

I would I were a careless child,
Still dwelling in my highland cave,
Or roaming through the dusky wild,
Or bounding o'er the dark blue wave;
. . . . George Gordon Byron

I

The boat was rolling, reminding her of the smoothness of New Zealand's enormous Interislander, *Aratere*, with its six decks, two of them for cars and cargo. Along with its sumptuous pleasures, she recalled the mesmerizing rumble, a gentle lullaby of sound easing passengers between the picture perfect little fishing cove of Picton on the north end of South Island and blustery and blowing, hill-tucked Wellington on the south end of North Island. The ferry she was on now, the Coho, was actually traveling from Port Angeles, Washington to the Inner Harbour of Victoria on Vancouver Island in the Canadian province of British Columbia. The trip took nearly two hours, during which time she tried but failed to escape heavy thoughts, her weary eyes transfixed on rough water and drizzling skies. For a time she attempted to think of the in-betweenness of ferries, not even to think of it but to reside in that place, in that arrested time where one forgot what they were: commercial vessels bearing lives from point to point in routine, leisurely, or

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regretted passages. In that captive pause they collaborated as aloof and graceful engines of escape, gliding over the timeless waters. She mused that she could actually chart some of her life by the routes of ferries, having so frequently crossed various placid and stormy waters of the miraculously hydrated planet.

The misty cyan-blue hills over by Sooke Harbour rose and fell on the horizon as the port edged up into the sky then dropped back into the choppy Juan de Fuca Strait. The steady roll hinted of malaise, assisted by an anxiety she hoped to dispel at her familiar and unfailing destination.

Was she far enough away yet? No, she would never get far enough away, unable to run from what was inside. Deliverance was only from immediate disintegration, not from the underlying cause. *Why can't I get it right? Why can't I ever get it right?* Finally she had found something that made her fall into a lush stillness without the echo of self-accusation. All too soon its continuance reached a startling impasse -- so untenable she had to run simply to free herself from the fear of *having but having not*. "You liar. Liar!" echoed her impulsive and regretted cry, a flimsy accusation that a child might make. She remembered the endearing bronze hand reaching out, hesitating a moment then dropping back in a tight fist. "It doesn't matter how far away you go, Kate. One day you'll look up and there I'll be," his message later pursued her, the memory easily flaying her heart.

It was perpetual misery to think of her accusation, her confused conduct. It did not fit the moment that had engendered it at all, and should have been mutely aimed at her own self-deception. The boat rolled sharply; she clenched her teeth in a wave of nausea. *Just a short bit more and you'll be in*

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your room, your lovely walnut-paneled room, wrapping its comforting old history around another wrecked endeavor. Hang on. Hang on.

The sleepless long transport from down under, on serviceably proficient Air New Zealand, had imprisoned her with recurring and undesirable memories, causing a relentless ache mimicking that of a broken bone. Unpacking and repacking lightly in her Seattle apartment, she had hastily driven down to the Winslow ferry, thereby reaching the Peninsula and heading for the Port Angeles ferry's car lot, her body all rigid tension behind the wheel. She could have reached Victoria via the passenger-only jet boat from the downtown wharf; driving over to Port Angeles simply made her work at something.

Finally disembarking the Coho, she took a taxi to the grand old Tudor guest house sprawling over its solid promontory--a Victoria landmark that had become a restful home away from home. Nowadays home was any extended time in one place. The courteous and accommodating owner welcomed her as a familiar patron, offering brief pleasantries respectful of her wish for privacy. Here, she occasionally encountered the same people in the same generously appointed rooms, most of which, from various angles and levels of the three stories, had a view of Juan de Fuca Strait and the snowy Olympic Mountain Range across the restless waters in Washington. The ground floor walnut-wainscoted room, which was her preferred refuge, faced out on the strait and the cloud-tipped Olympic Range, in full and spectacular panorama. It was a familiar place, in which she sometimes managed to heal herself sufficiently for another foray, after covering a bruising war or failing at a private existence -- the few personal relationships

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allowed to germinate were bound to wither, enduring just long enough for a ruinous or eagerly desired end.

Lan would not follow her to Seattle, and certainly never find her in Victoria. When he wrote that startling avowal, he must have really meant that she would look up and find him foremost in her thoughts, needed sorely enough to make her relinquish whatever defined her. He did not realize what she could withstand. Her attenuated frame and painfully sensitive mind were surprisingly resilient, relying on acquired toughness, a toughness that had formed as a thickening scar from repeated abrasion. Sweltering flack jackets, loud explosions, tumid, fly-covered, ripped-apart bodies had given her mettle when there was nothing left but stubborn spirit. That toughening process had actually started at a very early age. She would come through this, but she was wrung out and tired to the bone, could not remember, did not care, what day it was. The tiredness was nothing new. When one constantly moved around the world, days went forward and backward, hyper hours shifting into timeless periods of waiting, of merely lying down or standing up, finally hurtling once again into the mix by sheer force of will.

For two days she did not leave her room, offering a few platitudes when a gangly and equally taciturn British girl came in to make the bed and restock the refrigerator. She arose late and sat with her arms propped on the table by the window, staring out at the distant snowy peaks across the changing shades of salt water. With an old pair of binoculars left lying on the table for guests, the high snow fields yielded mysterious crevasses, the clean slopes dazzling in brief late winter sun or remote in blue moon shadow or peeking through morning sea fog. She stared and stared, as if a definitive

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answer could be wrested from the stippled water or the cunning mountains, or even the slowly drifting low clouds. “I collect clouds...the way a child collects something fascinating all too soon forgotten...nothing but clouds,” she had told Lan. They were standing on the sheep-grazed, cloud-backed South Island plain.

“Then ya can have all of this instead: *Aotearoa*, the land of the long white cloud. This cannot be forgotten.”

“I’ve heard the other expression: *the land of the wrong white crowd*,” she answered, knowing she had ruined the moment, ruined the most generous offering perhaps another more pliable nature could have hoped to receive. But *The land of the long white cloud*. How lyrical and tantalizing the expression, and how exhilarating she found the amazing land itself.

After her regrettable comment there had been a moment of uncomfortable silence. He looked at her with those inscrutable, very extraordinary Maori-tinged eyes holding something she did not want. She thought it was pity. *Don’t pity me, Lan. I’ve had quite a life...and still a ways to go, if I make it.* He seemed to know himself so well; an enviable condition beyond her will to achieve. She had never fit comfortably anywhere, outside, always outside and belonging to nothing. Discomfiture had become a catalyst for all her constant motion. The moment she settled anywhere for any length of time the anxiety, the restless sleep and threatening dreams, fell over her like a smothering blanket.

That unimaginable place in the South Pacific had held her like no other, held her for a perfect pause, as he had held her. There was a man who would not stand for any of her glibly spouted rationalizations, who mocked

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her excuses and cut her off in the middle of a facile explanation, which had become her practiced method of avoiding commitment. “Listen to yourself,” was his incisive charge. No other had ever suggested it.

She had gone to New Zealand to cover the America’s Cup races. For her, that sort of reportage doubled as a vacation. The idea of escaping the carnage of the world for a few short weeks had lifted her spirits and enhanced the woefully neglected carefree side of her nature. Katharine Gordon had, in a sudden spate of self-indulgence, allowed herself the liberty of light-heartedness. That recently less frequent transition could be a pleasure to observe. When this rare condition accompanied her deceptively serene but startling malachite eyes, an ironic smile playing into a smirk of amusement, certain men were bound to fall in love with her. Ultimately, from their point of view, it was a mistake; from hers, it was usually an imposition. She knew that eventually they would tell her she was too smart, too competent, too habitually independent, too unneeded to ever be thought of as a companion for more than a short season. Any longer and they might feel a strong desire to mistreat her, even harshly, simply to put her in her place. It had happened, once severely. From that experience she had constructed a marvelous avoidance that involved a brief span of superficial friendliness and a comparatively hasty exit. Learning to mistrust had come much earlier. By age five, she had already been irreparably conditioned to recognize her father’s heartless smile as the precursor of a hard slap. Out of sight, out of mind in his bitter world of blame and self-absorption. Learning that adage saved her many a beating but, blundering into his path, there were also many she did not escape.

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Her first view of Auckland with its bustling harbor reminded her a bit of San Francisco, without the tall buildings, for Auckland had almost none very tall, giving it a friendly village-like atmosphere for a city of nearly a million souls. Indeed many areas of the city were like unique villages, restored from Victorian times and retaining their flavor in trendy upscale shops and restaurants. Auckland glimmered in the sun, nestled between the blue-green waters of its two harbors, Waitemata and Manukau, and sprawling over or beneath some fifty volcanic cinder cones, some with manicured emerald slopes holding remnants of a thousand-year old occupation. A few indications of these Maori fortified villages known as *pa* remained as sacred sites -- a vivid counterpoint to the grand modern Skytower reaching into the clouds and offering a splendid view of near and far islands. The hundreds of sailboat masts quilling the lively moorages gave the city an airy, sporty conviviality, affording fatigued Katharine the leisurely promise of a buoyant and rejuvenating stay.

Not long after arriving in this North Island sea town, and still feeling cheerfully on holiday, she had walked into the New Zealand sailing team's signature store of apparel and gifts, in the America's Cup Village, and blithely announced to the clerk in a teasing voice, "I've come for America's Cup." The accent of her voice had at once made it obvious that she was an American.

Before the surprised clerk could mouth the same sentiment as the one which came resoundingly over her shoulder, the resonant male voice behind her had answered, "*You* will never get it back."

Katharine turned around and found herself looking into the rarest of

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dark eyes, an indelible stare that left her usual sharp wit stillborn in her throat: gold-ringed black eyes half teasing and amused, yet with a strange fierceness implying anger and, she was defensively certain, unrevealing of anything beyond a superficial interest. Yet it was something altogether different, as if she had been shaken awake. Her smile faded.

“I think we will get our Cup back...eventually,” she said, regretting her humorless smile as she made her exit. She had forgotten that she came in to buy a souvenir baseball cap.

“Not ever in the Hauraki Gulf...not without Kiwi sailors,” came the swift and, to her, accented reply, made as if an argument could lead to amity. She experienced a sharp sting of irritation as she swung through the glass doors and walked along Quay Street West, heading over to the outdoor tables of a crowded restaurant and bar called *The Loaded Hog*.

It was a noisy, friendly place with all of those New Zealand accents flying back and forth across her table. Probably a lot of sailing folk, as it was just down the street from the wharf where most of the sailing syndicates were located. Although, the entire city of Auckland could be described as *a lot of sailing folk*, for it was known as the *City of Sails* and one in ten Aucklanders owned a boat.

The day was humidly warm, and she removed the cream linen jacket that hung unbuttoned over her pale green silk blouse, laying it over the empty chair at her table. She rested her folded hands a bit rigidly in the lap of her tan linen slacks and stared toward the waiter serving a nearby table. Finally, she had his attention and requested, with what she was beginning to hear as an American accent, “Please bring me a large Guinness.”

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“Good on ya,” came the arresting voice she had just escaped.

She turned around and saw the same very tan face and angular body, half in the shadow of a fir-green umbrella and seated beside an attractive, dark-haired young woman. His white shirt sleeves were fastidiously rolled, the neck of the shirt slightly open, revealing a thorax well acquainted with the sun’s searing coloration. He leaned on one hand, staring at her with his chin in his palm and his elbow resting beside a tall beer, while the other arm was flung across the back of the young woman’s chair.

“Is it?” she said inaudibly, and smiled to herself, shaking her head in wonder and looking at her watch. She was supposed to meet a news photographer at two o’clock, and he was quite late. Katharine Gordon was always as punctual as she was punctilious in her work relationships, and under the present circumstances she was more than a little annoyed.

She sat sipping her beer, occasionally glancing at her leather-strapped wristwatch and feeling the eyes, which she had been unable to make herself meet a second time, boring into her back. What could possibly be so interesting about me? especially with an attractive woman like that seated nearby, she wondered. Perhaps this curious Kiwi found Americans intriguing. After years of necessary travel, she was well accustomed to the extreme adoration or hatred Americans could generate. As she was taking her last swallow, the photographer, Cash Taylor, slid into the other chair, knocking her jacket to the cement and offering a lame “Sorry I’m late,” then talking a mile a minute about having just come off a *flash* chase boat that would be used in the races. She was about to retrieve her jacket, which Taylor had made no attempt to pick up, when it was handed to her by a tall

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frame ducking under the umbrella. She looked up, and there were the relentless eyes again.

“Thank you,” she said, and knew that her voice could not be heard it was so soft and far beneath the ubiquitous chatter driving against her ears. She felt the beginnings of a headache.

Taylor glanced at the man and at her. She looked away across the opaque green waters. The man hesitated a moment, and Taylor stuck out his hand, introducing himself then remembering to introduce Katharine. She heard the name for the first time: Lachlan Manutaane. The sound, she thought it was something like Muh-nay-tah-ah-neh, pulsed in her ears. He smiled at her, an incredibly generous, gleaming smile that she could not begin to reciprocate in her now flagging state. She felt the heat in her face, the muggy air. Her head at that precise moment began a furious throbbing.

In the next several minutes Katharine had to suffer in silence while her loose-tongued colleague chatted chummily with Lachlan Manutaane, who occasionally glanced at her as her name came up. Apparently he was the owner of a large sheep and cattle ranch on South Island. She heard herself touted as a sort of Wonder Woman globetrotting reporter in town for the races, and then tuned the rest out, propping her head on her hand. She was too miserable even to protest Cash Taylor’s vaunting manner and outrageous hyperbole in describing the way she handled her profession. Perhaps he very mistakenly thought he was doing her a service.

“I’m sorry, I’m afraid I need to get back to my room now. It’s my head...sometimes the barometric pressure does this,” she was at last forced to explain, feeling a little faint and looking at Taylor.

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“Gee, Kate, can you snag a taxi? I said I’d have some tucker with the mates on the boat,” Taylor said, pleased with his newly acquired verbiage and glancing at his watch.

“Yes, a taxi.” She stood up with pounding head, laying out money for their bill and looking forlornly off down the street.

“No worries, I’ll drop ya. Just parked around the corner,” Lachlan Manutaane offered. His voice held the accent of his countrymen -- if a little impatient and capricious -- switching vowels around then biting them off in sudden elision, or stretching them almost beyond comprehension, boxing the ears of eloquence. Yet when this man spoke that way and looked at her so directly it did things to her stomach that had nothing to do with her steadily worsening headache.

She directed an apologetic smile toward his serious young female companion, still seated nearby, then answered Manutaane. “No, I’ll get there somehow...but thank you. I wouldn’t want to interrupt your...your afternoon. Nice meeting you.”

“This is my sister, Rani,” Manutaane quickly explained. He stepped back to his table and offered her name to his sister: “Katharine Gordon. Wait for me here, Rani, while I get Miss Gordon to her hotel.”

What might have been Katharine’s habitual reluctance, or possibly even dismissal, was overcome by pained urgency as she got into his Range Rover and silently rode the few blocks over to the Hyatt Regency. He accompanied her all the way to the door of her room. She had not looked at him once.

“It is sultry this time of year in Auckland,” he commented. “Where I

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live it's better -- South Island, dry hot wind...better.

She remained silent, fumbling for her key.

“Will ya look at me, please?”

She lifted her pounding head and felt the weakness in her knees, imminent collapse. Narrowed eyes keenly assessed her condition.

“Ya really do have a headache.”

“Migraine,” she muttered and thought she would swoon or very soon vomit. Light and sound were becoming unbearable.

“Ya need some help, I think.”

“No...thank you. Just let me get inside and lie down...in a dark room...something cool on my head...need to find my pills.”

He took the key out of her trembling hand, opened the door and said, “Come. I'll get ya some ice.”

She remained outside. “I'm sorry, I don't know you.”

“Yeah...that's what we're doing here.”

“Please...I have to take something and lie down. Otherwise, I think...I'm going to...vomit.”

Then they were inside the room. She was leaning against a chair, and he was bringing ice from somewhere, wrapped in a wash cloth. She flung herself on the bed and rolled onto her back, covering her eyes. He pulled off her sandals, closed the curtains, then held the bundled ice gently against her forehead.

“Can ya hold this while I get a glass of water?”

She grasped the cold bundle, closed her eyes and moaned softly against waves of pain, muttering in a ragged voice when he returned.

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“I...don’t...understand...why you’re here.”

“Fortuitous. Your photographer mate has no manners. Never seen eyes like yours, green as the Hauraki Gulf...full of pain. Sorry. Swallow this...from your kit bag...suppose it’ll help. Here, take another one. I’ll stay with ya until ya fall asleep.”

“No, please...just leave me.”

“I can’t just leave ya. Not until I see if that stuff ya swallowed is working.”

“Please, please don’t leave me, mama.”

“I’m just going away for a little while, Katie-bird. I’ll come back to you soon, my sweet girl. I promise, my darling. We’ll hunt for lady-slippers in the meadow.”

“No, mama. *No, mama!* I won’t ever see you again.”

Katharine struggled up from a familiar dream, crying out and sweating in a dark room. What room? Where? She remembered the headache, which was essentially gone, but had no idea what time it was. She squinted at the digital clock. Ten o’clock. Then she remembered Lachlan Manutaane and rapidly sat up, switching on a bedside lamp and staring around the room. There was no sign that anyone else had been here. Perhaps she had imagined him; but of course not; it was he who had brought her the two pills that so efficiently knocked her out: an essential prescription she always carried. There was no effective cure for the misery of a migraine but unconsciousness, if it could be achieved.

Pangs of hunger were at least a sign of returning lucidity. She called

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down for a sandwich and ate it before the television, watching a tourism station touting lovely exotic looking places on both islands, places she wished she had time to visit: Abel Tasman National Park, with giant silver ferns and black ferns and wood pigeons and tiny jewel-green beaches far below the trails, and then leaping whales off Kaikoura and joyfully bold porpoises choreographing their playful frolicking in the airy world above the green sea surface. She stared in awe at the giant kauri trees, listening to their history. Their extruded gum was nearly indestructible and much prized. Magnificent at two hundred feet and with a massive girth that dwarfed the human figure, they reached maturity at the ripe old age of 1,500 years.

Periodically his face, his voice flashed across her mind, unsummoned and unsettling. The tall dark figure leaning over her with the ice-filled cloth, an outdoorsman's skin, powerful, weatherized hands, but surprisingly gentle and ministering. The pain had precluded any consideration of this special attention, and now it came to her that it was certainly a generous kindness. She had not even thanked him and suddenly thought of herself as another wary *ugly* American. I'll try to find an address and send him a *thank you* note, she decided. No I won't, she vetoed herself, remembering his face. An intelligent well-molded tan face with high cheek bones, a full firm mouth and a straight Gaelic nose, black waves of hair above that concerned forehead, but the strange eyes altogether amused, fierce, and unreadable. They would brook no foolishness. More benignant eyes than those had once abused her. Irrelevant now, for nothing more would be set in motion. It was only a passing kindness, she reminded herself. Best to forget about it and get on with her work.

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By the end of the following day Katharine, with her usual methodical perseverance, had managed to interview two of the men who would be crewing on the sleek Kiwi boat, and had also expediently induced rather interesting comments from their wives. Cash Taylor had arrived late, having dallied heedlessly in the Skytower casino, just in time to run his shutter for the accompanying photographs.

Later over a glass of chardonnay, this time along with their dinner at *Gault's on Quay* -- it would be rather embarrassing to run into Lachlan Manutaane again at *The Loaded Hog* -- she irritably complained to Cash about his haphazard attention to business.

“Look, Cash,” she criticized, swallowing a bite of perfectly seared swordfish, “I, too, have thought this was rather like a holiday, but when I do business I *work* at it and I’m on time for my appointments. I can’t keep people waiting while you lounge on someone’s sailboat, gamble away the hours, or chummily swill beer somewhere out of range. So in the future when we need a shoot will you please--”

“All right, all right, duchess, I’ll get there. Hey, you know your reputation precedes you. You’re really going to make me work too, aren’t you?”

She put down her fork, took another swallow of her tepid chardonnay, and studied Cash with her head turned to one side. The brash blue eyes, wild and curly bleached blond hair, open-fronted violet silk shirt, and the gold earring were all of a piece well familiar to her in the world in which she moved. Everything he wore would most certainly have the appropriate label. She was never at ease with this marvelous superficiality,

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was often, in fact, repulsed by it.

“Oh come on, lay-dee, cut loose. You said you used to sing with a band in college. Work a little boogie down under in Kiwi land. Why not rustle up some high-end Kiwis and swing low?”

“High-end Kiwis? Swing low? What on earth are you talking about, Cash? Have you lost it completely?”

“I mean...well, do you want to meet some guys I know? They have long sailboats and fat wallets, and some of them might even go for your type: the smart lady journalist who sings rhythm and blues...sort of unusual and a...sexy.”

The evening was again sultry and this time she was dressed for it, in a sleeveless chiffon dress, white with red flowers, and red high-heeled sandals. Cash was staring brazenly at her breasts, and she wanted to douse him with her full water glass.

“I’m afraid my type finds your type off the chart. Singing and swinging are two different things in my book. I think this is the last time I’ll be dining with you, Cash. You work a lot better when you’re wearing ear muffs and a parka. Please see that you’re on time for the morning shoot with the U.S. grinders. And this time you pay the bill. Okay?”

She finished her chardonnay, stood up, placed her thin-strapped red leather purse over her shoulder, and sauntered out of the restaurant. Nearer the water there was a gentle breeze. She remained standing for a while, staring out at the sloshing pale green waters -- something quite different going on here. The equator was up north, she reminded herself. Strolling slowly along she came to a bench and sat down, thinking how nice it would

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be to be talking to an informative native. The wife of the Kiwi crew's helmsman had invited her to a barbecue the following evening. It felt good to be invited to a private gathering while sojourning in a strange place; in just that mood of alienation and gratitude she decided to turn up.

The tall helmsman, Ian Smith, was a skilled and experienced man of the sea, a highly respected sailor familiar with every shiver of water and shifting wind in the mercurial Hauraki Gulf. The Americans would be hard-pressed to wrest their Cup from the savvy crew Katharine had been getting to know. Ian's wife, Margaret, was very skilled behind the helm herself, and quite adept at dealing with the constant stream of people surrounding their competitive lives. From their first encounter, Katharine felt that she had possibly found a heavy-weather friend, a level head with a genuine interest in others and a much appreciated sense of humor. As the late afternoon progressed, her first impression was augmented by Margaret's demonstrated perspicacity, a smooth deftness at handling social obligations. Her inclusive manner, rather than the polite exclusion expected, was especially endearing to Katharine, whose veiled loneliness for friendship was never very intentionally addressed. The competitive Kiwis were rousing so when it came to their serious race against the Americans, but this did not preclude a generous friendliness toward Katharine.

"Am I rudely early?" Katharine had asked as she came up the brick walk of the Smith's large white bungalow-style house; it was perched high on a cinder cone hill in an Auckland suburb.

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“No such thing as rudely early around here,” Margaret assured her. “Although I might have put ya to work if you hadn’t worn such a lovely dress.”

“This?” Katharine laughed. “I travel light and chiffon is mainly something cool. Guess I’m a cold-blooded Northwestern American. This sultry weather really takes me down.”

“Yeah, it is a bit sultry. We’re all used to that, I reckon.” Margaret fluffed her feathery hair with quick fingers, and pointed to the red brick walk leading around to the back of the sprawling house.

Katharine followed the trim young woman, focusing on her tan shorts and blue shirt and enviably long tan legs. The large back yard was a veritable jungle of broad-leaved plants and spidery clusters of flowers in various colorful hues. It was partially ringed with a thick stand of golden-trunked bamboo, the rest of the perimeter shady and pleasantly pungent with eucalyptus trees.

“Oh, this is lovely, so lush. Please tell me what I can do to make myself useful...since I’ve had the nerve to arrive too early.”

“Really, I’m flattered that you’ve come early, Katharine. You could arrange some silver on that table at the end of the deck while I answer the phone. The caterers will do most everything else.”

“Just call me Kate and I’ll respond to all directives,” Katharine advised with cheerful laughter.

Margaret returned with tall frosty glasses of iced tea, and they sat in lawn chairs on the patio, visiting in the few minutes left to them before the others arrived.

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“What must it be like to grow up in this beautiful life, in this beautiful country so far away from the threat and strife of the troubled world?” Katharine asked.

“All that being true, I still have to add that every life and every place has its own sort of strife,” Margaret corrected. “Yeah, a lot of us have been lucky and we’re heaps proud of our country, but things aren’t always spot on around here. Family problems, unemployment, alcoholism. We also have our wonky politicians and plenty of other troubles, same as everywhere else. We’re a part of this troubled world.”

“At least you don’t yet have a population problem. I took a shuttle in from the airport and heard homecoming passengers complaining about the traffic jam on the motorway. I didn’t see any traffic jam. It looked like clear sailing to me, everything moving just fine. You Kiwis really have no idea what a traffic jam looks like, and I hope you never find out. Seattle has one of the most congested freeways in the nation. Sometimes the freeways are just giant parking lots...or I guess you’d say car parks.”

“Well, our narrow little roads get pretty jammed sometimes.”

“But you, Margaret...you must have had a wonderful childhood with all of this incredible variation in nature to play in. My country has great beauty, but you have to travel a long way for the diversity you apparently have condensed in these two lovely islands...and the *sailing*.”

“Yeah. My brother and I learned to sail when we were still practically little anklebiters, and we were lucky enough to have a family that liked to tramp all over the place.”

“It seems to me that you could hike around North and South Island

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all of your life and never run out of spectacular places. I've only seen videos of your parks on television but they're a mouthwatering temptation."

"What about you, your family? What did you do?" Margaret asked, leaning forward and touching Katharine's arm.

"I didn't have a conventional one...had a grandmother who took very good care of me when she finally took charge." Katharine sipped her iced tea with intentional evasiveness and thankfully noticed that people were starting to arrive. She did not like talking about herself, her history. Ultimately, it was like pointing the finger at a self that had done something shameful, something cloudy and vague that would necessitate puffery somewhere else to counteract an obscure wrongdoing, which could never, or must never, be revealed. *Yes, I was a worthless child, but I got high marks at school.* The end result was always a consuming guilt, a bewildering guilt that could actually change her chemistry. It had taken her years to realize what was happening to her and to learn to cope with it, not always successfully.

"We'll talk more later," Margaret said, with her lively, take-charge body already in motion.

Within an hour the spacious back yard had been transformed into a cheering section for the *Vulcan's Fire* crew and the entire syndicate. Darkness slid across the sky, and the rose lights strung through the trees winked on, creating interesting abstract shadows among the lacy webbed floral bracts and spiky plants. Katharine sat on a bench under arching sprays of vivid pink bougainvillea, discursively chatting in journalese with a sports writer for the New Zealand Herald. They were well into the conflicting aspects of reportage.

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“Excuse me, Phillip, Jennifer says you’re being paged,” a female voice sang out from the dim shadows, the airy words just audible above the band warming up at the foot of the garden.

“Ah, even when I give my wife the pager I can’t escape,” the sports writer said in a regretful voice, for he truly seemed to be enjoying their talk. He rose and left to answer his call.

Still smiling, Katharine sat staring at the dispersed crowd of buzzing, laughing voices. With her back against the cooling verdure and the stars coming out, she felt almost comfortable, almost a part of something solid and ongoing and admirable. The pervasive smell of eucalyptus was so pungently delicious.

“Even in this bosky darkness I can tell you’ve no headache tonight,” sounded a voice echoing the recent past.

“Oh!” Katharine cried out as she jumped to her feet and turned around. “What are you doing here?”

“I might ask the same question,” Lachlan Manutaane said. “Ian and I were schoolmates. I’ve known him just that long. It’s why I’ve come north, to see him win.”

“Sorry...didn’t mean to sound so... You really surprised me. Well, now that we’ve met again I’ll make amends for not thanking you the other day. I was in such a miserable state that I...totally lost my manners. Thank you so much for your help...your kindness, Mr. Manutaane...did I say it right?”

“I understood how ya were the other day. Ya did say it right but I’d rather hear Ian. Do ya go by Kate?”

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“My friends always...yes.”

“You’ve no glass in your hand.”

“I’m careful...headaches.”

“Ah, right...but ya were drinking Guinness.”

“Yes, it cures one thing and causes another.”

“Will ya please sit down. Ya looked more relaxed before ya saw me.”

After Katharine had sat back down, Lachlan Manutaane casually settled beside her, placing his empty glass below the bench. She was now far from relaxed, and hopeful of keeping her distance. Too close to this man and she became rather swiftly inarticulate.

“What does it cure?”

“What?”

“Guinness.”

“Oh, nerves, I suppose,” she said, staring off at the band.

“Am I causing nerves...or boredom?”

“Boredom?” She was uncomfortable with this sudden intimacy and unable to laugh if off. “That’s...not a very casual remark.”

“When I’m thoroughly interested in something...someone, it doesn’t translate as casual.”

She turned toward him for the first time and looked at his face. His dark eyes flamed with the points of light sparkling above in the trees. Something had ignited inside her, and her heart began to speed up. *Careful, Katharine, his idea of a friendly encounter and yours are two entirely different things.* Her wary head quickly dropped, taking in his apparel. Another white shirt, glowing in the darkness, but this time jeans and deck shoes without socks.

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He moved closer, then reached toward her and lifted her chin until he had her averted eyes fixed on his. She could not look away. Before his hand dropped, her head had stiffened and trembled. Why had he touched her like that, a near stranger? It must have been the intimacy resulting from the headache, vulnerability in a shared experience evoking a certain affinity. She reminded herself that he had watched her as the anodyne carried her from pain into sleep. A welcome rush of air fanned against her flushed face. He grinned, raising his hand to thrust his fingers through a jet lock of hair blown into his eyes. His wristwatch flashed glints of gold. Allusive lips parted over even white teeth, while his eyes laid her waste with an unsettling scrutiny. She swallowed slowly, wondering how to get away without showing any emotion, without showing anything at all.

“I think...” she began, her eyes searching through the crowd for Margaret. *Come and rescue me, Margaret.* If only she knew more people here. Why had this intrusive man fastened on her? What had she done to incur such intense focus? She almost spoke aloud: *What have I done to make you act this way?*

His amused expression held curiosity, enviable self-assurance.

“Why’re ya so skittish, Kate? Bloody sure I’m behaving myself.”

She tossed her head with a flash of anger at his accuracy. “Since you really don’t me at all, it occurs to me that you might be interested in...only one thing. Sorry to be so...*direct*, but I’m here in New Zealand on an assignment...working. It may not look like it at the moment but that’s the reason I’m here...and I think--”

“And ya don’t know me, Kate. There are plenty of bodies around for

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one thing. Sometimes more is wanted.”

“This completely unknown me is *more*?”

“I’m trying to find out...I think so.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake! I thought I’d heard it all.”

“Now you’re insulting me. You’re a stroppy little *wabine*.”

“What? It’s just that you...I’m not really who...you ought to realize that I’m just not...I’m sorry but you’re so...familiar.”

“I’ve recognized ya, too,” he said, laughing. “Why should I fool around with inane banter to get where we already are? Ask Margaret. She’ll tell ya I’m direct.”

A pretty young girl with a bouncing black braid and wearing shorts and a halter came hurrying up. Katharine saw that it was Lachlan’s sister, Rani, and felt a wash of relief.

“There ya are. Come and dance with us, Lan. Ya promised us you’d dance. Come on. You promised.”

“*Haere atu.* You’re acting bloody rude, Rani,” Lachlan said with a low cool voice.

“Hello, Rani. Nice to see you again. How are you?” Katharine swiftly chimed in, her eager voice almost desperate.

“Box of birds,” Rani answered.

“What?” Katharine responded with surprise.

Lachlan threw back his head, enjoying her baffled reaction with a thoroughly self-indulgent rush of laughter.

“It’s an expression ya haven’t heard,” he said. “It means she’s doing just great. But she won’t be doing just great if she doesn’t take her little

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backside out of here right now.”

Rani backed up slowly, lowering her head and looking very disconcerted. Even when she turned to walk away, she could be seen looking over her shoulder from time to time, until she vanished into the removed but still audibly chattering crowd.

Once again they were quite alone, and Katharine was sorry she had chosen such an isolated place to enjoy the garden, sorry she could think of no polite way to achieve a safe distance.

“You spoke Maori to Rani.”

“I was trying to spare ya that...just told her to rack off.”

“How did you happen to find me peacefully hidden away here?”

“I was watching ya earlier...then I saw ya with Phillip. Being the polite fellow I am, I waited until ya were free.”

“I’m not...free.”

“Are ya married?”

“No...I was once.”

“Then you’re free to do what ya want.”

“I don’t understand why you’ve fastened on me...you should know that it isn’t worth--”

“What...have ya no self-esteem?”

“Some...enough to get by.”

“Good. Ya have *pounamu* eyes and you’re no nonsense.”

“*Pounamu*?”

“Greenstone...jade.”

“I’ve admired it in the shops...very beautiful.”

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“Yeah, true nephrite. Here, many kinds, all with names.

She glanced toward the guests. “Guess I’d better--”

“Katharine...I didn’t intend to see ya until after the races when your work was finished, but here ya are. *Sonny*.”

“What?”

“It’s an old Scottish expression of my mother’s...it means lucky, fortunate.”

“The day my work is finished is the day I leave.”

“Ya don’t like my country?”

“It must be one of the most beautiful places on earth...the little I’ve seen of it.”

“You’ve seen nothing...but ya will.”

“Lachlan...Lan, please understand that I’m really a very independent person. I don’t take well to being ordered around.”

“Was I ordering ya around? Please excuse me. I was only expressing disbelief that ya could leave without seeing my country. Is there something you’d like to ask me?”

“You are really quite...surprising. I mean, I’ve never... Yes...yes, there is something I’ve wanted to know.” Dropping her head back, she studied the sky. “Where is the Southern Cross?”

He laughed softly then stood up. “Come away from these lights.”

They walked over into the shadows, beside muted yellow trunks of bamboo, and looked up at the star-filled sky. He put his hand on her shoulder. She felt an electric pulse shooting through her from that touched spot, almost caving her knees. He pulled her in against his chest and pointed

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overhead into the myriad stars. Instead, she was looking at his tilted profile, his silhouetted Scottish nose, the angle of his chin, the shadowed well at his throat. She could feel her entire body trembling out of control. It was frightening. She was in the wrong place for anything like this, or in the wrong life. She struggled to stay focused, but there was nothing she could do or, worse, wanted to do to save herself. Catching the scent of Scotch and citrus, she longed for an ample glass of The Macallan -- would even that be of any use?

“Follow my hand. Can ya see it? Right there.”

“I don’t...oh...yes. Wonderful...how wonderful. At last I’ve seen the Southern Cross...the four lovely stars on your flag.”

He spun her around and stared down into her startled eyes, then drew her slowly in until their noses just touched. “*Hongi*,” she heard him say softly, and remembered that nose-touching was a Maori greeting. She had supposed it part of a ceremony.

“That’s a...Maori thing.” Her voice was a mere whisper.

“The sharing of life breath.”

For a few wavering seconds, he perhaps gave her the chance to refuse his embrace, then the delicate propriety vanished in unrestrained indulgence. She thought she was resisting that overconfident mouth, intended that her hands push him away, but her hands would not work. Nothing worked but the desire to go on and on, responding to that powerful surge of commingled longing. She was far beyond frivolous anticipation, beyond the fancifully imagined, beyond the ridiculous, beyond even fear. With eyes closed, she still saw the curl of smile. The gently increasing

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pressure of his pliant mouth sliding over her parched lips, warm and whiskey-tinged, sent her floating up into the realm of the Southern Cross.

It was he who drew back, looking at her and catching her teetering body. She had withstood being shot at, but had never been kissed with an effect that folded her body as though she *had* been shot. Embarrassed, she held on to steady herself.

“Bloody hell, have ya really drunk nothing?”

“I...don’t remember...drinking anything.”

He scrutinized her face, offering a shadowy smile. “You’re drunk on something. *Ka pai*...strange little *manuwhiri*.”

“Don’t, please. That’s confusing...I don’t understand.”

“I only said it was quite all right...good. The expression also means thanks, and I do thank ya for that.” He was laughing.

“What is a...a *manuwhiri*?”

“Just a visitor.”

“And that’s what I am, just a visitor.”

“I rather enjoy teasing ya, Kate. Ya are going to come sailing with me...when your work is finished.”

“There you go again.”

“Excuse me. Will ya let me take ya sailing?”

“I’m sorry...I don’t think so...thank you, though.”

“There, ya see? So much for good manners. Now I’ll have to insist.”

“Oh, there you are,” Margaret said, coming up to them. “I’m so sorry to interrupt, but Ian is looking for you, Lan. He’s making a toast.”

“Right, and just in time before I lose my head,” Lachlan said, winking

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at Katharine. She was blushing thoroughly and glad for the covering darkness. “Margie, please talk to my friend here, while I toast *Vulcan’s Fire* and its soon-to-be-triumphant helmsman.”

Margaret sat down, laughing and pointing through the ginger leaves at Rani, who was dancing flamboyantly with one of the grinders. She turned back to Katharine and said, “I hope you’re enjoying yourself. This must be quite a different scene from your normal work.”

“Yes, although I’ve never thought of any of my work as very normal. But you...you are so wonderfully normal, Margaret. I feel as if I’ve known you all of my life.”

“What a choice compliment.”

There was a moment of silence, and even before Margaret spoke Katharine knew she was thinking of Lachlan Manutaane.

“It seems to me you’ve met Lan before this party. If I’m prying, tell me to shut up.”

“No,” Katharine said, quick to explain her short encounter with Lachlan and her headache.

“Oh, poor girl. They’re beastly I hear. Lucky me, I’ve never had one. I just get the flimsy little ones that can be knocked down with an aspirin.”

“Lachlan is...a very different sort of person,” Katharine said, wanting very much to know more but disinclined to pry.

“Yeah, he is. Even his given name...he was named after his maternal great-grandfather. He’s a very old friend, one of Ian’s best friends. I can see that you’re quite curious about him. I would not gossip behind his back, but

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I'll say a few things that I know, given time, he would probably say himself. He's very direct, pulls no punches, as they say. His father was Maori, Rang Manutaane, and his mother is a Scot, Mary McGregor. She was an only child, the heiress of heaps of sheep and cattle lands on South Island. Her brusque hulk of a father, Donald McGregor, bloody nearly made it into a kingdom, one he ruled all right. When she fell in love with Rang, a handsome laborer on the station, her father threatened to disown her, not especially because he was Maori, mind you, but because her father had wanted her to marry the son of adjoining lands and combine their large stations. He actually came to admire Rang Manutaane -- the man was a genius with animals -- and, of course, her father had no other heir. In the end he left Mary the entire station. She had married Rang, and they ran the place together. Her daughter--"

"Oh, yes, lovely Rani."

"No, Rani is no blood kin. She's Maori and adopted. Mary's ten-year-old daughter drowned in a flood while out on horseback. Mary wanted a girl...couldn't have children after Lan, and Rani was a foundling child. She's terribly spoiled, a decent girl essentially, I believe, but quite spoiled. She's older than she appears...twenty-two. I really think she stays in that childish mode because she gets so much attention that way. Lan treats her like a child."

"So Lachlan Manutaane is a prominent sheep rancher?"

"Oh, much more...quite a shrewd businessman. As a boy he went through a rather wild period, but his wise father soon straightened him out. He has always gone back and forth between *Pakeha*, that is white, and Maori

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cultures...speaks fluent Maori, as does his mother, who learned the language to honor his father. I've often heard mother and son conversing in Maori...their private language. Rani understands Maori, but I've never heard her speak much -- many Maori speak little or none of it, but their children are taught it now. Lan was educated at Oxford...has turned his holdings into a quite profitable business, or I should say businesses...owns a restaurant here; there's a fine Thoroughbred stud farm down west of Lake Taupo that belongs to him. Maori always have good positions on his places and in his businesses. He's been quite generous to the *Vulcan's Fire* Syndicate. But it wouldn't have mattered. He'll always be Ian's friend. He's easy to like, simple in his tastes...spurns most excess, except for a few interests in which he indulges. He really leans toward the teachings of his father...for whom he cared deeply. He tries to be a big brother to Rani...do what is best for her...that also being the wish of his mother, whom he certainly adores. I think she's ill...anyway a recluse. His father was fishing at sea with friends when their boat capsized a few years ago, in one of our sudden wicked storms. He was never found."

"How interesting, how moving this all is...really almost a magazine piece in itself."

"Good lord, I hope you're not going to write it."

"Oh, no." Katharine laughed. "I could, but it isn't exactly my professional cup of tea."

"I imagine Lachlan would be considered quite a catch for some worthy girl," Katharine suggested. She had suddenly thought of the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*, which made her smile: *IT IS a truth universally*

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acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

“He *was* married...to the most beautiful and clever girl you’d ever imagine...absolutely breathtaking, the daughter of a Maori chief. She died of a rare form of leukemia.”

“How sad, Margaret...such a sad story it pains my heart to hear it.”

“It certainly broke his...changed him considerably -- he drank heaps for a while...then suddenly straightened up and went on with empire building. I really doubt he’ll ever find anyone like that again. There are any number of pretty girls who seem to fall at his feet...but he steps over most of them.” Margaret laughed and shook her head. “I’ve seen him do it...deftly and politely...before the poor young things even catch on. He likes to do his own choosing. A few onlookers thought he might marry Rani, although they seem to have little in common. I believe he’d consider that incestuous, even though, as I say, they’re not blood related. But, of course, I’m beginning to stray into a place that is none of my business. So now you’ve snagged an interesting bit of family history to take home with you.”

“Yes...a memorable story...and sad.

“I’m really falling in love with this land, Margaret, and I’ve still seen almost nothing of it,” Katharine diverged, now certain it was time to change the subject. “I did see those incredible places on the tourist channel. They just made me want to run away and explore. I’m crazy about nature, this kind of nature, and you don’t even have anything here that bites.”

“Just one quite rare little poisonous spider: *katipo*, related to your black widow, and of course we have sandflies.” Margaret stood up. “I’d better go check on a few items...see that the caterers don’t accidentally walk

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off with any of my silver. Come on, let me introduce you to a few more of the others. Perhaps we'll find someone to show you New Zealand. I wish I had time; I'd take ya to some lovely places. You really can't think of leaving without a good dose of our nature."

Katharine stood up, shook out her dress's airy skirt, then walked along with Margaret. Her head was awash with information. She wondered what Lachlan had intended by that ruinous kiss, and even more unsettling to her: how she could have so ardently responded, like a lovelorn fool. Apparently brief encounters were more to his taste on his way to wherever he was headed. Having implied the occasional need of a more in-depth encounter, perhaps he thought she could presently fill that need. *No thank you*. She had enough misery resulting from her own history. The tragic information she had just acquired only made her want to run faster -- her proclivity for empathic sympathy would make her quite vulnerable. She suddenly realized that if Margaret now asked her friends for a helpful tour guide, Lachlan would step forward and assume that role simply for his own entertainment.

She took ahold of Margaret's arm before they reached the others and said, "Margaret, I'm so sorry but I have to leave. I have some early business to attend and my head feels a little punk...can't risk another headache."

"I'll have someone drive you back."

"No. I mean, please don't bother anyone. I'll call a taxi. Thank you so much for inviting me. I so enjoyed our talk. I hope we can spend more time together before I leave."

Margaret frowned. "And I hope you won't leave until you've

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properly seen New Zealand. There's a phone in the hall, Kate. I'll look forward to seeing you. We'll toast the winners: us."

Very early in the morning, Katharine's phone rang and once again it took a few seconds to remember where she was.

"Yes...hello?"

"Kate, ya could have let me drive ya back."

"What? Who? Oh. God, it's three o'clock."

"Sorry, Green Eyes, I'm a little pissed -- that's drunk to you -- and a lot pissed-off. What did Margie say to ya at that piss-up? Must've told ya I don't kiss every woman I meet."

"Well, this time you kissed the wrong one. Please, Lachlan, *Lan*...I'm...I'm afraid I'm no good at casual relationships when I'm working."

"Look, we'll just forget about the casual status right now. I'm too drunk to argue. As for the rest, I'll wait until you're quite finished with your work...because I'm bloody hell not through with ya...not at all, *pounamu* eyes. *Haere raa*."

"Incredible!...damn you!...*damn you!*" Katharine shouted at the dead phone. By the time she had recovered from her outrage enough to stop tossing and turning it was nearly time to get up.

The late breakfast, ordered from her room, came with a red hibiscus flower, a sealed envelope, and a small, gold-covered gift box. She stuck her hands into the pockets of her bath robe and walked slowly around the table holding these items, like a mongoose circling a cobra. Finally she snatched

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up the envelope in two fingers and broke its seal. The note read: *Katharine Green Eyes, I would have sworn that you would not do what you did last night: leave without saying good-bye. Still, I should never have awakened you and spoken as impolitely as I did. I can't blame Ian for continually filling my glass, because I was the foolish chap swallowing. Please forgive my bad conduct. The object in the box is called Totoeka -- a rare form of the stuff your eyes are made of. I'll see you after the races. Lan*

She sat with her arms resting on the chair, her hand dangling over the side, still grasping the note as she stared into space, foolishly smiling, remembering precisely how she had celebrated her first view of the Southern Cross. Reliving that eidetic experience, she did not very soon rise from her chair. In a while she lifted the ribbon and pulled off the lid of the square gold box. Nestled inside was a large pendant, a very beautiful, mysterious piece of jade, carved in an oblong convex shape to accent the gorgeous vermilion streak curling diagonally through its green field, like a rushing red river. The smooth, cool, solid feel of it vibrated in her hand. She slipped the black cord over her head and walked to the mirror.

“Oh, Kate,” she scolded the moist green eyes in the mirror, “you know you cannot keep this precious thing.”

When Katharine was not sitting in her room at her laptop, typing and sending back stories to the magazine that held the contract for her New Zealand work, she was talking and listening to all sorts of people in and around and involved with the races. It seemed that no one could talk or think of anything else. The races had begun. The Kiwis and Americans were

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now battling it out in costly, well-matched, finely tuned vessels. Watching them fly through the mercurial course out on the green Hauraki Gulf, and rewatching later on television each night, where she could bite her nails in seclusion, she concluded that, barring strange and unforeseen accidents and exceptional boat design, the win was decided at the starting gun. Whichever boat maneuvered into the most favorable position at the start more frequently emerged the winner, and Ian Smith was a master at getting it right. The smooth starting-point jockeying of the Kiwi helmsman and his crew in their top-of-the-line, big twenty-seven meter *Vulcan's Fire* was consistently perfect to the second. They made it look as effortless as an aerobatic bird on the wing, a masterfully delicate sort of finessing that swiftly won the advantage.

There was no lack of material for her carefully written stories, articles tailored to captivate the magazine's rigorously researched readership. Her only problem was keeping Cash Taylor in line for the various shoots she arranged. He actually did his work quite skillfully, but his idea of punctuality was more laid back than she had ever seen it. He continually abused her good nature and high spirits with his frequent tardiness.

When they ran into each other on the crowded wharf, Margaret had just enough time to inform Katharine that there would be a large celebration at the Skytower if the Kiwis won. They were taking over the entire *Fortuna* restaurant quarters, quite an accommodating space, which normally offered a huge and varied buffet but would be exclusively turned into a spacious party venue, complete with orchestra.

"You're invited. I'll have a ticket sent over to your hotel," Margaret

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encouraged, giving a congenial flutter of her hand as she spun off toward the syndicate offices.

The Americans had invited Katharine to a smaller gathering. She intended to put in an appearance there, too, and come late to whatever the Kiwi event might turn out to be. Margaret's welcome inclusion topped a list of other invitations, these Katharine intended to forego, certain she would not be missed.

She saw Lachlan Manutaane only a couple of times, from a distance, once with Rani and some other couples she did not know, and a second time talking briefly to garrulous Cash Taylor and then looking in her direction. She waved and turned away with her briefcase laptop attached to her other hand. He had made no attempt to approach her. The reflexive jolt of excitement at seeing him left her uncomfortably adrift in confusing territory.

What to do about the exquisite jade pendant? She had decided it must be given back. It was flagrantly an introduction to an assignation that would shortly end with herself in misery; not an unfamiliar pattern, except that previously the misery had been short-lived or nonexistent. This was undeniably different, as different as the man himself. She desired to know much more about him, inadvertently pondering small details -- the intense directness of his gaze, at once more enthralling than offensive. Still, regret at what might have been was better than suffering over the demise of a hopeless attachment. She would soon be back at more serious work, likely another war zone. Frequently exposing oneself to disaster gratuitously banished disabling imbrolios of the self.

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The race was over. With patriotic anguish she had watched *Vulcan's Fire* come about, as if in a pas de deux choreography, sliding between the Committee Boat and the Americans and over the starting line with only a couple of meters to spare, acing the American's out of the favored side of good wind and sealing their fate. For the last time, position reigned. She viewed a rerun in her hotel room, sorry for the Americans but, if someone had to beat them, glad that it was the skillfully deserving Kiwis. On her TV screen a beaming Ian Smith raised high America's Cup.

"The Auld Mug seems to like it here," he boasted.

Indeed, Katharine thought the *Auld Mug* was rather generous of itself, having once been smashed at its current residence by a protester wielding a sledgehammer.

Katharine fingered through her closet, slipping out an airy crepe evening dress she had splurged on in a trendy shop in the upscale inner suburb of Parnell. It was black with an almost demure, after-five ambience, a straight but filmy short skirt below a plain, spaghetti-strapped bodice: evening wear that tastefully molded itself to her slender curving body most appealingly, yet without vulgarity. Looking in her mirror, she saw that the black party dress made her softly streaked blond hair a striking contrast when left loosely flowing to her bare shoulders. She decided to forego her usual French roll. The dress and a pair of black patent leather heels and her small black peau de soie clutch purse were all she intended to appear in and carry. Just those things and a modest pair of opalescent pearls in her ears. She

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envisioned herself heedfully chatting here and there, ferreting out tidbits of useful information, always in the market for clever and definitive one-liners. Very likely she would end standing unobtrusively near a potted palm, freely licensed to gaze about in her comfortably defined role of the observing journalist. Such keen study was now habitual.

“Is that really you, Kate?” Margaret asked with a surprised scrutiny of Katharine, having spotted her standing by a thick yucca spreading above a large jardiniere. Katharine held a full untouched glass in her hand. “Good lord, you look like...I would imagine a New York model.”

“I’m an observer. I was hoping for unobtrusiveness.”

“Well, you’ll nivver bring it off with that hair and flash costume, luv.” Margarget laughed with all the fervor of her triumphant mood. She was wearing a tropics-inspired pale blue dress that matched the color of her happily crinkled eyes.

“Isn’t it grand? Ian is several meters off the ground.”

“This bested American is so happy for you all.” Here in this splendid land and feeling full of good will, her earnest voice carried a sincerity trailing no hint of the rather false blandishments heard in some other quarters.

“Where have ya been? I was looking for you earlier.”

“I was at an American wake...a lot of long faces...but they’re pretty good sports. More determined than ever, of course.”

“They were no slouches, that’s certain.

“Had anything to eat, Kate? The food is good.”

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“I’m afraid I ate at the other place.”

“Well, at least...oh, I see Lan headed our way. He looks as surprised as I did. Guess I’ll run off and tend to some other more needy folks. Spotcha.”

“Wait!” Katharine begged, but Margaret had already vanished.

She was consumed with a desire to run, run in any direction that held a door through which she could escape. “You coward,” she whispered to herself, standing firm and watching the tall figure in navy blazer, white shirt, and gray slacks stride forward. She had already decided, if she ran into him, to hand over the pendant, the main object in her little clutch purse.

“Please don’t drink that,” he admonished, with a grin that she immediately thought of as difficult to work against. “I don’t want ya getting a headache.”

She had not meant to drink even a sip from her flute of champagne. Now, that very assertive, accented male voice made lifting the glass almost a necessity. She did lift it, tilted it and drank half, paused a moment then drank the other half.

“That spoke volumes.” He tossed back his head, as if ridding himself of sudden irritation. “But I’m not in the mood for a long story. Nevertheless, ya look wonderful, more than ordinary wonderful. Ya look--”

“Lan, I’m sorry we have to stand here like this while I tell you...while I... First of all, I can’t accept the incredible pendant. Really. Thank you so much for your kindness. I know you meant well. But I can’t do this. Perhaps Cash said things to you and you’ve mistaken me for...I’m not who you think I am, not at all. I can’t do this...I *don’t* do this. Look, I...I have the

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pendant in my purse. I'm going to hand it to you and I want you to take it...please just take it and say no more...and then I think you should let me go my own way. Please...just let me be.”

His curled mouth reminded her far too much of that Southern Cross moment, but impatient now, the smile stalled. She hated what she had said, felt herself diminished, quite mean-spirited, yet the tannin-black forest pools of iris fully meant to drown her.

“Will ya give it to me then.”

She reached into her purse, lifted out the pendant and laid it in the palm of his hand. He stared at it a moment, clearly savoring its beauty. His fiery eyes then fell upon her, and he deftly slipped the cord over her head.

“There...*whakaturi*,” he said in a low voice, freeing her hair from the cord without explaining the Maori word; it was a soft word beginning with an f sound and spoken mostly to himself. “And please don't insult me with bad manners. While ya were running off at the mouth with your false assumptions, I was wondering just how ya ever imagined ya could read my mind. I'm not who ya think I am either. Do ya really imagine I'd let some wally photographer spot a woman for me...for Christ's sake? Pardon my language but I've been insulted. I want to be alone with ya. I've very compliantly waited an eternity for that. Let's get out of here.”

