly in his shirt collar. He wrestled with it for some time but the barb was too well buried into the thick cotton material. The best he could do for the time-being was to snip the line and leave a loop so that the end would be easy to locate. After dinner he would have them time to sit down and have a proper go at the problem.

Won over by the smell of the bacon, he reeled in the spare line and he returned his rod to the workshop. As he turned to leave, he caught sight of his reflection in the window. The black feathery fuzz of the Black Gnat fly was sticking out from the collar directly below his left ear. A close call. If that fly had drifted another inch or two to the left, the razor-sharp tip of the hook would now be embedded in his ear. Having experienced just such an injury some years ago, Amos was glad not to have made a repeat performance.

Inside the house, his mother and the two teenagers were sitting around the kitchen table, poring over the newspaper. He sidled in behind his daughter and placed an arm around her shoulder.

'Hi Dad. Look, here it is.'

At first, all Amos could see was a huge photo that took up three-quarters of the page – depicting a man tipping petrol into a collection of old rusty cans. A cigarette hung precariously from his lips. Beneath this, a caption read:

'Hoarding! It's illegal, it's immoral and it's dangerous at that! Don't hoard petrol.'

Immediately Amos thought of his stockpile of petrol and diesel in the workshop.

'I'm not a hoarder. That's different, I'm just planning ahead. *Be prepared*, that's my...'

Jenny giggled and put her fingers to his mouth to hush him up. She pointed to the Classifieds section at the bottom of the page. Sure enough, the medallion ad was there in pride of place, the only item listed in the Lost and Found column for the day.

'Aha – the trap is set' said Amos.

'Now what?' asked Carl.

'Now we wait.'

With the two teenagers safely packed off to bed and his mother dozing over her latest Poirot mystery, Amos sat himself down at the cards table. On the cabinet opposite, a near full bottle of Glenfiddich sat looking lonely. Amos shifted his chair to face the other way and stoked up his pipe. Soon the room filled with the familiar aroma of Port

Royal. He slipped off his jersey and shirt and spread the shirt on the table, resting the collar on a block of wood. The air temperature was cooler than he expected, so he pulled the jersey back on.

Having located the shaft of the hook where it lay buried in the collar, he took his Stanley knife and made a short incision. With a sharp tug from his smallest pair of pliers the fly came free, trailing a few threads with it. He slipped the bedraggled Black Gnat into his tackle box and returned to his pipe. The tobacco crackled softly as he drew at it. His eyes fell to a long flat box on the table. The Cluedo set. Packed away but with the lid still off.

Kids! Would they never learn to put things away properly? His mind drifted to his own deficiencies in the tidiness department, perhaps Jenny's untidiness was not surprising, given the example he set. Without knowing why he was doing it, he reached across and fished out one of the blank Clue Sheets. He studied it and drew deeply on his pipe.

The Port Royal tobacco glowed red and an idea sparked in Amos's mind. He took a pencil from the box and began writing on the sheet, the old table protesting loudly beneath his heavy arms.

'What are you up to Amos dear?' asked Dorothy, disturbed by the creaking and groaning sounds.

'Puzzling.'

'Jolly good. You'll tidy up after yourself won't you. I'm bushed.' She struggled to her feet and padded out of the sitting room towards her bedroom.

Having said goodnight, Amos returned to the Clue Sheet.

The first section listed names of characters in the game – potential suspects: Reverend Green, Professor Plum, Miss Scarlet and so on. Amos fetched a writing pad and set up two lists of his own:

People.

Takahashi: who is he? Is he telling the truth?

Whiting: could have poisoned Coral accidentally

Sammy: police record and burgled Coral's house. Is he the type? His cousin?

Smith: clearly wanted Hamill out of the way.

Pooh face: how serious was her feud with Coral?

Fischer: drowning, was he pushed? Who by?

Jack: why was he arrested? Fishing knife?

Things/Events.

Hamill's argument with Fischer. Relevant?

Dead meat smell.

Ear-ring.

Sardine tin.

Medallion... whose?

Fishing knife.

He knew that some or all of these pieces held the solution to his puzzle. But which ones?

After half an hour of gazing at them he was no further ahead. Still there were too many unanswered questions and still there were several people who could have been responsible for one or both of the murders.

He folded up his 'clue sheet' and slipped it into his pocket.

It was late and his head was aching. He finished the last of his tea and rubbed eyes and temples. His pipe had gone out. He relit it, hoping for more inspiration from that source.

Somewhere there was a missing connection, something that linked two or more parts of the puzzle together. But where was that link?

How had Coral been infected with Botulinum if not by injection?

Amos found his eyes wandering to a photo on the mantel above the fireplace, a shot of Jenny and himself fishing up the Waitaki Valley. He found his hand scratching his chin and then stroking his earlobe and the back of his neck. And in those simple actions, the missing link dropped into his mind – he knew how Coral had been killed!

But he still didn't know who had done it.

As for Hamill's killer – that remained a mystery, but his gut instinct suggested one name above the others... Andy Smith.

The next morning, Amos called into the Police Station before work. He found Barrett at the front desk, immersed in the newspaper and cackling quietly to himself. The Sergeant raised his head in greeting, his wide grin revealing a row of teeth that were

more amalgam than enamel - testament to years of sucking boiled lollies and the over-zealous activities of numerous state-funded dental nurses.

‘He’s a character isn’t he...? Andy Capp... I always read ‘im, best part of the paper don’t you think?’

Amos gave an accommodating smile, and looked briefly at the cartoons section.
‘You’ve seen the ad then?’

‘Yes sir. How’s Mary feeling about it by the way?’

‘Seemed fine last night when I phoned. She’s a plucky young thing Mary.’

‘So it would seem. Mind you, she might not be ready for...’

Whatever it was that Mary might or might not be ready for was lost to the clanging of the phone. Barrett let it ring twice, then picked up the receiver.

‘Oamaru Police, Sergeant Barrett. Yes, I see. Have you called the...? Right, which ward is he in?’

