

# *Fragments of a Map*

## *A novel*

**Tess Brady**

### **Acknowledgements**

The novel contains quotations and references from the following:

Ch2 A comprehensive description of the dig can be found in: Ingstad, Anne Stine, "The Norse Settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. A preliminary report from the excavations 1961-1968" in *Acta Archaeological*, Vol 41, 1970, Pp109-54

Ch3 *The Prophecy of the Wise-Woman* is from the Voluspa, Poetic Edda. The full translation can be found in: Simpson, Jacquelin, trans. *The Northmen Talk. A Choice of Tales from Iceland* Phoenix House, London, 1965

Ch4 A full translation of Eirik the Red's Saga and also its companion saga, The Greenlander's Saga can be found in Magnusson, Magnus: Palsson, Hermann, trans. *The Vinland Sagas. The Norse Discovery of America, Graenlendings Saga and Eirik's Saga* Penguin, England 1965

Ch5 Details of the rediscovery of the Vinland Map can be found in Skelton, R. A.; Marston, Thomas E.; Painter, George D., Eds. *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relations* New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1965

Ch6 For further details on Carmentis see Christina de Pizan *The Book of the City of Ladies* Section 33; trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards, Persea Books, New York 1982 Pp70-73

Ch7 translation of the Sumerian poem: Wolkstein, Diane; Kramer, Samuel Noah, *Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* Rider, London 1984

Ch8 Quotation comes from Canton 1 of Lord Byron's "Child Harold's Pilgrimage". The full poem can be found in Byron, Lord *The Poetic Works of Lord Byron* Oxford University Press, London, 1904

Ch9 Quotation from a ghazal of the 12th century Iranian poet Hafiz. A translation by R. M. Rehder can be found in James Kritzeck (Ed) *Anthology of Islamic Literature* Holt Rinehart & Winston, New York 1964 P270.

The medieval questions come from a list put together by Adelard of Bath (1100c). See Ross, James Bruce; McLaughlin, Mary Martin, Eds. & Trans *The Portable Medieval Reader* Penguin, England 1955. Pp620-626

The Madonna of the Rose Arbor, Martin Schongauer, 1473, panel, 2.00x1.15 meters, held in the collection of St. Martin, Colmar, France. It is arguably the most famous of his paintings and the only one dated. The actual inscription on the painting reads "Me carpes genito to qu O Scitissi a V."

Ch11 A detailed account of this story of cartographic espionage can be found in Arthur Davies, "Behaim, Martellus and Columbus" in *Geographical Journal* Vol 143, November 1977 Pp 451-459

Ch12 A full account of the stories of Chingis Khan, his son's armies and the customs and habits of the Tartars can be found in George Painter's translation of the Tartar Relations. P54-101 in Skelton, R. A.; Marston, Thomas, E.; Painter, George D. *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1965

Ch14 Quotation from Dylan Thomas *Collected Poems* London Dent 1952

Ch15 Korda Productions, a production company in part financed by the British Intelligence Service MI6, was the production company for the film *The Third Man*. (1949) Directed by Carol Reed and written by Reed and Graham Greene

### *The Map*

*She took from her pocket the  
mandalas she had been storing  
for all of her life and, one by  
one, she showed them to him.*

## 1

### **The First Mandala - Projection**

I had been distracted by my father's papers and not heard the beginning.

By the time I got to my front door a crowd had massed in the street. A woman at the hub of it called out, "Phone the police." Another woman, an older woman who commanded some authority, stopped the first one and said, "No! An ambulance."

I picked up the hall phone and dialed. I fumbled the number and dialed again, this time a little slower. I was

never very good in emergencies. I spoke deliberately, slowly, making sure they knew which house to come to.

I walked out as far as the veranda, there might be something else I could do, and I was curious, but I found myself holding back, afraid as always of the sight of blood or broken bodies. The crowd was too dense for me to see what the problem was even from the height of the veranda so I steadied myself and went to the gate. Then I saw her.

"What does she need an ambulance for?" I asked the older woman who'd suggested it.

"They'll take her back, back to where she came from, where she belongs." And she glared at me as if I had known this all along.

It was only then that I realised this woman, and all the others who had crowded around, were afraid of the one on the ground.

I looked down at her; she was probably the oldest woman I had ever seen. She sat leaning against the gate, partly on the footpath and partly on my garden path. In complete defiance of fashion and circumstance, she wore a bright frilly purple hat that looked as if it had come from a child's dress-up box. The hat was all fluff and colour and caught what little sun there was that day like a joke catches laughter. The other strange thing about her was her chanting - it wasn't loud, but constant - a chant which seemed to come from the depth of her body.

I bent closer to hear her, to make out the words, but I could only catch snatches... "Diddle... little... diddle... diddle...."

I looked around again at the crowd and was about to ask why she needed to be carted away when the ambulance arrived. There was no fuss. The ambulance personnel lifted her up and without speaking, without questions, as if this had been done many times before, she was very quickly shut into the ambulance. As they closed the doors on her she had just enough time to catch my eye. For that brief second she stopped chanting and stared at me - she stared as if she had always been aware of me, as if it was me she had come to see; me who was sending her away.

The crowd dispersed and I watched the ambulance drive away.

I felt uneasy, as if I was being drawn towards some strangeness I wanted to avoid, towards something too complex or too raw. Had I, in that brief moment, tasted what the others feared? I shook my head trying to free myself from the grip of her stare. It was not something I wanted to remember.

I went back to my study, the old atlas and my father's papers, but all day the colour purple caught my eye. By night, when I finally slept, I knew she had entered my memory.

## 2

Crete called me, moon-voiced and wanting to talk. We agreed to meet later in the day, at the herbarium. It was a favourite place of hers.

I arrived only a few minutes before her, just in time to see her stride in. She was wearing makeup, an unusual thing for Crete, and she'd recently been to the hairdressers; the grey was coloured out of her hair. Her unbuttoned coat billowed behind her and it gave her an almost medieval look, as if she was striding across her own cloisters. She was as at home in this place as she was in a library or in the corridors of the University. But today she was distracted, searching in her pockets for something.

Fussed with work her voice was firmer, stronger and more self-assured than it had been on the phone. Whatever had been worrying her earlier would come out soon enough - it's common enough to camouflage our raw emotions with efficiency, annoyance or urgency.

"Hi, Meridian, good of you to meet me here," she said casually and then continued to search her pockets. "I've got the name of it somewhere. Long Latin thing. Can't remember it, not that name." At last she found what she was looking for, a small piece of notepad paper. She unfolded it. "I prefer its common name, *feverfew*," she smiled. "Easy name, you don't have to write that one down, but this..." She stumbled with the Latin, "*Pyrethrum parthenium, erythraea centaureum*."

I took the piece of paper. Her knowledge of Latin was pitiful and in copying down the botanical name for the plant she had combined two different naming systems. It was odd how Latin, that long dead language, had been the thing which had brought us together. Crete, a medievalist of international reputation, had the dodgiest Latin I had ever come across. It was just one of those things, she never could get a feel for the language.

She made her way down a bed looking at the names of the plants; it was as if she couldn't keep still. She turned and glanced at me, more to ensure I was following her than anything else. "You know, the ordering of plants is difficult isn't it? I keep expecting them to be alphabetical, or by smell, or colour, or something that, well, makes sense to me."

"Aristotle."

"Mmm," she agreed distractedly. "All those boys, Aristotle, and the boys of the Enlightenment, Bacon, the French Encyclopaedists, all of them. Bloody cheek really, to set about ordering *our* plants". She pulled nervously at the piece of paper; "I wonder how women would have ordered the plants or if we'd bother at all?"

"By their use?" I suggested trying to carry on the conversation, but all the time I was watching her, wondering what was troubling her so greatly.

"Yes! I like that. All the cooking ones to one side, the medicine and potions and spells to another. Those for perfume and those for colour in another part." She gestured extravagantly and her coat billowed. "Can you imagine it? And we'd worry about what it *looked* like."

"...Maybe a garden."

"Exactly."

"So this plant," I asked, "what's it for?"

"A potion." Her answer was quick and direct as if my question had been to no avail. She took out her reading glasses and continued, delivering me a lecture I had heard many times before. "It's one thing to read about the medieval women's potions and recipes but its entirely another to have to go to the trouble of making the things. They're fiddly and time consuming and some are anything but stable." Her eyes darted around the rows of plants as if she was looking not so much for a particular specimen but rather for some hidden clue, some knowledge which she has somehow misplaced amongst the greenery, or perhaps she had never owned it, and was now searching for it.

Quite suddenly I was reminded of the old woman at my gate, how the others had been afraid of her, and how they had carted her off, shut her off from the world. I said, without even thinking, "Careful, it could be dangerous." And, wondering where my caution came from, I added, "You could poison yourself."

She shrugged. "Poisoning myself is the least of my worries. Fending off the accusation of witchcraft, now that's a real threat." With her reading glasses on she began looking carefully at the labels of the plants.

"More complaints?"

She nodded then grinned, "The great part is they are thinking of taking me off teaching altogether, I'm some kind of risk to the University. More time for potions!" Her attention was immediately given back to the task of finding the herb. As she did so she recited for my benefit: "Dried and made into a powder, two drams mixed with honey or sweet wine will purge the melancholy." She smiled, "I think I'll mix it with mead, like a Viking queen, should do the trick." She continued to recite: "Good for giddiness of the head, those suffering from vertigo, or where they have become so light headed they have lost speech."

"Your condition?"

Crete sat on the edge of a plant bed. At last she was still. She took her time to speak. "I wish I was troubled by some great universal truth, but I'm not. It's Gabbett of course, he rang and..." She was distracted, fidgety. I let her continue without interruption. "Meridian, if I talk to anyone else about this they'll think I'm mad....a woman of my age isn't meant to be distracted by romance, I'm meant to have it all under control." She bit her lip and left a space in the conversation, but I decided it was best to say nothing. She continued. "He's coming over. I've cancelled all my appointments. Can you believe it? I told them I had to meet this film producer. I said he was only over for the day and I might need to spend the entire day with him... Meridian?"

"A film producer?" It seemed a rather elaborate ruse.

"Sure, that's what he does. Didn't I tell you? He makes docos for SBS. That's how we met."

I put my arm around her; there wasn't much I felt comfortable saying. I talked casually about work, about cooking, about our kids. It was an awkward distraction but I didn't know what else to do. There had been a time in my life when faced with friends lost in their own emotions I would hit the automatic pilot and recited a monologue on bread making. The monologue lasted for almost an hour and by that time the troubled friend had centred themselves again and I no longer felt in danger of having to take on board their problems, their life. It was a habit I'd taken some time to drop. I talked about work.

She turned towards me. "Yes, you're right. Focus. Keep telling me to focus. That's what we academic girls are good at aren't we." She was close to tears. "It's just, Meridian, I'm really scared. I keep feeling myself take that extra step, deeper and deeper, further and further away from the safety of the garden." She was calming herself, taking her time to speak. "It's as if I'm in a dream. I know it's dangerous but I'm doing it, I can't help myself, I'm moving faster and faster, like the child with her red dancing shoes."

"...and the axeman cut off her feet so she could no longer dance in her red shoes... she could no longer dance the frantic dance."

Crete reached out and squeezed my arm, almost in fright. "I'll stay away from axe men."

"You do that!"

The moment passed and Crete reoriented herself. "I actually did come here looking for a plant."

We began the search again, hunting through the beds for her feverfew but we couldn't find a plant whose name even vaguely approximated to the herb.

"I guess I'll need one of the botanists." She sounded defeated. "They get so superior when I want one of these herbs. I don't suppose you've got the time to come with me, ask them for the thing in Latin, that would give them somewhere to put their superiority!"

I shook my head. I'd made an appointment to see Eric and I was keen to hear what he had to say. Eric had been translating some of my father's papers, the ones I'd found that morning. They'd been in one of his old atlases. The notes had been written in Greenlandic, a peculiar habit my father used when he wanted to keep something secret - Greenlandic was not a language many knew, in fact Eric was the only speaker I'd ever met outside of Greenland. Besides, I didn't think I had the energy to take on any more of Crete's battles.

"Fair enough." Her mood became mischievous, "Once I tried to get a specimen via inter-library loan. Unfortunately the librarian didn't quite see it my way. They can get awfully stuffy sometimes."

"They probably have instructions to discourage your witchcraft."

"Research, Meridian. Research." She turned to leave and then remembered something she wanted to tell me, but changed her mind, thinking better of it. I watched her walk away and once again I felt that odd feeling; maybe it was a premonition, maybe it was more of the intuition Crete so often talked about. I wasn't sure. I didn't know how to protect those red shoes from the axeman. How

can any of us protect the dream of the dance from those who forbid even the dream?

\* \* \*

It was a pleasant enough day so I walked the short distance to the museum where Eric worked. I was a little early but I didn't think he'd mind. I'd known Eric long enough to walk in unannounced. He was a tall man who had aged with a certain confidence and it was that confidence which I most admired about him. He didn't disguise his greying hair, or his complete lack of interest in his appearance. He avoided fashion, the youth culture and television, and was one of the worst cooks I had ever had the misfortune of dining with. At regular intervals in our friendship he assured me he'd improved, but I was never willing to risk it. We always ate either at my place or at a restaurant.

His office was a clutter of books, papers, unplugged computer bits, specimens, labeled artifacts and unwashed coffee cups. He spoke hurriedly, but I knew he always did, and I wasn't put off by it. On this occasion he sat formally behind his desk and that, rather than his hurried speech, made me nervous.

Eric came straight to the point. "You were right. I think he wanted to keep it from you."

"Shit, What?"

He calmed my nerves a little by telling me it didn't contain any dark family secret. But that only disappointed me.

"I thought perhaps it might have been about his time there, in Greenland."

"No, not that, well not really." Eric was confused. "I suppose it has more to do with how he spent his free time while he was there. It's about the Vinland story, the old Norse saga and a map - the Vinland Map. Do you know it?"

"That map?" I didn't tell Eric I'd found the notes next to a facsimile of the map. "But it's a forgery, a 1950's con by a handful of dealers. And they pulled it off, they made their money." Surely my father had not been taken in by the dealers' wild story of coincidence and chance.

Eric didn't say anything; he shrugged in what I took to be agreement.

"Why did he write about it in Greenlandic?" That was the part I couldn't understand. If he was making notes on the Vinland Map, why conceal them in that obscure language?

Eric was reluctant to hand over the translated notes. "Perhaps he wanted to keep these thoughts to himself."

I frowned. My father was a secretive man but I'd never know that secretiveness to travel into his historical work.

"Before I leave you with your father's notes I think you should..." he paused, a little unsure of himself, "well, know about a dig I was on, years ago."

"It's to do with his notes?"

"Partly. I just think you should know, that's all."

He told me his story.

## **The Second Mandala - Discovery**

It was the summer of '62. I'd almost finished my doctorate and Professor Eldjar asked me if I wanted to join his team at the Old Norse dig in Newfoundland. I'd heard of the dig of course, it was in its third year, but I never thought I'd have the chance to join it.

By the third year there was no doubt the Ingstads, Anne and Helge, a husband and wife team, had discovered an old settlement. But they still had to put the pieces together and identify it as a Norse settlement of around the year 1000. If this could be shown, we could prove the Norse navigate the sea to Newfoundland - this northern part of America was their Vinland.

But more importantly, much more important than confirming once again that the Norse were great sea mariners and navigators, what we were really trying to show was that the sagas themselves were more than fanciful stories. You see, it's easy to view the sagas as fiction, as a myth or a fable. What we were doing was reading the sagas as history, as accounts as accurate as the Viking's methods and ideas allowed them to be. After all, what is our own history if it isn't just a collection of our stories, a collection of what we think are important events, what we remember, what we pass down from generation to generation?

So we were working with history itself, with the idea of history. With what constitutes history and what constitutes myth.

The Ingstads were fascinated with the problem and had a keen knowledge of the whole arctic zone. He was governor of Greenland, about the time your father was there.

It was a big project and teams came from all over the world. My team, headed by our Prof., was given the task of excavating house site J. From earlier evidence it looked as if our site was the smithy.

I have to tell you that while the wider dig didn't share our faith that our site was the smithy, none of us had any doubt. Several things were in its favour. The site's distance from the other buildings was a standard protection in case of fire. And quite close was a charcoal kiln, which had been unearthed the previous summer. But to be sure, to prove it, we needed to find something like an anvil stone. And that's what we were looking for.

It was toward the end of the summer, light was shortening and it was getting cold - arctic cold. The winds began to change. They started to come off the



Labrador Sea. That's a mean sea, cold currents, cold winds. There were no hills to speak of; nothing to give any shelter from the wind and J site was close to the bay. It was as if the winds were the first warning that winter, dark and cold and ice and slush, were not far away. No one spoke of it, but we all knew time was running out.

Then there was the official announcement - winter was coming early that year and we had to begin packing up. We were only given a couple more weeks and all teams were to leave by the end of the month. That gave us one last week of excavation and the remaining time to close up our site for the winter and break camp. We all knew if we didn't find the anvil stone or maybe an artifact, anything to confirm the use of the building, then we'd have to leave the site unsolved. Leave it for another team, another year. It was our last shot. We were desperate for a find - anything that would make sense of the long summer, anything to justify our being there. We were like a losing Olympic team who had one last shot at the gold.

I remember that morning. It was eerie. The air felt grey and the whole day threatened rain. We had the tarpaulins up; they were flapping in the wind, making an awful racket. An eerie racket. It was the only sound you could hear. Usually a dig is a noisy place, a bit like a building site, radios, talk, that sort of thing, but on that morning the only sound came from the wind and the flapping tarpaulin.

I don't know who first called out. I was working in another part of the site. But suddenly there was a lot of excitement. Eldjar came over and we stood back to let him through. If anyone deserved to clear away the last of the dirt from the stone it was that man. He carefully dusted away the remaining soil, first from the top of the stone, then from around it. The stone was so old it crumbled at touch and threatened to completely shatter. I remember looking at his face as he worked. Every stroke of the brush held his full attention and it seemed as if there was nothing in his world beyond that stone, beyond that find.

There was of course now an enormous amount of work to do and such little time to do it in. We had to document, measure, take samples, film, label, number and code everything. A lot of the team members from the other groups came over to help out, but there's a certain etiquette on a dig, so mostly they just held back, helped with the lamps or secured the tarp, that sort of thing.

I was there Meridian, in the thick of it. I was measuring and labelling and recording. That night I ached. Every bone in my body had caught the chill of the wind, but I didn't care. I was enormously happy. It was my first

major find on a dig. You can imagine the feeling of elation. It was as if the whole of my life had been about that summer and everything, from the small to the large, had been worth it. Everything. Living in that tent, putting up with my tent mate, the Norwegian who bragged day and night about his team's finds. Yes, everything. The lack of facilities, the endless messing about with turf and soil and sand. It had all been worth it. We'd found the smithy.

I think it was the moment I fell in love with archaeology, the moment I realised the importance of the find, of any find.

"And was it a Norse settlement?"

"Little doubt of it. Carbon dating has been discredited, but for what it's worth it fits nicely with the dates needed." Eric smiled. "It's one of those things. When the carbon dating backs up a find we cite it, when it doesn't, well, I can go on for hours about its inaccuracy."

"So what else do you have besides carbon dating?"

"Humanity. The funny little habits we all have and act upon without even noticing." He gave me a piece of paper. "Draw me a house, any old house."

I did as he asked. I drew the outline of a house much as a child might and I gave it a roof, windows and doors. I handed it back to Eric. "Not much of a drawing I'm afraid."

"It's perfect. You see Meridian, what you've drawn here is the map of a house, the *idea* of a house. It's rectangular and not square or round. The windows and doors are of a certain height and proportion to the walls and the roof. You've mapped how our culture builds houses." He screwed up my rough drawing and, making a ball of it, tossed it in the bin. "Some things can't be measured scientifically. The reason most archaeologists believe the settlement is an ancient Norse one, of the Vinland Saga period, has nothing to do with the few artifacts found or any carbon dating. It all comes down to the way the houses were constructed and the way the entire settlement was laid out."

"Humanity's habits?"

"Precisely. You know Meridian, we can change a lot of things when we go to a new land but the ordinary things, how we build a house, its dimensions, where windows are placed and the like. Those things are hard habits to break." Eric began to draw as he spoke. "Around the year 1000, houses in both Iceland and Greenland were constructed from turf. They were long in dimension and had a central hearth running down the middle. Like this." He showed me his sketch. "At the Newfoundland site the houses were made of turf, they were long in dimension and had a central hearth." He continued with various architectural details but I was reminded of Crete's methods, of how she wanted to mix up potions to understand the women she studied, to understand some aspect of medieval life. It's how we do the ordinary things that passes on the culture. How we make a salad, where we think windows ought to be, the dimensions of a room or a book. The small and ordinary things, the unnoticed things, the things we take for granted, the things we do without thought. These hold the secrets of

civilisations and cultures. Both Eric and Crete knew this; they let it work for them.

Eric continued. "Unlike Greenland or Iceland, in Newfoundland, and close to the site, were forests full of good building timber. It would have been a lot easier to construct a timber house, easier that is for builders with the know-how or the inclination. But no, they built in turf. There's little doubt the houses were made by men and woman who had sailed from Greenland almost a thousand years ago. The Norse legendary Vinland was most certainly Newfoundland."

He picked up the translation of my father's papers and handed them to me. "It's how we see the world that dates us, and it does so much more accurately than any carbon dating or scientific test will ever do. So often we are distracted by the big picture, the great narratives when really we should be focusing on the small, the ordinary business of being a human being."

I looked at his translation. "It's all to do with the Vinland Saga?"

"And the map. But you'll find them incomplete. I think it's simply a few pages of a much larger document. Where did you find them?"

I lied to Eric. I'm not sure why, but I suddenly didn't want him to know where I had found my father's notes. The whole thing was beginning to intrigue me. Why had my father written these notes in Greenlandic and why had he only kept a few pages? There was something else I hadn't mentioned because it didn't seem to be related. With the notes was an old newspaper cutting. It was a feature article on the Kennedy brothers, before J. F. became president. It had come from a newspaper cutting service, a government agency, and judging by the phone number printed under the name of the agency, it was not an Australian organisation. "If I come across anything else?"

Eric nodded. He didn't mind translating. "I seldom have use for the language now, it's good to dust off those Arctic consonants."

I laughed and listened to his story about his current work and the hunt for the paleochestres. It seemed a long way from Newfoundland, from that cold day when they discovered the anvil stone, from the sunsets in the north sky and the myriad of birds flying in for the evening on that low shallow bay. I wondered then what had caught my imagination and taken it so far from home. Was it something about having breathed Greenland's northern air as my first breath? Did the north invade my lungs and my spirit after all?

### 3

*...from The Prophecy of the Wise-Woman.  
The holy gods went to their judgement  
seats;  
They gave a name to night,  
To morning and midday, mid-morn and  
eve,  
To reckon the years aright.*

Some facts about me.

I was, not out of any national or cultural identity but because of an accident of place, born in the small town of Godthaab, the capital of Greenland. I am not Greenlandic, I am Australian. The accident of my birth is perhaps the singularly most unusual thing about me.

I was born towards the end of the Second World War and that was always offered as an explanation as to why my parents, who had been born and met and married in Australia, should be living in Greenland. At the time my mother fell pregnant with me they had been renting a farm house a little way out of the village of Godthaab, but with her pregnancy they moved to be closer to doctors and the only hospital for miles. In that country, in winter's half of the year, even the small journey from the farmhouse to the town was not without risk and my parents, not being Greenlanders, understandably chose to avoid it. In the village they rented a small, and, judging from the photographs, slightly dilapidated cottage.

I grew; swelling my mother's belly, as the dark of winter shrivelled away leaving just the stain of night, a few hours of darkness in the long days of summer. And in this small cottage, up close to the Arctic Circle, where days and nights fill imbalanced hours, I was born on the longest day of the year, the 22nd of June.

But what were my parents doing in Greenland during the war? The story I was told as a child revolved around my father's profession as an historical geographer. At the time of the war he had been interested in the sagas and was, according to the family stories, spending a few years in Greenland on sabbatical researching the old stories. Since my father later held a private Chair in historical geography all of this made sense to me, and as I grew up, I found no reasons to question it. Family stories attached to our birth are easy to let slide into the realm of mythology where questions seem inappropriate and unusual events commonplace. So it is of little wonder that for many years I just accepted the strange story of my birth.

But adolescence brings prying teachers running classes in family history and sprouting pseudo sociology; teasing friends; and enough self doubt to last for the rest of your life. And so, like so many of us, I began to doubt. I doubted I was my parent's natural child and I invented fantasies of being a Greenlandic waif. I read anything I could find on the Norse adventures, and cursed the fact my hair wasn't platinum blond. I insisted on growing it and wearing it in a long plait, mimicking the image of a Norse maiden I had seen in one of the books. And I had plans to bleach it, but that was, I knew, a matter of timing. I had to work out how to do it, and I had to work out how to get away with it.

What is interesting to me, now I look back, is that I questioned my *relationship* to my parents, rather than what we were *doing* in Greenland at that time. That my father was there reading and studying the sagas seemed a completely natural explanation to me.

## The Third Mandala - Wile

It was my first conscious act of deception.

I waited until I was alone, quite alone in the house, and I made a search for my birth identity. After looking in my mother's private drawers in her bedroom, something I feel even now deeply ashamed of, I searched my father's desk. Eventually, and it took some time, I found the certificate in an envelope with other old papers.

Any feelings of shame that I was disturbing my father's privacy were overcome by the burning necessity to prove to myself whose child I was, and that I had indeed been born in Greenland.

The other day when I discovered his notes in the atlas I had the same feeling: an almost shameless curiosity, which overcame any amount of guilt or doubt. Then, and now, it was the burning desire to know about myself and my heritage, which seems to justify my prying, my intrusion into his world.

I unfolded the papers carefully. They were yellowing, and had been folded for so long that in my nervous hands they didn't open easily. While all the papers in this envelope were in another language, I recognised the officialese of my birth certificate. The details were written in large copperplate letters in dark blue ink. I could decipher my name, and my father's, and my mother's, but the rest was beyond me. My school French and Latin were of little use here.

I found a dictionary and began to work translating as best as I could, the intricacies of the grammar and words. It was quite a challenge and I realised in my schoolgirl attempt that dictionaries were of limited use when I knew little of the way this language ordered words. It was like deciphering a code; an intensely fascinating code that once cracked would yield the origins of my birth. I worked harder than I had ever worked on any lesson until I had translated, at least enough to convince me I was my parent's child, and that I had been born on the day, and in the place they had told me.

I felt both relieved and enormously disappointed. I was relieved that I could, untroubled, enjoy the security of their love, but I was disappointed I was not the lost Norse maid of a great seafaring family. I carefully folded the papers and slipped them back in the envelope, making sure they looked undisturbed. I put them in my father's desk in exactly the place where I had found them.

I had found my birth origins but lost the romance of childhood.

The next day over the evening meal my father said to me, "I thought you might like a copy of your birth certificate. You do things like family history at school, don't you?"

I said nothing. He smiled and handed over a photocopy of the document I had taken such pains to uncover the day before. "Shall I read it to you, explain all the language or would you like to try and translate it yourself? I have a few dictionaries that might help you."

I never tried to deceive my father again.

The whole issue lost importance and instead I became distracted by TV idols and rock stars. It was not until I was a little older, when I had begun to question the beliefs and ideologies of my parents, that I once again began to doubt the story of my birth. This time I wanted historical explanations and the image of father sitting out the war in Greenland reading the sagas became comic. What was he doing in Greenland during the war? It was a question that began to obsess me.

With the taste of my last effort at deception lingering in my memory, I asked him directly. He was, however, evasive. "Research," he replied, and expanded at length on some detail of the sagas he knew was quite beyond my knowledge. He closed the topic comically, referring to a family joke; "I was hunting the uniped."

But my curiosity was only fuelled by his evasive tactics. I began to read about Greenland. I began to read about the war and it wasn't long before I realised the importance of Greenland to the American defence strategy, and its strategic placement as a tracking station and a warning base. Bombers and missiles from Europe had to pass by Greenland on their way to the US. For the first time I realised that Greenland was not some kind of wilderness frontier, a haven for anyone wanting to sit out the war undisturbed. It was instead a hub of strategic communication bases. I then remembered my parents talking about their American friends, the photos of one or two and the stories of the dances at the Mess. There had also been talk of a meteorological station, although I was now convinced such a place tracked more than the movements of clouds.

I confronted my father with my version of life on Greenland but he maintained his story and stuck rigidly to his version of his past and my beginning. I did not believe him and he knew it.

I've often wondered why he maintained this story even into my adulthood. I don't so much believe he was protecting either himself or me from some darkness in the family history. I think he thought it no longer mattered. He detested war movies, war memorabilia and Anzac Day. He had no ex-service mates and each Anzac Day he would take himself off fishing - trout fly-fishing. Mum would pack his picnic hamper and early, just about dawn, he'd set off. After dark he'd return and sit quietly in his chair, or perhaps he'd bring home a fish, a rainbow or brown trout, and mum would make a fuss and cook it the way he liked, with flaked almonds and parsley.

It's odd isn't it, how without ever a word passing a whole family can know that a certain day is one for mourning, for private space and reflection. That day, Anzac Day, was father's.

Probably like most girls whose fathers did something or other during the war, I had built up girlhood fantasies about my father the spy, but I knew they had to stay deep in my private thoughts. I couldn't share these daydreams with my school friends as my father just was not the sort to be seen leaping from trains, climbing mountains, or for that matter carrying a pistol in his breast pocket. He was a quiet sort of man who enjoyed books more than action and who seemed to

have few friends or confidants. It was mother who was the social one, who dragged him out to dances and arranged dinner parties.

As an adult I have realised that spies are more likely to be quiet secretive people, the kind of person you'd not notice in a lift, rather than the girlhood illusion of flamboyant beauty and bravado. So I've never quite given up the idea that my father spent his war years as a spy. Since we came back to live in Australia, I presume it was for the Allies. Perhaps he spent his time breaking codes; perhaps there were a few submarine rides. I don't know. As my own life took shape, and I had secrets of my own, I learnt to respect his secrecy.

There were other things about Greenland I remember from their stories and from the photo albums. There is a snap shot of my mother holding a baby by a weedy stunted willow growing between two boulders. The tree was no more than four meters high and under it was a caption written in my mother's hand, "Meridian at six months by the tallest tree in Greenland; Tasermiut fjord". When I crossed the Nullarbor, I thought of these treeless countries, the land of my birth, Greenland, where the soil is covered with ice and the land of my culture, Australia, where the inland soil is covered with red earth. Both offer vast treeless landscapes - their large expanses of unmapped terrain threatening the unwise traveller.

It was my mother who taught me to travel cautiously, to pay attention to the maps. She had taken no risks when tuberculosis broke out and she shipped herself and me back to Australia. I was not yet two. We apparently needed to spend some time in a quarantine station before the relatives were allowed to visit us. Father joined us a few months later.

My mother was the socially outward going member of the family. She met my father through her work; and I had often thought that if it had not been her fortune to be working as a laboratory assistant at the university's Geography Department, she might never have even laid eyes on my quiet father.

She had had an unusual childhood in so far as she was permitted to study sciences at school. Not the hard sciences though, when she was young girls weren't permitted into the senior school laboratories where the mysteries of chemistry and physics were explored, but nobody minded her sitting exams in geology and botany. Once, when sorting out her things, I found an exercise book old enough to have come from her childhood. Ferns and grasses were pressed between the pages. Each specimen had been carefully labelled with what I presumed to be its correct botanical name. The pressed plants crumbled at my touch. I wondered if she'd ever collected flowers, pressed their bright petals between heavy books, or if she had always been more interested in the subtleties of grasses. Perhaps the showy blooms of flowers were too excessive for her; after all, she had chosen a quiet man in my father.

I handled the old exercise book as if it was a precious manuscript and felt awkward touching its pages with my ungloved hands, touching pages that contained my mother's girlhood dreams.

But my mother's family was not a wealthy one and it was not possible for her to continue her education. Instead, she took a job that matched, as closely as she could manage, her dreams of becoming a scientist. I often wondered how she felt when the reality of her life occurred to her; when her well mapped out dream of becoming, strange as it may seem, a world authority on glaciers, had vanished into the economic and social realities of her family and the customs of her time. Few then thought it was worth educating girls. Few then thought girls had such dreams.

I had no brothers or sisters but my childhood years were busy ones, crowded with ideas, people, events and make-believe. And I had perhaps an extraordinary advantage over many other children in that I was loved by both of my parents. It was like growing up in a warm environment where food is plentiful and rich with taste. Their love was unfailing, which is not to say we didn't argue, but rather, I can't recall a single moment when I doubted their love for me. This unquestioning love remained like a backdrop to my life, a safety net and a soft landing. I didn't realise how much I had grown accustomed to its security until my father died and my mother could no longer give love, but instead needed it. I think of it as a time when the wells ran dry. It was hard at first, living without their love, learning how to make it myself, how to generate love for others and for myself. Gradually, it took time; I became my own well.

Before my mother grew old, old before her time, she'd tell me stories prompted by photographs, or newspaper clippings, or scraps of material, all carefully pressed and positioned in her photo albums. They were of course much more than photo albums, they were more like journals, a map of my growing up, her growing old. There was a strand of my hair taken from the first cut; my school reports; a card I made for her birthday; and a newspaper clipping, all yellowed now, of my father when he was awarded his personal Chair at the university. There was a small newspaper notice of my grandmother's death and a snippet of the gold material my mother sewed to make my first dance dress. It was all there, our lives together. Those photo albums were like a patchwork where fragments of living evoked the memory of dresses and parties, ceremonies and meetings, partings and laughter. If I could have sewn those photographs, those clippings, those precious pieces of memorabilia into a quilt, I would have done so, and wrapped my mother in it, a shawl against the pain of aging.

After my father died, she moved into a home where care adapts constantly to her increasing Alzheimer. I no longer show her the photo albums. Such details of her living are now hazy and her memory is as soft as her skin. It hangs loosely with time.

And my own adult life?

## **The Fourth Mandala - Moil**

Like so many of my contemporaries, I was caught up in the second wave of feminism. Politicised by the events of the Vietnam War, I charged and ran and fought in the streets, my rights as a woman seemed such an obvious demand, such an obvious ask.