“What?” She gaped at him in astonishment.

“I said, let's get out of here. You're late and we've done all the celebrating here either of us needs.

“What kind of shape is your duffle in?”

“My...now wait a minute. My luggage is packed in my room and

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ready to leave with me in the morning.”

“That’ll make it easy. We’ll haul it over to my place.”

“*Your* place?”

“I have a house on the harbor in Herne Bay. It’s where I stay when I’m in Auckland.”

He took hold of her arm. She stared at his hand there. His touch bewildered her because of what it did to her body, even while she was saying, “All right, I will let you take me back to my hotel, because I’ve really had quite enough of this...this unfortunate misunderstanding. Very soon I probably will have a headache.”

She tossed her hair back in rising frustration, often the precursor of a fear that involved losing control. This time she had to admit how much she might be ruining, yet envisioned the ending all too clearly. The unrelenting intensity of Lachlan Manutaane encircled her, forcefully reminding her how recklessly she was engaged in a contest of wills. He had already figured out some things about her, some she only vaguely understood herself.

He said nothing and made no move to console her, politely holding her arm, yet somehow as if she intended to escape. They moved gravely along the sidewalk, still silent even after they got into his Rover.

Outside the Hyatt Regency, he asked her to stay put while he retrieved her luggage and checked her out. She at once flew into a jittery cry of protest. Had she possibly unconsciously invited this forward conduct, her courtesy been mistaken for encouragement? she wanted to know. He merely smiled, his knowing manner even hinting at commiseration, as if they were both combating some outside hindrance.

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“Please, Kate, will ya stay put. We’ll sort it out well enough. Give me your room card. If ya don’t like the outcome, I’ll cart ya back here and let ya go. Please just give us a chance.”

Certain her reason had taken flight, she sat huddled in her seat while the bellhop stowed her bags. Her body aroused, her mind in retreat, she stared straight ahead, while Lachlan drove them out to the harbor and up to his breathtakingly beautiful Herne Bay house, a white Victorian residence overlooking the bay.

“This is where you stay when you’re in Auckland?” Her voice held further apprehension, along with surprise, begrudging him the architectural beauty of an old treasure very well restored.

“Right. It’s comfortable...friendly. I like it. I have a sloop just over in Westhaven Harbour. Maybe we’ll go sailing tomorrow...or the next day. Do ya like to fish?”

“I...I’ve done it,” she muttered and fell into a dazed silence.

A few halting steps over the stones of a fragrant palmy garden and she was climbing the steps, then hesitating as Lachlan stood aside and nodded for her to precede him past the dark, handsomely carved front door. Once inside, passing through a painting-hung but dimly lit foyer, she stood on a hardwood-edged, blood-red Turkish carpet, spread wide and long beneath walnut-wainscoted walls. Her eyes settled on stained oak furniture tastefully upholstered.

Her wild heart pounded ever more swiftly. What was she doing here? Holding herself together with folded arms, she nervously and diffidently attempted levity. “Don’t you have to hurry back to your ranch and...dip

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cows or punch sheep or something?”

He was just setting down her two pieces of luggage, and dropped to his knees before her, laughing with thundering pleasure, his dark head cocked back and the cords of his neck tight. She thought if he remained kneeling there she would helplessly do the same, kneel down or fall down in complete abdication, involuntarily looking at him precisely the way he was looking at her.

“*Miharo!* What a wonderful sense of humor, but ya need to know that when I work I work full-on and when I play I play the same.”

“With playthings in little black dresses.”

“I’d like to think ya wore it for me. Ya do know you’re irresistible in it. But I think I’ve got to take it off ya fairly soon. Katharine...Kate, do ya realize ya can do anything ya want with me? You’ve done a hell of a lot already. I fancy ya, Green Eyes. Do ya know what that means? It means something more when I say it...because I never say it.”

He stood up, reaching out for her. She stepped back.

“Before you touch me, tell me why I’m here. Just sex?”

“That too,” he said, with an accommodating smile.

“I’ve come this far. Make it clear to me.”

“Ya really are choice. I’ll tell ya any number of things, if you’ll tell me why ya kissed me back the way ya did at Ian’s. I nearly had ya where we stood.”

“I...was overcome by the Southern Cross.”

“And not by the way ya were kissed?”

“That too,” she said, smiling for the first time. Her fingers took hold

Careless Child

of the pendant hanging against her breast.

“What was that word you said...for this?”

“*Whakaturu?*”

“Yes. What does it mean?”

His expression was at once sly and amused.

“It means love token.”

“I haven’t been bought with jade.”

Again he threw back his head in laughter.

“We’re going upstairs.”

“I couldn’t even climb them,” she managed, still with vestiges of a smile but now noticeably trembling out of control.

He lifted her easily in his arms. “When ya smile at me like that I’m not sure I’ll make it all the way upstairs either, but for both of our sakes I’ll try.”

“My clothes, my suitcases,” she called out in a last desperate attempt at rationality.

“Ya won’t be needing them tonight.

“I like your perfume...roses.”

“Attar of roses,” her whispery voice trailed after them.

He climbed the stairs, entering a large bedroom facing out on the harbor, and placed her gently on his bed.

“I haven’t been very kind to you,” she warned.

“Maybe the difficulty increases the value. You’re afraid. I’m afraid, too, but for a different reason...afraid ya won’t be who I think ya are.”

“I won’t...I’m not.”

Careless Child

“I think ya *are*. We’ll see.”

She sank back into the soft, dove-gray duvet and said, “I’m in very bad shape here because you see I don’t want to want you, and that can be very hard on the system. I don’t want to have you because it only means more pain. For you it’s nothing at all, but for me it’s another eventual misery, and if you only had a little compassion you’d--”

“Be quiet, Green Eyes. All this waiting is another kind of pain, and when it’s over we’ll be able to talk. But I can’t talk now...Jesus, not now. My brain isn’t working at all.”

“And very soon mine won’t be either...oh, wait.”

He did not hurry after he had removed her dress. It was the thing that surprised her. He rather deftly parted from his own clothes, and her simple dress came off quickly in his adroit fingers, but his hands went over her flesh like those of a blind man, recording every unfamiliar place until she wondered if he expected her to beg. First his hands, then his mouth exploring her, laying claim to her body until she could not hold still, finally pinning her hands above her head while a piercing hard thrust slid into the very wet center of her just as she was about to open her mouth and beg, and before she even realized what was happening. There followed a sort of beautifully orchestrated wildness. Such fierce wildness she was half afraid half wild herself. Who was this man? Who was this person doing this to her? A man, a stunned Katharine was in the act of discovering, absolutely consumed with sharing deep pleasure. She could not think anymore or question anymore, her masterfully tended body rocking in waves of rising sensation until the mind’s wary eye closed. His freely offered, naturally given

Careless Child

self elicited the same spontaneous giving from her, responses heretofore utterly unknown to her. By climax she was deliriously beholden for everything that had gone before. Then he was outside her and coming against her belly, her reflexive hand pressed to that consideration; the responsible specialist unleashing his hunger; all that earthshaking sensual play, all that uninhibitedness, and yet thoughtful, if not risk-free, care with his sperm.

“Okay?” he asked with his mouth in her hair.

She was dazed, could not answer, could not open her mouth, could not tell him that she wanted more, wanted to do it all over again. And then amazingly enough he said, “We’ll get better. In a couple of days it’ll be nearly perfect.”

And in a couple of weeks it will all be over, she thought.

“You could’ve asked me,” she managed, slowly returning.

“What?”

“If I was on the pill?”

“Are ya?”

“Yes.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I’m so cautious that even when I’m celibate I’m on the pill.”

“Nice try.”

Aiming for lightness but lost in the airy unreal, she countered: “I was always hoping that someday you’d come along.”

“I like that better,” he confirmed, kissing her lips one at a time. His

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mouth gently touched the lids of her closed eyes.

He held onto her, waiting as the tall case clock across the room swung its pendulum. Looking at their pairing, she tried to hold herself still, tried to think of sinking into nullity, but she was with him, had felt, and still felt, his muscular strength irrupting in her captured self, his intuitive touch steadily turning her into his, a blur of tawny skin fused to sun-deprived flesh. No use.

“Ya like this, don’t ya?”

“A...little.”

“A little. A little? Do ya like this a little?” He pulled her up against him and drove himself right back into her, so that she gasped with self-immolating craving, reaching out and closing her eyes, moaning, arching her body in sudden quick spasms.

“Open your eyes. I want to see your eyes. Green...never seen eyes this color...endless green. Maybe the hills on my place in the heat of spring. Sleepy hot green. Ah, Christ, ya *are* sexy, Green Eyes.”

He lay with the back of her body held tight against him, his mouth caressing the nape of her neck while his hands stroked down the front of her. The feeling was so wonderful she thought she could drift off to sleep like that, his intelligent hands working so nimbly, knowing precisely how to make her rise into the air, until she turned to him thoroughly aroused again, physical need yanking her into wakefulness -- her breath coming so quickly she was dizzy -- and cried out, “Please, Lan!”

“This what ya want? Yeah? Tell me.”

“I want...yes...I want...help...oh, help!”

Careless Child

“I’m with ya...right here with ya, Green Eyes...we’re helping each other, yeah? Good?”

“Yes...good...yes.”

Very soon they were too lost in the way they were handling each other, what they were making happen to each other, to speak any more words, only brief sounds of mutual satisfaction leading to a wild annihilation of the external world.

The next time she opened her eyes was some time in the morning. She was so exhausted she could hardly sit up. The bed was very damp. Her body was damp. She needed to pee.

She looked around the room and saw a vintage oak dresser and desk, a large bucolic painting, perhaps of South Island range country, and the morning-steeped view facing out on the silver-green bay. Her feet slipped down on a broad and creamy sheepskin rug, in itself a sensual luxury. She wandered off, through a carved-oak door that just happened to lead into the bathroom. When she had relieved herself, she looked into the oak-edged mirror and saw a rather pale face with large, moist green eyes that seemed fearfully startled. Erotic sensations that drove her to the far edge were heretofore unknown to her. Previous encounters with aroused men were always of minimal effect, unsatisfactory haste, or both, including those of her dysfunctional marriage. Somehow the full pleasure of it never quite arrived. Those greedy partners never appeared very concerned with what might be happening to her. Leaning on the counter, she felt the weighted tiredness of her body with a strange erotic throb. She decided to take a shower. A few minutes after turning on the water, she found she was sharing the shower

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with Lan. His arms came around her and he took hold of her hair, gently pulling her head back to find her mouth.

She muttered something unintelligible, even to herself, and felt his mouth opening over hers. Then he had her pressed up against the tiles and was inside of her. They both came very quickly. She hung onto him because she was so weak from expended energy, and from him. He lathered her and himself with an aromatic black bar of soap smelling of tobacco and cinnamon. They rinsed off, looking at each other only occasionally and with very few words spoken. In a dreamy state of fatigue she turned to open the door, slipping backwards into his arms. “Hold it. You’re totally rooted. I think it’s back to bed.”

“And I think that’s where I get worn out. Do you have any coffee in this place?”

“The coffee is after bed,” he said, picking her up.

“What? Are you made of steel? I’m so tired that--”

“I’ll let ya sleep, Kate. I want ya to sleep.”

When he had dried them both with huge navy towels, she lay staring at the ceiling, dazed and silent. He leaned on an elbow and studied her.

“Ya haven’t had sex in a while and I don’t think ya enjoyed it much when ya did...but ya enjoyed this.”

“What makes you so...confident of that?”

He smiled. “The innocence, surprise...the way ya lost yourself in it...like it was something all new to ya.”

“Yes...it was that. All new. *You* are certainly new. You...*cared* how I felt.” Her eyes closed as she relived the incredible pleasure of really being

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with someone, the smile it induced lingering on her face.

“I like the way ya said that...caring makes it good.”

She opened her eyes and faced his continuing scrutiny straight on. “Why did you... I still wonder why you followed me out of the store that day.”

“Ya think I was buying souvenirs? I followed ya *into* the store.”

“You--”

“Yeah. I’d been watching ya for some time. The way ya noticed things, touched things. I could almost feel the pleasure ya had in them. Picking something up, thinking about it and then putting it down with your hand still on it, smiling as if you’d taken its value without possessing it. That slow contemplation, consideration I found bloody irresistible.”

“Haven’t you ever noticed anyone doing something like that?”

“No, not the way *you* did it. I wanted your hands on me that way. Ya turned in my direction once and looked right through me, totally somewhere else. These green eyes shot sparks through the soles of my feet, rather like sixty volts.”

“Am I falling asleep yet?”

“No. I think ya want more loving.”

“And I think you have me mixed up with yourself.”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“You’re awfully good at this...but...why me?”

“Haven’t I been telling ya why? You’re no part of any complicated Enzed crowd. Ya have an open mind -- that much is obvious. You’re new to me...unmixed in this thick history...strangely beautiful...so fair. And as we

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go along, I'm discovering that you're very smart -- I suspected as much after Taylor's grudging praise -- and you're amusing. I mean with a sense of humor that is absolutely necessary in this bloody rotten world."

"Is it so bloody rotten for you?"

"Not always. Not all the time. I tend to be an optimist but I'm no fool."

"You think these eyes are untainted? Do you know what they've seen? I'm a journalist, a writer of obscene truths. I report on this rotten world, Lan."

"Yeah...helps make ya who ya are. And who ya are is the person I find very compelling...maybe even...necessary."

"No, don't say that. I live in a different world, one I'm going back to. We...we wouldn't last, anyway."

"Ah, not all perfection...too bloody cynical."

"Guess how I got that way."

"All right. I can see you're not going back to sleep, so let's do this instead."

He ran his hand down the length of her body, fingers stroking between her thighs until she quivered, then rolled atop her and drove himself into her, her legs clasped around him, her fingers tearing through his hair, her exhausted body trembling uncontrollably while she cried out for more.

Finally, they lay on their backs simply breathing for silent stretches of time, until she turned on her side and said, "I've been wondering what that is you have around your neck. You even shower with it on. Doesn't it represent a fish hook?"

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He stared at her for a while without answering, then his fingers slid across his chest and cradled the pendant in his hand without looking at it. He frowned and gazed away into space.

“Yeah...a finely carved, stylized fishhook made of...whale bone.”

She wanted to take it in her hand and examine it, but something in his manner forestalled a closer inspection.

“It looks beautifully made. I’ve seen them in the stores.”

“Not this...never in a store.”

“Your wife gave it to you,” she proposed with gentle intuitiveness.

He lay in heavy silence, his eyes continuing to stare up at the turning ceiling fan.

“I never had any such relationship with my husband, or any other man. You’re lucky, very lucky to have had it.”

He sat up, slipped the thong over his head, wrapped the cord around his fingers, then opened the drawer of the stand beside his bed and laid the pendant carefully inside.

“Please don’t do that because of anything I’ve said.”

“I should have done it before I had ya...since I... It’s been with me so long I didn’t think of it.”

“I wish I hadn’t said anything. I feel sad for you...I’m sorry, I shouldn’t say so...but very sad. I wish that you could have been happy for a long time...that it never happened to you.” Her restless fingers smoothed nervously over the sheet.

He picked up her anxious hand and kissed the palm.

“*You* are choice, Green Eyes. I didn’t really know how choice.

Careless Child

Come here. Let's sleep like this."

In a few hours she awoke and found herself held close against Lan, who was breathing softly in her ear. She turned her face toward him. He opened his almond-shaped black eyes and blinked at her with a slow smile.

"Say something to me in Maori."

"Something to me in Maori," he muttered.

"No, come on, humor me. Maori?"

He shook the sleep out of his head and stared at her. "Why? You're not a speaker and ya won't understand me...but...you'll probably hear plenty of it from me anyway."

"Yes...you've said things to me before."

"Mostly tourist words," he mused in a grainy sleep voice.

"*Pounamu* eyes?"

"All right...couldn't help myself."

"I've listened to the language on the radio. It has a beautiful lilt to it. Rather like Hawaiian. I'd like to hear it from you. Please, will you speak to me?"

Lan raised up on one arm and leaned over her. The black, gold-ringed eyes appeared even more black when he began to think in Maori. His smooth Maori-Scots face looked daggers at her, and she was beginning to wish she had kept her mouth shut. "*Noku ka pakeke, katabi ano toku hinengaro ka huri ki te ao Maori i tipo aki ai ahau.*"

"Lovely. What did you say?"

"Didn't think about the Maori world of my childhood until I became an adult."

Careless Child

“Oh, Lan, I think you’re very lucky. Maori and Scots English -- it fascinates me, the interlingual ease you have. I love to watch you thinking in Maori. Changing languages is such a beautifully complicated mystery. Oh, how does it work...the transition going on in your head?”

“And in *your* head, Green Eyes? Ya strange woman.”

He stared at her while a slow, appreciative smile altered his serious mouth and crept over his transformed face. It was a Maori smile, she thought, one that she could feel as from another frame of reference. The singularity of language, the rare forms of human communication began to overwhelm her as she stared off, now heavily into speculation. Soon she felt his fingers smoothing the serious furrow in her brow, followed by delicate, carefully made kisses over her face and throat until she, too, was smiling.

“*Taku manawa, taku tau,*” he said in a soft voice.

“Which means?”

He studied her a moment and came to a final decision. “I’ll tell ya some other day...maybe.”

His manner returned to the laconic frankness she was gradually coming to recognize as ingrained in a nature either seriously or humorously direct. “Now either sleep or more fucking or we get up and go sailing. Which is it?”

She was sitting in the breakfast nook, holding a yellow mug with two hands and staring dreamily out at the waters of the harbor. Her body felt light, perhaps slightly worn down but not unpleasantly affected, as if she had been rolled over and over by warm waves and tumbled onto a sandy beach.

Careless Child

“What kind of shoes do ya have with ya?” Lan asked. “Any boots? I suppose not.”

“You mean like hiking boots?” she asked, turning her languid green eyes on him and making him smile as he reached out to touch her sleep-flushed cheek. “I don’t carry hiking boots with me unless I expect to go hiking.”

“Ya sure’s hell didn’t plan on staying long in Enzed, did ya? No one with any sense comes here without tramping boots. We’ll have to buy ya some.”

“I thought we were going sailing.”

“We are. We’ll sail over to Rangitoto Island and tramp to the top. It’s rough lava. Choice view. Good exercise.”

“I’ve just had rather a lot of exercise.”

“Yeah, this tramping bit will get ya in better shape for the kind ya just had, Green Eyes. Finish your coffee and let’s head out.”

She stared at him as he stood up from his Windsor chair. He wore tan bush shorts and an open-necked blue shirt, smiling as if he owned the world. “You certainly are a bossy bloke.”

He laughed. “I don’t mean to be. I don’t want to boss ya, not at all. I’m just the leader here because it’s my country. When I come to your country, *you* can tell me what to do.”

“Have you seen much of America?”

“A fair amount. Ya have a lot of nice wild there, but it’s crazy...too many people. I like it better here.”

Careless Child

Lan drove with an impatient self-assurance, one hand on the wheel the other doing other things, tuning the radio or touching the bare leg below her shorts to point out something. They drove out Jervois Road to the Herne Bay shopping center.

She squinted down the street at some English words below a large shoe, too far away to read. “What does that sign say?”

“*He putu, he hu, we nga whakamaunga waewae katoa e hokona ana i konei,*” he translated into Maori, teasing her with a wink.

“Now you’re getting back at me.”

“What’s the matter, do ya need glasses?”

“Is that what you said?”

“No, I said *boots, shoes, and all other footwear sold here*. Do ya need glasses, perhaps?”

“No, I need lessons in Maori.”

“When was the last time ya had your green eyes checked?”

“When was the last time you spoke Maori to an American woman with no boots?”

“Jesus, I’m going to have a royal smash-up here if ya go on like this.” He was laughing so hard she thought it fortunate they were just pulling into a parking space before the store.

“I like these. They’re okay, sort of cute.” She smacked together the toes of the boots she had just tried on.

“Cute doesn’t cut it. These are better. Give them a try,” Lan

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advised, handing her a heavier pair of dark leather boots.

“You will have your way, won’t you?”

“I’m thinking of your feet, Green Eyes. They’re what is cute, and ya ought to keep them that way. Please try these.”

“I would but I’m afraid they’d sink your boat.”

“Christ, I already see the sort of day we have ahead of us.”

At the register a slight disagreement occurred as to who would pay for the heavier boots decided upon.

“Expensive,” she said.

“I’m buying,” he quickly replied.

“Certainly not. I’m wearing so I’m paying.”

“I’m paying,” he said with finality. “It’s not your fault you’re getting boots ya expect to sink my boat.”

They drove back to his place for two ice chests, one filled with sweating green bottles of Steinlager beer, from an ample supply in the refrigerator, and a hunk of Stilton with a loaf of uncut bread. Lan tossed in a broad-bladed knife and two oranges. The other ice chest held bait and was for any fish that might be caught on the way to and from Rangitoto.

When Katharine first saw his boat *Waiata Reka* riding in its slip at Westhaven Harbour, she exclaimed, “Beautiful! It’s an old boat...pretty as an antique jewel box.”

“Yeah, ten and a half meters...that is, thirty-five feet of history, loaded with new gadgets to keep ya from drowning.”

“What does *Waiata Reka* mean?”

Careless Child

“Sweet Song. I like the sound she makes close-hauled and moving fast...the water splashing against the bow.”

“You’re a sort of poet, Lachlan.”

“And not a cow puncher, huh?”

“I imagine you do that very well too.”

"On our station cows are at a minimum."

He had uncleated the three lines from the bow and portside cleats that bound them to the slip cleats, then tossed her the lines and jumped on deck.

“Do ya know anything about sailing?”

“A little...so my editors believe.”

“In sailing it works this way: ya either know how to sail or ya don’t. Which is it?”

“I’m a Pacific Northwesterner.”

“And evasive as hell. I wonder why that is.”

She was standing there thinking about her former husband, Richard, and how he used to swear at her: “Goddammit, Katharine, cleat down that fucking line. Do I have to knock you off this damn fucking boat again to get your attention?”

She jumped back onto the dock.

“Changed my mind. I don’t want to sail, Lan. I’ve had the captain’s orders that go along with the sport. My captain knocked me in the water when I didn’t move fast enough. Thank you...but I don’t want to sail.”

She turned and looked off at the other boats, her hesitant feet moving a little forward up the dock, humiliating memories still burning away

Careless Child

at her insides.

He reeled a line fast and jumped onto the dock, coming up behind her and turning her around in his arms.

“What son of a bitch treated ya like that?”

“My husband.”

“The bloody fool dumped ya off your own boat? Bloody hell, what a rotten wanker...can’t believe it. Green Eyes, we’re going sailing to have some fun. Please get back on the boat. I sound a little gruff sometimes, but it’s just the way I am. I don’t care whether or not ya know how to sail. I can handle this boat. I just have to move a little faster that’s all.”

“I think I do know how to sail...or I wouldn’t have done this assignment, but...sometimes it was so demoralizing that I--”

“We’ll see. Show me your stuff or take a nap. I don’t give a damn. We’re here to enjoy ourselves. Right?”

“All right,” she agreed. “Sorry...for the bad stuff.”

While the auxiliary took them out of port, she stared about her at a very shipshape sloop. The perfectly flush lay and rich vertical grain of the shining teak deck, the glinting bright winches and turnbuckles, and down in the galley: polished bronze hardware, solid and firmly set over rows of well-joined, gleaming cabinets. Someone must come and care for this boat most tenderly when he was away, unless, of course, he did it all himself.

They were out and ready for sail.

“Would ya like to take the wheel while I hoist canvas?” he asked with careful politeness.

“All right.”

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She stood up. The boat yawed slightly. She grabbed a shroud, moving slowly toward him along the tilted deck and then dropping into the cockpit. He said no more to her, allowing her to reveal her own capabilities.

Bent on holding *Waiata Reka* steady into the wind, she looked up at the whipping telltales on the shrouds. She was determined not to let the boat fall off as he swiftly worked at shaking out the mainsail along the boom. Her eyes went from the telltales to a quick glance at his hands and back to the telltales. When she looked again toward the mast, he had freed the main halyard tail, and the mainsail was climbing into the sky. Glorious to watch the big sailcloth eagerly suck at wind, swelling and lapping with hunger. Her heart began to speed up as she watched him in the bow, snapping the jib shackles to the forestay and raising the luffing jib.

“Okay,” he called. “She’s all yours.”

She turned the wheel and the sails swelled and bit into the mast. Her quickening heart lunged like that as the boat heeled and strained, nearly leaping into the sky with windpower. The water rushing against the bow was music, sweet song, *Waiata Reka*.

She was laughing and there were joyful tears in her eyes when he reached her side.

“So now we know...something very important I won’t have to teach ya.” He slid his thumb across her wet cheek and kissed her laughing mouth.

“Will I have to teach ya how to ride a horse?” he asked as he changed places with her.

She stretched out on her stomach opposite the cockpit on the seat above the well and said between her fingers, “I haven’t seen any horses

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around here.”

“There are horses around here, but the ones I’m thinking of are in Canterbury.”

She was silent, staring out toward Rangitoto. Canterbury was quite a ways off, in both distance and persuasion.

“You have such magical names in this land,” was all the response she gave.

They beat into the wind for a while, then he brought the bow to leeward and slackened sail as the wind fell abeam of them. The boat lurched into a soft glide, and the sails jostled in stillness. A pod of dolphins played off the bow. Thrilled, she looked on, feeling the heat and finally donning her sunglasses.

“Better put on a hat and some of this,” he said, handing her a baseball cap and a tube of sunscreen.

Water reflections danced off his face beneath his cap, and his eyes were again in that phase of watching and studying that made her more than a little nervous as she stared back at him.

“Ah, Kate, mysterious Kate,” he said, taking the hat from her idle hand and pulling it down over her shaded eyes. “When will ya talk to me?”

“When will you talk to me?”

“There’s probably a heap I don’t have to say. Didn’t Margaret do a lot of my talking for me? Ya know some things.”

“She told you of course.”

“Yeah. She’s a real straight arrow and doesn’t like to say things behind another’s back without permission.”

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“This is something she does for you, tells your women--”

“God, Kate. *E whakaaro ana ahau he patai hobore tena?*”

“Oh, talk to me in a language I can’t understand.”

“Dammit, easier unshipping that way without going round the bend. I just said it was absurd, that’s all. Please don’t get yourself in high dudgeon. *You* have some problems. You’re rather untrusting...I’m beginning to understand. Going to bait a hook and do some fishing...want to fish?”

“I’ll just watch for a while. I feel very lazy.”

“Okay. Get some rest. You’re still rooted.”

“Should I tell you whenever you use an Enzed expression that I’ve never heard...or just keep quiet and try to figure it out contextually with my high intelligence?”

He was walking away but stopped and turned around, staring at her with his lips curled in a thoughtful smirk. He gave an appreciative laugh and shook his head.

“Green Eyes, you’re a hard case -- there’s one for ya: you’re clever and quick...and I like your spirited independence. I’m fairly well schooled in the language department. I’ll know what ya aren’t getting. I’ll simply explain as we go along.”

She watched him toss his hat down, pull off his sunglasses and reach into the chiller for bait. His tan fingers moved with a quick and familiar dexterity. She saw that he concentrated thoroughly on what he was doing, as if he were alone. That unselfconscious aspect of him was reassurance both exemplary and fascinating to her. The spinning rod he used looked powerful enough to pull in some hefty sport fish, yet the line he used was light and

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delicate enough for a fair and artful play with nimble smaller fish. He made a smooth long cast, put his foot up on the taffrail and glanced back at her, cocking his head.

“Sure ya don’t want to do this?”

“I’d rather watch you. You look like you know what you’re doing.”

“Yeah? It’s all in the way ya hold your mouth.”

She continued to stare after him until the scene became a sharply fixed but slightly removed impression, as in a film or a dream, but brought to life by a rhythmic cadence of wind in the sails and the lyrical swashes of water on the hull. Yes, the perfect blue dome of Canaletto sky, the intense dazzle of light reflecting off the green sea, but then all the mysterious dark life in Lachlan jolting the perception into a vivid reality of here and now, his arm casting out over the waves, puffs of breeze tugging the hair from his cap. She watched him until her eyes burned, feeling almost dizzy then soporific. Easing herself down on the teak deck, she stretched out.

The sloshing boat and the heat were gradually lulling her to sleep. A couple more times she looked up and saw Lan casting his line out over the realm of unknown fishes, then she fell into a deep sleep, dreaming something dark and foreboding. Someone was after her -- perhaps her father. Some ominous form chasing her up through endless rooms in a strange old building and out a small confining window into the sky. She tried wildly flapping her arms to stay above the ground and fly away. A noise opened her eyes. She saw a shadowy figure standing nearby with a raised club. She screamed and leapt up, flying over the gunnel. When she hit the water she was thoroughly awake and sputtering.

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“Kate! For Christ sake! What in bloody hell are ya doing?” Lan shouted at her.

“I thought you were...someone who...I thought you were going to hit me,” she choked out.

He was throwing a rope ladder over the side.

“Come out of there. There are sharks around here. Granted they’re well-fed sharks, but I don’t like ya in this water.” She struggled forward as he reached for her.

“Now you’ve turned your clothes into swimming togs. What were ya thinking?”

“I was having a really unpleasant dream and--”

“It’s okay. You’ll dry out.

“I woke up and saw you with that club and I...”

“I was using my *mere* to club a big *kahawai* I just caught. Jesus, come here ya silly *wahine*. Look at ya, all wet.” He pulled her against him and pushed her dripping hair out of her eyes. She looked up at him and began to laugh. “This is certainly proving an unusual day. Do ya always stir things up like this?”

She could not stop laughing and hung onto him with water dripping down her forehead and into her open mouth. He kissed her wet mouth slowly. She felt his warm solid body hard against her. Deep in the throes of the second kiss her bare feet left the deck and she was up against him in his arms.

“God, I want ya, Kate, I want ya, oh, Jesus, I want ya. *Ipo*, sweet *ipo*, sweet crazy little *ipo*.”

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He carried her below and removed her wet clothes, peeling them away from her cool damp skin; then his own clothes came off in a wild rush, and she drew herself back away from him, amazed at the ferocity of such needful hunger.

“Get your little arse over here *wahine* before I come all over my boat.”

“What if I were to start calling you strange names, you randy devil?”

“I just called ya a woman...you’re very much that. Stop talking and come here...please come here.”

He pulled her damp hot body down on the tight bunk. She twined around him as they tore into each other in the utter joy of wildly impassioned oblivion. The boat went on gently swaying, rhythmic waves sloshing indifferently against the hull.

After a while he said, “I have to go topside before things get out of hand.” He quickly donned his shorts. “Stay here. I’ll lay your clothes out on the deck to dry.”

She stretched, feeling drowsy and sated, so thoroughly comfortable she drifted easily into a peaceful sleep.

Later she opened her eyes to the touch of his hand on her cheek. He was crouched on the edge of the bunk, his taut-skinned, heat-flushed naked body leaning over her.

“Bloody amazing. I come below and discover a golden-haired woman sleeping...a bare-skinned body sprawled across my bunk. Just when I’m getting over the shock of that, ya open your dreamy eyes. I could dive into these green pools and swim right down to the bottom of ya.”

She sat up slowly, covering her mouth to suppress a half-grinning

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yawn, then almost at once her lazy heart lurched forward colliding with her ribs. It had begun with her eyes roving over poignantly wind-mussed jet hair, over curves and angles of sun-warmed, walnut-gold flesh. Her clearing head slowly considered his poetic voice. Seized with a desire to touch and touch, to somehow get deep inside this dark enigma and reach the place that made her into a being of sensuous joy, she curled her body against him. Nothing of her appearance or mood escaped those tracking black eyes. He laughed, lifting her onto his lap.

“Careful, don’t hit your head.”

Turning herself half around, she put her hands behind his neck and straddled him with her knees pressed into the cover of the bunk.

She stared up into his eyes, her gaze captured and held by points of light glittering in diminishing hues of hot darkness. His hands were on her waist, lifting her up and slowly bringing her down on him, not an invasion but a deep coupling that gave such excruciating pleasure the sweet pain of it knocked her head back. Quickly sucking in air, her mouth formed a startled high note of satisfaction, a tenuous fragment of song.

“This what ya wanted?”

She might have played with understatement if she could have managed her own rhetoric, said anything clearly. Her throat gave breathless acknowledgment as she raised her arms above her head, feeling them crash into the roof of the cabin.

“Hey, don’t hurt yourself, ya wild little *wahine*.”

She was beginning to moan softly, her body swaying, her bent arms extended with her hands anchored on his shoulders. Her heart raced and her

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breath came in quick jaggling gasps. They were almost together then as he coaxed her into a tight weave of heated rhythm.

“No, wait...easy...with me...with me. Yeah. Good.”

His fingers clasped her waist, helping her to move as she writhed and twisted against him, at last *with* him completely, until his hands held her firm and still and she could not move at all but only feel his pleasure rising with her own and spreading through their bodies.

“Ah! Jesus Christ, Katharine...*careful*, don’t hit your head on the...watch it!”

“Oh, oh...oh God!” she exclaimed, collapsing against him.

He held her, stroking her back.

“Okay?”

“Uh-huh,” she affirmed with a slight gasp. “Oh...yes.”

They lay back with hands locked together beside their heads, kissing and stroking one another in lazy oblivion.

“We’re anchored off Rangitoto,” he finally muttered into her left ear. “Are ya hungry? Shall we eat first or tramp?”

“I want to eat like a starving tramp,” she offered with playful enthusiasm. “Where are my clothes?”

When she was dressed she came topside and said, “Where is the *kahawai*? I want to see it.”

“Good on ya, ya remembered its name. It’s in the chilly bin, gutted...also two *tarakibi*.”

She lifted the lid and studied the fish. The *kahawai* was about twenty inches long, a silvery-green-topped, pointed-nosed fish with a V-shaped tail

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and nicely attenuated at both ends. The *tarakibi* were rounder, beautiful silvery fish with dark backs, dark-banded raised foreheads, beaked noses and large sad eyes, also with forked tails.

“Nice...lovely, lovely fish,” she praised. “At home I’ve sometimes fished for steelhead, streamlined ocean-going trout with tremendous fight. I always put them back.”

“I’m certain ya do.”

They sat on the deck, swilling Steinlagers. She watched him slice the grainy bread and edge off wedges of cheese, then hand an open sandwich to her. They ate in silence, staring up at the island. He peeled an orange and handed it to her.

“*Mau tenei arani.*”

“What?”

“I said this orange is for ya.”

“*Mau tenei arani,*” she repeated.

“Ya have a very good ear.”

She repeated it several more times while he smiled at her.

“What is *ipo*?”

“*Ipo* is sweetheart, lover.” His eyes held hers until she blushed so deeply she could feel the coloration spreading over her face.

“I find it choice, really quite wonderful that ya can blush with such innocence after what we’ve done to each other.”

“All the more reason to blush,” returned her softened voice.

“I...noticed your tattoo when we were...”

“I’m sure ya did. Something that occurred in my earlier days, a *moko*,

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part of my Maori half -- tattoo on the buttocks, a common practice.”

“What is it?”

“*Heitiki moko*, a stylized ancestor, a *tiki*, big *mana*, power and...a...fertility.”

“I see.”

“I doubt it,” he said, offering her another Steinie, which she declined. He glanced at her for the certainty of her refusal and then drank from the bottle himself.

“You said your Maori half. Do you ever think of yourself as two opposing halves?” she asked with a carefully gentled voice.

“I’m what is known as *hawbe kaehe* in Maori, a half-caste. I went through a period of being bothered by it, had a few scraps, but I speak the language well enough, thanks to my father -- not many Maori speak much of it, but my father thought I should know it. I’ve been fairly well accepted among my Maori friends. Scots aren’t much of a problem, not for me. They’ve seen it before, but there were almost no Maori on the Canterbury plains. I hardly think of it anymore...wouldn’t change much if I did. I’m comfortable with myself...and far too busy.”

“Where are those clodhoppers I’m supposed to put on to protect my *cute* little feet?”

He rowed them to shore in the dinghy, with their boot ties knotted and the boots strung around their necks. They secured the dinghy, booted up and headed over the abrasive black lava trail.

“Tell me about this place,” she requested as they moved along, “the name...everything.”

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“The name comes from: *Nga Rangi-iotongia-a-Tama-te-kaupua*. It means *the days of Tamatekapua’s bleeding*. The chief of the *Arawa* canoe was wounded here.”

“The *Arawa* canoe?”

“It’s rather a long story, but the Maori came here in waves of canoes. The *Arawa* canoe arrived in the Bay of Plenty in the fourteenth century. That’s where the *Arawa* Maori settled.

“Rangitoto blasted out of the sea only six hundred years ago and last erupted about two hundred and fifty years ago. The word means lava. It’s two hundred and sixty meters high and it’ll take about an hour to reach the top. The last part of the climb is easy boardwalk...and a lot of wood steps.”

She halted a moment to gaze off at the dark greenery.

“These trees and shrubbery grow right out of the lava. What’s that small-leaved one?”

“*Manuka*, the early settler’s tea substitute -- very useful for us, and medicinal -- a rather all-purpose plant that you probably know as tea tree, a slightly different species from Australia.”

“I know it well, tea tree oil and soap and shampoo -- very good stuff. What’s that other gorgeous tree I see everywhere?”

“*Pobutukawa*. This island has the largest forest of it in Enzed. Always blooms at chrissy...Christmas time...still a few lingering red flowers. Bees love them, and honey collectors get their honey here. Ya had some on your toast this morning.”

They crunched over the lava in silence, stopping now and then to look back through the tunnel of leaves or far into the distance when a sea

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view was available. Finally they were starting up the boardwalks and steps, stomping along until they reached the top and broke out into a marvelous windy view of the neighboring island *Motutapu* across the causeway, and Auckland shimmering on the clear horizon.

“*Motutapu* is mostly grassland, grazed by cattle and sheep,” Lan said as they walked the loop around the crater’s rim. They returned in about half an hour and settled on a bench, gazing out to sea in thoughtful silence.

Another young couple came along, glanced around and left.

They sat gazing out and at each other, until he said, “Kate Green Eyes, talk to me...your family, your childhood?”

“I have no family.”

“None?”

“None that I know of. My mother left my father when I was five. I couldn’t blame her for it. He was strangely cruel. She promised me she would come back for me. I never saw her again. She was killed in an automobile accident with her lover. For a while I didn’t know that. I went to live with my grandmother. She didn’t have the heart to tell me. I waited and waited. The last words from my mother were a promise that we would pick flowers together in the meadow of a woods beyond our farmhouse, lady-slippers. They’re a small wild orchid...delicate, lovely. I sometimes dream that my mother and I are there... When my grandmother discovered that my father was beating me she took me away. I was eight. She tried to tell me the beating was really nothing personal because she was afraid it would ruin me. She said he was only venting his rage at my mother. She was a wise woman, a florist: greenhouses in the winter filled with deep blue iris

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and white and yellow narcissus. I roamed her woods, hunting wild things. My grandmother sometimes spoke French, and she called me her *Fleur des Champs*, her Wild Flower. She sent me to a very good school where I did well. I always had to excel.”

“Yeah, I’m beginning to understand. And then?”

“Then I went to Stanford, where I could often be a quillet-tongued wise-ass -- until later when I had my ears knocked back getting shot at, and developed some humility. That was when I became a journalist. I had intended a singing career, but I was a little too cerebral and, I suppose, idealistic...decided to make my contribution to the world by exposing its evil underbelly -- little did I know. I loved my grandmother. She saved my life, took me into her heart and filled me with sweet old aphorisms. When she died it was the saddest day of my life. Cut loose from everything, I found it fairly easy to go into dangerous places. It just became a habit. I’m good at writing and that’s what I do. End of story. Oh, not quite. I accidentally married Richard one cold winter sojourn in New York, a deceitfully friendly, greedy, cut-throat advertising executive, possibly even worse than my father. That lasted a little over a year. He was the one who made my judgment of another’s character highly suspect. There, end of story.”

Surprised at having said so much, she was beginning to regret it, nearly sickened by revelations far too private.

He sat in silence, looking at her.

“Now...you see, more than you ever wanted to know about Katharine Gordon. Very soon you’ll be shut of all this, as Faulkner has folks in the southern United States expressing it.”

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She sprang off the bench, ready to head downhill, but found herself being led back.

“Sit down a minute, Katharine.”

She sat back down and glanced at him from time to time, with her head cocked to one side and the wind blowing strands of hair across her wide pained eyes.

“I wish you hadn’t asked me things,” she at last agonized in a thin voice. “I know you think it’s been a crazy mixed-up day, but to me it’s been...wonderful...the kind of wonderful that nearly hurts...until now, one of the best days I’ve ever--”

He had stopped her voice by hauling her against him and burying his face in her salty hair.

“I simply want to know things, clever Green Eyes, because I’ve discovered I like being with ya, touching ya and looking at ya and listening to ya...and, *Jesus*, having ya. I recognized *you* the exact instant I saw ya wandering down the street. I bloody well knew it would turn into this.”

“Fun when you come to Auckland.”

He leaned away and looked at her long and hard in silence.

“Well, yeah, guess I can’t argue with that. A part of me thought ya might be fun for a few days...but most of me felt something else, was hoping for more...that’s the part I’m talking about. Why are *you* here, Kate?”

“You were so insistent...I guess I hoped for a nice memory.”

“A nice memory? I’d have sworn it was more than that.”

“I’m...I’m being conservative.” She offered a shy smile.

“That’s good, because I was right about what I thought when I first

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saw ya. I was *insistent* because I saw ya wouldn't allow yourself the truth of us. I don't know how it works. Something just clicks...there ya are and ya can't go back to whatever the hell ya were doing before...and you'll never be the same."

"You're scaring me."

"Don't be afraid. The day isn't over yet. Maybe you'll catch some fish on the way back. Ya like to fish, don't ya?"

Nothing more was said of what had transpired. They walked down the hill, both in somber thought, hardly touching but ranging deep inside of each other.

They returned home late, without more fishing and somewhat subdued in mood. After showering separately, he asked her if she wanted to go out to dinner. She declined, feeling reflectively unsociable and wanting to simply wander through his house and peer at the books in his library.

He scrambled six eggs after she had turned down the fish, which went into the freezer. Fluffy eggs with a bit of cheese, sliced tomatoes, tea, and toast served on blue and white china. They cleaned up the kitchen, quietly washing and drying the dishes, then went into the living room; he called it the lounge.

Katharine, wearing fresh tan slacks and a blue silk shirt, sat on a lovely old striped Victorian chaise lounge, browsing idly through an array of magazines.

"Hmm, I've had articles in here on occasion," she mused, looking up to find him intensely studying her. His right hand was clenched beneath his chin, the elbow resting on his left hand. He dropped his hand and sat back,

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ponderously quiet.

“I’m sorry, Lan, you wanted to go out to dinner, didn’t you?”

“Not at all. I’m sorry you’re in this sooky state.”

She flashed him the first grin of the evening and said, “Explain please.”

“Moody.”

“Is that what I am? Well, it’ll go away. Recalling parts of my past can cause bad chemistry. But I had a wonderful day. I was a lazy lout...loved watching you fish along the way. I can close my eyes and see you. Your clever hands. The easy way you do things. I’ll always remember that. I’ll always remember this day. Wherever I am next I’ll be able to close my eyes and see everything so clearly I’ll never forget--”

“Stop it! Please stop it, Katharine. Ya know how I feel. I know ya do. My God, ya must.”

“Tell me, please...how you feel.”

He looked at her a long incredulous moment, started to speak then continued looking in silence, his brow furrowed and his eyes staring hard with what she thought must be a bewildering sort of amazement at what he was about to say.

“I’m besotted with ya, that’s how I feel, out of my head and can’t think of anything else, that’s how I feel. Afraid you’ll get away from me, that’s how I feel. I should be working, yeah, but I’m not going anywhere until I have ya with me, and I’m trying to figure out how to do that...that’s how I feel. What I don’t think ya realize is that ya feel the same. Ya refuse to admit it...accept it. When ya make love with me ya give yourself so

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completely. Bloody hell, how can ya do that and then just chatter on about walking away? Sorry...I feel like smashing something. Not you. Don't worry. I've got a temper but I'll never lay any pain on ya. *Never.*"

"You can hurt someone without touching them."

"*You* have. Have I?"

"No, but--"

"But I might. Is that it? And the sky might fall and the earth might cave in. In what do ya place your trust, Kate?"

"Nothing."

"Then I feel sorry for ya. You're a little coward unwilling to take a chance. Running around the world nearly getting shot is, I suppose, easier for ya than taking a chance on a close human relationship."

"I tried to tell you in the beginning."

"Tried to tell me what?"

"I guess that I'm...rather unstable." She looked at him with sad moist eyes and saw reflected back such obvious misery she had to look away. She stood up quickly and walked to the window, staring dumbly out at the lights around the harbor.

"At least tell me the truth," he said, coming up behind her.

She had walked away so that he would not see how badly she was shaking, barely steady on her feet.

"Kate, you're--"

She turned around rapidly and said, "The truth...the awful truth. Today, sharing moments with you, I was getting sick. Everything you did was like being hit hard. Your voice...your hands...the way you moved and

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held your head and looked at me and laughed with me and told me things. Oh, that hurt...such...such pain and...the way we make love. What is this? What is it? Whatever it is I can't stand much more of--"

"*Wewebe,*" he said softly.

"Tell me it will go away...or tell me it won't go away. Tell me something. Tell me...what? Way-way?"

"It's...lovesickness. Recently I've become very familiar with it." He was grinning and his expression had changed completely.

"Lovesickness?" The word startled then frightened her. "How could that be when I've never...well, I did spend this day in a joyful sort of agony, yes, loving everything about you...loving...*you.*" The shock of it made her attempt flight, her shaking hands pressed to her temples. He came behind her, caught her, held her and let the tears soak into his shirt.

"Poor little Green Eyes." He wiped her eyes with his thumb.

"*Tangibanga.* She's having a good cry."

"Are you making fun of me?"

He did not answer, merely picked her up and carried her once again up the stairs to his bedroom.

Their lovemaking had been so furious and all-consuming that when morning came neither wanted to get up. They stayed in bed most of the day, only rising for brief visits to the bathroom, and to the kitchen to stave off hunger pangs. In the early evening he brought her a glass of chardonnay and a single slice of bread with salami, coaxing it into her mouth. She lay with her head on his shoulder, staring idly out at the harbor.

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“What was that you said in Maori?”

“What?” he asked, rubbing his chin over the top of her head.

“You said you would tell me some day.”

He turned her face up, leaned over and looked into her eyes.

“Taku manawa, taku tau. My heart, my love.”

“Taku manawa, taku tau,” she repeated, staring into his incredibly black eyes.

He slid his mouth over her lips, holding his thumb in the well of her neck. His deep kiss was answered in selfsame manner, until he took firm hold of her, sliding her down and fitting her against him. She ran her tongue over his chest, a warm nipple. With his head briefly angled back, he groaned softly and thrust into her, making her cry out. Their initial efforts, even more arousing now, were slow and languid, luxuriating in the certainty of the terrible heat to come. In a while he lifted her writhing body atop him and watched her pleasure them both, her head back, lost in swaying rapture. She looked down into his burning eyes and saw the rapt glaze of vulnerable satisfaction, then found herself rolled over and brought to orgasm by a quick ferocity, inflaming and startling. They rested and resumed their pleasures with a relentless give-and-take intensity of devotion until their bodies were drenched in sweat. She threw her arm over her head and lay back, panting softly, her slightly parted legs trembling in exhaustion. Gradually she managed a languidly coy smile.

He laughed and said, “Yeah, you’ve had enough, wild dove. Gluttony. I’m rooted. We’re flying south tomorrow. What kind of a pilot do ya want? Overfucked and brain-dead?”

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“I’m a somewhat nervous passenger,” she at once explained, drawing up her knees and curling against him.

“Nothing to worry about...just replaced my old Cessna with a new one. A Turbo Skylane four-seater. Nice plane. I’m fairly interested in living, too, Green Eyes.”

“Where is Rani?” Katharine asked.

She saw his face change very subtly, a slight frown of impatient annoyance.

“She took a commercial planeload of her mates down to Christchurch...going to bus them over to the station and mess about in idle nonsense -- that will take some time, if they ever get there...the little idiot,” he added, laughing at last. “When they finally do arrive, if those pikers get in anyone’s way there’ll be hell to pay.”

“When I was twenty-two I was very serious, ridiculously so, much older than I am now.”

“I can just imagine it, lassie.” He grinned, pulling her head back by a silky hank of hair and opening her mouth with another deep kiss.

“You know when you do that I only want more.”

“All right, maybe I’m up for it -- pitiful -- and then ya close your green eyes and give me a rest.”

They had taken a taxi out of town, south and over to the air strip where his plane was parked. Katharine saw that the small plane was indeed sparkling new and looked like a very capable and compact form of private transportation. Oxygen for each deprived passenger, wall-to-wall carpeting,

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tinted windows, and shoulder-harness seatbelts. The single piston engine, 235 horsepower, could fly at an altitude of 20,000 feet. The range, he told her, depended on the air speed and altitude, but at 12,500 feet and eighty-eight percent power it could travel 594 knots in a little over three hours. As the crow flies, they had to travel only about 600 miles, and at a speed of over 180 miles per hour they would arrive in a little over three hours.

Lan loaded in their luggage, then checked the oil and fuel, which he had already ordered topped off, while she sat pondering how she had come to be making this journey, and wondering briefly what would happen next. At the moment, she was too suspended in the narcotic of love to care.

When they were cleared for take-off, he revved the engine up to 1,500 rpms several times, then they rolled down the runway and powered into the sky.

She looked down upon this exquisite surprise of cloud-dappled land, pinned between the Tasman Sea and the South Pacific Ocean like a multifaceted brooch set with colored gems of all the earthy hues. Staring dreamily through the window and out into the gauzy blue horizon, she was shaken from her transfixed state when the plane bucked in an unruly current of air. She glanced at Lan.

He gave her a reassuring smile, touched her arm and said, “You’re off to *Waikikamukan*, Kate Green Eyes.”

“Why kick a moo-cow,” she offered, giggling at the echoic word’s humorous translation, a word meant to stand for remote rural places -- this she had learned from Auckland television.

“Exactly -- the very back of beyond.”

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She began to feel a small pulsing of unease.

“How far will we have to drive when we land?”

“Hmm, not quite a mile. The runway is on our station.”

She tried to imagine how it would be, but it was simply impossible, too many variables to consider. All she knew about Canterbury was that it was wild sheep and cattle country with hills and snow-capped mountains rising above a broad flat valley.

Once again the plane was going through some turbulence in the mercurial wild currents of air whipping across New Zealand. She was trying to remain calm, to show how unconcerned she was, but her stomach was not cooperating.

He looked at her carefully and said, “No worries, Katharine. Collywobbles? Not going to spew breakfast are ya?”

“Not if I can help it.

“Tell me about your mother, Lan.”

“My mother is not as well as I'd like to see her...suppose some of it's from bouts of depression. When my father was lost at sea she never fully recovered. Her devotion was very strong and thorough. I'm congenious, very like her in that respect.”

She was silent, thinking the remark implied that devotion to his dead wife remained strong. And why would it not? She looked away and realized that she felt terribly sad. His wife had not crossed her mind since the incident with the fish hook pendant. For Katharine this had been a selfish time of falling in love, brief, thoughtless, and sparsely developed. Lan had spoken little of his earlier days. Except for Margaret's cursory history, his

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past was a strange unknown place to her.”

“You’ve gone very silent. Did I cause that?”

She hastily shook her head and slipped back into a ponderous silence, feeling rather like airy froth floating above something interminably deep and unshakably solid.

“I only wanted ya to know that I’m faithful, Kate.”

“Yes, I think you must have been very much so...*are* very much so. How could you not be? I’m so sorry.”

“That isn’t quite what I meant. I live in the present. I’m here with *you*, Kate, trying to tell ya who I am.”

“Sorry. I only thought...sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about.” He lifted her hand to his mouth then pressed it against his knee.

“Have any desire for a sandwich?”

Realizing that he was hungry, Katharine said, “Yes, I do,” and reached for the bag with their ham sandwiches in it. When they had finished, she neatly folded the wrappers and put them back in the bag while he smiled at her tidiness.

“I was thinking about your mother, Lan. Whenever I’m at home I try to visit with...with older folk. I like them. They can be like a family. When my grandmother died I was so lonely for the company of a wise older person that I started visiting a retirement home. I’ve often listened to the shut-ins, brought them small things. Sometimes they have wonderful stories to tell. Their loneliness and, of course, the loss of loved ones often causes serious depression. A visit, a hug, a drive in the country does wonders for

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them. Maybe I could get your mother to show me around while I'm there. Maybe she would come with me to Christchurch. Does she go out?"

"No...but I'm impressed, Kate."

She fell silent again. The droning engine made her sleepy. After a while she dozed off, soon astonished to find they were in a landing pattern. Lan was radioing someone on the ground. They were coming down over dry rolling-hilled, but altogether rather flat, tussockland, with a river flowing through it and gorgeous snow-capped peaks biting into the sky. These were called the Southern Alps.

"I can't have slept that long," she said with surprise.

"A good thing, now you'll be rested. Got to concentrate here a minute and we'll be down."

