

Dreamers

Dreamers

by

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This book is dedicated to my dear friend

Auton Low

Part One

Dreamers

I

It was a normal working day yet Thomas Young-Felo decided to wear his Pierre Cardin suit. Usually the Pierre Cardin was kept for special occasions, however there was no reason to think that this particular day was to be anything out of the ordinary. It was just that he'd had a strange dream which he could hardly remember now. Something about joyful trumpets sounding among clouds of glory. That he was to receive some gift or thing of advantage and that he had to be ready for it. He selected the pale blue shirt with the white collar, which had been carefully washed and ironed, and an orange tie. He thought it looked quite smart. After all he was the proprietor of the Dreamers Second Hand Bookshop and, as such, felt beholden to make a fashion statement in mild protest at the drab grey suits that occupied the downtown aluminium and glass office buildings.

He departed from his humble cottage in Tonks Avenue at approximately ten fifteen am. This was the usual time he left for work as he never expected customers before lunch time. Tonks Avenue was a short cul-de-sac running off Upper Cuba Street near the centre of town. On the corner was Solly's Five Star Opportunity Shop. Solomon Oliver, a plump, balding, middle-aged Jew, was just opening up.

"I have something for you. You might like. An old gentleman brought it in yesterday." Solly unwrapped the tissue paper to reveal a pair of gold cufflinks. "You see. Art Deco style. You like these?"

Thomas picked up the cufflinks and inspected them carefully. "Gold plated."

"Ach yes. All gold cufflinks are gold plated."

"The plating is worn."

"I sell to you at a good price."

"The exchequer is a little embarrassed at the moment."

"Remember I sold you that thousand dollar suit you are wearing, I sold you for twenty dollars."

Thomas handed the cufflinks back. “New and tailored, a thousand dollars. Second hand and a bad fit, twenty dollars.”

“It is an excellent fit.”

“Well, satisfactory. Wearing a good suit won’t help me sell second-hand books.”

“Ah, but you should have a best-selling bookshop.”

“And pigs might become air-borne.”

“I tell you, a distinguished scholar and a gentleman such as yourself should be at the university teaching the students English literature.” Thomas said nothing. Although he had attended Cambridge University, that was almost thirty years ago, and he had left without completing his studies. “And you are very attractive to the ladies. The rich Widow Schultz, she has soft spot for you. That would be a way out from your financial problem.”

The rich Widow Schultz had been coming to the bookshop and buying romantic love stories of the literary kind. Her droolings over *Wuthering Heights* were excessive to the extreme. She was overweight and suffocating in her gushing ardour. She prattled on all the time, mouthing trivialities.

“I have no wish to marry.”

“Where would I be without a wife already? My dear Rebecca, she feeds me and warms me. She keeps my house for me and she never complains.”

“I assure you, Solly, you are a very lucky man. That is not always the way with marriages.”

Thomas left and walked down Cuba Street to his shop. He liked this part of town. It had been placed in a time warp forty-five years ago when the authorities had decided to put a motorway through the area. As a result property values had slumped and buildings had been without regular maintenance and left to decay. For various reasons, including protests from the Greenies, the project had never started, although it was still on the drawing board, hanging like the Sword of Damocles over the heads of the eccentric inhabitants.

Of course, Wellington City was the capital of New Zealand and had the Houses of Parliament. The commercial heartland was not far away, and every morning was invaded by thousands of frantic suits and ties who departed in the evening to

their overcrowded motorways and suburban houses. The few who lived in the centre of town in cheap accommodation were very lucky.

As he unlocked the door to his shop Thomas sighed. Wellington City was a happy place as far as cities went. He wondered how long it would last.

2

“We’ll need a book to prop up the leg of the table,” said Miss Stickney. “And young Jamie needs a sword.”

Kate sighed. Why did she get roped into these things? Oh well, she was a member of the English Department, of which Old Stickleback was the head. Also she had been doing some acting in community theatre, the latest effort being a very eccentric one act play written by a local author. Who else on the staff would be suitable to act as Producer’s Assistant? If only Miss S. wasn’t such a fussy and unpredictable old maid. If only school plays weren’t so... so... so bloody amateur.

“There’s a sword in the props room at Stagecraft,” she replied.

“Do you think they’ll lend us it?”

“We’ve already got half their stuff; I don’t think one sword would make much difference.”

“It’s not a sharp edged sword is it?”

“It’s a wooden sword painted silver.”

“Good. I was worried about that sword... Knowing young Jamie, there could quite well be blood-letting on stage. Right in front of the parents on opening night most likely. You know what those brats are like. Third formers prancing around the stage, crying out at the top of the question. Oh well, they’ll be clapped for it. Most tyrannically.” Miss Stickney was misquoting from Hamlet. “What about the book?”

“We could try the school library.”

“Miss de Bris, you cannot take a book from the school

library. It might well get damaged. The leg of the table presses down on it. Anyway it says in the script that the book must be a hundred years old. There are no books that old in the library. Go to a second-hand bookshop. They're full of old volumes that nobody wants to read."

Kate swore under her breath. She had forty essays to mark and now she would have to traipse around town looking for an old book.

"One old book," she said as she made a note on her list of things to do.

"And Miss de Bris, would you sit down for a minute?"

Miss S. adopted the look she always adopted when matters of discipline were concerned. It couldn't be too bad though. They weren't in her study, where such actions normally took place; they were on the stage of the assembly hall surrounded by the confusion of set development.

Kate sat on the chair which was at the table with the rickety leg. "Yes, Miss Stickney?"

"I have to comment on that jersey you are wearing."

"Oh. What's wrong with it Miss Stickney?"

The jersey was one that Kate had knitted herself. One day she had said to herself, no, she wasn't just a flighty intellectual, no, she could actually do something mundane and practical such as knitting a jersey. Well, it had to be bright colours of course in order to express her personality. And she did love parrots, and yellow, and green. So she had found a pattern and knitted two of them on the front and one on the back. Very hard to knit a pattern like that.

"I don't think it is appropriate. We have to present a proper image. The students use us as models for their behaviour. Also those parrots, they draw attention to... the heads enhance..."

Kate looked down. The heads of the parrots coincided with her breasts. Surely the Old Stickleback didn't mean that. Anyway they were very modest breasts. Also, due to her inexperience at knitting, the jersey didn't cling to her figure at all.

"I won't wear it to school again, Miss Stickney," she said, trying to keep her voice as even as possible.

“Thank you, Miss de Bris.”

Kate knew that she shouldn't get angry at Stickleback's petty ways. She stalked back to her classroom and took the essays from the drawer. Out with the marking pencil. There were so many aspects of these student essays which irritated her.

‘Too much verbiage,’ she scrawled on one. ‘You need to review your spelling and grammar,’ on another. ‘Inappropriate subjunctive.’ ‘Try to express your views in a clear manner.’ ‘Obtuse.’ ‘That sentence does not make sense.’ ‘Ambiguous.’

Ah, that felt better.

3

It was approaching closing time when Thomas picked up, and began to leaf through, *The Book*. Not that there was anything particularly notable concerning *The Book* that would require capitalisation or italicisation. These were applicable later when it was established that *The Book* was a precursor of the events that were about to unfold. He read from the flyleaf:

LETTERS
of
Thomas Carlyle
to his
Youngest Sister.

Edited with an
Introductory
Essay by
CHARLES TOWNSEND COPELAND.
Lecturer on English Literature
at Harvard University.
With Portraits and Other
Illustrations.
LONDON.
CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED.
1899.

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The book was even older than he was. And books of that time did have a quality; more of a quality than the flashy trash turned out on the modern treadmills. It was well bound. The quires were stitched and there was a hard cover with the title in gold embossed lettering. Well printed also, on excellent paper with adequate margins. You could tell from the rough edges that the pages had had to be cut. It was a pity that the content did not match the presentation. He had studied Carlyle at Cambridge. He was a dry as dust Victorian pedant whose ideas were hardly relevant to the modern world. And inconsequential letters to family members? Hardly of any interest. It had come from an estate collection which had contained a hoard of unlikely books which hadn't been selling at all well. He marked it down from six dollars to three dollars and placed it on the specials bench. How are the mighty fallen?

He was at the door and had just rotated the Open/Closed sign, when she entered.

“Are you closed?” she asked.

He indicated the sign, which read ‘Open’. “Open on the inside, closed on the outside. You have a few moments; I have to balance the till.”

He returned to the desk and began to add up the meagre takings. She was browsing the shelves and paying particular attention to English Literature he noticed. She was an attractive young lady, he thought. A more gracious adornment to the room than all his tattered decorations. He sighed. He should avoid such feelings.

She came up to the desk.

“Excuse me.”

“Yes? May I help you?”

“I'm looking for an old volume.”

“At your service, madam.”

Beware the careless word, she thought, this old chap is sharp. “I mean an old book.”

“The shop is full of them, madam. Did you have a particular title in mind?”

“No. I need one for the set of a play.”

“Then you would do best to choose at random.”

She went to the specials bench, picked up *The Book* and opened it at the title page. "*The letters of Thomas Carlyle...* That's good, and it's almost a hundred years old. It looks stuffy enough."

"Stuffy? Thomas Carlyle? Stuffy?"

"Well he was a musty Victorian wasn't he? Has it been soaking in water?" Indeed the cover was somewhat warped, as if caused by water damage.

"I'm not sure if it were left to soak, madam. Perhaps someone with a heart wept over it."

"Three dollars?" She looked in her purse, fumbled around for coins and fished out a two dollar piece. "I don't know if I have a single dollar here."

"As the till is closed, two dollars shall be sufficient." Young people, he thought. Musty Victorian indeed. You might say that Dickens was a musty Victorian mightn't you? "We have some Webster also madam, if you would prefer a fusty Elizabethan."

"He was Jacobean wasn't he? Here are your two dollars"

She handed him the coin, which he put in his pocket, seeing as the till was balanced.

"Thank you. Shall I wrap it in crêpe, madam?"

"Did I say something wrong?"

"I do hold Carlyle somewhat in esteem." He didn't really believe that, but he wanted to talk to her, wanted her to stay, wanted to find out something more about her, wanted to ask her questions, wanted to see how she would react to a controversial statement, wanted to discover if she had a mind of any stature.

"Do you? We have different value judgements on the matter," she replied.

"You have studied Carlyle, enough to form a judgement?"

"No. I shall read the book and come back and tell you what I think. Don't worry about the wrapping paper."

And she was gone. Value judgements, he thought. Well she was a cheeky young thing, wasn't she? It was nice to see a bit of spirit. But now it was time to shut up the shop and go home.

Kate walked home from the bookshop. It was 'going home time' and the city was crowded with impatient motor cars and Big Red buses crammed with the resigned white faces of commuters. She had a small but expensive flat in the Terrace Gardens. You couldn't call the Terrace Gardens a street, more a pathway running along halfway up the side of a hill. It was a world of its own within a stone's throw of the city centre, surrounded by office buildings yet inviolate from development, due to poor access.

Wellington city and its suburbs were built around a large lake of inland sea, connected to the ocean by a narrow channel. The land arose sharply around most sides of the harbour in the form of steep escarpments and farther away were bush clad mountain ranges; the Rimutakas, the Tararuas, and the Orongorongas. The city was a city of hills and winding streets, apart from the commercial centre which was built on reclaimed land close by the harbour. The escarpments were a natural result of uplifting due to earthquake activity in the prehistoric past. There was an active fault line which ran through the city centre and along or across all roads in and out. There had been a major quake in 1855 which raised the land two feet, but caused little damage to pioneers' cottages. It was inevitable that, one day, a big one would occur.

However there are no earthquakes in this story, apart from those upheavals of the heart that always come to mar the path of true love.

Kate took her mail from the letter-box and unlocked the door. Her ginger cat, Michelangelo, rushed out past her and into the garden. Oh dear, the cat door must have jammed again and he'd been locked inside all day. Now she really was in the poo. She kicked the door with her foot and it freed. She really must get that attended to. Michelangelo would no doubt be haughty for an hour or two, but eventually he would forgive her.

(Although it has nothing to do with this story I must tell you how the cat got his name. When he was a kitten Kate de-

cided to paint the kitchen and left a tray of paint on the floor. Being an inquisitive animal, and atypically unafraid of water, he went for a little walk through this lake of paint and then left his paw prints on a piece of brown paper that had been placed on the floor to catch the drips. Kate found this pattern of paw prints and drips quite attractive. She mounted it on a piece of hardboard and entered it in a charity art exhibition, where it sold for two hundred dollars. Hardly up to the standard of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, but still a collectable work of art.)

It was only after she and Michelangelo had eaten that she remembered the mail. The usual collection of bills and circulars, except a letter from long lost Bruce addressed to her in his meandering scrawl. Why would he want to write to her? The affair was over. Should she bother to open it? Surely he wouldn't want her to take him back after the way he suddenly departed without explanation. When they had been together he'd filled her ears with such sad and sorry outpourings that she wondered why she ever put up with him. She tore open the envelope.

My Dear Kate;

I am just writing this letter to say that I have no regrets. I appreciate our past relationship very much and am glad that I met you. But now, you see, I have found my soul mate...

You ignorant bastard, she thought angrily. Dear Bruce, she would have to write to him and say that she had found another lover. That might shut him up. Another lover? Not if she could help it. Not for a while. Why didn't he just go away and lose himself?

She tore up the letter and threw it into the rubbish basket. All her life it was just one man after another, and they always wanted just one thing. All men. And when they'd had that they were off and away to find their true love on some other shore. Even her father had been like that. He had left her and her mother when she was a young child. A selfish man who had got what he wanted and then refused to take responsibility for the fruits of his lust. He'd gone, sailed off over the sea and left his family to fend for themselves.

Get thee to a nunnery, girl. Get thee to a nunnery.

Michelangelo could see she was upset and decided it was

time to forgive her for locking him inside all day. He jumped onto her lap, licked her hand and started purring.

“I love you, Mick,” she said out loud. “You’re the only male who understands me.” She scratched him where he loved to be scratched, behind the ear. Now that man in the bookshop; she should have an affair with someone like that. Maturity. Old fashioned charm. He wouldn’t settle his mind on his lustful requirements. Maybe she should read the book and go back and discuss it with him. But not for a lover, he was too old for that, just as a friend.

5

Thomas was almost home when he remembered that he had nothing in the house to eat. The late customer had distracted him. He’d forgotten that he’d needed money and had put the total takings in the safe. Then he remembered the two dollars she had given him. Just enough for a can of baked beans from the corner store.

Baked beans for tea. Once upon a time it would have been clam soup with fried croutons to be followed by chicken and asparagus and a chilled white German wine. How are the mighty fallen?

As he walked along the rutted lane to his cottage, avoiding the muddy puddles, he noticed that the light outside the theatre at the end of the street was on. It was always on when there were people inside. They must be building the set or rehearsing the next production. Then he remembered the poster he’d seen at the dairy. “Stagecraft Plays Seven”. It was a programme of seven one act plays written by local authors. It seemed to be a very ambitious undertaking. Would a series of plays written by a number of obscure authors hold the stage?

Stagecraft Theatre was domiciled in a grand two story house at the far end of Tonks Avenue. The house had seen better

days. It had originally been the home of the Tonks family, who had been wealthy merchants in the first half of the twentieth century. The cottages had been built for their servants and extended family. But family fortunes declined, the property had become a boarding house, some say a brothel, and then was lovingly converted into a community studio theatre.

Thomas changed into his lounging clothes and put the suit back in its cupboard. The dream that had prompted him to wear it had promised much in the imagination. A rich American collector perhaps, or an unexpected discovery of a rare edition, but nothing had eventuated. He could dream about riches, but in real life they were as elusive as the rainbow. Mere daydreams.

He ate the unsatisfactory meal and then, for some reason he couldn't quite fathom, decided to read from his collection of Carlyle. Was there something about this pedantic old philosopher he'd missed out on?

At midnight he went to bed. In the early morning hours a wild tempestuous sea-storm invaded his sleep. There were sea-horses riding the foam, unaware of the bones of dead sailors lying on the serene floor of the ocean. And above the sound of the crashing waves he heard the voice of a child calling out.

"Daddy. Can you hear me?"

What was this voice crying in the wind? It was a voice he knew. A voice he remembered. A voice he had long forgotten. It was Ruth. It was Ruth his daughter, his little girl.

"Where are you?" he called out in his dream.

"Over the sea, daddy."

It was a plaintive voice, a lost and plaintive voice. But he could not see her. His eyes were closed and so he had to ask:

"Where?"

"Over the sea. Over the storm-tossed waves."

"Will you come to me?"

"No Daddy. I'm drowned."

The vessel of his hopes and fears crashed on the dark reef and sundered.

"What? Drowned? No, not drowned."

"I'm drowned by time. I'm drowned by neglect. I'm over the sea. I'm drowned by forgetfulness."

“Drowned?”

He could not believe it. He could not believe she was drowned. He set out on his boat to rescue her, but his blind eyes could not see. At last her voice came from beneath the waves.

“In your mind, I am drowned.”

He woke up with the words echoing in his mind.

It was an unaccustomed time to wake, but he could not go back to sleep. It was a cold morning. He put on his dressing gown and pulled back the curtain. In the sky was the pink glow of sunrise.

*But look the morn, in russet mantle clad,
walks o'er the dew on yon high eastern hill.*

The phrase was from the opening scene in Hamlet. The image transcended reality, he thought, but sat poorly in the scene. He would censure the Bard for his lack of care. *Russet mantle clad*. We look backwards through the centuries at the brave words and wonder at the magic.

What did he dream of? It came back to his mind. He'd dreamed of his dear lost daughter. The dear drowned, the abandoned drowned, the living drowned, a castaway of a dead father. No, she was not really dead; she must be alive now, living under some other sun. Another sun in another land, a sun which sets as this one arises. How was she now, his dear girl, his milk-warm darling, his bundle of once-infant joy?

And he thought of her mother. Oh, her mother. She would still be in the bawdy bar. Still be seeking the tinsel pleasure. The painted picture that was betrayed by time leaving a face of tired lines and smeared lipstick.

Cold morning.

Why did he dream of his daughter? What prompted that? She would be grown up now. A woman he'd never know. He'd put her from his mind. The opium of neglect. Did she grow up to be like that young girl, the one that came into the shop seeking dunnage? Over the storm-tossed she was, over the wine-dark....

There was nothing to do now but make a cup of tea and wait until it was time to go to work.

