

Walking Long Enough, and Primrose Moore's Legacy

Pamela S. Melding

An Exegesis and Thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology,
in fulfilment of the degree of
Master of Creative Writing (MCW)

2013

School of Language and Culture

Table of Contents	Page
Attestation of Authorship	3
Intellectual Property Rights & Confidential Material	4
Abstract	5
Exegesis - Walking Long Enough (7151 words)	6
References	36
Appendix A. Formulation of characters	40
Appendix B. Background bibliography for the thesis	41
Thesis - Primrose Moore's Legacy (80,777 words)	45

Attestation of Authorship

I declare that this submission is my own work. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Candidate's signature

Intellectual Property Rights

In the content of the candidate's thesis, all intellectual property, including copyright, is retained by the candidate.

For the removal of doubt, publication by the candidate, of this or any derivative work does not change the intellectual rights of the candidate in relation to the thesis.

Confidential material

1. The content of the candidate's thesis is confidential for commercial reasons, that is, the possible publication of the thesis, or a derivative of it, as a work of creative fiction for sale
2. This exegesis relates to and discusses the thesis, and confidentiality is retained in it, for that reason.
3. This confidentiality remains after any commercial publication.

Abstract

Walking Long Enough discusses the influences having an impact on my thesis, the novel, Primrose Moore's Legacy, submitted for the degree of Master of Creative Writing.

Primrose Moore's Legacy is a young adult novel, aimed at the emerging adult. I discuss the genre of Young Adult Fiction and its limitations regarding the interests and psychosocial challenges of emerging adults, today's Generation Y. The exegesis describes the relationship of these elements to the text.

A theme in the novel is the pursuit of happiness, and its relationship to external tangible possessions and internal elements of well-being. The exegesis examines how the study of happiness and positive psychology provide a theoretical background for the novel.

My background in psychiatry influenced the creation of the characters in the novel. I discuss the various models I considered, and how I used these in the text. Finally, I examine how the characters are revealed in the text of the novel and the literary principles used in the writing of the novel.

“Walking Long Enough”

Introduction

“Cheshire-Puss,” she began, rather timidly, as she didn’t know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. ‘Come, it’s pleased so far,’ thought Alice, and she went on. “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where——” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t much matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“...So long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “ if only you walk long enough.”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, 1866

The thesis is a revised first draft of a novel, Primrose Moore’s Legacy. The initial first draft was a black comedy about a dog that inherited millions of dollars, and the consequences of the legacy. The draft had a minor subplot about the disinherited youngest daughter of the donor. After consultation with my mentor, we decided the story could work better as a young adult novel. The main reasons for the change were:

- The context of the story is about an animal charity and companion animals, topics that appeal to young adults,
- The comic aspects of what happens to the heiress dog,
- The potential to bring in young adult themes into the story.

Re-orientating the novel to suit a young adult readership required the daughter protagonist, Kat, to become a twenty-year-old granddaughter. In the re-writing, her personality changed, as did her relationships with the other characters, requiring changes to much of the original draft.

The work is unfinished and needs development. Writing the exegesis has helped to identify areas for improvement in the next revision. In the current draft, the story threads of the two heirs are only intermittently and superficially connected. These threads need to relate to each other, more effectively. As this draft progressed, spiritual ideas, happiness themes, and social topics, such as human's ambivalent relationships to animals, emerged from the text, and the second draft will be an opportunity to clarify and refine these, in the context of the protagonist's emerging adulthood.

The title of this exegesis, *Walking Long Enough*, borrows from Alice in Wonderland's conversation with the Cheshire Cat. This metaphor not only epitomises the protagonist's journey in the narrative, but also my own in writing it. I too have to walk further, to get to the 'somewhere' of my vision for the completed novel.

In this exegesis, I will discuss:

- The Synopsis Of The Novel, *Primrose Moore's Legacy*,
- The Background To The Story,
- Genre And Young Adult Fiction,
- Themes Common To *Primrose Moore's Legacy* And Other Young Adult Fiction,
- Themes Of Emerging Adulthood And Happiness,
- Influences On The Creation Of The Characters,

- Characterization,
- Focalization And Point Of View.

Synopsis of Primrose Moore's Legacy

The novel is a story about two heiresses, neither of whom realise the true value of their inheritance. One is a pet dog, Poppy, who only wants to love and be loved. The other is Kat, a young woman on the verge of her adult life.

Katherine does not know what she wants to do with her life. Still smarting from being foisted on her elderly grandmother at age 13, by her indifferent mother, she enters her twenties determined to leave her family behind her. On an unplanned trip to Nepal, she comes into contact with a different culture, which offers her a different way of thinking about the world. Her trip is cut short by the death of her grandmother, Primrose Violet Moore, and she has to return to New Zealand.

Unknown to Kat and her dubious extended family, her grandmother has won a fortune in a US Mega-millions lottery, all of which she later gifts to establish an animal welfare charity. She also leaves a sizeable fortune for the care of her pet dog. Her gift and legacy causes much ire in her excluded offspring.

Kat goes to work for her grandmother's charity as an assistant to Allen, a widower in his thirties, who cannot leave his own history behind. As the charity becomes established, Kat finds herself increasingly engaged in the work, discovering that she has more than one choice for her future.

Meanwhile, Poppy, the heiress dog and her hapless caretakers, Eddie and Joan, discover the consequences of their new found wealth is not all they wished for as they fight other people's selfishness, greed and malice.

When Poppy, the heiress dog, is kidnapped and held to ransom, hers is not the only life at stake. As suspicion falls on Kat and her family, the characters have to discover what is important to each of them.

The novel is about emerging as an adult, and what makes us happy.

Background

The idea for a story about an heiress dog comes from two historical events. In 2007, American billionaire heiress Laura Helmsley, (Strom, 2008) cut her immediate family from her Will, and left a vast fortune to animal charities in the USA, including twelve million dollars to her pet dog. Even more bizarre was the 1991 Will of a German Countess, who left \$80 million marks to her German Shepherd dog (Grossman, 2007). When the dog died, the entire fortune passed on to the dog's heirs i.e. One of the dog's puppies!

Potential heirs, the public and the Courts often consider leaving large sums of money to animal charities or individual animals, proof the benefactor was incompetent or mad. In the Helmsley case, the Judge revoked the donor's wishes in her will, despite little evidence suggesting incapacity (Grossman, 2007).

For some years, I used the Helmsley case as teaching material for the subjects of Testamentary Capacity and Undue Influence. Animal Charities, all over the world sometimes have to battle relatives to retain a legacy. For most Will contests, the contentious issue is the donor's Testamentary Capacity, or

Undue Influence (Pesiah, et.al, 2008). I based the trial, in the novel, on my experience as a witness in contested Wills in the High Court in New Zealand.

For the novel, I wondered what might happen if something similar to the Helmsley case happened to ordinary people, in a New Zealand context. This is the basis for the plot of Primrose Moore's Legacy. For the money not to be family money, but money won by gambling, introduces another layer of complexity.

Genre

Genre is a category of literary composition, useful for publication and marketing. The general categories are contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, folklore, fairy tales, mystery and thrillers, science fiction and adventure. A genre may include age categories, such as adult fiction, young adult fiction and children's literature. Age categories are defined by the writing style, plot type and characters that appeal to different age groups.

Primrose Moore's Legacy is contemporary realistic fiction. Although its plot lines are improbable, they are possible within a contemporary context. The context of an animal charity, a young woman protagonist, the plot and writing style, are suitable for young adults.

Young Adult Fiction targets readers between 12 and 18 years, adolescents, yet to transition into adulthood. However, the sociological and scientific literature considers young adults to be a much broader range of people, forming three distinct groups:

- Adolescence, during which the physical changes of maturity occur,

- College or University aged emerging adults, aged 20-28, physically mature but yet to achieve the milestones and responsibilities of the adult,
- Novice adults, in their later twenties, who have achieved adult responsibilities, but lack life experience.

The interests, psychology and life challenges, for each of the three groups of young adults, are decidedly different. Young Adult Fiction aimed at teenagers is less relevant to today's older young adults. Recently, some publishers recognized there is more to young adults than just teenagers, and emergent adults have interests and challenges different to adolescents. One publisher, St. Martin's Press, has diversified their Young Adult portfolios, to include emerging adults, calling this Generation Y Literature (Andriani, 2009). There are few novels intended for this age group. My vision for *Primrose Moore's Legacy* is to be one of them.

Primrose Moore's Legacy and other Young Adult Fiction

I reviewed some Young Adult fiction that feature themes similar to those in *Primrose Moore's Legacy*. Animals and work in animal shelters are popular topics in Young Adult fiction (Trupe, 2006). In these, mostly teenage, coming of age stories, vulnerable animals act as catalysts for learning life lessons for equally vulnerable human protagonists, allowing them to become emotionally invested in the welfare of the animal (Hogan, 2009).

One example is Kathe Koja's *Straydog* (2002), a novel about an animal welfare shelter volunteer, teenager Rachel, who tries to tame an aggressive, feral dog before it is euthanized. In the process, she learns about love and loss,

and develops trust in another human, which helps her with her grief. Another example is Peg Kehret's novel *Cages* (2001), about a shoplifting teen, Kit, who does community service in an animal shelter, the experience transforming her.

A common theme in young adult fiction is the metaphor of the sacrificed animal representing the rite of passage of the young person into adulthood. Campbell (2010), criticized the use of animal death, abuse and cruelty as literary tricks to gain interest and tension in Young Adult novels. She questions whether it is responsible to exploit affection and concern for animals to get an emotional charge for a story. There are animal deaths in Primrose Moore's *Legacy*; in a story about animal welfare organizations, it would be unrealistic not to bring up euthanasia of animals. The young protagonist in Primrose Moore's *Legacy* sees a dog euthanized, but I tried not to exploit the death to get an emotional charge. The sacrificed animal at the end of the story is a trick, literary and literally.

Primrose Moore's *Legacy* does not focus on a particular human-animal emotional relationship to fuel the plot or changes in the characters. The dog in the story is a passive protagonist. Events happen to the dog character; she does not initiate them and it is the events that cause change in the characters. As in *Straydog* and *Cages*, the work with animal welfare charities helps both Primrose and her granddaughter to find purpose and meaning in their lives.

Few Young Adult novels have addressed Buddhism. One exception is *Buddha Boy* (Koja, 2003). In this novel, teenager Justin's psychological growth comes from his relationship with Jinsen, his Buddhist friend. Karma (the belief that actions eventually have consequences) is a leading theme of this novel.

In Primrose Moore's *Legacy*, protagonist Katherine gets a short but thwarted introduction to Buddhism. She recognizes that understanding more

about the philosophy may help her think more positively. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes loving kindness, compassion, and gratitude; ideas that have influenced the modern, scientific understanding of happiness and human flourishing (Haidt, 2006; Seligman, 2002).

Themes

Emerging Adulthood

In western cultures, mid-twentieth century young adults often acquired adult responsibilities as they entered their early twenties, when still in late adolescence, and while relatively immature. The median age of first marriage, in the 1960s, was 21 years for women, and 23 years for men. By the millennium, this had risen 5 years to 26 years for women, and 28 years for men (Henig, 2010).

Today, society is more tolerant of young adults remaining dependent on parents for longer, and of experimentation in the selection of partners and jobs or careers. Through the medium of MRI scanner technology, we now know it takes up to 25 years to mature the frontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for the attributes we associate with adulthood¹, (Toga, Thompson, & Sowell, 2006). The current social postponement of adulthood into the later twenties allows a young person's emotional maturity and personality to develop

¹. The frontal lobes of the brain control attributes such as sense of significance, abstract reasoning, recognition of consequences, control of emotions and social

The corpus callosum, the area of the brain responsible for integration of the two cerebral hemispheres, also does not mature until the mid-twenties. (Pujol, J., et.al. 1993).

simultaneously with their brain maturity. The effect of this delay on young adult's future emotional stability and relationships remains to be seen.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett argues the twenties is a distinct life stage, theoretically and empirically distinct to both adolescence and the thirties (Arnette, 2004; 2011). Important themes in the emerging adults psychological profile are identity exploration, self-focus, a feeling of being 'in-between' and a 'sense of possibility.' Although some of these begin to arise in adolescence, in emerging adulthood, they take on greater urgency.

According to Arnette, the main issues young adults consider important for their transition into adulthood to be:

- 1) Accepting responsibility for one's self,
- 2) Independent decision making,
- 3) Financial independence.

A major part of becoming a self-reliant adult person is developing identity. This begins in the adolescence period and by the twenties becomes more meaningful, affecting the person's loves, work and worldviews. Romantic relationships become more serious, the focus on work changes to acquiring fulfilling careers or skills (not just having money to spend), and worldviews become shaped by personal beliefs and values. These emergent adult issues confront the young protagonist Kat, in Primrose Moore's *Legacy*.

Social philosopher George Mead hypothesized identity formation as a symbolic interaction of the self, summarized as the difference between 'I' and 'Me' (Mead, 1934). 'Me' refers to what the individuals learn about themselves by social interaction. 'Me' is projected from significant others, who they think the individual is. 'I' is the attributes, discovered by people themselves; their values, beliefs, standards of behaviour that the person considers defines them.

According to Mead's theory, when 'Me' is predominant, the personality is one of conformity, a persona that cares what people think of them. In contrast, a predominant 'I' persona is less conformist, and more individualistic. In emerging adulthood, discovery of the interplay between the 'I' and 'Me', aspects of personality, is important for identity development.

In *Primrose Moore's Legacy*, Primrose appears a 'Me' person, but her actions following her lottery win suggest an unknown independence of spirit. Her granddaughter Kat, freed from family constraints, wants to explore her 'I' identity. An example follows:

Kat gave him a quizzical look. "You sound just like Mum, and Gran and the teachers at school, as if that should be the pinnacle of my goals in life. I'm not ruling those things out, not yet anyway. But, all my life, I've been defined in terms of someone else. When people think of me they think of Leone's daughter, Primrose's granddaughter, one of the classes of 2009 and in ten years time I'll be defined again as someone's wife, maybe someone's mother. I figure that right now is the only time in my life when I don't have to play a role someone else expects of me. Now is my best opportunity to find out who I am. What I stand for. What I believe in. Who I really am. Not who other people think I should be. (*Primrose Moore's Legacy*, Ch.18, p 221).

Happiness

New Zealand Lotto's slogan is "What would you do?" The slogan sells the idea of huge wealth bringing joy and happiness to winners. The public

identifies with this fantasy (Kaplan, 1987). The phrase “when I win Lotto” is heard more often in conversation than the more realistic “if I win Lotto.”

However, sudden wealth, from either inheritances or lottery wins, does not bring lasting happiness. A classic study showed that both lottery winners and serious accident victims returned to their previous state of happiness after initial strong reactions to their new circumstances (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). A large lottery win is more likely to bring disruption to winner’s lives than happiness (Argyle, 1999).

While experiences in external world can certainly temporarily enhance or destabilise happiness, the pursuit of lasting happiness is an inward journey of self-discovery. Furthermore, from Aristotle to the Dalai Lama, philosophers reasoned that self-reliance is necessary for happiness.

I was a Psychiatrist for nearly thirty years, with a professional interest in depression. I came across Martin Seligman’s theory of ‘Learned Helplessness’ (Seligman, 1975) in the 1970s. The theory suggests that adverse events (real or perceived) lead an individual to believe they are unable to control the outcome of a negative situation. The negative thinking becomes a vicious spiral of self-fulfilling prophecies of helplessness, leading to depression. The remedy for this type of depression is to change the fixed, negative thinking patterns by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

In the 1980s, Seligman had an epiphany. His insight was that, not only a person could learn how to change the mental set of their negative thinking, but they could also learn to do the opposite, that is, learn optimism. For the next thirty years, he researched learned optimism and happiness theory. His work, now called positive psychology, has relevance not only for people with mental illness, but also for the personal well being of all people. I also did extensive

training in coaching, with an interest in personal development, and the ideas and techniques of positive psychology are invaluable in coaching.

Martin Seligman's, 'Authentic Happiness' (2002) and 'Flourish' (2011), discuss the considerable research on happiness and wellbeing. According to Seligman, the elements of well-being are:

- Positive emotion,
- Engagement,
- Relationship to others,
- Meaning,
- Accomplishment.

The attributes enable a person to put life-challenges into perspective, gain life-satisfaction, and learn self-reliance. I based the pursuit of happiness theme in Primrose Moore's Legacy on these concepts.

Some characters, for example, Eddie and Joan, are happy. They have a loving relationship with each other, a positive outlook, and have meaning and accomplishment in their lives. Their happiness is destabilized, by the intrusion in their lives resulting from the legacy. Their emotions, relationships, and engagement with the outside world suffer as an unexpected consequence. The major stress of Edwin's heart attack threatens their partnership and forces them to reprioritize what is important to them.

Kat is resentful of her mother's preference for her sleazy husband instead of herself. A number of failed relationships contribute to her unhappiness and her self-view as unlovable. When she becomes engaged in the work of the Foundation, she develops a sense of meaning and accomplishment in the work and starts to see possibilities for her future. She

begins to feel happier and moves towards a more healthy relationship with Allen, with the possibility their friendship may develop further.

As Kat's character progresses through the story, she realizes her spiritual journey towards understanding herself and acquiring meaning in her life is important. Kat recognizes that for her to be truly engaged with life, and form lasting relationships, she must first develop herself:

Kat thought she had better end Allen's fishing expedition. "No way. I'm too young to get married. I want to make something of myself first. I want to be able to offer something in a relationship. One day, perhaps, I will get married and have kids, but first I want to learn how to stand on my own two feet, be responsible for myself. Therefore," she took a deep breath, I'm going back to Uni. I want a job, a career I can be passionate about." (Primrose Moore's Legacy, chapter 26, p.307).

Developing the Characters

My background in Psychiatry provided me with an experiential and theoretical resource of different personalities and behaviours. I have drawn extensively on this resource to depict the characters in Primrose Moore's Legacy. The main models I considered were:

1. For the character Kat, the literature on emerging adulthood and identity formation, as discussed above,
2. Generational characteristics and personal observation,
3. Psychoanalytic theory, Freud and Jung,
4. Cloninger's model of personality and character development.

Generational characteristics

In 1951, Time magazine suggested that the pre-war cohort was different to previous generation (Time, 1951). The idea that external events affect the attitudes and characteristics of a particular cohort expanded to include subsequent generations (Tolbize, 2008; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

Primrose Moore's Legacy has three main generations, which create possibilities for interesting intergenerational dynamics. I modelled the character of 80-year old Primrose Moore on observations of elderly women I treated during my psychiatric career. Primrose, born between 1925 and 1945, belongs to the 'silent generation.' This cohort grew up with the Great Depression and World War 11, and their characteristics were conformity, stoicism and acceptance of the status quo. In New Zealand, they had limited job choices, an ethos of egalitarianism, a determined sense of traditional family, upright values, and strong work ethics. The 'silents' tend to be circumspect in their praise. As Primrose says in the novel, they do not "like to be too flowery." Modern-day exuberance is for many of them, 'over the top', and disingenuous.

Her offspring are baby boomers and early Generation X. The Korean and Vietnam wars, the protest movements of the 60's, and exploration of recreational drugs shaped the Boomers, born after the disruption of World War 11. The boomer stereotype is one of a rebellious, selfish, materialistic generation.

Protagonist Kat, born in 1981, is a Generation Y individual, stereotyped as technologically adept, individualistic and self-focussed. Kat is not a typical

Generation Y. Brought up by a 'silent' grandmother, she did not enjoy helicopter parents hovering over and obsessed by her every move. As a result, she is perhaps more independent and less self-obsessed than many others in her age group.

Allen is a Generation X; the stereotype being people who are pessimistic and mistrustful of institutions, as he is about Kat's interest in Buddhism.

While a starting point, generational characteristics are stereotypes and characters need to be more rounded.

Psychoanalytic Models

Sigmund Freud (1927) postulated a structural model of Id, Ego and Super-ego. The Id is the unconscious instinctual drives of libido, aggression and self-destruction. These hidden impulses are unresponsive to reality and drive to achieve the 'pleasure principle' and the avoidance of pain. The Super-ego, or conscience, aims for perfection in the outside world, constraining the ego with internalised moral demands and prohibitions derived from early experience with parental objects. The ego, or conscious self, balances the hidden impulses of the id and the prohibitions of Super-ego. This constant balancing creates the individual's basic affective state. Anxiety occurs when the ego is bombarded with external realities that allow the unacceptable hidden impulses of the Id to emerge. The ego defends itself by the psychological defence mechanisms². These help to reduce the tension of threatening id impulses.

Immature examples of the defence mechanisms are, denial, displacement, splitting, fantasy, projection, rationalisation, regression and reaction formation. Mature examples include, intellectualization, humour and sublimation.²

In psychoanalysis the meaning of the hidden impulses are interpreted from the transference of the patient's immature defence mechanisms, onto the analyst, by means of the analysand's stream of consciousness. In a similar manner, the subtext of a character in a novel, projects onto the reader, allowing them to interpret its significance.

My antagonists' egos are id driven with weak super-egos. I used Freud's formulation of immature defences of psychopathic personalities for my antagonists e.g. splitting (i.e. father good, mother bad), projection (of their own motivations onto their mother) and reaction formation (acting as an outraged victim of behaviour they have perpetrated on others). In contrast, the elderly protagonists have powerful super-egos. In Mead's (1934) formulation, they are conforming 'Me' people.

Carl Jung, (1960) postulated the 'Collective Unconscious' in 1934-6 and its mental forms and representations, archetypes³. Jung described five main archetypes, patterns people recognize without previous personal experience. The self or psyche (ego), the shadow or the attributes the psyche does not want to identify with, the anima or female image in the male psyche, and the animus, the male image in the woman's psyche. The persona is the mask the person presents to the world to protect the psyche and hide their shadow.

Joseph Campbell, an American Mythologist, extended Jung's ideas, and he took the results of their collective ideas to a wider audience in his acclaimed work 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' (Campbell, 1949). Jung and Campbell both recognized there are stories, myths, symbols and legends that have commonalities in all cultures.

³ *Arche-Greek*, meaning original, and *typos* meaning form or model)

Film director George Lucas, an admirer of Campbell, adapted the core idea of The Hero's Journey for the blockbuster Star Wars (1977). Clear Jungian archetypes, for example, hero, shadow, mentors, damsel in distress and so on, are a main feature of this film and its successors. Christopher Vogler (1998/2007) uses this formula in 'The Writer's Journey' and describes how the Jungian/Campbell archetypal model can assist in creating plot and characters for the novel and the screenplay.

While archetypal forms may be in my human characters, I did not deliberately set out to use a Jungian model. However, as there are also animal archetypes, and this novel is a story about animals, I used animal archetypes for the names of some of my characters (see below).

Nowadays, both Freudian and Jungian models are controversial in mainstream psychiatry. Freudian theories, modified and embellished by later developments, are less so. Jungian ideas have almost vanished from the modern psychotherapy repertoire. Freud and Jung's ideas have given way to more modern theories in 21st Century psychiatry and psychology. Nevertheless, I find it fascinating to note that Freudian ideas influenced some of the great classics of 20th Century literature⁴ while the Jungian ideas influenced the blockbuster film, fantasy and best-seller thriller genres of fiction⁵.

⁴ For example: James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939); Ernest Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926); D.M. Thomas, *The White Hotel*, 1981 to name just three of many.

⁵ For example: Star Wars (Lucas film, 1977); Lord of the Rings (Tolkein, 1954); Harry Potter (Rowling, 1997); The Millennium Trilogy (Larsson, 2005, 2006, 2007).

Modern understanding of Personality and Character

In my novel, protagonist Primrose Moore has three offspring who are the antagonists, the older two overtly, the younger daughter more subtly.

Personalities are shaped by nature as well as life experience. My antagonists have temperamental traits similar to their fraudster father, and Frank's undermining of Primrose's influence on them as children, allows their basic nature to predominate in their characters. These ideas are based on Robert Cloninger's work.

According to Cloninger (2009), an individual's personality development depends on both biological and psychological variables. A person's inherited neurobiological nature or temperament, biases the emotional responses or style of the individual. This is relatively stable throughout life. Cloninger described four main types of inherited temperament; harm avoidance, novelty seeking, reward dependence and persistence. People have a mixture of these temperamental traits in varying degrees of expression, but usually one bias predominates.

Character layers over temperament, is multidimensional and is formed by learning from experience, motivations, goals, and development of values and virtues. Character develops over the entire life-course in response to internal and external experiences, including cultural and social influences. Cloninger describes three character dimensions, insight (self-transcendence), judgment (cooperativeness) and foresight (self-directedness), which play out in various aspects of people's lives. He agrees with philosopher Immanuel Kant's definition of character as "what people make of themselves, intentionally" (Cloninger, 1994).

Primrose's three offspring in Primrose Moore's Legacy have similar high novelty seeking temperaments (i.e. they are craving, extravagant, irritable, impulsive, and exploratory), but their character traits are those of poor judgment and lack of foresight. The elderly protagonists have high harm avoidance temperaments (i.e. anxious, shy, and inhibited), but their aging characters have evolved reasonably good insight, and judgment, despite their naivety. Granddaughter Katherine's genetic component from her grandfather is diluted, but she has enough of it to give her a feisty and a persistent nature (i.e. impulsive and exploratory yet she is also ambitious, loyal, and perfectionistic). Her life experiences with her moral agent grandmother influence her emerging character taking her to more mature levels of insight, judgment and foresight.

Appendix A (p.37) is a table showing how I applied each of these models to the personalities of the created characters.

Although these personality models appear to be different from each other, each was postulated in a particular historical and social context; the psychoanalysts in the 1920s; the generation stereotyping in the 1950s; the psychosocial stages of human development in the 1980s; and the biological, psychological social theories of personality in 1990s to current day. Each model builds on previous models so that modern day understanding of personality and character is enriched.

In his book, *Feeling Good, the Science of Well-Being* (2004), Cloninger integrates his bio-psycho-social model with the work of the insights from psychoanalysis (particularly Freud and his successors) and interpersonal psychology. Furthermore, he integrates his model with spiritual ideas, including meditation and mindfulness from Buddhist philosophy (p.61-2). These

techniques promote the individual's development of their character in the dimensions of insight, judgment and foresight, increasing their capacity for happiness and well-being. These insights are other reasons why I wanted to incorporate some of the lessons from Buddhist philosophy into the protagonist Kat's journey towards finding happiness.

Characterization

The traits of fictional characters can emerge from the text in various ways (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). These indicators of character include (ch.5):

- 1) Direct definition,
- 2) Indirect presentation,
 - Action,
 - External appearance,
 - Speech and interaction,
 - Environment,
 - Analogy and names.

In *Primrose Moore's Legacy*, I tried to avoid directly describing a character's personality, preferring a mimetic approach of showing the personality indirectly. However, I used direct definition with some characters, as demonstrated in this expository paragraph, introducing the reader to the minor character Wayne, the heiress dog's bodyguard:

Wayne Moody emigrated with his parents, from Scotland, when he was thirteen. He objected strongly at the time because he didn't want to leave his mates in Glasgow, but his parents insisted. Wayne paid them back by being a rebel at school, playing truant and spending most of the time he should have been at school in the arcades playing King of Fighters and Virtual Cop. Unsurprisingly, he left school at sixteen without managing to get any qualifications, but his Dad used his influence at his own company to get him a job in the office. Wayne found working in an office worse than school and much preferred his second job, a bouncer in a nightclub. The job enabled him to do his weight training at the gym every day and throw his weight around in the evening at the club. (*Primrose Moore's Legacy*, ch. 20, p.229).

Wayne appears in only one chapter, and I wanted to set up his character quickly. The paragraph indicates a rebellious nature, a misspent youth, and a lack of aptitude yet he has a sense of his own importance. These characteristics cause him unwittingly to aid the kidnapper.

Some examples of indirect presentation follow.

An example of character indirectly indicated by external appearance is the actions of the lawyer Daphne:

Daphne Winner strode out of court, still wearing her black gown over her smart black wool suit and white silk shirt, a double row of expensive Akoya pearls at her throat and walked the few steps to her chambers. Her junior followed a few steps behind, trundling the large black business

case containing all the court bundles. Once in her room, she took off her gown, hanging it up carefully in the cupboard, walked over to the large mirror, patted herself down, smoothing her collar before twisting slightly to look at her reflection in the mirror.

(Primrose Moore's Legacy, ch.7, p. 128).

In this passage, I want to convey to the reader that lawyer Daphne is successful and high earning; she can afford expensive clothing and jewellery. She is hierarchical; her junior follows a respectful distance behind and transports the bags. Daphne is meticulous; she takes care of her appearance, and she is vain. The first thing she does on reaching her office is to look at her reflection in the mirror and admire her superficial appearance.

An example of character revealed through speech is in the following exchange between 80-years old Primrose and her younger neighbour Joan. Unknown to Joan, Primrose has arranged the gift of an air ticket for Joan and her husband to visit her daughters in Australia:

"That's quite nice, Joan dear. Fancy that." Primrose handed the paper back to Joan and dropped to her knees to scrutinize the veggie patch. Joan glanced down at the paper again before hugging it to herself.

"Quite nice? It's wonderful."

"I suppose so. Yes, Joan dear, it is quite nice really." Primrose agreed.

"I can't wait. I haven't told Edwin yet. He will be over the moon. We haven't seen the youngest grandchild yet, only photos and that's not the same. We didn't think we could afford to go over and see them until Edwin retired and he gets his gratuity, or we won lotto or something. And

now this!" Once more she studied the piece of paper, drinking in every word, memorizing every last detail.

"When do you go?" Primrose's trowel was working hard now, as she pulled out a couple more lettuces.

"Next week. Can you believe it?"

"Well dear, I'm glad you're pleased."

"You are funny Mrs. M. You don't believe in going over the top, do you?"

"Well, don't like being too flowery, you know." Primrose spotted a weed and pulled it out. "Would you like a lettuce to go with your tea, Joan dear?" (Primrose Moore's Legacy, ch. 5, pp. 101-2).

The generational difference between the two people shows by Primrose's constant use of the word, dear, to her younger neighbour, her use of Joan's first name, while Joan always refers to Primrose respectfully as Mrs. M. While her neighbour is ecstatic about the gift, Primrose's circumspection describes it as 'quite nice.' When encouraged to be a bit more enthusiastic, she uses the expression, 'quite nice, really.' Primrose admits, despite her name, she does not like to be 'too flowery.' Her present of a mundane lettuce signifies her real gift. She pulls the weed in the lettuce patch, portending of her subsequent decision to 'weed' her proliferate offspring from inheriting her money.

An example in the novel of character revealed through the environment occurs when Kat first sees Allen's garden:

The bi-fold windows occupying the whole of one wall were pulled back revealing the expanse of the garden. Decks extended out of the living

room under a roofed pergola, and set with cane armchairs and a low cane table. To the left was another pergola with grape vines twisted around the posts; dripping bunches of grapes, ripe enough to eat, uncovered and attracting birds to drink from their juice. Beyond the deck the garden was set out formally in the Italian manner with box hedges walling in enclosed paved areas, the two furthest and nearest contained white urns, the middle two, statue fountains spilling into two identical ponds. The overall effect was green and white. No colour. Ordered. Tidy. Structured. Nothing out of place. The garden would not have been out of place in imperial Rome. (*Primrose Moore's Legacy*, ch. 18, p.214).

Allen is 12 years older than Kat and is a widower. His Italian wife died several years before, and his garden reflects his inability to forget. The grapes signify his unfulfilled ambition to be a winemaker. Only birds drink from the unpicked grapes. Allen's garden is structured and ordered, like his life since his wife died, reflecting the way he has coped with the chaos and unpredictability of his loss.

Analogous Names

Lodge (1992), believes having analogous names that invoke meaning in the readers mind is an essential part of the writing process. He states, " In a novel, names are never neutral. They always signify, if it's only ordinariness" (p.37).

I chose the names, for *Primrose Moore's Legacy*, bearing Lodge's comments in mind. I changed these several times until I was happy the name

and character aligned. Primrose and Violet are two old-fashioned names that depict an older character, and perhaps a little quirkiness. To her family, she is prim and proper, disapproving of their actions, while to others, her late blossoming independence in the matter of her legacy seems rosy for some, but also has thorns.

The family name, Moore means dark or black. Primrose is only a Moore by marriage and Katherine's family name is Anston, an old English name meaning solitary stone. Kat is a lonely character at first and has a proud, aloof, independent spirit. For Katherine, her human name means innocent or pure, but her nickname Kat, and her appearance, suggests the archetype of the cat in her personality. Like her animal archetype, she can lash out as she does in the following exchange:

The frown line between her eyes deepened. "Now look here, I don't care if you are the boss but I'm just a beginner at this and I need some help from you, quite frankly. You seem to expect me to know instinctively what do but I don't know. I'm not bloody well clairvoyant, you know. I suggest you find someone else who is. And, what is more, I don't appreciate you patronizing me either!" She made to push past him and get to the door.

Allen took a step back and held his hands up in surrender. "Ouch," he said, "Put your claws back. I thought that having done a year a Uni you would know a bit about problem solving. (*Primrose Moore's Legacy*, chapter 12, pp. 167-8).

The antagonists in the story also have names that are signifiers. Lyall's name means dark wolf, and Todd's name is taken from the Scottish word for fox. Their personalities reflect their animal archetypes.

Other characters such as Eddie, Joan and Fred have names representing their everyday ordinariness. The surname Reeve comes from medieval English for steward, one who looks after the books and affairs. The Reeves are the custodians of the Foundation. Lawyer, Daphne's surname, Winner, means victorious champion, which she usually is, except in this story.

The animals in the story also have signifying names. The dog adopted from the animal shelter is Lorna a name derived from forlorn. The girl in the wheelchair who adopts her changes her name to Laura derived from Laurel, the Olympic champions crown and the healing herb. I chose the name Poppy for the heiress dog both for its ordinariness, and because of the flower's connotations with the drug that provides solace and eases pain. The dog Poppy provides comfort for Primrose after her granddaughter leaves.

Narrative Point of View

Lodge (1992) considers:

The choice of point(s) of view from which the story is told is, arguably, the most important single decision the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way the readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions (p.26).

Rimmon-Kenan (1983) prefers the term focalization to point of view. He asserts the idea of focalization allows for a richer concept, encompassing cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation (ch. 6).

In a text, 'who speaks' (narrator), may be the same or different to 'who sees' - the focalizer. Focalization can be external, limiting knowledge to what is visible and perceptible. It can be internal knowledge subjectively observed by a character. It can be unallocated, as in omniscient narration. An authorial narrator who is not a character, and externally focalizes from outside the story, is a heterodiegetic narrator (Genette, 1980). A narrator, who is also a character, is a homodiegetic narrator. One whose perceptions and experiences are the core of the story is an autodiegetic narrator. An uninvolved witness is an alterodiegetic narrator (Lanser, 1981; Nieragden, 2002). A character, whose perceptions determine how a scene unfolds, is a figural focalizer, and relates either from the perspective of their personal identity (isoperceptive) or from what they observe (exoperceptive).

Focalization is monofocalized when only one character in the story focalizes on events, or multifocalized when several characters are focalizers in the narrative. Multifocalization can be singulative, when each character perceives different objects or repetitive, when different characters view the same objects. (Bal, 1993; Lanser, 1981; Nieragden, 2002; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983.)

Applying the model to Primrose Moore's *Legacy*, an external narrator (heterodiegetic narrator), relates to the reader, the characters (figural focalizers) focus on people and events acted out by the other characters (agents focalized upon). As different characters perceive different events in the narrative, most of the text is a singulative multifocalized narrative. In plain English, the text has

multiple points of view from the third person subjective and objective perspective.

Lodge (1992) states:

Just as a real event may be experienced by more than one person so can the events in the novel. Characters can have different perspectives on the same event, but, if the narrative is not to be confusing to the reader, this should be only one at a time (p26).

He further states:

There is no rule or regulation that says a novel may not shift its point of view whenever the writer chooses; but if it is not done according to some aesthetic plan or principle, the reader's involvement, the reader's "production" of the meaning of the text will be disturbed (p28, para. 2).

Lodge's premise recommends (excluding omniscient narratives) each scene should have only one point of view. In writing the draft, I allocated a colour label to each character and colour coded each scene, according to which character was the focalizer. This enabled me to stick to an 'aesthetic plan or principle' and identify when I strayed into allowing agent characters to focalize out of turn. I hope the reader's production of the meaning of the text is undisturbed.

Research for Primrose Moore's Legacy

I used many sources to research the background for Primrose Moore's Legacy. These included my own experience, Internet sites, newspaper articles, and scientific papers. In addition to the references cited in the exegesis, the subject matter researched for the story is included in Appendix B (p.39).

Conclusion

Primrose Moore's Legacy began as a light-hearted story about a dog that, bizarrely, inherits millions of dollars. As the work progressed it became clearer to me that there were important themes and social messages that could be incorporated into the work, giving the story a more serious undertone to contrast with the light-hearted aspects. My background in Psychiatry and Coaching and my interest in Positive Psychology strongly influenced the text, both in the formation of characters and in the themes that emerged during the course of writing. The writing of this novel has been an opportunity to write about aspects of the human condition in a more creative paradigm than my background has previously allowed.

In Western culture, today's emerging adults, popularly known as Generation Y, tend to delay their entry into the responsibilities of adulthood until they achieve independence and self-reliance. The foundation of lasting, stable happiness is dependent on developing a personal identity and self-reliance, major tasks of emerging adulthood. While external realities can enhance or detract from a state of happiness, fundamentally happiness is a state of being.

Knowledge of the challenges and psychology of today's emergent adult is important for writers as well as, educators, parents and prospective employers. Stories incorporating themes of relevance to emerging adults have a valuable contribution to make in the emerging adult reader's self-awareness of their own human condition, as well as deepening understanding and empathy for their journey in the writer. Getting to 'somewhere' requires the effort of 'walking long enough.'

References

- Andriani, L. (2009, Nov 5th). Weiss to St. Martin's. YA publisher to develop content for Gen Y readers. *Publishers Weekly*.
- Argyle, M. (1999). Causes and correlates of happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. (pp.353-373). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Arnette, J. J. (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The winding road from late teens through the twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Arnette, J. J. (2011). Emerging Adulthood(s). The cultural psychology of a new life stage. In L. Jensen (Ed.), *Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology. New Syntheses in Theory, Research and Practice*. (pp. 255-275). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bal, M. (1993). First person, second person, same person: narrative as epistemology. *New Literary History*, 24, 293-320.
- Freud, S. (1927). *The ego and the id* (Revised for The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, James Strachey (ed.), W.W. Norton and Company, New York, (1961. ed.). London, United Kingdom: Hogarth
- Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 36(8), 917-927.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces* (1st edition ed.). Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Foundation.
- Campbell, P. J. (2010). *Campbell's scoop: Reflections on young adult literature (Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature)*. Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press.

- Cloninger, C. R. (1994). Temperament and personality. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 4, 166-173.
- Cloninger, C. R. (2004). *Feeling good: The science of well-being*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cloninger, C. R. (2009). Assessment of personality. In M. Gelder, N. C. Andreasen, J. L. Lopez-Ibor Jr, & J. R. Geddes (Eds.), *New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 78-85). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Grossman, J. (2007). *Last words from the "Queen of Mean": Laura Helmsley's will, the challenges that are likely to be posed to it, and the likely fate of the world's second richest dog*. Hofstra, NY: FindLaw.
- Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis. Finding modern truths in ancient wisdom*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.
- Hemingway, E. (1926). *The sun also rises*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Henig, R. M. (2010, August 18). What Is It about 20-Somethings? Why are so many people in their 20s taking so long to grow up? *New York Times Magazine*.
- Hogan, W. (2009). *Animals in young adult fiction*. Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press.
- Joyce, J. A. A. (1939). *Finnegan's wake*. London, England: Faber and Faber.
- Jung, C. G. (1960). *On the nature of the psyche (Vol. 8)*. New York: Bollingen Foundation.
- Kaplan, H. R. (1987). Lottery winners: The myth and reality. *Journal of Gambling Behavior*, 3(3), 168-178.
- Kehret, P. (2001). *Cages*. London, New York: Puffin.

- Koja, K. (2002). *Straydog*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Koja, K. (2003). *Buddha boy*. New York: Speak.
- Lanser, S. S. (1981). *The narrative act: Point of view in prose fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lodge, D. (1992). *The art of fiction*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Mead, G. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the perspective of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nieragden, G. (2002). Focalization and narration: Theoretical and terminological refinements. *Poetics Today*, 23(4), 685-697.
- Peisah, C., Finkel, S., Shulman, K., Melding, P., Luxenberg, J., Heinik, J. & Bennett H. (2008), The wills of older people: Risk factors For undue influence. *International Psychogeriatrics*. 21 (1), 7–15.
- Pujol, J., Vendrell, P., Junqué, C., Martí-Vilalta, J., & Capdevila, A. (1993). When does human brain development end? Evidence of corpus callosum Growth up to adulthood. *Annals of Neurology*, 34(1), 71-75.
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983). *Narrative fiction: Contemporary poetics*. London, New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd.
- Seligman, M. (1975). *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realise your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Sydney, Australia: Random House.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish*. Sydney, Australia: William Heinemann, Random House.
- Strom, S. (2008, July 2). Helmsley left dogs billions in her will. *New York Times*.
- Thomas, W. H., (1981). *The white hotel*. New York, NY: Viking Press.

- Time. (1951, November 5th). People: The younger generation. *Time*.
- Toga, A. W., Thompson, P. M., & Sowell, E. R. (2006). Mapping brain maturation. *Trends in Neuroscience*, 29(3), 148–159.
- Tolbize, A. (2008). *Generational differences in the workplace*. Minnesota, : Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota.
- Trupe, A. (2006). *Thematic guide to young adult literature*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., Hoffman, B. J., & Lance, C. E. (2010). Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing. *Journal of Management*, 36 (5), 1117-1142.
- Vogler, C. (2007). *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for writers* (3 ed.). Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese. (1998).

Appendix A

Development of Characters, for *Primrose Moore's Legacy*, with regard to Life Stage, Freudian Structural, Jungian Archetypal, Social Interaction Theory, and Cloninger Personality Models.

Character	Primrose	Kat	Allen	Edwin	Joan	Lyall	Todd
Cohort	Silent	Gen. Y	Gen. X	Early Boomer	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	Late Boomer/ Early X
Life Stage	Elder	Emerging Adult	Adult	Elder	Elder	Adult	Adult
Dominant Freudian Ego Structure	Superego	Ego	Ego	Superego	Superego	Id	Id
Jung /Vogler Archetypes	Old Woman Crone Matriarch Fairy Godmother	Damsel Innocent Heroine	Mentor Lover Guardian Shapeshifter	Mentor Father/King Guardian	Earth Mother Deprived Child	Outcast Villain Trickster	Trickster Villain
Mead Social Interaction	Me	I	I	Me	Me	I	I
Cloninger, predominant temperamental bias	Harm Avoidant	Persistent	Persistent	Harm Avoidant	Reward Dependent	Novelty seeking	Novelty Seeking
Character Traits	Stoical Conforming Circumspect Loyal Kind Principled Inhibited Empathic	Perfectionist Loyal Determined Identifying Free-flowing Intuitive Resilient Resourceful	Perfectionist Loyal Ambivalent Optimistic Skeptical Trusting Tolerant Responsible	Stoical Conforming Compulsive Pessimistic Controlling Frugal Loyal Rigid Responsible Trusting	Sympathetic Empathic Optimistic Sociable Sentimental Trusting Attached Creative Forgiving Tolerant	Craving Extravagant Irritable Impulsive Materialistic Materialistic Alienated Compulsive Revengeful Inconsiderate Opportunistic Irresponsible	Craving Extravagant Impulsive Materialistic Exploratory Inconsiderate Opportunistic Irresponsible Avoidant Aimless

Appendix B

Bibliography of Background Sources for the novel, *Primrose Moore's Legacy*

Arluke, A., Levin, J., Like, C., & Ascione, F. (1999).The relationship of animal abuse to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior. *J Interpers Violence*.14, 963-975.

Arluke, A., & Sanders, C. R. (1996). *Regarding animals. Animals, culture and society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Arnette, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from late teens through the twenties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arnette, J. J. (2011). Emerging adulthood(s). The cultural psychology of a new life stage. In L. Jensen (Ed.), *Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology. New Syntheses in Theory, Research and Practice*. (pp. 255-275). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bal, M. (1993). First person, second person, same person: Narrative as epistemology. *New Literary History*, 24, 293-320.

Becker, F., & French, L. (2004). Making the links : Child abuse, animal cruelty and domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review*, 13, 399–414.

Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36(8), 917-927.

Charles, N., & Davies, C. A. (2008). My family and other animals: Pets as kin. *Sociological Research Online*, 13(5), 4.

Cloninger, C. R. (1994). Temperament and personality. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 4, 166-173.

- Cloninger, C. R. (2004). *Feeling good: The science of well-being*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dixon, A. K. (1998). Ethological strategies for defence in animals and humans: Their role in some psychiatric disorders. *The British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 71 (4), 417-445.
- Ekman, P. (2009, 4th December). Hidden messages in micro-expressions workshop symposium conducted at the meeting of the *The Mind and its Potential*, Sydney.
- Ekman, P. (2009). *Telling lies*. New York: W.W. Norton. (1985)
- Grossman, J. (2007). *Last words from the "Queen of Mean": Laura Helmsley's will, the challenges that are likely to be posed to it, and the likely fate of the world's second richest dog*. . 2012(3/09/2012). Hofstra, NY: Findlaw.
- Haidt, J. (2006). *The Happiness hypothesis. Finding modern truths in ancient wisdom*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.
- Healy, J. P. (2011). Involvement in a new religious movement: From discovery to disenchantment. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 13(1), 2-21.
- Henig, R. M. (2010, August 18). What is it about 20-somethings? Why are so many people in their 20s taking so long to grow up? *New York Times Magazine*.
- Jerolmack, C. (2005). Our animals, our selves? Chipping away the human-animal divide. *Sociological Forum*, 20(4), 651-660.
- Kaplan, H. R. (1987). Lottery winners: The myth and reality. *Journal of Gambling Behavior*, 3(3), 168-178.
- Kemp, B. J., & Mosqueda, L. A. (2005). Elder financial abuse: An evaluation framework and supporting evidence. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 53(7), 1123-1127.

- Lucas, R. E. (2007). Adaptation and the set-point model of subjective well-being: Does happiness change after major life events. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(2), 75-79.
- Mead, G. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the perspective of a social behaviorist*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merz-Perez, L., Heide, K. M., & Silverman, I. J. (2001). Childhood cruelty to animals and subsequent violence against humans. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 45(5), 556-573.
- Noonan, L. (2010). The ins and outs of bequests. *Newz Viewz*(76). Retrieved from <http://www.newzviewz.co.nz>
- Peisah, C., Finkel, S., Shulman, K., Melding, P., Luxenberg, J., Heinik, J., Jacoby, R., Reisberg, B., Stoppe, G., Barker, A., Firmino H. & Bennett H. (2008) (2009), The wills of older people: Risk factors for undue influence. *International Psychogeriatrics*. 21 (1), 7–15.
- Pillemer, K., & Suitor, J. (1991). Will i ever escape my child's problems?" Effects of adult children's problems on elderly parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53(3), 585-594.
- Reed, K. (2005). When elders lose their cents: Financial abuse of the elderly [Case Reports]. *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine*, 21(2), 365-382.
- Rogers, P. (1998). The cognitive psychology of lottery gambling: A theoretical review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 14(2), 111-134.
- Sachs-Ericsson, N., Hansen, N., & Fitzgerald, S. (2002). Benefits of assistance dogs: A Review. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 47(3), 251–277.
- Seligman, M. (1975). *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

- Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realise your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Sydney, Australia: Random House.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish*. Sydney, Australia: William Heinemann Random House.
- Smola, K. W., & Sutton, C. D. (2002). Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23, 363–382 (2002).
- Strom, S. (2008, July 2). Helmsley left dogs billions in her will. New York Times.
- Swabe, J. (2000). Ambiguity and ambivalence in human-animal interaction. In A. L. Podberscek, E. S. Paul, & J. Serpell (Eds.), *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships Between People and Pets* (pp. 292-312). Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, Sao Paulo: Cambridge University Press.
- Tolbize, A. (2008). *Generational differences in the workplace*. Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living University of Minnesota.
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., Hoffman, B. J., & Lance, C. E. (2010). Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing. *Journal of Management*, 36 (5), 1117-1142.
- Walker, M. B. (1992). *The psychology of gambling*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Wells, D. (2007). Domestic dogs and human health: An overview. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 12, 145–156.

PRIMROSE MOORE'S LEGACY

Pamela S. Melding

A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Creative Writing (MCW)

2013

School of Language and Culture

July 2010

Mrs. Primrose Violet Moore couldn't figure out, no matter how many times she thought about it afterwards, why she looked up into the sky at that precise moment, expecting to see a wood pigeon whooshing over her head, but instead saw a large, square, white metal box hurtling towards her. Primrose froze. She heard the screams around her. She was sure one came from Edna across the street.

The air-conditioner crashed on to the pavement with a deafening thwack as it hit the concrete, about six inches in front of where she stood. The white box bounced before several bits of it broke off. A little cloud of dust rose above it.

Primrose watched in fascination, unable to move, her eyes staring at the scattering dust, watching the bits of metal break off on to the ground.

A second or two later, a young man, shirtless, wearing torn jeans shorts and no shoes came rushing out of the door of the building, a screwdriver in his hand. "Oh My God. Is anyone hurt?"

Primrose, unable to speak, her eyes still riveted on the fallen missile, shook her head.

"I'm so sorry. The bracket holding the air conditioner was loose. I was trying to fix up a new one, when I dropped it. The other bracket must have given way, and the whole thing fell." The young man looked about to burst into tears.

A police officer arrived on the scene. He checked Primrose first to make sure she was all right. By this time, Edna had arrived and was comforting the now uncontrollably shaking Primrose.

The officer took out his notebook to record the incident and wagged his pen at the young man with the screwdriver. "You should have gotten a professional to do it instead of trying to fix it yourself. What floor were you on?"

"Twenty-five, Officer."

"Twenty-five! My God, you are lucky you didn't kill this poor lady here. If she had been six inches further along the road, she would have bought it for sure."

The young man covered his face in his hands and repeatedly apologized to the pavement.

Primrose finally found her voice, "I'm all right, Officer, really," she squeaked. "You're extremely lucky Ma'am. Less than six inches in it. Must be your lucky day." The police officer shook his head from side to side.

"I don't believe in luck, Officer." Primrose's voice wavered slightly.

The Officer closed his notebook and flicked his wrist at the young man, inviting him to leave the scene, an opportunity he took immediately. The Officer grinned at Mrs. Moore. "Well, Ma'am, you've had a very narrow escape. If I had your luck today, I'd go and buy a lottery ticket."

In Auckland, two months earlier, a surprise was waiting for her when she arrived back from her volunteer spell at the local Animal Welfare Village. Three times a week, Mrs. Moore worked in the shop at the village, selling tee-shirts and pens, dog bowls and cute cat pictures, to raise money to support the work of the charity. One day a week, she worked at the local Pound, mostly to give comfort to dumped or lost dogs. Sometimes when she came home, she was a bit depressed, especially if she became attached to an animal that would end up being put to sleep forever. They all had a bit of a cry when that happened, paid staff and volunteers.

She had managed to save one puppy though.

Poppy's pregnant mother was abandoned on the middle of the motorway just as she was about to give birth. Luckily, she had been dumped at night when there wasn't too much traffic around. One of the road maintenance workers saw a man dump the cardboard box in the middle of the road and run off. The worker sprinted to the box, pulling it to safety at the side of the road. The next day he took the pregnant mother, still in her box, to the Animal Village.

Poppy was one of three pups born a few hours later and Mrs. Moore fell in love with her the moment she saw her. The vet thought she had a fair amount of Fox Terrier in her, perhaps a bit of Aussie Terrier, and maybe a touch of Beagle. Whatever her garbled lineage, to Mrs. Moore, she was the cutest bundle of tan, white and black fur, she had ever seen. Her black eyes said, 'pick me' the moment they met Mrs. Moore's and when she did, her bushy, golden tail wagged so fast it was a blur. She was such good company after Kat left.