They touched down and rolled over a long packed runway, not as smooth as the one they took off from, but sound and well maintained.

When the plane had taxied off the runway, an older weathered looking Maori stepped up, reeking of tobacco that she could smell on the wind blowing through the open cabin. Lan greeted him as Rex, and was soon handing him luggage to be transported to another Range Rover. Lan came around to her side of the plane, lifted her yawning self into his arms and offered a welcome kiss.

"Been thinking about this for a few hours. Welcome to Green Braes, sleepy Green Eyes.

"The name sounds like something out of Robert Burns."

"It is," he said with surprise, "from his poem *Afton Water*. My grandfather loved that poem. He named my mother Mary from it, and I was

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raised on Robbie Burns. Green Braes is named for the green banks upriver where our property runs around lake preserves and into rugged foothills.

Eager for more history and facts, Katharine asked, “How many acres do you have?”

“Acres?...hmm...acres...about twenty thousand or more.”

“That’s a lot of acres.”

“For sheep and cattle ya need a lot of hectares...acres.”

After a friendly introduction, Lan waved Rex off, then got behind the wheel of the Rover. They drove down a gravel road and turned into a lane bordered by thick and low, gnarled old trees, some hardy species of dry small-leaved holly. At the end of the lane, she saw rising heavenward a structure reminding her of a great stone castle, or perhaps some massive old mansion in Edinburgh, with its many slate-roof peaks facing in all directions and its thick walls of heavy gray stone.

“Is that--?”

“Green Braes Lodge, *The Lodge*,’ as my grandfather was fond of calling it.

“That’s your--”

“My home.” He looked at her and laughed.

“It’s more like a...a sort of fortress for a feudal baron.”

“Big and solid it is. Stone does very well out here in these extremes of heat and snow.”

“I certainly feel the heat,” she remarked, having stepped off the plane into a hot wind surprisingly persistent.

“Testin’ your temper, lassie?” Lan teased. “That nor’wester is the

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bane of us high plains jokers. It sweeps down off the mountains and as such is called a föhn. Many's the time it's been a good excuse for a corker of a scrap."

"I see. Lan...did you really attend Oxford?"

"Oi did," he said with a burst of laughter. "You're not a snob are ya, Katie Green Eyes?"

"No one ever accused me of it, Lachlan Manutaane...Laird of Green Braes Lodge."

"Jesus, ya make me laugh, ya cheeky brat. I love it."

They rolled to a stop in the circular drive, precisely before the steps of the towering Lodge.

"My mother might greet ya in Maori. Don't worry if ya don't understand something...just her way of honoring my father."

An attractive woman with short ash-blond hair and a smiling face was standing on the steps. She was slender and almost as tall as Lachlan, perhaps somewhere in her mid-fifties. She wore well-cut tan slacks and a white tailored blouse beneath an olive green, boiled wool jacket. Her comparatively small, gracefully poised feet sported smartly tooled brown loafers.

Good lord, Katharine thought, this radiant specimen of mature womanhood must be Lachlan's mother. She almost laughed in remembering how she had pictured the *dear old woman*.

Lachlan went forward to meet her. They embraced in a very loving way, both speaking in low voices. Katharine hung back, smiling and waiting.

Lachlan turned around and said, "Mother, this is Katharine Gordon.

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Katharine, my mother, Mary Manutaane.”

“Welcome to Green Braes,” Mary Manutaane said, “*Tena koe. Haere mai, Katharine.*” She reached out her hand and Katharine quickly took it, wanting to hug her but uncertain. She hesitated a moment longer, then succumbed to her inclination, putting her arms around Mary. There was a brief instant of restraint and then Mary hugged her back. Katharine saw immediately that Mary Manutaane was not used to being warmly greeted by anyone but her son, and certainly Rani. Katharine also noticed that Mary rolled her r when she said Green Braes, and Katharine realized she had been hearing the same slight roll in Lan’s speech. That fetching burr would surely be a prevalent Scottish characteristic of this part of South Island.

Unbeknownst to Lan, Katharine had been carefully practicing a single Maori phrase: *This is a beautiful land* -- which she had heard another journalist repeat to a coaching Maori speaker. She had been practicing it over and over to get an authentic vowel sound. She smiled at Mary and said, “*He whenua kura tenei.*” Both Lan and Mary grinned with appreciation, and Mary quickly replied, “*Mamae ana to korero.*”

“She said that was a beautiful remark. I agree,” Lan praised.

Mary laughed and said, “Your Scots girl likes the words, Lan.” The burr of the r in her pronunciation of girl was as much a delight as the way she had phrased the sentence.

They walked into the grand foyer, while Mary informed them tea would not be for two more hours and that Lan’s room had been thoroughly tidied for Katharine’s visit.

“Tea means dinner,” Lan explained.

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“Yes, the same as in England,” Katharine said.

“You two may have afternoon tea if you like, Lani.”

“Hungry, Kate?” Lan asked, eager to be alone with her.

“No, I’m fine. We had a sandwich. I can wait.”

Katharine was still considering Mary’s words and wondering just how conservative she was in her outlook, for apparently she thought little of the two sharing a bedroom. Perhaps it was Katharine’s Scottish ancestry that had so favored her in Mary’s eyes. She had never even thought of it until this moment. She wondered if Lan had thought of it. Very likely he had.

They climbed a broad stairs adorned with handsomely carved thistle newel posts, briefly stopping on the first landing while Katharine admired a large-paneled stained glass mural displaying a proud, full-racked stag in a Scottish highland setting.

Entering the commodious bedroom, her senses were infused with the smoky spice of years of fires, the mellow tones of brown and burgundy, the pooling velour drapes at the wide beveled and leaded windows filled with blue sky and facing out on the river, and the gold-framed paintings hanging above what must be kauri wood. A well-lived-in room enhanced by Lan’s consuming presence.

“Surely this must be the master bedroom,” she speculated.

“Surely it is, complete with master. Mother didn’t want it without my father,” Lan said as he watched Katharine explore.

The ceiling was very high, holding a heavy metal chandelier fixed with opaque glass globes shaped like flames. The high burgundy walls were met with gleaming wainscoting, running behind a massive fourposter of

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carved oak, overspread with a brown and wine duvet. The carpet, a strange interlocked repetition of stylized violet-topped thistles of muted green on a field of dark umber, was laid over a shining parquet floor patterned in red and blond woods. There were paintings of well-sired horses poised in dressage, portraits of hunting and sheep dogs on the walls, and a large gray-stoned fireplace with a shining bronze fender before its opening.

“That must be nice in the winter snows.”

“It is,” Lan affirmed, still smiling and watching her.

“Do ya want a shower? What will ya have?”

She turned to take in all of him at last, this tall, dark, surprisingly urbane Maori-Scot male from the back of beyond, the strange black eyes still so full of mysteries. Could it really be that she had been wildly intimate with this barely known man smiling at her from across the room? Could it really be that she was now standing in his time-honored, very masculine bedroom in the uncommon house of half his ancestors? How did it ever come to this? She felt as if she had just met at least half of him for the first time. Perhaps it was so. Consequently, she at once assumed that if she ever accompanied him to a Maori setting she might also meet the other half. He grinned, flashing the white teeth of an irresistible mouth that could so easily and fiercely consume her. At that moment, she remembered even more precisely who he was to her and how he was to her.

“Kate? Katharine...where have ya gone, Green Eyes?”

As if a whirling dark cloud of misgiving were rolling up to engulf her, she pocketed her hands and backed up slowly toward the wall, glancing behind her and just avoiding a narrow oak desk.

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“What are ya doing?”

“I’m...I don’t quite know,” she said, fearful of the heated impulses attacking her reason. She stood looking at him, silent. Nearly all of the self-inculcated reason that had for so long facilitated her controlled pre-New Zealand life was swiftly evaporating, blowing away as if caught on the hot exterior wind of this place. Jabbing dark thoughts of how to save a shred of herself flew like disturbed hornets across her divided mind. She knew what he wanted. It was the same thing she wanted. But how long could they abandon themselves to this wildness without a thought of the consequences? Or had he been thinking of them all along, confidently plotting out the rest of her life? When she spoke -- candidly to imitate his frank manner -- she strove for diversion, temporarily sending him in another direction.

“Your mother is perfectly well. The only thing wrong with her is that she’s lonely and a possibly a little depressed.”

“Didn’t I say as much?”

“She needs to get out.”

“Ya don’t understand. When my mother was a young woman, the social climate here was far more provincial than now, and even now it can be a bit chilly. When she married my father her so-called friends shunned her. She avoided them...has mostly done so ever since. She prefers going bush...where she can feel comfortable and safe and free to roam through her own house and over her own land as she pleases.”

“Is that her wish or yours?”

“What? Kate...ya really do plunge right in, don’t ya?”

“You almost said it’s none of my business. Is there an expression for

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that in Maori, too?”

“*Kaore he wahi o tera ki a koe.*”

“Good, you can say it whenever I *shockingly* offer an opinion.”

“For Christ’s sake, are we having a row over my mother before we’ve even sat on my bed?”

“It isn’t good to sit on a bed.”

“I certainly agree. Beds are for lying down.”

His censure was rapidly sliding into humor. Katharine was eager for a carefree mood as well, casting aside all the weighty speculation of an unreadable future. The sweet here and now of freewheeling emotion was more, so much more than she had ever known. She could never have adequately explained what she was doing here anyway, except that Lachlan Manutaane was here.

“Ya are choice, Kate. Have we just met? Again? A little more of us, yeah? No worries...please. Come here, my fiery *wabine*. I need to make ya smile. Will ya get your clothes off, Green Eyes...or shall I do it? I fancy ya like nothing else.”

“We have to get up. It’s nearly time for tea.”

“I’ll have my tea at breakfast,” Katharine clowned, stretching languorously.

“Get up, ya randy little wench.”

She kissed his throat, then ran her fingers down his firm-muscled body and along his groin to play in the soft black curls.

“Jesus, woman, *taera*,” he muttered, thoroughly aroused and gathering

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her up. He rolled atop her and ardently yielded to her prostrate condition yet one more furious time. Master of a punctual household, he was in a rough hurry, startling her. She cried out, moaning softly as they flung themselves hungrily together. She bit unhurtfully into his shoulder to prevent a rising scream. “Salty skin,” she murmured with a soft laugh, while her heart was still wildly pounding.

She thought that drifting slowly back to sleep would have been a lovely aftermath, locked together as they were. Instead, he leapt out of bed and strode across the room and into the large shower. Katharine trailed slowly after him.

“*Christ*, if we shower together now we’ll likely go right down the scuttle.” He drew her into the steaming white-tiled shower and hard against his slippery wet body.

“Lan!” she cried, not even able to laugh.

They rapidly descended the stairs arm in arm, Katharine laughing and stopping to button a missed space in Lan’s shirt while he kissed the top of her head. She was dressed in a plain olive skirt and beige silk blouse, the large jade pendant hanging vividly around her neck. On her hastily tripping feet were chestnut wedge-heeled shoes. Lan wore gray slacks and Spanish cordovan loafers and another trimly tailored crisp white shirt.

Tea included a robust red wine, cold roast beef, and a very fresh green salad with a sweet spicy dressing unfamiliar to Katharine. A pungently aromatic grainy bread was served hot from the oven. The gray-haired plump

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Maori cook, Mattie, bustled and clattered, stepping in and out of the dining room through the swinging door that led into a huge old kitchen. Mary, who sat talking with them and eating sparingly, sometimes got up and went into the warm kitchen on the pretext of checking on the food. Low indistinguishable words could be heard, voices occasionally ending in tittering bursts of laughter. The longtime housekeeper was a cherished friend, Lan explained with a wink.

The spacious kauri wood dining room had a broad stone fireplace on the inner wall. The room faced out on a meandering river, which Katharine had not even realized ran past the back side of The Lodge until she noticed it upstairs. It was a very lovely environment for a meal, to sit looking toward the pink-tinged Southern Alps in the distance, or gazing out upon the blond grasses along the rough banks of the river, now running at its lowest stage.

Dessert was a frothy vanilla pudding topped with slices of kiwifruit. Before it was served Lan went to the sideboard and uncorked an icing white wine. He poured some into small vials and said, "Taste then tell me what ya think...our spicy version of ice-wine from a winery we own up near Nelson."

"It's delicious," Katharine said in earnest. "Really very good. How long have you been a vintner?"

"A few years. It's working out well enough. We export to the U.S. Our innocent young whites have finally become more sophisticated...but white has certain limits."

"I see you two have not been talking about wine," Mary said with a twinkle in her eye.

"We have not, mother...or snails or puppy dog tails," Lan teased, with

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a quick wit that Katharine was discovering could readily match her own.

“So you aren’t going to ride off punching cows, after all,” Katharine merrily encouraged.

“If this is where I’m supposed to dive into a discussion concerning sheep, you’ll find the conversation wanting,” Lan forewarned. “We’ll ride a few miles out among ’em, and ya can get a feel of hard leather and a whiff of down and dirty on the plain. That’s a fair introduction to sheep...also a few cattle...and anything else on the hoof.”

“What else is on the hoof around here...besides horses?”

“Up at the north end of the property we have red deer, plenty of them, exported to Germany where venison is eaten with relish.”

“What kind of relish?” Katharine asked with a coy smile.

“Very amusing, Green Eyes.”

Katharine saw Mary watching them. She knew that Mary already understood a great deal, rather easily realizing that they were vulnerably in love. She would also understand this to be an excruciatingly fragile time of foolishness, great joy, and anguish: joy because they were thoroughly sentient beings; anguish because they were also reasoning beings, fully aware of fleeting time, even as distracted as they were, although as yet unwilling to think things out to a possibly grievous conclusion.

When tea was over, they lingered at the table while Mary brought Lan up to date on the mundane happenings at Green Braes. Katharine sat listening in silence, until Mary apologized for boring her. “Oh, no, I love to listen,” Katharine protested. “I learn so much that way; even small details are significant. As a journalist, I’ve learned that very well.”

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“Can you imagine yourself living here?” Mary asked, with the very same directness she had apparently passed on to her son.

Katharine found this surprising, a little embarrassing, but tried to answer in a serious and thoughtful way, as if she were an uninvolved friend come for a visit.

“I think I prefer nature to the city, although I now live in a city, Seattle...a blustery Pacific Northwest sea town made more attractive by the beauty of its setting, but with all the usual problems of congested cities. Growing up on my grandmother’s flower farm was a fortunate experience. It brought me close to nature and made that a necessity...from time to time at least. Green Braes must involve a great deal of hard work and constant attention. I would think it quite a challenge, requiring a very special and single-minded devotion.”

Her answer had been so absolutely tactful, unassailable, and aloof that she could not look at Lan, instinctively knowing he would not like it. If she was expected to gush and say how she could hardly wait to settle in, one or both of them would certainly be disappointed. She felt somewhat mean-spirited, even dishonest, and stared out at the mountains, a self-critical smile slowly forming. Habitually independent, she was deeply enough in love to punish herself and everyone around her for the loss of will involved. She knew very well that, within a matter of mere seconds, Lan could make her coolly remote response evaporate and fall like acid rain on her defensive pride.

Lan suggested they go for a walk along the river. She went upstairs to put on her jeans and tennis shoes while he went on talking with his

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mother. Leaving, she heard them softly engaged in a conversation in Maori, almost resenting that very private way of saying anything they wanted, until she reminded herself it was something they regularly did and none of her business.

She was standing by the bedroom window, gazing out over the shadowy river, toward the beckoning fading pink mountains. Lan came up behind her. He kissed the nape of her neck, and went away to put on his jeans and slip into a pair of old Wellingtons.

“Are those Wellingtons from Wellington?” she asked in a teasing voice.

“From the 1st Duke of Wellington, early nineteenth century,” he responded with equal humor.

“Hmm, they’ve held up rather well, although they’re looking a bit done in after all those years.”

“Clever Kate, you’ve drunk just enough of my wine to denigrate my favorite boots. These old boots are essential. Are ya ready? Let’s walk.

“Where were those trucks going, the ones I saw when we flew in?” Katharine asked as they strolled along. She had recalled staring down at two large trucks loaded with sheep and stirring up dust clouds on the road far below.

“They leave every Thursday, usually at five in the morning, headed for the port of Timaru, where the woolies are shipped out, mostly headed for the Middle East. When they roll out of here they’re on roads we’ve made

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that link up with metal country roads, that is gravel, and then paved roads. They got a late start today because of road repair. Our manager, Wheeler, keeps an eye on road erosion...periodically oversees some repair work.”

The wind had abated a little, but the evening was warm and the river quite refreshing. They were treading on a well-worn path between patches of tough and very tall blond grasses. Katharine was listening for unusual bird sounds, asking Lan about one she thought she could distinguish, the sweet-noted bellbird. He failed to answer but turned around and took hold of her arm, drawing her against him, his penetrating dark eyes revealing a concern she had likely precipitated.

“Ya were happier in Auckland, I think.”

“No, that isn’t true. It’s so nice here. I’ve barely seen this place. Can we go riding tomorrow...or are you busy?”

“Yeah, I am...have to fly to Christchurch. I thought ya might try to get my mother to come with us. See how I follow your good advice? I wonder if ya could get her out.”

“I simply will,” Katharine asserted.

“I appreciate your determination, but I’m not sure ya know what you’re in for. Mary McGregor Manutaane is no pushover.”

“Neither am I.”

“That I well know.

“Kate, I’ve gotten ya this far and now I’m wondering about the next obstacle. The very things that attract me to your independent self are also the worries I have. I’ve sussed the hesitation. You’re unpredictable and...restless...complicated but--”

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“And so are you...complicated.”

“But how I love having ya with me, I was about to say.”

“And how I love being with you.”

“What does that mean?”

“Just what I’ve said.”

“No more?”

“Please don’t press me, Lan. I become...uncertain when you do, apprehensive. I don’t really know. I only know that I--”

“All right, no more tonight. We’d better return...give ya time to try a little of your friendly persuasion on my mother.”

Lan went into his study to deal with a batch of e-mail, while Katharine went in search of Mary and found her in the library, reading in her favorite red leather wing chair.

“Am I disturbing you?” she inquired.

“Not at all, I was merely reading my friend Scott. I expect you’re here to have a little talk about something. Are ya not?”

If Mary had chosen to be direct, Katharine decided to be the same and said, “I’m hoping you’ll come with me to Christchurch tomorrow. Lan is flying over on some business, and I’ll be all alone. I know nothing about the town. I’m afraid I’ll do all the wrong things...I mean, go to the wrong places. I really have no idea where to begin there but I’ve heard it has lovely gardens and parks.”

“It’s an easy town to get around in, if you don’t mind the river,”

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Mary said.

“Easy for you, Mary, but not for me. Will you take pity on me and come along? I’ll probably hang onto your arm like a lost schoolgirl. It would be so wonderful to have you show me some things.”

“I certainly do see why Lan has taken such a fancy to ya, Katharine Gordon. You’re a very fetching girl...persuasive and hard to put aside, but I don’t go out.”

Katharine dropped her head, her eyes swimming with moisture that was not so very difficult to summon. She had only to think of her life without a family for a few seconds, and might soon be gently weeping in earnest, if not for the desired result.

“I’ve had to go everywhere alone most of my life, always longing for a mother, a grandmother who left me too soon. I have almost no idea anymore what it feels like to walk down the street with one or the other and share experiences. Of course I can do it, but it’s not so easy in a strange place.”

“Are ya not the same fearless girl who goes around the world covering wars and looking into the troubling affairs of others?”

“Oh, that’s very different. There I’m assuming the role of journalist, totally immersed in what I’m doing, and I nearly always have a local person with me...or a photographer. I’m hardly ever a tourist...far too lonely a proposition.”

“Well, that’s one I haven’t heard. Nevertheless, I’m sorry, I don’t go out.”

Katharine wrung her hands and said, “Poor Lan. He told me you

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would. He said you would come with me because it would make him happy to have you there beside me. I'm sorry, Mary, I can't tell him how mistaken he was. I just can't. Will you tell him please. He's in his study."

Mary rose from her chair and stared at Katharine with a half disbelieving expression that began to look like concession.

"I think you know I would never tell Lan anything that would make him unhappy," she solemnly scolded, tugging at the edges of her blue cardigan. "He's had too much of that already. I'll come then. I'll show you whatever you'd like to see. I'm not so selfish as to deny Lan anything simple as that. It was nothing against you, I hope you know. You're a clever girl...a good girl, or Lan would never have brought you here. You're the first since...you're the first. Go tell him I'll come."

Katharine went into the study looking like the Cheshire cat. She went up to Lan, who was heavily into e-mail responses, and stood quietly with her hands crossed behind her back. He looked up and said, "What are ya grinning at now, ya devious imp?"

"Mary will be coming with us tomorrow."

"Get off the grass. Are ya serious?"

"Hmm, I like that expression...and, yes, I am serious."

"What the devil did ya say to her to win her over?"

"Every bloody thing I could think of," Katharine answered.

Lan turned to her, laughing with such conspiratorial delight she was becoming quite heady with her success.

"I just thought of something," she mused in a speculative voice as she turned to the computer. "I'd be willing to bet there's no Maori word for

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this modern machine.”

“Then ya would lose the bet, Green Eyes. It’s *rorobiko*.”

“How on earth does that translate?” she asked with surprise.

“*Roro* for brain and *biko* for lightning.”

“How ingenious. Sort of like your brain, I think,” she teased, giving him a tempting kiss.

“That’s enough of cyberspace for tonight, *ipo*. Let’s go to bed. It’s time for your reward.”

“You think very highly of yourself.”

“Right now I’m only thinking very highly of a green-eyed phenomenon.”

Katharine and Mary were on their own in this flat, very English city of Christchurch, known as the city of gardens. Lan, riding in the car of the business associate who picked them up at the airport, had left them in the heart of the city at Cathedral Square on Colombo Street. He had promised to meet them later in the day at a popular riverside restaurant called Thomas Edmonds; it was located in a former band rotunda on Cambridge Terrace. Looking in her guidebook Katharine had a clever idea concerning the location of this restaurant, which she intended to broach later, but first she suggested they go inside the towering and ornate Christ Church Cathedral, consecrated in 1881. She was thinking wistfully of having a look at the splendid view and the cathedral bells in the viewing balconies of the sixty-three meter high spire, but not about to suggest that Mary climb the one hundred thirty-three steps, when Mary spoke up.

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“At least this is one thing that hasn’t changed. Come let’s climb the stairs. I do remember the view.”

“Oh but...are you sure, Mary?”

“What? You think I’m incapable? I ride a horse and walk all over Green Braes. I’m not that far gone. A few steps are nothing to me.”

“I’ll probably be in worse shape than you at the top,” Katharine cheerfully confessed, laughing at her caution.

When they reached the top, Mary was not even winded. The view was a wonderful way to study the layout of the city, and they stood together while Mary pointed out places of interest.

“This spire actually fell into the square once during an earthquake. It’s been damaged several times in them, Katharine, and probably will be again one day. Ah, the devilish quakes.”

When they were back on the ground they looked briefly at the historical display, with which Mary seemed quite familiar, and then Katharine suggested they walk over to the Botanic Gardens beside the cool Avon River meandering through the city.

“Since we both like gardens and plants we’ll probably enjoy ourselves in that green environment, Mary.”

“Oh, it’s a lovely place. It has a restaurant. Do ya know I’ve never eaten there...not once.”

“Then let’s have lunch there,” Katharine invited.

They ambled slowly down Gloucester Street, into the well established and soothingly luxuriant Botanic Gardens.

“There’s something about the intense light down in this southern

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hemisphere that seems unusual to me,” Katharine noted, slipping on her sunglasses. “It’s a white light that makes everything startling and sharp. Oh look, even lush roses, and so many colors. And everywhere...all of these wonderful trees.”

The Gardens Restaurant was a six-sided flat building with a sloping roof and wide viewing windows. It served a popular smorgasbord, and Katharine encouraged Mary to indulge herself.

“I’m paying.”

“No, girl, I’m paying.”

They sat by a window looking out at rare flora in every direction, dazzling in the sunlight. Odd little motor-towed carts with green-canvassed canopies kept arriving and depositing visitors at the restaurant.

“Those busy carts carrying so many visitors are called Toastracks,” Mary revealed.

“How very amusing.” Katharine laughed. “And the people are the toast, riding about when they ought to be walking.”

Mary shook her head in agreement, joining in the laughter.

“Incredible variety here...exotic, to me at least. How my grandmother would have loved it. She was a florist and curious about every growing thing.”

Mary’s smile faded as she stared at Katharine and said, “You have no family alive then?”

“Perhaps somewhere. My maternal grandfather died long before my grandmother. Both he and my father were Scots. My grandmother was French. I deeply miss her. She was so good to me, sent me to school,

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bought me my first lovely prom dress -- it was pale pink toile over pink taffeta -- nursed me through many a tummy ache and bruised knee and unrequited teen-aged crush.” And a number of other things left unmentioned: bouts of depression and moodiness.

“I’m sorry, Katharine. That’s the way of it.”

Mary set down her fork and stared out the window, her faraway eyes roving over a tall broad-needled fir gilded a shimmering gold in the sunlight.

“Rang and I came to Christchurch on business from time to time, although we more often went to Dunedin for pleasure. We both felt more comfortable there.”

“Could we go together?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know if I could do that. I miss him so. We loved hard, we two. And Lan is like that. He loves hard,” Mary confided, watching Katharine. “Sometimes he’s a mystery even to me...and I know him so well, better than anyone.”

“Of course you do, Mary.”

“But what I did to him with my own selfish love...that mix of Scot and Maori was not an easy thing...no, not an easy thing.”

“Oh, but he could never be who he is without it, not at all, and he’s so wonderful...so wonderfully self-possessed,” Katharine frankly marveled, hopeful of having her meaning go beyond her own praiseful sentiment. “It seems to me, Mary, that he’s exemplary of...he’s the coming together of two kinds, a sort of refinement of each, really celebrating varied human life...or else how can we ever progress? Without appreciation and awareness of that unity there can only be strife.”

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“Well, that’s settled in my mind at least. I can see how you feel about my son...that it’s not a careless thing, except that...I don’t think you’ve made up your mind about anything, Katharine. Of course it’s far too soon, so we’ll leave it at that,” she proposed, observing Katharine’s discomfort. “We’ll just leave it at that and go on with our day...but I hope to heaven Lan is finished with suffering.”

When Mary had paid the bill, insisting upon it once again, they walked over paths thickly lined with collections of verdure often unknown to Katharine. She learned from Mary that about eighty percent of the flora in New Zealand was found nowhere else on the planet. Looking at various plantings and blooming flora, cupping flowers in their hands and sniffing for favorable aromas, they went along exchanging information. Finally, they rested on a bench while Katharine consulted her guidebook.

“Would you mind if we walked to the visitor center and caught the free bus over to the gondola that goes to the top of Mount Cavendish? I’d love to look down on Lyttelton Harbour, and it says here the view is stunning.”

"I wouldn't mind at all. I haven't done that in years."

They caught Bus number 28, and made the quick and restful twelve kilometer journey. Soon they were gliding up Mount Cavendish in a little gondola. At the top they walked about. Katharine found the windy vistas breathtaking, very different from anything she had ever seen. The barren dry bronze hills swelling in rounded curves above the opaque azure waters of the harbor, and the distant fingered inlets far below, had a surreal quality, almost like a purely stylized storybook painting.

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“Oh look, Mary, there are your snowy Southern Alps way off in the distance.”

“Yes,” Mary said. “Lucky we have such a clear day. We’re having quite a treat.”

“And I’m going to treat you to tea inside this convenient restaurant,” Katharine said, catching a hint of Mary’s fatigue.

Inside the high-perched airy restaurant, they found the quiet coolness and simplicity of decor a soothing atmosphere: a neat open room with a splendid wrap-around view, a pretty white tea service, and even a fresh sprig of some bright blue flower in a white vase on their shiny black table top.

“I’m supposed to be showing you around, but the truth is it’s yourself doing the showing,” Mary said with a quick sip of tea.

“I wouldn’t have enjoyed myself nearly as much without you,” Katharine protested.

“You’ve a lovely kindness, Katharine.”

“I hope you’ll still think so after I tell you what I have in mind for our next adventure.”

Katharine glanced once again into her guidebook and then looked up with a mischievous smile.

“I want us to get into a punt at the Antigua Boatsheds and have ourselves punted all the way over to Cambridge Terrace. Apparently punts will take you right to the Thomas Edmonds, and we can time it so we arrive just in time to meet Lan for dinner, that is for tea.”

“What? I don’t think...why, Katharine, what a nice idea,” Mary said, reversing her doubtful reaction with a carefree smile that rendered her

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normally solemn face almost girlish.

They floated along in utter delight and lethargy, laughing and pointing and with Katharine occasionally singing.

“What a fine voice ya have, Katharine.”

“Thank you. I once thought of singing professionally,” Katharine revealed, leaving aside her college performances.

As they were skillfully poled to their destination, the burbling Avon River coolly assuaged their fatigue, lifting their spirits even higher than the previous hours. Mary dragged her hand through the refreshing waters and hummed from time to time. When they were almost to the restaurant, Katharine pulled off one of her tan walking flats, rolled her beige linen pants leg and dropped her foot into the water.

“I’ve been wanting to do that. How good it feels. It’s given me a whole new perspective.”

The punter shook his head and whistled. Mary began to laugh while Katharine was drying her foot with a tissue from her purse and putting her shoe back on.

“Lord, Katharine, what if you’d dropped your shoe into the water, and ya have nylons on. Isn’t your foot a bit clammy?”

“No, it’s the undipped one that’s clammy,” Katharine said, giggling merrily. “Really, you should have tried it. One foot in the Avon and nothing will ever be the same.”

“Perhaps another day I’ll try it,” Mary said, “when I’ve no sense left at all. Mind you, no offense, *Kate of doused foot.*”

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They both began to laugh at this splendid title, until they could hardly get out of the punt. Then Katharine looked up and saw Lan watching them. They came toward him hanging onto each other in stitches. He was looking at her with an expression she could not read at all, but the look was quite serious and very soon she interpreted it as censure. She had embarrassed him by arriving at the restaurant acting like a madcap child. Her laughter abated and her face went soft and quiet. She remained that way all through dinner and on the plane ride back to Green Braes, while Mary chatted cheerfully with Lan about the pleasant day she had experienced. It was not as if Katharine did not know what good deportment was. Although sometimes preferring to revel in lively unconventionality, she certainly knew when the proper conduct was necessary. It was only that she had so delighted in bringing Mary out of herself, of slowly transforming her into a confiding and mirthful friend, perhaps even a motherly friend.

She did not go up to their room right away, but remained in the library reading, thinking she would wait until Lan was asleep and then creep into bed and fall asleep simply thinking about the day. She had rapidly come to adore attentively candid Mary with her slightly sodden whimsy and very dry wit.

Lan found her in the library and said, "Aren't ya tired after all that running around?"

"I thought I'd just read for a while to calm down. It was so much fun being with Mary. I like her very much...suppose I ended up pretty excited."

"Please come to bed, Katharine. I'd rather have ya there with me. I

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know ya must be tired. Didn't ya think I'd want--"

"I'll be up in a little while," Katharine interposed. Glancing at Lan in trim slacks and a t-shirt that clung to his muscular diaphragm, she was hardly able to restrain herself.

He stood looking at her a few more seconds in silence, then left the room, gently closing the large heavy door behind him.

Half an hour later she crept into the bathroom and then into bed, staying carefully on her side and lying still. Very soon she heard a lilting voice that astonished her, for it was the voice of Robbie Burns:

O, merry hae I been teethin a heckle
An merry hae I been shapin a spoon!
O, merry hae I been cloutin a kettle,
An kissin my Katie when a' was done!
O, a' the lang day I ca' at my hammer,
An a' the lang day I whistle and sing!
O, a' the lang night I cuddle my kimmer,
An a' the lang night as happy's a king!
...Come to my arms, my Katie, my Katie,
An come to my arms, and kiss me again!
Drunken or sober, here's to thee, Katie,
An blest be the day I did it again!

Katharine turned on her side and fell into beguiling black eyes, narrowed and glinting in the moon's blue light.

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“Will ya kiss me now, Kate? I’ll never sleep until ya do, ya strange sulky lass.”

“Lan...I’ve never heard anything more--” Her breaking voice was smothered by an impatient mouth. “Lan,” she whispered as his body fiercely tangled with hers, “I thought you were mad at me because I was acting so childish with your mother.”

“Ya thought wrong, Katie Green Eyes. *Ka pai, ipo*. I’m about to thank ya properly for what ya did today.”

It was a little after seven in the morning and at last they were going to ride out onto the Canterbury plain. Katharine had on her jeans and t-shirt, and sat over her half-finished oatmeal, eager to be off. Lan sprawled across from her in no great hurry, sipping coffee and dressed in old jeans and an open-necked blue shirt and wearing scuffed boots, looking very cowboyish to her.

“What kind of horses do you have?” she asked.

“Ah...we have red ones and black ones and white ones and--”

“Oh stop it, Lan. I really want to know.”

“Would ya know if I told ya?”

“Do you think I’m completely stupid, Lan?”

“No, I think you’re very nearly completely smart.

“We have mainly quarter horses, a great breed for herding livestock, fast and strong.”

“Get off the grass. Really?”

Careless Child

“God, ya make me laugh, the way ya slide into things. Come on, cowgirl, let’s go down to the stable and saddle up.”

They did not really have to saddle up, because Rex had already taken care of that necessity by the time they arrived.

“I’ll give ya a leg up,” Lan said, but Katharine had already run over to her mount, placed her foot in the stirrup and leapt into the saddle. She edged her moccasined feet gently back into the flanks of her chestnut horse, Jangle, then gave a little flick of the reins and galloped off just clearing a fresh pile of stockade poles. Lan was left staring after her.

He caught up with her on his big stallion, Ben, and said, “All right, cowgirl...you’re a cracker on a horse, another part of your past I know nothing about.”

“I was raised on quarter horses. My grandmother had several of them. I belonged to a horse club and rode in funky little competitions when I was just a nipper of ten.”

“Well Good on ya, *wahine*. That means we can hang out here all day and I won’t have to worry about your tired little arse.”

Lan, who was wearing a rather handsome oiled leather hat, reached into his saddle bag and pulled out a rolled felt hat, then leaned over and arranged it on Katharine’s head.

“This is to keep your brains from frying, cowgirl.”

“What if I get thirsty?”

“For me or water?”

“Either.”

“We’ll dismount by the river and take care of both of those

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requirements. I promise ya where we're going the water is safe."

"But are you?"

"Don't get me thinking on it, please. Let's ride for a while. Ask me anything...or enjoy it in silence."

They were up on a slight rise, surveying the sheep-dotted landscape. Katharine said, "I've never seen so many sheep."

"There are ten sheep for every Kiwi in New Zealand.

"Come on, just follow me. We're going up into the foothills and along the river where ya can see some real green...where Green Braes got its name."

They rode on, dismounting once when Katharine intended to adjust her stirrups but then let Lan do it for her. They stood in the warm wind on a slight rise and looked at the splendid clouds rolling in great billows along the Southern Alps.

"I collect clouds...the way a child collects something fascinating all too soon forgotten...nothing but clouds," she mused."

"Then ya can have all of this instead: *Aotearoa*, the land of the long white cloud. This cannot be forgotten."

"I've heard the other expression: *the land of the wrong white crowd*," she said. She watched him frown, and immediately regretted ruining the moment with her cool irrelevance.

He pushed his hat back, looked hard at her and said, "Why do ya do that?"

"What? I don't know. I just need to be realistic...try to stay on an even keel...I don't know. I've always maintained my freedom to come and

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go...do what I want. I've made a sort of life for myself and I don't really need much else. I don't need--"

"What in bloody hell are ya doing? Listen to yourself."

She was silent. He was right to make her hear her strange rush of words. A disconnected, straying explanation that was not quite true and oddly off the point. But had there been a point? She *did* need, needed very much. It must be so obvious. The promise of New Zealand clouds had been left to evaporate like the clouds themselves, and an entirely different subject overtaken her, that of change, drastic change. Her pathetic suspicion and mistrust were why she had spoken in that frenetic, dismissive manner. She cringed at the echo of her arrogantly deflecting words.

"*Sklent*, ever hear that word? One of my mother's Scots words. It means to look askance...in your case sidestepping because of fear."

They remounted and rode side by side in silence until he said, "Ya don't have to be afraid of me, Katharine. I'm not going to hurt ya."

"I'm not afraid of you."

"Yeah, ya are. I scare ya bloody bad because I want ya."

"I'm happy with you, Lan."

"Yeah? Until ya want me a little too much."

They were climbing slightly with Lan ahead, following the river until it was squeezed between raised green banks, frothing in a rushing white foam, the near grasses greening up all around them. The roaring water, the wind and clouds, the tender bright grasses had all charged her senses with a restless hunger.

"I'm thirsty, Lan."

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He turned around in his saddle and looked at her.

“Then get down.”

They tied their horses’ reins in branches and walked to a level opening where they could reach the river’s low bank, then lay on their bellies, drinking the cold mountain water.

“It’s so quiet and pure and clean here,” she said, wiping drops of the refreshingly cool water from her lips with the back of her hand.

He went to his horse and returned with a blanket, throwing it on the ground.

“This is as good a place as any.”

“For what?”

“I want to...I need to tell ya some things, Katharine.”

He squatted at the edge of the blanket, with an unsmiling mouth and eyes lost in the shadow of his hat, but looking away from her in a moment of thoughtful consideration.

A tremor of fear quivered in her throat. She curled against him and lifted his hand to her cheek.

“It’s so beautiful here, Lan.”

She knew he fully understood how she wanted to share this moment with him, but she was startled by his response.

“I can’t right now. What I have to say is...”

He took off his hat and threw it down, running his fingers through his hair and looking at her with an unreadable question, an intense speculation in his troubled dark eyes.

She put her arm around his waist and said, “Please, Lan.”

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“I never want to deny ya anything but I...”

He pulled her backwards across his knees and held the nape of her neck while he opened her jeans and slid his hand to her crotch, gently working his fingers against her while she moaned softly with closed eyes.

“Look at me. Ya like this?”

“Yes.” She opened her eyes and stared dazedly into eyes of covert blackness, until a rising ambivalence made her look away, a fear of leaving herself, of falling helplessly through space.

“Give me back your beautiful eyes...yeah, sooky green.”

“Lan, you...you hypnotize!” she cried, unable to escape the steady jet gaze. “Oh, I wish...”

His careful fingers eased smoothly inside her. “Better?”

With a serious concentration, he watched her come, her head twisting elatedly against his shirt in spasms of pleasure. “My *ipò*,” he muttered softly, kissing her and drawing her mussed hair away from her eyes. He zipped her jeans and lifted her languidly pulsing body up to a sitting position, then folded his arms and stared at her.

“Ya must know how I want ya...but...what I’m about to say has my guts in a knot and the rest of me useless.”

“What, Lan?” she asked with a new fear sweeping over her.

“When I saw how ya were with my mother yesterday, I knew how very right I was about ya...who this Katharine Gordon really is. I doubt ya know yourself. Ya want me and ya want my mother and you’re so bloody scared of that, my Green Eyes. Kate...do ya even know how much ya are? Everything I want...except...I’ve never seen anyone so afraid of any kind of

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change. The mystery of it is how I sussed some of that wariness when I first laid eyes on ya.”

She reached for him, giving in to the truth that he spoke for both of them, wanting him beyond any other conceivable need, even enough to override the ruinous fear he had named. “Lan, I can--”

“Wait. *He tamaiti taku!*”

“What?” she pleaded, confused and suddenly fearful again.

“There, I’ve said it...practice for this: apparently, I have a child, a daughter.”

“That’s nice. I want to meet her.”

“Ya can’t meet her. I mean, she lives with my...my late wife’s parents.”

“Why? Why don’t you have her with you?”

“Let me finish, please. Jesus, this is...when Ani died...I turned into a bloody...I was twenty-five and drunk most of the time, very drunk for quite a while.”

“But she would have wanted you to--”

“Please, Kate. The child isn’t hers. It came later.”

“But I don’t...whose?”

“One night I came home off-my-face drunk. Ya see, Rani had always wanted...she fancied me. She was sixteen, and to me she was just my little sister. I had no idea. I was *haurangi*, dead drunk. She came into my room and...crawled into my bed naked. Somehow I had her. I don’t even know how I accomplished that. I don’t remember anything. Imagine how I regretted what she said the next morning when I found her in my bed. I

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regretted it so much it was the thing that sobered me up. But Rani got pregnant. She was a wild little bird, a child herself, and didn't want the baby. I couldn't take care of it...I didn't...we gave the baby to my in-laws to raise, and sent Rani away to school. I pay them for anything the child needs. I visit her. Rani doesn't care about her. I don't know why. Rani acts like such a reckless child herself...I reckon because of my guilt I treat her like a child. I...Kate, will ya please not let this...*please!...wait!*"

She had jumped up with her heart flying out of her chest.

"Liar...you liar!"

"What? I've never lied to ya. I'm telling ya now, telling ya everything. I would never have opened my mouth. It wasn't really necessary...except...I thought of how Rani could ruin us."

Seeing her distraught state he jumped up too, with a fist coiled at his side in a sudden heat of frustration.

"You can lie by omission and that's what you've done, waited until I was...*waited!*" She was remembering how he sat with his arm over Rani's chair back at *The Loaded Hog* when first they met. Mistrust, a suspicion made easy by past experiences, was already corroding her thought. "How do I know anything anymore? How can I believe anything? You and Rani...you. *You!*"

"Life isn't perfect. Nothing is perfect, Kate. I know ya can't stand hearing that because of your dismal past. Ya want me flawless and I've disappointed ya. Maybe you'd like to see me representing some perfect circle that doesn't exist -- we all join hands and sing hallelujah. *Jesus*, I'm far from perfect but I know what love is. I want ya. I found ya and I love ya...and *you*

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love me. Do ya know that? In my bed ya do. Please, Kate, please, my Green Eyes, please understand.”

She turned and ran, jumping on Jangles and whacking his rump. Crazy reckless, she rode in a dazed stupor, twice finding herself lost, but Jangles had a fine sense of direction and knew where he was going, bringing her eventually to the stables.

There was Rani, newly arrived with a busload of mates who were laughing and joking and exploring the grounds of The Lodge. The sight of Rani made Katharine sick. She hastened to her room, packed her things and took her suitcase into Mary’s room.

“Mary? Mary?” she shouted in a wild unrecognizable voice. “Please come here...please come here! *Mary!*”

“What is it, Katharine? What in heaven’s name is wrong with ya?” Mary cried as she tugged at her fruit-stained apron.

She stared at Katharine’s face. “Oh, I see. My God, I’m *dumbfooner!* He’s told ya then. I told him *no*, it was water under the bridge, but he had to do it. He loves ya so.”

“Don’t let him near me, Mary. Please don’t let him near me. I couldn’t stand it. Please understand I couldn’t stand it. I’m getting a headache. God, my head!”

“I’ll put ya in one of the guest rooms.”

“No! Please let me stay in your room. Please, I can’t be alone. He’ll get to me, *he will*. Please let me stay in your room.”

“Of course you can stay in my room. Come let’s get ya into bed. Come along. I’ll get a cold flannel for your head.”

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Mary brought Kate a washcloth with lumps of ice gathered inside and held it on her brow.

“I spoiled Rani. I spoiled her badly. So much of it was my fault, my selfish fault,” Mary agonized. “I let her restless little self run wild. When Rang died I was so gone I couldn’t straighten her out. There’s plenty of blame to go around.”

Katharine ran her hands over her face and moaned.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t be talking. Try to sleep now.”

“I have...pills...in my little blue bag. Please, Mary, could you get me two?” Katharine begged.

“Lie quietly. I’ll pull the curtains and bring the pills. Just try to sleep.”

Very soon Katharine heard loud voices outside the door, Mary and Lan speaking more harshly, transitioning back and forth in Maori and English. She cringed and pulled the covers up to her throat, then turned and buried her head beneath the pillow.

“Katharine!” Lan called.

“Leave me alone,” she moaned against the sheet. “Go away!”

Finally, the two pills she had swallowed knocked her out. She was awakened by an odd sound and looked at the clock. It was ten in the evening. Mary was nowhere visible. She started to sit up, hearing a rustling in the shadowy end of the room.

“Mary?”

Rani turned on the light and moved toward her, her spiteful young face gloating. She was laughing with triumphant delight.

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“He’ll never marry *you*. He loves me...and he knows it. Not you, paleface. Not you...ya phony American bitch.”

“Please get out...leave me alone,” Katharine implored.

“I just wanted to say what I really think of ya.”

“Get out!” Katharine shouted, her eyes pained by the light.

“Rani!” Lan barked as he entered. “Get the hell out of this room! I’ve had enough of ya, you emotionally retarded little stirrer. Out! Now!” he demanded, dragging Rani out the door.

Katharine was shaking badly, having momentarily decided she was in a madhouse. If only Mary would come now and hold her hand...offer comfort...distracting, consoling sweetness...the way her grandmother had done when she was sick or afraid.

God, I’m a fearful mess...thoroughly incapable of judging the rightness, wrongness, worthiness of anything. I’ve got to get out of here right away...but how? Sliding in and out of agony -- the agony of longing for Lan -- it gradually came to her how escape might be accomplished, if only she could last until Thursday morning.

When Mary came into the room, Katharine apologized for her histrionics and explained that she was feeling a little better.

“I’ve told Lan to leave ya alone until ya calm down. He sent Rani and her friends packing. They had planned to go on a tramp over at Milford anyway. Tomorrow he’s flying up to Nelson to check on business at the winery. He’ll be back in a few days, and maybe you’ll feel better by that time.”

“Yes, yes,” Katharine swiftly agreed, thinking how well this would fit in with her plan.

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“Will you sleep here tonight, Mary?”

“Yes, girl...poor Katharine,” Mary said, stroking tangled hair away from her eyes. It was a soothingly familiar gesture, very like her comforting grandmother’s when she was a sick child.

In the morning she found Mary gone. Then Lan tapped on the door and called to her, “I love ya, Green Eyes. *E nobo ra*, good-bye. I’ll see ya very soon. Please know that I love ya, Kate.”

Her eyes filled with tears. She clenched her teeth with anger and frustration. She wanted only to have her arms around him, until she remembered everything. Now she hated herself, not Lan, *herself*, for her inability to resolve anything. There was a huge lump in her throat. She thought, *Oh God, if only I can last until Thursday*. The disclosed incident with Rani had jolted her out of paradise and back to reality, but she vaguely sensed it was not the real problem; the real problem went far beyond Rani; the real problem was herself, the fear of losing herself in Lan.

Mary, although a taciturn person not much given to personal revelations, bared herself with a special softness, attempting to commiserate with Katharine. They talked over tea, and again in the evenings spent together in the lounge after their meals.

“Even I didn’t realize how much Rani fancied Lan, or I’d have put a stop to that soon enough. I thought she was more like a worshipful sister looking up to her big brother. I should have seen it...been far more careful, since they aren’t blood related and it was too easy...too easy being so close.”

Katharine put down her fork and said, “Let’s talk of something else now, Mary. You can’t go on blaming yourself. You had your own serious

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problems. I realize now there were problems all over this place...this lovely place.”

“If only his Ani hadn’t died. Oh, I am sorry. That was quite the wrong thing to say. My head is off today.”

“No, I’m sure you’re right, Mary. It is sad. Probably his beloved Ani would have kept everything on an even keel.”

At last Thursday arrived. Katharine had planned carefully, laying out her clothes the night before and putting her packed suitcase downstairs at the back of the foyer coat closet, along with her briefcase laptop. She had written Mary a thankful and loving and apologetic note, then decided that it would be a sufficient good-bye for Lan, too. She had placed the note in an unobtrusive but well-used place in the kitchen, where Mary would not find it too quickly. So that Mary might suppose she had gone riding. At four o’clock she slipped out of bed, smiling sadly as she looked at Mary who was softly snoring. She dressed, using Lan’s bathroom, the pain shooting all through her body as she relived their happily indulgent showers. She tiptoed downstairs. Slipping a few wrapped oatmeal cookies into her purse, she retrieved her things from the closet and crept out the door.

Down at the stockades and sheds the large trucks were warming up their engines for the haul to Timaru. She went up to one of the drivers and said, “I need to get to Timaru, can you give me a lift?”

The hulking, blowsy driver looked her up and down in her fine linen slacks and jacket and laughed. “There are plenty of four-wheel drives around here, Miss.”

“No, I can’t take any of those. They’re needed here. I’ll pay you, if

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that's a problem.”

“No problem. Mr. Manutaane pays for all the petrol around here, Miss. Right, climb up then. I'll stow these. We'll be off in a few minutes.”

“I'll keep this,” she said, hanging onto the laptop.

And so it was, her clandestine and ignominious departure from Green Braes in a sheep lorry, and the several hours long, bouncing, lurching, gear-grinding drive to Timaru. Quite a difference from the way she had arrived. *I would not have missed this for the world*, she taunted herself, still numb with pain, grimacing bitterly and frequently clenching her teeth.

In her guidebook, Katharine discovered that a train, the Southerner, left Timaru each morning at 10:35 going south through Dunedin, where she could get off and rent a car. Timaru, from the Maori word *Te Maru*, meaning *the place of shelter*, was a busy port city of 27,500 people; it was said to have a very nice beach and a statue of Robbie Burns, which, in her present condition, she preferred not to look upon. When the kindly driver left her off at the train station, she bought a ticket then walked about the town. She had some coffee and soon boarded the Southerner, headed for the Scottish town of Dunedin.

On the train she had plenty of time to think about what she would do next. It occurred to her that piling new experiences atop the present pain would help to deaden it. She decided to drive until she was exhausted, simply look at things and keep on driving. From Dunedin she could aim for Queenstown, drive across one of the passes on the map and head up the

Careless Child

West Coast. Way up north, she could catch the big interislander ferry to Wellington on North Island, keep driving until she reached Auckland, and fly out of there. *Fly, fly away, lost foreign bird.*

In Dunedin, which she knew was Celtic for Edinburgh, she rented a white, right-hand-drive Honda and had to keep reminding herself to drive on the left side of the road. She immediately came across another statue of the ubiquitous Robert Burns, and began to feel ill. After looking around this lovely old Scottish town, which had seen greater days of glory but had a certain Midlothian charm and splendid beaches, she decided to leave.

Too many memories, she thought. *I've never been here but I have all of these memories. Mary came here with her lover, Rang, and the place is full of her folk, maybe even some of my folk.* Many buildings were heavy stone, old and fine like *The Lodge*. The memory made her long for Lachlan, the man she had seriously fallen in love with, yet with whom a future had finally been inconceivable. She hastened through this student-filled old university town and headed south, cutting west near Milton, heading for Queenstown. On and on through green flat sheep country, over one-lane bridges above broad rivers, on and on with tears streaming down her face.

Queenstown was high and cool, airy and bustling with life, its buildings studding the hills and tumbling down to the esplanade at the edge of expansive and serene Lake Wakatipu.

She stayed in a comfortable bed and breakfast with a balcony that overlooked the sky-reflecting lake. Strewing her things around the room, she showered, and there discovered an innocent bruise from Lan's lovemaking. She slid down upon the tile floor and sat with her head on her knees, the

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warm water pouring over her. Drying herself off in a slow daze, she then began to pace, looking from time to time out at the lake. Finally, she dressed and went out, walking down uncluttered streets and peering into small restaurants until she grew tired, still with no appetite. Having reached the end of endurance, she sat down at a blond wood table in a tiny cream-walled bistro that was supposed to remind one of Morocco. Ordering a drink, she nibbled around the edges of a generous plate of rice with chunks of meat and vegetables. She ordered another drink, and another, leaning on her hand for a while and discreetly watching the convivial diners. They all seemed to be in flagrantly amorous twos, forking food into their smiling mouths and sipping wine -- perhaps some of it was Lan's wine. She paid her bill and left, standing outside and wondering for a moment how to get back to her room. At last she regained her sense of direction. She had been all over the world and hardly ever got lost, but had never been quite this drunk alone. The drinks were strong -- vodka. Did she have three of them or four? Vodka was the best, less wear and tear on recovery.

In the middle of the night, she woke up sweating but with only a slight headache, a deceptive little ache that promised to bloom fully later. She had experienced this condition before. Swallowing several aspirin, she lay back and murmured, *Lan, oh, Lan, oh, Lan, I'll never see you again, will I?*

She fell into a disturbed sleep.

In late morning she sat cross-legged on her bed with her laptop screen glowing before her. A list of her e-mail was displayed, and suddenly there was the message from Green Braes:

“Please come back to me, Katharine. We'll resolve this together.

Careless Child

Please come back, my Green Eyes. Don't leave New Zealand, my love. Please.”

Have to understand it's for the best, she muttered, feeling a terrible pain in her wrists and ankles. She threw herself back and curled on her side, wiping her eyes on the pillow case.

She had decided to skip Milford Sound, too piercingly beautiful -- a place for lovers. If she encountered many more couples holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes, she would feel inclined to jump off a bridge, without a bungy cord.

It rained half way up the West Coast, but the sun shone at the beach town of Hokitika, where all the splendid hard jade was fashioned into jewelry. She stayed near Westport before crossing the mountains on her way to Picton. That night she took out her *totoeka* jade pendant and held it in her hand: cool, the red river flowing through the green field like blood gushing from her torn heart. Staring at it she tried to will herself to fall asleep or fall into a trance or fall into some insensitive state, anything but consciousness.