So I lived out the social changes of my time, not in any kind of distracted academic way, but as a player performing my part high up on the trapeze. I made posters, I organised, and I threw away my makeup, my girdles and my bras. I untied my body, I untied my identity, I untied my ambitions.

We were busy women then; too busy to give our minds to anything but the struggle to have a voice, to be heard, to infiltrate the male world, to prove we were as good as they were. We had to drink in the front bar - who would want to do that now? We had to take jobs as council labourers - who would want to do that now? We



had to reshape the language, demanding our own pronoun. We had to heckle, and insist, and battle, and march, and talk, and scheme, and demand until our voices ran hoarse. Who would want to do that now? There was no time for the frivolous, glorious play of women, for our laughter and light-heartedness, for our healing and generosity, for our great sense of humour. We were busy women, we were serious women, we were women charged with a mission. We had a job to do. We were in the trenches.

Somehow in those early days of my feminism, obsessed with the trappings of sameness - with being as good as, as worthy as, as capable as - I lost touch with my humour, my physical self and my psychic self.

And what, perhaps, is sad about this, is that I know I am not alone in this loss. I am part of a generation of women who struggles with great gaps in my knowledge of myself. I carry with me, like a name, some deep and yet simple confusion. I don't fully understand, for example, the sensation of softness I feel in my fingers when I touch my *own* hair, my *own* skin.

Let me explain. With one hand, I touch my lover's skin, with the other I touch myself. But even in the most concealed and hidden places of his body, in crevices and folds that never see the sun, his skin is much coarser, much firmer than mine.

But our difference is greater than the touch of our skin, the trace of our shape. When my lover wakes in the night, his body icy with a cold sweat, I comfort him. He fears grand epic things. We turn on the light. We talk of nothing, the normal, the everyday. The epic issues subside, become navigable and we sleep again. But when I wake in the dead of night startled by a sound, or by a memory, or falling from a dream, he comforts me sleepily, and my fear subsides into the stillness and darkness of the room. I can faintly smell, from somewhere in the house, the night perfume of flowers. I return to sleep. Such is the difference of our dreaming.

So I am left confused. I who have spent so many years fighting for sameness, for equality at any price, am now silently wanting to explore my difference.

I am part of a generation who swallows the sour taste of confusion. We express this confusion in different ways. Some, shall I call this one Helen, when looking at her life, fills herself with regret and calls out that we went too far, we were wrong. And, in an effort to find some comfort and companionship in her old age, she wants to wind back the clock on this or that social reform. I cannot share Helen's regret. And there are others, Margaret, Louise, who now regret they never carried a child, never gave birth.

Still others lost the shape of themselves. I do not mean those women who are the beautiful and large goddesses of our world, but those who hid their tender womanness in the armour of a large and ungente shape. Robyn, Christine, Julie. Their shape expelled opulence and fecundity, it was a shape where breasts and bellies and buttocks were melded together disguising the curves of womanness. These women cropped their hair so that nothing revealed the softness of their inner thoughts, their vulnerability, their pain. I sometimes wonder if these women were not the most damaged, the most hurt.

And there were other women, Jean, Jenny, Carol who became fiercely academic, competitive, ambitious and determined to win the battles on the work front. They conducted a kind of arm to arm combat with their male peers and took up the dress of the male, the stance of the male, the gaze of the male. Padded shoulders and power dressing made ideal combat clothes, hiding even a sigh, even the slightest sign of fatigue.

There were those who gave up their King James Prayer Book for late night meetings exploring women's spirituality. Karen and Bernice who took up the tarot and the ancient lore. Still others, Pat, Marian, eroded drip by drip, the stone pillars of the male churches. They re-wrote their prayer books. They put women in the front pews; they put women at the altar.

Still others, and I am one of them, fearing suffocation inside a husband's embrace, bounced from one relationship to the next, unable to give anything of the self and offering instead raw sexuality. It was as if my body had become a consolation prize for something completely unobtainable, something I could not own, let alone give or share. How could I give even part of myself when I had lost touch with my private self?

I had lovers and husbands and divorces and a child. But I couldn't now tell you anything of the physical experience of carrying a child, of giving birth, of suckling it at my breast. I can't remember those early men, what their bodies were like or how they made love. I can't remember clothes or dresses or scarves or necklaces or how I wore my hair. My memories of those years are of women's meetings, seminars, tutorial groups. I recall papers, and lectures and books I read. I remember the banners we carried on demonstrations but I do not recall the colour of my child's pusher, or where she went to kindergarten, or what her first day at school was like.

Perhaps it's really quite simple. If you grow up in a war zone, you're bound to have a very different attitude to crossing the street, to nightfall, to a knock on the door, from someone who has only lived in the cities of peace. We all fought; it was enough to mar us, to impress on us

all the mark of combat, the mark of the victim. I was no exception.

I am proud of the battles; proud of the world I have made for my daughter, proud of the changes I helped to shape. And I have found contentment. I am happy to live without the confusion of lovers, to live in a house where I can suit myself, where I can leave personal papers scattered about, and where I can receive letters and phone calls from whoever I like without deception. So, while it is true no one greets me at the airport when I return home, it is also true I am not left waiting in a transit lounge for a late partner who is too preoccupied with his own problems to even remember to smile. I have learnt to like the freedom and ease of taxis.

For the rest, I am an Australian woman of Celtic stock, my skin is too white for this climate, my hair, which I wear cut not too short, is light reddish-brown. The colour is artificial. I am of medium height but a little plump. I think I have come to enjoy my shape, I have become used to it, the amount of it, the whiteness of my skin and the circles and arcs which make up the physical part of me. I am not fat but I am careful where I buy my clothes.

I have had a series of jobs at universities and, not unlike my father, I am now employed as an historical cartographer spending my time debating finer points of ancient maps. And while I enjoy my work, I admit it is something of an indulgence, or a stroke of luck, to be actually paid a salary for engaging in such eccentricities.

I am 50, and I do not lie about my age.

I am called Meridian.

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## ***Fragments of a Map***

***A novel [continued]***

**Tess Brady**

### **4**

As Eric had warned me, my father's notes were fragmented as if whole sections were missing. There were notes on the Vinland Map, some detailed data relating to oceans and tides, and a couple of pages on the importance of preserving our past set against the moral issues raised by any collection of cultural artifacts. It was well worked territory, perhaps my father had been wrestling with it at the time, but since his notes offered no new insights they didn't interest me greatly.

The part of my father's notes which did intrigue me was the story about those odd one legged creatures, the uniped. He'd translated this one from Eirik the Red's Saga.

#### ***A Uniped Shoots Thorvald with an Arrow and Kills Him***

*One day the merchant Karlsefni, who was eager to explore Vinland, sailed with his crew and Thorvald, Eirik the Red's son. They went north past the headland Kjalarness and then west keeping the land on the port beam. They passed great and wild forests until they came to a river and they decided to shelter on its southern bank. They steered their ship into its mouth.*

*Karlsefni saw something moving in the clearing not far from the ship. He called out to it. His men stopped what they were doing and came over to look. Thorvald, who was resting on the bow, did not stir. The creature was a uniped. On its one leg it came bounding towards them at great speed. It fired an arrow which hit Thorvald in the groin.*

*Thorvald pulled the arrow from his groin, and, although at first he thought he would survive the wound, he died soon after.*

*The uniped fled towards the north with Karlsefni and his men in pursuit. But the uniped was too fast and Karlsefni only caught glimpses of it now and then*

*before it disappeared into a creek. The party returned to the boat. They set sail calling the place Unipedland. They returned to their settlement in Vinland and did not set foot again on Unipedland for fear of the crew's safety.*

*A poem records the event:*

*Karlsefni, hear that it is true,  
Your men did chase a uniped  
Down to the sea.  
The creature ran like the wind  
Over stone and ground.  
Hear this, Karlsefni.*

Reading my father's notes brought back childhood memories of the stories he'd told me about the uniped. It was a favourite character of his, and time and time again, he'd tell me of the uniped's fantastic adventures. We even had a family saying: "I'm hunting the uniped," which tended to cover everything from hunting dreams to tackling the impossible.

Thinking about it now I realised the uniped, a lively part of my childhood menagerie, was no more a fantastic or unbelievable creature than the unicorn, the dragon, the bunyip or the Martian. It is as if we humans must have at least two kinds of creatures: those which are familiar, zooed and charted; and those other quite magical creatures - the imagined, the unexplored bestiary. These are the creatures of the gargoyles. They decorate our charts and our dreams. They guide us to the unimaginable or to the strange and unknown. They populate the land on the other side of our horizon, the other side of our sight. It's as if there's a human need to create these mythical beasts and only then is the universe somehow complete. Do I sleep better knowing that the Loch Ness Monster is safely in the depths of the loch? Do I breathe easy knowing that the Yeti is high up in the unpassable snow bound regions of the Himalayas? And do I walk the streets with comfort knowing that the Martian is safely in its flying saucer? Are my rituals complete knowing that the Tooth Fairy will appear at the right time along with the Easter Bunny and the elves and Father Christmas and the whole basement full of seasonal creatures? Where does the Easter Bunny go for the rest of the year? We never ask. Who has seen the Centaur or the Cyclops? Was there a body to bury when the Minotaur was slain in the labyrinth? Did anyone bother to look for it?

Somehow, these creatures complete the mystery. They give us the understanding that no matter how far we travel we will never quite reach the end - even at the edge of the map there remains, always, inside ourselves or on the land, an uncharted world of possibilities and unbelievable danger. The wise traveller is wary of the future, it contains not just our wishes and our dreams, our tomorrow and our hope, but it also contains the moment of our death. These creatures, the ones which populate the future, the unknown, are not to be taken lightly.

I put my father's papers away and made a cup of coffee, trying to clear my head of unipeds.

\* \* \*

We left in Crete's car. It was late summer and the afternoon was pleasant without being hot. She drove out of the city and turned into a park I didn't know. The

road edged itself along a creek between two steep hills. One hillside was covered in trees and yellowing grass, the other was rocky, and for me at least, inaccessible.

It was like a lot of reserves, a curious word for a wild park. We drove past campers, a kiosk and telephone box. There were few people about. It was a week day and too late in the season for most campers. Further into the park, we passed a slightly less regimented picnic spot with barbecues and free-form play equipment for kids. There was a sign saying 'no sliding allowed', I had forgotten the word, but a rope that hung from a tree and dangled over the creek gave me a clear enough image. It would be good to come here, I thought, when the place was full with children.

I wondered why swinging on the rope was such a forbidden pleasure, and yet it hung there, tempting disobedience.

We passed a parked car and drove deeper and deeper into the valley. Crete had hardly spoken but she had driven without hesitation. She was taking me to a place she knew well. It was Crete's dreaming space, her woman space.

She pulled off the road and stopped the car.

At the spot she had chosen, it was easy to cross the creek, and on the other side the grass wasn't too long, the bank not too steep. There was no one about and it felt as if we were exploring a new land. She tugged up some shoots of creeper, some ivy, and we both wrapped them around our waists like children. The air smelt sweet with the afternoon sun and we walked for a bit through some thistles; the leaves were dark green and striped with white, unlike any I had seen before.

Crete let her thoughts wander, casually telling me snippets of her week. "I began to bleed this morning," she said, changing the conversation. "I hadn't bled for awhile, maybe a couple of months. Menopause," she explained. "They tell me that's how it begins." She pulled at a piece of grass. "It feels good, like the relief after a heat wave - suddenly it rains and all the earth around you, the bitumen, the air itself, drops in temperature and the world feels fresh again."

"Funny isn't it. Do you recall when we were younger, if we didn't bleed dead on time there'd be such a panic."

She nodded, "Did you ever have to have an abortion?"

I shook my head and then smiled. "Just luck I guess! Do you remember when you started, as a girl?"

"Not quite twelve, I think. Was it a shame job for you as well, something kept a secret from everyone else in the family?"

It had been. "Was that the first part of our separation, our isolation as girls?" Nothing was ever said of course, it was a subtle rite of passage, but it was about then that I was discouraged from playing with any male children. I remember one night Eric stayed over and he had to sleep in the lounge room. I couldn't work out why. Every other time he'd slept in my room, in the spare bed.

We talked as we walked along, sharing stories and taboos of our girlhood. Crete's voice changed, it became quite serious. "How can you begin to love someone if you can't let your body swell with his child? When I've lost my fertility, when I can't have a child. Where does the love go? What does it become?"

I found her question odd - it was something I hadn't thought about - I had never seen love in those terms, but then, Crete had had children with all her lovers. Obviously, it had been a manifestation of her love, a way in which she made the intangible, tangible. I thought then that she had a lot of new things to learn about loving - if she was going to give Gabbett love she'd need to find a new way of expressing it. But I wasn't about to lecture her, I knew only too well that there was a lot I too had to learn. After all, Crete was at least prepared to have another try, to risk rejection, disappointment. I knew I wasn't even prepared to open a Valentines card - that's how scared I'd become. "Maybe that's why menopause takes so long, we need to adjust, acclimatise." I didn't say, but I had begun to notice slight changes in my own body.

"Mmm..." She was distracted with her own thoughts.

"How did the potion go?" I asked.

"I'm still drying the herb. It has to be quite brittle."

"So you found some?"

The path wound down to the creek bed but didn't cross it; instead it hugged the bank and then turned back towards the hillside and the wild olive trees and old gums. We came across a small square patch of dirt, it looked to me as if an animal had been buried there, some favourite pet or something, but Crete muttered about people taking potting soil so I thought my mood must be turning very romantic.

"Meridian," Crete broke the silence, "I don't know about Gabbett." She was looking at the palm of her hand as if it held some answer. "They say it's all here," she rubbed her palm. "My life. It would be so easy to go to a fortune teller, to have it all laid out for you."

I agreed. It was hard work living without faith, without someone else making all the hard decisions, justifying all the pain and forgiving all the mistakes.

"He's coming over again next Thursday. He said he wanted to spend the weekend, work everything out, one way or the other." She bit her bottom lip like a worried child. "Sometimes I wake up and I look at him sleeping and I'm really afraid, not of him, he's a gentle man, but..." She stopped herself. "Meridian, I can't tell him this."

"Maybe," I said trying to reassure her, "It's just been too quick. Does he know?"

She shrugged. "A bit. I don't want to..." And she broke off. We left the conversation at that point.

The one attack I'd experienced I carried like a deep scar. I couldn't even begin to understand what Crete must be feeling after her history. Have any of us, I wondered, completely escaped? If it isn't in the form of a fist, the violence comes some other way, some form of abuse, some form of bullying. I thought of the old woman at my gate and how she had been bundled off, how no one had asked her, listened to her.

We continued walking in silence. We stopped and looked at a cluster of small flowers, those minute ones you hardly ever notice, and we walked back through the thistles to continue in the opposite direction. I was enjoying the day and as I walked I listened to the sounds around me. I could hear a dog barking somewhere in the distance, a few birds, some movement in the trees, and the buzz and click of insects. I began counting the sounds, as I did as a child.

We were walking through the tall grass by now and I had a collection of unusual fungi in my coat pocket. We stopped and looked at some that were fluted on top as if the whole fungus was turned inside out. I tapped it to release its spores, it was a trick my mother had taught me, and put it with the rest.

"He was over last night..." Crete offered by way of explanation. "He'd flown in for the day; he needed some more footage of that Spaniard, the old librarian. He caught the early flight this morning."

"No wonder you wanted to come out here..." I broke off. She hadn't heard me. She was transfixed staring at the grass. She grabbed my arm. "Look! Blood, here and over there."

Tiny droplets of blood, fresh and dark red, stained the grass. Here and there, like a trail, as if someone or something had been cut and was staggering. We followed the trail. Instinctively we felt that whatever it was could only just be in front of us.

We neither hurried nor spoke but followed the trail carefully. I felt apprehensive at what might lie ahead. We were both a little afraid, I could feel it in Crete.

At times the trail was thin and hard to follow, at times heavy, but always it was fresh. That distinctive colour of fresh blood before it begins to grow dark or clot. I doubt very much if any woman could ever mistake that colour. As women we know blood in an intimate way, its texture, its feel, the way it changes. We knew that what we were following was not far ahead of us.

We must have walked for about a mile following the trail. I began to think about Crete, her body changing slowly, and how mine would as well. How gradually over years our bleeding dries up, the wound heals and we change our patterns from the moon to perhaps the sun. Is that why gardens become important to women of our age?

I wondered if Crete was thinking about her coming menopause, or if she was reliving her night, dreaming of Gabbett and assessing the possibilities of sharing her life with him.

We kept on following the trail. It was something about the freshness of the blood that kept us; compelled us to go on looking. We had the feeling we were first on the scene - afraid of what might lie ahead of us but afraid to stop.

The green belt of ivy fell from my waist to the ground.

The trail took us back to the creek and led into the water. Next to the edge of the trail, a few steps away, two large concrete pipes formed a kind of bridge. Whatever it was had lost a lot of blood, why didn't it cross using the bridge?

Crete touched my arm. "Will you look or will I?" She was asking about the pipes that formed the bridge. Perhaps that was the first time we admitted the worst to each other.

I didn't feel very brave, but, I thought, she really was afraid, and one of us had to look. I went down stream and reluctantly looked back, up into the pipes.

Nothing, just the water. Nothing, just the things we had come to see. The reeds, maybe some tadpoles, a bit of watercress. Nothing.

The relief was enormous and I called out to her and splashed the water. Were we, I wondered, constructing a world of danger and violence when all the time there



was nothing to fear? Was the blood nothing but a trace left by an animal who had cut its paw? Were we colouring this place with some deep psychic fear, something from girlhood? I kept my thoughts to myself.

We crossed the creek and Crete began to look around for new signs of the trail. We found a few drops of blood and they led to where fresh tyre marks had bent the grass. We looked around but couldn't find any further traces of the blood and we both agreed that whatever it was must have got into the car. Probably, because we couldn't cope with any other explanation, we agreed it was a dog that'd hurt its paw. It sounded as feasible as any other explanation and we sat down, tired, for we'd walked miles.

We sat there in silence until Crete said, "What if it didn't get into the car but came out of it? What if we went in the wrong direction?" I had to admit it sounded feasible, as feasible as the dog explanation or any other we might have played around with privately.

We crossed the creek and began again.

It was odd; somehow retracing the trail was a lot less stressful. Going back over history seems a lot easier than moving forward into it, perhaps because when we look back we do so with hindsight. When we move backwards, we are searching for some kind of explanation, some causal factor that links us with a past event. We are searching for an order, we are trying to *make sense* of the world. We make links and connect situations, provide provenance, form lineage, trace genealogy and, importantly, find comfort. To look back is easier because we are looking for something in particular, something familiar and known, something we *want* to find.

But when we go forward into the future, we are engaged in the perplexing quest for survival in a completely unknown world. All we know about the future, the only thing we can map with any certainty, is that within it, somewhere within it, we will cease to be. The future is the paradox of humanity for it holds both our hope and also our demise - our death.

It's little wonder religions created the afterlife and populated it with hell and heaven, purgatory, recreation, judgement, pearly gates, Saint Peter and the archangels. They crowded the landscape to make it more familiar, a safer bet, a known garden. Armed with the afterlife we can name the future, plot it like a map, and speak about it with some easy familiarity. But it's a trick, a sleight of hand, a projection, which hides the awful truth of human nothingness. We can no more turn the future into a safe place than we can turn the circle into the square. Human beings just aren't that competent.

The blood was beginning to dry and change colour. By now we had passed a few familiar sections of the trail, some flowers I remembered and the crop of inside-out fungus. We must have been getting closer to where we began the search.

I thought of my father's notes, of those Norse men and women, of the courage it must have taken to go beyond the known world to places where fantasy and reality collided, and neither religion nor history could help them make sense of it.

"This is where we started. The trail, we began here." Crete said, and she pointed to other markings. She had been right, we had gone in the wrong direction.

I felt the first sour taste of fear. I could feel it forming in my throat and in my stomach. We went on as before, in silence, slowly searching the ground. Then without any reason the blood trail just stopped.

We searched the area, under fallen trees, over the creek edge, up the hill among the wild olive trees. But nothing. Not a trace. Not a sign. All we could hear was the distant sounds of young children playing. Nothing. We looked for some trace on a broken bottle or an old tin. If it had cut itself, there would be some signs of blood. But nothing. It was as if the blood had somehow just come from within the body, some kind of injury, and then it had stopped.

By now our heads were firmly fixed on the ground, searching over every bit of the grass, moving in circles, out at tangents. But nothing.

"Watch out!" A male voice called out.

We looked up and he was pointing to a spot not far from us where he had set a trap. By his feet was a clutter of hunting apparatus including what looked like a bow and a quiver of arrows. But more disturbing to both of us was his appearance. He was barechested and his jeans had a tear across the knee. His hair was loose and unkempt and in his left hand he very definitely held a knife.

"That trap, you nearly disturbed it!" He was angry. We had stumbled into what he clearly saw as his private domain. Lawrencean in appearance and totally frightening, he held all the arrogance of youth and might have sprung from those romantic novels we read as young girls.

"Where are you shooting the arrows?" Crete demanded trying to hide her fear behind indignation.

I grabbed her arm, this was not the time to challenge such a figure, and without hesitation or a word I rapidly led her away from him to the safety of the car.

As we drove out of the body of the gorge I kept thinking that any other day we would have found him harmless, almost picturesque, possibly quaint. He was probably a camper. But on that afternoon he represented all of that brash single minded energy which in its positive form builds bridges and in its shadow, as male dominance and aggression, banishes and smashes the dreams and thoughts of women. He represented the *fear* of the hunter. He was the inquisitor, the axeman, the hunter, who by his very archetype fears the quarry into submission. It was important, crucial for our survival that we got out of there; that we did not let him see our fear, we did not let him see the red shoes of our dreams.

Had we let our own history and thoughts colour the situation, saturate it until one reality had become another? Had we seen a world which did not exist, one which we had invented? Had we turned a walk in the park into a *search*, the camper into a *hunter*? I looked around me; there was nothing sinister or frightening about the park, about any of it. Nothing that is, except what we'd constructed in our imaginations. But wasn't that construction real to us, frightening to us?

We drove out of the reserve and in a little time we were back at my house in need of some coffee. By the front door a courier had delivered a parcel. My breakfast and lunch dishes were still in the sink. I put the kettle on and undid the parcel. It contained a small dark carving of a uniped. Eric had sent it.

An article in the daily paper caught my attention. Once again the Vinland Map was in the news. I called Eric and asked him over for a meal. If anyone could help me get to the bottom of this whole thing, he could.

I showed him the article: after further examination of the scientific evidence on ink particles taken from the Vinland Map, doubts had arisen regarding the original scientific findings. Yale University Library had, however, refused to subject the map to further scientific testing.

Eric smiled. "So now you think the map might be genuine?"

I didn't know. My certainty that it was a forgery had been disturbed. I had placed a lot of credence on the original findings which *proved* that the ink used in the map was of a modern origin. Once again the scientific evidence had been unreliable. "Does the date 1347 mean anything to you?" I asked him.

"It's where your father's papers left off. Have you found more?"

"I'm not sure. Nothing in Greenlandic, but I'm not too sure."

I had prepared a simple meal of prawns, crusty bread and some tropical fruit I'd picked up that day from the market - red paw paw, lychees and mangoes. It was the kind of meal Eric liked, and I was careful to point out to him how easy it was to put together, how even he could prepare it. He suggested he could use apples instead of paw paw and I realised even this meal might die in his culinary hands. I let the topic drop. We ate and then, in the study, I showed him the papers. "This is the only thing I could find with the date 1347, it's a shipping record from an old annals. The ship was bound for Markland..."

"Markland, Helluland and Vinland. They were the Norse names for what I think was Newfoundland. Helluland was the land of stones. Markland the land of timber and Vinland of course was the land of vines. According to the sagas the Norse made a settlement in Vinland."

"The dig?"

Eric nodded. "I believe so."

"Well it makes sense, the ship heading for Markland was on a timber run from Greenland. The odd thing is," I added, "there are all these calculations on the same page. Tides I think."

Eric took them from me but couldn't make any sense of them either.

"There's more," I showed him the ones I'd found in a copy of the sagas. "The only thing I can think of are tides, or longitudes or something. Something to do with shipping." I showed him the numbers I thought were tides, and those that looked like longitudes.

He still couldn't help me. "Even when I was at the Newfoundland dig there was talk of tides and shipping routes but it never made much sense to me. You need a marine archaeologist."

I shrugged; I didn't feel like getting bogged down in that much detail. I wasn't sure why I was even interested in these old scraps of my father's notes. Over the last couple of months I had been feeling slightly out of kilter; it was an emotional feeling rather than a medical ailment. It felt as if I was about to discover something, not so much about the world, but about myself. And yet what did *that* mean? Who am I but an extension of my parents and my history?

Would I discover I was *separate* from this, *more* than this, *other* than this? Or was there something else, something about my history, some secret or forgotten thing that waited lost in the shadows of the family photographs, waiting to be uncovered? And so once again I found myself wrestling with two conflicting desires: I felt drawn to investigate my father's papers; but I also felt a great need to step back from them, to leave that part of life, that part of time, unmapped.

"Take them to Andersen," Eric persisted. "If your father had been plotting the currents and the likely route the Norse took from Greenland, then Andersen would be able to, well, make some sense of it."

"Is he still alive?"

"Comes into the museum regularly and bothers the hell out of us." Eric agreed to phone through Andersen's address. "Did your father keep a journal, a notebook?"

But of course. If I could find it, if it existed, it would certainly contain my father's interest in this, as well as other areas. The trouble was, I had never seen my father with any kind of journal and nothing like it had turned up amongst his papers and books. "You know ..." I felt troubled by its absence. "I've never seen one, nothing like it. The only things I've found are these bits of paper and some old newspaper cuttings. It doesn't make sense Eric, he was *exactly* the kind of man who'd keep a notebook."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Haven't you always thought he was some kind of undercover agent during his time in Greenland?"

I blushed. "That's kid's talk. Besides he never admitted it."

Eric waited a few moments before he spoke again. "I know we mucked about with him as kids, but it makes sense Meridian, as an adult, it makes a lot of sense. What else could he have been doing in Greenland during the war?"

I shrugged. I felt awkward. It had been a subject my father and I had agreed to leave concealed. "He was hunting unipeds!"

Eric smiled. "That's one way of putting it." He continued, not noticing how awkward the topic made me feel. "I know you don't like talking about it. He's dead; it can't hurt him now. But there were some unexplained things about your father. Now, either he had a double life and he kept a stack of papers somewhere else..."

I shook my head.

"Or, if he did put his hand to the odd spying job he wouldn't keep a journal, what he'd do is keep odd scraps of paper in old books, notes written in esoteric languages, like Greenlandic."

"But that Greenlandic stuff was trivial. Unipeds and the Vinland Sagas..."

Eric said nothing. He got up and poured us both a glass of wine.

"Besides," I defended my father's memory; "it was just during the war. Everyone did something then. It was probably just code breaking. That kind of thing."

"Meridian, " Eric spoke unusually slowly, "what if he kept up those connections? What if he stayed on the payroll?"

I stared at Eric. The thought was monstrous. And yet it made sense. Those words, 'What if he stayed on the payroll', rolled around and around in my head making sense of doubts and memories, of his secrecy and quirky habits. " *My father?*" I found it hard to speak, to form these thoughts into words.

Eric was thankfully silent; it gave me the space I needed to work through his suggestion.

"You suspected, when I gave you his notes to translate?"

Eric nodded.

"But why?" The whole thing was so incredulous I was clearly miles behind Eric.

"There's a lot about your father that doesn't warrant too close an inspection. Take his personal Chair in historical geography..."

"What do you mean, he was a scholar!" I felt a surge of anger as if Eric was now going to doubt my father's credentials.

"No doubt about it. But the appointment to a Chair just doesn't happen overnight. It costs a lot of money. He was paid a whacking wage; he had few duties, less teaching and a heap of research money to let him flit about the globe as he so pleased. Meridian, you work in a university, they're cash strapped. Have you never thought it odd your father had such a deal?"

I could honestly say it had never occurred to me. I had never questioned my father's position.

"And after he retired what happened to the endowment which paid for the Chair? There wasn't another scholar appointed after him. The endowment appeared and then just disappeared. Odd that, wouldn't you say?" Eric leaned forward. "It was the Menzies era, odd things happened then."

I said nothing but my face must have advertised my doubt.

"You're at the same university as your father. I bet you can't find out about the endowment that set up his Chair. All your research skills Meridian won't get you that information. The records just don't exist."

"You've looked?"

He nodded.

"Jesus, Eric. I need time for this."

"I'm just surprised you didn't put it together yourself ages ago."

"I guess I blocked it... Parents, it's easy to take the family myths unquestioned." I forced a smile. "It's not as if you're telling me I have brothers and sisters I never knew about.... You're not, are you?"

He laughed.

"But there is something else isn't there. Something else you haven't said?" I knew Eric well enough to know how he held back, let information drop inch by inch until suddenly you found yourself sitting in a puddle of ideas, all soggy and uncomfortable.

"It's the Vinland Map. The story of its rediscovery is just too contrived. It was a set up, it had to be."

"By the dealers..."

"Maybe. But what if the dealers where just a couple of clowns, a couple of naive fools who happen to be in the right place at the wrong time. What if *they* were set up?"

Eric told me what he knew of the rediscovery of the Vinland Map

### **The Vinland Map's Recent History**

*In 1957, while much of Europe was re-building after the war and many services had resumed to normal, there was still a certain disarray in museums, libraries and the world of collecting and antiquity. Art and fine book collections had been ravaged, lost, discovered, forged or destroyed. The catalogues that still existed were often in hopeless confusion and there was an air of secrecy and suspicion, which only helped the forgers and the thieves. The black market in most European countries was trading well in art and rare pieces of antiquity along with certain medicines and foreign currency.*

*The rare book market, its buyers and sellers, were no exception in this climate.*

*In the middle of all of this, an Italian manuscript and bookseller, Enrico Ferrajoli, who at the time was living in Barcelona, represented an unnamed client. This client wanted to sell a 15th century volume from his collection. It was a small work, possible a fragment from some larger volume and had quite clearly been rebound in the 19th century. The volume was not an illuminated manuscript of any great value, as while it was scribed with confidence on well-prepared sheets of vellum, it bore no decoration whatsoever. It was a functional text and recorded the journey of Friar John de Plano Carpini on his Franciscan mission to Tartary, the lands of Chingis Khan. The text is known as the Tartar Relations and while in 15th century Europe there was considerable interest in the customs and stratagem of the Tartars, sometimes called the Mongols, as a contemporary collectable manuscript it was of little interest.*

*However, at the front of the Tartar Relations , in two leaves of vellum that matched the rest of the volume, was a map of the known world. Like the Tartar Relations , it was drawn simply and without decoration, the legend scribed without flourish. On inspection it appeared to be drawn by the same hand as had scribed the Relations . In itself it was not remarkable in any way, and might for some time, have only been seen as*

*an illustration of places named in the text. What however became quite remarkable to the 20th century collector were four things. First, the map contained the earliest known reference to Japan. Second, it contained the first known drawing of Greenland as an island and not as part of a great northern arctic continent. Third, it contained, reasonably accurately, the Atlantic islands, and it had not grouped them to form the mythical Atlantis. And lastly, it contained, as three linked landmasses, Helluland, Markland and Vinland, situated in the space Newfoundland might have occupied on the map. The remarkable thing is that the map was presumably drawn before Columbus sailed for the New World.*

*The Vinland Map, as it became known, was the first map which bore evidence of America.*

*Now Enrico Ferrajoli knew there wasn't anyone in Greenland with enough money to be worried about the map. In Greenland, history had been remembered through stories, and they had always told of the ice which covered most of the island and its seas. He knew that to look towards Japan was not, at that time, a very smart move. Post war, post atom bombs, the Japanese were not terribly interested in when the West thought to include them on maps of the world. But the Americans had both the money and the fascination to make the Vinland Map a very valuable piece of merchandise. Enrico needed a way to sell his client's map to an American.*

*But the map had no provenance, it had no history and in the 500 years from the time it was drawn to the time Enrico's services were enlisted, there had been no mention of it anywhere. It didn't occur in any letters, any catalogue, no mention had been made of it in any history, any geography, and no replica or copy had been found in any atlas. Further, the binding which attached it to the Tartar Relations was late 19th century in origin.*

*Enrico took the map to a dealer with a reputation more reputable than his own. He chose the London dealer, Joseph Davis. Davis was interested in the map but before he could offer a price, he sent it to the British Museum for authentication. This is what Enrico needed. If he had sent the map to such an establishment, it would have been looked at very suspiciously. But Davis had a fine reputation, and sending a manuscript to the British Museum for authentication was just part of his daily routine. At the British Museum the formidable team of Painter, Skelton and Schoefield examined the map and the Tartar Relations .*

*But it wasn't smooth sailing for Enrico. The team at the British Museum did not authenticate the map. They were particularly concerned about certain wormholes.*

*Somewhere in the history of the manuscript worms had attacked the vellum. The problem was that the wormholes in the map did not match with those in the Tartar Relations . So while the experts could verify the Tartar Relations to be a 15th century manuscript, the vellum containing the map had been bound with the Relations long after the worms had done their work.*

*Joseph Davis rejected the map but at the same time purchased from Enrico Ferrajoli a more reliable item, a fragment of a copy of Vincent de Beauvais' Speculum Historiale . It was just a fragment of what was really a well known and much copied text and Davis expected to be able to sell it to a private collector more as a curiosity piece than anything else. Davis put a notice about the fragment of the Speculum in his international catalogue.*

*Later in that same year, 1957, a small-time bookseller and collector from America, Laurence Witten, arrived in Europe specifically to purchase old manuscripts.*

*While Witten was in Geneva, he visited the offices of the dealer Nicholas Rauch, where he was told of the existence of the map. As it so happened, Enrico Ferrajoli was also in town. Rauch arranged a meeting and Witten became excited by the idea of purchasing a pre-Columbus map that clearly showed parts of America. He jumped at the chance of a viewing. Witten was perhaps less concerned as to where the manuscript had come from and was possibly prepared to accept the spoils of someone else's post war corruption.*

*Ferrajoli took him to a secret destination - the library of the collector who owned the manuscript - and without any effort to investigate authenticity Witten purchased the map for three and a half thousand dollars.*

*The names of the library and the original collector have never been revealed. The location, even the country is not known. Enrico Ferrajoli was Italian. He lived, after the war, in Barcelona, and he met Witten in Geneva.*

*One last thing is important about Enrico Ferrajoli. Two years after he sold the map to Witten he was arrested, tried and served a jail sentence for selling manuscripts that had been stolen from a Spanish cathedral in Saragossa. The time of the theft at Saragossa coincides with Enrico's possession of the map and the subsequent sale to Witten, but the cathedral has never claimed the map was part of the manuscripts stolen from its library. Interestingly enough, they have never denied it either.*

*Witten, delighted with his find, returned to America where he spent time studying both the map and the Tartar Relations . For reasons, which he has never*



*explained, he was not in a hurry to reveal the existence of the map nor to offer it for sale.*

*And now the first great coincidence occurs. Witten lived quite close to Yale University where he had many friends and associates. He was particularly well known to the curator of rare manuscripts at Yale Library, a certain Trevor Marston. There were, after all, professional reasons why the two men would know each other.*

*At about this time Marston purchased a manuscript from an international catalogue. He purchased the fragment of the Speculum which Enrico Ferrajoli had sold to the London dealer, Joseph Davis.*

*In due course, the manuscript arrived and it is not surprising that Witten was invited to view the new acquisition, the fragment of the Speculum .*

*All the pieces were beginning to fall into place. On viewing the Speculum , Witten incredibly recognised the configuration of the wormholes in the manuscript. He arranged to borrow the manuscript and back home compared the wormholes with those in both the Vinland Map and the Tartar Relations . He found if he placed the Speculum between the map pages and those of the Tartar Relations the wormholes exactly matched up.*

*If the wormholes matched up, then the three manuscripts, the Relations , Speculum and the map, had been bound together for many hundreds of years. They were only separated in the 19th century when the map and the Tartar Relations were rebound as a single unit.*

*This discovery made sense of an inscription scrawled on the back of the map. The inscription read, ' delineation of the first, second and third parts of the Speculum'.*

*Witten and Marston were tremendously excited by this discovery and it wasn't long before Yale found an anonymous donor, allowing the library to purchase the map and the Relations from Witten for 200,000 dollars. The Yale Library then had them rebound with the Speculum as one.*

*Yale went public in as big a way as possible. In 1965, the day before Columbus Day, they released, with much publicity, a coffee table book containing a reproduction of the map and various articles, translations and commentaries on its significance. It was probably the only time an ancient map commanded headlines in most of the daily papers. The headlines announced Yale had proof - Leif, the son of Eirik the Red, was the true discoverer of America.*

The modern part of the story had too many amazing coincidences to be believable. And yet I knew the history of manuscripts was riddled with such long coincidence. Little known works of great scholars had been found on market barrows, pages of lost manuscripts had turned up as padding in the binding of an unimportant work. But what I found unbelievable about this story was not that the map should re-emerge after 500 years of silence, nor that it should end up in the hands of a disreputable dealer who was known to be involved in the theft of manuscripts. No, that was not uncommon. What was completely unbelievable was the coincidences surrounding Witten.

