

VICKY ADIN



Award-winning author
of
New Zealand Historical Fiction



www.vickyadin.co.nz
vicky@vickyadin.co.nz

www.amazon.com

CONTENTS

First Chapters or Tasters for Each Novel

THE ART OF SECRETS SERIES

The Art of Secrets	3
Elinor	7

THE NEW ZEALAND IMMIGRANT COLLECTION

Brigid The Girl from County Clare	14
Gwenna The Welsh Confectioner	19
The Costumier's Gift	23
The Cornish Knot	28
Portrait of a Man	32
The Disenchanted Soldier	37

About Vicky Adin

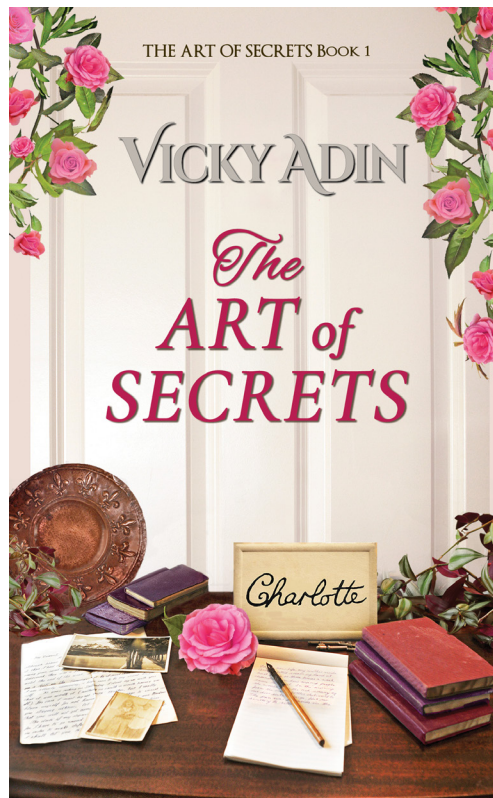
Vicky is a family historian in love with the past. Like the characters in her stories, she too is an immigrant to New Zealand, arriving a century after her first protagonists, and ready to start a new life.

Born in Wales, she grew up in Cornwall until aged 12. Her family emigrated to New Zealand, a country she would call home. Vicky draws on her affinity for these places, in her writing. Fast forward a few years, and she marries a fourth-generation Kiwi bloke with Irish, Scottish and English ancestors and her passion for genealogy flourishes.

The further she digs into the past, the more she wants to record the lives of the people who were the foundations of her new country. Not just her own ancestors, but all those who braved the oceans and became pioneers in a raw new land. Her research into life as it was for those immigrants in the mid-to-late 1800s and early 1900s gave her enough material to write for many years about the land left behind and the birth of a new nation.

Her first book, *The Disenchanted Soldier*, is the most biographical of all her books, inspired by her husband's great-grandfather. For the rest, while the history of the time is accurate, the characters are fictionalised to fit with the events and happenings as they occurred.

Vicky holds an MA(Hons) in English, is a lover of art, antiques, gardens, good food and red wine. She and her husband travel throughout New Zealand in their caravan and travel the world when they can. She hopes younger generations get as much enjoyment learning about the past through her stories, as she did when writing about it.



Book 1 of THE ART OF SECRETS set in New Zealand
Dual-timeline family sagas about finding your roots

Emma is an enterprising young journalist whose life and career are falling apart. Charlotte is a reclusive and ageing author with a reputation for being difficult. Preferring her roses to people, Charlotte resents the young girl who has been sent to interview her but they soon find themselves unravelling a tangle of secrets that change their lives.

THE ART OF SECRETS

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2014, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-9941035-7-4

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-9941035-8-1

First produced for Vicky Adin in 2014 by
AM Publishing New Zealand www.ampublishingnz.com

Cover image: Bev Robitai

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz, www.amazon.com

Emma

November

“I can’t do this any more, Jackie.”

Jacqueline McKenzie looked up sharply from her computer and peered at me across the top of her glasses. “I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that, Emma, but it’s crunch time. I can’t hold the position open any longer. I need to hear you say you’re coming back.”

As editor of a large New Zealand woman’s magazine, she could make the hard-nosed decisions with the best of them, but in spite of that, I liked her. She had been my mentor for the dozen or so years since I’d started as a junior. As she’d climbed the ladder, I’d followed in her wake until my life had fallen apart.

I bit my bottom lip, struggling to stay in control. “I can’t write a single word that has any meaning. And editing is driving me to drink. I can’t concentrate.”

Jacqueline took her glasses off and held them partially folded in her hand – a message she was busy. “Steady on. It can’t be that bad.”

“How the hell do you do it, Jackie?” I asked, angrily wiping away the tears. “You always look so damn cool and collected, while I can’t hold myself together for five minutes.”

I usually loved gazing at the view overlooking Wellington Harbour from her office, but now I hardly gave it a second glance. I flapped my arms and paced the room before flopping into a chair, hands over my face.

Jacqueline put down her glasses and leaned back into her large executive chair.

“Look, I know you’ve had a hard time. And I’ve done my best to understand and support you. But ... It’s been how long now? Two, three years?”

I nodded, whispering, “I can’t come back.”

“Now you listen to me, young lady,” she said, leaning forward over the desk. “If you keep on like this you will wreck your career. It’s time you pulled yourself together. You used up all your holiday and sick leave; I gave you additional leave and let you go on half time. Those contract and editing jobs were supposed to give you the freedom to sort yourself out. You’ve come and gone to suit yourself, and I’ve supported you. Yet here you are again still in a mess. What more do you want? Quite frankly, I’m losing patience with you, my girl.”

Put that way I could almost understand her frustration. “You’ve been more than generous, and I know I’m letting you down, but I just can’t seem to do anything right. I don’t know what’s the matter with me.”

“I’ll tell you what I think. I think you need a change of scenery and something else to think about other than what’s gone wrong in your life. You need to get over it, Emma. I’ve got an idea. Something I’ve been thinking about for a while. How about you write some articles for me?”

“What articles?”

She hesitated. “I’m considering something along the lines of ‘What ever happened to ...?’ or ‘Where are they now ...?’ on people from the past. Something a bit different. There’d be quite a lot of research involved.”

“Really? You want to write about ancient history in your magazine?” This idea was way outside the norm and so unlike her. “Come on, Jackie. This is a modern magazine. Why would you want anything historical?”

She ignored me.

“Here’s your first assignment,” she said. Switching to her no-frills, no-nonsense manner of getting a job done, she gave me some background material, including an autographed photo of a toddler in a frilly white dress, wearing a bangle, taken around the 1920s by the look of it.

I stared at the photo. Its old-fashioned imagery should have been softly blurred and in sepia tones, but as a modern black-and-white reprint, it was sharp-edged and didn’t look right. I felt certain I had seen this image somewhere before but couldn’t place it, and the name scrawled across it meant nothing.

“Charlotte Day?” I queried, looking at the signature. “Who’s she?”

“A famous author. Don’t you read?”

I shrugged. “You want me to track her down and interview her?”

“I do.”

“How the hell am I going to do that from a baby photo?”

She handed me a business card.

“Who’s this?”

“Ray Morris manages Charlotte Day now. Talk to him and see what he can do to help. I knew him in journalism school back in the dark ages. His nickname was ‘Prince Smarmy’ and I bet he hasn’t changed, so watch out.”

Belatedly, I realised I’d been cleverly upstaged. But something about that photo bothered me. For starters, why would anyone use a photo of a child as a promotional photo? It didn’t make sense. But it was more than that – the photo seemed familiar somehow, and I needed to know why. My curiosity was aroused.

“Find out what’s happened to her. Dig up some dirt. Anything you think will make a good story. Here’s a list of a few other has-beens you could follow up and write something on. Ray might be able to help there, too. Some will be short articles; others, like Charlotte Day I hope, could turn into a series. I’ll pay you a retainer and put you on contract for six months.”

I still hadn’t spoken.

“Well, go on. Get on with it.”

Galvanised by the new assignment and with no one left to keep me in Wellington, I packed up what few possessions I had and headed north. I knew I wouldn’t be back. Thanks to Jackie’s generosity, I had enough money to live on for the next six months at least. After that, I would live on my savings if I had to. That was the only benefit to come out of the mess. Nothing else: no home, no roots, no anchors – just money.

I contacted Ray Morris within a few days of arriving in Auckland. “Sorry, sweetie. You’ll have to wait until January.”

Dismayed I had to wait so long, I pushed for a date and promised to contact him again.

Christmas in Auckland was awful. I spent my time in bars and nightclubs pretending I was young and hip with a fantastic future ahead of me. I went home alone. I did the tourist thing, trying to get to know the city, but returned to my flat bored and frustrated. I resorted to doing some research on Charlotte Day and her fellow has-beens and began to be a little intrigued, but mostly I wasted time, unsettled and confused.

I met Ray on a hot summer’s day on Auckland’s waterfront. The place was bustling with people, boats were coming and going in the harbour and the gentle sea breeze cooled my shoulders. He arrived late, but as soon as he approached the open-air bar where we’d agreed to meet, I knew it was him; a man in his late forties, tall, trim, suave, and so damn sure of himself. He took his sunglasses off and tugged at his shirt collar, pausing to see if anyone was looking at him before heading my way.

I stood extending my hand. “Mr Morris? I’m Emma Wade.”

“Sweetie. Call me Ray.” Ignoring my hand, he grasped my shoulders and kissed me first on one cheek then the other. His hands lingered a little too long on my bare arms. “So, you’re the little entrepreneur. Nice.” His eyes scanned my body.

I smiled as sweetly as I could.

The waiter delivered our drinks and I launched into my plan. “I’d like to follow you around for a few months,” I lied, putting my hand on his forearm. “Gathering material for a story about what a publicist and manager does and how you promote your clients. I understand you are the best in the industry.”

“Of course I am, sweetie. Now what can I do to help?”

I pretended to think. “Who is your most famous client? That would be a good angle.” I leant forward; his eyes followed my fingers as I played with the pendant dangling above my cleavage. “I might even be able to swing an exclusive, and maybe a reward.” Knowing I wouldn’t. I could play the game as well as he could.

I flirted, boosted his self-importance further and led him on until he believed the whole idea to interview Charlotte was his own. He coerced, twisted and bartered for a better deal, until we both got what we wanted. He let me interview his most difficult client – the one and only Charlotte Day – and I let Ray take me to bed.

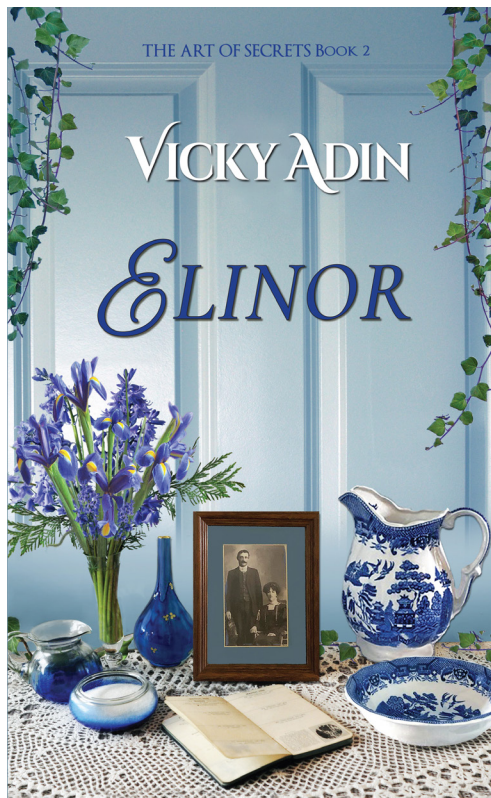
It had taken weeks to set up the meeting, but at last my time had come. *It’s now or never*, I thought, knowing it a cliché Jackie would not have allowed, but I no longer cared. By now, I had ideas of my own.

I turned on my brightest smile, determined to be my most charming self.

The tall, graceful woman who answered my knock wore her grey hair scraped back and twisted into a careless topknot. Stray strands stuck out at odd angles, which gave her a devil-may-care appearance. Her unusual green eyes were intelligent, but weariness etched deep lines on her face.

I knew the moment I met Charlotte Day my life was about to change.

...



Book 2 of THE ART OF SECRETS set in New Zealand
Dual-timeline family sagas about finding your roots

Book 1 – *The Art of Secrets* Book 2 – *Elinor* Book 3 – *Lucy* (2023)

When a friend begs Emma to untangle her family skeletons and find Elinor, a series of threats puts her in danger. Elinor only wants one thing in life: a home, and a hearth where she can dispense love and laughter. But is what she yearns for a step too far? Intrigued by Elinor's story, Emma must find out who is causing trouble before it's too late.

ELINOR

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2022

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-473-63021-8

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

This is a work of fiction. Historical places and other incidents have been woven into the lives of the fictitious characters and used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events they may have attended, is purely coincidental.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-473-63023-2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

Produced for Vicky Adin by AM Publishing New Zealand www.ampublishingnz.com

Cover Background Image: Bev Robitai

**To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz, www.amazon.com**

1

*Warning Signs**Auckland**26 January 2021*

The haunted look on Jessica's face propelled Emma to her feet. "What on earth's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost." The hated cliché was out of her mouth in an instant but summed up her friend's distressed appearance. She had not seen Jess in weeks, and the person standing before her was a different woman – she'd lost weight, was pale and dispirited, her long, dark locks escaped limply from a large hair claw.

"Maybe I have." Jess handed her the creased newspaper cutting she'd been clutching.

"What's this?"

"Read it," whispered Jess. She perched on the wingback chair Emma guided her to and folded her arms, her knees bouncing up and down.

Emma placed a hand on Jess's shoulder, hoping to calm her while she read. "I don't understand. What's this all about?"

"I don't know exactly, but it's not right. It can't be right." Jess trembled. Unable to sit still, she suddenly stood, to stare beyond the window and the scene outside to a world far away. "My dad always said knowing your family and where you came from gave you roots. A realisation that we are all connected somehow."

"Yes, I understand that feeling, but what's upset you so much?"