The rainy West Coast had offered a few sunny spots, long sparkling beaches. Once she parked the car, scrambled down to the beach and ran barefoot on the gray sand until she could not catch her breath. She stood gasping, staring at the spiky dark flax growing on the cliffs, the white tassels dipping in the wind. She never acquired a single sandfly bite. *No finicky little fly would bite into this poisonous body*, she told herself.

At Picton she bought a ticket for the 10:30 sailing and got into the long line that wound through the town, finally driving aboard the huge

Careless Child

interislander ferry that plied the waters to Wellington. It was named *Aratere*, Maori for *quick path*, just what she needed. Nothing like her tame Seattle ferries, it even had a movie theater. She took the elevator up to the plush bar. Comforting. She ordered a drink and sat in the broad bow in a sumptuous, violet-padded chair as the ferry plunged through the misty waters with hardly a tremor, spanking past golden islands like a proud swan. In three and a half hours windy Wellington came sliding into view. So tranquil had she been rendered by the lulling ferry and her Scotch, she dreaded returning to her car. Waves were crashing over the motorway in a howling gale that was apparently the norm for Wellington. She had to turn on her wipers. Public places reveled in the land's exotic nikau palms, both real and decoratively sculpted.

So this was where the writer, Katherine Mansfield had spent the teenaged years of her short life. New Zealand had stifled her. Off to the sophisticated cities of Europe she had sailed. Paradise had been far too provincial.

She drove by the famous executive office building of the parliamentary complex known as the Beehive, which was just what it resembled. After checking into the Novotel Wellington, she took a shower, rested, dressed in her cream pantsuit and pumps and called a taxi. She had no desire to drive herself to dinner, giving the driver the name of a restaurant on Queens Wharf called *Shed 5*. A journalist she knew had raved about the food there, and he was right. Her order was far more than her appetite could accommodate: fresh bluenose bass, pesto mashed potatoes served home style, a large bowl of crisp salad, and thick slices of Parmesan cheese bread.

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She swallowed generous amounts of wine, and looked the opposite direction from two staring men seated at a nearby table. Did bone-aching misery make one more attractive?

Back in her room, a little woozy from the wine, she sat on her bed in her silk robe, checking her e-mail. She held her breath, her heart racing. Why was she doing this, as if it were some kind of masochistic game? It was no game. She felt the top of her head tingling, the room growing dim, and almost fainted. If such misery must continue, why not turn the car around? The message from Green Braes read:

“You belong to me, Pounamu Eyes. I am yours and always will be. Remember how I hold you, ipo. Remember how we are together. No one else will ever have you like that, my Kate.”

She lay back on her bed, rolling from side to side, crying softly and sliding her empty hands over the moist center of her body. Was it too late? Had she already disappeared into Lan?

It took her seven hours to drive to Lake Taupo in the middle of North Island. Once there, she would be more than halfway to Auckland. She drove over sweeping empty landscapes and miles of carefully manicured, dark green forests. Fresh Lake Taupo was a popular place, with tidy modern dwellings in Taupo at the lake's northeast edge, very clean for so much tourism, and the lake a high, clear, cold, very large body of water; the largest lake in all of New Zealand, and savagely formed by one of the largest volcanic upheavals the world has ever seen, especially for those living in 186

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A.D. The waters teemed with famously large and gleaming iridescent-silver trout, rainbow trout, all having originated in California's Russian River. It was 375 meters above sea level, and she felt the crispness of the snowy peaks that partially surrounded the lake, high thin air. She wanted to stop and catch fish. But even the thought of fishing made her eyes spill with regret. Surely Lan fished here. There was a large old racing yacht floating around the lake, *The Barbary*, built in 1926; it had once belonged to the rogue actor Errol Flynn, and was touted to offer a popular tourist cruise.

She finally crashed at a lakeside motel in Taupo. There was no message on her computer that night or the morning after. She had drunk too much at a restaurant, disappointed because she found no trout on the menu. Or was it only disappointment with herself? She could not get away the next morning and lay in bed with a miserable headache.

"I *will* go fishing!" she cried aloud from her bed.

She hired a Maori fishing guide and he took her out on the lake to a spot guaranteed to produce trout. She caught two large glimmering fish, far too easily, then gazed at the mountains as they plowed home with the wind in their faces. She shouted to the kindly guide -- above the constant noise of a very loud motor -- calling out vivid recollections of rambunctious steelhead trout fishing in the Pacific Northwest. Her friendly guide photographed her with the fish, then left her and her handsome catch at an accommodating restaurant, having assured her of nicely prepared trout. Returning that evening at an appointed hour, she found the proprietors had expertly prepared two presentations, one trout in a light soy and green onion sauce, the other in a delicately spicy red sauce, which did not at all detract from the

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fresh flavor of the fish. The ample entrees she thought worthy of sharing in celebration, and invited four arriving patrons over to her table.

“Good on ya,” a member of the two agreeable couples replied.

They insisted on buying drinks, and were all thoroughly and happily soused by the end of the evening. She too was quite soused, although not nearly as happy. She could not remember their names or very much of what they had said, only the laughter and the heart-rending accents and the very welcome camaraderie of their rosy smiling faces.

In her picture the trout looked wonderful but she did not. She was surprised to see herself looking thin as a reed, her moist green eyes sad and larger than ever in her drawn face, but she was indeed smiling proudly over her two excellent fish. On a sudden impulse she decided to send the photograph to Green Braes, as if to say, *See, I don't need you or any part of your mixed up life. I'm having a wonderful time in your country without you, and catching your lovely fish to boot.* As soon as she had released the picture she regretted her foolishness. The notion was cloaked in a terrible lie, one that swiftly drew her back to inescapable Green Braes.

Driving eighty-two kilometers the next day, she arrived in Rotorua, the Maori spot tourists seemed to love most on North Island. The place reeked of hot springs. She found too much acridly pungent sulfur and too many tourists, but the dense Maori history there was quite fascinating to investigate. She managed a curious walk through *Te Whakarewarewa*, a unique thermal reserve of famous geysers, spectacular aquamarine pools, and bubbling mud ponds -- quick immersion in one of these would cure everything.

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She had wanted to visit a *marae*, the open area in front of the Maori meeting house. It was a physical and spiritual act that she thought of as a profoundly beautiful ceremony, the welcoming and acceptance of a guest, but she felt unclean, unfit to be so ceremoniously welcomed. She felt more like a solitary foreign bird flying over the land, searching for a place to land. There was no suitable place, because she had failed to forgive Lan. It was not all a matter of forgiveness, either, but perhaps another excuse to run. It seemed to her that he was a symbol of what must be accomplished, and she was the one who had failed, trapped in her avoidance, her fear and mistrust. Perhaps one day she would return with enough humility and understanding of herself to deserve a *marae* welcome.

After sending her photograph, she had begun to feel an ill wind nipping at her heels, an anxious desire to get away as quickly as possible. She stayed one night in Rotorua and in the morning drove the three hours to Auckland.

She checked into a small, obscure hotel, a very unlikely place in which to be found, and called Margaret.

“Good lord, I’m so happy to hear your voice. Where are you, Katharine?”

“I’d rather not say. I’m sorry, Margaret...*really* sorry. I’m leaving New Zealand almost at once.”

“Kate, please, I know I shouldn’t say anything but I have to. I don’t know what this is all about, but Lan is a very good friend. He’s quietly going out of his mind. I can’t believe it myself. I mean, not that you aren’t...well, I just never thought he...but I should have known, because you really are quite

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a girl...oh, bloody hell, Kate, please call him. *Please.*”

“I can’t, Margaret. I just can’t...because, you see, it wouldn’t be me calling. Can you understand? I’m far too much of a stranger to myself already...and no good to anyone this way. The role of journalist is at least familiar to me...all I have.”

“Kate, Lan knows who you are. I know he respects your independence...respects you heaps. Don’t you care enough to--”

“God, Margaret...I think I could totally disappear into Lachlan Manutaane...the end of me before I even manage to straighten myself out...if I ever do. It would destroy us both. I’ve always run like mad from anything that...from whatever privately becomes too important. And...of course there are other problems.”

“I don’t really understand this, and I don’t know what the problems are, but when you love each other they can surely be worked out. Kate, you found each other. Isn’t that rather amazing? Perhaps you’re too...well, too much of an idealist. You’re bloody uptight for someone who’s always out there in the world’s bad parts. I think you’re making a terrible mistake.”

“I’ve got to go. I just wanted to thank you for being a friend. I’m so sorry we never got to spend much time together. Maybe I’ll be back some day...I hope...or if you ever come to Seattle...but I suppose you won’t. What a long way it is, what a long, long way. Sorry, I’ll go to pieces if I don’t hang up.”

“Wait! My final word to you, Kate: Lan cares for you as I’ve never seen him care for anyone in years. Please think of that on your long flight home.”

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“Good-bye, Margaret. Say good-bye and cheers to Ian.”

“Good-bye, my friend. Please come back. E-mail me or write me or call, anything, Kate, just keep in touch.”

Katharine hung up and bawled in a loud rush of misery. She had never felt so alone. She could not begin to consider what her life might have been like if she had stayed at Green Braes. She could not envision it, even though she could not recall a single memory of Ian without nearly passing out. Doubt and the familiarity of an undefined and chaotic way of life ruled once again. She knew there was something missing in her frame of reference, continuing to feel pinched and unworthy, continuing to believe she must go out and do something about it. She tried to assume a stoic posture, to soothe herself with a meaningless cliché that came into her head as she was standing in her tacky little room: *It just wasn't in the cards*. She confirmed her plane reservations and called a taxi for the morning. It was a terribly sad way to leave such a beautiful country.

Lan must have discovered the picture very quickly because there was a message in her e-mail the next morning that nearly finished her off.

“Green Eyes, my ipo, you look so sad with your two handsome fish. Thank you for sending the picture. I treasure it. It tells me something very important about you. It tells me that you've suffered, and if that is so then you love me. It doesn't matter how far away you go, Kate. One day you'll look up and there I'll be. Think deeply. Think of your childhood. It's why you can't forgive and why you run so hard. We are one spirit. You know I love you. Lan.”

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II

It was cold early spring in Victoria. When at last she could leave her room, she walked around the verdant island town, distractedly peering into sleeping wet gardens, shivering in the sea mists and looking at stucco English cottages and quaint old wooden houses that reminded her of New Zealand. Occasionally, she would fall into a vacuous stare and wonder what she had been looking at, seeing instead a tall sail unfurling over aquamarine water, and feeling a sudden heat on her skin. There was an ache that came into her wrists and ankles, a bittersweet misery that at times almost sent her to her knees. What was it? Once Lan had told her. A Maori word she could make herself remember but not without hearing his voice. She had gone to New Zealand with only the thought of an easy assignment, and there was this heavy sickness being dragged around in her body until she could hardly withstand the weight. *This isn't working out*, she murmured, standing in the rain in Beacon Hill Park and listening to the peacocks' mournful cries. The next day she was back in Seattle, with something more engulfing and monumental in mind: work, exacting work requiring full concentration.

Victoria had been an interlude borne in a state of shock, and producing not the slightest change in pervasively menacing uncertainty. The interlude was over and she had refused to think of anything, to engage in any form of self-evaluation, for if she went far enough back to dig at the root of the problem there was her father telling her she must be beaten. She was, after all, the child of her mother, would always be tainted, never mind an attempt to correct anything. The condition was as congenital as an arm or a

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leg. Her intellect told her this predetermined fate assigned by an enraged parent was ridiculous. Her nerves told her it hovered straight overhead, like a dark cloud swelling with menace. By the time she was eight, her well-meaning, provincial grandmother could have done little to erase this emotional scar. Katharine took care of her permanent affliction in the best way she could, at first with outrageous arrogance and then by lying, asserting that everything was wonderful, just as she had lied by slight implication to Lan about her happy post-father childhood. Beneath this self-deception, the damage thrived: *No matter what you did you were going to be beaten. Why expect a positive outcome if you were congenitally no good?* Of course a certain part of her always longed to believe in good, strove to act as if it existed -- even in herself -- and that it was present in ample enough amounts to make life worthwhile. That fragile part of her was thoroughly receptive, softly hopeful, and vulnerable; it lived in small pleasures and an attempted good for others. *You could never dissociate that part or you would be dead, possibly very quickly and by your own hand.* The only remedy was to keep moving in a positive manner, concentrating on work.

This time she was so far gone that, in a sense, she needed to go further. She went all the way to Jerusalem on a rigorous assignment postponed until this latest misadventure. Now she was in a working mode. Her mind must stay wholly focused on inflamed Palestinians and Israelis in a comparatively dangerous place. In this resumed role of journalist, the rules of conduct were quite familiar; she did not distract herself with endemic fear; it was counterproductive. Unlike many pols with agendas, she could wade into the fray with an open mind and a controlled compassion. In a world

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gone blind and deaf, these eyes and ears would watch and listen carefully, would attempt a viable encapsulation and dispersion of a long and very complicated history of unnecessary pain. Katharine felt herself fairly well-equipped for the job. *We all get on in the best way we can; there are others a lot worse off* was the oft-repeated bromide of her enduring grandmother -- whose own mettle had been tested frequently enough to produce strength and wisdom. It was an underlying precept upon which Katharine always relied.

In this starkly beautiful, blood-fed land of dissension and death, her own misery would be readily superseded by a large collective misery that daily accelerated. Here, in this exotic red desert supporting rich treasures of antiquity, she tried to imagine what it would feel like to be the dispossessed. Standing on her veranda on the fourth floor of the King David Hotel in the rosy-gold setting sun, it was quite a difficult achievement. Although architectural modernity of the most avant-garde stripe existed in Jerusalem, her room faced the renowned Old City. Sprawling out before her was a collection of ancient buildings representing far more than ornate and long-lived periods of architecture, for they were powerful symbols of peoples and cultures with spiritual dreams.

How ironic that the name Jerusalem meant *foundation of peace*. The hotel's namesake, King David, had captured this once humble and now sacred spot from the Jebusites some three thousand years ago. Three thousand years of strife and struggle with swiftly time-threaded moments of peace and hope, she reminded herself, the ever-changing, ambitious proprietors coming and going from every corner of the Middle Eastern map. The Romans alone had been here over three hundred years, three centuries

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longer if one considered the Byzantine Roman Emperor Constantine.

When not curtained with winter drizzle, everything was light and shadow here. Today the sky was an ethereal, translucent blue hazed with gold above the dense texture of the Old City, the walled city, 2.7 miles of gated wall that the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent built between 1536 and 1541. It was seventeen to fifty feet high and in places ten feet thick. Inside its southeastern part were the gray-domed Al-Aqsa Mosque, the gleaming Dome of the Rock, and the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif with its most sacred Wailing Wall dating from the first century. Off to the west in the Old City was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Places sacred to Christians and Muslims and Jews, so close together and yet by historical paths and human nature so very far apart. Her squinting eyes could hardly take in a fraction of the encrustations of history and meaning, all existing beneath the pervasive specter of spilled blood; always it seeped into flawed man's magnificent achievements. She stood very still, gave one long sigh as the light faded, then stepped back inside her commodious suite.

The room was a bastion of comfort, although she hardly ever worked in such luxury: a separate living room, a functionally handsome bedroom, a Jacuzzi, a compact disc stereo system and computer-friendly space. An extravagant self-indulgence to soothe her troubled brain. She could easily set up her laptop and work from a convenient desk when she returned each day. *If* she returned each day.

She had a guide lined up to visit Palestinian camps and planned to do her own photography when permitted. There were regular Israeli-imposed curfews in this tit for tat world of monstrous acts, and despite careful

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scheduling nothing was ever certain. She well knew the red-tape imbroglios that were the norm, the troubling logistics of even negotiating very short distances -- for an American all distances here were very short; the greatest distance was a deep psychological pathology with no end in sight. Great care had always to be taken. One did not even allow an Israeli stamp on one's passport, but instead requested a special entry document for that purpose. Otherwise, the Israeli stamp would prevent one from entering an Arab country when reportage required such entry.

She dressed in an olive sweater and skirt and slid her foot into her chestnut wedge-heeled shoe, suddenly remembering Green Braes, descending its baronial stairs beside Lan, stopping to button his shirt as those dark eyes engulfed her reason. She sat motionless, holding the other shoe in her hand, summoning up the entire memory. Her heart pounded as if he were about to enter the room. She took several deep breaths, finished her dinner preparations, and went downstairs to meet a friend who lived in an Art Deco apartment not far away, in the lovely old 30s neighborhood of Rehavia. She had stayed there on her last visit, and the friend, Judith Stein, had again offered her a pleasing bedroom. This time she had declined, wanting her own sanctum, her own headquarters, her own coddling cave in which to work absent of any memory at all. But the swarming memories would not leave her. She had thought of Lan and was suddenly back in his world, under his ineluctable sway, her body once again more his than her own. She must shake off those memories over dinner. *A shaking off* -- it was the meaning of *intifada*, a violent Palestinian response to suppression and devalued existence, begun in 1987.

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Striding briskly over the shining floors and through the splendid public halls of the King David, she tried to focus on its sumptuous intimations of antiquity. Here were touches of Assyrian, Hittite, and Phoenician cultures, the square, scroll-sided cream columns and the high ceilings cross-beamed with colorful and interesting motifs.

Once seated at her table in the *La Regence Grill*, she ordered a Manhattan neat and waited for her friend. Judith Stein was a practitioner of psychology. She also taught at Hebrew University on Mount Scopus north of the Mount of Olives in northeastern Jerusalem.

“There you are,” Judith called out as Katharine stood up to receive and give a hug. “You’re much thinner, Katharine.”

“Thin is good, isn’t it?” Katharine was smiling at her old schoolmate as she heard anew that familiar Israeli voice.

“Not too thin. But it *is* good to see you again.”

As if to amend her physical condition, Katharine ordered chicken croquettes and sauce with wild rice and a mixed green salad, although her initial hardy attack flattened and she was unable to finish her meal. Judith ate white fish with the same wild rice and salad. They both commented that the food was fresh and well prepared as they sipped their citrine wine and discussed at greater length a reacquainting range of mundane matters.

“So you are going to visit Palestinians,” Judith finally remarked, as they slowly spooned into a fruited mousse dessert. “The logistics of doing that could really be dangerous.”

Katharine emptied her wine glass without responding.

“Come up to my rooms, Judith. There’s a sort of varied little bar.

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We can have a short nip of something with coffee and talk in private.”

Once seated on Katharine’s comfortable sofa, and nursing small glasses of brandy, they resumed their discussion of what everyone called *the situation*.

“There is every shade of sentiment here from rabid hatred of each other to a desire for co-existing states and an aloof, commerce-exchanging peace,” Judith said. “Everyone is equally sick of and horrified at the current state of affairs. One of the sticking points is the control of this extraordinary capital city of over six hundred thousand souls that is so important to all of us.”

“Where do you stand in those shades of feeling, Judith?”

Judith, her smallish body wrapped in a pale blue cashmere sweater and matching slacks, leaned back and said, “Ideally, I wish it all belonged to us, but it doesn’t. If you manage to talk to the far right, you will see that they think it does. They refuse to consider the plight of the Palestinians. For them there is no plight but their own. It’s a history of their own suffering, a willful interpretation of God’s written word and anger, hubris, ignorance...rationalization...hunger for a place they believe nearest to God. I love this city...this land. And I grieve.”

“Do you ever grieve for Palestinians?”

“I’ve been too busy grieving for Israelis. Why do Arabs want to kill us?”

“For me, an outsider, it seems elementary. You’ve made a beautiful place here, something to be proud of in that sense. It might have been paradise. You Israelis are so remarkable...so very intelligent and really

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longsuffering, and apparently caring...all the more amazing that...you've so uncompromisingly taken away their homes and land."

"We have tried to resolve this."

"Meanwhile, you've shut them in pens...I'm sorry to say very much like concentration camps. You've given them curfews and treated them like bad children, or worse...prisoners."

Judith threw back her dark blond head, pale eyes glaring.

"Katharine, yours is not a popular view. Don't get me started. They kill innocents. They have no regard for life, no respect for even their own lives -- they make themselves into human bombs."

"Because they're under severe stress...their land gone, their houses gone, their dignity assaulted...a frustration at the level of mad rage."

"But human bombs--"

"They don't have tanks or gunships, and so many have died. Their homes, their villages, their dreams have vanished. Yes, it's inexcusable that innocent youth are inveigled into those wretched tactics...what a sorrow. But backed into such an inescapable corner...a hopeless place, I believe I, too, would fight, even with my bare hands...until I died."

"They want only to fight, to kill."

"What was the Haganah, Judith?"

"The Haganah? The beginning of the Israeli Defense Forces, rising out of the Zionist Labor movement. Our survival."

"They wanted only to fight. And who were the Lehi and Irgun armies and the Palmach strike force in those early days? They, too, wanted only to fight, even to fight amongst themselves. As soon as the well-oiled

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machinery of a state was properly in place, those radical wings were swallowed up. With a Palestinian state the same would come to be true.”

“How do you know?” Judith asked with irritation.

“The populace doesn’t want to fight when it isn’t necessary. Only those wrong-thinking leaders with self-serving interests and backed by extremists want that. Innocents don’t have to go on suffering and dying on either side.”

Judith stood up. “So you know something of our history, but you don’t live here. You’re not a Jew, with a legacy of brutal mistreatment and vilification. Don’t preach to me.”

“I hope I’m not. I’m sure you’ve had preachment enough.”

“And I’ve had this discussion too many times. I can’t do it anymore.” Judith flung her hair back with an angry grimace.

“Please sit down, Judith. Now we’ve had our say. Don’t think I don’t feel for you. I feel deeply for both sides. Both sides have to ride through all of this killing, slice right through the horrors of the extremists and move without stopping to a place of co-existence, or you’ll never have peace. Somehow reason must come into play, because neither side is going away. They just aren’t going away. Now let’s talk of something else.”

“You have no idea...you seem to think you can just come here and tell us what to do.”

“Me? Do you mean me, or my country’s representatives? It’s exactly what you need. Both sides are mired in rage, and the leaders are involved in all sorts of conflicting agendas, some honest and some far from it. Palestinians and Israelis are too often misrepresented by fanatical, warring

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autocrats, and it only leads backwards. I've been reading comprehensive reports on the actions of both sides, and the more I read and observe the more I realize that you need a persevering mediator, a third impartial party to come in here and tell you what to do."

"And you think your American president can do that? With all the public posturing, it hasn't happened yet."

"You know, it's interesting. I've found that Palestinians hate us for being partial to Israelis -- and yes, our government and certainly many of our citizens have been -- and then I've observed that many Israelis are furious with us for favoring a Palestinian state, but that is what must occur. A society only lives freely and comfortably when reason is allowed to supersede the horrors of wild emotion. The Palestinians need an autonomous state with a sound structure. A state isn't a leader but a structure, and if it's well in place it will survive the sudden loss of any leader. The history of my country has proved that. Some strong third party must mediate a lasting peace. Oh, it's been tried many times, but the trouble is something always stops it. *Nothing* must stop it. That's the only solution."

"They seem to want it all," Judith chided.

"I know you fear that, but I don't think so, and to them it looks quite the reverse. Innocent Palestinian people are being oppressed. That cannot continue. They have a right to houses and gardens and land, too, the right to come and go freely, to laugh and sing and eat and dream. This is their country. A number of well-intentioned Israelis have seen this, seen that the killing must stop and how to stop it. Surely you see it, too."

"I do," Judith said, once again standing with her agitated fingers

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sliding through her shoulder-length hair, and her gray eyes blazing with a certain indignant anger.

“Please don’t be angry, Judith. You wanted to continue and so I did. Now we’ll talk of something else. You’re my friend. Please.” Katharine had stood and touched Judith’s shoulder.

Judith sat down, leaning forward with her face in her hand and her elbow resting on her knee.

“You’re a guest in Israel and I’m trying to be polite. You think your country has committed no atrocities?”

“How I wish it were the case,” Katharine said, shaking her head as she sat down. “We were talking about the problem here.”

“You were such an exceptional student, Katharine. I think it’s one of the reasons I tolerate your audacity. You have a very good mind and I do respect that...respect your opinion.”

“You weren’t so bad yourself. And it’s more than opinion; it’s a conviction.”

“Aren’t reporters supposed to be unbiased?”

“I try to be...try to tell the truth...however unpopular.”

“Do you have a private life, Katharine?”

“Sometimes...it comes and goes.”

“Hmm. And you’re here because it has gone perhaps?”

“Psychology is definitely your *métier*, Judith. Currently, I haven’t much of a private life, but it has nothing to do with my conviction. I’m far better at my work than I am at private life. Sooner or later I would have come back here. The present circumstance is unconscionable for any

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compassionate human being, for anyone in a position to publicize the futility of constant bloodshed. If enough people can be shown...ah, but you have me doing it again.

“What about *you*...your private life?”

Judith gave a sardonic laugh. “I intend to marry as soon as I find a suitable husband.”

“What? You haven’t found one? You can’t be looking very hard. You have so much to offer.”

“I don’t know about that. It could be that I’m far too particular. I have a very good friend who is apparently just that...more a friend than a lover.

“Maybe it’s the way to go. Lovers consume you. They...”

“Yes?” Judith said with an incisive encouragement.

“Just...opinion,” Katharine answered, shrugging.

“If you could see your face...those sad green eyes, my friend. Envy is expressed as green, is it not? But your eyes are enviable...except when they are this sad. Do you want to talk about it? I think you need to.”

“When you aren’t teaching, you’re listening to enough sad stories in your practice. You don’t need another one from me.”

“But I’ll listen if you want me to. It’s in my nature. I usually know when it’s needed. I’m a listener...in the same way that you need to go about reporting on the state of things.”

“And to do that I have to do a lot of listening, too.”

“So you’re going to be evasive. Well, let me know if you need a sympathetic ear while you’re here.” Judith stood up in a conclusive manner.

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“Guess I’d better get back to my place. I have a few things to do before I sleep for the morning rush.”

“Thank you for coming and for sharing thoughts with me, Judith. I’ll check in with you from time to time.”

“And I thank you for the good meal. I will have you over for supper in a few days. Please be careful, Katharine. Going to those camps seems to me like a nightmare...rather futile.”

“The nightmare is, I’m sure, for the people living there. I don’t think of futility...or I wouldn’t be in this profession.” Katharine walked a rather sullen Judith to the door.

In the morning it was raining, but the season of rain had tapered off. The fragile white almond blossoms that Katharine had once seen in February would have blown away, for it was late March and nearing the end of Ramadan. This was the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, involving dawn to dusk fasting -- no food or drink -- and no sex, smoking, or harsh oaths. Self-purification for the Muslim population. Katharine went down early to the tempting miscellaneous breakfast buffet provided by the hotel, dabbled in a few items: an orange, a roll, a boiled egg along with coffee, and then returned to her room to make a phone call. She was to meet her contact, Ahmed, in front of the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem, Orient House, a lovely old refurbished hotel slightly north and west of the Old City. He would have arranged a visit to one of the camps, and once there interpret for her. When she phoned Ahmed, he told her that absolutely nothing was negotiable today. There had been another explosion

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on one of the main roads, resulting in two deaths. Many roads were closed, the others moving at a snail's pace and open only to settlers. The Israeli Defense Forces had placed the camps under twenty-four hour curfew. This disheartening news made Katharine nervous and irritable. She was sorely in need of mitigating exercise, and currently had no wish to visit the hotel's fitness room but rather a desire to stretch her legs and breathe the high cool air of the rain-washed Judean Hills. Setting off with an umbrella borrowed from the hotel, she walked over to the Old City, now often rife with soldiers.

A large date palm was dripping in the slow drizzle as she passed through the ancient Jaffa Gate and then down through the souk, the now subdued marketplace, and the tight, narrow, overhung and winding passageways that held centuries of echoing footfalls; so many determined lives, so many little intrigues that melted away with disappointment and physical decline. Moving along the Street of the Chain, in Hebrew called *Rehov Hasharsberet*, ever watchful but resolute, she turned right, descended the steps and came out into the northwestern side of the plaza. There was a lone black-garbed member of the orthodox Hasidim making his way to the Wailing Wall with his dripping umbrella raised high. She had never been there in the rain, the rain like the tears of all those who had suffered over this small sacred spot on the troubled planet. She realized that she herself was blinking away the moisture of remorseful eyes; she, the past and the present miseries all joining a restless river of sorrow from which she was unable to swim free. "This bloody sooky mood," she muttered, and then heard Lan's idiom, his voice in her soft outcry. She stood letting the rain drift over her face, mingling with commiserating regret and her own frustrations. This

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sacred place, presumed to represent man's triumph over pain and a connection with the Divine, was itself awash in fierce contention and wild negative emotion. *Why have I become so hopelessly ineffectual...unable to move on...oh, such a victim of my sorry self?* she pondered. Continuing to chastise herself, she turned around and headed slowly back the way she had come. A hot bath and then tea might help, she decided, as she shook off her umbrella and entered the soothing quiet of the King David Hotel.

When she had soaked in a warm herb-scented bath, she sat on her sofa in her robe, drinking tea and reading an editor's e-mail directives appearing on her laptop. The screen glowed like a living entity, pulsing with the impatient world. While going through the remaining business messages, she saw an e-mail registering from long silent Green Braes, at once splashing hot tea on her shaking hands. Quickly setting down the cup, she rubbed her hands together and held them clasped against her chest a moment then sighed and opened the message.

"I miss you very much, Kate. Please communicate with me. Do you give a damn if I'm suffering? Don't do this to us. I need to know how you are, where you are."

Her uncooperative hands barely allowed her to hit the right keys as she finally succumbed to a distraught answer:

"Please go on with your life. Please don't suffer over me. I'm out in the field, trying to work. It's difficult to do like this. Perhaps you know what I've come to admit to myself: that it wasn't really about Rani. It was the whole thing...looking down on the whole thing, I couldn't see how...oh, I can't write this. Apologize to Mary for me. Please, Lan, can you help me by

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being well and by forgiving, forgetting...”

Suffering herself, she could go no further and pressed the send button before she could change her mind.

Rattling through small bottles in the conveniently stocked little bar, she found the vodka, tossed it down, then curled up in her luxurious bed, hugging a pillow until she dozed off. She wanted no food. She wanted to work, to obey the wise counsel of her honest grandmother by losing her own story in the grievously disregarded stories of others. At least she was at liberty to do this, to inform a segment of the world that needed to hear the other side. The risk involved was somehow soothing.

At seven in the morning, Ahmed called to say that a road had temporarily opened to Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. He was not promising that everything would go according to plan, but would pick her up in the UNRWA van, along with another person with whom he worked in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. She was to be in front of Orient House in half an hour.

Standing on her veranda, she checked the weather. Coolish air, but the drizzle had stopped. There was a thick dark cloud bursting in a gray column behind a rainbow low in the west.

A hotel-summoned taxi let Katharine off before the iron-gated entrance of elegant Orient House. Flying the red-triangled, black-, white-, and green-barred Palestinian flags, the building was a stone’s throw from the extremely orthodox Hassidim neighborhood of Me’ah She’arim. Formerly a hotel and the 1897 villa of Isma’il al-Husseini, Orient House was now the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority in East Jerusalem. She walked

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through the slightly ajar high gate and stared past the dark green firs, studying the *gamariya* construction often found in Islamic architecture, the gabled covering over a handsome fan entrance set with colored glass surrounded by stylized plaster latticework. She considered climbing the stairs to see if she might peek inside, but heard the quick beep of a car horn.

Clutching her large purse, Katharine hastened outside the gate and climbed into the waiting white UN van. She sat behind Ahmed and was at once introduced to the shyly smiling passenger beside her named Karima. Karima's smooth-skinned round face was surrounded by the gossamery white *bijab*, a head scarf that fell to her waist and was a common sight among the women of Gaza.

"I have brought for you a scarf," Karima said in careful English.

"I'm not Muslim. Is that the right thing to do?" Katharine asked with a polite smile.

"It will be easier, especially on the road," Karima said.

Katharine reached for the scarf, but Karima said, "Let me do this for you," and brought the scarf gently over her head with quick agile fingers. "Your eyes are surprising...the green. Never have I seen eyes of this green...very beautiful, like the mineral stone malachite...or jade."

Immediately thinking of Lan, Katharine felt a weakness in her stomach. "Thank you, Karima. I find your amber-brown eyes quite lovely. My eyes are from the eyes of my mother."

"She is alive?"

"No. Gone a long time ago."

"So then, another parent you have?"

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“My grandmother raised me...gone now, too.”

“Ah,” Karima said, “the old are wise...good teachers.”

“Yes. She was a wise teacher.

“What route do we take?” Katharine called out loudly enough for Ahmed to hear. They were on the tunnel road out of Jerusalem, a road often closed, Karima had informed her.

“We are going almost to Hebron, then to Gaza and south. The army checkpoints at Muraj, Kfar Darom, and Netzarim are open to travelers now.”

Katharine stared forward out the front windshield while Karima explained the places they were passing as they rolled along through the Judean Hills: the Jewish communities of Gush Etzion, Efrat, Elazar, and Neve Daniel. When they reached Kfar Etzion the Arab villages began to appear and continued until they reached the Kiryat Arba turnoff. Arab women were selling produce along the road. Their weathered faces heavily lined, and each line, Katharine thought, a story of hours in brutal sun, field work, child bearing, human loss, strife, the stuff of life and quite a bit more...and the desperate need for sustenance.

“Do you have children?” Karima asked.

“No, I don’t.”

“You will be asked this often. They will be wondering what you are doing here.”

“Because I’m a woman.”

“Yes.”

“You’re working, Karima.”

“My husband is dead. I have three children and my mother. I must

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work.”

In this warring climate, she was hesitant to inquire just how the presumably young husband had died, and said, “I’m sorry.”

“I, too,” Karima responded and fell silent.

They were on the Gaza road, traversed for thousands of years, and would now have to deal with checkpoints, intimidating road blockades involving examination and interrogation, and at which Palestinian travelers were powerless to do anything but suffer whatever fate was decided upon by IDF soldiers.

As they drew up to the first checkpoint, Katharine began to experience the anxious feeling of threat that was always present under such uncertain and unequal conditions. Ahmed was ready with *hawiyya*, ID, his and Karima’s special passes. Katharine lowered her head and sat very still, trying not to look at anyone, but she knew that sooner or later she would have to lift those always startling green eyes and level them at someone’s scrutinizing face.

When attention was at last focused on her, Katharine held out her passport and explained that she was simply going to visit with some Palestinian women and had the required approval to do so.

“Why the *hijab*?” the soldier holding an M-16 inquired. “You are not one of them.”

“I’m not trying to hide,” Katharine answered with a smile, “just trying to be polite.”

The soldier warned her about the dangers of the camps and, because she was with an UNWRA guide, waved them on.

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“Good lord, that’s unnerving,” Katharine exclaimed.

“We go through that every time we reach a checkpoint,” Karima said, “and it is never without worry. If we are allowed to pass, we have a single moment of relief. It is very humiliating to have a young immigrant IDF soldier demand of an older Palestinian man what he is doing in the place where he was born. My father has experienced this many times.”

“I have deep regret for all of this humiliation, Karima, and immense respect for your great strength in living like this.” Her voice had been altered by newly heightened emotion.

“It is my hope that you will make others understand what is laid upon us, why we often have such anger,” Karima said.

“Should we worry about the curfew?” Katharine asked.

“Officially, you have a U.S. passport and are not subject to curfew, but even then it is not easy. Red tape, questions. They do not like journalists.”

“I try to play that down,” Katharine said, stroking her travel purse with camera inside. She also knew that she could take no picture without first carefully seeking permission from her subject. “But curfew for you?” she went on.

“UN workers have red passes, exempting us from curfew. During Ramadan, Israeli authorities extend curfew from seven o’clock to nine o’clock. We can eat after sunset, and it is a social time; still it is difficult. In some countries Muslims can party all night. Here, we must rush to be home by nine o’clock. And very soon it will return to seven o’clock.”

Katharine rode in silence, feeling some of the anger that so many

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innocent Palestinians must feel in very large doses at the severe proscription of their lives.

One more very fortunately uneventful checkpoint at the Israeli settlement of Kfar Darom, where guards in high towers waved them through, and they were soon in Khan Yunis. Here, fourteenth century Egyptian Mamluk sultans had provided caravan travelers with a *khan*, a sort of castle-like dwelling for rest, worship, and supplies; its eroded remnants were falling to dust in the square, while nearby a contemporary mosque, its minaret soaring seventy-five feet into the sky, flaunted an illegal Palestinian flag. This crowded town of more than 80,000 people looked oppressed and jerry-built. Donkeys, horses, and cars were throwing up mud from the recent rains as they plowed through open sewage. The electrical wiring overhead appeared haphazard and fraught with danger, as though a sudden wind would bring it all down in a snapping tangle.

“The language of graffiti,” Katharine said softly, staring through the window at the heavily marked side of a building.

“For you this will be of interest,” Karima said. “It is called *sahafit is-shaab*: *popular journalism*; another way of communicating the stress of suppression.”

They drove through the town to a cinder block house that looked as though half of it had been cut away. It faced a broad street slicing right through the housing area.

“Yes, the house was cut in half for the *Sharon Street*, a wide street dividing the neighborhood to make room for the Israeli soldiers to chase guerrillas who vanish in narrow alleys,” Ahmed said. “This happened in the

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1970s with General Ariel Sharon's *Iron Fist* response to the *fedayeen*, Palestinian fighters. They tore apart houses, imprisoned people, a lot of shootings...and the people who suddenly found a black X on their houses had all or a part of their houses disappear quickly for this big road."

"We are visiting Amira, the mother of three children. Her husband, Omar, has been out looking for work," Karima said. "He lost his last job when a long curfew was imposed and the roads were closed. If he comes home in time it will be possible to speak with him, too."

They entered the house through a narrow and dark makeshift vestibule with another door at the end. This was to protect the entrance from Israeli tear gas canisters, Karima explained. Katharine had already noticed that the windows facing the street were sandbagged. She had heard that Israeli settlers sandbagged the windows of exposed houses in their settlements to protect them from Palestinian snipers. Generally, the settlements were walled in and guarded by Israeli soldiers. The houses in the Palestinian camps were subject to entry and search at any time by the IDF.

"Sometimes they get on the roofs of our houses to watch us and shoot at rock throwers," Karima said as they entered Amira's house.

When she was introduced, plump Amira's shy eyes flashed out from a round face surrounded by the thin cloth of her white *bijab*. She wore a long-sleeved, delicately flowered blue blouse and a long black skirt that was being clutched by a dark-eyed, very curious little girl.

"Laila," Amira said, pointing to her staring child.

"We are not in the best of humor today," Karima translated for Amira. "Our home was invaded last night. Fasting is difficult under these

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circumstances, but I must not complain.”

“Thank you for letting me come into your home,” Katharine said.
“Your daughter, Laila, is a very pretty little girl.”

They sat on large cushions placed on a cold tile floor in a barren square room painted soft blue with a white ceiling.

Amira brought a tray with tea in a small glass, which she could not herself drink.

Katharine said, “I should not drink when you cannot.”

“No,” Amira said, waving her hands. “We do not expect this of you. It is not your way. Please drink.

“Where is your husband...your children? You have pictures?” Amira asked with smiling curiosity.

“I have neither husband nor children.”

“This is very sad for you.”

“Not so sad for me. I’ve chosen this way of life. I like what I do. It’s a different point of view, a different way of living a life, Amira.”

At first Amira was hesitant to speak when Katharine asked to hear an account of her existence, but after a period of brief responses to politely orchestrated questions and short voluntary comments of her own, she began to open up. Gradually, her withheld emotions rose to the surface and spilled out in a rapid and lengthy harangue of frustration and anger.

“When my husband lost his job because of the curfew and the closed roads, we had to sell some of our possessions, even one of my gold bracelets, to have food. You cannot imagine what it is like to live this way. Our water tastes of salt from sea water, because the new settlements have used so much

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water that only a few wells still have *maaya behwa*, sweet water. My children are so frightened whenever they hear a strange sound...this after the soldiers have come into our home. I worry that the fright will damage them. What is their future? None of us sleep very well. In the middle of the night they might burst into our home again and line us up for questions, like criminals. Most of the time we have no idea who they are looking for. A free state, to be left alone and manage our own affairs that is hardly a dream anymore. Oh, that is so far ahead of us it is hardly a thought.”

They talked on, Katharine with her voice recorder now readily approved and her note pad scribbled full of descriptive passages of Amira, her home, children, and visibly ravaged neighborhood with its sewage perpetually trickling down the sandy, muddy edges of the cracked sidewalks. Just before sundown, the husband, Omar, returned. His attempts to find work had met with no success. The dark eyes set deep in shadowed wells of a haggard face flashed with anger as he explained his humiliating plight. He was unused to speaking to a strange woman, of speaking to any woman in this manner, and directed his words to Ahmad, yet he accepted Katharine’s role of journalist and even smiled, displaying teeth in need of dental work, as he welcomed her into his home. With his tall figure gaunt and stooped by fatigue and his hair already thinning, his smile seemed to Katharine a monumental effort.

Omar’s soft-spoken mother, Hanan, shuffled quietly into the room to welcome her son. Her wrinkled face beamed from behind her black scarf at the sight of her son. Her full figure was swathed in yards of a long black kaftan from which her bare feet protruded. Katharine glanced at the cold tile

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floors and wondered if the bare feet were a habit or a necessity.

According to Ahmad's translation, Omar said, "My mother wears the key of her former house on a cord around her neck. It is like a talisman for a dream that can bear no fruit. One evil day she had to close the door of our home forever. She locked the door and carried away the key. The house of the key is gone. The village of the house of the key is gone...now a new Israeli settlement of fine houses lives there, but she will not give up the key. Her dreams are stronger than even her children's.

"This is a sorry place for the young men. There is nothing for them to do...no hope for them. These young rock throwers, the *shabab*, get into trouble because they are always angry and restless. How else can they retaliate for this hopelessness? What can they do?

"I myself do not want Palestinian terrorists. I do not want Israeli soldiers in my life...killing us. I want a job, a good life for my family, a country for my people that is free. Write that down for the world to read.

"Do you have children?"

"No," Katharine answered with a look that she hoped said *This is who I am. Please accept me this way.*

"One day you will have children and they will be in a free place," Omar said. "Ask the same for us. *Insha'allah*," he added. God's will.

Soon the sun would be setting. They heard the *atha'an*, the call to prayer, and Amira asked, "Will you stay for *iftar* with us. This was the dinner that broke their fast, and there were a number of hungry mouths to feed. Katharine considered whether it was unkind to accept or rude to decline. She glanced at Karima.

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“Thank you. We will share some of the food with you that we were going to eat,” Karima said and explained her words to Katharine.

Several layers of covering were placed across the floor, the bottom one a fiber matt floor covering, the top one a sort of oil cloth upon which the food was laid. Amira’s oldest girl, whose name was Aysha, shyly spread out the covers, and they gathered around the meal, sitting on foam cushions as Karima and Amira arranged the food. There were fluffy almond-studded rice and mounds of a minuscule dried fish, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, and beans stirred with olive oil and thyme. Young Aysha tended the flat bread warming on the charcoal brazier. They drank apple juice, which Ahmad had brought from the van along with containers of the very small fish, a pot of jam, and the cucumbers. Omar’s mother, Hanan, entered the room with a bowl of humus and knelt to set it on the cloth.

Katharine broke her warm bread and dipped it into the humus as the others were doing. She chewed slowly and looked at the surrounding faces. They were smiling, happy to be eating, making jokes she could not understand, but she understood the necessary socializing, the pleasure of the meal, and was content to watch and listen to the chattering, melodic sounds of spirited voices. She bit into a crisp fresh cucumber and smiled at Hanan who nodded at her and returned her smile. How amazingly cheerful they all looked, simply happy to be eating together, perhaps for a moment forgetting their great misfortune.

Katharine asked Ahmad to ask Omar if she might be permitted to photograph the family as they sat at their meal. The request was granted, and she reached for her purse. She tried to frame her photograph carefully, but

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all was motion. The wiggling children, Amira with the baby boy, Atif, on her lap being fed, mischievous Aysha teasing her younger sister, Amal, and Omar frowning and reaching for bread. Ahmad's lanky torso rested back on his elbow, his black-haired head bobbing as he chewed and grinned. Karima was talking softly to Amira. Only Hanan looked at the camera, smiling serenely. Such a pose Katharine could not allow to slip away and was pleased and moved by its capture. The entirety of the photograph made a rich story.

At the finish of the meal, they reclined on their cushions drinking mint tea. Ahmad's cellular phone rang. With the phone up to his ear, his face grew serious and he shook his head and exclaimed softly. He stood up and raised his hands for silence.

"Only a mile and a half away. Can you hear it?" he said in English to Karima and Katharine.

"What?" Katharine asked, and then she heard a loud explosion that shook the room.

"An antitank missile. My God! Heavy explosives. They say a jeep was stoned and two soldiers run off the road, one killed, stoned or shot...the *shabab*. Now we're in for it. We won't get out of here tonight. They will be finishing off the houses of the suspected *shabab* in the morning with their dynamite and bulldozers. This is what I mean when I say nothing is certain," he directed at Katharine. He had been speaking with an RAO friend on his phone, a Refugee Affairs Officer. RAOs were European or North American contractors, refugee-UNRWA liaisons, but they monitored human rights.

As the house shook again in a loud and threatening boom of sound, young Aysha and her little sister, Amal, huddled together in tears. Their

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mother moved over to comfort them.

“This is *el wadd’a: the situation*, what we must live with,” angrily excited Ahmad said with a dramatic gesture for Katharine. “As you see, it is really *halat harb: a state of war*. Children are martyrs now. Before *wadd’a* is over, every house will be *beit shabeed: a martyr house*. Maybe every house will be knocked down. Listen to that artillery.”

“You must stay here,” Omar told Ahmad.

“There are some blankets in the van,” Karima said, as she went on explaining to Katharine what they would do.

She slept in a roomful of women and children. The floor was cold and hard, her blanket thin. She turned back and forth fully clothed, only her shoes removed, pulling futilely at her cover, never comfortable, wishing for the release of sleep but instead contemplating this life and her own. A child was crying. At last she fell asleep, but dreamed that Lan was making fierce love to her in a long half-water-filled kayak as it sank. She awoke with the sudden stirring of the others, her damp body still pulsing in the throes of fear and erotic desire.

Lights flashed in her eyes. She sat up as Hanan placed a glass of cardamom coffee in her hand. The old woman’s shrouded face looked bone tired and slightly grotesque, green in the fluorescent lamp. It was just after four o’clock. They must eat before sunrise. It was time for *subur*, the meal that would last them through the day. Stuporous, Katharine wobbled across the floor, slumped down with the silent family and fed flat bread and jam into her mouth between sips of coffee. She avoided the beans but ate a hard-boiled egg. The groggy children whimpered and gurgled in complaint.

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Then they all returned to their floor mats, wrapping themselves in their blankets, and were at once greedily asleep. Now she was fully awake and thinking again.

How long would Lachlan Manutaane invade her waking and sleeping dreams? She pondered his perceptive observations, then those of dear Mary, so incisive. She had wishfully entertained the idea of Mary as her adoptive mother, as if Mary were simply waiting for her to come along in order to dispense that longed-for maternal tenacity, security, devotion. What an arrested child she now saw herself in this matter, so callow in her yearning...and so completely in love with Lan but unable to imagine any sort of future, just as careless children live in the present with no thought of ensuing dark days. She had managed to get herself away; that involved some projection of thought, some strength of will, spurred on by the nervous idea of how swiftly she might be swallowed up if she stayed; yet, her escape felt like, *was*, a self-inflicted sort of wound, no victory at all.

When she awoke the other blankets were put away, and Amira and her daughter were mopping the floors. Karima handed her a glass of very strong cardamom coffee, and Katharine said, “Why did you let me sleep?” She was wriggling into her shoes.

“It is good,” Karima answered, “Just as well. We may not be leaving today.”

“Where are Ahmad and Omar?”

“They have gone to a neighbor who needed help with a broken door.”

“I wish I’d brought my laptop, but at least I can watch the

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household, talk to Amira and Hanan...with your help...perhaps write some meaningful things.”

“There is much to write, is there not?” Karima remarked. “Now we are preparing for *eid al fitr* celebration, the end of Ramadan in two days.

The women are baking bread and cakes. I am afraid they will not have much time to talk to you.”

“Then I’ll just watch.”

Katharine leaned against the wall, watching the women and girls who were presently making Ramadan *atayif*, pancakes filled with ground nuts, fried and heavily soaked in honey.

“Ahmad has been talking to his RAO friend and thinks that tomorrow we may get you back to Jerusalem. *Insha’llah*. If nothing else happens. With *nadd’a*, nothing is ever certain,” Karima said.

Wishing to be unobtrusive, Katharine had done only minimal ablutions in the crowded household. The water was indeed unpleasantly salty. Her teeth felt furry and her clothes needed changing, but she had existed under far worse conditions in more immediate war zones. It was the amazing endurance of the family that she found so uplifting, and the indulgent and kindly way her inconvenient appearance was accepted into the flow of things.

Later, while Amira was feeding baby Atif, holding his squirming little body on her lap, she talked to Katharine with Karima’s help. Katharine learned that Amira actually spoke some English but was shy about using it before a journalist. Amira had met Omar at the West Bank Birzeit University, which they were able to attend with part-time jobs and help from

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their families. Upon graduation and after their marriage, Omar had enlisted the help of both their families to start a needed door manufacturing business in Gaza. At first, Amira said, it was doing quite well. They were able to employ more and more workers. Then they had to lay off half their workers because of an Israeli licensing restriction that allowed businesses no more than ten employees. Next, their supplies were cut off due to curfews and road closures. The business could not operate, and Omar's employees all found themselves jobless. Omar had to quickly take a job as a gardener in a settlement. That job, too, failed after a long curfew that prevented Omar from going out. Now he was daily searching for work. Amira's eyes were moist as she told her story, half in English, half in Arabic.

Katharine looked at Amira's hand, which was stroking nervously over little Atif's body as she spoke. Patting this frantic hand then offering a quick grasp, Katharine said, "Things will improve. I know they will because they must."

"Are you now to tell me I must have *amal*, hope?" Amira said.

"I guess that's what I'm saying," Katharine answered.

"You are not the first to say so. Do you not know how long this has gone on? We are tired of it...depressed and tired."

An elderly bearded man clothed in a long cream *jalabeeya* and wearing a *taghiya* or skullcap atop his gray head suddenly entered the room, his tall frame moving with a stumbling forward tilt. He stared at Katharine with a look of surprise then a grimace, retreating to another room where the men often met to talk.

"My uncle, Ibrahim," Amira said. "He has the suspicion. Perhaps he

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thinks you are Shin Bet.”

“The Israeli domestic intelligence?” Katharine said. “Why would he think that?”

“They have posed as journalists to catch people. Yes, they have done this when they want to find someone.

“Uncle Ibrahim stays with us from time to time. He comes and goes. He is very...how do you say? He is very...”

“Disturbed,” Karima said.

“Yes, very disturbed man...restless man. He cannot stay in one place...is sometimes going to other relatives, other friends. His good mind is not good anymore.

“Once he has orchards. I play in this beautiful place with my young sisters. He is always working in his orchards, rows of olive and almond trees...such perfect rows. He loves...loved to tend these trees...happy in the blossoms and buzzing bees, thanking Allah for this life. One of his grandsons is sometimes with the *shabab*, and for this the IDF knocks down Uncle Ibrahim’s house...bulldozes his orchards. I do not think the boy is so bad...perhaps he throws some rocks -- the soldiers taunt the young boys, you know. They say a soldier goes off the road because of rocks. But even so, how can it be right to punish the innocent grandfather? Because the boy is living there? We cannot punish the families of those who steal our land, our houses, our dreams. Look what we have...what we do not have. Who is punished for this?”

“Oh, Amira, this must stop. Punishment is not the answer. This all must stop,” Katharine said. “What I have seen are not martyred children,

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but only dead innocents sacrificed for nothing. For this their families are paid, *rewarded*. That is evil. These insane sporadic killings of the blameless on both sides only create seething hatred, not the path to freedom. No peace or harmony can rest on a foundation so evil...but I myself can only tell your story, and I will.”

“I do not want to punish. I want rights for Palestinians. I want peace,” Amira said. “Leave us to have a country of peace. *Insha'allah*.”

Back through the desert Katharine had finally been driven, past the cacti and the orange groves and the settlements, through the nerve-wracking checkpoints and up into the Judean Hills, back to Jerusalem to write a portion of her story. She had been allowed to photograph quite a bit more than she had anticipated. “*Salamtak*,” she had told them all: *Health be with you*. Finding difficulty in saying good-bye, she had promised to return soon, after the Ramadan *eid al fitr* celebrations, to see what hectic life was like with a seven o'clock curfew, with still more heavy uncertainty on the horizon, and in pursuit of a few more of the thousands of Palestinian stories that existed in the camps.

With her usual self-demanding perfectionism, she sat at the desk that held her computer, working long into several nights, writing and rewriting until she had included and excluded all that was necessary to make a moving and flowing story of fact. When she was reasonably satisfied with the result, she e-mailed her work to the contracting magazine, posted the accompanying photographs, and set out to escape her troubled thoughts by exploring more

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of Jerusalem before returning to the camps.

Four days after she had finished her current story, Judith left a phone message, instructing her to catch a bus to Mount Scopus and meet her in the cafeteria of Hebrew University for a chatty lunch. “I’ll show you my office,” Judith said, “my tidy existence at the center of chaos.” She explained to Katharine where and when to catch a bus for the following day’s visit.