A few days later, Thomas was in the shop, sitting at his desk. It was the second occasion that the trumpets blew their horns. He had a stack of romance novels piled up beside him and was reading them with bored perspicacity. There had been had many enquiries from customers which had made him embarrassed by his inability to give advice. Now he could say: “Oh yes Ma’am, Dangerous Dan wins the heart of gentle Katherine who is engaged to a pimply scholar.” or “She was a queen of high society but fell in love with the gardener.” He’d read one in his youth which was pretty modest in its description of sexual encounters but now-a-days they were somewhat more racy. The protagonists were even permitted to have sex before betrothal. A sign of the times. They were his best selling line, but hardly approached literature.

Kate came in carrying *The Book*. She came up to the desk. “Mills and Boon today?”

“Oh, how do you do, madam?” Thomas stood up.

“I do very well thank you. Why are you reading that trash?”

“I need to research, madam, for my market.”

“So you can tell them all about love?”

“Oh, hardly a recognised authority in the field.” He had to change the subject. “How is the play going?”

“The play? Oh... yes... we open next week.”

“An amateur production?”

He wondered if she had anything to do with the production at Stagecraft, which also opened next week.

“Amateur? It’s a school play.”

“Hardly amateur. I see you have my book.”

“My book now. I said I’d come back and talk to you about it. It’s commonplace. Look, I’ll quote at random”. She adjusted her imaginary pince-nez, opened the book at page eighty, which she had marked previously, adopted the *Reading Pose* after the manner of the one employed by Miss Stickney and read

in the manner of a poorly executed stage Scots accent.

“My Dear Jenny, According to promise I set about writing you a word of Scotch news, now that I am fairly settled here and know how things are. The railway train whirled me away from you rapidly that evening... Shall I go on?”

Thomas wished that she would as the tone of her dulcet voice was most pleasing to the ear.

“The actual lives of the great are usually commonplace, are they not?” he said eventually.

“If they are, why publish them, why sell them?”

“I only charged you two dollars, madam, I did not represent it to you as a great work. It was merely a collection of his letters. After all it was only intended to prop up the leg of a table in a play.”

“How did you know that?” Surely she hadn’t told him about the leg of the table at their previous meeting.

“You told me it was for a play.”

“I mean about the leg of the table.”

“It’s the only reason for the existence of book like that. How else can one correct faults in carpentry?”

“I thought you said you held his works in high esteem.”

Thomas walked around making gestures, as he always did when delivering a lecture.

“I hold the works of Shakespeare in high esteem, but that doesn’t mean to say I have to like Titus Andronicus. You can’t judge a mans life-work by a few inconsequential letters published by some don with a eye to sifting prestige from another’s reputation. Have you actually read any of Carlyle’s works?”

“I read this one, and the introduction. I thought he was a nice man, wasn’t he?”

“I think he was.” Well there was nothing wrong with Carlyle in a moral sense, and he did have influence in academic circles.

“But didn’t he love the Nazis?” Kate had actually gone to the public library and read some potted biographies and commentaries.

“He died before the word was coined.”

“Well, the Nasties loved him.”

“Indeed they did.”

“Why was that then?”

Kate sat on Thomas’s desk while he walked about, pontificating.

“A matter of a... a corrupt regime needing a respectable philosophy to bolster its image; but he had no affinity with that rabble; all he said was that the salvation to our political problems lay in a return to a simpler society and the rule of the strong just man; a man who could not be obtained by a popular election. Of course there are flaws in the argument; the system that gives you a Perikles may also give you a Kleon.”

“Kleon?”

“The little Hitler of ancient Athens.”

“You prevaricate, you prevaricate as much as the introduction; still I like you; and I like your Mister Carlyle. Do you have any more books you can sell me?”

“About Carlyle?”

“Yes. Or by him.”

“Not in the shop, madam.”

“What’s all this madam business. You can call me Kate.”

Altogether too familiar for such a brief encounter, thought Thomas. Call me Kate. Kiss me Kate. Love me Kate. Sweet Kate. He was thinking of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but although this Kate (now sitting on his desk with cheeky aplomb) was forward, she was not a shrew. “Certainly, madam.”

“Kate.”

“Certainly, Kate.”

“And what is your name?”

“Thomas. Thomas Young-Felo, madam.” Why on earth would she want to know his name?

“Call me Kate.”

“Yes, Kate.”

“That’s better.” The Youngs and the Young-Felos were prominent families in town. The nearest thing to upper class you might say, so she asked about them. “Are you one of the original Young-Felos?”

“I am no longer a young fellow.” But, of course the pun was not exact. His name rhymed with ‘feel’ not ‘fell’.

“Oh I'm sure you are. Do you have any more books by Carlyle?”

“Only in my personal library.” He did have a couple of volumes tucked away in a top shelf in the shop but he wanted to lend her one of his own, so she would have to return it, so he would see her again. “I could lend you a volume if I could be sure that it would be returned.”

“Oh thank you. Thank you very much. I would be certain to return it.”

“I'll make a selection and leave it at the desk. If my part-time assistant is here when you call, will you ask him for it?”

“All right. I will.”

“And if you would leave your name and address, when you come.”

“Katherine, Katherine de Bris.”

“de Bris?”

“Yes, debris, the remnants of a war.”

“Oh surely not. And your address?”

But she and *The Book* were gone.

Sudden departures, he thought. Life was full of them. He would have liked to have called her back, into his dreams, to talk to him to engage in a stimulating intellectual discussion, as a student... as a daughter... as a votaress, seeking wisdom together. Dreams.

7

On Sunday Thomas put on his second-best suit and went for a walk in Central Park, which was not far from where he lived. Of course there is another, more famous, Central Park in New York but this one is actually rather insignificant by comparison. It runs from the edge of town in a narrow strip up to Brooklyn, one of Wellington's hilltop suburbs.

Thomas walked along the path beside the stream to the curved bridge. This was a charmed part of the garden. It was

autumn and the hundred year old lime trees had shed their leaves to form a carpet of yellow, fit for a king to walk upon. Here the magic of his imagination created a world of fairies and elves, a world where every tree was inhabited by a spirit of nature, where he knew that strange mystic rites would be celebrated under the light of the still and silent moon. He sat on the bench beneath a broad spreading pohutukawa tree and there flowed into his mind a world of illusion, a world of daydreams. (And philosophers might say that this world we call reality is likewise a dream in the mind of God.) Into this ethereal world of thought came a vision of Kate. And he talked to her in his thoughts, in his world of illusion.

“I’m a little careworn, a little shop-soiled. Will you accept that?” he asked the unsubstantial figment.

“Yes,” she replied.

He felt glad that such a beautiful vision would be prepared to accept him for what he was. He had to tell her all about himself, the secrets that he never wanted to be revealed, that he could never even reveal to her if she were a real person, that could never be revealed to the world.

“Once I was an Oxford scholar, but I made the wrong attachments. It was my fault. I made a mistake.”

Would he ever be able to explain to her, when they met in the flesh? Would he ever be able to tell her why he was such a lonely old bachelor? Would he ever be able to discuss the mistakes he had made and how he could never atone for them? His doubts that he ever might be worthy of her love. But was it love? Was that what he was feeling? How could he have such a thought after only two brief meetings? Was it just that what he really wanted was a daughter? But how could he ever be forgiven for abandoning his daughter? Did he have any right to demand forgiveness?

“Tell me about yourself,” said the imaginary Kate.

“Will you understand?”

“Tell me.”

Of course a figment could understand and later dissolve into the calm air as though it had never existed. He had been a brilliant fellow in his school days. Hear his confession. He was a

brilliant fellow, blessed with a retentive memory and the ability to re-arrange and organise facts; along with a modicum of skill in the arena. They made him a Rhodes Scholar and sent him to the famous English university to pursue his studies.

These were the things that he would have to tell her if there were to be any confluence of the heart. This story of his life had a bright beginning, the herald of a fine future. He had won a prestigious prize and been sent to a far country in search of fame. But the ship of adventure on this sea of renown had sailed into a storm of folly and had crashed and foundered on the derelict rocks.

“And you were successful?” asked the vision, asking him the question he had never asked himself, that he had always refused to acknowledge.

He had been a fine student. He had made the boat crew also, but in the end he was not successful. He was heading for a First, and the boat had won the regatta. He could have lectured in any university in the world, lived a life of comfort and ease. But in the end he was not successful.

“What happened?” asked the vision.

“I married a barmaid,” he whispered out loud.

There had been women in his life, students, women of the world, other relationships he felt too embarrassed to talk about. Women were attracted to him and he found pleasure in their company. He knew there had to be an end to casual affairs. There had to be a compatible wife for him somewhere but he had never found her. One night he was drinking alone after the end of a sad relationship with a married woman, when Dot, the barmaid indicated her interest. After a night of tipsy pleasure she became pregnant and, being the gentleman, he married her. Oh, the mistakes of our youth.

“Was that a tragedy?” asked the dream image Kate.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

They were incompatible. He left England in order to escape from the situation. He made the decision on the day when she disappeared for the afternoon and came home tipsy in the evening with a shyster in tow. One of her old friends, nothing

more, she told him. She had spent the housekeeping money on liquor. There was no food in the house. The child was hungry, he was hungry and his studies in ruin. He realised then what the rest of his life could be like. The following morning he packed his bags, kissed his daughter goodbye, and left, escaped on a sea voyage, back to New Zealand. Far away.

“And you did not complete your degree?” asked the figment.

No. He had made a commitment to finish his studies but he broke it. He could not ask his parents to continue with the financial assistance. After his return to New Zealand he had walked in paths of darkness for many years. Lived in poverty on social welfare. Eventually the clouds lifted to some degree and he began to make his own way. So here he was, the proprietor of a second-hand book shop.

“How the mighty are fallen.”

“Yes.”

“And you had a child?” she asked.

“A child? Yes. There was a daughter. She would be about your age now.” Was this his daughter standing there before him? Was this his long lost daughter come home from the sea? Was her mind as good as his? Would she carry on where he left off? “And you? You have a brilliant degree?”

“Of course.”

“And you have a brilliant future ahead of you?”

“My future is assured.”

She left the dream and dissolved into the darkness of reality.

He stood up and leant against the rustic railing beside the stream, staring at the bright sun-fairies sparkling in the flowing water. Her future was assured. His past was abhorred. It was the old story. You make a mistake at one time in your life and live thereafter in the shadow of regret; and it is your conscience that denies you salvation. There was no cure in these dream shadows.

Kate went to the book shop; however Thomas was not there. Instead a pale thin youth was sitting at the desk reading Keats. Although it was late autumn it was actually quite a mild day, yet he was muffled up in a scarf and overcoat against the possibility of a chill. When he started coughing the strange thought came into her mind that he might be dying of consumption.

“*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*,” she said without thinking.

“Yes, you might very well be,” he replied.

Keats had died of consumption, what we now call tuberculosis. He had thought of his condition as ‘*the fine lady without mercy*’ because it was believed that the disease enhanced the imagination and hence was food for the soul but poison for the body.

“Do I look like an Angel of Death?”

He wrapped his scarf more tightly around his neck.

“Are you Katherine Debris?”

“de Bris.”

“Oh yes. There’s a book here for you.” He rummaged around in the desk drawers, searched the shelves behind him, looked on the floor and eventually found a package, wrapped in brown paper, under the pile of poetry books on the desk. “There’s no charge.”

She took the parcel home and unwrapped it. It was another old book, but in better condition than the last. She read from the title page:

LAST WORDS
OF
THOMAS CARLYLE.
<device; sailing ship on a shield - 1726>
LONDON
LONGMAN, GREEN AND CO
1892
All rights reserved

It was a book which had been withdrawn from the Wellington Public Library. Turning to the back she noted that, at the time of withdrawal, fines for overdue were "ONE PENNY a day (including Sunday)". Then a pencilled note: "What a boring old book." So that was what Mister Young- Felo really thought about Carlyle. He really was an old volume, picked up at random in a second hand book-shop.

On Sunday she went for a walk along The Terrace, across the motorway bridge and through what was left of the pioneers' cemetery at Bolton Street to the Botanic Gardens.

(The pioneer's cemetery had been bisected by a motorway. The gravestones had been removed and stored for later restoration. Rita Angus, a renowned New Zealand artist, had lived nearby in a cottage in Sydney Street West. In her wanderings through the cemetery she had collected the stones in her mind and placed them in the sky in a famous painting of Island Bay, a location which appears not in this story but another, as will be revealed in due course.)

It was a day for mothers and children and scarlet autumn leaves. She sat on the bench by the duck pond and thought about Thomas. What did she feel about him? Was it something special? Would he have a place for her in his heart? Was she actually infatuated with a man much older than herself? Would a young person like herself hold much esteem in the eyes of a man of culture with as much experience in life as he had? What was this feeling she had which she couldn't fully understand? A strange form of bliss?

She liked to think that she was not usually given to flights of fancy but, like Thomas, she created a daydream world of illusion in her mind and spoke to him as figure of imagination as he stood before her.

"I'm a little careworn, a little insecure. Will you accept that?" she asked the figment

"Of course I shall," he replied.

Thomas's words seemed to echo in her mind. But was that only what she wanted to hear? He was a scholarly man; she would have to tell him the truth about herself. She knew she had a good mind, she knew that, but she was never able to make full

use of it. She had a degree, but it was mediocre. Her achievements as a teacher are, average.”

“It doesn't matter,” was his response.

But did she believe it? Would he say that? She was sure that he wouldn't. He'd have the delusion that she was a bright and forthright young woman. She knew she put on a big show, but inside she didn't feel confident.

“And what is the cause of that?” asked this imagined shape of Thomas in her mind. But was it he that was asking or was she asking herself?

“I never had a father you know; not a real one; not someone I knew. He was a Frenchman and he left mother when I was two years old,” she told him.

Sometimes she had vague impressions. Her mother had told her how she had loved him, but he had left both of them. Then he had sailed away across the dark sea, over the tossing tempestuous waves and never returned, leaving them both alone and sad. Now the sea was his mistress. He was like all the men she ever met, they always seem to disappear for some reason or another and leave her alone. And her mother never had another man for any length of time, apart from the one who fathered her brother and the one she was with now.

“Did your mother ever re-marry?” asked the daydream Thomas.

It was mostly just one man after another. And they all treated Kate with such, with such deference. Her mother had brought the children to New Zealand with a man she met in a bar, but that didn't last. She was living with a sheep farmer in the country now. Kate never liked her men.

“Why is that?”

“I wanted my own father.”

“Will you let me be your father?”

Is that what she wanted? Is that why she had such strange feelings about Thomas? That he might be a real father to her?

“You?”

“Yes. Let me try,” said the dream figure.

But she did not know. Then she thought about the Young-Felos. They were well known about town. The Youngs and the

Young-Felos. Lawyers and businessmen. And he was always so well dressed. His suits were tailor-made and of the highest quality. Why would he stoop so low as to run a second hand book shop. It must be because he loved his books.

“And you are, well educated?” she asked him.

“I have degrees, *cum laud.*”

“With praise’, yes. And you are not married?”

“I was married once, but my wife died, of consumption.”

Was it consumption? Why had that thought come into her mind? It must have been the influence of John Keats.

“Perhaps a difficult childbirth. Ask me when you see me in the flesh.”

The dream figure of Thomas disappeared into the world of illusion. She knew he had had a sad life, she had seen it in his eyes. How should they meet again? It had to be something more intimate than a shop conversation. Then she had the idea, she would invite him to her next soiree. What did he say? Leave her name and address? Later she penned a letter and delivered it into the care of Mister Keats who happened to be minding the shop when she came.

Dear Mister Young Fellow,

Thank you for the book, which I have read assiduously, albeit with some difficulty owing to the convolutions of style. I think he is a nice man although I do not particularly agree with what he has to say. I am holding an intimate soiree on the Twentieth Instant at number sixteen The Terrace Gardens to commence at Six Post Meridian (approx). You would be welcome to attend. One of the rules of these occasions is that intellectual matters are never mentioned.

Your obdt Servant,

Katherine de Bris.

"PS I have deliberately couched this epistle in the manner of your mentor in order to prove to you that I have actually read the book."

On the Twentieth Instant (which was a Saturday) Thomas donned the Pierre Cardin, the black shirt and the white tie. It made him look like an elegant gangster he thought. He made a mental note to call in at Solly's on Monday to see if there was a black pork pie hat with a white band. He caught the bus and arrived at Number Sixteen The Terrace Gardens at Six Fifteen Post Meridian (approx.) It was a quiet talking party with no music. Wine and nibbles. A mixture of eccentric people who seemed to know each other well.

"I'm so glad you could come, Thomas." said Kate. She had come to the door when he rang the bell. She took his arm. "You'll have to excuse me, I'm in such a muddle. Everyone came early and I haven't got the quiche ready."

"She never has the quiche ready," said a scholarly man, with leather patches in his elbows, who was standing nearby talking to a very thin but very attractive blonde.

"Oh Thomas, meet Dan Packin."

Dan transferred his cigarette to his mouth and his glass of white wine to his left hand. They shook hands.

"The poet?" inquired Thomas who remembered a couple of slim volumes that had been on his shelves for a considerable time.

"*Mine are ink stained fingers.*" Dan was quoting a well-known line by James K Baxter, the pre-eminent, yet sadly deceased, New Zealand poet

"I can help you with the quiche," said the blonde.

"Of course Jane, you always do," said Kate. "And Dan, you can make your mulled wine. Thomas, you will have to sit down on the couch and talk to Marion. I'll be back soon."

They all disappeared into the kitchen. Marion was a pleasant, dumpy young woman about Kate's age. She wore an outlandish floral dress and had Michelangelo sitting on her lap.

"Is she anorexic?" asked Thomas.

"Who? Jane?"

“Yes.”

“Yes, she’s anorexic, that’s why she always makes the quiche.”

Thomas tried to make the connection. Someone with an eating disorder should be a good cook? A fixation on food in one way or another? He changed the subject. “Nice cat.”

“Michelangelo. He painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.”

“The cat?”

“Of course. Do you like cats?”

“Only the artistic ones.”

This eccentric conversation continued for some time. Eventually a large man with a bushy moustache, who must have been of Dalmatian extraction, called for attention and read some of his poems. They were sad poems about his childhood, and failed relationships. Dan came out of the kitchen with cups of mulled wine and recited by heart “Lament for Barney Flannagin” by the aforementioned poet, James K Baxter. Following this a ruddy faced, middle-aged man stood up, introduced himself as Bill the Barman, and recited sea limericks.