Mrs. Moore took Poppy everywhere with her, even had a basket under the Animal Village shop counter for her, Poppy occasionally coming out to be patted and cooed over. When she did this, one of the other volunteer's pet dogs would usually slip into Poppy's place in the basket. Poppy didn't mind the competition. She enjoyed being shop front, greeting the customers, being the centre of attention. Whenever anyone patted her or scratched her ears, she would look up at them, and give a distinctive little "whoa, whoa, whoa," pressing her long snout under their palm, giving it a little wriggle.

Primrose and Poppy arrived back home about lunchtime, just after the postie had delivered the mail. Mrs. Moore didn't get many letters, mostly bills, so she never looked forward to opening the post. On this day, she saw a thick, cream, embossed envelope, addressed in her cousin's writing. Her heart gave a

leap at the thought of Edna's news. Edna, her husband and their family moved to Baltimore in the USA forty years ago, to run an import export business promoting New Zealand products. Edna hated flying, so she rarely returned home.

She made herself a cup of tea, handed Poppy a couple of dog-biscuits, which she wolfed down in seconds, her wet pink tongue vacuuming up any biscuit crumbs she'd dropped on the carpet. Mrs. Moore held the letter in anticipation as she sat down in her lazy-boy chair, putting her cup of tea on a coaster on the side table, and then she opened the envelope.

There was a letter, and an unexpected thrill, an invitation.

'MR. AND MRS. J. ORMISTON REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF THE COMPANY OF MRS. PRIMROSE MOORE TO THE MARRIAGE OF THEIR DAUGHTER, KYLIE JANE AND MR. CARY DEREK MORENO AT HARROWSET HALL, UPPER MAIN STREET, BALTIMORE ON WEDNESDAY 21ST JULY 2010 AT 11AM.'

How lovely! Of course, going was quite out of the question. Mrs. Moore only had her pension and some savings to live on, and there wasn't any spare cash to go to America. She opened the letter.

'Dearest Primmy,

Well, at last, my granddaughter Kylie has finally decided to get married. Cary is a lovely boy, although I shouldn't really say, 'boy' he is nearly 35! We are so excited and so is Kylie. When I asked Kylie what she would like for a wedding present, she said she wanted to meet the cousin I had talked about for

most of her life, and asked me to send you the invitation. What a sweet girl she is. She knew that would be my dearest wish, and I do hope you can come. Can you come over about three weeks before the wedding so we can have a jolly old catch up and Jim and I can show you Baltimore and Maryland?

I've booked you a flight at the beginning of July. Don't worry about the ticket. It's Kylie's and our gift to you, all the birthdays and Christmases we've missed over the years. We just want you to come. We will meet you at the airport. I am so excited, and so is Kylie.

Much Love,

Your cousin,

Edna.'

Mrs. Moore read the letter over ten times to make sure she understood. She put the letter down on the table, beside the now cold cup of tea, and it was only then she noticed another piece of paper attached to the invitation. She unfolded it. The last time she flew on a plane was twenty years ago when she and Frank went to Fiji for a week's holiday, the furthest she had ever travelled before. Then, the tickets had multiple coupons in a little folder. This was just a piece of paper with flight details-Air New Zealand to Los Angeles, American Airlines to Baltimore on the 1st July, returning on the 24th to New Zealand.

Unsure of what to do, Mrs. Moore phoned the airline and had a long conversation before she grasped that all she needed to travel, these days, was this piece of paper and her passport.

Poppy blinked and dropped her eyes mournfully as Primrose climbed into the taxi and said, "Back soon" to the dog. Poppy knew it meant Primrose was leaving her for a while. Whether this was for an hour, a week or a month, it was all the same to the dog. Mrs. Moore did feel a tad guilty though, but reassured herself with the thought that dogs have no idea of time. Poppy would be quite happy staying with her next-door neighbours, and best friends, Edwin and Joan.

As Primrose wheeled out of the customs area, her cousin Edna and her husband, Jim ran to meet her, the three of them colliding in a group hug. Primrose, not one to express emotion easily, felt a wave of warmth come over her as she pondered her cousin, last seen forty years before, when she had been chestnut-haired and thinner. The eyes hadn't changed, the face was written with more history, and the smile was the same as it had been when they had been children.

"I haven't brought a wedding present with me, Edna. I wanted to talk it over with you first about what best to buy. And, I thought that I might get better quality, and a bigger range of suitable things in America, than I could at home." Her cousin agreed. "And cheaper, I might add, Primmy. Jim tells me, it's got terribly dear at home now. Look, there are some lovely shops here. We'll go out tomorrow and have a jolly good old rummage around."

The next day, Edna and Primrose made their way to the local shopping mall. The size of it! It took forty minutes to walk from one end to the other. And, this was just one shopping centre! There was another, equally big, a few blocks

down the street on the other side.

They decided to have lunch at a small cafe on the street, Edna's favourite, midway between the two shopping complexes. The cafe had been made to look as if it were an old English teashop, something out of a book by Charles Dickens. Americans were mad for Dickens, Edna explained. It had little windows, rounded to look hand blown. Inside the cafe, the walls were lined in dark wood panels, and it had a beamed ceiling. The tables appeared to be oak, or more probably, oak veneer, and each had a small bunch of flowers in a crystal vase in the centre. Apart from the enormous espresso machine at the counter, the effect was if the cafe belonged to a century or so ago. Primrose rather doubted that Charles Dickens would have been able to get panini's or chocolate brownies in his day.

After lunch and a toilet stop, the two old ladies decided to make their way to the other shopping complex across the street, a few blocks down. It was only a few steps to the pedestrian crossing lights. As Primrose pressed the button to cross, Edna gave a start, "Primmy, I've left my bank card at the cafe!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I put it on the counter ready to pay, then realized I had enough change in my purse. I paid cash for our lunch and don't remember picking the card up again. These senior moments! I can do without them. Look, it's not here. You go on. The lights are about to change. I'll just pop back and get it, and I'll catch you up in a minute or two on the other side of the road."

The lights changed, and the green man lit up with the command, 'Walk.' Primrose obeyed as Edna traced her steps back to the cafe. On both sides of the road, buildings towered above the pavement, thirty, forty stories high. The ground level was mostly shops and above these, Primrose supposed, were

offices or perhaps apartments for the many people who lived in the city. She saw Edna come out of the cafe and waved. She was at the lights, but it was going to be a few minutes before the 'Walk' signal came on again. Edna could see where she was.

Primrose's diverted her attention to the shop window of 'The Heavenly Chocolatier.' The enticing tableau was of two large, chocolate birds with pleated tails, looking remarkably like New Zealand native Fantails, which made her think of walking with Poppy in the countryside, back at home.

The near death experience called for another cup of tea at the other shopping mall, with Edna holding onto to her cash card this time, mindfully remembering, to put it back in her purse. Instead of choosing a cafe, they had gone to a large open plan area on the ground floor, set with tables. Primrose slowly gathered herself while her cousin fussed around her.

"I can't believe how close I came to being knocked on the head. Fancy, an air conditioner falling out the sky. You don't expect that to happen."

"I can't believe it either. You were so lucky. Perhaps the officer was right. You should buy a lottery ticket," Edna said.

"Oh Edna, you know how I feel about gambling....."

"I know. But, it's not actually gambling, is it? Come on let's have a little go. You might win a few extra dollars for your trip or a few bones for that dog of yours. You never know. And, today is your lucky day."

Primrose looked uncomfortable. "Oh I don't know. After all I've had to say about the evils of gambling."

"If not for yourself, then buy one for Poppy." Edna urged.

Primrose still looked doubtful. "Well, OK, for Poppy."

The lottery outlet was nearby their table, its garish livery unmissable.

Edna asked for a five-dollar scratch card. She bought one about twice a year, not that she needed the money, but perhaps she needed the little tingle of excitement that came with scratching off the surface to reveal the numbers. It drew a blank. Primrose asked for a lottery ticket, lucky dip.

"Do you want Mega Millions, Powerball, Euromillions, Super-lotto plus?" The girl, with her long fair hair tied into a ponytail, was chewing gum as she rattled these off in a bored voice.

"I don't know. The first, whatever you said."

"Mega Millions, Powerball?"

Primrose was getting flustered, and the twenty-dollar note in her hand flapped in her hand.

"Yes, whatever." She handed over the green twenty-dollar note and received a couple of tickets and some change.

"Good luck and have a nice day."

Primrose immediately regretted what she had done. It was only a few dollars, but the tickets burnt in her bag making her feel a hypocrite.

The wedding came and went. Kylie and Cary were waved off to Florida for their honeymoon, promising to visit Primrose in "Noo Zeeland" one day. The holiday had all gone too soon, collapsed into an album of photographs, memories and little mementos scattered throughout her suitcase, wrapped carefully in her clothes so they wouldn't break in flight.

"You go, dear." Primrose said to Edna at the airport once she had checked in and obtained her boarding pass. "I know you have things to do. There's only an hour until the flight, and I can get a cup of tea while I wait. Everything has

been checked through to Auckland so, I will be fine."

Edna did have things to do. She hugged her cousin, tears rolling down her eyes. "Take care, now. Keep in touch. It was lovely seeing you."

"And, me you. Thank you so much for inviting me and sending me the ticket. I've had a really nice time."

Primrose waved her cousin off, suddenly sad at the thought of not seeing her every day. She paid for her cup of tea with coins and saw she had several greenbacks in her purse. About a hundred dollars unspent, because her cousin insisted on paying for most things. Primrose looked around the passenger waiting area, saw the money exchange booth across the room and went over to change her American currency for New Zealand dollars. '*Save doing it at the other end,*' she thought. She had plenty of small change to buy a cup of tea and a sandwich at Los Angeles. Just as she was putting the New Zealand dollars into the wallet part of her purse, she spotted the lottery tickets tucked in the back. The Lottery outlet was next door to the money exchange. Primrose figured that was deliberate, knowing gamblers as she did. Change your money, walk two steps, go and put it on a bet.

She tossed up whether to bother, or just to chuck the tickets in the waste bin. Wavering over the bin with the tickets in her hand, she spotted a SPCA donation container on the counter, in the shape of a dog, with a slit for the small change of punters. It was half-full. Primrose reckoned it could cope with a few more dollars, if her tickets were worth anything. "I've got a couple of tickets here. Could you check them please?"

The girl behind the counter hardly glanced at her, continuing to masticate her chewing gum, opening her mouth to show the elastic white threads between her teeth. Does everyone chew gum here? The machine was brightly twinkling

as the tickets went in. Suddenly, the girl gave a start, her mouth open, the mass of gum showing clearly, disgusting Primrose. The machine shut down.

"Oh dear, is it broken?"

The girl came round from behind the counter, grabbed her by the arm and started to pull her into a room at the back of the counter. Primrose wondered if she was being kidnapped. Once inside the back room, the girl started dancing up and down and whooping loudly. A colleague joined her, who studied the ticket, the computer, and then Primrose.

"Is anything the matter, dear?" Primrose was mystified at this behaviour. They didn't do this in Auckland.

"You've won, you've won."

"What, dear?"

"You're a winner, a big one. You've won the lottery." The girl continued to bounce up and down, whooping and hollering.

Primrose clutched her handbag tightly. "But, I'm just off to Auckland, dear."

"No, No. You have to go to Atlanta. Now!"

"Atlanta, dear?"

"Yes, Atlanta, to claim the money."

"But, I've got my boarding pass, dear." Primrose opened her bag to show the girl her boarding pass.

"Rip it up. You need to go to Atlanta today. Come on, we'll help you book your flight. How exciting, a winner, here. You're the first since I've been here."

The next thirty minutes were a blur. The lottery girl, still chewing gum, took Primrose over to the American Airlines counter and asked for a ticket for the next flight to Atlanta. The girl on the airline desk said Primrose could rebook her onward flights once she arrived in Atlanta and had new dates, and asked her for

\$186 US.

"But, I've just changed all my money."

"Credit card?"

"Yes, I hope there'll be enough to cover the cost of the new tickets." She handed it over, punched in the keys and her pin, careful that no one saw what it was.

The lotto girl doubled over with laughter.

"There's more than enough for many flights to anywhere you want. Don't worry. Just go!"

Mrs. Moore dozed for most of the flight, the result of drinking a couple of large glasses of red wine on settling into her seat on the plane. This was not a particularly wise thing to do as she wasn't used to wine, partaking of only sherry at Christmas and special occasions, but it had been offered, was free, and she felt she needed relaxing after the events of the previous few hours. The smart flight attendant, dressed in a navy pencil skirt and crisp white shirt, held the tray of drinks in front of her, a moment's hesitation before she reached for the glass.

The wine felt good, the warmth of it ignited her throat. A second glass followed, strangely tasting better than the first, but having downed it rather too quickly, she felt giddy, closing her eyes to stop the swirl. She must have dropped off, woken by the announcement.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we will shortly be landing at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Please shut off all your electronic devices..." The disembodied announcer delivered the rest of the message in a monotonous drawl at a rapid rate, far too fast for Mrs. Moore to catch, unaccustomed as she was to an American accent.

Out of the corner of her eye, she took a surreptitious look at the man in the adjacent seat. Her neighbour, a dark-suited man with silver-flecked hair balding at the temples, was busy putting his Apple logo'ed laptop back in his black leather briefcase

She hesitated a moment before asking him, "Did she say we were landing in Atlanta?"

"Yeah, that's right, Ma'am. Your first time in the deep south?" Without waiting for the answer, he started packing his papers into his black briefcase along with the laptop.

She had a strange rotating feeling in her head, and her mind was a complete blank. Atlanta? What on earth was she doing on a plane to Atlanta? Wasn't she supposed to be on her way to Auckland? Oh my God, I'm getting Alzheimer's. The thought of going senile terrified her. *'Mind turned to jelly, slithering away, unable to grip. Not knowing why you're in a place, why you came here or where you are supposed to be.'* She wished she had Poppy with her now.

Mrs. Moore bent down to look under the seat in front to find her handbag. Opening it, she saw a boarding pass, American Airlines, Baltimore to Los Angeles. She opened her bag wider, and found a second boarding pass for Baltimore to Atlanta. Two boarding passes for the same time? Was she in one of those anxiety dreams, the ones you have when can't decide what to do? Those dreams when you are running for trains pulling out of the station or just missing the bus. She had never had a dream where she got on a plane and went to Atlanta.

The only thing she could remember about Atlanta was that it was the home of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler. She saw *Gone With the Wind* when it first

came out in 1940, at the start of the war. She had gone along to the dilapidated Roxy Cinema with Frank to see it on their first date. She was fourteen and Frank was seventeen. Frank wanted to kiss and cuddle on the back seat, but Primrose fought him off, determined to see the film to the last teardrop. At the time she thought Frank resembled Rhett a little. He was trying to grow sideburns and a moustache to make himself look older. His seventeen-year-old downy facial hair, valiantly trying to camouflage red facial eruptions, somehow lacked Rhett's mature allure. On reflection, now she thought about it, the only real resemblance was that Frank was tall and had jet black hair. No matter how much she would have liked to identify with the heroine, she always knew she wasn't a Scarlett. Not tough enough. No, she was more like Melanie Wilkes. Perhaps, not even Melanie Wilkes. Hadn't Melanie invoked devotion and honour, and Scarlett rejection?

The feeling of haziness that had enveloped her when she first woke from her dozing slumber was going, and she looked around the plane. It was full, the passengers were all busy buckling up their seat belts and fiddling with their tray tables. She stared out of the window, fluffy clouds below them, blue sky above.

The man in the next seat, now settled for the landing with all his bits and pieces carefully packed away, seemed more interested in making conversation. "Is someone meeting you Ma'am?" He had a southern drawl too, but spoke slower than the flight attendant, so was easier to follow.

"Gosh, yes. I hope so."

"Are you staying near the airport or downtown?"

"I'm not sure. Near the airport, I think. I'm only here for a day or two then I have to get home."

"Looks like we're coming into land. Have a nice stay."

Mrs. Moore was glad the conversation finished as she had started to panic. Flashbacks of events at Baltimore airport were emerging in her memory although she still did not quite believe they actually happened. *'I'll wake up soon'* she thought. Supposing it was all real. My God, what will happen when we land? What if there was no one to meet me? What if there was no hotel booked? How would I even go about booking one? What if everywhere was full up and there's nowhere to stay? What if I get run over in this strange city? Or worse, mugged or murdered? The papers were full of this sort of thing happening. How do I get from Atlanta back to Auckland?

Her head was spinning. She had a sudden fantasy that, any minute now, her head would pop off her body, like a child's spinning top and swivel down the centre aisle of the plane. As the plane descended and her ears started popping, her head was buzzing with unanswerable questions, her stomach worming into her chest, her lungs searching for air. What had she done? At this moment, it seemed to her, going on that shopping spree with Edna was the most foolish thing she had ever done in her life.

Primrose walked out of the arrivals hall and saw a man in a dark suit, holding up a placard with 'Moore' written on it. She wondered if she were the correct 'Moore,' so she approached him and asked him shyly, if he was meeting her or someone else. He was meeting her.

"Gosh. How posh," she thought on seeing the black limousine. "Where are we going?" Primrose asked the uniformed driver.

"My instructions Ma'am, are to take you to the office first."

When they reached the "office" there were six people at the front door all of whom shook her hand up and down until it hurt.

"Congratulations, Mrs. Moore. Congratulations."

"Oh I don't know about that. I haven't done anything to deserve to be congratulated, dear." Mrs. Moore replied.

"But, you're a winner."

"Well, it not because of anything I did, is it dear?" She told them the story of the air conditioner missing killing her by inches, to much oohing, awing, gee whizzing, and the odd four-letter word, which she decided to ignore.

"We'll transfer the money after tax into your Noo Zeeland bank account, today. We need the numbers of course."

For a moment, Primrose questioned herself whether she should hand over the numbers. She was particularly careful about not letting other people know her account numbers, pin numbers and that sort of thing. But, this office was an official one, and she was pretty sure she wasn't being conned. The people seemed so genuinely happy for her. Primrose found her cheque-book in her handbag, and tore off a deposit slip, handing it over to the person she thought was the head official.

"So, Mrs. Moore, what are you going to do with the money? Have you any plans?"

"I don't know dear. The only thing I really want is to make sure there's enough to look after my little dog after I'm gone. I'm eighty, you know, and she is only just one, so I think she might outlive me, and I want to know she will be all right."

Everyone in the room started laughing. Primrose couldn't understand why her comment was so funny. The head official wiped his eyes and fought to gain control of himself. "Oh I think there might be more than enough for that, Mrs. Moore."

"Really?" Primrose was suddenly overcome with curiosity. "I don't like to ask, dear, but how much have I actually won?"

"After tax, Mrs. Moore, after tax, your prize will come to, approximately, give or take a few dollars, to two hundred and sixty-seven million US dollars!"

March 2011

It was hard going. Despite all those workouts at the gym and the backpacking she had done earlier in Thailand, this trek was tough. Visitors had to walk up the steep hill, carrying everything themselves. The hard slog, the weight of her backpack, the thinning air, and the sight of the beautiful snowcapped Himalayas in the distance, made her feel as if she were floating a few inches above the ground.

Katherine had a couple of days in Kathmandu before this trip, enough for her to fall in love with the city. She loved its many pagodas with their red tiled tiered roofs reaching for the sky, the colourful markets, and the busy temples. The sound of bells as many prayer wheels rotated sending their messages of goodwill into the universe, made her heart sing.

Her new friends, Lesley and Dave had offered to show her more of the city's hidden treasures, later when they got back after the retreat. Kat eyed the minibus taking them to the start of the foot trail that led up to the monastery with suspicion, wondering if it would even make it down the road from the backpackers hostel.

The yellow dirt track road meandered up and down the sides of the hills, the minibus jolting the passengers whenever it hit stones in the road. The wheels stirred up dust into clouds obscuring the view of the smaller wayside shrines on the road. Their drop off point was a thousand feet below the monastery, and Kat could see a glimpse of it ahead, perched on top of the hill, partially obscured by fir trees. The day was clear, the sky an intense blue, with streaks of fair weather cloud. The red gravel pathway taking them up the mountain had

no litter bins, and here and there were little piles of coke cans, plastic bags and cigarette butts.

The path curved upwards for a while, and Katherine's pace slowed. Eager to get away from the minibus, she set off at a furious pace, leaving the others well behind, but after a short time, the weight in her backpack became uncomfortable, and she realized she was not taking enough notice of the stunning scenery all around her. The quietness of the surroundings intruded into her consciousness as if the world's clock stopped ticking. All around was stillness. A little extra time on the road was not going to detract from the experience. Alongside the road were some tablet-shaped stones, fallen off a decaying, weathered and beaten ancient shrine, with its pockmarked spine still trying to reach for nirvana. There was little vegetation apart from some dust covered, brown lichen plants stubbornly clinging to the rocks on either side of the narrow gravel path.

A little ping shattered the peaceful silence announcing she had a text. She stopped, and rifled through the pockets of her backpack to find her mobile phone. Amazed there was coverage, she took it out and flipped it open to read the text.

'WAN2TLK. CMB. A.'

She stood still looking at the text, staring at the message for a full minute.

She texted back, "RUSOS. 1H8U. URFUBAR. FU. K'

Kat sat down on the side of the road, took out her water bottle and drank, draining every last drop, placing the empty plastic bottle on the pile of litter on the wayside. Andy is history.

Kat and Jen met Andy and his friend Phil, at a nightclub in Sydney shortly after Jen arrived from New Zealand. She came to spend the summer with Kat at

her mother's fancy apartment overlooking Sydney Harbour while Kat's mother and her husband were in Asia. Jen was very attracted to Phil and Kat to Andy; for several weeks, they went out as a foursome before they left for Bangkok. Andy wanted to go with them to Thailand, but Phil wasn't keen. Didn't like the food, he said. Kat had wondered at the time why Andy was so keen to come along without Phil. Now she knew. Creep. Double creep. Well, they could get on with it. She didn't want to see either of them again. Having caught the pair of them in bed together, one afternoon when she came back to hotel earlier than expected, Kat stormed out of the hotel and caught the first bus to Bangkok airport. She had only just calmed down when she got to the airport.

Looking at the airport departure board she saw a Thai airlines flight to Kathmandu was leaving shortly. It looked a more exotic destination than any others on the board, and before she knew it, she had landed in Nepal. Irritatingly, she had overlooked the need for a visa, and she ended up in two-hour queue to get one before they would let her out of the airport.

Once into the city, she found a backpacker's hotel with a room next door to a Canadian couple, Lesley and her boyfriend Dave, who were just a few years older. The three of them immediately hit it off and enjoyed seeing the sights together. Kathmandu was entrancing, so exotic. Even the air smelled different, spicier.

Her new friends were off to attend a week retreat at a Buddhist Monastery nearby. Lesley had been before, twice and had met Dave the last time she had been there. "Come with us." Lesley encouraged, "It's mostly young people, from all over the world and you'll make new friends. Everyone there is looking for something just a bit more meaningful than they get back home. We have a couple of weeks of learning, talking, discussing life and doing projects. It's fun,

and they don't shove the religious thing down your throat. It's a fantastic opportunity to see a different way of life."

Kat thought this sounded just what she needed, some time-out, peace and reflection. *'Live in the present, not the past. Stop worrying about the future, live for now, the future will come soon enough.'* A school counsellor she had seen a few years ago once told her to try doing this. *'Be mindful of now and stop regretting, stop resenting, and stop worrying about what you can't change.'* Kat hadn't found that helpful at the time. It just made her angrier, as if it was all her fault.

Kat turned her face up to the sun, warming and comforting her. In the distance where the mountains met the sky she could see a large bird ascending, an eagle she supposed, searching for prey. The monastery was strictly vegetarian, but not so the wild life. As she gathered her belongings, to carry on up the path, another text arrived.

'We r in prague. gr8. hpe u r ok. LOL, Mum.'

As if she cared. When were adults going to realize that LOL meant laughing out loud and not lots of love? Knowing Mum, she probably did know, and the LOL was deliberate. Mum and Jerry would be swanning around Europe by now, spending money freely, boasting of their social connections, impressing people, so Jerry could suck them into investing money in his business.

Kat didn't want to think about her mother now, not in this beautiful place. They had nothing in common other than that they shared some DNA. Kat could see now that she was an encumbrance, a nuisance, and a threat to her precious marriage with that creep Jerry. She always had been. What was it her Mum said, the day they left for their trip to Japan and Europe? "You're an adult now, Kat. You can do what you please. Keep in touch if you like." If you like.

Adults were supposed to have got it together, and she was nowhere near that. Maybe she could get her shit together here? She decided to ignore her mother's text - bet she wouldn't even notice. When Kat first arrived in Sydney, she hoped her mother might get to like her better, now she was older, be a friend, maybe even go far as to love her. That hope was finally dashed with that "if you like."

On reflection, it had been a stupid thing to do, storming out on Gran and catching a plane to Sydney. Maybe she should go back and see her. She pulled out a postcard of Kathmandu out of her backpack and started to write a message.

Dear Gran,

Guess where I am? Yes, I'm in Kathmandu. Left Sydney. Mum and Jerry - same old, same old. Decided to go travelling with a friend. Went to Phuket, lovely but boring. Now trekking in Nepal and going to a Buddhist monastery for a fortnight's retreat. Sorry, I was so horrible to you when I left. You were right, and I was wrong.

Love Kat.

Kat hoped there would be some way of posting the card from where they were staying; otherwise it would have to wait until she returned to Kathmandu. Gran would want to know where she got the money to go traveling from, but she wasn't going to give her that satisfaction. She giggled when she remembered how she extracted it from Jerry, after threatening to show her mother the photographs. He had come on to her one late afternoon when her mother was out shopping, and she had thrown a glass of wine in his eyes to get him off her. While he was mopping his stinging eyes, she had used the camera

app on her mobile phone and obtained a clear picture of his intentions, reaching out of his unzipped pants. Creep. What he didn't realize was that her mother would always take his side. Mum's reaction would be that Kat had led him on. Mr. Perfect would never come on to another woman without provocation. But, Jerry was sufficiently alarmed at her threat to give her enough money to go to Thailand. '*Fair exchange*,' Kat thought as he handed over a fat cheque in exchange for the phone. When Mum and Jerry got back from Europe, she'll have her own place, somewhere, and she wouldn't be telling them where.

Lesley and Dave caught up with her on the path, complaining about the cracking pace that Kat had set. She tried to look suitably contrite, "I waited for you at the back of the bus, but before you got off the bus started to roll backwards towards me. I had to jump out of the way."

"Is that what happened? We felt the jolt as we were getting out of our seats." Dave said rubbing his backside.

"Yes, the driver put bricks behind the rear wheels to stop the bus from slipping back. Thought I would prefer to make it to the monastery before a runaway minibus bowled me over, so I scrambled away as quickly as I could. I could see the monastery up there, waiting for us. I felt a pull, and I just had to go. I promise to slow down, now there are no runaway buses."

"Aren't you hot, Kat?" Dave was sweating in the sun, putting his backpack down and taking a swig from his water bottle and wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

Kat, in contrast, looked cool after her brief rest, despite wearing a black sweatshirt, jeans and a peaked baseball cap to shade her eyes from the fierce sun. Her long dark, almost black wavy hair threaded, into a ponytail through the cap, made her look younger than she was. The only speck of colour on Kat was a bright red ribbon that tied up her hair that matched her red nail polish. The

distinctive luggage label on her black backpack was in the shape of a Kiwi.

A corner beckoned, waiting to reveal with a magician's flourish, the monastery perched high on the top of the hill. Kat could see the multicolored flags fluttering in the breeze.

"Are they to keep the birds off?" Kat asked, thinking of the used car sale yards at home, which strung flags over the yard to keep the birds from fouling newly washed vehicles.

Lesley laughed, "No they're prayer flags. They represent the elements, blue for sky, white for water, red for fire, green for wind and yellow for the earth. When the flags fly, the Buddhists believe the prayers and mantras written on them are carried on the wind to benefit all beings."

They reached the ancient stone steps that led up to the compound. Each stone step was worn away in the centre. Kat was overcome with the realization she was just one of many millions of people who had made this pilgrimage over hundreds of years. Each tread she made on these ancient steps would leave a microscopic indentation on these steps forever, a faint trace recording her passing through here.

They stopped to look at the valley behind them. The fir trees framed the view of the path they had come up; the fields below fading into the distance beyond and far away the Stupas of Kathmandu glinted in the sun. Turning towards the Monastery, Kat saw beautiful gardens, lush green grass, bright flower beds and low stone walls laid out in symmetrical geometric patterns, leading towards a glorious golden roofed Stupa. To their right was a line of prayer wheels, red cylinders inscribed with gold lettering. The arriving visitors were touching each of these lightly as they passed, sending them spinning and the bells singing. To their left, a huge, heavily inscribed bronze bell was hanging

from a great arch with more colourful prayer flags at its foot.

At the gate, Kat was disappointed when the maroon robed monk at the gate asked her to give up her new smartphone, but she reluctantly handed it over. It was the only camera she had to record her visit.

The monk pointed out the sign on the wall just inside the compound.

'Whilst in the Monastery, please observe the following.

No Killing,

No Stealing,

No Lying,

No Sexual Conduct,

No Taking of Mind Altering Substances (Tobacco, drugs, alcohol)'

Kat turned to Lesley. "No killing?"

"What it says, Kat, no killing, not of anything and that includes insects. So, if you get bitten by a mosquito or stung by a bee, tough, you can't swat it." Lesley took Kat's arm to lead her to the women's dormitory.

"Good job, I've got insect repellent then," said Kat grinning, "what's that about, Lesley?"

"It's their respect for all living creatures. They don't kill anything, even for food; hence everything we eat here will be vegetarian.

"Good," said Kat, "I'll lose some weight then." She patted the tiny rounded mound of her abdomen.

"I don't think you're taking this very seriously Kat." said Lesley. "The weight you want to lose here is the baggage that's holding you back in life, the stuff that's stopping you from reaching your potential as a human being. The anger and resentment in you."

'Is it that obvious?' Kat thought.

The brightly coloured, hot air balloon climbed high in the early morning light, ascending above the Stupas, their gilded roofs glinting when they caught the light. The only sound was the pfutt, pfutt of the flags flying from the ropes holding the wicker basket, and the tink, tink of the small brass bells hanging down from the balloon. Kat could see clearly for miles, the horizon meeting the sky was far in the distance, yet seemed as sharp as if it were just a few feet away. On and on they flew and Kat was aware that the chaotic jumble of thoughts in her mind had gone, and she felt at peace.

An eagle flew towards her, its wings flapping, its feathers stretched out in fingers ready to grasp her. It landed on the side of the basket and peered at her with piercing eyes. Kat reached out to pat the bird, drawing back when the eagle pecked her finger with its hooked beak, a drop of blood welling up from the end of her finger. The eagle looked like Jerry with its beady eyes and hooked nose. "Go away," she screamed at the bird, hitting it with a flyswatter that appeared in her hand. "Cork," squawked the eagle, flying away from her flaying arm and towards the red, yellow and blue silk balloon. "No," cried Kat, when she saw the bird thrust its beak into the silk over and over, tearing the fabric until a hole appeared and the air from the balloon hissed out. The balloon collapsed, beginning to fall, slowly at first, then dropping rapidly from the sky. The horizon flashed by, becoming a blur, and she could hear the toll of a bell in the distance, louder and louder as the earth rushed up to meet her. Dong, Dong.

Kat woke with a start. The bell was deafening and was coming from the courtyard outside the dormitory. The other girls in her four-bedded room were already out of their sleeping bags and getting dressed.

"What time is it?" Kat asked, sitting up and looking at her watch. "It's only five o'clock! It's the middle of the night."

"Not here, Kat, time to get up and go to our first session." Lesley pulled Kat's sleeping bag off her. "You'll get used to it."

Kat felt sleep deprived and thought she would never wake up properly. Her head had been buzzing with the sights of rotating prayer wheels, chanting sounds and smells of burning juniper, that met them the evening before, when they first arrived. It took a longtime for her to drop off to sleep.

The evening before, Lesley and Kat were walking through the grounds to get to their allocated rooms in the female dormitory, when they heard a low throaty growling noise coming from one of the buildings. They stopped to listen. It was the sound of many people chanting in low bass voices. The sound was hypnotic in its rise and fall. There were other noises, a deeply pitched bell, maybe a gong. And, what sounded like a cymbal. The combined effect of the sounds reached inside her whole being and made the atoms of her body vibrate.

Once up and dressed, they made their way into the Goempa and joined the monks in their maroon robes and yellow shawls in a half-hour of prostrations, which made Kat feel slightly nauseous and light-headed. She was grateful for the warm drink afterwards. There was to be an hour introduction to meditation before breakfast with one of the nuns, an American woman of indefinite age, her face unlined apart from laugh lines around her intense blue eyes. Her voice was soft, gentle and slow giving every word its due respect.

"I'm Katherine Anston." Kat introduced herself when it was her turn to say who she was, where she came from and why she was at the retreat. "Please call me Kat. I'm from New Zealand, well lately Australia. I was born in New

Zealand, in Auckland. I never knew my father because he left my mum before she had me, and we haven't heard from him since. He was from Britain and I believe he is in London now. Maybe I'm British too. My Mum and I went to Australia when I was three, and she met my stepfather in Sydney, and married him when I was eight. I remember not being happy when my Mum remarried, and I played up so much that, when I was thirteen she sent me back to New Zealand to live with my Gran. I went to University when I was eighteen, to do a Bachelor of Business Studies. I don't know why I did that. It was just that Gran said I had to go and do something. All my school friends knew what they wanted, but I didn't, so I got a list of subjects and a pin and decided that way. Anyway, it didn't work out. I hated everything about the course. Liked the parties though." No need to tell them about the debacle with that lying cheating Logan Kennedy.

The rest of the group laughed at this. Kat grinned and carried on. "I dropped out of Uni after a year and went back to Australia for a while before doing a bit of traveling with a girlfriend in Thailand. She wanted to stay there for a bit, so I came on to Nepal by myself. It seemed a cool place to come to. I'm here at this retreat because my friends, Lesley and Dave thought I would get something out of coming here. I hope you can help me find what I'm looking for, although, I haven't a clue what that is."

To her surprise when she sat down, she was crying. She wiped her eyes fiercely with the back of her hand. Lesley, sitting cross-legged next to her, took her hand and squeezed it.

"Verdict, Kat?" Lesley asked on the walk down from the monastery, to catch the bus to Kathmandu.

"It was A-MAZ-ZING. Thank you for telling me about it. I wish it had gone on for a lot longer."

"Come back next year for more, Kat. That's what we do." Lesley gazed at her partner with affection. Dave smiled back at her and took her hand.

Kat saw the mysterious exchange between them and felt a little ache inside her.

"I can't say I found it easy. You know some of the teaching was extremely difficult to get my head round, and I found the meditation impossible until the last day. As soon as I started to try, all these difficult thoughts would suddenly emerge from nowhere and start crowding in my mind. It was hard to keep them away."

"Takes practice, Kat, everything worth achieving takes time and commitment, you have to keep at it until you master it." Dave said.

"Yes, I know. I think the breathing stuff was so useful. It helped to concentrate on breathing and, by the end I was beginning to be able to force the thoughts away. I liked the mindfulness stuff too. I'm always doing stuff without thinking, so I think it will be extremely helpful to practice concentrating on what I am doing in the moment. Oh, I want to know so much more. Especially after seeing that goat!"

On their last day, one of the Lamas arrived in the Great Hall for the day's teaching, with a goat. The Lama had been to Kathmandu and had found a man selling the goat for the dinner table. He saved the goat from its fate with the little money he had, and brought it back to the Monastery, for the goat to hear the teaching of the Abbot.

"I thought that was so funny. How can a goat understand the teaching, if I can't?" Kat said laughing, her laugh turning into a snort.

"How do you know it can't?" Lesley asked.

Kat glanced at Lesley to see if she was serious. She was. "Well... I suppose I don't, but animals can't understand that, can they?"

"Animals are sentient beings that feel, know what it is to feel safe, scared or in pain. They understand kindness, they understand compassion, they understand love, and they understand respect. Not perhaps in the way you or I would understand it, but in their own way. Wasn't that the gist of the Lama's teaching?" Lesley's serious expression gave way to a broad smile as she met Kat's eyes.

A ping came on Kat's phone at that moment, just as Lesley's point caused her to pause to consider it. For a second or two, Kat felt annoyed. She had been without the phone for two weeks and, after the first few hours she hadn't missed it. Now on the way back to the real world, the damn thing had to intrude.

"Bad news, Kat?" Lesley asked, looking concerned.

Kat was staring at the text, her face crumpled. "It's, it's my Gran. She's had a terrible accident. She's in the hospital. It sounds serious. Oh my God, the last time I saw her we had a blazing row, and I stormed off and went to Oz. I didn't tell her I was going because I wanted her to sweat a bit. What if that is the last thing she ever remembers of me? What if she dies and we never made it up?"

"And, that matters to you, Kat?"

Yes, yes." Kat was speaking forcefully, her forehead wrinkling as she squeezed her eyes tight shut. A few months before, when she was still angry with her Gran, she would have said, no. "Of course it does. What is it, we've just spent the last two weeks talking about? Right speech, right thought, right deeds, saying the right thing, being compassionate, showing loving kindness to others. I did none of those things. I screamed at her. I told her that I hated her. I have to get back to Gran. I have to make it right."

July 2010

Joan Paine met Primrose at Auckland airport after her trip to Baltimore. Primrose saw her immediately and gave her a wave. "Joan, it is so kind of you to come and meet me like this. Sorry, I'm a couple of days late."

"No problem, Mrs. M. No problem. Good to see you home. I must say, you got through Customs quickly today. They must be improving their service these days."

Joan started to push the luggage trolley towards the doors. Primrose glanced at the priority label on her suitcase and put her hand baggage over it obscuring it from view intending to tear it off when Joan wasn't looking.

"Yes, must have improved, very efficient."

"You don't look tired after such a long trip."

Primrose coloured slightly and looked away, busying herself with her luggage on the trolley. "I find I can sleep quite well on planes these days. I've had plenty of sleep."

"I find trying to sleep sitting up on planes, really hard. You are so lucky for it not to bother you. Anyway, you'll need all your energy. Poppy's in the car. She'll be so excited to see you."

Primrose didn't like to tell Joan she had travelled business class with a nice lie-flat bed, so was grateful for the change of subject. "I'm pretty excited to see her too. Has she been good?"

"Like the little angel she is Mrs. M. Perfect. How was the trip?"

"It was quite nice."

Joan raised her eyebrows, a half smile on her face. "Just quite nice?"

"Well, the wedding was quite nice really, even lovely and everyone was well. Maryland is uncommonly pretty in the summer"

"Anything exciting happened?"

"An air conditioner nearly fell on my head. It came loose from its bracket and fell twenty-five stories in front of my feet. Missed me by six inches."

Joan took a sharp intake of breath. "Golly me. And, were you OK?"

"Yes, I was fine. Not my day to die. Now where is that little dog of mine?"

Poppy was standing on the back seat of Joan's car, looking out of the back window. Primrose heard her bark as they approached. The second she saw Primrose, she started scrabbling at the windows with her front paws, rushing from one end of the seat to the other. Primrose sank into the back seat; the little terrier jumped on her knee and started licking her face madly.

"Steady on, Poppy." The dog's tongue washed her eye sockets and then her nose. She hardly dared open her mouth as Poppy's pink wet tongue repeatedly licked both her cheeks, until they were wet. Poppy was shaking with excitement, pushing her nose under Primrose's hand, and cocking her head to one side, for Primrose to scratch behind her ears. "What a welcome! Yes, baby, I'm home now."

The dog settled on her knee and rested her head on her chest so she could gaze adoringly at her owner's face.

'Yes,' Primrose thought, *'it's good to be home,'* as she opened the blue front door of her little house and stepped into the bright hallway. At least it was her house. One she had bought with her own money, and not Frank's; although in Frank's case, it wasn't his money either.

She bought this house from the proceeds of an inheritance from an aunt.

Her benefactor stipulated in her will that the legacy was to be inherited by Primrose only, and not Primrose and Frank. Perhaps, she suspected something, long before anyone else did. Primrose did consider this lucky for her because the family home, the holiday cottage and everything else of value was clawed back by the authorities to pay reparation. The authorities couldn't touch Primrose's inherited property. At first, there was a couple of hundred thousand dollars, besides the house. Most of this had since disappeared, on Lyall and Todd.

The house was a small but cozy ex-State house. It was only two bedrooms and had one bathroom, no fashionable en-suite here. The living room faced north, warmed by the sun all day. The house was a single story, easy to care for, brick and tile, and secure. A fenced back garden with plenty of lawn provided space for Poppy to run about. Primrose had a small green Toyota car in the garage, just large enough to get her and Poppy to the shops, the Animal Welfare Village and the Pound. But for Primrose, the beauty of this little house was that her friends, Joan and Edwin Paine lived next door in an almost identical property.

Primrose unpacked her suitcase and loaded up the washing machine. Once the wash was on, Primrose and Poppy went next door with a bottle of duty-free whisky for Edwin and a large box of Ferrero Rocher for Joan, thank you gifts for looking after Poppy.

"You shouldn't have," murmured Joan, eyeing the chocolates, her favourites.

"It's the least I can do for all your help and kindness to me and Poppy."

"Anytime, Mrs. M, you know we love her as if she were ours." She ushered Primrose over to the armchair and offered her a cup of tea. The coffee table was laden with magazines, mostly House and Garden and snipped out pictures

of flowers. Joan must be starting to make her Christmas cards and gifts as she did every year. Many years before, before she had her family, Joan Paine used to teach home economics, and still kept up the sewing and the handcrafts, sometimes teaching groups of housewives the arts of card making, and paper crafts.

When Joan came back with the tea, Primrose cleared a space on the coffee table for the handmade tea tray. "I worry about what will happen to Poppy when I go."

"Now, don't you worry about that, Mrs. M. You're not going to go for a long time yet and rest assured, we will have her if anything happens to you." Joan poured the tea.

"Are you sure? It would give me great peace of mind if I knew she would be safe with you."

"It's a done deal, Mrs. M. We'll have her and look after her and love her just like you do. Eddie's really soft with her. You know how he is. Lets her sleep on our bed too."

Primrose felt guilty at this. Poppy had always slept on her bed since she first brought her home, the little dog cuddling up into the small of her back when the weather became cold. Once having trained her owner to allow this, the little dog considered this her rightful place.

Joan unwrapped another chocolate and bit into it, looking as if she was sticking her tongue through the chocolate coating to the gooey chocolate surrounding the hazelnut inside. "Mm mm. There is one thing though, Mrs. M. If you want us to have Poppy after you're gone, then I think you need to put it in your will and state it clearly. Otherwise, that son of yours will come along and take everything out of the house that he can sell, and that could include Poppy."

Primrose put down her tea on the table and picked up the scissors, looking at them for a moment before putting them down again and raising her cup. "Yes, I'll do that. And, I'll also make sure I leave you enough to cover any expenses too."

Joan appeared surprised at the comment. "No need for that, Mrs. M. We're happy with just the dog. We do miss our girls and the grandkids - and Poppy, well, she makes up for it, a bit."

At this Joan's arm dropped down and scratched Poppy behind her ears. Poppy tipped her head one way for the scratch and then the other. Primrose sat down in the armchair, Joan opened the chocolates and offered her one.

"You are right though. Todd is always after money for one thing or another. He would have no misgiving about getting rid of Poppy." Primrose started fiddling with the dog's lead, pulling her in closer. She gave the dog a chocolate crumb. Not a whole one, she knew chocolate wasn't good for dogs.

"Is he still bugging you for money? He is a trick, that boy of yours."

"He's always asking for money to 'invest' in his various schemes. I refused him last time he asked. He was very angry with me after that, and said all sorts of hurtful things about me for not helping him out. I haven't seen him for months."

"I don't know Mrs. M, what you did to deserve your children, but they certainly don't deserve you."

Primrose started to fidget with Poppy's lead, and she stood up to leave, picking up her house keys. "Come, Poppy, we need to go." Primrose put the lead on the dog. She couldn't meet Joan's eye, and a deep flush crept up her neck.

"Sorry Mrs. M. I didn't mean to embarrass you." Joan said lifting the half-eaten tray of Ferro Rocher to her friend. "Here, have another chocolate."

Primrose wavered, her head dropping to one side while she thought about it, before reaching out, taking one, unwrapping it slowly before popping it into her mouth. Poppy followed every movement of the chocolate until it was gone.

Primrose's normal daily routine was, Monday, Tuesday and Friday mornings volunteering at the Animal Welfare Village, Wednesday and Thursday mornings at the Pound. The afternoons were for walking the dog, visiting the library and popping over to have a chat with her friends next door. The pattern soon became reestablished, and for the next few days, she thought little of the events in Baltimore, apart from looking at the wedding photographs again.

She had almost put her visit to Atlanta down to a complex dream when her bank statement appeared in the mail, with the usual bills. Primrose always read the bank statement last in case there were any nasty surprises. She noted her electricity bill was lower than last year at the same time, no doubt because she had been away. Her credit card statement was alarming, nearly seven thousand dollars in debit. The paper shook in her hands while she read entries indicating she had bought air tickets from Baltimore to Atlanta, Atlanta to Los Angeles and Los Angeles to Auckland. There was an item for one night's accommodation at the Sheraton Atlanta.

She dropped the statement on the floor and rifled through the rest of the mail, looking for the bank statement. Normally, she would carefully open the envelope, but this time she tore it open, almost ripping the statement inside in two. She pulled it out and spread it out on the table. She looked, took her glasses off, and cleaned them with a cloth before putting them back on again and checking it again. The balance was \$NZ300,100,697 and 20cents. She sank into her lazy-boy armchair, her eyes riveted to the figure in the right-hand

column. And sat there, frozen.

The phone rang. It was her bank manager. After much fawning over his new multimillionaire client, he suggested to her that he opened a separate interest bearing account to hold the money, until she had decided what to do. Primrose nearly fainted again when he told her at the ordinary current rate of 4% the money would earn over ten million a year in interest alone. He was sure his bank could do even better for their special client.

Putting down the phone, she settled herself in her chair with a fresh cup of tea. Overwhelmed, she wanted to shut out the world and go to sleep. Maybe she'd feel better when she woke. The steady tap, tap, tap of rocking arm of the Japanese table fountain that Kat had bought for her on her seventy-eighth birthday was hypnotic. The smaller bamboo arm poured water into a larger one, which when full, tipped, spilling the water into the bowl. Tap, tap, tap. Primrose found the gentle sound soothing, steadying. She dozed off for a while before waking with a start; It's such a responsibility. What am I to do with it all?

Primrose's small house needed little housekeeping and her garden was always tidy, lawns mowed, roses deadheaded, and the hedges clipped. In the next few days, Primrose decided to go through the house, throwing out clutter, getting rid of anything broken or superfluous to the living needs of an eighty-year-old woman and her dog. She washed curtains, bedspreads, rugs and polished until everything gleamed and shone. The physical nature of the work tired her out but helped her think. Thoughts about the lottery win swirled around in her mind like bees in swarm, and she worried she would never work what to do for the best. The more Primrose thought about it, the more she realized she couldn't tell anyone. Anyone except Fred.

Fred Reeves pleasure at seeing Primrose again was clear. He was still youthful looking for his fifty-five years, and his hair was turning grey and thinning at the sides. His eyes twinkled over half-frame glasses, and he was more casually dressed in an open neck shirt with a teal sweater over and slacks. Frank had employed Fred as a junior employee straight out of college, many, many years ago, when Primrose's children were all young. The two men fell out over something, Primrose was never told what at the time, but when it all came out, she wondered if Fred suspected what Frank was doing. After leaving Frank's accounting business, Fred had set up his own company across town, and in time his son joined him. Fred's business, was thriving, and he employed several other accountants and support staff. He could afford to retire but didn't want to. Like Primrose, he was widowed and lived alone, but he still ran the business, although Allen was taking on more and more. "Kept his mind active," Fred said.

"We have to keep this quiet, Fred. You mustn't tell anyone." Primrose sought reassurance from Fred.

"Well, Allen needs to be in on it, Primrose and we need to involve Andrew Strange as well." Andrew, a lawyer, was well known to both of them.

"OK Fred. Just us, at the moment. I know I can trust you. You're the most honest person I know."

Fred held Primrose's gaze with regret in his eyes.

"So, you did know, Fred. I always wondered if you knew. You leaving so suddenly, and all that. I knew there was something!"

Fred seemed uncomfortable and paused for a moment.

"I have kicked myself for not telling you for years. I feel guilty I didn't warn you

of what he was doing."

"Why didn't you, Fred?"

He grimaced and squirmed in his seat, like a small boy. "I was young and didn't want trouble and thought it would have been devastating to you, had I told you. I also needed a reference to get another job. I was a coward, I took the easy way out, and I am so sorry for all the misery Frank caused you over the years, Primrose. I've always felt a bit responsible."

Primrose patted down her skirt and looked at Fred, with a wry smile.

"Fred dear, Frank was a bad lot I'm afraid. It wasn't just the gambling, and the cheating clients, but he was a drunk too and a nasty one at that. He never hit me of course, but he couldn't half rain verbal abuse on me. He was like that soon after we were married, when Lyall was a baby, way before the gambling started."

"Why didn't you leave him? You deserved better."

"I don't know. It wasn't done to leave your husband in those days. For better, for worse, and all that. Moreover, there were the children to think about. They adored Frank and he them. I always hoped I could change him. Silly now to think about it."

"I have thought many times, if only I'd blown the whistle, Frank might have seen the error of his ways and reformed."

"Fred, dear," She reached out and took his hand in hers, patting it in her other,

"We all do our best at the time. None of us know what might happen when we decide to take one path or another."

"Talking of paths to take, Primrose, are you sure about this?" Fred picked up the papers of the desk and examined their contents again.

"In truth, Fred, I'm extremely uncomfortable about the whole thing. About the

money, I mean. Frank was the gambler, not me. I thought at the time the money he stole off his clients was a massive amount. Nearly eight million is a lot of money to lose, especially when it wasn't his in the first place. Now, I've done what Frank was never able to do, put down a small amount of money for a ticket and won a pile of money. And, I did nothing, absolutely nothing to deserve it. Some machine in Atlanta pulled numbers at random, that were on one of 50 million tickets, and I just happened to have that ticket."

"It was your luck. Fate."

"Luck Fred? Fate? Oh, what I have had to say about those in the past! How I've lectured everyone on the evils of gambling; how it ruins families! How it ruined mine. I've banged on about the immorality of believing you could have something for nothing, and now this."

"You could buy a really lovely house, back where you used to live on Takapuna Beach, perhaps on the cliff somewhere."

"I could Fred, but you know, when Frank was arrested, everyone believed that I must have known about his crimes, all along. And, when he evaded going to prison by having the heart attack and dying after sentencing, it was me who attracted the rage from the people he cheated. The money recovered from the sale of the house, and back barely covered a tenth of the amount stolen by Frank. And when Lyall got into trouble as well, the papers had a field-day calling me a criminal matriarch. If I suddenly buy a new big house for cash now, what are people going to think? Not that I've won a lottery, but there must be a stash of money I've kept hidden away from the authorities. You know that. People are quick to judge these days, and they don't always bother to check out the facts."

"You could still be a lot more comfortable in your living situation, Primrose."

"I'm fine, Fred. I have what I need. I am content with what I have now. But, I do

want you to help me set this up."

As they talked, Fred relaxed more into enjoying Primrose's plans, well for the most part. Some of her ideas he thought were bit daft but, it was Primrose's money, not his, and it was his job to help her realize her goals. Knowing something that no one else knew, gave him a sense of potency, a tiny inner frisson to brighten his day.

A few weeks after the meeting with Fred, Primrose caught the bus to the centre of Auckland. Late August is supposed to be early spring, but it was still cold and wet and her old coat was shabby. She needed a new one, and planned to get it from Stanford and Chester, in the city. Primrose rarely went shopping in town, since Frank's disgrace and death, and never in the more expensive stores.