The next morning offered the sweet promise of a fresh early spring day. Katharine stretched on her veranda with her coffee in hand, staring thoughtfully off at the Old City and thinking of Amira, Omar, and their children. *They must have a better life*, she asserted silently as she went inside to read her e-mail. When this routine task was finished she intended to dress and head out to find the appropriate bus for Mount Scopus.

As she was perusing her e-mail list a quick gasp escaped her. Blood pulsed into her temples. Another message from Green Braes. She thought they had ended. Her troubled response to his earlier message had made her assume that Lan would finally give up on her, if not in anger then in disgust. She opened the message with great trepidation and read.

“Forgiving is easy, but I’ll forget when you do. Come back here and tell me to forget. Tell me to my face. A writer who can’t finish her sentences is in pain. I know you have courage, doing what you do. Don’t be a hypocrite in this, a coward in this. Please come back to me. Where are you? I worry about you. My God, Kate, I love you! Lan.”

Indeed she was in pain, but there was nothing more she could say. Lan had said it all, she thought as she listlessly put on her tan slacks, blue silk blouse, and cream linen jacket for a lunch that she hoped would not be

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difficult. She sorely needed warm understanding conversation with an old friend.

Katharine had walked a few blocks when she saw a bus pulling up to the shelter. Certain it was the one she needed to catch, she clutched her purse and began to run. Ah, she was going to make it. At the same moment she thought this, there was a concussive explosion of sound so loud her ears captured only the first half. The world spun around, the spring trees, the blue sky, the pink limestone buildings all askew and spinning. Or was it her own body spinning, her own body being pushed along by the force of some hard blackness, tumbling, flying, crashing into the earth?

There was an instant of stillness, the moment the Arabs call *sargat el sikineh*: *knife shock*, the initial paralyzing calm after a deep wound, then a searing red flash of pain, then a wall of night. Nothing.

All in an instant the bus, as such, no longer existed.

There were short spans of sudden consciousness, but even then all was blackness. In those times she thought herself fallen into the water in complete darkness and called for Lan. He had told her there were sharks. Surely he would come. She called and called until she felt herself sinking back into timeless nothingness without even comprehension of blackness.

“Are you fully awake now?” an unknown, heavily accented voice asked. She believed that she had opened her eyes.

She coughed and said in a rasping voice, “Are...are my eyes open?”

“Yes. Can you tell me your name?”

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“My...I’m...wait a minute...I’m Katharine...Katharine Gordon. I...can’t...see.”

“No, you cannot. Very good, Miss Gordon. You are doing well. We were certain you would not see at present. Try to stay calm, and we will talk to you a little at a time.”

“But I...I could always see. Where am I?”

The strange male voice said, “You are at Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem.”

“There’s something...something wrong with my leg. It’s hurting quite a bit.”

“Yes, I am sure. It was broken in two places.”

“When? When was it broken? I don’t remember.”

“Two weeks ago there was a bomb explosion in a bus. You were nearby and sustained some injuries.”

“Two...two weeks ago? But I...I don’t remember anything.”

“Quite a normal reaction. You have been unconscious from a concussion...flying debris. You were somewhat shielded by a large section of the displaced shelter, or you would be full of shrapnel, but you were hit in the head. The swelling of your brain has caused pressure on your optic nerves. We believe...we hope that is why you cannot see.”

“But I...am I blind then? *Blind?*”

“Calmly...please try to stay calm. Because you are awake now, we want to do a few tests. Then perhaps...you may have a visitor, someone who has been waiting to see you.”

“Who?”

Careless Child

“Judith Stein...your friend. She is quite anxious to see you, Katharine, but only for a few minutes a little later.”

“Judith...Stein? We...were...in college together.”

“Yes, good. When did you last see her?”

Katharine’s brain roiled in a vague gray muddle, thoughts clouded with areas of darkness as she struggled to recall.

“I last saw her...I last saw her...oh, I last saw her at the King David Hotel.”

“Yes, that is good...very good. Please wait a few minutes, and a member of the staff will come to get you.”

“Daisies,” Judith said as she entered Katharine’s room. “I think daisies are cheerful. Someone can put them in a vase. I’m so relieved to see you looking better, Katharine. Last time I was here you could hardly talk.”

“I can’t *see* the daisies...or you, Judith. You should have brought something that smells good.”

“I’m sorry. How stupid. I didn’t think.”

“I was only teasing. How have you been?”

“How have *I* been?”

“Well, you know how *I’ve* been...and where I’ve been. Lying around on pain killers, blinder than a bat. Karima and Ahmad were here. They had to undergo interrogation to get through a roadblock. I wouldn’t expect them to come again.”

“I’m sorry, Katharine. The explosion killed and maimed--”

Careless Child

“Yes. I might be dead, too. It’s so horrible. The incredible tragedies of these times.”

“Katharine, I swore...swore I would not say anything, but now perhaps...perhaps you understand, my dear friend. You have changed your opinion maybe a little about Palestinians?”

“Absolutely not. I hold the same convictions, more strongly than ever. I’ve had plenty of time to think. The people I met in Khan Yunis would never have done this. They are not terrorists. They’ve called me...they were horrified.”

“No, probably they would not hurt you, but us... Most of them condone what is done, condone the suicide of their children, which they call martyrdom.”

“The people I met would not have done this to anyone, Judith...not anyone.”

“No, they let their young people do it.”

“Judith, when a civilization is driven to sacrifice its children -- the very way it perpetuates itself -- it has reached the limits of its existence. For that, its leaders and the affluent, indifferent world must bear some of the blame.”

“Well, you have had plenty of time to think, haven’t you?”

“Recently I heard one of Canada’s Prime Ministers, Jean Chretien, on the news. He told how he had spoken at a meeting of capitalists in New York City and said to them: *When you are powerful like you guys is the time to be nice.* I like the way his simple, Frenchified use of English conveyed so much.”

Careless Child

“And, I’m sure, angered so many.”

“The freedoms of America are priceless. I want it to see how others need... Oh, I can’t do this. I’m too tired, Judith.”

“What are you going to do, Katharine? How can I help you?”

“The doctors say I’m young enough for my leg to mend fairly rapidly. Clean breaks, I guess. I’ll need to be on crutches for a while...have to hang around here for a month. Some therapy. They’re watching my eyes. The prognosis isn’t too bad. When the swelling goes down...the irritation heals, they think...well, they think it will be a while before I can see anything. Doctor Berg says it might happen suddenly somewhere down the road.”

“You’ve handled this with such stoicism. I’m not sure I’d have done as well.”

“Oh, Judith, I think I almost expect misfortune -- one of the *perks* of my rather strange childhood.”

“We have excellent doctors here.”

“Yes, you do, you do...really good doctors. I feel very grateful to them. I suppose they’re getting quite good at this.”

“Katharine, I...my God, I asked you to take that bus.”

“Don’t start that, please. A lot of people were on the bus. I wasn’t. I’m one of the few alive.”

“One of your nurses, Rachel, asked me to ask you something personal,” Judith said, quickly changing the subject.

“What?” Katharine asked without much interest, sighing and leaning back on her pillows.

“She wanted to know who Lan is. I mean, if he is someone they

Careless Child

should be getting in touch with.”

“What? How do they know of him?”

“Apparently...every once in a while when your brain turned itself on, you called out his name.”

“I don’t remember doing it.”

“Probably not.”

“No, there’s no one I want contacted. But you could bring me my laptop and help me read my e-mail, when you have time. I know you’re busy.”

“Of course, I will do that. Are you crying?”

“I’m really emotional right now...embarrassingly so. Every little thing sets me off. The doctors have told me it’s very common with head injuries, so just ignore it.”

“I’m quite familiar with that malady, Katharine. I treat people with the same problem...so if you...if you want to talk, feel free. It might help you. I would like to do that much.”

“Thank you, Judith. You’re a good friend. You know...right now I wish you’d just tell me something funny. I haven’t laughed in a long, long time.”

“Something funny... Yes...all right. My friend, Jacob, asked me to marry him.”

“That’s funny? Really, Judith, that is not funny.”

“Then why are you laughing?”

“Because you said it was funny...*that’s* funny -- the idea that you would say it was funny.”

Careless Child

“Well, it’s funny to me. He lives with his mother. I have no wish to be a mother to a grown man, not *that* mother. I could never live up to it. Do you know what a traditional Jewish mother is like?”

“No. Tell me. Maybe it’ll make me laugh.”

Katharine struggled minute by minute in her new world of darkness, gradually noticing that her hearing was improving -- readily detecting intricate subtleties of sound she had never before attended or cared about: a sigh, the slight creek of a door, the distant hum of a machine, a soft gasp, a clicking tongue, rolling wheels, a rustle of starched cloth, tiptoeing feet. The nights were difficult, less activity, more silence. She could feel the dreaded nights approaching, settling over her, even without the more obvious signals of the mitigated staff activities and mentally logged-in evening routine.

Judith had brought her laptop and gone over her e-mail with her. There were no more messages from Green Braes, and she found this both a relief and a sorrow. One afternoon following a particularly vigorous therapy session, she developed a nauseating headache. This condition briefly summoned her first meeting with Lan, and for a few moments she swam above the pain, almost smiling. His concern over her migraine that day in Auckland seemed to her now even more tender. She relived every small effort of assistance, now magnified a thousandfold. It was this wretched new surfeit of emotion taking control, she told herself. Soon thereafter, she called a nurse and was given an injection for her throbbing head. “What about the pain here...can you do something about that?” she muttered half coherently

Careless Child

to the oblivious departing nurse.

“How I wish I were back in Khan Yunis doing my work,” she complained to Judith in the following week.

“I do not understand that wish at all.”

“Something draws me there...to that sharp edge of life where the mundane struggles alongside the specter of death...until the struggle becomes heroic. Then death comes...suddenly...over and over to that center of misery the world covers its eyes not to see. The necessity, the intensity of sharing it, like...like running your finger very slowly over a sharp knife blade, nearly cut by it, understanding how deeply it wounds. They would not understand my eagerness to return to their degrading prison.”

“Nor do I. Obviously, you cannot go back there now. What will you do when you are scuttling about on those crutches? Where will you go? Home?”

“Scuttling? Blundering about in the dark is a more accurate description. And that will be quite a trick.”

“They say you will eventually see.”

“So they say.”

“Oh, you must plan on it, Katharine.”

“Hmm, May in Seattle. The tulips and lilacs will have bloomed already. But there will be peonies. My grandmother had an acre of them. Great blowsy-petaled globes of pink and white extravagance. She and I gathered them in thick bunches and arranged them in shaved-wood baskets for wholesale. How I miss the innocence...a lush field of fresh blooms bobbing in the wind, or heads drooping in spring rain. I can almost smell

Careless Child

that unique peony fragrance in the fresh rain...probably raining in Seattle now. I don't really want to go back. There isn't *there* anymore. I'm so restless. I can't do very much about it. I've been ruined. Oh damn it, I'm really useless now."

"No, you aren't, Katharine. You're a mass of unstrung activity, temporarily shut down. You still have to heal...and not just your body, your mind, too. But...why are you so...so closemouthed about personal matters?"

"Why are you so curious, Judith?"

"I'm simply trying to help. Can you understand that?"

"What good does it do? Really. Hashing over old wounds."

"You've just discounted my profession."

"Sorry. Can we go over my e-mail now?"

"Of course."

Together they went down the dwindling list of messages. Katharine was in an apathetic mood, expressing a desire to erase almost everything without reading.

"Here is something from Green Braes. What is that?"

Katharine sat up, rubbing her face in sudden agitation. She dreaded this revelation but had no alternative other than Judith's help. A crumb to a starving bird was how she thought of the message, and yet she felt herself removed from that once paradisiacal world, as if she were about to weep over a vivid emotional scene in a movie, herself no longer in the picture.

"What does it say?"

"Katharine, I haven't heard from you in a long time, and I need to hear. You won't tell me where you are, so I can only imagine and worry.

Careless Child

Swear at me. Any bloody thing. Please, my ipo, just answer this communication. Lan.”

“*Well.* So, at last the mysterious Lan. Surely, you are going to answer this.”

“No,” Katharine said, groping for her tissues.

“What was that he called you?”

“Nothing.”

“It was not nothing. Oh, you are so exasperating, my friend.”

“A Maori word. It means sweetheart...lover.”

“Maori? You mean New Zealand?”

“It’s a beautiful country.”

“Exotic, I think. I’ve never been. When were you there?”

“Shortly before I came here.”

“Ah, isn’t this where I say, the plot thickens?”

“Don’t be cunning with me, Judith...just because you delight in scouring out another’s mind.”

“I’ve never heard my work described in that manner. Your journalism is skilled at embellishing the clinical.

“This man appears to care for you. I can’t think why.”

“It won’t work, my friend. I’m going to try and rest now. Thank you for your help, Judith. I’ve really become dependent on you, haven’t I?”

“Not *very* dependent, not you, Katharine.”

Careless Child

One blurry day as uneventful as all other recent days, Katharine was sitting up in bed, listening to the shortwave radio Judith had brought her, when she heard a lusty voice teasing one of the nurses just outside her door. There was a squeal of female laughter and into the room sailed Cash Taylor.

“Hello, duchess. I was in town looking for a roll of film and thought I’d drop into your temporary digs.”

“I’m speechless!” Katharine exclaimed.

“That’ll be a change. Looks like you’re all FUMTU, as the British have been known to say: *Fucked up more than usual.*”

“Ah, the same old Cash. Did you come to gloat?”

“No, I came to hold your hand and let you smell these bright red carnations.”

“I’ll smell the carnations...umm, nice. What now?”

“Same old Katharine.”

“Hardly.

“How did you know I was here?”

“I’m in the business...remember?...but as to that, the news media have said next to nothing. Maybe folks here think it will scare away tourists. I had to hear it from an Israeli friend who remembered one of our stories. The magazine didn’t even say--”

“I told them nothing, just said I was in the field. Maybe I’ll write something about it later,” Katharine quickly explained as an excuse for her silence. “Don’t scoop me now.”

“Are they treating you okay? Is there anything you need?”

Careless Child

“A working pair of eyes would be nice.”

“I hear they’ll be working eventually; they have to, these incredible green eyes -- for you, art is a color portrait. I could make you famous with just my macro lens. Your eyes are probably what made that big dark Kiwi letch for you.”

“Stop it, please, Cash.”

“Sorry...but the guy *was* on the make. We weren’t on the same wave length at all. He hated my guts, but he was polite about it. I kind of thought he’d be here. You know, patrolling your bed to keep guys like me away.”

“I can’t laugh, Cash. You have no idea.”

“Yes, I have an idea. Come on, laugh. Then I’ll go away satisfied. I made Katharine Gordon laugh, broken leg and all.”

Katharine felt the tears sliding down her cheeks.

“Good God! I’m sorry. I’ll come back tomorrow with a whole new bedside manner.”

“What are you wearing?” Katharine asked, rubbing her eyes.

“What am I wearing? Nike Air, black; Calvin Klein jeans and an old black Armani jacket over a white Burberry shirt.”

“My picture is complete.”

“You think that’s all there is?”

“No. There must be more or you wouldn’t be here.”

“I’d prescribe some horizontal exercise...only somehow, with that cast on, it doesn’t seem quite the thing.”

“Now *that* almost makes me laugh,” Katharine said with a wide grin.
“Maybe someday I’ll sing you a complimentary torch song.”

Careless Child

Cash Taylor did return the next afternoon, and spent part of his visit extolling the beauties of New Zealand. He told her he planned to return there at some future date and travel everywhere photographing everything. Little did he know what he was doing to her feeble attempts at establishing equilibrium. “Meanwhile,” he informed her, “I’m photographing flying body parts. That’ll put me in serious need of crashing in Kiwi land, and damn soon.”

“Your bedside manner hasn’t improved much, Cash, but thank you for coming. I’m afraid I’ve really enjoyed your cheery company. Please be careful out there.”

Katharine was in her hotel room now, hobbling about on crutches and wondering if she would ever see. The doctors said very little, promised her nothing. A very mysterious science called *wait and see*, she told Judith. “I’m going to assume it’s just a matter of time. If I don’t I’ll go crazy.”

One day, recalling Cash’s tantalizing images of New Zealand, and in one of her sudden transitions of mood, she asked Judith to get a number from her computer, then filed it away in her head until the appropriate hour. A day later, she called Margaret in New Zealand. It was only when she heard herself talking that she knew with certainty what she would do.

The first thing Margaret said after her initial surprise and delight was, “Katharine, a while back I thought I caught the tail end of a news story with your picture attached. I tried to hear more, but could learn nothing. I thought ya might have been in the Middle East. Were you there...are you there?”

Careless Child

“Margaret, forgive me please, but I don’t want to say anything much, except that I want to come to New Zealand. Of course I could only do that if I were sure you wouldn’t tell Lan I was coming. If I didn’t have your promise of that, I guess I just couldn’t come.”

“Then I suppose I can’t say anything. He’ll have to find out on his own. See how agreeable I am. Please come.”

“But I don’t want to see anyone at all.” *As if I could*, she thought with bitter irony. “This is strictly confidential: I was in a little accident and I need to heal.”

“Oh, my God!”

“No, please, none of that. Do you promise to be silent?”

“Oh, bloody hell, I...I suppose now I must.”

“Then I’ll trust you, Margaret. I’ve been thinking a lot about New Zealand. I really love your land. I have such good memories of its peacefulness and beauty. I want to thoroughly immerse myself in that wonderfully relaxing atmosphere and...get back in shape for my next spate of globetrotting. I was hoping you could find me one of those nice little holiday cottages for rent, maybe in the Bay of Islands or somewhere not too far from Auckland, where the weather isn’t so bad this time of year...the sort of hideaway you call a *bach*. Do you think you could?”

“Of course. I have a lot of friends who sometimes let their vacation cottages.”

“I have just a few requirements. The place should have a door that opens right onto an easy path. You know, the sort of place where you could practically walk in the dark and not get lost. I’ll need to use my laptop. Then

Careless Child

I would need someone to stop by from time to time with, oh, supplies and mail...who could maybe clean things up a bit. Would that be possible?”

“Absolutely. People are always looking for work around here. I have a few ideas. When are you coming?”

“I’ll be e-mailing my arrival time, and maybe you -- I mean *only* you, Margaret -- could meet me at the airport. That would be so good of you. This would all be so very good of you, my friend.”

III

“No one told me it could rain like this here,” Katharine said to Margaret on the phone in a testy voice. “I might as well be in Seattle.”

“I’m bloody sorry, Kate, but it is highly unusual to have so much. This is getting on to our winter, you realize?”

“Yes, I know. Ignore that remark. I’m glad I’m here. Actually, I like the sound of the rain on this noisy tin roof. I’ve come to love all sounds. Last night I heard a Morepork, the repetitive little owl that cries out *more pork, more pork.*”

“Yeah, they’re everywhere.

“I worry about you there all alone and...your eyes! I was just so astonished when you came off that plane. I haven’t recovered yet. You told me on the phone it was only a *little accident.* Good God, Kate.”

“Penny is doing a great job. She walks right in here and takes over. ‘Are you remembering to take your anti-inflammatory pills?’ she asks me. ‘Yes,’ I answer like an obedient child. I’m so well cared for. Where did you

Careless Child

ever find such a jewel...or is New Zealand just full of Pennies?”

“She’s a real brick...going to make a fine doctor when all those studies are through.”

“I think she’s already a doctor. She has that manner about her, and she knows when to leave me alone...knows when I need something. As to being alone, I like it. I’m doing a lot of thinking and some writing...appears to be turning into a novel. I suppose it’s one way of distracting myself from the grief of the Middle East.”

“That was so bad...such rotten luck, Kate.”

“I’m talking about the grief of the Palestinians. It looks like a very long, gloomy, tragic road of depredation for them. Misery, death, and destruction. A million Gazans incarcerated in squalor with little hope for much else, and over sixty percent unemployment. Half of Gaza for a million penned-up Palestinians, the other half for six thousand walled-in settlers, but the settlers are free to come and go, and living in new homes with lawns and sprinklers. Right now, it looks as if the situation can only get worse, although that’s hard to believe. It’s a frightening powder keg.”

“Is that what you’re writing about?”

“Not now. I can’t. I feel helpless in that regard, really frustrated and...angry. I’m writing my way out of something else at the moment. Some days I don’t do anything. I want to throw things, swear a lot. Sorry. It’s all the misery in the world. Perhaps later I’ll be able to write about some of that.”

She did not bring up the bizarre things her brain was doing almost nightly, the strange dreams it made her endure, in which she found herself

Careless Child

wandering down a street in the Gaza Strip, herself old and in tatters and bleeding, staring down into a pit of black bodies, herself a Gaza dweller shuffling through the dust, dragging one aching foot over crumbling debris. She would awaken whimpering in darkness she could not escape.

“Kate, you’re quite something...really quite brave...still young and lovely, with a lot of pluck. I wish--”

“Please, Margaret, don’t go where I think you’re going.”

“But he doesn’t even know you’re here and it just kills me. If he finds out, he *will* kill me.”

“He doesn’t need to know. I’m doing my own thing...as well as I can. I really and truly do not want anything else. It’s enough to know that he’s somewhere getting on with his life.”

“That’s bloody amazing to me, that sort of talk.”

“So be it.”

“Doesn’t he send you e-mail?”

“Yes, less frequently. Penny reads it to me. I don’t answer very often. One day it’ll stop, I suppose.”

“I don’t think it’s right. Not at all.”

“For me it has to be. Think of it. I’m not material for Lachlan Manutaane’s world. It would be a disaster. Furthermore, I have suspicions that those eye doctors were being kind. I’m trying to deal with what that means. I’ll have to become someone else to live this way.”

“What about your leg? When can you abandon the crutches?”

“It was a bad break, two fractures, but clean at least. I’ve got to stay off it a while longer. Penny is taking me in to see my new doctor next week.

Careless Child

We'll see."

"Should I come now and sit with you a bit, or get you--"

"No, Margaret, thank you. The phone is fine. I know how busy you are."

Katharine got out of the car, a tight-fitting little Citroen, and walked, leaning heavily on Penny, up to her cozy bach. She now knew every angle and obstruction in her compact and comfortable nest and could hobble about freely, as if she had full command of her sight and not merely the shadowy vision that so limited her world. Gradually, the darkness had evolved into a gray light filled with obscure shapes, unrecognizable forms, nothing more. She told herself that if her vision had come this far it might continue to improve. That sudden transition to sight, which her doctors had only suggested, was a mysterious phenomenon she tried neither to dwell upon nor entirely cast aside.

"I can make the tea," Katharine said.

"Let me do it, as long as I'm here," Penny's eager, take-charge voice insisted.

When they were sitting in the small kitchen nook sipping their Earl Grey, Katharine said, "I've painted you from your voice and manner, Penny. Now tell me more about yourself...the way you look."

"Describing myself this way is rather strange. I've never tried to do it...easier for a writer."

"Well, try."

"I'm a bit taller...your height is?"

Careless Child

“I’m five feet four inches. What color is your hair? It’s shoulder length, isn’t it?”

“Yeah...a sort of dirty blond.”

“Ah, you see I would never use the word dirty, not for you. I would say you are a tawny blond.”

“Right. I have pale blue eyes and freckles across a rather narrow nose, and a small mole on my left cheek.”

“Now you’re getting it. I know you have long, agile fingers, a doctor’s hands.”

“I hope so. My mother used to call them piano hands. Now she’s switched to calling them a surgeon’s.”

“And you’re wearing denim...at least a jacket of it -- I felt your arm, so probably denim jeans.”

“Yeah. Good old denim. I live in it. Hospital wear will be quite an adjustment.”

They sat for a moment in silence. Katharine heard Penny sipping her tea and rattling her cup.

“Well, at least my cast is off. But these useless eyes are...the ophthalmologist didn’t tell me much, as usual. He pats me on the shoulder and promotes optimism.”

“He’s right in that. I believe optimism is essential for any cure.”

“I’ve never been a very patient person, but I’m certainly working at it...trying to cheer myself up singing old songs.”

“Good on ya.”

“You don’t know how much I appreciate your willingness to give my

Careless Child

writing a brief check. I have a terrible and constant fear of hitting the wrong key and creating a volume of absolute gibberish.”

“I’m enjoying it. Quite good. I don’t have time to read much else that isn’t technical...medical. Your writing has a lot of wisdom...guess you’ve had heaps of experiences that are useful in your personal life.”

Katharine gave a sardonic laugh. “How do you expect your life to go, Penny? Are you going to be a strictly professional person with little time for a private life...or...or what?”

“Oh, no, of course not. I’m going to marry Neville, my fiancé.”

“I didn’t know. You’ve hardly spoken of him, and you aren’t wearing a ring.”

“Yeah. We skipped that. Maybe later.”

“So, children and all the trimmings?”

“Yeah. We’ll both be doctors. We pretty well know who we are, and the babies will just have to fit in somehow. We don’t worry about it...simply press on with our goals and let the rest happen.”

“You’re so relaxed about the way that works. I really admire you. A private life still scares me. Maybe because I’ve done so poorly at the little I’ve had of one.”

“Really? Could be that you worry about it too much. Maybe you ought to just let it happen. I mean, don’t dwell on it. You do know you’re very good at what you’ve been doing...quite well established there. That certainty ought to be your anchor, your assurance...all that. Then, I rather think...just let the rest happen. That’s the way I do it.

“Well, I’d better dash over to Russell and snatch your mail and some

Careless Child

groceries. Recite that list one more time. I'll scribble it down then be on my way. I've got hours of heavy studying ahead."

Later, when Katharine had slowly made her way over the path to her outdoor lounging chair and sat warming in the afternoon sun, she considered Penny's very together attitude, making a mental note to ask her about her childhood at some leisurely moment. It must have been quite a happy and secure one.

The air was coolish and the late sun welcome. She listened to bird calls, a few startling notes from the lyrical repertoire of the Tui. She tried to recall how a Tui looked: a dark head with a curved beak, a white-tufted throat, which gave it its common name of *parson bird*, and gorgeous feather vanes that were rather dark and tipped with stunning blue. The wavelets lapping at the beach sands below were soothing. She knew her setting was breathtaking. Margaret and Penny both praised this Northland beauty. She longed to see it.

Returning down the shell path, she banged the foot of her good leg on an unfamiliar rock at the edge of the path, almost stumbling, dropping her crutch and fumbling for it with some difficulty. Once inside, she broke a tea cup that had just missed reaching the counter. She groped her way to the kitchen table and cried with great bawling sobs. Why not throw herself into it, let it out? No one could hear her.

Penny returned, cleaned up the cup shards that lay scattered around the floor, made Katharine a tuna sandwich and brought it to her at her computer, then departed with her usual upbeat, "Cheerio. See you in a couple of days."

Careless Child

The writing was leading into a mental labyrinth of intricate paths that kept her exploring deeply, thinking hard and focused. Without it she might have gone mad. Unless one was long inured to blindness, New Zealand was not a country to visit without vision, for it was a tempting visual paradise. Still, she was glad for her cozy cave and her world of writing. She liked the way things were unobtrusively placed in the bach, the rugged furniture with durable, thick-woven upholstery positioned around a huge circle of sheepskin thrown over the floor -- its soft satiny texture, a number of furry pelts, luxuriously brushing over her skin. Sometimes she lay on it imagining it was from the Green Braes plains, and dozed off thinking of Lan. Along with the heater there was a stone fireplace, which she was afraid to use for fear of burning the place down. When the weather permitted she walked to the foot of the path where her chair was firmly planted, sat down on the foot rest and placed her crutches on the ground then swung her body around and lay back, breathing deeply, feeling the breezes, listening to the water, the birds, the buzzing insects. Out there, she could easily hear Margaret's or Penny's car arriving on the gravel road at the other side of the cottage.

Napping one day in her chair, she was awakened by the sound of a car. She listened to see if she could determine who it was. The car doors slammed, heavier doors. She heard two low voices, a man and a woman. They knocked first on the front door and then came around the walk to the back.

“*Kia ora,*” a familiar sounding male voice called as they approached. “Sorry to disturb ya. I’m the owner, Lachlan Manutaane. My sister and I were just going fishing, and I remembered that I have a fly kit locked in the

Careless Child

closet here. I suppose you've discovered the locked closet. I'll just duck in and... Bloody hell! My God! Katharine?"

Katharine's hands were gripping the chair arms so tightly her fingers were numb. Her eyes were closed, her head turned out toward the sound of the waves, her body trembling uncontrollably.

"God, the bitch is living in our bach," she heard Rani exclaim.

"Shut up, Rani," Lan exploded. "One more word out of ya and you'll be walking. Go back to the Rover and stay there."

Rani's crunching footsteps receded on the shell path.

Katharine swallowed slowly, sat forward, opened her eyes and turned toward Lan's voice.

"I had no idea. Believe me, I didn't know. Oh, thank you, Margaret!" she cried out with a miserable voice.

His dark shape loomed before her, almost more than she could bear. She wanted to run screaming into the sea rather than be forced to sit there exposed.

"It's all right. Don't be mad at her. She was trying to be loyal to us both. I told her that if she heard from ya, saw ya, I wanted to know. So she did it this way, left it to chance."

"What are these crutches for? Kate, what are ya doing here? My God, have ya been hurt?"

"An accident. Please don't keep Rani waiting out there. She's incredibly angry. Just...just get your fly kit and go. I'll be out of here by tomorrow evening."

"You're not going anywhere. Please don't even think of it. I can't

Careless Child

believe you've come, that you're actually here. I nearly lost it when I saw ya. I'm still bloody astonished. Please talk to me. Tell me what's happened to ya."

He lifted her hand in his and she snatched it back and turned her face away.

"Leave me alone. Please go."

Her head was beginning to throb, emotions boiling over, her heart slamming into the pained walls of her chest, her whole body trembling in shock and the agony of what was to come.

"Oh, I can't...I can't! Just go."

She wanted to get away and envisioned herself hobbling off on her crutches in the wrong direction, ridiculous. When she first identified his voice, she had tried to push the crutches away with her hand, so foolish, and now she groped beside her chair for them, unable to reach them, find them. She drew her hand back quickly and held it against her mouth. The utter silence of the next moment terrified her more than anything that had happened thus far. She felt his hand under her chin, turning her head up. The silence went on and on as she tried to focus her eyes. She could hear the sharp intake of air in his throat.

"My God, not your eyes. Christ, not my green eyes."

She turned away and bit her lip. *I'm not going to cry. I won't cry.* She desperately needed to get up and walk.

"Where are my...they were here somewhere," she said, turning further away from his shadowy form, running her searching fingers over the broken shells beside her chair. Then she felt his hands sliding around her, lifting her

Careless Child

up against him, and he was walking with her back up the path.

“What are you... Wait, I can walk with my...”

He carried her inside and settled her on the sheepskin rug, dropping down beside her and holding her against him in silence.

“I wish you hadn’t...” she muttered, fumbling on in a clumsy, apologetic voice. “Sorry...so sorry that I’ve--”

“Don’t do that, Kate. Don’t apologize. It kills me. I don’t want to talk for a while.”

“Rani’s in the--”

“I bloody well know where Rani is and I don’t give a fucking damn.”

He continued to hold her against him in silence, his chin sliding over her hair, his firm hands burning through her clothes. She listened to his sigh, his breathing near her ear. Gradually, after some minutes of uncontrollable shaking, her body began to relax and grow still. She then realized it was that stillness for which he had been waiting.

“What happened, Kate?”

“I was near a bus that blew up in Jerusalem.”

“Jesus Christ! Why didn’t ya let me know?”

“I was unconscious for a couple of weeks. Apparently... They said I was agitated from time to time. Apparently, I did try to let you know...sort of...in a manner of speaking. When I rejoined the living, a nurse wanted to know who Lan was. I’d been calling your name. I don’t remember doing it.”

“Then why didn’t ya tell them to call me? Christ, I would have come.”

“To see this?”

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“I see only Kate...my same Kate...a lot thinner. I see these green eyes...perfect green eyes. Why don't they work?”

“The concussion...swelling in my brain and pressure on the optic nerves. It was supposed to diminish but I'm not so sure anymore. I'm taking anti-inflammatory pills.”

“I'll take ya to doctors in Sydney.”

“No. I'm tired of doctors. I'm working. I'm really all right...a little spacey sometimes...a few strange aches...far too emotional. I seem to be writing a novel.”

Her voice was light and soft, uncertain. She kept her head down against his shirt, her vacant eyes away from his, but the scent that was Lan made her almost dizzy. His mouth was against her hair. It was as if he could read her mind, or at least her nervous feelings. The silent holding of her had a calming effect. She heard low Maori words spoken against her ear, almost like an incantation: “*Ma te wa e whakaora to mamac.*”

“What, Lan?”

“Time will heal your pain.”

“In which place?”

“All places.”

She roused herself from his reassurance to face reality.

“You can't just leave Rani sitting in the Rover.”

“I'll take Rani back to Russell where she can catch the Paihia ferry. She knows the way home. I'll come straight back.”

“I've ruined your fishing trip.”

“My fishing trip was a reward for Rani's good behavior. She's been

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making amends, helping Mary. She finally told me the truth: that the father of the child is some wanker she hates. She screamed it at me one night after ya left and I'd been refusing to talk to her. It doesn't matter. I'm still taking care of the child."

"She's a very young twenty-two, or three."

"Yeah, she is, but she's growing up, or I thought she was until a few minutes ago. I'll see she apologizes."

"Lan, just leave her alone."

"No. She *will* apologize. Stay here, please. I'll be back in a minute."

"I'm not going anywhere," Katharine reminded him. "Could you please find my crutches on your way?"

She crawled across the rug and pulled herself up onto the couch, straightening her hair and waiting for the next scene in this sudden surreal drama.

After several minutes, the door opened and Rani's quick light footsteps entered the room, followed by Lan.

"Hello, Katharine. I'm sorry I said what I did," Rani offered in a quick rush of words. "It was stupid and thoughtless and I ought not to've said it."

"Hello, Rani. Apology accepted," Katharine replied, rather succinctly. She did not know what else to say, knowing Rani probably did not want to hear any more. She had a few times felt like slapping Rani soundly, but now she felt consoling. Folding her hands on her lap, she tried to offer a placating smile.

"I'm sorry to hear of your horrid accident and I hope ya enjoy the

Careless Child

bach,” Rani finished, retreating back through the door.

“Your crutches are here, against the arm of the couch,” Lan explained with a careful voice.

Of course her situation compelled his kindness. She found it unbearable. “Thank you. You don’t have to come back. It’s out of your way and...I think it must be getting late,” she offered with nervous uncertainty.

“My God, Katharine, will ya please stop this...this damned niceness. Do ya really think I wouldn’t come back?”

He sat down beside her, massaging soothing fingers over her taut back, obviously striving to make her calm. She could not possibly reach that state and remained bewildered.

“I’m sorry, Kate, sorry...but for Christ’s sake, tell me the truth for a change.”

“Oh, yes, the truth.” She tried to smile through tears. “The truth,” she repeated, sighing. “All right...if you don’t come back, I’ll...walk into the sea without my crutches.”

“Ya won’t even have to walk across the room.” His mouth touched the back of her neck, causing shivers of joy. “I can’t kiss ya properly now...couldn’t stop. Think of later; that’ll keep us both awake in the meantime. Christ, I don’t want to let go of ya. On second thought, better take a nap while I’m gone.”

She heard the door close and gave a long sigh and a jittery laugh, wiping at her wet cheeks. *Why do I feel so grateful? I have no idea what to do now, or has this hopelessly consuming emotion decided for me?*

Careless Child

Lan was building a fire, crumpling old newspapers from the wood box and carrying in chunks of wood from a pile that existed somewhere outside.

“I have a short maze I run, like a wary little mouse,” she said. “I didn’t know there was wood, but I wouldn’t have built a fire anyway. I might have burned down your bach.”

“I’m staying here with ya for a while, Kate. Then we’ll think of something else.”

“I have Penny coming in.”

“Every couple of days isn’t enough. Something could happen. I’m not leaving ya, in any case...not until you’re no longer confused about us. Ya have to learn to trust me.”

“I just can’t interrupt your life like this.”

“Ya interrupted my life months ago, Kate. Consider my previous life permanently interrupted. I’ll fish and work. I’ll set up a computer in the other room where there’s better wiring and that’s it. When you’re tired of this we’ll move to the house in Auckland. Ya like it there.

“And a...there’ll be a young woman showing up around here, Nina, my secretary. I sometimes speak Maori to her, but I’ll try not to do it around ya. Don’t want to--”

“It won’t bother me. I’m not as thin-skinned as that. Is she attractive?”

“Yeah, she’s attractive, smart, hardworking and the mother of two little anklebiters. How’s your skin doing?” Lan asked with the utterly

Careless Child

captivating warm burr of laughter that had echoed in her head for so long.

“You tell me. You’re the one who can see my skin.”

“Like cream...no tan at all. My hands remember all of ya. I love this body...this stubborn intelligent head.” His fingers moved from her arms to the back of her neck, stroking up through her hair. “I’m glad they didn’t cut your hair.”

“I guess there was no point in cutting my hair.”

He carried her to the sheepskin rug, eased her down to a sitting position, and shortly thereafter placed a stemmed glass in her hands.

“Champagne. Don’t drink it all at once the way ya did that night at *Fortuna*. That was *taurangi*. You were being temperamental...because you were afraid of me.”

“Yes, I thought you would steal my self. In a way you did. Now you steal my body...I can hobble on my own you know.”

“Yeah, waste of time. I like having ya in my arms.”

“I like being there,” she whispered very softly.

“Now you’re shy...because of your eyes, but the champagne will help, *ipo*.”

She laughed and indeed felt shy, continuing to sip her champagne. The crackling fire’s warmth was pleasant, and the slight euphoria of the champagne. When her glass was empty she held it out to him. He took it away. His arms came around her, letting her down into the luxuriously silky sheepskin rug. She was kissed until she could almost believe her eyes were merely closed, that she was whole and well and nothing ruinous had happened in between this moment and their first lovemaking. Still, there was

Careless Child

a lingering hesitation.

“What is it, Kate?”

“I feel...as if we’ve just met.”

“We have...second time...*ka pai*.”

Her slow fingers explored his face, sliding across the warm lids of his eyes and over his responding mouth.

“I wish I could see you...I want to *see* you.”

“Ya will. Just close your eyes and pretend ya like it that way. Tell me if your leg hurts...if anything hurts.”

“Nothing hurts...oh, not quite true. I have...this ache.”

“Yeah...the same...ever since ya left.”

“Taking care of that right now.” His deep kiss sent her reeling. He lifted her gown over her head and tossed it somewhere.

“Are ya warm enough?”

“I’m warm, Lan, but I--”

“No worries, I’ll be careful with ya...do whatever ya want however ya want, until ya tell me to stop.”

“What if I don’t tell you to stop?”

“Then we’ll both die happy.”

She awoke in the early morning and lay with her eyes open. *Did I ever tell him to stop? No, I think we both just passed out, sated with pleasure, exhausted.* His warm body lay peacefully sleeping beside her. She would like to have gotten up, to have slipped out and walked on the shore below, perhaps singing some old love song.

Where were her crutches? Not propped by the bed where they

Careless Child

should be, because he had carried her there. She rolled carefully to her side and sat up.

“Where ya going? Ya haven’t got your crutches.”

“Nowhere. I’m going nowhere. Sorry I woke you.” She sat on the edge of the bed and began to cry, softly and quietly.

“Carry ya to the loo again?”

“No thank you.”

“What is it now, Kate?” He slid his arms around her, stroking his fingers through her hair.

“I’ve no idea what’s going to happen next.”

“Nobody does. Ya can’t have the certainty of that. Ya expect everything to work like a schedule. It isn’t that way. You’re smart enough to know that but you’re full-on emotional right now. Try to let it be.”

“I hate...*bate* being so helpless.”

“Come on, we’re all just fooling ourselves that we’re spinning this planet. Ya can’t control your life the way ya do writing a story.”

“I’m sorry. You must think me awfully self-centered.”

“I do not. Ya aren’t.”

“You’re a man who loves sex. What did you do all of this time?”

“Ah. When ya change the subject ya really do change the subject. Is that your interview technique? What did ya do yourself?”

“Thought of you and suffered...and you probably--”

“Remembered us...taught myself patience.” He laughed. “Got ahold of myself.”

“Lan...you felt that I’d come back?”

Careless Child

“If I ever doubted it I thought how ya were with me. We really turn each other on, but it’s more than that--synergetic. Better together. Ya never had it that way before and ya wouldn’t get it quite like that anywhere else. Neither would I. Leaving the way you did was such a damn waste of...ah, never mind. Ya need me and I want ya. I want ya to need me.”

“You’re a man of basic principles.”

“Ya do make me laugh...and at four in the morning after so much sex I could hardly stand up long enough to piss. Christ, ya really are something, ya sexy little cracker. Can we go back to sleep now?”

“I guess...if I can’t get up and walk along the water.”

“Ya need to walk along the water?”

“Sort of, but what’s the use? I can’t see much. I think I’ll just curl up against you and drift off like a little child rescued from this big bad dark.”

“Good on ya.” He wrapped his arms around her.

“Lan?”

“Yeah?”

“When you get tired of me will you--”

“Stop it, Kate. When we get tired we’ll take a nap and start over.

Ehara toku aroha i te kiri moko, engari he aroha no te what Manawa,” he muttered in her ear.

“What?”

“My love is not shallow...but a love of deep passion. Go to sleep, *tau aroha*...my loved one.”

Careless Child

When Penny arrived she was astonished to find Lan cooking breakfast. Katharine liked the way Lan accepted Penny into his life as if he had known her for years. Penny immediately pitched in with breakfast preparations. The two laughed and talked about everything from Enzed beer to aubergines and how the national rugby team, the All Blacks, was in a fiery winning streak.

“Is that friendly manner something all Kiwis have? I mean, I’ve encountered it over and over,” Katharine said later.

“Yeah, we’re fairly nice to each other. We haven’t been stricken with rat poisoning yet.”

“Rat poisoning?” Katharine asked with surprise. She leaned forward in her lawn chair, irritably defeated in her wish to see Lan’s expression. “Rat poisoning?” she repeated.

“Population. Too many rats and they all turn killer. Compared to you, Yank, we’re a small population...still fairly nice to each other.”

“Actually I feel a little like a rat right now, running my fixed path from back to outdoor chair and back to the computer. I’ve always been so active that this is--”

“I’m giving ya a couple more weeks, and if your eyes haven’t improved I’m taking ya to a Sydney specialist,” Lan interrupted.

“You are, are you?”

“Yeah, I am. Ya know I’m right, Kate.”

“You’re never wrong, are you?”

She sat frowning while Lan exclaimed over the silliness of her

Careless Child

remark. She could imagine him shaking his head as he scolded.

After a short pondering silence he said, “The last wrong thing I did was a heap of stupidity. I flew up to the Nelson winery and left ya in misery...so disturbed ya ran off in a bloody sheep lorry...as if ya were a prisoner. Were ya that afraid of me, Kate?”

“I was more afraid of myself.”

“Afraid of *us*?”

“Yes.”

“And now?”

“I wanted to be here, to heal here. I felt so drawn to this place...*your* country. I didn’t expect to encounter you. I couldn’t stand to think of you dealing with this...supposing I might be here as a last resort...here because I’m...helpless.”

“Oh, Christ, you’re so far from helpless. Ya came back because of me?”

“That’s what you’d like to believe. You have such a healthy ego. I love New Zealand.”

“Right.”

“Lan, I’m teasing a little. For me, you *are* New Zealand.”

“Then in a roundabout way I get loved.”

“Oh, if only I could see you, look into those rare black eyes. I might confess everything.”

“So now we’re back to that. I will be taking ya to Sydney, Katharine...two more weeks.”

Careless Child

Lan's secretary, Nina, had a musical, placating voice and a strong will that was clearly evident. She was not afraid to tell Lan her opinion of things as they worked together, but Katharine could also hear fondness and respect for Lan in her voice. Katharine knew how Lan liked his women: able to take charge, to think for themselves. This preference surely came from his self-determined mother. Trying to stay out of their way, she worked at her computer, or wandered out to sit in her chair and listen to the sounds of nature. Lan was rather quickly drawn back into his busy schedule. The phone rang incessantly. People even drove out in groups to find him, and Katharine at last realized that it was not at all what she had in mind when she had first settled into her cozy bach in peace and quiet.

"This place is too small for your peace of mind and all of my business affairs," Lan said one rainy day. "I'm interfering with your creative self."

"A nice way to address your inconvenience. So this is a prelude to what?" Katharine asked. "Are you going away?"

"I have to drive over to Auckland and then fly to Green Braes. Will ya come?"

"You said you wouldn't leave me."

"Yeah, I know I did say that. I want ya to come with me."

"I was only teasing. Go on. Get out of here," Katharine ordered. "You must be going crazy trying to work in this environment. It's all starting to get me too."

"Then you'll come?"

Careless Child

“No. I don’t want to be with Mary like this, Lan, not like this. I was hoping--”

“Mary adores ya. She wants to see ya, Kate.”

“I’ll wait a little. I’m sorry Lan. Just go on about your business and let me be. I’m doing well at my computer.”

“I can’t do my work and worry about ya, Kate.”

“You don’t have to. I’ll be fine. I originally intended to stay here by myself anyway.”

“Penny told me she worries about ya too...she can’t be here often enough.”

“Oh, nonsense. What can happen to me?”

“A bloody lot of things can happen to ya.”

“Nothing will.”

“All right. I’ll be at Green Braes for two days, then back in Auckland. I’ll get back as soon as I can. Ya do know I’m going to hear it from Mary when I turn up without ya?”

Only when Lan and Nina had driven off the next day did Katharine realize how she had come to appreciate the busyness going on around her. After all, they had left her alone when she was at her computer. She stood in silence, regretting her own willfulness. How she would miss Lan’s arms around her at night. She drank some leftover coffee while nibbling on a blueberry muffin, and did not even bother to eat the rest of the day.

The next day Penny drove her to the doctor, the two of them setting out quite early. She was thrilled to be told she could dispense with her crutches.

Careless Child

Penny, happy with Katharine's progress, was more voluble than usual and eager to discuss Katharine's improved life. Back at the bach, she ladled mutton stew into a bowl for Katharine and said, "Looks like you've settled into New Zealand and availed yourself of the best we have to offer."

"Lan, you mean," Katharine said.

"Yeah. He's really choice, Kate...lucky to find a fella like him, one who cares so much for you."

"How's Neville?" Katharine asked, changing the subject.

"Neville? Neville is Neville, nearly always the same. I can depend on him for that. He's the one for me all right. He's found a larger place so I can move in with him. Easier to study together."

Katharine detected a slight embarrassment in Penny's voice.

"I hope it doesn't turn into the sort of commotion that's been going on around here," Katharine offered.

"You don't miss Lan when he goes?"

"Oh, yes," Katharine affirmed with a half-hearted laugh.

The following morning, Katharine was alone again and working at her computer with intense concentration. Gradually she began to notice the initial signs of a headache.

"Oh no," she muttered, "I hope it's not one of those."

She poured the rest of her coffee into the kitchen sink, rinsed the cup and went to stand on the sill of the opened door. She could feel the sunlight on her skin, her pained eyes taking in the brightness of it. She carried a towel to the foot of the path, moving with counted steps, glad to be without her crutches. Wiping off her damp lounging chair, she lowered herself onto it.

Careless Child

Her head felt very strange, but the sun was warming. Worrying over the pain of a full-blown migraine, she managed to doze off.

Mary was standing before her speaking. Was it a dream? It must be a dream; she could see Mary's softly admonishing visage, one arm resting on her red-sweatered hip.

"What will you do now, Kate? Are you going to hurt Lan with your selfishness?"

"I don't know what to do. Something isn't quite right. I feel useless and my head hurts so, Mary," Katharine answered.

"I thought you were my girl, but you'll never be that without him. Never," Mary called out as she grew smaller and smaller, merging with a vast herd of sheep, until Katharine could not make her out but only hear her emphatic voice at the center of an increasing swirl of noisy animals.

"Never...never, Kate."

Katharine awoke with a cry of protest, looking up at the soft cerulean sky and then out at the water. Clouds were flying above the rippling waves, making racing shadows over the opaque green water. Racing white clouds. Such intense light. The bright sparkle of sun-spangled water. The rolling emerald rise of verdure above the sands, clear and startling! She could see the delicate shapes of leaves, blades of grass, the perfect forms and colors of the land and sea. *See everything.* She could *see!*

"Amazing!" she cried, jumping out of her chair and spinning around. "It's more beautiful than I could ever have imagined, so much more beautiful. *All of it,* all of it here in my eyes!"

She hurried back to the beach, pausing for a moment to look around

Careless Child

her and then reaching for the phone.

“Penny, it’s Kate. I need you to drive me to Auckland. I’m packing a few clothes and I’ve got to get there right away.”

“Hey, hey, this place is gorgeous,” a jubilant Penny had said when she left Katharine off at the elegant old Victorian house. “Wish I were living here.”

“It is a nice place,” Katharine agreed, “very well kept.”

She took the key from its hiding place and settled herself in the Herne Bay house like a respectful guest, but adding a few welcoming touches of her own. At the final hour, she donned her little black dress with her freshly washed hair curving above her shoulders and the Totoeka pendant hung around her neck. Waiting at the window, peeking through the curtains, at last she saw Lan sauntering up the walk. He was carrying his briefcase, his sleeves rolled, his tie flapping in the circling marine air, and his jacket slung over his shoulder. His thoughtful face looked rather tired and worried, quite ready for the glass of wine waiting for him on the coffee table in the lounge, where a fire was burning in the fireplace. The door opened as he was reaching for the key. He looked Katharine up and down in shock, his eyes going quickly to hers.

“Why don’t you call me Green Eyes anymore?” she asked in a soft, rather sultry voice.

She was looking directly at him, her eyes traveling over his face, staring into the startled dark eyes she had waited so long to see.

Careless Child

He tossed his briefcase inside on the floor and gathered her into his arms. “Jesus Christ! Is life repeating itself?”

“We’ll get better. In a couple of days it’ll be nearly perfect,” Katharine teased, smiling and continuing to look into his eyes. She could hardly bring herself to look anywhere else.

His head went back in laughter. “*Miharo!* Amazing!”

“Into the lounge, please. I have some wine there, from your favorite Nelson winery. I’m sure you’ll approve...it looks especially nice in your Waterford crystal goblets.”

“I don’t need any bloody wine to cheer me up, Green Eyes. I haven’t called ya that because I thought it would upset ya.”

“Well it won’t upset me now.”

“When did it happen?”

“This morning. I had a strange headache, dozed off outside in my chair, dreamed a certain dream, then awoke and discovered I was in a very beautiful place.”

They sat sipping their wine and gazing into the fire, occasionally staring at each other and bursting into laughter.

Finally Lan sighed and said, “Afraid I invited Margie and Ian over for drinks...and they’re just about to--”

Across the room the oak tall case clock chimed as its little full-sailed ship rocked back and forth above the face, then the doorbell gave forth a tuneful announcement of company.

“Are ya still pissed at Margie?” Lan quickly asked.

“I wonder how I could be,” Katharine replied, bracing herself.

Careless Child

She stood off in the background while the three others cheerfully greeted each other, then Margaret stared toward her with a startled face, taking a step backwards, pulling at the hem of her gold turtleneck and nervously smoothing her hands over her long black skirt. Katharine went forward, reaching out her hand.

“Hello, Margaret, I haven’t seen much of you lately.” Then she added with a laugh, “Well, I haven’t really seen much of anything lately.”

“Kate! But you...how did you? I mean, are you...can you--”

“Yes. You’re looking great, Margaret. Nice outfit.”

“That’s bloody wonderful, absolutely wonderful!” Margaret exclaimed. “I think I need a drink, Lan.”

When they were seated back in the lounge with glasses in hand, Ian remarked, with a complete lack of the exceptional subtlety and finesse he showed on the water, “So now we can acknowledge that you two are back together again. We weren’t supposed to appear to know. My old friend here couldn’t keep his mouth shut. Can’t blame him for that, can you?”

Lan shrugged and smiled at Katharine without making any comment.

“Ian, for heaven’s sake,” Margaret scolded. “I think he’s rooted. He and tactician Colin are racing in heavy weather...as if it were high summer,” Margaret added by way of apology.

“Come into my study a minute; bring your glass...want to show ya something,” Lan said to Ian, glancing at Katharine.

“Ah, I believe we’ve been left to recover our dignity,” Katharine suggested.

“What do I say now?” Margaret asked. “Do you hate me?”

Careless Child

“It wasn’t a very nice thing to do. When Lan walked up to me floundering blindly in a lawn chair, I could have throttled you with my bare hands. But I was in no condition to throttle anyone. I recovered and we...resolved the matter.”

“That’s a rather cool explanation, Kate.” She held up her hand. “I know, I know, it’s none of my business. At least you’re together. I did that...can’t say I regret it at all. If you could have seen Lan when you left... He tried to keep it to himself...but if ever I saw a man in pain--”

“Margaret--”

“Right. I’ll give it up. But do you know what, Kate? Just a moment ago, with Lan there next to you, I could feel the bloody electricity. It...it simply curls my toes. Sorry, sorry.”

“Lan only found out tonight about my eyes. I sort of dropped in unexpectedly with the news.”

