

## CHAPTER ONE

The nonsense stopped as soon as he entered the room. He let the door crash back and stood there, watching Tasha Whatserface smear lipstick all over her cheek. A look of panic came over Tall Chloe's face as he caught her in mid-text on her mobile; that wasn't going to help win any spelling bees, was it? Jade quickly unwrapped herself from Dale's clutches, stuffing what passed for a breast back into her blouse. Dale himself looked suitably blank, so there was no change there. Even Laura looked sheepish, aware as she was that she had a black, non-regulation top on under her white Leighford High blouse; the mark of the beast. Martin, he of the weasel-eyes and uncertain temperament who hovered on the fringes of autism and glue-sniffing, reached surreptitiously down to replace his outlawed trainers with his black school shoes, lace-up, for the use of. Why, oh why, did those kids go to the unholy lengths of carrying them all day in carrier bags? Could it possibly have made their lives easier?

The hubbub died down as he crossed to the desk. He flipped open the laptop carelessly, with a nonchalance born of years at the chalkface. His fingers hammered on the keys and a PowerPoint presentation, beloved of Ofsted inspectors the length and breadth of the UK, burst onto the screen in

glorious Technicolor. Words spun and rotated, interspersed with wild images of the world we have lost: Winston Churchill ordering the troops *out* of Tonypandy; Joe McCarthy hugging Joe Stalin; history like it really was. He felt rather than heard someone stick a piece of chewing gum on the underside of a desk. He twirled slowly, still writing the lesson's objectives clearly on the whiteboard – Aim: to knock some sense into a band of misfits before it was too late – handling the board-marker as smoothly as Napoleon used to handle his cannon.

There was a new boy in the corner, a face he didn't recognise, but he knew the signs; could read the attitude. The lad wore a pale-blue hoodie and a white baseball cap at a rakish angle – he who had never heard of Babe Ruth in his life. His jaw seemed to be working around a piece of half-day old gum. And why not? He'd watched telly for hours as countless football managers with an IQ the size of a pinhead chewed frantically on the side-line between roaring some timely expletive to the even bigger morons on the pitch. They were all his heroes. Why was it, the teacher wondered – and not for the first time – that kids who joined the school late in the year always seemed to be delinquents with ASBOs? Then he answered his own question – they were probably the children of a parent (never two, of course) on the run from the ever-shortening arm of the law. At least wherever they came from would be a safer place.

He noticed the kid at the back, the Chav With No Name, slide his right arm sideways. That settled it, he thought – it was the paper-flicking season again and he was reaching for his elastic band. He'd wait before he struck, biding his time,

letting the Chav hang himself. There'd be no warning shot, no barked defence, 'Stop. Armed educator'. But he was to be disappointed. Dom Creddle, the lad next to the Chav, caught the boy's arm and hissed, 'No, mate. That's Mad Max's kid. He'll have yer.'

The Chav frowned, unimpressed. 'But he's a baby. Still wearing bloody nappies.'

'Even so,' Creddle warned solemnly. 'Don't mess. It runs in the family, madness. Don't mess. Don't...'

But it was too late. The elastic band had barely cleared the desktop when Mad Max's kid sent the board-marker hissing through the air. It scythed past Dale's ear with the speed of an Exocet, whistling past the waist of Tall Chloe – I said she was tall, didn't I? – and took the head of the Chav off his shoulders, as well as the smirk off his face. There was blood everywhere, spattering over the desk and down the wall. And the screaming started...

Mad Max woke up with a start. God, he hadn't done that before. Fallen asleep in his own office. For the briefest of seconds he expected to see little Nolan saunter in through his door, tossing a bloody board-marker in his hand and grinning, his nappy dangling between his legs.

'Got another one for you, Daddy!'

Maxwell chuckled. How unlikely was all that? Little Nolan was only ten months old; he still found walking a tad of a challenge, still less sorting out shitheads in a History lesson. Maxwell checked his watch. Half past four. Time to go home – the radio jingle of his childhood echoed faintly through the cavernous recesses of his brain. He downed the last of his

coffee, toyed with taking home a pile of books to mark, thought better of it and made for the door.