But they were coincidences and questions that remained unanswered. All the main players were now dead. Witten never revealed the name of the library nor of the collector who originally owned the map. Enrico never told his version of the story and Marston to the last, swore his purchasing of the *Speculum* was pure coincidence.

"The thing is, Meridian," Eric said, "I don't think it was any accident Yale University released the map to the world on the day before Columbus Day."

"What do you mean?"

"Columbus Day in the US is a major celebration, and in particular it's a big day for the ethnic Italian community. Columbus, the discoverer of America, was, after all, one of theirs."

"But what does it matter? I mean there is a lot of contention over who discovered Australia, the English or the Dutch or the... I just don't care and nor does anyone else really. I can't see any fuss being made if we suddenly come across a map which shows the French or the Portuguese were the first here. Can you honestly see the English or the Dutch communities in Australia getting upset by such a find?"

"That's now, and here. We're talking about the 50's and early 60's and we're talking about the States. Discovery was important, nationality was important. Just imagine how upset people would be if some historian found documents to suggest that Australians weren't at Gallipoli and all the heroics were carried out by the Kiwis." He stopped for a few minutes and looked into his wineglass. "The problem is," he continued, "the part I can't work out is, what, at that time, would any government have to gain by stirring up anti-Italian feeling in America?"

I didn't know enough about recent American history to provide any answers but I did think that during the Cold War governments didn't need much justification for any number of witch-hunts. Reds were under our beds; the Asian communities were going to fall down onto Australia by sheer weight of numbers, sheer gravity of the globe. Countries like Korea were sliced up like cakes, drawn up scientifically with longitude and latitudinal lines and no thought of ethnic or geographical divisions. It was a time of cartographic lunacy.

Eric drew a sketch of the Vinland Map. He began at the centre with the Mediterranean Sea and then followed the line up the page filling in Spain and France, Denmark and Scandinavia, and then let his pen swoop across and down, as an arc, drawing in the vast outreaches of the Mongol Empire. He continued the line and included India and Africa until he was back at the Mediterranean Sea. I fetched the atlas with a copy of the map and he drew in the islands of Japan on one side of the map and on the other he filled in the space he had left for the Atlantic Ocean. He drew England and Ireland, Iceland and Greenland and several of the smaller Atlantic islands. And then on the far left of the page he drew the three parts of the Americas: Helluland, Markland, and Vinland. Then he shaded in the places where the wormholes had damaged the map.

He drew the map confidently.

I watched and remarked on how much of the map could be drawn without moving the pen off the paper. Most of the world was joined and spread itself around the Mediterranean Sea - the centre of the mapmaker's world.

We talked for a time of cartography, how it uses a language like any other, how it sets up conventions that somehow became fixed in our imagination.

We finished the last of the wine. Eric held his almost empty glass up to the light and deep in thought rolled the last few drops of wine around in his glass. "It's odd isn't it," he said, "how some presume maps are about human ideas and knowledge, when they are really about human imagination."

I wondered about the link between human perceptions of the world and the maps we draw of it. I remembered another map and drew it for Eric. I drew a child-like outline of a polar bear, a profile. Inside of that drawing I drew the exact same outline, only much smaller, so that one bear contained the other. Then I drew a series of bear prints, curving under the whole drawing, as an arced horizon. "Now that's another map. It intrigues me just as much, but I know this one's origin."

He picked up my drawing. "But this one is a map of culture."

"And so, at least for me, is the Vinland Map." I hadn't used the phrase 'a map of culture', but now Eric had mentioned it the idea clung to me.

I looked at Eric's drawing of the map and also at the one printed in the atlas. It was such a simple map and with the obvious exclusion of the legends, they were quite similar. I had another version of it I'd found amongst my father's papers. That one was a facsimile on vellum, but oddly enough, it didn't include the wormholes. Somehow without that disfigurement the facsimile seemed less real, even from Eric's version.

As a cartographer I knew maps are like novels, they sing the story of the mapmaker, they tell us what the cartographer notices, what is considered important, what is considered worth mapping. Why do we map one thing and not another? Why do we map contours of hills but not directions of winds, or flights of birds, or the shadows drawn by the sun? Like other maps then, the Vinland Map was a fingerprint of the cartographer or the forger and it was a fingerprint that intrigued me. Who was this person who thought to include Greenland, the islands of the Atlantic, India, Japan, and the coast of Newfoundland, named as the Norse named it? Who had taken the trouble to record the names of Mongolia, the names in Africa, the reference to Prester John, the legendary 12th century Christian whose empire was somewhere in India. Who was this person with such a vision of the world?

Eric picked up the glasses and carried them into the kitchen. It was getting late. I saw him to his car. It was a clear autumn night, the stars brighter than any other time of year. I pointed to a constellation I knew from childhood, the scorpion.

"Another map." Eric said good-heartedly. "Like your polar bear. Do you know the other constellations?"

I didn't and neither did he. Just before Eric drove away he said, "I think I'm fascinated with the map because it's so very Greenlandic. Who else would know their frozen land is an island? And who else would bother mapping all those small Atlantic islands but a sea-faring race?" He continued, "What interests me about the map has nothing to do with who discovered America, it has to do with

finding out more about the Norse, the people from Iceland and Greenland." He paused. "You see, for them to know that Greenland is an island they would have had to accept the knowledge, the mythology and the stories of the native people, the ones they called the Skraeling, the wretches. I like the fact that they might have done this. That they might not have been completely biased against these people. That the imagination of the Skraelings might have become part of the imagination of the Norse."

"You're just tracing your identity."

"Isn't that what you're doing?" He smiled and winding up his window, he drove away.

As I walked into my house, the phone was ringing. I almost let it go to the answering machine as it was late and I didn't feel like bothering with anything. But some apprehension made me pick up the receiver. It was the police. They were careful not to alarm me. They wanted to know if I'd seen the old woman who had been carted away from my gate. She was missing again and they thought... I rang off. It was late. I wasn't going to go out looking for a stranger.

As I turned out my house lights I thought of her bright purple hat. Somewhere it was reflecting the stars.

Quite late in the night I woke, disturbed by a sound. I listened intently, terrified of an intruder. But it was the sound of the old woman's chant. It appeared to be coming from the front veranda, so in the dark I made my way to the front room and looked out of the window. She was sitting on the veranda; her purple hat caught the moonlight. She rocked with her chant.

I turned on the front light and went outside to her. The light startled her a little and then she simply grunted, as if she was annoyed I had kept her for so long.

"You sleep too well," she said, and waved the situation away as if it was an annoying insect. She stared at me, and for the second time I felt something uneasy, strange. I was not afraid of her; there was something else. I found it too difficult to put my finger on. Something which made me cautious, wary.

Her voice became very clear and she continued to stare at me as she spoke. "Make haste girlie! Make haste! We have no more time for your rationality. Make haste!"

I didn't understand her. I took a step towards her but she put up her hand to stop me coming closer. "We have so little time. Listen! In the distance, coming closer. Can't you hear it? Can't you hear the uniped calling?"

And with that she stood up and made her way out onto the street and the darkness of the night. I didn't try to stop her but held tight her words which wrapped themselves around me like a cloak of smoke. I took them inside with me. I took them inside of me and let them become part of my night's dreaming.

## 6

It was Thursday, the day Crete had arranged to meet Gabbett. She woke early. She rang me. It was too early. She wanted to talk. I wanted to sleep. She was

nervous. She'd dressed carefully. This was the day she and Gabbett were planning to make some decisions. I find it odd how people can earmark a day in the calendar for decisions, how on this day, at this time, over this cup of coffee, you'll know what to do. It's as if the times and the places in our lives for decision making are fixed, mapped out before us like some astrological prediction. I find it all too neat to be believable. I prefer to let life flow, to take up the whim of the moment, the wind of circumstance.

Over breakfast Crete rang a second time. She still wanted advice about her clothing. I told her what she had on sounded fine. It didn't help. I knew she'd ring again but I didn't feel up to it, I didn't know what else to say to her. It was not a good time to be by my phone so I decided to spend the day in the library. There was a manuscript I wanted to view. It wasn't part of my current work but it did interest me.

Martha, the Rare Books librarian, greeted me as I entered her section. She was a tall woman in her fifties with distinctive grey hair that she wore long and loosely tied back into a ponytail. Although I had known her for some years, it was on this occasion that I was particularly struck by her beauty. Perhaps it was seeing her in her own environment which caught my eye, seeing her surrounded by the glassed shelves of rare and precious books. It was something about her as the collector, the carer for the ancient and valuable fragments of our history, which radiated from her and gave her face a remarkable poise and self-composure. She smiled as I walked towards her.

How much is missed, I thought, by those who always seek to find beauty in the superficial or in the young.

*Crete waited at the airport for Gabbett. His plane was late and she drank three cups of coffee trying not to think about the future too much. She sat at one of the back tables in the airport cafe; the last thing she wanted to happen now was to come across someone who knew her.*

*As she drank her third cup, she tried to picture Gabbett coming through the arrivals gate. She thought of the word she'd used to describe him. Neat. That much she knew. Gabbett, a large man, was trim and neat and had sandy colouring. He smiled a lot, took small steps and he wore perfumes, aftershave or something. And there was a gold signet ring on his left hand. Did he also wear a wedding ring? She was trying to remember as the loud speaker announced the arrival of his plane.*

*She made her way to the arrivals lounge and hung back in case someone else was also there to meet him. He came through and with his predictable smile scanned the faces of the crowd for her. Yes, 'neat' would be the best word to describe him. Other lovers she'd called distinguished, or easy-going, or larger-than-life, or loud, or awkward. But Gabbett was neat, and for whatever reason she liked this neatness. She noticed his signet ring, she'd been right about that, and there wasn't a wedding ring. Had he taken it off for this meeting?*

*She went up to him and touched his arm. She felt a huge need for secrecy, for decorum, for remoteness in such a public place. He understood and they collected his luggage, an overnight bag and a heavier case filled with notes and videos.*

I shared with Martha a preciousness for libraries. They were almost sacred places for me and I could chart much of my life by listing the libraries I had read or worked in. And while it is true that I had known perhaps as many libraries as men, with only one exception it was the libraries I remembered with greater affection. The exception, of course, was a scholar, and it is hard for me now to think of him in any way separate from his books. He had three passions: he collected dictionaries and had some of the earliest examples in the language, including Johnson's; he spent many hours repairing old grandfather clocks; and he loved me in a way I can only now begin to understand. For him the three passions went hand in hand, although it was a combination I found curious. Perhaps it all had something to do with husbandry. I'm not sure. Husbandry is a concept I have always found difficult to grasp.

The clocks seldom worked, no matter how much he tinkered with them; I left, too charged with life to appreciate the sanctuary he had built around me; but the dictionaries were another matter. They delighted me. At the time I was only beginning my lifelong love affair with Latin and I think now that perhaps my time spent reading his early dictionaries, hunting for the etymology of a word or a particular meaning, sparked in me a great curiosity about that ancient language which gave birth to so much of English. I saw Latin as the mother language, and unlike those who approach it dressed in ecclesiastical robes, I came to her as a feminist, as a woman interested in the birthing process of words and language. Like its mother, Carmentis the legendary founder of Latin, I made the language mine.

*They made their way to Crete's car and there, shielded from open gaze, they embraced as lovers.*

And when I think of books I cannot help but think of my father's collection of rare and precious atlases, the ones where I found his pages of notes. Those books would be my most precious possessions, not because of their market value, but because they somehow contain the essence, the memory, of him. When I want to remember him I go into my study and take down this or that atlas. I sit with it quietly. I turn each page and I hunt in the ancient maps for the lines of his hands, the lines on the back of his neck, the creases around his smile. I remember him.

As a child they held a different mystery, and much as I might have longed to spend private hours with these ancient atlases, I could not lift them from their shelves. Looking at them was something I always did with him.

There was a ritual to this viewing that gave the occasion importance. In the privacy of his study we would put on our white cotton gloves, his large hands next to my tiny ones. Gloved, he would take down the required volume, and sitting me on his knee, he'd open the ancient cover. These maps were not like any ordinary map; they mapped fantasy and wild unseen animals, they mapped stories and all the creatures of my imagination.

There was one atlas I especially remember. It was a volume of the maps of Africa: that great continent which changed its shape from map to map, where mountains and rivers and animals were drawn on the land and wondrous dragon-like creatures lingered in the sea. In other atlases there were galleons and cherubs that blew the four great winds. There were huge creatures from the sky that held the earth in its place in the heavens, and there were lands so mysterious they filled my dreams and play.

Those childhood moments with my father have stayed with me. The memories are filled with the feeling of safety, the musk and male smell of his study, and the sanctuary of his love.

*Crete drove out of the city. She had decided to take Gabbett to her house by the sea, an hour or more drive through the countryside. She felt nervous and Gabbett was keen to talk. She drove and listened as he told her parts of his life story. They neared the house and her nervousness returned. This house had become something of a sanctuary for her; a sacred place where she rekindled her spirits and dreamt solutions to her biggest problems. Why had she been so certain to bring Gabbett here? It had been four years since she'd brought a lover to this place.*

I grew up and became less interested in my father's atlases. I began to think of his study as small and old fashioned, and his books as musty and far too familiar to offer me anything new. Instead, I busied myself with the trivia of a young girl, with nail polish and stockings and learning how to walk in high heels. I was thirteen, preoccupied with myself and poised on the brink of womanhood when one day I found myself, quite by accident, in the hall of a great library. I will never forget that day, that library.

## **The Fifth Mandala - Marvel**

I told no one. After school, just before my thirteenth birthday, I walked up the steps and made my way through to the foyer of a building that had fascinated me. I had seen people enter and leave it and I knew some public activity took place inside of it, but I had no idea of its purpose.

I remember feeling a mixture of fear and excitement as I climbed those stairs and approached the foyer. I was a child-woman, and as a child-woman I was about to enter knowledge.

I opened the foyer doors and stepped into the labyrinth.

The library was the length of a cathedral and not unlike one in proportions. In Gothic style, the tall roof was arched in dark wood panelling and the walls were lined with the muted and dark tones of books. A series of

stairwells and mezzanine floors led to more and more shelves, more and more levels. Browns, maroons, dark blues, greens and blacks seem to melt into the shadows and the wooden shelving, melt into the walls and the alcoves, creating that stilled atmosphere of the sacred. In both the ambience of the great hall and within myself there was a hush, as if I had accidentally entered a holy place.

I will never forget that first sight. Nothing had prepared me, nor would it again infect me with such awe. It wasn't just the sheer number of books that impressed me; it was the library itself, the thing of a library, the idea or notion of a library. Until that moment, I could imagine a bookshop, a pile of books, shelves of books, even a wall of books. But I had no idea that filled the category of library. No idea that filled the sacredness of the place, the way the books were housed with such reverence.

I had approached a great body, the mother of knowledge, the keeper of books, the protector of ideas, and I was overawed by her.

As I stood at the entrance I could easily see the various levels of mezzanine floors, the rows and rows of shelves stacked tightly with books. I could see the desks, the low lights, the librarians, and the readers. It seemed exposed to me, almost naked. And yet as soon as I began to look at the books I discovered the true nature of the labyrinth of libraries. I had no knowledge of how the books were ordered, shelved, catalogued. I did not know how knowledge had been divided into discrete areas, how we had ordered the canon, excluding and including, selecting, arranging and combining knowledge, banishing some ideas into the esoteric or as a hobby, and inflating others into philosophy or religion. As a child-woman I had no knowledge of how one remedy could be categorised as scientific and another as superstition. I had no knowledge of the ordering of thought. The library was for me a great temple of books which might as well have been stored by size, or colour, as by any other system. I had no map by which to read the library and so I set to, familiarising myself, as I might now in some new and foreign city.

Each day after school I went to the library. It was something I did in secret and told no one, not even my parents. At first, I was contented to simply sit in an alcove, any alcove, and read books at random. But after a few days I began to leave traces amongst the books, a trail to re-find one I had enjoyed and wanted to view again. Like Ariadne, I devised methods to map my path. I counted bays, left a book upside down in the shelf, another one sitting on top of the shelf, and so forth. But my system kept breaking down. So many times I returned, only to find the thread broken, the marker



book re-shelved correctly, the paper I had left on a table, removed.

I knew there was a system and I began to ask my father, as obliquely as a thirteen-year-old girl could, about libraries and the ordering of books. It didn't take him long to extract from me that I had been visiting the public reference library after school. Perhaps, because joy and guilt have a way of cohabiting in the mind of a teenage girl, I was sure he would forbid me to go there again - the library was somehow too pleasurable a place, too sacred a place for me to be allowed to visit it legitimately.

The next day, and without too much joy, I called into his office as he had asked me to do. But to my great delight he walked me back to the library and let me show him what I had discovered. Gently, for he was a very gentle man, he drew my attention to the numbers on the books, and we played a kind of detective game over the next few weeks until I had worked out the basics of the catalogue system.

I remembered my first library as some might their baptism or their first communion. The library had become my temple and I viewed it nostalgically. Since then of course I have grown and changed, as libraries have. Now it's all electronic searching and catalogues, neon lights, liquid displays, vinyl, metals, creams and beige colour schemes, shopfront windows and controlled atmospheres. These days any schoolgirl knows a library is as close as a computer terminal. We have taken the Latin out of the mass and the mystery out of libraries. I don't know if it's a good or bad thing.

And here I stood, in this modern library, waiting to view an ancient book, one scribed five hundred years ago, hoping to catch in its pages, its texture, its feel, something of medieval life. How different libraries must have been then, how much rarer, how much more sacred. It seemed obvious to me that they were part of monasteries and convents. The library, a sacred place of ideas to balance the chapel, the sacred place of belief. Perhaps, I thought, I was becoming a little too nostalgic.

*Crete and Gabbett arrived at the house, a stone cottage set in an elaborate and perhaps old fashioned garden with statuary, formal beds, shrubs and trees. The path to the door led through a walled rose garden where the pennyroyal grass broke perfume with their steps. She took him into her house.*

*She needed to talk and it seemed natural to gravitate to the kitchen. There, like a domestic couple, they stood arm in arm, and he rocked her gently as she spoke of her life and this place. They both knew they would make love shortly but she had to tell him things first, she had to ease her nervousness. She didn't explain, because she*

*couldn't, why she had brought Gabbett there, why after so much time, she had taken a lover to this place.*

*She had brought sheets for the bed and towels for the bathroom, milk and butter for the fridge, and some other food stuffs in case they stayed for breakfast. She unpacked the few things. But there was something too premeditated about putting the sheet on the bed. She fumbled with it, tried to joke. She felt inept and gauche, and shy of her nakedness as a novice is shy of her knowledge to come. They made love: a little too quickly; a little too hungrily; a little too desperately.*

Martha had collected the illuminated manuscript from the vault and she had also brought two other, less prestigious, manuscripts from the same period for me to inspect as a comparison. The latter two volumes were held in her collection but the one I had come to see was on loan from a private collector. I had brought with me a new pair of white gloves; such a special volume deserved the newness of the cloth. As I prepared to open the books I thought again of my father's papers, his use of Greenlandic, his translation of the old uniped story and the utter plainness and undecorated nature of the Vinland Map itself. I thought of the facsimile - someone had taken the trouble to draw the map on two sheets of vellum but had not completed the task. I thought it odd that my father had chosen to keep that particular copy of the map which, like the book I had come to view, claimed to be a 15th century work.

I cleared my head of my father's trivia. The volume I had come to view was a Parisian manuscript, and the other two were English. They were all the Book of Hours and were all from the 15th century. I saved the best until last.

The Parisian manuscript was made as a special presentation volume. The entire volume was produced by one artist, (I use that term rather than 'scribe' for this book). He had felt confident enough to break with convention, not just in his use of colour but also in the way he played with the margins, letting the design, here and there, tilt over the edge. Each page was decorated with a combination of delicate geometrical designs that acted like a lattice holding flowers, insects, birds and grotesquerie. Blue was the dominant colour, with greens and reds as contrast. Gold and white were used as highlights. Martha pointed out to me the unusualness of the colouration and in particular the use of white.

The text was scribed almost completely without fault. There was an evenness in both the hand and the colour of the ink. Unlike the first two manuscripts I viewed, this one was without corrections and without comments or drawings in the margins. It was, from its very inception, a precious book and for five hundred years had managed to maintain that aura.

Handling the manuscripts I could not help thinking of the scribe, so long dead, who came each morning to his place in the scriptorium. How he might select another leaf of vellum, having the pick of the signatures, selecting one piece over another for its whiteness of colour, its evenness of thickness. Would he cut and draw up the margins on the vellum or would he have had an assistant? Could nothing be left to chance? How did time and temperature, the variation of seasons and events impress itself upon his work? Was that one of his challenges? Was it difficult to keep the consistency of vellum from one section to the next, from one season to the next? Was skin from one herd so different from another? Did winter-killed cattle yield a different texture from one that had been

slaughtered and tanned in the summer? And the pigments he mixed for inks - did he need to store ingredients between seasons or scrounge from others when something was in short supply? Were there dyes that had to come from distant places, minerals whose availability was always at risk of shipwrecks, wars, bandit raids or the variance of caravans? What would it be like, I wondered, to give your life to such a task, to know each waking morning what lies ahead of you, to fall asleep dreaming of the next illumination, the next piece of text to transcribe, the next piece of vellum to prepare and paginate?

Would it offer a very peaceful existence where contemplation and meditation could easily fill the other moments of the day? Or would each new page present such a challenge that it mirrored the dissonance of the outside world? Was his daily task of walking to the scriptorium no different from the painter's task - she walks down the side streets to her studio and makes herself a cup of coffee, she stares at the canvas in front of her, and all the while, colours and textures, sounds of traffic, the bark of a dog, the problems of her lover, the newspaper's headlines, all fill her head and brush, until, bursting, she paints? She paints to avoid, she paints to create, she paints to become part of, and she paints to understand. Was it the same for this scribe? What thoughts were going through his mind when he penned this or that text?

I shook my head. Such romantic notions were coming from my own malaise and weariness. And yet to study anything at all from the medieval period I knew I'd also have to know something of the lives of those who lived in it. Was that what my father was doing? Did he plot the tides, translate the sagas to try to understand something of the lives of the Norse explorers? Or was he trying to discover something of the life of the scribe who in the 15th century turned those stories and sagas into the Vinland Map?

I turned another page of the manuscript and the vellum rustled in my gloved hand. I have never learnt to turn such ancient pages with any dignity and my fingers, clothed in gloves, fumbled and wrestled with the manuscript as I tried to avoid straining the binding or damaging the pages. I found the middle section of the manuscript the most difficult to physically manage and felt unsure as to how to hold the book in order to minimise any damage to the spine. I had no doubts Crete would have been particularly deft in her gloved fingers and probably knew of some trick in tackling the middle section. Indeed, (and she had been the one to advise me that the manuscript was in the library), she had impressed upon me the need to take the time and effort to view the middle of the manuscript.

Crete had been right. In the middle of the manuscript I found sheets of vellum that had not discoloured with age. They were a much whiter colour and the lines the scribe had drawn to guide his pen were easily visible. The colour of the ink was strongest here and the illuminations brightest.

The ornamentation, as earlier, consisted of leaves of ivy and grapevines with a treillage of wild flowers, daisies, violas, thistles roses and stocks. Strawberries and grapes were worked into the pattern. On other pages, drawings of animals intertwined with strange mythical beasts and grotesquerie made up the borders. Again, blues, bright with concealment, dominated the colouration. There were highlights in green, white and gold. Miniatures were worked into the initial letters: one of the Visitation; another of Saint Anthony, or was it one of the Apostles? And then I came across a full-page illumination. It depicted Christ seated on his heavenly throne. He held, in his left hand, the tables and canon of the Church while his right hand was raised iconographically in a blessing. Winged lions, birds and angels circled him while below was the orb of the earth. The dominant colour here was maroon with whites, golds and greens were used to pick out the detail and exaggerate the grandeur. Blue had been left for the orb

of the earth and the heavenly sky. A great deal of time had been taken on the illumination, a great deal of detail had been given to the word of this god.

I shut the manuscript and held it in my hand. Was it the lightness of the vellum, the lightness of the manuscript that made me think of it as *other* than a book?

The perfection of the manuscript was offered, as a prayer might be, to the embodiment of god's design. It was an act of teleology, a reflection of the perfection of the universe. *Teleology*, what a neat and tidy word we give to something as awesome and as mysterious as the design and craft of life and the universe. The word felt too abstract and I felt cheated of any language which could describe my feelings. It was as if the words I searched for belonged to some other time, some other part of history where objects were infected with spirits and where gods existed for every nook and cranny of our lives. I needed the language of saint's days and burning candles and miracles and indulgences and novenas. I needed the language of stained glass windows, of tolling bells, of altar bells, of organs and choirs, reverberation and incense. I needed the language of the soprano whose voice rises in clear rounded tones above the texture of harmonies filling the stone arches of the cathedral. I needed the language of an empty church, the echo of my footsteps on stone floors, the smell of polished wood, the hardness of the pews.

Five hundred years ago I would have touched its pages with my naked hands, but not now. And yet now, at the beginning of the 21st century, I felt awkward in the knowledge that its pages had touched me. It was almost as if time had concertinaed, squashing together in an unspoken alliance, the scribe sitting at his desk and me, sitting here at mine.

I put the manuscript down. How different it was to the Vinland Map, in comparison a scruffy, hurriedly drawn diagram without any decoration or adornment. And yet this beautiful manuscript sat virtually forgotten by history while the map had caught the imagination of nations.

I took off my gloves.

In Martha's company I left the library.

*The sun was beginning to fade. Crete left Gabbett to sleep while she prepared the house for nightfall. She set and lit fires in the lounge room and in the wood stove in the kitchen. She brought water in from the well and filled the wood baskets with enough logs to keep them warm all night. She set and lit the bedroom fire last so as not to disturb his sleep, but she found him crying, lying in the dark and crying.*

*He turned away, angry that she had discovered him weeping. She said nothing. She put a match to the fire.*

*Before long the room was lit by the fire's warmth. The room felt safer, cheerier now. Arm in arm they sat on the bed and almost absent-mindedly Gabbett stroked her breasts. "We have to talk." He said. She nodded. She knew.*

*By the time Crete and Gabbett had left the house to find themselves an evening meal they had decided to live*

*together. Crete felt giddy with the speed of their relationship. She had to tell her children and she didn't know how she was going to do it. He had to tell his wife and he knew exactly how he was going to do that. Recently he had rehearsed that moment many, many times.*

*That night, after they had made love and the fire had burnt down to grey ash, Gabbett sleepily nestled his face on Crete's breast. He took her nipple in his mouth and suckled until he fell asleep. And they slept that way, Crete cradling his head to her breast and Gabbett's lips, loosely closed around her nipple. It was not until dawn that either of them moved from this position.*

*At dawn Crete stirred and moved herself down in the bed so that she now could lie with her head on Gabbett's chest. He put his arms around her and they went back to sleep.*

*What they had discovered through the night and through their dreaming, was that they perfectly matched, they perfectly filled, each other's emptiness.*

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Deakin University

## *Fragments of a Map*

*A novel [continued]*

**Tess Brady**

### 7

... *from* The Songs of Inanna, Queen of  
Heaven and Earth  
*Who will plough my vulva?*  
*Who will plough my high field?*  
*Who will plough my wet ground?*

I woke badly. I had dreamt of the old woman and was still troubled by her odd message. I showered and tried to put it behind me, but it clung like a hangover. In my cloudy morning head her words mixed themselves with Eric's fanciful theories of conspiracy and my father's involvement with what? MI5, ASIO, CIA? It was crazy. I didn't know why I had let Eric lead me along. Not everything in life is explained away in grand epics, there are so often simpler, more human size explanations to be found. My father was a quiet scholarly sort of man, a man more at home with his ancient atlases than with any international intrigue.

I had a long drive ahead of me that morning and I didn't want to dwell any further on the old woman, or Eric's ideas, so I collected a pile of cassettes and tossed them into the car. I'd fill my head with the clear but ornately worked lines of Purcell and maybe a little Hildegard of Bingen.

I drove out to the country, to a landscape on the edge of the Mallee where my department was having an organisational retreat. It was out of the teaching term and they had taken over part of our rural campus. I didn't mind the drive, it was a warm day and I liked the chance to have a little time to myself, but there was a time, not so long ago, when such retreats would have been held in a city four star hotel.

I arrived quite late and was shown to my room. Like a school camp, the women had been separated from the men and we occupied two separate dormitory

buildings. The passage in the women's quarters was lit only with a dim night light and I couldn't see anyone else about. I unpacked the few things I'd brought and just as I was settling down with my book, I heard a gentle knock at the door.

Crete was standing in the hallway, glass in hand and dripping wet. Her shirt and skirt clung to her skin and her hair hung around her face in wet ringlets. She spoke in a whisper. "I've been for a swim."

"In your clothes?"

"Want a drink?"

I went with her. The pool was about a five-minute walk from the dormitory block. There was no one about and it felt refreshing and surprisingly safe to walk in the dark amongst both the buildings and the trees. The night silence of the country always excites me perhaps because, paradoxically, it is filled with sounds I hardly ever hear.

The pool was floodlit with yellow lights, and a large wattle tree, in the shadows of this awkward light, looked as if its tresses were long dreadlocks. Just like an old woman, it seemed to keep watch over the water, over the pool.

Crete led the way to the shallow end. Neither of us were good swimmers. I knelt down and tested the temperature of the water; it was warm, much warmer than the night, much warmer than I had expected.

We undressed, this time completely, and slipped into the water without making too much of a sound, without disturbing the surface of the water or the stillness of the night.

## **The Sixth Mandala - Knowledge**

I am not a good swimmer.

I swam a kind of breaststroke, keeping my head above the water and making no waves or sound. I was careful not to splash, not to break the water.

I enjoyed the way it moved in a rhythmic flow over the curves of my body. I felt its movement over my rounded stomach; it curved around my breasts and my buttock. I could feel it under my armpits, and as I moved my arms, a small current flowed between my legs.

Floating like this I felt as if the water was caressing me, massaging and exploring the flow and shape of me. Tiny air bubbles captured in my pubic hairs caught the yellow light. They glistened and jewelled my vulva. I rolled onto my back and exposed my pubic hair, my jewelled vulva, to the stars.

There were, of course, stars, ripping my breath away with their ordinary magnitude, their nightly excesses.

There was something about that night, the sensuousness of the water on my naked body, the excess of stars in

the sky and the stillness of the night which made me stay in the water long after Crete had returned to the dormitory. Normally I would have been too timid to stay there alone but on this occasion I felt godlike, as if all of my life had come together in this place, on this night. The water rippled against me, I moved in it, making slight deep watery sounds, and I delighted in the way droplets glistened on my skin or took colour in the yellow floodlights.

Alone I indulged myself in my own *me*, in the completeness of me, in all the parts of me, the shadow and the light, the curves and the crevices, the longitude and latitude of me. Confident of my womanhood, like Inanna, I too, took the *me*.

I took the me of truth; the me of forthright speech; the me of slanderous speech; the me of deceit; the me of kindness; the me of lamentations; the me of attention; the me of dismay; the me of counselling; the me of judgements; the me of decisions; the me of fear; the me of consternation; the me of perceptions; the me of purification.

I took the me of the builder; the me of the scribe, the me of the potter; the me of the weaver; the me of the healer; the me of the sculptor; the me of the painter; the me of the dreamer.