“Ah, I see, and then we arrived. Perfect timing. But look at *you*, you’re walking without crutches. I’m incredibly happy to find you so improved.”

“Thank you, Margaret. And...just to put a cap on this, I understand that you’re loyal to Lan. I can only admire you for that...and be happy he has such good friends. I hope I can earn a little of that kind of loyalty too...some day.”

“From now on you’ve got it.”

“Margaret...you probably did the right thing. I don’t know how things would have gone -- I suppose something like the way they have gone, because I...anyway I’m happy to see you. And not just because I’m happy to

Careless Child

see anyone at all. I do so like you both.”

The evening went rather well after that, and Margaret and Ian left earlier than they had intended -- this, Katharine surmised, due to the whisperings of Margaret to her husband.

Katharine sat gazing into the fire in silence while Lan removed glasses and put away bottles. He came to sit beside her.

“Ya okay?”

“It all went very well,” she responded in a thoughtful voice. “They really are nice people.”

“Good on ya. They like ya, Kate.

“Ya look just like the night I met ya at *Fortuna*. You’ve no more crutches, either. Can ya walk up the stairs?”

“I think so...well of course.” Katharine furrowed her brow a little in nervous speculation then stood up.

“Never mind, Green Eyes.” He was laughing at her serious frown. “I’ll carry ya, I’m in a hurry.”

Floated up the stairs, she stood beside the bed, trembling with excitement. Lan was holding articles of removed clothing and kissing her, finally lowering her onto the duvet. Her slight diffidence dissolved in a long deep kiss.

“Déjà vu. Ya rarely get two of this.”

Lying beside her thoroughly aroused body, she saw that he was still captured by her intensely focused eyes.

“Different, your eyes. You’re looking back. Miraculous. I’m deeply sorry ya had to go through that horror in Jerusalem. Sorry I wasn’t there.”

Careless Child

“How could you have been? Don’t talk about it, Lan. I don’t want to think of anything...just you.”

He ran his thumb across her lips and kissed them with intense concentration, as if repairing something broken, then a second time, a kiss that, for her, was very different from those at the beach, her eyes rejoicing in glimpses of taut skin, curling mouth, tan cheek and ear, unruly lock of black hair. The sense of it was in her laughter as she drew back, initiating her own deep kiss, his body as soon settling over hers.

“Look at us.” He grinned, still amazed at the return of her vision, lifting her head with one braced hand while he guided himself into her with the other. “Had these green eyes in mind all night...when I saw *you* standing at my door -- my little hard case looking back at me...*Jesus!*”

She moaned softly, biting her lip to hold herself still as he leveled himself against her. How could this go on? *How can this go on?* she almost cried out in disbelief.

“Let go, Kate. Give me all the wildness inside. *You* are mine, are ya not? Tell me...show me.”

Never mind anything else, was her last rational thought. His fierce attentiveness had banished the need to question. Her own physically demanding responses were all-consuming, silently defining her exultant answer. She moved breathlessly, instinctively acting and reacting.

“Yes, yours,” she managed at last and could say no more, instead sensually demonstrating what was meant. She threw up her arms and felt his hands closing over hers.

“Look at me, Green Eyes.”

Careless Child

She found her eyes in his, joining the hot dark river of pleasure that was Lan. In the dissipating heat of post-orgasm, there remained nothing else, nothing of her damaged self, only a dreamy, dazed stare of languid satisfaction, an ephemeral peace.

Katharine eased out of bed and curled up in a large gray wingback by the windows. Off to her left the sun was just rising over the pink water. She rubbed her eyes lightly and squinted at a close-hauled sloop in the bay. A fear nearly congenital was slowly, steadily reasserting itself, her nerves beginning to fire and jump beneath her skin.

Half an hour later, Lan found her staring into space in the kitchen nook, a cup of coffee held in both trembling hands. With one discerning look and the nudge of past experience, he said, “Are ya thinking of leaving me again, Kate?”

As familiar as his directness was, the question itself startled her. How could it be? Was she thinking that, thinking of vanishing in a haze of indecision? Somewhere else, anywhere.

She sat desiring him, his solid dark body wrapped in a navy blue wool robe, desiring him even now in her sexually sated, stalled life. Still silent, she watched him pour coffee from the glass pot into a white mug and lift it to his questioning mouth, the mouth that so quickly and easily took possession of her.

“Afraid of me again...or is it yourself you’re afraid of?”

“Both...as I’ve said. By now you know.” She looked away.

“Got to run like bloody hell from the bad fate in your own willful

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head...only ya can't run from yourself."

"Don't, Lan." She lowered her head, staring at her hands.

"Then look into my eyes and tell me ya don't love me and you're going away."

"I can't."

"Christ, what self-deception. Look at me," he demanded.

"You always tell me to look at you, to *see* you. For a while I couldn't see your face -- never an easy face to read -- and it made me so miserable to have lost your subtle expressions. Now I think you want me to look so you can do what you always do...take possession of--"

"Jesus Christ, Kate! Stop this shit and tell me what ya feel, what ya really want. Ya do it with your body when you're having me. Ya know ya do. Ya went away and *then* felt miserable. Have ya forgotten that? God, I nearly lost ya."

"I'm a journalist, Lan."

"Yeah, right. When I found ya I didn't say, *Hell, I can't fall in love with a journalist*. I went after what I wanted...I knew, I *felt* it was right...even if I expected less of the trouble we're having now. Is that what you've been doing, saying, *Wait a minute, I can't give myself to Lachlan Manutaane and ten thousand sheep?*"

"No, but I--"

"I can't do this, Kate. Ya can't straddle that high fence to suit your fancy. Jump. I'll catch ya. This is us together. I love ya. I want ya. My God, you ambivalent woman! Do ya want me?"

"I want you...I always want you. I can't quite see what that means."

Careless Child

“Ya love me?”

“I love you...God, I do love you so.”

“Come with me to Green Braes and Mary’ll gladly tell ya what it means.”

Looking at him with sudden resolution, she pulled her white satin robe firmly around her unsteady self and folded her arms.

“*You* tell me. You tell me now, here, what it means.”

“All right. It means you’re with me always. It means we help each other always. I can’t leave all of this, so it means ya have to want me enough to make it part of your life. Ya can write. I know ya have to do that. I’ll help ya in any way I can. Stay here in Auckland and write...if ya don’t want to come to Green Braes.”

“You said I must be with you always.”

“Yeah, but I’d be willing to do that, let ya stay here and write...if that’s what I have to do to have ya.”

“But it isn’t what you want at all. You want me to be with you, work with you. Mary knows this very well.”

“About me my mother doesn’t know everything. I’ll take what I can get. *You* are what I want.”

“But *I* want to be with you all the time.”

Lan laughed. “Jesus, ya schizoid little wonk. Half of ya wants to run away from me and the other half never wants to leave my side. Which is it?”

Katharine felt herself coming apart in frustration, as surely as if she were crumbling before Lan’s eyes.

“I think...I want to see Mary.”

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“Yeah, I thought as much.” Lan took her in his arms with some impatience and stroked his fingers through her hair. “So we’ll fly to Green Braes...today. Did ya bring anything with ya besides that wicked little black dress?”

“I left in haste but yes...slacks and a shirt.”

“Then go put them on, and hurry it up. We can borrow more clothes from Mary. We’re heading out of here now.”

“You certainly are a bossy bloke.”

“I’ve heard that before...from the same irresistible mouth.

“I’ll get ya one of my jumpers -- sweaters to you. There’s snow on the ground at Green Braes.”

“Snow? Isn’t it difficult to land?”

“Not very. Rex and his mates keep the runway clear. I’ll check with them...make sure it is.

“Come on, rattle your dags. The sooner we’re out of here the sooner you’ll see Mary.”

“Explanation please.”

“Uh, sorry...sheep talk...ya can find out for yourself.”

In the air, Lan was more patient, reaching out to hold Katharine’s hand as they winged through the clear sky. The band on his left wrist flashed beneath the cuff of a green plaid Swannie -- woolen Swan-Drish shirt-like jackets frequently worn by New Zealanders. Katharine pointed to the gold on his wrist.

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“Is that a Rolex I’ve been glimpsing?”

“Yeah...prosperity sells in the marketplace...but there’s a limit to what I’ll do. At least it’s reliable.”

“Oh, I’m sure...a bit incongruous.”

“No, nothing but pragmatism.

“Made sandwiches while ya were dressing...behind my seat under my heavy jacket when you're hungry.”

“Can you cook, Lan?”

“Haven’t ya already experienced some of my cooking?”

“Some, yes...breakfast...simple but pretty good...the little things I don’t know about you.” She cocked her head in scrutiny.

“Might take a long time to find out,” he promised.

She dropped her head back and thought of his remark, knowing he was counting on Mary to help him, help them both. She had thought of Mary a great deal, even dreamed of her. Here was a chance to have a loving, understanding mother figure, what everyone needed, craved until the day they died. To have Lan and to have his mother, the very thought of it thrilled her -- incomparable persuasion and Lan knew that very well. She studied his concentrating profile and wished she could know what he was thinking at that precise moment.

He glanced at her and said, “Do ya like snow?”

“It’s never treated me badly. I’ve always thought of it as a sort of capricious, playful thing, but I suppose it can be very brutal.”

“On livestock, yeah.

“My jumper warm enough?”

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“It’s wonderful. What is this? Really thick and furry.”

“A blend of possum and wool.”

“Possum?”

“Not the kind you’re thinking of, Yank. Kiwi bear...from Australia. We’re overrun with the little creatures. Warm fur.”

“Oh, those poor brownish critters I saw squashed all over the roads.”

“Yeah. We line our hats and coats with the skins, weave the fur into our sheep wool jumpers.”

“I suppose that’s a more noble death than simply getting flattened on the highway.”

They ate ham and cheese sandwiches, then Katharine dozed off. She had thought she would sleep only a few minutes, but once again awoke to find them in a landing pattern, coming down upon a world of white. The runway was almost clear. Lan was off the radio and very soon thereafter rolling to a stop.

He reached for a heavier coat, stepping out of the plane and quickly donning his big leather jacket. Waving to Rex, Lan came around to Katharine’s side and helped her out.

“Brrr,” Katharine said in surprise.

“Let’s get ya into the Rover fast.”

They were soon moving down the holly lane over packed snow, up to the ever-impressive looming stone house, a gingerbread mansion now piled with layers of thick white frosting.

Katharine’s heart leapt with sweetly wild anticipation as she stepped out of the Rover. Her feet crunched in the snow. For her it was a setting

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that took her back to her childhood, to the snowy winter fields of her grandmother's flower farm. She bent down and gathered a handful of snow, gingerly packing it tight with ice-burned fingers. As Lan was coming around the side of the Rover she let fly and hit him soundly in the chest. He scooped up a handful of snow and strode toward her, grabbing her and rubbing it over her face. Screaming with laughter, she whirled away, quickly packing another snowball and barely getting it airborne before he grabbed her again and plowed her into a snowdrift. He straddled her and kissed her laughing mouth. His lips were cold but growing warm. She held onto his leather jacket, forgetting the cold, forgetting where she was, forgetting everything but the rough caressing mouth and fiercely taunting black eyes. He eased away from her and lifted her to a sitting position.

“Come on, before ya freeze your arse, ya wild little brat. Your clothes are already wet.”

“Really? I don't feel a thing...numb...but so alive.”

He helped her up and brushed her off while she stood laughing. They turned toward the house and saw Mary, hunched inside a heavy red cardigan and standing on the steps, shaking her head and smiling.

Katharine was snugly wrapped in a soft wine robe of Mary's and curled up on the long black leather sofa angled before the big snapping fireplace in the lounge. Lan sat with his arm around her, occasionally reaching for his hot tea. Mary sat across from them in a wingback, her face softer than the last time Katharine had seen her. Two huntaways, Sheb and

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Wooly, hounds she had once seen from a distance, were in from their station duties, their brown, black, and white fur gleaming as they dozed by the fire. Its steadily drumming warmth calmed what Lan described as their normally loud and nervous behavior.

“Your hair is still wet,” Katharine said, reaching up to run her fingers through Lan’s snow-dampened black waves.

“So is yours,” he countered, twisting a hank of her drying blond hair around his fingers.

“Look at the two of ya, doused from rolling in the cold snow like naughty little bairns,” Mary scolded in a teasing voice.

“I was perfectly ready to come in but the child needed her playtime.”

The blond hair wound around his fingers received a sharp tug.

Katharine could only smile, almost teary-eyed with gratitude for the firm hug of welcome she had received from Mary. Her body was still glowing from its effect.

Mary stood up, straightening her black wool skirt.

“I’m going to help Mattie with baking. There’s a fire laid in your room, if you’d like to rest until tea is ready.”

As Mary slipped out of the room, Lan said, “You’re blushing, Green Eyes. Ya know what that does to me.”

“Shhh,” Katharine cautioned.

“Ya won’t shut me down when it’s good. How’s your little mended leg? Do I carry ya up the stairs?”

“Aren’t you comfortable right here?” Katharine suggested in a half teasing, half pleading voice

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“I’ll have ya here if ya want.”

“Shh! Oh, Lan, quiet.”

“Then it’s up the stairs, *he kakariki.*”

“What?”

“Parakeet...it also means green...green, green, green, *kakariki he karu*...these green eyes. Come on, ya heard Mary, time for our nap.”

“I napped on the plane.”

“Good on ya. Lucky for you I didn’t, but I’ve still got enough life left in me to help ya finish me off.”

They climbed the stairs slowly, arm in arm, with Katharine pausing to greet the noble glass stag poised over the landing.

“He never tires of standing there. I’m surprised he hasn’t been shot by now.”

“When I was a little blighter I thought of it.”

“I’d give a lot to have seen you then.”

She sat on the edge of the high bed, watching Lan kneel to light the neatly arranged dry wood. Seeing him kneeling there, the climbing yellow flames flashing over his Maori-Scot profile, her eyes began to sting and burn. She closed them to clear away the faint tears trailing down her cheeks.

Lan turned around and stared at her in surprise. “What’s wrong with ya now, Kate?”

“Just come and hold me.”

He tossed off his clothes, removed her robe and drew her shivering body into his warmth. With their backs propped against a bank of square pillows, they stared into the flames. Katharine reached out for a tissue from

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the night table. She blotted her eyes, blew her nose and said nothing.

“What?” he asked, grasping a brown woolen afghan Mary had knitted, yanking it out from the foot of the bed and settling it over their cooling bodies.

“The...*horror* in Jerusalem did other strange things to my head. I cry a lot...never used to...always aimed for stoicism.”

“Why now?”

“I was thinking of last time...here...us...how I treated you. You’ve been so good...steadfastly so...incredibly fair to me. How could you know me so well...put up with--”

“Stop it. Stop all of that. Let’s make love. Maybe my motive is just a form of selfishness, yeah?”

“You’re not selfish, Lan. I can’t think of anything wrong with you, nothing at all.”

“Right, make this *Maori-Kotimana* divine while you’re at it.”

“What are you making me?”

“Yeah, maybe I’m round the bend over ya but I’m good for it. Trust what you’re feeling here. I’ll keep ya happy. You’ll forget some of those painful things. Haven’t I given ya Mary? I’ve told her about ya and she understands. Both of us, Green Eyes...along with all the Green Braes sheep. You’re done for, *wahine*.”

“Am I really...then why am I laughing?”

“See how useful I am...but I’m a greedy bastard. I’ve won some of your important parts...now give me the rest.”

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Descending the stairs was a replay, flushed from lovemaking and a warm shower, irresistible lovemaking in the shower, they rushed down the stairs. Katharine wore a skirt and sweater of Mary's, a soft golden wool.

"Ya look good in my mother's clothes. This lot matches your hair."

"You look good in anything," Katharine teased, "even wearing only a small tattoo on your--"

"Careful with the blasphemous tongue, lassie.

"Speaking of which, we won't do any heavy talking tonight, just drink a lot of wine and go to bed. Tomorrow I'm meeting my manager down at the sheds...communicating with the bloody muddy sheep while ya talk to Mary."

Tea was thin slices of tender roast leg of lamb with mint jelly, roasted herbed potatoes, and freshly baked oatmeal rolls light as air, served with an acorn-stamped mound of newly churned butter. There was a crisp salad made with pale leaves of Belgian endive and dark green cress, sprinkled with spice-sugared nuts, all drizzled with sweet dressing. Lan uncorked two bottles of a chilled tart rosé from his winery and filled their generous-sized goblets.

"To Lachlan and Katharine," Mary said, lifting her gold-edged crystal goblet, "and the happiness of it," she added.

They did indeed drink several glasses of the pleasant wine, chatting amiably, often laughing over Mary's ample and pointed witticisms, her humor far dryer than the vanishing wine.

Short little Mattie stuck her sparkling dark-eyed round face into the

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dining room and grinned shyly. Entering fully, wearing a flowered apron smock and black skirt, she held her hands on her hips, offering a captious smile. Her attention was focused on Lan, who stared back into her scolding, teasing eyes. Between them was an obvious familiarity and long devotion.

“*He kai oti.*”

“Yeah, we’re through with the main course, Mattie. Very tasty, but where is our dessert? *He kaireka.*”

Mattie waved her hand, and called over her shoulder as she was walking back into the kitchen, “The dessert is coming, *he tobunga miharo.*”

Lan laughed heartily and shook his head. Encountering Katharine’s questioning eyes, he said, “She’s the only one who does that -- she’s calling me a genius -- Mattie’s sarcasm.”

“*He tobunga miharo,*” Katharine repeated softly. “I’ll have to remember that. But it couldn’t have been sarcasm.”

“No,” Mary agreed. “And she never flatters.”

Lan was staring hard at Katharine. “Ya did that so easily, repeated *he kupu.* I think *you* must be the genius.”

Dessert was a kiwi custard tart served with a sweet liqueur and demitasses of rich coffee. Mary retired early.

Katharine’s head was whirling with good feeling as she climbed the stairs, a little clumsily and leaning on Lan’s arm.

“Alas, I think I’ll have to let ya sleep, Kate.”

She fell into a deep slumber but awoke in the morning with a tight wrap of depression that threatened to unfold itself in all directions. She tried to blame it on the wine, and after such a wonderful evening. Somehow she

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would have to head off this heavy downward spiral, which could so easily make her ruinous company, sensitively unpredictable even to herself.

Wrapped in Mary's soft robe, she stood at the windows, gazing out at the icy river and the exquisite pink shimmer of early morning sun falling on banks, fields, and purple-shadowed hillocks, all blanketed with pure unblemished snow.

Lan's arms came around her from behind. His chin edged down against her mussed crown of hair as he gazed out with her.

"Beautiful," she whispered, soothed by his touch.

"More so when ya can share it." His voice was warm and sleepy. He yawned and spoke softly into her ear.

"Ya don't have to get up yet. Come back to bed."

"I think your nice wine did a little mischief."

"Drink a large cup of black tea -- a big jolt of caffeine will chase that. You'll be right as rain."

"What a smooth tongue."

"No, just psychology...expect it and it will happen."

"*He tobunga miharo!* Oh, you are too clever by half."

"Half wit. Is all this sooky pondering of any use, Kate?"

"I've been thinking...in my work I almost never equivocate as I've been doing. And yet, running around the world involving myself in constant misery may have accrued some personal damage. Then the explosion...all this has made me more vulnerable to... I do want to stay in one place with you and write. Why then am I so worried, so indecisive now? What's wrong with me, Lan?"

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“Nothing...much. It’s just the way ya started out. Ya think we’ll come to a sad end. *You* expect it...always trying to head it off, kill the dread of what seems uncontrollable. Your mother went away and never came back when ya were so young. Your violent father was a bloody poor excuse for a human being. Ya were so full-on hungry for love ya married an abusive liar. The only person around who cared was your grandmother. Then she died and left ya with no family. Ya can have mine...all of them. Would ya like to meet the other half? The Maori half?”

“Yes, I would love to meet them, to see you with them. And you really want me to?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I? First they’ll accept ya because you’re mine. When they know ya they’ll like ya for yourself. I’m part of a rather extended family. Ya can have them all.”

“Where is Rani?”

“I’ve cursed myself a hundred times that I ever told ya about Rani. It wasn’t necessary...just the excuse ya needed to run away and hurt yourself. My mother was right again. I bloody near fired the lorry driver who took ya away from me...lost my reason. But Mary stepped in to save the poor bloke.”

“I’d have found some other excuse. I didn’t fully realize how madly I was trying to run from myself...as you’ve said.”

“And maybe I could have convinced ya of that.”

“Ultimately, I think I had to go and do what I did. That’s all I can say. The world has frightening places. Continuous wrongs that need to be exposed. I’ve tried to do a little.”

“That proposition nearly killed ya. I think you’ve given quite enough

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of yourself that way. Time for some happiness.”

“Rani...where is she?”

“Rani is...she’s with my former in-laws, trying to learn how to care for her little girl.”

“She’s finally paying attention to the child?”

“I think so...hope so.”

Katharine turned over and looked into Lan’s eyes.

“I strongly suspected the baby wasn’t yours, Lan. She would have wanted it. Any woman carrying your child would never have wanted to...”

“You’re blushing...kind of early in the morning to be blushing, Green Eyes. Were ya including yourself in that last remark?”

“It must be...why I’m blushing. I didn’t think of it until I said it.”

“And now that you’ve thought of it?”

She put her hand under her cheek against the pillow, continuing to look into his dark questioning eyes, her surprised thoughts turning over in wonder.

“You’re...wanting children...a man about town like you?”

“A man about Katharine, ya mean.” He chuckled and kissed the tip of her nose. “Yeah...with you, *pounamou* eyes, I’d be after a little anklebiter or two. It would be good for ya.”

“You think so?”

“I do...the mother is here. It’s the softness that I see, and the caring...inside this plucky little package. And yourself focusing on something besides personal loss. Yeah, good for ya.

“Mary would go bloody nuts.” He rolled on his back, staring at the

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ceiling and laughing. “Maybe it would have green eyes. Then I’d go bloody nuts.”

“You wouldn’t like it if it had your rare dark eyes?”

“What do *you* think? Come here, my little *ipò*. Are ya still on the pill?”

“Now wait a minute, Lan. Wait! You’re making me dizzy.”

“All right...now I’m fully awake and I want ya any which way. Then it’s off to the sheep pens for me, and ya can talk to my mother. Think about the rest. We’ll talk about it later. Four of them maybe? Two with green eyes, two with...whatever.”

“Lan!”

Reveling in his own laughter, he grabbed her escaping body and fit her to him, kissing her scolding mouth.

Mary refilled Katharine’s cup with more black tea. They were sitting at the long wooden work table in the tidy old kitchen, a sparkling pale green arena of constant activity and warmth. Mattie had relinquished her reign there to set about vacuuming in the upstairs bedrooms.

“You could have come sooner. Your condition wouldn’t have mattered to me, Katharine. I’ve looked after a few in my life.”

“I wanted to be able to see you, Mary. At least, I was hoping I could.”

“It’s a miracle that you’re here at all.”

“I certainly agree. I’m quite ashamed of the way I ran off without

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saying good-bye...of the way I was. I really threw quite a fit, didn't I? How ironic that it took a knock in the head and blindness to make me see a little better...and yet..."

"Well, the good of it is that you're here now. My heart was breaking for Lachlan. He's entertained a few rather interested women since the loss of...but never did he bring a single one of them here. The sudden appearance of Katharine Gordon said more to me than any inadequate words could have. Still, I'm not so sure I know what you intend."

"I dreamed about you, Mary. You were scolding me."

"Your own conscience is in good working order then."

Katharine stared into Mary's gray-blue eyes, her warm, softly lined Scottish face radiating a momentary relief that was not without uncertainty.

"May I ask why ya did come back, or am I overstepping myself?"

"It's sort of complicated. I felt so drawn to this place. Returning to Seattle to recover seemed so...so depressing to me. Oh, I have some friends there but I--"

"You really have no family?"

"No. At least here I could be near what I imagined I shouldn't have. That does sound a little crazy, I suppose. Finally, I had to admit to myself that New Zealand was so special, all of its touted beauty notwithstanding, because Lan was here...and...you. You were good to me, and you didn't have to be at all."

"Of course I did. You're Lan's chosen one. Do ya not know what that means? Surely you do. He loves so hard, and you're the one receiving that attention. To my way of thinking you're as lucky as can be, but I think

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there are still some problems to resolve. Are there not?”

Mary leaned back with her hands folded on the table and her sharply focused eyes waiting. Katharine began to identify more of the facial features given to Lan, a softer version of his angular jaw and well-molded chin.

“I’m a professional person, Mary. It’s all I’ve ever been. I’ve failed at everything else.”

“You were never loved...not after your gran. That isn’t failure, but it’s loss...hunger.”

“At least I’m good at what I do.”

“And satisfied then?”

“No...not always. I have periods of depression.”

“A person can’t live very well without love. I had enough of it to last me to my grave. All I have to do is remember those times and I can go right on -- the same kind of love only Lachlan can give you. That’s why you came back. Ya had a taste of something you’ll never forget.”

“You’re so right about that. It was much more than a taste. I was inundated with...with Lan. And yet...and yet the thought of such a complete change in my life is...frightening.

“You’re frowning at me, Mary. Am I’m shamelessly craving unconditional love? I know I have no right to--”

“It’s not that so much. You’re a lovely girl with a right to happiness. It’s just that I don’t know if you’re able to make that change you talk about. Lachlan has suffered a heap too. Do you see that...understand that?”

“Yes...yes, I do...see it and feel it.”

“For a while he drank a great deal. He doesn’t know that I heard him

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swear an oath one bitter night...that he would never give himself like that again. Now he's done it. He couldn't help himself any more than I could when I fell in love with Rang. For him it works that way, but you, Kate, somehow ya do resist."

"Oh you're wrong. I don't resist. It's why I'm here."

"A successful career is a powerful thing...the way it feeds your ego. My dad sent me to the best schools, and I taught music for a while. But when I found Rang I was quite content to leave off...play the piano for my own joy of it. I have loved the stewardship of these lands. My career was here with my husband. We ran this place together and we ran it well. Now it belongs to Lachlan, and he's made it into something much larger. He could do with a good partner, an intelligent woman like yourself. He knows that very well but he'll never ask it of you. He loves ya too much...enough to deny himself what he ought to have. There I've said it."

"I'm a writer, Mary, and...a journalist."

"Nobody could take that from ya, Kate. Each has to do what he or she is born to. But I can't help feeling that if you loved him enough we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"Please understand, Mary. Somehow, without completely losing myself, I have to fit into your world, because I do love Lan...because I love him far more than I think you realize."

"And for that you have all my devotion." Mary stood up, giving Katharine a steady, reassuring hug.

With her arms gratefully wrapped around Mary, Katharine basked in the ensuing release of tension, the stir of a deepening filial warmth. Along

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with this went a huge sense of relief that Mary had always quietly been here, was solidly here for Lan. What if she were to betray her presumed commitment to Lan, betray Mary's trust in her? What would make her? She glanced out the tall side windows opening onto a narrow sun porch. Beyond the sun porch windows the hardened snow crystals glittered more splendidly than faceted diamonds. From the cold hard beauty of nature shone the solid permanence of this place, like truth itself.

“I'd like to take a walk in the snow.”

“Yes, my girl, then take my warmest jumper.”

Katharine was walking along the river, the crisp air biting into her lungs. There was ice along the bank but the freezing water bubbled with a lyrical sound naturally soothing. The snow was dazzling in the bright sun, and off in the distance ruled the Southern Alps, piercing the hard blue winter sky. She stopped to position herself on a large rock, first brushing it off briskly with a gloved hand. Leaning back, she gradually drifted off in thought, pondering her situation. In this pristine environment she could easily assert that she had miraculously escaped the jaws of death, was now sitting at the pinnacle of all beauty, all good fortune, but alongside this circumstance was a somewhat anxious speculation of how she would live the rest of her life.

Did she want a little child clinging to her skirt, very likely with lovely black eyes? A part of Lan -- how she would cherish it. Could she help to run a place like this, a world like Lan's? Probably she could learn. She could

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certainly write about it, about so many things. It would be a necessity for her. She was not indifferent to the cornucopia of good things spilling into her life, enriching her lonely self, feeding her creative needs with endless titillating themes. Of course there would be some difficulties; there were always those. Love did not conquer all; she knew this, even though she was totally and inescapably in its thrall, could no longer imagine being otherwise. Was that the irrefutable answer? What was wrong with her? She began to see that deep down she felt inadequate for Lan, an old insecurity rising at weak moments, and perhaps also, if she were really honest, the betrayal of a promise she had made to the troubled world. She lowered her head and sighed.

“What is it now...this long face,” Lan’s startling voice intoned. “Have ya decided to give me up? You’ve made me a wary man, Katharine.”

She turned around and could not bear the uncertainty on his face a second longer, sliding into his arms.

“For as long as you want me I’m yours, Lan.”

“Forever?”

“I don’t know if...if I’m the right person for you.”

“That decision is the one I get to make...have made.”

His kiss warmed her entire body. She kissed him back until he leaned away and looked into her revealing eyes.

“But that isn’t the end of the problem, is it?”

“I have to learn to live well with you, to make you happy.”

“No. I’m already happy -- *you* came back to me. It’s I who have to figure out how to make ya satisfied.”

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“But you satisfy me so wonderfully.”

“Then what in bloody hell are we talking about?”

“I guess...I guess we’re really talking about a special sort of competence...and about the end of something and the beginning of something else. It’s kind of sad...in a way.”

“Bloody hell it is! No more sadness. *No more.* Ya hear me, Katharine? I found ya and *you* needed to be found. We’ve both had enough of sadness. I won’t steal ya from your rare self. It’s what I love. Can’t ya have done with all this equivocation, before ya drown yourself in it? Have done with it!”

There was a pause of heavy silence, then gradually her taut face softened, finally blooming with amusement. She had come to that infrequent lacuna in dark inner turnings where a blaze of insight exposes everything as simultaneously ludicrous and wonderful, fatuously unimportant and extraordinarily delicious.

“If you so decree, great god Manutaane.” Her coy mouth offered a teasing smile. She stretched out her hand to press against the shearling collar of his sheepskin jacket, touching to happily affirm and savor his actual presence.

He hesitated, contemplating her humor as his mood drifted away from the heat of protest. “Do ya know what your eyes do to me when ya smile like that?”

“Just *pounamou* for my lover.” She laughed with an expansive surge of joy and began to run.

She ran over the powdery snow in quick bursts of speed, up away

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from the river and into an open field where the whiteness rose in smooth hillocks. For a second she wondered if her leg was really up to this, but the thought blew away behind her as she ran on, the dry snow crunching, spraying up, sifting away. Nothing could stop her now. Was not her body forever trying to launch itself, to fly higher and higher in dreams of escape? For once she was carelessly flying high in the reality of safe capture.

“Kate!” He caught hold of her and swung her around against him. “Be careful with your leg. Dammit, be careful.”

Her woolen hat had flown off. It was the thing that had slowed Lan down when he stopped to pick it up. Her hair was in her eyes, pasted over her gasping, laughing mouth. His fingers lifted the strands, drawing them away. He replaced her hat, pulling the rib down near her eyes and staring at her.

“Another thing I’ve learned about *you* -- the way ya suddenly eat up life...infectious.” His eyes traveled over her face and he clicked his tongue with ardent impatience. “Now I want ya bad and we’re in the snow.”

She slid her hand over the front of his jacket and looked up into his eyes. The lids were closed down to a narrow darkness that was only her. She had begun to tremble, not from hypothermia.

“Can’t have ya in the snow...too bloody cold. Over there,” he jerked his head toward a stone shed with a small, snow-etched window. “There’s straw on the floor. Come on.”

The pale blond straw was fresh and sweet beneath them as they pulled off their gloves and tugged at their clothes.

“Oh, brr,” Katharine muttered.

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“Leave the jumper on, but let me get my hands inside.”

He eased her down upon his open jacket, his tongue tasting her cold lips and his hands fitting her against him. She gripped him tightly, fastening her legs around him as they became one tortuous element of hot energy in a still space of heavy cold. Their quick breath turned into rising white clouds of vapor.

“Oh...what if someone--”

“No. No one will. Shout at me...anything ya like. Jesus, I want ya...always here with me like this...always.”

Their cold bodies joined in heat, her love-charged voice uttering his name, her attuned ears repeating his soft response.

“Katharine, *ipo, whaiaipo.*”

A bolt of white light streamed through the high snow-framed old glass, in its path motes of whirling dust. The straight shaft of intense dazzle ignited a part of this man having her. For the first time she encountered fully the translucent mahogany grain of his eyes; the rich deliquescence, unfathomed, fierce with lust, heightening the agony of being so close, feeling so much and knowing so little.

“Lan...if I only I could know--”

“It’s no good knowing too much. We’ll discover enough.” His words were tinged with regret.

Even in this condition, far beneath her momentous longing she knew that he was right, that to receive even a partial revelation of the mystery behind the windows of the eyes was to finish something, something that should never be finished until the eyes closed for the last time; perhaps not

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even then. From his brusque response she inferred a similar longing, already studied and abandoned as dangerously destructive and useless.

“Get your arms where I can...good.”

His hands slid down her waist and pressed her into him until her separate flesh was his.

“Will ya tell me if I hurt ya?”

“Y-yes.”

Their bodies rocked hard into the crunching straw, the dust of it rising as she was thrown backwards and pinned there in throbbing heat.

“*Ata nobo,*” Lan said softly. “Hold still...wait, don’t move Green Eyes...let me look at ya while I...”

Rising from deep inside she felt a pleasure so excruciating it was almost a searing pain. She wanted it to go on but thought it powerful enough to stop her heart, pulsed blood racing in a silent scream.

“Lan!”

Above her, he leaned away, head back, eyes briefly closed, then opening as he lifted her shaking body up against him, stroking her back.

“Okay?”

“Yes.”

“Good?”

“Oh...so good,” she managed.

“Jesus...*e tino aroha ana abau ki a koe.*” His voice sounded soft and slow with satisfaction, while his fingers held the back of her neck, his thumb rubbing the damp hollow of her throat.

“I...liked those words.”

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“Yeah, good...love words.”

They lay back, slowly reentering the world, until the harsh cold began to creep over them. Quickly sitting up they knelt to pick the golden straw stalks from each other's hair and clothing, then pulled on what little they had removed.

“What is this for?” Katharine asked, looking around.

“Just a place where Mary nurses her culled newborns from time to time...lambs who've lost their mothers...like her newest pet, my *tau aroha*.” He smiled at her and led her through the cobwebbed heavy wooden door into the cold bright sun.

They walked home arm in arm along the icing river, remotely receiving the rhythm of its warbling winter song. Occasionally Lan stared down at her and smiled, as if surprised to find her there beside him looking back.

They had flown up to Nelson and were driving to the winery in a car left at the airstrip for them by Lan's uncle, Gus, his father's younger brother. Gus and his family managed the Wai Reka Winery for Lan. They drove through fields of vines in a gentle rain.

“The wind blows and it rains some this time of year in Nelson, but mostly it's a land of sunshine and good beaches. Need that rain...keeps everything rich and green,” Lan said.

They turned down a long lane and drove up to a large old stone house set back before clustering red beech trees and a few towering rimus, coniferous evergreens prized as ornamentals. People of various ages began

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coming out of the sprawling gray house. Katharine put her hands tightly together in the lap of her gray gabardine pantsuit.

Lan glanced at her and said a word to himself, *webi*, shaking his head. “Don’t be afraid, Kate. *Kai te pai matau* -- we’re all right. They’ll like ya.”

“Are you going to speak a lot of Maori?”

“I’m sorry...tend to do that more when I come here. I’ll try to help ya understand.”

“Will there be *bongi*?”

“Maybe. Relax, Katharine. You’re mine. Nobody will do anything to make ya feel bad.”

“But will *I* do something? When it’s my job I can stick my nose into people’s lives quite easily...when my own life’s on review I react like this. Pathetic, isn’t it?”

They had all greeted her, studied her with polite curiosity, and she heard Maori words, but they were polite in that, too, and readily conversed comfortably in welcome New Zealand English.

Gus and his wife, Mea, both with graying hair, had done *bongi* with her, their eyes twinkling with a slight teasing amusement at her rather shy responses. She felt a little clumsy and did not look at Lan for fear she would encounter a certain keen assessment, however inadvertent. Gus was saying something to his wife in Maori: “*Ka mumura ona papering i te whakama.*”

Katharine then gave Lan a questioning look.

“Just your chemistry, Green Eyes. You’re fair and it’s easy to tell when ya blush.”

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They sat down at a long, smoothly polished rimu dinner table set within a beech-wainscoted, brick-red dining room. The four adult children of Gus and Mea sat below, and eight of their older grandchildren sat at two separate smaller tables, giggling and teasing one another. Katharine noticed that no one sat at the head of the table but Gus and Lan sat across from each other at its end. Lan was served first. Would this be in deference to him because he had provided the winery in which so many of them worked, or simply because he was the guest relative. She did not know if there was any meaning at all, deciding she should save her analyses for some other time and simply let things happen.

With her hands held motionless in her lap, she was trying hard to remember everyone's name. Lan was putting food on her plate as the serving dishes were passed on.

“*Kumara*,” Lan said.

“Yes, sweet potato,” Katharine answered.

“Here, *Kina*, sea urchin. It has to be prepared live, right out of its spiny cover. Ya eat the reproductive organs that make the roe. It's salty, light, almost sweet. Taste.”

Katharine stared at the small curved golden egg sacks and smiled weakly as she lifted her fork to her mouth. She chewed a moment and said, “Oh...yes, a different texture. Good.”

“Can she cook?” Gus asked, his flat, robust dark face lined with humor.

Lan turned to Katharine, who was now blushing deeply.

“I really have no idea. Can ya cook?”

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“I...can keep myself from starving,” Katharine said with a cheerful smile. “I’ve...I’ve helped smuggle food to a starving African village under siege; does that count?” she added in a softly defensive voice.

“Tell him: *E whakaaro ana ahau he patai bobore tena,*” Lan said.

Katharine, a quick study in pronunciation, focused on his mouth as he slowly repeated the phrase. She tried to say it.

Gus laughed and threw up his hands.

“What did I say?”

“If ya feed yourself of course ya cook to some degree. Ya simply told him ya thought it was an absurd question.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, “Lan is teaching me bad things.”

“Lan will teach you only good things,” maternal dark-eyed Mea offered in a slow, discerning voice, which held for Katharine a lovely sympathetic warmth.

Gus looked at Katharine and said, “*He ataahua te kotiro ra,*” and everyone, including Lan, laughed with great enjoyment. Then Lan squeezed her hand and winked at her.

“He said you’re attractive. Ya see that excuses a lot.”

“What needs to be excused?” Katharine hastened to whisper.

“Nothing. Now don’t get yourself in high dudgeon.”

“I’m not.”

Katharine lifted her glass of white wine, taken from their own Wai Reka Winery and said, “Here’s to all of you and thank you for this delicious food.”

Everyone drank while Katharine took a sip and stared out over the

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many full serving dishes, which included some things she recognized: green-lipped mussels, fire-roasted pork, and colorful fruit and vegetable salads. Lan was taking unknown things and putting them on her plate again. She tasted and he explained.

“I do love these plump green-lipped mussels,” she said, holding up a dark shell and admiring its opalescent, emerald-edged beauty. “Some of the best I’ve ever tasted.”

“They *are* the best...choice,” Lan assured her.

Later when dessert was finished and the table cleared, Katharine found herself with Mea in a sort of study, a small dark blue room with a shiny rimu floor, a room filled with many framed photographs. They were both rocking slowly in old, very large and satin-grained wood rockers. Mea had explained to her that this pastime was soothing and good for digestion.

“The men are counting barrels...or bottles,” Mea said, laughing and waving her hand.

Just as they were beginning a conversation about Lan’s father’s childhood, there was a loud crash. Mea heard one of the babies screaming and went to see what happened.

“Nothing too serious...messy,” the young mother called out.

Katharine sat listening a moment to the voices discussing whatever cleanup was necessary, then got up and stepped slowly around the room.

She was enjoying the photos, so many of the growing family at work and play, fishing in various rivers and lakes, eating and celebrating. Then her eyes fell upon an earlier photograph of Lan. She stared at his cocky grin, fascinated. His arm was around an exquisite young woman with long black

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hair and vibrant eyes, large, intelligent, loving eyes, her face turned toward him, her mouth smiling with unmistakable possession. A pain spiked through her heart and her knees almost buckled. That was precisely what a man looked like who was content with the love of his life, a couple satisfied to be just themselves together. Once again and very swiftly the old insecurity assailed her.

She left the room and went into the kitchen.

“May I help?” she asked, staring at Mea bent over the floor, mopping something up.

“No, thank you. Finished. Sticky orange juice,” Mea said.

Why had Mea taken her into that dark blue room filled with pictures? Was it intentional? Or was she simply overreacting? Perhaps they did not want her with Lan at all. Why should they? They might have been far more satisfied if he were with Rani, or some other Maori woman...not this foreign *Pakeha* journalist. *Stop this, Katharine*, a voice inside her head insisted, but she found it very difficult to obey. She wondered how Mary had felt when she met Rang’s family. Before they left to come here, Mary had spoken of the family with admiration and warmth. Mary had such a different childhood from her own. Adored and coddled by her father, her manner evinced a secure sense of self. What had Mary’s mother been like? Presumably devoted to her daughter.

This time they settled in the lounge, with the other young women and babies surrounding them, the growing children running in and out. They were all trying to carry on rather truncated conversations, punctuated by the antics of the children together with their puppies, kittens, and toys. The

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entertaining children were apparently foremost in all of their minds.

Mea moved closer to Katharine and said, “Ah, *tamariki*...so much life, these children...full of wild spirit.

“Will you learn to speak as Mary did?”

“Mary?” Katharine said, masking her surprise. “She’s been at it a long time. I do love the sound of your language. I wish I could chatter away in it. There’s an expansive thing about learning a language that makes you a part of...of--”

“Another culture...a part of us. You would like that?”

“I would...I would,” Katharine said, fumbling and miserable. *Why is there this gulf between us?* she wanted to ask. Why should she feel as if she were under a microscope? *What is this? We are all just human beings.*

“I like this big friendly house,” she said, and that, too, sounded false, like patronizing flattery.

She saw two of Gus’s daughters staring at her from across the room. They bent their heads together to whisper something while a laughing little boy tugged at one of their skirts.

Then it happened. The back of her head constricted, the forewarning of a migraine. *My God, no*, she thought. *Lan will be thoroughly disgusted.* At the same moment, she felt the mixture of unusual food she had eaten churning in her stomach. Her head started a slow throbbing. She had seriously begun to think of inescapable vomiting.

“Please, the bathroom?” she requested, standing up with her hand against her mouth.

Mea pointed and she hurried off in that direction, stumbling into the

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massive old white tile bathroom.

She was on her knees over the toilet bowl and could hear the women giggling down the hall. Of course they thought she was pregnant. A surge of food rose up through her esophagus and tears streamed from her eyes as she gagged and spewed out acid-burning, bitter half-digested food.

“What?” she heard a voice say and then Maori words, some of them Lan’s. He tapped on the door and came inside. She was mostly through with vomiting but could hardly bear to raise her head the pain was so consuming. He leaned over the sink, wetting a warm washcloth, then knelt and wiped her face. Lifting her up against him, he started to lead her out of the room. She could not speak. The top of her head was like ice, small pin pricks of ice. Shivering, she felt a sudden flash of white heat and tried to take a step, sliding down as he caught her and lifted her into his arms. She regained consciousness lying on a bed in a dark room. Lan was threading massaging fingers through her hair.

“Lan...I haven’t any pills...simply forgot them.”

“Mea is making ya something to drink.”

“Don’t think I can.”

“Try at least.”

“Sorry. God...so sorry.”

“Doesn’t matter...just want ya to get through this.”

“Can you...put me on the plane...like this? I could--”

“No. Absolutely not. Ya have to sleep.”

“Maybe...I could...sleep on the plane.”

“No.”

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Mea came into the room with a warm cup of strong herbs and handed it to Lan. He held it to her lips and she tried to drink as agreeably as possible, swallowing about a third of the cup.

When the door had closed she said, “Are you mad at me?”

“Jesus, Katharine, I’m bloody sorry you’re hurting.”

“Hold me.”

He lay down beside her and held her in his arms, his fingers rubbing at the base of her skull. Beneath her lids the colorful squiggles of pain writhed on. Slowly she drifted off to sleep.

She awoke with a start, slowly realized where she was and whispered, “They think I’m pregnant.” There was no one else in the room. She heard bursts of laughter, and sat up in the darkness, reaching for the bedside lamp.

Stealing down the hall she tried a door knob, then another and she was back in the dark blue room of photographs. There was one small lamp lit. Resting on a hardwood cabinet among all the others, the beautiful photograph resonated with life, more life than her breathing could ever bestow. Its perfection had all the power to censure and accuse. *You will never have this. You are a divided self,* the photograph called out to her. *You will never be able to give enough of yourself to have this.*

She turned around and saw Lan standing before her in the open door. She fled past him, through the kitchen and out the back door into the dark night, inhaling a strange sweet dampness that smelled completely unfamiliar to her. Stumbling over the grass, she leaned against the trunk of a red beech tree. She would like to have thrown herself on the ground but heard the soft rustle of footsteps in the grass. Lan’s shadow stretched

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toward her in the lights from the house.

“I’m glad you’re feeling better.”

“Yes, thank you, better...those herbs were good...usually it takes a long time...I needed some air.”

“Will ya come back in?”

“Yes. I want to apologize and thank everyone.”

Flying back in the early morning she was very quiet, hoping that Lan would assume she was still recovering. She closed her eyes, pretending to sleep, but saw only the perfect black and white photograph, so perfect she could actually grieve for Lan instead of herself. There was no way she could discount that photograph -- a scene evocative as a love poem...poetry itself.

Finally they screeched down on the frosty runway, hurrying to the Rover, its wheels soon crunching over the snow. No sooner had they come to a stop then she had wrenched open the door and clumsily raced up the steps, almost tripping while Lan shouted, “Careful, Kate!”

She went through the great house room by room, like a frantic child with a bleeding wound in search of its mother. She found Mary in her bedroom having tea before a crackling fire. Dropping down, she placed her head on Mary’s lap -- an immediate rescue she had sometimes sought from her grandmother as a troubled child. Every shred of worldliness had vanished. She was that desperate child.

Mary sat patiently stroking her hair.

“It was easier when I did it,” Mary said. “I did have a bit of worry

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with that first visit, but I was Rang's only wife and quite headstrong with the daring of my deed. Poor Kate, ya want so to be liked...loved.

"Here, take a sip of my tea."

Katharine lifted her head, took a single long swallow of the strong black tea, then attempted a brief explanation.

"In the beginning it wasn't so bad, Mary." She sighed with regret. "I was eating that incredible food, laughing with them. I liked them all and...yes, really hoped they'd like me, but then...something happened. I think they wanted me to know... Then I had a wretched migraine and was thoroughly sick...that was the end of it...disaster."

"They would understand, Katharine girl. Your imagination is running wild. Ya have such strong feeling that--"

"I thought I could be...enough...but I can't, Mary. I can't. When I saw the amazing photograph of the two of them, so utterly...*complete*, I knew I'd lied. I'm not the person who--"

"You don't love him then?"

"I never really knew what it was...love...not until Lan."

"It's a mystery to me that you can go around the world and nearly die of it but not face up to what ya feel here and now. I know ya aren't a coward, girl. Have ya no more faith in yourself than this?"

"Just more proof that I'm no good at a private life. They don't want me anyway. They don't like me, and how can I blame them after--" Mary's door burst open.

Lan stood silently staring at both of them, his scowling face now registering a complete loss of patience, an angry frustration.

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“All right you’ve had your tea and sympathy.” He removed Katharine from Mary, lifting her into his arms. “Now it’s my turn.”

“Careful now, Lachlan. You know she isn’t completely well yet. I do think her head’s still confused. That was a terrible accident your girl was in, and you’ve got to consider that too.”

“Thank ya, mother, talk to ya later.” He walked out with Katharine in his arms, heading straight for his bedroom.

He set her down on the bed, grasping her neck and running his thumbs slowly over her throat. “If I didn’t love ya so I could almost strangle ya with exasperation, except that part of this is my own fault.”

“I saw what really meant--”

“*I know what ya saw!* Ya saw the past and set it blazing with your bloody great imagination. This is the present.”

“Oh, Lan, I understand why they don’t want me to have you.”

“Oh, ya do? Ya understand that? They thought ya were smart and attractive and polite. They were bloody sorry ya were crook as a dog. They thought I was damned lucky. *He tino nui tona atamai*, Mea told me: *She has plenty of common sense*. They thought your green eyes were fascinating...nearly as much as I do...and, yeah, they thought ya were pregnant. And I wish to God ya were!”

She lowered her head and sat in confusion, rubbing her temples with extended fingers. Her thoughts were in a jumble. Never had she felt so bewildered. If she were truly that mistaken then she must really be in a very distracted state.

“You’re going away. You’ll need some light clothes,” Lan said in a

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softer voice.

She looked up at him, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“Lan, please don’t send me away right now. I’ll be better. I just didn’t--”

“My Green Eyes,” he soothed, holding her face in his hands. “I’m taking ya away to Rarotonga. I have a place there. Ya aren’t well. Mary has said it too. I realized it flying back, and that’s what I’ve been doing while ya were talking, making flight reservations from Auckland.”

“Rarotonga? That’s way up north in the Cook Islands, a dependency of New Zealand. Margaret told me you Kiwis like to vacation there.”

“Right. Very relaxing. Ya need to lie in the sun and do nothing, hear nothing but wind and water and birds. This has all been too much for ya. Ya need to heal. You’re not over any of what happened to ya, and I should have seen it. You’re so damned good at living with misery none of us fully understood what you’ve been through.”

IV

“You can go round and round on this little green jewel in the sea until you’re dizzy. Round and round one way, then round and round the other. The poor bus drivers must go out of their minds.”

“Are ya worrying about something again?” Lan asked, shifting in his beach chair and reaching for his Steinie.

Katharine dug her toes into the warm beige sand and stared at the

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startling shades of aquamarine water. Small waves lapped gently up over the smooth shore incline, their force broken by the distant reef. Out on the reef's edge waves boiled up in a line of high white foam, splashing into the sky and crashing down with a constant roar.

“This morning there were thousands of ants on the kitchen counter, so tiny I could hardly see them, almost transparent but enough to carry the place away.”

“They’ve always been here. Ya can’t get rid of them, don’t even try,” Lan said, laughing and swilling his beer.

Katharine stood up, straightening her new navy bathing suit. “The scar on my leg isn’t so bad.”

“No, it’ll mellow out. Ya make those plain swimming togs look flash, whitey.”

They had departed from the airport without even going into Auckland first, and with no time to buy any suitable clothes. On the plane Katharine had read a magazine and dozed against Lan’s shoulder while he studied statements from his accountant. They arrived late at night, went straight to the cottage and slept. The next afternoon Katharine had gone into town with Lan and done some quick shopping.

“Avarua is the kind of town I like. No problem making up your mind about fashion...a few miles down the road and you’re in very nearly the only store with a suitable suit. Hmm, what if I hadn’t found this one?”

“I’d have enjoyed that.”

“I’m going for a swim.”

She observed that Lan got up rather quickly and followed her into

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the water. She swam out to the reef and felt a little tired, realizing that her lungs needed more exercise. Watching Lan's dark body in the clear water, swimming toward her with powerful strokes, she felt happy and playful. There were small colored fish, blue and yellow ones and silver and black striped ones, darting all around them. She rolled over and lay on her back, staring at huge white cumulus clouds fastened to the sharp blue horizon. Resting a while in weightless drifting, she rolled over and started back. Lan surged up from beneath the water and held her by the waist, giving her a slippery kiss.

“A white sea nymph.”

In the shallows she stood up and shook out her hair.

“You keep referring to my floury skin. Aren't you a little embarrassed to be seen with this pale creature?”

“Seen by whom? There's no one around. I love your skin. Need some more lotion or you'll burn like toast.”

She lay on her mat while he slathered lotion on her body. His fingers slid over skin warmed by a very hot sun.

Turning over she shaded her eyes, smiling at him. He remained kneeling, motionless, looking at her.

“Your eyes are like the water now...or the water is like your eyes.” He glanced toward the dark orange stucco bungalow nestled in the rippling palms above the sand. “Let's go inside.”

“I'm covered with lotion.”

“Good. That'll be fun. Ya smell like a coconut cocktail, my hot little sex object.”

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Under the outside shower nozzle her oiled skin beaded as she rid her suit of salt water. She pulled it away from her breasts to wash away the sand. Lan flung his head back in a spiral of spraying droplets and stripped water from his arms. She loved to study him closely when he was not aware of her scrutiny. Whether aware of her keen observations or not, she knew he never acted self-consciously, doing whatever was required in the most natural and direct way. They grabbed the huge striped beach towels flung over a chair, dried themselves and went inside.

“Want something to drink?” Lan asked, swinging open the door of the refrigerator in the dark-green-tiled kitchen.

She walked away, trying to get out of her clinging wet suit and calling out, “Yes, guava juice, please.”

He came into the shadowy bedroom with the juice and set it on a low glass-topped bamboo table. Grinning at her ongoing struggle, he grasped the suit and pulled it down away from her damp body, kissing firm nipples and stroking his hands over her dimpled flesh as she shivered in the sultry heat.

She reached for the juice and drank with his fingers sliding over her pulsing throat.