Jess turned towards Emma, a frown marring her brow, but some colour had returned. "I found that funeral notice when I was cleaning out the house. The cuttings were in an old envelope under a whole bunch of other stuff." Jess's father had died last November, and his death had thrown her into turmoil. "Dad was so adamant about his family tree. He was always telling tales when I was growing up, about this aunt and that, or what one grandmother or another got up to. I used to get terribly confused with all the names and relationships, then after I left home, I forgot most of what he told me. Once I had a family, we were too busy with the immediate things to listen to his stories."

Emma knew how easily stories from the past got lost. In part, that was why she had become a ghostwriter – to help people find their roots. "That's normal, but I don't see why you're quite so distraught."

"I feel my whole life is falling apart and everything I knew and understood about myself has gone."

"I'm sure it's not that bad. So tell me, who is this 'Evelyn Somers, daughter of the indomitable Elinor Somers'?" asked Emma reading from the clipping.

"That's my problem. I don't remember. Dad could count back several generations and knew all about his various grandparents and their siblings." Jess sat again and rested her face in her hands as if she was trying to block something out or make sense of something behind closed eyes.

"Sorry, Jess, I don't understand the problem here."

At that moment, Emma's ever-patient husband Luke stuck his head around the door. "Anyone want coffee or anything?" he asked. "Hi, Jess. You okay? You rushed past me so fast I didn't get to say hello." Looking at Emma, he rolled his eyes towards Jess. "Everything all right?"

“Oh, hi, Luke. Sorry, I ... um, well ... it’s just ... Hi. Coffee would be great, thanks. White with two.”

Emma looked at Jess in surprise at the unusual request for two sugars but let it slide. She glanced up at the clock. “Thanks, honey. I’ll have tea, please. Can you do the school pickup?”

“Yep. One tea, one coffee, coming up.”

Emma smiled her thanks, knowing he was aware how long this conversation could take. She and Jess had been friends since antenatal classes nine years ago. Their daughters had been born a couple of months apart and had more or less grown up in each other’s houses. Until lately.

“Can you tell me why this has upset you so much?” asked Emma.

“The date. Look at the date she died.”

“1999. I still don’t ...”

“Exactly. She was alive all those years when I should have had a grand-something-or-other, whatever she was, like other kids. Only I didn’t. Dad said ...” She broke off, struggling to make sense of her memories. “But now I come to think about it, I don’t remember what he said. I just knew I didn’t have grandparents. I suppose I thought they were dead, like Mum’s. But that funeral notice shows they weren’t. Or this Evelyn wasn’t.”

“Listen, Jess, I do know what you’re going through,” soothed Emma, remembering how fragmented she felt when she discovered her own mother, alienated from her adopted parents, had kept those grandparents a secret until it was too late. “But let’s not jump to conclusions. There must have been a reason your dad never told you.”

“What possible reason could there be?”

“I don’t know. But if your mother also kept quiet about this Evelyn, she must have supported him.”

Jess fell silent, contemplating Emma’s words. Her usually warm, dark eyes were now red and swollen, her face splotchy. She appeared completely at a loss.

“Here you go,” said Luke, returning with a tray. “If you don’t need anything else, I’ve got stuff to do. I’ll pick the girls up on the way back.” He winked at Emma. “Am I on cooking tonight?”

She squeezed his hand. “Thank you.”

Emma passed the coffee mug to Jess and placed the biscuit plate on the side table. She moved the carver chair from the corner to sit within touching distance of her friend. “Let’s start at the beginning, shall we? I know it’s been a tough couple of months since your dad died, but what were you doing to find these cuttings?”

Clutching the coffee mug in both hands, Jess stared intently into the milky liquid and began to explain. “The lawyer said I had to clean the family house out because my sister wants it sold. ASAP. I know I’ve been putting it off, what with everything ... Last week, I decided I’d better get started. Olivia wanted to come with me, so the two of us went over to the old house.”

Jess talked about packing up all her dad’s possessions ready to take to the hospice shop; how her eight-year-old daughter chose to keep a couple of things, and she’d collected a few items for herself, but all the furniture and other stuff had to go. “None of it would suit our place, and Martin wouldn’t have it in the house anyway.” Jess appeared to shudder as she said her husband’s name. She placed the mug on the side table and ate two biscuits.

Emma waited until Jess was ready to continue.

“By Sunday, all that was left to sort was the paperwork. Dad had stuffed papers into every drawer, and the cupboards were full of boxes. Livvy got excited by the old photo albums and lay down on the floor to look at them while I tried to sort out what might be important and what was rubbish.”

Jess sipped at her coffee, pulled a face and put the cup down. “It wasn’t easy. Some of it I had no idea about. I think Mum and Dad kept every card and letter they’d ever received. After looking at twenty or so cards that said little beyond the obvious, and from people I didn’t know, I chucked them. The letters I put into a box for later. Olivia kept asking if I knew who this or that person was in a photo. Sometimes I did, but not many. One drawer was full of loose photos. I glanced at a few on the top. One or two had names on them, most didn’t and ...” She paused, took another breath and

continued. "... And I realised I didn't have a clue. I didn't have that connection with family that Dad had considered so important. And at that moment, I realised I'd lost touch with Dad. And it broke my heart."

Jess burst into tears. Emma found a box of tissues and put it on Jess's knee. Pulling several tissues out, Jess blew her nose and wiped her eyes. Her sobs subsided. "Sorry. I'm so topsy-turvy right now, I can't think straight."

"Don't be sorry. It's natural. You've lost your dad. Grief often comes at odd times, sparked by little things. Give it time. How's your mum?"

Emma knew better than to ask about the estranged sister, the one who'd stormed off, vowing never to speak to Jess or her father again after they'd gone against her wishes and put her mother into dementia care. That was over a year ago.

In return, Jess blamed her sister for putting added stress on their dad's heart and causing his death. There seemed no way to be reconciled, and with the lawyer breathing down Jess's neck to get the house ready for sale, Emma sympathised with her situation.

Jess attempted a smile. "I knew you'd understand. Mum's deteriorating, and she doesn't remember Dad's gone. She keeps talking about him as though they were young again."

"What do the doctors say?"

"Not much. There's not much to say. She's cared for, she's safe, she doesn't wander, she eats most of what is put in front of her. I can't ask for more. It was hard not being able to visit her through all the lockdowns last year. But in some ways, it was easier. It's impossible to talk to her about anything."

Jess stared out the window again as the sun lit up the roses swaying in the breeze. Her voice was almost a whisper. "Some days she doesn't know who I am. And I don't take Olivia now. She's too young to remember Mum as she was."

"Oh, Jess. That's a huge load to bear. No wonder you're stressed. Let me help – what can I do? Meals or housework or something."

"No!" The instant retort was sharp and took Emma by surprise. "Sorry. I mean, no thanks. It's okay," stammered Jess. "Honestly. I'm managing. And Olivia is so good. She helps me a lot."

The ups and downs of life over the previous twelve months, as the pandemic sweeping the world reared its ugly head, had taken a toll on even the most placid people. Learning to live within the bounds of the various lockdown levels – anywhere from 'stay at home and only go out for essential supplies' through to 'free to go out anytime and mix with people' and back to isolation again – was often a challenge. Especially so for those with health, emotional or family problems. There was no telling if or when there'd be a new outbreak, which might necessitate another lockdown.

Over that time, mostly thanks to Luke's even-tempered nature, Emma's family bubble had managed well, but she was beginning to think Jess's household hadn't been as good. Their friendship had changed in that year. They didn't talk the way they used to. Emma put it down to spending more time at home with their own families; they'd communicated less and no longer reached out to each other as much.

Even so, Emma considered Jess's reaction to the old funeral notice a bit over the top. Why did it matter so much? Was it a culmination of her dad, her mum and her sister all rolled into one? Or was something else going on she didn't know about?

Uncertain how to introduce her concerns, she changed the subject. "Do you know who Elinor Somers was?"

"Not exactly. There were two Eleanors, I remember that, but I never knew their surnames. Dad used to rattle off on his fingers the five Es and he was number six, Edward. He was proud of his heritage, especially the female side, extending back to the 1860s or something. I forget now." Jess pulled out some more tissues and blew her nose again in what seemed to Emma a delaying tactic. "Oh, Emma, why did he lie to me? Why tell me they were all dead when they weren't? Why pretend?"

"Maybe he didn't. Maybe he was protecting you." Emma's experience with family histories often revealed stories people wanted to keep secret. The reasons were as varied as the people involved. "What do you know about your dad's mother?"

Jess looked confused. “Nothing. I don’t remember who his mother was.”

“Where did you find this?” Emma asked, returning to the cutting.

“I’d hardly dented the piles of papers before it was time to go home. You know, family stuff, and get Martin his dinner.”

Another pause. Another vacant stare.

Emma frowned. Her instinct said something was wrong.

“I’d left everything pretty much as it was, and I’ve been back every day since trying to sort it all out. It was strange being there on my own – without Olivia, without Dad. I could almost hear ...” Jess drifted off again, staring at the floor.

“Hear what, exactly?” Emma often felt a sensation of old houses ‘talking’ and wondered what Jess had experienced.

“Oh, never mind. Nothing much. Just old houses creaking in the wind. Anyway ...” She rubbed her eyes. “Jeepers, we collect a lot of paperwork in our lives. Screeds and screeds of it. I ended up with a box of what I thought were the most important and threw the rest away. Not that I care much. If that rotten sister of mine wants any, she can come and get them herself.”

Jess pulled angrily at another tissue. “Then I started on the drawer of photos. I went back this morning to finish sorting them and check I hadn’t missed anything. At the bottom of the drawer, I found an envelope with several clippings inside. I peeked at the first one and saw the name ... I don’t know quite what came over me, but I panicked. It was as if ...”

Jess raised her tormented eyes and looked straight at Emma, begging her to understand, to help. And something else Emma couldn’t put her finger on. “I had to get out of there.”

“And that’s why you came here?”

Jess nodded.

“Shall I come to the house with you and help finish the sorting?”

“Would you?”

“Of course. Anything to help.” Emma looked at the clock again. “Luke should be back any minute with the girls. He can look after them for a couple of hours or so if you want to go today, or would tomorrow morning suit better?”

Jess jumped up. “Oh, damn, it’s late. I’d better go. If you’re sure you don’t mind, I’d be grateful if you would help me sort out my dad’s stuff and ...” Jess gabbled. “Would you please find out if I really did have a grandmother until 1999? You’re so clever at that. I’ll give you a call. Is Luke back yet?”

“No, not yet. Oh wait, yes, I hear the car. Jess? What’s going on?”

“Nothing.” She shook her head. “Nothing. I have to go.”

Emma followed as Jess raced towards the front door. She watched Jess wave goodbye to Luke, hustle Olivia into the car and take off in a hurry.

“Hi, Mum,” said Rosie coming through the door and giving her mother a hug around the waist. “Anything to eat?”

“Course. Ask Dad.”

“What was that all about?” said Luke, closing the front door behind him.

“Tell you in a minute.” She put her finger to her lips. “Come into the library where ears can’t listen,” she whispered.

“That sounds like an invitation I can’t refuse. Let me fix a snack for Rosie. I’ll be there in a jiff.”

The library was Emma’s domain. Painted a pale aqua, lined with bookshelves and family treasures, the room was a haven of history and serenity. She had placed her desk and two computer screens directly in front of one set of shelves, facing the garden. A comfy armchair piled with cushions sat in one corner, an antique padded carver in the other, and her grandmother’s precious leadlight cabinet filled with all her mementos was against the far wall. French doors opened onto the patio and led to

the path her clients used.

“Rosie,” Luke called, “remember, no TV until you’ve done your homework.”

“Aw, Dad. Just while I eat my afternoon tea, please? Then I’ll do my homework.”

“Okay,” Luke conceded. “Half an hour, while I talk to Mum.”

Luke took Emma in his arms and kissed her. She stretched her arms around his neck. The colour of the walls brought her aquamarine eyes, shining with expectation, to life.

“You’ve got that look on your face again,” said Luke, tucking one side of her blonde bob behind an ear. “I can feel a new case coming on. What’s up?”

“Sit down and I’ll tell you.”

Resting one long leg across the other knee, Luke relaxed into the armchair while Emma began to tell him about Jess’s discovery at her father’s house.

“I know I shouldn’t ask, but what’s your involvement in all this?”

“I offered to help her sort some photos and whatever else she finds. If she’s found one set of cuttings about a funeral twenty-plus years ago, I’m positive there’ll be more. And possibly papers that will reveal other family secrets. Her dad was a hoarder. She’ll need someone to explain the complexities.”

Luke grinned at her growing enthusiasm. “Is that all you’re going to do, my little sleuth? I know you too well. You’re going to want to dig a bit deeper to see what you can find.”

When Emma arrived at Jess’s family home the next morning, she was captivated by its old-world charm. The house was a typical Californian bungalow of the 1920s, set on a large section, with a white picket fence and a central pathway leading to the front door. The garden was a riot of colour, out-of-control roses and cottage garden plants.

“Are you ready to do this?” asked Emma, thinking how pale and drawn Jess looked as she answered the door, as if she hadn’t slept well.

“I have to get it finished. That impossible sister of mine is wanting rid of everything, even though it’s half mine. Come on, let’s get on with it.”

They spent the next few hours loading Emma’s car with bags that she had offered to drop off at the hospice; those destined for the rubbish dump went into Jess’s.

“I’d better call the auctioneers and see if they want any of this other stuff,” said Jess, sounding unenthusiastic.

Looking around the rooms of furniture, lamps and ornaments, Emma was saddened that so many mementos would go to the second-hand shops to be disposed of, and any link with their previous owners would be gone. But she had to remember that not everyone was as nostalgic as her. Sometimes she felt more attuned to the past and people she’d never known than to many of the people she met in her current life.

Except for Luke. He understood. She’d had so little growing up, and lost so much in such a short space of time, long before they’d met, that it wasn’t a surprise she hung on to sentimental objects.

“Let’s clear the table and spread everything out until we can make sense of it,” said Emma, putting a pile of photos on the table and roughly sorting them into recognisable groups.