*“The susurration of the sea
does sound very nice to me
shell cap your ear
and you will hear
the susurration of the sea.”*

There were others of a more salty nature. They were enjoyed greatly by the assembly however this memorialist is too modest to repeat them. A tall young man with fair hair and a premature bald patch sat on the chair next to the couch. He took a comic book from his brief-case and began reading it.

“You’ll have to excuse me,” he said when he noticed Thomas looking at him. “A new issue, I just have to glance through it.”

“Marvell Comics? Are you a fan?”

“Yes, I collect them.” He put the book away. “Alistair is the name. Are you a friend of Kate?”

“Yes. Thomas.” Thomas handed him his business card. He remembered that there had been some Marvell comics in the collection that had contained *The Book*. He had put them aside thinking that they were not in keeping with the shop’s image. “You might drop by. I have a few old issues in stock.”

At last the quiche arrived and was distributed on paper plates. Kate sat on the arm of the couch beside Thomas.

“I’m glad you came,” she said.

“I’m glad to be here.”

“And you haven’t felt neglected?”

“No. I had an interesting discussion with Marion, about cats. I was going to mention T.S. Elliot but I wasn’t sure if that could be termed intellectual.”

“Oh, that was just me being silly.”

“In what way?”

She didn’t answer the question. Instead she smiled and touched his arm. “Do you like cats?”

“Personally I am neutral; but still I would fight for their continued survival.”

“Why is that?”

“If I were to explain that, Kate, I would have to involve you in a philosophical discussion.”

“Philosophical?”

“Or intellectual.”

“That would never do.” A young woman with dark hair in a sleek black dress came with a bottle of white wine and asked Kate for a corkscrew. They went into the kitchen.

I feel something when I am with her, thought Thomas. Something special; a form of energy. He so much wanted to ask her out. Perhaps to dinner. But would she want to go out with an old chap like him. If he asked her would she tell him he was foolish to want to?

Kate returned. Thomas stood up.

“Sorry. What were you saying?” she asked.

“We were talking about cats.”

“Yes, now tell me about them.”

“All about cats?”

“Yes. How you fight for their existence even though you

merely tolerate them.”

“Well you did say there were to be no intelligible discussions.”

“Give me your unintelligible observations then.”

“Say I hated cats; it would not be a good idea for me to kill one of them because it would be detrimental to the common good; it might even be detrimental to my own good.” Thomas waved his arms about, as he usually did when he was pontificating. This could potentially cause problems, as he had a plate of quiche in one hand and a fork in the other.

“Why do you say that?” asked Kate.

“When a creature dies all nature is diminished, and so are we because we are part of nature. No man is an island.... You know the saying.”

“But what will happen if a cat kills a mouse.”

Thomas stopped pontificating and looked at her seriously. “Then cheese shall survive.”

She kept a straight face with some difficulty. “And if I eat cheese then I shall survive.?”

“And the mouse will die because there shall be no cheese to eat, and the cat will die because there shall be no mice to eat, and my friend that is fond of the cat, shall be unhappy because the cat has died, so she shall not be hungry and will not eat the cheese, so the mice shall have cheese to eat...”

“Do your arguments always go around in circles?”

“Only when intellectual discussions are not permitted.”

Thomas paused and then recommenced his gyrations with quiche and fork. “There is a balance, an interaction, between humanity and nature. Man was made by God to live in the world. It is his nature to live in the world and once he departs from that he becomes lost. Do I sound pontifical?”

“Not at all. What you say is most interesting.”

Kate was amused. He sounded most pontifical indeed. But she wondered what all this talk was about. Idle chatter at a party. It was the superficial semblance of reality. But was it reality? No. Underneath the words, the particles of speech, there was a deeper reality. In between the lines she felt that flow. Magnetism. But would he want to ask her out? Someone young and

frivolous like her. Why was it always the man that has to ask?

“I wonder if I might...” he began.

“Might what...”

“Return the favour....”

At this moment the doorbell rang. It was fate at the door come in sombre robes.

“Favour? Oh, excuse me there's the door.”

She went to the door and admitted a young man. He had fair hair, brushed straight, and wore a reefer jacket and tie. He was carrying wine and a bunch of roses.

Look at the young stud, thought Thomas. That was more stag for her satisfaction. The young man gave Kate the flowers and she kissed him on the cheek. She leads him to the wine, he thought. In his mind he saw them dance together, Bacchus with vine leaves in his hair, and Ague trailing leaves of myrtle, columbine, sweet herbs of the earth. That was the man for her, the spring satyr, not him, the autumn sedge.

She came back to Thomas, with the roses in her arms. “I'm sorry, he's always late.”

“You have some good friends.”

“Yes I'm lucky.”

“And roses.”

“Aren't they beautiful?”

“Pristine. Dew kissed. All that is fresh in the world. You should hold such things to your heart.”

“Now you are being romantic.”

“Hardly romantic. Just...”

“Yes?”

“Oh nothing, just an old pedant.”

“Don't be silly.”

“No. But now my young friend, I must go.”

“Must you?”

She touched his arm, wanting him to stay, wanting him to complete the question that had been on his lips. But he was out of the door and down the path before she could move. The question would never be asked. She knew that. She knew that she would never go back to the shop, never see him again. There had been a misunderstanding. Something had happened when her

brother had arrived. For the man with the wine and roses was indeed her half-brother.

10

All the guests had gone. Kate and Michelangelo were left alone to tidy up. It was dark outside. She lit the candles and turned off the lights. She still couldn't understand why Thomas had left so suddenly. There had been some sort of warmth between them; a kind of tingle. Then he had become distant. The switch had turned off. As though it were the end of an affair. It had been a successful soiree but somehow everything had gone flat now. The only thing left to do was clean up and go to bed.

Thomas walked alone through Manners Street and on up Cuba Street. The lights were dim, tarnished, touched with the grime of the world. The transvestites outside the old National Bank building on the corner of Abel-Smith Street called out. They knew him, not as a patron, but as a fellow traveller on the sea of loneliness. They played a game they always played.

“You want some business, Literature-man?”

The girls always called Thomas ‘Literature-man’ because he had recited Shakespeare to them on the way home after one of his infrequent visits to the local pub.

“Not tonight, darling,” he replied sadly.

When he arrived home he carefully placed the Pierre Cardin in the wardrobe. Best to leave that in mothballs for a while. He had enjoyed the party. It was foolish of him to think he could get close to her. There were so many young men more suitable for her than him. He had been captured in the fantasy of a dream. And so to bed.

And while these lovers slept, knowing they would never meet again, they entered into a world of dreams, a seascape where the soul-selves of lovers roam and speak in words of truth that are never remembered, never forgotten. A troth-pledge that is

never remembered, never forgotten. These ghost figures are made of fragile dream-strands and they roam in the night under the stars and the moon. And they cannot see as their eyes are closed and although they try to reach they cannot touch.

“Are you there?” asked Thomas in their dream.

“Where?” replied Kate.

“Can I see you?”

“No.”

“I try to reach you. You are not there.”

“I ride the night-horse, riven by the billowing waves of sleep. I cannot cross the gulf.”

“Are you there?” asked Thomas again in their dream.

“Where am I? Where do I sit? On the mermaid’s knee?”

“Are you there?” asked Thomas

“I cannot give coherence to my thoughts.”

“I would like to meet you.”

“Where?”

“In my dreams, in the netherland, in the primrose centre of your heart, where peace resides.”

“I cannot,” replied the dreaming soul of Kate.

“What?”

“See.”

“Why?”

“The clouds of sleep billow between us. We are deep-drowned, deep in seabed’s caves. We are somnolent. Sleepwalkers, blind in our dream.”

“Open your eyes,” said the dreaming Thomas.

“I cannot.”

“Why?”

“I would awake to the dream of the real world.”

“Are you afraid?”

“What?”

“Afraid.”

“What?”

“To see.”

“But we all are.”

“Yes.”

“You also?”

“Yes. I seek dreams in sugar and silk. I am seduced by the soft pleasures of the world,” said Kate in her dream.

“Yes.”

“Will you not come?”

“Come?”

“Touch me.”

“Touch?”

“Awaken me from that dream of death.” For her life in the world called reality was death in the world of dreams.

“I cannot”

“What?”

“Reach.”

“What?”

“Touch.”

“You cannot?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“It is dark. It is a dream. In the dreamworld you cannot touch.”

“Cannot touch?”

“No.”

“Then I shall never awaken.”

“No.”

“Never awaken.”

“No.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight my dear.”

“Goodnight. I shall rest on my bed of roses.”

“May the stars touch thine eyes. May the sandman come and carry thee to the mystic castle where kine graze and the swans see miracles. I cannot touch thine heart. I cannot see thy face. The night shall rock thee to rest on the billows of a dream and lead thee to peace.”

“Goodnight my father.”

“Goodnight my child.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Part 2

Lovers

I

Did you ever stop to wonder what you were? I suppose everybody does at some time in their life. It is a profound thought isn't it, the meaning of life, and all that? We like to think we are in charge of our own destiny, but are we? We might be puppets, like Pinocchio, controlled by the strings of The Almighty's thought. Or we might be characters in a book or a play under the control of the skein of the author's imagination. The Greeks had a legend concerning the three Fates. They were women of power who sat on Mount Olympus, beside their mystic loom, weaving a tapestry into the warp and weft of our lives. And if they dropped a thread, that's you, gone down the gurgler, another entry in the books of Amnesty International. What do we have here? A strand has come down from heaven and laid itself upon the author's lap. Let him just pick this one up and put it back in its proper place.

Our two lovers (although not as yet lovers) were at Kate's soiree, an event that has been described previously. Or was it ever described? Was it somewhere from a universe that no longer has an existence?

At last the quiche arrived and was distributed on paper plates. Kate sat on the arm of the couch beside Thomas.

"I'm glad you came," she said.

"I'm glad to be here."

"And you haven't felt neglected?"

"No. I had an interesting discussion with Marion, about cats. I was going to mention T.S. Elliot but I wasn't sure if that could be termed intellectual."

"Oh, that was just me being silly."

"In what way?"

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"Personally I am neutral; but still I would fight for their continued survival."

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"I wonder if I might..."

"Might what..."

"Return the favour..."

At this moment the telephone rang.

"Favour? Oh, excuse me there's the phone."

She came back in a moment. "I'm sorry, it was my brother."

"Your brother?"

"He's always late but now he's going to be even later. He had a flat tyre. He's going to have to bring wine and roses to make up for it."

"Oh I thought..."

"What?"

"It doesn't matter. You have good friends."

"Yes I'm lucky."

"Wine and roses." He looked at her seriously. "I wondered..."

"Yes?"

"If I could return the compliment."

“Compliment?”
“In return for the soiree.”
“Do you hold them too?”
“Oh no, not any more. I thought perhaps a dinner, for the two of us.”
“Yes, yes, I would like that.”
“I could cook something.”
“Cook something?”
“Oh yes. Never fear madam, I am a dab hand at cookery when I set my mind to it.”
And that was the start of the affair.

2

Two weeks later Kate sat in her flat in a moment of meditation before setting out for the intimate evening with Thomas Young-Felo. She had taken incredible care with her toilette which was a rare thing for her. She was dressed in a black frock that had been obtained from an op shop and carefully restored to its original antique glory. It was a gown she had naively imagined that a person of the upper classes might wear. High heeled shoes, a red scarf, and a silver brooch. She felt uncomfortable. It wasn't her. She read again the handwritten invitation she had received. It had been penned in black ink in impeccable archaic calligraphy on hand-made paper. But there was the address – Tonks Avenue. The cottages in Tonks Avenue were just tumble-down shacks left in neglect while waiting for the bulldozers to come and tear them down to make space for the motorway. She knew it well because she had acted in plays at the theatre at the end of the lane. Why would a member of high society want to live in one of those? There must be a reason. Oh well, the night would reveal it.

Tonight, dinner with Thomas Young-Felo. She knew she felt something for him. Something special. But what did she want? A lover, or a friend, or a father? Or a glass of wine and a red rose in a silver vase. Would he wear a dinner suit with a white carnation in the button-hole and sit back puffing a cigar after the meal?

Thomas came into her daydream, dressed in a tuxedo and with a large cigar, puffing great clouds of aromatic smoke. "Does the smoke bother you, my dear?"

"Not in the least," her dream-self replied, coughing genteelly.

"Will you have a little more brandy?"

There had been wine of course. Beaune she imagined or Chateaufort du Pape. Expensive wines from France followed by brandy and cigars. Or was it only the men who had brandy and cigars after the women were relegated to the kitchen to do the dishes. No not the kitchen of course, there would be servants for that.

"I have had ample sufficiency, thank you," the dream Kate replied modestly.

"Not a bad drop. Can't say the same about the cigar though. Yes that will be all, James."

The butler? There had to be a butler didn't there? An obsequious man in a dinner suit hovering around and caring for their every whim. But now that a moment of intimacy had arrived he would have to be dismissed. The butler disappeared into the clouds of forgetfulness.

"Nothing like a decent Havana," continued Thomas in the daydream. "Still Fidel put a stop to that didn't he?"

Should she say that it was the paranoia that inflicted American political thought that had put a stop to it? Hardly. But if he had been brought up in wealth he would surely be right-wing and would have to be converted to liberal thought. She changed the subject.

"I thought..." she began

"What?"

"I thought we might, become friends."

Friends, she thought, just friends. Anything closer might not be appropriate.

"Friends? My dear girl, of course we are friends. Here, as a token of our friendship."

There was a box on the sideboard. He opened it, took a white mink jacket and placed it about her shoulders.

"Oh, mink, how beautiful..."

It was just a dream so she could accept it.

“A mere trifle, and this, it’s for you.”

He took a black jewel case from his pocket and gave it to her. She opened it. There were diamond ear-rings. She picked one out and put it to her ear lobe,

“Diamonds.” They glistened with a diffuse glow, as though photographed by a camera out of focus. “And for all these, what do you want?”

“I want to be a father to you. I want your friendship.”

“Just my friendship?”

“I want to calm away life’s troubles. I have no desire for anything else.”

“Let me...”

“What?”

“My dear girl let me hold your hand.”

“Yes, hold my hand.”

But the tuxedo clad Thomas walked away from her into the fragile mists of obscurity.

What romantic twaddle, she thought. He can’t be wealthy, those suits of his look fine but they must have originally come from St Vincent de Paul. Was he the black sheep of the family? Surely they could find a place for him on the board. There was no need for him to run that seedy bookshop.

Was she ready? As well as can be. She kissed Michelangelo goodbye and departed to enjoy the wine.

3

In Thomas’s modest cottage all was ready. He had made a potato salad and a wine sauce which was warm on the stove. It would only take a minute to pop the asparagus into the sauce and fry the steak. He’d decided to dress informally. Dark trousers and a t-shirt with the message: “There’s one thing worse than burning books and that’s not reading them.” A bit of a pompous statement perhaps but in keeping with his commitment to literature.

The wine was the best medium white Chateau du Plonk, a bit of a far cry from German Leibfraumilch unfortunately.

But what of his guest Kate? Was she a child, or was she a woman? Was she the lover that he had always wanted, that he had always sought. Was she the pure vision of hallowed loveliness that crept into his lonely dreams? Or was she like the one that he had left behind over the seas, over the storm-tossed waves? The one who was as dead as the light in the cold cathedral of space between the mind and the moon. Could Kate and he become lovers? Or were they destined to remain only friends? Or would they just dream?

And as he sat by the table awaiting the arrival a vision of Kate came to him in his daydream. She was wearing a Grecian robe and had a wreath of laurel in her hair.

“I can give you warmth, the warmth of my smile, the warmth of my being,” said this imagined figment.

And Thomas wondered to himself in his dream whether he would ever see it, whether he would ever meet his ideal of love. This pure image of holy light and affection, that often entered into his dreams of hope, replied to his thought:

“I am your ideal of love. I am the girl with the tender smile and the bright mind. Someone to engage your intellect and your heart.”

Would she come to him? Would she come and give him that warmth and companionship that he so much desired? Would she become involved in an intellectual and loving union? Would they live forever in the warmth of each others arms?

But she changed like the Proteus and the malleable stuff of imagination turned the vision into that of a little girl asking for her father.

“Shall I give you a big hug, Daddy?”

No, he could not have any hugs now, not from a daughter, not the one that he abandoned over the waves, over the storm-tossed, over the billows of sleep. He could have no hugs now. He could have no one to love him. He did not deserve that because the sin did not warrant affection.

“But I can love you, like a daughter,” she continued.

Like a daughter? He could not have a daughter. He was

not worthy of a daughter.

“Like a daughter. Like a friend. Like a student of knowledge. Like a lover,” said this girl in his dream.

Like a lover? He could not have a lover. He was not of such stuff as lovers are made. He was an old and shop-worn scholar gone to seed, that was all.

“Yes, like a lover,” insisted the dream child who had now become a woman.

Would she want to hold him in her arms? He could not believe that she would.

But “yes,” she said “yes”

Would she hold him in her arms forever?

“Yes, forever,” she replied.

He enfolded her in his arms. A tender embrace. There was music and romance. All creatures of the world were silent in their contemplation of this celestial union. Scented petals fell from the trees in a redolent shower.

Then the real world appeared. He came into the cold light of the realm of blocks and stones while she departed to the insubstantial world of dreams.

He was a silly old duffer. His thoughts were a rearrangement of Mills and Boon reality. He made gorgeous sand castles in his fantasies and, when he opened his eyes, the sea came and they dissolved into the waves.

4

When Kate arrived at the cottage and was ushered inside she immediately noticed that the interior did not have the opulence she had half expected. Instead of lavish wealth it was populated with well-worn second-hand accoutrements. Although the furniture was old, it was of high quality and seemed to have been chosen with immaculate care. It seemed to belong to a bygone age. Even the books were well used and, one imagined, written on vellum. High class poverty, she thought. And he didn't even wear a dinner suit, just that outlandish t-shirt. She felt uncomfortable. Had she dressed up for nothing?

Thomas had been an experienced man of affairs in his youth and thought to himself that here was a young lady who felt something for him. She had dressed herself with a care and attention that must imply that she had some affection for him. But what an outlandish getup. Still he supposed that young people were inclined to wear such clothes on special occasions. He was out of touch with modern sartorial conventions. He should put his feelings aside. After all what he wanted was merely friendship. He was sure that all he wanted was friendship.

