

## Part One

### Dreamers

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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.

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“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.