They pulled out the remaining drawers in the drop-front writing desk and put the more-important-looking papers on the table.

“What do you want to do about all these receipts?” asked Emma.

“Dump them. They’re old.”

“Are you sure? There could be clues to your dad’s life amongst them.”

“Nah. Get rid of them. It’s what she wants.”

Emma wondered why Jess was being so compliant with her sister’s wishes. “Do you?”

Jess shrugged as she added a few more handwritten letters to the box she’d started to fill. “Dunno what I’ll do with this lot. I doubt they’ll say anything interesting.”

“How do you know? They could be a gold mine of dates and names.”

“Maybe. But will they help me find my grandmothers – or whoever they were?”

“They might. I’d suggest you sort those letters into date order, and glance through *them* first. See what’s there.”

Jess took a handful from the box and began to place the letters into piles in decade order. “There’s a couple here from way back, a few in the ’30s and ’40s, but most are later.”

“What’s this?” asked Emma. The desk appeared empty, but she spotted a small drawer in the top section that had been missed, and pulled the knob. “It’s locked. Have you seen a key anywhere?”

Jess came to peer over her shoulder. “Is it? There’s no obvious keyhole.”

“Maybe it’s stuck.” Emma ran her hand along the front and sides, pushing and prodding. “Got it,” she said, pressing on a tiny lever at the back. The drawer popped open. Inside lay a fat envelope full of bits of paper and family notices. She handed it to Jess. “I think we may have found something.”

Emma noticed the front panel of the shallow drawer in the middle had extensions on either side. She pulled the drawer from its surrounds and, as she did, the entire front section slid out to reveal another set of letter slots and drawers behind. “Oh, wow! This is amazing. I didn’t expect that. I’ve read about these secret cubbyholes but never seen one. What a treat.”

Emma was eager to investigate further. Her love of antiques was almost as deep as her love of tracing family histories. “See how the drawer and the front set of racks are half the depth of the side? I hadn’t noticed. This could be where your dad hid all his secrets.”

The two women stared at the back section of tall narrow slots, which held several envelopes, and a centre section with three small drawers.

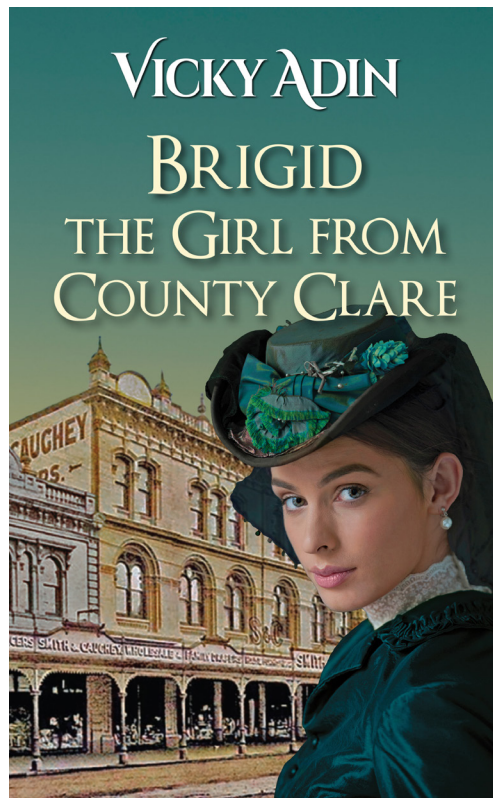
“Oh, Jess, this is beautiful. You can’t sell this. It’s so special.”

A strangled gasp escaped Jess, and Emma turned to see what was wrong. Jess held her hands over her mouth, her eyes goggling. Not for the first time, Emma wondered what else was bothering Jess. It couldn’t just be a bunch of old papers.

“Dad built that desk. A long time ago. I remember ...”

“That’s wonderful. Are you positive you don’t want to keep it? If it was precious to your dad, maybe it’s tied to your past and might reveal the ‘indomitable Elinor Somers’.”

...



Counterpart to *Gwenna The Welsh Confectioner*
Prequel to *The Costumier's Gift*

Like making lace – she pieces together a new life from a single thread of hope.

Brigid O'Brien flees the poverty and starvation of Ireland in the late 1880s for a better life in Australia. But life doesn't run smoothly for Brigid, the talented lace maker, and she once again must face life-changing choices. A new start in New Zealand offers hope - until the day she encounters the man who seeks her downfall.

BRIGID THE GIRL FROM COUNTY CLARE

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2015, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-9951076-3-2

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-9941305-0-1

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

First produced for Vicky Adin in 2015 as a print book and ebook under the title *The Girl from County Clare*, by AM Publishing New Zealand
www.ampublishingnz.com

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz, www.amazon.com



1

The Leaving

Gravesend, London

Tuesday, 19th October 1886

Brigid's nose wrinkled at the odious mixture of oil, coal and scummy seawater. "Ah, Mammy. What have I done?"

Any enthusiasm she had once felt soon turned to trepidation on the journey from her village in County Clare to the docks of London. She'd been told all sorts of tales about England, as foreign to her as her destination, but she hadn't expected it to be quite so different from her native Ireland.

Bells clanged, engines churned and animals bayed. Hordes of anxious people chattered, sailors shouted and cargo thumped and banged as the crew loaded it. Her ears buzzed from all the noise. She'd never seen so many people and so many buildings in one place. A sudden ear-piercing screech from the steam whistle drowned out every other sound, and Brigid clamped her hands over her ears to ease the pain.

"Breeda!" her cousin Jamie shouted. "Breeda. Do ye hear me?" A head taller than most people, Jamie pushed his way through the throng of passengers and around stacked crates to reach her.

His touch startled her.

"I was calling you, our Breeda."

"I didn't hear you above this frightful din."

"Never mind that now. Come on, come with me." Jamie picked up her small trunk and marched off again. Brigid felt for her great-grandmother's brooch to check she still had it firmly pinned to her petticoat. She treasured it as a good luck charm. Satisfied, she gathered up her bag stuffed with clothes, her rosary, Bible and other precious things and followed him.

It had taken her and Jamie two weeks to get to London. She knew all the reasons why she was here facing the start of her new life, but the reality of the decision was vastly different from the talk. And there'd been plenty of that over the last few years since the potato crop had failed – again.

Brigid had fretted during the idle hours spent waiting to board. Under the command of Captain Sayers, the SS *Dorunda*, a new-style steamship owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company, would take her thousands of miles away from her homeland, across the oceans to Australia. They'd been pushed and shaped into endless queues in order firstly, to pass inspection by the ship's officers and get their tickets stamped, and secondly, for Dr Goodall, the ship's surgeon, to examine their persons. The doctor had placed a long trumpet-shaped object against her chest, with his ear pressed to the other end: checking for infectious diseases, she'd been told. Whatever he hoped to hear she never knew, but thankfully, she and Jamie were both waved on through.

"You're down the back in the single girls' quarters, and I'm up front with the men," Jamie shouted over his shoulder. His muscles bulged as he manoeuvred the trunk through the crush of people and obstacles on deck. Even at eighteen, he wasn't one to be messed with. He'd developed

enormous strength through a life of hard farming on stony ground.

“Ah, Jamie. Can’t I stay with you?”

“No luck there, Breeda, my love. There’s rules. You’ll be grand, that you will.” His lilting Irish brogue comforted her.

Trapped between the shoulders of the other passengers, she would have had an elbow in her eye if she hadn’t moved her head in time. The distance between her and Jamie grew.

“Wait up,” she cried and surged forward to grab the tail of his jacket, unsettled by the strangeness around her.

British seamen shouted orders to dozens of brown-skinned sailors wearing strange, brimless black hats, decorated with colourful kerchiefs. Their long cotton tunics, tied with a scarf and worn over baggy trousers, looked stained and unkempt, but the men seemed cheerful enough as they lifted and tossed endless sacks of mail and crates of goods. She hadn’t expected to see people who looked so, so ... she searched for the word to fit. Exotic, or fanciful, came to mind.

“Keep close, Breeda. We need to get in quick to get ye the best bunk. First in, first served, they said.”

As they moved further aft, the crowds thinned out, and Brigid saw families nervously gathered together around their possessions; a woman stood alone, straining her neck to look for someone; a child cried. With no one to bar his way, Jamie led her down the aft ladder into the dimly lit compartment between decks. Blinking to adjust her eyes to the shadowy light, Brigid could see the chamber ran the full width of the ship. What little light seeped in came from the occasional small porthole on either side.

The ceiling rose high enough, but the darkness made it feel low. Bunks stacked two high and two deep lined the outer walls. Jamie slouched his shoulders and bowed his head as he shuffled his way along the central passage. At the far end he spied a set of empty berths – narrow bunks with barely enough space between them for him to stand front on – and shoved Brigid’s trunk under the lower bed.

“Oi! You,” shouted a woman, appearing out of the shadows. “Yer not supposed to be in here. Yer a man!”

“That I am, for sure, miss.” Jamie took his cap off and flashed her a cheeky grin. “And I’m just leaving, ma’am. Only here to help ma cousin with her luggage. Little t’ing that she is couldna manage on her own. I’m sure you understand, a woman as canny as you.” He winked at the woman, who laughed and tucked a stray strand of her unruly strawberry-blonde curls behind her ear.

“Gerraway wi’ ya, young ’un. You canna flatter me, even if you do have manners.”

Jamie kissed Brigid on the cheek and gave her a wink as he disappeared up the ladder.

“Well, lass, looks like we’re neighbours. I’m Sally.”

A curvy woman dressed in a dark blue full-skirted dress with a rather low-cut neckline scrutinised her. Brigid guessed she would be at least twenty-five years old but couldn’t be certain.

“I’m Brigid O’Brien, but they calls me Breeda.”

“Well. Glad to meet you, Miss Breeda.” She paused. “I know – Breeda Kneader, Pudding and Pie, kissed the boys and made them ... wild.” Laughing at her own joke, she gave Brigid a friendly push in response to the girl’s mortified look. “Ease up, a’ways, hen. We’ve a long way to go together. Just a bit of funning.”

Brigid tried a wobbly smile, but couldn’t think of anything to say. She took off her bonnet and coat, revealing the deep purple bengaline costume with her own handmade lace collar – a copy of a hand-me-down donated to the convent – and felt indebted to the nuns for her two good dresses and the skills to make them.

“Skinny wee thing, ain’t you?” remarked Sally, eyeing Brigid from top to toe. “And that’s a lovely bit of lace, an’ all. Did you make it?”

“Thank you. Yes, I did.”

“Clever you. Wish my hair’d braid as neat as yours.”

Brigid patted her dark chignon self-consciously. "I could try and do yours for you sometime, if you'd like. The colour is beautiful. Like molten honey in the sunshine."

"More like scraggly straw!" she guffawed. "We'll see. Get yourself sorted."

Anxious as to how bad the journey would be, Brigid took the advice of a sailor she'd met to claim an upper berth: 'Ye don' wanna be down below 'en people start chuckin' up,' he'd said. 'An' they will, when weather gets rough.'

Sally sat on the edge of the bottom bunk she'd claimed. "Where you from and where you goin' then, lass?"

Brigid unrolled her sleeping mat and blanket, neatly tied her eating utensils together through the holes in the handles and hung them on a hook. "I'm from County Clare in the west of Ireland. I'm going to Brisbane. And you?" After rerolling some of her clothing Brigid shoved her bag hard against the outer wall.

"Sally Forsythe from Dumfriesshire, Scotland, going to Townsville."

The women shook hands, but before anything more could be said, two newcomers wanting to claim the neighbouring berths jiggled past them.

"And who might you two be?" Sally cheerfully greeted the newcomers.

"I'm Annie McKenna," said a shy, thin girl with lank, dark hair and shadows under her eyes.

"And I'm Lettie, from County Derry," announced her look-alike counterpart.

"We're sisters," they said in unison, as they placed their belongings on the adjacent lower bunk.

"Hello, Annie and Lettie. I'll get out the way for a wee bit while you set up." Brigid squeezed around them to give them some space.

The mast, hatchway and ladder took up much of the 'tween deck, and the claustrophobic space was becoming even more cramped. A steady stream of women stumbled down the ladder in search of a bunk and a place to store their belongings. Brigid silently thanked Jamie for insisting she get in early to find a bunk.

Benches of some sort hung from the near-black ceiling space, and Brigid puzzled how they would get them down – and where they were supposed to go. They had little enough room to manoeuvre as it was.

Amidst the clamour, she heard some Irish voices, but most accents she didn't recognise: Scottish ones, maybe, and lots of English. Many a time since leaving home she'd not understood much of what was said. Even the people looked different.

On their journey, Brigid had seen the fashionable families in their stylish clothes and watched the ladies in their finery she'd heard so much about, but while some of the women in this section were dressed like her, in their Sunday best, there were also many still in rough peasant clothing.

"Ow," she squawked as a bag hit her across the back of the head and shoulder. She spun around in time to see a coarsely dressed woman with filthy hands push Annie out of the way.

"I'll have that bunk," she snarled. "You're little enough. Go get yerself a top bunk."

Annie tried to explain she couldn't be parted from her sister, but before she'd finished talking, the woman had shoved the girl's kit from the lower bunk towards her with such force she sent the girl sprawling on the deck. Lettie rushed to Annie's side, muttering something Brigid couldn't hear, but the wide-eyed fear in the girl's face roused Brigid's protective instincts. She leapt to her feet.

"Can I ask ye to be kindly, now?" she said to the woman. "These girls claimed their beds first. I t'ink 'twould be better for ye to find somewhere else."

Her antagonist stood a good head and shoulders taller than her, and Brigid faltered. But reassured by Sally standing beside her, she tilted her head back and faced the newcomer.

"Mind yer own business." The woman turned and glared at Brigid and Sally's determined faces. Immediately, she started wheedling. "I gotta have a lower bunk. It's me legs, you see; I can't climb up, and she's young enough to move to a top 'un," whinged the woman.

Brigid let her breath out slowly, trying to keep her temper. "That's as maybe, but being a bully about it will get you nowhere."