At the top of the escalator was the first floor, full of high fashion clothing with prices to match, mostly aimed at the young professional with much disposable income, not elderly ladies well past their fashionable prime. Primrose searched through all the racks of designer clothing and despaired of finding what she wanted until she tried on a camel wool coat. Made of Italian fabric, the coat was a perfect fit, stylish and warm as toast. She balked at the price, almost dismissing the prospect of buying it before remembering money wasn't something she needed to think about any more.

Large carrier bag in hand, containing the carefully tissue paper wrapped coat, Primrose decided to explore the second story. She remembered, in the old days, there was a cafe somewhere up there, and it was time for a cup of tea.

Tucked away at the back of the second floor was the cafe, just as she

remembered it two or three decades before. Some things never change, she thought, feeling comforted, even before she joined the queue. The staff all wore logo'd black uniforms now, no more frilly white caps and aprons. The decor of the cafe was more modern than on her last visit, and the display of food more enticing than she remembered. The classics were still there, asparagus rolls and three tier sandwiches, now in a choice of white or whole meal. Assorted salads healthily balanced the array of slices, cakes and muffins occupying two glass-fronted counters. Primrose ordered a pot of tea, and as a special treat, a mouthwatering custard slice with crisp flaky pastry, thick yellow custard between the layers, and white icing on the top. Finding small table in the corner, she sat down to consider her day so far. It was a long time since she had treated herself to something new, and she had to admit to herself, it was nice. More than that, it was quite nice. She looked up as the girl arrived with her order, and as she did so she caught the eye of a woman across the room.

It was Mrs. Millsom. At that moment, Primrose wished she was Alice in Wonderland, with a bottle of size-changing elixir labelled, 'Drink Me'. But, all she had was a cup of tea, and she didn't think it would enable her to shrink to invisible. Mrs. Millsom bobbed her head in recognition towards Primrose, rose from her table and made her way over to where Primrose was sitting. Her shape grew larger and larger the closer she came, until she stood at Primrose's table with her back against the window casting her shadow over the table. The custard slice seemed less inviting than before.

"Primrose Moore? Hello."

"Hello." Primrose could only mumble expecting the usual onslaught she usually received from former clients of Frank, even after all these years.

Mrs. Millsom gestured towards the empty chair.

"Can I join you?"

"Please do." Primrose didn't mean this, but what else could she say? Mrs. Millsom sat down, unblocking the light from the window.

"How are you?"

"Fine thanks, and you?" Primrose murmured, looking into her teacup, her mouth dry.

"I'm glad I've seen you." Mrs. Millsom hesitated for a moment before continuing.

"You know I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for all those things I said about you years ago. We were so angry at the loss of all our money. It was most of our superannuation savings, you know. We just saw your big house and lifestyle and thought you must have been in on it at the time. If we'd stopped to think, before mouthing off, we would have seen you were a victim too."

Primrose felt her throat tighten, and she squeezed her eyes tight to stop tears springing out. She remembered the harsh words Mrs. Millsom and several others had for her at the time. No one knew the truth, that Frank never confided in her, that she had no idea what he was up to until he was caught. While she suspected he might be at the casino, she found betting slips periodically when sorting out his clothes, or even seeing another woman, it never occurred to her that he was stealing client's money. Perhaps, Frank's long time insults of her being a fool, chump and sucker were justified.

Mrs. Millsom waited for a reply; Primrose struggled to speak, her voice squeaking as her throat tightened further. "I'm sure you were. It's kind of you to say these things now."

Her companion appeared to be thinking of what to say next. She took a look around her to see who was nearby, and dropped her voice to a whisper. She leant over the table to speak closer to Mrs. Moore. Primrose was suddenly

overpowered by a whiff of strong perfume from Mrs. Millsom. She surmised Mrs. Millsom had been trying some out in the perfumery on the ground floor.

"But, a wonderful thing has just happened though. You'll never guess."

"What has happened, Mrs. Millsom?"

"The other day we received a letter from some solicitor or other. The solicitor said that a wealthy anonymous benefactor, concerned about losses people had made through fraud, had decided to donate some money to victims of fraud, including us."

"Fancy that, Mrs. Millsom, and after all those years!"

"Yes, after all these years. And, do you know there was a cheque for all our money, plus interest."

"Do you know who it was from?" Primrose toyed with her custard slice, removing the icing layer to the side of her plate.

"The solicitor wouldn't tell us who this was. Why us though? Do you know anything about this Primrose?"

"Well dear, it can't have been Frank. He's long gone."

"Yes, and I heard you lost everything too, so, it can't have been you either. Anyway, I thought I'd let you know. Considering all the other people who have lost money with all these finance crashes recently, we're jolly lucky. Nice to know there are still benefactors in the world. We'll be OK for the rest of our lives now, so long as we're careful. No hard feelings then?"

"No hard feelings, Mrs. Millsom. I hope everything turns out well for you."

"Morning tea, anyone?"

Jennifer, the youngest of the people who worked in the Animal Welfare Village shop, placed a large cafetiere of coffee and a white china pot of tea on the table in the staffroom. A few moments later, she brought in a large plate of cheese scones, blueberry and cream cheese muffins and assorted decorated cupcakes.

"What's brought this on?" Pat asked. She was an older, single woman, recently retired from a senior administration job in the Inland Revenue.

"Present from the Executive Director. He opened his mail this morning and found a cheque for two million dollars - two million for the rehoming fund." Jennifer had a broad grin on her face as she put the plate down on the table.

"Gosh, dear that must have been a surprise," said Primrose, "Did they say who gave the money?"

"Anonymous, apparently. It came from a firm of solicitors, from an unknown benefactor they said. Didn't even want a tax certificate to claim any tax back."

"They wouldn't be able to claim much back anyway," sniffed Pat. Jennifer picked up the cafetiere."

"I'll have tea, thanks Jennifer." Primrose said.

Jennifer handed her the cup of tea. "As you are the oldest person here, Mrs. M. Perhaps you'd like first pick of the muffins."

"Oh really, dear. That's kind of you. Do you think I could have that one with the cherry on top?"

"Oh course Mrs. M." Jennifer handed her the cupcake. "Bit of scone for Poppy?"

Poppy's scone disappeared down her throat in two licks. Unlike Poppy,

Primrose relished every crumb, saving the cherry for the last, delicious, special treat. Jennifer helped herself to the coffee, and a large muffin, biting into it and giggled when the cream cheese plopped out off the muffin and on to her face.

Cathy, one of the paid staff, in charge of the shop, heard her volunteer crew chatting and laughing in the staffroom, so she finished serving her customer, put the 'Back in five minutes sign' on the door, and joined the group. She padded towards the morning tea table, considering the array of goodies. Primrose, Pat, and Jennifer had barely made a dent in the pile of food. Longing filled her eyes when she saw the array of food.

"Oh, what lovely muffins. I'm supposed to be on diet." She turned her body sideways on to the group, holding her stomach and bottom in with her hands. "Do you think I look any thinner?"

Nobody thought so, but they all pretended to appraise Cathy's figure before murmuring agreement.

"So, I can have a muffin then, as a reward?" She took two, biting into the first, with a mm mm. "Did I hear someone has made a big donation?"

"Yes," said Jennifer, "two million. Anonymous."

"Well, that's all terribly nice, and I'm glad for the donation and the morning tea, but you know these people. I bet it isn't truly anonymous, just anonymous to us, and the public. Donators of that size usually don't want to be anonymous. They want their generosity noted and chalked up on their philanthropy tally, so they eventually get a knighthood or gong for services to the community."

"Oh, Cathy dear, that's really cynical," said Primrose.

"Maybe so," said Cathy stuffing her mouth with the rest of the muffin, "perhaps this is the exception that proves the rule, as they say. I know of a few 'anonymous' donators that make damn sure their name gets known to the right

people. You know what I mean?" She tapped her nose and winked. Primrose thought she had been watching too many comedy shows.

"Anyway, no doubt the Director is delighted of course. The last appeal didn't get as much as hoped, so this gift could make up for it." She swallowed the rest of her muffin. 'Back on the diet, tomorrow.'

"For sure." Jennifer said.

Primrose thought the morning tea was a nice gesture, and she was glad the Executive Director had been pleased enough to offer a thank you to the staff. Having eaten a whole muffin, she felt full up and didn't want any lunch. She had a visiting order for that afternoon.

She dreaded these visits, and the scrutiny, of her driving licence to make sure she was who she said, the searching through her handbag revealing its contents to the world, the patting down of her body to make sure she wasn't hiding anything illegal such as a gun or a mobile phone, or worse, a cannabis joint. The sniffer dog she didn't mind, though they wouldn't let her pat him. This ritual happened every time she went and to everyone, she knew that, but it still felt intrusive and degrading.

The prison was on the outskirts of town, where the city gave way to smallholdings and farms. It was in a valley surrounded by low hills, patch-worked paddocks, planted with cabbages and flowers. The soil lacked the richness of the Waikato, and was mostly heavy clay, but was good enough, with supplementation, for market gardening and hydroponics. The prison lookout towers could see across the paddocks in all directions. It would be easy to spot someone who shouldn't be there. Someone in an orange sweatshirt.

She went into the visiting room with the other visitors to wait for Lyall to

arrive. It was a large room with small barred windows, off white walls, and steel grey linoleum on the floor. Small tables made of a heavy-duty plastic with chairs to match scratched and battered from being stacked too many times, or maybe thrown about, lined up in rows, with little space between. Each of the tables had a visitor, wives, girlfriends, lovers, friends, some with small children. Some greeted each other as old friends; acquaintances forged within this room, visiting time after visiting time; their familiarities lending support to each other.

Other visitors were lost in their own thoughts. She surveyed the room, 'soulless,' she thought. A buzz of excitement went through the room when a door unlocked and the men poured in, all wearing prison issue orange sweatshirts and grey track pants. Several prison officers took up positions around the periphery of the room. The noise of people calling out and waving erupted in the room.

Primrose stood up and raised her hand and waved. Lyall saw her and swaggered across the room to stand by her table. He looks so like Frank. When he sat down, she noticed his hair had receded more than last time and was much more flecked with grey. He'd left the hair long on top, but he had shaved the sides to a stubble. He'd put on weight too, especially around the middle. Mustn't be getting enough exercise. Lyall sat opposite her and rolled up his sleeve. She gasped. Oh my God, he's got a new tattoo. A drawing of a wolf's head with teeth bared. Lyall's lip curled at his mother's gasp. Primrose supposed he could always cover up the arm with a nice shirt. "Lyall, dear, what have you done to yourself."

"Not even an 'Hello Lyall, nice to see you,' before you start criticizing Mum?"

"I'm sorry, dear. It was a shock that's all, seeing that thing on your arm."

Primrose averted her eyes and fiddled with her handkerchief. Lyall leant back in

his chair and drummed the table with his hand.

"I think it's stylish, Mother dear. Shame you don't like it. Anyway, mother not long now, only another eighteen months and outski."

"It will be nice to see you settled again, dear. Have you thought about what you will do when you do get out?"

"Of course I have." Lyall's left nostril flared, and he pondered his mother as if she had just flown in from Mars.

"I understand they teach you new skills in here to help you when you get out, find a job and things." Primrose said leaning over to touch his hand.

Lyall snatched it away and started scratching his ear before giving a little laugh.

"You think this is a bloody sheltered workshop, don't you? Socially minded screws teaching us woodwork, gardening and catering. Oh, and communication skills and how to express ourselves, so we don't get misunderstood?" His voice was mocking, taunting, just like his father's used to be in the old days. "And see the error of our wicked ways. Then, when we leave here, we walk into a decent job and become model citizens? Get fuckin' real, mother."

"Don't swear, Lyall dear. You had a good job once and a happy life. Wouldn't you like that again?" Primrose eyes flicked around the room, at the miserable surroundings, it's starkness making her shiver.

"A happy life? What on earth do you think is going to give me a happy life? What sort of job do you think I could get now? Customs Service again? Security guard? Bus driver? Doctor? Lawyer?"

"I only want what is best for you, Lyall." Primrose opened her handbag and rummaged inside, finding a small bag of chocolate caramels he'd loved since being a small boy. She passed them over the table to him. He took the bag of sweets and pocketed them.

"Best? Best? What you think best is not what I think best. What you want for me is boring, boring, boring. Every day the same, boring people, same boring conversations every day. Then go home to an equally boring wife. Forget that and, in case you've forgotten in your senility mother, she left me and took the kids to Oz." Lyall laughed.

"Martin came back though."

"He knew which side to stick with. He's a clever boy, takes after his dad." Lyall jutted his chin out and puffed out his chest.

"I haven't seen him for a while, and I don't think I have met my great-grandson. I'd like to see him."

"He's a little corker, that one. Spitting image of Marty. His Dad's doing well too. Got a couple of bars and a multi-story car park building and is thinking of expanding into Waikato." Lyall smiled rarely, but he now beamed.

"Well, that's very nice dear. I'm glad."

"And, he's just had a bit of luck on the horses."

"Luck, luck again. I wish you boys wouldn't gamble." Primrose's head dropped, and she shook it slowly from side to side.

"Life's a bloody gamble, mother, and I intend my luck to change when I get outta here. Lyall shrugged his shoulders as he spat out his words at his mother.

"Lyall, dear, you ended up in here because you broke the law, not because of bad luck."

Primrose surprised herself with her assertiveness. Lyall leant across the table towards his mother. "I ended in here," he hissed at her, "because I had the bad luck to have a silly cow of a mother who shopped me!"

Lyall furrowed his brow and wrinkled his nose at his mother.

"I didn't want to get you into trouble, Lyall dear. The parcel was addressed to

me. Unsurprisingly, I opened it."

Primrose remembered the day with a shudder. Parcels didn't often come her way, and she was surprised to get this one. A bad cold kept her in bed for the few days before, and she stayed home rather than infect the other people at the Village. Primrose opened the parcel and found in it three pairs of men's shoes and a teddy bear. She knew she hadn't ordered any shoes or a teddy bear. She thought the sender had the address wrong, and it was for another Mrs. P Moore, not her, so when Joan popped in to see how she was, she asked her to take it to the Post Office. Much to her surprise, Lyall made one of his rare visits a few hours later and demanded the parcel, but by then a suspicious postal worker had handed it over to the police. At the trial, she found out he had been arranging parcels to be sent to her address and collecting them before she picked them up, for a couple of years.

"Like I say, bad luck for me, you being home that day."

"Lyall, dear, aren't you sorry?"

"Bloody sorry, I'm in here. But, I've made some excellent contacts in here. Learned where I went wrong and all that. Now I've got a much better idea how to manage my business, once I get out. Rule number one, don't work for anyone else. Make them work for you."

"So, it's all not been wasted then, dear?"

"No, Mum. Apart from the boredom, it's not all been wasted." Lyall stretched out his arms in an arc above his head, arched his back and grinned.

Primrose leant forward towards him. "Lyall dear, please, get a proper job when you're out of here. Show some responsibility, you know, work for money, earn it!" Primrose flushed slightly, burying her nose in her handkerchief and pretending to blow her nose.

Lyall's eyes were cold as he peered at his mother, his lip curling in contempt. "I do earn it."

"But, what you do is criminal, Lyall dear. It's not right. It hurts other people. Your father hurt people. Doesn't that put you off?"

Lyall sneered. "Those people were all fat cats, fiddling their taxes and wanting twice as much interest on their money as anyone else. They deserved to get ripped off."

"Please, Lyall, I'm begging you. Give this life up; get an honest job, any job. If you do, I promise you I'll help you out. But, I won't if you continue along this path."

"You'll help me out with what mother dear? Your pension? You only want to help me on your terms. No surprises there."

"Lyall, that's unfair. I helped you out when I could. I got you the best lawyers I could afford, out of what little I had. I didn't want you to go to prison because you could only get legal aid. I believed in you. I couldn't believe that you would risk a good job, with a government pension too, or your marriage and kids, to sell misery to unfortunate people. I thought the police had made a genuine mistake when they arrested you."

"And, have never stopped reminding me since, of how much I owe you. You are a bitch, mother."

"That's not nice, dear."

"You'll see how nice I can be. Still got that dog of yours?" Primrose was halfway out of her seat, preparing to leave as he said this. She gave a shiver and stared at Lyall. She didn't like the smirk on his face. He didn't get up from the table, so Primrose couldn't give him a hug, not that she wanted to in that moment. She said goodbye to him without looking at him, busying herself with her handbag

and buttoning her coat. She made her way towards the locked door and freedom. The air in the visiting room was stifling, the prison had yet to turn off the heating for the summer. As the visitors left, it smelled of exhaled tobacco, stale sweat and cheap perfume. Primrose was eager to meet the fresh air outside the prison. She was glad she hadn't put on her new coat to visit Lyall.

Primrose didn't sleep well after her visit to the prison. The visits always unsettled her. She usually slept fitfully all-night after a visit, the mental tape recording of the conversation with her son, playing over and over in her mind. Occasionally she would nod off, only to wake with a start, what seemed like a few minutes later, her heart pounding, and 'where did I go wrong' screaming in her brain. Lyall, her eldest, such a sweet baby. Whatever happened to him?

When Frank was arrested, Primrose was shocked and felt deep shame, but when Lyall was sentenced to ten years, a few years later, the feeling was one of utter despair. If only she had left Frank when the children had been small, maybe she would have been able to influence them better. But, Frank would have seen her dead first before he would lose his boys. This thought always gave her shivers, despite the fact he had never been violent. If only I'd never married him; If only I'd found out he was cheating clients; If only I'd realized earlier about the gambling, he might have been helped; If only...if only...if only.. Regretful thoughts lashed like whips, thwarting her sleep.

Morning came, and Primrose still felt tired. Her eyes were puffy, deep bags had formed underneath. She needed to do something to snap her out of her low mood and the garden needed attention.

Primrose was bent over her vegetable patch, culling lettuces, when Joan Paine came flying through the gate, waving a letter. "Mrs. M. Look at this." Joan was in her housework clothes and still had a rubber glove on her left hand. She seemed excited, cheeks flushed, a broad smile on her face and her eyes were sparkling while she thrust the paper at Primrose.

She took it gently, smoothed it out and considered it with consummate

concentration. "How nice, dear. What a surprise."

"Well, I thought it was from Margaret of course because she was saying on the phone last week how much she wanted to see me and I was telling her how much we missed them and the grandchildren and she said she wished there was a way in which they could get us over for a visit and much as they would have liked to buy us air tickets things are a bit tight for them at the moment and they couldn't afford it." Joan took a breath. "Then this came today. I was sure it was from Margaret, so I rang her just as she was getting the kids off to school - I'd forgotten they are two hours behind us in Melbourne - anyway she was pretty excited too but said no it wasn't them and she didn't know who had sent them!"

"Fancy that, dear. So, who do you think they've come from?"

"Blow me if I know." Joan shook her head from side to side, her brow furrowed, "The letter came from a travel agency in Auckland City. I rang them to ask who sent them, but they said they didn't know. They said it was a man though, they referred to 'him' but they said 'he' said he was working for a 'client' who would remain anonymous."

"That's all quite nice, dear. Fancy that!" Primrose handed the paper back to Joan and dropped to her knees to scrutinize the veggie patch for weeds. Joan glanced down at the paper again before hugging it to herself.

"Quite nice? It's wonderful. I haven't told Edwin yet. He will be over the moon. We haven't seen the youngest grandchild, only photos, and that's not the same. We didn't think we could afford to go over and see them until Edwin retired and he gets his gratuity, or we won lotto or something. And, now this!" Once more she studied the piece of paper, drinking in every word, memorizing every last detail.

"When do you go?" Primrose's trowel was working hard as she pulled out a couple more lettuces.

"Next week. Can you believe it?"

"Yes dear I can. It's quite nice really."

"You are funny Mrs. M. You don't believe in going over the top, do you?"

"Well, don't like being too flowery, you know." Primrose spotted a weed and pulled it out. "Would you like a lettuce to go with your tea, dear?"

The next day, Primrose tapped on Joan's door. She had on her new coat and was wearing gloves and had her best handbag with her. Joan was in her baking apron, the linen one decorated with chillies, now slightly obscured by a dusting of flour. Edwin liked a bit of cake after his tea.

"I've got an appointment at the doctors, dear. Would you keep an ear out for Poppy? I've given her a bone, so I think she'll be O.K. in the house. She'll chew on it for hours. But, just in case she starts barking, could you just pop in to make sure she's all right."

"No problem Mrs. M. Happy to bring her here if you prefer."

Primrose heaved a big sigh of relief. "Oh would you, dear? That would be so much better for her."

Joan chuckled, wiping her hands on her baking apron. "I'll come and get her. You're not ill are you Mrs. M?"

"No, dear. It's just a check up. My friend Fred thought it would be a good idea."

"Who are you going to see?"

"That nice lady doctor. The one who was on the telly the other night, just after the news. She's written a book you know."

"I saw her, pretty little thing, but isn't she an expert on Alzheimer's disease?"

"Yes, dear. She wrote a whole book on Dementia, all by herself." Primrose picked some invisible fluff off her smart new coat.

'But, you, haven't, surely, you can't have, not the way you do crosswords?'

"Oh, don't worry dear. I don't have dementia; at least I don't think I have. I'm just going for a check over to make sure I don't, that's all."

"Why would you want to do that?" Joan looked mystified.

Primrose looked about to say something and then changed her mind. After a moment she said, "I don't want anyone saying I don't know what I'm doing, dear. It's just in case."

Primrose was putting out Poppy's dinner when the doorbell went. Primrose didn't get many visitors, and it was getting dark, so she left the security chain on until she knew who this was. Opening the door, she saw it was Todd.

"Hello, Todd. What a nice surprise." She fiddled with the door chain, unhooking it so she could open the door.

"Hello Ma."

"Todd dear, do come in." Primrose opened the door and let him in.

Todd was wearing a black wool overcoat.

'Expensive, better quality than the one I've just bought,' thought Primrose.

Todd took it off when he got to the living room, throwing it over the back of a sofa. He sat down in Primrose's lazy-boy chair and pulled up the footrest to show off his spotless, shiny, black shoes. He opened the buttons on his suit jacket to show an ivory shirt and dark-blue tie with a gold tiepin.

Very smart, he does look nice, thought Primrose.

"Cup of tea, Ma?"

"Yes, I'll get you one."

Primrose busied herself in her small kitchen, coming out with a patterned tea tray with two cups of steaming tea and a plate of arrowroot biscuits.

"Can't you get yourself some decent biscuits, Ma?" Todd said reaching for the biscuits and taking a couple.

"I like these, and anyway I don't get many visitors. But it's nice to see you, dear. It's been a while, and I really don't see enough of you. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

Todd bit into his biscuit, and chewed it slowly before answering. "I thought I'd let you know I'm getting a divorce."

Primrose's jaw dropped, and she put down her cup of tea on the coffee table.

"Again?"

"Yes, again. I don't have much luck with my wives, do I? Anyway she's decided she's off and is threatening to take me to the cleaners."

"I didn't think you had much left to clean up." Primrose was immediately sorry the minute she said this. She didn't do irony well.

"Now, Ma. That's not fair."

"I'm sorry, Todd. I shouldn't have said that."

"No, you shouldn't and it's none of your bloody business what I have, or don't have anyway." Todd frowned and crossed his arms tightly.

Primrose's head dropped and her voice mumbled to the floor. "I know, dear and I'm sorry."

Looking up, she smiled at him. "It's good to see you're looking so well. What are you doing with yourself these days?"

"I've been buying and selling stuff on e-Bay. Dead easy, advertise stuff, get people to pay for it upfront, then order whatever it is in from Taiwan or China. Hope it arrives before they start complaining about delays. Change email

address if it doesn't."

Primrose gazed at him, eyes wide. "You mean you're dealing in fakes?"

"Not fakes, exactly, replicas. Got a line in DVDs and watches too. Very profitable. Made quite a bit last year. "

Todd rolled up his sleeve and showed his mother his watch, a Rolex. "You'd never tell this from the real thing. Don't worry mother, it's all legitimate. The punters know they're getting replicas, at least, they should for the price they pay."

He leant back in the chair, his arms arching above him as he stretched, just like Lyall did, just like Frank used to do.

"It's nice that you're doing well, dear. I'm sorry your wife's left you. I don't think I've met this one."

"Nor will you, thank God. No, she's upped and left and is suing me for half my worldly goods. She won't get anything though."

"But, if you're doing so well dear." Primrose offered him another arrowroot biscuit, but he waved her away.

"Yours not to reason why, Mother. On paper I don't make anything of course, so she'll be hard pushed to find anything she can take a cut from."

"And, you think that's fair?" Primrose regarded her son for any flicker of doubt.

"Of course, it's fair, mother. I'm the one who's made everything while she's been swanning around, doing her nails, playing ladies who lunch and doing the rounds of the tennis clubs. She wouldn't get a job once we married but was prepared to spend the money. She's not getting a cent more. She's taken the car. That's all she's getting."

He stood up and walked around the room, pausing to look at his reflection in the mirror over the mantelpiece. He sleeked his hair down and adjusted his

tie, making sure the knot was perfect.

"That's as maybe, Todd, but what are you doing about your children, my grandchildren. The ones you had with the wife before and the wife before that?"

"The authorities can't make me pay if I don't have the money can they?" He pushed his chin out at his mother.

"Todd, you should look at yourself. You're very selfish."

Todd's eye's narrowed. "I'm selfish. I'm selfish!" his voice was raising in a crescendo. He screwed his eyes up further and wagged his finger at his mother.

"Yes Todd, you are." Primrose stood up and put his empty cup on the tray to take back into the kitchen.

"You're the selfish bitch, mother. You give all that money to Lyall, but when I ask you to help me out you refuse."

"Todd, the money I gave to Lyall was for his defence. He was going to jail, and he swore he was innocent. What else could I do? And anyway, I lent you a hundred thousand dollars to set up that property business of yours. You've never repaid me."

"Well, that was an investment you made, mother. It was unfortunate the business failed. Global economy and all that. It was a good idea. Wrong time. The money was an investment, not a gift like you gave to Lyall. You made a bad financial decision and lost out, that's all." Primrose tensed and the cups on the tea tray rattled while she carried them into the kitchen. She came back into the room. "It was a loan, Todd, a loan. You were supposed to pay me back."

"Show me a document that said it was a loan. I issued you with a share certificate didn't I? The company bombed. You lost. End of."

Primrose had to admit he had issued her with a share certificate, but when Todd asked for the money, the arrangement was for a payback loan. If only she

had got it drawn up properly by Andrew, but she didn't. He was her son, and she trusted him. Always pay your debts, she had tried to teach her children. What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine too had been Frank's philosophy. No wonder her children were confused.

"Anyway, mother, you've this house. If you're short, raise a mortgage. No, on second thoughts, don't do that, it will reduce the value of the house. How much is it worth now? Must be a few hundred thousand. Come in handy when you're gone. Can't be that long to wait, now."

Primrose bit her lip and felt a jet of hot tears come into her eyes.

"You know, Mother, you deserve all you get. You talk about me being selfish, but as far as you're concerned, it's all about you. You alienate everyone by your 'holier than thou attitude'. That's the problem isn't it? You look down on us, Dad, Lyall, me, Leone? No wonder your precious Kat left you too."

"Thank you for letting me know about Naomi, Todd. I think you had better go now."

A thousand needles pricked her body.

Todd climbed out of the lazy-boy. Poppy came into the room and regarded her mistress and the visitor in turn. She was standing still, head held high with a straight tail. Todd walked towards his mother, and bent to give her a peck on the cheek, but Poppy moved herself between the two of them, preventing any close contact.

"See you've still got that bloody mutt."

He brushed the dog with his foot and started towards the door. Poppy moved in like a practiced chess player to block his exit. Check. Todd made a kick towards the dog, a more deliberate one this time. The dog eyed him, staring hard, without blinking.

"Bloody thing's going to attack me, call it off." He sounded alarmed.

"Poppy dear? Poppy wouldn't hurt a fly."

Primrose glanced over to where the dog was standing. To her surprise, the dog's ears were straight up, alert and not moving, her back was rigid, and her curled back lips showed her sharp, white canine teeth. A low snarl came out from deep inside her.

In the few months before Primrose's unexpected death, Andrew Strange worked closely with Fred Reeves, and his son Allen, to make sure they fulfilled all her wishes. The lawyer was confident they had everything covered.

The dog alerted Joan. It was unusual for Poppy to bark constantly, but she did so on that morning. Joan knew immediately that something was wrong. Poppy's bark was a higher pitched, more frightened sounding bark than usual. She immediately went round to her neighbour's house and found Primrose lying on the floor, unable to move. It seemed as if she had just washed the tiles on the kitchen floor, and while putting the mop away, slipped on a wet patch. Joan organized the ambulance and went with her to the hospital, staying with her while the doctor admitted her.

Primrose had fractured the neck of her femur, just below the hip. A NOF they called it at the hospital, where people lose their identity and become referred to by their diagnosis -- the NOF in bed three. The break needed pinning and plating urgently. Primrose was one of ten other elderly people admitted that weekend, with the same problem. Not wanting to fuss, she was the last patient in the queue and didn't get to theatre for a couple of days. Lying in bed, unable to move, and despite the nurses and physiotherapists encouraging her to take deep breaths, pneumonia set in. The old people's friend.

Primrose went peacefully, with Joan and Edwin by her side. Her last words were "Look after Poppy. And Kat." When reassured they would do so to the best of their ability, she closed her eyes for the last time. Now she lay in her Eco coffin with a picture of her children at the beach when they were very young in

one hand. Frank wasn't in the picture. He must have taken it. In her other hand was a picture of Poppy and one of herself with an eight –year – old Katherine. The little girl was shyly hanging to Primrose's skirts. Leone must have taken it.

"The funeral is all prepaid." Andrew told Todd on the phone, "You don't need to worry about it. Your mother arranged everything."

"I hope she didn't spend too much money on it."

"She spent what she thought was necessary, Todd." Andrew flicked a bit of debris out of his front tooth with a toothpick.

"I hope you're not going to charge like a horse, Andrew. She's not worth much."

Andrew anticipated the moment Todd found out what his mother was truly worth with relish, but that moment wasn't now. "My fee was decided by Primrose before she died. It's all set out in her Will and various other documents, which you are very welcome to see, after the funeral. I'll be organizing a reading of the Will, for those mentioned, after the service."

"Can you just tell me how much the house is worth then? Six hundred thousand? Seven?" Todd's voice on the other end of the phone sounded upbeat, optimistic, and expectant.

"You'll see when it goes on the market."

"So, divided between the three of us, could be a couple of hundred thousand each?"

"I think we need to get your Mum's funeral over first, Todd, before we start selling her house and dividing it up." Andrew put the phone down and went over to the espresso machine on the sideboard in his office. He made himself a large black coffee, put two teaspoons of sugar in, and drank it down in one. He would have preferred a large whisky, but, it was only nine o'clock in the morning and

he had a feeling it was going to be a long day.

Primrose passed away a couple of days before Kat arrived from Kathmandu. The row with her Gran kept playing over in her head, and no matter how much she concentrated on the breathing technique taught at the retreat, the memory of it continued to intrude. She had only to close her eyes to hear her words screaming at her Gran again. She could see again the hurt in her Gran's eyes, and remember, only too clearly, the self-satisfied pride that her barbs had hit home. And, for what? None of it mattered now.

For the funeral, Kat dressed from head to toe in her favourite colour, black. She braided her long dark curly hair with dark maroon and yellow ribbons, the only accent. Her red-rimmed eyes seemed immense against her pale skin.

The vicar had just started the service after the first processional hymn, when the door rattled open and in walked Lyall Moore handcuffed to a prison warder. Lyall swaggered down the aisle of the chapel, noting who was there, making sure everyone saw his handcuffs and were suitably unnerved. The vicar stopped talking until the pair had reached the front seat and took their place next to Todd, Leone and Kat. Fred glared at Lyall.

The vicar, who had been patiently waiting, started the service off again. For a full five minutes, Leone wittered on about the universe and how her mum was now star dust and part of the eternal cosmos, ending her speech overcome with loud sobbing that seemed put on to Kat. Her mother went over to the coffin placed her hand on top, crying 'Mummy, Mummy.'

"Oh, for fuck's sake," said Lyall loudly, getting an angry look from the Vicar.

Joan spoke movingly of her 20-year friendship with Primrose, and then Edwin followed. The Executive Director of the Animal Welfare Village and Pat,

on behalf of the volunteers in the shop, talked about her service to the animals, while Lyall yawned and pretended to go to sleep. The manager of the local pound spoke of Primrose's compassion, and the local librarian of her love of reading. Fred was the final speaker to speak.

As they left the church, Leone took her daughter's arm. Kat tried to shake it off, but Leone gripped it even firmer. "You might have looked a bit pleased to see me, Katherine."

"I might say the same to you, mother."

"Don't be cheeky. After all I've done for you."

"After all you've done for me? Let me see, what was that now? Throwing me out at thirteen, graciously allowing me to come back for a bit after I left Uni, but telling me to leave before your precious husband starts showing more interest in me than you."

"That's not what it was about, and you know it. Jerry would never.... "

"Never? Never what, mother? Where's Jerry now, by the way? Couldn't be bothered to come over? Don't tell me, he's got a guilty conscience!"

Leone raised her hand to slap Kat, but she dodged and Leone merely slapped the air.

"Sorry, I've been such a disappointment to you, Mum."

Her mother's mouth drooped. "You're not.... You're not, Katherine. But, you can't keep drifting like you are. You really should be thinking about what you're going to do in life. Go back to Uni. Even if you don't get a degree, you'll have the opportunity to meet a man who is going places."

"Mother, how many times do I have to tell you, I'm not interested in becoming a social predator looking for a rich husband? I'm not interested in becoming a

clone of you!"

Leone took a step back and put her hand over her mouth. Kat could tell she was seething. Good.

"You ungrateful wretch." Leone said. "OK, so I am not the mother of the decade, but I've only ever wanted the best for you, Katherine. Truly. I made sure you had everything you needed, don't forget that."

"Oh, sorry, silly me. Fancy me forgetting about the frilly designer dresses, and the expensive shoes, and the computers and iPods, and mobile phones, and the school trips. Thank you Mother for your generosity. I'll make sure I remember from now on."

Her mother slipped her hand through her handbag and crossed her arms tightly around her. She was frowning. "Sarcasm doesn't become you, Katherine. We gave your Gran a lot of money over the years for you. And, Katherine, If you're going to wear black all the time you should have worn that gold necklace I gave you for your birthday?"

Leone, herself was wearing expensive rings on each finger, several gold bangles and a heavy gold chain around her neck. Kat blushed and strode away from her mother as quickly as she could.

"Don't tell me, you've lost it already," her mother said stopping on the pavement. Kat stopped also and turned around. "Not exactly."

Leone gave a penetrating look to her daughter. "Meaning of 'not exactly'?"

"I gave it to a worthy cause." Kat mumbled into her chest.

"You did what? That necklace cost a fortune." Of course it did! Kat lifted her head.

"I donated it to a Buddhist monastery in Nepal."

"You did what? You idiot! That's exactly what these places want. They want you

to give them anything of value, so they can be kept in luxury."

Kat thought of the monks she had seen with their begging bowls, begging for rice from the public. In contrast, the students at their International Centre were well fed for the fees they paid; they weren't expected to go without.

"You gave it to me. A gift, Mum. A G.I.F.T. You know, one of those things you hand over to someone and say this is yours. Not 'yours under certain conditions I'll stipulate'. I didn't want you to buy it for me. I don't need a gold necklace, and they needed it more than me."

"That's the last you'll get from me, lady."

"Fine. I'm happy with that." Kat strode off into the reception hall, leaving her mother standing by herself on the grass by the chapel.

"Moet and Chandon? Champagne? French? Who ordered all this? There are crates of the bloody stuff." Despite his protest to Andrew, Todd was already on his fifth glass. "Where have all these people come from? Didn't know she knew so many people."

Andrew tried to keep a straight face. "Yes, good turnout. Most of the people she worked with at the Animal Village and the Pound came, so did all her neighbours and people from the library, and the local shops she used to frequent. Your mother was pretty popular."

Andrew noted with some satisfaction the vicar needed to stop the testimonials from all the people who wanted to speak because of lack of time, and ask the disappointed mourners to share their stories at the reception. "And, as for the champagne, Primrose wanted to have a bit of a celebration, today."

"Everyone's drinking my inheritance, Andrew. I should have been informed. If she wanted champagne, Aussie fizz would have done at a fifth of the price."

Todd took another flute from the waiter when she went past. "Quite a spread too. I dread to think how much this all cost."

"Don't you worry about it Todd. It's what your mother wanted."

'Yes', Andrew thought, *'the funeral has all gone off, to use a Primrose expression, quite nice really'*. He wandered over to speak to the Paines, who were standing in a corner of the room by themselves. Joan was eating a Lamington, with distaste written on her face, and Edwin wearing an old-fashioned black suit just a little too small for him, was drinking a cup of tea.

"I hear you're retiring soon, Edwin," said Andrew, inclining his head towards Joan and shaking Edwin's hand.

"Yes, a couple of months to the gold clock, the farewell party and everyone forgetting who I was after that. Forty-five years I've worked for that company."

"I expect you'll miss work Edwin?"

"Maybe. It isn't the most exciting job in the world, quality control. Only gets interesting when something goes wrong. It will be good to have time to develop some hobbies. I've always wanted to do photography. I think I'll find plenty to do. I enjoyed work, but I'm looking forward to the next few years. Just us, Joan and me. I just hope Joan doesn't get fed up with me under her feet all day."

Joan laughed and put her half eaten Lamington down on the table. "No, it will be good to have you home, Eddie, but if you get under my feet, I'll throw you and Poppy out the house. You can go for a long walk on the beach while I get on."

"Talking of Poppy," said Andrew, "how's she settling in?"

"Fine. I think she's missing Primrose, like the rest of us. She's a bit quiet at the moment and keeps wanting to go next door, but she's eating OK. She likes Edwin taking her for long walks, Primrose couldn't walk as far as Edwin, so

Poppy will get fitter. Not so sure about Eddie though. I don't think they walk very fast!"

Joan laughed and patted her husband in the belly where his suit didn't do up.

"Good, relieved to hear that. By the way, would both of you mind coming to my Office afterwards, if you've got time. Primrose made a provision in her Will to help you out with Poppy."

"Oh, she needn't have done that." Joan appeared embarrassed and fiddled inside her handbag until she found a tissue. She mopped her eyes and blew her nose hard, "I told her, and we would take the dog because we wanted her, not because we thought we were going to get anything. We don't want anything from Primrose's Will, especially since that tight-fisted son of hers is bound to kick off if anyone else gets a cent off his mother's estate."

"You don't need to worry about him, Joan. Primrose had his measure, and Lyall and Leone's for that matter."

There was barely a place to park outside Andrew Strange's office later that day, after all the champagne was drunk, the asparagus rolls and lamingtons demolished. Leone, Todd, and Kat came together in Todd's new car. Kat sat quietly, head down not looking at anyone, twisting a wet hanky in her fingers, her dark curly hair covering her face.

A large dark kauri desk dominated Andrew's law office. On a matching sideboard was a bronze statue of Justice with her blindfold, sword and scales, a replica of the one outside the Old Bailey in London. The wall above it was decorated with framed degrees, Andrew Strange, LLB and Andrew Strange LL.M. The other two walls had bookcases to the ceiling, all filled with heavy looking bound tomes. Andrew's office administrator kept popping her head

round the door, counting heads, and returning with more chairs until everyone was seated.

Andrew arrived with a document tied in traditional pink ribbon. He sat himself at his desk, adjusted his half framed glasses and peered over them at the people assembled. "Welcome, everyone, although this is a sad occasion." The corner of his mouth twitched as he picked up the document on his desk. He made a show of opening it out carefully, spreading it on the table and ironing it flat with his hand. He started reading. "This is the last Will and Testament of Primrose Violet Moore of 19 Menzies Place, Milford, Auckland, dated on August 9th, 2011 and witnessed by Daphne Harris, Legal Office Administrator and Fred Reeves, Chartered Accountant."

"Oh, get on with it," said Todd.

Andrew regarded Todd for a moment. "Your mother, Todd, left detailed instructions and one of those are that I am to read these out. She expressly wanted everyone to understand the reasons for her actions."

"What actions? It's simple isn't it?" Todd said with a sniff.

"If I may continue, Todd."

Todd gave a sharp jerk of his head, crossing his arms tightly.

"My wedding and engagement rings and any other small pieces of jewellery I own, I leave to my granddaughter Katherine Jane." Kat didn't look up and continued to cry quietly, occasionally blowing her nose into her handkerchief.

"And, we all know what she will do with them, don't we?" Leone said, glaring at Kat.

"I forgive the debt of \$100,000 that my son Todd James owes to me and the debt of \$125,000 my son Lyall Francis owes for his legal bills. My personal saving account holds about \$40,000, and I leave this to my granddaughter,

Katherine Jane."

"I don't think that's fair, Leone." Todd elbowed his sister in the ribs, speaking to her in a stage whisper. "That money she gave me was an investment in my business, not a loan. That money should have been split between the three of us, and Kat left out of it. The old woman had other grandchildren after all."

"I agree, but what can we do about it?" said Leone, looking more than a little annoyed.

Andrew continued. "The house and contents at 19 Menzies Place, I leave in equal shares to my three children, Lyall Francis, Todd James and Leone Mary. I hope they will use the money from the sale of the property wisely."

"What a cheek, the old witch," said Todd, frowning. Leone examined her fingernails.

"The sale of the house and division of the proceeds between my offspring, will dispose of the portion of my estate, for which they might have a reasonable claim."

Andrew saw Todd was smiling. No doubt he's adding it all up and working out just what his share is going to be, he thought, Can't wait to see what happens to his smile when I get to the next bit.

"Having disposed with the family possessions, I now wish to turn to the money held in my Trust. "

Todd was suddenly interested. "What's this?"

"One of the great regrets of my life is that my husband ruined many lives by his addiction to gambling, including his own. I have always had a strong aversity to taking risks, gambling or get rich quick schemes."

"She has to fucking well lecture us even after she's dead, the bitch."

Kat glared at her uncle Todd.

Andrew continued reading. "The money, embezzled by my husband Francis, has been repaid, with interest. If there are any debts still outstanding at the time of my death, these are to be settled on the same terms. I hope this repairs some of the damage Francis did to people who trusted him with their life savings. On my death, I leave two million dollars in my late husband's memory to Gambler's Anonymous."

"God, the old witch had gone doo-lally, two million! Two million what? Bits of fluff?" Todd elbowed Leone in the ribs. She moved her chair away from him.

"I leave two million dollars each to Prisoner's Aid, Save the Children Fund, World Vision and the Tear Fund."

"This is getting really funny," said Todd loudly.

Andrew developed a twitch at the corner of his mouth. "I have set up a trust fund for my grandchildren under 25 years of one million dollars for each grandchild. There are terms and conditions attached. Each grandchild can only have access to money in the fund for genuine education purposes, until they are 25 years. After they have finished their education, they can access any remainder, as an allowance paid annually, on condition they do not have any criminal convictions. If they have, that grandchild will lose their share, which will revert to the Trust, for the benefit of the other grandchildren."

"Delusional, positively delusional." Todd exclaimed in a loud voice.

Kat hissed at him. "Shut up, Uncle Todd."

Andrew paused a moment before carrying on. The twitch of his lip crossed his face again.

"In the past few months, I have endowed a new charity, The Protection, Animal Welfare, and Sanctuary Foundation. The PAWS Foundation is to be concerned

with animal rescue and welfare. Animals do not gamble, they do not take risks with other people's lives, and they are not knowingly greedy wanting what belongs to others. Yet, they are often abandoned, abused, discarded and many are euthanized, because animal organizations cannot save enough of them. I appoint Fred Reeves to be Chair of the Board of the Foundation. My lawyer Andrew Strange and Allen Reeves of Reeves and Reeves will assist him. The Trust will work in partnership with animal charities, furthering the aim of enhancing animal welfare."

Andrew paused, and looked up to see if there was any reaction. There was a buzz of excitement coming from the Animal Welfare faction. The Executive director was leaning back in his chair with his arm round his administrative assistant who was mopping her eyes with a tissue.

"It is my dearest wish that my children, Lyall Francis, Todd James and Leone Mary will support the Foundation in whatever way they can."

"This is getting really boring, Andrew. What was she on about? Come on joke over." Todd crossed his legs and uncrossed them, then folded his arms tightly hugging them into himself.

Andrew ignored him. "I leave the care of my beloved dog, Poppy, to my dear friends, Joan and Edwin Paine. The Paines have stood by me for many years, helping me through my many lonely and difficult times, supporting me when I was ill and less able, always being there for me without being asked. They have not asked for any financial assistance from me, but I do not wish them to be out of pocket because of their generosity. Therefore, I leave,"

The lawyer's voice started to squeak, and he stopped reading to take a sip of water from the glass on the desk. He did this slowly, relishing his tongue around each drop, and taking a full minute to satiate his throat. The squeak

was still there, but not as obvious.

"Therefore, I leave fifty million dollars to be a principal sum placed in the 'Poppy Moore Trust', a section of the PAWS Foundation. The income from this trust is to provide for the care and support of my beloved dog, Poppy, and her caregivers, while she lives. The income from this Trust is to be paid to her caregivers, Joan and Edwin Paine, on an annual basis, how the Directors of the PAWS Foundation see fit. When Poppy eventually dies, hopefully in many years' time, the principal sum will be donated back to the Foundation."

The room was silent. If a pin had dropped, it would have ricocheted through the room like a gun exploding.

Then Todd unfolded his arms and slapped his knee and started clapping his hands slowly. "I didn't know she had it in her. I've never known her to have a sense of humour before. So much for Dementia being a depressing disease."

"She wasn't demented, Todd," said Fred, polishing his glasses.

"Course she was. Eighty, imagining she had millions in the bank? Completely deluded. That's what happens when you get old. Paranoid too. Always thinking that we were up to no good. Always lecturing us. She lived in the bloody past did Mum. Never cottoned on to the fact the world has changed. Completely Ga Ga. And, you and Andrew were completely sucked in."

Andrew rose from his desk, holding a piece of paper, bringing it over to where Todd and Leone were sitting and thrust it in front of them.

"Here are the accounts for the PAWS Foundation. As you can see, Todd, it registers a two hundred and fifty-million dollar donation from Primrose Moore four months ago. It isn't a joke."

Todd looked from Andrew to Fred, and Fred back to Andrew, in disbelief. Leone grabbed the paper and studied it closely, her eyes scanning backwards

and forwards.

"Where would Mum get this sort of money from?" Todd asked.

"She won the US Mega Millions Lottery and Powerball, last June, when she went to Baltimore."

"Well, fuck me!" Todd eyes, open wide, roamed wildly around the room as he furrowed his forehead.

Andrew peered at him over his half glasses. "That just about sums it up, Todd."

Fred found a suite of offices in central Newmarket, and he thought they might suit the budding Foundation well. The offices were perfect, bright, airy, had a good outlook over the Domain, so he contacted Andrew to arrange the let. Before Primrose died, Fred suggested his son Allen would be an excellent interim General Manager, to which she agreed once she met him. Allen's brief was to set up the Foundation and, once it was a going concern, appoint a CEO who would take the organization forward.

Managing a not-for-profit organization had not been a prominent curriculum item in Allen's MBA, and he had little experience of running a charity. Allen's expertise was in setting up efficient structures, and managing funds. Fred expected that Allen's nose for good investments would earn a respectable income for the Foundation once it set about the work.

Allen was a wine buff and he had an interest in a vineyard in Clevedon, developing fine Sangiovese, and another on Waiheke specializing in Merlot. Fred had long suspected his son's interest for wines was considerably more than his interest for accountancy. Still, he was adept at his job, but Fred felt he had no passion for it. Allen talked about going back to Italy for years now, to learn more of the language and culture. The talking had yet to develop into action.

As the setting up General Manager, Allen was annoyed that the terms of the Endowment required the Foundation to offer jobs to any of Primrose Moore's family that wanted them. He pointedly told his father that his business success usually depended on him picking the right people for his team. From what he knew of Primrose's offspring, they were a dubious bunch, and he was unhappy

about having people foisted on him, with whom he wouldn't even want to pass the time of day.

Primrose's desire for the Foundation to have her family members involved troubled Fred also. He thought it was a lost cause. Lyall would not be out of prison for another year, Leone had already told him to stuff his job, before she flounced back to her husband in Australia. The offer only needed to be made to Todd and Katherine.

"You've got to be fuckin' joking Fred."

Fred took a deep breath and fought the rising pressure in his throat. "Your mother wished you to be involved, and according to her wishes, I'm offering you a job in the Foundation."

"And, that would, of course, be in charge, CEO?"

"No, Todd, Animal Welfare Officer."

"You can get lost, Fred. My mother cuts me out of her will, and you offer me a measly job in an organization, set up with money that's rightfully mine. Anyway, you're not going to hang on to that money, Fred. We intend to contest the gift and the Will. Where will your bloody Foundation be then eh?"

Fred pondered for a second or two whether to get into a discussion. He couldn't help himself. "Primrose was clear in her wishes, Todd as I am sure any Court will recognize. Anyway, your mother didn't cut you out of her will, Todd. She left you a third of her property, and you'd already taken a large sum off her, and she put some money in Trust for your children's education."

"That the parents, who have the bloody expense of the frigging kids, can't touch. And, as for that money, she invested it in my business, so it shouldn't even enter into the equation. If the business had been successful, she would have got it back. As far as I'm concerned, she left us all destitute. I still can't

believe she had mega-millions tucked away. If only I'd known."

"What would have done if you had known, Todd?" Fred regretted asking the question the second it left his lips.

"None of your fuckin' business Fred. At least I could have made sure I got my share before she started giving it away. Make the most of it while you've got it Fred, because I'm telling you, it won't be for long."

"Somehow I doubt that, Todd. Perhaps you might like to ponder on why your mother decided not to leave you a share of the money." Fred had to hold the phone away from his ear, deafened by a tirade of expletives shouted down the phone.

"When you've finished shouting, Todd, I will ask you again. Your mother wished you to support the Foundation and be offered a position. Yes, or No?"

"Same answer I gave before. The bitch has a bleeding heart towards animals but couldn't give a toss for her flesh and blood."

"So that's a no then?" Fred wrote a large NO on the paper in front of him and with his pen underlined it several times.

"No, NO and NO."

Fred put down the phone and heaved a sigh of relief.

'Kat might be a different proposition,' Fred thought. *'She's young, likely to be more pliable, and she's out of a job.'* He'd only met her at the funeral, and he was struck by the likeness Kat had to her grandmother. He rang her and made her the same offer.

"Thank you Mr. Reeves. I was wondering what to do."

"So you're saying yes, Kat?" Fred stared out of the window across the Domain, where he saw a family walking with a couple of small children running around their parents. They were playing with a Frisbee. He smiled at the sight. He

wished he had grandchildren.

"Yes, Mr. Reeves thank you. I will sign up for a year. I'd like to do a bit of travelling sometime, do my OE, you know, go back to Kathmandu, but I've run out of money, so I do need a job. So what is it then?" Kat's voice lifted slightly.

"You'll work with Allen, my son who is the interim General Manager. He'll decide what your job will be, but I expect he will want you to be his assistant. I'm pleased you've said yes. Your grandmother would have been pleased."

Fred heard a slight sob on the other end of the phone. "Kat?"

"I suppose this is something I could do although I've never been much interested in animals before. I mean, Poppy's a sweet dog and all that, but I never realized how much she meant to my Gran."

"It was only after you left, Kat. You'd been there living with her, for what four, five years. I expect Poppy filled the gap you left. She volunteered for the animal welfare work to keep herself going, and then it became essential to her. Cheered her up hugely." Kat went quiet, and Fred thought she might have hung up. "Kat? Are you still there?"

"Yes, sorry. Just thinking that's all."

"So you can report for work next week then? You never know, it might be something that interests you too. What do you want to do with your life anyway?"

As he said this, it occurred to Fred, this might be the wrong question.