Amos sensed that it was time to go, this was clearly nothing to do with the ad. He waved goodbye to the Sergeant, who was now fully occupied writing into his notepad and appeared to have forgotten that Amos was there. This was a good thing. It meant that Barrett did not notice him sneak into the staff room, open the cashbox and uplift a handful of skeleton keys – the very same ones that he had used to break into the undertakers.

The front yard at Fischer’s house looked scruffy. There was not much in the way of actual grass but clumps of straggly brown weeds had overtaken the lawn, reminding Amos of his first youthful attempts to grow a beard. The edges were untrimmed and the flower-beds unkempt. Fischer, had he been alive, would have been appalled at the disharmonious state of affairs.

Although the sun was already high in the morning sky, Amos was hoping he was early enough not to arouse too much suspicion from nosey neighbours. He walked directly to the front door, the skeleton keys grasped firmly in his hand. His recent practice at the undertakers was not forgotten, he had the old lock open within seconds. He slipped inside and carefully closed the door.

The house looked the same, though the air smelt a little musty. Amos was not entirely sure what he was looking for but gravitated towards Fischer’s study, reasoning that things of importance would be stored in there. It was the logical thing, after all. In spite of the conductor’s wild emotional swings, he was also a man of logic. The German influence no doubt.

Entering the study, Amos quickly formed the impression that it had been searched already. Desk drawers were pulled out and books had been torn from the shelves. In the corner of the room, the mat had been rolled back and the door of a small in-floor safe sat wide open. He ran to the spot and knelt to peer in. It was empty. Yes, the place had been searched or burgled, or both. He tried not to think of Sammy's cousin, but could not help it.

Rising slowly to his feet, Amos found his eye drawn to something peculiar.

On the top of a filing cabinet, a large bronze bust of Beethoven sat. The crazy hair and tortured face of the composer still had the power to communicate. If only they could tell him who had robbed the safe! Amos stared back at those strange wild eyes. His gaze moved downwards to the base of the bust, which sat on a block of plain unvarnished particle board. Strange – an old lump of wood like that... not up to Sebastian's usual high standards. Quite out of place.

Intrigued, he lifted the bust and placed it to one side. A loose sheet of writing paper covered the wooden block and, beneath the paper in a hollowed niche, he discovered exactly what he was looking for. A small black booklet. He dropped it straight into his pocket, replaced the bust and then quickly let himself out of the house.

Five minutes later he was opening up the bookshop.

Chapter 22

Join Together, the Commonwealth Games song, was barely audible under the hubbub of chatter at the Famished Farmer. Once again Amos found himself gazing into the eyes of Dr Zoe O'Malley. It was wishful thinking on his part to consider her an old flame but being around her had certainly set a fire or two. The pair sat in a private cubicle, reminiscing the old days at Otago University.

Although twenty years had passed, their versions of what had happened were in agreement, on the whole. Amos however, had a number of large gaps in his memory. Gaps which coincided, perhaps not by chance, with events such as pub crawls, dances, parties and other excuses for immoderate consumption of alcohol. Disregarding such instances of self-induced amnesia, there was one occasion of which Amos had a very clear recollection.

'Do you remember my first flat, in George Street?' he asked, wiping a beery moustache from his lips.

'Of course. Sally and I used to come down most Friday nights, anything to get away from hostel food.'

'Remember the flat-warming party?'

'As much of it as I stayed for. You know I was never that keen on wading around in spilt beer and vomit. I imagine you'd had a skinful. Bet you can't remember that one!'

'Actually, I can. Didn't have much at all that night.'

'Really? What about the squash game?'

'Oh yes.' Images flooded back. They had cleared all the furniture out of his bedroom and used it as a squash court, with unfortunate implications for the new paintwork and two window panes.

'Well. I was having a bit of fun – but not totally written off by any means. To be honest, I didn't like getting completely pissed.'

'Really! You gave a pretty good impression of someone who does.'

'Perhaps. But not that night.' He looked away to the front door and then back to Zoe's eyes. 'Where were you, later on?'

'I don't know. Presumably I went back to the hostel.'

Amos shook his head. 'No, you didn't. I was there just after midnight. Waited for an hour. You never showed up.'

‘I didn’t? And you remembered? For God’s sake, how long ago was that? Most likely we went off to the Ploughman for a cheese toastie.’ Suddenly her face warmed and looked younger, sloughing off the years that separated her from that night. Her voice was softer too.

‘You came after me? Why?’

Amos had spent a lot of time preparing and rehearsing an answer to this question. Never a confident actor, he suddenly felt his heart thumping at his ribcage.

But the opportunity vanished with a voice from the bar.

‘Amos, there you are! Have you been hiding from me?’

This time the voice preceded the perfume cloud. Either way, Amos was in no doubt who it was. Rebecca.

She squashed onto the seat beside him, pushing deliberately close.

‘Hello,’ she extended a pale hand to Zoe, ‘I don’t believe we’ve met? I’m Rebecca.’

Zoe took the hand and gave a perfunctory shake. ‘Zoe O’Malley, I’m an old friend of Amos.’

‘Yes, you *must* be’ Rebecca smiled.

Amos closed his eyes. Perhaps she would go away. Perhaps the whole situation would go away and he would find himself at home, digging the spuds in the garden.

He found no such thing.

‘You knew Amos at varsity then?’ Rebecca asked in a tone that was more Inquisition than inquisitive.

Amos opened one eye and peeked out.

‘That’s right’ Zoe’s words passed her lips like air through an open freezer door.

‘Did you study together?’

‘No. We lived together.’

‘*Flatted* together’ interrupted Amos. ‘We flatted together, in our third year.’ He tried desperately to get Zoe’s attention, but she was starting to enjoy herself. Irish mischief twinkled in her eyes.

‘True. We did have to call it that, didn’t we?’ she said. ‘Landlord would have kicked us out if he’d known what was going on. You know what prudes people were in those days. Especially Christians, they were always the worst...’

Amos racked his brain for an explanation: Zoe was drunk... or mentally unstable... or perhaps suffering side-effects from her medication, yes, that might work... But he did not need an excuse. Rebecca had taken the none-too-subtle hint and was already striding from the bar.