An apparition in green stopped him.

'You'll never guess what they've bleedin' well gone an' done now.'

Maxwell hesitated. Was that it? Was that all he was going to get? This was Mrs B, the Lady Who Cleaned for him, both here, at the chalkface that was Leighford High, and at his *chez lui* along leafy Columbine, to the south west. Usually, Mrs B spoke in a torrent, spitting out statements like a Gatling gun, if that wasn't lobbing too many metaphors into the suet-pudding of conversation.

'Er...what?' was his rather lame response.

'Only appointed a new Head Caretaker, haven't they? I mean, what's the point? And she's a real bastard, so they say. What's all that about? Sending a woman to do a man's job? I don't know what was wrong with old Doc Martin, meself. But then, what do I know?'

That was more like it. Maxwell swilled his cup under the tap in the corner and gave as good as he got. 'Yes, I heard. Well, new brooms and all that. Yes, I'd heard that too. Something to do with equal opportunities, I suppose. Neither do I. Quite a lot, Mrs B, if I'm any judge.'

Yes, Peter 'Mad Max' Maxwell was a judge all right. He'd been judging kids' essays, their behaviour and the great mysteries of life now for more years than even Mrs B had bristles in her brush. He used to be jury and executioner, too, before the world had gone mad and they'd created some EU regulations against such things. He'd been at Leighford, man and boy, for nearly four centuries and nothing ever fazed him. Even so, he

was sorry to see old 'Betty' Martin go, especially as no one knew the bloke's first name. And his replacement wasn't quite a Head Caretaker; she was a Premises Manager. *Plus ça change.*

'You goin' out tonight?' Mrs B was rummaging in the corner, rustling her black bag in time-honoured tradition and longing for a fag on this no-smoking site.

'No, no,' Maxwell told her, hauling up his battered Gladstone. 'Lesson preparation, Mrs B. Mr Diamond checks, you know. He wouldn't be happy if I didn't prepare my lessons for the next day.'

Mrs B paused in mid-rummage. She was gagging for that fag now and her sciatica was giving her gyp, but she wouldn't show any weakness in front of Maxwell – he was mad, after all, and that was a proven fact. *And* he was her employer – wouldn't do to let him think she couldn't cope. For a moment she looked at him oddly, then her grey old face broadened into a toothless grin. 'Yer, right,' she croaked.

He winked at her and was gone.

He left the office bright with the trappings of his obsession, the film legends of yesteryear. Nikolai Cherkassov stared down at him under the rim of his steel helmet, like a poor man's Charlton Heston, in *Alexander Nevsky*. Tyrone Power, Alice Faye and Don Ameche grinned like three toothpaste ads in *In Old Chicago*. Whoever painted the United Artists' posters, he really wasn't very good. And Jimmy Stewart and Doris Day looked suitably frantic over the kidnap of their son in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* – nobody on Leighford High's staff, that was for sure. Then, he left reality behind and strutted his stuff down the corridors of make-believe, past that ghastly...thing...Year 8 had painted last Activities Week,

on beyond Healthy Schools posters and exam notices without end, their reminders that mobile phones were not allowed or the Exam Board would personally come and cut your bum off, four thousand free hours or not.

Maxwell was glad of the fresh air as he strode across the car park. Ben Holton, the Head of Science, was still on the premises, his crumpled Volvo straddling two spaces. With a bit of luck he'd be in a lab somewhere feeding some hapless Year Seven kid to his locusts. Maxwell recognised the gleaming Audi of James 'Legs' Diamond, the Worst Headmaster in History. He'd be pinching some pointless initiative from a website somewhere to try and con parents that he knew what he was doing. For a brief, ignoble moment, Peter Maxwell toyed with keying the silver metal as he walked past. Then uprightness got the better of him, he remembered he used to be a public schoolboy and he just kicked some broken glass under the wheel. Well, it was a health hazard. Surely the Premises Manageress would approve.

He lashed his briefcase behind the saddle of White Surrey, his faithful charger-turned-bike, one of those coursers that changed the course of history. The original Surrey had been Richard III's horse at Bosworth – and just *look* what happened to him. Out of his pocket came the cycle-clips, officer's undress, and in a flash he'd hooked them round his trousers and was pedalling like a thing possessed out of the school gates and into legend.