"Please, not you as well," said Kat with pleading in her voice, "everyone is always asking what I am going to do with my life, and nobody believes me when I say I don't know. The more people ask, the more confused I get. Everybody's got an opinion about what I should do, everybody that is except me. 'Why don't you do this, or that, or the other?' And, it's always something they would do, but

they're not me."

"I'm sorry Kat, I didn't mean to upset you. Of course, you need to find your own way. Your Gran would have wanted that too."

"I never knew what my Gran wanted for me. She must have been totally fed up with me being dumped on her like I was, but you know, it really wasn't my fault. My Gran was really unhappy when I went to live with her. Nothing I could do would lift her up no matter how hard I tried."

"Kat, your grandmother lost everything when your grandfather died - her home, her reputation, and her self-respect. It should be no surprise the disgrace over your grandfather, then the disaster with Lyall going to prison made her depressed. That was only a year before you went to live with her. It was nothing to do with you. She felt a total failure as a wife and mother, but I know she did want to be a good grandmother. I don't think you realize just how difficult it was for her."

"It wasn't my fault all those things happened to her. I always thought she only took me because Mum paid her to look after me." Kat sounded bitter on the other end of the phone. Fred wondered what he was getting himself into.

"I don't think that was so, Kat. She took you because she wanted to."

"I think my Gran was a lot better at training Poppy than she was at training her family, including me."

"Poppy's a dog. It's not quite the same thing."

"I know, and Poppy is obedient and grateful and loyal. Everything I'm not?"

"You're being a bit hard on yourself, don't you think? You're at the beginning of your life, too early to write yourself off." Fred was beginning to think employing Kat might be a lousy idea.

"My Mum did, she dumped me on my Gran 'cos I was getting in her way. I was

inconvenient. And, my Dad didn't even want to know me, wasn't even interested I'd been born, inconvenient again."

Fred's secretary popped her head round the door and mimed drinking out of a cup and saucer. Fred nodded to her silently. His throat was dry, and he was ready for a tea break. "But your Gran..."

"Gran never praised me. Not really. It was always, that's nice dear. Always just nice. If I was lucky I got that's quite nice, dear. Once in a while, I needed a bit more than just nice. A bit of enthusiasm for what I was doing at the time, or even for me as a person would have been nice."

Fred, hung up the phone and walked over to the window again. The little family had gone. The sky had darkened, and it looked as if it was about to rain.

Daphne Winner strode out of the High Court, still wearing her black gown over her black cashmere suit and white silk shirt, a double row of expensive Akoya pearls at her throat. She walked the few steps to her Chambers, her junior followed a respectful few steps behind, trundling the large, black business case containing all the court papers in bundles. Once in her room, she took off her gown, hanging it up carefully in the cupboard, walked over to the large mirror, patted herself down, smoothing her collar before twisting slightly to look at her reflection in the mirror.

At forty-five, married to a high court judge and a Queen's Counsel, she was the epitome of success. She sat down in the high-backed, cream-coloured, leather chair behind her desk, patted its arms, and for a moment or two thought about putting her feet up on the blotter. She dismissed the thought. If someone came in unexpectedly, she would be at risk of showing her pure silk and French lace knickers. Wouldn't do to be so undignified. Instead, she buzzed her

secretary to send her in some tea, and a muffin.

In court earlier, she had managed to demolish the case against her client, who accused of sexually abusing two of his children. It was all hearsay and supposition from their mother, his estranged spouse. Daphne, always adept with words, had argued the mother's motivation was to get full custody and emigrate with the children to Australia, to join her new partner. Tipped off the mother had a psychiatric history, she subpoenaed her medical notes, and presented in Court. One medical report commented on the mother's fancifulness. Daphne was sure the judgment would be in her client's favour.

Daphne looked forward to regaling her husband with her success that evening. Her eyes focused on her desk where there were several files waiting to have final notes written before Elinor could file them, so she set to work efficiently, with two piles, one needing notes and the other noted. The phone rang just as she almost completed the task.

"Simon, Good to hear from you."

It was her old classmate from her University days, Simon Potts. Daphne picked up a pen and her notepad in readiness.

"Daphne, darling. How would you like a nice juicy Will to contest?"

"Simon, can't you do better? These will contests are usually so boring."

"Come on, the last one was pretty good."

He was referring to a case they had settled a couple of weeks before. Their client was a woman whose mother left a Will giving the family home to a Psychic, who had claimed to be her reincarnated daughter from a previous life. The real daughter, who had fallen out with her mother over the friendship with the Psychic, contested. Daphne enjoyed that case. It ran for weeks. The judgment reverted the house back to the real daughter.

"Oh yes, that one. It was pretty good. Client pleased?" She smiled at the pleasure of the memory.

"Well, to a point. Unfortunately, the legal costs for the case exceeded the value of the estate by a long way."

"I suppose the costs did get raked up. All those expert witnesses cost a lot of money. The client was surely pleased at being vindicated?"

"I suppose so. Shame house prices are a bit depressed at the moment. Anyway, no mumbo jumbo this time. You'll be up against a few animal charities, and there's a helluva lot of money involved this time."

"How much money are we talking about?" Daphne was suddenly interested.

"About three hundred million dollars this time, Daphne's old girl."

"Bloody hell!" Daphne sat back in her chair and stroked the back of her hair.

"Yes, old woman gifted the lot to an Animal Charity a few months before she died. The family didn't know she had that much money. Then to cap it all, she leaves fifty million to her pet dog in her Will. The adult children want to contest."

"The gift or the Will?"

"Both. They want the gift reversed, the Charity wound up, and all the money revert to them."

"Grounds?"

Daphne knew if animal charities could pull in big legal guns. Some of the lawyers who worked for the charities were passionate animal lovers and often gave their time for free. Usually they could afford to as they raked in megabucks from human litigation. Daphne was not one of them. She was allergic to cats, and she hated everything to do with dogs, from their unpleasant doggy smell to the fur they shed everywhere.

"Well, the son says she must have been senile, so I guess the lack of

competency is the main grounds. The son cites a Fred Reeves, an accountant, and Andrew Strange, a lawyer, who arranged the endowment for the Charity and drew up the Will."

Daphne drew circles on her notepad and put dollar signs inside them. "Did she cut the family completely out of the will then?"

She drew some lines quickly across the paper, bisecting some of the circles.

"Not entirely. The dispute is really over a lottery win several months before she died. According to her Will, she didn't think her children had any right or claim on it. The children think differently of course."

"I'll take the case. This is obviously really juicy. Have you told the client my charges?"

"He wants the best, Daphers, and you're the best."

"I am, aren't I, Simon darling? We really must meet up and have drinks soon. Great to be working with you again."

She rang off and contemplated the doodles on her note pad. Yes, this had been a very good day.

Todd parked his Toyota in the visitor's space in the underground car park as directed by the secretary. Climbing out of his car, he had a good look round. In the Partners' space were a Porsche, a Lexus and an expensive looking Audi. 'Very nice', he thought, *'soon be having one of those myself'*. He mused which one would suit his personality better. *'Definitely, a Porsche. A red one. One to be noticed.'*

"Todd Moore to see Ms. Winner?"

"Yes, sir, I will let her know. Please take a seat. Would you like a cup of coffee or tea?"

"Coffee, strong and black, three sugars please." Todd made his way over to the low, dark blue, boxy couches. There were three of them around a glass coffee table with gold trim, littered with magazines; he noted they were up to date for once. He picked up Property Investor and started to flick through it when the secretary brought him the steaming cup of coffee, and a chocolate biscuit to go with it. He had just finished it when the secretary returned; "Ms. Winner will see you now."

She escorted him to a large wooden door opposite, opening it and gesturing for him to go through. The office was enormous and had a large picture window on one side that had a splendid view across the city. From the vantage of the tenth floor, the vista was spectacular, despite the darkening clouds and showery rain coming in from the sea. The barrister rose from her chair to greet him. She was tall, slim with dark hair coiffured up into an elegant French roll. A pale cream open necked blouse worn under a long jacketed taupe suit suited her colouring, and the short skirt showed off her long legs.

"Welcome, Mr. Moore, do take a seat" Daphne's voice was low and throaty. Todd looked around the room, taking in the artwork on the walls, a Goldie here, a McCahon there. He noted a photograph of an elderly man resplendent in bright red cope, white-tabbed collar and full-bottomed horsehair Judge's wig on the wall, his face wearing a 'don't mess with me look'.

"Father?" he gestured towards the photograph.

"Husband."

Todd sat down where indicated facing Daphne and crossed his legs.

"The plaintiffs are yourself, your brother Lyall and your sister Leone? Is that correct? Anyone else?" Daphne opened out her notebook, pen poised.

"Just the three of us."

"Any of you still dependent on your mother when she died?"

Todd frowned.

"We all left home many years ago if that's what you mean."

"It would help if we could show you had some financial dependency on your mother so that she was obliged to make proper provision for you after her death."

"Oh I see. Well, Lyall's coming out of prison soon and of course hasn't been earning anything, and his wife took their house and car, so I suppose you could argue he might have been dependent on Mum, and I can easily show that I have nothing."

"Have you thought about a settlement conference?" Daphne asked.

"Meaning?"

"You and your siblings meet with the Executor of the Will, the Foundation, the Trust and a Judge and work out a settlement between you." A passing squall blew over the building. The rain beat on the picture window.

Todd was puzzled. "Why would we want to do that?"

"Well, you could ask the defendants for a reasonable sum each, say a million, couple of million, even three million each out of the Trusts, and in return, you forgo further action. They keep the bulk of the bequest, you get a nice nest egg, and everyone's happy. Win, Win."

"No way! Settle for three million when they get nearly three hundred million. We want you to contest for the whole sum."

"That might look a bit greedy. I can hardly argue for proper provision if you want everything. The Judge would consider two or three million each, pretty decent provision."

Todd stood up and started walking round the room, examining the artwork minutely.

"Your art-work in this office is worth a bob or two. You probably make three million in just a year."

Todd jutted out his jaw at Daphne and glared at her. A tiny flicker of something, a nanosecond of annoyance crossed Daphne's face, but was gone in a flash, replaced by a social smile. "We could try for more on provision ground, but I doubt we'll succeed."

"So? A Different tactic?"

Daphne inclined her head in agreement, "How was your mother's mental health?"

"She must have been fucking senile to do what she did." Todd gazed unfocused through the window. The sun came out from behind the clouds.

"Any medical notes we can use?" Daphne fiddled with her pen, twisting it over and over in her hands.

"There might have been some when she broke her hip. I don't know of any

others. That was just before she died, and she'd made this bloody Will months before."

"Nevertheless," Daphne's voice became syrupy. " Senile dementia takes years to come on. If there is anything in the notes that suggests confusion, I'm sure I can find a tame psychogeriatrician to testify she probably had impairments earlier, like when she instructed her Will."

"That's more like it," said Todd sitting down again and arching back, stretching his legs. "Look, anyone who gives all that money to animal charities has to be bonkers. Just the act of doing something so daft should be proof enough."

Daphne pursed her lips. "I need you to sign this release for the medical notes."

"Give me your pen!"

Todd reached over and signed the paper.

"Thank you. Now tell me what you know about Fred Reeves. What is the relationship between him and your mother, and how did he become involved in the Endowment and Will?"

"All I know is she consulted him about the money, and he was there with her when she made her Will."

"Good, Good. On the spot when she gave instructions for the Will eh? And, managed to get a very nice job as Chair of both Foundations for himself, from which he could pay himself a fat retainer."

"So?" Todd uncrossed his legs and sat forward in his chair. Blue sky was appearing between the scudding clouds. A perfect rainbow arch formed over the harbour bridging the city and the headland.

"I have to wonder if his motives weren't exactly pure, and he had plenty to gain. So, if the senile dementia argument fails, we will argue undue influence."

Daphne seemed pleased with herself and patted an escaped strand of hair

back into her chignon, basking in her client's obvious admiration.

Todd drove straight to the prison after his meeting with Daphne. Gingered up by his talk with the lawyer, he was polite and friendly to all the security people, even cheery as he went through the search rituals before going into the cheerless visitor's room. His brother seemed pleased to see him.

"This Will is a bit of a turn up?"

"The solicitor is hopeful, and he's engaged one of the top QCs to act for us."

"Could do with a few million when I come out." Lyall grinned and sat back in his chair, "That could seriously set me up in business. I could be the top dog with all that loot. Goodbye, watching my back all the time, and hello Lion King."

"With a bit of luck, it'll be a bit more than just a few million, Lyall. And, all legal too." Todd smoothed the lapel of his Italian wool overcoat.

His brother leant towards him. "She must have gone loopy to have even bought the ticket in the first place, since she's banged on about the evils of gambling for as long as I can remember."

"Poor Dad," Todd agreed, "didn't have a chance. He married his bloody mother, you know. Grandma was always going on about steady jobs and pensions, just like Ma did. On and on. Poor Dad was nagged into becoming a fucking accountant when he should have been a racing car driver or a stockbroker. They drove him to it, I reckon."

Lyall nodded. "If she told me to get a proper job with a good pension again, I think I would have strangled her myself. Neither Grandma nor Ma ever understood the world had changed. They thought we still lived in a world where you doffed your cap at your betters, were grateful for what pittance the masters cared to give you for working your guts out day and night. Whatever you do,

don't step outside the establishment mould. Never got the new world order, where everyone's for himself. Or, that to accumulate you have to speculate - unless you can get it for nothing of course. Even better."

Todd bobbed his head slowly.

Lyall grinned at his brother. "So, three hundred million kiwi eh? How much of it do you think we can get?"

Todd beckoned his brother to come in closer. He lowered his voice. "It should be all ours, Ly. Ours by right. She shouldn't have given a cent of it away, without asking us first. And, give all to dogs too, not even the ones you can bet on. My God, three hundred million! She could have left a good bit to charity and set us up for life too. Instead, she leaves a bloody fortune to her fuckin' dog and leaves us zilch. Shows you what she really thought of us, the bitch."

Lyall stroked his stubble on his chin and studied his younger brother's abject face "What does Leone think?"

"Leone? Can't get any sense out of Leone at all. She's bemoaning the fact that she didn't have the opportunity to resolve 'stuff' with her, whatever that is, and now feels guilty she wasn't here when she died. I don't know what "stuff" she had to resolve. Anyway, she can't stop snivelling and whining on about her "issues". Shit, other people have problems. Leone has 'issues'. Anyway that husband of hers is loaded so, she can stump up a sizeable share for the court costs. Until we win, that is."

"And Kat?"

Todd glowered and pursed his lips. "It's nothing to do with bloody Kat. She's just one of six grandkids, and anyway, she's young enough to access the bloody grandkids fund, if she wants to. Yes, grandma made sure she was all right, but.." Todd began to speak in a high pitched mimicking voice, "I don't want

to. I want to go back to Kathmandu 'to find myself.' Fuckin' hell Lyall, you should've seen the floodgates open, when I told her she'd been very careless to lose herself in the first place. Kat's just like Mum, Lyall. She'll give everything away, only instead of going to the dogs, it would go to World Peace or Save the Trees or something equally pathetic. Do you know the silly cow has started to work for the fuckin' Foundation?"

"OK, Toddy, that's useful. She'll know what's going on then. I'm so bloody pissed off that my son Marty didn't get a mention. Just because he's over 25. He's the eldest grandchild after all. I've had a chat with him, and he thinks we should leave the charity something. He's a bit soft on animals that boy, takes after his mum in that."

"Okay dokey, Ly. We go for the fuckin' lot, and being the generous, kindhearted people we are, we may graciously concede a small donation to an animal charity, but not to that fuckin' dog of hers. That's the bit that really hurts."

Andrew immediately rang Fred when he heard Simon Potts had applied to the High Court to challenge the Will on behalf of Todd, Lyall and Leone.

"Can they do that?" Fred asked.

"Well, they can try. They've engaged Daphne Winner, QC to take the case for them. She's a hotshot lawyer with a reputation for winning hard cases. She is feared in cross-examination. She has a tendency to rip the jugular out of a witness with her verbal riposte, then before they know it, she's ripped the other one out, and then before they can recover from that, she's stabbed them in the guts. Metaphorically speaking that is, of course."

Fred laughed nervously. "They must be feeling pretty confident then?"

"They'd better be feeling in pocket because Daphne charges like a stallion."

"So, what do you suggest?"

"The Trust's earnings won't even take a dent if we employ top counsel, which we will of course. I suggest we get Fraser Pickering to act for us. Fraser's on the boards of the RSPCA, and the Humane Society. He has a pack of dogs of his own, at home. At least four I think. He's our man."

"Happy to take your advice, Andrew."

"According to the papers, I've received from Simpson Potts, they've filed for both the Endowment and the Will to be set aside, on the grounds that Primrose was not competent at the time she made the gift and drew up her Will. Alternatively, she was unduly influenced by you and I, when instructing us."

Fred took a deep intake of breath at the other end of the phone. Unduly influenced?

"Look Fred, that's standard practice. They're backing both horses, then if one argument fails, they can fall back on the other."

"OK. Andrew, so I guess it's game on?"

"Game on, indeed, Fred. Game on."

Andrew put the phone down. He suddenly remembered that when Primrose and Fred came to instruct him about the Will, she had given him some documents to file with the rest of her papers. He went to the filing room and started sifting through the files until he found Primrose's. Taking it back to his desk, and making himself an espresso on the way, he sat down to go over the details so he could brief Fraser. He read through his original notes on which the Will was based. No problems there. He went over to his bookshelf, found his copy of the Family Protection Act and sat down to read it, making notes as he went along.

The evening was starting to draw in by the time he finished, and he realized

he was extremely tired and should be making his way home. His wife would be getting worried. Andrew gathered his notes and copy of the Act and put them back into the master file to put onto his desk, ready for a fresh look the next day. As he did so, he noticed a document had fallen out of the file onto the floor. He picked it up and started reading it, his concentration increasing with each line he read.

Kat had her own small office, next door to Allen's Executive Assistant as he called his secretary. Her office had a new computer, a printer and a phone. The desk was a utilitarian grey kit-set desk but perfectly adequate, and she had a comfortable high backed office chair similar to Allen's, but in a different colour.

The mushroom coloured walls were plain, and Kat thought hard about how she could make the room seem less stark. Her Greenpeace calendar looked a bit lost on the expanse of wall. A travel poster of Kathmandu would look fabulous, and remind her she was working towards another trip there next year. The large picture window looked over the grassy Domain to the harbour in the distance beyond. From there, to the world.

She didn't know what to make of Allen. He looked a younger version of Fred, but whereas Fred looked as if he might be fun at a party, Allen's manner was dour. He had short, slightly wavy, blonde hair spikily cut, and swept off his face. Kat reckoned he must use hair products to get it looking that way; it couldn't possibly grow like that naturally. She noticed his eyes were a muddy green colour, but when he looked at her through his dark rimmed glasses, his gaze was distant, disinterested. Kat reckoned he was about ten or twelve years older than her in looks and about thirty years in his behavior. She felt a bit intimidated by him. Was it his offhand manner, his lack of smiling, or the way he regarded her as if she was an irritating child? He had made it clear to her at their first meeting that he was the Boss and his job was to set up the Foundation, following her grandmother's wishes, and hand it on in good shape. He made a point of telling her, despite her being the benefactor's granddaughter, not to expect any privileges.

Kat was somewhat miffed at his belief she would expect special privileges. After all, her Gran had drummed into her she must not get above herself, she was no better than anyone else, she had to stand on her own two feet and fight her own battles. And, she had done, although there were many times when she wished she didn't have to. Now Gran was gone, she truly had to. I'll show him. Allen droned on about his expectation that she would work hard and benefit the organization, and her mind started to wander. She started remembering the low, throaty chant of the monks, and how it filled her mind, displacing all other thoughts.

"Are you listening to me?" Allen sounded sharp, and she refocused.

"Yes, yes, you were saying?" She made eye contact with him and gave him an exaggerated look of riveted attention.

"So you weren't listening!" Allen was frowning at her.

"Yes, yes, I was."

"So, tell me what I just said then," he said insistently.

Kat wished she could disappear. "I'm sorry, I must have just lost concentration for a second or two." She mumbled looking at the floor.

"Second or two? You've not mentally been in this room for at least five minutes. I'm sorry to be so boring, but we have a job to do, whether you are interested or not. Concentrate please, if it's not too much bother."

Kat fiddled with her handbag and pulled out a notebook and pen, and tried to look interested in what he had to say. "What do you want me to do?"

"You will be working in the field, fact-finding, Katherine. You will identify the major issues, problems, needs, wants, and collate these into a document to present to the Board so that the terms of Reference for the Charity can be set up. Once that had been settled, I will set up a strategic and an operational plan.

You will act professionally always. You are the face of the organization, and the impression people in the field have of the Foundation will depend on how you go about your job."

"So, how do I go about the job, Allen?"

Allen's tone left her in no doubt he had expectations as high as Everest. Kat had written down his instructions and now stared at them, the words forming squiggles before her eyes. She screwed her eyes to focus on the words she had written.

"Use your initiative, Kat."

"I'm not sure..."

"Of what, are you, not sure?" Allen tapped his pen on the desk. He was plainly irritated.

"What exactly you think I should be doing."

He looked pained. "As I thought I had made clear, I expect you to use your undoubted intelligence to prepare me a report and recommendations, Kat. Simple."

"But, I've never done..."

"Kat, can you use a telephone?" The tap of his pen on the table was getting more frequent.

"Yes, but..."

"Can you talk?"

"Yes, but..."

"Can you listen?"

"Yes, but..."

"Can you write stuff down?"

"Yes, but...."

"Then Kat, if you can do all of that, then contact each of the agencies, talk to them, listen to what they have to say and then report it back." He placed the pen on the table and reached for the phone.

"But, I've never done ..."

Allen pointed the handset at her. "Kat, I am not interested in hearing what you've never done. I just want you to do it. Understand?"

Kat kept her eyes cast down looking at her hands in her lap, and mumbled a yes.

"Then get on with it."

He dialed a number as Kat left the room, sniffing back tears. Kat was sure she heard him give a deep sigh as she ran out the door. She was disappointed in Allen's reaction. It was all very well for him, he might be the boss, but she didn't think he was particularly supportive to her. She'd just lost her grandmother after all. He should be taking that into account.

It started raining and Kat stared out of the window for a while at the sullen gunmetal grey-skied day, dreaming of the spires of Kathmandu. Allen should have told her what was required, in detail, and then she would know how to go about it and do it right. Pity she hadn't finished that leadership paper at Uni after all. She wondered what his birthdate was. Perhaps, if she could find out, she could get his astrological chart done and see if they had signs compatible for working together. Somehow, she doubted it.

A bird suddenly flew at the window and crashed against the glass, startling her out of her reverie. The little bird bounced off the glass and fell backwards, stunned. *'It must have believed it could fly through'*, she thought, worried it had killed itself. She looked out of the window to see where had it got to, but there

was no sign of it. She hoped it had managed to fly away.

At least Kat knew she was adept on a computer, having had her first one given to her almost before she had cut her teeth. She checked her email.

Message from Lesley and Dave. They were in Bhutan – “where they have a Gross National Happiness measure for the population, considered more important than GDP”, they said.

How brilliant, I must go there, next time. Her friends' email had an attachment of some stunning and dramatic photographs of their trek up to a monastery, dangerously perched on the side of a cliff 11,000 feet up. It was a deeply spiritual place, their email said, supposed to be the fountain of contentment. Their walk up there had been very hard, they said, altitude and vertigo fighting them all the way, but once they had put a foot on the path, they knew there was no going back for them. They regarded the climb as symbolic of their journey towards achieving their goals in life. Kat felt a little stab of envy again. She missed their company and their sureness about their lives.

There was an email from Jenny, saying she was coming back to New Zealand. She'd dumped Andy and could they meet up. Kat hit the delete button before accessing her Facebook page and unfriending Jenny and Andy. Nothing new on her news feed. Some of her friends had posted items about what they were currently reading or doing for the weekend. They all seemed to be having a fab time, telling the world, about the blast they had at one nightclub or another, or how they had got wasted last Saturday. Who cares? Well, she wasn't interested in that superficial stuff anymore.

Kat clicked out of Facebook and started searching animal welfare organizations on the Internet, finding to her astonishment there were many. Not just the big ones everyone knows about, but dozens of little ones, who rescued

and rehomed animals. Some specialized in dogs, others cats, still others horses, or birds, or farm animals. They all seemed to rely on volunteers and donations to continue their work. She clicked on to more links, finding the time disappearing as she delved into the information on her screen. Kat made a list and found the phone number of the top one, the local Animal Welfare Village her grandmother had worked for. When she said she was ringing from the PAWS Foundation, to her surprise, she was immediately put through to the CEO's office.

The Chief Executive invited her to come and see him the next day, promising her a personal tour of the work of their organization. He said he was looking forward to meeting her, and having a good chat about their common goals. Putting the phone down, Kat felt pleased with herself for getting a satisfactory result. She tried to banish the thought that the favourable reception was, almost certainly, less about her communication skills, and more the Foundation having lots of money.

"All rise."

The Judge entered taking his place on the raised dais at the head of the court. A distinguished man, with longish steel-grey hair, dressed in a dark suit and a somewhat incongruous red bow-tie, took the witness stand. Daphne Winner gave him one of her practiced smiles.

"Now Doctor," she said, "before the break you were saying, in your opinion, the confusion experienced by Mrs. Moore when she fell over and broke her hip likely suggested that she had underlying cognitive problems."

"I said it was possible. The only time she had any mental tests was during her last illness. It is difficult to say, with any certainty, how long she might have had a problem."

Daphne looked at her notes before going on to the next question. "You said that her Mini-Mental Status was recorded at only 15/30. You agree that is fairly severe and usually means advanced dementia?"

Daphne peered at her witness, expectantly.

"Yes, it is, but... "

"No need for any buts, doctor. A simple yes or no will do." The doctor appeared discomforted by the interruption, but Daphne ignored his fidgeting and carried on. "How long does it usually take to get to that level of severity?"

"It usually takes several years." The doctor adjusted his tie and took a drink of water.

"So, in your expert opinion, Mrs. Moore had brain impairments for several years before she died?"

"It's possible, yes."

"Mrs. Moore's Will was made several months before she died, so is it likely her thinking processes were impaired at the time?"

"It is possible she had impairments at the time she made her gift and drew up her Will. She was eighty."

"Quite. Thank you, Doctor, your witness Mr. Pickering."

Daphne sat down and brushed imaginary fluff of her gown.

Fraser Pickering was a bear of a man. Over six foot four and well built with it, his shock of white hair down the middle of his head contrasted with the blackness of the rest. He had long sideburns, and he wore half-glasses that he took off often to polish. "Doctor Sloan, beside cognitive impairment, what else could influence the mini-mental status examination?"

"Dehydration could, also some drugs."

"And, what did the medical notes say about drugs, Doctor Sloan?"

"She was on antibiotics for pneumonia."

"Antibiotics wouldn't affect her cognition, you agree?"

"Yes, correct."

"But, a serious infection could make her delirious? Is that correct?"

The doctor agreed. Fraser continued. "Read the marked passage from the notes, please doctor."

"Patient restless and confused. Dehydrated and has a temperature. Agitated due to mistaking surroundings."

"Does that suggest anything to you, Doctor?"

"It suggests delirium, Mr. Pickering."

"And, that would affect the test, yes?"

"Yes, but...."

"If she had a delirium suppressing the score on that occasion, it would not

necessarily mean she had problems before she became ill."

"Yes, but as there are no records of tests done previously, it is conjecture, Mr. Pickering. I can only say, in my expert opinion that it is possible she was not competent to instruct the making of her Will when she did."

"Possible is not probable Doctor Sloan. You did not know Mrs. Moore, you did not test her cognition yourself, did you?"

Fraser didn't wait for the answer before declaring, "No further questions."

"Call Dr. Carole Pickford" the Usher announced.

A petite, attractive middle-aged woman, her hair cropped in an elfin cut framing her face entered. Her voice was steady and confident as she read her qualifications to the Court. She sounded as if she had done this a hundred times before.

"Your area of expertise is dementia, Doctor?" Fraser asked.

"Yes, I have particular expertise in Dementia". She placed her hand on the sheaf of papers on the edge of the witness box.

"You wrote a book on the subject?" Fraser gaze went from his witness to the material on his desk.

"Yes, I did Mr. Pickering."

"And, this is the book?" He held up a fat volume, showing the Court the back cover with Dr. Pickford's face smiling from it, before passing it to the usher to give to his witness."

"Yes, this is my book."

"And, in addition, you are a contributor to several leading medical textbooks on the subject of Dementia?"

"Yes, I am."

"In all Doctor, you are one of this country's leading experts on dementia?"

"Kind of you to say so, Mr. Pickering." Doctor Pickford inclined her head to acknowledge the compliment.

"Please, tell the court when you first saw Mrs. Moore."

"Mrs. Moore came to see me at my private rooms on August 9th, 2010."

"Was that consultation because she was mentally ill? Had she been referred by her doctor because of any problems?" Fraser face was unreadable.

"No, there was no referral. The consultation was requested by Mrs. Moore."

"For what purpose, Doctor?"

"Mrs. Moore said she wanted to make a controversial gift and a Will that she was convinced would be contested. She wanted me to examine her rigorously, and certify to her testamentary capacity, in advance. "

Fraser adjusted his robe around his shoulders. "Please continue, Doctor."

"I asked Mrs. Moore the value of her estate. She was well aware of the money at stake, and lest I did not believe her, she brought along her bank statements and her latest house valuation for me to see. We then discussed what she wanted to do, and I probed her reasons for her intentions deeply. We discussed who might have a claim on her estate and what she thought their reactions would be to her actions."

"Did you do anything else, Doctor?"

"Yes, because there was so much money at stake, I suggested my clinical psychologist colleague Jules Paton saw her, and did some detailed neuropsychological testing. These are stringent tests with high scientific validity. Dr. Paton did several hours worth of testing in total."

Fraser waved some papers and handed them over to the usher.

"Your honour, I have the detailed testing here. Dr. Paton is overseas, so cannot

be present in person until next week, should you want him to appear. In the meantime, I am asking Dr. Pickford who ordered the tests to interpret these for the Court."

The Judge agreed. Daphne looked annoyed and scribbled on her notepad. Fraser raised his eyebrows towards his witness and bowed his head slowly.

"And, the findings were Doctor?"

"Mrs. Moore had above average results in all brain tests. In fact, she was in the highest percentile for these tests, indicating high ability."

"Your conclusions, Doctor."

"Mrs. Moore was competent to dispose of her estate as she wished. There was no evidence of dementia, mental illness, irrational thought, failure to think through the consequences of her actions, and she was capable of communicating her wishes. She showed considerable insight into her actions

"Fucking Hell." The shout came from the man at the back. The people seated in the public seats craned their necks to see who had uttered the profanity.

The judge bailed the man up with a look that could pierce steel. "Mr. Moore, I will not have such language in my court."

Fred took the stand. He had a fair idea of the tack that Daphne would be taking. Daphne, in her black suit and high heels, looked like a falcon waiting to spread its wings and swoop, started her questions.

"So, Mr. Reeves let me take the Court through this. You were the person who advised Mrs. Moore what to do with her money; you arranged for your lawyer to set up the Foundation; you made sure that you and your son benefitted by means of lucrative appointments; you encouraged Mrs. Moore to cut out her children from the Will. In addition, you accompanied Mrs. Moore when she instructed her Will and Mrs. Moore did not have an opportunity to speak to Mr.

Strange, without you being present."

"You are implying?"

"A lot of red flags don't you think? Seems to indicate to me that you were unduly influencing Mrs. Moore, possibly coercing her into the actions she took?"

"I refute that assumption."

"Of course you would. I wouldn't expect you to say anything else, but in everything Mrs. Moore did concerning this money, you were present, and you personally benefit from what she did. Despite your denials that your influence was undue, unfortunately, Mrs. Moore is not available to refute or support your version of events. The outcome speaks for itself. Your Honour, there's not much space between these dots."

Daphne sat down and smoothed out her skirt before acknowledging her junior's admiration.

Fraser rose to his feet, his face still unreadable. "Mr. Reeves. The court has noted that you were present at every step of Mrs. Moore's decision making concerning the disposal of her estate. This is not in dispute. Correct?"

"Correct, Mr. Pickering."

"Ms. Winner has a point though, hasn't she? When she says that we only have your statement that you did not influence Mrs. Moore?"

"No, Mr. Pickering. Ms. Winner's assertion that Mrs. Moore cannot speak for herself is incorrect."

"And, the reason for you saying that is...?"

Fraser thrust his shoulders back and put his hands behind the lapels of his jacket.

"Mrs. Moore insisted on recording every conversation with myself, my son and Mr. Strange on the subject of the disposal of her estate. The tape recordings

were held in a safe deposit box at her bank until her death, when they were sent to Mr. Strange, her executor."

Fraser turned to face the Judge "Your Honour. These tapes are available to the Court." Fraser then turned to the Usher. "Would you please play the recordings now."

Daphne had a bad feeling about the judgment well before it arrived on her desk. It was usually so easy to win her cases, but that wasp Pickering had stung her badly with those recordings, and it hurt. That Mrs. Moore had it all worked out, she left nothing to chance, and that raised questions for Daphne about Mrs. Moore's lack of trust in her family. No wonder they were all so dysfunctional, she almost felt sorry for them.

She read through the document unsurprised that the Judge had found in favour of the Foundation and Trust. There would be no celebratory champagne this time; she would have to make sure the family paid all the legal bills before she told them the bad news. She screwed up the piece of paper with her notes on the judgment and threw it across to the waste paper basket on the other side of her desk. Muttering under her breath, she rose from her desk, picked it up from off the floor and threw it into the basket, kicking it with her foot.

The phone rang. It was Todd Moore. "I thought you said we couldn't lose."
"Mr. Moore, please don't shout down the phone. I can hear you quite clearly. It just goes to show, you might have been better going for a settlement conference after all. You might have got something then."

"So, it's my fault? Typical. And, another thing, your account is astronomical, for what, zilch, nix!"

"It was never going to be no win, no fee, Mr. Moore. You knew that when we

started. I did my best. Had the opposition been honest and put everything they had into Court before we started instead of springing surprises on us, I would have been able to save you the expense of the case and you could have cut your losses."

"My mother knew we'd contest didn't she? The bitch made sure we weren't going to get our hands on the money. How could a mother do such a thing to her children?"

Daphne could hear the bewilderment and pain in his voice. "It looks that way, I'm afraid. She was your mother. You should know why she wouldn't trust you with the money or why she decided to keep it from you, not me." Daphne picked up her gold fountain pen and started doodling on the desk-pad in front of her, drawing a series of boxes in perspective, one on top of each other, the top one looking as if it were falling over.

"Can we appeal?"

"Waste of time, I think Mr. Moore. The evidence presented was so strong I doubt I can find any loopholes. Better just to accept it and move on." Daphne started filling in the sides of the doodled shapes with zigzag lines, pressing down heavily on her pen to blacken the lines.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" Todd sounded almost wistful.

"We've exhausted all legal channels. The only thing left to you is to negotiate with the Trust and see if they are prepared to give you anything."

"They won't give us anything voluntarily. Not after my mother making it so clear how little she thought of us." Todd's voice dropped to a mumble.

Daphne put the phone down and coloured in her boxes until she had a large black inkblot on her pristine, white paper, desk pad. Looking at the inky mess, with some disgust, she ripped the spoiled layer off the pad, screwed it up

and threw it in the waste paper basket. This time, she got it in one.

Todd always looked up to his older brother. Lyall would know what to do. He was smart, clever. A bit stupid to get caught as he did. He should have known that sending a parcel of drugs to his mother's address was asking for trouble, if she found out what was in it. Todd was sure she did know, and she shopped his brother deliberately to stop him. She had Todd suspended from school once, when she caught him with some marijuana he'd bought off a kid in his class. Trust Mum to report what she discovered to the school. The other poor kid was expelled, and he was suspended for three weeks. It was always black or white with Mum. Either good or bad, never just naughty, or mischievous, or just being a kid. She must have driven the old man mad with her exacting standards. But this latest humiliation, really took the biscuit and a chocolate one at that. His long held belief that his mother considered her children, maggot blown rotters up to no good, had not only been confirmed but also broadcast to the world by the court case. She was beneath contempt.

His hands gripped the steering wheel tightly while he drove into the prison. For weeks now he dreamed of owning a mansion in the best part of town, how it would have the best of everything, marble floors and Versace curtains, all owned by his offshore company, of course. He'd taken several expensive cars out for test-drives, but decided to wait until he had his ten-car garage built. Travel magazines illustrating the world trips, first class, he intended to take littered his flat. Damn her. He found a parking space and climbed out of the car, kicking the front tyre. It was a right pain having to put up with this cheap shit.

Lyall came into the visitors' room and made his way over to the table where Todd was sitting. He had several days' stubble on his chin.

"Growing a beard?" Todd asked.

Lyall laughed and ran his hand over the prickly bristle.

"Not exactly. I converted my shaver to be a charger for a mobile phone."

"You've got a phone?"

Having gone through a metal scanner, his every pocket searched, his body patted down on the way in, and sniffed by the mobile phone sniffer dog, Todd wondered how?

Lyall dropped his head down and spoke softly. Todd had to move in closer to hear him. "Well, I did. Unfortunately, they did a search last week and found it in the heel of my work boots. They didn't twig to the charger though. I'll need to get another phone somehow if we are going to get anywhere." He tapped the side of his nose and gave his brother a wink.

"I thought they have signal jamming equipment, Lyall."

"They do, but there are holes. Like in the chapel. Very popular place. Good place to reflect on our crimes."

Lyall laughed, saluting one of the watching warders with an exaggerated tipping of his forelock. "Anyway, once I've got another I can make some arrangements."

"I'll talk to Martin. What do you think we should do?"

Lyall steepled his fingers and rocked back and forth on his chair. "It's a waste of fuckin' time to go after the Foundation, I reckon. But, the other is a different matter."

"Meaning, Ly?"

"Mother dear had a dog, didn't she? A dog she left to the care of those pathetic

neighbours of hers, Edwin someone and his featherbrained wife."

"With a swag of our money." Todd's felt his stomach cramp.

"Interesting that Todd, isn't it. OK to make the neighbours rich but never us.

What have they ever done to deserve anything?"

" Zilch. Yet, they get what is rightfully ours, Lyall. Ours."

"Including the dog."

"And, the dog's worth millions."

Lyall rocked back and forth on his chair, so hard, Todd thought he might overbalance and tip over and fall on his back. Todd gazed at his brother for a minute before snorting with laughter.

A couple of people on the next tables stopped their conversation mid-flight, so he suppressed his laugh and leant forward towards Lyall, reducing his voice to almost a whisper.

"Do you know someone?"

"I do." Lyall replied, equally quietly, "someone, on the outside, owes me a few favours, and it's time for me to cash in my chips. You and Marty need to get a phone to me first."

The court case was over, and Edwin couldn't help but have a small glow of satisfaction, when he saw the Judge awarded costs to the Foundation.

Edwin, Joan, and Poppy settled in to a daily routine. Edwin finally took his retirement, and the gold clock was proudly displayed on his mantelpiece. He noted with some satisfaction that his bank balance had swelled by a few thousand dollars when his retirement bonus came into his account. That, plus the pension he had paid into for years, his reward for all those years of tedious work. Now the case was over, there was also the promise of a bit of money from the Foundation to care for the dog.

Eddie planned to buy a top of the range digital SLR camera as his retirement present to himself, and he had already joined the local photography club. He had thought long and hard about what to give Joan as a present from him to celebrate his retirement. She had asked for an eternity ring, to stop the chaffing between her wedding and engagement rings, but he decided that would be a bit extravagant. Instead, he bought her a red ukulele because she said she wanted to go to classes to keep her brain active. If the gift disappointed, she didn't show it, as she seemed to be enjoying the classes.

'Yes,' he thought as he left the house and started to walk towards the beach, *'Life is good. More than that, contented even.'* Edwin felt he was a lucky man. He'd had a steady job all his life, had done reasonably well, and had enough in the bank to fund their retirement, provided he was careful and invested wisely. His work colleagues had made speeches at his leaving do, praising him to the heavens, and he hoped they meant it. He was healthy, had a splendid wife, and now had the best buddy possible to walk with on the beach.

Nothing like a dog, to show you how to feel the cooling wind on your face and the sensation of warm, yielding sand between your toes.

When they reached the boat ramp, the arc of the beach stretched ahead, a golden eye with a brow of pohutakawa trees clinging to the rocks, protecting the coastline from the prevailing westerly winds. The trees were showing their first few crimson blooms. By Christmas, the beautiful dark red spiky flowers, contrasting with the dark green of the leaves, would cover them.

The beach curved gently for a mile from the boat ramp to the cliff. Exclusive houses lined the shore, their grandeur increasing the further they were down the beach, where the full sweep of the beach and harbour would unfold before them. Guarding the bay, a little way out to sea, seeming almost within in touching distance, was the presumed extinct volcano, standing sentinel over the bay. It was low tide, the swathe of the beach was broad, and the receding sea left tongue licks here and there, below the high tidemark.

The upper beach was littered with bundles of seaweed, sharply smelling of salt, dead fish and sea creatures, attracting the attention of many dogs exercising on the beach. The dogs sniffed these mounds, noses meticulously judging each with all the care required to assess if each smelly pile, could be the very spot that would determine the future fate of the earth. The male dogs always added their own contribution to the piscine aroma.

Although early morning, there were plenty of people on the beach. Joggers ran up and down the hard sand near the water's edge, running from one end to the other. A few brave people ventured out for a morning dip, devotees of round the year swimming. Walkers greeted one another like old friends, stopping to chat while their dogs sniffed each other's bottoms and played tag.

Edwin took off his shoes and socks to feel the sand between his toes, and

he threw the ball into the sea. Poppy bounded after it, pouncing on it, taking it into her mouth and surfing a wave came back to Edwin. She thoughtfully dropped the ball at the water's edge, just as a wave arrived to drag it back into the water. Edwin would have to paddle into the water to retrieve it. They would walk the entire beach until one or other of them tired of the game. It was never Poppy who gave up first.

After walking the entire beach both ways, they stopped at the cafe by the boat ramp for a coffee, a read of the morning paper for Edwin and a drink of water for Poppy.

Revived by the coffee and rest, Edwin and Poppy made their way home. When they passed the local dairy, he saw a flash out of the corner of his eye. Instinctively, he turned round to where the flash had come from

"Did you just take a photo of me?" He asked the man dressed in a light coloured sweatshirt and jeans, holding an expensive looking camera.

Edwin stared at the camera. Very nice.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. Just taking a few pics and liked the look of your dog."

"Yes, she's a lovely dog. What sort of camera is that? Mind if I take a look? I'm interested in photography."

"It's a Canon."

Edwin noted it was the top of the range digital. The type he had a craving for. He took it from the man and weighed it in his hand. Heavy, had a decent lens too.

"Had it long?" He asked, his eyes still fixed on the camera.

"No, it's new, just trying it out, see how it works and all that. Hey, you mind if I take a pic of you and the dog together?"

The guy in the sweatshirt appeared to know what he was doing, and Edwin did want to see the quality of his pictures. "OK. Where do you want us?"

The man gestured to a nearby tree. "Do you live round here?"

"Just a couple of houses down." Edwin waved towards his front gate. "I could get the wife to be in the picture too."

"Even better, Mr... ?"

"Paine, Edwin Paine. Dog's named Poppy."

The two men and the dog walked the few steps to the Paine's modest house. Edwin knocked on the front door, and Joan answered in her housework apron. He grabbed her by the hand and walked her down the path to the front gate. "This man is learning his new camera and wants to take a picture of us and Poppy."

Flustered, Joan took off her apron, throwing it over the garden fence and smoothed her hair. The man took some photographs of the trio and a few more of Poppy before showing Edwin the results on the LCD screens the back of the camera.

"Gosh, isn't it clear." Edwin said, impressed.

"Look why don't I email some of the pictures to you?"

Edwin took note of the model, meaning to check it out at the weekend when he went to buy his new camera. "How kind. I'd like that one of the three of us, and that's the best one of Poppy."

"Not a problem. Thanks for your cooperation." The man patted the dog, put his camera away and gave a wave while he made his way down the street.

To her surprise, Kat enjoyed her visit to the Animal Welfare Village far more than she expected. The staff in the shop greeted her as an old friend and pulled

out their photo albums of bygone events at the Village, showing her grandmother looking happy with her friends. In one photo, she was dancing, something she had never thought her Gran would do. Another showed the staff at a Christmas Party with the staff pets, including Poppy, wearing paper hats and streamers. Poppy had an 'I suppose I have to humour them' look on her face. Kat realized with a little pang, this must have been her Gran's last Christmas.

Her chat with the CEO and Executive Director had gone well. The conversation was more interesting and much less daunting than anticipated, and she had some stimulating ideas to follow up on. Kat was feeling cheered by the time Susie joined her to take her around the adoption centre.

There was a decidedly doggy smell to the pens, but Kat didn't find this unpleasant. There were a lot worse smells. Kat and Susie stood at one end of the corridor watching a family look at the selection of dogs available for adoption. A young girl wheeled her chair down the corridor. She had someone who looked like an older brother with her, offering to push her chair, but the girl turned him down, preferring to propel herself forward.

On either side, the light and airy pens holding the animals stretched out the entire length. Busy dogs jumping up, barking 'pick me', 'look at me'; baby puppies cuddled up together, waking up slowly, sleepily, yawning; bright sparks with flashing eyes commanding attention; feisty tear-aways chasing their squeaky toys, bumping into the walls of the pen; long legged athletes looking ready to jump fences and feel the wind in their fur; regal giants, aloofly waiting for a hero to worship; socialites greeting every guest indiscriminately; ageing arthritic hounds relaxing on their cuddle blankets, wisely observing, as if they'd seen it all before; vegged-out teenagers lying on their backs, bellies full of food,

waiting for a tummy rub; court jesters playing rough and tumble whether their companions wanted to play or not; cute canines, head cocked to one side, listening for all they are worth for the golden words, lifting their paws to touch the hand of the choosing god and everywhere, the sound of barking, barking loud, soft, harsh, gentle, tumbling over each other, vying with each other, trying to seize the opportunity to attract the attention of just one special person. When the family came close, their inhabitants would rush up to the side facing the corridor, pressing their noses against the wire. The boy would point to an animal and his sister would wheel herself towards the pen and have a long look before shaking her head.

"The poor girl. How awful it must be to have to live in a wheelchair." Kat commented to Susie.

"She may not be able to walk, but that won't matter to the dog. We get many disabled people, looking for pets. They usually make good owners."

"Do they? How can they look after them? Feed them? Exercise them?"

"It's a reciprocal process. The animal needs its basic needs met for sure, but once they bond they offer everything they have back to their owner. Dogs want to love and be loved, just like we do. It's almost as though, these disadvantaged animals, have a particular empathy for underprivileged humans." Susie gestured to the choosing scene before them. "Just watch, Kat. I bet you anything, one of the dogs will choose her, not the other round."

The girl wheeled the full length of the pens and back, carefully examining every animal. She returned to the middle left-hand pen, a couple of times, where there were just two dogs. One of the dogs, a few months old golden syrup coloured terrier cross with black molasses markings was at the front of the pen. The dog held the crippled girl's gaze, softly focusing its chocolate eyes

for a few seconds on the girl's, in a long stare. The dog was quiet, no barking, just a long, steady look deeply drinking in the girl's uncrippled spirit. Slowly, the dog raised a paw to the wire, touching it gently and holding it there. The girl wheeled close to the window and put her hand in the same place, the cold wire between them, paw on paw.

"Can I look at this one, please?"

"What did I tell you, Kat?" Susie whispered, opening the pen and lifting the quiet dog on to the knee of the crippled girl. The dog lifted her face to the girl, who bent her head towards the head of the dog allowing the dog to lick her face. She stroked her back and the dog snuggled into her waist, moulding into her; she knew this was her place.

"I'd like this one, thanks." Her mum beamed and stroked the dog.

"She'll make you a lovely companion." Susie too stroked the dog, "She's called Lorna, but you can change that if you like. She's not too old to adapt."

"What's her background?" The mother asked.

"Lorna was given, well frankly, to an unsuitable family. She was a birthday present for their young child, but the young child was soon disinterested in her and the parents both worked full time and they all lived busy lives. Lorna ended up being fed, watered and not much else. She was left for long periods on her own, doing her own thing. Unfortunately, that was mostly chewing and crying because she was alone. In the end, they surrendered her. I think it's a kind of abuse, not giving a dog the attention it needs."

The mother gently caressed Lorna's head. Kat bit her lip.

"Has she been affected by neglect?" The mother's question sounded a little anxious, but her daughter was oblivious, continuing to cuddle the young dog. Her brother stood behind the wheelchair looking over at the little bundle on his

sister's knee.

"We've had her here a couple of months. She wasn't socialized with other dogs or people, but we've worked hard on that, and she's naturally companionable, so she responded remarkably well."

"It's a shame people neglected as children can't adapt as easily." Kat said this reaching her hand out to pat the dog.

Susie put her hand on Kat's arm. "Dogs don't hold grudges Kat, and they are pretty good at forgiving and forgetting, especially if they get the right attention eventually."

Kat continued to stroke the dog and didn't look up, her face hidden by her hair. The mother was standing behind the wheelchair looking down at her daughter entranced by the pup.

"She's a dog who needs to be with people all the time? Are you able to do that?" Susie enquired.

"That is exactly what we want," the mother replied, " Hannah needs her own individual companionship, especially after school. It not easy for her to go out and play like other kids her age, or go and do stuff. Tom here is always out with his friends, football and the like, that Hannah can never do. But, Hannah can take Lorna out for walks alongside her wheelchair. And, if she gets tired, well she's small enough to jump in the basket and take a ride!"

"What about when Hannah's at school?" Susie had to make sure they were right for the dog.

"When Hannah is at school, Dad's home. He is a freelance writer so works from home. The dog can keep him company; stop him from sloping off to local cafes all the time and not getting any work done. At least if he does, he'll have to take the dog, so he'll get a bit more exercise." The mother laughed and ducked when

her husband ruffled her curly hair.

"Don't give all our secrets away, darling!" He said smiling at her with a look that Kat knew was special. She wished someone would ruffle her hair like that, instead of ruffling her emotions.

Hannah examined Susie's face, pensively.

"Can I really change her name? Lorna's a good name but.."

"But what, Hannah. What do you think her name should be?"

"I'd like to call her Laurel if that's all right?"

The parents and Susie all smiled agreement. "It's a good idea, just to change the name slightly then the dog doesn't get confused," Susie said. "A new name for a new life. Laurel, welcome to your new forever family."

Allen read through Kat's notes on her Internet searches and plans for visits.

"You've made a quite a good start, Kat."

"Not really, Allen, don't feel as if I've started at all. Haven't got very far yet. I'd like you to check what I've done."

Allen's eyes rolled up, and he sighed. "Kat, you don't have to run everything past me for approval."

"Sorry, Allen, but I do want to get it right."

"There's no right or wrong, Kat. You're just information gathering at this stage. When you've got the intelligence and grasped the problems, we can decide what are the issues and problems we need to address."

"So, how do we go about that?"

"Questions, questions, Kat. You sound like a five-year-old. How, why, what, all the time."

Kat blushed and pushed her hand through her hair. She narrowed her eyes. She wasn't a kid called to see the headmaster for some misdemeanor. She stood up from behind her desk and started to leave the room. When she got to the door, she turned round. The frown line between her eyes deepened. "Now look here, I don't care if you are the boss, but I'm just a beginner at this, and frankly, I need some help from you. You seem to expect me to know instinctively what do, but I don't. I'm not bloody well clairvoyant, you know. If that's what you want, I suggest you find someone who is. What is more, I don't appreciate you patronizing me either!"

She made to push past him and get to the door.

Allen took a step back and held his hands up in surrender. "Ouch," he said, "Put

your claws back. I thought that having done Business Studies at Uni you would know a bit about problem solving."

Kat turned around to face him. "I can," she said, drawing herself up to her full height, "provided you tell me what problems I am supposed to solve and give me some clues how to go about it. I'm not stupid, I just don't know. I don't have years of experience like you do."