“Yeah. Now clear off,” said Sally. “We don’t want the likes of you next to us anyway.”

Reverting to her natural bad temper, the woman lowered her head, stuck out her chin and growled, “Who’s gonna make me?”

“I am.” Sally took a step forward, arms akimbo, her voice menacing. “Do you want to risk taking me on and losing before you start?”

“And me.” Brigid’s eyes burned with fire. She’d never understood people who were mean or nasty. “But if it makes ye feel better, I’ll help you find somewhere,” she offered, hoping a bit of kindness would ease the situation.

“Aye. I could do wi’ some ’elp. You’re a good lass.” While the woman spoke sweetly to Brigid, she spat at Sally. “You’ll regret this, you will. I’ll get you afore the journey’s over. That I will.”

Wednesday, 6th October 1886

Our journey to the other side of the world began when we piled into Da’s cart, me in the front and Jamie in the back, holding on to our stuff for dear life. Behind us, we could see our two families standing in the middle of the road, watching us go. There was little joy in the parting. My sisters stood huddled together, solemn and still.

It had taken many a month to get ready for our leave-taking. Autumn began kindly enough with a just a little more sunlight than normal, and what rain came fell lightly. But by the end of September, the weather got worse. By the time we were ready to leave, the rain had set in.

The damp seeped into everything – even our spirits.

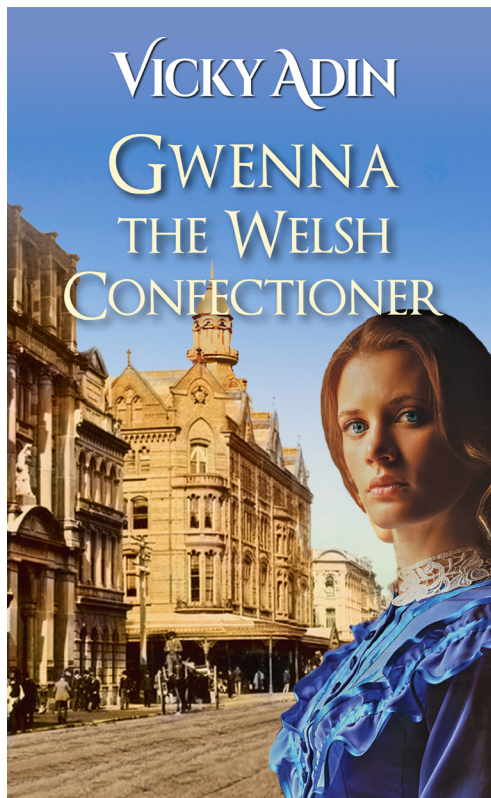
The goodbyes had started weeks before we left. I got excited when friends and neighbours called by to talk, or gave me a small gift – something useful like spoons or linens, woollens or precious, precious thread. But saying goodbye to my two sets of grandparents – Michael and Bridget, and John and Mary – was the hardest part. Well, no, if I’m honest, leaving Ma was the hardest.

Ma had kept busy in the weeks leading up to leaving day. She swept and baked, sewed and knitted, trying to remember everything she considered a mother should tell her daughter. She helped me gather what I’d need on the journey, packed things I could add to my dowry for when I might have my own home. She kept my bedding and clothing dry – draped over the rack above the fire, next to where she hung my Da’s and brother John’s wet clothing at the end of each day. It fair made the air fuggy with the rising steam and stale smells of peat, straw and pigs.

It was Ma’s way of coping, keeping busy. She would sometimes give me a saying to write down, or remind me about one of her recipes handed down from her mother. She repeated what I would need, over and over again, and wouldn’t say goodbye, even at the last minute. All she said was, ‘Be safe’ and pressed the shawl pin that once belonged to her grandmother into my hand and disappeared inside the cottage again. I struggled not to let my tears fall as I said goodbye to my sisters gathered around the door: Norah holding Susan, and Nellie holding the baby Katie, while Máire stood alone – always alone was our Máire. Their tears flowed silently.

Da said nothing as he coaxed the donkey to move along at a faster clip than it usually managed, and we soon reached the main road and turned east towards Ennis. Da couldn’t take us any further if he was to get home again before dark. He shook hands with Jamie and charged him to look after me, but when it came to saying goodbye to me, he just stared, as if memorising my face. Gruffly he said, ‘Travel well’ and headed off again at a fast trot. He never looked back.

...



Counterpart to *Brigid The Girl from County Clare*
Prequel to *The Costumier's Gift*

Inspired by a true story, Gwenna The Welsh Confectioner is a fascinating insight into life in Auckland, New Zealand at the turn of the 20th century.

Gwenna is young and irrepressible in the face of adversity. Since her father died, her abusive stepbrother is in charge and the business is failing. She promised Pa she would bring his dreams for a sweet shop to life, but she has many obstacles to overcome and risks losing the one person who matters the most.

GWENNA THE WELSH CONFECTIONER

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2017, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-9951076-4-9

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-9951000-2-2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

First produced for Vicky Adin in 2017 as a print book and ebook under the title Gwenna, by AM Publishing New Zealand
www.ampublishingnz.com

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz www.amazon.com



1

LOCKED IN THE PAST

*Auckland, New Zealand
March 1899*

For the moment, she felt free – deliciously free – only too aware the illusion would pass soon enough.

Gwenna Price hurried along busy Karangahape Road towards Turner’s, the greengrocer. Her boots crunched along the hardened grit as she swung her basket and called a cheery good morning to shopkeepers preparing for the day ahead. She loved watching them sweeping footpaths, cleaning windows or winding out the shop awnings, unless they were lucky enough to have a fixed verandah. Other merchants set their wares out in doorways and along their shopfronts, seemingly indifferent to the rattle of trams and clink of harness, or the clomp of horses’ hooves and bicycles whirring past.

Gwenna delighted in these sounds as the day came to life, exhilarated by all the hustle and bustle. She waved to the girl changing the window display in the milliner’s shop, and stopped to pat a horse munching on oats in its nosebag, wishing her life could be as contented. In the distance, the sails on Partington’s Mill slowly turned in the breeze.

One day, she promised herself, she would be a part of all this busyness. One day.

She continued down the street, mentally ticking off her shopping list, thankful for the wide-brimmed bonnet shading her face. Her cool dimity blouse and pale grey skirt swishing around her ankles were a blessing in the warm air on a cloudless autumn day.

She pushed the niggling worry of her ailing half-brother Charlie to the back of her mind as the far more pressing worry of the charming and persistent Johnno Jones entered her thoughts. She was tempted to give in to the young man’s pleas, if only to escape life at home, except for one troublesome detail – his father, Black Jack Jones.

She and Johnno had known each other once in childhood days, when his father had been the local carter and used to do odd jobs for her pa, but they’d disappeared years ago. She’d all but forgotten about them until Johnno returned over the summer.

Deep in thought, Gwenna hadn’t seen Johnno appear, as if from nowhere, as he was wont to do. He’d grabbed her hand and spun her round like they were dancing, before his smiling face came into focus. His cap was set at its usual rakish angle. “How’s my favourite girl doing?”

She slapped his arm playfully, laughing, elated at the sight of him. Readjusting her hat, she tried to ignore the melting feeling that swept over her whenever he was near. As a youngster, with his impish smile and cheerful ways, Johnno had been a popular lad for running messages. He still found occasional work, but nobody hired Black Jack any longer.

“What are you doing here at this time of day, Johnno? You near scared me to death,” she teased.

“Hoping to see you, of course. How can you ’xpect a man to go for so long without seeing yer pretty face?” Johnno twisted one of her freshly curled ringlets around his finger as he leaned closer.

At his touch, a flutter ignited in places too intimate to think about. “Away with you now. Enough of your flattery, and it’s not much more’n a week since you saw me last. I’ve work to do, ev’n if you don’t.”

“Aw, Gwenna. Don’t be like that. Walk with me aways. You make my heart glad, that you do, and I need some cheering.”

“So you always say.”

His glorious brown eyes, glowing with desire, threatened to devour her, and she couldn't resist their unmistakable message.

"All right, then, but only a wee ways. I need to get the groceries home before that stepbrother of mine thinks I've been gone too long. I don't want to feel the sting of his hand this day if I can avoid it."

"Run away with me, sweet Gwenna, and I promise you'll never feel the sting of a man's hand ever again."

He led her off the main road and down a couple of twisting alleyways until there was not a soul in sight. Gently pushing her back against the warmth of the brick wall, he kissed and caressed her with a lightness of touch that sent shivers through her body. The more she quivered, the more amorous he became. She lost her heart, as well as her hat, as the fiery passions of youth flared.

"Ah, Gwenna, me love. I wish you'd come away with me. What have you got to lose? Jack and me, we're leaving this night to try our luck down south." Johnno always called his father by his nickname. There were far too many John Joneses, even in Auckland, not to differentiate them in some way. "The wagon's all loaded and only needs you to decorate it."

Gwenna had heard this argument before, more than once, and it was enticing, but not if she had to be anywhere near his father: something evil burned in that man's dark eyes.

If only Pa were still with us, she wished fervently. He would advise me. She shook her head to chase away her futile thoughts. Her stepbrother, Elias Hughes, was head of the household now, and life had changed.

"We've been through this afore, Johnno. Sometimes the devil ya know is better than the one you don't. And I can't leave Mam just yet. She's enough on her plate caring for young Charlie. He's mighty sickly, and Elias wouldn't care whether he lives or dies."

Never to be undone and always philosophical, Johnno shrugged his shoulders. "Well then, give us some more of those tasty kisses to take with me on me travels. I'll have to store 'em up till I return."

* * *

"Wherever have you been?" whispered Bethan as Gwenna eased the latch to the door, hoping she could pretend she'd been at home for a time before Elias found her. "He's been looking for you."

A trickle of fear turned Gwenna's stomach sour, but the sight of her stepmam's tired, wan face unsettled her more. Sitting in the big armchair next to the fireplace, Bethan nursed the sleeping Charlie on her knee. He was almost seven, but small and scrawny enough to be mistaken for a four-year-old.

A lump rose in Gwenna's throat as Bethan began to sing softly in Welsh 'Ar Hyd y Nos' – the old hymn 'All Through the Night'.

"Charlie's so peaceful there, Mam. Don't disturb him. You stay put and I'll start the soup."

"Be quick then, chook. He'll be wanting you to make the sugar ready - not doing my chores. Charlie had a rough go earlier, coughing his little lungs out till he were sick. Poor fellow."

Gwenna placed the basket of groceries on the kitchen table before going through to the scullery. She filled the pot with water from the butler's sink and set it on the coal range to heat. Chatting away to Bethan about the gossip she'd picked up at the grocer's, Gwenna sorted the vegetables.

She didn't see the blow coming. As she stood up from getting a few parsnips from the bottom of the pantry, Elias slammed the door against her face, sending her staggering into the table. Before she could gather her wits, he was leaning over her, forcing her back into a painful arch. She could smell him. The foul odour of stale beer and sweat made her gag, and his cold, hard stare frightened her. Most times when he lost his temper and spittle flew from his mouth in his rage, he was content to push and shove, and sometimes slap her, but nothing like this.

Even as the blood seeped from a cut to her cheek and pain exploded in her nose, she refused to show her fear.

"I'll break you in two one day, I will, if you don't learn to do as you're told. One hour, I said, then back here and ready the sugar. But what do I find?" Elias's temper was rising and Gwenna's body relaxed a fraction. He ran out of steam quicker when he was angry and often mistimed his blows. "I find you missing for more'n half the morning, the ol' woman in there caring for the crybaby an' you doin' her chores instead of yer own, that's what. An' I won't have it. Do you hear me? I'm head of this family now, and you'll do what I tells ya."

The open-handed slaps jerked her head first to one side then the other. As she prepared herself for the next blow, he turned away. Crossing to his mother, he grabbed her by the bun at the back of her neck and forced her to her feet. She barely had time to put the now wide awake and whimpering Charlie down before Elias shoved her in the direction of the scullery. "Get in there and do ya chores."

Tripping from the force, Bethan would have fallen had Gwenna not caught her.

Elias's hand was raised to strike again when the sound of the adjoining door stopped him in his tracks.

Hugh Powell filled the doorway. His muscles bulged under the rolled-up sleeves of his collarless white shirt, as he wiped his hands on a towel. His jaw clenched within a grim face.

"What do you want?" snapped Elias, spinning around and combing his fingers through his hair.

The women stood silent, watching from the safety of the scullery door, waiting for Elias's next move. Hugh was broader than his employer and a good half-head taller. Elias had never challenged him, but there was always a first time.

"I've finished that batch of boiled sweets," said Hugh.

Wise to his boss's temper, Hugh said little. He had become a thorn in the other man's side and someone Elias viewed as a necessary evil – someone with both the strength and skill needed to keep the business viable, but who saw what he shouldn't.

Elias glared between the two women and Hugh, before pushing past him, and stormed into the back room where the large sugar-boiling kitchen was housed. Hugh followed, closing the door behind him.

"Let me see, Gwenna, bach," Bethan coaxed, as she soaked a towel under the tap.

Gwenna, pale with shock and pain, leant against the door frame, holding her hands to her face, unable to control the trembling in her legs. At times like this, she sorely missed her pa George, who had died two years earlier of the bronchial disease Charlie now suffered from. Elias would not have dared touch her or Mam had Pa been alive.

"Come, sit down," Bethan said, pressing the cold compress against Gwenna's nose, and led her to the table. Gwenna's sky-blue eyes filled with tears as she gaped in bewilderment at her beloved stepmother – the only mother she'd known.

"Why, Mam, why? He's never been that vicious before."

Bethan subdued her own tears as she fussed around inspecting the damage to Gwenna's face, cleaning up the blood amongst the tears and runny nose. "I can't answer you, my dear. I don't understand him any more. He wasn't like this as a child. You remember, don't you? He was never moody and bad-tempered. Not until his father died. But now – since your pa's gone – he seems to have lost his way."