I took the me of travel; the me of adventure; the me of chance; the me of risk; the me of danger; the me of returning; the me of the fenced garden; the me of the hearth; the me of the kitchen; the me of the herbs; the me of the spices; the me of the clean folded sheets; the me of rebellion; the me of treachery; the me of power; the me of the hero; the me of the heart; the me of memory; the me of rejoicing.

I took the me of clothing; the me of jewellery; the me of perfume; the me of coiffure; the me of decoration, the me of colour; the me of lace; the me of satin; the me of leather; the me of corsets; the me of nakedness.

I took the me of lovemaking, the me of wetness; the me of the lips, the me of the tongue; the me of the kissing of the phallus; the me of cooing; the me of the wife; the me of the virgin; the me of the whore; the me of the mother; the me of the daughter; the me of the concubine; the me of the priestess; the me of the sister; the me of the stripper; the me of the wise; the me of the hetaera, the me of the crone.

I took the me of song; the me of drums; the me of the fiddle; the me of the dance; the me of the tambourine; the me of the fire. I took the me of the sound of wind over stones. I took it all.

I was so lost in my own private experience I was not alarmed but amazed when I saw a man standing by the



gate of the pool, he'd ridden up silently on a push bike that was beside him.

"You look like a mother seal in there," he said, and we both knew I was completely naked.

I'm not sure, perhaps it was the way he seemed at ease and unfussed by my nakedness, but for whatever reason his presence didn't alarm me. Perhaps it was the night itself, the whole experience of the swim and the environment; he simply seemed just another part of it. There was something unreal about him as if I had conjured him up out of the sensuousness of the water, and I knew I did not need to fear him.

Without any further talk he came to the edge of the pool and held out my towel. I swam towards him and as if I was that mother seal, the goddess of the water, I slowly raised myself out of the pool and stood, my white body, full and curved and fecund, glistening yellow in the lights. He handed me my towel and I took my time to dry myself.

Why was I not ill at ease? Why didn't I grab the towel and wrap it around me like some timid wet mouse? Why didn't I rush toward the dormitories?

As I dressed, I looked at him. He was in his forties and he looked, he walked, he talked like a farmer. "Are you from around here?" I asked.

"No. From further out, from the Mallee."

We began to talk about the sky and the land.

Walking his pushbike he joined me as I made my way back towards the dormitories.

As we got closer to the building I realised I didn't want to leave his company. He offered to show me the stump jump plough, the machinery that had tamed the land. I'd never seen one. It had originally come, he told me, from around this place.

"There's some in the sheds."

I nodded and we took a path away from the dormitories.

As we walked he became animated with the details of the plough, its mechanics and history and importance for agriculture. At the first fence he left his bicycle against a tree and helped me over the barbed wire.

We crossed over paddocks and made our way towards a group of sheds. We passed some small silos and a place where grain is mixed and bagged.

The moon was still low on the horizon. There wasn't much light but he knew his way. He guided me along

dark paths and to places where he knew the fences were low, where it was easy to climb over them.

He talked to me about the land, about it forming the lines on his hand, about it being in his family, about the Mallee country, the stars out there and the horizon. He talked to me of the sound of the wind over rocks, the sound like the didgeridoo, of the comfort of rain, the seeding and the green shoots coming through the dust, changing the colour of the earth. He told me of clouds and formations and wind movements. He told me of fencing and burning the mallee stumps in the winter. He told me of the parrots, the birds, and the summer sky, how there was always so much sky, so much blue. He told me of the clouds - like pencils, a scatter of pencils. And then he showed me the machinery that had conquered all this, he showed me the plough, the stump jump plough.

He was strong too, stronger than I thought, for he wasn't a large man. He pushed up against the taut springs of the plough to show me the mechanism, the way the blade retreated from the earth when it came across a buried stump. I tried to push the blade back but it wouldn't budge, I didn't have the strength of the land.

He was pleased with himself; pleased I wanted to know his knowledge of the Mallee; pleased at his strength; pleased at how I responded to him; and like a child showing off a trick, he pushed the blades back a second time. I touched his arm; it felt brown with the sun. I put pressure on my fingers and ran them up against his skin, pushing against the hairs on his arm. He released the blade but I did not take my hand away. He put his arm around me and without talking, he took me to a part of the shed where he knew there would be bags of seed.

I liked the feel of his arm around me, it felt safe and there was a security in this embrace. In amongst the smell of bags and seeds, chaff and earth, machine oil and fodder, I tasted him: his mouth, his tongue, his neck, his shoulders, his nipples. I traced the line of his rib cage and let my tongue fill the crevice of his navel. And then without any more tease I buried my face in his pubic hairs and sucked and licked his hard penis. He ran his hands under my armpits and guided my face up to his. Manoeuvring his body, he pushed into me.

I watched his face as he made love to me. I wanted to see him; I wanted to see him come. In that nighttime light I could see his face muscles tensing, changing. I could see how defenceless he was. And I could see something else - the inner essence of the man, the landscape stamping the map of the Mallee on his dreaming.

I understood it was not my dreaming.

It was late when I returned to the dormitories and I found Crete asleep on my bed. She woke as I came into the room. She'd been crying. I put my arms around her. I smelt of sex and she of sleep and tears.

She went with me to the showers, we didn't bother to turn on the lights, there was enough of a glow coming through the windows for me to wash myself. She sat on the side of the bath and talked while I washed away the smell of the land, the smell of the farmer.

I washed the shampoo out of my hair and turned off the taps. I had enjoyed the hot steam of the shower, the pressure of the jet against my back and shoulders. For the second time that night I was handed a towel. I dried myself and put on a robe.

In my room I pampered myself and rubbed body oils onto my legs and thighs and belly and buttocks. Crete rubbed it into my shoulders and back while I smoothed the slightly perfumed oil onto my breasts and ran it down between my legs. I rubbed it into my arms, my hands and then up around my neck. I could feel my muscles relax and I enjoyed the slight scent of cinnamon, and, was it roses?

I told Crete of the farmer and then I asked her. "You've been crying?"

She nodded. "I've been trying to work out why I'm so scared. It's not easy to face." Crete said, "Gabbett wants to move in next week."

My eyes darted quickly to hers. Perhaps I had misheard her. "Did you say next week?"

She nodded.

"Christ, Crete, that's a bit quick. You hardly know him."

"Hardly know him?" she repeated. "Meridian, it's as if I've never known anyone else in my entire life."

"Why not a flat or something, give yourselves a bit of space?" And then I added, "I guess you've thought about that."

"Sure. What's the point? We're both close to fifty. Why should we muck about with flats?"

I agreed, there wasn't much point in being careful or coy. I offered her the oil and she began to rub it into her legs. "Why are you frightened?" I asked.

"That's what I've been trying to work out. It doesn't seem to have much to do with Gabbett. It's me. I haven't lived with anyone for four years. I think I've grown to like the solitude, the control over my own time and space."

I knew what she was talking about. There were days when I paced about my house crying with loneliness and self-pity. But they were few. For the rest, I enjoyed the total control over my own world. I enjoyed sleeping and eating and cooking and cleaning, and just living at my own pace, my own way. If I wanted to open a bottle of wine at three in the morning, or suddenly roast myself some potatoes, there was nobody to complain. If I wanted to leave the dishes, have bakebeans on toast for dinner, sit around in a tracksuit for half the day forgetting

even the morning shower, there was no one to complain. Friends and lovers were just a phone call away.

But there was a down side of course. Those nights of loneliness, eating alone in a restaurant, having good, no, great news, and no one to tell it to. That was Crete's paradox, the one we all face. How do we balance and weigh loneliness against companionship, independence against intrusion? The price for having your own time is loneliness; the price for companionship is no autonomy. What do women like Crete and me want? Which way do we decide?

Crete spoke softly in a night voice. "I think I have to trust. Hold my breath, trust in him."

*Him*, it would have been safer for her to place her trust in herself, but I said nothing, I didn't know how to tell her that.

Crete added, "Let's leave as soon as we can in the morning, I don't think I could stand any departmental politics? Not now."

"Sure, glad to." We were both tired. We embraced and she left for her own bed.

I fell asleep listening to a single woman's voice singing Hildegard's chants. Her voice reverberated through the cloisters of history, through the pages of a manuscript.

## 8

Professor Andersen gave me lunch at his club and talked enthusiastically about currents and ocean movements around Greenland, Iceland and the Americas. By the time I left him my head ached and I knew nothing more of my father's history than before I had arrived. The ocean currents were of no interest to me and Eric's ideas about my father's espionage activities seemed even more preposterous than before. I dismissed that line of attack. I knew my father, or at least I thought I did, and I couldn't see him embroiled in some kind of international conspiracy where the Vinland Map was used to help jolt Italian-American ethnic pride. It was all too far fetched.

I took myself for a coffee and quietly thought about the whole mosaic of experiences. On the one hand there was the business of the map and my father, the two seemed linked in some way and as a consequence somehow linked to my own life and my own personal history. On the other hand, my personal life seemed to be taking peculiar twists and turns. There was the old woman in the purple hat who kept appearing in my dreams. She was haunting me. It was something about the way I could never talk to her, as if, like the old women of the tribe, she had given up the need for ordinary communication, for the sounds of simple or complex words. She sat and chanted. She spoke in riddles. She knew the songs. She watched. Watched over, perhaps? She troubled my sleep and I'd wake with an odd unease, like the after taste of a lover you wished you hadn't spent the night with.

I looked into the dark well of the coffee. The old woman wasn't the only thing troubling me. There was the way I felt embroiled in Crete's love affair with Gabbett, she kept coming to me with more and more of the complications. I felt overloaded. And there was the incident in the swimming pool with the man from the Mallee and the way Crete and I suddenly left the departmental retreat.

Our head of department was not impressed when we just drove away from his over organised colloquium. Crete had mentioned something about a visiting scholar, but he glared at me. Crete had a reputation for such scattiness but I didn't, and while it might just have been possible Crete did have some international scholar about to visit her, he knew such academics did not visit me. I knew I'd get the brunt of his annoyance somewhere down the track: draw the short straw on a tutorial timetable; walk into a class and find it oversized; be handed a difficult postgraduate to supervise. There'd be some pay-off, I was sure of that.

What I wasn't expecting was the summons to his office. It was an embarrassing moment. He was trying to be fatherly. We were both awkward. I told him I was distracted by a new research project. I'm not sure why, but I told him of my growing interest in the Vinland Map. Perhaps it was the only thing I could think to say, or perhaps, cornered like that, I could admit my growing curiosity in the map.

What I was interested in, I told him, was in researching and studying the map as if it *was genuine*. I wanted to find a way of claiming it for cartography. There had been several efforts to prove the map was a forgery but each of these efforts had left uneasy questions. I convinced myself, if not my head of department, a much harder and much more rewarding quest would be to show the map to be genuine, to be a medieval map of the known world. The fact that the known world contained aspects of America fifty or more years before Columbus discovered it was an issue I left out of my discussions. Sensationalism was not the Head's style.

We parted amicably, with him offering some research assistant time for my Vinland Map investigations. It was good of him but I didn't want the intrusion. As I left his office I realised I had talked myself into a fully blown project and he would, at some stage in the not too distant future, be looking for results.

I instigated a library search on everything written about the map, it was not, as it turned out, a great deal, and I tried to order the bits I already knew of the story. Witten was dead and so too was Enrico Ferrajoli, the only two men who claimed to know the location of the library where the map and its accompanying text had sat for over 500 years. Neither had revealed even the slightest hint of the identity of the collector or the library.

Unlike my friend Eric, who created layers of fanciful solutions to solve riddles, I preferred to cut to the quick of a problem. I began to play a familiar game, the cartographer's "what if..."

What if Witten and Enrico didn't reveal the secret location of the library, and the mysterious collector, because there wasn't one? If Witten hadn't been taken to a library, if he had never met the noble collector, then it would be easy to refuse steadfastly to reveal anything at all about either the library or the collector. If he had gone to the library, if it had existed, then over the years something or other would have slipped out. He would have known about a text he shouldn't have, or he would have compared an illumination to one he'd normally have no way of seeing. Somewhere he would have slipped up because although Witten was not a major dealer in manuscripts even he would not have been able to resist looking

at some of the other treasures in the mysterious library. He would have picked up other volumes, looked in shelves and drawers, noticed something about the decor, some painting, a sculpture, maybe a globe of the world. Some small aspect would have caught his imagination and would have reappeared innocently, troubling his silence. How could it *not*? But no such error is recorded. Witten doggedly maintained his story and nothing ever slipped to contradict his refusal to offer even the slightest hint as to the identity of the collector or his library. There was no letter after his death, no confidant who came forward. Just silence - a complete silence.

The more I thought about it the more I was convinced Witten had not been taken to a library, nor had he met a mysterious collector.

If the collector and library did not exist then Enrico must have shown the manuscript to Witten and suggested - what? That a great library existed but he couldn't take Witten to it, for a number of reasons? That the manuscript came from a great library behind the Iron Curtain? Or from the East? Or was part of a Nazi official's booty? Witten might have believed any one of those stories.

How was I casting Witten? The naive American abroad with too much money in his accounts and too little caution or sense? It seemed a more feasible explanation to that of the arch conspirator.

But Witten was the one who had the most to gain financially. This was a snag and I needed to keep it in the back of my head. He had made a lot of money by buying the map from Enrico for three and a half thousand and selling it to Yale for two hundred thousand dollars. Was that enough of a financial gain to act as a motive?

Then again, Witten could have been someone's agent, acting the part of the innocent Yank abroad, but I just didn't think so. I'd leave such theories for Eric to mull over.

So who was Witten? A small time dealer so interested in the manuscript he *knew* the configuration of its wormholes off by heart? I've looked at several manuscripts and I know that to be so committed to the wormholes requires considerable dedication. Wormholes are not in themselves very interesting things and I have found most other people distracted by the text, the illumination, the ink pigmentation, or even the vellum. Rarely, I must say, have wormholes so fascinated even the most pedant of scholars that they would know their configuration and recognise them in another text. And yet Witten recognised the configuration in the fragment of the *Speculum*. How remarkable.

The wormhole story was unbelievable, as was the co-incidence of the fragment of the *Speculum* turning up at Yale. That much had to be a set up. The only question was by whom? Was Witten involved from the beginning or was his main role the miraculous recognition of the wormholes? And, perhaps, did he also have to prod Marston into purchasing the fragment from Davis' international catalogue? I thought about this for a time but decided there were too many moving parts, too many people involved for Witten to be a main player in anything but the recognition of the wormholes.

I smiled to myself; perhaps Eric wasn't so far off the track. Not concerning my father, but there might have been some sophisticated help in getting the *Speculum* to Yale. The fragment of the *Speculum*, after all, went from Enrico to Davis, to the international catalogue, to Marston at Yale. It's a long journey and would take more organisation than could be mustered by such small players as Enrico or Witten.

I turned my attention to Enrico. Where did he get the manuscript from? If I dismissed the story of a mysterious collector, a great family library, tax evasion and the rest, the simplest explanation was that he, or someone he knew, had stolen it. This fitted with what I knew about Enrico. He was known to be a thief and a small time fence, who traded in manuscripts and artefacts from antiquity for those who didn't want to inspect the provenance or the receipts too carefully. But if it had been stolen, where had he got it from?

The best lead in the story had to be the Spanish cathedral library. Enrico was known to have stolen manuscripts from it, serving a prison sentence for his trouble. The theft at the library and the appearance of the map and the *Tartar Relations* amongst Enrico's wares, coincided nicely. Could the Vinland Map have come from that library?

The list the library issued to the police of the stolen manuscripts did not include the map, but they also refused to deny it had been in their possession. Why? What was the point in neither affirming nor denying? Could there be reasons why a library would want to keep secret the exact nature of their collection? But surely in this day and age of electronic catalogues the only secret collections are those acquired on the black market, private collectors who store their booty in secret vaults. Somehow this didn't seem to be the stuff of cathedral libraries. Is it possible that they had the book and didn't even know it? Is it possible that aspects of their collections are not catalogued?

I needed to know more about such libraries. I rang Martha at the rare books collection.

We met in town at the end of her working day. She took me to a cafe not far from the library and ordered some red wine and a plate of antipasto. While we waited for the wine and food, I drew the Vinland Map for her. It was not hard to sketch its outline, and I told her of the *Tartar Relations* and its account of Chingis Khan's empire.

What I liked most about Martha was her professionalism. She was less interested in the drawing of the map than its specifications. It was the same with her knowledge and selection of wines. Labels, names and prices were of no consequence, she knew her wines, she knew exactly which bottle, which year, which grape, and she wasn't put off lightly. I wanted to compliment her but I knew better of it. She disliked me drawing attention to her skills and was not a woman to take compliments easily.

I got right down to the details, I knew Martha would appreciate that. "The map was drawn on two sheets of vellum which are now joined. They measure almost 30 by 40 centimetres, a bit less than 30 and a bit more than 40." I was embarrassed slightly that I didn't remember the exact measurement. I redeemed myself as best I could. "Of course, over time, the vellum pages might have lost a little around the outer edges, or perhaps shrunk a fraction. It's hard to say, the vellum is not in a good state of repair and there are wormholes."

"It is vellum, not parchment?"

"Yes, calf not sheep. And, with the *Tartar Relations*, looks to have come from one lot, one parcheminerie, although you wouldn't call it your finest quality."

"A functional text?" She suggested.

"Probably."

She asked about other markings.

"The back of the map is blank except for a Latin inscription which translates as 'delineation of the first, second and third parts of the Speculum'."

"The Latin?"

I wrote it down for her on the back of a drink coaster: *Delineatio 1e ps:2e ps.3e ps. specul'i*-. "The handwriting and ink of this inscription appears to be similar to that of the legends on the face of the map. So it's fair to assume the inscription is part of the original document." I went on to give Martha the full cartographic details.

The red wine arrived and was predictably excellent - full bodied and tasting of late afternoon - but Martha seemed less pleased with it saying to herself, "I still prefer the Coonawarra." She moved the olives towards me. "Middle of the 13th century wasn't it? The *Tartar Relations*?"

I nodded.

"And what's the inscription on Vinland? I take it there is one?"

"Yes, it records a visit to Vinland by Eric the Bishop of Greenland in the last year of Pope Pascal, 1118." I smiled to myself at Martha's briskness. She often made me feel as if I was being cross-examined. But I'd become used to her matter-of-fact style and didn't mind. There were others, I knew, who couldn't handle it and avoided her.

Martha continued. "So it was important for them to claim those lands as Christian?"

"I think so. The question is *when*. This copy dates, well most would agree, from the Council of Basel which began in 1431 and ended abruptly in 1439. However, the *Tartar Relations*, as a text, was already about 200 years old."

"But not unimportant. Not originally." She took a little of her wine. "That's better," she looked at the label, "yes, it really needs to breathe." She continued with our conversation. "Two hundred years earlier the Tartars were a major threat to the entire Christian world. The *Tartar Relations* would have been required reading for any strategist and prince, papal or otherwise. It's just that by the time the scribe copied the text, the one with the Vinland Map, the whole threat was well and truly over." She paused, "Well, at least it wasn't immediate. I think the West has always had the recurring nightmare of the East invading it." She thought for a moment. "You know, the fact that the manuscript was an historical one at the time it was scribed might account for its disappearance. It was a curio, even at the time it was drawn up."

We were getting close to the ground I wanted to cover. "It hadn't surfaced for five hundred years. Where would a map, a volume like that, end up?"

She shrugged. "On a barrow somewhere! It's happened before."

I asked her directly. "Would a library like a cathedral library not catalogue such a work?"

"More than likely I'm afraid. There's still a lot that remains uncatalogued." She told me of several incidents where an ancient cathedral or library had kept its precious manuscripts from the various, and monotonously regular, waves of invasions and pillage by telling no one of their existence. "If the conquering army didn't know about the existence of a particular precious document they didn't go looking for it. Secrecy was always the safest lock and key. And



Meridian, looting armies are not just a thing of the past. Some old libraries still use secrecy as part of their security system."

She told me of other manuscript thought lost forever but eventually retrieved or casually happened upon. "Because I work with antiquity people think there is nothing new in the field. Nothing could be further from the case. New material, volumes, fragments; whole collections are turning up all the time. Where did that dealer come from?"

"Most of Europe. But there was the cathedral in Spain, the one he was caught stealing manuscripts from. A cathedral in Saragossa. Do you know it?"

"Sure," Martha replied with the utmost casualness, "Cathedral de la Seo. I haven't been there though, but I have met one of the librarians."

"You're kidding!"

"No. At a conference, years back. A very distinguished man. It was quite a few years ago so I guess he's getting on. But, it's interesting, I believe he's still about. Crete's man, the latest, have you met him? He'd know."

I was excited by this turn of events and didn't want to be distracted with Crete's lover. "Martha, what has Crete's men got to do with the librarian?"

"It's her new bloke, the one who makes films for SBS. I can't remember his name. I can't keep up with her. Well that's how she met this one. He was here making a documentary that had something to do with the librarian, or the old cathedral library or something. Look, I'm sorry I don't know the details. Ask Crete."

"The librarian is here?"

"Out in the sticks somewhere. He came to be with his family, something like that. I remember his talk. He kept speaking in Latin and annoyed most of the audience. You'd have loved him!"

Perhaps. I had only been to one seminar that had been largely conducted in Latin and that too had annoyed most of the audience. I wondered how Crete's lover Gabbett would have got on with such a classicist. But at the moment archaic references didn't concern me greatly. I was more concerned with the possibility of meeting the librarian. How could he be here? Was this more of the long list of coincidences which surrounded the Vinland Map? And there was something else which troubled me. When I thought back I remembered Crete telling me of the old Spanish librarian but I hadn't listened. I had been so preoccupied with avoiding the continual saga of her love affair I had really ceased to hear what she was saying. What else, I wondered had she told me over the last few weeks? What else had I missed?

Martha poured the last of the wine and we turned our attention to other topics.

It took me several days before I could get onto Crete only to find out Gabbett was in Sydney for the week. She gave me a phone number which connected me directly to a studio. There was a long delay and eventually he came to the phone, somewhat curious.

"Meridian? Is everything all right?" We hadn't met and my called alarmed him.

I assured him Crete was fine. I found his immediate concern for her touching and wondered if this time she might have actually found herself a bloke worth

keeping. I explained why I'd rung.

"How's your Latin?"

"Fine, how's yours?"

"Schoolboy but I passed the test. I mainly got by on my Italian. You know he's a right bugger? There's a whole lot of stuff he won't talk about - something about the secrecy of the library's collection. Says he's taken a vow or something."

"I've been warned. What's his address?"

Gabbett went to his briefcase and found the details. He returned to the phone. "He's a weird one. Named after a philosopher, Francisco Suarez, so I'd brush up on Suarez as well, if I was you."

"Did you?"

"My researcher." Then he explained as best he could. "He's old, comes from another world. If you want him to talk he has to, well, want to talk to you. Still, I think he's a bit starved of real conversation out on the farm and is a bit sick and tired of stupid, nosey questions. What he is hungry for is real conversation."

"In Latin I presume!"

He laughed, "Latin or possibly Hebrew. The bugger is probably proficient in a fist full of languages. I'd watch his son though. That's who he lives with. The son seems more concerned with account books than any other kind of book. We had to pay a fee, not to the old bloke, but to the son."

He gave me the address and rang off. As I put the receiver down I realised this was the first conversation I'd had with Gabbett. He came over as a person much more likeable than I'd thought he would be. Crete had had such a run of hopeless men in her life that I had just expected this one to be the same. I rang her to report my conversation and to tell her what an amicable man Gabbett appeared to be. She liked that. We all like our lovers to be praised by our friends.

I made a loose arrangement to have them both over to dinner, and set about arranging to meet Francisco Suarez.

He was in no hurry to see me and I had to wait a couple of weeks, by which time I had eaten with Crete and Gabbett and heard even more stories of the old man. I read up on Saragossa and the cathedral. I had even borrowed a book of Suarez's philosophy but could make little of it. I needed a simpler explanation, or more time. I put the tome down. It was not this ancient philosopher I wanted to know about, but his namesake.

I was excited and I drove, nudging the speed limit, to a property his son owned just outside of Chaffey. It was an area at the edge of the vineyard country where most of the rural industry centred around the orange growers. As I drove I felt toey, a little nervous, and I wondered if his English was proficient. I wasn't looking forward to struggling with my virtually non-existent Spanish or, for that matter, my poor French. I knew that at least my Latin would be fine and to attune my ear I spoke Latin to myself as I drove along.

I found their block without too much difficulty and pulled the car up outside of a large modern farmhouse built in cream brick, and resembling, although by no means imitating, a Mediterranean architecture. What the house told me was that

while there might have been a paucity of imagination, there was certainly no shortage of money. Gabbett, it seemed, had been right about the son's interests.

Without too much ceremony I was taken into a small library where a man in his seventies slowly rose from his chair and greeted me in English. His accent was a little heavy but his English was impeccable. I was left feeling awkward and inept because I could not respond with a suitable Spanish greeting. Instead I chose to greet him in Latin as one scholar might greet another. It was the best I could do. He smiled and responded in kind.

The room was one I would come to know intimately. It was not a grand, or wood-lined, or dimly lit library, nor was it like my father's study. This was an airy open room with sunlight that poured in from two large windows. The walls were lined with books and there was a writing bureau and also a larger reading desk. The desk contained a lamp and a bowl of roses that gently perfumed the room. Both the writing bureau and the reading desk had papers strewn about on them, as if I had disturbed him at work on some project. At the far end of the room was a small door. The smallness of the door had a strange optical effect and made the library seem longer than it actually was.

A cut crystal decanter and two small glasses had been placed on a small table which separated two ornately upholstered armchairs. He gestured towards one of the chairs and we sat down. He poured out two sherries and let them sit on the table.

He continued in Latin; "*So, are you interested in the Cathedral de la Seo or perhaps the manuscripts, maybe the theft, maybe...*," his eyes gave away his amusement, "*it is the Vinland Map which interests you?*"

As he spoke I became aware of the aroma of the sherry. It was a drink I had rarely taken and knew little about. The aroma was new to me. It smelt of another world, of wood and olives and tiny streets. "*Indeed,*" I answered, "*many things interest me. But first, I'm curious Senor, how did you come to be here?*"

He flipped his hand as if to brush away a speck of dust, "*It is unimportant. My son, Eximius, migrated from Saragossa. Our family lived there for many generations.*" He moved back to English. "It is, I think you know, a proud city."

I followed his lead and spoke in English. I had prepared myself for this interview and had read up on Saragossa and its role in the Civil War. I suggested courteously, "Perhaps Saragossa is proud of its commitment."

"It depends upon one's politics." He knew what I was referring to. "There are no tougher fighters in all of Spain than the Aragonese, and no tougher fighters in all of Aragon than the citizens of Saragossa."

"And more recently?" I had read Saragossa was the nursery of Anarchism.

"I was not in a position to take a public side. I did what I could. We all did." He offered the glass of sherry. By this time its perfume had filled the air between us. My attention was caught by the brownness of his hand and when I took the glass from him, we both noticed the contrast of my white skin against his olive colouring.

He continued. "But it is a long time ago. From the factories of Saragossa the Anarchist rose up and challenged the Fascist. It's a well known fact."

He moved the conversation away from the Civil War. Perhaps, I thought, his political alliances were elsewhere, or was he like my father - too touched by that

particular period of history to even mention it?

He continued. "The same city held out against Napoleon. Do you know of the Maid of Saragossa, your English poet Byron talks of her bravery?" And then, more with his eyes than with his mouth he smiled and added, "Byron also talks of her womanness." He had not yet put his glass to his mouth. I followed his lead but held the glass close to my face so I could saturate my senses with its aroma. The lightly coloured wine clung to the sides of the glass like an afterimage and my mouth was salivating for the taste.

Still he did not drink. He quoted some lines from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

"Her lover sinks - she shed no ill-timed tear;  
Her chief is slain - she fills his fatal post;  
Her fellows flee - she checks their base career;  
The Foe retires - she heads the sallying host:  
Who can appease like her a lover's ghost?  
Who can avenge so well a leader's fall?"

I completed the quotation, one of the very few lines of Byron I knew. It was part of the warring rhetoric I made use of as a young feminist:

"What maid retrieve when man's flushed hope is lost?  
Who hang so fiercely on the flying Gaul,  
Foiled by a woman's hand, before a battered wall?"

"Exactly! Senora, a woman's pale hand." He was enjoying the entente. He continued. "I migrated to join my son when my wife died and I became too old and bothersome for people." Once again, his eyes showed a slight sense of amusement, as if to him life had become some kind of divine joke. "Isn't that what children are for? Do you too look after your own old father?"

"He's dead." I replied perhaps too abruptly, but I did not want to bring my father's memory into this room.

At last Francisco sipped on his sherry and I followed, letting silence fill the room as the sherry filled my mouth. It felt the right thing to do, as if the room itself needed a pause from our conversation. I wondered how often this room heard voices.

"Do you like this sherry?" He asked, knowing fully well that by the time I had sipped it my mouth was moist with the wine's scent, moist with anticipation.

It tasted of history, of vellum and stone buildings, of fruit and olives kept for generations in vats of the best woods, the best vinegar, and the best oils.

"I have it imported. An old man has few pleasures and even fewer visitors."

I nodded and was pleased I had chosen the right slowness of pace. This first visit I realised would be nothing more than an introduction. If Francisco enjoyed my company there would be other visits, and it was during those that he would talk of the matters I was so anxious to discuss. Time had shaped this man, had moulded and formed the way he worked within the world. Like a religious belief, time had become a companion to him, and was as much a part of him as a lover of half a century might have been. We shared the sherry and made almost casual conversation.

My research on Saragossa was holding well and I asked him about the early Arab influences.

He was pleased with my interest and immediately began to quote a long passage to me in Arabic. It did not faze him in the slightest that I clearly could not understand a word of it.

"We had many Arab scholars come to the cathedral library because there was much of interest for them there. Our cathedral, the Cathedral de la Seo, was the older of the two cathedrals. It had the library, the collections."

He refilled my sherry glass and we sat in this gentle conversation until the light began to fade. By the time his daughter-in-law came into the room it was almost dark. She turned on the light and I had to squint my eyes to accustom them to the sudden illumination.

With his daughter-in-law in the room he immediately reverted back into Latin. I don't know if it was a game he was playing with her or if he didn't want her to know the details of our next meeting. I found it curious but went along with it.

"*I have enjoyed our talk,*" he said. "*You will come again?*"

"*Of course.*"

He went over to the reading desk and snapped a single rose from the arrangement. He handed it to me. "*Even if what you want to know is sub rosa? Will you still come to visit this old man?*"

I smiled and took the rose.

I made a time to see him again.

## 9

Alone in the quiet of the night I thought back over my day, the drive, Francisco, his library and his knowledge. Outside the moon had risen full and fecund, its bluish light made patterns in the room, pretending at shadows.

What was I really looking for? I had put myself out on a limb for what? A fifteenth century map? In the overall scheme of things, in the large picture of my life, it didn't matter at all to me if the Vinland Map was authentic or not. There was something else there, some other thing which had grabbed at me, which compelled me, fascinated me.

Was it the *idea* of the map, the way the cartographer had combined stories of exploration and empires only to have his work fall into the darkness of silence?

Or was it more than that? Was it the curious way in which the map somehow mirrored me? By looking at the map I was really looking at my own history. I felt uneasy. Too much of my personal life seemed caught up in this quest for the map's provenance. The whole of the Vinland Map's known history had been shrouded in coincides and now I felt myself being drawn into, somehow caught up in the improbable coincides of the map - there was Francisco's connection to Crete's lover, and Eric's idea that my father had been involved somehow, that he was part of an international conspiracy.

On the bedside table was the rose Francisco had given me. It perfumed my bed, my sleep. '*Sub rosa*,' he'd said.

As I fell asleep, I thought again of him and his library, the sherry and the upholstered chairs. I thought of the colour purple, as if I had seen some flower or other and its colour had once again caught my eye. What an odd colour purple is - caught in the sunlight it bounces out and away from the greenness of the leaves; yet in the shadows it remains silent, hidden by that very same greenness. Is that the silence of the map? Is that what *sub rosa* really means?

I slept deeply and over breakfast, refreshed, I decided I wanted to know more about the rose and *sub rosa*. Francisco had given me the flower as well as the phrase and I wanted to trace the connection, to go beyond any dictionary definition. If anyone would have that knowledge at her finger tips it would have to be Crete. I decided to call her.

"The rose? God you ask the most complex questions. The rose would have to be the most loaded flower in the whole botanical catalogue. You know I have a recipe for Turkish delights which begins: *first plant your roses* - those lovely deep red smelly ones." She was in a good mood and chatted away. Things must have been going well for her and Gabbett. "What on earth do you want to know about roses?"

"The symbol of the secret?"

"Ah, *sub rosa*."

"Exactly."

"How far do you want to go back, Knights Templar?"

I didn't know. "It's not my field, it's yours, just tell me about it."

She didn't say anything for awhile and then she said, "I'm serious. We need to go to a ...," she hesitated knowing I would resist, "a rosary."

"Crete!"

"Meridian, some things are tactile." Her voice sounded a little hurt as if she was trying to give me the right advice but I was resisting it. She continued defending her suggestion. "You wouldn't expect to study art from a bunch of photographs would you? We need a garden, a rose garden."

"Do you have a particular rosary in mind or will any clump of plants do? I am, you know, familiar with what a rose looks like." I was cynical and let it show. And perhaps I was a little angry. I wanted to know something quite specific but Crete in her usual fashion wanted to envelop me in a whole culture of knowledge. That was one of our great differences. I looked for facts that fitted together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle while Crete made large sweeping gestures and let ideas float on the surface as watercolours wash over the page. I checked myself. If I wanted to explore this connection between the rose and the phrase perhaps it was only fitting I did it Crete's way.

I conceded and agreed to meet her later in the day. For some reason Crete believed that late afternoon was the best time to view roses and being who she was, she had picked an elaborate recreation of a Victorian rose garden. It was part of the city's central Botanic Gardens.