Allen looked taken aback. "OK, Kat, let's start again."

Kat thought she saw a hint of a smile. It would help if he did smile. He makes me feel so, well, inadequate.

"OK. Maybe I was expecting too much at first. Let's meet each morning and plan the day. We can set up some goals, little ones at first and as you get into it more, we can get a bit more ambitious. If you need any training, then I'll get that arranged for you, but mostly you need to hone your people skills in the beginning. You already have good computer skills, but you need a bit of polishing up on the presentation side of things. I'll show you. How does that sound?" His voice softened.

Kat stopped glowering at him, "Good, thank you."

"What do you want, Kat, out of this job I mean?"

"Not sure, Allen. Haven't discovered what the job is yet. I want to learn some new skills. It would be nice to know what I'm good at."

"Don't you know?"

The question discomforted Kat. She couldn't see herself working in an office for the rest of her life. Offices, enclosed four walls, made her feel claustrophobic and want to escape. At least, in this job, she had to get out of the office and see people; opportunities to sense the wind rippling her hair, the warmth of the sun on her face, and feel her spirit reaching for the universe.

"I was good at a few subjects at school. But, nothing excited me, inspired me enough to say I want to do this for the rest of my life."

"What would it take to inspire you, Kat?"

"I don't know. Something I did that made someone's life better than it was before, maybe, did something someone felt was significant. Maybe, make a difference that wouldn't have happened, if not for something I did."

"That's a lot of scope, Kat." Allen's face broke into a smile.

Kat noticed his eyes crinkle up, and his face transform. He looked almost human.

Edwin and Poppy always stuck to the same routine each day, and he arrived at the cafe the next day at precisely ten o'clock. The usually silent waitress who brought him his coffee said, "See you're in the paper this morning."

Edwin was tying Poppy's lead around the table leg and wondered why he should be in the paper. With the dog secured, he made his way over to the newspaper stand and picked out the day's edition. He had just unfolded it when he saw the picture of Joan and him with Poppy, outside their house. Joan's face appeared startled. It wasn't the best picture of her. The dog was staring right at the camera. Edwin's eyes homed in on the headline.

'Millionaire Mutt Makes Megabucks for Master

Yesterday, the High Court upheld the Will of the late Primrose Violet Moore. Mrs. Moore left over \$300,000,000 to an animal charity and \$50,000,000 in a Trust for the upkeep of her dog, Poppy. Primrose Moore was the wife of fraudster Francis Moore who died, shortly after being sentenced to 10 years prison, for fraud. Her son, Lyall is

currently in prison for drug dealing and money laundering. The Tribune understands that Police are investigating how Mrs. Moore came to have so much money. Her only source of legitimate income appears to be the Government superannuation.

Primrose Moore's dog is now the property of the Poppy Moore Trust and Edwin, and Joan Paine of 17 Menzies Street, Milford are the dog's appointed caregivers. Edwin Paine is a former Quality Control Manager, and his wife is a housewife. The couple has two children and four grandchildren, all who currently live in Melbourne, Australia.'

Edwin couldn't read any further. *'Oh my Lord'* thought Edwin, *'I'd better get back home.'* He untied Poppy and ran out of the cafe, throwing down a \$20 note on the counter when he left. The waitress rang up the \$4 dollars for the coffee and pocketed the rest.

Edwin and Poppy reached the corner shop near his house, and he could see hordes of people on the pavement outside his front garden. They were all shouting and gesturing. Some were holding their cameras high above their heads, poised, ready. One of them spotted him.

"There he is!"

The crowd saw him and broke up, first one reporter running towards him then another taking up the pursuit. Edwin froze, cornered, like a rabbit in headlights, until Poppy gave a jerk of the lead. His eyes went down to her and saw she was pointing, alert, ears up and growling as the storm of people came closer. Edwin and Poppy ran into the corner shop, waving the owner to let him through to the back yard. From there, he could sneak round the back gardens of his neighbours' houses and into his house through the back door of his garage.

Joan was shaking inside the front door. Reporters were banging on the

door, calling for her to come outside and talk to them. The noise was deafening.

When she saw Edwin and Poppy enter the house through the garage, she burst into tears and clung to him while he hugged her and patted her back.

The phone rang. Joan picked it up, "Mrs. Paine, what do you have to say about....."

She flung the phone down onto the receiver cutting off the call.

Edwin took up the phone and rang Andrew's number. "What do we do?"

"I tried to keep this secret, but I guess it was a forlorn hope. Look, I'll ring the police and see if we can move them off your property, but they won't be able to clear them from the street. I suggest you pack a bag, and as soon as they've thinned out, take off for a few days. There's an exclusive lodge in the Bay of Islands you can go to. They'll take the dog too. Do you want me to arrange it? Get you away for a few days until it all dies down."

"Exclusive? What about the cost?" Edwin frowned and twiddled with the phone cord.

"Don't think you need to worry about cost Edwin. I'm just making the first payment into your bank account from the Trust, for Poppy's upkeep. I'll book you in, under a false name. Mr. and Mrs...?"

Andrew sounded upbeat on the other end of the phone.

Eddie thought for a minute, but his mind was blank, "I don't know, Brown, Green, anything."

"Green it is." Andrew sounded as if he thought the name appropriate.

The 'Greens' were allocated Lodge five at the exclusive Bay of Island's resort. The Lodge had privacy walls on either side, a patio set with recliner chairs, a barbecue and outdoor table setting, and there was a small garden that

went down to a private beach, complete with tethered dinghy and a kayak. The unit's patio and garden faced northwest to catch the afternoon sun and the sunset over the Bay.

"Wow," said Joan when she saw it. The inside of the Unit had a bedroom with a king-sized bed, a separate living room complete with comfortable armchairs around a fireplace that no doubt would be appreciated in winter, but now, in spring was superfluous. The unit had a fifty inch plasma TV set fixed to the wall, and the cabinet below held an expensive looking Hi-fi. There was a small kitchenette, for making tea and coffee; any meals, individually prepared by the Lodge's Michelin starred chef, were personally delivered to the Unit, at the time requested. The dining area held a polished Kauri table and chairs and the side cabinet contained fine red wines, and a refrigerator for the whites. There was even a bed for the dog.

Poppy was welcome to run round the private garden and play on the little beach. Under no circumstances was she allowed out after dark. Kiwis were about, the feathered kind, the receptionist explained, and dogs, especially ones with terrier heritage like Poppy, had an innate urge to hunt and eat them. "They think they're chickens," she'd explained.

Joan warmed the glass of red wine in her hand. The sky behind the clouds turned crimson to match. "My word, Edwin, this is lovely. I never knew such places existed. I could take a lot of this, but I dread to think how much this is all costing."

"A lot. Probably more than my monthly super, I would think." Edwin had been doing the calculations.

Edwin needed to get some cash. He thought about three hundred dollars would do, and he thought he had better telephone Andrew to find out how best

to pay the bill for the Lodge. He was sure his credit card limit wouldn't cover it. Collecting the money spat out by the money machine, he glanced at the receipt and his eyes riveted on the balance. There was over one hundred thousand dollars in his current account.

Back at the Lodge he phoned Andrew and raved about the accommodation. "Glad you like it, Edwin I must try it myself sometime."

Edwin walked over to the French window leading onto the patio, glanced out and saw that Joan was sunbathing with the dog by her side. "Andrew, I checked my bank balance today and see that a deposit for a hundred thousand dollars is in my account."

"Yes, that's right, I made the transfer, yesterday. Now the funds are unfrozen we can get on with the various Trusts."

"But, that's extraordinarily generous. I don't think Poppy's upkeep is going to cost that much a year, Andrew." Edwin flicked on the table lamp on the sideboard.

"Edwin! That is the first installment. The terms of the Will are that the interest is to provide for the care and upkeep of the dog, and her caregivers, Mr. and Mrs. Paine. I went through this with Primrose before she died. It includes paying you and Joan a fair proportion of the interest made on the money left to Poppy, minus taxes and Trust administration expenses, of course, for the life of the dog. You can expect ten installments of this much a year."

"But, that's a million dollars." Edwin sat down with a thud.

"Yes, it sure is. The terms are that you'll get paid for as long as Poppy stays alive and well. Payments finish if anything happens to the dog. She should live for another ten years or thereabouts, so basically, you'll never have to worry about money ever again, Edwin."

"I didn't quite understand we would get"

"Edwin, Primrose was exceedingly fond of you and Joan. She wanted you to have it. She said it was small compensation for all the support she had from you both. She couldn't rely on any of her family, but she always felt she could rely on you, and she wanted to reward you for that. She wanted to make sure you never had to worry about a thing for the rest of your lives."

Edwin ran his hand through his thinning grey hair, wondering how he was going to explain all this to Joan. "I can't believe this. Like everyone else I know, we've dreamed of winning the lottery and never got more than a few dollars and now this. I feel as if"

"Yes, Edwin, all your dreams have come true. I hope the money makes you very happy."

Allen popped his head around the door of Kat's office. She was busy looking at something on the computer and taking notes.

"How did the visit go Kat?"

"Good, thanks Allen. They've given me some excellent ideas, and I'm mapping out as much information as I can get on the net. It's surprising how much there is." Allen walked into the office and sat down opposite Kat.

"So, tell me."

"They're incredible people, Allen. All so passionate, about what they are doing I mean. It's good to see that people can feel strongly about something more than money, or possessions, or clothes, or the latest gadget, or 'must have or else what is the point of living' sort of thing. These people really care about something outside themselves."

"That's a surprise to you?"

"Too right it is."

"Your Gran obviously cared, Kat."

"You know, Allen, I never thought she cared about anything while I was growing up. She rarely showed any emotion and never talked about how she felt. Didn't like to be too flowery, she would say. I put it down to her being depressed at having to put up with me at the time, and I have to admit, it got to me."

"Some people want to keep a lid on their feelings. Doesn't mean they don't feel, just that they don't show it."

"If people don't show how they feel, how can you tell? It's confusing."

Allen turned to leave and started to close the door, then opened it again.

"You're doing a good job Kat. You're turning out to be adept at collecting the

information we need. Have you been to the Council Pound yet?"

"Not yet." Kat averted her eyes.

"I thought you were going last week, the week before if it comes to that."

"I've some information from the net so far. Am thinking, maybe I'll ring them this week."

A flush was creeping up her neck to her cheeks.

"Kat, you are procrastinating. What's that about?" Allen's voice sharpened and made her uncomfortable. He would be thinking she was lazy and not doing her job.

She took a deep breath. "I don't know, Allen. I guess this is all getting to me, but every time I think of going I get this sinking feeling in my stomach. I dread going there. Yes, I know they provide a vital service. Yes, I know we can't miss them out. Yes, I know it's essential to understand their issues if we are to help. But, every time I go to the phone to make the appointment, I end up putting it down before the call goes through."

"So what is about the Pound that is worrying you, Kat?" Allen's voice was gentler, less terse than usual.

"It's just that, well, more than anywhere else they have animals no one cares about, no one wants any more, they're surplus to requirements. Many of them never get out of there. At the Animal Welfare Village, the focus is on finding homes for as many suitable animals as possible, so it's more positive. But, at the Pound, they have to get them out of there, one-way or another. The animals are on borrowed time. "

Allen was silent for a moment. "You're not the only one in the world who thinks that. Don't you think the people who work there think that too?"

"I suppose...." Kat wouldn't look at him and kept her eyes fixed on her desk.

"Your grandmother was a volunteer there. She didn't avoid it. Look Kat, our mission is to improve the situation, and we can't do that unless we know what the issues we can deal with are."

"I don't know how Gran could have stood seeing those animals about to lose their lives."

Kat looked down at the desk. From where he stood, Allen could see her twisting her fingers in her lap. "Animals lose their lives all the time, for food, for clothing, for our protection," he said.

"I know, but these animals lose their lives for no good reason, because of us, because we've abused and misused them; because we've neglected to train them properly; because there's no room for them in people's lives; because they're inconvenient."

Kat hands, gesturing as she spoke, flicked over the half-empty paper coffee-cup on the table, spilling the dark liquid across the desk, causing her to mop up the mess and brush it into her waste paper basket.

"Sorry, Allen. Gran always tried to tell me not to get too excited!"

Kat grinned, and Allen smiled back at her. "I never knew your grandmother Kat, but Dad always said she was a person who wanted to make a difference. Isn't that what told me once you wanted for yourself?"

Kat sat back in her chair. "It's just the callousness of people makes me so angry, and I don't like feeling that way."

"So if the callousness makes you angry, use it. Use your anger to fuel change in the world. Better that than turning it on yourself in resentment, or dumping it on those around you. Don't be afraid of your passion, Kat. Let it help you find your purpose in life."

"I'm not going to find my purpose in life here, Allen. I'm going back to

Kathmandu, remember."

Allen sucked in his cheeks. "How could I have forgotten, Kat? Silly me. Thank you for reminding me, yet again. What's there that's so different from here Kat? Let me see now. Oh yes, I remember. A group of monks and nuns who believe in reincarnation, and chanting around a pile of golden statues."

"I can't stand it when you're cynical. It's more than that. You don't understand."

"Ah yes, another person who says 'you don't understand' when what they actually mean is I can't or won't explain?"

"You're impossible!" Kat crossed her arms across her body tightly and frowned at him.

Allen bit his bottom lip. "You know, you don't have to go all the way to Kathmandu to find what you want, Kat. You might find it right here."

"Might I indeed? Another person in my life who knows more about me than I do! How come I might find what I want right here when I know you can't? I know you dream of going to Italy. Your Dad told me. So you can't get what you want right here, but right here is good enough for someone like me? Well, my experience of right here is being someone's doll to dress, an accessory to her latest outfit. Right here, I was dumped on my grandmother at thirteen because I got in my mother's way. Right here, everyone including you, expects me to conform to your expectations, mustn't be different to everyone else - far too dangerous."

Kat's was seething inside at his hypocrisy, "You, Allen, living your privileged life, in your middle-class bubble, you just don't understand what it was like for me."

She rose from her seat and started shuffling the papers on her desk. Allen observed her for a second or two, pursing his lips. Kat slammed down the

papers on the desk.

"You don't know what I understand, Kat. Don't assume you do. So, you had a tough time as a kid. So did millions of other people. What do you want to happen? Someone to be the Daddy you never had, pat you on the head, tell you you're a good girl, take you for a ride on a merry go round?"

Tears sprang up in Kat's eyes. "Who do you think you are now, Allen? My bloody psychotherapist?"

Allen was silent for a moment. "I didn't intend to...."

"Didn't intend to what? Upset me? Well you have."

"OK. Sorry. So, I was having a go at you, but you had a go at me." He retorted.

"You may be the boss, Allen, and I'm just an assistant, and while you have a perfect right to tell me how to do the job, it doesn't give you the right to tell me how to think. Don't worry. I'll ring the pound today."

"Good. See that you do." Allen rose from his seat and left the room. Kat saw the almost suppressed smile crossing his face as he did. Scumbag!_

Joan liked the routine of her household duties. Washing up after breakfast, gave her time to plan the rest of her day, around her favourite soap on daytime TV. The characters she followed never had messy homes, and neither would she by the time the show came on at noon. Looking out of the window, while she stacked the dishes, she saw the sun come out from behind the clouds, and the trees begin to sway, their leaves rustling as the wind piped up. A good drying day. After stacking the dishes, she put the washing on, hanging each item on the line, a carefully placed peg each corner. She could hear her mother's voice in her inner ear, 'you can tell they're nice people. You only have to look at how they put their washing on the line.' Joan laughed at the memory.

What had the state of the washing got to do with how nice you were? Nevertheless, she wasn't going to let anyone judge her on poor housekeeping.

This money left to them by Primrose was a bit of a turn up. Edwin said they had to be sensible about it. He was a devoted husband, looked after them well, but to be frank, he had always had a touch of the 'short arms, but deep pockets' syndrome. More than a bit overcautious where money was concerned. Sometimes, Joan wished he would loosen up a bit and splash out, go out to a fancy restaurant or something, but he usually said that Joan's cooking was all he ever wanted. But, it would be good not to have to cook sometimes, try something different, a bit exotic, and not have to wash it up or clear away. Edwin worried about not having enough money for as long as she had known him. Now, after a lifetime of being careful, they had more money than they'd ever dreamt of. And, providing all went well, it would keep on coming. The thought of never having to worry again about paying bills, or buying something expensive or get outside help if needed, made her tremble with excitement. Whether she could persuade Edwin to part with some of it was another matter. He constantly worried about things going wrong. We could help the girls out, get some lovely presents for the grandkids, go and see them a bit more often. Enjoy ourselves.

Unfortunately, the hordes of reporters camped outside her house putting them under siege were giving her palpitations. She wished they'd go away so she could begin to enjoy herself again. Edwin hadn't been able to take Poppy out for a walk now for three weeks, and they were both getting cabin fever. A housebound Edwin was getting in the way and stopping her from getting on with her daily routine. Whenever he tried to leave the house, photographers accosted him the moment he opened the door. One reporter complained loudly

to Edwin that Poppy was a dangerous animal that should be muzzled, after she growled at him. He had thrust a long lens under her snout, and when he didn't pull it away she snapped at his arm in warning. Her teeth didn't make contact, but the photographer made such a fuss that anyone nearby could be forgiven for thinking Poppy had ripped open his arm, and there was blood on the pavement.

When they managed to make it outside the front door, their walk would be a misery of constant clicking. Edwin couldn't scratch his nose, or Poppy do her business without the paparazzi taking a photograph. Even the back garden wasn't safe. As soon as Edwin threw a ball in the garden, the waiting photographers would hear the noise and seconds later their faces behind their cameras would appear over the wall.

Eddie was good at offering to 'help' about the house, but after many of managing her household routine her way for many years, Joan didn't want any 'help.' She prided herself on being 'Mrs. Fix it.' Joan was a prudent housewife, always made sure the housekeeping money stretched enough to give them a reasonable lifestyle. Where she could make savings she did, anything she could make herself, from clothes to shelves, she did, and anything she could fix around the house, she did. Over their many years together they had adapted into their respective roles, Eddie's, to earn the money, pay the bills, and be the family protector. Hers to make sure that her man was cared for and happy, and the household ran smoothly. The same values drummed into them as kids. Right now, a retired Edwin, with no quality control line to supervise, was driving her dotty. She needed him to go out and take the dog with him. Poppy had taken to bounding around the living room in circles to burn off her frustrated energy, nearly tripping up Joan on several occasions.

Joan's regime had been well and truly upset, and she needed to find an outlet for her frustration. Joan loved cooking for her Eddie, and it was something she could do without fearing the paparazzi snapping her. Homemade biscuits, chocolate chip and macadamia so moreish they didn't keep beyond a day; light and fluffy Victoria sponge cakes, filled with strawberry jam and fresh cream, that melted in the mouth; fruit cake with almonds and glacé fruits on the top, perfect with a cup of tea; lamingtons rolled in coconut shards that stuck between the teeth prolonging the flavour as the tongue sought to grab them; decorated cupcakes with intricate iced tops, each day a new challenge to create a different design; banana cake moist and dark-flecked, one of Eddie's favourite; chocolate slices, gooey caramel oozing out with each bite, were all produced with expertise from Joan's kitchen, love tokens for her increasingly sedentary and rapidly widening husband.

Joan had just taken in the washing on when the phone rang.

"Mrs. Paine?" A crisp official man's voice came on the phone. "Coast to Coast, TV, Mrs. Paine. We'd like you and your husband, and your dog of course, to come into the studio and do an interview for the Today, Tonight show."

"Us, on the telly?" Joan glanced around the room, her hand patting her chest.

"There's much interest in your story, Mrs. Paine. It's not every day someone gets left a million dollars a year to look after a dog."

"Suppose not. We didn't ask for it, you know."

"Sure, sure, but we can talk about it on the programme. So, we'll send a car for you at five o'clock? Need to get you in makeup before and the presenter will need to have a little chat before you go to air."

The man rang off. Joan ran into the living room to tell Eddie the news. He was flicking through a camera magazine trying to decide which accessories he wanted for his new camera. "We're going to be on the telly Eddie. Fancy, us of all people. Tonight. Now Eddie, I just can't be on the telly in my old clothes. What would people say? Do you think I could I pop out and buy a new dress and my hair done, now we can afford it?"

Joan flushed with excitement. "Get your best suit out, Eddie so I can give it an iron before we go."

Joan grabbed her handbag and went to go out the front door. She was a bit put out that Edwin had said she mustn't spend too much money on a dress, especially as he had just spent nearly three thousand dollars on a camera for himself. There was still a reporter hanging around the front door, so she decided to take the car. Opening the garage door, she closed her eyes and put

her foot down. She was sure they would jump out of the way, just like the cats did, who used to sunbathe on the driveway until Poppy came and claimed the territory.

Joan couldn't remember the last time she had gone out and bought a dress ready-made. Being adept at handcrafts, Joan sewed most of her clothes herself, and she was extremely doubtful of how she should go about buying an off-the-peg dress. There were several women's clothing shops in the High Street, each increasing in poshness and prices the nearer they approached the central shops. She decided to go into one with a window display featuring classically styled clothing, suitable for 'the more mature woman.' Joan hoped that wasn't a euphemism for being 'fat.'

The shop assistant's fussing, pulling the sleeves down, and smoothing her vee shaped décolletage to make her look less bustier, embarrassed her. However, the saleswoman was correct about the dress, it looked lovely on her. She assured Joan it would look marvellous on the telly. Joan turned and looked at herself in the mirror. The dress was flattering, and the obviously expensive fabric fell beautifully. She looked at the price label, and her eyes nearly popped out when she saw how much it cost. She went to put it back on the clothes rack, but then thought again how delightful it looked and, for heaven's sake, she was sure Primrose, would not begrudge her this beautiful garment. They could afford it, and Edwin would just have to accept that she deserved such a dress. She closed her eyes when she put her credit card into the machine and avoided looking at the price on the machine or on the chit as she signed. It had cost her entire annual budgeted allowance for clothing. *'On one dress!'*

Joan felt like royalty getting into a chauffeur driven car in her new outfit.

Edwin gulped when Joan told him how much she had spent, but before he could object, Joan pointed her index finger at the new camera, and he obviously thought better of saying anything. He was in his best suit and tie. It was his only suit and tie, but the TV people wouldn't know that. If this were going to happen again, Joan would make sure he bought a new one. Edwin had washed Poppy for the occasion, so she was looking sharp and smelling sweet.

Joan's eyes were popping while she walked down the corridor at the studio. A well-known newsreader came out of the room marked 'Make Up' looking immaculate, still wearing a bib. Joan and Edwin stopped, astonished to be so close to a National Icon. The presenter dropped to her knees when she saw the dog. "Is this the dog? The millionaire dog?"

While she was patting the dog, a woman with a powder brush emerged, waving her brush over the presenter's face, showering Poppy's head also with beige face powder. Oblivious, Poppy held her head from side to side for the pats, shoving her snout under the newsreader's hand.

The TV personality laughed. "I don't want to wash my hands now. Hope some of your luck has rubbed off onto me. Bye, bye, lucky doggie."

Joan was astonished to see that the television studio was one gigantic room divided into sections. One corner had the 'News' with its wall of television screens behind it, a little separated was the Sports desk, and in the next corner was a large weather map. The opposite corner had the set for 'This Week' programme that aired on Sundays, and across the room from the 'News' was the set for 'Today, Tonight.' In the middle several TV cameras were moving backwards and forwards, swiftly and silently, on their motorized wheels. Joan and Edwin were shown to a couple of red-upholstered chairs to the side of the presenter's lectern, and the dog told to sit, stay.

The presenter came and sat in a chair beside them. "So how does it feel to have the care of a dog worth fifty-million dollars?"

Joan had been told in the briefing, when the red light on the camera went on, the entire country would be looking at her. The red-lit camera rolled towards her, mesmerizing her, and she opened her mouth to answer, but no words came out. Edwin gave her a brief look and said, "We love her to bits. To us, she's priceless. "

The presenter appeared bored with the cliché. Out of camera range, he glanced towards the studio manager as if to say, what can you expect? Need a bit more meat here.

"So how does it feel to be the beneficiaries of a fortune that cut out all the living relatives?"

Edwin's eyebrow started twitching. "I'm sure Primrose Moore knew what she was doing, and it was her wish."

"So tell us, where did the money come from in the first place?" The presenter's sotto voice sounded saccharine.

Edwin shot Joan a look, but she stared blankly back at him. He swallowed and his eyebrow started twitching again. The presenter waited expectantly for him to answer and when he was slow to do so, repeated the question, a little more loudly. Edwin finally replied. "The money came from a lottery win, in America. Primrose Moore won the Mega-millions. That was why she left it all to charity."

A flurry of excitement went around the studio.

"Really!" The presenter looked taken aback.

"It's not a secret," Eddie said in a diffident tone. "Well, not now. Mrs. Moore founded an animal rescue charity with the money - The PAWS Foundation.

Poppy's Trust is an arm of that Charity."

Edwin's eyebrow stopped twitching, and he relaxed his shoulders. The red-eye relentlessly moved in for a close-up. Edwin's eyebrow started twitching again.

"So, you are doing exceptionally nicely out of it thank you, aren't you? Unlike the disinherited family?"

"We get a substantial income from the interest of the Trust, yes. Primrose Moore had her reasons for doing what she did. We didn't ask for the money. We were as surprised as everyone else."

Joan was still staring wide eyed at the camera, her mouth dry as the Desert Road.

"So, it looks as if you're the real lotto winners, Edwin and Joan. What are you going to do with the money? Diamond collars for Poppy? Gold balls for her to chase?"

When the presenter said this, Joan's frozen mind thawed enough for the thought Poppy would look really nice in a diamond collar to penetrate and for a second or two she entertained the idea. The camera eye, seeing her smile slightly, honed in on her face, scrutinizing every wrinkle.

Eddie glanced at his wife. "We expect to carry on just as we always have."

The presenter eyes glazed. Joan had no doubt he was thinking, *'this is what they all say, yeah, right!'* The presenter tilted his head, listening to the voice of his presenter coming through the bug in his ear.

"Does Poppy do tricks?"

Edwin laughed. "No way. She'll stand, sit and stay, and come if called, if she wants to. She can bark on command if you say 'speak' to her, if you call that a trick.

The presenter stood up and walked to where the dog was sitting. "So, Poppy, what do you think about all this? Speak!" He put a fluffy covered microphone in front of the dog, which she attempted to take in her mouth and eat. He repeated the question, holding the microphone out of Poppy's reach. She raised her nose and sniffed at it, before standing and regarding the presenter for a moment with her dark brown burnish eyes. The she sniffed at the studio floor and started circling, going round and round.

The presenter said, "So, look at Poppy, she does do tricks!"

Joan knew what was about to happen and flushed deep red as Poppy stopped circling, squatted and dumped. The presenter recoiled two steps back, the smell pervading the studio, the camera focusing back on his face while he did.

"Well, folks, we have to leave it there for now, but thanks for coming in and showing us one extremely wealthy dog and her immensely fortunate owners. Poppy, Edwin and Joan, thank you for speaking to us."

"Arhh, Arhh, Woof, Woof."

"As bad as you thought?" Allen asked Kat when she came back from her fact-finding visit to the pound.

"Worse!"

Kat sank into the chair opposite Allen and burst into tears. Allen handed her a tissue and waited until she had stopped sobbing. "Sorry didn't mean to break down like that. You must think I'm such a kid."

"The visit upset you?"

"Yes."

"Just, Yes?"

Kat mopped her eyes and blew her nose. "Isn't it bleeding obvious the visit upset me? Of course, it did." Kat shouted at him.

"Good. We need to know that. What was it about the visit that upset you?"

"It was pathetic. All these animals in wire cages and noisy, you wouldn't believe it. They all sounded so, well, desperate."

"The animals or the people?"

"Both. The people despair at the callousness of some owners who don't care if their dog lives or dies. They have serious issues about people who won't or can't be bothered to secure their dogs, so animal control picks them off the streets, and then they won't pay the fine, often don't even bother to pick them up. They just get another dog and the cycle starts over. They told me they could often rehome the nice-looking dogs, the cute ones. But, the ugly ones, the old ones and the injured ones they can't, so they get euthanized when, given half a chance, they could make good family pets. And some dogs are so aggressive they have to be shot. Shot! That really upsets them."

Kat's eyes filled with tears again and she started sobbing.

"There was a dog - just like Poppy - a mixture - a bit older - with a lovely, bushy tail and," Kat reached for a tissue, "and bright, dark brown eyes - he was lame. The vet said he'd been found limping round the streets, abandoned - he'd been hit by a car - left on the roadside. It broke his leg - hadn't healed properly - no one claimed him. The vet let me cuddle him."

She broke off again to blow her nose, but, as fast as she did, her eyes filled again, the tears falling on to her desk. "I saw myself reflected in his eyes - he saw into my soul. Then she killed him. With me holding him. She said he was lucky. Most animals don't have anyone to hold them. He was so cute - so full of life one second and next nothing."

Allen was silent until Kat stopped crying.

"That's where we can come in, can't we Kat?" He said gently.

"Yes, I suppose. From what I'm gathering, the Animal Shelters and Humane Societies do what they can, with few resources, reliant on unpaid volunteers and dependent on donations. They need foster carers, money for vet bills, room to house more animals, transport, food donations, the list goes on and on. And, then there are the animals, injured cats, dogs, horses, birds, who need surgery. They can do most things for animals that you can for people now, but there's no public health system for animals. If they need expensive surgery and, it's often extremely expensive, if the owner can't afford it, it's bye, bye, Rover."

"Which is what happened to the dog you comforted while it was put to sleep?"

Kat looked down at the floor and sighed, before lifting her head and meeting Allen's gaze. "Killed, Allen, not put to sleep, killed deliberately. Humanely, yes, but still killed."

"You look worn out Kat."

She looked up at him with surprise in her eyes. He almost said that as if he cared. "I feel drained. I felt so sorry for them all, the way they looked at me. When I moved past them and looked back at them, they were still looking at me, their eyes full of hurt. I was their last chance, and I let them down."

Kat broke down again, letting the tears flow, ignoring the tissue crumpled in her hand.

"We can't save every animal, Kat." Allen handed her another tissue.

"I know. But, I do want to try to save some."

"And we will, Kat, in time."

Kat lifted her head. He's got kind eyes; maybe he's not so bad after all. "I do hope so Allen. I can't believe I've got so emotional over this little dead dog. I

didn't cry like this even when my Gran died."

"Maybe, it's not just the dog you're grieving for, Kat."

The postie stopped putting letters in the letterbox on the roadside, and had to come up the path with the large bag full of mail. "It's getting a bit much, Mrs. Paine. I can't carry anyone else's mail these days, so I have to make two trips each round. I think you'll have to start picking your mail up at the Post Office."

The grumpy postie dumped the bag on the door lintel, letters spilling out onto the path, forcing Joan to pick them up.

Every day since the television programme, it was the same story. Edwin couldn't keep up with deleting all the emails begging for a handout, 'now he was so rich, and they so poor.' His email account kept freezing because his Inbox kept going over the limit. This bag must contain five or six hundred letters, Joan estimated. She felt tearful at the thought of going through them all, but she had to, in case there were letters that needed attention, like bills. Joan couldn't bear to be late paying; it would worry her too much.

Joan carried the heavy bag into the living room and placed it on the table. It would take several hours just to flick through them, identify bills, letters from people they knew, and those belonging to the ever increasing correspondence from people living in cardboard boxes with no food for their dog, or cat, or budgie or pet cockroach. There was a large pile of letters, abusing them about their good fortune, or worse, threatening. Joan wavered between being sympathetic to people begging for money, and piqued at their expectation of handouts. As the youngest child of six children brought up in South Auckland, Joan knew what it was like to be poor. Her father was a lowly office worker and her mother eked out the family finances by cleaning other people's houses. Nobody helped them out. Flicking through the begging letters her mother's

voice intruded telling her these beggar people undoubtedly put carelessly washed laundry on their lines.

Much to her surprise and consternation, a couple of Joan's older siblings asked her to 'share their good fortune.' Joan didn't remember her elder siblings sharing much with her when she was a child; having so little encouraged them to territorial of what they did have. Her elder brother became nasty towards her when Edwin and Joan refused his request to buy them a new car.

After a couple of hours, she had identified the critical bills, a postcard from her daughter who's gone to Surfer's Paradise with the family for a short break courtesy of Edwin and Joan, and which of the rest would go into the rubbish. There was a few official looking letters besides the scrawled, misspelt handwritten ones. One letter looked intriguing. She opened it.

The letterhead was Maxfax Magazines and was from the editor of Women's Way, a women's weekly magazine.

'Dear Mr. and Mrs. Paine,

We would like to do an exclusive feature article on you and your dog, Poppy. There is enormous public interest in your story. We envisage a several pages spread featuring an 'At Home with Poppy' photo-shoot.

We are prepared to pay \$5,000 for the exclusive, either to you or to the Foundation.

Please contact the undersigned if you would like to go ahead.

Kind regards,

Diane Borron-Shaw'

"It might be a good idea," said Edwin later when she showed him the letter, "if we give the media what they want then maybe they'll go away and leave us alone."

"A photo-shoot! Fancy! Here! I'll have to get my hair done and.." Joan hesitated

for a moment and gave Edwin her foxy look, "perhaps another new dress?"

Diane Borron-Shaw arrived at the house within an hour of Joan's phone call saying they would like to go ahead. She was an imposing middle-aged woman, tall and smartly dressed in black trousers and plain black top with a gold and black jacket over. Her styled dark brown hair was impeccable, as was her make-up, and she towered over the couple in her five inch heels.

"This is an exclusive, you understand. No deals with any other magazine."

Joan glanced at Edwin. He indicated his agreement also.

"Right, sign here," handing Joan a pen to sign.

Diane took out a clipboard and handed the contract to Joan to sign. "Now, we need to plan the shoot. May I look around?"

"Be our guest" Joan waved her hand in invitation, "welcome to our humble abode"

"You're not exaggerating are you?" Diane sniffed.

Diane wandered through the house, making notes on her clip board, wrinkling up her nose, frowning and shaking her head."

"Is something wrong?" Joan asked, hovering behind Diane.

"This won't do at all, Mrs. Paine, this won't do at all."

"What won't do Ms. Borron-Shaw?" Edwin came and stood behind his wife, putting his arm round her.

"Our readers are expecting something a little more classy than this. You're wealthy, and the Dog is worth mega-bucks. This is all so ... well.... ordinary."

"It's what we have, Miss." Edwin folded his arms tightly.

"I think we should call in the home stagers."

Diane tapped her pen against her lips before pulling, then pulled out her

mobile phone.

"What are you doing?" Edwin took a step forward, and Joan sat down.

"We need to stage the photo-shoot." The other party answered Diane's phone. She spoke quickly and brightly. "Oh Hi, Diane Borron-Shaw here. Women's Way. I want you to stage a three-bedroom house for a photo-shoot for us. Current furniture is unsuitable. Something up market. Lots of shiny satin and gold. Yes, thanks. No, a day's hire will do, perhaps two, one to set up and the other to do the shoot. Thanks, Thursday it is then, Bye"

Diane flicked off the phone and made a note on her clipboard. "That's all fixed up then. The garden's acceptable although we might bring in a few pots of colour to dot here and there, just to lift the garden shots. We'll set them up tomorrow. Then we'll move your furniture out into the garden on Thursday and stage the house for the shoot. Perfect." She smiled and tapped her clipboard with her pen.

"But, what if it rains?" Joan said, worrying about her furniture getting wet.

"Cross that bridge, cross that bridge." Diane waved her hand dismissively at Joan and Edwin. "Our readers expect standards. They don't expect millionaires to be living in scungy houses."

"Scungy!" Edwin said, outraged. "I think we'll forget the whole thing."

"Sorry, you've agreed now. Contract signed and all that. See you tomorrow."

With that Diane left the house followed by her assistant and drove off in her red BMW convertible at top speed.

"Oh Eddie, it does look nice." Joan surveyed her living room. The home stagers removed all the family photographs, bar one of Edwin and Joan on their wedding day, and placed fashionable art works on the walls. A red, gold and

green tapestry covered the dirty mark on the wall where their granddaughter had once decided to draw her family with a felt-tip pen. Their thirty-year-old three-piece suite, languished in the garden, while in its place was an elegant pale green sofa with gold and cream satin ribboned cushions with a cream silk throw over one arm. A small matching wing back chair and a cream leather boxy armchair replaced their own loved, but battered furniture. A marble coffee table, resting on a Turkish rug had an urn vase with a white floral arrangement. Their bedroom now had a king-size bed with a polished rimu headboard, the bed made with a plump gold satin duvet with dark red satin throw and multiple pillows.

The home stagers gave up on the kitchen and bathroom, so the shoot was to take place mainly in the living and master bedrooms.

"Edwin, you know when you see what can be done with the old place, it does make you think." Joan said. "Maybe now we've got a bit of money, we could splash out a bit."

Edwin gave her arm a squeeze. "Look old girl, we need to be careful. This might not last. You know its all dependent on the dog, and the Foundation, and if they don't like it, all this money will disappear."

"You know, Edwin, you are an old stodge sometimes. What's going to happen? Poppy is two, she'll live till she's fifteen if we're lucky and that's a lot of money. It's so much we won't know how to spend it. It's downright incredible, Edwin. Our luck has finally changed, and we could change our surroundings a bit. Like that woman says, people expect you to have nice things when you've got money. And, it is nice having people envy us for a change." Joan gave a toss of her head and picked up her old handcrafted tapestry handbag and tossed it in the rubbish bin by the back door.

The shoot was to begin in earnest a little later. The natural light was best in the room in the late afternoon, and a photographer was setting up his tripod and lighting in the living room when Edwin walked in. "Haven't we met somewhere before?" Edwin asked.

The photographer in the light-coloured sweatshirt, jeans and three days stubble kept fiddling with his ball-head settings, adjusting the camera angles and mumbled, "Don't think so."

Diane came into the room with Joan, newly coiffed, wearing her best beads in the décolletage of her new print summer dress. For the special occasion, the dog had been bathed and blow-dried by a professional groomer.

"Hasn't she got a diamond collar?" Diane sounded disappointed.

"I don't think you can get them." Joan said.

"Well, fake then. Swarovski. Linda, run up to the Swarovski shop, the one in the Mall, and see if they have anything that looks like a diamond collar. Oh, and lose that Council Registration Tag. Looks so common."

Linda came back half an hour later with a crystal collar. Poppy kept bounding away from Diane, shaking her head when she tried to put the collar on her. Joan took over and managed to get it on her after a struggle. Poppy developed an itch and her back paw came up to scratch, spinning the collar round and round, so it caught the photographer's lights, flashing and sparkling.

"You are so beautiful, Poppy," murmured Joan, patting the dog.

The photo-shoot began in earnest, the photographer hidden behind his camera shouting instructions. Look this way, that way, up, down, round about. Poppy on the couch; Edwin and Joan on the couch; Poppy in between them; Poppy eating from her dog bowl; Poppy on the bed; Poppy looking cute; Poppy lying down one eye closed, the other alertly looking at the camera - the money

shot!

"She's a natural." The photographer was happy with his pictures. "You should sign her up for an animal talent agency."

The Home Stagers removed all their furniture and restored the house to its former state. Back came the dirty mark on the wall, the cherished photos put back in their place. Somehow, their decor looked more dated and ordinary, their sofas seemed older and more battered, their bed felt lumpier, and their sun-faded duvet cover, one of many made by Joan out of cotton sheeting, appeared dowdier than before.

Poppy's squeaky toys littered the house. She emptied her toy box, the moment the Women's Way left, taking out each toy individually and depositing it in a corner of the house before going back and repeating the process in a different corner. Poppy was adept at taking her toys out of the box, but it was Joan who had to put them back in.

Joan flicked through the latest 'House and Garden' magazine, checking out the interior decor of the rich and famous. She appraised her own surroundings and her nose wrinkled. "Edwin?"

"Yes, dear." Edwin was checking his bank account on his new laptop.

"Edwin. I think we should move."

Edwin's head came up with a start. "Move?"

"Yes, now we've some money. Our lives are a misery with all these media people camped outside the house. You're not getting enough exercise, and frankly, you're under my feet all the time. You can't even go into the back garden without someone trying to take a photograph. You haven't been to photography club for weeks, and I've had to abandon my ukulele group. Yes, I

think we should move, to somewhere with high walls and large gates."

"Somewhere expensive, you mean?" Edwin looked at the screen on his laptop.

Joan handed him a cup of tea and a cupcake, "Well, yes dear. "

"Joan, much as I hate to disillusion you, there's not enough money in the kitty to buy somewhere very expensive." He closed the lid of his laptop with a snap.

"But, there will be. By the end of the year, there'll be a million. That's a lot of money. And, if Poppy lives to fifteen that could be twelve million or so."

"In total. We haven't got there yet, Joan. Don't forget, we're paid in installments, and anything might happen. We have to be a bit careful."

"Eddie, I'm sick of being 'careful.' I've had a lifetime of being 'careful.' What's the point of having money piling up in the bank if we continue to be 'careful'? If we just carry on living as we've always done, on a shoestring, always being 'careful'?"

"It's just that, if anything happens, the money stops coming. We have to prepare for a worst case scenario, and buying a new house before we're sure we have enough money to pay for it, is madness."

"Eddie, you have to take a risk sometimes. Why do we always have to play safe? What can happen? The dog is a gold mine. At least think about it. We've real problems here, and I don't feel safe. Please, Eddie."

Joan fixed her gaze on her husband and held her head slightly sideways, just as Poppy did when she wanted a biscuit.

"No, Joan, I'm not giving into pleading look of yours. When we've enough money to pay for it, and not before."

Joan glowered at him, sat down in the armchair and opened her magazine and pretended to read.

Edwin rotated the business card in his hand, trying to decide whether to ring the number or not. The card came through the mail the week before, with a letter from Craig Clarke, of Clever Creatures Animal Talent Agency. Craig's letter said there was 'considerable interest' in Poppy, and her appearance in advertising could be 'advantageous' to him.

He reckoned it would take another year before there was enough money from the Trust to buy the type of house Joan had set her heart on. If the dog could earn some money for them, he could bring her dream a little closer. Edwin hadn't discussed capitalizing on Poppy's celebrity status with Fred or Andrew. He was unsure of whether they would approve, perhaps they would think he was exploiting the dog. But then, they didn't have to live with the daily invasion of their privacy. Edwin was tired of the constant jostling, flashbulbs going off in his face, and intrusive questions about what he was doing with his money. He'd taken to walking Poppy on a different beach, further up the coast, which meant a ten-minute drive. Poppy didn't care; a drive was almost as big a treat as a walk. However, Eddie was sick of vacuuming out sand from his car after each trip. Joan hadn't left the house for weeks, and her shakiness and panic at the thought of going through the front door worried Edwin.

Even Joan's friends stopped coming to the house. They still had plenty of visitors, mostly people who came collecting money for charity. But, these people weren't her real friends, not the ones from the home crafts club, or the Library, or the people she used to go shopping with. These days, her longtime friends were full of excuses, why they couldn't come round any more. Edwin had lost track of all the family crises, household catastrophes, funerals, and

other serious problems Joan's friends had to endure recently. It saddened him to see his wife looking so hurt and miserable.

Joan spent her day dusting the new furniture she bought after he had finally succumbed her not so subtle pressure, or in the kitchen, baking. Edwin couldn't keep up with eating all the cakes, slices and biscuits, Joan forced on him, and he thought he'd probably gained all the weight Joan had lost.

He focused again on the business card. It couldn't hurt to find out more information. He dialled the number.

"Clever Creatures, Animal Talent Agency, Jessica speaking"

Edwin hesitated, cleared his throat.

"Hi, I'm Edwin Paine. Mr. Clarke contacted me about my dog Poppy. Is he about?"

"Putting you through." Edwin continued to turn the card over and over in his hand.

"Eddddie! Thanks for getting back to me." The accent was a mixture of American with some distinctively Kiwi sounding vowels.

"Craig, not sure what you have in mind. Perhaps you could talk me through it."

Edwin put down the card and grabbed a pen and notepad.

"My agency is always on the look out for new talent. We would be very happy to manage Poppy's career. We do advertising, films, supply animals for shows, merchandise and so on. An animal in demand could earn \$1000 a day, less expenses and agency fees, of course. And, your dog is such a celebrity, of course. Does she do any tricks?"

"Not the sort you would want, I'm afraid." Edwin remembered the television interview in vivid flashback detail.

"Well, never mind. The dog's famous, and frankly that is enough to sell her to

advertisers. I can see an exciting future for her, not just here but internationally. Before you know it, the sweet smell of success will be money."

"Really?" Edwin thought this was a bit far-fetched.

"I believe the money she inherited came from the States originally. I think they'd be particularly interested in having the Mega millionaire dog. I can see possibilities, 'The Tonight Show', 'Helen', 'USA today' and the rest. You could make a mint, Edwin. They'll pay appearance fees, not expect you to do it free like stingy New Zealand TV companies. But, it's a good idea to get the dog used to working in studios with lights and cameras first, though."

Edwin wasn't at all sure about taking Poppy offshore. The Foundation wouldn't like that at all. "Well, what about..."

Craig interrupted him. "I've got a client who would pay handsomely for the dog to do their dog food advert. The dog doesn't have to do anything except eat their dog food. Good place to start. Once the dog endorses one brand, all the other dog product companies will be falling all over themselves to get the dog to back their stuff, and when that happens we can negotiate a higher fee. All gain and no pain, Edwin. You don't have to do a thing; the dog does it all. And, don't forget the spin-offs, you know, tee shirts, photo mugs, lucky paw prints, that sort of thing. As I say, the stratosphere's the limit. Do you follow where I'm coming from?"

Edwin wrote all this down on his notepad. "Yes, it's very tempting."

"It's a no brainer, Edwin. You should strike while the wheel is turning. Bring the dog to the studio Friday week. We have a shoot for a Bowser advertisement, and they would be mightily pleased to get a celebrity dog. I'll see if I can get them to up the fee. I can get money out of a stone."

Craig rang off.

'Wouldn't do any harm to try. If Poppy was a 'natural', she could bring in a bit extra money until there was enough in the kitty to buy a new house, or maybe if she liked it.....?'

It was later he realized he hadn't asked about fees, or commissions or contracts. He should ask Andrew. Maybe, it might be better to see if the dog had any aptitude first. If she did, he reckoned he had a better case to put to the Foundation Board. If he could, say, allow the Foundation some of the profits on tee shirts and stuff, they might be more prepared to let Poppy have a career as a doggy celebrity.

The studio was in a large warehouse, a vast space with high arched ceiling and shuttered skylight, divided into sections. One space had white walls seamless with a white linoleum floor. Huge lights under canopies glared on the space, so the slightest speck of dust had nowhere to hide. In another part of the room, was a set for a suburban kitchen and this was to be where the advertisement was to be filmed. Several people were milling around. Edwin marvelled how many people it took, just to film one tiny advertisement. Then there was Craig.

Arriving with his personal assistant in tow, Craig made a beeline for Edwin and the dog. He was a thin, wiry man, hair curling round his collar, jacket-less and wearing an apple green shirt with a dark red bow-tie. The PA trotted behind him, attempting to keep up in her high heels and tight skirt, carrying a clipboard. Reaching Edwin, Craig snatched the clipboard from her and thrust it at him.

"Contract. Sign here and here, please Edwin."

Edwin took the clipboard and started to read it.

"Standard terms and conditions, Edwin. You agree to the agency being the

dog's artistic manager. We negotiate the fees on your behalf. We take our usual percentage plus any expenses."

"And, that is?"

"Thirty percent of any earnings, royalties, repeat fees."

"Seems a bit steep." Edwin fiddled with the pen. "Not sure about the artistic manager bit. Would have to check that out with the Foundation. They actually own the dog."

"Going rate, Edwin, going rate. OK. Appreciate you have to check it out with the official owner. I'm sure they'll agree when they see how well she does. Now, if I were sitting in your shoes, I just sign for today and let's see how she does."

Edwin signed for the day and kept a copy of the management contract to run past Andrew. Craig threw up his hands and stalked off towards the producer.

"OK. Folks. We're ready to go down the water chute firing on all cylinders. Am dying to see how this little cookie pans out."

Edwin was fascinated to see a large whiteboard with the detail of the script; a 'storyboard' the producer called it. The script called for the 'owner,' a glamorous, long blonde haired woman, who Eddie doubted had ever worn an apron in her life, to dish out the dog food and put it down on the kitchen floor. The dog was to leap through a dog door, cut into a door-shaped piece of glass. Two posts, one hand-held by an assistant supported the 'door.' Once through the door, the dog was to hone in on the dog food and eat it.

Poppy eyed the dog door with suspicion. She persistently ran round the glass, to the man standing behind holding the biscuit and sat down waiting to be patted and handed her treat. Try as they might, Poppy, who had never used a dog door in her life, refused to go through the device, let alone leap through.

After several aborted takes, Edwin had to go on one side of the door with some lumps of cheese, cheddar her favourite, and call her to come for the treat. Poppy had eaten most of the packet by the time they had a passable take. Next up was eating the dog food. By this time, Poppy had so many dog biscuits and bits of cheese she wasn't interested in the offered bowl of dog food. Edwin didn't like to mention that Poppy hated canned dog food and was no more likely to eat Bowser than fly. She would walk up to the bowl, sniff, and contemptuously walk away.

The producer was getting irritated, and Craig looked decidedly embarrassed. "Can't you just get her to eat it?" He hissed at Edwin, twiddling his bow tie. Edwin wondered if it squirted water, but decided not to ask. He worked hard to suppress his smile. "Oh well Craig, you know the old saying - you can take a dog to water, but you can't make it pig out."

"She's a real star!" Joan sounded impressed when the ad came on TV. Edwin, having been there, was less so. He'd decided the \$500 after commission and expenses, received for the day's work probably wasn't worth the stress of trying to persuade Poppy to do something she didn't want to do. Craig suggested an animal trainer. Edwin said he'd think about it. Joan thought it was a really good idea.

Poppy's ears picked up when she heard the music on the television, and bounded over to the TV when she saw herself. She did this with any programme featuring another dog, so it was unlikely she recognized herself, but like Joan and Edwin, she watched it intently. Not a bad leap through the dog door, thought Edwin, the prop door now seamlessly edited to look like a real one on the outside of a house. Shot of glamorous owner putting down bowl of

brown, chunky Bowser in gravy, Poppy running toward the bowl, head down eating it all up, close shot of her head back licking her lips. Close in for caption "Bowser, the choice of Mega-millionaire dogs."

"Did she really eat that muck?" Joan said to Edwin, glancing first at him then Poppy. Edwin wriggled and shifted position on his chair.

"No. She wouldn't touch it. They had to go out and buy some cheese and sausage rolls and put that in the bowl. They must have changed it for dog food afterwards. Clever how they've disguised it isn't it?"

The wind was picking up nicely. It often did at this time of the year. The increasing daylight of late spring warms up the southern ocean, bringing strong, steady westerly winds and improving weather. It was a fine day to be out in the bracing air, a good day for a father to take his small son kite flying on the high paddock, overlooking the valley.

The kite was black red and gold and had a head shaped like a dragon. The bamboo frame under the painted silk was strong, light and buoyant. The long tail, stretching ten or twelve feet, was made up of sections, each one a silk cell supported by a bamboo rudder, each section providing more lift for the dragon to climb high into the sky. Even from far below on the ground, the Dragon's huge eyes painted on either side of the silk covering the frame seemed menacing, its open mouth baring sharp teeth. Hanging down was a long dangling tongue of flame-coloured silk clearly visible in the morning spring light.

The man played out the string, and the kite ducked and dived, swooped and swooned, catching the wind currents to ride far high into the sky until it was a bright red comma in the sky. Then he hauled it in before letting it fly again up into the sky. The small boy, running with his Dad over the paddock, whooped

with delight when the kite lifted.

The officer in his observation tower fixed his gaze across the perimeter fences to the paddocks of the farm on the other side of the road, where the man and his son were enjoying their quality time together. He watched the pair of them for a few minutes, and reminded himself he should get out with his own boy soon, and do the same. He glanced at his watch. Shift nearly over. Needed to fill out his log and make his checks before his colleague came to take over.