“I was about to come down to the street,” he said.

“Oh?”

“To escort you. The alley is a little dark. Dogs lurk sometimes.”

“I come here often – to the theatre.”

“Stagecraft? An actress as well as a director of school plays?”

She did not know what to say. It was old Stickleback who had directed the play. And her own acting was hardly up to the standard set by Vanessa Redgrave.

“Do you act?” she asked in desperation.

“In the old days I did a spot of Shakespeare.”

In spite of the simplicity of the ingredients the meal was delicious. It was a pity that the quality of the wine was not up to standard. She should have told him she preferred red. Even a rough red was preferable to maiden’s water. The conversation was desultory. Still in that exploratory stage of a friendship. She had to pretend she knew something about Hamlet and King Lear. She had glossed over Shakespeare at University because of what she considered to be his anti-feminist and warmongering viewpoints. At the end they sat back in easy chairs with glasses of wine.

“Now we should have cigars and chocolates,” she said, not knowing how to continue the conversation.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think of cigars, and chocolates.”

“You’re not wearing a dinner suit either.” She didn’t know why that came out. Why did she say such a foolish thing?

“Dinner suit? Why should I wear a dinner suit?”

“You seem like the type of person who would wear a din-

ner suit.” She was floundering. Why did she bring up this subject? It was her daydream coming back to life and turning into a nightmare. Change the subject, change the subject. But he wouldn’t do it.

“I used to wear dinner suits in the old days, when I was in England. On one occasion I made an amusing mistake. “

“Oh? Did you?” What else could she say?

“I had a friend in a band in a Chelsea restaurant. I wanted to see him play so I borrowed a white tuxedo. Well it didn’t fit for a start and I wasn’t told that you don’t wear white in winter. Then this inebriated woman took me for one of the waiters. They all wear white you know. ‘I’ll hava shame agen shanks waida.’ Too much Champagne. She even called the manager when I wouldn’t serve her. Why do you expect me to don formal attire?”

She had certainly put her foot in it now. Nothing to do but tough it through.

“I’ve heard of the Youngs and the Young-Felos. All terribly upper class for the classless antipodes aren’t they? I suppose you’re not related.”

“Oh but I am related. My mother was a Young before she married.”

“Have I said something wrong?” She was sure that there was some sort of manure clinging to her shoe, or was it egg on her face?.

“Not at all.”

There was nothing for it but to persist.

“Well, the Youngs in particular have a reputation, I mean you’re rich and social, and you have Members of Parliament.”

“True, my blue-stockings sister was once the Member of Parliament for Karori, and yes, the Youngs are rich and social, the Young-Felos are comfortable, and social, but you don’t hear much about the Felos.”

“No you don’t, I never heard of them.”

“The Felos are left-wing radicals and Aytalian fishermen from Island Bay, at least, most of them are. My father was one of them until he changed his name to Young-Felo.”

“So your father is a left-wing radical?”

“Until he bought a fish and chip shop and became a capi-

talist.”

“There's money in fish and chips.”

“There certainly is. Then he sold the shop and bought a restaurant. A very high class restaurant too. And he fell in love with one of his high class customers. Caviar and chips.”

“And so you reverted to type did you?”

“Perhaps.” He wished to put aside this line of conversation. He had drifted apart from his parents now hadn't he? He had disappointed them by marrying the plebeian woman; the fishwife who cries out fish-oh! What-ho! Godot! “Brandy and cigars for the Youngs, Ruffino Chianti for the Felos. Would you care for a drop more wine?”

“I'm fine thank you.” She was having some trouble with it. She would have to teach him something concerning the nature of drinkable wines. Strange that he should be so ignorant. At least now the subject could change. “Where did you read Carlyle?”

He paused before answering. This past life was best forgotten.

“Oxford.” he said at last.

“And you think he's dry and dusty don't you?”

“I thought I told you the opposite.”

“You made certain notes on a flyleaf of a book you gave me.”

“Oh well, he got people thinking. That's a good thing.”

“Oxford? Is that where you met your wife?”

“What makes you think I ever had a wife?”

“I thought you might have had one. I can tell if a person's been married. I imagine you'd marry someone intelligent and beautiful. And I imagine you've had several attractive mistresses.”

“Mistresses? Just the odd dusty librarian. Just the odd undertaker's wife.” He was hardly telling the truth. He'd had several beautiful companions before his marriage had put a stop to that.

“Did she die?”

“Who?”

“Your wife.”

“My wife? Die? That's a romantic notion. I had a wife, but we parted. How is your wine?”

“Fine. And there were children?”

“Yes. A child.”

“Beautiful?”

“Of course she was. Your children are always beautiful. You can't forget your own children can you, not in your hearts. Your wives and your husbands can go, but never your children.”

“I don't know. I never had any.”

“About your age now.”

She looked at him, the hair starting to grow grey at the edges, the lines of care on his face. If he'd read English Lit. at Oxford there must be some substance to his mind.

“I was born in Oxford,” she said.

“I thought I detected the trace of an accent.”

“We weren't University. We were Town.”

“Oh? Town.”

“My mother was a barmaid.”

“A barmaid?” Good God, he thought, was this his daughter sitting there before him?

“And my father was an itinerant fisherman, from France.”

“I didn't know that fishermen were itinerant,” he said with relief. He could hardly be described as an itinerant fisherman. An image came into his mind of a travelling salesman with a suitcase full of cod, ogling him with their dead eyes.

“He left mother when I was two years old.”

“Really? That young?”

“Over the years I received five letters from him, at Christmas, each one from a different town in Europe and each one smelling of a different species of fish.”

Why was she telling him all this? Was it because of his air of kindly interest that she could not help herself?

“And your mother was a barmaid?”

“Is there something wrong with that?”

“No. Not as such.”

His past life came before him and that regretful night in the bar where he met Dot and afterwards when he took her to a musty room where they satisfied their lust. The barfly that he

married, buzzing with the men while he sat on the student's stool.
“Wordsworth was a poet full of worthy words,” she said at last.

“What?”

“You seemed to be in a brown study.”

“I don't even possess a study now-a-days. In fact no, I do have a brown study of a dusky maharajah, done in sepia tints... Will you take a drop more wine?”

“No thank you.” She looked at the grandfather clock standing in the corner of the room. “Oh goodness, is that the time.”

“Oh yes, *tempis fugit*. The last bus leaves in five minutes.”

“I must rush.” She picked up her purse and shawl. “It's been a lovely evening; I didn't realize the time flew by so fast.”

“I've enjoyed it, very much.”

“So did I.”

“Shall I, see you again?”

“Yes, if you wish.”

“I do.”

“Good.” On an impulse she gave him a quick peck on the cheek. “Goodnight.” She went before he had time to offer to escort her to the street.

He went to the window and watched her walk down the dark, rutted lane. “Goodnight my dear.” Yes, it was a good night. They met and talked for the first time. The world had changed. Until now his conception of the affair had been coloured by unreal fantasies but the dreams could dissolve like cloud-castles in the air and allow common reality to take over. She had given him a kiss. Was it a kiss of friendship, or was it a kiss of love?

When Kate returned home, Michelangelo jumped up on her lap and started purring. He could see she was happy. It had certainly been an interesting evening. What a foolish notion she had had before she went that he might be rich and prosperous because of his name. She was just so full of sentimental and unreal imaginings. So he had turned out to be an ordinary pauper like all of her other friends. It was just as well because she would never get on with a world-wealthy person. Why did people think that it was necessary to cling to possessions? She could not associate with those who did not believe that perhaps there might be something higher than mere dross. People who valued money were not good company. To be rich was not her way of life, not something she sought.

She thought again of the daydream she had before setting out. Didn't she have strange ideas at times? Like a foolish child carried away by immature dreams of love and romance. Now the feeling was entirely different. They had finally met for the first time in the real world. Their previous meetings were casual and indifferent. Even so when she first walked into his shop she recognised somehow that there was a contact in a world of some other reality. It was something she could not explain in rational terms. It was somehow that their soul-selves had become intertwined, a vague and insubstantial recognition of a spiritual bond which transcended time and space. But what about worldly love? Did that enter into the equation?

Now it was time to lay herself down on her virtuous bed. For a time she slept peacefully but as morning approached, storms with tempestuous waves invaded her dreams. And from the cloud wrack blown by the wind above the waves, a voice called out.

“Ruth. Can you hear me?”

It was her father, Dominic.

“Where are you, father?” she cried in her dream.

“I'm sailing the sea my, dear. Pulling in the nets, a harvest

of little fishes.”

“Will you come to me?”

“Yes, I shall come soon, scudding over the billows.” She could see him in her dream, standing on the deck of his craft as it rode through a tide of foam. “Soon I shall hold you in my arms.”

“Come to me soon,” she cried.

“Do not forget me.” His voice faded as the seething arms of the ocean caught him and carried him beneath the water.

She awoke. Was it morning? What a strange dream to wake to. She went to the window and opened the curtains. My God the sun was bright. It was Saturday morning and she had all those things to do. Her washing. She had planned to bake a cake. And she had to take those brats to netball in the afternoon. She decided to go back to bed.

What did she dream of? Her father sailing over the waves. It was a sad thing to dream about. She hadn't heard from him since childhood. She remembered sitting in her lonely room and weeping tears of bitter remorse when her mother told her he had abandoned them. How could a father leave his child without a goodbye? Why would she dream that he would come to see her? He was just a ship that stopped at a port of call and deserted the child he left behind. Still she knew how fickle her mother was. All vessels were likely to sail into that wide bay. Kate could have been any man's daughter. Why did her father ever bother to give her his name? Why did he write five letters to someone who was too young to ever remember him when he left? The least he could have done is take on his parental responsibilities - both him and her mother. He deserved to lie on the sea-floor with marine centipedes crawling into the caves which once held his blighted eyes.

She had to cast away these morbid thoughts. Last night had been pleasant. She could smell the fragrant smoke of Havana cigars. It made her cough. Havana cigars? No, she imagined that. But she did not imagine Mr Thomas Young-Felo. Perhaps that was where her future lay.

A week later Thomas invited Kate to accompany him to a concert by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in the Michael Fowler Centre. The conductor flapped his wings like a penguin. Of course you have to do something dramatic if you conduct Tchaikovsky

“Do you admire Tchaikovsky, Thomas?” asked Kate at the interval.

“A better composer than I’ll ever be.”

“But do you admire him, Thomas?”

“I admire his music. I don’t admire his flamboyance or lack of subtlety.”

At the end of the evening Thomas explained to himself that it was merely a friendship, nothing more. Even so he had a strong desire to kiss her goodnight. In the end reason prevailed so they shook hands before they parted. That night Kate had vivid dreams.

The following Monday morning Thomas stopped in at Solly’s shop on his way to work. Solly looked very morose.

“What is the matter with you today?” enquired Thomas.

“Ai, ai, ai, my daughter is to be married. The household is in chaos.”

“I thought that would be a happy occasion.”

“But we have tailors and dressmakers and caterers and florists and aunts and uncles, and I have to make decisions on this and that. I never get a moment’s peace. And where is the money to come from? I am only a poor second hand dealer with hardly two pennies to rub together.”

Thomas doubted that. Solly had many irons in the fire apart from his business. Some of his dealings were, if not illegal, at least close to the wind.

“You are lucky you have no daughters to get married. That is all I can say,” continued Solly.

Thomas thought of his own daughter but said nothing. She would be of a marriageable age now. Perhaps she was even

married with children. Would she be happy? Would she have made a bad marriage to compensate for not having a father? He forced the thoughts from his mind.

“Do you still have the gold plated cufflinks?” he asked.

Solly laid them on the counter. “I tell everyone that comes but no-one shows interest.”

“I’ll give you a five dollar deposit. Repay me if you sell them.”

Solly re-wrapped them in their tissue paper and put them away. “Your financial situation has improved, eh?”

“I’ve been promoting Mills and Boon. It’s remarkable what trash people will read.”

“You should not say things like that. The Mills and Boon people will surely sue you for defaming their character.”

“Only trash for someone who admires Shakespeare. I am sure they are excellent for a large number of readers.”

“Ah yes, my wife and my daughter they read it all the time. My wife, she wishes for a knight in bright armour. She finds that in the book so she is happy enough to have me in the house. She knows I am better for her than a knight who would not be attracted to a plump woman of her age.”

“Do you have something that might suit a young lady,” asked Thomas, thinking that he might buy something for Kate.

“Ah we have a good selection; bangles, necklaces and ear-rings for gifts.” Solly indicated a tray in the display-case. “You have a young lady friend, I believe. The rich widow Shultz tell she me she noticed you at a concert.”

“Just a friend.”

“I tell the widow Schultz that she is your daughter.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Widow Shultz is a better wife for you than a young girl. How would you support one on your income?”

“She is just a friend, Solly. I do not wish to marry her, or to have an affair.”

Thomas looked over the trinkets. There was nothing there that caught his eye. Perhaps it was too presumptuous of him to offer gifts at this stage in their friendship. He walked along Cuba Street towards his shop. This morning there was jauntiness in his

step and a feeling of well-being such as he had not experienced for some time.

7

The following Saturday Kate and Thomas attended a presentation of seven one-act plays at Stagecraft Theatre which was at the end of the lane in which Thomas lived. Stagecraft was a small amateur studio theatre with only fifty seats. Once the building had been owned by the wealthy Tonks family and had been an elegant and ornate home for family and servants. But now the theatre had been sawn plain for the practicality of its use leaving only remnants of that grandeur. How are the mighty fallen.

There was a marvellous feeling of intimacy and fine spirit about the place. All the plays had been written by local authors who worked in the theatre. Kate knew many of them as she had acted in a play by one of the authors herself. They chatted to the actors and the authors in the Green Room at the end of the evening. Everyone was very excited to see these strange and rare plays actually presented on stage, even if they had to do it themselves.

Afterwards they went to Thomas's cottage for supper. Kate put her hand on his arm. She could see that this embarrassed him but she made no attempt to remove it.

"It wasn't a very romantic evening was it?" she said eventually.

"I don't think it was intended to be romantic," he replied. "Not the sort of plays you would see in a professional theatre. Only amateurs can afford to take a risk nowadays. Not everything that is good is necessarily full of passion."

"But you are a very passionate person, Mr Young-Felo."

"Oh hardly. A dry as dust old bookworm I would think."

Kate realised that she was the one more likely to take the initiative in any affair but it was not yet time. When she was about to go she sensed that he wanted to kiss her goodnight but

could not take that step. She did not oblige. It had been an interesting evening but it was an evening of another kind, a romantic evening, that she wished for. She hadn't realised until then how attractive an older man could be.

That night she had had dreams in violent Technicolour.

The following day she decided to do something about her small garden. She noticed that daffodil spikes were starting to break through. They come even in the dead of winter, she thought, realising that spring was but a month away. Michelangelo scratched away at the earth as she weeded. Soon he would be Tom-cattling around again. Maybe she should get him fixed. No, she could not do that, he would lose his personality. Why should one want to alter him? Everyone wanted to meddle with nature but surely God alone held the copyright.

On Monday at school it was necessary to tidy away after the play.

"It was very successful," said Stickleback as she placed the costumes on coat hangers ready for storage in the wardrobe. "We even made a modest profit, which will help the school funds no doubt."

She was positively glowing with bonhomie this morning, something which was quite unusual for her on a Monday.

"I wondered if I could keep *The Book*," said Kate.

"Did you claim for it?"

"No. It only cost two dollars."

"Then I don't see why not. We could have used a block of wood you know and changed the script slightly." Miss Stickney looked knowingly at Kate over her glasses. "Yes I do recall you suggested that. Is it an interesting book?"

"Quite boring really."

"Sentimental value I see." She gave one of her rare chuckles. What was wrong with the woman this morning? And how did she know that *The Book* had sentimental value? Was it possible to believe that Old Stickleback actually had a sense of humour? She decided to change the subject.

"At least young Jamie MacPherson didn't cause any blood letting on stage."

"No." Miss Stickney looked wistful. "His father congratu-

lated me on the production. I know we've had problems with Jamie's behaviour but it is understandable if you realise that he lost his mother at an early age."

"I didn't know that."

"Mr MacPherson finds it hard being a solo father. We need to treat Jamie with a little more understanding, I think. What he really does need is a good mother."

"I know very little about being a mother."

"If you lost one..." Miss Stickney seemed to be caught off guard in her own thoughts. Surely she never could have given birth. It seemed hardly possible. "Mr MacPherson told me that he believes Jamie has a talent at English. I wonder if you would have a close look at his essay." She came back to more her normal self. "Also I did notice that your markings on the previous set of essays were very negative. What we need is more encouragement for the students. Certainly point out the faults, but always in a positive way."

Has the old battleaxe fallen in love with Jamie's father wondered Kate as she walked back to her classroom. Jamie's essay was certainly very well written. He would have to get an 'A' for that. In fact the whole batch of essays seemed to be markedly better than the previous one although she detected an underlying current of angst. Her comments were positive and encouraging.

8

Thomas sold a rare volume for an excellent price and neglected to put the proceeds in the till. He bought the gold cufflinks from Solly but still could not find a suitable gift for Kate. That Saturday they dined at an expensive restaurant and afterwards attended the cinema. Even though it was a modern movie it was photographed in black and white for dramatic effect. Thomas remembered that when he was a child all movies were in black and white.

“It shows you that the marvels of modern technology are not always relevant,” said Kate.

“Does it matter what colour you paint a picture? Does colour give a story sufficient sensitivity and emotion to make it a work of art?”

“Why does he mouth such rubbish?” Kate asked herself. It was just not good enough. If they were to be friends then something should be said. If they were in love then he should make some statement to draw it out of her. She didn’t know what to think. Mr Young-Felo, you have kept a young girl waiting far too long. Why was he so reserved?

That night she dreamed of her father. In her dream she saw him with long dark hair, bright eyes and gold rings through his ears. He held her in his strong brown arms and carried her through the crashing breakers.

The following Friday night Thomas took her a lecture at the university. Only too late did he realise that the delivery was quite academically esoteric and would probably be very boring.

“Pederasty in Greek Theatre,” she said afterwards, satirising the title of the lecture. “Why did you want to take me to something like that?”

“I actually happen to admire Greek Theatre. I thought it would be of interest.”

“What a boring old fart.”