As I walked towards the arranged meeting place I had to admit I enjoyed being out of my office. The air was a little crisp but there was plenty of sun about; not the burning kind of mid summer sun, but the softer, gentler, autumn sun. A temperate sun and one my fair skin doesn't shun. I realised how much I had recently begun to enjoy the *temperate*, the well tempered in climate, and music, and art, and fashion. It wasn't a lack of passion or contrast that I saw in the well tempered but rather a gentler, perhaps more profound, subtlety of contrast. The passions were there all right; they just didn't see the need to parade about like a teenager with excessive colour or attitude.

Crete had chosen to walk in a particularly perfumed part of the rose garden. The gravel path was only wide enough for the two of us to walk side by side, and it twisted in large graceful curves around beds and arches of roses, which had been planted in masses to show off each variety. Further along was a fountain, which I could hear rather than see, but I had little doubt the path would eventually wind its way towards it. That was the nature of such gardens, like an exposed labyrinth they wind their way towards some central feature so that the entire garden is built around that central axis. They were like a medieval map which centres itself in Rome or Jerusalem and lets the world form and unfold around those holy cities.

As we walked, I asked her about Gabbett.

She shrugged and took her time to talk. "We had a row last night. It was my fault. I don't know..."

We walked on in silence, giving her the space to talk if she wanted to. Sometimes Crete was an intensely private person and then at other times, all she wanted to do was talk and talk about her life. I found it hard to judge the time and moment.

"He came home," she continued, "and said his doctor wanted him to go to a psychiatrist."

"Jesus!"

"Yes. I lost the plot. He'd managed to stop taking Prozac and he was okay. He'd been taking pills for years, to numb the pain I guess, the pain of unfulfillment. Sure we can all do with a bit of therapy but not a shrink. Not all that medication and pills and control. They take over your life... It's odd isn't it, now that he's found the courage to make changes in his life they see him as a nut case, as someone in need of a shrink."

"What does he think?"

"Mmm, that's what the row was about. I ranted and carried on, then he turned to me, and said, 'Don't you think I've got a say in all this.' He was right; of course, I'd been treating the situation as if he would automatically comply. He wanted to talk about it and I thought he was informing me." She shook her head. "Jamie's father... for years there were shrinks in my life, telling me how to look after him. I was only in my twenties, I didn't know how to take control away from the doctors, toss away his Valium, and take on board something other than the medical solution of hospitals and pills. When Gabbett told me I guess I just lost myself in that terrible time. I couldn't bear it if Gabbett..." She turned and looked at me. "I get it all so wrong, Meridian, so wrong."

"Crete," I hesitated for an instant, giving advice was not something I felt comfortable doing. "Maybe you should tell him. Tell him about that time, and the other. Then he'd know. He'd be able to give you some understanding."

"I don't want to weigh him down. He's got so much to worry about. There's still stuff with the kids. He can't see them. It really hurts him and I think he fears it will go on forever. Some kind of punishment for finally deciding to embrace life. He thinks he's had to make a choice between losing his children or losing himself. I tell him it will get better, that they'll come around, out of curiosity if nothing else, but I don't think he believes me."

I nodded in some kind of agreement but let it slide. It was her life, her relationship. We walked on in silence until we came to a garden bench; it was nestled into the rose bed and had recently been painted to exaggerate its Victorian design. It was a little too fussy, a little too domestic for my taste. We sat down. Close at hand was a mass of pink fragrant blooms. The flowers themselves, as roses go, were not particularly attractive and with their short stems and clusters of petals, they didn't look as if they'd be at all useful to florists. But their perfume was heavy and inviting. A number of bees had also been attracted to the blooms and busied themselves in the late afternoon sun. Their sound and the smell of the roses were an hypnotic combination.

"Have you noticed," Crete said, "how the afternoon sun is richer in colour, more reds I think. Altogether more mellow."

Her voice was soft and composed and I knew we wouldn't talk any further about Gabbett.

Crete began to tell me about the rose. "Did you know it first came to Europe via Spain? The Arabs planted rose gardens when they invaded."

"But why? Why import the rose?" I asked. "Why go to all that trouble?"

"Because they didn't see the rose as simply a flower. To the Arabs the rose provided food, scent, flavour, essential oils, and of course, beauty. Planting rose gardens was as much a part of their colonisation of Spain as building mosques. It was just another part of their culture." She told me how the rose spread as far as Paris but it lost its importance after the fall of the Arabian influence. "You see the Europeans just saw it as a flower, they didn't understand its cultural and culinary significance. It wasn't until the Crusades, when once again the European and Arabian cultures clashed that the rose became a significant symbol in Europe. But of course, then it became a military and political emblem."

"Like the English in the War of the Roses?" I suggested.

"Yes, exactly. The white and the red rose. What a stroke of diplomatic brilliance on the Tudor's part to create an emblem which combined them both."

On a bench, not far from us sat four old women. They looked as if they regularly came here to meet and enjoy the gardens. They were dressed sensibly. One of the women, the one who carried a walking stick of some beauty, didn't talk to the others; she just sat and stared out into her own private world. I noticed the stick; it was the kind I had secretly always thought I'd get in my old age. Wooden and elegant. The end was tipped with silver which had been generously engraved. The knob was decorated, carved with a foliage pattern that made its way, just a little, down the nape of the stick. I was too far away to see the detail of the carving but the overall effect was of a functional and also an elegant walking stick. I liked the stick and I also like the look of this old woman who watched over her own private space and kept her own counsel.

Crete moved away from the political, it wasn't an area which interested either of us. "If we put the political aside the rose held two really important and sometimes conflicting ideas, it was the symbol of the woman as sacred and the



woman as sexual. The interesting thing about the rose is that I can't think of an instance when it represents one without at least a hint of the other. It doesn't, for example, represent barrenness or pornography. The goddess, the sacred, is always fecund and creative. The sexual woman is always enticing in her mystery, the folds of the vulva, the lips, like the petals of the rose, desired but mysterious, perhaps sacred."

"A perfumed garden?"

"Yes. The flower gave a sweet and merry time to the poets, particularly the Arabian poets."

I remembered a line from Hafiz. "*The red rose is open and the nightingale is drunk.*"

"Exactly! We can trace the symbolic rose back to the Greeks, to Venus. The sexual, sacred and creative powers of women were explored in her rites and rituals. The rose was her symbol."

Crete went on to explain. "There is by the way, another side to the story which I'm not terribly interested in but you might be. It's the Egyptian connection. Their god of silence, Horus, had the rose as his emblem. Some consequently claim the phrase *sub rosa* comes from Horus, but I think our cultural connections are more likely to come from the Greek-Arab-European link than from ancient Egypt." She talked further of how European culture had only in the last few hundred years revisited the knowledge and lore of the ancient Egyptians.

Like the old woman, we sat in silence for a short time enjoying the late afternoon sun, the roses, the perfume and the bees. I was only too aware of how most of the ancient knowledge, especially from the Greeks, had to come back to Europe via the Arabs, and in the early medieval period there was only a handful of scholars who could read and translate Arabic.

Imagine having the task of translating Aristotle's ethics and presenting it to the medieval church. How would anyone turn Aristotle's ideas into something acceptable to a church where sins were listed with their penance and indulgences sold? And what of Archimedes who understood about the displacement of matter? How could he be translated for the minds of the church that was otherwise preoccupied with the corporate state of saints and angels, and the number of them who might fit onto a pin's head?

I had recently seen a list of medieval questions which included:

*Why the fingers were made unequal;  
Why the palm is concave;  
Why water does not go out of a vessel open in the lower  
part, unless an opening is made above;  
Where thunder comes from;  
What food the stars eat, if they are animals;  
Whether beasts have souls;  
Why we hear echoes;  
Why joy is the cause of weeping;  
Why the nose is located above the mouth;  
Why men universally die;  
Why, as one can see from darkness into the light, one  
cannot similarly see from the light into darkness.*

These questions had interested me; they'd given me an insight into the problems a medieval scholar might have had. If I was to make a list of questions now,

questions a woman at the beginning of the 21st century might ask, I wondered what I might include. Certainly, I ached for knowledge about myself. I wanted to know how to live as an independent woman, how to pursue ideas and thought as well as my own womanness. And in particular I wondered if there was ever any way I could successfully combine my fascination with the scientific and my fascination with the symbolic. One question I might ask is, 'Why when I am most afraid of my womanness do I become furiously academic?' I knew this was also one of Crete's questions. It was after all what brought us here to this rosary.

Crete had been talking about the rose as a religious symbol, the holy flower from Jerusalem

"The prayer, the rosary?" I suggested.

"Sure, it's another part of it, the Mary worship. Rosary beads were once made from dried rose hips and you'll find pictures, icons and statues of Mary holding a rose, or in some cases standing on a rose. Of course, there is the opulent *Madonna of the Rose Arbor* by Schongauer. It's an extraordinary work where Mary is portrayed as a rose, the woman and the flower became one in the artist's mind. It's very beautiful; the colours are soft and rich. Her robes are russets and reds, and her honey coloured hair falls in long ringlets on the folds of her robes. She holds the Christ child on her arm and they both look away from the viewer, but he looks in one direction and she in another, as if they are saying, "See, here is the human race." She sits on a moss bench and behind her a rose grows on a trellis, the blooms are the colour of her robes. The background is golden and above her head two angels, dressed in deep blue, hold aloft her elaborate golden crown. There are birds too; small robins and finches perched on the branches of the rose bush or on the trellis supports. There can be little doubt the artist painted her as a rose, the Madonna and flower becoming one. And just in case we didn't understand his imagery, on her halo he wrote the inscription, *Pluck me also for thy son, O holiest Virgins.*"

"Pluck me?"

"Yes, it's delicious isn't it." Crete smiled, "Well, that's the translation I have been given."

I thought of the Latin which might have formed the inscription and wondered why it had been so coarsely translated. "I don't suppose you remember the Latin?" I asked Crete, but she didn't.

Crete continued. "The image of the mother goddess, the virgin and the rose were all intertwined as the brambles themselves." She paused. "This is where it gets really interesting. The ancient religions, the sun worshippers, believed in one version or another, that each night, or in some versions on one particular night in the year, the sun god died. When this happened he was taken up by his mother who lived in the west, and wrapped in her arms, as sunset, they sank into the night. During the night, using her great powers of creation, the mother goddess resurrected him to be born again in the east at dawn. The reds of sunset and sunrise were seen as the blood of death and birth."

She continued. "It's a metaphor, a story which has been continued in the Christian tradition with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection at dawn on Easter Sunday."

I thought of the Pieta, the pity it evoked, the male god dead in the arms of his mother. It was a powerful image and one I felt deep in my psychic. How terrible a task for a woman to bury her child.

"It's one of the reasons why so many of the Gothic cathedrals placed in their west wall a window depicting aspects of the Madonna's life, the great roses of the mother goddess. In the late afternoon the light fills the cathedral, reds and rich blues, golden browns and mauves. And in the morning, the east window sheds on the altar and the crucifix, a fresh new crisp light of yellows and greens and bright reds. If you can be in one of those cathedrals to catch the dying sun shining through those roses, you can begin to feel the power, the devotion of the goddess, the Mary worship. The colours are, well, look around you, it's these same gentle rich colours."

She was right, the reds and golds, even the whites looked deep with their colour. I remembered the deep blue light at Chartres, how peaceful it had felt, and yes, I had been there in the late afternoon. I was quietly pleased by the chance of such good timing.

She continued. "Many of these cathedrals were named after the Queen of the Rose, Mary, the female goddess, the mother of all creation."

In the gravel path she drew the outline of a typical medieval cathedral. Those extraordinarily beautiful windows always facing west and down the long body of the cathedral the crucifix and altar at the eastern end. "I think cathedrals were built like this because at the time there was still a lingering of the ancient religions, here and there and mixed up with Christian beliefs. The Church of course made use of those old religions, appropriated as much as they could."

Her drawing looked a little like a person, the naves forming the arms, the altar section the head.

"The really interesting connections," she said, "are around blood. It's a connection I'm still working on." She went to wipe out her drawing of the cathedral but I stopped her. For some reason I wanted to leave the trace of it in the gravel, as if it was a marker to our conversation.

It was getting chilly and so we left the rosary and made our way up to the cafe district of town. "I want to buy you a sherry." I said knowing Crete would be surprised by my choice of drink.

At the wine bar I was left asking for advice, I had no idea how to order a sherry and had been confused by the list. After a good deal of consultation I decided on two *amontillados*. It was the colour that had convinced me in the end, a rich, late afternoon amber colour that seemed completely in keeping with the roses and our conversation. They were poured from a slim long bottle, the kind that might contain very precious oils.

We were given a small plate of fat green olives and we moved to a table in a quiet part of the wine bar to continue our conversation. As I put the sherries down I advised Crete to not touch the wine until it had perfumed the air. I was enjoying mimicking Francisco.

Crete embraced the new experience. She took the small glass to her nose and smelt the wine, then putting it down she turned it around slowly watching the light reflect in the amber colour, and noticed, as I had done in Francisco's library, how the viscous wine left faint traces of patterns on the glass.

"And *sub rosa*?" I prompted her.

"Well, for the ancients, women held two great secrets of life. We bled from a wound which did not hurt us and," she stressed the word, "we created new life in the form of a child, both a female and a male child. We didn't just reproduce

ourselves we also knew how to reproduce *them*." She paused and reflected. "All of this must have been very daunting for the men. Perhaps it made them a little afraid of us."

"Perhaps it still does."

The sherry was beginning to perfume our space and I felt, for the second time, my mouth salivate with the desire for its taste. But this was a different colour sherry than the one I had drunk with Francisco, and it carried a richer, warmer odour.

"Where this relates to roses," Crete resumed, "is that it became the symbol for a whole set of secret rites and knowledge. But to understand its power we need to view religions anthropologically, as a continuum of human ideas and needs. Each new religion takes customs and rites and symbols from the old ones. So the rose for the Greeks represented the secret sexual, creation, sacred rites of Venus; for the primitives and sun worshippers, it represented the rites associated with the mother goddess and her ability to give birth, again and again to the male god. In the Christian version Mary, the mother of god, is worshipped in various rituals including the rosary."

Crete digressed, "I have always thought that the Christian religion, in most of its forms is a very male religion and has often had a great unease with the strong Mary worship of its followers. Don't forget Mary didn't die either, she just ascended to heaven."

I could see Crete's point. "She couldn't die could she, not if she was connected to the great mother goddess. If she died then all of creation would die with her, we would be plunged into perpetual winter."

Crete nodded. "And that part is never explained. The church has tried to sanitise the Mary worship, take it away from its primitive base, but they haven't been completely successful in doing that." She thought for a moment. "I'm stumbling for words, for a way of putting it all together, precisely because the church has tried to sanitise it, tried to take the sexual, the creation aspect out of the Mary worship. It reduced the whole thing to something awkward and uneasy and they needed to invent the improbable immaculate conception. Are we to believe that Mary never had sex?"

She took the sherry to her nose again, "You know this really is very good. When can I taste it?"

"Not until your mouth is wet with anticipation."

"Sounds vaguely sexual. Where did you acquire this sherry taste anyway?"

I didn't tell. I encouraged her to continue

"There's one last part to this puzzle." Crete said, "It has to do with what the male priests do inside the cathedrals, inside the body of the churches. The initiated stands at the head of the church, at the altar, and performs a ritual that turns bread and wine into the body and blood of their male god. The initiated men are performing a creation rite; they are appropriating the power of the woman. It's little wonder that there is such a fuss in making women priests."

She smiled. "I warned you the rose was a loaded symbol. *Sub rosa* weaves its way thought all of this. It depends where you're coming from". She raised an eyebrow; "I'd like to know why you're so interested?"

I told her of Francisco's parting gesture.

"Can't you guess?" She teased me with suggestion.

"Don't be daft, he's really old!" I snapped and was surprised at the intensity of my annoyance.

"Well, Meridian," she took her time and enjoyed the play. "In the sexual mysteries of Venus, the lore of the secret knowledge of love and sexuality and creation, the white rose represents chaste knowledge and the red rose..."

She continued to tease me and I shrugged and made light of it. I took the glass to my lips and tasted the rich wine.

The wine merchant, who was known to me, came over and sat with us. He had brought with him a few slices of fresh peach and the long thin sherry bottle. "This might be more refreshing than the olives," he suggested. "Try a slice." He was right, the olives were a little too salty, a little too acidic for the mellow rounded taste of the *amontillado*. The peach, golden yellow with its core stained red from the stone, moist like the petals of a rose, was exactly right. Both tastes lingered together in the depth of my mouth.

Crete's mobile rang. I didn't know she had one. "It's Gabbett." She said. "He insists I carry the thing. He's the only one with the number. I hate it." She answered her phone.

I thought back on the illuminations in the fifteenth century *Book of Hours*. What I had thought of as decoration I could now see was probably commentary, or perhaps another text of its own, drawn and designed in a code familiar to the medieval mind but complex and mysterious to me. The rose had flowered in those border trellises, the rose of the goddess, of Mary, of women, of creation, of fecundity. How much of this had Francisco been referring to?

Crete finished her call. "Sorry about that. It's a security thing I think. He just likes to know where I am. Funny that. I thought it was just when he was interstate, but it's all the time. So I said I'd take the phone with me. It's easier. He asked me if we've eaten, I told him we'd dined on peaches!"

We laughed and I realised we'd both had too much to drink.

"He'll be here soon, said he thinks he'll run you home as well."

"Maybe some food?" But I didn't feel hungry and nor did Crete.

"By the way," Crete asked. "What colour was the rose Francisco gave you?"

"Mauve," I lied. "A kind of silvery mauve."

I'm not sure why, but I didn't tell her it was red, a deep, dark, velvety red.

Gabbett arrived and bundled us both up into his car. The cold night air hit me hard and I swayed with the warmth of the sherry. His arm grabbed me. He was stronger than I'd imagined. He wasn't the kind of man to display his size or strength.

We arrived at my place and he walked me to the door and waited while I turned on the lights. I touched his arm. "Gabbett, be gentle with her."

"I am Meridian, I am."

"Ask her about it, about her past." I knew I had to be careful here but the wine was speaking, tossing caution away.

He shook his head. "Goodnight, drink some water."

I didn't let go of his arm.

"Meridian, we all have a past, if she wants to tell me any of hers she will, in her own time. Don't worry."

I let go of his arm. "Goodnight," I whispered, and he left.

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Deakin University

## *Fragments of a Map*

*A novel [continued]*

**Tess Brady**

### 10

I felt more than a little excitement as I drove towards Chaffey. This was my fourth visit to Francisco's library.

It was raining quite heavily and I turned off the car radio to listen to the sound of the windscreen wipers on the glass. I'd always like the swish-swish of the wipers, the pattern it sets up, like a metronome to the road. I was glad that in spite of other engineering advances in car technology, sound had remained much the same for years. My old car had finally given up and I had purchased a new one - silver and fun to drive.

Sitting nestled in the passenger seat was a long thin bottle of very fine fino sherry. It was an Australian show variety; made using the traditional solera system and one I hoped Francisco might enjoy. He had often said to me, only the Spanish could make sherry, I hoped to prove him wrong.

As always, he greeted me in the library.

He took the sherry bottle and inquisitively inspected its labels, both back and front. I could tell by his expression that he was keen to try it. His hands felt the temperature of the bottle. "It's cool enough, shall we try your gift?" I nodded.

He went to a cupboard and brought to the place where we always sat, two glasses and a corking knife. I took the seat which I knew was meant for me. With very little ceremony, he poured two glasses of the fino sherry. He had brought to the small table not the glasses we normally used but two decorative ones. Most of the bowl of the glass was stained a deep blood red colour with a rim of clear glass at the lip. Into the deep red had been etched a delicate pattern of leaves and flowers. I was reminded of the trellising patterns I had been so captured by in the medieval manuscript and I wondered about the age and preciousness of these delicate glasses.

"Something special for this very fine wine. Something special for this Australian vintage." He looked at me and smiled enjoying the innuendo and he took his glass to his lips in what I would have under different circumstances interpreted as a sexual gesture. If I had been older or him younger, I thought, and a faint

smile formed on my face. I dropped my eyes in what he must have seen as a demure gesture, but what was in fact generated by my sudden understanding and the subsequent slight embarrassment I felt. Perhaps, I thought, it had not been such a good idea to bring the wine. Such a gift obviously carried with it more than the gift of wine.

And yet I wanted to share the taste with him. The perfume of the wine, the anticipating moisture of the mouth, the lips, the tongue, the desire for taste. I wanted to share that game with him, but through my culture, my country's vintage. I wanted to share with him the taste of the New World. Of stone wineries only a couple of generations old, of vines still budding, of vats not yet black with age. I wanted to share the taste of this sherry not yet steeped in so much history. This sherry was still acquiring history and I liked that. I liked the scope of possibility.

I let my eyes slowly rise again and meet his. Without a word and not taking my eyes away from him, I slowly took the blood red glass to my mouth. I let the strong smooth wine moisten my tongue and my lips. Perhaps we had both known, not in our consciousness, but somewhere deep in the night dreaming, that I would one day bring this wine to him.

He smiled and spoke, breaking the moment. It was enough to play at this discovery, to travel the world of innuendo, of coveted gestures and possibilities. Desire is rushed at by the young and the hungry, but how much more delicious it is to let it stand for a while tantalising the mind until such appetite is aroused that all inhibitions are overcome.

Francisco told me the story of his glasses.

### **The Seventh Mandala - Desire**

I remember vividly the day I purchased these glasses. It was in Saragossa, in a little shop not far from the cathedral. It was a shop I didn't often go into, mainly because I hardly ever went down that street. You see, leading from the cathedral to the river were a series of small streets, really nothing more than narrow lanes, most of them, and they were lined with old shops selling religious souvenirs. I had, of course, no time for such things and rarely went down that little street.

On this particular day it was raining, not unlike the weather outside today. I can't quite recall, perhaps I took a short cut through that street; perhaps I thought the awnings might give me shelter.

It was quite awhile ago; I was a young man then. I saw these glasses in the window and I knew instantly I must have them. Can you imagine that Senora; my youth was completely overcome with avarice? I rushed into the shop and spent my entire week's salary on them.

When I got back to my desk with my proud purchase, I was very disappointed that no one was interested in inspecting them. We had just had a tapestry delivered to the museum. It had been several years in restoration and



such an event greatly overshadowed the purchase of a few sherry glasses, even these most beautiful ones.

I went down the stairs to the room where the tapestry was being hung. It was one of the Brussels series of the Virtues and Vices. We had two of the series, *Original Sin* and the *Passions of Man*. It was the *Passions*, which was being re-hung.

I stood there and watched it unfold, this magnificent tapestry and for the second time my eye was caught by unusual beauty. For the second time in so many hours I had found something I longed for, something I needed to touch and know.

The tapestry was worked in tones of blues and reds and depicted all the human passions through liturgical and symbolic emblems. The detail was extraordinary but perhaps the most memorable image was the multitude of wild spring flowers strewn upon a grassy meadow.

In my mind the two objects blurred together and I can't think of the tapestry without thinking of these glasses. It's odd, some were very critical, very passé about the tapestry. They thought the work a little too full blown, as if by the early sixteenth century the art of medieval tapestry had lost its prime, its youthful beauty, and like a man who had aged, the beauty and energy caught by the medieval weavers was also in decline. But, I did not agree. Even as a young man I did not agree. I knew wine needs to mature. So too do people, and so too do movements of art. I have no trouble at all with maturity, in any of the things a man can desire, in wine, in people or in late medieval design. And you Senora? You are quite fascinated with a late medieval map, isn't that so?

I avoided this opening to talk about the map and also the play on the wine I had brought. I also tried to avoid the intensity in the air between us. I was playing my own game. Just as he had taught me to wait for the wine, wait until my mouth salivated with anticipation, so too I was delaying the time when we could talk of the map. I wanted to hold out as long as I could; hoping that then he would be thirsty enough to give me what I wanted to know. Instead, I asked him about the tapestries. "You hadn't told me of this museum, was it within the cathedral?"

"Yes, yes. I have told you that the sacristy consists of a series of apartments. Leading from the first is a corridor, quite a long one, a very noisy place. I recall an echo, it was the flooring, they were polished wood and without carpet. We often complained about the noise the tourist constantly made as they went to see the tapestries. I don't know why it was never carpeted, no doubt something about authenticity. A lot of nonsense. Hundreds of years ago there was nothing like the queues of noisy tourists. There were pilgrims, of course, but nothing like these tourists who have no care for the fact that the scriptorium and library are so close at hand."

For a moment he was annoyed and I realised it must have been a contentious issue. On one hand, the tourist's admission fee was probably needed for upkeep, but on the other, the place was a functional cathedral, scriptorium and library. He

explained to me that the scriptorium was a busy place where scribes worked mainly on presentation illumination manuscripts. He thought it slightly absurd that some new cathedrals still wanted to have hand scribed and illuminated gospels. "Of course," he said wryly, "they call themselves illuminators now, the humble word scribe is beneath them."

He poured a little more sherry into our glasses. "There were of course a few, those involved in restoration and antiquity who still preferred to be called scribes." His mood changed slightly and for a few minutes he was lost in his thoughts, back, no doubt, at the cathedral. He smiled, almost to himself and looking at me he said, "One or two, they were very kind to us."

I thought it odd that he had included me in his memory. Usually his language was more precise than this. But I made nothing of it. Clearly our talk had stirred up some potent memory. The moment passed and he continued talking about the tourist. "They were so noisy, it seemed impossible for them to walk down a corridor quietly. The problem was that the museum was only accessible from a staircase at the end of the corridor. And the staircase itself caused them to chatter even more because it was a particularly fine one. It had an elaborate metal balustrade where iron vines and flowers weaved around the supports."

"Trellised?"

"Indeed, like the decoration in many medieval books. If I remember rightly there were a few large and frightening beasts among the vines." His eyes laughed, "Not sufficient to scare aware the tourist. I thought we should erect a few gargoyles but nothing would keep the tourist quiet, their voices echoed down the corridor and bounced about the stone staircase. It was most distracting."

"And the museum was above the library?" I asked.

"Not exactly, but more or less. The first room of the museum, it is called the Museo de Tapices, gave way to other rooms, one after the other and in true Gothic style they all connected back onto each other. Not just the museum, the whole of the sacristy was built like this. The rooms followed on from each other but not always in a direct line. You might, for example need to go from one floor to the next in order to progress through the rooms".

He frowned, slightly. "I knew it well, the passage ways, the back stairwells. But anyone who first arrived found it very confusing. Still," he added, "for someone who is not used to it, a shopping mall or a large department store can be a very frightening maze. It's just a matter of what we're use to. And the design was a fairly standard security device." He grinned, "Security cameras and alarm bells weren't available to the medieval architects. Not that we are talking about a sophisticated labyrinth here. It would only take you a couple of days before you were familiar enough with it. It would have only hindered the casual intruder or the first wave of victorious soldiers hot for the spoils of their battle."

"Perhaps that might be enough, after a couple of days the victor might be calm enough to begin to value the cathedral's treasures and not want to just loot for the sake of it. What about the tourists?" I asked.

"Yes, of course, and there were some amusing stories about them straying away from their guide and getting lost. But they were always meant to be in the company of a beadle. That's what we called them, not guides but beadles! We had two of them, they wore wigs and dressed in long black coats. Very silly. I wonder if they still dress like that. Imagine having to wear a wig, like a lawyer's wig, every day at work. There is an English joke, they were called Beadledom and Beadledee! I don't understand this joke but I can see you like it."

I tried to explain it to him but I eventually gave up. Some things are just not translatable.

He continued. "It wasn't just the invaders that needed to be guarded against, it was fashion itself. The church waxed and waned over the question of piety, over the question of poverty, over interpretation, over dogma, over law. This map you are so interested in reputedly came from the Council of Basel, 1440 or there about, am I right?"

"Yes, no later than 1431. That's when Pope Eugene IV suspended proceedings and transferred a watered down version of the Council to Florence."

"And that is the crux of the issue. It is a perfect example of fashion changing in the Church. The Council of Basel was disbanded because the Pope won the day. There was something like a revolution going on, the bishops wanted to establish authority and override the Pope. They wanted to set up a kind of Magna Carta. Later, in 1460, Pius II issued a decree condemning what he called, how do you translate it?"

"Conciliarism."

"Ah yes. Pius saw it as a deadly poison and forbade under pain of excommunication any appeal to a council that questioned the Pope's authority. The decree was restated by his successors, Sixtus IV and Julius II. They were very wary and concerned about the rise of power of the Councils, of the cardinals, bishops and canons and others in the Church."

Francisco had read well on the topic and he was determined we should talk of it. Perhaps, I thought, we had waited long enough. We talked of the politics of the 15th century Church and he reminded me of the power of the monasteries. Scattered over so much of the Christian world monasteries linked together by brotherhoods were potentially powerful institutions. They could align with kings and conquerors, they could hide objects and harbour heretics, and they could form a chain of safe houses for those travelling on Church or other business. So when the Carthusians in particular spoke out against this destruction of the Council system, of course the Pope felt threatened.

"In such a climate Senora, what do you think might happen to the papers which had been prepared at Basel during the Council? Do you think they would be proudly displayed? Once the Pope had put in place such a cloud of excommunication, which probably meant death, if not torture, do you think any library, any cathedral, any monastery would fly a banner saying they had these papers in their collection?"

He stopped talking as if he knew he had said just enough to intrigue me. Language had become the desideratum, and we were playing a game with each other, over the wine, the stories, the innuendo. Desire in all its forms was lingering like a gargoyle in his library.

And then he spoke again which surprised me. Perhaps he wasn't quite sure I had been lured into his intrigue, perhaps for a moment he simply doubted his own ability to attract. "There is something else you should remember. The Crusades, which virtually ended two hundred years before the time you are interested in, nevertheless, established communication route throughout the Western Church. Those links, partly trade and commerce links, partly road links, partly bonds of brotherhood, continued to be used long after the Crusades had petered out. So it would not be unusual two hundred years later for certain volumes, papers, documents, to find their way from Basel to Saragossa for example, since such connections were a part of the crusader routes. They are far apart, it is true, but

there are times in history, and for some, such a time might well have been at the sudden closure of the Council of Basel, when it was prudent to put some distance between oneself and Rome."

Francisco suddenly switched to Latin which caught me quite unprepared. It was a habit I would become used to. I think he simply found English too difficult to maintain for a long period of time, Latin was more familiar to him and easier than English. I concentrated, but I had missed the first of his sentences. "...or there was another route. The German priest, Nicholas of Cusa, a mathematician, a scholar, an experimental scientist and a philosopher. Did you know he was a scientist?"

I didn't.

"A Renaissance Man. Before he was ordained a priest he attended the Council of Basel and in 1433 published 'De Concordantia Catholica', a treatise advocating the formation and maintenance of the Councils as an authoritative body in the Church. But by 1437 he reversed his position and came out strongly supporting Pope Eugene. He would have made many enemies at the Council of Basel. He was accused of expediency but it didn't harm him. He made a virtue of it. He taught a philosophy where man's search for truth was analogous to trying to convert a square into a circle. Expediency." He said in English.

I thought of the mysteries of the transcendental number \*. But there was something else. Francisco's use of Latin had made the whole conversation take on an air of secretiveness as if he was giving me knowledge only available to the initiate. Were we now, I wondered, in the country of *Sub rosa*?

Francisco continued. "His philosophy taught a particular kind of scepticism which no doubt helped him so radically change his mind on the issue of the Church's authority. And it proved useful; he was made Cardinal of Brixen in Italy.

"But I digress, it was not his piety that the man was known for but rather his scientific experiments, he, for example, discovered and measured the weight of air. Just think of it. A man who makes a virtue out of expedience is remembered for discovering the weight of..." He gestured extravagantly, "Nothing at all!"

"He is not your favourite character in history?" I said in English.

Francisco leant towards me. "Senora, I will forgive him a great deal of human foibles for one thing. He collected a great library." And quite suddenly, as if Francisco's mood had changed he spoke once again in English. "Of particular interest to me was his manuscript collection. He re-discovered twelve lost comedies of the Roman writer Plautus."

This did not warm me to Nicolas of Cusa, I had always thought the Roman playwright Plautus to be overrated, and had not engaged at all with his comedies. "Cusa could have travelled to Spain?" I asked.

"Of course. I have been at great pains to point out to you how he was a cultured man of many interests. There is one other interesting thing about him you should know. He is responsible for a map of Germany. It was found in his library and printed posthumously. It's considered to be the first modern map of Germany. The map includes Denmark, Southern Scandinavia and the Baltic. Sadly for both of us it did not include Spain, so we cannot deduce from this map that he travelled widely in Spain, but what we can deduce is that he was very interested in the science of cartography, and he was a scholar who might well have been interested in the preservation of certain documents." Francisco smiled, pleased

with himself and his story, but mostly I thought, he was pleased with my attention.

"The tapestries," he continued, "arrived at the Cathedral at about this time. So everything is in place at the same time, the first half of the fifteenth century. It's very interesting isn't it, to have so many things all happening together."

He paused now for a few moments and his mood changed a little. He touched the glass as if it held more significance than he was prepared to reveal. He continued. "The tapestries form quite a well known collection. I'm told this, you understand. It's not my field. Apart from the one I have already told you about there was a very famous crucifixion from Flanders, *The Story of the Holy Cross* and an often cited *Esther and Ahasuerus* from France." He poured some more sherry into both of our glasses and with more candour than I had seen in him before he leant forward and placed his hand on mine. I must have looked as I felt, slightly alarmed and yet not repulsed, for he continued to speak in his soft low voice and neither removed his hand nor progressed any further.

"What has captured the imagination of that particular tapestry is the opulence of the feast. It was a great banquet in the house of an important lord. The table was set ready for the feast." His hand on mine felt warm, almost hot. He continued to describe the tapestry. "At the centre of the table was the game, a peacock, dressed and succulent. To the side trumpeters blew their horns..."

"Francisco," I cut across him. My voice was hushed, almost a whisper. "I don't know what to do."

"Senora, you do nothing, absolutely nothing."

His hand tightened around mine and he stood up, leading me toward the small door in the far wall of the library. He opened it onto an antechamber where he must have taken his siestas.

My eyes felt wide open, my breathing erratic, difficult. I wasn't at all sure of what I was doing. Could I really be desiring this man, this old man from a world of libraries and cathedrals and tiny streets and dark red glasses?