The man continued to roll out the kite string, and the dragon soared higher and higher until it was over the opposite paddock. Suddenly, the man lost control of the kite string, and it ran out quickly, taking the kite high across the road to hover over the perimeter fence at the back of the prisoner's exercise yard.

The man took out his penknife and cut the cord. The dragon lifted slightly when loosened from its tether, then fell like a missile, dropping into a tree in the backyard of the building. As the doomed kite dropped, a man stepped out of the shadows and sprinted over to where the kite had landed, hauling in the long swaths of silk caught on the branches of the tree, until he had hold of the bamboo head. He stuffed the small parcel containing the smartphone and sim cards sewn in the tongue of flame, in his underpants and left torn kite where it fell.

He sprinted of after the others until just a few metres behind them. He started to hobble and complained to the officer that he'd twisted his ankle and needed to go back to his cell to rest.

Joan kept thinking about how marvellous the Swarovski collar looked on Poppy. It suited her, made her look special. A diamond collar would look even more special. Everyone who knew the dog had inherited millions always asked if she had one. It seemed like it was, sort of, well, expected. Edwin said he didn't want to be seen with a dog with sparklers, artificial or real. Emasculating he said. Joan hadn't got much joy from Fred either. When she mentioned how striking Poppy was in her crystal collar, Fred's eyes glazed over.

Fred had taken to calling round to the Paines to see Poppy, as the terms of the Trust demanded, and Joan especially looked forward to the visits. Fred was always so sensible and full of sound advice. Besides, Fred always brought round flowers for Joan, a bottle of whisky for Edwin and a little present for Poppy on each visit. Joan thought he was most kind.

"Oh! Thank you Fred. What lovely lilies. Come in and I'll make you a cup of tea." Joan said, opening the door and ushering him through.

"I see there's still limpets hanging on to your front door, jostling everyone who comes to your door, and someone's graffitti'd your garden wall. They've written 'Rich Bitch' all over the wall in luminous green spray paint."

Joan sighed. "I know. Eddie keeps cleaning it off, but they just come back at night and do it again."

As Fred handed the flowers to Joan at the door, a flashbulb popped. *'No doubt that would appear in some gossipy magazine with a headline hinting at something sleazy,'* thought Joan. *'Ah well.'*

"The Press come and go, depends on whether they've other celebrities to chase or news to write, I suppose. I wish they'd lose interest in us." Joan sighed

again.

She had lost weight, a lot of weight. Her clothes were baggy, her face looked a lot more drawn than it had a few months ago and there were bags under her eyes. She brought in the tea and poured him a cup. Joan's hand started shaking while she was pouring the tea, and she had to put down the teapot for a few seconds to try again. The dog came bounding over to greet him, wagging her tail. "No feeding her biscuits, Fred please."

"As if I dared," said Fred, "here Poppy, present for you this time."

The dog put one paw on his knee while he removed her collar and council tag, carefully replacing the tag on to the new one he had in his hand. Joan thought she saw a flash, and for a minute, believed Fred had really bought Poppy a diamond collar.

"There you are Poppy, present from Allen. He saw it when he was last in the States on business, and thought it's just what you need, old girl. Your old one looks a bit frayed at the edges. Wouldn't do to lose your collar, you might get picked up by the Pound." Fred patted the dog, and she nudged her nose under his hand in appreciation.

Joan felt a bit disappointed. She had to admit it was a nice collar, padded black leather, and it looked comfortable. It had a heart shaped centerpiece with rhinestones around the edge, and there were more rhinestones dotting the main part of the colour. It was quite nice, but not in the same class as the Swarovski collar, and diamond it certainly wasn't. Still it was a kind gesture, and she graciously thanked Fred and Allen, for the gift. Fred drank his tea and ate his homemade white chocolate chip and macadamia biscuit, being careful to drop crumbs just in front of Poppy. She vacuumed them up, but not before Joan noticed. She thought better of telling her benefactor off so she kept quiet, and

started to walk towards the kitchen in case Fred saw her disapproving look, returning with a jam and cream filled Victoria sponge. Poppy licked her lips, keeping her eyes focused on Fred, a shared conspiratorial glint in both their eyes. The mobile phone pinged in Fred's pocket. He took it out and stared at the message before patting Poppy on the head.

"Good dog. Very good dog."

"Anything wrong, Fred?" Joan pointed to the phone.

"No just a bit of business I needed to check that's all."

"Edwin won't have a bar of those awful things," Joan said pointing to the smartphone. "Says he was at everyone's beck and call, at work. His greatest pleasure in retiring is getting away from the phone."

"I wasn't into them either, but Allen insisted I had this one. I've since found they're useful for some things."

Joan's look belied she believed they could be useful for anything, but was too polite to say so. Fred appeared to be pondering on something.

"When's Edwin back, Joan?"

"Soon, I expect. He'd just gone round to see a friend in hospital." Joan glanced at the clock, noting visiting time was just about over. "Did you want to speak to him about anything special?"

"Eddie mentioned that you were finding it hard living here at the moment."

"Fred, it's awful. I can't tell you how much since it all came out in the newspapers. I tell you, I truly regret going on TV and having that photo-shoot. Everyone now knows our business, and what's worse, knows where we live. The graffiti is just one thing, it's also having the press outside all the time, and the tons of begging letters, and some are really abusive, you know. People seem to assume we have all the millions in the bank at our disposal and think

we should give them a share. It's just getting too much."

Joan took the knife and cut a large slice of cake, handing it to Fred, while her own slice was half the size. She toyed with it, eating just a tiny piece before pushing the plate away.

"Eddie said you wanted to move, but he didn't think you could because of the way we've arranged the instalments."

"He said absolutely 'no way' to me. Eddie hates being in debt. Reminds him of when he was made redundant, just after we'd taken a big mortgage on this place. Was he asking for an advance?"

"In a roundabout way, I think he may have been asking for an advance, but under the terms of the Trust we can't give you one. What he asked was if we could help with is security for Poppy - and you of course."

Joan had being getting hopeful as the conversation progressed and her hand had stopped shaking. Now it started again. She thought Fred said the last bit a trifle too quickly, an afterthought.

"More cake for you, Fred?"

"No thanks, Joan. I've done well. No more for me. I agree we need to improve your security. I agree you're too vulnerable living here. You're too near a main road for a start. And now, everyone now knows where the dog lives, might mean she becomes a target for unscrupulous people."

Joan's head came up with a snap, her eyes widened, and her face paled.

"Poppy? Surely no one would seriously harm Poppy. Would they?"

"Good report on the Pound, Kat."

Kat looked at Allen to see if he if he was sincere. She was surprised to see he

had lost his trademark business suit, which marked him out as the Boss, for a distressed tan leather bomber jacket, and open necked shirt worn over a pair of faded jeans.

"Thanks Allen, it wasn't easy, but I knew I had to steel myself. It wasn't quite so bad, once I'd been there a few times, and I could see how they brought some humanity and care to an awful job. And, I found they could save some animals. Not enough though." She bit her bottom lip, the way she always did when she was upset.

"The way you're responding to the plight of these animals, I'm surprised you've got out of there without bringing one home." Allen gave a wry laugh as if responding to some inner joke.

"I keep having to tell myself, I can't commit right now. One day perhaps. What's funny?"

"Your strength of resolve, Kat. You were stronger than me."

Kat gaped at him. "You have a dog?"

"Yes, Benji. I got him from the pound."

"I didn't know that, Allen."

"There's a lot you don't know about me, Kat."

"So you rescued him? And, here's you pretending not to know anything about rescue dogs."

"I never pretended not to know, Kat. As for Benji, well, who rescued whom is debatable. Anyway, he's a Huntaway cross, unregistered and abandoned when he was a young dog. He was wandering the streets, just like the dog you comforted, only he wasn't hurt."

'Except by the person who abandoned him,' Kat thought.

"No one came to claim him, so I did and he's been my best friend ever since.

You'll have to come and meet him. You'll fall in love with him."

"He might not like me."

"He'll love you." Allen sound emphatic.

"Oh I don't think so, somehow." Kat flushed and averted her eyes.

"Come and meet him anyway." Allen coaxed.

Maybe it would be good to meet him out of work. Might see another side of him,

"O.K. I'll come." Kat said, after a pause.

"Great. That's brilliant."

Allen's eyes lit up, and he had a slight flush round his neck. Kat wondered if he were coming on to her. He was so much older than her. After the disaster with Andy, and the snake in the grass lecturer who'd caused her so much grief at University, she wasn't too keen on getting into another relationship, just yet. She knew nothing about him; he never talked about himself, only the work. His PA had told her, he had been married once, but his wife died, and though he'd dated a few times since, nothing lasted more than a couple of dates. She had better be careful. What was it about these older guys and her?

Fred opened the door for Kat and she stepped in carrying a bottle of wine in a cooler bag. She was surprised that Allen had invited his father for dinner also, but she quickly remembered her manners.

"Allen's in the kitchen. Shall I take that?"

Kat handed him the bottle of wine, hoping she had bought something that Allen would approve of, and stepped inside into the brightly lit hallway. A sleek black dog came bounding towards her, sniffing her skirt and pushing his head against her. Kat scratched him behind the ears. "Is this Benji?"

"Indeed he is," said Fred escorting her to a pleasant lounge at the back of the house.

The bi-fold windows occupying the whole of one wall were pulled back revealing the expanse of the garden. Decks extended out of the living room under a roofed pergola, and set with cane armchairs and a low cane table. To the left was another pergola with grape vines twisted around the posts; dripping bunches of grapes, ripe enough to eat, uncovered and attracting birds to drink from their juice. Beyond the deck the garden was set out formally in the Italian manner with box hedges walling in enclosed paved areas, the two furthest and nearest contained white urns, the middle two, statue fountains spilling into two identical ponds. The overall effect was green and white. No colour. Ordered. Tidy. Structured. Nothing out of place. The garden would not have been out of place in imperial Rome.

Allen came out with glasses and placed them on the cane table under the pergola. Benji came up to Allen and nudged him.

"Benji, sit!" The dog immediately sat and looked at Allen expectantly. "Down,

Stay!" The dog dropped, one eye still on Allen, his eyebrow twitching.

"Well trained!" Kat said, laughing.

Allen grinned back and swept his hand through his hair, making it even spikier.

"Me or the dog?"

"I think I meant both of you." Allen smiled to himself while pouring the drinks."

Here, try this. Nothing is quite as good as a cool Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc on a warm summer evening. This one is particularly good. Made by a friend of mine on Waiheke."

Kat savoured a couple of sips. Not too cold. She held a little in her mouth so the fruit flavours lingered on her tongue and throat, making them tingle. "Nice garden," she said.

"Yes, it is thanks. I have an Italian friend who designed it for us. Easy care, but it does have a tiny bit of grass over there for Benji to poop on."

"He prefers dragging you out for a walk around the streets." Fred said.

"Indeed he does, Dad. But sometimes he doesn't get a walk out if I'm working late so..."

Kat spotted a photograph of a woman on the sideboard and another of the same woman, this time with a younger looking Allen on the bookshelf.

"Is that.....?' Kat caught her breath.

"My wife?"

"Yes, it is, well she was."

"Oh my God. She looks so young."

"She was. In her early twenties when she died. Not much older than you." Allen left the room and went towards the kitchen.

"That is dreadful. I'm so sorry." Kat said to Allen's disappearing back as he walked quickly towards the kitchen door.

"It was a long time ago, and there's no sense any of us living in the past. What's happened has happened." Allen snapped without turning around.

Kat gave Fred an embarrassed smile and sat down.

"It was an accident." Fred said. "A dental extraction under anaesthetic went wrong."

Kat gasped. She felt vapid, banal, and didn't know what to say.

A few minutes later, Allen came back carrying a dish that he set on the middle of the dining table. "Would you two like to come in and eat now please?" Fred and Kat moved to the table and sat down. Allen poured them another glass of wine. Kat's eyes sneaked across to the photograph. One moment, frozen in time, captured forever, a face that would never age, a face that lacked any portend of the brevity of her promised future.

Out of the corner of her eye she became aware Allen was watching her and she brought her attention back to the table, picking up a napkin and patting it down on her lap.

Allen served a first course of chilled avocado and tomato salsa with toasted ciabatta. While he served Fred, she noticed for the first time, how muscular shouldered he was, broad-backed and strong.

Fred piled his salsa on to the toast relishing each bite. The salsa had chilli added giving it a mild heat that contrasted with the sharpness of the lemon juice and tomatoes. A rich vegetarian lasagna made with lentils and aubergines followed, served with a crisp green salad. Fred and Kat pronounced it delicious, causing Benji to look up from his basket to ask his master the question.

"In your dish, Benji." Allen left the kitchen with the remains of the dish followed by Benji, the dog's share resting in his dish, only for a few seconds. Allen returned with a large bowl of ice cream. The dog's eyes locked on to the new

treat as Allen set it on the table.

"You seem to be a fan of Italian food as well as gardens, Allen."

"Alas, my repertoire is small. I can do a few easy dishes, the ones I can remember how to do. We lived in Italy for a while before... And, I have a splendid ice-cream maker that makes desserts easy and Dad doesn't half like a bit of Gelato. And so, as you see," he regarded the brown saucer eyed Benji, solemnly, "does the dog."

Kat relished every mouthful of the ice cream, scraping her spoon around the bowl to make sure she had every last creamy sliver. She was tempted to have a second helping as Fred did but, thinking it might make her look greedy, she declined. She stood up from the table and started to walk around the room.

Compared to the ordered intricacies of the garden, the room was simply furnished. It had polished wooden floors, a flame effect gas fire, a stereo cabinet with television in the corner and two black leather sofas. In a corner was an antique-looking grandfather clock, its face in roman numerals, the case adorned with intricate marquetry patterns and its pendulum of polished brass swinging back and forth behind a glass door. Apart from the two photographs there were no other ornaments. The room's focal point was the garden vista.

A couple of paintings hung on the wall. One was a meticulously painted picture as detailed as a photograph. A mediaeval tower perched high on the top of a hill, the surrounding trees turning red and gold in the late afternoon's golden light, the hill covered with combed rows of vines. Tuscany in Autumn?

Kat scrutinized the painting for a signature and found the initials LAR and 2002 in the bottom right hand corner. So, she was the artist.

The painting on the opposite wall was quite different. It was a contemporary painting. Plainly New Zealand and probably Auckland. Hard-edged, stilly-drawn,

multi-coloured, colonial villas juxtaposed against a stylized landscape of a grassy volcanic hill, standing out against the sky.

"Is that a real Siddell?" She asked, trying to impress him.

Allen seemed surprised at the question, "You know something about art?"

"A bit, one of my best subjects at School." Almost true.

Yes, it's Peter Siddell. I just love it," he said, "I've had it for some years now. It makes me realize where home truly is. Although of course," He laughed, "there's nowhere that looks like the place he's painted. His landscape is an invention, playing with our memories of times past. That is his point of course. The hill is Mount Eden." Kat, who didn't know that much about New Zealand art, bobbed her head agreeing.

Kat sat down on the sofa; Benji joined her and snuggled up beside her.

Fred started making excuses to leave, saying he was an old man and needed to be in bed early. He came over and kissed Kat on her forehead and shook hands with his son before departing.

Allen saw him out while Kat continued to snuggle up to the dog. Allen sat on the sofa with them, the contented dog in the middle.

"I see you two are making friends then, Kat."

"He's lovely Allen. How long have you had him?"

"He's six now. Been with me since he was about one year old." Allen sat down on the sofa, Benji between them. "He was one of those dogs in the pound whose time had run out. If I hadn't brought him home, he would have been put down the next day. Such a lovely dog, I couldn't let that happen."

"Did you go there especially to get a dog?"

"No way! I had a client, a vet who did some part-time work there. I had to see her urgently about some accounts. I seem to remember she had forgotten to

sign something. I was passing the Pound and thought she might be there, so I popped in on the off chance. She showed me Benji, twisting my arm of course, by telling me the worst aspect of her job was euthanizing animals like him that no one cared about or claimed and how he would make a great companion for someone like me. We did the business I went there for, and I came home with him."

"Good job it worked out then?"

"Yeah! Our business was going well, and life was pretty full on. But, I didn't realize there was a space in my life until Benji filled it."

"Oh, I know all about spaces in life. I've lots of them." Kat spoke without thinking as she studied the ordered garden and its neat hedges and geometric shapes. Each had a centrepiece, the two furthest and nearest contained white urns, the middle two, had statue fountains in the centre. The steady sound of the rushing water spilling into the little ponds was almost hypnotic, reminding her of the low chants of the monks.

"Helloooh. Are you on a mental journey, or astrally travelling or something?" Kat's focus came back to the room and Allen. "No. Sorry, it's just the water is so peaceful and restful. Reminded me of being back at a monastery in Nepal."

"Ah that again."

"You're a lot older than me Allen. You've travelled, been to Europe, lived overseas, and seen a different way of life. Something pulled you to do that. It meant something to you. I also want something more meaningful in my life. I only had a couple of weeks there, but I know I have to go back to learn more about them and myself. It's a deeply spiritual place."

"And, is that what you want?"

"I want...what everyone else wants. To be happy and fulfilled, realize my

potential. But, I have to know what that means."

"And, you're not happy?" Allen looked concerned.

"What is happiness, Allen? Tell me 'cos I'd love to know."

"That's a hard one. For me, I realized what happiness was when I lost it." Allen looked pensive and fiddled with his ear.

Kat had the awful feeling that if she continued down this track she was going to get the whole story of the dead wife, and she couldn't cope with more grief. She found it difficult to cope with her own feelings, never mind anyone else's. Happiness was for other people, who laughed and joked and had a sensational together. Other people fell in love and lived happy ever after. Whenever she fell in love, it turned to disaster.

Kat took another sip of her wine and remembered the day, a few years ago, when she saw a school counselor. The lady had asked her when she was last happy, and she couldn't think when. She just couldn't remember a time when she felt contented, joyful, everything was in flow and couldn't be better. She remembered breaking down while speaking of feeling there was something missing in her life, but she just couldn't put her finger on it. And, now here was Allen wanting to talk about what was missing in his life.

She looked over to the grandfather clock. A quarter to ten. Its pendulum swung forwards and backwards, and as she watched, she could hear the loud tick tock that she hadn't noticed before.

"You seem happy enough now, Allen." Kat decided this was a less risky reply.

Allen's mouth opened as if he was about to say something.

"And, you've got your dog. Doesn't he make you happy?"

"Of course." Allen put his arm over the dog and pulled him up to his side. "Ah, Benji, my right hand. What would I do without him? He taught me that love

doesn't stop in the world, just because you think it has. To him, I'm the centre of his universe, one that has just bright stars and no black holes. He's made me realize I have to be worthy of his devotion and get on with life. Make everyday count for something." Allen's face brightened, and his former sad look had gone.

"Make every day count?"

"I think happiness is a doing word, Kat. It's something you have to work on yourself, day in day out. Being alert to the positive things in your life and not dwelling on the negative stuff, the things that go wrong, the things you lose, and the things you never had."

Kat remembered the American nun saying something similar. The clock chimed, announcing the hour.

"Maybe you're right. They said exactly that at the monastery in Nepal. They told us happiness isn't something you can get from outside yourself. That expecting other people or things to make you happy is a delusion. That's why I have to go back. To find out how to do it."

Allen scratched the dog's ears, not looking at her. "Aren't you making the same mistake? Believing that they have the answers for you? Relying on someone else to fix it for you? Don't you want to get married sometime, have kids? Wouldn't that make you happy?"

Kat gave him a quizzical look. "You sound just like Mum, and Gran, and my teachers at school, as if that should be the pinnacle of my goals in life. I'm not ruling those things out, not yet anyway. But, before I can offer anyone else anything, I need to know who I am. You know Allen, all my life, I've been defined in terms of someone else. When people think of me, they think of Leone's daughter, Primrose's granddaughter, one of the class of 2009 and in

ten years, I'll be defined again as someone's wife, maybe someone's mother. I reckon right now is the only time in my life when I don't have to play a role someone else expects of me. Now, is the best opportunity I have to find out who I am. What I stand for. What I believe in. Not who other people think I should be."

"I can understand your need to do that Kat. I spent three years in Italy after leaving University, and yes, I learned a lot about myself there, especially about standing on my own two feet, without any immediate family to rescue me if needed. I met my wife, Luisa there, and we always intended to go back one day. Believe me, I do understand what you mean. It's just that ...I'll be sorry if you leave." Allen reached over the dog he took her hand in his.

Kat snatched it away and stood up, looking at the pendulum clock about to chime the hour. "I think I'd better be going now. It's getting late." Kat collected her bag from beside the seat and stood up.

"Please, Kat, won't you stay a little longer?"

Kat wouldn't meet his eye.

Very few car park spaces were available on the beach ramp, and Edwin glided into the next but the last one. A sleek looking Subaru slid into the last park seconds after Edwin. '*Glad we got here in time*', thought Edwin opening the hatch door of his car. Poppy leapt out, her tail blurring, when she realized they were off for a long walk down the beach. Picking up a tennis ball from the back seat, Edwin locked the car, and followed the dog. The man in the Subaru waited until they had reached the beach before stepping outside his car. Poppy raced into the water, got herself thoroughly wet and dried herself by rolling in the soft sand.

The late summer day was fine, and there were plenty of people walking on the beach enjoying the early morning warm sunshine, watching the windsurfers and kite boards scream up and down the sea just outside the shallows. There was a light breeze, enough to propel the windsurfers and kick up white caps on the waves offshore. A kiosk was hiring out paddle-boards and already they were doing a roaring trade by the looks of the number of paddle-boarders out on the water. Dotted in the distance were small islands, humpbacked with tufts of pohutakawa trees clinging precariously to them, their leaves and roots drinking in the salt from the sea-spray, the lifeblood they needed to survive.

The little dog came running up to him and shook herself sending sprays of water all over Edwin.

"Hey Poppy, you're soaking me, girl." He bent down and scratched her nose.

"Whoa Whoa Whoa."

"Nice dog." The voice came from behind him.

Edwin turned round to see who was speaking. He didn't recognize the man;

he was not one of the regulars on the beach. The man had a hoodie top covering his head, although it wasn't a cold or windy day. In one hand he carried a dog lead, and a walking stick with an impressive silver handle shaped like a golf ball in the other. Edwin couldn't see any sign of the stranger's dog.

"Where's your dog?" Edwin asked.

The man waved towards the sea where several dogs were splashing about in the water chasing balls and sticks. "He's over with that lot. What sort of dog is yours?"

"She's a bitzer, a mongrel, but a pretty good one I reckon. Interesting walking stick."

"Yes, prize for getting a hole-in-one. Can I pat your dog?" Edwin was used to people asking if they could pat her and Poppy enjoyed the attention.

The man bent down to pat Poppy. Edwin was surprised that she growled at him. Most unlike her. "Aa, Aa Poppy," he barked back at her, telling her off for her unacceptable behaviour. As he did so, he saw the man in the hoodie lift his cane high with both hands, stick end in his hands.

'How strange, doing a backswing here,' thought Edwin in the nanosecond before the heavy golf-ball handle came down crashing down hard across Edwin's stomach. The pain was intense and his eyes filled with flashes of light. He struggled for breath, the air not wanting to enter his lungs, belly burning with pain. He doubled over, clutching his stomach, and fell on to the sand breathless and dazed, unable to think because of the pain.

A young woman, her hair in a ponytail, wearing a red tracksuit and trainers came running across to where Edwin was doubled up on the sand. "Are you OK? No of course, you're not. I saw what just happened. Outrageous. Wish I had my phone with me."

The woman let him lean on her while he slowly stood up still gasping for breath, dusting the sand off him. "He took the dog too. Was it his?" she asked.

Edwin felt his heart jump while his eyes scanned the area around widely. He squinted up and down the beach, dazzled by the sun, and his breathing became faster. The light-headedness recurred, and he felt his body sway drunkenly and he thought he would faint. The thought that if he did, Poppy would be lost forever steeled him, and the moment passed. He shaded his eyes, hoping to see ahead but could only see walkers and joggers. Where was she? He surveyed the water's edge, several dogs, no Poppy, no stranger. No Poppy.

"No. It was my dog. That bastard stole her. That's why he thwacked me."

"He ran off with the dog in that direction, towards the car park," the woman said.

"Come on I'll help you. He can't have got far. There's a phone box in the car park. We can phone the police."

"Poppy, Poppy," he yelled at the top of his voice attempting to run towards the car park. He couldn't run more than a few steps without getting puffed. The blow across his stomach, and the result of indulging in Joan's tempting baking over the past few months had taken a toll in reduced fitness. "Poppy, Poppy," he called, breaking out into a sweat.

"Lost your dog?" Another jogger, a man in black shorts and a white tee shirt emblazoned with a company logo hailed him, stopping and jogging on the spot.

"Yes, a tan, white and black terrier with a bushy golden tail. Stolen by a man in a hoodie. Seen her?"

"There's a guy back there dragging a dog like that. Dog didn't seem to want to go with him."

Edwin thanked the jogger who ran off while Edwin looked in the direction

the man pointed to. Edwin shielded his eyes, and when he did so, he spotted Poppy, being dragged on a lead by the man in the hoodie. Edwin felt as though his stomach was about to eat his heart as he and his new red-suited friend took off after them; Eddie cursing his age and his legs that no longer had the athletic power they once had. "Poppy, Poppy, Sit, Stay, Stay!" He yelled at the top of his voice hoping Poppy would hear, encouraging her to sit, despite the yanks on her neck. Anything to slow the man's progress towards the car park.

Poppy pricked up her ears and heard, despite the noise of the waves crashing on the beach, despite the distance. She sat down. The man tried pulling her along, but Poppy wouldn't move and slowed his progress. Edwin could hear the man in the hoodie yelling at the dog as he picked her up, put her under his arm, and started to run again towards the car park. Poppy wriggled vigorously in his arms and a couple of times the man lost his grip, enabling Poppy to jump out of his arms, only to be held fast on the lead and scooped up again.

"Stop him, Stop him, he's stealing my dog." Edwin was screaming at the people walking further down on the beach, nearer to the man carrying Poppy. Several glanced at each other, wondering what was going on, not registering the struggle between the man with the dog and the man with the young woman.

Just before the man in the hoodie reached the car park, a middle-aged woman with a Throw Stick in her hand and a Scottish terrier dancing at her feet, walked down the ramp onto the beach. The little terrier's dark eyes were fixed on the long red handle that held a tennis ball in a cradle at the end. The stick would lob the ball when served as well as any tennis racquet. The little terrier bounced up and down at his owner's side anticipating the game of fetch on the beach. The woman raised the throw-stick to lob the ball down the beach for her

dog to chase, aiming well to the side of the man in the hoodie carrying the tan terrier running towards her.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the older man and the girl waving at her and yelling, "Stop him. He's stolen the dog!"

The woman moved her aim slightly diverting the trajectory of the throw towards the feet of the man hurrying with the dog under his arm. Deadly accurate are these throw-sticks. The little black terrier shot off at a rapid pace after the ball, towards the man in the hoodie. Edwin stopped running and held his side. He could see the impending collision, almost in slow motion. The ball hit the sand in front of the kidnapper's feet and bounced up towards his chest, throwing him off balance. Startled, the man dropped Poppy, just as the Scottie leapt for the ball falling off his chest. Catching the ball between his teeth, the terrier dropped to the ground in front of the man in the hoodie. The man could not prevent himself from falling over the doggy tripwire, and he fell on the ground letting go of the lead. Poppy, seizing the advantage, ran towards Edwin. Eddie grabbed her collar, putting on her lead, and took off in pursuit of the man in the hoodie, now scrambling off the sand and on to the ramp. His hood had fallen off, and Edwin saw a dark-blue spider web tattoo on the back of his neck.

The man leaped into the Subaru at the same time Edwin and Poppy reached the car park, and reversed it in their direction, causing Edwin and his jogger friend leapt back to avoid being hit. The man with the spider's web tattoo drove the car forward, it's tyres screaming while it accelerated, billowing the loose sand on the ramp on to Edwin's face. He wasn't quick enough to get the registration number. Edwin stopped and leant on his car, holding his hand under his ribs where his chest felt tight.

The middle-aged woman came up to him. "Are you all right?"

She seemed concerned. Edwin was pale and so breathless he couldn't speak at first. The terrier sniffed Poppy's bottom, before turning his body round for the compliment to be repaid.

"That's some weapon, you've got there." Edwin's words came slowly while he fought to get his breath back.

"Do you mean the Throw-Stick or the Scottie?" The woman said, helping him to a bench on the grass to the side of the ramp.

"The Scottie. But, thank you."

"That man got a bit of his own medicine back," the red suited jogger said.

"Although, being hit with a tennis ball wouldn't have hurt him as much as what he did to the gentleman here."

"Ah these dog toys are great. I just threw the ball in the right place to unbalance him, I didn't reckon on Jock delivering a coup de grace. As you saw, he's pretty good at stopping dead in front of your feet when you're moving forward. I broke my wrist one time, tripping over him."

She bent down and patted her little hero and then Poppy. "That guy must have taken a fancy to your dog," she said to Edwin.

Edwin felt a rapid thumping in his chest, realizing his walks with Poppy could never be the same again. "Must have."

Wayne Moody emigrated with his parents, from Scotland, when he was thirteen. He objected strongly at the time because he didn't want to leave his mates in Glasgow, but his parents insisted. Wayne paid them back by being a rebel at school, playing truant and spending most of the time he should have been at school in the arcades playing King of Fighters and Virtual Cop. Unsurprisingly, he left school at sixteen without managing to get any qualifications, but his Dad used his influence at his own company to get him a job in the office.

Wayne found working in an office worse than school and much preferred his second job, a bouncer in a nightclub. The job enabled him to do his weight training at the gym every day and throw his weight around in the evening at the club. For the first time since arriving in New Zealand, he enjoyed himself and made friends. One of them, a fellow bouncer called Robbie, decided to join the army. Not to be outdone, Wayne followed suit. They were mates, right?

Robbie signed up for ten years, so Wayne did the same. All that arcade training paid off once he joined. Wayne's hand-eye coordination was so good he rapidly became a crack shot. The comradeship, the structured life, the physicality of the job, and the sense of purpose all suited him. Plus, there was the bonus of travel, even if it was to Afghanistan. The army helped him to grow up, and when he left, after serving five years extra, he was ready for civilian life, a job in security, somewhere.

SafeGuards was his first job since leaving the army. He fancied himself pushing paparazzi away from glamorous pop stars or shadowing some foreign minister visiting the country.

"A dog? A dog?"

Wayne regarded the photograph, running his fingers through his ginger coloured hair. "I'm a bloody Afghanistan war hero, and you want me to guard a fucking dog?"

"It's not an ordinary dog," the Boss pleaded. "And, they're paying well. Very well. You get to guard the owners too."

"Course it's an ordinary dog, Boss. It's not a fucking Wolf. It's a bloody bitzer, not even a pedigree." Wayne glanced round the room, looking for an escape hatch. Didn't the boss realize how fucking humiliating this was?

"The dog is worth fifty million dollars, so no, it's not an ordinary dog." The Boss continued to plead. "Look Wayne, we need this job. We've lost a business recently, and I don't want to lay any more people off."

Wayne didn't like the way the boss looked at him as he said this. "Boss, please don't do this to me. I've been under fire from the Taliban, mentioned in dispatches, been commended for bravery under fire. Surely, I'm qualified to guard more than a bloody dog?"

"It's your excellent war record that appeals to the client, Wayne. They are very keen for you to take the job, precisely because you are a war hero." The Boss took out a large handkerchief and mopped his moist brow.

"I don't even like fucking dogs. Especially not poofy ones with silly names like 'Poppy'. What sort of bloody name for a dog is that?" Wayne sulked.

"Look, Wayne. All my other people are busy on jobs, you're just starting out, and hey, it'll be good practice, ease you into the bigger jobs, when they come along. You've only to make sure no one snatches the dog when they go out. Great opportunity to put everything you've learned into practice. When another job comes up, a person that is, you'll be ready for it."

His boss rose from behind his desk and went to the water cooler in the corner of the room, poured himself a drink and drank it all down in one.

"Do you promise I get Madonna or Sir Peter Jackson next time then?" The boss returned to his chair and leant back. Since SafeGuards never had a contract to guard either of those two people, or anyone else as famous for that matter, he felt safe in saying "Of course, Wayne. Of course."

The man with the spider web tattoo had more hurt pride than grazes on his arm and knees. He knew his boss would be furious and dreaded the inevitable call.

"You fucking idiot. How could you lose the bitch?"

The voice on the other end of the phone was quiet but obviously seething. Spiderweb could hear the sound of an organ playing celestial music at the other end.

"Sorry, Boss. Nearly had her and would have, but for a stupid woman on the beach who sent her dog deliberately to trip me up. Bloody dangerous animal." The man rubbed his knee. His sand abraded skin was extremely sore.

"Do fucking well better next time, then. Remember, you owe me."

He did. The Boss saved him from being beaten up in jail. Saved his life, he reckoned.

"It's only a fucking dog." The Boss barked at him down the phone.

"It's a bit more complicated now, Boss. They've hired a bodyguard."

Spiderweb had staked the house out from a discreet distance, looking for another opportunity, but since the attempted snatch, a ginger-haired brawny fellow now accompanied them. Spiderweb supposed he must be a bodyguard. The obvious earpiece and cuff microphone gave him away.

"A bodyguard?" The Boss was incredulous. "A bodyguard?"

Spiderweb could hear the soft organ music in the background playing a hymn. He *thought* it sounded like '*A closer walk with thee*' or perhaps, he was just getting paranoid.

"Yes, Boss, a bodyguard and not only that, they've moved house."

"What! Moved House? This is getting worse and worse. You really have fucked-up this time. Where've they moved to?"

"Don't know, Boss, at least yet. I'm working on it."

"Well, fuckin' well find out, and be quick about it. When did this happen? Why weren't you there to find out where they'd shifted to?"

"Boss, they moved in the middle of the night. It was all done very sneakily. They made it look as if they'd got all tucked up in bed, so I went home for a few hours shuteye. I have to sleep sometime, Boss. When I arrived back, to stake out the next morning, there was no signs of life anywhere, no one. So I asked a neighbour, and she told me they'd upped and left, in the middle of the night. Woken them up, she said, all that shifting stuff, car doors banging. No forwarding address. All their mail rerouted to that Animal Foundation or something."

"Shit, bloody fuckin' shit." The boss sounded as if he was pacing up and down. The organ in the background was playing '*All creatures of our God and King.*' Spiderweb decided he would smash the bloody organ up next time he was inside.

"Did you recognize the fuckin' bodyguard?" The Boss hissed down the phone.

"No, but the time I did see him, he arrived in a van with SafeGuards written on it."

"OK. Good. That must be the firm they're using. Check it out. And don't you

fuckin' dare fuckup again. Or else."

The Boss rang off. Spiderweb went to his computer and Googled 'SafeGuards'.

The webpage flashed up on his screen.

SAFEGUARDS

Personal Bodyguards for Corporate, Media, Entertainment and Diplomatic Industries.

He wrote down the 'Contact us' number and dialled 0800 UBESAFE.

"Safeguards. Amanda speaking. How can I help?"

Spider web made his voice sound as silky as he could. "Amanda. This is Kevin Spencer here. Last week, my wallet was stolen, and one of your bodyguards lent me ten dollars to get a taxi. Most kind of him, but I've lost his card to pay him back. Could you let me know where to find him please? He's the ginger-haired guard who is looking after an old couple with a dog."

"Sorry Mr. Spencer. I can't give out that information on the phone. You can send the ten dollars to us with a note if you like and I'll see he gets it. I'll tell him that you called. Anything else I can help you with Mr. Spencer?"

Spiderweb rang off. If the receptionist had been someone new, and unfamiliar with the privacy laws, he might have obtained the information more easily. The trick had worked for him before. However, there were other ways of finding out. The Internet made it easy to stalk people. People often left little traces of themselves on the net without realizing it. He scanned each page of the website. Nicely designed. There was a page boasting of some minor celebrities guarded by the firm. *'No one really famous. Mostly people who*

thought they were more important than they were. 'Who cares' type of people.'

There was a news page. He clicked on the tab. In the margin was a link to the firm's newsletter. Spiderweb clicked on it, half expecting it to be password protected, but no, the newsletter flashed on to the screen. Most of the news was dull stuff. Scrolling down he found reports of the firm's social events, including details of a recent cricket match against a rival security firm. There were several pictures of the event, including one of a ginger-haired man bowling to the opposition. Underneath was the caption Wayne Moody bowls opposition over. Spiderweb leaned back in his chair and grinned.

Gotcha!

There was no listing for a Wayne Moody in the phone book, and he drew a blank on directory enquiries. Spiderweb tried varying combinations of email addresses with the usual providers to see if anything clicked, but all his tries bounced back. Even trying a SafeGuard email address with various combinations of Wayne Moody failed to work. He tried Facebook, typing in the search-for-people box - Wayne Moody. Three Wayne Moodys popped up, one in the UK, another in Australia, so he dismissed both of those. The third lived in Auckland. Spiderweb sneered at the photograph confirming this was the right Wayne Moody. Fancy a security guard having this low-level of privacy on a social networking site. Wayne's page said he was single, and had 100 friends - so he liked to party. In activities and interests he listed weight training, ironman competitions and Celtic beer. He 'liked' Finnegan's Irish Pub in downtown Auckland.

Wayne usually took the weekends off, and one of the other guards took over his job at the Paines. Two days respite from the demeaning job was good

enough reason to celebrate. Army routine gave him a taste for regular habits, one of which was meeting his best mate Robbie at Finnegan's Bar for a few beers after work each Friday.

The pub had green and white shamrock patterned wallpaper, and had green, white and orange tricolor flags hanging from artificial wood beams on the ceiling. The bar's stools were mostly occupied, and there were some booths with low tables to the side, separated from each other by stained glass partitions. The pub spilt out onto the pavement, the tables and seats reducing the width of footpath for pedestrians walking the footpath. Complaints about this were many, but despite these, the pub continued to push tables further and further onto the footpath, until the Council officials came and pushed them back. The landlord viewed the number of infringement notices pinned up on the notice board a matter for considerable pride. On the wall of the pub, a sign, counted down the days left to St. Patrick's Day. The pub was popular with people working in the city, and at 5 pm on a Friday, the smart and the not so smart, congregated here, ready to party after the working week was over.

Wayne saw Robbie sitting at the bar and went over. There was a spare barstool, saved by Robbie.

"Murphy's thanks Rob." Robbie ordered his friend's drink. He had done better at school than Wayne, and he trained to be an electronics engineer during his time in the army. When he left the army, he'd walked straight into a good job with an electronics repair firm. Robbie was a fit looking man in his early thirties. He had light brown hair, blue eyes and a slightly hooked nose, the result of a fight in the barracks one day and a poor reduction by the medics. It didn't stop him attracting female admirers, though none were evident on Friday evenings; they were reserved for drinking with his mate, Wayne.

"How's the new job, Robbie?" Wayne said, sipping his beer with relish. Nothing like Celtic beer.

"Good. Great money and easy peasy after the army. How's yours going?" Robbie drained his glass.

"Training was good. No probs, enjoyed it. Then, what do you know, the fucking boss gives me my first assignment, and it's to guard a fucking dog!"

Robbie considered Wayne for a few seconds, his mouth open, before slapping his thigh and breaking out into uproarious laughter. "Guarding a dog? A dog? You're having me on, mate. You can't mean a four-legged one?"

Robbie looked incredulous, and his voice got louder. Wayne tried to hush him, but Robbie doubled over with laughter, kept repeating "A Dog? Fucking priceless."

"Did I hear you say you're guarding a dog?" said the man sat a few barstools further down the bar.

"Private conversation mate. Mind your own fucking business." Wayne said sharply, turning his back on the man.

"No offence mate. Keep your hair on. Only being friendly, mate. Couldn't help overhearing and it sounded funny that's all. I always thought that dogs are supposed to guard fuckin' people not the other way around."

"Well, it's bloody ridiculous if you ask me." Wayne emptied his beer glass in a single swig, putting it on the bar.

"Can I buy you guys a drink?" said the man pointing to the friends' empty glasses.

"Go on then, Murphy's for me, Guinness for him. You local?"

"Jeff," said the man with the spider tattoo, putting out his hand. "And, you are?"

"He's Robbie, and I'm Wayne." They shook hands.

"Game of darts later?" Jeff pulled out a set of expensive feathered darts from his inside pocket.

"Why not? Happy to take you on Jeff. Want to put some money on it?" Wayne liked a game of darts, especially when the opposition didn't know he was section champion, six years on the trot.

"So what's special about this dog then? Designer dog?" Jeff asked, casually.

"No, mate. Mutt. But it got left a lot of money." Wayne took a swig of beer from the full glass.

"Insured?"

"They can't insure the dog - some legal thing, so we get hired to be the insurance."

"So what happens when you're not there?" Jeff asked, looking deeply into his glass, and nonchalantly swirling his drink around.

"I suppose if they want to go out they call the company and they send someone else along."

"Must be well off these people. Remuera types?"

"Nah. Used to live on the North Shore. Milford I think. Nothing flash. Now what about that game of darts?"

"Yeah." Jeff pulled out his darts, taking one out, smoothing the feathers, before eying down the barrel. "So where do these people live now then?"

"Big house in Kohimarama."

Jeff threw the dart at the dartboard on the wall. Bull's-eye.

Kohimarama beach, on the east of the city, is smaller than Takapuna. The eastern beaches are warm, welcoming and sheltered. Al fresco cafes congregate across the road from the sea wall, pleasant places popular for

brunch at weekends and corporate lunches in the week. Millionaire mansions lining Tamaki Drive have front row of the circle views, across the bay towards Rangitoto Island, Auckland's icon for seven hundred years, until usurped by the Casino's Sky Tower. At low tide, it is possible to scramble over the rocks and walk the entire length of the eastern beaches, from St. Heliers to Okahu Bay. A good walk for Edwin and Poppy.

Wayne accompanied them, thinking this gentle walking was no substitute for the gym, and when Edwin wasn't talking to him about subjects he had no interest in, his mind concentrated on wondering when the boss would relieve him of this boring job. He looked forward to Friday when he met with Robbie and their new friend, Jeff, at Finnegan's. A few beers, a game or two of darts, which he usually won, was a brief respite from the mindless tedium of his job. Last week he had been saying to Jeff and Robbie, that he'd rather poke his eyes out with a blunt stick than do this job. It was only the good money, and a promise of better assignments in the future, that kept him going.

A few hundred metres down the beach a man with binoculars swept his gaze down the beach, focusing momentarily on the two men and the dog leaving the beach, to cross the grass verge by the main road. The man kept his distance behind them, but his binoculars were steadily locked on the trio. He followed them across the road, keeping a safe distance away, merging into the background. The trio went up a steep street, just back from the beach, and stopped outside a large white house with black wrought iron gates, a high wall surrounding the house. The man focused his binoculars on his quarry, while one of them punched in a number onto, what he supposed was a keypad. He was just too far away to see the numbers clearly, even through the powerful magnification of the binoculars, but even a digital lock would be no match for his

lock picking talents. The trio disappeared behind the high wall into the house. He waited about five minutes to make sure everyone was safely inside the house, before sprinting up the hill to the house and noting the house number. He would soon have the layout of the grounds, once he consulted Google Earth, and saw the aerial satellite image.

The work was seductive. Kat's interest increased, as she did more fieldwork and research. Having overcome her fear of being overwhelmed with sad animal stories, she now enjoyed going out and talking to people about what the Foundation could do. Did Gran feel like this when she was doing her volunteer work? The more contact Kat had with the people involved in animal welfare organizations, the more she admired their dedication, passion and commitment. She was busy at her desk when Allen entered the room, carrying her report. She could see he had been busy using a yellow highlighter on it. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Kat. It's great. I've highlighted and made comments, and I think you've captured the issues well, and I like your recommendations."

"I have? You do?" Kat sounded doubtful.

"Yes, Kat you have. Well done."

Kat felt a slow feeling of warmth reaching her ears. "Thanks Allen. I'm so relieved you like it. I enjoyed doing it, and you know, I think I'm beginning to see why Gran did what she did."

"Your grandmother would have been proud of you."

"Perhaps. Gran was never one to be effusive about anything. I think she was too scared to allow herself to be proud of anyone, after Granddad and Uncle Lyall, in case they let her down, which they always did of course. So did I."

"I don't think you've let her down over this Kat"

"I'm glad you think so, Allen." She laughed, her dark eyes sparkled.

"Next job, Kat."

"Already? Don't I get a rest?"

“No. Dad’s finally appointed the Board and their first meeting is next week. I want you to present your findings and recommendations to the Board. Do the works, power point slides, handouts and all that stuff?”

“Me, Allen? Hey you’re the General Manager. Shouldn’t you do it?”

“Maybe, but I’m not the visionary. That needs someone with passion for the work. This is your report, and you should get credit for it.”

“You trust me to do this?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

Kat had no answer to this. He had been so pleasant to her recently; surely he wasn’t setting her up for humiliation, for ridicule by the Board?

Fred, as Chair of the Board, appointed six other members. One was Andrew Strange, who also doubled as the Foundation’s legal adviser. Another was Dame Stephanie Packer, a retired MP and animal rights champion. She was a large woman, with a booming voice honed in parliamentary debates, to project over a constant heckling background. Yet another was Robin Knowles, the bespectacled, crinkly faced Executive Director of the Animal Welfare Village, who was also the chair of the National Association of Animal Welfare Villages. Professor Sir Gareth Williams was an Emeritus Professor and former head of the Veterinary Science School, an internationally noted academic who was famous for his research on animal behaviour. Out of the lecture hall, he was a man of few words, but every one worth listening to. Deborah Lyons was the CEO of a communications and PR company and a self-acknowledged cat fancier and rag-doll cat breeder. James Arron, a writer and ethicist was the chair of Animal Rescue and Conservation Society, or ARC for short. James headed the animal experimentation ethics committees at the university, and his

passion was to improve conditions for animals serving science. The new board members were chatting happily together, making each other's acquaintance and re-acquaintance, when Kat and Allen entered the room.

Kat surveyed the faces round the table. These new people were all successful in their careers and publicly well known, and Kat felt a little intimidated by their talent and experience. Allen gave her an encouraging smile just before they walked in the room. The meeting started, and Kat was unable to think of anything else except her forthcoming presentation.

"Kat?" How long had Fred been trying to attract her attention?

"Yes, Fred, sorry." Kat stood up and went to the head of the table. She could feel her heart thumping as she opened the presentation on the laptop computer. All morning, her fantasy of breaking down in the middle or there being a power cut so her slides didn't work, or they got in the wrong order, or one or more of the board members would keep interrupting her putting her off track, had played out in her mind and now underpinned the tremor in her voice when she started to speak.

Her first slide was of Poppy. "I think we should begin by thinking why we are here and what we are here for. What is the point of the PAWS Foundation? If this dog had not been rescued by Primrose Moore, there would be no Foundation. So let's start by making sure whatever we do in the future, the animals are right at the front and centre."

Kat's next slide showed the national statistics - over 100,000 animals a year dumped, abused, lost, or abandoned, picked up by welfare organizations and animal shelters.

Kat focused on her audience, half expecting everyone to be playing with their smartphones or asleep. But, they were all listening attentively, and some

were even making notes. She hoped there weren't going to be difficult questions afterwards.

"We have to show we are not just another animal charity. Many people criticized Primrose Moore's legacy, leaving money to animals and not to humans. If the Foundation receives charitable status, there could be resistance to fundraising because of this, and it could affect animal welfare donations. Yes, the Foundation needs to fulfill Primrose Moore's wish to provide more help to re-home unwanted animals, cats, dogs, horses, rabbits, and yes, the Foundation needs to think about how best to work with the other organizations. But, I think we can do more than that."

She glanced across at Allen, who gave her a little nod of encouragement. She reciprocated with a shy smile.

"Every day, there is something in our newspapers about a dog who has bitten a child or person. We hear little about whether there was provocation. We get comments like 'he's never shown aggression before' but once is enough. We have animals euthanized for aggression, often because of a lack of training by irresponsible owners. They're expendable, just another commodity, if it doesn't fit let's just get rid of it, put it in the rubbish, can always get another, sort of attitudes. Then there are animals condemned because they are too unwanted, too ugly, too old, too unsocialized to be rehoused. And, let's not forget, 'having a bad day today, why not kick the cat or the dog, or someone else?'"

"Sorry for interrupting Kat, but I want to say that the public need to understand the relationship between animal abuse and cruelty to people, particularly child abuse." Robin chipped in, "This, one issue we're extremely hot on. It requires education of not just pet owners, but of the non-animal owning public too. We need to stop abuse before it happens by whatever means we have, education,

low cost obedience training, the law, sanctions. There's a lot the Foundation can do in this area."

"Hear, Hear!" came from a couple of board members. Kat was a little flustered by the interruption, but it wasn't as bad as she anticipated. At least it supported her main thrust. Kat flicked on a slide of a police dog and his handler, quickly flicking on to a farmer and his sheepdog mustering, a beagle sniffing at a suitcase at the airport, a dog in the rubble of the Christchurch earthquake, a husky pulling a sled over a frozen landscape.

"While newspapers are full of shock-horror stories about animals that bite people, there isn't so much interest in these animal heroes. Here we have the animals with jobs. The dogs that work on our front line, protecting us, helping our economy and saving lives. Professional animals cost a lot to breed and train. Some abandoned dogs may not be suited to be pets in families, but have the right attributes to make excellent working animals. I believe we can assist here, by identifying surrendered animals who have the right stuff to be service dogs."

"Too right, Kat," Sir Gareth said, "I never cease to be astonished at how well animals, dogs in particular, but others too, can be trained to aid our lives. Let's not forget about other animals who help people, horses, for example, and riding for the disabled."

Kat took another deep breath. At least the interruption could segue into her next slide, so she swallowed her irritation.

"Yes, Sir Gareth, absolutely right. I'm about to go on to talk about assistance dogs."

Kat put up a slide of a blind person with their guide dog at their side.

"Everyone knows what fantastic work these animals do." She put up a slide of a

woman with a black Labrador, wearing a red service jacket. “And, of the Hearing Dogs.” Kat clicked on to a picture of a young woman, about eighteen, sitting on a bench cuddling a retriever.

“This is Ellen. She is an insulin dependent diabetic. Her dog has been trained to recognize symptoms of impending coma, and is trained to bring her medications and a telephone to her before it is too late. This dog has allowed Ellen to live independently in her own flat on her own.”

Kat flicked on to a picture of a young boy and a black Labrador. “This is Jackson. He has autism. He didn’t respond to human interventions until he got Kelly, his help dog.”

She flicked over.

“This is Daniel. He has epilepsy. His dog is trained to detect the onset of a seizure and warn him to get into a safe place.” Kat paused for breath and to take a swig of water. Her throat felt dry, but the more she delved into her talk the more she enjoyed it, her voice strengthening and projecting into the room. She quickly took a look at her audience. They were still listening; even Allen who knew what she was going to say. He was smiling at her, nodding to continue. She clicked over the slide to a girl in a wheelchair.

“This is Lynne, she has Spina Bifida and has always lived in a wheelchair. Now eighteen, she wants to live independently. With Sally, her assistance dog, she can. Sally retrieves dropped items, fetches items, warns when anyone arrives and guards her mistress.”

Kat clicked to a slide of three dogs, a medium sized retriever cross, a smaller white mixed breed, and a chocolate coloured spaniel playing at a beach.

“These are off-duty psychiatric service dogs, enjoying a bit of socializing. These

animals have a human partner with a psychiatric illness.”

Dame Stephanie raised her hand to ask a question. “Kat, But there are many different types of mental illness. How can a service dog be trained to deal with the range?”