“Yes. He did not appear to one of our more enlightened graduates.”

“Wasn't he the Quasimodo of the doddering academic fraternity? If you are going to take me out, Mr Thomas Young-Felo, then please take me to something frivolous and light-hearted, like *The Damnation of Christ*, or something pure, like *The Lesbian Vampire Women of Sodom*.”

“I was told he was a very sound man in his field.”

“Oh, I'm very sure. If ‘sound’ means you regurgitate facts from a textbook without any real understanding of the subject.”

“Not a thing I expected.”

They were partaking of coffee and cheesecake in the university cafeteria which had remained open for the late night theatre crowd. There was a buzz of conversation. It had been the

opening night in the Memorial Theatre of a play by the well-known and very popular New Zealand playwright, Roger Hall. Thomas did not admire his work. After all, the man had a devoted wife, beautiful children, a happy life and no known mental defects. Hardly conducive to great literature. Kate was wistfully stirring sugar into her coffee thinking about Thomas, how he looked so sad and vulnerable, how there must have been something in his life that kept him so insulated, so difficult to make contact with.

“We never talked about our past, have we?” she said.

“Do we want to?”

“You were married once. You never talked about it.”

“No. I was never married.”

“You once told me you were, Mister Young-Felo.”

“It wasn’t a marriage.”

“But you were divorced?”

Thomas did not reply. He did not wish to discuss the matter. Papers for divorce had come from overseas to his solicitor. He’d signed them and paid the legal costs. He had also sent money. He’d thought that there would be continual demands for more but they never came. There had been a cloud over his life for a couple of years but when he emerged to some degree, he had written a letter which had been returned ‘gone no address’. It was then that his ship of sorrow had been cast off to float on the sea of remorse.

“You were divorced,” repeated Kate without the question in her voice.

“If you say so.”

“And you had children?”

“No. I never had any children.”

Not a child that was alive. Just a drowned daughter, Ruth. Deep-drowned she was, tossed by the storm beneath the waves. Deep-drowned in seabed’s caves. Floating dead in the sea of neglect. His daughter Ruth who was lost and gone forever.

Kate realised then that it must be some worm from the past that stood between them. Had he abandoned a child in the same way that her father had abandoned her? There was nothing she could do or say at this point in time to resolve the matter.

“Are you going to take me home then?”

“Yes, if you wish.”

“I hope there is something equally exciting next week.”

“Is there something the matter?”

“Not really”

But there was something wrong. Their life together had become a series of Platonic dates at satisfactorily high-brow entertainments followed by long intellectual discussions. There had to become a time when that was no longer sufficient. Thomas did not wish to discuss the issue of whether there should be another dimension to their relationship. He kept telling himself that she was just a friend, an intellectual companion. What else could there be?

“There’s an event on tomorrow. Something that might interest you,” he said.

“Oh, what is that?”

“It’s the annual blessing of the fishing boats, at Island Bay.”

“Blessing of the boats? That does sound extremely interesting.”

“It’s not important. Just a traditional ritual I like to attend.”

“I’ll come. Nothing could be worse than lectures on pederasty. But now, you can take me home.”

Thomas escorted her to her home. There were many steps down the hill from the University to the Terrace Gardens. He held her hand so she might not slip in the dark. When they arrived at her house he felt he would like to hold it forever, however she was still grumpy and would not invite him in for coffee. As he walked up Cuba Street the girls on the corner called out to him.

“You want some business, Literature-man?”

“Not tonight,” he replied. “I’m in love.”

One of the girls came up to him.

“Love, deary? That’s a great anachronism.”

“What you say is very true, even if you don’t understand what it means.”

“We haven’t got love here,” said another of the girls. “Not

good for business.”

He spent the night on his virtuous couch and dreamed of mermaids.

9

The suburb of Island Bay was so called because it was a small bay with had an island in the middle of it. Unlike much of Wellington, which surrounds the inner harbour, this bay was open to the sea. The island provided shelter for the fishing boats which rocked gently at their mooring buoys between it and the shore. There was a large population of Italian descent in Island Bay and it was they who manned the boats. Thomas had grown up in the area, being of Italian descent himself. There was a sandy beach, a pleasant place for a stroll. You could smell the salt air. Kate had a big straw hat with a red ribbon. She had selected it especially to tell him that it was time for summer. It was one of those rare fine winter days with hardly a breath of wind.

“An ice cream would be nice,” she said in order to enhance the summer image.

“At this time of year?”

“Well don’t worry about it,” she said truculently. They walked up steps to the street and leant back against the sea wall. “Where did you say it was that your parents once lived?”

“Over there, in Reef Street.” He pointed across the park. It was a short street with houses only on the side facing the sea. Suburban houses, such as would be owned by fishermen and their wives.

“It would be nice to meet them.”

“Who?”

“Your parents.”

“Why?”

“Why not?”

Thomas did not wish to discuss his parents. He had let them down so many years ago and had little contact with them

nowadays. He changed the subject back to the ice cream when he saw the Minerva cart travel by.

“There’s the Minerva Ice Cream Kart. I could get you that ice cream.”

“It never stops here.”

How did she know that he wondered? It certainly did not stop, it just trundled on past.

“No. I could go to the store later.”

“Don’t worry.” She walked back down onto the beach. He followed her. “What about visiting your parents?” she asked, returning to the subject he wished to avoid.

“Well, nothing has been decided, has it?”

“No. Nothing has been decided.” Kate bent down and picked up a shell. “Just a pipi shell.” She threw it down.

“I’ve never found any unusual shells on this beach.”

“Haven’t you?”

“No. Pieces of driftwood sometimes.”

“It’s sheltered. Storms don’t wash things up.”

“No.”

“When are we going to see the blessings then?”

“It’s tomorrow. I made a mistake.”

“You made a mistake?”

“Well it’s on Sunday. We went out on Friday this week. We usually go out on Saturday. I just got the day wrong.”

“That is the first sign of geriatric senility.”

“Perhaps. Will you come tomorrow then?”

“No.”

“No?”

“No. I’m not interested in your silly old boats. Matter of fact I’m bored. I’ve been going out with you for months now and all you ever do is take me to academic lectures on pederasty.”

“Pedantry. And less than a month.”

“Don’t be pedantic.”

“What do you want then?”

“I want a partridge in a pear tree, Mr Young-Felo, that’s what I want.”

That was the problem with the younger generation, thought Thomas. They always wanted things to happen in such a

rush. Still he had probably been the same when he was young. Hadn't he rushed into a marriage? And all the affairs he'd had, he never waited a whole month before starting something. But then the women had just fallen into his lap like ripe apples from the branch. But with Kate it was different. Something that he had never had before. A union that would last forever or never, never, never happen at all. Here she was annoyed with him for not saying what had to be said. If he kept his silence she would walk away and never return. He could not let that happen. He had to ask the question.

"Will you marry me?"

"Marry you?" She burst into gales of laughter. How could she be so cruel and laugh at him like that? "You should get down on your knees."

"Don't be frivolous. I'm being perfectly serious." He was very annoyed. He had opened his soul and been treated with levity.

"I'm sorry. You make it sound so ridiculous."

"Well, if you think I'm ridiculous then you're not the person I damn well thought you were."

He stalked off in the direction of the rocks at the end of the beach. She followed and took his arm. He stopped, remained looking out to sea.

"Thomas."

"What?"

"Don't run away from me" He turned and looked at her. She searched his eyes. "Why are you always so stuffy?"

"It was a perfectly serious proposal."

She took his hands. "I know. It just took me by surprise. Did people of your generation always marry a girl before they went to bed with her?"

"No. We got them pregnant and then we married them. You might think I'm stuffy. I acted foolishly once before and I'm not prepared to do the same again."

"Well, I don't care, Thomas; I'm never going to ever get married. Marriage is not in my make up. You will just have to make me your mistress."

"That's not a marriage."

“I didn't say it was marriage, it's requiring our mutual lustful desires, and if you don't want it then leave it.”

Surely there was more to it than merely requiring lustful desires. He disengaged his hands. “But I'm not ready...”

“Then you never will be.” She turned her back and walked off.

But he couldn't lose her, not like this. She will go and never return. He had to take the step she suggested. He caught up with her.

“Miss de Bris?”

“Yes?”

“Will you become my mistress then?”

“Yes. If you want me to.”

He held her in his arms, kissed her passionately for the first time.

So at last the candles were lit, the wine was poured and the fire burned brightly. The ritual was performed. That night they toasted each other.

“Red wine tonight,” said Kate.

“To warm the heart.”

“I'll drink to that.”

They drank. Thomas wasn't used to red wine. He coughed and spluttered. “I shouldn't drink red.”

“You've spilt it. Here let me take your jacket.”

She helped him remove his jacket and tie. Put her arms around his waist.

“Why, there's a wench!” said Thomas “Come on, and kiss me, Kate.”

They kissed. It was a slow, lingering kiss, where their lips touched in passion for the first time, where the experiences both had had in passion in the past were revealed to each other, where the secrets of their past love affairs were revealed. It was the touch of sugar on the tongue. She was his dear Kate, his sweet Kate.

It was late.

“Come, Kate, kiss me Kate, we will to bed.”

They made love in the aromatic night, clinging in the sensations of the world, seeking the body touch, ever attached to the pleasures of the world, blind to the true reality, ever seeking fragile enjoyments of the objects of the senses. Then they passed into in slumber and saw in their dream a reality that they did not understand in the world of illusion.

“Are we lovers?” asked Kate in the dream.

“We touch,” replied Thomas.

“Touch?”

“Yes, my fingers touch your skin. The sensitive tips of my fingers touch the soft velvet of your cheek.”

“Soft?”

“Yes.”

“Velvet?”

“My toes touch your ankle when we lie in bed. My fingers touch the sensitive spot just beside the shoulder blade,” murmured Thomas.

“The moths crawl over.”

“It's a sweet touch of sugar on the tongue. The sweet taste of your lips when you have eaten fruit. I touch. I want,” he said in the dream always desiring, always demanding the pleasure of sensation.

“Want?”

“Need. Crave. Desire. To touch.”

“Are we lovers?” she asked again.

“What?”

“I asked you.”

“What?”

“Are we lovers?” she asked again and again.

“We touch,” was all he could say.

“Are we lovers?”

“I touch your skin with my skin.”

“If we touch the skin does that make us lovers? Should we not touch...”

“What?”

“Something, deeper.”

“I lick the inside of your ear with the soft tip of my tongue. I touch the sensitive tip of your earlobe,” said Thomas in his sensuous dream.

“The skin?”

“Yes.”

“You touch the skin?”

“Yes, ” he said ever seeking sensation, ever seeking to experience the senses of the world, ever seeking to give substance to the world of illusion.

“Is that all,” she asked in her dream of despair.

“What?”

“That you touch?”

“What?”

“That you touch?” she asked again and again.

“What?”

“Nothing deeper?” she asked knowing there should be more than just touch.

“Deeper?”

“Are we lovers?”

“We touch,” he said denying their soul-self twining, inured in the tangle of the flesh.

“What?”

“Fingers.”

“What?”

“Toes.”

“What?”

“The form of bodies, the outward shape.”

“The skin?”

“Yes.”

“Are we lovers?” she asked yet again.

“We touch.”

“What do we touch?”

“My finger touches your skin.”

“Are we lovers?”

“We touch.”

“Under the skin?”

“What?”
“Do we touch under the skin?”
“What?” he said in his ignorance.
“Under the skin?”
“We touch,” was all he had to say, again and again.
“Touch?”
“I touch your skin with my fingers.”
“But under the skin, is there anything under the skin?”
“We touch.”
“Are we lovers?”
“We touch,” was all he could say.
“Yes.”
“We always touch.”
“Are we lovers?”
“We touch.”
“Yes. We touch.”

II

Kate awoke in the cold morning. Thomas was not beside her. She was shipwrecked among the soiled and crumpled sheets. It had been a night of passion without the touch of a lover. It was time to get out of there. She'd been in this situation before, so many times. What did it mean? It meant she gave her body, the sweet temple of her soul, for a night of sweaty lust and did not see the smile of God in return. Nothing was satisfactory. She had been led astray by her dreams.

Thomas entered in his dressing gown. He did not come close or offer any word of endearment.

“There's a fresh towel. In the bathroom.”

“Thank you.” She wrapped the sheet around her. “I'll get dressed.”

She picked up her clothes and went to the bathroom. Thomas looked from the window. There was a bright sunrise. The

quote from Hamlet came back to his mind. *Russet mantle clad...* It was all wrong somehow. She came to his bed as a stranger. They had their cohabitation. They sweated in the sheets in a moment of fumbling pleasure. For him it was a half-forgotten experience, that was all it was. He couldn't find her heart, he didn't know how. That was the clay of their relationship, barren earth, dried out, desiccated, turned to dust. He was not worthy of that bright spirit. All he had to offer was a cold heart.

He sat there musing by the window. Eventually Kate returned, dressed and scrubbed.

"Thank you, for the toilette." She did not know what else to say.

"*Russet mantle clad...*" The sunrise was fading.

"What did you say?"

"Whenever I see the sunrise I think of The Bard."

"You do?"

"There's a phrase in the opening scene of Hamlet that comes to mind:

*But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.*

A rather pretty phrase to end a night of ghostly apparitions don't you think?"

"A matter of contrast. I think I should go home soon."

"Will you stay for breakfast?" he asked

"No."

"A cup of tea?"

"No."

He looked at the sky turning to grey. "The sun will be up soon."

Then there will be a cloud over it, she thought to herself. We shouldn't live in a country where clouds cover the sun. "It's covered by clouds," she said.

"What's the matter?" But he knew what the matter was. There was no need to ask.

"Nothing."

"I wanted to..."

"What?"

He had no answer to her question, nothing to say, nothing

to ask, nothing to discuss. All there was was silence.

“I should make a cup of tea.”

“We've had our time...”

“Must you go, now?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it's good-bye then.”

“Yes.”

She touched his cheek, kissed him lightly, picked up her purse and went. He stood alone in the middle of the room looking after her. They would never meet again. Never talk. Never touch.

It was a cold morning, yes, as cold as a heart of stone.

Part 3

Friends

1

So, fellow inhabitants in this world of illusion, it is time to pick up the thread again. Did you ever hear of the Goddess Minerva? She was the Roman version of the Greek goddess, bright-eyed Athena, the patron of Athens. She was a bit of a tough old girl; she carried a shield and a lance and wore the helm of war. Very much like Britannia of later years.

Why do I talk about Minerva?

Because of MICK of course. You don't know what MICK is do you? An acronym for the 'Minerva Ice Cream Kart'. You should taste the ice cream they sell. They say it is made in heaven. Thomas and Kate were walking along the beach at Island Bay when it came past.

"An ice cream would be nice," said Kate in order to enhance the summer image.

"At this time of year?"

"Well, don't worry about it," she said truculently. They walked up steps to the street and leant back against the sea wall. "Where did you say it was that your parents once lived?"

"Over there, in Reef Street." He pointed across the park. It was a short street with houses only on the side facing the sea.

"It would be nice to meet them."

"Who?"

"Your parents."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

Thomas did not wish to discuss his parents. He had let them down so many years ago and had little contact with them nowadays. He changed the subject back to the ice cream when he saw the Minerva cart travel by.

"There's the Minerva Ice Cream Kart."

"It never stops here."

"But you are wrong, it has, I'll get you one."

Indeed in this universe the MICK did actually come to a slow stop close by. Kate walked back down to the beach. It was a strange vehicle, this ice cream kart. A sort of tricycle thing with a

van at the back and very archaic lettering. There was an eccentric woman in it, dressed like a gypsy with large gold ear-rings and bangles on her wrists.

“Do you have an ice cream?” asked Thomas.

“O dear, O dear, I’m right out I’m afraid. I was just on my way home to replenish supplies. You know it’s quite a warm day for winter. The demand has been unexpected. Now it appears that the fates have decreed that I get a puncture.”

Indeed, when they inspected the front wheel the tyre was quite flat. Fortunately there was a spare and appropriate tools. Thomas had owned a car in the distant past and remembered how to change tyres, so he helped her with it.

“What’s your name?” she asked when they had finished.

“Thomas”

“Ah, a young fellow.” Thomas smiled at the accidental pun on his surname. Just a strange coincidence that she should hit on it, he imagined. “My name’s Clotho. My two sisters didn’t want to come.”

Thomas couldn’t understand that. He merely said: “Pleased to meet you.”

She reached into the back of the van and produced two red roses in bud.

“I brought these for you,” she said. She wrapped one carefully in tissue paper. “That is for you. Put it in your pocket. Be careful with it now. The other rose is for your friend on the beach. If you take the right road then one day they both shall bloom.”

She departed. The whole incident seemed unreal, as though it were a chapter in a dream. He went down to the beach, drew Kate’s name in the sand and left the small bud there. He had been thinking that he might ask Kate to marry him but seeing the roses not as yet in bloom made him realise that something needed to be resolved before that could ever come about. All he could offer her now was friendship. Perhaps one day the buds would open. He sat on a rock nearby. Kate came by and picked up the rose.

“No ice cream?” she asked.

“She had sold out.”

"It's not the season for roses. Where did you get it?"

"The ice cream lady gave it to me. She said she was a goddess."

"A goddess? No wonder she had rosebuds at this time of year."

"She knew."

"One rose. It's a symbol of pure love isn't it?"

"Yes."

She'd had these before. The florists around the world must send out a million every day. And yet it was just a bud. What could that mean? A rose is nature's piece of perfection. But what of her relationship with Thomas, was that any piece of perfection? No it was not. She desired the tangle of flesh, and that has not occurred. But now she did not know if that was what she really wanted. A rose-bud is something different. If it has not bloomed was there any point in that tangle?

"Why did you leave me the bud?"

"I told you it was from the lady in the ice cream kart. She said it was for you, that it would tell me what was in your heart."

"But what can a rose say? Has it lips? Can it speak?"

"A rose by itself, no."

"Well, you should speak. You should tell me what you mean, and how you think."

"I know. We've been courting, is that what you call it?"

"That's what someone might call it."

"Yes. I know I haven't taken any initiatives. It wouldn't be right for me to take it any further."

"Then what is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong. It's just that something is not right. Do I make sense."

"No."

"Then you will have to ask the rose. Can we remain friends?"

"Friends? Yes."

"And go out together, as we have done."

"If you wish."

"Shall we go out tonight then?"