“This is good for us both...a good idea.”

“I’m spoiled by all of this attention, Lan. You’re the only one who has ever made me want to stay forever in the present moment.”

He took the empty glass from her. “Cool damp skin, ya oily sweet *wahine*. Lie down, I’ll keep ya in the present moment.”

His body was warm to her touch, solid and faintly salty against her mouth, dark moist flesh her entire boundary as they tangled together atop

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the flowered coverlet.

Katharine, calm now after a week of rest and lovemaking, lay in her beach chair, browsing through a newspaper where she came across reportage of another severe flare-up in the Middle East. Lost in this disturbing recurrence she was surprised when Lan reached over her head and snatched the paper out of her hands.

“Where in bloody hell did ya get this?”

“Even in Rarotonga they receive bad news it seems.”

“If ya could see your face you’d know why I don’t want ya reading this gloomy gore. You’re on holiday, Kate.”

“I was thinking of a family in Khan Yunis...of--”

“When you’re there ya want me and when you’re with me you’d like to be there. What can I do with ya?”

“Lock me in your castle? Lan, right now I feel so happy with you. I don’t want to be anywhere else. It’s only that I feel a little guilty.”

“Guilty enough to die of it? Ya won’t get very much in exchange.”

“I can’t think that way. The more the world knows about that situation the less it will tolerate...I hope. There has to be a concerted effort to--”

“Katharine, do ya want any life of your own?”

“Yes.”

She looked at Lan, at his darkly serious expression, and felt fear spring up, the fear of loss.

“Do ya know it isn’t all a campaign of reform, not with *you*? An

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unsettled part of ya has been trying to run away from me since the beginning...because ya think if ya keep moving life won't disintegrate. It will. It's moving even faster than your quick brain."

He knelt in the sand and put his hand on her thigh, looking into her eyes. She dropped her gaze, staring at his brown hand on her white flesh and shivering with the truth of his words.

"Look at me, Kate. Do I let ya keep running then, my Green Eyes? Is that what ya want?"

"You would...just let me go?"

"That would never be my decision, but I'm trying to make ya tell me what *you* want."

She got up from the chair and went to lean against the trunk of a shady palm. Her heart was beating so rapidly it felt as if it had leapt into her throat.

"You're giving me ultimatums, aren't you? You want--"

"No. Life gives ya those. I'll force ya into nothing. It would ruin us both."

"What would you do if I went away, Lan?"

"Forever? Suffer badly. And what would ya do yourself?"

She leaned against the trunk, no longer able to stand without support. The thought of Lan gone from her life made her body go limp, made her slide down to kneel in the sand. He knelt down too and lifted her chin. Her swimming eyes were filled with grieving love. She knew what he saw, knew he recognized a force so powerful it could never be hidden or laid aside.

"Will ya marry me, Kate?"

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She responded with sudden disbelief, more recently having contemplated those words and yet amazed at the sound of his voice saying them. She would remember this day and hour with utter clarity, staring out at the ultramarine blue of deep sea, hearing the palm fronds rustle overhead, feeling her knees dug into warm sand and his dark eyes on her, waiting.

“Be your...wife?”

He cocked his head and laughed. “That’s what it means, husband and wife. Yeah? Marry me?”

“Yes.”

“And will *you* be reasonably happy in that condition?”

She clasped her arms around his solid, much required body and laid her mouth against his flesh.

“I didn’t think the world had a Lachlan Manutaane,” her voice was slow and dreamy against his shoulder, “a person who could do this to me...or...for me. There’s no alternative I could bear...but what if I wake up?”

“Ya *will* wake up and there I’ll be...when ya go to sleep and when ya wake up. We’ll do this bloody life together and pleasure each other in the doing. Yeah?”

“Mary seems to think you’re in need of a...sort of business partner. Is that why you’re marrying me?” She offered a playful smile to rescue the question from any harmful assumption.

“You’ve sussed the lay of things,” he answered, falling in with her levity. “I’m in need of a top level employee...but think of the benefits.”

He picked her up and started toward the water.

“Lan? What are you going to...wait! I’m all nice and dry now

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and...oh no!”

She grabbed the back of his neck, pulling him down into the water with her, then managing to wriggle out of his careful grasp and swim away. He came swiftly after her and dragged her under, surfacing with her in his arms. Her laughter drifted into a deeper emotion, discovering his altered face, a face full of proprietary rapture. He lifted her up and held her tight against him, his mouth sliding over hers until she uttered some small sound coinciding with his thorough preoccupation. They sloshed to the water’s edge and slipped down on the wet sand, wavelets lapping at their oblivious embrace.

“Let’s get ourselves back to the cottage.” Lan pulled her to her feet. “Come on, my love. You’re making me crazy all awash here, and I’d rather have ya without getting ya drowned.”

In the morning they stood at the roadside in their sandals, Katharine in a yellow sun dress and Lan in shorts and a black tropical shirt, waiting for the circling bus to carry them into the town. Very soon cottages, shacks, developments, palms, hedges of crimson bougainvillea, white beaches, azure lagoons, and green slopes of the ever-present central volcanic mountains flew by as they turned to each other and laughed at nothing, at the wind in their faces, at the droll bus driver making humorous comments to break the monotony of his endless revolutions.

They walked down the street hand in hand, peering into touristy little shops with shells, batik prints, and Gauguin-style watercolors, finally settling at a bistro table on a grayed wooden deck. They dipped their heads beneath broad sun-infused banana leaves and sipped overfull glasses of cool beer.

Careless Child

When Lan got up to find Katharine a napkin for her spilled foaming beer, she saw a woman across the deck exclaim and grab his arm. A slender brunette with tanned skin, laughing and tilting her head back with surprise. Lan bent to her and said something and the woman laughed again.

Katharine could just make out her words.

“Oh, but you have to come...just a small party. It’s been so long, Lan.”

She was straining to hear more when a man carrying a pint of beer blocked her view. The interloper sat down at her table, for the moment completely diverting her attention.

“Mind if I join you? Not many tables available. Haven’t seen you in town. I’d remember that.”

“No,” Katharine said and was pondering a further comment when the man relieved her of any speculation by continuing.

“I’ve been sportfishing big time. Out beyond that boiling reef you can find some pretty hefty prey for even a heavy line. Good guides around here. They know their stuff.”

Katharine drew herself up and angled her head, wondering if he was simply being friendly or actually engaged in that familiar male routine of *getting to know you*. He was rather nice looking, neat sandy hair, rugged tan, blue eyes, no rings on his fingers, a leather-strapped watch of the style she liked, and khaki shorts and shirt with bare feet sporting expensive looking deck shoes.

“Hey, I’m talking your head off, aren’t I? I’m Frank McGregor from Chicago. You like this place?”

Careless Child

“Yes I do. It’s just the right size and shape,” Katharine said, having made a decision to be courteous, even amusing.

He laughed heartily at that, took a swallow of his beer and leaned forward.

“Mind telling me your name?”

“I--” Katharine said, but Lan had sauntered up to the table.

“Sorry, fella, I was here first,” Frank explained.

“Yeah?” Lan said, grinning. “How long ago was that?”

“About five minutes.”

“Then you’re out of the running, mate.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake, sit down, Lan. This is Frank McGregor. He’s been sportfishing.”

Katharine noticed that Frank’s face registered considerable disappointment, but he was apparently not a quitter, nor, she realized, was that his first beer.

“She isn’t wearing a ring. I don’t give up that easily, not when I’ve got a real trophy on the line. Huh, sport?”

“Yeah?” Lan said, raising one eyebrow and remaining on his feet.

“Ya haven’t got anything on the line, mate.”

Katharine tapped her fingers on the table.

“This is very amusing. I really thought this sort of thing only happened on television soaps. I think you’d better stick to those swordfish on your line, Frank. Come on, Lan, I’m through with my beer. We’ll let Mr. McGregor get on with his vacation.”

Frank stood up and moved near her. He was an inch or two shorter

Careless Child

than Lan, but well built and apparently quite familiar with contests of braggadocio.

Lan stepped between her and Frank McGregor with a cool smile and said, “Might as well unclench the fist and settle down, mate, because when I scrap it’s for results not appearance, and ya won’t be catching any fish tomorrow.”

The narrowed eyes leveled at Lan for a moment. “Ah, what the hell,” Frank said, “but I sure will miss those green eyes.”

Katharine and Lan left Frank McGregor sulking over his beer, and walked down the street in silence.

They stopped at the corner and Lan said, “Ya didn’t have to encourage the bloody wanker.”

“I didn’t mean to. I really couldn’t believe...I just thought he was being friendly.”

“Yeah, he was.”

“I’m sorry. Were you really going to...do something?”

“Bloody right. I’ve had plenty of practice with wankers like that.”

“Hmm...well, I guess I just don’t move in those circles.”

Lan turned to Katharine, took her arm and gently backed her against a plate glass window while his still enlarged feral black pupils held her firmly.

“Green Eyes, if you’re in the human race you’re always moving in those circles.”

“Okay, probably good advice. My...my husband slapped me around sometimes but I doubt that he would have fought anyone else for me.”

“Yeah, he probably would have. We do that for various

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reasons...some of them ego. With me, I hope it's more about simple protection. I'm not crazy about scrapping over ya like a helpless possession, but I'm bloody hell not letting any pissed bastard put his hands on ya."

"Oh...thank you...I guess.

"Who was that woman?"

Lan thought a moment, his mind clearly in the process of switching subjects, and said, "Oh, Patricia Leonard...Patsy."

"Yes, I thought so."

"What does that mean?" he asked, grinning.

"Very obviously an old flame...one that, from her point of view, is still burning."

"I knew her once."

"I'm sure. She would have to show up in *my* town."

He was laughing. "Kate, are ya jealous?"

She did not answer, merely walked along staring at hibiscus blossoms across the street.

"Come on, Green Eyes, I'm going to buy ya something...it's something nice...something for which this place is famous."

They were soon standing at the counter of a rather upscale jewelry store, and Lan was fastening a chain holding a large iridescent black pearl set in white gold around her neck.

"Lan, I don't think--"

"No, about this ya don't have to think."

"You've already given me a lovely jade pendant."

"And now ya have a black pearl pendant. Right?"

Careless Child

“Wait a minute. Let me see that pearl ring with the diamonds, please.” Lan tapped the glass counter.

Katharine stood with quickening heart while Lan took the ring from the smiling male clerk and lifted her hand.

“Here, try this on your ring finger.”

“No, Lan.”

“Yeah, my choice little possession. Then I won’t have to scrap over ya. You’ll be doing me a favor.”

Upon leaving the store Katharine nearly stumbled as she studied her new ring from various angles, clasping the pendant and smiling appreciatively at Lan. He laughed at her engrossed antics, making watchful adjustments to her oblivious steps.

“If you’re trying to make me feel good it’s working. Let’s go over to *Trader Jacks*, sit up on the deck and have lunch. Nice breeze on the water and I’m ready for a bit of tucker.”

While they were drinking their beer and waiting for their food they observed two men standing below on the beach; the men, holding remote controls, were guiding a pair of authentically equipped miniature sailboats over the gentle waves of the small harbor. After a lively race done with boyish enthusiasm, the men brought their sturdy little boats to rest on the gravelly shore. They stood animatedly laughing, talking, and smoking.

“Happy as two children on holiday,” Katharine remarked.

Just as they were finishing their pesto fish sandwiches and beer, Frank McGregor drifted in with a telling swagger, catching sight of them and shambling toward their table.

Careless Child

“Well, *kia orana*. Isn’t that just dandy? He’s got you a nice pearl showpiece on your pretty little hand. Smart move, fella. Thank me, too, honey. Except I’d have bought you a great big emerald to match those green eyes. You want the real thing, you want emeralds, you come with me you beautiful little babe.”

“Rack off, mate,” Lan admonished. “Go haul on a ton of northbound marlin and leave us to our pleasures.”

“I’m ready for you, Kiwi.”

“Look me up when you’re not off yer face,” Lan suggested, standing up and throwing his money over the check.

They heard the bilious Frank McGregor hurling steadily more indistinguishable invective after them as they departed.

They walked quietly through the graveled lot, heading toward the bus stop. Katharine began to laugh. Very soon she had tears in her eyes, and Lan was laughing right along with her. Not far from *Trader Jacks* she had to sit on the weather-beaten steps of a large old gray building, which looked like a barn but turned out to be a T-shirt store. When the laughter finally subsided she began to look around.

“I like cheap T-shirts with local names on them...and pretty fishes. Do they have any with fishes?”

“Are ya drunk? How many beers did ya have? I wasn’t counting.”

“Not enough. Not nearly enough to fully appreciate Frank McGregor.”

“Let’s go inside. I’ll buy ya a stack of T-shirts, Green Eyes. Ya can cart them back to Enzed as a strange reminder of how not to get engaged.”

Careless Child

“Oh, Lan, I wouldn’t have changed a thing. This is one of those incredibly memorable days...precious to me...absolutely, unforgettably precious.”

Mary was leaning over Green Braes’ kitchen table, while cradling her brick-red and white porcelain tea cup in both hands and studying Katharine.

“Why I think ya do have a bit of a tan.”

“Oh dear,” Katharine said, drawing clenched fingers over her forehead with mock seriousness. “Apparently, Lan likes me white.”

“He likes you in your natural state, is the proper way of putting it. If ya were Maori, he wouldn’t want ya looking otherwise. And there I go again...putting my foot in it.”

“It doesn’t matter, Mary. Nothing could bring me down today. I must be in a manic phase, a silly, shallow one at that. It’s been a sort of roller coaster.”

“Why not be trying for a nice bit of evenness? But I suppose writers have a difficulty with that.”

“I would think the serious ones barely have any idea of it. As for myself, I probably shouldn’t be drinking this tea. I’m more nervous than usual.”

“Ya do look at sixes and sevens, Kate. It’s the sudden changes in your life doing this.”

“Somewhat, I suppose. But...oh, darn it, I’m dreaming those detestable dreams again, things going round and round in my head with no form of expression but fragmented distortion. I think I’ve actually been

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moaning or muttering...or whimpering, but Lan won't tell me what I've done if I happen to wake him."

Mary rubbed at her gray-blue eyes, beneath which were slight dark circles. Having felt the need to bring up her dreams, Katharine was experiencing a sharp twinge of guilt, certain she was vexing Mary with the ups and downs of her fluctuating nature.

She thought of the recent times she had felt Lan's hand on the back of her neck, stroking up through her hair when she knew she had been crying out in her sleep. Explosions, war, Middle Eastern horrors had translated into electric impulses shooting through her brain. Blood-spattered hands reaching out to her, calling her back to scenes she had not meant to escape in such a drastic manner. *Come back and share this with us. You should not have left us. Your work is not finished.* She was painfully convinced that her selfish happiness had precipitated a reverse outpouring in her dreams.

"Put me to work, Mary. Can't I help do something around here?"

"Everything that needs doing is being done. I think ya should work on your novel. With Lan gone it might help to fill your nights too."

"All right. I'm off to my laptop then. But please let me know if you need any help you think me capable of giving."

"I think ya capable of doing most anything, Katharine, but you need to engage your mind. Now off with ya," Mary said with a wave of her hand. "Plenty of time to chatter over our tea."

With visits to the winery, the restaurant, and the stud farm, Lan had been gone a week. He still considered Katharine not well enough to travel with him or assist him in any way with his work. Once again, Katharine was

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experiencing what it was like to sleep alone, to write and think and go about a daily routine without demanding interruptions or the captive emotional interplay of a paired life. Within this temporary solitary existence there was a gaping exclusion: the habitual devotion to a profession that had now become dormant. The usual assignments that came under her purview were placed on hold or turned down. Alone and without this engagement, she felt adrift and aimless, an unpleasantness that made her set to work on her novel with an anxiousness unfortunately counterproductive.

When her eyes grew tired she paced. She was restless, but she knew that her trust in Lan and her respect for his sound judgment must manifest itself by patience. It was incumbent upon her to agree with his diagnosis of incomplete healing.

In the evening after tea Mary called her into the study, then handed her the phone with a nod and a smile and left the room. It was her nightly call from Lan.

“Where are you, Lan?”

“*Tamaki-makau-rau* -- Auckland. I’ll be home tomorrow evening. All the legalities have been taken care of. I’ve arranged for a family ceremony at the meeting house near Nelson. Do ya mind, Kate?”

“I...no.”

“Ya do.”

She heard the regret in his voice.

“No...it’s just a selfish thing...wanting to be only with you and Mary...feeling like I’ll be on display.”

“They do love a bit of celebrating. Mea told me they’ve been hoping

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a long time for this.”

“I’m deeply ashamed of myself. Please forget I said anything at all.”

“Ya have a right. It’s your own wedding. What shall I do, Green Eyes?”

“Do exactly what you intended. I’ll smile at you and everyone else with no difficulty at all.”

“Ya are choice.”

“Please come home, Lan.”

“Home? I like it when ya say that. Are ya resting up for tomorrow night?”

“For you.”

“Don’t get me thinking on it too much. I’ve still got some work to do. Good night, *ipo*.”

Katharine went into the library where Mary was reading by a noisily snapping pine log fire.

“Lan just told me that we’ll be going up to Nelson for our wedding ceremony. It seems everyone is looking forward to it.”

Mary laid aside her book and studied Katharine a moment.

“But not so much yourself, I believe.”

Mary took up a piece of needlepoint that lay on the lamp table and held it up to the light, half finished pink roses on a sky-blue background. She turned it back and forth then looked over her glasses at Katharine.

“Kate, have you no one you’d like to be there at Nelson to share your wedding?”

“No. Oh, a few friends in Seattle, but it isn’t necessary. It’s a long

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way to come, and I don't see them that often.”

“It's a shame ya have no family at all, girl.”

“My grandmother would have loved to come, would have loved to see me marry Lan. I know she would have adored him. Our span of life is too short, isn't it? She simply couldn't last this long. How quickly it all...sorry...sorry...”

Katharine averted her face, running her fingers over folded arms held taut against the soft boiled wool robe Mary had given her. Why this flood of emotion over events long over? An excuse for lamenting the shortness of her own life? She felt annoyance at her fragility, disgust with herself; and to burden Mary so.

“Are you crying, Kate? I'm sorry. I did not mean to upset you. Come here to me.”

Katharine felt a needy childishness overtake her, a desire for release. Nestled inside soft sheep's wool slippers her feet shuffled slowly across the dark blue carpet. She knelt down and put her head on Mary's lap. Slipping back in time as her hair was gently stroked, she gave in to the coddling she so often craved. *How shamelessly adept I am at turning into a deprived child, and how easily I still cry from that damnable explosion.*

“You wriggled your way into my heart from the first day I met ya, Kate, with your eagerness to be accepted. Lan has told me you were a mistreated child and I'm heaps sorry for that. You have a family now. A rather large one, if you want. I'll be a part of that family to ya as long as I'm around. This is a time to be especially happy, my poor lamb. To me you're sometimes like a lost child, no matter how worldly and traveled ya are; it's a

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part of you that needs attention. I do see why Lan loves you so, ya clever, caring girl...so lovely. You'll always be a concern to me...especially when I scold ya. Both of us are quite fortunate to have each other and Lan. Do ya not think?"

"I do, Mary. Yes, I do. I've really nothing to complain about. It's just my sappy head. I did have my grandmother for many years. Thank you for making me feel so welcome, for all of your loving generosity...and, most wonderful of all, thank you for raising such an amazingly patient son."

So eager was Katharine for Lan she drove the Rover to the airstrip and waited there for his arrival, with the motor running and the heater on and the radio playing Frank Sinatra. After a while, Rex pulled up in a muddy snow-spattered black pickup, and she waved as he parked near the small office.

When the plane touched down and rolled to a stop, she opened the Rover's door and ran over the snow. Lan was putting on his leather jacket when she came up behind him. He turned around and laughed with surprise as she jumped into his arms.

"*Haere mai!*" she cried.

"*Tena koe*, Green Eyes. What a choice welcome. Maybe I should go away more often, yeah? Did ya drive over here?"

"Yes."

"Here, take my laptop and get back in the *waka*. It's too cold. I need to talk to Rex for just a minute."

Careless Child

“The *waka*?”

“Oh, sorry,” he said, with a mischievous grin. “I’ve been speaking a lot of Maori lately. A *waka*, you should know, is any form of transportation from an auto to a kayak...or whatever.”

Very soon Lan was in the driver’s seat. He reached for her and gave her a deep kiss, the smell of his leather jacket delicious to her as it creaked beneath her fingers. They started back along the snowy road in the shadowy blue dusk.

“Are you hungry? I’ve fixed you something to eat.”

“Ya have? I’ll eat whatever it is.”

“Well, it’s not going to kill you, brave one...probably won’t even make you sick,” she teased.

“God, I’ve missed ya, ya cheeky *wahine*.”

When they had eaten Katharine’s zesty macaroni casserole, made with sheep’s cheese in rich cream sauce and praised by Lan, who ate several helpings, he went into the library to talk with Mary, who had already taken her meal. They needed to talk about the weekly business and anything else that occurred to them, and Katharine decided to help Mattie in the kitchen. Despite her eagerness for Lan, she wanted them to have that time, to continue on with the routine normal to them. But they were a long time in their discussion tonight. She finished helping Mattie, who only assigned her minor tasks, while humoring her with wry comments and cheerful wisdom. Still restless and unable to engage herself in either writing or idleness, she decided to take a warm shower, perhaps calm the excitement of having Lan home at last.

Careless Child

Her head was back and water pouring over her hair when she felt Lan's arms come around her.

"Me too...good to wash off the travel."

He took a soapy rag and drew it slowly across her back, then his kiss at the nape of her neck made her tremble.

"I understand about the wedding," he said, surprising her with his desire to talk instead of make love. "Ya feel like it's just you...all the rest on the other side and none of your own to celebrate with ya. That must hurt, and ya don't want the others noticing no one there. I'm sorry, Kate. If there's anyone at all ya want at Nelson I'll send them airfare."

"No, Lan." She turned around and leaned against him. "It isn't necessary." Some of this must be Mary's intervention. "I want Penny to come. You'll invite Margaret and Ian, won't you?"

"Yeah, but mostly only family," he said between arousing kisses at her ear, "too many friends and associates for anything else...that'd turn it into a bloody piss-up."

She laid her head against his chest in the steamy spray, finally bringing herself to say, "You aren't going to like this."

"What?"

"I...I'm afraid I promised Cash Taylor he could do the wedding pictures. I thought at the time it was only a joke."

"What? Ya want that snarky lens-popper at our wedding?"

"He came to see me when I was in the hospital in Jerusalem."

"Ah...and I wasn't even there myself. I suppose he didn't fail to mention that."

Careless Child

“He didn’t understand about us. I never talked about it. He really is a good photographer. He’s very unobtrusive when he’s working. You might not even notice--”

“All right, invite the bloody wanker.”

“You won’t--”

“Ya think I’m an uncouth sod...and at my own wedding? I probably won’t notice anyone but yourself, Green Eyes. It’s all mainly for Mary and the others, isn’t it?”

“Is it?”

“No, it’s for us, too, of course. *Us*.

“Let’s get out of here. I’ve been wanting ya all week. We’ll talk more later.”

“The talking was your idea,” she said, watching him yank two large white towels off the linen shelf.

They towed dry, ending up sitting on the bed, with Lan lifting the edge of his large towel and flinging it over her dripping hair.

“Wet as the day I fished ya out of the Hauraki Gulf.” He laughed as he worked vigorously at her hair.

She pulled the towel out of his hands and dove against him, pushing him back on the bed and kissing his steamy warm mouth.

“Jesus,” he responded, laughing and holding her wrists.

She sat very still above him, her slender white form straddling his much darker skinned body. Carefully, with a shy flirtatious delight, she scrutinized all of what she had been missing. Falling slowly into his startling evening eyes, she now fully understood what her own eyes could do to him.

Careless Child

Hers was a languid warming stare, its power conveyed by simply looking with the obvious joy of seeing. She continued to gaze at him in a transfixed silence, until he pulled her down against him.

“Come here, ya strange beautiful thing. Ya know very well how to do that, don’t ya, Green Eyes? Right now I want in ya...we don’t fare very well apart. This is what happens.”

“Oh, Lan, please don’t make me scream. Don’t make me scream...Mary will--”

“Bloody hell with that. These walls have heard years of my mother’s voice.

“Come on, sweet woman, don’t tease me. Not tonight. It’s been an entire week...I’m starving. Ya want me?”

“I want you,” she whispered.

Her arms rose over her head in nervous exuberance. He clasped her wrists firmly above her and settled into her with a fierce, rhythmic attentiveness; always that attentiveness, with his hungry mouth everywhere, eliciting sensuous responses so exclusive she neither thought nor heard anything but his few soft words of pleasure, not even the sound of her own cries.

Pink light reflecting off the snow came through the high windows. Katharine lay watching Lan sleep. When he turned over his eyelids moved and she wondered if he would awaken, wanting him to sleep yet longing for another unspoken message imparted from his dark gaze. He threw his arm out, the hand just touching her shoulder. She thought of the historic

Careless Child

admixture of blood coursing through those supple curled fingers. She ran her palm lightly over his arm, slowly and with a guilty shiver of pleasure, having gone too far to escape his awakening.

“That’s what I first saw of ya,” his sleepy voice revealed.

“What?” Her fingers were still on his arm.

“The thing ya do...exploring with your hands.”

“Where did you really see me doing that?” she asked with disbelief.

“In the shopping center on Quay Street East. I’d just sailed back from...visiting a friend in Devonport. I was on the wharf, headed for coffee at the Paneton Bakery.”

“What was I doing?”

“A...fondling a red jersey from a sale bin outside a shop in the center. Ya held it up to yourself and ran your hand down the front of it. I leaned against the wall, bloody fascinated. Then ya looked up...your dreamy eyes went right through me.”

“But...you must have...you followed me from there all the way over to the gift store?”

“Yeah, I did...obviously I did, right?”

“Funny.”

“What?”

“I wasn’t even going in there...the center. It was because I had some time to kill. We might never have--”

“I don’t want to think about it. I might have found ya later at *The Loaded Hog*. I’d have picked up your jacket, looked at you and...Jesus, maybe I ought to thank that rude jerk.”

Careless Child

“Lan, will he--”

“No worries. I’m okay with it.

“Come here, my green Green Eyes. Let’s wake up slow...like this. Slow...nice...just...easy.”

“Oh...I love how you...”

“Katharine...Kate...yeah, clever hands. Then ya can sleep more.”

Katharine awoke the second time to find the sun whiter and higher above the snow. Lan was gone.

“He’s ridden off with the men to look for a wee flock of missing sheep,” Mary told her over tea and toast.

“How did that happen?”

“Oh, it happens on occasion. They were being moved to another pen further out. The herder stepped into an icy hole, lost his footing and off that little batch went, not to their cozy shelter but scattering into the snow. Sheep are not very bright animals, Kate...but still lovely things.”

“What about the huntaways?”

“They were walking backs in the big pens. The poor woolies are no match for those clever hounds. The dogs are with Lan now. Retrieval should not be difficult.

“I do think he needs to be out there sometimes, getting well into it. Lan grew up wild as the wildest föhn blowing over the plain, always going off without a thought of it, even in the sorriest weather. I worried that he’d be too much of a loner far more than that he’d meet with an accident. He is

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independent, self-sufficient...was sometimes quite a *hautulu*, as his father said it, a hell raiser. But we knew he'd keep decent values because we raised him with so much love. He looks out for others...has a good many mates, but there are still his sooky times...just like yourself...the wasteful sorrows of life.”

“What a pair we make,” Katharine said, running her finger around the edge of her cup and smiling dreamily. She was still enjoying memories of the early morning with Lan, sharp details permanently stored, but to ponder them too profoundly might lead to desire debilitating enough to leave her useless.

Mary looked inspired and turned her face to the windows, obviously with her own countless recollections, a vicarious pleasure that made Katharine happy, happy to encourage another's treasured memories with the prevailing mood of her own.

It was snowing. The fire in the lounge was burning high. Tea was finished for Mary -- Katharine did not eat -- and still Lan had not returned.

“You should have had your tea, Katharine. I learned to get over that anxious state long ago. Well, because of...Rane...I did fear Lan's sailing for a time, but Lan must do as he wishes. I've never been on his boat. Lan certainly knows the plain. He's not after doing anything to harm himself. Never think it.”

“I just thought I'd eat with him,” Katharine said, a bit embarrassed at her wariness. Again she had to admit that the explosion in Jerusalem had increased her fears a thousandfold.

In another quarter of an hour the unruly huntaways Sheb and Wooley

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bounded ahead of Lan into the lounge.

“Don’t shake yourselves in here,” Lan warned his dogs.

They snorted and stared up at him with wet-matted coats, appearing to understand a frequently given command, then threw themselves before the fire and stretched out.

Lan had shaken the snow from his oilskin hat and coat at the outside steps, then hung them in the sun room. His hands and face were sharply cold to Katharine’s touch.

“You’ve been gone all day without any food, Lan.”

“Bog-standard hunting sheep,” Lan answered with a grin. “I’m a bit knackered from the saddle and I could eat the shelves of a dairy clean.”

“Mary’s eaten. Here’s a measure of your Glenlivet with hot water. I’m going to feed you right now.”

“What about yourself?” he asked, swirling the Scotch in the steaming mug then taking a long swallow.

“I haven’t eaten.”

“Why not? It’s late.”

“I thought I’d wait.”

“Ya weren’t worried about me were ya?”

“Just...a little anxious.”

“I don’t want ya anxious. I’d have told ya not to worry but I didn’t want to wake ya. Ya don’t sleep very well, Kate...even with all the exercise ya get in bed.”

“I thought I was sleeping. I think I sleep too late.”

“That’s because ya don’t sleep well.”

Careless Child

Katharine laughed and said, “We’re talking about my sleep while you’re standing here starving. Why don’t you take a warm shower while I get the food on the table.”

Lan followed her into the kitchen and asked, “Where’s Mattie?”

“Mattie’s retired to her room. Mary’s reading in the library. I can do it. I’m neither incompetent nor an invalid.”

“Come here and kiss me properly first.”

“You’re very spoiled.”

“What? By whom?”

“Me.”

Katharine laid her hands against the buttons of his navy Swannie and leaned on her toes to straighten his tousled hair.

Lan lifted her up and backed her against a countertop, kissing her so thoroughly it seemed that she herself had been sipping his Scotch. He set her down, cocked his head at her with a wink and left the kitchen. She stood a transcendent moment, still with throbbing mouth, and then began to scramble eggs and fry sausages in the generous amount she deemed suitable for a hungry horseman fresh from a day on the cold plain.

It was a bleak desert she walked through, bodies piled together and strewn over the bloody dust, many of them in pieces: arms, legs, torsos, grimacing severed heads. Among this gruesome carnage, were familiar faces. She wept and howled. A moaning body raised up from the black earth. *Help us. Oh, look at us!*

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Katharine screamed and rose from the bed, flying across the room and into a chest, knocking jars, combs, and brushes to the floor, fumbling and falling, then struggling up, out the door and across the balcony headed blindly toward the stairs, all the while giving helpless cries of revulsion.

Lan caught her perilously near the top of the stairs and held her struggling body until she went limp, her arms half raised, her hands dangling, her head back in terror.

“What is it, Lan?” Mary stood outside the door of her room, wearing her long flannel nightgown, having rushed straight from her bed and now looking upon the scene with a startled frown.

“A nightmare, mother. Please go back to bed. I’ll take care of...this.”

He picked up Katharine and carried her back to their bed, wrapping her in her robe. She turned her head aside, mute and ashamed. Lan continued to hold her in silence. Finally she was able to speak in a low wondering voice. “I’m sorry...that was bad...sorry. Bodies everywhere. I couldn’t...sorry.”

“It isn’t your fault. Maybe some of it’s my fault.”

“What?” She raised her head in surprise.

“What’s this?” Lan said, lifting her wrist to examine a swelling blue bruise.

He led her into the bathroom and held her wrist beneath the cold water faucet.

“Leave it there a minute,” he advised, leaning back against the counter and looking at her. “Ya hurting anywhere else?”

“Not very much.”

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She dropped her head to one shoulder, holding her hand beneath the soothing coldness and staring at the tile floor, small white octagonals, simple and easy to look at, easier than looking up. She felt his eyes on her. When she lifted her head she saw that they were filled with pity.

“Please don’t. You can’t possibly think any of this is your fault.”

“Yeah, it is. Some of it.” He dried her wrist carefully, muttering, “*He ngakau e habaetia ana e te whakaaro papa.*”

“Where have you gone, Lan?”

“It’s where you’ve gone that matters now. You’re torn in two directions, Kate. Come back to bed and let me tell ya something I should have already said.”

A fear was rising in her as she lay back against the pillows and looked at him. Very quickly he discerned her apprehension. “Don’t be afraid, my *ipo*. Ya really are a handful. I’m not ever going to part from ya, Kate, not ever. But...I have to let ya go for a while...if ya want...if ya need to.”

“What?” She was beginning to tremble, almost dizzy.

“*Käti ake!* Stop it. *I love ya!* I love *you*.”

“I read your novel...as much as was written when I left. I loaded it into my laptop...read it at night when I had time. I wanted to find out what was coming out of this head.” He kissed her temple and stroked her hair. “Ya write very well.

“On the flight back I did a lot of thinking. Your story about a journalist is really all about Katharine Gordon, but it isn’t finished yet...neither the novel nor your quest to be who ya think ya must be. That’s how ya see yourself. That’s your identity. Without realizing it I took that

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identity away. I think it's needed back...for...a while longer. Over these years of diving into hell, your work has been your security, your self-esteem, the way ya deal with...the way ya get around the harm done to ya in the past."

Tears rolled down her face.

"I'll never leave you, Lan."

"Yeah, ya will. But you'll come back. That's what I need to have, that you'll always come back. At least ya need to know that you're still what ya worked so hard to become...that it's not gone...the commitment ya made. Ya can go on doing what fulfills ya...anyway, until ya see--"

"You fulfill me. *You.*"

"Don't be nice, I know ya love me. You've tried so hard to please me I feel some guilt along with all the pleasure of it. Maybe away from me you'll finally decide what ya couldn't decide here: if ya want this sort of life. I begged ya to come back because I love ya so. Now I have to let ya go for the same reason -- my God, that scares me! But I have to let ya go until ya suss how to love yourself."

"I'm not going anywhere. I want to stay here with you."

"Well, when ya finally decide to chase down another story just remember this: ya can't stay away too long or get yourself in harm's way...unless ya want to kill me in the doing."

Katharine placed her head against his chest, at once inhaling a faint admixture of scents: Scotch, wood smoke, spicy herbal shower soap, but these mingled with a fresh outdoor scent hinting of leather and hay and shearling, of the river and the plain and musky-sweet growing things, scents that never seemed to leave him. It was Green Braes in his skin, the male

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scent of him she found so arousing. All of this was in his skin. She placed her arms tight around him.

“Do I understand ya well enough now?”

“I think I love you more at this moment than I ever, ever thought possible.”

“Ah, then we’re of the same mind. Now all ya have to do is prove it, *tau aroha*...by sleeping peacefully with me.”

V

So it was that Katharine went away from Lan to finish the work she strongly considered unfinished. The wedding ceremony was postponed until a future unnamed date when Katharine adjudged herself fully in accord with all those tenets for which it stood. Happiest in Lan’s company, she could barely comprehend how she was to go away. She knew only that until she completed that unfinished portion of her work, so intertwined with her presently disengaged self, she could never be as whole and satisfied as she needed to be for them both. In leaving this time, the comfort was in knowing that Lan had promised to be there for her, just as she would have no other but Lachlan Manutaane.

It was very difficult trying to make Mary understand -- Mary was thinking mainly of Lan’s loss. “We’ve gotten ourselves into this situation where we know we need to have each other, and we have to resolve it in our own way...as best we can,” she tried to explain to Mary. It pained her that

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she could not even promise to marry Lan, not until she understood the hazy mystery of her nomadic striving, until she connected the vexing disjointed parts of herself and felt complete while alone and standing still. “I love him so and I can’t burden him with this. He deserves so much better,” she explained to a disgruntled and grieving Mary, who only waved her hand in disappointment, perhaps even disgust. “You’ve had years to figure out who you are,” was Mary’s final comment, and that appraisal did ring indelibly in Katharine’s head. At the moment she knew she was undeniably a journalist, but could not frighten Mary with that clear understanding. It involved the unfinished work in Israel and Palestine, along with discoveries there that very naturally made her ponder her own condition.

In those lonely nights of writing more Khan Yunis stories, of holing up again and again in barricaded homes in the middle of ongoing war, she came to consider what held families together, how it worked with strife all around so much worse than anything beyond the violent house of her childhood? In those formative years before her redeeming grandmother, she had no real family, no mother and father struggling together to make a home, and willing to do so even in the face of destruction and early death.

Could she possibly have played some part in driving her parents away from each other? She did understand this pitiful notion to be a frequent conviction of bereft children. The idea seemed so unfounded, and yet the lingering guilt required a reasonable explanation before it could be expelled.

Her stories continued to win recognition and praise, most gratifying praise from Lan. Her stature in the business was never more unassailable, but this mattered little to her. What she sought in her work, and from the

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endeavors of like-minded proponents, was some curative effect, a moral recognition that would help bring to an end the carnage. The killing went on. The hatred and vengeance went on. Her ultimate conclusion was that it would never stop until both sides suddenly and firmly ended it with sincere mutual tolerance and respect, bona-fide acts implementing human rights, sacrificing what was really only the unformed part of themselves -- how morally undeveloped many humans still were. Consideration of others was not innate; it had to be learned. Justice had to be taught. Perhaps her small contribution, her careful portrayal of individual lives, their miseries and desperate strivings, had made hostile factions see mankind's similarities not merely its differences. Perhaps. Perhaps not.

One evening in a state of exhaustion, back in her hotel room and just having managed to get there before the roads once again closed, she sat focused on nothing, her unseeing eyes cast out toward the Old City, her tired self unable even to rise from her chair for a glass of water. She was thinking of Mary, of their last conversation.

"The answer isn't out there, it's in yourself. You can't give up Lan so easily and be my girl, Katharine."

"You said that to me once in a dream, Mary. Please know that I can't ever give up Lan. It isn't easy to go...incredibly difficult. I won't give you up either. I claim you as my family. You *are* my family...please understand...try to forgive."

Forgiveness, she thought, falling into a half wakeful, half dreamy, transfixed state. If only she could forgive herself. But for what? Had she fallen asleep in her chair? Yes, it must be a dream but, no, it did not feel like

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one. There were two dark figures sitting across the room, well apart from each other: her mother and father. They sat expressionless, straight and rigid as stone, looking at her in mute recognition, offering nothing. After her shock came rage, seething, exploding, colliding with the tender yearning she had always known, anger coming from a volatile place so deeply repressed it took a while to speak.

“It was a good thing you didn’t take me with you, mother, or I’d be dead too. I wanted to have you, know you, wanted you all these years. I remember a few good things, the loveliest thing: picking lady slippers in the woods meadow, delicate little nodding flowers. You held them up to the sun, its light coming through their fragile pink shapes, held them up and laughed. I can hear your joyful laughter, carefree as a child’s. I remember you as beautiful. I have your green eyes, even more distilled, so Gran always said. Mother, *my mother*. I have little of you to keep. I might have had far worse memories, of course. You were good to me in our short time together...you must have loved me. I think you intended to come back and get me.”

“But father...what is your excuse? Why didn’t you know what you had? I was a good girl. Couldn’t you see that? I tried so hard to please you. We could have comforted each other. Why did you have to hurt me? You hurt me...really *hurt* me. You made me believe there was something wrong with me. There was nothing wrong with me. It was you. *You!* Why did you do that? I was good...hopeful...innocent. You were bitter and cruel, sick with anger. But you hurt me badly. I withstood your threatening hands, so suddenly cruel, but what you did to my mind... You taught me to hate

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myself, to fear that others would find out something terrible about me, something I could never even define. I wanted to punish you. I wanted to show you how good I could be, but I never believed in myself. I never believed! You hurt me...almost ruined me. *You hurt me!*"

Katharine awoke with a start, the garbled cries of rage still echoing in her head. Her phone was ringing. She answered, letting her editor ramble on while she considered the dream and its powerful effect, as though a profound stirring had swept her mind clean of all uncertainty and indecision. She had the right to her own family. She had the right to love and be loved. She had the right...she had made it so. *She* had made it so.

"With this work," her editor was saying, "you've damn near nailed a solid future...while your competitors are busy wangling for advantage. You sure as hell know how to turn the right stones, Kate, turn them over and expose the rotten mess beneath."

"Probably I care too much...I'm really tired, Morris."

"What you need is a change of scene, Kate. We'd like some informative pieces on global trade...the effects of free trade on ecologically sensitive areas of the planet...natural resources. That might even you out. I know you'd thoroughly--"

"I'm going home," she heard herself interrupt. *Home*. It was where Lan was. In New Zealand it would be late spring.

"I'm sorry you're leaving, Katharine, and I'm sorry you missed my wedding. But at least you got to know a little of Jacob while you were here,"

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Judith said. She was resting back comfortably in a thickly padded white floral chair, watching Katharine pack.

“Yes. You once implied that he was a mama’s boy. He isn’t at all. You made all of those silly jokes...I really didn’t think you were going to marry him.”

“I know, I know...more of my black Jewish humor.

“*Oy vey*. Life is getting difficult, Katharine. One can hardly find anything to joke about anymore. It is getting too dangerous to live in Jerusalem. Frightened professional people, educated people are departing. Fanaticism reigns in religion and secular Jews are in a minority. The heartbeat of this beautiful old place is slowing -- my home. With only extreme orthodoxy in the ascendant, with only Yeshiva students and the destitute, with only bombings and shootings, perhaps the Jerusalem we have known will soon vanish.”

“Oh, Judith, will you really leave too?”

“Jacob and I may have to go. What good is this place if we can no longer move through it, partake of it?”

“You’re depressing me. Where will you go?”

“Perhaps Tel Aviv, although it too has its *pign’a* -- you know all about the terrorist problems.”

“You’ve become very dear to me, Judith, my friend. I’ll miss you terribly. I don’t think I really knew you well enough in college to fully appreciate your droll self.”

“There was less to know.”

“Oh come on, Judith, I always thought you were a really valuable

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person...so dedicated...maybe a little too serious.”

“You mean like yourself?”

“All right, the two of us.”

Katharine studied her suitcase as she ran her fingers through strands of hair falling over her eyes. She yanked a poorly folded blouse back out and refolded it.

“You cannot know how relieved I was to see you so well restored. I was not certain about your eyes. And to think that you would come back to these dangers...take up right where you left off. I really do not understand how you could have left New Zealand...after agreeing to marry someone you really love.”

Katharine stopped her meticulous packing and stood still for a minute, gazing off.

“I know I’m difficult, Judith. Few would put up with me for very long. It was Lan who first suggested that maybe I needed to finish my work here...much more than my work! He understood so well...more readily than I understood myself. That’s sort of wonderful, isn’t it? I’ve never known anyone like him...clever strategy too...very clever. He knew I’d come back the first time I ran off. *Ya left your tramping boots in my Auckland house*, he teased me in his irresistible accent.”

“I’d like to meet this astonishing Kiwi. Ah, New Zealand, that mysterious place I’ll probably never see.”

Katharine looked up, focusing thoughtfully on Judith. “I’ve just had an idea...would you?...you wouldn’t..”

“What?” Judith demanded, struggling out of the massive overstuffed

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chair and tugging impatiently at her beige cardigan.

“Would you come to my wedding? Please? Oh, could you?”

“Me? It’s a long way and Jacob--”

“Jacob too. Please.”

“Hmm. We never did have anything resembling a honeymoon.

Maybe we could--”

“Yes. Oh, yes. What a delight to have you there, Judith.”

“Well, if you really think...hmm, I’ll certainly have a very enthusiastic talk with Jacob about it. I wonder if I could get him to--”

“What do you mean? You’re a psychologist, make good use of it and get him to come.”

“We’ll see. All right, we’ll see.”

“Maybe he’ll be more agreeable when you tell him that a generous Lachlan Manutaane will provide you both with airfare.”

“God, yes. Can he afford to do that?”

“He offered to fly anyone to our wedding I wanted and I declined...but now I’ve changed my mind. I want you there.”

An excited Judith threw her arm over Katharine’s shoulder. “I think you’re likely to get your wish...I’ll write you a more conclusive answer...yes, you surprising female mensch.”

The plane arrived very early in the morning, early enough for Katharine to consider it still night. Wanting to surprise Lan, she had not told him she was coming. She had no idea whether he would be in Auckland, Green Braes, or somewhere else, and decided she would call Margaret at a

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reasonable hour and find out. Meanwhile, she checked into a hotel near the airport and slept. She wanted to be fully rested before she had herself driven into town, either to the Herne Bay house or to Margaret's.

When Katharine awoke she discovered it was late afternoon, jet lag having thoroughly caught up with her. She phoned Margaret while having her coffee.

"Come straight here," Margaret said with an excited, very welcoming voice. "I'll tell ya everything when ya get here. We're having a little gathering of friends tonight, so put yourself in a sociable mood. See ya soon, my friend."

"But wait, Margaret, where is--"

The phone had gone dead. Unusual behavior for Margaret.

Katharine got up with a sigh and went to look in one of her suitcases. She had been too tired to hang up anything. There was a rather exotic green evening dress somewhere in the layers. She bought it in Jerusalem to wear to an embassy party, a slim silk brocade with a Mandarin collar and short sleeves. Searching through the rumpled pile she pulled it out and held it up while her face contorted in a wide sleepy yawn. The dress had a few soft wrinkles. She decided to hang it in the bathroom and let it straighten out while she was showering. Looking into the mirror, with a more critical eye, she focused on her hair. When was the last time she had paid very close attention to it? It appeared to need a trim. *Think I'll go to the beauty salon...feels good to be fussed over...have a couple of inches cut...let them blow dry a gentle curve just above the shoulders.*

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When the taxi pulled up to the Smith's house the windows were brightly illuminated. There were a number of cars parked up and down the hill-hugging curved street.

The driver carried her luggage to the door. Ian whisked it inside while she paid her fare.

Margaret clasped her firmly, quickly leading her into the kitchen where she handed Katharine a flute of champagne.

"Lan is here, Katharine." Margaret pressed her hands together against the tiny pearls covering the front of her white Angora sweater. "He's been in town all week, opening another flash restaurant, so of course we planned a celebration. I can't believe your timing. I just can't believe it. I haven't said a word to him. I feel heaps conspiratorial...absolutely bursting with excitement. This is so choice."

"Good heavens, Margaret, I'm so hyped on all this drama you've set up I'm heading for a nervous collapse."

"You look beautiful...a little thinner but really gorgeous. I'm glad you got some rest. What a flash dress...and with your Rarotanga black pearl, too," Margaret soothed.

"Are there a lot of people out there?"

"Only about twenty."

"Well...I guess I'll just go in then."

"Yeah, walk right in. He's in the lounge talking with the others...the new manager is there."

"All right. Here goes."

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Katharine swallowed, smoothed her hands slowly down her dress front and preceded Margaret into the big noisy lounge.

She immediately saw Lan's dark head bent a little above the others in a cluster of attentively leaning bodies. Making her way across the room she stood slightly behind and beside Lan -- so handsome in his casual sports jacket and slacks. She folded her arms across her midriff, rather holding in a rising excitement while forcing herself to concentrate on his remarks.

"Yeah, we are featuring our wines, but of course we're giving the clientele a chance to choose what they want from the usual varied list of high end stock. That's just good business."

Across from Lan a very focused, dark-suited man of Maori descent, perhaps the new restaurant manager, smiled at her, probably because she had just approached the group. Noticing the exchange, Lan offered a quick glance at the green dress to his right then started to say something more. There was a slight hesitation. He turned his head again, looking directly at her. His jet eyes blinked as his searching expression registered disbelief followed by astonishment.

Her carefully restrained face was apologetic as her hand inadvertently moved over the bodice of her emerald dress, for an instant nervously touching the glowing black pearl.

"Hello," Katharine said, smiling shyly, "Please go on...I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Oh ya didn't?...ya didn't mean to interrupt!" Lan exclaimed with an explosion of laughter.

He continued to look at her, as if to verify her actual existence, then

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took her hand firmly in his. His touch after so long made her body tremble, perhaps noticeably. Her eyes went from their clasped hands to his rapidly altered face. He stared down at her, his eyes flashing a reflected glint of her green dress. She smiled at this, and at having him within the grasp of her hand, no longer out of reach, once so far away the thought of the distance between them had become unbearable.

Lan's grinning single focus drew the captivated attention of all those present. Everyone clapped and whistled. Margaret stood at the back of the room, smiling in complicity with her hands pressed together, fingertips beneath her chin.

"Excuse me," Lan apologized to the fascinated gathering. He hurried her out of the room and down the hall into a small study.

"Jesus, thought I was delusional, ya beautiful thing."

"I'm sorry, Lan. I didn't know all of this was going--"

The sudden force of his exuberance left her pressed down upon a leather sofa until she was almost in a reclining position. He knelt beside her, his fingers threaded through her hair and cradling her head. Then the long awaited kiss.

"Perfect." She heard the word made soft against her ear. "Can't believe it. I was wishing for ya and here ya are...the missing, most important part. Green Eyes, you've made this night perfect."

It was late morning and they were lying in bed in the Herne Bay house, studying each other while quietly holding hands. She began to sense

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that Lan, all too familiar with past experiences, expected some disturbing inclination to separate them.

He got up, put on his robe and went into the bathroom. In a while he returned and stood looking at her. She felt his harsh transition of mood but remained imperturbable. Simply by the joy of being where she was and knowing what she knew her patience with his sudden displeasure remained impervious. Her hand obviously smoothed over the turned edge of the top sheet, while Lan looked on, perhaps imagining himself engaged in a contest of intent. She said nothing to assuage his stormy countenance, only showing obvious satisfaction with the previous night.

“Is this a break in your schedule or...or what, Kate? I’m sorry but I can’t...I know what I’ve told ya but I can’t stand the possibility of what comes next. Katharine, are ya listening? You’ve stayed away too long.”

“No, just long enough. You knew I had to do that.”

“I knew I had to let you go. I knew that sooner or later you’d blame me if I ruined your career -- *that*, I could not stand either. I thought you’d eventually figure it out...but now--”

“You were right to let me go...I did nearly *figure it out*.”

“How much time does it take to feel good about your own existence? I bloody hell can’t do this.”

Katharine sat up and pulled her silk robe from the foot of the bed. She saw that her smiling light-heartedness would only continue to infuriate him, and directed her gaze to the misty waters beyond the tall windows.

“How can ya smile like that?”

“Hand me those pills on the dresser, would you please?”

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“Ya don’t even...what, these? Birth-control pills.”

He tossed them to her and rubbed his hand over his chin, sliding his fingers through his tousled hair with impatience.

She plucked them from the covers and walked across the room, making certain that his eyes followed her as she threw them into the waste basket.

He stared at her in speechless surprise.

She removed her robe and returned to the bed, leaning back against the pillows and clasping her arms, just managing to contain amusement, the levity finally surfacing in an apt appeal for dispensation. “You can reel in your line, I’m caught.”

“Did I miss something? When did this happen?”

“It happened...just as you intended. You’re so very clever, Lan...and justly impatient. Pretty soon I’ll tell you about a dream I had. My darling sheepman, do *you* think I should get pregnant? I’ve thought and thought of this, of you, of--”

“*You’ve* thought and thought?” He yanked off his robe and settled at her side.

“Are ya sure about this, Katharine? It wasn’t my going round the bend just now?”

“No, I know what I want...but only if *you* want it. Once you me told you thought it was a good idea...that I would--”

“A small version of us,” he teased in a completely altered voice. “As long as ya keep some time for me.” He clasped her shoulders and playfully grappled with her laughing, dodging body. The laughter died, his voice thick

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with arousal. “My strange, unpredictable *nahine*...with me at last. Jesus, ya really are home. Ya want a sprog in your sweet little belly? I’ll give ya that...and plenty of everything else, Green Eyes.”

In the evening Lan took her to the new restaurant, a handsomely appointed bistro-style establishment overlooking the water and not far from the Herne Bay house.

As they walked up to the entrance she was astonished to read the name scripted in gold across the dark wine awning: *Fleur des Champs*.

He grinned and said, “Your gran was right...ya grew for a while without much cultivation and it made ya into a wildflower.”

“But how did you ever, ever remember that? I only mentioned it briefly that day on Rangitoto.”

“I remember the day, Katharine...every small detail of it.”

The heartily ingratiating manager swung open the brass-edged glass door and stepped aside with clasped hands and a bow.

Katharine wore black velvet slacks, her pearl pendant nestled in the bosom of a pale green, low-necked Angora sweater, which made the slightly darker green of her eyes even more expansive. Lan was dressed casually, wearing a navy sports jacket. His smiling eyes followed her, enjoying her reactions as she assessed the room with a roving gaze of discernment.

When they were seated in a private booth at a white-clothed candlelit table near a corner window, and Lan had ordered drinks and told the manager not to fuss over them, he sat back and said, “My other place is big

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and noisy. This is smaller, much more intimate...more class. How does it look?”

“I like the décor: burgundy and black, that rich mahogany-grained paneling...the etched glass is a nice touch...all the necessary fittings polished and gleaming...uncluttered and elegant...a sort of marvelous extension of *Waiata Reka*. Rather a sophisticated adventure...but warm and friendly...like you.”