All right, so the South Coast wasn't what it had been. There was a time when mad old George III had swum off Brighthelmstone while the band, up to their waists in water, played 'God Save the King'. A time when 'Prinnie' had doffed

his hat to the swells along the Steyne; when Kaiser Bill raced his gleaming yacht through the glittering waters of the Solent; and a much older time when William the Bastard had come ashore at Pevensey, looking for road signs to Hastings and just reading 'Normans, go home' everywhere. But somehow, all that was so...elsewhere. 'Here in Leighford,' read the Tourist Board signs of Maxwell's imagination, 'Nothing Happened At All.'

It was approaching the height of the season, the sun flashing on car roofs and bonnets, the breeze fluttering the little flags that bedecked the Esplanade. Even as he braced himself for the Flyover, he could hear the mechanical music of the fairground wafting in waves on the sea-salt air. He chuckled to himself as he realised he was slowly turning into Dylan Thomas – slow, black, quick, quick slow. Well, perhaps it needed work. Porkpie hat firmly on his barbed-wire hair, he waved gaily at the motorist who roared past him, bouncing on his car horn and waving a finger that had an altogether different message for him. It was a sad fact that at the dawning of the twenty-first century, nobody except Peter Maxwell thought bike anymore. And he was mad.

And then, Surrey's tyres were purring down Columbine and all was right with the world. He noticed as he turned onto the pavement, carefully negotiating the doggie-poo as he did so, that Juanita's car was not in the drive. 'Drive' was actually rather a grand term for the space in front of Number 38, but it was what it had said in the Estate Agent's brief when Maxwell had moved in, so it had to suffice. He wheeled Surrey round the back, through the side gate and hauled off his briefcase, sweeping the hat off in an extravagant gesture.

18 M.J. TROW

Shit! Look at that lawn. It was like the Serengeti; yellow and knee high. He could almost smell the wandering herds of wildebeest. He'd have to break off from all that lesson preparation later to become Lawnmower Man. If his hayfever didn't get him first.

Odd. The back door was open. If Juanita had slipped out with Nolan, surely she'd have locked it? John Cleese, of course, would explain it all by saying she was from Barcelona and would have clipped her around the head, but that wouldn't do very much for Anglo-Spanish relations, and ever since the Armada, we did have some bridges to build.

'Hello?' Maxwell called. 'Halloooo!' No reply. The girl must have taken the Wee Lad – so called for his habits – down to the beach. Now, Peter Maxwell didn't miss a trick. He could have Observed for England. And he noticed, as he reached the kitchen, that the sunblock was still there, along with little Nolan's towels, sunhat and spade. All right, Maxwell pinged off his cycle clips and reached for the mail, piled on the surface by the kettle; Juanita had taken the boy to the shops. She wouldn't get much for him, Maxwell mused, remembering the difficulties Mr Bumble had once had with Oliver Twist. Even so, the hat and the sunblock, in weather like this, wouldn't have come amiss.

Maxwell turned a livid shade of pale at the sight of the Saga holiday offer in the post. With unerring skill, he lobbed it into the bin. 'Have you been hurt in an accident at work?' the next missive wanted to know. 'None of your Goddamn business,' he growled and the second lob followed the first. 'Holy Mother of God.' The third envelope offered the most ghastly knick-knack Peter Maxwell had ever seen – a seven inch

porcelain depiction of Princess Diana to take pride of place on Maxwell's mantelpiece. Actually, it took pride of place in Maxwell's rubbish.

He checked the clock. Nearly five. Jacquie would be home in just over an hour. Did he have time? He caught sight of his reflection in the mirror. 'Go on, Maxwell,' he snarled in his finest Clint Eastwood impression, the .44 Magnum of his imagination gleaming in his fist. 'You owe it to yourself to live a little.' So, he began to make his day. He threw his jacket and bow tie somewhere on the furniture in the lounge as he passed through, then on up the second flight of stairs, past little Nolan's nursery and into the master bedroom. 'What a dump!' he pouted, being Elizabeth Taylor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* being Bette Davis in another film nobody could now remember. His wife's fol de rols were lying on the floor next to her shoes which stood at an impossible angle to each other, like Charlie Chaplin on speed. Then he was up the third flight of stairs to his Inner Sanctum, the War Office, that holy of holies from where only Peter Maxwell returned.