‘What did you say that for Zoe? It’ll go straight back to mother.’

‘Amos! You worry far too much about what *you think* your mother thinks. Think for yourself! Anyway, I’d say your mother actually wants you to be in a relationship with a woman... again.’

‘I know she does. That’s just the problem. That’s how Rebecca came into the picture in the first place. She was one of Mother’s bright ideas – daughter of one of her cronies from church. Not the first one either.’

‘Then I’ve done you a favour.’

He stared at the tablecloth for a moment and then looked up. ‘Maybe you have.’

Their eyes locked for some time.

Zoe suddenly reached for her bag. She produced a refill pad.

‘Here, this is what I wanted to show you.’

Amos took the pad and strained to read it in the dim light.

Fischer, Sebastian. Immigrated 19th July 1972.

Real name = Charles Lindsay. British citizen.

Accused of assault and sexual attacks, case turned out due to lack of evidence.

PhD in Chemistry, not Music.

Family implicated in chemical warfare weapons in WWII.

Won the Franz Steinberg medal for Industrial Chemistry in 1937 = the medallion.

‘British!? But what about his German accent, and all the music stuff?’

‘He’s certainly done his research hasn’t he? Amongst his list of qualifications I did find some music results – LTCL in piano I think it was. And, though it’s not mentioned anywhere, it seems he has some acting skills as well.’

‘I always thought there was something odd about his emotional outbursts. Over the top, melodramatic. Everyone put it down to the artistic temperament... really it was because he *was* acting. Not too cleverly though. He drew a lot of attention to himself.’

‘Clever is a good description’ said Zoe. ‘Clever, and devious – when you consider what he got up to in the UK. Nasty piece of work all round.’

‘Coral never liked him you know. She was good at reading people.’

‘So... the medallion was Fischer’s, we know he was a liar, an imposter and a scumbag, what’s all that got to do with the murders?’

‘Damn! It means we’ve probably been barking up the wrong tree. I’ve just remembered something else about Coral. That night at the rehearsal, she told me Fischer had given her a gift as an apology – a piece of jewellery. I bet she was talking about the medallion!’

‘So... our trap with Mary and the ad in the paper...?’

‘A waste of time! Even if he could turn up to claim the medallion, which he can’t, because he’s dead, all it proves is that he gave the thing to Coral.’

Sergeant Barrett sat in the office of Detective Inspector Greenwell and drummed his fingers on the desk. It was an action that seemed to fit. Across the desk from him, Andy Smith wriggled uncomfortably, arms handcuffed behind his back, resentment oozing from his pores.

‘What the hell are you playing at Barrett? You’ve no right keeping me here.’

‘Actually I do.’

‘On what grounds?’

‘We’re questioning you with regard to a death.’

Barrett noted genuine surprise in Smith’s expression, then fear.

‘Why? I thought you’d already arrested that crooked boss of yours and one of the Tongan boys from down at the foundry.’

‘I’m asking about someone else. Someone out your way actually: Peter Thornton.’

Smith’s eyes quivered a little. ‘Thorny, what do you mean. He’s not dead. I was just around there on Friday, he was fine... what are you smiling at?’

‘Thanks for that, just needed confirmation it was you that made that delivery.’ Barrett reached across the desk to a cassette tape-recorder and pressed the STOP button.

‘Why? What are you on about?’

‘Peter Thornton was admitted to hospital this morning. Severe chemical poisoning.’

‘And he’s dead?’

‘Not yet.’

‘You bastard. Why did you tell me he was dead?’

‘I didn’t, not in so many words, you made that assumption yourself.’

‘Well you wanted me to think that.’

‘Say what you like. Doesn’t matter now I’ve got your confession on tape.’

‘What do you mean ‘confession’? All I said was that I’d been to his place, not that I’d killed him.’

‘Why did you visit? On what business?’

‘A delivery.’

‘Of?’

‘Weedkiller. I quite often supply him with...’ Too late, Smith realised he was cornered. Barrett completed his sentence.

‘... with weedkiller. How’d you get it Smith? Stolen or illegally imported?’

‘Nothing illegal about it. I make a product and sell it. That’s called good business isn’t it?’

‘Not when the stuff you make is DDT-based. You need a licence to make that, not to mention a considerable amount of equipment and expertise.’

Smith looked away, covering his eyes with his hand. He rubbed his fingers across his forehead.

‘Who’s your chemist Smithy? Who brews the stuff?’

‘You’re dreaming Barrett.’

‘Fair enough. It will be your arse that gets locked up for however many years.’

Smith shot to his feet, knocking the chair over behind him. ‘I’m leaving, you can’t keep me here. I’m going to lay a complaint about this.’ His voice crescendoed abruptly. ‘I’ll go right to the top – the air-commodore or whatever his handle is.’

He made a lunge for the office door, but before he got there, the handle pressed down and the tall portly figure of Donald Abernethy filled the frame.

‘*District Commander* is the handle Mr Smith, since you’re asking.’

Smith recoiled, stumbled back over the chair and fell sprawling under the front of desk. By the time Barrett had hauled him up and re-seated him, Abernethy was perched behind the desk and a uniformed officer was standing by the door.

Smith had the look of a defiant schoolboy in the headmaster’s office. ‘Aren’t you supposed to let me phone my lawyer?’

The Superintendent said nothing, his face like granite. Barrett piped up from the side of the desk. ‘Your lawyer - John Chester isn’t it? We gave him a call ourselves earlier on. He said he wasn’t prepared to do anything to help you until you settled your account.’

His head dropping, Smith muttered, ‘alright, what do you want?’

‘A simple exchange ...’

Barrett interrupted. ‘Excuse sir, the walkie-talkie, I’ve got to go...’ In his hand he held a chunky radio-telephone, its red alert light flashing rapidly.

Once the Sergeant had slipped out the door, Abernethy returned his attention to Smith, '... a simple exchange. You tell us about your meetings with Detective Inspector Greenwell and we'll hold off our investigation into your so-called business enterprises.'

'Look, I'm just trying to earn a living here, working the land, helping out my fellow-farmers with good prices on chemicals. Everyone wins - would have been fine if he hadn't stuck his nose in.'