He did not speak but with all the confidence of living, all the experience of life, he placed his hands firmly on my bottom and drew me to him. I smelt the rich taste of sherry on his breath. His eyes were fixed onto mine I could feel his hands slip under my skirt and caress my stockinged buttocks. Then, he pushed his hands in between my legs, parting them slightly, and pushing up he put pressure on my labia. In minute movements he withdrew the pressure and then applied it again, and again, and again. I began to rock gently with the movement. And in all of this he did not once take his eyes from mine. My breathing settled down and became long and deep.

I don't know how long we stayed like that; all time seemed to cease, as did everything else about the outside world.

"You are ready for me now." He said, forming the words almost without voice. And I was, quite completely and absolutely ready.

The phone rang. I was not in the mood for Eric but that did not deter him.

"The point is Meridian, there *is* a reason for a conspiracy." He always spoke rapidly but this time he was going a little too fast for me.

"Slow down!" I demanded with a sharpness which was not entirely meant.

"What's the matter?" He paused and then said very slowly, "Are you ill?"

How could I tell him? I felt soft and quiet and I just wanted to be alone to think. Was it melancholy? There was a kind of deep and quiet sadness in me, a sadness which comes from discovering something which is both profound and new, from discovering something which you know is transitory, as transitory as life itself. "No. Sorry. A slight headache." I lied. "Just slow down a bit."

Reluctantly, I did not have the energy to dodge his wishes, I agreed to meet him. He suggested a cafe in the old section of the port where he had to wait for a boat or a mariner or something. He'd been unclear about the reason, or I might have missed his explanation. It didn't worry me. It had been years since I'd been to the port, especially this section and, if I had to meet Eric for a dose of his conspiracy theory, then it might as well be in such a place. At the very least, I thought, I could do with the fresh air.

As I walked along the wharf I noticed a certain distinctive smell - the smell of old ports. I'd quite forgotten it and I breathed in deeply letting it fill my lungs. It's a smell not just of the sea but of people, of diesel and food and washing and stories and, of course, fish. It's a good human smell. It's the smell of yarns and adventure, of long boring days and of make-believe.

The cafe sat on the edge of one of the utility canals where fishing and tugboats lined the wharf. There were no yachts, catamarans or trendy weekenders here. The cafe reflected its clientele. In fact, I thought it a very Eric kind of place - the tea was well stewed, the coffee instant, but the soup was home made, chunky and fresh and smelling delicious. It was served with a very large slice of freshly baked white bread and a wallop of butter on the side of the plate. I could have ordered fish and chips but I'd smelt the soup and opted for that. I also ordered a glass of water, which caused a slight stir, everyone else it seemed, including Eric, order a mug of tanniny tea and ritually piled it with sugar.

"They're famous for their tea," he said, trying to encourage me.

"I've no doubt. " And I told Eric about the time I had boarded an overnight train expecting to find the sleeping berth I'd booked. But on boarding, I was informed my carriage had been derailed and I now had to sit up all night. As compensation, I was offered, with official seriousness, a free cup of Australian Rail tea. That was the last time in my life I drank stewed black sugary tea. Even the smell reminded me of that long uncomfortable night. There is everything romantic about an old fashioned sleeping berth in an overnight train, and absolutely nothing at all romantic about sitting up all night in a seat designed for someone else's body. I haven't risked the trains since.

"So what is this conspiracy?" I asked.

"Well, in order for my theory to work there needed to be a reason for drumming up anti-Italian feeling in America at the time the map was released."

I agreed. The coincidences surrounding the rediscovery of the Vinland Map were too far fetched. It made a lot more sense to see it all as some kind of master plan involving carefully orchestrated moves in England, Europe and America.

"Unless of course," I joked, "the whole thing was a training exercise. You know a multi-national training exercise between MI5, Spanish intelligence and the CIA".

Eric frowned; he didn't like the way I'd throw such wild cards into the pack. He'd never liked it. "Was there anything, anything at all you haven't told me about, anything to do with your father's papers?"

I shook my head. "With the notes you translated you mean?"

"Yes. I'm sure you've overlooked something. Think, Meridian."

I thought back to that day when I had come across the notes written in Greenlandic - the old atlas, the woman at the gate, the uneasiness. Nothing came to mind. "What sort of thing are you looking for?"

"Something American, something about the..."

I broke in. "The Kennedys?"

Eric smiled. "Yes. What was it?"

"Nothing. A newspaper clipping. An old article before J F was president and the assassinations began. About the Kennedy brothers. I guess it was a 'watch this name' kind of article. I'm sorry. I didn't think it had anything to do with the notes."

"Can you remember if the article came from an Australian or overseas newspaper?"

I shook my head. "I'm not sure of the paper. I don't think I looked. I wasn't interested. But I did notice it had been sent to my father by a newspaper-cutting agency. The stamp looked like a government agency and the phone number wasn't Australian, the digits were all wrong. What does it mean?"

"That the Kennedys were involved."

I stared at him in disbelief. Was that unfortunate family going to have to take on more conspiracy theory?

Eric could see my reaction. "The point is this." Eric continued doggedly, "If not the Kennedys then their sort - Irish American money. These fortunes, not unlike most great fortunes, were at times made less than legitimately." He stopped himself for an instant and carefully qualified his rash statement. "I'm going back to early last century and not all of these fortunes came that way, but there were some very dodgy business interests lurking about the place. The Irish connections in gambling, horseracing, and of course liquor, wasn't as publicised as the Mafia's, but it was there all right. The main difference between the Kennedys and the Mafia families who were satisfied with wealth and power, is that old man Joe Kennedy wanted respectability as well. We all know he had his eye on the White House."

"That was the gist of the article. But where are you going with all this?"

"At exactly the time the map was so sensationally released Robert Kennedy, as the Senator for New York, chaired the Select Committee on Improper Activities. Sure, it's not the famous committee, all we ever heard about was the Committee on un-American Activities, but Kennedy's Committee was just as important."

"What was it concerned with," I asked. "Politician's sex lives?"

"If only. Its focus was corruption in the right wing union movement."

Eric was beginning to make some interesting connections and I tried to concentrate a little better. He continued. "Shielded by all the publicity of the un-American Activities Committee Senator Bobby Kennedy was running his own shop prosecuting corrupt right wing union leaders." He had slowed his speech right down and was taking trouble to be lucid, he must have realised I was distracted. "Much of the Mafia activity, protection of one sort or another, had gone into the union movement. At the time, you have to remember, the union movement was about *controlling* the work force so that Family members, or those paying protection, could buy sweetheart labour deals."

Our soup arrived. It was a kind of vegetable minestrone mixture. I gave it some pepper for good measure and Eric, who was one of the few people I knew who ate and actually enjoyed salted fish, liberally sprinkled the salt over his. We buttered our bread and began to eat. It was delicious and I hadn't realised just how hungry I was.

Eric continued. "The old Mafia skills proved useful in keeping the workers in line and eradicating any whistle blowers. It was a lucrative business and industry paid up. After all, the economy was going well, manufacturing was in top gear and nobody wanted labour problems. It was post war boom times when, after so much austerity, people were spending on refrigerators, cars, radios, lawn mowers..."

"The modern woman in her modern kitchen." I pictured the 50's ads - a gleaming white kitchen filled with gadgetry of every kind. "The soup's great!" I added.

Eric nodded, "You should have had the tea as well, the whole package."

"Next time." I said to appease him, but I knew there was unlikely to be a next time. There just wasn't any reason for me to come down to the old port.

Eric continued. "Kennedy's committee, by investigating the union movement officials, was putting pressure on one of the biggest protection industries, probably bigger than the prohibition, that America had ever seen. He was hitting the Mafia or more accurately, large Italian financial interests and their dynasties."

"Has there ever been an Italian president?" I couldn't think of one but I only knew the famous presidents.

"No, and for that matter there is more likely to be a black president before an Italian. The Irish Catholics in the Kennedys won the new money race to respectability."

"And part of the way they climbed the social ladder of respectability was by discrediting the Italian Catholics?" I was beginning to see the point.

"That's the key, one lot had cleaned up their act but the other lot hadn't. In the union movement the Mafia was still using the old methods of sending in a hit man, intimidation, muscle, guns and bribery."

"And the new methods?" I asked.

"Public opinion. If you have a good press you can just about get away with anything."



"So they controlled newspapers?"

"In one way or the other. Owning the press became a powerful weapon. But don't forget the other great weapon. The banks."

"I don't follow you?"

"A bankrupt opponent was as powerless as one who had had a visit from the hit man. The press and financial institutions were the new hit men."

I had rarely seen Eric so colourful, he was enjoying the details of his conspiracy theory and was playing at it, imitating some character out of a gangster movie. It felt a long way from his museum office and his love of archaeology. A long way from the staid Eric I had known since childhood.

"We'll need to look, but I think the date on that newspaper clipping of your father's will match up with the date of the release of the map." Eric went on, "By itself, the map couldn't sway public opinion, it's just that it proved to be one more factor in what was becoming an ever increasing list. The rise of the Kennedy clan and the fall from grace of the Italians who, incidentally, were the enemy during the war."

"The Irish were hardly pro the Allies." I pointed out.

"Yes, funny how nothing is ever made of that."

"Public opinion." I suggested, and finished off the last of my soup by wiping the sides of the bowl with some bread.

Eric agreed. "Releasing the map on the eve of Columbus Day maximised its effects, the Italian community could no longer claim one of their nationals discovered America." Eric asked if I wanted another bowl of soup, he was still eating his and I had finished off every drop of mine. It was tempting but I thought better of it.

Eric continued, "Just look at the intensity and emotions in the Italian community's defence of Columbus. It bore all the hallmarks of religious passion."

We talked for a time about the Italian-American judge, Michael Musmanno, whose books and articles defending Columbus were almost legendary in their passion. "He was chair of the Columbus Society, did you know?"

Eric didn't, but he recalled seeing the man. "When we were in Newfoundland, on the dig, Musmanno made a real nuisance of himself. He'd send up spurious reporters, I guess from the Columbus Society, to try to find out about the dig. We were all warned to avoid reporters or over curious outsiders. I saw him once; he was with a group of his people picketing a conference. He was possessed. Perhaps," Eric added, "he was almost as possessed as we were. He said something I'll probably never forget, he said the human mind couldn't handle a contradiction."

"That's a very narrow view."

"Yes. He wanted the world to be black and white. A truth was a truth, something mathematical and handed down by God. For him Columbus discovering America was such a truth." Eric had finished his soup and looked up at me. "What do you think causes that kind of need for certainty?"

"Some kind of fear, I guess." I was surprised by Eric's question. Had I over all the years sold him short, thinking him afraid of the emotional self? Was I the one who had always kept our friendship on an intellectual rather than emotional level? I made an effort to engage with Eric. "A fear of transcendentalism?"

He nodded, "The Shank's principle. You spend your life calculating \*, trying to pin down the mysteries of the circle only to have someone else discover you made a mistake in your calculations. The transcendental can't be pinned down, can't be defined. That, not his calculation error, was Shank's real mistake."

"How many places did he get to?" I asked.

"Seven hundred odd. Just think of it. He calculated that many decimal places until the number resolved. But he was wrong. In an early calculation, he made a simple human error. He thought he travelled to the edge of the circle's mystery but he hadn't."

Eric took from his satchel a library printout listing all the newspaper articles associated with the release of the map. It was pages in length and the newspapers were prestigious ones: The New York Times, front page; the New York Review of Books; the New York Financial Review; the New Yorker.... New York. Yes, Robert Kennedy, the Senator from New York. I thought of the amount of publicity the Vinland Map had received. It was just too good a job for any university public relations unit, they were universally hopeless. Most of them would be lucky to get the release of a cure for cancer on the back few pages of a weekly give-away.

At this moment we were interrupted by a slimly built man, probably a seaman if the smell of fish was anything to go by. He spoke to Eric in a hoarse whisper and then handed him a parcel, wrapped in newspaper and tied up with a piece of fraying twine. Eric didn't introduce me to the man who appeared nervous and worried by my presence. I put my nose into the list of newspaper articles and left the two to conduct whatever business there was between them. The man left as quickly as he had arrived and Eric put the parcel into his briefcase. He winked at me, "Something I need for the museum," he said, and I knew from his expression he would say no more about the parcel.

Eric and I finished our lunch and decided to walk along the wharf. It was slightly overcast and a little too windy for me. I buttoned up my coat; glad I'd remembered to bring it. The seagulls, unperturbed by the wind, squawked at us, scavenging food. We had none to give them.

"But Eric," I continued our conversation, "even if the map's rediscovery was engineered by some international conspiracy carefully placing all the players in the right spot at the right time, none of it helps the authenticity debate. It wouldn't matter to a conspirator if the map was genuine or not."

"Exactly, but it would help. They'd expect to have the map scrutinised by experts."

"So if it's a fake it has to be a clever fake."

Eric nodded. "One made by an expert in old maps, someone," Eric took his time to finish his sentence, "someone like your father."

"Stop it!" I wasn't sure why, but Eric's continued suggestion of my father's involvement in all of this annoyed me.

"Okay! Okay!" He deflected my annoyance. "One thing that does trouble me is the way the experts at the British Museum, Skelton and his lot, changed their minds. When the map was first presented to them, when Davis sent it over for its first examination, they declined to give it the Okay. But later, when Yale called them in they were only too ready to pronounced the map a genuine article."

"Do you think they were bought?"

"I'm not sure. It's possible. I can't see Skelton's crew accepting an ordinary bribe, but maybe they might have been convinced by some idea of loyalty to their country."

"For Queen and empire!" I laughed.

"Let's not get too carried away. You can only buy so many people. A map purporting to be the first map of America will eventually undergo some independent examination."

"Or," I thought out loud, "some examination from the opposite camp. The Cold War was alive and hot at the time."

"Mmm." Eric was looking at a tug that was heading out to the main wharf, even in the dirty canal water its wash generated quite a beautiful white spray pattern. "If it was rediscovered to drum up anti-Italian feeling then it really didn't matter if it was a forgery or genuine as long as it could hold out for say two or three years as the real thing."

I agreed. My own library searches had found a number of articles in scientific journals debating the various outcomes of scientific tests on the map. Tests had been carried out on the vellum, the ink, and the mapmakers initial guiding lines under the ink, but none of it had been conclusive. For every finding there was a counter claim. One laboratory's conclusions were quickly refuted by another. I found it a tiresome set of articles dealing with ink particles and molecular structures and somehow I wasn't surprised by its inconclusiveness.

I had rarely found scientific evidence of much value in historical cartography. I wasn't sure why, perhaps our questions were too precise for science which, in spite of its publicity, is just not a precise discipline. Science deals in approximations and statistically likely results. The real world of time and substance defeats it. It was just like Eric's \*, a simple enough idea, the number always derived by dividing the diameter of any circle into that circle's circumference. And yet it eludes science still. We can use our mathematical calculations for the business of a square and know we will generate precise results. But the circle? That's another matter. Our calculations are always, even slightly, inaccurate. Only the mandala can turn the square into the circle, the circle into the square.

Suddenly a flash of purple caught the edge of my eye and I turned sharply. I thought it was the old woman's hat. But it had gone, as quickly as it had appeared. I felt uneasy and I realised the old woman's chant was sitting at the back of my thoughts, troubling me.

For a time, Eric and I walked in silence until we had reached the end of the wharf and he turned to me. "Tell me your stories? Tell me about the far-fetched cases in the discovery of maps? There has to be others. Tell me the stories that make the Vinland Map look straight forward, normal. Isn't there a story about a map that turned up in a shop?"

"A butcher's shop. Yes, the Cantino Map." Eric was right. He needed to place the Vinland Map into its own history. When we isolate something, it can seem a lot more fantastic than when it sits in its natural surroundings. How marvellous the igloo looks, how ordinary and commonplace it is to the Inuit people. How strange the old worshipping of trees and yet how ordinary to bring one into the house and adorn it with garish trinkets at Christmas time.

I told Eric some of the more fantastic stories in the history of maps.

"The butcher," I began, "was using the map as a screen. He claims to have found it and thought it a curio, he had no idea of its value. It's quite a wonderful story, almost as good as the Vinland Map. But the story goes back much further than the discovery in the butcher's shop. It was the beginning of the 16th century, a time when maps were not freely available and the possession of a reliable one of the known world meant a great deal of money to merchants and governments alike. I guess they were as much contraband as drugs are today."

I thought of the seaman who came up to Eric in the cafe, his nervousness, his hoarse whisper and Eric's delight at the parcel. I knew Eric well enough to know he wasn't dealing in drugs, but I was also quite sure that what he carried in his briefcase, what was wrapped so clumsily in newspaper and twine, was both of great value to him and not quite legitimately gained.

"Imagine," I suggested to Eric, "that we had just been sitting in a tea house in medieval Portugal, one on the docks perhaps. Up comes an old seaman, he's just got off a ship, he'd been sailing with Diaz. You've arranged to meet him and he comes over, a bit embarrassed that you're not alone. He hands you a parcel; you don't open it but quickly hide it under your cloak. You hurry away, or maybe not. Maybe you stroll up and down the wharf talking to a friend, just in case the King's men are watching you."

Eric blushed. "That's not how it is..."

I laughed, "I'm teasing you, but you get my drift. In the parcel I'm talking about is a copy of Diaz's charts. Maybe not all of them, that would be asking too much, but enough, enough to guess at some of the other sections. You take it back to your cartographers and they work through the weeks, putting together the pieces. You've got other spies out working for you as well, hanging about the popular drinking places, catching gossip and snippets of stories from drunken sailors. All of this is collated. As the map takes shape the spies are given specific tasks, to find out about what happened after the ship left the sight of land, or rounded a particular cape. It's a jigsaw of course and a lot of chance and cunning is involved but at the end you have a map of..."

Eric interrupted me. "It's a paleochestes bone, well I hope it is." He explained, feeling obviously uncomfortable.

I gave him a quick hug. "Of course it is..."

He shifted from one foot to the other, obviously still a little uncomfortable. I continued, feeling that perhaps I had taken my tease a little too far. "The possession of a map or chart meant the possession of very valuable knowledge. Diaz and the period of great Portuguese navigation is a case in point. Access to the map room of Prince Henry the Navigator was almost impossible to any but the chosen. Those cartographers, scribes and librarians, at a cost of death, were bound to secrecy. In many ways, Prince Henry's maps were of more value than his jewels. The map room was the most secret, most guarded part in his kingdom. Well," I hesitated, "his compass was surrounded by a fort. But that's another story."

I continued. "Imagine the intrigue, the espionage, the secret dealing and bartering that must have taken place. It's the stuff of boys' adventures and buccaneering movies!"

Eric agreed but suggested it was probably not all together unlike the current industrial espionage or computer hacking so often talked about.

I told him the story of the Cantino Map. "Alberto Cantino was an Italian in the employment of the Duke of Modena, Erole d'Este. The Duke could see the enormous trade advantages in owning a map of the known world, and he financed his employee in a daring and fantastic adventure. Cantino went to Portugal, where in Lisbon he disguised himself as a horse-dealer and as such made his way untroubled about the city. He eventually came across, probably in some alehouse, one of the Portuguese Map Room cartographers who, for whatever reason, was prepared to copy a map for Cantino. None of this happened overnight. Cantino would have had to stalk his man, possibly blackmail was involved. We don't know, the cartographer was never caught and remained anonymous. It must have been enormously risky, so the stakes, whatever they were, were high."

"I guess everyone had a price."

"Yes, it's interesting but it's probably true. Especially if we think of other incentives besides money." I knew I too had a soft underbelly. If someone threatened the children in my life, I'd commit any number of crimes to protect them. I continued with the story. "The cartographer copied the official *mappa mundi*, the Padraõ, which was the standard map of the world. It was the map that all new information and discoveries were added to. It was of course constantly changing and what was copied was not the most up-to-date version." I wondered if that eased the conscience of the cartographer, made his crime a little easier to commit, a little easier to live with.

"It was no mean feat to smuggle out the map as the copy was done on parchment, a bulky and noisy material, and the security was meant to be the best in Europe. There must have been quite a bit of money used in bribes. It's my guess that at least one of the guards must have been in on the deal. No doubt, they all appeased their consciences by knowing they were only copying the standard map and were not giving away anything too new or precious. But, as I've pointed out, even this standard map was still closely guarded secret information.

"Cantino put his name to the map and in haste and secrecy it was sent to the Duke. It arrived at Modena in 1502."

"And the butcher?" Eric asked.

"For three hundred years or so the map had an uneventful life and stayed in the library of the successive Dukes. Obviously over time it became a curio and just part of the library's collection. But in 1859, in the middle of the Modena riots it disappeared. Most thought it had gone in one of the fires, but quite miraculously it re-emerged in the back section of a Modena butcher's shop nine years later."

"Some souvenir."

"Quite. But I don't know that it was found so innocently as the story would have us believe. After nine years the butcher or his mates probably thought they could claim to have discovered it and reap some kind of reward. I mean, in the middle of the 19th century what kind of person is likely to have both been in the back of a butcher's shop and been able to recognise the map?"

"Unless it was a priest or a doctor?"

I agreed, they were about the only professions which travelled equally across libraries and butcher's shops. Whether we like it or not, most of us stay well within our cultural and class boundaries.

"There's another map at about the same time which is also quite interesting, although its story is less romantic." I told Eric of the Pesaro Map, the first map to use the term *Mundus Nova*, the New World, and how in compiling the new world it drew on almost all the known evidence about America which was available in Europe before 1510. The map was interesting because it combined information from the lost drawings of John Cabot and the charts of the Portuguese navigators, Gaspar, Corte-Real and Fernandes. All of this knowledge the Pesaro Map added to the conventional maps of the time. It was probably the very map Cantino wanted, but not the one he got. It's interesting to speculate that Cantino might have had a hand in the theft of this map as well, but that's pure speculation."

"It's at the right time, did it turn up in Italy?" Eric asked.

"Yes, it's named after the Italian town where it was re-discovered by a marchese, Santinelli. Still," I looked at Eric, "we can't get too carried away with these romantic speculations. It wasn't re-discovered until the late 19th century. The first time the map was displayed was in 1881 at an international Geographical Congress. Like the Vinland Map there is almost 500 years missing in its history. Of course various efforts were made to establish its provenance but, like our map, it has also defeated the historians."

"Does it have the same cloud of forgery hanging over it?"

"No, probably because less is at stake. If the Vinland Map hadn't pre-dated Columbus there wouldn't have been anything like the fuss."

I was getting a little chilled and so we made our way to a section which looked as if it was out of the wind.

"But all of this," I continued, "is child's play when compared to the really big story of medieval espionage." I had consciously kept the best story until last. "A sensational scandal broke out just after Diaz had returned from navigating the Cape of Good Hope. At the time, 1488 to be precise, King John was on the throne of Portugal and his security in the Map Room was as good as any of his predecessors. Diaz knew his charts were extremely valuable both to him and to the King."

"He was paid well?" Eric asked.

"More than that. No King was going to finance further journeys if the captain couldn't keep his information secret. Diaz took particular care no idle seaman copied them on his voyage. They were locked securely away in his cabin and on arriving back to Lisbon, in December, he personally, and under guard, took his charts immediately to the Map Room. Imagine how valuable Diaz's new charts were. For the first time he had rounded the Cape of Good Hope, he carried the route to the Indian Ocean."

We found a bench out of the wind and sat down. The cafe was close at hand but neither of us felt like going back into it. Eric joked with me that I might need a cup of tea but I ignored him. I continued "Everything should have been secure but within months, in 1489, a map was produced in Italy, the Martellus map, which contained not only the details of Diaz exploration but his full

nomenclature as well. Indeed, even today, the Martellus Map is the best description of the Diaz journey; a far fuller map than anything produced by King John's cartographers. The Portuguese security had been broken.

"It caused a sensation in all the courts across Europe. Breaking the security of the Map Room was a bit like robbing the Reserve Bank's vaults. Some places just define security. If they tumble everything else seems to, nothing is safe."

"So how was it done?"

"Paper. The invention of paper." I explained. "The problem for the thief was of course the size of the maps. Originally, if an illicit copy was being made of a map the scribe would copy sections of the map on small pieces of parchment and later paste them together. But parchment is noisy and cumbersome and the guards were on the look out for this. The invention of paper made life a lot easier. Paper, you see wasn't nearly as noisy. Certainly, the copier had to be a well-known and trusted member of the map room's staff even to get access to the maps. But once that was achieved, the invention of paper made it a lot easier for sections to be copied hurriedly and hidden in the thief's clothing. Over a couple of months an entire map could be copied."

"Was it money or politics?" Eric asked.

"Perhaps a little of both. Christopher Columbus left Lisbon in 1485 and went to Spain to try his luck finding patronage in the Spanish Court. His brother, Bartholomew, an expert cartographer, stayed in Lisbon working in the Map Room. He was making a large map of the world based on existing knowledge and the new charts. It was an official project and he was in and out of the place, and of course, had access to all the newly arrived charts. At the beginning of 1489, just after Diaz had returned to Lisbon with his charts of the African coast, Christopher Columbus fell into very hard times. He called on his brother for help. Both men, you must remember, knew the value of maps."

"And how to draw them." Eric added.

I nodded. "Bartholomew Columbus knew only too well the value of his work and the kind of money he could raise if he copied the secret maps and charts of the Map Room. He set to work using paper which was quieter than parchment. That was the genius of the man, the quietness of the paper. And because he knew what he was doing, he didn't need to make spotless copies. Later in Spain, with his brother Christopher, he could draw the charts again, this time elaborately and on parchment. He copied and sold various secret charts in this fashion and both he and his brother recovered from debt."

"And the Martellus Map?" Eric asked.

"Yes, his greatest achievement. Bartholomew Columbus simply pasted together the paper copies he'd made in the Map Room. All Martellus did was draw a border around the edge and lend the map his name. Martellus, an Italian cartographer was little more than a front man. He was a minor cartographer known more for his decoration and painting than for his cartography. His only other contribution to mapmaking that we know of, is a very beautiful folio of island maps. Martellus was commissioned to produce the maps not because he had any great skill as a cartographer but *because* he was so skilled at the decorative script fashionable in Italy at the time. What he produced of course was a medieval coffee-table book. His island folio was about decoration and beauty, not seafaring maps of the world. The folio is a far cry from the marvels and precision of the Martellus Map, arguably one of the greatest maps of the world drawn in that century."

Eric leant back. He'd enjoyed my story. "Those Columbus brothers had a lot to answer for."

"Maybe more than you think. What is really interesting for us, is that the Martellus Map, that is, the original one traced onto sheets of paper and then glued together, is held in the Yale University Map Library. It was anonymously donated in 1963."

"And there was an anonymous donor who purchased the Vinland Map from Witten and donated it to the same library, to the Yale University Map Room." Eric let out a low slow whistle. "Amazing how it all fits together, like bones of a prehistoric animal, bit by bit the whole paleochestes takes shape."

All the talk of forgeries had brought me back to my father's copy of the Vinland Map. Why had he kept a facsimile which didn't include the wormholes? Was it that my father wanted to view the map as it was first made? Neither Eric could make anything of it. "The point is Eric, it's on good vellum. Such a curio you think he'd have drawn on something less precious."

The sun was getting low and the activities of the wharf had changed making ready for the night. Boats were being secured and the sky, now grey, looked menacing. Another tug had pulled up just by our bench and was shutting down its engine. We stood up and made our way slowly towards the car park. I was glad to make my way to the warmth of my car.

## 12

Gabbett had made a time to see me. He had sounded cautious on the phone and had asked me not to tell Crete. The secrecy made me feel awkward.

"I'm worried, Meridian. She's drinking too much and..."

"The other night was my fault."

"No, at home. Wherever. It's not just that night." He pushed his coffee cup away. "There wouldn't be a week without her having a hangover, having to spend the day in bed."

I had no idea. I reached out and touched his hands. "Is there something you want me to do, talk to her?"

"I'm not sure. I feel bad about talking to you behind her back."

So did I and I was glad Gabbett mentioned it. The waitress came and removed our cups, wiping the table as she chatted away to us about nothing. When she left I dropped my voice and said "Gabbett there are things in her life that frighten me. You need to talk to her."

He took his time before he spoke and when he did, he sounded nervous, apprehensive. "I think you better tell me."

"I don't know much. She keeps lots to herself and just every now and again, there's something. I don't have a clear picture."



"Just what you know - anything."

I went to the counter and ordered a couple of clarets, a good strong earthy wine. If I was to tell him anything of what I knew we both needed the wine.

"She told me a story once, I've never forgotten it." I took a gulp of the wine. "It was when she was with her last husband, the violent one. They'd had a fight and he'd bashed her, ripped her clothes off her, and in a rage stormed out of the house. She came to and found herself sitting in the dark, in the far side of her bedroom. Probably she'd passed out or been knocked unconscious..." The story was hard to tell, and it was hard to listen to. We both needed to take our time over it.

I continued. "She came to, and as I said, she was sitting on her bedroom floor, all bunched up like a child, her clothes torn and hanging loose. It was dark now and she saw a light coming down the hall towards her. It shone into the bedroom. It looked like an eye, a single bright eye at the door of her bedroom. It was a torch of course, held by a policeman. By his side was a woman police officer. They heard Crete and turned on the light. They were kind enough to her, got her clothes, to a doctor, made her a cup of tea, that sort of thing. But she told me, and this is what really frightened me. She told me the worst was not the beating he'd given her, the bruises or the ringing in her ears, the torn clothes or the soreness in her shoulder. The worst was the fact that two strangers had just been able to walk into her house and find her like that."

I looked at Gabbett. "She said, *That's what being a victim really is, forgiving him for bashing you but not forgiving him for letting strangers into your world.*" As I spoke those words I could picture her, hear her voice, see her resolve. I could hear her laugh about it, make light of it, as if the past was another place and she could escape it by living in the here-and-now.

"Can you handle *that*, Gabbett?"

He didn't know.

We talked for a little longer and then parted. I agreed not to tell Crete of our conversation although I did say I'd tell her we had coffee. I wasn't prepared to lie to her about Gabbett. Once again, I had warmed to him. I like his concern for her and his own doubt. Perhaps, I thought, this time Crete had found someone worth loving.

\* \* \*

Francisco was, as usual, in his library. As I entered he rose and stepped towards me, holding out his hands. Once the door had closed he kissed me with affection. "You have been a few weeks, I thought I might have frightened you." It was a question rather than a statement.

I shook my head. But yes, I was a little afraid. I needed time to think. The space between us had narrowed and I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted.

I had brought with me my father's facsimile of the Vinland Map. "It's the one I told you about, it has no wormholes."

He was pleased that I'd eventually brought it to show him. Earlier I had brought my own copy but he'd been disinterested and asked again and again if I had another, one on vellum.

He cleared a surface on the smaller of the desks. There was an awkward silence between us and I unfolded the vellum, the noise of it seemed louder than usual.

"Ah yes." He said almost to himself, and he handed me a pair of white cotton gloves. I was immediately reminded of my father's ritual and must have looked curious because he added, "A habit, do indulge me Senora."

He seemed pleased with the copy and he bent over it, tracing some of the lines of the map with his gloved fingers. Breaking the awkwardness, I stood close to him, as close as an intimate would stand, and he looked up and smiled at me. Then, as if my closeness was the most natural thing in the world, he gave his attention back to the map. I looked at his hands; his fingers trace over the map as if the map was Braille, as if by touch he could re-associate himself with something familiar.

"It's such an interesting pastiche. No wonder it fascinates you, it has fascinated people for a long time. Can we take it for the time being that this is not a forgery?"

"Of course."

He smiled at me. "Good. Now look here," his hand moved to the area east of mainland Asia. "These islands, information about them must have come from the Mongol Empire. It must have come all the way to Basel." He looked up at me and then down at the map. "What I see here is the excitement of the Council, I see the excitement and intrigue that must have invaded Basel. Can you imagine what a great Church Council would have been like? Clerics, and monks, and deputations from heads of state, princes and marquise and scholars who had come from the far parts of the earth. Ideas from all over the known world. And from the past, from the Greeks and Romans. Translations, music, spices. Imagine the streets and corridors, the different dress, the accents, the colours. The exchange and sale of information, traded in the markets like any other commodity. And someone had come with information about the far reaches of the Mongol Empire. It's all here." He tapped the map. "They knew about the islands of Japan. Look what our cartographer called this sea, the Great Sea of the Tartars. And then the legend," he translated as he read, 'the Tartars affirm beyond doubt that a new land is situated in the outermost parts of the world. Beyond this land is only ocean.' So here, quite literally, was the edge of the world."

His voice was more animated than I had heard before. "And here, look at the medieval confusion over Prester John, placing this little outpost of Christianity, or at least something very like Christianity, in Africa. But you know," his attention was caught by the other side of the map, "I find the details in the Atlantic the most interesting."

He took off his glasses and cleaned them. "The Council of Basel must have had a delegation from the North, perhaps from Iceland. The cartographer must have had access to the Old Norse sagas. It's quite fascinating isn't it, how these maps evolved. How sometimes charts were copied and other times stories were drawn. Yes, stories shaped whole landmasses. The cartographer traced not science but the human imagination. And it's all here Senora, all of the talk and the activity of Basel."

I enjoyed his absolute delight and wondered now at why I had waited so long to bring this map to him. Was it something about the vellum, I wondered which made the map more real to him than those carefully constructed images in my books.

His attention was still caught by the map's depiction of the Atlantic. "It's interesting isn't it, how untidy the map is here. Compare the Atlantic to the tidiness of the islands of Japan and the Great Tartar Sea."

The islands to the east almost completed the curve of the European-Asian landmass, but the Atlantic islands were scattered about almost randomly in the sea. It was as if the Atlantic Ocean closely resembled the actual world, but the Tartar Sea islands were drawn to provide balance. Francisco was right to point out the oddity of the Atlantic, it would have been a far more usual practice if the islands had been placed in the ocean forming some kind of shape or pattern, or perhaps in a way which offered some kind of counter balance to the whole design.

It was not, I knew, the usual methods of a medieval cartographer, who drew their *mappa mundi* as much to reflecting the divine order and balance, the heavenly design of things, as to chart any navigational routes.

"That untidiness" Francisco continued, "tells us a great deal. Either a chart was being copied or those islands, the Atlantic section, were added to the map at another time."

"Do you agree with that?"

"Mmm, it is a theory." He hesitated trying to make up his mind. "No, not at all Senora, maps were always drawn with the centre of the world in the centre of the page. If the islands of the Atlantic were not intended on the map then the whole of Europe would have been placed to the left. The central axis would have been drawn somewhere through Asia."