"Tomorrow, the day after. Tonight I have to wash my

hair. Excuse me, there seem to be no blessings of the boats today, I shall have to go home and put my rosebud in water.”

2

One day they met in the tea rooms in the begonia house in the Botanic Gardens. It was a most elegant place with windows everywhere and the feeling of plants, of nature, alive around you. They served the most delicious teas; Twinings, Dilmah, herbal. Thomas ordered Irish Breakfast tea and a large piece of chocolate gateau with a double filling.

“Shall I pour?” he asked when the tea and cake arrived.

“Are you going to eat all that cake?”

“Yes, that was the intention.”

“You’ll get fat.”

“That was the intention. I think I might have cream in my tea.”

“Cream in your tea? How revolting.”

“Well you know how I like sweet things.”

“Hedonist.”

There was actually no cream on the table and Thomas made no attempt to get any. It was a grumpy day. A day when nothing seemed quite right.

“Have you been here before?” he enquired.

“Yes.”

“It’s where I usually bring my rich clients for a business luncheon.”

“Your rich clients?”

“Yes. As far as the Inland Revenue Department is concerned this entertainment is a necessary expense for business purposes.”

“You are very dishonest, Mr Young-Felo.”

“I am very poor, Miss de Bris. How can I afford to be honest?”

“Let me pay the bill.”

“No. I can afford it today. The business has temporarily become solvent.”

“Really? How did that happen?”

“It was all your doing, you sent Alistaire to me with his collection of Marvell Comics.”

“He’s not selling his Marvell Comics!?”

“Yes, he needs the money for a trip to India. He’s organising a group. I must admit that I only took them out of a sense of obligation, but he had some good numbers and they’ve sold rather well. Now I’ve become an expert. I know all about the rare issue number 20 of *Infra Red Man* and the problems with forgeries of issue 13 of *The Black Demons of the Sinister Pit*. It’s a real study.”

“Those aren’t real Marvell Comics.”

“How do you know?”

“I was a collector myself once.”

“You continue to amaze me. How about *The Incredible Hulk* number 184, and, *The X-Men* number 99.”

“That’s better.”

“I was just testing. I even have *Journey Into Mystery* number 83.”

“Really?”

“He didn’t know what it was worth, so I’ll take a commission, if I manage to sell it.”

“Alistaire asked me if I’d like to go.”

“Go? Where?”

“To India. With his party.”

“Whatever for?”

“I don’t know. I might find myself a dusky Maharaja. I’ve no ties here.”

“There’s a Maharaja in the shop round the corner. Six dollars twenty.”

She didn’t understand what he was saying. She looked at him with perplexity and then changed the subject.

“Well I don’t agree with you paying for everything. You paid for the theatre the other night and then you didn’t even want to talk about it.”

“I noticed you liked it. I didn’t want to get involved in a difference of opinion.”

“You didn’t like it? *The Tempest*? I thought you loved

Shakespeare.”

“If they ever do anything like that again I shall write a letter to the newspapers. Shakespeare wrote some of the most marvellous words in the English language and I think I managed to hear five of them. If I want to watch a circus I’ll go to Barnum and Bailey.”

“Well, I liked it.”

“It wasn’t Shakespeare. We should have gone to *The Comedy of Errors* at Stagecraft instead.”

“You have no heart.”

“And you don’t understand Shakespeare.”

“I do understand Shakespeare.”

“You don’t. You think *The Taming of The Shrew* is chauvinistic.”

“Of course I do, it’s the most chauvinistic thing that was ever written.” Kate’s hackles were rising.

“It is not, it’s about true love....”

“You try treating me like that and I’ll show you what true love is.”

“You’re not a shrew.”

“And you are not a bloody intellectual.”

“Another cup?”

“No thank you.”

“Well, I’ll have one, and some of this... this cake.”

Thomas understood that Kate was a Liberated Woman but Liberated Women had not been current in his day. He did understand the reason for the movement but thought that some of the extremists took it too far.

“It’s the most sexist play that was ever written,” she continued in the same vein.

“This is a nice cup of tea.”

“He was a chauvinistic, sexist, racist, warmongering pig.”

“Who was?”

“Shakespeare. *Into the breach... into the breach...*”

“Hardly a pig.”

“All right, a poet. He was a chauvinistic, sexist, racist, warmongering poet.”

“That’s better.”

"I thought you'd agree."

"To being a poet..."

"He hated women too."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you read *The Taming of the Shrew*?"

"Of course I've read it. He just took some story by a popular Italian author...."

"If he was a real man he wouldn't have been prejudiced."

"He wasn't prejudiced. It's a woman's nature to be submissive. Petruchio was just putting an aberration to rights. How can anyone live with a shrew and a nag?"

She took the cake knife and pointed it towards his lower region. "If you don't watch out I'll cut them off."

"Oh, a female Petruchio."

"You are on very shaky ground."

"Then don't take me seriously."

"If I thought you were serious you'd have this pot of tea over your head. I'll speak to my Liberated Sisters about you."

"You wouldn't."

"I might even supply the tar and feathers."

"You would. I don't think that Shakespeare hated women. I think he understood them, which is more than I do sometimes."

"Yes, we should all be in a nunnery, while the men go out and fight wars and kill each other."

"In my father's day women gave out white feathers to the men who wouldn't go to war. If you women want equality why don't you go out and fight the wars yourselves?"

"If we women had equality there wouldn't be any wars."

"No. Eternal knitting circles."

"Sometimes you are not a very nice man, Mr Young-Felo. You're like all academics, you put your Shakespeare, and your Mr Carlyle, and your Mr Stuffy Philosopher up on a pedestal and say they are perfect beings. And you use this so-called knowledge to pontificate and put down other people, especially women."

"Really."

"Yes. Really."

"Well, I think this boring old academic might just order

another pot of tea.”

“If you wish. Get yourself another piece of that sweet cake. I'm going to look at the begonias.”

Kate got up and left abruptly.

How could he tell her what he felt about her? There was always such a warm rush of pleasure whenever he met her. Although he couldn't express it, he was as much in love as a young man panting hot sonnets to his mistress' brow. But he couldn't tell her. He didn't know how. He thought of the rosebud in his study. It was still not in bloom.

Kate went into the greenhouse and looked at the begonias. She thought about herself and Thomas. They meet, discuss trivialities and got into banal arguments. A platonic relationship could not be sustained. She felt too much for the crusty old pedant. Eventually he came and found her.

“Are we friends?” he asked.

“Yes.” She touched his arm. “The Begonia House is the best place in Wellington to be stoned.”

“You don't?”

“Only occasionally.” Why did she say that? Put her foot in it as usual. “Will you take me to visit your parents?”

“My parents?”

“Yes.”

“If you wish.”

Thomas was uneasy about this. After all it was a major step. You only took a girl to see your parents when things were getting serious.

3

It was Wednesday. Kate hardly saw any staff all morning. She had become engrossed in her own thoughts, away in another world. The pupils took advantage of this of course and threw darts across the classroom when she wasn't looking. At the lunchtime bell young Jamie came up to her desk.

“I have some flowers for you, Miss de Bris.” He held a tattered bunch of daffodils in his hand.

“Oh, what are they for?” she asked in her distracted way.
“Gloria... Miss Stickney... she told me you liked them.”
“Thank you very much, Jamie.”

He put on his cap and went out the door. Now she would need to find some water to put them in. Was Stickleback’s first name really Gloria? And if so how did Jamie know? And was it her that suggested that he give her flowers? It certainly was a puzzle. In any case Jamie’s behaviour had improved out of sight in recent times. And his essays were certainly of a very high standard, probably good enough to win the school essay competition. Perhaps even good enough to be entered in the National.

Her questions were answered when she went to the staff room for lunch. Miss Stickney was the centre of attention. She had an engagement ring on her finger and was proudly displaying it.

“I never would have realised. You hid it under your glove, you cheeky little thing,” said Adrian Fisher, who took geography and was well and truly out of the closet.

“Hearty congratulations,” said the headmaster in his gruff voice. He must have been teaching as he was wearing his gown and had chalk on his fingers. Yes, Kate remembered, the Latin class. Impossible to get Latin teachers nowadays so the Head had to take them. Probably the only school in New Zealand that taught Latin. “Tell us, who is the lucky man?”

“Mr. MacPherson... Jamie’s father.”

“Ah, that young chap who can’t master polynomials,” said Fredrick Stretch, the maths teacher. He wore leather patches on his elbows and always affected an air of scholarly deference.

“He asked if I could explain them to him,” replied Stickney. “Unfortunately they are a mystery to me also.”

“Oh yes, I’ll point to the page in the textbook and you can go over it with him. Then if you have any questions come back to me.”

Of course that explained the daffodils. Stickney must have become part of the family. Then Kate realised, she must have been ‘doing it’ with her fiancée. Kate hadn’t stopped to notice but Stickney had developed a look of fulfilment and calm benevolence recently. She even looked five years younger and

had lost the scholarly stoop she had affected. It all boded well for harmony in the English department.

“So when are you intending to be married, Miss de Bris?” asked Stretch.

Kate shuddered at the thought. Stretch had been hinting lately in a wholly unacceptable way that he was attracted to her. It was completely out of the question. He was twice her age and a boring hack. Then she remembered that Thomas was twice her age also. But then he wasn't a mathematician he was a student of literature.

“I don't think I will get married. I think I'll just live in sin,” she replied, hoping that Stretch would be offended and leave her alone.

Later, when they were standing on the sideline watching the girls play hockey, Stickney confided in her.

“I think Fredrick has his eye on you, Katherine. I don't think he would be a suitable partner. There's something about him...”

“Yes, I agree, Gloria.”

“Come on girls, come on. Oh good play, Melissa.” She turned back to Kate. “You know my name? I never tell anyone.”

“Jamie let it slip.”

“Oh well, I have to tell my family of course. You'll not mention it, will you? I never did like that name.”

“Jamie gave me daffodils. Did you tell him I liked them?”

“I happened to mention it in passing.”

“I do like spring flowers.”

Even though there were daffodils spring had not quite arrived as yet. There was snow on the Rimutakas which had closed the hill road to traffic. There were hail storms in the South Island with the daily highs in single digits. Kate wondered if the ice would ever thaw.

“Come on, Jessica. Pay attention to what you are doing.” Miss Stickney paused and looked pensive. “He's five years younger than I am. Do you think age matters?”

Kate was taken aback at this confidence. Of course Thomas was twenty years older than her. But then it was more acceptable for the man to be older than the woman.

“No, it doesn’t matter at all as long as there is a need.”

“It’s not only a need, Miss de Bris, it’s.... Come on girls. Come on girls.”

Kate noticed the reversion to surname. She realised that by mentioning that there might be a need she had overstepped the bounds of familiarity. At least she knew now where the boundary was, and it was much closer than before.

4

“You are still looking for something nice for the young lady?” asked Solly when Thomas called in to see him the next Friday, after work.

“Would you have a red rose in bloom?”

“Do you think I would have second hand flowers in this shop?”

“No, I expect not.” Thomas inspected the gift case in a desultory way. There was still nothing there of interest. “I intend to take my friend to visit my parents tomorrow.”

“You take her to meet the parents? This is serious.”

“Not at all.” Thomas did not wish to think about this occasion. “You are open late tonight. I thought you had to close by sunset on Friday nights.”

“Ah yes for the Sabbath. It is not quite sunset. I have to work late to make money to pay for the wedding.”

Although he had never been to a Jewish wedding a picture came into Thomas’s mind. The men would be in dark suits and wearing skull-caps. What about the women? Would they wear their best dresses or would they be more demure? The Rabbi of course would have a black beard and a Homburg. Why were the beards of Rabbis always black? Of course, apart from intermingling with the gentiles the Jews were of Arabic origins, and the Arabs were a swarthy race. Even Jesus must have been a bit of a darkie. The marriage ceremony seemed to him to be a great im-

position on a young couple. Still, it was their day in the sun and enabled them to establish their relationship and be accepted by their society. He had been thinking about marriage himself lately but had decided to put the idea from his mind. There was to be no more marriage for him. If he and Kate were to ever come together it would be a liaison without ceremony, something that stemmed from the heart, not external frippery.

“It all went well did it?” he asked.

“Ah, now that it is over, it is a great success. The bride, she was radiant. Now I am very popular. I am more established as head of the family and a great benefactor.”

“And you are happy with your new son-in-law?”

“She’s a smart girl, my daughter. Her husband he was working for Abe Leibowitz. Now he comes to work with me. It is a great advantage.”

Thomas did not make it his business to investigate the affairs of the local Jewish Mafia but he knew enough about it to understand that Abe Leibowitz and Solly were somewhat akin to Montague and Capulet. At least in this case the love story seemed to be heading for a happy ending.

“Yes I can see that. A political marriage is often an advantage.”

“Ah, there is love too I think. At least my daughter, she is in love. Her husband he understands business affairs and the reason for the right connections. He will stray but be faithful if you know what I mean.” Solly put the gift tray back in place. “Now it will be quiet in my house. My wife she will have nothing to do.”

“Except to look after you.”

“Ah, too much looking after I do not like. I will find her an interest. Knitting or playing cards or work for the community.”

Just then a tough young man arrived with a package for Solly. They went into the back room with an air of mysterious collaboration. So it was a business transaction that was keeping Solly open late. A shady deal to pay for the wedding no doubt.

As Thomas left the shop he bumped into Tina, one of the transvestite girls from the corner.

“You’re out early, Tina,” he said.

“Oh I got some business to attend to, Literature-man.”

“I didn’t know you did business at this time of the day.”

“Not that sort of business, darling. I just come to make sure our minder takes the money to Solly.”

“You pay for a minder?”

“Have to, love. There’s a lotta venisons on the street.”

“You mean denizens.”

“You be the literature-man.”

“How much do you pay him?”

“He’s a mean cookie. We pay him twenty-five percent. You sure you don’t want some business? We gotta time. You just live up the road.”

“I’m trying to give it up, Tina.”

Poor Tina, thought Thomas as he walked down the lane to his cottage. She was consigned to a life of rough men and lonely days. But perhaps being alone was the best thing for an outcast from society. Why was marriage always such a complicated matter? It was a fact of life that there were bound to be difficulties in close relationships. It was best for him to live alone and care for himself only. Then he had a happy thought. With his newfound wealth, albeit temporary, there would be mushrooms and bacon for tea.

5

Thomas took Kate to meet his parents the following afternoon. It was a fine day after a slight frost. They sat outside at a cast-iron table in the cultured elegance of a Karori garden. It was as though they were in a time bubble, insulated from the modern world. Kate took an immediate liking to Thomas’s parents. His mother wore a pink frock and served lemon tea in bone china, with cucumber sandwiches on a silver platter. She introduced herself as ‘Celia.’

“Please don’t call me Mrs. Young-Felo dear. And you

will let me call you Katherine?”

“Kate will be fine.”

“Thomas, you are a naughty boy to keep to keep such a delightful young lady from us.”

Thomas was embarrassed. “Kate and I are just friends, Mother.”

“I’m sure you are,” said Celia as she poured the tea.

Thomas’s father, Peter, wore brown trousers with a crease, a beige shirt and panama hat. He was dark from the sun and had short grey hair. He gave Thomas a hug.

“Good to see you, my boy. When are you going to come fishing with us?”

“When it’s full moon, Peter.”

Peter did not seem to be satisfied with this remark. He sat down with a sigh. Later he took Kate to the top garden to look at his roses.

“Celia doesn’t always make cucumber sandwiches,” he said. “She did it because Thomas once told her that only blue stockings ate them.”

“Did Thomas say that?”

“Yes, I’m afraid he did.”

Kate wondered why. It did not seem to be a typical thing for Thomas to say. He was usually such a gentleman. The only time that he had appeared not so, had been when they’d discussed Shakespeare in the Begonia House.

“Why would he say something like that?”

“Things weren’t going too well for him then.” Peter snipped a mauve rose from a large untidy bush and gave it to Kate. “This bush flowers most of the year. I’m afraid the yellows are not blooming yet.”

“Oh?” Kate did not understand the reference to yellow roses and looked quizzical.

“Yellow suits you. I’ll give you a yellow rose in the season.” He closed the clippers and put them in his pocket. “Thomas went through a hard time in England. He married a girl that wasn’t suitable for him.”

“I know there was something. He never talks about it.”

“Shotgun wedding that went wrong was the problem. He

could have been a great scholar but he gave it away. He saw us a few times after he came back. Then he started making comments about cucumber sandwiches and we hardly saw him again.”

“I’m sure he didn’t mean it really.”

“No, that passed. He just became distant.” They paused by a bush that was starting to bud. “English red. Now what is the name?” He paused and looked at her carefully. “Do you think you can do something for him?”

“I don’t know.”

“A difficult relationship is it?”

“It’s a relationship that hasn’t even started.”

“I think I understand. He needs to get all that stuff out of his system. It happened years ago. Not like Celia and I, we made it through. We came from different backgrounds. She’s whipped cream and I’m a piece of salty fish. I think the difference was that we were lucky enough to fall in love. If you’ve got that you can cross all barriers.”

In the meantime Thomas and Celia were left with the lemon tea and cucumber sandwiches. They had gone inside as it was getting chilly outside. They sat in silence without speaking for a time.

“Was it Kate who insisted you come to visit us?” asked Celia at length.

“Yes,” replied Thomas reluctantly.

“She is quite young. I could still have more grandchildren.”

Thomas stood up and looked from the window. It had small square panes of glass and looked down onto a garden of shrubs.

“You have enough grandchildren, Celia,” he said. He had his back to her still, looking down on the garden but seeing nothing. “You don’t need to ask any from me.”

“But you did give me one.”

“One? Oh yes.” He turned back into the room.

“Don’t you remember?”

“Yes, yes, I fathered a child.”

“A sweet young thing.” Celia went to the mantelpiece and

took a small photograph from behind a family portrait. "See."

"It's Ruth." It was a photograph he had taken of her as a baby. He knew he'd had it once but it had disappeared many years ago. "Where did you get this?"

"You gave it me. Don't you remember?"

"No, I'm certain I didn't. I would remember." He was sure he would have remembered. It was not a thing you would forget. His only link to his daughter.

"You weren't well when you returned from England. It was quite a serious case of melancholy you know. And you wouldn't see a doctor. Then you started ranting about cucumber sandwiches and calling me a blue stocking. It was quite bizarre behaviour."