'Who, Greenwell?'

Smith slumped back in his chair and Abernethy pressed the record button on the tape recorder.

'No, that little prick from the Ministry... Hamill.'

Mary flung a teatowel over the pile of dishes that sat on her kitchen bench. It was Sunday night, the dishes could wait. Sunday night was TV night. She glanced at her watch. 7.22, still a few minutes to make a hot drink and get comfortable before Coronation Street was due to start. And after Coronation Street, Big Time Wrestling re-runs – it didn't get much better than that.

She opened the hall door and listened. Good, not a peep from Elvis. For a change he had gone out like a light after his supper. She pulled the door softly shut and scuttled back to the kitchen.

A few minutes later she set a steaming mug of cocoa onto the coffee table, switched on her TV and slid onto the couch. The new vinyl was smooth and cool against her skin, so she pulled the patchwork quilt over her legs and picked up the mug, cradling it between her hands. A circular glow appeared in the centre of the TV screen and began to expand, like a car's headlight approaching at speed.

The Pye 210T, a 21' black and white television, was one of the first models to be introduced into the country - state of the art technology in the early 1960's. During the 14 years since that time, the science of television had moved on considerably. Mary's set however, despite its faults, carried the decided advantage that it had been free, a gift from her mother when she was still alive. She snuggled further under her quilt, pedalling her feet with excitement as the dark green tube at last began to show a picture. Watching Coronation Street on the tired old screen was good exercise for the eyes, the dreary grey backdrop of suburban Manchester gave little scope for contrast between sky and building.

The theme tune faded and Annie Walker swung open the door of the Rovers Return, smiling her welcoming smile. She stepped out onto the street and spied Ken Barlow a few doors down, talking with a pretty young woman. He leant forward and kissed her on the cheek.

Mary sat up straight. Who was that?

‘Ken. What are you doing? You’ve got a wife, remember?’

BZZZZ! The sound of Mary’s front door.

‘Shit!’ Mary leapt from the couch and thundered along the hallway, having completely forgotten that Elvis was asleep in his room. She had also forgotten that she was part of a ruse to flush out a murder suspect.

‘Damn it all - people should know better than to call when The Street is on!’

By the time she opened the front door, Mary was exuding more righteous indignation than fear or alarm. On the porch stood a man dressed in a long tweed coat. For an instant she thought her visitor was Hamill – he’d had a tweed coat. That was silly, Hamill was dead and Hamill didn’t have a beard. Still, the man did look familiar.

‘Yes. Can I help you?’

‘I’ve come about your ad... the medallion you found.’

‘Look, I’m a bit tied up at the moment. I don’t suppose you could come back?’

‘That would be very inconvenient.’ He moved halfway through the open door. The sound of Ena Sharples’ caustic tongue echoed along the hall. ‘I gather you are busy but I won’t be at all long. If it is my medallion, I’ll know straight away.’

Mary sighed. ‘Oh, alright then. I suppose you’d better come on in.’

Under the hall light, she got a better look at his face. Behind the thick black beard and moustache, his skin was a bronzy brown colour – as brown as the Tongans who sometimes came into the bookshop. And on his head was most appalling excuse for a wig that she had ever seen. Still, if he was one of these collector types, none of this was too surprising. Mary had encountered all sorts of weirdoes and ‘enthusiasts’ at the bookshop, when they came to collect their magazines. She led her visitor through to the lounge and with a grimace, she flicked off the TV. Her hostess genes began to take command of the situation.

‘The kettle’s just boiled, I’ll make you a cuppa.’

‘No thank you. I don’t want to hold you up.’

‘Nonsense, it’s no trouble at all. Have a seat. I’ll be back in a jiffy.’

When she returned from the kitchen a few minutes later, the man was still standing near the TV. His face now more red than brown. Beads of sweat trickled down his temples. He scowled at Mary as she set down a tea-tray on the coffee table.

‘Milk and sugar?’

The man managed to hiss a strangled ‘thank you’ through his teeth.

Mary smiled, poured a cup and offered him a plate. ‘Scone? They’re yesterday’s I’m afraid.’

This was too much for her visitor.

‘For God’s sake, I just want to see the medallion. Where is it?’

‘All right, all right – keep your hair on!’ She walked to the far end of the room.

‘There - is it the one you’re after?’ she pointed to a small box sitting on the sideboard. The man rushed across and hunched over the container .

‘Yes, this is it – I’m sure it is’ he said, still with his back to Mary. He straightened up and held the medallion up to the light. A loud creaking of hinges stopped him dead. He swung around, slipping the medallion into his pocket. In the doorway at one side of the room stood a breathless Sergeant Barrett, walkie-talkie in hand. The man bolted for the opposite door, but got no more than a few steps. Carl, Jenny and Amos stepped through and barred the way there too. In her hand, Jenny held a third walkie-talkie.

Wide-eyed and growling like a cornered opossum, the man leapt at the trio, catching them off balance and sending all three sprawling. He was on his feet again instantly and lurched towards the hall. He did not get far. Two wiry arms encircled his neck from behind and squeezed. The air emptied from his lungs in the form of a rasping croak.

‘Shh’ hissed Mary, ‘you’ll wake up the baby.’

He staggered backwards, giving Mary the opportunity she needed. She changed her hold to a sleeper and re-applied the pressure. A few seconds later, her victim dropped to the floor, unconscious. Sergeant Barrett appeared at her side. He grabbed hold of the man’s hair and beard and yanked. The disguise came away with a sharp tearing sound to reveal the face of Dr Sebastian Fischer.

Alive and well. Though possibly not as well as he had been before his encounter with the *Queen of the Night*.

Chapter 23

Detective Inspector Jack Greenwell walked into his office to the sound of light but enthusiastic applause. He took a bow and installed himself at his desk. His ‘audience’ comprised Amos, Dorothy, Zoe, Sergeant Barrett and Superintendent Abernethy.

‘Welcome back sir,’ said the Sergeant.

Greenwell was in no mood for small talk.