Looking at the map, I suggested the Holy Lands as an alternative central position.

Francisco agreed. "The Holy Lands would be an acceptable centre, after all, the Crusades were now part of the Church's identity, saving Jerusalem and the Holy Lands had become an important aspect of life and faith. But look, it's not the centre, mid Mediterranean is. No, the Atlantic islands were part of the original map."

He let his body lean a little against mine, and said very quietly, "Would you like a little wine Senora?"

I nodded. He didn't move and I was glad, I like the feel of him so close, the gentlest of pressure against me. With Francisco everything was about suggestion, everything was engineered to heighten desire.

Once again, he drew my attention back to the map. "It's very interesting, these islands." I wondered if he was talking to himself or to me. "They weren't added later, they are too messy to be drawn from stories so they must have been copied from a chart. But which chart? The Norse were always thought to use stories rather than charts to navigate their way over the oceans, and I can't think who else would have navigated the Atlantic but the Norse? It's a mystery Senora."

"The Arabs?" I suggested knowing almost nothing of their culture.

He shook his head and smiled. "The Arabs got sea sick in the Mediterranean!"

"They still invaded Spain."

"That they did Senora, they were fast on land. Such wonderful horses!" His attention at last moved away from the map and I felt him lean just slightly more against me. "Let us have that glass of wine together." And this time he moved away to pour the familiar sherry. I took a deep breath of air sucking in the space. I knew I wasn't thinking too clearly and there was something important nagging at me. In all of Francisco's conversation, in the way he read the legends, in the manner his hands moved over the map, he was showing me it was not the first time he had seen this map. Could he have seen the original in the collection at Saragossa?

He spoke as he brought the sherries over. "This map, you do realise Senora, was not a work for God. It was a utilitarian copy, made perhaps in a hurry. The scribe was a little bit amateurish." He pointed to various mistakes that had been made in the Latin including in one case a correction. "The mistakes are more in the European section of the map. One would have thought that this monk at Basel was more familiar with the European names. Look how the 'r' was left out of Prussia."

I stared at the map and the aroma from the sherry began to fill the air. "Could it, " I wondered, "perhaps just be the cartoon of a map? Maybe a copy for the black market?" I was remembering the fantastic stories of the Portuguese Map Room.

"Yes, it is a very naked document." He took the sherry glass to his mouth and let a few drops sit momentarily on his lips until he moved them together, enjoying the taste.

I smiled. "The map." I said.

"Of course. And, you are probably right. I think it might have been hurriedly finished. That would certainly account for the mistakes."

He changed the subject. "So, have you finished your translation of the *Tartar Relations*?"

I nodded. "It sheds a lot of light on the names and legends of Chingis Khan's empire, most of which is now Russia, China and India. The bulk of the text tells the story of how Chingis divided his army into three to conquer the entire known world. He took one army to march against the people of the Caspian Mountains, a second army was sent towards India and the other, the third great army under the command of his son, Jochi, marched on the West.

"There were some really amazing stories about Chingis' adventures. In one story, as Chingis and his army approached the Caspian Mountains their spears and arrows began to tremble and move about in their sheaths, the horses shied and whinnied. Nervous, the army marched on, alert and watching for some strange enemy. As they came closer to the mountains, everything that was made of metal, the arrows, swords, and spears moved about so much that they made a terrible noise. Then quite unnaturally, on their own propulsion, they flew from their sheaths into the air and rushed towards the mountain. The braces, stirrups, and bites from the horse harness and bridles, the shields, helmets and all the metal the army carried, made off in a terrible and frightening racket. The heavier pieces of metal, such as the helmets and shields, trundled along the ground kicking up a cloud of dust while the other lighter object flew through the air. Chingis and his army fled in terror leaving the people of the Caspian Mountains unconquered.

"Another time, when they were in the north the army came across a land with paths and footprints and all sorts of sign of humans but they couldn't find anyone about. They made camp and waited. The Tartars, who were sun and moon

worshippers rose early, as was their custom, to give homage to their sun god, but as the sun rose it caused the most terrible and loud noise, ripping itself from the night. The men fell to the ground crying out and covering their heads. Some found shelter in caves, but many died of the terrible noise. Chingis marched his remaining army away from that place, leaving the people, who lived underground, to their own inhospitable country.

"There are lots of these marvellous stories but what fascinates me is the story told by Jochi when he and his army returned. He told of a place he called Unipedland, a place of one legged, one armed men who could out-run the fastest Tartar horses and out-shoot their best archers. So impressed was Jochi that he left these people to their own devices and didn't try to conquer them. Just like the unipeds in the Norse stories of Vinland, both were fast of foot, accurate with the bow and arrow, and both were left unconquered.

"What I find quite extraordinary is that these two completely different sets of people, the Norse and the Tartars, both had stories of a tribe of one legged creatures." What is it, I thought, about the human mind, that creates these images, these same symbols? How is it that our dreaming invents a one legged creature who is faster than our horses, faster than our fastest runner?

And what of the other mythical creatures? Are mermaids and snowmen, are dragons and bunyips, are unicorns just part of the human daydream, part of the human imagination? How could these two accounts, separated by the divide of East and West, by the divide of land and sea, possibly come up with the same creatures possessing the same unlikely attributes? How could it be, I wondered, that one tribe of unipeds lived on Vinland and the other somewhere in Eastern Europe.

I told Francisco of my father's stories of unipeds, of the unipeds in the Norse sagas.

"What was it your father used to say about unipeds?"

"I'm chasing the uniped.' It was a family joke, it meant something like chasing dreams or doing something silly or impossible."

"How I would like to have known him better."

"Yes, me too." I thought of my father and the fun we had with unipeds. And I let my mind play with his memory until from somewhere, some part of listening that had slipped and needed time to penetrate my mind, Francisco's words echoed around and around in my head: *How I would liked to have known him better*. I repeated them aloud. Francisco sat quietly and said nothing. He had, after all, said quite enough in that simple sentence.

I left the map and went to sit in the chair next to his.

"You knew him?"

He shook his head. "No, I wouldn't say that. I met him. Perhaps. He was the same, the historian of maps?"

"Yes. He had his own Chair..."

"Then it was he. I thought perhaps it must have been."

I wanted to shake Francisco; I wanted him to tell me everything, ever single piece of information, every moment of their meeting. "But where? When?" Was

all I could manage.

"He came to the library, just for a short visit, a couple of days. That's if I remember correctly, and I have been going through my diary." Francisco digressed to explain. "When I realised there might be a connection, I thought you would want to know as much as I could remember..."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, it was an embassy who arranged the visit. I thought it odd at the time because it wasn't the Australian embassy and he was an Australian professor. Mind you, relations between the two countries have not always been so friendly."

"Which embassy?" It didn't make sense. My father didn't work for other governments.

"The American, the US embassy. I recall that distinctly as there was a fuss, some importance was given to such a request. I felt at the time it was a lot of nonsense. He could have written to me from his own university and I would have given him the same courtesy and attention."

But why? Why the American embassy? "When was this?"

"After the war. A little after it, we had managed to clean up the mess, already we had rebuilt the east nave and if I recall correctly we were still waiting for the glass window to be repaired. So it must have been..." He paused, "yes, before the theft, of course it was before the theft. I'd say late in 1955, perhaps 1956. Does it matter?"

"You know it does!" Witten had been sold the map in 1957. "What did my father come to see?"

Francisco spoke very softly. "You know, I cannot tell you that. Perhaps I have told you too much already. The library's collection is..."

"*Sub rosa*."

"Exactly." He smiled, "you remember?"

"The rose, the red rose? Of course."

"Leave it now, Meridian. You have brought this intriguing map to show me. It is enough for an old man." It was the first time I recalled him calling me by my name. "Come and tell me of your week. Let us talk of the living, the landscape of men and women."

I looked out of the window. Outside the sun was drawing long, long shadows on the grass. I knew soon it would be time for me to leave him. For some unspoken reason I had never stayed after sunset.

Francisco poured fresh sherries and began to tell me his own story. He used Latin.

## The Eighth Mandala - Orientation

*When I was a young man, in the library, I became fascinated by a particular manuscript. It was not unlike your fascination with this map.*

*Every piece of time I could spare, and some I couldn't, I would spend on the manuscript. I inspected every aspect of it. I knew the watermarks of the vellum, the batch of vellum it had come from, the parcheminerie, the scriptorium, the ink pigments, the nature of the script, the corrections, the nature of the binding, the leather and stitching used, the board, the... He laughed at his own memories of his obsession.*

*Even, as you, the wormholes and the water damage, the this and the that. There was nothing I didn't know about this manuscript. I had translated the text into three languages, and I had compiled a list of all the illuminations and borders. I was an expert!*

*One day my superior came into see what I was working on. He picked up the manuscript and commented on how beautiful it was. He drew my attention to an illumination of little importance; it was just a little bit of border down the side of one page. There he pointed to a very tiny white flower that, in spite of all of my scrutiny, I had not noticed or paid any attention to. I was after all an historian of such manuscripts. I wanted to uncover all the manuscript could tell me of its history, of the various processes used to make it, of the way it had been housed and used and how it had come to the library. I wanted to know how difficult it was to keep the quality of vellum; to find the exact pigment; of the events surrounding its making; of the life of the scribe. But here was my superior drawing my attention to a tiny insignificant white flower!*

*My superior, an old man, kept talking about the beauty of the flower, and how I was blessed and privileged to have been directed by God towards such a mission - to work on a manuscript of so great a beauty. He knelt and asked me to pray with him. I gave chorus to his prayers as was the tradition and then he left me feeling somewhat bemused by this tiny white flower. He had not wanted to know anything of my findings, of the life of the scribe, the herd the vellum had come from, the war with France at the time. None of it.*

*I sat for some time staring at the illuminated border that had so caught his attention. He had been so impressed with this tiny white flower and the beauty of its depiction.*

*Francisco stopped talking and looked, not at me, but into some private place, perhaps he could see the manuscript, feel the library and his desk and the gentle afternoon light coming through the cathedral library's windows. I had missed it. Completely missed it. I needed that old man's myopic eyes to see not just the*

*flower, but the whole manuscript. All I had been looking at were facts and figures, pieces of vellum, pigments of ink, stitches of binding. I had forgotten in my earnestness that I was examining a manuscript, a total thing, a book, a book of prayer and thanksgiving.*

*I had forgotten its wholeness, its beauty.*

*He paused for a moment. It was the beauty which mattered, which really mattered, because that was what the manuscript gave to the world. How the document came into being and all the other stories were unimportant. They were like a mosquito buzzing around my ear. I had become completely distracted by the mosquito and I could no longer hear the great symphony.*

I asked him if he thought I was so distracted.

*I don't know. That's for you to decide. I know that after my superior left I put away that manuscript and I only took it out one more time. That was the day I left the library for the last time. I took out the manuscript to remind myself of the beauty of that tiny white flower.*

He paused and leant towards me, resuming English. "And now let me enjoy your beauty as well."

He ran his fingers over the inside of my arm, pushing up my shirtsleeve. His voice was little more than a whisper. "Your skin is so pale, so white. I would like to see you naked, standing naked, from behind. Would you take your clothes off for me? Would you show me your beauty?"

There in the library, in the dying afternoon light and the rows of books I slowly took off my clothes for him. I did not strip; there was nothing cheap or tacky about the moment. I simply, quietly, and in the gentleness of that light, removed every part of my clothing and turning stood there, wrapped only by his eyes, his breathing and the warm hush of the library.

Was it a fantasy I had always had? Since that first time I found a library? Had I, even as a pubescent girl, wanted to stand like this, my white skin, pale and curved among the warmth of the rows of books? I wasn't sure. But I did know I felt at ease and comfortable. I felt completely and utterly safe in my nakedness, as if I had discovered some terrain of innocence I had not previously known.



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Deakin University

## *Fragments of a Map*

*A novel [continued]*

**Tess Brady**

### 13

It was my turn to call Crete, soft voiced and wanting company. She came around without delay and we sat in my kitchen. I was making pasta. It was probably the most involved thing I knew how to do in the kitchen and I wanted that - I wanted to play in my kitchen.

By the time Crete arrived, I'd kneaded the flour and egg dough and it was resting on the bench. It was a messy business and I'd managed to spill quite a bit of flour. I made a fresh coffee and Crete put on an apron to help out. She enjoyed, as I did, messing about with flour and threading the slabs of dough, again and again, through the press, until eventually they become paper-thin.

"What I like about this ridiculous business of making pasta," Crete said, "is the way I get myself covered in flour. I took pottery classes once, " she went on as she wound another piece of stiff dough through the press, "just so I could get messy with clay. I loved it!"

She chattered away filling the silence and waiting for me to find the words I wanted to share with her. There is no easy way to begin so I just blurted it out. Awkwardly, and in unconnected sentences I told her of Francisco, of how I had come to know him. I offered no explanation as to why I had not told her earlier, and importantly, I told her of his meeting with my father. "Eric has this idea about an international conspiracy." I explained, "he thinks my father was somehow involved and now it seems..."

"It doesn't *seem* anything." Crete interrupted what was a very confused and rambling account. "It's not the time to worry about Eric's conspiracy theories. Bigger theories! We're talking pure emotion here." She handed me a slab of dough. "It's your turn, that's vellum enough for you I take it." There is a stage in the process I particularly like, it's when the dough slabs resemble the texture and thinness of vellum sheets. As part of our ritual I am always the one to carry out this stage of the pressing.

I concentrated on the dough, taking slice by slice again and again through the press until each slice became long and thin, an almost transparent streamer of

pasta. She helped carry each thin strip to the broom handle we'd suspended between two chairs. The pasta steamers hung on it, drying.

"What are you going to make?" She asked me.

I didn't know.

She laughed and hugged me. "You're in a bad way. Come on I'll help you, let's cook a feast. We need to make your house smell of cooking. It has to smell of basil and tarragon and oregano and parsley, loads and loads of parsley."

"One of your potions?"

She turned and looked at me. "A sure cure for love sickness is to cook. When I was so afraid of my coming relationship with Gabbett, more than once I found myself staring at an entire banquet and no one but me to eat it. It was really stupid. I think I just went into the kitchen and switched on automatic and began cooking." All this time she'd been sorting through the pantry and fridge working out what we'd cook with. "It's my theory that if a love affair is going well the fridge is either empty, or full of silly things like bowls of wine flavoured jelly and tubes of chocolate icing. That sort of thing. But if it's going badly the fridge and freezer is over brimming with curries and soups and..." she laughed, "elaborately made pastas."

"And how's your fridge these days?"

She shrugged.

"I had coffee with Gabbett the other day."

"Mmm, he said."

"He's worried about you."

"Is he?" She looked away from me. "It's really hard, you know. Living with someone again, day and night. I've got too many ghosts about the place...."

"Would he move into a flat?"

She shook her head. "No, I think he's really afraid of living by himself. There's something in his story. He talks sometimes about a flat, empty, with a fridge and nothing else. It sounds desperate, emotionally empty. It's an echo he can't go back to. Besides..."

She didn't complete her sentence. Instead she got on with cooking and changed the subject. She chatted about school days, about growing up, about anything but Gabbett.

It was good to cook, not to talk of the men, of Gabbett or Francisco, not to think about my father or Eric's theories or... Eventually the food was in the oven. We had over-done it and prepared an enormous meal. Crete, with my help, had made two different cannellonis, a meat one with plenty of parsley in the filling, and a cheese based version. On the meat dish, she poured a wine and tomato sauce while the cheese based cannelloni had a sauce made of cream and mushrooms and tarragon. We'd made a vegetable dish to go with it of zucchinis, tomatoes, basil and potatoes. It sat ready to go in the oven at a later stage. The food looked fantastic and the whole house smelt of herbs and cooking. Her potion had worked, I felt a lot better, a lot more focused.

"What I find the most difficult to grasp," I explained, "is the way the investigation of the map has become so personal, as if I've been..." I couldn't find the word. I wanted to tell her about the old woman in the purple hat. I spoke quite softly, perhaps embarrassed. "There's this old woman who chants and speaks in riddles..."

Crete looked up and caught my eye. For a moment her expression unnerved me.

I continued unsure of myself. "She's old, really old, and I keep dreaming about her. I'm not sure, but I think she came around here one night." I shook my head. "It's probably a dream. I don't know."

"What did she say?"

"Something about a diddle, riddle, something about a male calling, about the uniped. It didn't make sense then, I'm afraid it doesn't make any now. Maybe if I talk to her."

Crete shook her head. "They don't talk, not like that. Surely you know the rhymes: they know the songs, they throw the stones, the look after the children, they watch in the night."

"Crete, this is a real person, not some apparition. She's an old woman who for no good reason was carted away from out the front of my place. She wears a bright purple hat and..."

Crete, half laughing, interrupted me. "Sure, and she wanders through your dreams muttering riddles. Sounds like a flesh and blood pensioner to me!"

I shrugged. "I may be mis-remembering." I said limply, and tried to place the whole thing into the confusion I was feeling over the map. "It's just all this stuff about the map, it's getting to me. Crete, it's meant to be an academic exercise, it's meant to be out there, in my office, in the libraries, not here, not part of *me*."

She didn't answer, but went to the pantry and selected a bottle of red wine. "Whose is this?" In one hand, she held the wine she'd selected for us and in the other she held up a bottle of cheap lambrusco.

"Eric brought it one night."

"I've heard its okay for dying your hair, something like that." She put it back. "I think about as much of his conspiracy theory as I do of his taste in wine." She pulled the cork and poured us both a glass. "Those arctic men." She shivered. "He's the only person I've ever met who actually enjoys salted fish."

We sat down at the kitchen table with the mess and smells of cooking all around us. It was domestic, it was good, and it was my space. Neither of us had any inclination to move.

I tried to defend Eric's theory. "It makes sense, how else would the map be re-discovered. I just feel awkward about my father's involvement..."

She cut me off. "Sure it makes sense, if that's what you want, and for that matter lambrusco makes a good hair dye if you want carrot red hair. I don't." She raised her glass. "Cheers!"

I wasn't following her and my expression made that clear.

"If I've got Eric's story right, it goes like this. The CIA or some other group decided they wanted to clean up the Mafia's power and their control of the labour movement in America. A whole list of things take place at once, one of them is the Kennedy committee, another is a bright idea to discredit the American Italian trump card, old Columbus himself. We're not sure as to the exact sequence or the exact players, but someone, maybe your father, maybe someone like your father, someone who knew the Norse stories and had heard about an old map, told them about the existence of the Vinland Map. He goes to Saragossa and inspects it, because he hasn't seen the map, only heard about its possible existence. He meets your Francisco, inspects the map and back at the embassy, the plot is hatched. Ferrajoli and his men will break into the cathedral library and steal a collection of manuscripts, one of which is the *Tartar Relations* with the map and the section of the *Speculum* . The long chain of coincidences begins."

I nodded.

"Now if your father had come to Saragossa as an innocent and just happened to be around at the same time as the embassy's professor, or Norse expert, or whatever, then that's another interesting coincidence."

I went to protest but Crete kept up her version of events. "I know, scholars were in and out of the place all the time. So why should Francisco remember your father above the thousands of other foreign scholars who asked to see manuscripts kept in the library's uncatalogued section? He had foreign scholars every day coming to inspect his old manuscripts."

"What made your father's visit memorable was not that he asked to *see* the *Tartar Relations* , with its accompanying map, don't forget it wasn't known as the Vinland Map then, it was just a *mappa mundi* of little value or importance illustrating aspects of the *Relations* . What made your father's visit important," she repeated, "is that immediately after his visit, or perhaps during it, arrangements were made to have certain manuscripts *stolen* from the library." Crete brought the point as close to home as possible. "Can you imagine if Martha was told this? If she had to assist in a theft of manuscripts from her collection? If she had to choose which one of her manuscripts were to be stolen so a group of embassy boys could play out some espionage plot. Can you imagine Martha sacrificing some of her collection so that the *Tartar Relations* and *Speculum* could be part of the theft?"

I couldn't see Martha, or for that matter Francisco coping at all well. The situation would have been abhorrent to anyone so concerned with the preservation of knowledge.

"And then, all those years later he meets *you* . You, the daughter of a man who could suggest such a thing to him. The daughter of someone who must have appeared to Francisco as a cross between a barbarian and a scholar."

I was thinking back now on each visit to Francisco's library.

"First he plays a game with you, all that stuff about the rose."

"No," I corrected her, "first he played the game of speaking in Latin."

"Yes, that's right. Only you were up to it. That must have surprised him. Then the rose.."

" *Sub rosa* ."

"Secret knowledge... but you still weren't put off. And what about that business with the sherry, all that waiting for the taste, for the right moment. It was another test but you got through that one too because, Meridian, you've always known how to wait. That's one of the things I've liked about you. You sit and take time, you think. You're not impetuous like me. I rushed into a relationship with Gabbett and now..." She cut herself short.

I touched her hand. "Now?"

She shrugged again. "Nothing. He's in Sydney."

"For how long?" My voice was a little too alarmed.

"No. Not for good. Well I hope not. For a couple of weeks. There's a program. There's always a program... it's just that his wife, his kids are in Sydney."

"He's seeing her?"

She nodded. "I think so. The kids were meant to come over for the half term break but suddenly that's cancelled and he won't talk about it." She toyed with her wineglass. "There's money stuff as well. But I guess there always is with a divorce." Crete cut us both a thin slice of cheese. "I hear things. He doesn't know the women's network. He doesn't realise we academic girls know each other. I'm more likely to know a woman from a history department in Sydney, or for that matter New York, than a woman from a science department at my own university."

"E-mail?"

"It's so easy, so quick. Gossip mixed up with work, gossip mixed up with contacts, gossip..."

"Maybe that's all it is." I tried to cheer her up.

"Yes, we'll talk when he's back. Maybe it's just my own insecurities coming out. Maybe I'm not being supportive enough. Who knows?" Suddenly she added, "You know I don't mind him being away. I like, well, the bathroom to myself. I can take my own time in the shower. I can talk to myself. I didn't realise until he was away this time how much I miss talking to myself!"

I knew what she meant. I'd always preferred lovers who lived a couple of hours drive away.

I got up to make a green salad. I dressed it heavily with my best olive oil and a dash of balsamic vinegar. As I put the bottle away, I noticed the vinegar was from Modena. I thought of the duke, the Cantino Map and butcher's shop. Odd, I thought, I'd not noticed it before.

Crete broke my thoughts. "You know, it must have been quite a shock to Francisco to, well..." she was trying to be delicate, "well, when he fancied you."

"I guess. It was quite a shock to me as well you know."

"Brave of him."

"What?"

"To tell you about your father."

She was right. It had been brave of him. I'd not thought of it that way. I was glad I'd turned to Crete and not to Eric, who would have fired me up with theories and dates and brought up too many memories of my father.

"Have you put in the vegetables?" Crete asked, knowing we'd both forgotten them.

We laughed and I put them on the top shelf of the oven, hoping they might not take too long. "We can have them after, or during or..." I knew it didn't matter.

I served the meal we had cooked together and over many hours, we ate even some of the vegetables.

Crete stayed the night; we had both drunk too much red wine for either of us to think about driving. When I woke, Crete was already up and had made coffee. She was in my study bending over the facsimile of the Vinland Map.

I liked the way she was completely at ease in my house. I went into the kitchen, the dishes were piled high on the sink and two empty wine bottles had been stacked by the kitchen tidy. Another one, re-corked, was sitting half empty on the bench. My head felt cloudy. I ran some water over the piled dishes. I could handle that job a bit later in the day but the pasta looked as if it was about to permanently stick to the plates. I poured myself a coffee, milky, sweet and strong. Just how I like it first thing in the morning. I went back to my study.

"How's your head?"

"Fine," she looked at me innocently. Crete was one of those early morning people who lack any understanding at all that some of us, especially after such a night, have brains that like to switch on slowly, gently approaching the day.

"It's such an odd map. I've been looking at it now for maybe an hour. If there hadn't been all that fuss about Columbus Day and Vinland I'm sure it would have stayed in, whatever library, virtually unknown except for a handful of scholars. And yet there *is* something quite fascinating about it. "

I drank my coffee. It helped, a little. Crete was ahead of me and I had to concentrate.

She ran her gloved hands over the facsimile, "Something is quite odd about this map. I think it's the water, the amount of water."

"I'm sorry?" Many people had been intrigued by the map; Eric had been fascinated with the way Greenland was shown as an island. Francisco with the islands in the Atlantic. The people at Yale by the Vinland continent, others by the depiction of Japan. I was, in my own way, interested in the nomenclature of the Tartar Empire; Witten had been intrigued by the wormholes; there were those who were interested in the legend relating to Prester John; in the nomenclature of Africa; in the way the bottom of Africa had been cut off; in the drawing of England as one island with Scotland well attached to the landmass. Many different things about the map had generated a number of papers and symposiums. I knew, I'd read them all. But I'd never heard of an interest in water.

"Look," She showed me, "the map fits nicely into the medieval view of the world, of how things were seen to be. It represents balance and design, two of their essential ingredients of life. It's teleology. There could be no doubt about the existence of God because as the master architect his existence is shown in the design of the world, in the balance and design of the physical world. It was just too perfect to have happened by chance. East and West, night and day, good and

evil, dry and wet. Everything sits in balance and so too does this map." She drew a line with her finger. "Here is the East, the pagan side of the world, it belonged to the Tartars and evil, the devil. And here is the West, the Christian side of the world, it belonged to good and God."

I nodded. I knew the map represented a traditional medieval balance.

Crete continued. "But most of God's world, most of the good, is water. Now, don't you find that fascinating?"

"The islands?"

"No, more than that. It's extremely unusual for a medieval cartographer to map water. Land was the thing that was mapped. Water was shown as a kind of void in between the landmasses. You don't ever come across maps of oceans, not even the Mediterranean which would have been as familiar as you'd expect a sea to be to the Europeans."

"They couldn't, they didn't know how to map oceans."

"But this map balances earth with oceans and it claims that ocean, *Mare Oceanum* ?"

"Oceania Sea." I translated.

"Yes, the great Oceania is claimed for God, for Christianity. And here in the East the Great Tartar Sea is given to paganism and all that Tartary stood for." She paused, pleased with her interpretation.

"If I was working on this map," she continued, "I wouldn't give a toss what *use* was made of it in the 1950's, and I'd completely ignore the scientific ping pong on ink pigments and vellum scrapings. I'd think really hard about all this water. Whoever made this map was not your ordinary medieval cartographer because it wasn't your standard medieval mind. It's just not a medieval thing to do, to ascribe such a profoundly positive property to something like the oceans."

"Unless you come from an ocean going people."

"That's possible." She looked back at the map. "It's interesting how England's depicted, but look at the enlarged size of Ireland. Maybe it was an Irish monk?"

"Maybe. Certainly not English, the map doesn't show any of the English cartographic traditions. I think the English cartographers quite liked the idea of Scotland being separated by passage of water from the English mainland."

"Isn't there some joke about England?" She asked.

"Yes, 'a cartographer's mistake'." I didn't explain there were a few such labels. The 'cartographer's dream', the 'cartographer's nightmare', and the 'cartographer's joke', but they belonged to other countries.

Crete was close to a thought I'd had for some time. The mistakes in the legends around Europe had troubled me. But if the cartographer was an Icelandic-Irish monk then the European names might not have been so familiar and it would certainly explain the knowledge of the Atlantic. And there was, at the time, quite a bit of travel between Iceland and Ireland. Especially after both had been converted to Christianity.



"The trouble is," I drew her attention back to the Tartar Sea, "such theories don't explain the knowledge of this part of the world. The map is also the first depiction of Japan."

She shrugged. "More coffee?" And as we walked into the kitchen she said, "I'm glad it's not my research problem." And then added as an after thought, "There isn't anything else in your father's notes?"

There wasn't. I'd looked. I didn't bother to mention the newspaper clipping; it was not the kind of thing Crete would have been interested in.

Crete took off the white cotton gloves and put them on the side bench. "Are these new," she asked, "they're in better nick than any I own?"

I went to answer her but something stopped me. Why had Crete used the manuscript gloves. The facsimile wasn't overly valuable or old? And when I thought of it, why had Francisco also used gloves? "Crete," I asked, "What made you wear those gloves?"

She misunderstood my concern. "I'm sorry, are they special or something?"

"No, not at all, but why? Why did you put on gloves, there's nothing precious about the facsimile?"

She looked at me and understood. "I did it intuitively. I did it because - oh my God - because its very old vellum."

I found another pair of gloves and within seconds we were back bending over the manuscript. I told her of Francisco's delight in viewing what I had always thought to be a curious copy of the map. "He kept asking if I had another copy, one on vellum, but because it didn't have the wormholes I thought it useless."

We both went into automatic mode - we were both skilled in documenting old manuscripts. Crete measured the piece of vellum and I set up the magnification table. We set the lights so that they'd cause the least damage and slowly began to inspect what I had always thought was a facsimile.

Magnified the lines of the map were clearly made by hand and here and there were visible the old graphite guide lines of the scribe. The inconsistency of the lines traced a nib first full of ink and then running low. And in the legends it traced quite magically the pressure of the scribe's hand, heavy on the stroke of the *h* and light on the cross of the *t*.

I opened an atlas at the page of a printed copy of the map held in the Yale Library. Apart from the wormholes they should have been identical but now, on such a close inspection, there were slight variations. I scanned in the copy of the Yale version and adjusting as best we could for size, I printed out sections of it on overhead projector transparencies I used in my teaching.

Crete made some comment about having such a complete home office but I ignored her, I was too excited by the work. A scanner and a few transparencies hardly constituted a complete home office. Besides, I was thinking back on all Francisco had said, on how he had told me of the libraries scriptorium, what was it he said, 'they had done us a favour' - him and me?

Crete broke my thoughts. She had the transparency over the section of Upper Mongolia. "See, here, and also at this point, the lines are different. Mind you," she added, "it's a good copy." She pulled back and arched her back. We had been at work for a couple of hours and both needed more coffee.

Crete cleared away a space on the kitchen table and made the coffee while I hunted through my Vinland Map notes. There was something I needed to find. By the time I'd found the right article the coffee was made and felt fantastic. In all the excitement I had quite forgotten my heavy head. I put the newspaper clipping on the table for Crete to read. I was the one which had originally rekindled my interest in the map. While initially the scientific evidence claimed that the inks used in the Yale map were made from modern processes and thus the map was a forgery, later work on the samples doubted this finding. The doubt centred around the fineness of the particles. "Do you think, Crete, it is unusual for pigments to be ground so very carefully, so very finely?"

Crete explained how she needed to take time over her potions. "The medieval person was not in a hurry, when they say 'ground the ingredients together', they don't mean a few turns of the wrist with the mortar and pestle, they mean hours of grinding. It really does make a difference to how the chemicals react with one another. I don't doubt that the medieval monks would have ground their pigments as finely as any modern process."

My mind was working overtime. "So if I was going to make a forgery of an old map I could still grind up pigments and make inks which were not only faithful to the times but also finely ground?"

"Exactly. This scientific evidence isn't much use I'm afraid. It's also complicated by the fact that there aren't too many 15th century maps offered to laboratories as comparison. They have to scrap off sections of the ink to do these experiments and no one wants their maps damaged by that."

We both drank our coffee and the big question hung between us in the silence. Was the map in my study a 15th century map? Were there two Vinland Maps or was one, or both, a forgery?

## 14

I called Eric. He was like a kid at Christmas with the news Francisco had met my father and that the map in my study was probably a very old one or at least an old piece of vellum.

Eric, to my surprise, said he had always suspected that there was an old map in my father's papers. He was, for the moment, more interested in the meeting. I told him the detail I had and that the years fitted.

"But how did you know," I asked, "about the map?"

"There had to be more to those papers I translated. You do realise you could have another copy of the Vinland Map, I mean an original 15th century copy?"

"From the Council of Basel?"

"Or from the Cathedral, copied after the Council disbanded - something like that."

I didn't much like the thought of my father being involved in the kind of international plot Eric had built up in my mind, but I had to agree that it was

looking decidedly like he had been right all along.

The newspaper clipping had provided fresh insights as well. The article which so prophetically predicted the Kennedys rise to power appeared in the New York Times exactly four weeks after the article on the Vinland Map. It was as if having scuttled the ship the newspaper now provided the hope of a lifeboat. The phone number of the clipping agency was surprisingly easy to isolate. The number no longer existed, but I could trace it as a Washington prefix. The cutting had been sent to my father by a Washington based, government newspaper clipping agency.

What was my father doing receiving cuttings from such an agency?

If only my mother could remember her life. I had tried. I'd visited her with my copy of the map. I've gone through photo albums of the right time, but she couldn't recall anything of my father's movements or his involvement in work. She remembered some of the friends they'd made in Greenland, some of the friends from the American base. There had been Christmas cards, I remember that, but there was nothing unusual in a few cards. I remembered I collected the stamps, always so different from ours.

I thought of my old stamp collection and went hunting for it. My mother was not one to throw things away and I was sure she'd have kept it somewhere. I found it, the old dark blue cover, a simple map of the world, but the album was smaller than I remembered. Collecting stamps now seems such an old fashioned thing for children to do, mine had not been in the slightest bit interested. My mother had collected and pressed grasses, I had collected and ordered stamps.

It was an unbalanced collection. There were, of course, a large number of Greenlandic stamps, some from Iceland and a few from England and New Zealand. The Australian collection was pedestrian and consisted of standard postage stamps with a few larger denominations and a good collection of special Christmas issues. But the American collection spread over pages. There were standard and Christmas issue stamps; special commemorative-issue stamps, as well as a large collection of high denomination stamps. I remembered my father would bring them home from his office. He must have had, by the look of the collection, quite a lot of documents which came via the post. There were also three U.S. presentation packs of mint stamps commemorating scientific achievements.

I shut the album and thought back to how the whole Vinland Map journey had begun, how in one of my father's books I had found a handful of papers written in Greenlandic translating an Old Norse story about the uniped. The papers had been slipped into what I'd thought to be a copy of the Vinland Map. They'd all been left in one of his atlases. But which one?

I went into the study and took down the book. It was a collection of old maps of Europe. The book opened easily at the page where the papers had been. On that page was a reproduction of Nicolas of Cusa's map of Germany.