“They can’t, Dame Stephanie.” Kat was in her stride and more confident, “Each individual has unique issues, problems, signs, symptoms that they need assistance with. So, the dogs are trained individually with their human partner to provide the needed responses. The animals are not interchangeable. The animals are trained to provide various responses, depending on need. For example, some people may have apathy and stay in bed all day. The animal can be trained to start activity, or wake up their person. They can remind people when to take medication, and fetch it. They can find phones, or keys. They can even be trained to detect dangerous driving and warn their handlers. They can stop people getting into obsessive repetitive behaviours, guide people to a safe place if they are prone to becoming confused or disorientated, and many more other things besides. In addition, they provide grounding, tactile stimulation, and companionship with a caring presence.”

James Arron raised his hand. “I’ve heard of this overseas, so it’s not a novel idea.”

Kat nodded. “Yes, the idea is gaining traction slowly but currently only overseas. There is also resistance to the idea that people with mental disabilities could benefit, despite increasing evidence of its value. A major problem is that training is costly. Many people think that no one should own an animal they can’t afford to train and keep, but there are some people who could benefit, whose disability prevents them from earning a living. This is where the Foundation can help by providing training scholarships, or support packages.

These assistance dogs can be any trainable dogs. They don't have to be specially bred and, overseas, they've found abandoned animals needing rehoming are often suitable."

Deborah Lyons chipped in. "It's not just these people either. There are many older people needing emotional support and companionship, who could benefit from animal companionship, dogs and cats, but their limited incomes preclude the possibility. The Foundation may be able to help here as well?"

Kat agreed, "Yes, I'm beginning to realize that is why my grandmother got Poppy." She bit her bottom lip momentarily.

"Yes, and I think she would be pleased if we enabled others to have the same experience." Fred replied.

Robin Knowles spoke up. "I know I'm always banging on about education of the public, but our society is ambivalent about animal ownership and it's often forgotten that animals provide us with more than companionship. We need to increase community respect for these sentient creatures, and I would like to see the Foundation play its part in this."

Sir Gareth attracted Kat's attention, smiling at her broadly, his eyes crinkling as he did so, "Well done, Kat. You've done a thorough job, and we can see you have enormous compassion and vision for the animals. Ever thought about becoming a vet?"

Gosh, thought Kat, a flush creeping up her neck.

Fred caught Kat's eye. "Have you finished, Kat?"

"Almost, Fred, we need a logo that encapsulates what we are about. Something that puts the animals at the centre, and humans in support. Here, is one idea. I'm sure that a professional company like yours, Ms. Lyons could come up with something even better." She flicked on her slide and put up a picture of a rough

drawing of a paw print hovering over a lotus flower. Deborah inclined her head. "Yes, maybe hands making up the lotus flower? Or, maybe a hand drawn like a fern-frond reaching over the paw?"

Kat took a surreptitious look at Allen, who was staring blankly at the drawing on the slide. She had been proud of that drawing. Kat wondered why his previously encouraging expression had disappeared.

Someone had given her a book, perhaps for her birthday. Gran, '*yes probably Gran, gave it to her.*' Kat liked to read at night in bed, and she usually dropped off to sleep quickly after reading a few pages. The Alchemist was her favourite, and she was reading it for the third time. Her eyes were heavy, and the page blurred as she reached the bit where the Alchemist tells the young boy "It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting."

'What is my dream?' She thought as her eyes closed and she fell into a deep sleep. She was running for a train. She could see it in the distance, standing at the station, and she knew she had to run or else miss it. Her legs felt leaden and wouldn't move, no matter how much she willed them to get going. As she reached the station, the train pulled out leaving her on the platform staring after it. She felt that sinking feeling again.

The little girl sat on the old wooden bench at the end of the platform. She was dressed in a pink, frilly dress, and a white cardigan, with her long dark curly hair tied up in two bunches with matching ribbons. Her feet didn't touch the ground, and she swung her legs back and forth. Kat could see she had white socks and black patent leather shoes on her feet. The little girl was alone apart from a large suitcase and a battered pink stickered vanity case beside her. Kat went up to the little girl and saw she was crying. "Where are you going?" she

asked the child.

"I don't know?"

The little girl started to cry, a high-pitched mewling sound that Kat thought would break her heart. "Don't cry, it will work out all right," she said to the little girl. Her crying got louder and louder and filled her ears. She put her hands over her ears and woke up.

It was still there. The crying. She was wide-awake but could still hear it. The dawn was just breaking, the light brightening the room as it penetrated through the thin curtains of her bedroom. She got out of bed, put on a dressing gown and a pair of slippers, and made herself a cup of tea, getting back into her bed to drink it. There it was again, and again, a little cry, high-pitched, distressed. Kat got out of bed and began to search the room, then the rest of the small flat she rented, but although she continued to hear the cry she couldn't find where it was coming from. She went back into her bedroom and turning her head to listen carefully, she realized the noise was coming from underneath the floorboards.

Her flat, one of three, was in a converted old villa. The conversion hadn't been done well, and the house was damp and cold, but the rent was cheap. She had one bedroom, facing south, so it was dark as well as cold. There was no wardrobe just a rail across the front of one wall on which she hung her clothes. A white painted chest of drawer with rose patterned handles was beside her single bed. On it was the battered pink stickered vanity case. She had asked her mother if she could have a skateboard and got the vanity case instead. What her mother would have wanted at ten, not her. She remembered taking it outside in her disappointment and bashing it against a wall then collecting various stickers to cover up the damage before her mother could see

what she had done. Why had she kept it all these years, she wondered, I hate pink! Time to throw it out.

Kat slipped on some shoes, grabbed a torch, and went outside. She searched through the overgrown flowerbeds for the source of the noise, but she couldn't see or hear anything. When she walked back to the house, she heard the mewling again. Is it an animal, maybe trapped, somewhere in the crawl space under the house? She searched round and found a small hole where the weatherboards touched the ground. Kat couldn't see anything, so she lay on the ground and shone her torch through the hole. The light caught something bright at the back of the space, two bright blue eyes. It moved, and she saw a tiny streak of fur move. The boards would have to be removed to get the animal out, but her landlord would probably go into orbit if she did it. She reached into her dressing gown pocket for her mobile phone and rang him. The landlord was annoyed at being woken early to be told about a trapped cat. He yelled at her to get the SPCA, and not bother him with such trifles. He added that he would expect her to pay for any damage done in getting it out. Kat stuck her tongue at the invisible landlord as pushed the end button. Creep. She rang the animal rescue team who recognized her voice, from the time she had visited them to find out what they did.

Her dressing gown was muddy from where she had lain on the ground, so she went inside to shower and change before they came. She could still hear the little creature crying. It wasn't moving.

"Here we are," said the officer pulling himself out of the crawl space with a tiny, grey tabby, kitten in his large hand. The kitten blinked with the sudden light and meowed, opening its mouth wide showing its pink tongue. "About seven or

eight weeks old I reckon."

He handed the kitten to Kat who held it in the crook of her arm. The little kitten stopped meowing and started to purr. Kat stroked its head causing the purr to increase in volume, the vibration tickling her hand. The officer took off his hardhat and got a cat carrier out of his van.

"You should tell your landlord to clean up under there, Kat. It doesn't look too safe to me. Some of the piles are rotting, and there's a lot of debris underneath."

The officer popped the kitten, protesting at being moved from her comfy spot on Kat's arm, into the cage.

"Now for the hard part," said the officer, "Getting a foster mother for the kitten. You wouldn't like to keep her, would you? She'd make a lovely pet."

"No," said Kat, shaking her head, "I want to travel a bit next year, and there's no one who could look after her. Can't commit to looking after an animal at this stage in my life and, anyway, it's no pets here."

"You don't sound too sure, Kat. There are always catteries, you know, if you go away. And better places to live."

"I'm sure."

"O.K." The officer put the cage in the back of the van and walked round to the driver's door. Kat followed him and touched his arm as he got into the car.

"Actually, you know, I'm not sure."

The eastern beaches are famous for their glorious sunrises, but in a settled late autumn, looking west towards the harbour crossing, the sunset is also spectacular. Crimson streaked heavens, clouds gold edges on fire, contrasted against the silhouetted starkness of the bridge. The sun sets quickly in the Southern Hemisphere and darkness falls like a blanket.

The moon would not rise until after midnight; its absence promised a fine night for stargazing. Edwin's camera, on a tripod on the patio, pointed to the sky, its' automatic timer set to several hours exposure. The assignment, set by the photography club, was to capture the star's movement as they crossed the heavens, the long exposure recording their track as bright lines in the sky. Eddie's star-shot would finish just before midnight, so Edwin didn't bother to lock the conservatory door, intending to bring his camera in before they went to bed. After setting up the shot in the darkness of the garden, he joined Joan in the lounge to watch the evening's television, as they always did.

Their favourite comedy show was on. It was particularly amusing this week, and both were soon engrossed and laughing uproariously. So, the soft click of the gate opening, the near silent rubber soled steps behind the bushes, the dark shape edging closer to the conservatory door missed by the gaze of the camera pointing to the sky, the conservatory door pushed ever so gently, Poppy's befuddled attempt to stand in her basket and bark, the whoosh as the muzzle went on her nose and mouth, the soft flop of the blanket thrown over her to contain her struggling, the scrape of the cane chair when the intruder left the conservatory wrestling with his bundle, the soft pad down the garden and through the gate, the rev of the car outside on the road making its rapid

getaway, all failed to be heard by the couple, mesmerized by their huge plasma screen.

The Bowser advertisement came on at the start of the ad break. The background music usually enticed Poppy to stand in front of the television set and bark, but this time she failed to appear.

"Where's Poppy?" Joan asked Edwin, who was busy flicking through channels with the remote control.

"In her basket, last time I looked, fast asleep, snoring her head off."

"Cup of tea?"

There was plenty of time in the ad breaks to make a cup of tea and get a chocolate caramel slice for Eddie's supper. She called the dog. No answer. '*Strange*', she thought, '*she's usually so obedient.*' Joan walked into the conservatory and saw the empty basket. "Poppy" she called. No answer.

'Eddie's left the conservatory door open, she must be in the garden.' Joan walked over to the wall switch and flicked it expecting the outside floodlights to come on, but was surprised when there was no response. She went out into the dark tree-lined garden, pitch-black, barely illuminated by the stars above. She called again, but no sign of the dog. She went to the side gate and saw it was partly open. She went down the path to the electronic front gate and gasped when she saw it open also. Surely Edwin closed it when he came in? Even so, Poppy wasn't the type of dog to wander. Joan went back into the house as fast as her arthritic hips could take her.

"Edwin, Poppy's missing."

"Can't be. Must be here somewhere." Edwin stood up and glanced around the room, expecting the dog to pop out from wherever she was hiding.

"Edwin the gates are all open and the conservatory door too. You must have left

them open" Joan started to cry.

"No, I didn't. I hadn't locked the conservatory yet, but the gate was certainly closed."

Joan and Edwin started to check the house, calling the dog, hoping that she would appear, wagging her tail. They scoured each of the bedrooms, checking the wardrobes and cupboards, went through the living rooms, even looking behind cushions. They went through every kitchen cupboard and checked every storage area. No sign of the dog. Joan kept dissolving into tears as each search area drew a blank. Edwin could feel his heart racing while he grabbed a torch and went out into the garden, checking under every bush and tree.

"She must have got out," Edwin said, putting on his jacket. "Right, Joan you ring the police and ask them to look out for her. Animal control won't be open now. I'll go and search the neighbourhood." He ran out of the house, with his torch into the street, looking up and down the street. No sign of the dog. He went to his neighbours, apologizing for the lateness of the hour, asking them to check their properties for the missing dog. Edwin thought she might have gone down to the beach and he walked the full length, calling, calling.

The moon started to rise over the beach, giving some welcome light to illuminate the nooks and crannies of the beach and sea wall, but failing to reveal a place where Poppy was hiding. Edwin's heart was beating so loudly he could hear it in his ears, and every step was heavy as he walked towards home, each one tamping down his hope of finding her. He could hear the crash of the waves as they reached the shore and fizz of the water as the foam broke on the beach, his mouth could taste its salty bitterness.

Edwin came into the house and flung the torch down, sinking into an armchair. "She's gone. Did you ring the police?"

Joan was holding a piece of paper in her shaking hand. She handed it to him, sobbing. "This was on the coffee table in the conservatory."

Edwin took the paper and read it, his colour draining from his face. Written in blue felt-tipped pen in capital letters was,

WE HAVE THE DOG. AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

Sergeant Bill Johnson decided to do a bit of overtime and was working an extra evening shift when the report came in of a missing dog in Kohimarama. He and his wife had just bought a new house in Glendowie, and his wife had her heart set on buying some new furniture to fill it up. Bill was in the British Police Force before he emigrated and people assumed that he would find New Zealand policing quiet in comparison. Not so. A lowly cop in the British force rarely got out of beating the streets or doing the donkey work for his superiors.

In his first six months, in New Zealand, he was assigned to a murder case, a drug deal gone wrong, numerous traffic accidents honing his 'breaking bad news' skills, and he'd tracked down a professional burglar who had left a calling card in the shape of a betting slip dropped at the scene of the crime. Very careless. The bookie had CTV, and the burglar was easy to identify. And he'd been told, by his English Colleagues that New Zealand was a quiet place with little crime!

"Tell them to call animal control in the morning. We don't do missing dogs unless they're causing a traffic hazard." He said to the person who took the call. "Sorry Sarge, but it appears there was a break-in, and the dog was stolen." The female constable sounded concerned.

"Even so, haven't time to go chasing after stolen animals. Some designer dog was it?" People who had designer dogs deserved to have them stolen.

"No Sarge, it's the one that was left a swag of money, you remember, the one in the paper a few months back and on the telly."

Bill vaguely remembered something about it. Mostly because the fortune came from a lottery win. Every time he heard of a big winner proved to him that buying a lottery ticket each week was a good investment. It was pretty daft to leave all that money to a dog, though.

"Oh THAT dog."

"Yes, Sarge, THAT dog," the woman on the phone said. "Can you at least go round and check the property. The lady is frightened whoever took the dog might come back for them."

"OK. I suppose so. It's on my way home. I'll call by."

Bill arrived at the house just before midnight. After doing a double shift, he had been looking forward to a few hours sleep before starting his normal day shift. The house lights were all on, but the garden was in darkness. He called the intercom and Edwin released the gate from inside the house. Bill walked up the path, shaking his head. Surrounding the lawn were mature bushy trees, just inside the high walls, towering over the walls so prying eyes could not oversee.

By the door were more tall bushes, big enough to hide a man in. He could never understand why people planted their properties in a way that aided and abetted burglars to get close to their properties unseen. He looked at the motion sensor security lights, placed just above head level. Silly place to put them so low; so easy to unscrew the bulbs just enough so they lost contact stopping them from coming on when the sensor fired. They would appear normal if anyone glanced at them. Bill put his hand up to one and fiddled with it. Yes, it was loose. He expected whoever took the dog had done a rekey earlier in the

day and unscrewed the lights so they wouldn't come on. He checked the side gates and noticed the drawn back bolts. He made a note to ask the owners if they usually left the gates unbolted, but he suspected someone else had primed them in advance. So far, this looked like a professional hit. He doubted there'd be fingerprints, the professionals usually wore gloves, but he supposed the forensic guys should check tomorrow.

Edwin let the policeman in. He ushered the Sergeant into the lounge, where he found Joan, red-eyed and tear-streaked, holding her head in her hands, and rocking backwards and forwards in her chair. Edwin silently handed Bill the piece of paper. He read it quickly and put it in a plastic evidence bag.

Bill surveyed the room and started to draw a sketch of the layout in his notebook. The lounge had French doors leading out on to a garden patio. Next to the lounge was a dining room that led out in to a conservatory. Bill checked the mortice lock on the door, noting scratches where an object, a screwdriver probably, had picked it. The dog's basket was by one of the cane chairs and lined with an old blanket. He lifted it up and saw crumbs and bits of chocolate.

He came back into the lounge. "Not much we can do tonight sir, but I've taken down some details. I suspect a professional robbery; there are hallmarks of one, all over the house. Anything else missing besides the dog?"

Bill cast his eye round the lounge noting the newness of the furniture and the expensive television.

"No, there's nothing else gone. It was the dog they were after. I can't understand why she didn't bark. She's usually such a good guard dog," said Joan.

"There are crumbs in her basket. Looks like a chocolate biscuit. Did you give it to her?" Bill asked.

"No way. Chocolate is frightfully bad for dogs, it can kill them. We don't allow her human biscuits anyway. How on earth did she get it?' Joan said, looking puzzled.

"Whoever cased the place probably planted it in her basket. I expect if we test the crumbs we'll find it was injected with Valium or some other sedative." Bill noted this in his book. "This was well planned. Had any visitors, strangers, workmen recently? Anyone looking around the house for any reason?"

Joan gaped at him, her eyes opened wide.

"Yes, there was a man from the Telephone Company who came yesterday. Something about a fault reported on the telephone line.

"You didn't give him any numbers or anything did you Ma'am?" *'I bet she did,'* thought Bill, *'People like her always do.'*

"I don't think so." Mrs. Paine had gone bright red. "I was upstairs you see cleaning the bathroom and the release was down stairs. I remember coming down to the front door."

"You did check his ID, didn't you Ma'am?" Joan bit her bottom lip.

"Well, he flashed a card at me, with a photo on. It looked official. I'm afraid I didn't look at it closely."

Bill gave her a sharp look and gave a big sigh, noting this in his notebook.

"It's all my fault" Joan began to sob. Edwin went up to her and gave her a hug.

"You weren't to know dear. What I want to know is how they found us? The house belongs to the Foundation, not us, we're not in the phone directory, and no one knows us around here. We came here because it's such a good, safe area."

Bill marvelled, once again, how some people still believed in 'safe areas'.

Preliminaries completed, Bill walked around the house, making sure that

everywhere was secure again, then screwed the security light bulbs back in, checking they worked.

"Try to get some sleep. I'll be back tomorrow morning with some mug shots for you to look at. Maybe help you to give us a description of the man who came to fix the telephone wires, Mrs. Paine?"

The sergeant arrived early the next morning, with another man who he introduced as his senior colleague, Inspector Bullcott, of the CID. They brought a portfolio of pictures for Mrs. Paine to go through to see if she could spot the telephone man from the array of known offenders in the area.

The Inspector was a much slighter man than the sergeant and more formally dressed in a dark grey suit over a white shirt and dark tie. He had a light-coloured moustache hiding his top lip and grey haired temples framing his shiny head. The Inspector seemed a taciturn fellow, avoiding conversation when Edwin tried to engage him. Nor could he be persuaded to have a cup of tea and piece of cake by Joan. Focused on the job, he went into every room, taking notes, and then into the garden to look for footprints in the soft soil behind the bushes.

Bill had found a couple of prints, with trainer-like treads, the Inspector wasn't impressed and said they would probably turn out to be shoes that sold in their millions at the Warehouse and difficult to trace. Still, it was worth a try. He stood guarding them while he sent his Sergeant back into the house to stress to the Paines how important it was they didn't go out into the garden until his investigation people arrived.

Bill gave Joan a series of photographs to look at, hoping she might recognize the man who said he came to fix the phone lines. Joan sat down to

look but the more she contemplated the pictures, the more flustered she became, mopping her face constantly with her handkerchief. To the Bill's disappointment, she couldn't identify the man.

A pretty young girl arrived, dressed in black tee shirt and jeans, her long curly hair tied in a ponytail. Joan had opened the door to let her in and was sobbing in the girl's arms at the doorstep. Daughter, he wondered, granddaughter?

"I'm Katherine Anston, Officer. Call me Kat. I work for the PAWS Foundation that administers Poppy's Trust."

'Stranger and stranger, Not only was there an heiress dog, but an organization as well. Was everyone out to lunch around here?'

The young woman explained that Edwin rang Fred first thing that morning to tell him what had happened. As Fred was in a meeting all morning, and her Boss was on a plane coming back from Wellington, they'd sent her round to see if there was anything she could help with.

"The Inspector will probably want a word with you, Miss. Please wait here while I get him." Bill left the room, and went into the garden to speak to the Inspector. They both came back a few minutes earlier.

"And, your role in this ... Foundation, Miss Anston?" The Inspector asked.

"I'm Allen Reeve's assistant, Inspector. The Foundation invests the money left to Poppy."

"And, if anything happens to the dog?"

"Under the terms of my Gran's Will it all goes back to the Foundation."

"Your Gran?"

"She set up the Foundation and Poppy was her dog. I am so upset, my Gran's dog, stolen. "

Bill could imagine the cogs of his Inspector's mind whirring inside his head as he heard this.

"Can you think of anyone who would want to kidnap the dog, Miss. Anston?"

"No. Why would anyone want to kidnap Poppy?"

"For money, Miss. Anston, for money. Or revenge. But it's hard to see why anyone should want revenge on Mr. and Mrs. Paine. Unless there's something we don't know of course. So, it looks like money to me."

The Inspector didn't take his eyes off Katherine Anston's face. She sucked in her cheek on one side of her face.

"You know something, Miss Anston?"

"Nothing, Officer. I'm sorry I can't help you."

The door opened, "Oh, good. My boss has just arrived. Perhaps you could talk to him."

Kat pointed to the door as Allen walked in through the door.

'Not for long,' thought Bill. 'If I know my Inspector he will be checking Missy out and wanting to talk with this one again, soon, very soon.'

Allen entered the house with Fred and the two of them introduced themselves to the Inspector and Bill.

Allen went over to where Joan was sitting and briefly glanced through the photographs.

"Recognize anyone?" he asked Joan.

She shook her head and buried her nose in her handkerchief. "If only I could see him here. Oh, it's all my fault. Poor Poppy, where on earth can she be?"

Allen took out his mobile phone and peered at the screen. "I think you'll find Poppy at 24 West Derbyfields Road, West Auckland."

"What?" Everyone spoke simultaneously.

"Here, see." Allen thrust the phone in front of the Inspector.

"How....?"

"When I was in the States, last year, I saw these GPS devices for animals. I bought one for my dog, at the time. After someone tried to snatch Poppy at Takapuna, I wrote to the people where I got Benji's from and imported a one for Poppy, as well. Dad and I were a bit worried it might happen again, but we didn't want to worry Edwin and Joan, so Dad didn't tell them. Anyway, here is the app on the phone, see, 'Find my dog', and hopefully it has, here!" He prodded the screen. There on the screen was a map and a purple pin with a pulsating circle around it was located at the address he had mentioned.

"Any more tricks up your sleeve, Allen?" Eddie's face registered disbelief. Fred laughed. Joan forgot to breathe.

"Allen, you are brilliant!" Kat's eyes, shining like midday suns, couldn't take her eyes off her boss, her admiration for his trick affecting everyone else in the room.

"Well, yes, as it happens." Allen said, hesitating just a little. "The collar I got for Poppy was extra special. You know, the technology, you can get these days is incredible. This collar has a camera that you can trigger remotely through an app on my smartphone. It takes a picture every minute."

Allen tapped on the screen. He stared at it for a few moments before thrusting it at the Inspector. "Ring any bells?"

The inspector scrolled through the pictures on the phone, stopping at one. He handed the smartphone over to Bill. Their eyes met, and both chorused, "Dylan Bagshaw!"

Dylan Bagshaw's house was halfway along the street. Originally the weatherboards on the house were white, but now were dusted with grime, with cobwebs in every corner. Several broken weatherboards at the bottom of the house needed fixing. Paint had peeled off the windowsills, and bare wood showed through in many places. The wire mesh fence and gate had seen better days. At the side of the house was an old black car, half out of the carport, its number plate tied on with string.

Bill scrolled through the web page on his police issue iPad, noting Dylan's wife had left him for a new boyfriend when he went inside. She had taken the kids with her when she moved in with her new partner. The house must have been shut up for some years. Even so, Dylan had been released six months before, after serving six years, but it didn't look as if he had been doing any maintenance about the place since. Bill wondered what he had been doing instead.

The police parked just a little way down from the house so they could watch the front door. Dylan came jogging round the corner, carton of milk in his hand. He was wearing a beanie on his head, but the hood of his jacket was down and they could see the spider web tattoo clearly. The big black spider was prominent in the middle of the web tattoo, one rung for each year spent inside.

Dylan disappeared inside the house, and Bill and Inspector Bullcott surveyed the property for a while, listening for any noise, barks in particular, but could only hear a loud radio playing from inside the house. They got out of the car, and walked up to the front door, listening intensely against the blaring punk music emanating out of the open window. They knocked. A shuffling noise

inside and the door slowly opened. The second Dylan saw the two men he tried to close the door, but Bill jammed the door open with his foot, a practiced move. "Hello Dylan." The inspector said thrusting his badge in Dylan's face. "Aren't you going to invite us in?" Dylan had taken his beanie off and had a milky moustache around his mouth.

"Get fuckin' lost. Stop harassing me Bullcott." Dylan said, spitting out the words, causing Bill to duck his head to avoid milk spray.

"That's not a nice thing to say to an old friend, Dylan, when we've come to pay you a visit. Can't a man come to see you about a dog?"

Dylan continued to hold the door tight against Bill's shiny black brogue.

"Ain't no dog here mate. Skedaddle. Get fuckin' lost I tell you." Dylan continued to spray spittle on the Inspector.

"Well, why don't you let us in and we can see for ourselves, Dylan."

"You can't come in here without a search warrant. I know the fuckin' law." Dylan spat out at the Inspector, leering and jutting his jaw out.

"Well, it just so happens Dylan, in an emergency, like if we suspect controlled drugs are on the premises, then we don't actually need a search warrant. We can search your property for drugs, as if we had already had one. I can tell you the law if you like. What was your last conviction? Wasn't it dealing in speed for that mate of yours? We suspect you have drugs on your property, and we are now exercising the right to find them." The Inspector inclined his head towards Bill, who responded by putting his shoulder against the door and pushing hard. The force knocked Dylan off balance, allowing the door to open enough for the two police officers to get access to the dingy hallway.

"Thank you for inviting us in, Dylan. Most kind," said the inspector, "Oh dear, have you hurt your hand?" He pointed to a bandage wrapped round Dylan's

right-hand.

"Had an accident." Dylan nursed his bandaged hand in the other.

"Best to get someone to look at it." The Inspector grabbed Dylan's good hand, twisting it behind his back. With a flourish, he ripped off the bandage.

"Well, well, Dylan, very nasty. Looks like a bite to me. Possibly a dog bite? Think you'll need a tetanus injection for this, Dylan. Thought you said there were no dogs here?"

"There ain't. I'm telling the truth." Dylan was sullen and wriggled his shoulder to get his hand free. "And, there ain't no drugs either. I'm clean."

"Have a look round, Bill, while I hold our friend here." Bill went into each room of the house, shaking his head when he came out of each one.

"Told you, no dogs here."

Dylan jutted out his jaw again at the inspector and grinned showing the gap in his upper teeth. The Inspector saw he hadn't put his denture in this morning. Lazy, very lazy. Not expecting visitors. Or maybe, they've already been.

"Check the car, Bill." Bill obeyed went through the back door. The Inspector studied Bagshaw, silently. Bagshaw shifted from foot to foot and tried to avoid the Inspector's stare. His eyes flicked around the room looking to see if there was any escape. Behind him was the Sergeant, in front the Inspector.

Bill returned and stood behind Dylan, giving a subtle nod to the Inspector's eye. Bullcott broke his silence, "So what have you done with the dog Dylan?"

"I told you, there's no dog here, never been any dog here. Ask the neighbours. You've no proof there's been a dog here."

"Apart from the fact there's a nasty bite on your hand. Have to see what forensics can do with that, Dylan. They can detect all sorts from a bite, and I am certain they can tell us that some dog has freshly bitten you. Might even tell us

which breed." Dylan laughed and spat in the Inspector's face.

"Oh yeah, and that is going to stand up in court is it, Inspector fuckin' Sherlock Bullshit Holmes? Give us a break."

"Not only can we see a very nasty dog bite on you, Dylan, but you see, we have a photo of you, taken by the dog, who emailed it to this phone here."

Dylan spluttered and laughed out loud.

"Talk about police fuckin' windups. Now I've heard it all."

"Not quite, Dylan," said Bill walking round from behind to face Bagshaw. He held up a dog's collar in his hand. He held it up for Dylan to see and stretched it out to face Dylan.

"Smile, Dylan, you're on candid camera."

The postie brought the letter, again handwritten in capitals with a blue felt-tipped pen. Included was a photograph of Poppy. Propped up by her front legs was the previous day's paper, and in front of it, a ball hammer.

\$40 MILLION DOLLARS OR THE DOG WILL HAVE EACH BONE IN ITS BODY SMASHED, ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS.

The Inspector bagged the letter, scrutinizing the photograph for any distinguishing background. He wasn't hopeful of seeing anything that might help them find the place where the photograph was taken. The case was now extortion, demanding money with menaces. The Inspector had not come across any situation remotely as bizarre as this one. Could be promotion in it? He fancied himself as a Chief Inspector. Shame about the dog though.

He gave the job of arresting Dylan Bagshaw to his Sergeant, who relished the job. Bagshaw was not saying anything, not about whom he was working for,

nor what he had done with the dog. The police meticulously examined the house and car, collecting every suspicious hair in their evidence bags. Wayne positively identified Bagshaw as his darts acquaintance, 'Jeff,' from Finnegan's Bar.

Inspector Bullcott had no doubt had the identification been face-to-face instead of behind a one-way screen; Wayne would have attacked Dylan, judging by his reaction when he recognized Dylan, in the lineup. The Inspector wondered what the security company would have to say about their employee giving details of his assignment to a pub associate. He didn't wonder long. Eddie Paine complained to the company and SafeGuards sacked Wayne the same day.

The Inspector asked Fred, as chairman of the PAWS Foundation Board, to call a meeting at the office in Newmarket to discuss the development. Andrew was a bit late, and the conversation was well underway when he arrived.

"You can't be serious about giving in to this demand?" Andrew said, when brought up to speed. "What happens if we give in, they could keep the dog and demand another 40 million and another?"

"This whole caper has been well planned, and we need to know who Bagshaw is working for." Inspector Bullcott said, his face lacking any expression. "He hasn't done this on his own, and I've got my team looking at his prison mates and known associates. My guess is the people behind it wouldn't hesitate to carry out their threats." The rest of the participants looked anxious, as he hoped they would. He liked people to wonder what he was thinking. More likely give themselves away, if they had anything to give away.

"So, they kill the dog," Andrew shrugged, "so what. The money

automatically reverts to the Foundation with all its interest. Sorry Edwin, but you're the only one who actually misses out if anything happens to the dog."

"Andrew!" Edwin shouted, "I don't give a stuff about the money. But, they're not threatening to kill the dog, not directly, they're threatening to maim her and presumably let her die slowly in agony. I won't have a bar of that. She's family! I feel sick, Andrew. How can you be so callous?"

Andrew shrugged his shoulders. "I have to protect the Foundation, Edwin. I don't want anything to happen to the dog either, but one of us has to be realistic. We shouldn't give in to demands like this."

Kat held her hand up to attract attention. "Surely, if my grandmother left her entire fortune to prevent abuse and ill treatment of animals, the one animal she would really want us to protect would be her own. If we let them do this awful thing to Poppy, then we've broken the trust she put in the Foundation. I am sure she would be handing the money over to get her back."

'Interesting, the disinherited granddaughter arguing to hand over the money. And, hand the money over to whom, I wonder?'

"Well said, Kat," said Allen beaming at her.

The Inspector saw the way he glanced at the dark haired woman. A bit too long. *'Interesting.'*

Inspector Bullcott prided himself on reading people, and he rather liked thinking of himself as a human lie detector. He trusted his intuition. It rarely let him down.

Allen continued, "We have to go along with this to get the dog back. Nevertheless, it is a massive ransom. Can't the police help with tracking devices, like we did with the collar, or something? Drop a GPS trace into the money, that sort of thing?"

"I'll look into it," the Inspector said. "I'm sure there is something the forensic people could come up with."

Kat looked at her watch. "Would you excuse me, please? I have to meet someone for lunch."

Allen's head snapped up. Kat looked flustered as she gathered her handbag, checked her phone was in there, and almost ran out of the room.

'And who are you meeting Miss?' The Inspector wondered.

Fred tapped his fingers on the desk. He had been doing some calculations on a notepad. "Forty million dollars is a lot of cash. Even in hundred dollar notes, I'd be amazed if we could even collect four million of them quickly for a start off. And that much isn't going to fit into a suitcase, if that is what they have in mind."

The police tapped into Edwin and Joan's phone so they could record all calls. It was another two days before the kidnapper's call came through.

"I want proof the dog is well." Edwin told the muffled voice on the other end of the phone.

"You'll get it. We want forty million. We'll arrange when and where."

"Hey hang on. Do you know how much space forty million in cash takes? We've calculated it, and in \$100 notes, that much will weigh 200 kilograms, and need several boxes!" The phone rang off.

The Inspector shrugged. "They obviously haven't thought about the logistics of handling forty-million in cash. He'll be back again, just wait. Recognize the voice?"

"No, he was speaking through some device, but didn't sound familiar. Couldn't tell whether young or old."

The phone rang again. Edwin waited for the signal from the Inspector sat at

the table, his laptop ready. Edwin lifted the receiver.

"Put the money in a dark-green Nissan Cargo Van. I'll give you two days. When you have it ready, we'll arrange the swap. Cross us and the dog gets it."

The Inspector signalled to Edwin to keep the caller talking on the phone, but the caller hung up abruptly. Edwin gave a shudder when he put down the phone, and suddenly gripped his left arm tightly. His face screwed up as if in pain. His voice was breathless, "We'd better go shopping."

The rendezvous instructions came two days later. They found a suitable van in a secondhand car dealer and bought it fairly cheaply, at least it seemed cheap in the scheme of things.

"You have everything ready?" The disguised voice on the phone asked.

"Yes. We have everything ready. Dark-green Nissan Van as requested, loaded with forty-million in cash. In boxes, ten of them."

"Good. No GPS tricks like last time. If we find one or a mobile phone or any other tracking device in any box or on the vehicle, we'll fix the dog. And, don't think we won't know. We'll have a GPS detector this time."

"No, no GPS this time." Edwin's mouth was dry.

"And, no police either. Get it?"

"OK." The Inspector listening to the instructions through headphones on his computer expected this. The police would be there but discreetly hidden. The caller rasped down the phone.

"Drive the Van to the car park at Bellbird Falls. You know it?"

"Yes." Edwin's head bobbed even though the voice couldn't see him. The car park was at the start of several nature trails and bush tracks.

"Wednesday afternoon 2 pm sharp. You park the van in the car park on the

north side. We will join you and do the swap. Understand?" Edwin gestured to the Inspector who was sitting listening. He mouthed 'Yes' silently and pointed to the phone.

Edwin took a deep breath, "Yes, understood."

"No crossing us. No police. No tracking devices. Cross us and your little puppy won't be able to ever walk again. No vet in the world will be able to fix it." Eddie's dry mouth extended to his throat, and he felt it spasm.

"How stupid is that?" said Inspector Bullcott to Edwin. "Not many roads along there. We can easily block the access roads to the Bellbird Falls. We'll let them transfer the money then we'll catch them further down the road as they try to get away."

Edwin pressed his fist under his breastbone.

"You O.K. Edwin?" The inspector saw that Edwin who had gone pale again and this time he had a film of sweat on his forehead. Eddie took out a pill from a bottle on the sideboard and swallowed it without water.

"Indigestion. Been eating too many of Joan's cakes."

Edwin was to drive the van. The Inspector went through the plan with him several times. Edwin wanted to know every small detail of the plan, and what contingencies there were if anything went wrong. The Inspector thought he was being overcautious and tried to reassure him that nothing could go wrong, but Eddie was unconvinced. What if this happens, what if that happens, what if, what if, what if. The Inspector suggested he should have someone else with him, would help steady his nerves. It couldn't be one of them as the police were to keep their distance until after the transfer had been made, just in case the kidnappers knew any of them. The Inspector thought someone from the

Foundation was best to accompany Edwin. It was their money. He suggested Kat, the young woman. She was unlikely to threaten the kidnappers, and she didn't look old enough to be a police officer. The Inspector rang her at the Foundation and made the request.

There was a slight hesitation on the other end of the phone before Kat replied, "I would like to help you and Mr. Paine, Inspector, but unfortunately, I've arranged to go somewhere that day and, sorry, the arrangement can't be changed."

'How convenient.'

Allen confirmed that Kat had taken a day's leave the same day as the rendezvous and wanted to know why the Inspector was asking. Inspector Bullcott left him wondering. The second alternative was Fred, but he had to attend a funeral and he thought Joan would be a liability. Not ideal, having Edwin by himself, but there wasn't any other alternative.

Edwin was to phone a predetermined number the second the pick up occurred. The police, hidden further down, would then block the access and exit roads and catch the van leaving the area. The Inspector would be watching through his binoculars at a safe distance hidden in the bushes.

The road, cut out of the bush lad hill was long and winding. The houses behind the bush were invisible from the road, their driveways hiding behind trees, their gardens merging with the bush. Towering on either side were pine trees, native and exotic, filtering the sunlight slashing through the canopy. Cabbage trees with their cheerleader foliage fought with scrub for space above the marbled clay banks. Long black mottled trunks of tree ferns thrust upwards, their feathery fronds forming delicate fans gently moving in the air. Red-berried

titoki trees and white flowered manuka provided relief from the million shades of green. Shiny leaved coprosma, gold, brown and green competed for attention with soft pittosporum.

The sound of the car engine was deafened by the chirping rapper songs of millions of male cicadas clinging to the trunks of the trees. On any other day, this would have been a great day out in the country, a chance for fresh air and sun on the face.

Edwin found the park and drove in, placing his van where ordered. The car park was empty, and the thick bush concealed what might be round the next bend. He switched off the engine and waited. Five minutes later, an identical dark-green Nissan Cargo van drove into the car park and parked parallel to Eddie's van. The two vans were so close to each other that Eddie couldn't open his door more than a few centimetres. There were two men inside the other van, both wearing balaclavas obscuring their faces. The man in the passenger seat of the other van wound down his window. Edwin did the same.

"Get out of the van, go behind it and walk to the other side of the car park. Leave the keys in the ignition." The voice was low, rasping like someone who smoked too much.

"Show me the dog first." Edwin put the keys back in the ignition, his hand trembling.

"You'll see the dog only when we see the money. Now get out."

It was an effort for Edwin to climb over to the passenger seat, and it made him realize how much his recent weight gain affected his mobility. At one point, he got stuck on the handbrake, but just managed to ease himself over. He was breathing heavily and sweating profusely when he finally climbed out.

The man in the driver's seat of the other car emerged, opened the back of

Edwin's van, and checked inside the boxes. He took out a device similar to a walkie-talkie and waved it all over the boxes.

"OK, its clean here," he shouted to his companion. The man bent down low and passed the device under the body of the vehicle, checking the tyres carefully.

"Clean here too."

He walked to the back of his van and opened the back. The dog was shivering. When she saw Edwin, her head lifted, and she stood up but was prevented from moving forward by a chain tethering her and holding her back. Edwin heaved a sigh of relief. She seemed no worse for her ordeal. The kidnapper closed the van door, while Poppy barked at Edwin from inside, "I'm O.K.," and he climbed into the back of Edwin's van with the boxes of money. A moment or two later the second man slid out of the side door and ran round to the passenger seat of Edwin's van, jumping in with considerable speed. The man did not have Eddie's difficulty in getting across the front seats, as it was only a second or two before the ignition fired.

The van reversed quickly to turn and accelerated forward out of the car park. At the same time they drove off, Edwin pressed the send button on his mobile phone, sending a prewritten text to Sergeant Johnson. The hidden police would be in position in seconds. Edwin walked over to the lone dark-green van and opened the back.

"Poppy, it's O.K now girl. Soon be home."

The van was empty. The chain lay on the van floor. There was no sign of the dog.

'They can't have. Got away with both the money and the dog. Maybe they'd let the dog out of the van, and she would be in the bushes somewhere.'

He called her, "Poppy, come."

No response. He frantically searched the bushes, calling, calling but there was no sign of the dog. Edwin felt a sharp pain under his ribs that pulled his breath way from his lungs. He paused for a minute thinking he was winded and took some deep breaths, but the pain did not ease this time as it had done before. The pain under the ribs was stronger. It felt as if someone had stubbed out a cigarette in his stomach. He felt sick and lightheaded. Edwin walked back to the empty van and scanned the inside again. He pulled out his phone and texted 'Dog gone.' Send.

The Inspector emerged from his hiding place, and seconds later the Sergeant roared into the car park in an unmarked car.

"We're road blocking all the roads outta here. Everyone's alerted to finding a dark green van. We'll get the bastards. Edwin, you look a bit queer. Are you O.K mate?" The sergeant said taking out his phone from his police vest.

Edwin could barely answer. The weight crushing down on his chest was getting heavier and heavier, expelling his breath from his body, and preventing him from inhaling. His left arm ached terribly, and his jaw locked.

"You're not OK. mate, are you?" Bill dialled 111. "Ambulance, quickly, Bellbird Falls car park, Man having what looks like a heart attack."

Bill and the Inspector helped him to the side of the car park to wait for an ambulance.

"Joan," he said as he was placed into the ambulance. The paramedic gave him a shot of something strong, it made him feel drowsy, and the pain receded slightly. Even the coldness of the oxygen blowing in his face couldn't stop him from losing consciousness.

The Inspector ran down the main road feeding into the Bellbird Falls car

park to the first roadblock. Each patrol car had a photograph of the van and the registration number. The Inspector surveyed the scene with his binoculars. *'Where are you hiding?'* But he could see nothing through the thick canopy of bush and trees, the green colour of the van melding into the landscape, no glint of sunlight on glass to giveaway its position. There was little traffic about, and only the odd car passed by the waiting police cars. A dark green BMW four wheel drive, a small Holden with a woman and a small child, and a courier van belonging to one of the big delivery companies. Of the green van, there was no sign. Inspector Bullcott was about to call headquarters for reinforcements to do a house-to-house search, when a black Audi drove up to the roadblock.

"Hey you Police, looking for something?"

Inspector Bullcott wound down his window. "Might be, and ...?"

"Wouldn't be a dark green van would it?"

The man leant into the Inspector's window. He sounded irritated. The man was about fifty, thick neck, no doubt a former rugby player, prop most likely. The inspector opened his car door. "Well, sir, we might just be looking for a dark-green van. Have you found one? Mr...er?"

"Joshua Barclay. Doctor. Came home from the office, it's my half-day today. Turned into my drive up to my house and nearly smashed into this dark green van, all doors open, completely blocking the drive from side to side. Looks like a stolen one to me, just dumped. Saw you when I was driving in here. Can you move it please, pronto? Preferably before my wife gets home."

"Anything in it?" The inspector asked. Could this guy be involved somehow? Who knew they would be out?

"Empty. How long is it going to take you?"

The police followed Dr. Barclay to his house, which was just round the

corner from the car park. The house had a curving drive doubling back against the road, completely obscured by the thick bush. The villains had it all worked out. They knew there would be roadblocks. They had another vehicle tucked away. The Inspector hoped all his police cars followed his instructions to photograph all vehicles, entering or leaving the area. *'Which one was it? The Beamer? The Holden? The Courier Van?'*

The police car followed the doctor's car into the drive. In the middle was the dark green van. Empty, its doors all open, as if to prove it had nothing to hide. The Inspector had a look in the bushes around the path. Nothing.

Joan taxied to the hospital the minute she heard. At the hospital, they told her he was stable, and in Coronary Care. Edwin, her Edwin, was lying on a bed with an intravenous line in his arm with an oxygen mask on his face. Wires led from his bare chest to a machine showing his heart trace. Watching the mesmerizing green line trace across the machine, she was glad she could hear the beep, and that it was steady. But, Eddie's face appeared cold and bloodless. Without his pyjama top on, Joan could see how much weight he had put on. Surprising, after all that dog walking. He was lying against the pillows with his eyes closed when she arrived, and when he saw her, he tried to sit up in bed.

"Don't Edwin, Just rest. I'm here now." Joan patted his hand as she sat down beside the bed.

A nurse popped her head round the room door.

"Everything OK?"

'Silly question!' Joan wondered what would happen if she replied, 'No, everything isn't OK', because that was how she felt. 'No, it isn't OK. It isn't OK! My Edwin shouldn't have had a heart attack. The people who stole the money deserved to have a heart attack, not my Edwin.'

Edwin fixed his gaze at her, struggling to speak, and she felt the tears well up in her eyes. She had known Edwin for nearly fifty years, forty-two of them as his wife, and she couldn't imagine a world without him. Where had those fifty years gone?

"Oh Edwin, I'm so upset you're in here, but at least you're alive. The only thing that matters is that you get better." She squeezed his hand and mopped

her eyes.

"Poppy?" Edwin could barely say the name.

"They're out looking for her. Don't worry, they'll find her." Joan wasn't at all confident they would, and she didn't think the police were either. Still, she couldn't bear to think about what might have happened to the animal, when her Edwin was so ill.

Edwin fell back into his backrest, exhausted. The doctor came in, wearing a stethoscope round his neck like a scarf, jacket-less with an open necked spotless white shirt and a grey woollen sleeveless vest. *'They don't wear white coats these days.'* Joan thought that was a shame, *'how could you tell who was whom?'*

"Are you Mrs. Paine?" the doctor asked. When Joan affirmed, he introduced himself as Dr. Bingham. He had an ID badge on a lanyard round his neck, but Joan didn't like to ask if she could have a look at it to check.

He studied the trace for a minute or so and then examined Edwin, listening to his heart, taking his blood pressure. "Your husband is stable Mrs. Paine, but he has had a massive heart attack, I'm afraid. He may need angioplasty or bypass surgery when he has recovered a bit more."

Joan found it difficult to breathe. He said when he's recovered, not if he recovers. Her face brightened.

The doctor ran his pen down the clipboard, stopping at one point and underlining something. "Now Mrs. Paine, your husband is carrying far too much central abdominal fat and his blood pressure is far too high. He's also got diabetes. Has he put on much weight quickly, Mrs. Paine?"

The doctor could hardly hear her reply and asked her to repeat it.

"I'm afraid so. He seems to me to have put on a lot of weight since he left work

last year. Hadn't really noticed until now."

"Not getting enough exercise?" The doctor asked, noting down her answers in Edwin's file.

Joan felt hot and clammy, and the room was stifling. "He walks for a couple of miles or so, each day. With the dog. I don't think they walk very fast. The dog likes to play a lot and sniff at everything." Joan said, adding by way of explanation. "But, he's been under a lot of stress though."

"That hasn't helped for sure, but his weight gain has been the main influence here. His cholesterol is sky high too. What does he eat?"

Oh my God. Have I done this? All the baking I've pressed on him? All those cakes and biscuits I made for him?

"What was that again, Mrs. Paine?" The doctor asked.

"He does like a home made biscuit with his afternoon tea, Doctor." Joan mumbled.

"That will have to stop. He needs to lose at least twenty kilograms. I'll the dietician to talk with you both in a few days. Good to meet you." He left the room.

Joan started crying, and Edwin picked up her hand up and patted it.

"Edwin, I am so sorry. I thought I was looking after you, just like your mother taught me too. Fill the tins, she said all those years ago, remember. Make sure your family know they're loved. And, I thought I was doing that, but now the doctor says it is killing you. I am so sorry, Edwin. I promise you I'll stop forcing goodies on you. I never thought. Please get better, Edwin. I couldn't bear it if you weren't here. There wouldn't be any point to life any more." Joan squeezed her eyes tightly to dam the tears, but it didn't work and they started to flow.

Edwin squeezed her hand. Joan sat silently at his side, dabbing her eyes

with a tissue, not letting go of his hand, thinking about what the doctor said. Was it her fault? If she hadn't been so unhappy with being confined to the house, perhaps she wouldn't have forced so much baking on Edwin to cheer him up. He usually demurred after one cake or biscuit, but Joan always insisted on him having more. She had needed to know that she was useful, like she was before all this started, before Edwin retired, before Primrose left them all that money.

They had each other then, they had their health, they had modest means, they weren't destitute, they had a comfortable life, they didn't need anything else. What was the point of having all that money, if she panicked every time she left home, and Edwin died of a heart attack? They couldn't stay in the Kohimarama house any more. They would have to move, again. But, no doubt, someone else would discover where they lived. Some other greedy person. And the whole nightmare would start again. How many more times would the dog be targeted during its life? How many more death threats, kidnappings? Did they really want to live their lives with security guards, day and night because if they successfully found the dog, that's what it would mean. Even if they did, they would they would still have the unrelenting stress, of waiting for the next attempt. Sitting silently beside her critically ill husband, the more Joan thought about the possibilities, the unhappier she became. She was sure the strain of keeping the dog would kill Edwin, perhaps them both. The ache in her heart was different from Edwin. Blocked arteries weren't causing it, but something else. The heavy feeling in her throat, strangling her, filled her with fear. A little voice in her head whispered, *'What if it's too late? Too late to turn the clock back to before, when everything was so straightforward.'* *What if that trace stopped right now?'*

"Edwin, we can't go on like this," She said patting Edwin's hand. "Primrose thought she was helping us, making sure we would be all nicely set up for the rest of our lives. She would be devastated to see us like this, me too frightened to leave the house, you having a heart attack, her dog stolen and lost. It's a real mess."

Edwin was too tired to say anything, the oxygen mask on his face fogging with each laboured breath, clearing with each inhalation that preserved him for a little while longer. While he breathes, he lives and it can't be too late.

"Edwin, listen to me. You have to concentrate on getting better, and get back home. When you do, we'll work out what to do for the best. For all of us."

Joan loved Poppy, and wanted no harm to fall on her, but right now she wished she had never set eyes on the dog, or Primrose. If the choice was the dog or Edwin, then it had to be Edwin.

Edwin had plenty of time to ponder his fate, lying in his hospital bed, over the next few days. Joan visited every day, and his improvement, slow though it was, cheered her. The doctor came in twice a day, and Edwin felt like a pincushion from all the needle pricks and blood tests he had. He hoped they knew what they were doing. They have to, don't they? I have to trust them. When he thought about it, the crushing pain, the ache in his arm when he walked too quickly, and the occasional breathlessness, the signs were all there. I should have checked it out. Not just assumed it was indigestion. Now he was here, feeling guilty for his carelessness, feeling as if an asteroid had smashed into his bubbled world.

No one was telling him what had happened to his dog, whom he supposed, was still missing. Please don't harm her. Just get her back. We don't want the

money. The Foundation would want the money back. It was theirs after all, not his. He wondered if they thought it was his fault. Blamed him for his ineptitude at failing to keep her safe, blamed him for putting her at risk. But, she was a dog. He couldn't wrap her up in cotton wool. Poppy only wanted to get outside in the fresh air, run, play and enjoy her life. Like they all did.

Joan would cope without him. He was sure of that. His mother had taught her well when she was just a teenager, coming round to their house after school, when her own parents and older siblings were working. He thought about his mother now, long dead, nothing too much trouble for anyone, spoiling him rotten. She'd coped brilliantly after his dad died. *Ah mother!* When he closed her eyes, he could see her there, so real he could almost put out his hand and touch her. His mind wandered back to his childhood, when the sun always shone, the sea was always perfect for bathing, the sand was always warm and never stuck to you. Families laughed themselves silly with scrabble (no TV in those days), and problems were something other people had, never them. People were more content with less. Back then; there was no one really rich or really poor. People weren't jealous of what others had, as they seem to be now. His mother never worried about security or leaving windows unlocked or whether she could trust people. People didn't steal dogs or hold them to ransom in the old days. A cornucopia of happy memories. Maybe that was his difficulty. He didn't remember bad things happening to ordinary people like him, in the old days. He didn't expect them to even now. Couldn't see them coming. Was it really like that, back then? Really? Or was it more he wanted to remember it like that. Idealised, mythic, surreal.

Edwin looked out of the window. Large, fluffy cumulus clouds were forming in the sky. I'll be imagining faces in the clouds next. He laughed wryly to

himself, turning to look at the monitor on the locker, with its yellow line tracing his life. Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep.....

Some colour had returned to Edwin's face by the time Kat arrived at the hospital. She brought a huge bunch of flowers, yellow lilies for their perfume, bright red, orange and hot pink gazania daisies, for their cheering vibrant colours. She arranged the flowers in a vase and placed the get-well card on the locker to join the many others, before she sat by Edwin's bed.