‘What’s this about Fischer? I was told by my ‘guards’ that he was dead. Drowned or something – and now you’ve arrested him? Clever trick!’

‘We all thought he was dead,’ Barrett replied. ‘Turns out it was a hoax. He staged the whole thing, fake death, burial service, public announcements, the lot!’

Amos had a point to make. ‘You might be interested to know, his death was announced on TV – by your friend the Assistant AC.’

‘Yes, we’re looking into that’ added Abernethy with a frown. ‘Galbraith has some answering to do.’

‘Anyway, I gather Fischer has implicated himself in the murders?’ asked Greenwell.

‘Yes’ said Abernethy. ‘Both Mrs Simpson and Hamill.’

‘How? Why...?’

The District Commander turned to Amos.

‘You tell him, after all, you worked most of it out. And to be honest, there are still a few loose ends I haven’t put together myself.’

Amos grinned, the look on Greenwell’s face was priceless. Until that moment Amos had not known it was possible for a person to look astonished and peeved and pleased at the same time. He pulled a tattered black booklet from the green manila folder he had been nursing.

‘Sebastian Fischer is, as we now know, not who he claims to be. Even though his passport here appears to confirm his identity as a native German citizen.’

‘We found it in his safe. It’s a forgery of course, and a very good one,’ explained Barrett. ‘Fooled a lot of people. But it was not quite good enough to fool Mr Jackson.’

‘Fischer had a good knowledge of spoken German but his skills in the written language were rather limited’ Amos explained. ‘Whoever he got to forge the document did an excellent job in terms of the appearance and craftsmanship but they made the mistake of exactly copying Fischer’s hand-written draft. Someone with even a basic schoolboy knowledge of German could easily find the mistakes. Plenty of them too.’

Barrett shook his head and made a quiet tutting sound. ‘So when Mr Ja... ah... that is, when *we* searched his house this morning, we found his real passport.’ He held up a second crinkled and faded black booklet.

‘But that’s a British passport’ said Greenwell, leaning across his desk.

‘Yes. In spite of his very passable German accent and knowledge of all things German, it was his Britishness that betrayed him,’ said Amos. ‘His ability with word-play and cryptic crosswords, his intimate knowledge of small British towns and customs, his love of a good cup of tea. If he had simply told us that he had spent time in England after the war or something, I would never have been suspicious. But that day when I first questioned him, he was quite insistent that before coming to New Zealand he’d spent his whole life in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.’

‘Who is he then, why the change of identity?’ asked Greenwell.

Zoe took over the explanation, opening up her notebook.

‘Dr Charles Lindsay. A chemist and a researcher. Brilliant man in his own way. Winner of the Steinberg medal for Industrial Chemistry research in the early 40’s.’

‘Hence the medallion’ said Amos.

Zoe held up a small black and white photo. A family group posing in full academic regalia in front of an imposing stone building.

‘Charles Lindsay and family on capping day. This was taken outside Trinity College in the late 30’s. The Lindsay family were bright bright people. All studied at Cambridge, mostly in the sciences. Three of his siblings feature in science journals and academic publications to this day. Charles was the youngest, the runt of the litter if you like. He struggled to gain recognition in the shadow of his more dominant siblings. To make matters worse, when the war came along, his work on biochemical pesticides was considered non-essential.’

‘However, the army learned of his skills. They persuaded him to turn his attention to the creation of chemical weapons. He proved to be spectacularly successful at it and even started experimenting with biological weapons. In the end, he was *too* successful. Once they saw the results of some of his more ‘adventurous’ work, his bosses got cold feet and canned the programme.’

‘Not the end of the world for such a talented individual you might think, but it was the way that it was handled that really did the damage. Evidently the top brass rigged it so that tests of his weapons would fail. The resulting furore hit the headlines and featured in the academic literature for months. His professional reputation was left in tatters.’

‘So he immigrated to New Zealand to make a fresh start, with a new identity’ said Amos, ‘and would have done just fine making use of his considerable musical talents, had he not met Smith and been talked into manufacturing cheap pesticides and herbicides for the farming community. They’ve had a prosperous black market running for nearly two years. But sometime last year, the unfortunate Mr Hamill was starting to get wind that something was going on at Smith’s farm. Of course he was unable to really tumble their operation because he was continually instructed to keep away from Smith’s farm by you, Jack.’

Greenwell flushed as all eyes turned to him. ‘Well I had to, I was under orders from Dunedin. For some reason which he never clearly explained, Galbraith insisted that I leave Smith alone.’

‘Galbraith again!’ barked Superintendent Abernethy. ‘Sergeant, get Dunedin on the phone, pronto. Tell Brian Stevenson I want Galbraith up here for questioning. And, Barrett, he’s not to be told what this is about.’

‘Yes sir!’ The Sergeant left the office immediately.

Now Dorothy picked up the tale. She held in her hand, a small diary-sized book.

‘This is Coral’s honey log. Let me read you an entry she made on Sunday January the sixth:

Kakanui Taipo hives. Unable to collect today as two hives knocked over. Assume young larrikins playing about again. Must inform police, farmer not helpful. Found curious old war medal nearby. Will try to find owner, probably fisherman or tramper.

‘The hives she mentions are right near the spot where I discovered Hamill’s body. In fact it was this log-book that led me to them. It looks as though dear old Coral has found the medallion and has taken it home with her, with the best of intentions, and then she’s completely forgotten about it.’

Amos continued.

‘Fischer of course, didn’t forget. I think he must have realised where he’d dropped it, in his struggle with Hamill, and knew he had to get it back. So he went looking for it – coincidentally on the same day that Coral was there tending her hives. He must have seen her find it. Of course he knew exactly who she was and where she lived and went to retrieve it that night. That, I suspect, was his real reason for leaving rehearsal early

that evening. Except the medallion wasn't at Coral's. Sammy and his cousin had broken in and stolen it shortly before.'

Superintendent Abernethy was leaning forward, his head angled slightly to one side. He addressed Sergeant Barrett as he re-entered the office.

'That reminds me, we have evidence of the break-in?'

'Yes' said the Sergeant. 'A confession from Visio. And we have a statement from a witness who saw the two Tongans come and go, and then a third man not long after.'