Only Maxwell? Not exactly. 'Afternoon, Count,' Maxwell bowed slightly as he caught sight of the cat on the linen basket's lid. The great black and white stirred himself, but not unduly, looking like a couch potato's Guinness ad. He and the Master went back a long way, since Count Metternich was a little black and white nothing of feet and fur, endlessly astonished, in the three-second memory span of cats, to find he had a tail somewhere behind him. Maxwell hadn't quite celebrated his own Millennium then, so some of his hair was still brown and Surrey's crossbar presented no challenge at all. That, of course, was then – the historian's mantra. This was now.

20 M.J. TROW

‘What’s new, pussycat?’ Maxwell ventured. It was a passable Tom Jones.

Metternich wasn’t going to respond to a cliché like that. They just served to show his man’s age. He merely flicked his tail to give it the contempt it deserved and watched as the Great Man sank into his modelling chair, flicked on the lamp and picked up those stupid bits of plastic again.

The stupid bits of plastic in question were the legs and torso of Lieutenant Landriani of the Sardinian Army. And Peter Maxwell had been putting this one off for years. Laid out before him, under the skylight and stretching into the increasingly gloomy distance of the loft at Number 38 Columbine, sat Lord Cardigan’s Light Brigade, 54 millimetre and correct – thanks to another of Mad Max’s obsessions – to the last detail; every buckle, every strap. ‘At the last count – oh, no pun intended,’ he mused to the cat, ‘Lieutenant Landriani makes the five hundred and sixteenth figure that I have assembled over the last quarter century. That only leaves...’ Metternich saw the man’s spare fingers and his eyelids flutter as he wrestled with the maths of it all, ‘...one hundred and sixty-two to go. Think I’ll make it, Count, before that great day dawns and I’ll go quietly into that netherworld called retirement? ’Cos they stop your pay and all this,’ he swept an arm over the brigade, ‘will be a thing of the past. Then there are Nolan’s school fees and what with university top-up.’ He tutted and threw Lieutenant Landriani’s legs in the air. ‘Problems, problems. Nothing but problems. Right,’ he caught the legs expertly. ‘Now I know more or less where the good lieutenant was sitting – with Cardigan and a little, I suspect, to his left. That puts him in front of Captain White’s

squadron of the 17<sup>th</sup>. No, the problem, Count, is what the hell was he wearing? Sardinian, so lots of cocks' feathers in his hat, I bet.' Maxwell glanced up at Metternich. 'You're drooling, Count,' he smiled. 'Not even you would take on a full-grown cockerel, would you? So, the uniform, then. What...powder blue? I don't mean to cast aspersions on our Sardinian allies, but they didn't join until the damn war was virtually over.'

He suddenly stopped in mid-ponder. Over the intercom, the one Jackie had insisted be set up in every room, Maxwell heard the gurgling sound and the sibilant lip-smacking of a little boy waking up. Jesus! Landriani – both bits of him – hit the deck, Maxwell's chair overturning as he sprang. Metternich, not known for his sudden movements in daylight, launched himself off his perch and Master and cat hurtled down the stairs, Maxwell making contact with the treads only marginally more often than Metternich.

For one ghastly moment, Peter Maxwell expected to see a scene from that tragic story of the dog Gelert he had read as a boy; to find the nursery ripped and bloody and with, at first, no sign of his darling son. But there was no blood, no torn sheets, no bloodied but unbowed faithful hound and sure as hell no dead wolf. Just little Nolan Maxwell, rediscovering his toes with all the joy of an Archimedes or an Einstein and smiling up into his daddy's anxious face.

Maxwell swept him up out of the cot in a deft movement and winced as the little tyke carried out his favourite parlour trick. It was called 'Swinging from Daddy's Sideburns.' And it hurt like hell.

'Where's Juanita, fella? Hmm?'