Gwenna's memories of Elias's father, Owen Hughes, were few, except as a funny, kind man. She'd been six years old when her widowed pa had taken his two daughters to live with the Hughes family in Treorchy, in the Rhondda Valley of South Wales. Their life had been blissful for two whole years – until the accident.

Owen and Pa had built up a healthy trade together, boiling and stretching the sugar to make medicinal lozenges and every variety of sweets she could imagine. Every month Elias would hitch up the wagon and happily traverse the hills and valleys with his father, selling their goods for days on end.

One day, Owen didn't come home.

In time, Gwenna had been told the full story of how, on a wet day, the wagon had got stuck in a muddy rut on a hill. How Owen had put his shoulder to the back, yelling at the boy to drive the horse forward, but the squealing, terrified animal kept slipping in the mire. As the cart lurched backwards, Owen was crushed under the wheels. Even now, Gwenna could picture the scene and hear the screams of both man and horse. She felt the agony of a young Elias who could not save his father. The scene had haunted her for years.

"Do you remember how inconsolable he was?" asked Bethan. "Elias blamed himself for his father's death, and his grief was unbearable. Overnight he changed from my happy-go-lucky boy into a morose young man."

Gwenna understood how barren Elias had felt, now she had lost her own father – and guilty. She understood guilt too.

...



A multigenerational dual-timeline family saga continuing the stories of *Brigid The Girl from County Clare* and *Gwenna The Welsh Confectioner*.

1903. Jane thrives in the one place where she can hide her pain and keep her skeletons to herself. As principal costumier at Auckland's Opera House in its Edwardian heyday, she is content – until the past comes back to haunt her. Her beloved foster mother Brigid and her best friend Gwenna are anchors in her solitary yet rewarding life. When the burden of carrying secrets becomes too great, Jane surrenders her role as keeper of the untold.

Generations later, Katie seeks refuge from her crumbling life with her Granna, who lives in the past with her cherished photographs. Katie must identify those people and reveal generations of secrets before she can claim her inheritance. Through Jared, an intriguing new client, Katie revives her stalled career until she learns *he* holds the key to uncovering her past. Despite an increasing attraction, she shies away from any deeper involvement ... but without him she will never know the truth.

THE COSTUMIER'S GIFT
Copyright © 2019 Vicky Adin
ISBN 978-0-473-47961-9 (epub)
Print book ISBN 978-0-473-47726-4
Kindle ISBN 978-0-473-47960-2

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Ebook edited and produced by Adrienne Charlton
www.ampublishingnz.com

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz www.amazon.com

1

LIVING IN THE PAST

April 2018

Katie had only herself to blame and now it was too late: too late for Granna; too late for her; just plain too late. Saddened, Katie shrugged the thought away. Life would never be the same again.

Her mother's death fifteen months before had shaken her. No, more than that, shattered would be a better term, but she doubted the old woman sitting before her, endlessly chattering about the past, even knew her daughter had gone.

"Janey, Janey. You're here," said Granna, looking through Katie to someone else. "Say hello to our Katie here. She's your ... oh dear, I can't remember now, your great-granty-something-or-other, she is, but you know her, don't you? Our Janey's ever so clever."

"Who's that, Granna?" asked Katie, knowing she wouldn't make sense of the answer if one came.

Part of her wanted to find out about the people Granna talked about, but none of it mattered. No one else cared about Granna or the past, and there'd be nobody to care in the future either, now Katie's life had gone awry.

"My Janey is so special," said Granna, continuing her conversation with no one in particular. "Her designs are superb. Oh my ... is this for me?"

After Katie's grandfather died, roughly twenty years earlier, her grandmother had continued to live in their substantial and picturesque villa alone. A decade later, Granna could no longer manage on her own and moved in to her daughter's family home. But trying to hold her own family together and looking after her mother as her mind slipped further away from reality, became too much for Katie's mother's overworked heart.

Oh, why had nobody noticed, Katie lamented.

But Katie noticed things these days. She noticed the delicate bones in Granna's fingers, and the soft, papery skin riddled with dark lines under the loose flesh. Those once-strong fingers had been so creative and so gentle. Now they looked as if they would break if you touched them, except Granna was nowhere near breaking – at least not physically.

A bird tweeted out in the garden and Granna turned her head. Her dark velvet eyes glanced across Katie's face and momentarily held her gaze. Eyes that shone with love and purpose. In days gone by, you could get lost in those eyes, drawn into their protective warmth. Now, the depth that lived within them belonged to another era.

Putting Granna into the rest home had been the most difficult decision Katie had ever made. Her father had wanted nothing to do with the batty old woman, he'd said, and washed his hands of the whole affair. Katie had no such choice. Left with sole responsibility when her mother died, she could see no other option. Granna's safety was paramount.

Prone to wander, Granna had taken it into her head that she lived in her grandmother's old house and nothing anyone said could change her mind. 'I know where I'm going, Katie dear,' she'd say – but she didn't. Wherever the house in her mind had once been, the rest home was new and in a foreign-to-Granna area.

Now, cherished photographs covered every surface and filled her room. When she'd first moved in, the managers tried to persuade her to limit the number to those that would fit on one shelf and keep the rest in a drawer. They promised to change them regularly, but Granna would have none of it. She didn't say anything but simply took them out and put them where she could see them. Another time, they tried taking them away altogether but Granna had thrown such a hissy fit, they gave in.

One photo in particular always drew Katie's attention. The sepia tones had faded but the clothes and hairstyles worn by the two women were unmistakably Edwardian. One of the faces looking back at her was her own – the uncanny resemblance made her uneasy, but as it had no name on the back, Katie had no idea where she fitted in the family. Granna called the older woman *Móraí*, which sounded something like 'Morr-ee' to Katie's ear, but she'd never heard Granna call the second woman by name.

She made a mental note to look in her mother's collection and see if she could find anything with names. She'd put off going through the house and sorting her mother's possessions, but the time had come. Her father had a new love now and the woman didn't want the old stuff around.

"You should see those costumes our Janey used to make," said Granna. "The fabrics were glorious, but Mam wasn't allowed to go to the theatre to see them on the stage until she was much older. *Móraí* was strict about that ..." and off she'd go again telling a story, half in the present and half in the past, about people Katie didn't know and whose relationships didn't make sense. Convinced Granna mixed up the generations, Katie hadn't been able to work out which name belonged with which era. She couldn't even put a name to Granna's 'Mam'.

Although her grandmother didn't recognise anyone else, for some inexplicable reason, she knew Katie. Born on the same day as her, sixty years later, and named after her, they'd had a special relationship, until Katie'd gone off to university. Now she wished she'd paid more attention to her mother, and her gran.

The nurse came in. "Hello, Mrs Bridges, how are you today?"

Granna turned towards the newcomer and a polite smile creased her face. "Hello. Now, who are you? Have you come to see me? I do so like visitors, they are such interesting people."

"I've come to make you more comfortable, Mrs Bridges." Katie watched the nurse pat her gran's arm.

Granna wriggled in the La-Z-Boy chair and plucked ineffectually at the mohair rug she sat on. "I do so like this colour, don't you?" she asked. "It reminds me of roses."

Granna Katy had kept a beautiful garden once. The two of them had often wandered around it together while Granna named all the flowers. Katie's eyes rested on the deep-pink throw she'd given her gran. She, too, loved that colour.

"How is she doing overall?" Katie asked the nurse. "Her memory of long-ago events seems flawless to me." But then, she couldn't say whether Granna was right or not.

"Very well, actually, for her age. She keeps active and goes to all the exercise classes, especially when there's music playing." Despite her memory loss, Granna was still a relatively fit and healthy ninety-year-old.

Katie smiled. She'd watched her grandmother more than once at these classes, dancing in her own world rather than following the instructor.

"And she still plays the piano," continued the nurse.

"I'm glad," said Katie. "She's a far better pianist than I'll ever be, even though she makes mistakes. The music seems to come alive under her fingertips."

Katie remembered the piano lessons with her gran at her house as a child, and the comings and goings of the other students.

"It's a pity she forgets what she's played almost as soon as she stands up from the keyboard," said the nurse.

Granna's voice interrupted their conversation. "I do so love my *móraí*. She's a wonder and such a great cook. She always makes my favourites. I can still taste those little biscuits that went with my tea. She'll be here soon."

"That's nice. There's a cup of tea coming shortly."

Granna unexpectedly got up from her chair. "We should go to Gwenna's Sweet Treats for tea. It's an age since I visited her. Grandma will get cross with me if I don't call. Now, where did I leave my gloves?"

While Granna searched the drawers, the nurse rearranged the rug on the chair, retidied the already-tidy bed, wrote something down on the chart by the door and pulled the window closed. "It's a wee bit windy at the moment. Do you think you should wait until it's died down before you go? How about doing some lacework instead? You can show it to her later."

Granna accepted the crochet hook and fine cotton thread and sat down again. Katie never ceased to be amazed her gran could move the hook so swiftly, in, out, over, under and around in a constant motion. She still created such intricate lace. The results weren't perfect, and she ended up with dozens of motifs and long edgings that would never get joined together, but Granna appeared satisfied with what she could see. "No, Janey didn't make lace, she was the famous costumier."

"Brothers!" growled Katie as she ended the call.

As usual, her eldest brother, Hugh, cited work issues and how busy he and Carol were with the kids' sport and music and whatever, as an excuse not to help sort through Mum's things. With her other brother, Tom, in Australia on business, everything fell to her – again, as usual. They were older than her by nine and eight years, and close together in age yet nothing alike.

But she wasn't mad at her brothers. She was mad at her father.

How could he even think of bringing *that* woman into Mum's house? Only a couple of years older than Tom, she still had teenagers at home. Katie wanted nothing to do with the whole sorry affair.

But how could her father have left it so long to clear her mum's things out? He'd not even touched her clothes; he'd simply shut the door on the room and left it all. Until now. When it suited him. And he'd left it for Katie to do.

"Don't be angry, Katie," said Tom. "Dad's a dreamer and he needs someone to fill those dreams."

She walked into her mother's old room, threw back the curtains and stared out the window. She knew her parents' marriage hadn't been a good one and had deteriorated even more after Granna Katy had come to live with them. The pair had lived separate lives for many years: Mum saying she had the responsibility of Granna and couldn't go gallivanting off chasing rainbows, while Dad argued that getting out and doing the wishful things in life would keep them young. Full of madcap schemes that rarely paid off, Dad did enough 'wishful things' of his own to keep half the world young. No wonder Mum ran out of patience.

Katie turned from the window, putting her anger and memories to one side. She'd earlier packed the photo albums and other papers she wanted to keep, ready to take to the car. Now she had to tackle the personal possessions. Opening the door to the old-style wardrobe and seeing Mum's signature skirts and blouses hanging there, Katie knew Tom was right. Their dad was a dreamer and their mum the practical one who had held it all together.

Katie lifted all the clothes off the rail and roughly folded them into black plastic sacks. She would drop them off at the hospice shop later.

Then she tackled the drawers. Katie didn't want any of her mother's clothes, but she'd keep the odd piece of jewellery. Not the costume bits and pieces and fake pearl necklaces, but a few of the older, better-quality pieces. She put those to one side and continued sorting.

The bottom drawer jammed, and she got down on her hands and knees to see what the problem was. Spying something, she eased the drawer back a little and jiggled it until she released the package from its hiding place.

She looked at the battered cardboard box, tied with a dusty velvet ribbon which had once been green, wondering why her mother had kept it hidden. The ribbon disintegrated as Katie untied it. Inside, wrapped in yellowed tissue paper, lay a brooch in the shape of a cross, made from stylised strands of straw plaited together, and although black with age, it looked like it might be silver. She'd definitely not seen it before.

"Katie, is that you?" Her father's voice echoed through the house. "I saw your car outside."

Damn. She'd hoped to avoid seeing her father on this trip. "Yes, Dad." Katie slipped the box into her handbag and opened the door. "I'm in Mum's room."

Over a cup of coffee in the kitchen, she and her father hedged around each other.

"How's your grandmother?"

"She's fine, all things considered."

"I thought the old bat would have carked it by now."

"Nope. She's got staying power."

"Don't remind me. She should have gone a long time ago, if you ask me."

Katie's temper was starting to get the better of her, and the pain in her chest threatened to burst any moment. Why did her father bring out the worst in her these days?

"I'm taking Mum's clothes and things to the hospice shop later. Are you sure there's nothing you want?"

Her father shrugged. "I've got everything I need," he tapped his head, "up here. And anyway, I don't want anything of the past around. Get rid of it."

She swallowed hard, determined not to show how much she resented him replacing her mother so easily. She gazed around the kitchen, seeing how the once-familiar touches were no longer there. The tea towel hung in a different place and the pictorial calendars Mum had liked were nowhere in sight. Her favourite china and her kitchen appliances had been put away somewhere and new coffee mugs were on display. Suddenly uncomfortable at being in another woman's kitchen, Katie climbed down off the bar stool and carefully washed and dried her coffee mug.

"I was hoping I could leave a few boxes of things here for Hugh and Tom to check and take what they like."

"Nah. Take it all away, Katie. If the boys wanted anything they should have got it by now." He too rinsed his cup, leaving it on the bench to dry, and looked out the window at whatever had caught his attention. "I've waited long enough."

She bit her lip, holding back a sharp retort. She'd always suspected things had reached crisis point before Mum died but how could he be so callous?