"Good to see you, Kat."

His voice was still quiet. The pain had diminished with the medication, and he was much more able to talk.

"I hear you're having a big test tomorrow, Edwin. Maybe even have the blockage removed?"

Edwin nodded. "Yes, they'll do a dye test then if the blockage isn't too big they'll push a balloon thingy up through an artery or something to ream it out." The doctor had tried to explain it to him, but he hadn't taken much in because his mind kept wandering, flicking between worrying about Joan managing on her own and what had happened to Poppy.

"Let's hope they can do it then, Edwin. It will be a relief to all of us when you're better."

"Thank you for coming to see me, Kat."

To his surprise, she burst into tears. "There Kat, it's all right. I'll get there." Kat blew her nose. "I'm so sorry. I should have been there with you, to help you as they asked me to, but instead I put my own needs first, as usual."

"There, there pet, you weren't to know."

"I feel so guilty. I didn't want to change my arrangements, but if I had, you

wouldn't have been left on your own to deal with those horrible people." Kat's tears continued to rain on the bed.

"I didn't have a heart attack because you weren't with me Kat." Edwin said patting her hand.

"I know, but I wasn't there for you, just like I wasn't there for Gran. I'm never there for people when I should be. I feel so selfish."

"Kat pet, don't worry. I'm sure you had a good reason why you were away that day. And I'm not dead yet, as you can see, and you're here now."

Edwin smiled at Kat.

She returned a sad smile. "It's just that. You and Joan were Gran's best friends, and you were always there for her, when I wasn't. You were so good to her. And she would hate to see you like this. I feel so guilty at not being there when she died, when she needed me, instead of me needing her. Your being ill is bringing it all up again for me. I never said I was sorry. I only told her what a pain she was. And now I can't say 'I'm sorry'. And, I can't bear to think her dog has been stolen, maybe tortured, maybe killed and for what?"

She blew her nose again and wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry Edwin, I shouldn't be going on about Gran, when you're so ill."

"Kat, pet, no need to apologize. I understand. Poppy is our last connection with your Gran, and we all love her, as much for Primrose as herself."

"My Gran drummed into me that the love of money was the root of all evil. That's why she gave it all away. And what's just happened is truly evil. Gran would be horrified to know how things turned out."

"Yes, she would, but none of us knows what will happen when we start down a particular path. We do what we think is right at the time. Maybe it turns out wrong. Maybe it doesn't. None of us is perfect. That's part of being human."

"Dear Edwin, I wish I'd had a dad like you."

"But you didn't pet. But you had your Gran and we have to be grateful for what we've got in our lives."

"I know Edwin and I am trying." Kat stood up and walked across the room to the hand basin. She splashed some water onto her tear stained face. She stared at her reflection in the mirror about the basin, at her red-rimmed eyes and mascara streaking away from her eyelashes. Kat mopped her face with a paper towel and reapplied her lipstick.

"That's better, pet. Much more like it." Kat gave him a kiss on his forehead.

"Thanks Edwin. Thanks for everything. Thanks for being there for Gran, thanks for being there for Poppy and thanks for being there for me. I'm really grateful. And I still wish I'd had a dad like you."

"Where's Kat?" Fred asked, after a few minutes. He arrived for the meeting in Allen's office, and his first thought was to pour out a cup of coffee for him and his son.

"She's organizing flowers and a card for Edwin, and then she was going up to the hospital." Said Allen, "She's pretty upset, her mother's best friend and all that."

Andrew walked into the room, not looking his usual jaunty self. "This is a pretty mess!"

"Too right, Andrew, a veritable dog's dinner if you ask me," said Fred looking over his glasses, "I'm horrified it has come to this."

"Edwin should not have been expected to drive the van or be the one doing the negotiating," said Allen, running his hands through his hair. "I should have been the one. I'm much younger, obviously fitter, and the dog belonged to the

Foundation, for which I am responsible."

"You weren't here, remember. Edwin insisted though," said Fred, "he had the care of the dog. To all intents and purposes, she was his dog. I doubt he would have let you do it. You know what he's like, calm, capable, don't worry I can do it, Edwin "

"Even so, Dad. Can't help thinking we should have realized, well before now, that Edwin and Joan were under huge strain. We really should have seen they could have done with more support from us, besides the money."

"It's all very well in hindsight," said Andrew, taking out a notepad and his fountain pen, "I also could have made it quite clear to the Press that the Foundation was the owner of the dog. We should have organized better security and not left it up to Edwin. But, we didn't, and now the dog's lost, the money's lost, and Edwin almost lost too."

"The police reckon they'll be able to trace the money if they're patient, and they have this Bagshaw fellow in custody," Fred said, hopefully.

"Yes, but he's not talking. He has Adrian Philpott as his lawyer. I was at law school with him, and he is a high-flyer. Someone is paying a lot for him, and it won't be Dylan Bagshaw." Andrew doodled on his notepad drawing checkered lines and filling them in.

"Who's behind this? I'd like to break their legs." Allen spat out, his hand gripping his coffee-cup tightly.

"Whoa, Allen, what's all this. I thought you were a proponent of nonviolence!" his father replied.

Andrew tapped his pen on the notebook. "It could be anyone who's after this money. There's plenty of people around who wouldn't think twice about harming an animal, or a person for that matter, to get this much money."

"And, your point is Andrew?" Fred asked.

"I can't help thinking that whoever is behind this is closer to us than we think."

Andrew furrowed his brow, looking at the empty chair opposite him.

"You mean...?" Fred took his glasses off and gave them a polish.

"Who can we think of that wants this money more than anyone?" Andrew regarded the other two men, his eyebrows raised in question.

Fred replaced his glasses. "The Moores?" he asked.

Andrew inclined his head, agreeing. "I had a discussion with the Inspector yesterday. He asked me who I thought would go to all this trouble to get the money. Lyall Moore has all the contacts, Todd Moore threatened all sorts when the Court Case went against them, and Leone Varanday was none too pleased either. The Inspector thinks the villains were tipped off. Knew we had roadblocks in place. Thinks someone told them, someone who knew what the plan was, someone with a vested interest in getting the money. And, the one person, close enough to the Moores to be leant on to tip them off, maybe even in on it, works for us."

The clock stopped ticking. No one moved. The colour drained from Allen's face. "No way." He said, shaking his head with disbelief, "Not Kat. No chance."

Bill Johnson took the call from the switchboard.

"Vet on the line. From South Auckland. Says she's got the missing dog. Dumped near a motorway entrance in the night."

"But, not the missing millions, I bet." Bill sounded disappointed.

The operator continued.

"Says the person who found her took a phone pic, which she thinks might show the rego of the car though."

"You beauty, Whoo Hoo! Tell her I'm on my way."

Bill studied the phone pictures. He could make out the number plate partially. Hard to keep a camera steady when you're moving in a car. He reckoned their computer geeks could enhance it. The car seemed black or dark blue. Probably stolen. Still, it was one step closer. He took a look at the photo of the dog. No doubt this was the one. So despite the threats, they hadn't harmed her. Nice mutt, cute too, but no one would think she was worth all that money. Most people wouldn't give her a second look; she was just like thousands of other ordinary bitzers all over the place. Some celebrity!

Back at the station, the geeks soon had the photos clear enough to see a BMW badge on the tailgate. The enhanced number plate showed four letters clearly and two of the numbers. Enough information to search the motor vehicle database.

"Guess what Boss?" Bill said, stretching back from his computer screen.

"Bill, you can be irritating sometimes. I'm too busy for guessing games. What have you got?"

"A black BMW, rego WPOX 768, owned by one Martin Moore!"

"So, what do we know about this Martin Moore?" The Inspector asked.

Bill tapped a few keys on his computer and scrolled down the information that appeared. "No record. But, we've had an eye on him as we think he is a bit dodgy. Calls himself a Company Director. Owns a private multistory car park downtown and a couple of sports bars, one in Auckland, one in Hamilton. He's the eldest son of one, Lyall Moore, currently banged up for ten years, drug maestro."

"So, the son has businesses that deal in cash, and lots of it?" The Inspector tapped his pen against his mouth and seemed thoughtful.

"Yes, but if they try to deposit the ransom into a bank as if it came from a legitimate business, that'll attract the Inland Revenue like a dog to a bitch on heat."

"Good point, Bill. But we should alert the banks for any deposits of suspicious funds, and give them the numbers of the notes."

"Already done Boss. Now we know he had the dog, but do we know if he has the money? Who else do ya reckon is in on it?"

"This puts the cousin bang in the middle of the frame. A family affair eh? Highly likely. We know Uncle Lyall is an old prison mate of Bagshaw's. But, I reckon Katherine Anston is more likely to talk with her cousin or the other uncle. So, I wonder, what's his involvement?"

"Todd Moore?"

"My guess is all of them are in on it. They were cut out in the will, so I bet they've just decided to take it for themselves," said the Inspector.

Bill agreed, gathering the notes he had been making on his desk into a neat pile and put them in a folder. "Talking of betting, they could try cashing in small

sums at the casino, couldn't they?"

"Good thinking. Common trick though, but they've got a considerable amount of money to launder. Do we have mug shots of Martin Moore anywhere, or Todd?"

"Katherine Anston could have photos."

"Leave her out of it just yet. Don't want to tip them off if she's involved; wait until I've spoken to her. Let's see if we can find some photos elsewhere else, and then we'll go talk to the casino. I'll go and talk to Katherine Anston."

Allen's PA showed the Inspector into Kat's office, where she was busy researching service animals. "How come you think I know something about this Inspector?" Kat looked puzzled.

The Inspector thought again how attractive looking she was, but he wasn't about to let that influence him.

"You have a cousin, I believe, a Martin Moore, your uncle's eldest?" The Inspector kept his eyes on her face, watching for any flicker of emotion to cross her face. Anything that betrays her lying.

"Yes, but..."

Ha, Ha! So she's surprised.

"But what, Ms. Anston?"

"I haven't seen Martin for years. He lives well south of Auckland, in the country."

"We understand he comes up to Auckland often. One of those days was the day the Reeves, Edwin Paine, Andrew Strange, and you discussed whether to pay the ransom. You left the meeting early, at 12.05pm to be precise. My sergeant noted it down. Who did you meet that day, Ms. Anston?"

Kat blushed and looked flustered to the Inspector. "It's none of your business, Inspector."

"It is if it concerns this inquiry, Ms. Anston." The Inspector tapped his finger slowly against his lips and waited for her to reply.

Kat averted her eyes.

"I'm waiting Ms. Anston. I believe you met with your cousin and tipped him off."

Kat brought her head up and looked the Inspector in the eye. "No, I didn't Inspector. And, tip him off about what, for heaven's sake?"

"Strange then that your cousin came up to Auckland, the exact day we had the meeting. We were told he was at the Viaduct with a dark haired woman in a restaurant at 12.30p.m precisely, on that day."

"Well, it wasn't me, Inspector. I didn't meet Marty that day or any day for that matter. I believe he has some business interests in Auckland, and he could have been meeting anyone. The last time I saw him was years ago. He didn't even come to Gran's funeral. All the time I lived with Gran he was in Australia. Why are you asking me if I met with Marty? Has he something to do with it?"

Kat furrowed her brow and crinkled her nose.

'So, she's annoyed, but at who, him or me?' "We've just arrested him, Ms. Anston."

"Arrested? Martin?" Her eyebrows lifted, and he could see the whites of her eyes.

The Inspector continued. "We have evidence he was in possession of the missing dog after the kidnap. My officers are searching his place now, but we have reason to believe that your cousin was involved in the extortion attempt."

Kat's eyelids narrowed, and her jaw thrust forward.

'She's getting angry now.'

"Martin had Poppy? He was behind the extortion?" Her nostrils flared.

'She's furious. At us finding out about their little scheme In wonder?'

A fly flew in through the open window and landed on the floor by the Inspector's foot. "Whoever took the dog, be it Martin Moore or someone else, knew we had roadblocks set up. Have you anything to say about that, Ms. Anston?"

The Inspector's tone was cloying, disconcerting. He stamped on the fly. Kat's lips went pale, her eyelids raised, and her jaw dropped. "What are you implying, Inspector?"

"Just simply asking if you knew anything about it, that's all."

'Give her enough rope.' Bullcott's eyes never left her face. Kat's eyes were flicking from side to side.

She swallowed. "You're suggesting I told Martin?"

The Inspector gave a slight dip of his head.

Kat sucked in her breath. "The answer is no, Inspector Bullcott, absolutely no."

For a second or two the Inspector almost believed her. "Did you tell any other member of your family?"

"Tell them what, Inspector? I didn't know what was happening. You lot didn't confide any details to me."

Kat crossed her arms tightly and continued. "I only knew what we all did, that the dog had been stolen and whoever took her demanded a lot of money for her return. Beyond that, what could I have told them? I'd no idea what you were planning."

"How come you were away, the day I asked you to accompany Mr. Paine to the rendezvous? Very convenient don't you think. Nice little alibi, prearranged?"

Kat glanced over to the poster of the temple in Kathmandu on the wall of her office. "It wasn't an alibi, Inspector. I was in Palmerston North that day. Truly."

"And, can someone verify that?"

"Yes, they can." Her breathing was rapid, and she looked pale.

The Inspector thought this was said a little too quickly. "Can I have the name?"

"If you must. But, please I don't want him to think....."

Kat wrote the name on the piece of paper. The Inspector read the name and put it a plastic bag. Her fingerprints would be all over the paper.

"Very Interesting, Ms. Anston. But, I don't think this convenient little trip of yours lets you off the hook. Perhaps your cousin or maybe, one of your uncles told you what was going to happen? Maybe, your mother did a bit of persuading you to help?"

"You mean," Her eyebrows lifted high, furrowing her brow showing the whites of her eyes, her mouth open. She put her hand to her throat, "was I in on it?"

The Inspector noted with satisfaction that she was looking very frightened now. "Were you?" He smiled at her, his teeth showing, but the smile never leaving his lips.

"No. I wasn't. How can you even think I...?"

"Lots of money, Ms. Anston. People will do all sorts of things for a lot of money." He rubbed his thumb and finger together.

"Money. As if I would do such a dreadful thing for money. I don't give a stuff about the money, Inspector," Kat said rubbing her fingernails.

"I find that hard to believe. People always say they don't want money, but when offered a lot of it, they tend to grab it with both hands and to hell with the consequences."

"Don't you dare judge me by your standards, Inspector. I would never, never, ever have harmed the dog, or my grandmother's best friends, or the Foundation by being involved in this scam." Kat's cheeks were flaming red.

"Really, Ms. Anston? When was the last time you heard from your Uncles or

your mother?"

"Ages ago. My mother rang me on my birthday for about ten minutes. That was a couple of months ago. I don't know Uncle Lyall, he's been in prison from before I came to live with my grandmother, and before that I was in Australia. Now I think about it, Uncle Todd did ring me after the Court case. He wanted to meet with me, take me out for dinner, he said, but I refused. He'd never bothered before and, I thought why now? What's he up to? So, I told him to get lost, and I wouldn't go."

"Are you sure, you refused?"

"I really don't like what you're implying Inspector. I have as little to do with my family as I can. Any family for that matter, I don't even know my Dad's. As for my mother's family, I don't even like them. Why would I help them?"

The Inspector pointed his finger at Kat, "Now, you're the best person to tell me that, Ms. Anston."

Kat scratched her head before looking at the Inspector. "It is true, my mother and my uncles are obsessed with having as much in their grasping little fingers as they can get. Well, I'm not like them."

"They were your role models, Ms. Anston. And, role models influence how we grow up don't they?"

"You're making me really angry now, Inspector. I despise their obsession with themselves and power and money. I want to be better than them. I don't want to be like my mother or anyone else in the Moore family. Well, apart from my Gran who was different to the rest of them."

"She certainly was different, Ms. Anston. I don't know anyone else who would have deliberately not left any of her lottery winnings to her family. Great motive, for you and your family to get back at her, don't you think?"

"Inspector!" Kat shouted at him. "She didn't leave her family anything because she knew what they would do with it. They would have frittered it away on lavish lifestyles, or build even bigger criminal enterprises or gambled it away, all the things she hated. I understand why she did what she did, and I think she did the right thing. She wanted the money to do some good, and it is. But if she'd left it to my mother and her brothers, they would have squandered the lot, and stuff anyone else. I don't care about the lottery money, she left me some of her own, her savings and her jewellery, and that means more to me than all the lottery millions."

"Strange, isn't it that your Gran, if she thought so much of you, cut you out of the lottery money too, if you're so different to the rest of your family, Ms. Anston?"

The Inspector raised one eyebrow at her and waited for her reply.

"Unlike anyone else in my family, my Gran was always there for me, always caring, always listening, although I didn't always appreciate it at the time. She was always guiding me, teaching me in her own quiet unfussy way, what truly matters, the important stuff, about being true to yourself, having integrity and values. Do you really think I would betray her trust? The only person who ever believed in me? The one person who loved me for how I was, and not for whom she wanted me to be. The one person, who, I now can see more clearly, gave me the courage to be my own person?"

"Quite a speech, Ms. Anston. Been rehearsing a bit?"

Kat's glared at the Inspector for a minute while he said nothing, hoping his silence would make her anxious again. Her glare didn't last, and she appeared lost in thought.

"No, I haven't," Kat finally said, quite calmly, "I've just realized what my Gran

really left me." She touched an old-fashioned heart-shaped gold locket around her neck, the only ornament dressing up her black top and black jeans. Inspector Bullcott kept his face inscrutable and studied Kat for any giveaway signs.

Her anger suddenly dissipated and her manner became composed, contemplative. "If Martin was involved, it explains one thing," she said.

"And, that is?"

"Why whoever did this, didn't harm the dog, because from what I've heard of Uncle Lyell, I have no doubt he would have done."

"Explain, please."

"Martin's a pussycat when it comes to animals, especially dogs. I suspect he took her from someone else who had more sinister intentions."

The Inspector studied Kat hard. He expected she was referring to her other uncle, Todd, the one not in jail.

Bill was typing up a report on his computer when the call came. He clicked onto his computer to watch the CCTV image come through. A broad smile came on his face.

He left his desk and went into the Inspector's office. "Got him, Boss. Todd Moore's just walked into the casino and bought \$20,000 worth of chips with, you've guessed it, \$100 dollar notes."

"And?"

"Gone into the gaming tables. Won't be there long, I wager."

"Better get going then."

The police arrived at the casino and slipped into the back of the cashier's office. Todd was still at the gaming tables. Bill checked the stack of \$100 notes

used to buy the chips against his list of numbers. Bingo.

Todd Moore came up to the cashier half an hour later. He didn't see Bill and the Inspector in the shadowed back office.

"Cash these in please." Todd handed over \$19,750 worth of chips.

"Cheque or cash?" The cashier asked.

"Cheque, please." Todd looked around nervously.

"Just a minute, sir, while I organize this for you." Todd tapped his well-shod shiny black foot on the floor.

The cashier went into the back of the room.

"Hand him cheque, and make sure you get a receipt." The inspector ordered. He gestured to Bill to take up a place behind the door.

"Here you are sir. If you could just sign this receipt." The cashier handed over the cheque to Todd and a piece of paper. Todd appeared surprised at the request but scribbled his signature. Bill emerged from the cashier's office, signaling to a security guard who was primed and waiting.

"Well, Mr. Moore." He said grabbing the cheque and the receipt. "See you've been washing and ironing some extremely dirty money."

"What are you talking about? This is legit winnings."

"Aren't you the lucky one, Mr. Moore?" The Inspector emerged from the cashier's office. "We've just documented that you bought chips with money identified as being part of a cache extorted from the PAWS Foundation. Exhibit A. He waved a piece of paper in his right hand at Todd. "And, have just received a cheque for your 'winnings' that you've just signed for. Exhibit B."

He waved the receipt in his left hand at Todd. "Amazed you would try such an obvious trick, Todd. What was the plan? Clean up 20 thousand a day? A bit here a bit there? Think you're the one who's in the tub now, Todd"

Todd was speechless, and he stared at first the inspector then the sergeant and back to the security guard.

"Don't know what you are talking about."

"Where did you get the money from Todd? Your nephew perhaps, Martin?"

A flicker of fear just crossed his face.

"Don't know what" A door behind him slammed.

"We know, you don't know what we are talking about. Let's go down to the station and do a bit more talking, and maybe something will start to dawn on you before too long"

"Are you arresting me?" He glanced at the door then across to the three men. He gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, I think so," said the Inspector. "Sergeant, you do the honours."

Allen put the phone down. Kat, was standing at his desk, waiting. "They've arrested your cousin and charged your Uncle Todd with demanding money with menaces. Also with being a party to theft of property, namely one dog."

Kat sat down in the chair opposite. "I am so ashamed, people in my family! How could they?" Kat flushed. "Did the police say what happened?"

"According to the Inspector, Todd says Martin asked him to store some boxes, but he didn't know what they contained. Yeah right! Martin said it was Todd who organized it with Dylan, and he just housed the dog. Todd said it was Lyall who was behind it all and, Lyall says it couldn't have anything to do with him as he was banged up in prison at the time."

Kat exhaled sharply and bit the corner of her lip. "Typical! Always someone else's responsibility, someone else's fault, never theirs." Kat's brow furrowed, and her voice trembled. "The Police think I was involved, Allen."

"You're not are you?"

Kat threw a pen at him and just missed. "No, I'm not. I wouldn't do such a thing. But, you know Allen, it's the story of my life. Because I have family members who do dubious things, we all get painted with the same colours. It's bloody hard sometimes, trying to show people that you're honest when everyone suspects you can't be because you just happen to be related. I can't help belonging to the same family, but that doesn't make me a criminal."

Allen held her gaze, noting the sadness on her face, his voice serious and reassuring. "Kat, believe me, I trust you. I know you had nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, you should expect some scrutiny still from the police. I expect they'll put the whole family under the microscope. They might even put you

under surveillance."

Kat shuddered and glanced over her shoulder. No one was there.

Allen stood up and walked over to the window. He had a good view of the Winter-Garden in the distance, a building that housed exotic, delicate and rare plants, a botanist's heaven. Still with his back turned to Kat, he told her, "I don't like your Uncle Todd, Kat. He's a poisonous piece of work."

"He's the piggy in the middle, Allen. I understand that when they were young, Lyall had all his father's attention, he was spoiled rotten by his Dad, as was my Mum, and she also had all Gran's attention. Todd was always vying to get noticed and, to some extent, I can understand that. Not being considered worthy to be left any of the money must have seriously hurt him."

Allen turned to face her. "That's a charitable way of looking at it, Kat."

Kat's face was serious. "You know Allen, I've been thinking a lot lately. I was really sad when my Gran died 'cos deep down I knew I'd lost something special. I know you understand that, since you... But, after that incident with the dog at the pound, I began to see I've been grieving for years. Grieving for something I never had, and never will. I'll never have parents who think I'm special or love me in the same way other people's do. It doesn't matter how much I get angry with them, or feel as if they neglected me, it won't change a thing. None of them are capable of being there for anyone else but themselves. I just have to accept it and forgive them, so I can go forward, knowing that there was one person in my life who wasn't like them. My Gran wasn't like them. She did love me in her own quiet way, and that's just going to have to be good enough."

"Other people think a lot of you too, Kat," Allen said.

She smiled broadly. "Perhaps. But, whether they do or not is up to me, and

not just because of me, not just because I exist. I have to deserve it. Like you have to with Benji?"

Allen remembered their previous conversation. They both laughed.

"Any news on the missing money?" Kat asked.

"According to the Inspector, once they had all three arrested they got search warrants for all their properties. They found two-thirds of the money stashed in a concrete lockup inside Martin's multistory car park. No one would think twice about vehicles moving in and out of a car park late at night. The rest was in Todd's attic. They've recovered just about all of it."

"So what happens now, Allen?"

"I don't know Kat. What do you want to happen?"

'Funny question,' thought Kat as she glanced at the clock. It was just on twelve noon. "Oops, have to go Allen, I've got a lunch date."

"Another date? With a man?"

Kat noted Allen appeared as if he had just had an ice cream snatched from under his nose as he started to eat it. "Why the surprise, Allen? Yes, it's with a man. And a very important man too."

She retrieved her handbag from under her seat and left the office, smiling in anticipation of her lunch date.

Desiree, the kitten, was playing on the rug with some scrunched up paper and a catnip mouse, chasing it over the living room, rolling onto her back, tossing her plaything into the air and catching it again in her paws.

'How lovely to play and have so much fun,' thought Kat as she watched the kitten skittering about the room. She got down on the rug with Desiree and tossed the catnip mouse to her, so the kitten had to leap up to catch it. The

kitten rolled over onto her back for Kat to stroke her soft underbelly before the game started again.

The flat was a mess, and the kitty litter in the bathroom was beginning to smell. Kat would take it out at the dead of the night making sure no one saw her deposit it in the rubbish. She knew it wouldn't be long before the landlord found out she had a kitten and evicted her. Hopefully, she would sort out a new place before he did.

Kat went into the kitchen and took out her rubber gloves from the drawer. She started to clean up, scrubbing the cupboards and putting everything back in its place. She washed and dried the dishes and wiped down the benches and floors until all was spotless and gleaming. The living room was next. Windows washed, sills wiped down, rugs shaken, books put away, papers filed, floor vacuumed. She went onto the bedroom, changing the linen and making the bed up neatly, rescuing objects from the floor and putting them in their rightful place. She opened the curtains and let the light in to the room allowing her to see the dust in the shadows, the cobwebs with their fly catch in the corners of the windows, sweeping them away with her mop. The bathroom got the treatment, hard scrubbing making everything shine. By the time she finished, she had used up several bottles of cleaning spray and three rolls of paper towels. She threw them in the rubbish with a flourish. The flat hadn't been this clean since she moved in. Her mood lifted, even though she was tired at the end of the big clean, and she had enough energy to sit down at the table, bring out her laptop, and log in to her bank account.

Andrew had been very helpful telling her of the terms of her grandmother's Will. She had the money, left between herself and her mother and, Andrew told her how she could access the money in Primrose's grandchildren's education

account. The main stipulation was that she needed to be in full-time education. Andrew assured her if she was, she could have her living and any educational-related travel costs, as well.

The money she inherited from her Gran was on term deposit. What to do with it? She wondered if there was enough for a deposit on a small house in an unfashionable area. She would have to work out if she could afford a mortgage. The thought of such a commitment was scary, but one day, she would have to do it. Alternatively, she could carry on renting another grotty flat, and use the money to travel with. But, she now had the kitten to think about. She couldn't just discard her, not after working for the Foundation for nearly a year.

Kat watched the kitten play for a while before getting back down on the floor with her again and teasing the kitten with her toy. Eventually, Desiree flopped into the crook of her arm and after a few moments of loud purring, closed her eyes and went to sleep, contented. For the first time in her life, she thought she felt happy. Not in the way the kitten was playfully happy with her scrunched up paper and catnip mouse, but more like the sleeping animal snuggled up in her arm. As if she had finally found her right place in the universe.

To Kat's surprise, her work at the Foundation had come to mean more to her than just a means to earn more money to travel. The work gripped her, the people she met inspired her and the animals stole her heart. *'Gran knew it would, she knew me better than I thought.'*

Kat liked the people she worked with, even though they were mostly older than she was. They treated her with respect and listened to her instead of telling her what to think or do all the time. It was good to know there were other people around who didn't have her family's self-centered cravings.

Her mind went back to the Monastery and the American nun's lesson at the

retreat about how self-centered cravings create unhappiness. At the time, she just didn't get it. Kat had never had cravings or attachment for money, or clothes or possessions like the rest of her family. No wonder they were unhappy, but why, when she avoided all those cravings on principle, had she still been unhappy? Now she realized she wanted to be angry and resentful. She was attached to those feelings. Being angry justified her feelings of isolation, her feeling there was something missing in her life, and her fear of being unlovable. Neither of her parents had loved her, but being angry at them could not make that change. She wasn't unlovable. Her Gran loved her, she knew that now. How do I learn how not to be angry? How do I learn how to channel my passion into something worthwhile?

As she looked down at the steady rise and fall of the sleeping kitten's breathing, comfortable in the crook of her arm, she could see the path she wanted to take. Being under suspicion for the theft of Gran's dog had alarmed her, but also helped her to understand who and what she didn't want in her life. She didn't need any more takers and, from now on, she was going to edit them out of her life. She now knew the next few years would be crucial, her opportunity to create another foundation, the one on which she would build the rest of her life. Kat wondered what Allen would say when she told him what she had decided.

"How was your lunch date?" Allen asked. He had his back to her, so she couldn't see his face, "You seem to be making a habit of it."

"Are you suggesting I'm not doing my job?"

Allen picked out a file and started to read it, without looking at her. "No, you are. But, you've had a few of these lunch dates recently. Same man?"

Kat smiled, making sure Allen noticed, "Yes, same man. He's very nice, helped me to realize what I have to do to get what I want in life."

"And that is?" Allen met Kat's eyes.

"Here, I have to give you this, Allen."

Kat handed him an envelope with his name typed on the front. Allen took it from her and rotated it over and over in his hand, not taking his eyes off her.

"What's this?"

"My resignation, Allen. I'm leaving at the end of October."

Allen tore open the envelope and scrutinized the few lines written on the piece of paper. It seemed an age before his eyes lifted from the paper. "I'm really sorry, that you want to leave Kat. You've done a great job here. I'll miss you. Do you want a reference?"

"Oh, sure, I suppose that would be useful."

Allen's face had lost all expression. "Are you going to Nepal?" He asked her in a flat voice.

"Yes, I am, but only briefly. I want to go to a month long retreat starting in November. I've already booked. It's a great opportunity to learn about a different culture and learn how to control my emotions and feelings instead of them controlling me."

She laughed, but Allen did not share in her observation.

"I see. What about when return after the retreat? Could you come back?"

"No, Allen. Out of the question."

"I heard you'd just got yourself a kitten. You can't just dump her."

"Joan and Edwin said they will look after her while I'm away. Thought she might be company for Poppy."

"That is unless the dog decides that chasing kittens is fair game."

Kat smiled at this prospect, knowing that the kitten almost certainly would win any such game. Desiree was mastering the art of the claw-swipe. She had already practiced on Poppy, whose response was to retreat, downcast, to her basket. "If it doesn't work out, they'll call Sally at the Animal Welfare Village, and she'll foster her until I get back."

"And, when you get back?"

"When I get back to New Zealand I'll only have enough time to pack up and move flats. And, I have to find one first."

"You'll need a job." Allen eyes were boring into her.

"No, I won't, Allen. At least not for some time."

"You're not getting married! You're not pregnant are you?"

He looked miserable.

Kat thought she had better end Allen's fishing expedition. "No way. I'm too young to get married. I want to make something of myself first. I want to be able to offer something in a relationship. One day, perhaps, I will get married and have kids, but first I want to learn how to stand on my own two feet, be responsible for myself. Therefore," she took a deep breath, "I'm going back to Uni. I want a job, a career I can be passionate about."

Allen's mouth dropped open. "What's brought this on?"

"Ah, ha, you see, Sir Gareth's been advising me about going to Vet School. He's even promised to be a referee. Beyond the encouragement, he can't help me to get selected, but he thought I would be with my school grades. So I applied and got an offer of entry into semester one starting in February."

Allen burst out laughing. "Sir Gareth was your date? You've been plotting this with him?"

Kat nodded, grinning.

“Good for you, Kat. I’m so pleased.”

Allen took Kat to the cafe opposite the office for celebratory coffee and muffins. The first signs of spring were everywhere. The day was noticeably warmer than the month before and was pleasant enough to sit outside at one of the shiny metal, round tables scattered on the pavement. Allen had a long black coffee and chose a blueberry muffin and Kat had a flat white with a peach and cream cheese muffin. The flowering cherry trees planted at intervals down the boulevard were putting on their spring flush of soft pink flowers. The showy display covering the trees bare branches had no competition from leaves, which patiently waited their turn to forecast the end of winter and the beginning of springtime.

"So, what about you Allen? While I'm chasing my ambitions, what are you going to do about yours. You used to stress to me in the beginning, how this job was only temporary for you too."

"Do you know, I haven't thought about that for ages. I've been caught up in the Foundation too. I'd still like to become a winemaker, I suppose, but haven't thought about it seriously for ages. That's me, good at talking about it, but not much good at putting it into practice."

Allen toyed with his muffin, breaking it into little pieces.

"If you continue to do so, you'll end up at seventy having not created one bottle of wine, and wondering every time you have a glass of someone else's if you could have done better." Kat said.

"I know. But perhaps I don't need to go back to Italy to do it. We have an appreciable industry here. Maybe, I should stop being a dilettante and get my hands dirty. First, I need to find the Foundation a new CEO, and since you

dropped your bombshell, some new staff to take it forward."

"There goes another excuse. Playing safe rather than taking the gamble?" Kat asked him using her cake fork to make her point. "You'll never know unless you try."

Allen fell silent pondering Kat's point. "I suppose not."

"Fred will let us keep our connections to the Foundation, even if we both go and do different things won't he?" Kat asked.

"I expect so. I'm sure so."

Allen looked at Kat with an expression in his eyes, she hadn't seen before, as if she was the only person on earth.

"But, the connection I want to keep up most, Kat, is with you. I really like you Kat, and I was hoping you and I could become something more than just work colleagues."

"Boss and slave, actually Allen. Get it right!" Kat replied laughing.

"You know what I mean." He looked crestfallen.

Kat stopped laughing and reached over the table and took his hand in hers. "Allen, I like you a lot. More than a lot. I want us to be friends, for a long, long time. But, it's going to be five or more years before I graduate. I'll be in Palmerston North, and you'll be in Auckland or Waiheke or somewhere. In five years, we both may have moved on in our lives. If you follow your dream, you could be the successful winemaker winning major prizes for your fine hedonistic reds, and I will be a professional woman, crusading for disadvantaged animals. We'll be different people. Who knows if we'll still like each other then?"

"I'm sure I'll still like you in five years, and I'm prepared to wait to find out."

He looked earnest, and Kat was sure he could hear the thudding of her heart. "I can't promise you anything, Allen. I'm only just beginning to know who I am."

Kat could swear she saw a glint in his eyes. Maybe the wind was blowing in his eyes. "Allen," she said gently, "you're twelve years older than me. That's more than half my age again. It's a big difference."

She removed her hand from his and took a bite out of her muffin.

"But, when you're thirty, the difference will only about a third as much again, and when you're forty it will only be a quarter, and when you're sixty it will only be a sixth. So if, we apply that sixth to your age now that's only about two and half years difference. Not much really!"

"What sort of accountant are you, with that crazy logic? I think someone should look extremely carefully at your books." Kat was laughing so much, she was spluttering muffin crumbs in all directions. Allen took a sip of coffee looking over the rim of the cup at her.

"I think you had plainly become a winemaker, Allen. I don't think you're cut out for accountancy or the office life."

Allen held up the paper cup holding his coffee. Kat joined him in the toast, tapping her paper cup against his.

"To pursuing dreams and friendship." He said.

"To the future, yours and mine, as long as it will be." Kat replied.

The police could not establish a case against Lyall, although, as a known associate of Bagshaw's, they suspected he was behind everything, but they had insufficient evidence. Instead, they prosecuted Dylan Bagshaw, with theft and conspiracy, and Todd and Martin Moore with demanding money with menaces. The Moores pleaded, 'Not Guilty.'

Their barrister tried to convince the jury that Primrose deliberately excluding her offspring from inheriting her lottery winnings had mentally destabilized them

to such an extent, it caused an aberration of their minds, compelling them to take matters into their own hands. The jury was unimpressed.

The court case made headlines on TV, radio and newspapers. The bizarre nature of the Foundation and Poppy's Trust became a major topic of discussion on radio and TV shows. Primrose was described as 'The Queen of Mean,' and 'Miscreants Multimillionaire Matriarch.'

Everyone seemed to have an opinion; whether animals should be allowed to inherit money; whether people should be able to cut family out of Wills; whether big lottery wins should be automatically family property, and who should be entitled to a share. The rich dog and high payments to her caregivers, invoked much indignation among the listeners of several Talk Back shows, stirred up by provocative presenters. Radio ran hot with long discussions on whether Primrose Moore or the dog caregivers deserved to have all that money. How could Primrose Moore deserve to win a fortune, when she married a crook and gave birth to at least two criminals? As for the caregivers, how could they deserve to earn all that money for looking after an animal when there were all 'these hardworking people who did honest day's work caring for people,' for a fraction of Edwin and Joan's monthly income. And, what did they do with all that money? Why weren't they helping other people out? There was outrage when the news revealed the Kohimarama house belonged to the Trust and not to the Paines. One newspaper described it as the 'most expensive dog crate in the southern hemisphere.'

Allen and Kat had to force their way through the reporters at the gate of the Paine's house, and were relieved when they finally arrived inside. Allen shoved

a couple of reporters after they had stuck Dictaphones under Kat's nose and asked for comments on the trial and the convictions of her uncle and cousin.

"I see what you mean, Joan," said Kat. "Is this what it's like, every day?"

"It is, and it's making life difficult for us again. The doctor's told us Edwin must reduce stress and get some exercise. It's impossible at the moment. He can't walk out of the door, can't go down to the beach. Poppy's missing out too." The dog bowled over to Kat, jumping up at her and giving her face a lick. Kat ruffled her fur. Poppy lay down on her back, legs waving in circles for Kat to stroke her belly.

Joan made them all a cup of tea and handed out cakes to everyone except Edwin. He gazed at his wife with a pleading look for a second, but then gave a wry laugh, patting his own diminishing belly.

"Fact is Kat and Allen, we can't go on like this." Joan bit her lip.

Edwin took a peep at the dog enjoying the attention from Kat.

"We love the dog, but having her is just too stressful for us both." Joan said.

"It's not the dog that's the problem," Edwin said, not taking his eyes of the dog pawing at Kat's arm for a pat. Kat met Allen's eye, a silent conversation passing between them.

"It's more the consequences of the money, being tied to the dog. We believe Poppy is going to be in danger for the rest of her life, and whoever looks after her going to have to put up with all this hassle. We only ever wanted to look after the dog. She's brought us much joy, and we care for her greatly, but the responsibility is killing us. Having a dog is supposed to prolong your life, not shorten it."

"What are you suggesting Edwin?" Kat shot back in her chair, her coffee cup in her hand, stopped mid-raise, "Get someone else to look after her, transfer the

arrangement?"

Joan crossed her arms tightly and glanced across at Edwin, he was staring at Poppy, his eyes glistening. "It's one way of sorting it, yes. There shouldn't be a shortage with all that money attached."

"My Gran thought she was giving you all a dream life and instead, it's turned out to be a nightmare."

Poppy licked her hand. Kat felt despondent and her eyes filled with tears. Edwin leant over and patted the dog, who immediately came and sat at his feet. "The problems are never going to go away," he said sadly. "If someone else took her on, they would just inherit all the grief, same as we have. I would hate to see her go too. She's family."

"She's legally owned by the Trust. We could find new people to look after her and revise the terms, so the new caregivers are paid well but not excessively. It was Primrose's wish for you two specifically, as her closest friends, to receive the income from the Trust, but, that wouldn't apply to anyone else." Allen said.

"Would they put up with twenty-four hour security guards? That must cost an arm and a leg."

"The Trust can easily stand that. It would become part of any new arrangement. Don't worry about it. My question is, can you bear to give Poppy to someone else?"

"It depends who." Joan bit her lip again.

Edwin mopped his eyes. "Silly to be so sentimental over a dog."

Poppy cocked her head from side to side, listening carefully to the conversation. She ran over to Edwin, sat and pushed her nose under his hand for a scratch, before giving her master an adoring look, which brought the tears back to Eddie's eyes.

Allen watched the little tableau, the Shangri-La of dog-human interaction. "Sure, she's been a faithful friend, Edwin. But she's just a dog. She doesn't understand any of this."

Edwin stroked Poppy's head, scratching behind her ear. "You know, it's terrible to say this, but in a way, it might have been better if Poppy had been killed in the kidnapping, or when she was dumped. At least she would have had a brief, but happy life, she wouldn't have the stress of being passed to new people again."

"EDWIN!!!" all three spoke at once. Allen dropped his cup, spilling the tea onto the Persian carpet. For once, Joan didn't immediately rush to clean it up.

Kat stood up and paced around the room, pausing in front of a white moth orchid plant arching across the sideboard, flowering out of season. She looked intently at it for a moment and put out her hand to touch one of the leaves. She gave a little laugh when she realized it was made of silk.

Returning to her seat next to Allen, Kat looked thoughtfully at each person in the room then tapped her finger on the coffee table, to draw everyone's attention. "Can I run something past you?"

The newsreader opened the second part of the news with,

"In a bizarre twist to the case of the lotto millionaire dog, kidnapped and held to ransom by the disinherited son and nephew of the late Primrose Moore, the canine at the centre of the controversy was accidentally killed yesterday. The dog escaped from the supposed secure property bought specifically to house the dog and her caregivers, and was hit by a passing car. The millions left to the dog were only for its life, and the legacy reverts to The PAWS Foundation. The caregivers of the dog are said to be "distraught." Cut to shot of the Kohimarama house.

The reporters thronged round Edwin and Joan as they drove out of the garage and through the electronic gate on the drive, preventing them from driving off. A reporter sat on the bonnet of the car, taking photographs through the windscreen, and some were banging on the side of the car, shouting questions at Edwin. Joan sank down into her seat, hoping to make herself less visible.

"Any comments to make, Edwin?" The bald reporter with the strawberry birthmark poked his arm through the open window, thrusting a digital tape recorder under Edwin's nose.

"No. Except to say, that after the kidnapping and attempts at extortion, we are devastated the dog was killed in a simple road accident."

"When did this happen, Edwin?" The reporter held the Dictaphone steady.

"A couple of nights ago. We had visitors and they mustn't have shut the gate properly. The dog slipped out of the gate after them and was bowled by a

passing car, driving too fast, boy racer we think."

The reporter looked suspicious. "So what happened to the dog's body, Edwin?"

"We couldn't do anything for her, she was already dead by the time we found her. The boy racer of course sped off, didn't bother to stop."

"How opportune." The reporter sniffed. "Where is the ex-dog now then?"

Edwin held up a little teak box with a brass plaque engraved 'Poppy Moore, RIP.' "We're off to Takapuna beach to scatter her ashes. She loved it there."

"Oh how bloody befitting. Going to have a funeral service too, Edwin? Surprised you've not got a bloody vicar in the car."

"Mock all you like, you mongrel. The dog was family to us."

Edwin shoved the reporter's arm out of the car and started the ignition.

The reporter put his elbow through the window. "Seems a tad irresponsible to have all this security for a dog, then to leave the gate open. Did you do it on purpose, Edwin?"

"Now why on earth would I do that?" Edwin exploded, "Losing the dog means losing everything."

"Is that why you're 'devastated' Edwin?"

Edwin tensed his shoulders and his face reddened. "No, We're devastated because we have lost a treasured companion."

"One you were entrusted to keep for a long and healthy life. You really let down your benefactor didn't you?" Edwin shifted nervously in his seat and pressed the button to close the window.

The reporter kept his hand in place pushing the window down, the other still holding the recorder. "You made a fair sum while it lasted. How much did you get Edwin, one million? Two million? More? What will you do now your golden goose is well and truly cooked?"

"The golden goose, as you put it, caused us many problems, especially with intrusive press." Edwin tried prizing the hands of the reporter from the open window, but the man was too strong for him.

"So, it sounds like you're glad the dog is gone, Edwin."

Edwin's anger spilled over. "Of course not! She was family."

"What will you do now, Edwin? Nice house. All that money gone. Find another rich widow to leave you a dog and a legacy? Keep you in the manner to which you have become accustomed." The reporter's lip curled lopsidedly into a sneer.

"That is really insulting. We never asked for the legacy. We would have had the dog without any money. To insinuate otherwise..."

"Whether you asked for it or not, you got it, didn't you Edwin. You didn't tell us how much have you had so far, Edwin? I bet it was enough to be worth leaving the gate open? Did you push the dog through it Edwin?"

"What an awful thing to say!" Joan spoke up and shook her fist at the reporter.

"Once you have all that money, it changes your life, doesn't it, Edwin?"

"Yes, and not for the better. That's all I am willing to say, so please take your hand away from my window and let us get on."

"Not so fast, Edwin." The reporter continued to lean in through the window.

"There's a rumour you're leaving here. Any comment?"

"We will not be able to continue living here, no."

"That's a bit of a come down, Edwin. Where will you go?"

"We've decided to retire, once and for all. Leave Auckland. Go somewhere quiet, go fishing, Southland perhaps, Maybe Stewart Island."

"And, get another dog?"

"Apart from the fact, that whether we do or don't is nobody's business but ours,

no, we won't be getting another dog. There was only one for us, and that was Poppy."

Edwin started to drive off, and the reporter quickly released his fingers from the car. His partner with the camera kept shooting photographs until the car was out of sight.

Takapuna was Edwin's favourite beach of all the various Auckland beaches, perhaps his pick of all New Zealand's stunning beaches. This was his beach, his and Poppy's, and he delighted in every grain of sand and gentle wave making landfall. On this special day, there was little wind to kick up any waves or swell and the dark blue water of the Waitemata Harbour reflected the bright sunlight, making it shimmer like black glass.

The cone of the volcano standing offshore rose out of the sea. Hundreds of years before, somewhere deep inside under the earth's crust, tectonic plates clashed, and fires formed, burning deep below the surface, melting subterranean rock, smouldering and seething, until one day the pressure became too much and the growling dragon woke, its tongue licking the sky as it spewed white hot lava, forming the Island, and spilling the dark volcanic glass called obsidian, into the Bay. Wai te mataa, water of the obsidian glass Maori called it; the newcomers translated it as sparking water.

Edwin and Joan carried the little teak box onto the beach. It was just after low tide and the beach was at its widest, twenty metres or so, from the grassy knoll to the lapping sea. Every now and again a little puff of wind blew on their backs as they meandered just a metre or so above the incoming water. Not many people were on the beach, but Edwin noticed the odd glint of light bouncing off someone's hidden camera pointed in their direction.

He opened the little teak box and took a handful of ash, letting it run through his fingers as he walked arm in arm with his wife. Joan did the same, then Edwin, then Joan until the little box was empty. The couple stood looking out over the glassy sea, past Rangitoto, past Waiheke, past Motouhi, past Rakino, past the faint outline of Great Barrier Island guarding the Gulf and its Island jewels, and into the distance beyond. Edwin put his arm around his wife, who put her head on his shoulder while they watched and quietly made their farewells.

Some time later,

Victoria, Australia

The little boy finished his ice cream and had chocolate staining his mouth and his bib. His older sister bounced up and down on her seat, waving a stuffed toy lion wearing an 'I love Aslan' tee shirt. It was a good day for a trip to the family safe swimming beach, one of the many that lined the vast expanse of Port Phillip Bay, and have a picnic lunch.

From the vantage point of the cafe, the family could see multi-coloured kites dotting the sky above the water, propelling adventurous board surfers across the bay. The little girl wanted a kiteboard one day. When she was a bit older, Mum said, but today she would have to be content with a small hand kite, one that a five-year-old with a bit of help could manage.

The child saw her Grandpa in the distance, coming up the street. She waved and when they responded she ran off towards them, dropping her toy lion on the ground. Her grandpa caught her running towards him, lifting her up high and twirling her around, before slapping a big kiss on her cheek. Now it was Grandma's turn to embrace the little girl. Their granddaughter pointed to the cafe where mum and dad and her baby brother were, and Grandpa waved with his left hand, his right holding a dog on a lead.

The little girl gave the dog a hug, getting a wet lick on her mouth in return. She didn't like this and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "Naughty Topsie. Don't do that!"

The tan, white and black terrier wagged her bushy golden tail.

"You should turn your head when she goes to lick you, pet," her grandpa

laughed. "She doesn't know you don't like her licking you on your lips. It's just a kiss to her."

The older couple walked up the hill to the cafe and greeted their daughter and son-in-law. On Sundays, they usually met here and decided what to do with the rest of their day. The grandparents lived on the other side of the Bay at St. Leonard's, and it took them a couple of hours drive round the Bay to reach their meeting point. Grandpa kept talking about getting a boat, but he hadn't seriously searched for one yet. Grandma suffered from seasickness, and the Bay, although protected, could still whip up some fair sized waves, so the idea had stayed firmly in the talking stage.

The older couple ordered a pot of tea for themselves and a latte and long black for the younger couple. Mother said no to more ice cream, so the little girl had a sulk. The waiter came out with their drinks, and seeing the little dog under the table, returned with a bowl of water for her. Topsy drank with loud slurping noises as if she had just emerged from a desert. The dog spotted the dropped toy Aslan lion and picked it up. The little girl tried to take it from her, resulting in the pair having a mini-tug-of-war for possession of the toy.

Just as they were finishing their drinks and preparing to leave another couple came across to their table. Janet hid her head behind her Mum's skirts and cuddled her toy. Her mother looked pleased to see the newcomers. "What do you know? Helen and Dave. Thought you two were still overseas. Join us, please."

Janet scowled.

"Well, just for a minute. Are you on your way anywhere?"

"Just down to the beach. Helen and Dave, you haven't met my parents, Edward and Joanne Freedman." Margie gestured towards the older couple who shook

hands with their daughter's friends.

"I think we have met somewhere before haven't we, Mr. and Mrs. Freedman? You look a bit familiar." Dave regarded Edward, squinting his eyes in the sun.

"Don't think so. Perhaps you're mixing me up with someone else," Edward replied. "Please call me Ted."

"Maybe it's just the family resemblance. Margie is very like you, Ted," chipped in Helen, "are you on holiday from New Zealand?"

Ted shook his head, "No, we live here now, on the other side of the Bay. We have another daughter in Lorne, so we live halfway between each of them. Can't have favourites, you know!" He laughed, looking fondly at his daughter.

"But, you're from New Zealand, aren't you Margie?"

"Yes, we do come from across the ditch originally, but we've lived here for a long time ago now. Mum and Dad came over last year to live here permanently. Much better for Annette and me having them here."

"And, for us too. "Joanne smiled at her daughter's friends. "It's great. We decided to retire here, where it's nice and peaceful. We live just a stone's throw from the beach, Ted loves his fishing, and we see the girls and the grandkids every week."

"We've just come back from a three year spell in New Zealand. Dave was teaching at Otago University, and he's just got a promotion back here, so we're just settling in back home again."

"So how is the old country?" Margie asked.

Her friend chortled. "You know Margie, New Zealand gets weirder, I tell you."

"What's weird about it?" Ted asked.

"It never ceases to amaze us how little real news there is over there, you know. Not much happens really, although they do try to sex up stories. Not a lot you

can do with sheep and farm sales, though. Would you believe, last year the TV and radio got all excited, for weeks on end, about a kidnapped dog, held to ransom, and then to cap it all, was run over."

"Special dog, was it?" Ted picked up his cup and scrutinized it closely.

"Only in that it was left squillions of money by some rich widow or something. Amazing that anyone would do that, isn't it? Anyway, the rich bitch is no more. Neither of them."

Joanne stood up and plucked her husband's sleeve. "I think it is time we were going, Ted. Janet is getting very impatient to get to the beach."

Ted stood up from the table and undid the dog's lead. "Come Topsie, time to go."

Dave leaned over and patted the dog. "Nice dog. We're thinking of getting one too, now we're back for good. What breed is she?"

"Topsie? She's a rescue dog. An abandoned mongrel, bit of everything. Came from an animal shelter."

"So, you saved her life?"

"And, got ourselves a very loving and loyal companion in the process. There's something very special about these rescue dogs. Give a home to one of these discarded mutts, and they'll reward you for the rest of their life."

"So how much would a dog like this cost?"

"Not much, a few dollars to cover the neutering, microchipping et cetera. But, she's been worth a lot more than that to us. I wouldn't change her for a million dollars, would I Topsie?"

Ted patted her and scratched her behind her ears in the spot where some people say dogs keep their souls. Topsie nuzzled his hand. "Whoa, Whoa" she pushed her nose under his hand, pressing her long snout under his palm and

gave it a little wriggle.

"She's cute."

"She's priceless."