The man who discovered air. I remembered Francisco's stories, of a man who preached a philosophy of expediency. Nicolas of Cusa had switched sides at the Council of Basel. His backing of the Pope was enough to turn the tables on those who wanted a more democratic church. The council was disbanded in a great panic and many fled with their papers and tapestries, their spices and ideas, as far away as possible from the reach of the Pope.

I shut the book and held it tightly against my chest willing it to reveal all of its secret. I thought of my life with my father, of the libraries and the books and the

maps. I thought of his great unwavering love for me and my mother, of his quietness and reserve, of the ritual of inspecting his ancient atlases, of the stories of unipeds, and the way he delighted in my childhood fascination with Africa.

Sitting hugging the old book I felt an enormous wave of loss centred in my chest, like a great painful wound. I felt, more than at any other time in my life, so completely alone, not of friends, colleagues, or even of my own children's needs and gifts to me. No, this was something else. It was an aloneness which came from within me, from the loss of a father, from the loss of a mother, from the loss of a love unjudgmental and unwavering.

My father was dead, my mother needed care. I reminded myself of the facts and chided myself for such a burst of self-pity. I should let it go, let it become a cherished memory of halcyon days. Understand that such innocence is as temporal as the harvest moon - it fades so quickly in the night sky and becomes just a moon, just an ordinary moon. Just an ordinary life. My father just an ordinary man.

I thought of the similarities between my father's love of books and Francisco's love of his library. How could two men meet to discuss such a theft of manuscripts? It didn't seem feasible. What on earth could have convinced them both to agree to such a thing?

Suddenly, charged with action, I stood up and put the book back in the shelf. There were things I had to do. I listed them in my mind. I had to accept my father had another life, one I knew nothing about. I had to accept his involvement in various cold war activities. Eric had been right about that. I had to accept that somehow the two men were involved in the theft of the map and I had to accept that I had in my possession something very old and precious.

I knew I wanted to write a paper which drew a distinction between the map itself and what had been *done* with it, what it had been *used* for. Crete had been right about that. I knew exactly what I was going to write. I'd thought it all through as I had been sitting holding the book. I'd thought through quite a lot of things.

I turned on my computer and began.

\* \* \*

Francisco's daughter-in-law smiled gently as she always did when opening the door and turned to lead the way to Francisco's study. Knocking as usual, she entered announcing my name.

Francisco, with some effort, rose to his feet. He looked deeply tired as if the effort of living, rather than some particular task, had weighed him down.

"Have I come on a bad day?" I asked, but the warmth of his smile and his strong grasp of my hand reassured me. He had set out the red glasses and his favourite bottle.

He poured two sherries, as he always did, and we talked.

"You know I can't answer such direct questions." Then added with wiriness, "If you want to talk of those times perhaps it is better we speak hypothetically."

"The little white flower, the one in your manuscripts?" I suggested.

He smiled. "So now you see."

"But how could two men who loved knowledge so much, who loved old books and precious manuscripts, possibly contrive to allow them to be stolen and used in such a deception?"

He told me a story of a librarian.

### **The Ninth Mandala - Legacy**

One day the librarian received a message from the Embassy of a great power. They wanted him to work with a scholar of theirs on something quite secret. The librarian was of course very suspicious but when he met the scholar the two warmed to each other.

These were no ordinary times. The librarian had, only a few years earlier, felt frustrated by his position. It was during a period of terrible upheaval. First the Civil War and then the Second World War. His task, so often re-stated to him by his superiors, was to keep safe the documents, the secrets of the libraries. But all around him his childhood friends were being killed, or worse.

What good was it to keep alive knowledge if people were being slaughtered? As a librarian he knew his duty but as a man he felt useless, as if circumstance had castrated him, robbed him of action.

And so when this scholar came to speak to him the librarian was ready to listen. The scholar outlined a plan where books and knowledge were re-cast as bullets. It was a young man's plan full of daring and intrigue. The librarian had at last been called to arms. He could stand against those whose actions were motivated only by a lust for wealth and power. You see, the Mafia were not so unlike Franco's men.

But yes, you are right, neither the librarian nor the scholar could bear to risk the destruction of knowledge. And so they devised a plan so perfect only one thing could go wrong. It was something the librarian did not even imagine. Such was his keenest to act, such was his innocence of the world.

He stopped and taking his time added. "And so now, do you know what went wrong?"

I wasn't entirely sure but I thought I knew, at least part of it. "The scriptorium. The favour they did us?"

Francisco nodded but said nothing. I told him how I thought the story went.

"You and my father couldn't just let the map out, it was after all important, not because of any American pride but because it showed us the importance of the Norse sagas. It was a map of the sagas as much as it was a

map of the Tartar kingdom. So you set about copying it. One of you suggested that you copy the map onto the leaf of an old and not very important scrap of the *Speculum* which had been bound with a version of the *Tartar Relations*. Neither of these were very rare documents and they had after all been damaged by worms. But you had the whole thing re-bound. Was that part of the favour? The fake 19th century binding of the two pages carrying the map and the *Tartar Relations*. The section of the *Speculum* was then bound independently. It wouldn't have been difficult. What was the *Speculum* bound in?"

"The same."

I smiled. "So the map which Witten had brought was always a fake, a map you and my father had made in the scriptorium in the 1950s. And the real map..." I stopped myself, something wasn't making much sense. "But why? Why not keep the map in the library? No one would know that it still remained in the uncatalogued section? Why give it to my father?"

"Indeed Meridian, indeed." His eyes were sad, moist and sad. "A foolish young man tried to make up for the death of his friends by grasping at the one action offered to him. My job was to preserve the secrets, keep the books, but Meridian, I let my passions distract me from my duty."

"My namesake, Suarez, the philosopher, did you know your English King James 1st had his works burnt on the steps of Saint Paul's Cathedral? Can you imagine what a passion the man must have stirred? Burning the text. It would have been such an extraordinary event."

I settled back in my chair and let Francisco take his time. He felt he needed to explain to me why he had become embroiled in my father's espionage. But curiously I didn't need his justification. Time and history invade us all, our actions cannot be judged in the too cold light of hindsight.

Francisco continued. "Suarez argued against the divine right of Kings. That upset your King James. The philosopher saw revolt against tyranny as a form of self-defence and he believed in the notion of a just war. Think of it Meridian, a just war." Francisco paused and reflected for a few moments. "There has, unfortunately, been terrible atrocities committed in the name of a just war. Saragossa has seen so many wars. So many just wars."

He paused for quite a long time and then added, but this time in Latin. "It is true what they say, our sins do live on to haunt us." He dropped his voice and almost to himself added, "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

I spoke very softly. "They haunt, it's true, but you need not fear judgement - not from me." I had never set out to judge anyone, I had been curious, sucked into the story by the same curiosity which had, all those years ago, lead me to pilfer my father's study for my own birth certificate. My passions had also taken me to - shall I call it sin? "None of us are free of guilt, you know that."

I took my time to speak again, I needed to give Francisco time to change his mood, even a little, because there was one last detail I needed to be clear over. "So my father, double crossed you? He stole the real map? That's the one I have?"

Francisco took my hands in his. "And now this old man will die having at last found what it is he lost. We come full circle."

We talked a little more of Suarez's political philosophy and then he leant over, his eyes and mouth close to mine, and said, "But all of this is for the young. If I am honest I am now more concerned with the questions of eternity."

I touched his lips with my finger. At first his face remained motionless, and then slowly he moved his lips, just a little, so that their moisture infected my finger. Then, as if he had changed his mind, his hand came up to mine and firmly, gently took my hand away from his face. "I want to ask you," he said, "if you believe in God?"

I was a little surprised by his question. We had spent months talking about manuscripts and libraries and ideas and philosophy but never had he talked of any religious conviction. I was careful with my reply. "I believe in the gift of life. And you?"

Our faces remained very close and we were almost whispering. "Yes, I like what you say," he used the Latin, ' *vitae donum* ', 'the gift of life'. I too find it difficult to be more precise than that. Elaborate concepts of heaven, purgatory and hell I find awkward, the clutter of tired frightened minds. If an old man wants the comfort of an afterlife, he must also accept the awkwardness of sin. It seems a heavy price to pay."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "a better word than 'sin' is 'despair'. Sin is just the humanness of life, despair is another thing, it is the place where we lose all hope, we lose that gift of life, we lose light itself." I remembered, as I spoke, the darkness of my own despair, the times I had felt it, become lost in it. " *Do not go gently into that good night.* "

"Ah yes, the Welsh poet. *Rage, rage against the dying of the light.* But, Senora, all of us must die sometime or other. Do we end there, does the light end there?"

I didn't like to hear him talking of death, I feared his death. I feared our age difference. I feared time. I closed my eyes and tried to shut out the reality of his words. Death had taken too much love from me.

He touched my hair, letting his open hand rest at the back of my head. "But we are just talking philosophy Senora, we are talking about the nature of being. Why are you upset when we just talk of Suarez's philosophy?"

I opened my eyes and saw his, moist - moist with knowing and the pain of the inevitable. I took a deep breath. "Yes," I said without conviction, "we are just talking philosophy."

After some time he said, "I would like to make love to you," he paused, "in a certain way." His hand caressed my nipple and I felt a heat at the back of my neck and down my spine. "You will remember Senora. I hope, you will remember."

The air felt heavy. "And are we still talking philosophy?"

He leant back and smiled, withdrawing his hand from my breast. He took his time to talk; his voice was firm and authoritative, firm and reassuring. "I want you. I want you with the fury and speed and arrogance of youth. I want you with the nervousness of the timid boy, new to the touch of a woman's skin. I want you with the tenderness of the bridegroom; I want you with the furtiveness of the lover. I want you with the drunkenness and clumsy hands of the middle aged man who comes in the night, full of guilt. I want you with the sophistication of the experienced lover, with the shielded and measured passion of one who sleeps with a different woman every night and who is afraid of the experience of repetition. I want you as the priest who prays for forgiveness to the virgin. I want you as the poet who partitions your inner door with the meter of his desire. I want you as the general for the spoils of war, as the king who needs you as solace for the lives he has taken in war. I want you as the lunatic, needing comfort from the fear of night. I want you as the captain who sails his boat in your wondrous harbour. I want you as the philosopher who searches for a soft receptacle for his harsh theories. I want you as the father, the son, the brother, the friend. I want to take you as all of men."

His desire gave him energy and he came at me with the flurry and passion of a boy. He pulled and tugged at my clothing undressing me in too great a hurry until we were both naked, our clothes strewn around the library.

Then, as if his energy had spent he slowly walked with me to the small anteroom and there caressed and gently kissed my body, slowly, lovingly, calmly.

And then, suddenly, quickly, roughly, again the mood swung around and he pulled my legs wide apart and pushed and shoved his tongue deep into my vagina. His hands rough on my legs, pushing them wider and wider apart hurting, his tongue deep in me, licking rubbing, filling me. My body writhed in spasms of enormous pleasure and pain. I cried out, I pulled on his hands trying to loosen their grip, I pushed myself onto his face, his nose pressed against my clitoris. The soft. The strong. The gentle. The rough. Confusion.

Then suddenly, again his energy changed and he let go of my legs and withdrew his tongue, lapping and licking my clitoris in soft even strokes. I gasped and pushing his face against my belly I came and came in spasms and contractions, in jerks and convulsions.

I fell back on the sheets exhausted but it was not over. He rolled me on my belly and ran his fingernails over and over my alive back and spine, over my bottom and my thighs. Aroused, gasping, holding back my orgasm until he pushed his fingers into my anus, I called out and he kissed me, filling my mouth with his tongue, deep into my throat. Grabbing my hair he pulled my head back until my scalp stung and my back arched - tongue, fingers, mouth, anus, hair. I collapsed, sweating, hot, thirsty.

He rocked me and sang to me. He stroked my breasts and my hair, and soothed me. He cooed and held me gently as a lover, protecting me from the nightmares of life. He clung to my breast as a child might, searching for life itself. He took my face to his penis and I suckled, licking his balls and stroking the opening to his anus. I kissed his armpits and his back and his stomach. And we rocked and wept in each other's arms.

I do not know how long we made love like this; time had been left in another place. Exhausted, he raised me to slide down upon his erect penis and we finished with him inside me, his face and neck muscles straining, tensing, in the pain and joy of his orgasm. He called out - a deep, rich sound; a male sound; a sound which came from his very essence, from his maleness. I fell back covered



in his sweat and we slept until noises in the house disturbed us. The light had completely faded.

Sleepily he stroked my hair and I kissed him. He tasted warm and of sleep and peace. I moved, meaning to rise and dress, feeling I had overstayed my time with him, but he placed his arm upon my shoulder and gently pulled me back to nestle into his warm body. "Stay with me through this night," he whispered.

Later, when the noise in the rest of the house had quieted and we were awake with thirst and hunger, he left me for a short time and came back carrying a platter of cold chicken, bread and sliced rings of peeled orange. He had a bottle of cold red wine, Boujelaïse style, and a couple of glasses. "Are you as hungry as this old man?" he said, mocking himself as he always did.

The simplicity of the meal seemed exactly right. We sat on the edge of the cot and ate, feeding each other. Francisco put a little chicken in my mouth. It had been cooked in some way unfamiliar to me. It tasted slightly piquant, the tang of mustard and juices and olives and thyme. And then the sweet bitter taste of orange, refreshing the palate, and more chicken and more orange. We dipped our bread in the cold red wine, and laughed and talked and ate as intimately as we had touched. The wine cooled my mouth hot and dry from lovemaking. I gulped at it, thirstily.

Safe in his arms we slept and talked until the dawn's early light and the first call of the birds. It was a night I will often remember. I felt completely at peace. I felt safe within myself, at ease within myself, and sleepy with the warmth of love.

Before the household stirred I dressed and left.

Francisco had made love to me with all the passion of life, with all the passion of a man raging against the dark. I had known him for such a short time. This tidy man with his sherry and his library and his stories of a world that had become my dowry.

As I drove towards the city, I remembered that first seduction; I remembered the red glasses, the sherry, the waiting for the taste and how by talking about the tapestries he had revealed his desire. How that was the way he communicated.

I thought right back, trying to recall the words and the conversations, trying to look behind the obvious to the hidden messages. And then I began to think through what Francisco had told me just a few hours ago. He had wanted my forgiveness for what he called his *youthful dereliction of duty* and yet it was my father who had acted the part of the barbarian. It was my father who had doubled crossed him and stolen the map. Did my father take the map because he feared their forgery would be discovered? Did he fear further government raids on the map? Were such genteel thoughts just trying to keep sacred his memory? Did I not know the man behind my father? Did he set out to trick Francisco?

I thought again of Suarez and Francisco's talk of that ancient philosophy of essence and being. Of life and death...

I cut my thoughts short and pulled over the car.

The radio had been playing but I hadn't been listening and now I could hear it - an aria from Mozart, full of dance and life and joy. My hands grasped the steering wheel with fear and a desperate effort to hold onto... what? - life itself? Some great inner pain ripped at my chest. I opened my mouth and screamed without voice. I screamed silence.

Gasping for air, I understood.

I smelt my skin, I smelt him on my skin.

I knew why he had asked me to stay with him through the night.

I don't know how long I sat there on the side of the road. Quite suddenly I felt enormously cold and tired, as if I needed to sleep for days and days. I started up the car and turned up the heater. I headed for home.

Back at my house I ignored the flashing light on the answering machine, I pulled the bedroom curtains and without bothering to shower I took off my clothes and fell into the warmth and comfort of my bed and doona. I cradled myself in the pillows, a buffer against the loss and the emptiness, and I fell into a deep sad sleep.

I dreamt as Keats on the cold hillside. I dreamt as me on the cold roadside. I dreamt of the old woman. I dreamt of purple hats and ancient rhymes; of chants and fires and old women's voices; of cards held in bony wrinkled hands; of manuscripts and maps; of oceans and billowing sails; of the seabird's high shrieking sounds. Shrill. Aloft. Away.

\* \* \*

The end came quickly. It was only a matter of days before a letter arrived from Francisco. As is his way he had written it in Latin. It read:

*My Dearest Meridian,*

*I write this letter with great sadness in my heart.  
Perhaps it is the case that we will not see each other  
again.*

*I am to go into hospital for what is euphemistically  
called 'tests', but I fear I will not ever see the night stars  
again.*

*I am an old man. As I write I can hear you playfully  
chide me for such remarks, but it is true. I have lived a  
very full and rewarding life and to be given the gift of  
your tenderness at this late stage of my being is more  
than I could have hoped for. How precious your visits  
were to me.*

*Do not cry or be distressed. I too wish we could share  
more time together. Even now I recall our last moments.  
It gave me such pleasure to bring it to you, to provide  
even such a simple feast.*

*I regret little in my life. It is poignant that perhaps that  
which I did most regret I shared with you. I leave it with  
you to put right what a youthful man set wrong. Is that  
too heavy a legacy?*

*It is time for me to test out those theories of eternity -  
do I now go to the altar of God?*

*I do not mind my death; I feel quite prepared and ready  
and yes, very tired, not so much of what life holds, but  
of the effort to maintain life. I long to sleep and to let  
my dreams and memories become my reality.*

*Take great care of yourself and of that other gift  
entrusted to you.*

*Remember me.*

*Francisco*

Was it a week? I don't know. It seemed no time at all before his daughter-in-law was standing at my front door holding a carefully wrapped parcel. She stood strong and erect and handed me the parcel saying, "He wanted you to have these."

I invited her in but she was edgy, not wanting to stay. She had almost no details for me of his death, it was obviously an extremely difficult subject for her and she refused to discuss it. I ached for detail.

I watched her walk down the driveway to her car. I shut the front door. I cocooned myself in my house. I put on my copy of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and turned the volume up high, letting the CD play over and over, filling the house with those extraordinary sounds - the sadness and joy, the horns and cellos of life and loss.

The parcel sat on the hall table and I carefully took it up. Inside, wrapped to shield them from breakage, were Francisco's blood red glasses. I took one slowly to my lips. I let the moist soft part of my lip feel the coolness of the glass.

I remembered his story about the small shop, the day he found the glasses, the fuss back at the cathedral, the arrival of the tapestry from years of restoration. I remembered the taste of sherry. I remembered the taste of Francisco.

I'm not sure how long I sat there. I remember the phone; it rang once or twice. I ignored it. I became aware of my body. I felt cold and stiff from sitting too long in the same position. The phone rang, it had, I think, been ringing quite a lot. This time I picked it up. It was Crete.

"Thank God you're home, are you all right?"

"Yes." I was puzzled by her question.

"Well, " she said a little awkwardly, "I heard about Francisco and I thought..."

"Crete, come over... I'll open a bottle of sherry."

"Sure, but have you any idea what time it is?"

I hadn't noticed time. There had been his daughter-in-law's visit in the morning, and the time I ate the omelette and... "Why? What time is it?"

"Just before two in the morning. I'll be over shortly." And she hung up.

I stood up, stretched, and went outside to turn on the driveway lights. I looked up at the sky and the beauty of the stars embraced me. Large tears began to fall down my cheeks and I stayed there, sitting by the front fence until Crete arrived.

In the house a single voice was singing against a cello, "Remember me."

## 15

It was early winter.

Crete and I drove out into the country. We wanted to walk in the cool country air and smell the smells of early winter - the grass, the wetness, the rotting leaves, the smoke from chimneys and burn-offs, the smell of kitchens and soups and rich red wine.

Crete's relationship with Gabbett had broken down and, as she had feared, he had returned permanently to Sydney. I wasn't too familiar with the details, for while she wanted my company she didn't want to talk about him or the final stages of their affair. I understood. I welcomed her company and also didn't particularly want to talk about Francisco, about our time alone in his library, his relationship with my father, or about the way I had been so excluded from his death.

I don't know how long we drove. Neither of us talked very much and I was thankful for the silence. I felt emotionally drained and like the sign on the Drive-in we passed, I too, felt closed for winter.

I thought of the Vinland Map and my paper, going over it in my mind. I had retraced the map's recent history leaving out the inclusion of my father but suggesting the possibility of a conspiracy. I had not gone as far as Eric and embroiled the Kennedy family or for that matter any anti-Italian prejudice that may have been about at the time. I had simply suggested, in the strongest possible way that the list of coincidences was too great and that the re-discovery had more than likely been aided by some outside intervention.

In the end I had wanted to protect memory, my father's and Francisco's. If they were involved in this particular plot then how many other slightly devious activities were either of them also behind? While I could admit to myself that Francisco might have been an innocent, I could not see my father so untarnished. I was only too aware of how easy it was, in post-war chaos, to shield espionage activities behind the mantle of art or scholarship. I had heard the fascinating story of the making of the film *The Third Man*, shot on location in Germany immediately after the war. In part financed by the British Intelligence agency MI6, it was one of the first films to be shot on location and was used to mask covert activities carried out by agents masquerading as additional crewmembers. Were conferences, digs and symposiums similarly used? We would probably never know.

As a consequence of my squeamishness and family loyalty, (I for one did not think it was my task as an academic to reveal the truth no-matter-what), I drew a strong line between the use of the map in the 20th century and the fragments we could recover of its history in the 15th century. The two, I argued, had for too long been confused and lumped together. I agreed with those who placed the map at the Council of Basel but made much of its symmetry, its depiction of the Atlantic islands, and the way it used oceans to balance the world. Crete had been right about that.

I argued that the map, of little consequence until its sensational rediscovery, was simply a *mappa mundi* that combined three sets of information - the known

world; the world as retold in the Norse sagas; and the world of the *Tartar Relations*. It was a map of stories as much as a map of the land. That Greenland had been so perfectly depicted was more a matter of chance since the drawing of the other continents were, to the modern eye, not immediately recognisable. I made much of the depiction of England and Ireland and argued that the map was produced by someone from a seafaring nation, suggesting a particular Irish-Icelandic monk, Saint Beneface the Bold, known for both his travels and his library. Indeed, he was probably the only figure in history to be mistaken for his library.

It was a well rounded, if not conservative paper, and while academically I was pleased with it, nevertheless it left me feeling as if I had cheated myself and my readers. There was so much more about the map and my investigations which I did not include. My paper avoided the human, muddy, aspect of discovery. I had shielded my father but there were so many other stories I had not told. How could I include the old woman in her purple hat, or Eric receiving an oddly wrapped parcel in a cafe on the old docks? How could I write about Francisco and the rose he had given me, the memory he had left me? How could I insert into such a paper the taste of the sherry or the feel of the water on my body as I swam naked in the pool? How could I write about Martha and her library and the precious illuminated manuscripts? And most importantly, how could I write about a time in the 1950s when two men did what at least one of them thought was right. How could I write the story which left me with the legacy of the map?

Crete turned off the highway. "There's an orchard nearby. I need the order today," was all she said. And then she added perfunctorily, "Is that okay?"

Crete turned the car off the road and drove down a rough farm drive. She waved to a woman working in the orchard. I opened the car door and the crisp country air assaulted me. I breathed it in, letting go of the closed city air, the closed air of my investigation, of rooms and cafes and libraries.

Crete had brought me to no simple orchard. This was an espaliered orchard where rows and rows of trees had been clipped, tied, and pruned tighter than a vineyard. The trees, quite old by the looks, resembled twisted and knotty vines, stark now that the leaves had fallen. The orchard was large and the rows of bound, two-dimensional trees long. The branches, curved and tied to long lines of wire, looked like huge wrought-iron fences designed by some crazy wild artist. I had never seen such a place.

We began to walk down one of the rows. It was completely contrived, as unnatural as a bonsai forest might be. And yet we were saturated by the sounds and smells of the countryside, of the natural. Birds flew overhead, and at the end of one of the rows was a smouldering fire where logs and clippings had been burnt. Everywhere was the wet, crisp air of the overcast day - it smelt of farms and cows and puddles and grass. How often, I wondered, do we mix the natural and the contrived together in our lives?

Crete was wearing her Driza-Bone. As she walked I noticed how parched the oil skin fabric was becoming. The wrinkled lines looked like an aerial map of arid countryside. She did up the top press-stud, shielding herself against the cold.

I drop back a few steps and watch Crete walking between the rows of trees. Strangely, I was beginning to like their two dimensional shape. They reminded me of rivers and creeks, folds in the earth as seen from above. I remembered a flight I took in a hot air balloon. It was late summer and the grass was withered and sparse. I was quite intrigued at how the lack of vegetation revealed the folds and tucks, the ripples in the skin, the veins in the earth.

I caught up with Crete and eventually said, "I've been thinking about the map, what to do with it." I'd thought of giving it to Martha, she could have put it with her other uncatalogued items, it would of course be safe in such a place. But something kept holding me back from giving it to her. Crete and Eric were still the only ones to know of its existence.

"Is it because of Francisco?" Crete asked. "It's connected to him?"

I didn't know. There was something there. The map had become my own story. Just as it had combined the Norse and Tartar stories so too had it combined my family and Francisco's stories. Somehow I needed to keep it, at least a little longer.

## **The Tenth Mandala - Centre**

I took from my pocket a small and precious watch and placed it in Crete's hand. Lately I had been carrying it around with me.

Crete looked carefully at it. It was about the size of a fob watch and its outer casing was made of tortoiseshell. At some time in the watch's history the tortoiseshell had cracked and a little of the yellow metal casing was showing. It was not gold but a yellow coloured alloy of some kind.

I took the watch from her. The tortoiseshell case was hinged at the side and I opened it and remove the watch from its casing. Crete held the outer casing and commented upon how light it felt.

"Yes, the weight is in the watch itself. It feels good in my hand." And I gave it back to her to feel the weight of it, to feel the history of it. It nestled in the centre of her palm.

"It feels quite precious. What century?"

"Seventeenth."

"It's stopped just a little after 12. A little past noon, or a little past midnight. I wonder how many years ago?" She handed it back to me.

I had forgotten the time it showed. I undid another clasp lifting the thick crystal cover to the watch face, and then yet another clasp, until the watch itself pivoted open and revealed its workings. I handed it back to Crete, opened for her to inspect.

"It's like a Russian doll." She said, taking hold of it carefully.

I could remember as a child being delighted by the layer within layer of the watch. I was never allowed to work the delicate mechanisms myself - more and more

clasps would be opened up for me showing more and more hidden treasures.

The mechanism of the watch was extraordinarily elaborate and decorative much like an illuminated manuscript. The cogs and coils were housed in their own casing, decorated with finely etched leaves and flowers centred around a smiling gargoyle. The top of this casing had been engraved with the watchmaker's name: Tomlinson, 1631, London.

"A family heirloom." I said and told her the story.

"The watch, in about 1631, just around the Great Fire of London, was given to a woman called Isabella by her husband. The story is a little unclear at this point. It was given to her either on her wedding night or at the birth of her first child. I've heard both versions in the family.

"Years later she gave it to her daughter, again I'm not sure if it was a wedding gift or a birthing one. Somehow, the occasion doesn't seem to matter at all. This daughter gave it to her daughter and the watch has been passed down from mother to daughter ever since. I remember seeing it at my grandmother's house and then at my mother's house and now it's with me. One day I'll give it to my daughter, and she to hers."

I put the watch back together and held it in the palm of my hand. "What's so precious about it is that this tiny object connects me to four hundred years of my female line. Isabella is my foremother and each and every one of those women who I am descended from have held this watch in their hands."

The watch was smooth and warm with 400 years of women's touch.

"Crete, somewhere in all that line is a woman with my colour skin, my eyes, my ear lobes. And Isabella? Somewhere in me is part of her, perhaps my hair colour, or my toe nails, or the way I laugh."

I wanted to explain this very carefully to Crete. "This watch connects me to my mother's mother's mother. This is my memory Crete, my historical memory."

I put the watch back into her hand to let her feel the age of women, the memory of the women.

We stopped by a smouldering pile of cuttings and logs where the farmer had been burning off. The smoke smelt good, it matched the smell of early winter. We stood and poked at the remains of the fire, turning over the coals. We knew we both carried pain and the silence was good, healing.

After a time Crete spoke. "I burn my Christmas tree, every year, I turn it into a barbecue, the first for autumn. It makes an awful mess of the garden but it doesn't matter. Gabbett...", She broke off and shrugged. "It doesn't matter what he thought." He had returned to his wife before winter began. I had seen him

once and he looked as unhappy as Crete. "It's for the boys," he said, and I wondered if he was lying to me or to himself.

"Do you hear from him?"

"On and off. When he needs me, when I need him. But it's always furtive. Maybe desperate. Yes, desperate is the word I'd use. God! I think I need to get away. You know," her voice sounded more pensive and sadder than usual, "I'm glad I'm not his wife. I couldn't bear to be lied to, I couldn't bear to be deceived in the way I know he deceives her. She'll never know it, but I think she's the one who's scored the worst deal."

I asked her to tell me about burning her tree, I thought it might get her mind off Gabbett.

She kicked at the coals. "It's about tradition. I always do it. Sometimes I think it's just an excuse to get rid of the thing, to have a primitive fire in the backyard. I don't know. It's one of the things I do in the year. One of the ways of progressing life along, even when you don't much feel like it."

We walked on away from the smoke, down another row of the orchard. "Traditions are important to me," Crete said. "What the burning of the tree does is give me the focus and the strength to have another try at life. When I burn the tree I get rid of the rubbish of summer, all the unwanted things, the mistakes."

Crete's burning of the tree reminded me of confessionals and absolution. I remembered last summer I was in Brisbane and I went to see the city's two cathedrals. It was midday on a weekday. As far as I knew there was nothing special, nothing liturgically special that is, about the day. But the Catholic cathedral had perhaps as many as a couple of hundred people in it. Some of them were kneeling in the pews in the main body of the church, others were in the nooks and at the side altars, praying or burning candles. The whole place buzzed with under-spoken prayer, with the sound of hundreds of lips moving and almost no sound coming forth. Then quite spontaneously someone, not a priest or a nun or anyone in vestments or attire, just an ordinary looking bloke who perhaps felt the need, stood up and began, in a clear open voice, to say the rosary. The whispered prayers stopped. The people kneeling joined in and the cathedral filled with the sound of this ancient prayer, with the ancient need to call upon the mother.

*Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death...*

I sat alone in one of the back pews and I began to weep. I wept for my loss of innocence. How wonderful, how simple, how totally easy it would be to believe in that absolution. Wasn't this the very thing Francisco longed for when he tried to justify his part in the theft? To feel that in a simple ritual, all our harm, pain, sins, and ugliness can be washed clean. I felt sorry for myself, sorry that I had lost that easy innocence. Was Crete's ritual just another form of absolution? Then and now I long for faith, for the luxury of faith, Crete's faith or the faith of that congregation.

"Tell me," Crete asked, "what was your great grandmother's name?"

"Lalla, I said instantly, She was a very Victorian woman, long dresses, that kind of thing. She lived in a room at my grandmother's, at Mater's house. It was quite a large room, I suppose, it was both a bedroom and a kind of sitting room for her.



I remember that behind a sofa was a trunk filled with treasure. Whenever I visited she'd open it and show me. She told me it was a secret so I didn't tell the others. It was a trunk filled with satin and silk off-cuts, every colour and pattern and texture you could imagine. Each piece held dreams for me, Cinderella dreams of ball gowns, and Lalla would fill me with her stories, stories of the fabrics, stories of dreams, stories of another time. I suppose she handled those off-cuts as some women do their patchwork quilts; their lives."

I continued my story. "She'd often tell me the treasure was mine when she died. She said she'd put it in her will. I was a little anxious about this and questioned her many times. You see, I was convinced that if it wasn't written down somewhere, as such a young member of the family, no one would believe me that the treasure was mine.

"I was still quite young when Lalla died and one day mum told me she was off to the solicitors because of Lalla's will. I waited at home and panicked. What would the family say when the will was read out and the treasure had been given to me? I dressed in a respectable way, in a way I thought an heiress might dress, and I waited and waited for a taxi to arrive from the solicitors. No taxi came.

"Eventually my mother came home and gave me a broach, 'From Lalla's things.' She said, 'So you can remember her.'

"I said nothing. I thanked her for the broach and went to my room. I was of course bitterly disappointed. Later, much later, as an adult, I told my mother the story and she laughed. Apparently they hadn't known what to do with the old trunk and threw it out. 'If only we'd known,' she kept saying, 'If only we'd known...'"

"Mater and Lalla. Great names. They're very alive to you."

"And your grandmother, great-grandmother?"

"Much like you. Meridian, do you realise I asked you for your grandmother's name, and your great grandmother's name. You gave me some names, wonderful names, and you told me stories to help the names come alive. But these are not the kind of names recorded in history. Can you tell me your grandmother's maiden name? What's Mater's real name?"

I couldn't, I didn't even know for sure exactly what her Christian name was. "Something like Winnie." I suggested. As for Lalla, my great-grandmother, I had absolutely no idea of her real name. I remembered them both by these pet names which seemed so real to me, so full of life and personality and old photos and old memories. I touched the old watch in my pocket. It felt warm and familiar.

"I suppose," Crete said, "tradition for me is a bit like your watch and your stories. It's the thing which connects me to my mother, her grandmother, her great grandmother. I can trace these women by the way I do these things. By the way I sing rhymes or make a birthday cake."

Crete smiled, "Maybe we need to have another tree burning, just you and me. We can get rid of Gabbett and ..." She stopped before saying Francisco.

I hugged her. "Yes, and Francisco. Let's do it." It was hard for either of us to speak his name. Why was that, I wondered? Do we not call out the name of the dead for fear of what it might evoke? Of what it might remind us of? I remembered the old woman at my gate. Is that what the others had feared?

Crete let her voice drop to a whisper. "So the map itself probably doesn't matter too much - what matters are the stories?"

She was right, deep down I knew it. Deep down I knew I was only delaying the inevitable. The map wasn't like the old watch, or the way I made scones. It came from another tradition, it needed to be returned. I could take it to Saragossa, to the old cathedral library or I could give it to Martha. Somehow Martha felt a better option, she knew me well enough not to ask too many question. How I came to have it was not something I wanted to talk about. Not yet. And besides, Martha was *our* guardian of such things.

We had reached the end of the orchard.

Crete's car was close by and deep in the conversation we got into the car and drove away. We were planning our own ritual tree burning. Our own absolution. As we left, I caught a glimpse of an old woman on a stepladder pruning the trees. I was surprised I had not seen her earlier.

But I was mistaken, the old woman was not pruning the trees. Her purple hat lay on the ground next to the stepladder, and all this time she had been patiently, painstakingly, clipping away the ties that bind the trees to the trellis.

Somewhere in the orchard the trees were becoming three-dimensional.

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