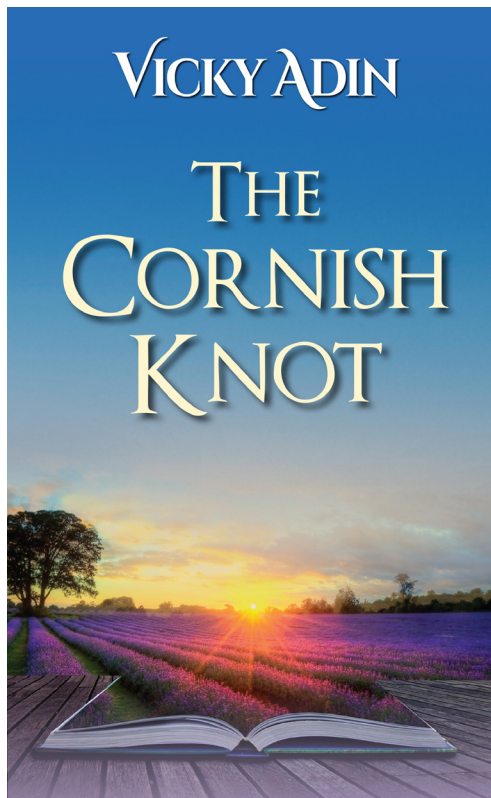
'Well, I'll be off then,' she gabbled and rushed from the room. She couldn't, wouldn't, let her father see how much he had hurt her. Back in her mother's room she hurriedly scooped up the remaining items and carted as much as she could carry in one go out to the car. She raced back for the last load before her father got an attack of the guilts and offered to help her. She didn't want his help. She could cope quite well on her own – thank you.

Except she couldn't – not lately – she admitted, as the tears formed.

She'd single-handedly wrecked her career and her life.

Slamming the car door shut, she started the engine and backed out of the driveway without a second glance.

...



Prequel to *Portrait of a Man*

A grieving widow, a century old journal, a missing portrait, and an engaging art historian: what will the secrets of the past reveal? Megan must travel to Cornwall in search of her roots, and soon becomes entangled with the world of Italian art and artists as she uncovers her past and finds herself. But can she find love again?

THE CORNISH KNOT

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2014, 2020, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-9922628-8-4

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-9922628-6-0

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

First published in 2014 for Vicky Adin by
AM Publishing New Zealand www.ampublishingnz.com

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz www.amazon.com

CHAPTER 1

The doorbell rang, its strident call shattering her melancholic state. Megan didn't want visitors. Not today.

The bell rang again, more insistently. Still she sat, unable or unwilling to move. Once before, a year ago, on an early spring morning when the sun shone and life was good, she had answered the door ... She couldn't bear to think about it.

A whole year had passed since that terrible day when she had lost her Tony, and the pain was still raw. Sleepless and disconsolate, Megan had risen before dawn to sit in her favourite armchair and stare out the window into the invisible garden. Night slowly turned into day. In her dressing gown, with a half-empty cup of cold tea on the table beside her, she sat motionless – remembering.

He had been a young fifty-seven with no hint of any heart problems. She saw him off to work, little realising she would never see him again. His sudden death heralded the end of life as she knew it. Spiralling deeper into the dark well of pointlessness as the months passed, she finally gave up the struggle and abruptly sold her vintage dress shop. She'd walked away without a backward glance to retreat into her private world where only emptiness lived.

Determined knocking pounded on the door. Her throat constricted.

Reluctantly, she rose and answered it.

"Mrs Marsh?" enquired the courier driver.

She nodded and her body drooped with relief. History was not repeating itself.

"Sign here."

She accepted the brown-paper package, turning it over to check the return address. It meant nothing.

Back in the family room, she dropped the parcel on the table and stared at it: plain, ordinary, book-like, tied with string.

Whatever it was, she didn't want it.

Her carefully constructed shield began to crack and tears ran down her face.

What in hell's name does a lawyer in Cornwall want with me?

CHAPTER 2

Megan had been too afraid to cry – too afraid to let go, in case she couldn't stop, in case the pain didn't go away. She buried her sorrow under a steaming shower, sliding down the wall to sit small, in a huddle, while the hot water rained down and washed away her torment.

Finally spent, her eyes now empty of tears, she dragged herself upright.

She chose a pair of well-cut dress jeans and a softly draped aqua tunic top that had been a favourite of Tony's. She wanted to look good today, for his sake. Tony often told her she looked beautiful and she missed his reassurances.

As she slipped a simple black pearl pendant around her neck and put on the matching earrings, Megan stared at herself in the mirror. As a teen, she'd felt average – average height, average weight, brown eyes, brown wavy hair – and ordinary. These days, with a few added highlights, she wore her hair cut softly around her ears with a flattering half fringe. For fifty-two, she thought she'd aged well and was more comfortable with her appearance.

She had barely finished dressing and was blow-drying her hair into shape when the phone rang. “Good morning, this is Megan.” Well trained, she spoke automatically, listlessly.

“Hi, Mum.” Her daughter sounded falsely cheerful on the other end.

Megan attempted a more upbeat tone. “Morning, Sarah. How are you?”

“I’m OK. More to the point, how are you today?”

Megan didn’t need reminding, nor did she want to remember. She would not commemorate this day, not now, not ever. That would make it too real. “I’m fine, Sarah,” she lied. “Just about to make myself some coffee and sit in the sunshine. Maybe I’ll read for a while.”

Megan had not been able to visit the cemetery nor would she today. She didn’t want to remember Tony in a place like that. He belonged with her, here, in their home.

“I’ve got an hour spare before my next meeting. I could do with a coffee. Be round in a jiff.”

Sarah hung up before Megan had a chance to respond.

Her spirits lifted slightly. Sarah had become Megan’s rock and one of her great joys in the darkness. Her granddaughter Isabella was another. In contrast, her son Jason had shut himself off completely and disappeared overseas again the day after the funeral, leaving her feeling forsaken.

Jason was her baby, single, a pilot and living a life she couldn’t imagine. She regretted losing some of the closeness they once shared since he had moved to London a couple of years earlier. But it was more than that – she couldn’t quite communicate with him any more. Not like she did with Sarah. Jason was more – she couldn’t put her finger on it – detached. No, that’s unfair. It’s just ... Something was missing.

Tony would have understood. Tony always understood.

Megan switched on the electric jug, put extra coffee into the plunger and reached for her daughter’s favourite mug. Taller, slimmer and fairer than her mother, Sarah worked as a graphic artist and often amazed Megan with her creative instincts. Where had she come from? Thanks to her architect husband Nick, her bouncy personality and positive outlook, Sarah had rallied more quickly after her father’s death, but Megan knew her daughter still grieved, deep down.

As if on cue, the young woman burst in through the unlocked front door, dressed in fashion statement clothes with high heels and chunky jewellery. “I’m here.”

Megan applauded her daughter’s style. Sometimes she wished she could be brave enough to emulate Sarah but had learnt to stick with what suited her best – well-cut clothes that flattered her trim figure, and understated jewellery, and she refused to wear black.

Megan filled the cups with the strong dark liquid. “And here’s your coffee.”

“Mum, you’re a wonder. Thank you.”

Sarah kissed Megan on the cheek, eyeing her thoughtfully. She shrugged off her jacket and threw it over the back of the chair in one elegant move. Taking her coffee, Sarah crossed the room to sit on the sofa under the window. The September sun streamed in, highlighting the unwrapped package on the table. “What’s this, Mum?”

“Oh. That. I don’t know. It came this morning.”

“Don’t you want to open it?” Sarah flicked her long, fair hair behind her ear as she picked it up and turned it over, reading the English return address.

“Not right now.” Megan’s voice sounded deflated, even to her.

A strange parcel arriving on the first anniversary of Tony’s death struck her as cruel. They would have opened it together, sharing in the excitement of discovery, eager to know what it meant. But now its presence simply served to heighten his absence – and her loss. For the best part of thirty-five years they had been the ideal couple – like a pair of comfortable shoes, perfect together but useless and unbalanced one without the other. No one had known her as long; no one knew her as well.

Megan felt drained and exhausted after her outburst, yet the black cloud of emptiness that normally floated in the recesses of her mind had begun to fade. A sense of release hovered amid the hurt.

Sipping her coffee, she sat in the chair beside Sarah.

“You look very pale. And you’ve been crying.” Sarah reached out and placed her hand over her

mother's. "Did you get any sleep last night?"

Megan shook her head. "Not much."

"I'm worried about you. You've increasingly shut yourself off from everything you once enjoyed and spend far too much time on your own. It's not good for you."

"Don't lecture me, please, darling. I appreciate your concern. But right now, I like my own company. Not that I don't enjoy you coming round, of course," she rushed on, feeling the need to justify her comment. "And your brother when he's in town," hoping he would remember to phone her today. "Really, I do, but mostly I like being alone with my memories."

The last year had been hard, and the impact had not yet worn off. Some days her spirits were so low she struggled to function. Much of the time she felt old, worthless. Days when her hair lay flat, dark circles marred her skin and the crow's feet around her eyes deepened.

"Sorry, Mum. I don't mean to lecture. I want to see you happy again." Sarah paused. "I miss him, too."

Megan saw tears fill her daughter's eyes and felt guilty for her self-absorption. "I know you do, sweetheart. You always were your dad's girl."

"Hey, I've got an idea." Suddenly Sarah stood up and busied herself washing the coffee mugs, forcing back tears. "I'll cancel my meeting and we'll go shopping. Come on, Mum. Please? Come with me. Anywhere. How about a walk? I've got a change of shoes. Or lunch? Anything, but let's get out of here."

Megan, hearing the desperation in her daughter's voice, conceded. "Okay, but let's go for a walk along the beach. I can't stand the noise of the mall."

Growing up as an only child, Megan had been a solitary person at the best of times, but in the last few months she'd become positively antisocial. "Sorry, love. I don't like being around other people these days."

As they wandered along Milford Beach, the sea alive with light where the sun shimmered on the ever-moving waves, Megan let her mind drift. Sarah chatted away about plans for her future.

"I'd love to get involved directly with clients rather than designing in the backroom, and Nick wants his own practice one day, too, but they're simply dreams at this stage."

Sarah's idea for a walk had been a good one. Megan was finding the beach, where she had spent so much time with Tony, soothing. Sometimes she sensed him still beside her.

Sarah's voice penetrated her thoughts. "Promise me, Mum?"

"Sorry, darling. Promise you what? I wasn't listening."

"I know!" Sarah laughed. "What I was saying, Mother dearest, is, I want to help. I want you to find some hope in the future. You are still young. You're smart and you look gorgeous, I'd like to see you young at heart again. I'd like you to do something special for your birthday. I'll organise it. A party maybe? Or a trip somewhere? You need to get out, make some new friends. You've got six months to decide. Just think about it. Promise me?"

"Oh. I don't ..."

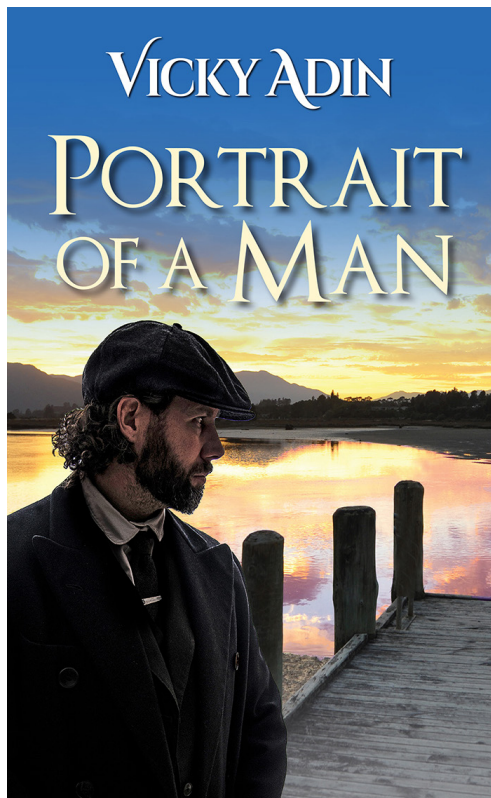
"Stop. Don't say 'I don't want anything' yet. Think about it first, please. What would Dad have done?"

The spectre of Tony's smiling face suddenly filled the frame, and Megan knew Sarah was right – again – he would have done something special. He always did. He would want her to find new life and new hope.

"All right. I'll think about it."

"And one more thing. Let's open that parcel from England as soon as we get back. I'd like to find out what it's all about, even if you don't."

...



The soul-searching conclusion to *The Cornish Knot*

A multigenerational tale of lies, lost chances and misplaced love. Haunted by failure, one man flees to New Zealand for a better life. A generation later, an Italian artist fleeing from his past, disturbs the balance. A Cornish knot and a Māori koru expose generations of secrets with life-changing results. Will their descendants reveal the truth?

PORTRAIT OF A MAN

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2020, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-473-53801-9

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

This is a work of fiction. Historical figures and recorded historical events have been incorporated into the fabric of the story, but all characters, businesses and family members are the product of the author's imagination. Historical places and other incidents have been woven into the lives of the fictitious characters and used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events they may have attended, is purely coincidental.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-473-53802-6

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

Produced for Vicky Adin by AM Publishing New Zealand www.ampublishingnz.com

Cover Background Image: Bev Robitai

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz www.amazon.com

1 The Arrival

January 1863

Matteo Borgoni walked off the ship like a man reprieved. He closed his eyes and inhaled the early morning air, detecting the usual animal dung and the grease and tar of a busy harbour, but also something fresher, more life-giving. Seagulls squawked overhead, searching for tiny fish among the seaweed rippling against the wharf piles for their breakfast. “This,” he sighed with a lighter heart than he’d had in a long time, “this is where life begins again.”

At first glance, Port Chalmers was more makeshift and primitive than he’d expected after Melbourne. Wooden buildings stood haphazardly along the main street and scattered over the hillside. The port hummed with activity, which pleased him. A busy port was good for business, but he hoped the city of Dunedin – some eight miles south-west – would be more prosperous. He heaved his bag onto his shoulder and, dodging horses, carts, trolleys and people laden with goods and baggage, he followed the steady stream moving along the wharf to where the authorities were waiting.

He’d seen the likes of many of his fellow passengers before. Poor miners and prospectors coming from the gold rushes of Victoria hoping for better luck. Most would move on again, empty-handed and defeated. A few had families, dragging them from one rough-and-ready tent town to another in the hope of striking the big one. He’d met a handful of Italians among them. Crazy people, in his opinion.

A voice from behind announced the presence of a toffee-nosed Englishman.

“This way, my dears, follow me.” He pushed his way forward as he escorted his wife and daughters to wherever they were going. “Make way, I say. Make way for the ladies. Coming through.”

Eventually, the queue moved along, and Matteo’s turn came.