'What witness?' asked Greenwell.

'Takahashi. The Japanese fisherman,' answered Amos.

The Detective Inspector looked far from convinced.

'Well his testimony's not going to stand up in court, the bugger can hardly string two words together!'

'I don't know, we could use a translator,' said Amos with a wink.

'What the hell was *he* doing at Corals' house in the first place?' continued Greenwell. 'Anyway, isn't this whole thing a bit extreme? Richter kills an old lady just to get that medallion back. Surely he could have just come back another time?'

'That would have been the logical thing' said Amos. 'But our Dr Fischer, as I can attest, is not an entirely logical person. At times, yes – at other times, he's fiery, volatile, irrational. There's an orchestra full of people who can back me up on that.'

'Not to mention his track record from the UK...' added Zoe.

The Superintendent had a faint glint in his eye. 'You know, a nice juicy confession would tie things off nicely. Jack, you and I will pay our Dr Fischer a little visit once we're finished here. See if we can't squeeze something out of him.'

Greenwell looked brighter at this prospect. 'We're holding him here I presume, Barrett?'

'Cell four,' replied the Sergeant.

Shifting his attention back to Amos, Greenwell posed another question.

'Putting Coral Simpson's unfortunate involvement to one side, can anyone tell me why Fischer killed Hamill in the first place? He didn't even know him did he? Surely it was *Smith* that had the motive to kill Hamill, given that he was sniffing around the farm. He's a shady bugger that Smith, I always suspected he was up to something.'

Amos shrugged. 'True, but Smith is as cunning as he is shady. He knew that the finger would naturally point at him if anything should happen to Hamill, given that he was on record making numerous threats against him.'

‘The thing we didn’t know, until I talked to pooh-face,’ Dorothy added, ‘was that Hamill and Fischer *had* met, after the OOSO New Year’s concert. And they argued very publicly. Of course at that time, none of us knew much about Hamill. He’d kept to himself, by and large.’

Greenwell was still not persuaded.

‘Are we sure the man Fischer argued with that night was actually Hamill? From what you’ve told me Amos, Fischer got into wild tempers on a regular basis. It could have been anyone.’

‘Oh yes’ replied Dorothy. ‘There were seven or eight of us there in the Opera House at the time. I’m sure any of us would be able to confirm it was him.’

‘Even so,’ Abernethy’s head shook as he spoke, ‘an argument between two men is not exactly proof, it’s circumstantial. We’re going to need something more concrete than that to make a murder charge stick.’

Zoe coughed lightly and smiled – not quite her Irish twinkle but something very similar. Amos knew that look well 20 years ago. It was the smile she used when playing Five Hundred, just before playing a trump that no-one knew she had.

‘How about this then,’ she said. ‘Hamill and Fischer have a track record before that night. In my delving through various academic records I also came across Hamill’s name. It turns out that although he completed his undergraduate degree in New Zealand, our Mr Hamill gained his Masters at Cambridge, where he was taught by a part-time tutor by the name of Dr Charles Lindsay. In spite of the intervening years, Hamill must have recognised his old tutor.’

She paused and glanced towards Amos for a moment before continuing.

‘And what if Hamill, knowing Fischer’s real background, threatened to expose him? Perhaps he had even found something out about Fischer’s business activities with Smith, about their chemical black market.’

Amos took his cue.

‘Fischer – sorry, can’t get used to calling him Lindsay – was cornered, he needed to silence Hamill. Jack, you know how Hamill was always going out to Smith’s farm to do his inspections. Maybe Fischer followed him out there one day and confronted him. I don’t know whether he planned to, but I reckon he killed him there and then, using this knife.’ Amos reached into his folder, pulled out a clear plastic bag containing the black fishing knife.

He placed it on the desk.

‘It’s the one I found by the river, Jack. As is happens, not too far from the area where Hamill’s body was found. If we send this to the forensics team, I bet they’ll confirm it’s the murder weapon. What do you think?’ He asked the question without meeting the eyes of his old friend.

Greenwell reached out for the knife, his face pale and his brow furrowed.

‘What’s the story? This... this is mine, my old fishing knife. Look, it’s still got my initials there where I scratched them on.’

Superintendent Abernethy interrupted, looking directly at Greenwell.

‘Are you sure Jack? You well know that if this is proven to be the murder weapon, it may put you in a very difficult position.’

‘Yes, of course. But there’s no doubting it. This is my old knife, definitely.’

Amos scratched his chin and paused for a moment.

‘When did you last see it Jack? It’s pretty rusty now.’

‘A good two or three weeks ago. I think I probably lost it on that Boxing Day trip of ours.’

‘But you had a knife with you when we went fishing last week.’

‘Yeah, a new one. I bought it at Malcolm’s Sports a few days before.’

Abernethy nudged the knife with his pen.

‘You’ll understand if we send this off to forensics then Jack? Just to remove all possible doubt.’

Greenwell nodded and let out a long breath.

Superintendent Abernethy leaned forward and pulled opened the lid of a cardboard box-file. In one deft movement, he flicked the knife into the box and pulled out a sheaf of papers. He tapped his pen lightly on the top page.

‘There’s something I’m not getting here, about the murder of Mrs Simpson. Let’s assume you’re right – let’s assume that Fischer has killed Hamill in the way you’ve described. And let’s also assume that he has decided to do away with Mrs Simpson. Now, I can see that he has the scientific nous and the contacts to get his hands on this Botulinum toxin. But how did he do it? How did he actually poison her? The post-mortem report said there was no sign of the toxin in her digestive tracts, only in her blood, but there were no puncture marks anywhere on her body – so she didn’t eat it and there was no injection. It’s going to be a hell of a job pinning this on Fischer unless we can prove how he did it.’

At this, there was a loud electrical crackling from the shelf at the back of the office. A voice blared out from Barrett's walkie-talkie, which had been sitting silently all the while.

'I can tell you that.' It was Jenny's voice.

Abernethy's face darkened like a cold front bearing up from the South.

'Barrett... what the hell...?'