“Is the wine good?”

She held her goblet of wine up to the candlelight to enjoy its ruby glow. “Very good. I prefer your wine. I’m quite loyal.”

“I know that.”

His appreciative dark eyes burned into her heart. She had an overwhelming desire to kiss his smoothly relaxed wry mouth. Her eyes told him this. He merely grinned and said, “Careful, the night is just a chit...like your cheeky self.”

He lifted her hand and studied the diamond-encircled black pearl.

“Do ya want another ring?”

“Another...absolutely not. Why would I want another ring? I love this ring.”

“I mean one that would go with a wedding ring?”

“This would be...a lovely mate for a wedding ring. Are we going to do that? Go up to Nelson and...do that?”

“Yeah, one way or another we’re doing it. However ya want it, Kate. If we’re making more of us we’re definitely going to do something.”

“I was really thinking more of...the actual ceremony.”

Careless Child

“I know what ya meant. I nearly always know what ya mean, Green Eyes.”

“I’d like to have it the way you want it, Lan. I love pleasing you...however I can.”

“And I’m thinking the same. That’s why I’m asking.”

She looked at him and was suddenly shy, wondering how she could tell him what she had said to Judith in Israel.

“Lan, I...”

“What?” He lifted her hand to his mouth. “I don’t want ya hesitating anymore...about anything.”

“Well...I’m afraid I told Judith, my friend in Jerusalem, that you’d...no, I think I should do it myself.”

“I’ll give ya an account at the bank and ya can take care of it yourself. A mate too?”

“Yes, newly married. They’d love to see New Zealand.”

“Good. *Aotearoa* never disappoints the *manuwhiri*.”

“But, the more I think of it, I should be the one to pay their airfare.”

His face registered surprise. “Ya are paying it. What’s mine is yours, *wahine*. You’re a part of everything I have...but I might make ya earn your keep, Katie Green Eyes.” He grinned and offered a provocative wink.

“Earn my... Oh...is this an interview? Just tell me what you expect of me.”

“Bloody little if you’re growing a sprog. For a time just look at me and smile and tell me when I’m veering off course. Later, businesswise, ya can do as much or as little as ya want, Kate. There’ll certainly be plenty of

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opportunity...with your good head.”

“I like to help others.”

“Good on ya. A heap of opportunity for that too. Along those lines, I try to employ as many as I can.”

Their food arrived. Her bluenose bass basted in lemon grass butter was delicious, very fresh and artfully simple.

“My grateful compliments to the chef. How is the venison?”

“Just the way I like it. Ya can compliment Chef Manny yourself before we leave. I found the clever bloke languishing in a resort on Rarotonga...unappreciated. He’ll have more incentive to satisfy customers here. Ya didn’t meet him at the party; he was already attracting patrons at *Fleur des Champs*.”

She looked up from her plate, wrinkling her nose and teasing him with her eyes. “Canterbury cowboy, you do amaze me.”

“Ya say the wackiest things...but I’m okay with most of your sass. Ya know I love the way ya wrinkle your nose, Katharine Gordon. Are ya having my name?”

“Katharine Gordon Manutaane. Yes. I like your name.”

“Here’s to the two of us,” he toasted, touching his glass to hers.

“To Lachlan and Katharine Manutaane,” she happily responded, caressing him with very suggestive eyes.

“Jesus, take it easy, we haven’t even tried the dessert.”

She smiled and lifted his hand, rubbing it across her cheek. “Just a little coffee. Let’s have dessert at home.”

He arched an appraising dark eyebrow, embellishing her suggestion

Careless Child

with a soft ruffle of laughter. “Fewer calories and a lot more satisfaction, yeah?”

They were walking hand in hand on the golden sands of Kaiteriteri Beach, not far from their camp above a hidden beach cove in the Nelson region. For three days they had been tramping and kayaking Abel Tasman National Park, gliding over the clear green shore waters near the edges of creamy-gold sand, slipping into jewel-like azure coves nestled in black lava, and, high above, tramping along rugged winding trails with spectacular vistas and exotic birdcalls. Once they heard wings beating as softly as a faraway drum, and looked up at a large white-breasted, green-headed bird resting high on the limb of a rimu.

“What is that?” Katharine asked in a hushed voice.

“*Kereru*, a wood pigeon, the only species that belongs here. Beautiful, yeah? Like your eyes at night, iridescent green.”

“What a lovely thing. Sort of a loner like you.”

“They do flock together. I’ve gone off alone in the outback since I was a little anklebiter, camping out in the wilds of our station and every other bloody place in Enzed. Glad you’re enjoying this, Kate.”

Katharine watched a sloop unfurl its sails against a cerulean sky as it rode the blue-green water of the bay.

“Yes, sooner or later I always have to bond with nature somewhere. Two nature-loving loners,” she decided with soft laughter. “The sand beneath these happy toes is truly golden.” She spread her arms. “Are these places *real*? Why didn’t you tell me?”

Careless Child

“I did tell ya...remember? I said ya hadn’t seen anything yet but ya would...when I first kissed ya at Margie’s.”

She stepped back and stared at Lan in his bush shirt and shorts and bare feet. The skin of his sinewy, sun-varnished body shone with the warm color of richly creamed coffee.

“You were so sure of yourself.”

“I knew what I wanted.”

“And that was the end of the matter.”

“No...the beginning of what’s between us, Green Eyes. *You* must have known that day in the store...didn’t ya?”

“I guess the very first time I looked at you. I’d thought of only one for so long. Very soon I was thinking of two.”

“And one choice day you’ll be thinking of three. Are ya still good with that?”

“No worries, as you like to say. How about yourself, Lachlan Manutaane? How do you wish to be addressed if you find yourself in the role of papa?”

“Tease all ya want, ya little imp, but I bloody well like the idea of my offspring growing here.” He slid his hand beneath her waist. “Tell me as soon as it happens. Preferably some time after the ceremony, so ya won’t be chundering breakfast on the day we marry.”

In a desultory manner they were approaching a golden-floored cove angled back into high black rocks. Watching the water swirl up and spill over the bubbling sand, she cried out, “Oh I love it, *love* it here! This entire country is--”

Careless Child

“Don’t say paradise. Granted our nature is wonderful to behold and this looks like paradise to the *manuwhiri*, but New Zealand has its problems: not the greatest economy; not always the highest standard of living, with social programs slipping away and redundant workers -- that means *laid off*, Yank; family problems; alcoholism among the unwaged; death on the motorway. Dodgy characters like everywhere else, although on a smaller scale. It’s one of the reasons I take pleasure in at least putting a few people to work.”

“Good on you, Mr. Manutaane, but you see I’ve been in such far worse off places that to me this looks like--”

“Don’t say paradise,” Lan exhorted again, grabbing her up and striding into the water. “I’m not living in a dream. It doesn’t work that way. If ya say paradise I’ll drop ya flat in and turn your clothes into swimming togs.”

“But why wouldn’t you love to hear me call this beautiful land of penguins and palm trees paradise?” she asked, and found herself flung into the water, screaming with the shock of it.

“Oh! I didn’t think you would. You mean thing!” she cried out, struggling up drenched and with streaming wet hair.

“It’s only because I like taking wet clothes off ya,” he said, laughing and lifting her dripping hair away from her eyes.

With very few words they had put on their boots and hiked thoughtfully back to their camp. Katharine was kneeling on her sleeping bag, having just removed her squishy boots and now searching through her backpack for a comb.

Careless Child

“Look at ya, ya drowned little *keiore*. Your hair’s a tangled mess.”

“Your fault. You, my trusted companion, *you* threw me into the water.”

“Not too serious. Here, let me--”

“Get away,” she said slapping at his hand.

“Let me, Kate...I’ll help ya get your clothes off.”

“No.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t you touch me!” she suddenly cried.

Cocking his head, his questioning jet eyes narrowed in hurt surprise.

“You’re not thinking...that it was like being tossed off a bloody boat, for Christ’s sake? I was teasing ya.”

She lifted her head and looked into his eyes.

“What on earth am I doing? I’m sorry, Lan...*sorry*.”

“No, I’m the sorry one. Ya could have laughed.”

“It was some horrible reflex. Now you’ll never--”

“Yeah, I will. I’ll go right on teasing ya and you’ll bloody well have to bear up, my crazy little water rat.”

He reached for her, unbuttoning her shirt, peeling away her shorts and kissing her shivering breasts.

She glanced around her with habitually modest caution. They were in a private sheltered area beneath a grove of ponga ferns, big silver tree ferns nearly ten meters high, hovering over them like giant umbrellas. She lay back a little nervously, staring at chinks of bluest sky through the spiraling lacey dark fronds.

Careless Child

“*They-ab’s nay one be-ab* but us,” he assured her. She smiled at his emphatic New Zealand accent.

Hastily undressing, he grasped her shoulder and rolled her supine body over, speaking in the low voice she had come to recognize as highly aroused.

“On your tummy. We’ll need this.”

He spread a large doubled towel over their zipped open and layered-together sleeping bags. She gave him a questioning look, accompanied by rising diffidence, watching his seriously focused countenance break into a soft grin.

“Ya aren’t used to G-spot orgasm, my love. That first night I changed the sheets before I joined ya in the shower.”

Unclear details of their startling beginning made her body flush at his allusion to the incredible Gräfenberg spot. When deftly stimulated, a woman was said to reach wild paroxysms of pleasure, a fountain of joy. What happened to her that first night was all of an incredibly indistinct piece. She had been blind-sided with arousal, disoriented and hardly able to make fine distinctions. The mystifying sexual act she now considered had been infrequently discussed among her friends with doubtful conjecture. Had it really happened to her?

He smiled at her with teasing eyes and said, “Going to get us both wet again.”

She rested her chin on her folded arms and asked, “How can you be so sure?”

“Going bush with *you* is special. I’ll see to it.”

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He raised her up and straightened the towels beneath the joining of her thigh and abdomen, then stretched out above her, making himself weightless. She felt a shivering thrill as his firm warmth came against her coolly exposed backside.

“Choice position...make ya feel very, very good. Turn your head more so I can see your eyes...yeah, *tau aroba*.”

Lifting her hair from her eyes he lowered his head to the side and kissed her mouth as he slid into her. She moaned softly and tried to raise herself enough to keep her head turned into his kiss. They had entered a feverish rhythm of steadily intensifying pleasure, locking them in ecstatic heat. As she yielded to his coaxing mouth, his long balanced form eased down upon her in a purposefully arranged cadence. Turning her head back to focus on his dampened face, she found his limpid eyes swimming with her. “Okay?” he softly intoned. The weightless, rhythmic, deep penetration had so enveloped her senses she was incapable of anything but a murmur of dazed exhilaration. Still, her body strove to give back.

“*You* are so good, Green Eyes.”

“And...you,” her impassioned voice managed as she responded to his demanding mouth. Now she was immersed in his repeated caresses, the climbing pulse of love, earlier inhibitions completely displaced by a thoroughly aroused state. Rapture shook her body and blurred her mind. The silence of nearing climax was broken by an urgent desire to enforce the motive of their lovemaking: “I...love...you.” Above all she had needed to impart that certainty, uttered on raggedly expended breath.

He pressed his hand against her groin and changed the angle of his

Careless Child

position very subtly with almost clinical precision.

“Green Eyes...look at me now,” he prompted, his nimble body stroking against her as his mouth moved over the perspiring nape of her neck and his head lowered to watch her come before she even realized she had arrived. Her eyes opened wide. Her trembling hand held against her moist cheek went rigid. Wild cries of release escaped her gasping mouth as her senses rose on waves emanating from a hot zone deep inside, gushing waves of nearly unbearable ecstasy, a deliriously exultant immolation. His low groan of satisfaction slowly registered in her pulsing vertiginous head. Turning to her side and gasping in amazement, she rubbed the driest edge of the soaked towel against herself and flung it aside then rolled over onto her back. Her fingers were clenched in his, her insides still throbbing as she tried to focus on whirling fern fronds.

She lay beside him, their hands remaining locked, breathing deeply, slowly reclaiming enough of her reason to consider his earlier assertion. He had been accurate -- oh, yes, she had felt, did feel, *very, very good!* He had known unerringly how to reach that excruciatingly sensuous place, an experience, until him, she had neither known nor believed. Bewilderingly sated, she held back the urge to cry, then realized her cheeks were already damp.

He turned his skyward-gazing eyes upon her. “Too much,” he said softly, running his thumb across her wet cheek.

“Yes...too much...too much Lachlan Manutaane.”

“Never enough Katharine,” he answered with a low chortle of pleasure.

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She curled against him with a long sigh and drifted into sleep.

In the Rover, driving back to Lan's cozy little cottage, which she had only recently discovered he had purchased in Nelson, Katharine was contemplative, staring out the window and pondering a certain neglected sticking place.

"I like to drive and think, too, but ya haven't said a word in nearly half an hour," Lan remarked.

"Hmm, guess it's another one of those areas that I dread venturing into...but I've become a part of your family, Lan, and there's the problem of...of--"

"Rani."

"How do you do that? You always manage to do that."

"Not too difficult. It's bloody near the only problem around...and it isn't really a deal."

"Oh? She despises me."

"She does not. She grudgingly admires ya. I had several rather long talks with Rani while ya were away. She's through messing about and bludging on the family...has a job working for a pol in Wellington. I managed that, but it'll be up to her to keep it. She's not stupid just spoiled and immature. Mary admits her hand in that, but it isn't all my mother's fault. I know I've been over-tolerant because of...what I told ya."

"And that wasn't all your fault...hardly any of it, in fact. If I were dead drunk and suffering with loss and a beautiful hunk crawled into my

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bed--”

“I don’t care for your flattering analogy, Green Eyes; drunk or sober I’m the only one crawling into your bed.”

“I was trying to make a point.”

“Ya made it. Anyway, I think I’ve straightened the matter out sufficiently. Rani is beginning to take responsibility for her daughter.”

“Well, isn’t that charitable?”

“Kate?”

“To produce a child, lie about its father and then cast it aside...it’s really too much.”

“Speaking of charitable--”

“All right. I just don’t like what she did to you. I think I’ve tried to be decent to her.”

“Ya have and she knows it.”

“Am I going to have to compete with her in...in petty little ongoing dramas, Lan?...because--”

“Bloody hell. Competition? That’s a laugh. No one will ever get near ya. I think of Rani as my little sister...I always have, always will...and that was the grief of the matter for me. She treated ya badly. I laid into her over that until she was crying.”

“On your shoulder?”

“Katharine, please, will ya--”

“Sorry, sorry. I’ll gladly extend the olive branch whenever she’s capable of understanding what that means.”

“Is that a catty--”

Careless Child

“No. I’m dead serious. I want peace with Rani. Maybe someday we’ll even be friends.”

“Maybe sooner than ya think, ya clever fox. Who could resist ya? You’ll have her eating from your hand. Ya handle others very well...especially the troubled ones.”

“And so do you, you silver-tongued charmer.”

“You’re a corker...almost convincing, but eloquence isn’t really my cup. What I have of it comes from my days at Oxford.”

“My modest Oxford bushman...my sophisticated sheepman, my wily cowboy entrepreneur,” she intoned, lifting his hand against her cheek while her giggling laughter augmented his pleasure. “My Maori-Scots love scholar...my patient teacher,” she went on after a short stretch of silence. The erotic intimations of her sultry voice had brought his caressing fingers to her neck.

“My extremely literate, both worldly and innocent green-eyed addiction,” he responded with amused voice, keeping his eyes on the narrow road as a huge lumber truck sped past them.

“I have to win Mary back. I really love her, Lan. Is she still angry with me for leaving you?”

“No worries, Mary loves ya. You’re mine for a start...and you’ve come back and agreed to marry the mystery of her life. That’s all she cares about. Any child of ours will be a chrissy bonus...send her round the bend with happiness.

“Anyway, ya can find out for yourself. I’m flying her up for the party Margie and Ian are giving us. She’ll be staying at Herne Bay.”

Careless Child

“I’m so glad she’s coming. That’s wonderful. I’m eager to see her.”

“You’ve done a heap of good for Mary, Kate...brought her out. She’s more her old self when you’re around...happier.”

“And I with her.” Katharine smiled and lay her head back, then frowned as she cautioned herself not to think of all the rigmarole that lay ahead. Lan kept one hand on the wheel and stroked her knee with the other.

While Mary rested at Herne Bay, Katharine was visiting with Margaret at her sunny home above the city. After flying Mary up, Lan had departed again on a fishing trip with Ian and several other mates. Katharine was listening from a deck chair on the patio, as Margaret began describing the rhythm and blues quartet she had engaged for the party. Katharine’s peacefully lolling head rose up in surprise at this news. She leaned forward in her chair, sipping from her glass of iced tea, mind and body coming alive with memories.

“Margaret, I used to sing R and B with a small band in college. We were sort of reactionary renegades. Nobody was doing that kind of music anymore and we thought of ourselves as preservationists. We had such a good time. We weren’t bad.”

“I imagine. Although you don’t seem like the type.”

“I know...too cerebral. I was really shy but when I sang I forgot about everything. I loved the old blues songs...also the torch songs...still do...that sultry soulful music. Our small repertoire eventually extended into more modern tunes.”

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Margaret sat up, slipping her feet back into her ejected thongs, which she called jandals, and grabbing Katharine's ankle with a friendly jerk signifying the birth of an idea.

"You're full of surprises, Kate. How good are ya?"

"What, at singing? I don't know. Someone heard me in a music class and hustled me into that hard-working little band."

"Where did you perform?"

"All over Palo Alto and San Francisco. Audiences seemed to like the band and my voice well enough. I finally quit; it was interfering with my work on the school paper...interviewing politicians. I craved that heady game of trying to get a factual answer...so...well, I was stretching myself pretty thin."

"A wonderful idea's come into my head," Margaret said with cunning self-satisfaction. "You could rehearse a few songs with the band...surprise everyone by singing at your own party."

"Oh, Margaret, no. The only singing I've done of late is to myself, and mostly in the shower."

"Ah, but that means your cords are in good shape. Sing something right now."

"What? Now?"

"Yeah. I'm the only one here. Sing."

"But I...I can't just--"

"Sing anything...doesn't have to be R and B. *Sing.*"

Katharine stood up and walked to the edge of the patio, staring off into the golden trunks of bamboo, remembering how Lan had stood with her

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there beneath the Southern Cross. She hummed a few bars then turned to Margaret and began to sing *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*. The slow, passion-driven song was not very easy to sing a cappella, a rather difficult choice without backup, but she had chosen it because the lyrics agreed with her personal experience so precisely. Within a stanza she began to retrieve her former voice, the pleasure of hitting her stride rising in her throat and resonating across the garden. Margaret, listening intently as if to the rare notes of a hidden songbird, registered an expression of astonishment. A heady joy swelled Katharine's lungs as she finished.

“Well...there. It's far easier singing to myself but I'd forgotten how good that feels...singing for someone else.”

“My God, Katharine, that was so good...that was very, very professional. The band is always rehearsing; I'm giving them a ring right now...maybe drive you over there. Oh this is really going to be choice. What a treat everyone has in store. You'll bloody well knock them dead, girl.”

“If I did sing, it would only be this one song, Margaret, and now that you've heard it you know why. I certainly wouldn't expect to impress an audience...just to celebrate the evening with our family and friends...thanks to you and Ian.

Mary was shopping with Katharine in a handsomely appointed Parnell shop. The escaped bustle of the street, where bright sun ruled the day, the hushed, rose-scented interior of gleaming dark wood, the silk-tasseled windows and bolts of elegant fabrics, along with Mary's softly earnest manner, all flowed together in a mellow interlude, agreeably

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distancing the much larger, more threatening events that lay ahead. Katharine was experiencing frissons of pleasure, the buoyancy of being happily in the moment. They had been looking at dresses for the party, also speculating on a dress or gown for Katharine's wedding ceremony. Unhurriedly browsing, Mary had come across a dress she thought of buying for herself.

"I haven't bought a fancy dress in so long I've no idea what's fashionable. I'm glad for your opinion," Mary said, running her fingers over the smartly cut navy evening dress she had just selected. They both agreed that it might be worn on various occasions by dressing it up or down, which noticeably pleased prudent Mary.

"You can leave the little bolero jacket off for the party and drape a pretty scarf over your shoulders, then wear the jacket for the wedding," Katharine suggested, delighted at having assisted circumspect Mary in finding something that satisfied her rather modest taste.

Katharine tried on a slender, strapless, dusty-rose velvet gown, wondering if it was suitable for the party. The moment she appeared, Mary raved over it, insisting she look no further.

"Ah, the young can dress like this. You look ravishing, like a flower, a rose! Like a lovely garden sprite. Do ya see how that skittery velvet goes from silvery pale pink to shady rose when ya move under the light? Oh, it's a choice thing on your lovely self, Katie."

Laughing at Mary's girlish enthusiasm, Katharine was mainly thinking that the gown's bare simplicity would perfectly accent her beloved jade pendant.

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A shot of fear drove through her swiftly as a bullet when she thought of standing before all the others in her velvet gown and audaciously bursting into song. Was she out of her mind to have agreed to this? When Margaret had introduced her to the poker-faced quartet of serious young musicians, Katharine saw that they were clearly bent on keeping their music untainted: piano, saxophone, bass, and drum. They were hardly enthusiastic about accompanying an unknown voice. The rehearsal session had begun with a sluggishly reluctant band, but when Katharine sang they sprang to life with beaming faces. Margaret thereafter walked around brimming with delight at favorable collusion. “I think you may be enjoying yourself at my expense,” Katharine had teased.

Mary and Katharine completed their purchases and strolled to a cozy tearoom. Once seated, Katharine leaned on her hands and stared through plate glass, squinting between the fronds of a fan palm to glimpse the busy street. A flashing image of Lan casting a fast-darting line over the riffle of a silvery broad river flew across her mind. He was there and she was here. Although glad for the camaraderie, she could not think of it for long, so eager was she to be with him, to fish with him herself. She pondered the coming days while Mary poured Earl Gray.

“Have a biscuit, Kate.”

“No thank you. I’m still full from our outrageous lunch.”

“Well, we haven’t made much progress on your wedding dress.”

“I just don’t know what to wear, Mary. I don’t want a traditional white dress, and it wouldn’t be appropriate anyway. You’ve seen these celebrations before. What should I do?”

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“You can do anything ya want, Kate. You know I do have an idea. As we were passing a shop I saw a creamy lace thing in the window that was most unusual. Set over the folds of the ivory lace bodice was a sort of rectangle of plaid, taffeta I believe, tapered to the waist and bordered in wine velvet on three sides. The skirt part was a simple affair of gathered ivory lace. I never would have thought how well it could work until I saw it. I was thinking you could have something like that, perfect with your slender waist.

“Let’s go have a look. It sounds interesting.”

“You could give it your own signature, ya know, by putting a small swatch of the Gordon plaid in that bodice, a bit of your own heritage: black squares edged in yellow it is; the border could be of black velvet. A lovely airy thing I’m imagining, and pastoral at the same time, like New Zealand itself.”

“Mary, that sounds wonderful. You may have solved my problem. Oh, I’m so glad we’ve done this. I always have such a good time with you.”

“You’ve no idea how much it all means, Katharine. You’ve no idea at all.” Mary’s wise gray eyes were rimmed with dampness.

Lan, who had been glad to give Mary and Katharine these busy days together, was still fly-fishing with his mates down on several of the scenic rivers feeding into Lake Taupo. On the day before the celebration he called Katharine to say that he would be back the following day in time to dress and meet her at the party. This fit in well with her plans, although she was missing him more than she would say, not wanting to taint his happy days

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with fishing pals, as she imagined them: casting over their wild, trout-filled rivers and drinking beer in devoted abandon. She did not know what Lan would think of her intention to sing at their party, and had decided not to tell him. Margaret still seemed to think the idea was a splendid tour de force. Katharine wanted only to offer her special song to Lan, if she could muster the skill and courage to do it well. The band had even suggested that she sing a few more songs. She had declined, but with a bolster of confidence at their surprising disappointment.

The first unexpected occurrence at the party was not a good omen. Katharine arrived early and, while she stood in the garden talking to the band, Rani suddenly appeared. She was wearing a bright blue party dress, of which there was very little, with her lustrous black hair piled high atop her head and far more makeup than Katharine thought necessary for her healthy young face. She came straight over to Katharine, greeted her in a friendly manner, and then asked if they could go into Ian's study to have a sort of ameliorating talk. Katharine, desirous of a pleasant evening, could hardly refuse and so followed her into the house, with which Rani seemed familiar enough, and thence into Ian's cool dark study where they remained standing.

"Ya look very nice," Rani said, and then added, "That's a choice gown...sexy enough for any man."

Katharine frowned and said, "Rani, I hope we can get along. It's clear that you don't like me but maybe with time--"

"You've been through some hell...sorry for that, but you're a bloody clever woman and ya get what ya want...all that smarmy sophistication is, I

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suppose, what poor Lani likes...and ya--”

“Rani, stop it. Is this all you wanted to say? Please try to have some compassion for others for a change. You profess to care so much for Lan, but look what you did to him. Do you even realize?”

“What are *you* talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about. Why pretend? When he was sick with grieving and thoroughly inebriated you took advantage of him...without a thought to his condition or his pain...simply to suit yourself...simply to extricate yourself from the mess you made...cruelly making it all come out in your favor.”

“It was just...I didn’t think he’d--”

“My God!” Katharine exclaimed, her voice catching on fire and her adrenaline pumping. “If you really love a person how could you ever do anything so selfish...wound them when they’re down and suffering? Do you think Mary hasn’t suffered deeply over this too? You still have no idea, do you?”

“Who are you to tell me--”

“Someone has to say it, Rani. Lan has always thought of himself as your big brother. He was there for you all of your life, and how did you return his devotion? By making him--”

“I didn’t!” Rani protested. “I didn’t make him do anything. I only let him think he’d... He was too bloody *haurangi* for that. He never even tried to touch me. I thought it would all come out differently. He never touched me, I swear.”

“Then tell him that and relieve his grieving heart.”

Careless Child

They heard a soft click and both turned around startled. The study door had slowly swung shut and Lan was standing near it with folded arms, staring at them.

“Rani won’t have to tell me anything now, will she?” Lan said in a regretfully mocking voice. He was looking at Rani.

“Oh, Lan, did you--”

“Yeah, I heard most of it, Katharine, and since it pertains to me I won’t apologize for listening.”

“Excuse me,” Katharine said, and slipped out of the room, closing the door behind her. She held her hand to her mouth, her eyes brimming, then lowered her head, trying to blink the tears onto her hand without ruining her face. She hurried back out into the gradually filling, refreshingly pungent garden. Why did she have to reopen that serious old wound at their lovely party? She regretted her unchecked wrath, but at least the truth was out. How would Lan deal with it? She did not want to think about it anymore and went briskly down the walk, as briskly as her slender gown would allow, stretching out her arms to greet Gus and Mea just venturing into the garden.

“Gus and Mea, *kia ora*.”

“Kate, how nice ya look...rose velvet and totoeka with those rare eyes,” Mea praised. She gathered Katharine into her arms. Over Mea’s shoulder Katharine saw Lan entering the garden. Their eyes met briefly and then one of his cousins placed a hand on his shoulder. He turned to speak to Gus’s eldest son, Russ, who worked in the winery.

“I’m so happy to see you both. I love your dress, Mea. That soft

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silvery color matches your gorgeous hair.” Her fingers just touched Mea’s silver-gray hair, done up in thick waves around her smiling, softly lined face, and sweeping back into a handsome French roll.

“Will you ever forgive what happened at your wonderful dinner?”

“A migraine is no one’s fault, pretty girl.” Mea gripped Katharine’s arm, smiled and said, “Come with me. Let’s take a tramp through this friendly-smelling garden...love to see all these happy plants. Someone is giving them tender loving care, like this smart *wabine pono* will do for Lan. I see the devotion. *I wāna nei*: the way it is.” They strolled with soft laughter.

The band was warming up, and still Katharine had spoken no more with Lan. How strange. This party was for them and yet they were still at opposite ends of the garden. If only she had not ruined his arrival by bringing up that grievous subject with Rani. But after Rani’s surly conduct it could hardly have been avoided. Rani was with someone, a dark, somewhat raffish young man with a motorcycle helmet under his arm. Was he going to carry it with him all evening? Katharine went around warmly greeting the Maori half of Lan’s family. She saw that people were starting to settle in chairs placed before the elevated platform where the band was seated. A shiver swept through her as she watched the drummer adjust the microphone she would use. Perhaps she should decline the invitation to sing, which Margaret was scheduled to make very soon. She saw Margaret arm in arm with Lan and leading him to a seat below the platform. “Oh, what have I done?” she muttered. Then the band began a slow rhapsodic melody and her heart softened. Gladness flowed through her body as she saw Mea and Mary strolling arm in arm to their seats. Margaret was pointing to the seat beside

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Lan, so fetching in his charcoal dinner jacket, his dark frame tinted rose bronze under the colorful hanging lanterns. As Margaret was indicating the seat where Katharine should have been, she lifted her head, looking for Katharine, who had ducked into the bamboo grove in cowardly escape. She was breathless and thoroughly disgusted with herself. Lan had a drink in his hand. At his wrist a gleam of gold cufflink flashed as he talked to another cousin seated next to him. On his other side was that flagrantly empty chair.

The band was already into its second melody when Margaret found Katharine, who was, or appeared to be, quite deep into a conversation with Gus. She was nervously explaining the virtues of steelhead fishing.

“There you are. Excuse me, Gus, I need to steal Katharine away from you. Please find yourself a seat down there. I think Mea has one saved.”

When Gus had politely taken himself off, Margaret said, “Kate, are you giving up on me at the last minute? I’m sure Lan has been wondering where you are. But now it’s time for our little songbird to make her appearance.”

“Margaret, I don’t think--”

“Oh no you don’t, not after all my efforts. Get your lovely self down to the foot of my garden. I’m after introducing a choice new side of you to your new family, and right now.”

Katharine had anticipated such a different sort of evening, a celebration of love in which she and Lan would stand side by side and greet the party guests while overflowing with mutual happiness. The vicissitudes of life simply refused a smooth road. Fate stepped in, superimposing its own

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dubious routes, making treacherous detours without warning. When first they met in this enchanting garden Lan could not reach her side quickly enough. Now he was sitting down there chatting with his family and drinking Scotch -- she was certain it was Scotch -- as if she did not exist, and after having been away from her for nearly a week. A maudlin wave of self-pity swept over her. She looked up to see Margaret insistently beckoning to her over her shoulder as she made her way to the bandstand. She was certainly in a wonderful mood to sing a love song.

“Hello, everyone. Hope you’re all enjoying this special occasion. Lachlan Manutaane, you’re one of my and Ian’s oldest friends, and how lucky we are for that...and to be able to celebrate your upcoming marriage to this lovely woman, Katharine Gordon. She’s about to come up here and sing to you, but the rest of us are bloody well going to share in the treat, and you’ll soon see what a choice treat it is. Katharine?”

Just pretend like it’s another band gig out of the past, Katharine told herself as she took Margaret’s hand and carefully mounted the platform. She could hardly bring herself to look at anyone, especially Lan, but her eyes drifted in that direction anyway. He was still holding the glass in his hand, but he set it down beneath his chair without taking his eyes off her. A shifting glance yielded a beaming Mary, supportive anticipation clearly written across her proudly expectant face.

Katharine’s heart filled with rapidly coursing blood. The band was keyed. Her eyes fastened on Lan. She heard her own slow steady voice, sending impassioned words straight out to the one who had refused to let her go, feeling them ripple and rise in warm waves up into the realm of the

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Southern Cross. There was his riveted face, reflecting the memory of their first kiss, the memory of their first night together, above now the very moon and stars of the lyrics; rich memories infusing the words carefully tendered by her voice. It had all gone by too quickly. When she completed the final long-held note she bowed low, attempting a demurely pleasing smile, then stepped cautiously down and hurried off to lose herself in the bamboo grove. Never had she exposed such flagrantly raw feeling in a performance, never freely given so much of herself. She felt completely drained, and perhaps a little foolish. Loud clapping and whistling pursued her. Tears overcame restraint, washing away decorum. She no longer cared how she looked, how she would present herself to the others. The song had finished her, stolen her strength, yet she was somehow cleansed by it, the intimate truth of it fervently resonating. With limp body and bent head she clutched a barely supportive young stalk of bamboo, fearful of losing her balance. Then she felt Lan's arms catching her up and coming tight around her, his aroused low voice soft against her ear.

“Thank you, *tau aroha*...for Rani...for your beautiful voice, your song...for your love.”

“Lan...it was for you.”

“My beautiful girl, what do I say in return? How do I tell ya what ya mean to me? Please stop crying, Green Eyes...you know I love ya. All I saw fishing on the rivers were these eyes. I've missed us, *you*...and here ya are, all mine and choice in your velvet gown. Your song was perfect...*perfect*. Jesus, I want to lie with ya.”

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It had taken very little time to alter Katharine's wedding dress, with her own and Mary's artful suggestions, and when she tried it on she was well satisfied--a unique and lovely dress stitched into a symbol of the ultimate celebration, one she had half feared would never occur. In these days her eyes were filled with dreams of the future and memories of the recent past. She thought often of the night after the party, when she and Lan drove Mary back to the Herne Bay house and wise Mary took herself swiftly off to a comfortable downstairs bedroom, leaving them to their insatiable lovemaking upstairs.

The following morning as Mary helped Katharine cook a late breakfast, and while Lan was in his study on the phone, Mary had said, "Whatever did ya say to Rani, Kate? I know you must have said something."

Katharine turned off the heat under the smoking frying pan and turned to Mary. "I'm afraid I told her what I really thought. Why? What did she say?"

"She came to me some time after your song and she was so changed, my spoiled little girl. She apologized to me for the terrible things she did. I told her to apologize to Lan. She said that she already had and...she said you had a beautiful voice. I believe you made her look into the mirror, Kate. I certainly thank you for that. I thank you for so much, the way you've set things right here...the way you've made Lan so happy. You have, ya know. He's a changed man."

Lan sauntered into the kitchen, rolling his shirtsleeves as he came and walking up to Katharine to whisper in her ear, "Anything edible in here yet

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besides yourself, songbird?”

Primed with the pleasure of Mary’s words, Katharine wanted to kiss Lan in a very private way. The desire was overwhelming. She glanced politely toward where Mary had been standing and saw her back disappearing down the hall. Considerate Mary, always reading the moment so swiftly and precisely.

She laid her head against Lan’s shirt, inhaling all the familiar scents that were so arousing, then lifted her head and said in a slow voice, “This kiss is for you...and this kiss is for having a mother like Mary...and this kiss is for—”

“Jesus, Green Eyes, any more of this and breakfast will be something else entirely.”

The wedding ceremony was a remarkably colorful and singular event. The day transposed into a swift parade of images: flashes of sharply indelible consciousness juxtaposed with flashes of blurring mystery, these as if streaming from a brain romping in REM sleep. Judith was there and Penny and Margaret and, of course, Mary. They crowded into the Spartan bedroom of Lan’s very masculine Nelson cottage and helped her dress and do her hair, giggling and chattering with a boisterous lot of noise and soaking up her emotional spillover. Her jittery, very fragile nerves necessitated self-deprecating bons mots, causing explosions of laughter among her friends. Struggling with a recalcitrant shoe she said, “My benumbed brain has disconnected my foot -- no shoe, hence no wedding. *Will you, nill you,* obstinate foot, I’ll marry Petruchio in bare feet.”

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“Here, drink this,” Penny ordered, handing her a flute of champagne.

“What? Should I drink that?”

“Absolutely,” Judith encouraged.

“Yeah,” Margaret chimed in. “Or they’ll have to peel you off the ceiling of the *marae* meeting hall.”

“No worries, Katie love, Lan will take care of any headache that comes along,” Mary assured her.

Amidst their laughter she went on with her *Taming of The Shrew* allusion. “Oh, but he’ll never bring me *from a wild Kate to a Kate comfortable as other household Kates.*”

“Nor would he wish to. He’s not after taming you. Your wild self is what he fancies,” Mary soothed, and they all burst into yet another effusion of laughter.

The actual ceremony was an unusual procedure for Katharine. No paternal figure would give her away. Cash Taylor, having made a tenuous peace with Lan, was continually popping up everywhere and capturing everything. He and camera had even made a quick foray into Lan’s bedroom, just as the women were preparing to whisk Katharine out of there. As the proceeding began, Rani, wearing a chocolate silk dress, walked up to Katharine and handed her a bouquet of orchids, curtsied ever so slightly, their eyes meeting with mutual consideration hinting at a positive outcome, then stepped back into the line of guests. Katharine and Lan stood before the *marae* where they were initially met by tattooed and sparsely clothed warriors who yelled at them and stuck out their tongues, chanting and waving their clubs in a ritually fierce demonstration of *baka*. Before this lively but

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abbreviated war dance ensued, she had been joined by Lan on the path leading up to the *marae*. He was wearing a smartly cut, pale gray Italian suit of shot silk with a fresh green sprig of some unfamiliar local plant affixed as a boutonnière. He looked so handsome that at first glance her worried frown softened into pure pleasure. Her anxiety had not entirely escaped his notice. He at once attempted to lift her spirits with a swift offering of humor, leaning down and muttering in her ear, “No worries, this will all be over soon and I’ll put ya out to pasture herding sheep.”

In her volatile condition, she found this so amusing that she had to place her hand over her mouth to suppress the giggling laughter Lan so often strove to elicit.

Following the clamorous intimidation of the threatening warriors, they were greeted with a loving display of *hongi* and some words in Maori that Lan answered in Maori. After this they were led inside. It seemed to her that Lan was exhibiting not only considerable composure but a quiet mastery of everything; or so it appeared from her own nervous frame of reference. An instant realization surfaced: he had been through all of this before on a more youthful, perhaps more euphoric day of his life. She stole a wary look at his serenely concentrating profile and quickly lowered her eyes. She could not allow a rising sense of inadequacy to darken this luminous moment.

The meeting hall was adorned with gleaming pillars of wood carved in the form of tikis and other earthy motifs. The highly polished hardwood floors shimmered in honey tones of gold and brown, and the walls rose in striking patterned designs, running to the peaked and cross-beamed ceiling. The hall smelled of spicy-sweet ginger combined with numerous other

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scented flowers of New Zealand. Seated at either side of their advancing passage were all the members of the wedding party. They approached the low wood dais where the Maori priest who was to marry them stood cloaked in a robe covered with tiny, delicate and airy feathers, and wearing large jade pendants around his neck, one of a tiki, the other an elegant twining vine which represented eternity.

The pungent smell of abundant floral arrangements swirled around Katharine's head in the warm packed hall. As Maori words flowed past her, a sudden jab of fear darted through her chest. What if her head began to throb and nausea ensued? What if she swooned and disgraced herself? She turned her face up to Lan and their eyes met. His empathic dark eyes imparted calm as he took hold of her arm, and the warm assurance traveled through her body. She smiled. Because she could not understand the words being spoken, she began to ponder the effect this man standing beside her had, would always have, on her life. More than anything she wanted to be good for him, to bring him peace and happiness but never, if it could be managed, never boredom.

Finally there were English words exchanged and they made their vows and kissed. All else momentarily dissolved, until she heard sighs and mutterings of appreciation traveling through the hall. Katharine then listened attentively to the very moving Maori love serenade, *Pokarekare ana* and smiled at Lan who winked at her. Then Lan was grinning and they were spilling out into the sunlight. From the moment of his first grasp he had never let go of her arm. For such a long time she had been her own strength, proving over and over, without ever acknowledging it, that she

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could stand alone. In this rushing span of time, when she found herself amidst sharp transitions so unfamiliar, her greatest strength had become simply relinquishing her rigid control and trusting another.

Following all the exuberant hugs from joyful family members and the few friends who attended the reception at Gus and Mea's large and beautifully decked out old house, they tried to make their way to Gus's car. He was to drive them to Lan's plane. Lan would then fly himself and Katharine to Auckland. After a visit with Gus and Mea, Mary was staying in Lan's cottage, and one of his flying mates was winging her home to Green Braes in the morning. Judith and Jacob were heading south to visit Milford Sound and other points of interest, and Ian and Margaret were sailing home on a friend's boat. From Auckland Lan and Katharine were flying to Rarotonga.

Everyone wanted to hang onto Lan and Katharine, partaking of the positive emotions spilling from their highly charged mutual pleasure. Their glowing aura held a magnetism so alluring they were continually restrained from departure, with fond teasing and offerings of food and drink. Lan would drink nothing because he was flying, and Katharine would drink nothing because she greatly feared a migraine, more possible now in her over-stimulated condition. They edged their way to the back door, having already said good-bye three times and been hugged by Mary, whose eyes were filled with tears of relief. Once out of earshot of everyone, Lan exclaimed, "Katharine Gordon Manutaane, let's get the hell out of here." They made a dash to the car, where Gus was transferring their luggage from another car into his trunk.

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“You were right,” Katharine said when they were finally aloft in Lan’s plane. “It seemed to be for everyone else. But when I look back on it I’m sure I’ll feel deeply moved...grateful and even sorry it ended so soon.”

“Looks like we’ll have plenty of photographs to go along with our memories. Your bloke, the ubiquitous Cash Taylor, even invaded the guest bedroom...tried to snap me putting on my suit. I had to tell him to bloody well rack off.”

“Lan, I spent half the day laughing hysterically and now I’m doing it again. I would have loved to watch you putting on your suit.”

“Yeah? Well, in a couple more hours ya can watch me taking it off.”

“I’m looking forward to it.” She continued to giggle, with Lan’s smiling encouragement.

“I’m actually glad we didn’t bother to change. Here I am in my ballerina length Scottish bridal gown, flying off over New Zealand...like magic...or an idyllic fairy tale. I’ll probably never wear it again. Oh how sad. How I wish my grandmother could have--”

“Please don’t, Kate. I want ya happy.”

“Weddings are sad, too, Lan.”

“Not this one...not for me.”

“And not for me, my darling Maroi-Scot lover.”

“Careful, Green Eyes, we still have some distance before we lie down together.”

“What if I’m too tired, husband?”

“Then I’ll hold ya until I can have ya in the morning, wife. But take a

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bit of a nap now, just in case,” he added with a wink.

Rarotonga was a time of love and lethargy, affording further investigation and uninterrupted enjoyment of one another. While there, they flew over to Aitutaki, about an hour away, and partook of the remote village life on that quiet atoll ringed in startling gold and turquoise. They swam to the *motus* in the lagoon and made love on uninhabited white sands beneath the shade of coconut palms. They drank at a thatched-roofed bar on the beach and ate diced raw fish prepared with coconut cream, lime juice, onions, and bits of tomato, a delicious pastiche called *ika mata*. The days passed in a luxurious idleness, away from the world and growing familiar with each other’s needs and desires and habits in a slow awakening, blissfully free from the prosaic intrusions of the workaday. Diving in shoreline conservation areas called *rani*, they encountered giant clams, reef sharks, moray eels, and myriad darting fish the Day-Glo colors of the rainbow. They watched the gloriously varied sunsets bleed into dark palm-fringed horizons, painting the surface waters of dusk with dazzling hues of crimson and gold. Teasing and cavorting in mutually generated playful situations of comic entertainment, they pleased each other and slept wrapped together in an airy bungalow with the crashing surf sounding on the distant reef and the soughing waves almost at their feet. After a week they returned to Lan’s orange beach cottage on Rarotonga, where he used his laptop to check into his business affairs. Katharine swam, chased thousands of ants around their kitchen, cut up fresh fruit, created her own *ika mata*, and mixed large tropical

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drinks. They lay together in their ample hammock, caressing or talking softly in a soporific state of contentment, while the palm fronds rustled overhead in warm fluky winds. Finally regenerated by days of spontaneity and laziness, they were ready to again face the world. They returned to Green Braes.

Katharine sat astride Jangle, looking out over myriad grayed-white tufts of grazing sheep. She was very glad to be here at this moment, had arranged it so, hoping to correct that other horribly failed ride, when Lan had professed such love only to be cruelly abandoned. This event would unfold quite differently. She would see to it.

Lan was beside her on the roan stallion, Ben, leaning on the pommel of his saddle and glancing at her reflective face from time to time. She thought perhaps, when he studied her that way, he suspected she was thinking of Jerusalem or Gaza or some other troubled place in the world, forebodingly calling to her. From time to time she did think of those places, but never at his expense. They were in her, would always be in her. She did find vicarious relief for relinquished assignments and professional obligations by the actions of the protagonists in her ongoing writing. Just now, however, she was thinking very close to home.

“Why don’t you ever take me fishing, Lan?”

“Ya never asked me,” he answered, smiling with good-natured ease. “I’ve finally taught ya to tell me what ya want in lovemaking, now ya have to learn to do it the rest of the time. Ya want fish, I’ll take ya fishing.”

“But I mean, why didn’t you just think of it on your own?”

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“I did once...when I took ya sailing. No worries, there’s plenty of time for that. But it nearly killed me when ya sent me that sad picture with your two fish -- *Christ*, I thought, *I found her and now I have to find her all over again*. But never mind that...I’ll drag ya around everywhere at a moment’s notice and you’ll be asking me the opposite. ‘Why do we suddenly have to go fishing?’ you’ll be saying soon enough.”

“I love fishing. I won’t say that.”

“Ya might, Kate...but not when I’m loving ya.”

“I won’t ever say it, cowboy Casanova.”

Lan shook his head and laughed. “Right now I’ve thought of something all *on my own*, ya hard case. Come on, Green Eyes. We’ll ride up along the green banks and eat our sandwiches by the river.”

As they rode along Lan asked, “Have ya been thinking of the situation in the Middle East, Kate?”

She was surprised that he would ask the question, since he had always preferred not to bring up that subject, mainly to keep her overactive mind from brooding on insurmountable problems.

“Sometimes I do, Lan. It’s there, war going on, a form of insanity that could stop at once with sound rapprochement.”

“I haven’t said much on the subject but I’d like to be able to talk to ya about it. Would ya have an opinion from me?”

“Yes. Yes, I would,” she said, bringing Jangle to a halt.

“The Israelis have no well considered ideas on how to fight that kind of war...other than overkill. They’re used to force, heavy retaliation and land encroachments. Swatting at clouds of sandflies only gets ya more bites.”

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“How should they fight it?” she asked in a rhetorical manner, eager to hear his answer.

“They shouldn’t fight it at all, because they’re only inviting more human explosions. They’re the ones with all the firepower, the strength. They’re the ones who have to bring it to an end...pull out their settlers and give the Palestinians a free state.”

“You realize, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they’ve had a huge influx of Eastern European immigrants to deal with? It’s one of the reasons they keep building settlements.”

“Right, but I notice you’ve said *one of the reasons*. What other motives have they for making Swiss cheese out of the occupied territories? They can put those settlers in Israel’s less populated areas or, better still, into new high rises in the cities.”

“I think you’re right. Why don’t they see that?”

“Wrong leaders...war-minded...and feeling threatened. Also, the orthodox faction wants that land as part of Israel. Israel needs a strong peacemaker who sees total stoppage as an honorable solution, concerted support from their own people -- that’s the tough part. But it’s really a form of winning, the *best* way to win, only it takes a bloody keen mind to see that, real courage. It would relieve a heap of tension in the world, threats to your own country: troublemakers always hark back to the Palestinian problem for their ammunition against America. Ignoring the need for a Palestinian state is the whole crux of the Middle Eastern problem. They have to understand the consequences of *no* Palestinian state: demographics might soon leave Israel a non-Jewish state. A free unified state for Palestinians is the only

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answer. Now it's become important for the whole world."

"You're absolutely right. I agree with everything you say."

Lan's gratuitous perception was like a pressure release. She was glad to find herself positioned beside an understanding mind, a companion who could share her thoughts so precisely. She gave a grateful sigh and smiled at him.

He reached over and brushed her windblown hair away from her eyes, then eased his boot into Ben's belly, clicking his tongue and ordering the big horse to move on.

Turning aside to glance down at her, he asked, "What happened to your grandmother's farm?"

"Oh, the farm? I still own it. I lease it to a grower. The house I've kept just as it was...I can go back there any time I want."

"I'd like to see it."

"We could go there...when you have some time...stay in the house even, if you want."

"Yeah, I'd like to...the place where ya grew. We'll make some plans to do that. Do ya miss it?"

"Those fragrant steamy greenhouses in winter snow, blooming with blue and white and yellow Dutch Irises...and the spring fields of narcissus. Oh, yes. And, of course, my dauntless grandmother. After she died I continued to go there. I could still have the flowers and fields, the memories of my roaming childhood, but not Gran. It's a lovely place, and her spirit is there. From the house you can see massive Mount Rainier floating on the horizon, pure and white -- it's over two thousand feet taller than Mount

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Cook. It would be wonderful sharing it all with you. I'd love it. Thank you, Lan...for suggesting it."

"Yeah, Kate. We'll do it this fall, your spring. Nice to keep the best part of your past alive."

Once again Lan had surprised her with his thoughtfulness, bringing her peace of mind, smoothing out another wrinkle of worry: she did not have to remain cut off from her homeland. Gran would have been so thankful.

They rode on in silence for half an hour, until they could hear the rushing river and see its emerald banks. The dazzle of sunlight on the climbing green slopes swelled her heart. An epiphany of joy like a sweet pain shot through her. She stared after Lan, who rode slightly ahead of her.

"I'm thirsty, Lan."

He pushed back his hat and turned in his saddle, with his head angled over his shoulder.

"Then get down."

A vision flashed in her mind as she dismounted. A bit of *déjà vu*, but never again would she entertain painful memories of a place so beautiful.

He swung off his horse, lifted the sandwiches out of the saddlebag and pulled the rolled blanket from behind the saddle. He stood a moment in silence, looking at her with a certain smile, a penetratingly soulful gaze that evoked a distinctive memory.

"Thirsty for me or for water?"

"For you...most definitely for you...and a little water."

They tied the horses and walked to the river, where they found a flat place between the rocks and lay on their bellies drinking. When they were

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finished he spread out the blanket.

She dropped down, balancing her knees atop the tan square of soft wool and watching him crouch beside her. Reaching out she pulled off his hat, running her fingers through his thick black hair to smooth the tousled locks. For a long moment she felt herself swimming in appraising dark eyes traveling over her face.

“I’m so lucky...so lucky to have you, Lan. What if I’d never found you?”

“Ya didn’t. I found ya...and ya didn’t trust me at all. Why were ya so bloody afraid of a *ngakau* joker like me?”

“*Ngakau?*”

He laughed. “Well...I was giving myself a kind heart.”

“Exactly what you have...you’re Mary’s son. Lan, the fear I had was...a kind of self-preservation. I went a little crazy and thought...you would consume me.”

“And have I *consumed* ya?”

“No. You’ve made me glad to be alive...so...relieved and full of hope...happy with myself and--”

He bent toward her and stopped her words with a dissolving kiss, then leaned back a short distance. His fierce eyes held hers, secretive and amused, obviously aware of her arousal, but something else. She was astonished. Did he know?

“Something ya want to tell me, *tau aroha?*”

“Yes.”

“Are ya pregnant?”

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“Yes.”

“I thought so.”

“How did you know? I was about to say that this time I was the one with the shocking news. You stole all the wind from my sails. How did you know?”

“Just knew...felt it. I feel a lot when I suss these green eyes. I was beginning to worry about that...wondering if you’d ever... Come here, *ipo*.”

He stretched out and lifted her onto his lap, then rubbed his chin over her hair, staring off at the rushing white river and finally speaking in a wondering voice.

“Jesus, a part of me is growing in ya, Green Eyes...a bloody little Gordon-Manutaane. Now, I’ll have to watch ya...can’t run around on horses like a wild *wahine* much longer.”

“Now don’t start treating me like fragile glass.”

“I won’t do that either. You’re a tough little hard case, but I’m not going to let ya hurt yourself or get in harm’s way if I can help it. I wouldn’t have done anyway.”

“Lan...are you afraid of losing me...because--”

“Bloody right...yeah, I am.”

“I understand, because I feel the same about you, but--”

“You’ll never lose me, Kate, except by something unforeseen, and let’s not dwell on that or whinge or... What? Ya don’t know that expression?”

“Whine?”

“Right. So let’s be happy instead.”

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“Yes, let’s...because, my urbane sheepman, you’ll never lose me either. At least not before I’ve read all of your hundreds of books at Green Braes and Herne Bay House...not until we’ve talked about every single one of them.”

“Yeah? Then I’ll buy hundreds more.

“I want ya now...and ya get to have me...the two of us here at the heart of Green Braes...once I denied ya that. Loving ya here this way...*ka mutu pea* -- that’s the best. We’ll eat our sandwiches later, get back on our horses and go tell my mother. She’ll go round the bend.”

He paused and looked at her. “Sorry...did ya want to tell her now...wait a while or--”

“Oh, Lan, of course I want to tell Mary. No, wait a minute, I want to watch *you* tell Mary...in Maori. I think that would be absolutely perfect.”

He pulled her down against him on the blanket, gave her a grateful kiss and said, “Ya know all the right ways to have me, don’t ya, foxy Kate? It’s why I love ya...that and your green eyes...amazing these *pounamu* eyes, green as life. *You* are life.”

There came a sudden vision of her lost mother’s eyes, her incredible gift, the gift of this rich and varied existence, the fortune of green eyes. Katharine smiled a pensive smile, joyful but with a tinge of sadness. From deep inside, a childish voice out of the past whispered, *Thank you, Mama.*