“Name!” barked the official, who ticked him off the passenger list and waved him on.

At thirty-five, Matteo had seen a lot of living. He was barely twenty-one when he left his home near Lake Garda in Northern Italy – a tiny hamlet surrounded by snow-capped mountains in the Dolomites, where life was measured from one festival to another filling the square with customs and chatter. On the odd occasion, he’d returned when money allowed. When he didn’t have the funds, he wrote to his sister, Gabriella, who understood him; understood why he needed to leave the traditions and shackles of the small village behind and find a new life; why he had no freedom in their tiny three-storey brick home living the peasant lifestyle. His dreams were too ambitious to be confined.

As he walked towards the village, the sun pleasantly warm on his back, he let his dreams fly free again.

“Hey, Matteo,” a fellow Italian called in heavily accented English. “You come?”

“Si, I come.”

Over the years living in Melbourne, Matteo had learnt to speak English. Now it was his everyday language, even with other Italians. There were too many regional differences to speak his mother tongue to passing strangers.

The younger man clapped him on the back and together they made their way along the dirt road. Trees covered the hillside, and the lush, green countryside appealed to Matteo.

He’d arranged for his packing crates to be transferred directly to Dunedin, but the new paddle steamer, designed for the shallow waters of Otago Harbour, wouldn’t be leaving for a while yet – and he needed a drink.

“Let’s go.”

With a beer in hand, they sat in a crowded barroom of the Royal Hotel, taking in their new surroundings.

“So, tell me, what brings you here?” asked Stefano, his accent far stronger than Matteo’s.

“A new adventure.” Matteo shrugged away thoughts of his past failures.

“Gold. You look for gold. I go look.” The young man’s eyes gleamed at the thought of making his fortune, as many others had yearned to do in the goldfields of Australia and New Zealand.

“No, I’m a businessman; a craftsman. I set up shop here.”

Matteo had soon learnt that life was a case of ‘each man for himself’ when the madness of gold

took hold. He'd seen too many fools work themselves to death for a few ounces of the shiny metal hidden in veins in the rock, and had far bigger plans than living the filthy, harsh life of a miner.

"What, no gold? Then why you leave if you have business?"

"Leave where? Home, or Melbourne?" He didn't want to talk about why he'd left Melbourne. No one here needed to know.

Stefano pulled a face. "I think I know why you left home. My papa say things not the same since Risorgimento. Si? Unification. Phht! He asks how can the north be like the south when our food and our words are different? People fight to keep what is theirs of right; they don't want change. They don't need one nation. They want to be Trentino men like you, or Tuscan like me. Friends, but not the same."

"Si, infatti," Matteo agreed, wondering how much Stefano had experienced first-hand, given his youth, and how much was his father's opinion. Nothing was as simple as he made it out to be. "I left during the '48 revolution – it was that, or fight, and I did not want to fight. Detesto politica. Generation after generation, many revolutions. One side say this; the other that. I don't want to know." But if what his cousin Alessandro had written was true, there was much infighting and disagreement still going on. "But it is better to be one people – Italian people – than be ruled by foreigners, si?" He sipped his beer and curled his lip at the bitter taste.

The men continued to chat about the strife still going on at home as the states fought to become a kingdom, or not – depending on which reports came from where – resolving nothing, and agreeing life was better away from it all.

"Which way you go to Dunedin?" asked Stefano.

"By paddle steamer, why?"

"I'm told there's a new road now, over the hills."

"So I heard, but by all accounts it's no more than a bridle path and not suitable for wagons. And I need to transport some goods – belongings I brought from Melbourne. Do you have a horse?"

Stefano shook his head. "No. I use all my money on the ship here and on a licence and tools for mining. I walk."

"There are many seagoing craft between here and Dunedin; perhaps you could work your way ..."

Matteo paused before he came to a decision. "But come with me. I could do with some company on our first night. I buy a ticket."

"Truly? You let me travel with you?"

Matteo nodded, glad to have someone to talk to for a while until he got settled.

They ordered some food and more beer while they waited for the ship's whistle to alert them to its departure. Within the hour, they were boarding *The Golden Age*.

"A good omen for me, si?" laughed Stefano on seeing the name.

"Maybe it is," agreed Matteo as they made their way up the gangplank.

"Welcome aboard this magnificent vessel during her first week of operation in this wonderful harbour," said the captain. "It is my pleasure to transport you to Dunedin, and I personally guarantee your safety."

Matteo leant against the rail admiring the new paintwork and studying the intricate construction of the paddle wheels and saloon facilities.

"I hope he's right," he said to Stefano in a soft voice. "From what I hear, all is not well. They left one of their owners behind. He was supposed to captain it on its maiden voyage over here. And then they struck a big storm and the ship was damaged." Matteo wondered how unusual a rough crossing was, given his own less-than-comfortable passage. "They left the cook behind, too. Locked up, they say, for stealing the engineer's watch. Not a good start."

"How you know all this?"

Matteo lifted his shoulder. "I ask questions." He looked around to make sure no one could overhear him. "I heard another story. About a Signor Alexander Leys, the engineer, who disappeared overboard a few days ago. I wonder how the captain can say everyone is safe when he lose someone."

"Incredible!" said Stefano, agog at Matteo's words.

"Not so much. Pays to be careful, that's all," said Matteo in warning. "But I've got better things to worry about. First task, find good vino – if such a thing is possible. I cannot survive on that beer."

The next day, nursing sore heads after an evening of carousing in the Union Hotel in Dunedin, Stefano collected his licence and waved goodbye.

“Ciao, my new friend. It’s been nice to know you. Maybe we meet again one day?”

After much backslapping and reassurance, they parted company. The chances of them meeting again were slim.

In need of fresh air, Matteo walked the streets of Dunedin, getting to know the place while searching for suitable premises and some decent wine. He finally picked an empty shop in George Street where his new life would begin.

“Happy to do business with you, Mr Borgoni,” said the building owner, shaking hands with Matteo less than an hour later. “The rooms upstairs are partly furnished. They’re not grand but light and airy and quite comfortable. I’m sure you will do well.” He handed the keys to Matteo.

“Thank you, signor. I am grateful.” Matteo smiled the self-effacing grin he had perfected. It had served him well up to now. His dark eyes glistened with enthusiasm. He was no fool. He’d learnt to charm people and hide his misery. Now he needed to learn to control his temper.

“With such a charming frontage I’m sure it will attract lots of customers.”

“Si. It is to be hoped.”

“If there is anything I can do to help you settle, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Ah, yes. You might be able to help with a little something. I’m in search of a good wine – not the sweet fortified wines, you understand. But a light burgundy or heavy claret with a good nose.” In time, he would ask his cousin, Sandro to send him a few bottles from their local vineyard.

“I do indeed. I like the odd drop myself from time to time. I’d recommend Smith & Marshall in Princes Street. They understand good wine, and they will help you with grocery items as well.”

“Si. Grazie.”

The landlord placed his hat in position and departed with a cheery, “Welcome to Dunedin.”

Matteo rubbed his hands together as he surveyed the premises. He would need to get some essentials before he uplifted the shipping crates and started to set up shop. After a quick change from his coarse travelling clothes into a frock coat, necktie and bowler, tut-tutting that they needed pressing, he set off.

A few minutes later, he walked into the offices of The Otago Daily Times.

“May I help you, sir?” asked the senior clerk.

“You may, indeed. I wish to put advertisement in your newspaper.”

“Most certainly, sir. May I ask your name and details first? Are you new to town? I don’t remember seeing you before.”

“I arrive today, but you will know me well soon enough.”

Matteo checked the calendar and booked a regular advertisement commencing the third week of February.

Picture Frames manufactured by M. Borgoni,
George Street. Engravings on sale.

He’d be ready. He’d make certain of it, and then the people of Dunedin would know what Matteo Borgoni had to offer.

“Welcome to Dunedin.” The clerk extended his hand and the men shook. “I look forward to doing business with you.”

“Thank you. Si. I believe we will do very well.” Matteo tucked the proffered newspaper under his arm to read later. He liked to keep up with what was going on in the local area.

With a light bounce to his step, he marched on down the street. His next stop was to see the shipping agents, where he arranged to have the chests delivered at four o’clock that afternoon.

“Good, good. I will be having new shipments often and will need for good care to be taken. They break, you see.” Matteo smiled.

“At your service, Mr Borgoni. Trust us to look after your merchandise.”

He doffed his hat and continued along the street. Before long, the auction house he was seeking

came into view. Dodging the horse-drawn traps and wagons, and letting riders pass, he made his way into the store. Impressed by the quality of the furnishings and the layout, he quickly made himself known to the owner. "I wish to purchase a few items for my home," he said.

"The auction is on Wednesday next, sir, if you would care to attend."

"Ah, si, I realise, but I arrive today and take up new lodgings but there is no bedstead or mattress. Can you not allow me to purchase a few items before the auction, per favore?"

The sombre man rubbed his chin, shaping his beard to a point, while he considered Matteo's proposal, but he was not to be swayed. "I'm sorry, sir. If it wasn't for my licence, I would consider obliging you. But I cannot risk displeasing anyone who might wish to purchase the same items as you and find them gone. Might I suggest you take a room for a night or two and return for the auction."

Matteo didn't push his point, but there was a man he would not do business with in future. "Most regrettable," muttered Matteo and took his leave.

By the time he had made his way across Bell Hill and along Princes Street to the general store recommended to him, he was not in a good frame of mind. Fortunately, he received a far more congenial welcome.

"Mr Borgoni, I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, sir. And it will be a pleasure to serve you," said Mr Marshall Senior, of Smith & Marshall, General Store, Bakers, Ship Chandlers and the all-important Wine and Spirit merchants. "I'll get the boy to deliver your order at your convenience."

Satisfied with the service, Matteo nodded. What more could a person want from a store, except perhaps advice. After choosing some bottles from a surprisingly plentiful supply of wine, and selecting a few grocery items, Matteo explained his predicament. "It's not that I cannot stay at the hotel, you understand. But I have work to do to get my shop ready, and no time for searching for furniture." Matteo omitted to say how annoyed he'd been by the auctioneer's manner, or how pleased he was to have held his temper. His hot-headed nature had got him into trouble before. But he'd show them. He'd show them all. He would make a success of this venture, and, in time, would be a respected businessman around town. He'd never let anyone humiliate him again.

Matteo continued to clench and unclench his fist to keep his irritation under control and bring his thoughts back to what Mr Marshall was saying.

"You should have come to us in the first place, Mr Borgoni. I am sure we can be of service. I will send a message immediately to the George Street Furniture Dealer who has the largest – and, I might add, the cheapest – mattresses of the highest quality in town. I also have it on good authority that Mr Theodore Rosenberg will very soon be taking over the premises of Edward Moeller & Co., around the corner in Maclaggan Street. There is to be a dissolution of their partnership, a rather rancorous one unfortunately, but they are keen to reduce stock and tidy up loose ends. You will be certain to find a suitable bedstead there."

A matter of minutes later, Matteo had taken himself off to Maclaggan Street, where he purchased a suitable bedstead, and returned to George Street and ordered a mattress to fit.

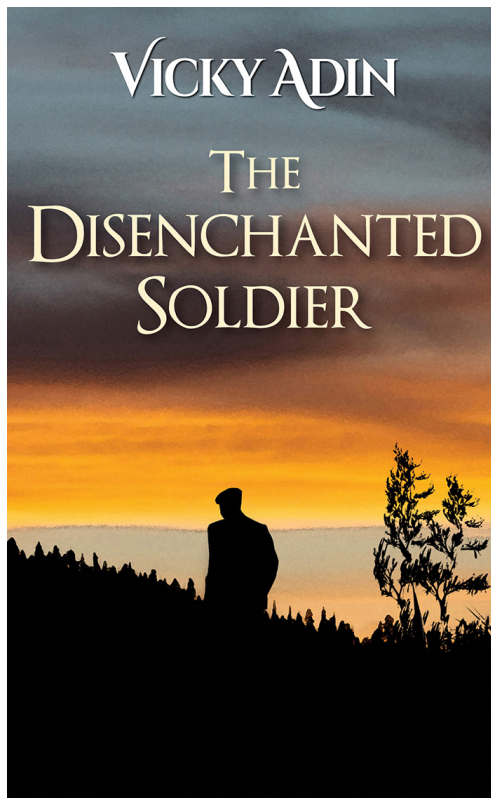
That evening, he sat in his rooms above the shop, conflicted. On one hand, he'd had a most successful day: his merchandise had been delivered, he'd successfully purchased what he needed, and it had been kind on his pocket. But on the other hand ...

He pushed his plate aside, poured another glass of wine, emptied it too quickly, and poured another. He was no cook, but when he was a youngster, his nonna had taught him how to make a simple risotto with butter and cheese. He'd managed to find suitable, if poorer quality ingredients, even by Melbourne standards, but nothing matched the taste of Italian tomatoes and homemade pasta. He'd even found polenta and parmesan, and made himself a meal that reminded him of home, but here there was no laughter. No one to share with.

He dragged his mind back to the present and the task ahead. He had such a short time to get everything ready to open the doors. He could not fail. Not this time. He emptied his glass.

Oh, how he missed Emily.

...



*A heart-breaking dual-timeline family saga
based on a true story of a soldier, pioneer, patriarch and pacifist*

In 1863, Daniel leaves England to find a new life and land to farm. In New Zealand, he is soldier, a flaxmill worker and family man, and the father of conscientious objectors in WW1. Fifty years after his death, Libby wants to know what Daniel was really like. His story is more than she'd bargained for.

THE DISENCHANTED SOLDIER

Copyright © Vicky Adin 2011, 2015, 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-0-9941305-1-8

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including photocopying, recording, information storage and retrieval systems, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author, with the exception of a book reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

In keeping with acceptable standards, macrons have been added to Māori words used in this text, except where a word is used within 19th century dialogue when macrons were not used. One exception is the character of Hemi, who would speak his own language correctly and therefore differently to Europeans. Macrons have been used to emphasise that difference.