'It's alright Superintendent,' said Amos. 'That's my daughter. She's waiting outside in reception.'

'Greenwell!?'

The Detective Inspector shrugged.

'Nothing to do with me sir, I've been under house arrest.'

Pulling his hands down over his eyes, the Superintendent sighed. 'Why not? Nothing else about this operation has been by the book. Alright, Barrett, show her in.'

'And the boy too sir? They're practically joined at the hip.'

'Yes, the boy too – why not see if the cleaners want to join us while you're at it?'

Barrett opened the door and hurried out. By the time he had returned with the two cousins, Abernethy had regained his composure. He looked at Jenny expectantly.

She met his eyes and rattled off her story.

'Well, Zoe worked out that Coral had to have been injected but there wasn't a needle mark and then Dad caught that fly in his collar and I remembered about the time when he let me get my ear pierced... and Mum threw a complete spaz.'

The Superintendent looked around to the other adults in the room. 'Did anyone understand that?'

Amos smiled. 'I speak teenager - let me translate.'

'A few days ago I was practicing my fly casting and got the fly caught in my collar. I mentioned to Jenny how lucky I'd been, it could have caught me in the ear – which did happen once, fishing the Waitaki last year. Not a pleasant experience I can assure you.'

'The point Amos, get to the point' said Greenwell.

'The point *is* the point Jack. Last year, the *point* of that fly hook pierced right through my ear lobe. And when Jenny got her ear pierced, she used a *self-piercing* ear-ring... under supervision of course.'

He paused and held out a hand to his daughter.

She reached into her coat pocket and produced a tattered brown envelope. Amos took it, flipped it open and tipped the small ruby-coloured ear-ring onto the desk.

Jenny stepped forward and pointed at the needle-like tip at the end the brass shaft.

‘You see? That’s a self-piercer.’

A grunt of comprehension from the Superintendent.

‘And Fischer could simply have contaminated the shaft with Botulinum. But how did he get it into Mrs Simpson’s ear?’

‘I can answer that one’ said Dorothy. ‘I remember Amos saying that Fischer had given Coral some jewellery as an apology, which we ended up thinking was the medallion. In fact it must have been these ear-rings. I knew Coral you see. She had never had her ears pierced, and she would never have bought them herself. It wasn’t her thing.’

A half-smile now twitched on Abernethy’s lips.

‘And you think Fischer... *forced* her to put on the ear-ring?’

‘Perhaps, he might have intended to. But I don’t think he would have needed to. Coral looked for every opportunity to see the best in people, even someone like Fischer who’d been so nasty to her. She would have been so thrilled that he was apologizing... she probably just went ahead and put the thing in herself.’

‘He’s damned persuasive when he wants to be, our conductor. I wouldn’t be surprised if he talked her into it.’ said Amos.

‘He must have,’ said Jenny, rubbing her own earlobe, ‘because it would have hurt!’

District Commander Abernethy rose abruptly to his feet.

‘Jack. Get Forensics to check out that ring. And I want Fischer and his whole bloody house gone over for any signs of botulinum toxin. And get them to look at this knife too. We need some sort of confirmation it’s the weapon that killed Hamill.’

He swung his eyes to the Sergeant.

‘By the way, Barrett – what’s happened with Galbraith?’

‘Sorry sir, that business with the ear-ring made me clean forget. Mr Galbraith can’t be contacted sir. It seems he’s gone missing.’

‘What!? I want him found. Call Dunedin again. Tell Stevenson I expect Galbraith up here no later than tomorrow morning.’

As Barrett hustled from the room, Greenwell stood and addressed his commander.

‘Does that mean...?’

‘Yes of course. You’re reinstated and back on this case.’

He held an arm out towards the office door. ‘Now, let’s see if we can *encourage* our Dr Fischer to co-operate.’

Chapter 24:

Christchurch. Queen Elizabeth II Stadium. 24 January

Dark brooding cloud and a howling southerly made for a less picturesque opening day than had been hoped for. In spite of it all, the Tenth Commonwealth Games were declared open by Prince Phillip with due pomp and ceremony. For many it was a deeply moving occasion, one that brought tears to the eye. For others the tears were more a result of the biting wind that seemed to have blown up directly from the Antarctic. And others still were moved in a different, more literal manner, when one of the temporary wooden stands began to sway under the weight of the crowd. Fortunately the stand was evacuated quickly and without further incident or injury.

For two spectators, seated on the more solid concrete framework of the main stand, the 24th of January was a day of magic of a different kind. They sat very close to each other, hand in hand like teenagers on a first date. Amos had taken Zoe's hand just after the opening ceremony explaining that these were the 'Friendly Games'. She had not protested in the slightest.

'Are you sure Jenny doesn't mind, missing out on all this?' Zoe asked him. 'I thought it was going to be your big apology to her.'

'Mind? It was her idea for me to ask you. Actually, I think Mother was involved too – sort of a Jackson female conspiracy.'

Zoe leant across and rested her head on his shoulder. A scent that had nothing to do with dead meat or Botulinum filled Amos's nostrils. Though why anyone would want their hair to smell of green apples he didn't know. Given the situation, he really didn't care.

Back at the motel that evening, two deliriously happy spectators returned from the stadium, still reeling with excitement. Amos pulled open the fridge. There was a noticeable gap where beer and wine would normally have been.

'Pies for tea,' he announced, 'do you want steak or mince?'

'Gosh Amos, you shouldn't have gone to all that trouble, honestly!'

'Why, what's wrong with pies?'

Zoe hopped up from the couch and stood behind him, slipping both arms around his waist and nestling into his back. 'I'm kidding silly. You choose, either is fine with me... honestly.'

Amos felt a powerful stirring. He was out of practice at this sort of thing. He felt nervous and unsure of himself. What was he doing with two pies in his hands? He stepped over to the bench-top warmer and slid them onto the tray.

At that moment the phone rang.

‘That’s weird’ he said, turning the dial to *Warm*, ‘no-one knows we’re here. Who could it be?’

‘Probably the motel office, telling you what’s for breakfast’ said Zoe, flopping down on the bed. ‘Ignore it.’