"Was it? I don't remember. Can I have the photo?"

"No, it's mine now."

"I don't have any..."

"Well, you never kept in touch."

"I wrote to them. Gone no address."

"What do you expect? Two years later, I suppose."

Yes, it was two years later. He wondered how she knew that. It suddenly struck him, she must have been keeping in touch. He had to ask her. Just then Kate and Peter returned from the rose garden. He couldn't say anything now. It would have to be some other time. Just imagine. Did she know about Ruth? He would have to come back one day and find out.

Afterwards Thomas and Kate stopped at Kate's flat for a light supper.

"I think Mother thought you were my girl friend," said Thomas. He was sitting on the couch. Michelangelo jumped up onto his lap.

"Have you never taken a girl to visit your parents?" asked Kate. She came out from the kitchen where she had been warming the quiche.

"Oh yes, I took Bible Class Millie when I was a pimply youth."

"Bible Class Millie. Sounds exciting."

"If I want to kill off the affair I take them to see Celia and

Peter.”

“It’s not an affair, Thomas,” said Kate sharply.

“No. I didn’t say it was.”

“If you want to kill off a friendship you’re going the right way about it.”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“You’re just a bit bloody thick at times.” Kate paced around the room and sat on the window seat. Thomas looked at her with perplexity.

“It was a pleasant afternoon,” he said.

“Of course they’re going to think we’re together.” Kate was starting to get annoyed.

“I took particular pains to dissuade them of the idea.”

“Yes you did take particular pains, Mister Thomas Young-Felo, you were a right and proper pain. What am I going to do with you?”

“Don’t get angry with me, Katarina.”

“My name is not Katarina and I am not angry with you, Thomas, I’m just slightly irked.”

“Indeed, you appear to be. Why would that be so?”

“Because of you. You just hide yourself away on a dusty old shelf. You’re too afraid to brush away the cobwebs and look at the real world.”

Kismet, thought Thomas. The moment of truth would come. He always knew it would. Something wonderful. The dull clay of words will melt. The obdurate beast will bow before her beauty. The knot had been tied, whatever was to happen from now on was inevitable.

“I think you might be right,” he said wondering where on earth the thought about Kismet had come from.

“You have lovely parents.”

“Yes.”

“But you never visit them. Why is that?”

“Seem to have got out of touch.”

“That’s no excuse. They love you.”

“I let them down. One time in the past.”

“Forget about what happened in the past. You’re letting them down now.”

“Yes. I know.”

Kate got up from the seat and paced around the room. “I think I will go on that trip to India.”

“What trip to India?”

“Alistaire may have a spare place in his group. There's nothing to hold me here. I might as well go.”

“Nothing to hold you?”

“The trouble is we can't remain just friends.”

“What do you mean, we can't be friends?”

“I said just friends. There is a difference.”

“We talked about it... we talked about it before. I have nothing to offer... You would be best to find someone, your own age.”

“Oh why are you so bloody thick?”

“I'm what I am. Don't chide me, Kate, you are a sweet person.”

“Oh, yes, sweet. A pretty sweetening,” she said sarcastically. She sat down again. “It's August holidays soon. I'm going to stay a while with my mother.”

“On the farm?”

“Yes. They have a bach at the beach. I thought I might stay there for a few days. I need some time to myself.”

“And when you come back, you'll go to India?”

“Nothing has been decided.”

“No. Nothing has been decided.”

Kate paused and looked at him. “Do you know anything about cats?”

“I'm an acknowledged expert when it comes to cats.”

“Good. You can look after Michelangelo when I'm away. He likes you.”

“I'd love to have him.” In fact Thomas was not at all expert when it came to cats but he was sure that Mrs Pellew, who lived two doors down and had a houseful of them, would be able to enlighten him. “You will write, when you are away?”

“Yes. But I must warn you, at the beach the mailman comes but once a week.”

Kate was not sure if this were true or not, but at least it would give her an excuse for not writing, for not having to think about the relationship with Thomas.

It was Sunday afternoon, a little over a week after Kate had left for her holiday. She had told Thomas that she would write him a letter but he had not yet received one. Well she had mentioned something about the irregular deliveries but he was sure she would want to know how Michelangelo was getting on. Thomas had been afraid that he might not settle into a different locality but Kate had reassured him.

“He doesn’t mind where he lives as long as he likes the people,” she had said as she let him out of the catbox.

Indeed the cat was quite plussed (or in other words not nonplussed) and had demurely investigated the house carefully before settling down for a nap on the guest chair. Over the first few days he became king of the street after scaring the living daylight out of the neighbourhood dogs.

Thomas looked outside at the weather. It was fine, but storms had been predicted. He decided to take the bus and visit the Botanic Gardens. There had been reports that the tulips were making a good show. Spring was on its way and was due to officially arrive in a few days. He was not sure if he liked the season now as much as he used to. It was a time when the children of the earth were emerging with unbridled energy while he was but a sedate and solitary man in the autumn of his life. In spring the seeds send shoots from the ground, germens of life burst forth into the world and the winter ice melts. Who knows what pain a thaw of ice in the heart might bring?

As the trolley bus approached the gardens Thomas remembered that it was just a ten minutes further on to his parents’ house and that he had a question that he wanted to ask his mother. He remained on board on an impulse knowing that the driver would not realise he had cribbed a couple of sections.

Celia was surprised to see him. “I didn’t expect to see you again so soon dear.”

“Just thought I’d drop in for a cup of tea,” he said in an offhand way.

“Of course.”

“Milk and sugar would be nice.”

“Sit down. It’s a little chilly outside.”

Thomas sat in the lounge chair. A fire was burning in the grate. After a moment he stood up and took the photograph of Ruth from the mantelpiece and put it on the coffee table. Celia returned with tea and Melting Moments. She noticed the photo but said nothing.

“Where’s Peter?” asked Thomas.

“He went out fishing.”

“I hope he’s all right. There’s a storm brewing.”

“Don’t worry, he always comes home. He promised me a nice piece of gurnard.”

Thomas had caught a gurnard as a lad, fishing off the rocks on the far side of the island at Island Bay. An orange flying fish he thought as he drew it on the line across the sandy bottom with its large blue fins outspread. One of the best fish for eating.

“I came about Ruth,” said Thomas eventually.

“I thought you might.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“Of course. You don’t think I’d let a grand-daughter go missing do you?”

Celia picked up the photo and smiled. Thomas sat fast in his chair not knowing what to do or say.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked at last.

“You weren’t with us. I hoped you’d come back, one day.”

Thomas stood up, went over to the window, walked around the room, sat down again.

“I’m back, Celia.”

“Give your mother a hug, boy.”

They clung together for some time. The first time in so many years that he had the close touch of the warmth of a person. She’d given him so many cuddles and kisses as a child. It was her way. But then the cold night had come and the ice which froze his heart. He left her arms and sat down.

“Is that better?” she asked.

“Perhaps.” There was a pain in his chest, a congestion, a

hard stone. There was a winter of discontent but it had never been made summer. "Tell me about my daughter."

"She's fine. I wrote to Dorothy at the address you gave me, not long after you returned from England."

"Dorothy?"

"Your ex-wife."

"Dot."

"You can call her Dot or Dash or Semi-colon or whatever you wish. I call her Dorothy."

"Yes Dorothy was her name."

"There are letters. You can read them. Photos too."

She gradually told him the simple story. She and Peter had supported Dorothy until she remarried. Even after that they had provided money if Ruth needed anything. Dorothy's new husband was a bricklayer. Dorothy was fond of him and settled down after the marriage. There were other children but the husband was good to Ruth. Ruth followed after her father and won a scholarship to University. Only redbrick unfortunately. She obtained first class honours in anthropology and married a palaeontologist. There were two small children.

"I'm a grandfather."

"You neglected things."

"I did."

"Time to mend the past."

"I'll write."

Thomas left with a bundle of letters and photographs in his pocket. But he was numb. The whole thing was a fantasy. Could it really be true that the lost daughter was found? He did not believe that it could be. He was sure that in a short while he would wake up to reality.

Thomas stopped off at the gardens on the way home. He walked along the path from the wrought iron entrance gate to the duck pond. There was a grassy bank at the bottom of the hill and on it grew five Soul Magnolias. The branches were leafless now and convoluted into gnarled patterns. As he looked at those branches it seemed that the twisted forms were dark and sere and full of melancholy. They reminded him of the bare and bitter branches of the trees which had been blasted by the wicked

spells of witches that he had read about in fairy stories as a child.

And perhaps the sadness that had been with him for years was like those black and broken branches, an interlacing web of mystery, a filigree of past actions and past omissions; of sins, woven by the chattering birds of his wrong-doings into a nest of defeat. For there had been a time in his past when spring thoughts had come into his mind and he'd lain with a woman without the thought of love; his only desire to satisfy a lust for a moment of transient pleasure. And from this moment of sin he begat a daughter and then forsaken her. Left her in a foreign land far away, left her over the waves abandoned and forgotten and in his mind she lay dead and drowned under the waves.

But of course she was not dead and drowned. Why would he continue to think she had been claimed by the sea? What strange and alien thought was that? And where was she now? Where was his innocent Ruth with her trusting brown eyes? Of course she was alive, living and breathing under another sun. He had thought that she had been dead, and once even dreamed that she had died lost and lonely in a cold room, dead from grief for her father? How could he have left her? Just gone away and left her without a thought for her welfare? Did she dream? Did she have dreams of her father like the dreams he had of her? But he had just been told that she had married a fine man and had children and a good life with money in the bank and food on the table.

There were no answers to his questions, no resolution to this ancient grief, no escape from the dark thicket.

And where did Kate fit into this? Was he seeking a young girl to replace his daughter? If he made love to Kate, would he be violating his own flesh? Committing incest. In that case shame and guilt might arise from the dark and hidden vaults of his mind, darker than the dark spells of the witches that had destroyed the soft green leaves on the magnolias. To commit such a crime would lead to damnation.

But was his daughter a dream child? Was he mistaking her for his lovely Kate? Was his daughter his lover? Was he her father?

He sat on the bench by the pond under the big cypress

tree, looking at the ducks being fed pieces of stale bread by children. A gust of wind blew in from the gate along the path and through the trees, rattling the branches. The predicted storm was on its way. But his feelings for Kate were creating storms also. They were disturbing grains of dust that had lain idle for centuries.

It was time to return to his shabby room and Michelangelo, to dream of things that may be and things that may not be.

7

Kate had spent an evening with her mother before going to the beach. There was to be a revelation. After dinner they sat at the dining room table with their host, Jim, the farmer that her mother was living with, and his daughter Sally.

“What are we going to do tonight, Sylvia?” Kate had asked. (Indeed Kate’s mother was actually named Sylvia.)

“I’m off to bed,” said Jim. “I’ll see you girls in the morning.”

“Cardboard,” muttered Sally and went out to the pantry.

“Up in the morning at six. The sheep are in lamb. He likes to look after them. He’s got a heart of gold,” said Sylvia.

“Rough diamond?”

“All the farmers seem to be.”

“Are you going to stay with him?” asked Kate.

“I’m a city girl. I know how to give a man a good time. I’m out at sea when it comes to sheep in lamb.”

“You can learn new things.”

Sylvia said nothing for a moment. “Yes. I like him. I have to settle down somewhere. Sally can do the farm things. I’ll stay at home and do the cooking.”

Kate wondered. Her mother had always said that her men had left her because they couldn’t stand her cooking. Sally was a stout girl with a generous heart, particularly where young men were concerned. She always wore gumboots, even on the dance floor. She came back just then with a box of wine and put it on

the table.

“Chateauf du Cardboard,” she said as she brought mugs from the cupboard.

“We’ll have to get some wine glasses,” said Sylvia.

“Still tastes the same.”

They sat drinking and chatting for a time. Eventually there was a knock on the door. There were two young men with bottles of beer. Sally went out with them.

“They’ll be having a party in the woolshed,” said Sylvia.

“Party?”

“I must admit I’ve had a few man friends, my dear, but always one at a time. It’s a wonder she doesn’t charge.”

“Maybe she just likes it.”

“I daresay she does.”

The evening wore on. The cask became depleted. They started talking about old times.

“You don’t remember your father do you, Kate?”

Kate mused. Her father had abandoned her. She didn’t want to talk about it. “No.”

“I wish you could have known him. He was the only love of my life.” Sylvia rambled along in an incoherent way, talking about her old husband. She was becoming tipsy. Kate was getting more and more annoyed with the vague words she couldn’t make anything out of.

“I don’t want to hear about it,” she said angrily at last.

“Why ever not, dear?”

“Well, he went away and left us didn’t he. We can’t forgive him for that can we?”

“Oh dear. I didn’t realise you felt so strongly about it.”

“Of course I do. I always wanted to have a father and he was never there for me.”

Sylvia picked up the cask and shook it. It was nearly empty. She got up and took Sally’s empty mug to the sink and rinsed it out. She came back to the table and put her hand on Kate’s.

“I should have told you.”

“Told me? What?”

“At the time... I didn’t want to worry you.” Sylvia paused

and looked pensive, suddenly quite sober. “Your father died. He was drowned at sea.”

“Drowned?”

“Yes, drowned. The whole ship went down.”

This was the revelation. All her life she had believed that he had gone away without caring for her. But he had died. At sea. Earning money for the family.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought you might grieve. I don’t know. You were such a young child. I didn’t think you would understand. Did I do the wrong thing?”

“All those letters from France. Where did they come from?”

“I got his brother to send them. I didn’t want you to worry.”

“You should have told me, Sylvia.”

“I know. Sometimes I do the wrong thing. You never know what the right thing is. He was the love of my life you know. We could have stayed together and been a family for the rest of our lives. All those other men. I just picked the ones who wouldn’t stay. I didn’t want to lose sight of that memory.” Sylvia looked reflective, thinking of the past. “But the sea was his real mistress. Sometimes I think I should jump into the waves and join him.”

“Don’t be morbid, Sylvia.”

“No dear. But now you know.”

“Yes, now I know.”

Sylvia shook the cask again. It was empty. Sally came back through the door, flushed and serene.

“It’s time for bed,” said Sylvia. “You’ll be going to the bach tomorrow.”

That was a week ago. The beach was a wild place with islands of rocks in the sea and steep hills behind, peaked with overhanging minarets of stone. It was not a township as such, just a few baches built on leased council land. There were a few permanent residents in the baches or in caravans in the camping ground. They seemed quite friendly and chatted when she went for walks

along the shore. It was Sunday evening. There had been an influx number of visitors for the weekend but now they had mostly left and everything was quiet. Anyway, she was not here for company, she was here for rest and recreation, a quiet time to reflect and recover. After dinner she sat down at the dining room table looking out over the sea and decided to write her obligatory letter to Thomas.

Dear Thomas and Michelangelo, I write this letter to tell you about the beach.

What could she tell them? She wasn't worried about Michelangelo because she knew he would be happy with Thomas even if the care was likely to be unconventional. But what else could she write about? She had been sitting in this room in a study of lethargy for some time now. She stared at the page. There was a complete mental block. She would have to write something literate - something pedantic and intelligent. Something that Thomas Carlyle might write to a younger sister. Scotch news? Hardly. You have to write about the state of the play.

I believe there is a tempest brewing within this couch of air...

She was looking over the ocean at the impending weather. But what she had written was pontifical. Although Thomas was a man who loved words he was not a fool. She had nothing to say. She crumpled the page and threw it into the fire. It was so comfortable in the room. She should get herself off the chair and go for a walk along the beach. Perhaps tomorrow when the tide had ebbed. In the meantime she would merely loiter like the pale poet, beside the shore, gazing at the ruffled sea and the rolling tide.

Then a dream picture of waves came into her mind. They were breaking on the shore like cruel mouths, hungry mouths, like the mouths of voracious fishes which eat drowned sailors and leave nothing behind, neither a bone nor a tooth.

Why couldn't she move? What web of apathy had chained her to the seat?

Dark clouds sat on the horizon. They were harbingers of the rough weather to come. She sat there watching the night slowly darken the world.

The sea glistened where the moon found a gap in the moving cloud-wrack. What was that dark ocean? Who was this fickle mistress full of strange creatures and moved by mystic tides?

She had once thought that her father had deserted her mother for another woman, but the harlot was a mermaid who had enfolded him in her mysterious arms and carried him deep to the sea-floor where he now lay, a bundle of bones, picked clean by sharp-fanged fishes. And she saw in the eye of her mind the fishes replete with the flesh from his body. And the fishes were singing in the sea and they sang in a choir and they sang to her a threnody. She had wept at the song, she had wept tears for him, an ocean of salt tears. She had called out to him in her dreams but his boat had never come scudding across the waves. Now he was drowned, deep drowned in seabed's caves.

Where would she find her father?

Was it to be in the heart of Thomas Young-Felo?

Was he to be her lover?

Was he to be her father?

Was she his incestuous child?

The storm had arrived. Rough winds battered the walls of the cottage. The door slammed and the house creaked under the force of the contrary gale. Out at sea sailors donned weather gear and prepared for a cold watch.

It was time to go to bed and enter the real world of dreams.

8

Gentle travelers on the common road to our final destiny, we live in a world which is made up of blocks and stones and where all objects of the senses are separated one from the other. Certain philosophers will say we are dreamers and that what we see and touch in our waking state is merely an illusion, a dream in the mind of a sleeping god. When we allow ourselves to rest in the arms of sleep we would expect to pass from this sad world into

the world of dreams, a place where phantom images, which are pale shadows of the blocks and stones, intrude. And from the world of dreams we might even progress farther into the realm of deep sleep where the sleeper dreams no dreams and does not desire the objects of desire, where experience is unified and thought dissolved, where one is full of peace, truly enjoying peace and finding the path to knowledge. It has been suggested that beyond the world of sleep lies a realm where a reality which transcends life exists. A place where one might become united with the great-soul of the effulgent Lord of Light. A realm of perfect union that is the goal of all our striving.

But for the meantime let us put philosophy aside and continue our sojourn in the kingdom of dreams. For it is in dreams that we begin to leave behind the obdurate texture of the unreal world and it is in dreams that our thought becomes softened by the fabric of a subtle vision, where our minds and souls are joined closer together by the strands of imagination.

When our two lovers fell asleep they departed from their workaday world and, emerging from the daytime shell, their soul-selves swam together in the sea of their dream, singing the night-song, silently singing the night-song, singing across the chasm of time and space, coming together in the station between heaven and earth where the storm-clouds sang their seething song, where the storm blown cloud-wrack darkened the fitful moon.