Also available as Kindle ISBN 978-0-9941305-2-5

First produced for Vicky Adin in 2011 by AM Publishing New Zealand www.ampublishingnz.com

Originally published as a print book and ebook by AM Publishing New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand under the title *Daniel*, November 2011. ISBNs 978-0-473-18814-6 and 978-1-4658-7448-1 respectively

To order copies of Vicky Adin's ebooks and print books:
www.vickyadin.co.nz www.amazon.com

Chapter One

Liverpool, England
16 September 1842

Forlorn, Sarah stood beside the open grave with five-month-old Daniel in her arms.

“We commit the body of our dearly departed brother Samuel Adin ...”

Tears rolled unchecked down her cheeks. Beside her, six-year-old Elizabeth clung to her mother’s skirts and sobbed. Sarah took little notice of the pleasant autumn day, the light soft and warm on her shoulders. A few leaves fallen from nearby trees skipped and stumbled their way over the ground in the gentle breeze. They, too, went unnoticed.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ...” The minister’s voice droned in the outskirts of her mind.

Samuel’s sister Mary and her husband John Meyers, the local registrar, stood beside her, yet Sarah saw no one, saw nothing beyond the plain wooden box that held her husband. The men from the estate where Sam had worked stood with heads bowed, caps in hand; the women clutched their shawls around them, handkerchiefs at the ready. After throwing the obligatory handful of dirt, they dispersed with a quiet word: “Sorry, love, ’e were a good bloke, your Samuel.”

The hollow sound of the earth falling on the coffin shook Sarah back to reality. Brushing the tears from her face, she bobbed down in front of Elizabeth to wipe the child’s nose and hugged her awkwardly, fiercely, hoping to quieten her sobs.

“Come along, love,” said Mary.

The women of the neighbourhood stood in their doorways nodding knowingly. They spoke soft words of encouragement as she passed. Life would be different from now on.

Saddened by the thought of Sarah returning to her empty home alone – around the corner in Luke Street – Mary led them to her front door in Warwick Street.

“I’ve set up a bassinet in the front room for Daniel, my dear. Go lay him down. I’ll put the kettle on and make us a cup of tea. Come into the kitchen when you’re ready.”

Elizabeth, quiet now, hovered at the bottom of the stairs waiting for her mother to say something.

Instead, her Aunt Mary spoke. “Run outside and play, Lizzie. There’s a good girl.”

“Yes, Aunt.” Elizabeth obeyed without argument.

Closing the door to the front room behind her, Sarah laid the sleeping Daniel in the crib. She lifted her bonnet from her head and unwrapped her shawl, dropping them on the chair near the window, and stared blindly through the lace curtains. Sad thoughts, wistful thoughts, happy thoughts about her life with Sam drifted through her mind.

They had been overjoyed when Samuel had been made coachman for a local squire not two miles up the road. He had rushed home that day, put his arms around her waist and twirled her around the room. She laughed and cried, and hugged him as he told her the news. But before that things had not been so good.

Has it really been seven years since that day when Samuel stormed out of his da’s house in a fit of temper? All that fighting and shouting and now both of them are gone, so what good has come of it? But Samuel loved me. Right from the moment he picked me out of the bramble hedge, he loved me.

“That’s what I must remember.” Sarah’s words echoed in the empty room. She threw her head back, eyes closed, reliving the moment. “That wonderful day when we first met.”

Goosebumps moved up her arms. She shuddered as she recalled his first look. That powerful feeling had stayed with her throughout the years. Samuel had treated her like someone who mattered. He was the only one who had ...

She clearly remembered the first day they met in Derbyshire, back in ’34, and every word spoken. The day had begun sunny and clear as Sarah trudged her way to the Bolsover market with a basket of cheeses on her back. On a narrow stretch of road, she met a farmer who tried to shoo the cattle over to one side to let her pass. Amid much pushing, shoving and bellowing one cow lashed out and kicked another. It sidestepped

into Sarah and knocked her to the ground. Throwing away the straw he had been chewing on, the farmer rushed to her side.

He held out his big, work-worn hands. "Aye. I'm that sorry, lass. Let me help you. Are you hurt?"

"No, sir, I'm a'right."

Ignoring his hand, she scrambled to her feet, brushed down her skirt and pulled bits of bramble away from her stockings. As she straightened her cap she tilted her head to look at the stranger. A man with solid shoulders and strong arms, some ten years older than her twenty-two years, stared back. His sharp, blue eyes missed nothing. The look that crossed between them spoke of eternity, yet only seconds had passed before he raised his hand to pull a bramble from her hair.

Sarah recovered first. Embarrassed, she bent down to pick up the fallen cheeses.

"Here. Let me." The man bent down at the same time. "I'm Sam Adin, by the way. What's your name?"

"Sarah. Sarah Green." A soft blush warmed her face as their hands touched over a round of cheese.

"Turn around then, Sarah Green, and I'll load these straight into the basket," and he lifted it onto her shoulders, talking all the while.

"Where're ye from, lass? I don't remember seeing you around here before."

Taken as she was by this farmer, she answered straight away. "I'm from Market Drayton in Shropshire originally. Only been over this way a few months."

"What you doin' away from home, then?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Decided to try something new. My folks worked for the brewery."

A look of surprise crossed Samuel's face. "What made you come up to Derbyshire?"

"Me ma sent me to a cousin of hers who works in one of them factories in Manchester, but I didn't like it there so I moved on."

"Well, those cheeses didn't come from no factory." Samuel turned one around in his hand to inspect it. "Where are you living now?"

"A few mile down the road – at the Bakers' place. Old Ma Baker has taken a fancy to me some and lets me take them little rounds of special cheese she makes to the markets." Sarah grinned with glee.

They walked the rest of the way to the market side by side, heads nodding in unison as they talked.

"Will ye meet me again at the end of the day?" asked Samuel. "We're sure to lose one another amongst the bustle of people once we get to market."

Sarah nodded her agreement.

At the market, Samuel went off to the stock area, she to the stalls.

Sarah fell in love with Sam that day. As the weeks and months passed they met again and again; their love deepened. She couldn't wait to sneak off in the evenings to meet Samuel; the thrill of seeing him was so great. They would meet in the woods or meander through the fields holding hands, listening to the gentle lowing of the cows, or wander arm in arm along the banks of the stream. Sam was so gentle, so loving.

She blushed as she recalled his soft touch and the way her body responded when his fingers traced the line of her jaw, down her neck to her throat and further down her bodice. Such thoughts aroused her even now. She tilted her head to one side, exposing her neck, moaning softly as her body remembered the way he kissed her, the words of love he whispered in her ears.

A whole glorious, loving year passed before the idyll came to an end in the following spring.

She would never forget that terrible day when Samuel took her to meet his family in Stanfree – his father, Samuel Senior; his mother Elizabeth; and his youngest brother Joseph. His sister, Mary, made the tea in a large, black teapot and served her fresh baking.

During a lull in the conversation Sam announced, "My Sarah and I are getting married. She's expecting so I'll have to go and find work in Manchester."

The silence was palpable and uncomfortable; many long, slow seconds passed before his father exploded.

"What do you think you're doing? Getting that chit of a girl up the duff? She's nothing. You're ruining all our plans."

"Whose plans?" Samuel sounded surprisingly calm. His father had always wanted him to marry the neighbour's daughter so they could extend the farm, but plans change.

“You’re the eldest.” His father could not contain his anger. “It’s your duty to me to do what I say and build on what I leave you.”

“Don’t talk to me of duty.” Samuel gritted his teeth.

His father ignored him. “I didn’t spend all my time an’ money so you could read an’ write an’ do sums and suchlike for you to waste it on some common serving wench. Why, she’s not even proper country folk like us. What do she know?”

“Don’t you speak ’bout her like that.” Samuel, angry now, stood up. His chair crashed to the floor.

His father took two strides across the room, snatched the door open, his voice strident. “It’s my house an’ I’ll do and say what I like. I decide who comes here and who don’t. You ...” he pointed to Sarah, “... get out!”

“If she’s not welcome in this house, then neither am I.” Sam let out a deep sigh, lowered his voice and turned to Sarah. “Wait for me outside, love. I won’t be long.”

Sarah slid out the door, glad to escape the tense air that pervaded the room, and waited behind the large oak tree as the argument raged inside.

Samuel and his father quarrelled bitterly, shouting at each other at the top of their voices. Terrible, unforgivable words were spoken that day.

Then silence.

Sam appeared only minutes later with a bag over his shoulder. Without a word, he grabbed her hand. She needed to skip and run to keep up with his big, angry strides. As they reached the main road they met a man with his horse and dray heading south.

“Hello, Tom,” greeted Samuel, removing his hat. “Can we hitch a ride with you, please?”

“Course ye can, son. Hop on the back. How far are you going?”

“As far as possible.”

Sam’s churlish response effectively ended the conversation. Tom shrugged his shoulders and drove on.

For many miles, they travelled without speaking. Sam was clearly deep in thought, and Sarah was happy to wait for him to sort out his feelings. Finally, they reached a fork in the road.

“Gotta drop you here, friend.” Tom pulled up the horses.

“Righto, Tom. Thanks. Would appreciate it if you didn’t mention this trip to anyone.”

“None of my business.” With a shrug, Tom flicked the reins. “Walk on.” Soon the sound of the wheels faded away.

“What we goin’ to do now, Sam?” asked Sarah.

“Don’t fret. I’ll take care of yer.” Sam put his arm around her shoulder. “We’ll go to Manchester. I’ll get a job of some sort.”

“How long will it take us to get there?” she asked anxiously.

“A few days, a week maybe. We walk some; we hitch a ride now and then. Does it matter?”

“No ... p’haps,” she admitted. “Oh, I suppose not, but if we need to sleep rough or beg the use of a barn, no farmer’s wife is going to take me in if she thinks we aren’t wed.”

“Well, Sarah Green. I’ve been thinking.” He dropped his bag in the middle of the track and took her hands in his. “Will you marry me? Right here and now in this great open place, with only the birds and bees and God as our witness? We can say we is married to the world. Who’s to know right or wrong?”

“Oh yes, Sam. What a wonderful idea. Oh, Sam. I do love you.”

“And I love you, my sweet girl.”

Sam took her in his arms and kissed her deeply. On tiptoe, she reached her arms up to wrap them around his neck. She could feel his body responding. They stumbled through the long grass, fumbling with clothes already awry, to celebrate their union under the trees.

They made their way to Manchester as Samuel had promised.

Only a few months later, on a midsummer’s day in June, even before the baby was born, Sam received the news his father had died. Nothing she said could convince Samuel it wasn’t his fault.

He rushed back to the farm where he learnt Joseph had married the girl next door and would inherit the farm. His ma had wept bitterly that day knowing she had lost her eldest son once more. Mary told him there was nothing he could do. Samuel left, never to return.

Shortly after, in the autumn of 1836, their baby was born. Sarah remembered how Sam had rushed into the room and gathered her and the babe into his arms. He held them as though they were the most precious porcelain on earth. He was ecstatic; his eyes glistened with pride.

He lifted the baby into his big arms. "I would like to name her Elizabeth, after my mother."

Nothing was too good or too much trouble for his two girls, as he used to call them. They had little then, living in a single room in a ramshackle lean-to affair at the back of a warehouse. After Elizabeth was born, events moved so fast Sarah was swept off her feet again.

Samuel searched in vain for better work, but Manchester was a hard city for a country-raised man to find work. Factory work was readily available but after a short stint inside one of the tightly packed cotton mills, with the heat and noise and the stench of stale bodies, he could stand it no longer. He despaired of finding something more to his liking when a letter came from his sister Mary, offering them a home.

My dear Samuel,

My husband, Mr John Meyers, has been offered a position in Liverpool as the Registrar of Births, Marriages, and Deaths – a highly respected position, which he has accepted. His role entitles him to a house larger than we need and knowing of your troubles, my dear brother, I explained your situation to Mr Meyers. He and I agree that we would like you, Sarah and baby Elizabeth to share our home for as long as you need.

I hope this small gesture of familial concern will be accepted.

Please let me know of your decision.

Your loving sister, Mary

If Samuel was embarrassed by the offer he was prepared to put it to one side to give his girls the best life he could. He accepted Mary's proposal, and they moved soon after to Toxteth Park in Liverpool. Within a short time, Samuel found his job with the squire. He worked hard and was promoted to coachman; his country life and skill with horses had proved to be an invaluable asset after all. Life was good.

Five wonderful years passed. Then they moved into a place of their own in Luke Street, with their future spread out before them. Sarah fell pregnant again. She smiled as she remembered how ecstatic he'd been when their second child was a boy, born on 18 April 1842.

"I name him Daniel Sampson Adin." Samuel's eyes never left his son's face.

They were contented then ...

The sound of Daniel crying woke Sarah from her reverie. "Oh, Samuel. What am I going to do without you?"

Samuel had complained about a headache when he rose that fateful morning two days earlier. Not an hour later, groaning in agony, he grasped his head, staggered up from the table and collapsed on the kitchen floor.

She could have done nothing to save him, so the doctor said. He'd had a brain haemorrhage.

She picked Daniel up, nestled him against her cheek and murmured, "My little angel. You and Elizabeth are all I have left of your da now."

"Cooee," called Mary, interrupting her memories. "Are you ready for that cuppa yet, Sarah?"

"Coming, Mary," she answered, and carried Daniel along the corridor to the kitchen.

"Sit down there and see to young Daniel."

Mary threw a fresh handful of tea into the teapot, poured in the boiling water and covered it with the cozy. She watched Sarah nursing Daniel in the rocker by the coal range and knew what must be said. Taking two cups down from the Welsh dresser, Mary filled them and handed one to Sarah. She settled herself comfortably on the old carver chair at the end of the table. "I know you'll need to think about what you are going to do, my dear, but I wanted you to know you and the children are always welcome here." Mary sipped at her tea. "You are a blessing to me and John. You may stay as long as you like."

Sarah felt tears of relief well in her eyes. She had hardly thought about what might happen to her now that Samuel was gone. Now her future and that of her children was secure. She sent a prayer heavenward.

"Thank you, Mary. You have been so kind to me. I would be grateful."

...