And he did, but only for a few more rings.

He picked up the receiver – bad news or emergency?

‘Hello, Amos Jackson... giddy Jack! What the hell are you... what...? You’re kidding?’

He went silent, listening intently. Then he glanced in Zoe’s direction.

‘Tonight? Well, it might be a bit awkward. I’ve... got company...’

Another short silence.

‘Who told you? Yeah, never mind, I can guess. Alright you’d better come round then. See you at about 8. On Riccarton Road, that’s right, number 255.’

Jack Greenwell walked through the motel door with a cheeky grin that rivalled Zoe’s Irish twinkle. The three old friends embraced and took seats around the formica table.

‘Look, I haven’t got much time’ said Greenwell. ‘Got to get to a meeting with the DC downtown at District HQ. I just thought you’d like to know, we managed to get a full confession out of Fischer before it was too late. Smith’s been charged with a whole raft of environmental and hazardous goods crimes, not to mention a spot of bother with the Inland Revenue. And, best of all, Galbraith has been found. Hiding in a caravan at the beach at Waikouaiti.’

Zoe looked puzzled. ‘What do you mean, about it being too late for Fischer?’

‘Sorry... forgot you two have been away a few days. Fischer’s dead.’

‘We’ve heard that before’ said Amos, ‘are you sure?’

‘No doubt whatever this time. Seen the bod myself.’

‘What happened?’ asked Zoe. ‘I thought he was in custody.’

‘He was. And then a few days ago he was taken ill. Rushed to hospital but there was nothing could be done... post mortem showed poisoning by botulinum toxin.’

‘What? You mean he killed himself, or somebody...?’

‘No. We think it was purely accidental. Remember, he must have played around with the toxin quite a lot. All he needed was a small cut on a finger... Also, it affects people differently – Zoe, you’ll know about this – depending on their age, fitness, underlying health condition and so on. Fischer was a lot healthier than poor old Coral.’

‘And no-one noticed he was crook?’

‘The DC and I saw he was under the weather when we finished interrogating. We just assumed he was worn out. Hadn’t given him a lot of rest you see.’

‘What was the story with Galbraith?’ asked Amos.

‘Smith and Fischer were blackmailing him alright. Threatened to make public a few photographs of him with a young girl who just happened to be some relative of Smith’s. The old prick was so close to retirement he just wanted to keep it all quiet until he got his gold watch and pension payout.’

‘And that’s why he was onto you to leave Smith alone?’

‘Exactly. And why he falsified Fischer’s death report too. Oh, and you’ll be pleased to hear, your theory about the ear-ring was spot on. The pathologist found a concentration of the toxin around Coral’s earlobe. Confirmed the piercing was recent too. And we found plenty of botulinum around Fischer’s lab.’

‘What lab?’ Zoe had suddenly tuned in.

‘Out at Smith’s farm. I gather that was his contribution to the business, providing the premises. We found a fully equipped lab hidden away in an old wool shed, way down the back of the property. State of the art gear apparently.’

‘God, I’ve just thought – that ear-ring, Jenny picked it up with her bare hands... so did I come to think of it...’

‘Ahead of you there, Zoe,’ said Jack. ‘Fischer had bought several identical pairs. It turns out that particular one was clean. We’re pretty sure that no-one else has been infected.’

‘So he had only doctored the one ring – the one that Coral put on?’

‘That’s right. At his house we found a small jar of contaminated ointment – a herbal face cream...’ The Inspector caught Amos’s eye and winked, ‘... from 3H actually. We think Fischer simply dipped the ear-ring in before helping Coral to insert the point.’

Amos hesitated before asking his next question.

‘And the knife?’

‘Definitely the weapon that killed Hamill. They found traces of blood matching his type inside the handle. When his body was re-examined, there was even a little bit of paint that had flaked off the outer casing of the knife and gone into the wound. Came

off from where I'd scratched my initials actually.'

'I mean, what about it being *your* knife?'

'That's all fine. The shop assistant from Malcolm's remembered me buying the new one. And Fischer eventually coughed up that after he'd killed Hamill he biffed the knife into the river by the bloodhole. Didn't biff it far enough, did he?'

'Or one of the monster trout spat it out again' said Amos.

'Eh?'

'Never mind.'

'So, what will happen to Galbraith?' asked Zoe.

'He'll go up in front of the Police disciplinary committee and he'll face criminal charges as well. Silly bugger. He'll get both barrels – nobody likes a crooked cop.'

Amos was looking thoughtful.

'So... what's happening with his job, won't that Assistant AC role be vacant now?'

Greenwell shook his head. 'No. They've filled it already.'

'Damn, that's a bloody shame. You were after that weren't you Jack?'

'I was but, well, there's no point applying for it now.'

'Why?' Amos could practically smell the subterfuge emanating from his old friend.

'Because I've already got it! That's what I'm meeting the DC about. *I'm* the new Assistant AC for the Otago region. Stevenson's already told me – unofficially – but he says it's a done deal.'

After punching him in the shoulder rather more heavily than was reasonable, Amos took Jack's hand and pumped it with an apparent view to shaking it right off his arm. Eventually Zoe managed to prise the two apart and gave the new Assistant AC a long hug.

Grinning, Amos opened the fridge.

'How about a drink to celebrate?' he said.

Greenwell quickly turned to face him, his good humour dropping in an instant. Amos reached in and pulled out a bottle of Coke.

'I'd open a bottle of bubbly or something but, I haven't a drop in the place I'm afraid.'

The expression on Greenwell's face was one that Amos recognised. He had first seen it on the day that Jack had landed his very first trout.

'Thanks.' Greenwell accepted the Coke and winked at Zoe. 'Amazing what the civilizing influence of a good woman can do!'

'Actually' she replied, taking Amos's hand, 'I had nothing to do with it.'

The three old friends settled in around the table and tucked into their healthy pie and coke meals. After a few mouthfuls, Amos stopped chewing.

‘Hey Jack – think you might have some more work for me, since you’re going to be the boss now?’

The future Assistant Area Commander smiled.

‘You never know Amos, you just never know.’

THE END