“Where am I?” asked Thomas in his dream.

“Where are we?” asked Kate.

“Together but apart.”

“I am with you though we are far apart.”

“Together in our dream.”

They were in that realm of space between the moon and the mind where sleepy children have fantastical dreams of swans and miracles, where the sandman comes with stardust, where the prince kisses his princess in the magic castle, where the lonely traveler finds peace from the travail of workaday enterprise, where Robin Goodfellow flies through the air on his magic broomstick.

“I cannot see you, Thomas.”

“But you know that I am here.”

“Yes.”

They could not see the substance of the world in their dream. Their daytime eyes were lidded blind to concrete and clay, but their dream-eyes became aware of the subtle senses of the night, were aware of their dream-selves swimming in a sea of glittering light, where eyes were not for seeing, where there was no flesh to touch, no sound to hear, just the insubstantial thread of thought.

“I am here.”

“Where?” demanded Kate in her dream.

“I am here.”

They were in the world of sand-castles, riding the night-horse, crushing the billowing waves astride the back of a surging whale, swimming in the sea-wash enveloped by clouds of foam, entwined by fronds of kelp, singing with choirs of fishes, smiling at the conger in his den. And as they swam day-blind, night-sighted among the billowing clouds of sleep their fingers touched.

“I touch your fingers,” she cried.

“We touch the skin.”

“Only the skin?”

“In the world of stone.”

“Touch my heart. That is where the truth lies.”

“In the heart? My heart is in the cavern of stone.”

There was remembrance of a dream from some other time and place where they had touched, seeking sensation, where only the fingers touched, only touched the skin, nothing deeper, where their love foundered on the lustful shore and ended in sorrow. Where that unhallowed touching blew up a storm of dissent and they had been riven by that storm, sundered by wild currents of thought, carried onto the obdurate rocky reef, into the unruly maelstrom of contention, the stubborn void of folly.

“We touched only the superficial,” said Kate to Thomas in their dream.

“Only the skin.”

“The external shell.”

“The superficial surface of the shell.”

“The hard carapace.”

“Enclosing the heart.”

“And so went our selfish ways.”

Perhaps this touching did occur or perhaps it was in a universe that no longer exists. Perhaps the seed did not develop into an entwining vine of destruction. Perhaps kind fate came in the guise of truth enclosed in the bud of a rose which had not yet bloomed. So they swam together in their dream, escaped from the maelstrom, rose above the sea and sang together in the winds under heaven.

“And where was your heart?” she asked.

“It was still here.”

“Where?”

“Lost in a whirlpool of ignorance.”

“It was. We were confused by the illusion of our foolish considerations.”

“The worm of thought.”

“The maggot of folly.”

They were carried eagle-high to the vault of heaven and looked down into the eye of the cyclone.

“There is peace in the centre of the storm,” he said, his night-eyes seeing in the dream.

“Yes, there is peace in the centre.”

“And we should find that place.”

“Yes. It is there.”

“Where would you find it?” she asked

“I would find it in your heart?”

“Where are you? Where do you sit?”

“Where am I? Where do I sit? On the mermaid’s knee?”

“With the mermaid? Under the waves? Hidden from my eyes by the surging sea?”

“Under the waves where it is calm. Serene. Storms ruffle the surface but do not penetrate the depths.”

“Will I find that place?” she asked.

“We will find it.”

“Where movement ceases.”

“Where all phenomena cease.”

“In the eye of the storm.”

Together they swam into the centre of the storm, the space where the wind was hushed, where they awaited in expectation of that moment of perfect peace. It was the netherland, the primrose centre of their hearts where peace resides.

“Can you see it?” asked Thomas, the dream figment.

“I can see it at last,” replied the dreaming soul of Kate.

“What?”

“I can see.”

“What?”

“There is nothing left to consider. We give significance to things of no importance. We carry baggage we do not require.”

“Throw it aside.”

“Throw it away.”

“Let it dissolve into the waves.”

“While we sing.”

“Sing the night song.”

“The song that dreamers sing.”

“That they sing in their bower of peace.”

“And in the morning?”

“In the morning?”

“Yes. What will happen?”

“We shall fall asleep again.”

“Yes. Fall asleep.”

“Into the dream of the real world.”

“And we will remember?”

“All will be forgotten.”

“Yes. Forgotten.”

“But the worm will go.”

“Yes. See I have a small gift,” said Thomas “Plucked from a thicket of thorns.”

A rose in full bloom appeared in his hands.

“And I too,” replied Kate. The gramayre of the night song permitted her to pick a bloom also. They exchanged roses.

“See the flower unfold. The leaves break away and the petals burst forth.”

“It breathes in the glorious air. It becomes part of the living world.”

“And now we will rest on our bed of roses.”

“Yes. Our bed of roses.”
“Goodnight my dear.”
“Goodnight my darling.”
“Goodnight.”
“Goodnight.”

*No storm now,
the air is still,
there is a hush over the world,
all creatures pause in silence,
awaiting the arrival of the great magician.*

9

Kate awoke late into the bright morning. She was vaguely aware of a strange dream, a fantasy which had passed through her mind like the wind passing through the sky. All that lingered now was a wisp of remembrance, a shade from a deeper reality that could barely be grasped and caught hold of. And like sea-mist, which dissolves into the air with the coming of the morning sun, the memory of the dream passed from her mind.

She jumped from her bed and looked out of the window. The tempest had passed and only remnants of ragged clouds lingered on the horizon. It was time to get dressed, have a substantial breakfast, leave her comfortable room, wrap up warm and take a walk along the beach.

The energy of the storm was still in the ocean and there was a deep sea-swell. The rollers surged and crashed across the rocky islands, but in the lee shelter nearer to the shore the waves arched like the supple neck of a swan and flowed to caress the sand. Before the storm and the dream she had had a vision in her mind that they were cruel and hungry waves full of vicious fishes pecking out the eyes of dead sailors.

Why would she have such thoughts?

Why should she imagine the sea to be full of drowned men?

Who were they?

Why should the waves be populated with vindictive sharp-fanged predators?

And she thought of her father, who she hardly remembered yet had damned in her mind. He was a sailor who roamed seas very much like these. She had never been able to understand whether he was a dear father or a damned father. All her life she had demanded that he come and see her, comfort her, tell her he loved her, keep her warm in his arms but he never did. He never came to that call. His worthy barque never came scudding across the waves. And for that she damned him, wept for her loss and hated him for denying love, always demanding love, always needing love.

And here and now on the beach by the sea was the moment when truth became apparent, the moment of passage from ignorance to knowledge, the manifestation of the truth that had lain hidden, unrealised and yet comprehended by her dream-self. She realised, really understood, for the first time that he would never come now. His vessel would never cross the waves. The rough tempestuous sea had come and taken him; it had enfolded him in its generous arms and carried him to the sea floor where he sang with the mermaids. It had been his destiny to go to a land where he would be content and from which he would never return. She had been acting like a little girl all her life in order to obtain that lost affection. Demanding a father. It was time to leave behind that small child.

And she looked at the worm of thought that caused her such discontent. It was not a thing of merit. It was something to be discarded, something to be dissolved by the salt sea-wash. She had wept for the lost father. Her tears had come from the salt ocean. It could have them back. It could swallow them up, for she needed them no more.

Then her thoughts turned to Thomas and she realised that there had been a tangle of considerations that had beguiled her mind. Who was this Mr Thomas Young-Felo? He was not her father. She had been demanding that he be both a lover and a

father. She had wanted someone to replace the father that was gone. She wanted to commit incest with him. The unrealised shame of that would kill any relationship. He was not her father. He would become her lover, that old man who sat on the scholar's stool. Now she could love him with the true love of a true woman if he would have her. He could be her lover and her friend.

She had been walking along the beach for hours. The waves smiled at her and told her everything would be all right, everything was resolved. It was time to go back to her little cottage and write him a letter. She would tell him about the magic coast. Nothing of importance.

10

Thomas awoke from his dream into the light of a normal day. He could remember little of the vision but some feeling of revelation remained. Something he could not touch and feel. It had been a strange fancy which had passed through his mind like a cloud passing through the sky, a shadow of a finer world had come which had somehow caused a change that he could not fully comprehend. A dream is not a thing that is made up of the normal stuff of that world of illusion which we call 'reality'.

There had been a storm over the last few days but at last there was peace in the atmosphere. The storm had been on the earth, in the sea and in the firmament. The perfect vault of heaven had been rent by rude winds. It had been raging in his mind also but had still not abated to the same extent as the storm in the world. There was still some knot of discontent that needed to be resolved.

It was Monday, a slow day, so he decided not to open the shop but go again to the Botanic Gardens hoping to find insight and peace in the world of nature. As he walked along the path by the soundshell he realised that somehow the world had changed. He saw the Soul Magnolias again. They were leafless and quite

untouched by the rough weather. But there was something he had not noticed before. Where branches proliferated into twigs at the tips, there was a wonder of buds waiting to burst into leaf and flower. When he had looked at them yesterday he had imagined that they were burnt and broken branches, that they had been damaged by wicked witches. But there were no wicked witches. His perception of the branches had been damaged by the faults in his own mind. He had been enchanted by a spell, created by the thicket of thoughts in his own mind. He'd been obscured in a cloud of illusion.

The branches were not black and blasted, they were brown and alive.

These things of the earth lived and breathed while his heart had been held constrained in a walnut prison.

In the stone.

In the dark land.

Out of touch with the living world.

Afraid to touch its real bark.

Never to be made whole.

Frozen into ice.

And he thought of his daughter Ruth, over the sea, over the storm-tossed waves, the little child he had abandoned in his moment of guilt. The guilt had been a worm that had gnawed in his heart and made him create a wall to his feelings, to protect himself from his feelings, to tell himself that it never happened, and for his life thereafter he had never been able to accept what he had done, he had never been able to regret what he had done.

But now it was plain. He had committed a sin in his past, but that had been done and there was no way to undo it. Let it lie in the past. Not to forget it, no, not to forget it but to learn and never do such a thing again. And it was guilt for his own un-charitable deeds that held all this in place. His living for years in the shadow of regret.

He did not have to recompense Kate for his sins as a father.

She was not his daughter.

She was his lover.

She was his beloved Kate.

She was his dream-child Kate with her generous red-wine feelings as fine and strong as Beaujolais, Chateauneuf du Pape, Beaune; the dark wines of the earth which fell like drops of blood onto his heart.

When he arrived back home that evening the long delayed letter was waiting.

My Dear Thomas,

This is not a long or important letter, just a chat. I have been sitting here doing nothing for the past several days, whilst the storm has been raging, but now that there has been an abatement to the tempest I feel that I might set forth in a worthy barque to discover islands in the sea...

Did she want to travel on journeys over the sea to distant lands, he wondered. Was it her answer that she should go away or did she intend to emigrate into the uncharted country of the heart?

II

It was late at night. Thomas was sitting on his easy chair with Michelangelo on his lap looking at the poster of "Ancient of Days" which he had recently pinned to the wall as one in the series of revolving art pictures. Would God actually need a pair of callipers to measure the universe he wondered? Kate had said in her letter that she would be home the following day. He was looking forward to seeing her. There was something that needed to be said. Interrupting his reverie, there came a knock on the door. It was her in the company of Kismet-Fate.

"Hello Thomas, it's not too late is it?"

"No, come in. I got your letter."

"Yes."

"And you had an enjoyable holiday?"

"Yes." She took Michelangelo in her arms and gave him a big hug. "Has he been good?"

"Yes. He's put fear into the hearts of all the dogs in the

neighbourhood. It was nice to have company. I thought you weren't coming home until tomorrow."

"No, I always intended to come back late at night. But I can't find my key. I gave the spare to the neighbour but she's asleep."

"How did you come to lose it?"

"Just absent minded. I probably packed it away somewhere. I knew you'd be awake so I came around. You're a night-owl like me."

In actual fact Kate was lying. She had carefully placed the key in the bottom of her bag where she knew she could say: "Oh there it is!" after a long and complicated search. The fact is she had to see Thomas. She had to know whether this new feeling of bliss was real.

"Oh,. I could put you up for the night," said Thomas.

"I hoped you might."

"There's a lumpy old camp stretcher somewhere if you can make do with that."

"Of course."

Kate put Michelangelo down and sat on the arm of Thomas's chair. Michelangelo sat by the fireplace with that satisfied air of introspection that cats often have. One could imagine that he was contemplating the esoteric secret wisdom of the Pharaohs. Perhaps he sensed that there was a sea-change in the relationship between two people that he loved.

"I had dreams, when you were away," said Thomas.

"So did I."

"One night I dreamt I was in the middle of the storm."

"So did I. The same dream. There was a real storm at the time. It must have knocked on my door and blown in. Then everything became calm."

"Like the real storm. You were dreaming my dream."

"We are a couple of dreamers."

"It helps you see things in a different perspective. My thoughts you know, they're a *deus ex machina*."

"How else can you solve problems, but by thinking?"

Thomas put his hand on hers. The hair of the Ancient was flowing in the wind. Perhaps you find God in the centre of the

storm. Perhaps when it is over you will see what is in your heart of hearts. There were things he had to tell her. It would be all right he knew. There was a flow of energy between them. Electricity. He could feel it. A golden flow of communion.

“Remember I told you on the beach at Island Bay that I didn’t want to take our... our friendship any further,” he said.

“Yes.”

“It was something about myself I didn’t understand...”

“I think it was right that you didn’t.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, it wouldn’t have been right then. It would have been a disaster. There was something about myself I did not understand.”

“What was that?”

“I had you confused in my mind as my father. If I’d gone to bed with you it would have been incest.”

“I had the same thoughts myself.”

“That I was your father?”

It was only Kate, thought Thomas, who would say something like that. “That you were my daughter. Will you forgive me, Kate? I’ve been a blind and ignorant fool to ignore your love.”

“We’ve both been blind and ignorant fools.”

“I do love you Kate, if you’ll accept a second-hand shoddy old book-seller...”

“Quiet now. I love you too.”

Kate moved from the arm of the chair onto his lap and put her arms around him. Their embrace went on and on. Michelangelo sat purring by the fire.

“And you’ll stay here, with me?” asked Thomas at the end of it.

“Yes. Anything would be better than a lumpy old camp stretcher in a dusty old library. Is that your bedroom in there?”

Kate got up from his lap and went into the bedroom.

“That’s my Kate, direct as usual.”

She poked her head back through the door.

“If you don’t hurry up Mr Thomas Young-Felo I shall be asleep. I’ve had a very tiring day.”

Kate and Thomas had to decide where to live after it was established that they would remain together in a permanent relationship. There was a worry about the arrival of the bulldozers but eventually it was Michelangelo who decided it. Although he had become master of the situation he was not very happy in Tonks Avenue where there were dogs and a busy street close by so the three of them settled into Kate's flat in the Terrace Gardens. The place became crowded with their possessions. They kept thinking that they should move to a larger flat but they were comfortable there. It was quiet and close to the city. There were occasional visits from friends including Gloria MacPherson (nee Stickney) with her family, and Solly with his wife. Solly made a more than generous offer for a few pieces of Thomas's furniture which relieved some of the congestion. Solly's business enterprises had been blooming under the influence of his son-in-law. What is more, Solly's daughter had demanded that only operations of the highest integrity be undertaken. Even the girls on the corner were only paying ten percent for their protection. Solly's wife had become involved with the first grandchild and also with community work. Thomas's parents also came for roast dinner and there were irregular but not infrequent return visits. Celia sadly accepted their decision not to give her grandchildren. In any case she already had five. She was very pleased that Thomas seemed to have settled down at last and was more prepared to have contact with the family. He even went fishing with his father on occasions.

One evening they were in the lounge. Michelangelo was purring before the fire. Thomas was in the easy chair reading the Guardian. Kate was standing, looking from the window. Thomas looked up from his page.

"What's it like outside?" he asked

"Hardly a breath."

"A little chilly. The nights are drawing in."

"Yes."

“Summer's over isn't it?”

“Yes, I like the autumn.”

“Calm and peaceful, but winter's coming.”

“Yes.”

“How long have we been together?”

“A year and a half.”

“Yes, over a year.”

Kate turned back into the room and sat on the arm of the chair.

“Thomas?” she asked.

“Yes?”

“Do you remember that day you asked me to marry you?”

“Marry you? I'm sure I never did. I much prefer a life of living in sin.”

“I'm sure you must remember. It was on the beach at Island Bay.”

“No, I remember I was thinking of asking you, but I don't think I got around to doing it. It was the lady in the ice-cream kart that prevented it when she gave me the rosebuds. Was it something you dreamt?”

“It may have been.” She took the paper from Thomas and put her hand on his. “I used to feel so, so excited when I was with you.”

“So did I. It was a flow of affection.” He looked up from the chair into her eyes. “And then the trials we went through.”

“Did we go through trials? That is something I don't remember.”

“Perhaps I dreamt about them.”

“It's a different feeling now.”

“What is?”

“That excitement I used to feel about you.”

“Is it... gone?”

“Yes. Everything has become familiar.”

“Has it?”

“Yes. Comfortable.”

“And I'm... quite familiar?”

“Yes.”

“What are you going to do then?”

“Do?”

“Yes.”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” asked Thomas.

“Oh course not. We are lovers, we still have dreams, what more is there to say?”

“Nothing. I sometimes worry...”

“What?”

“That a young fellow might come with wine and roses, and whisk you away.”

“Oh don't be silly. My brother is the only person who gives me wine and roses.”

“Apart from myself.”

“Yes, you are my friend.”

“I am?”

“I like to be with you. No one else.”

“And once I thought you wanted to go away and find a new world.”

“I did, I found it.”

“Did you, where?”

“Here.”

“Here?”

“Here with you.”

“With me?”

“Yes. I've found my old man, and I've found my home, and this is where I shall stay.”

“Yes, this is where we shall stay.”

Envoi

We should enjoy life while we have it,
we're only here for an instant,
an insignificant summer's day
while the mayfly dances over the water.

The winds of fate blow hot and cold
and throw us these things;
the worm in the mind,
the clutch of luscious riches,
collisions with the sharp edges of the universe
or quiet comfort.

Have we lost the truth when we leave our dreams?
Do we have to accept this mediocre world of reality?
I have no answers to these questions
and leave you to endure the motley as before.