Nolan gurgled his nearly toothless grin, not being terribly helpful.

'Phew!' Maxwell's nose wrinkled. 'Not been here for a while by the look of it.' He gingerly removed his hand from Nolan's nappy area. 'What a squelcher. Come on, old son.' He laid the baby down. 'Assume the position.'

In moments like these, it all came flooding back. The memories of long, long ago, when his first child had been gurgling in her daddy's arms. Maxwell had been a young teacher then, just starting out. And the smell of his little girl's neck was just like Nolan's today. He found himself smiling. Then the other memories started, the ones he couldn't control, couldn't separate from the sunshine and the laughter. The wet roads, the screaming tyres, the crystal hardness of broken glass that had shattered his heart and had seen his first family swept away. He shook himself free of it and pressed the boy's new nappy into place.

'Ah, Velcro.' He rubbed his nose against Nolan's. 'Where would we be without it, eh? Come on, let's you and me look for dragons.'

He knew exactly where to find one and he didn't have to cross a river either. He swept up Nolan's white hat from the kitchen and plonked it on his soft, fair curls. The little hands came up as he carried him through the house.

'Oh, no,' Maxwell chuckled. 'That stays on. We're going out into the sun now, dear boy. It's still quite scorching out there and your mother would have a fit if I took you out without it.' Their eyes met. 'Women, eh? Cha!' and Maxwell swept the lad downstairs. 'And I'm not even going to mention mad dogs and Englishmen.'

The dragon was coiled in her scaly steelness on a special offer steamer-chair from B&Q, a large sun-stopping hat on her tousled old head and a little drinkie in her hand.

'Mrs Troubridge.' Maxwell announced himself these days, ever since he'd crept up on the old next-door neighbour with unintentioned stealth and she'd nearly decapitated him with her garden rake in her surprise.

'Oooh, hello.' The dragon uncoiled, laying her drink down on the patio table, and began poking baby Nolan with her talons, smiling inanely and cooing baby-babble, as incomprehensible to Maxwell as it must have been to his son.

'Have you seen Juanita?' Maxwell asked.

'Who, dear?' the old girl's attention span wasn't what it was and she was currently in baby-mode. Alternatively, she had been out in the sun for a while.

'Juanita,' Maxwell repeated with what patience he could. 'Spanish girl. Looks after Nolan here. Lives with you.'

Mrs Troubridge blinked at him under the raffia of her chapeau like a startled iguana. 'Isn't she with you?'

'No.' Maxwell was still just about smiling, though he'd never got beyond NVQ level in Tolerance.

'Well, that *is* odd.' The old girl was still wrestling with Nolan's fingers, grinning inanely. 'What time is it?'

'Sun's over the yard arm,' Maxwell told her, peering up into the great orb briefly. 'Fiveish.'

'Only, they do have their siestas, don't they, these foreign people? Perhaps she's snoozing.'

'Perhaps,' Maxwell nodded. 'But I'd have thought while she was in charge of my child she'd have the courtesy to snooze reasonably close to him. At least in the same house.'

'Shall I check her room?' Mrs Troubridge offered.

'Shall we both check?' Maxwell countered.

'Well, I...oh, of course, Mr Maxwell. As it's you. Ever the perfect gentleman. Could you manage the stairs by yourself? My hip's playing up a little today, I'm afraid. It's the sun, you know. Leave the little one with me. I'll look after him.'

'Thank you, Mrs Troubridge,' Maxwell smiled, wrinkling his nose at her in what he hoped wasn't *too* patronising a way, 'but he's a little fractious at the moment. I'll just tuck him under my arm. So. We'll be fine.' And he was gone, striding across the garden of Number 40 Columbine, Nolan bouncing on his hip. Maxwell hissed at him, 'Look fractious, dammit, unless you want to be dribbled on by Black Annis back there.'

Nolan just grinned at him, then shoved an obliging fist in his mouth. Angst, baby-style. Nice to see the Method School still going strong.

Maxwell knew where Juanita Reyes' room was. Mrs Troubridge's house was, of course, a mirror-image of his own. He padded through her chintzy lounge on his Eighties brothel creepers and on up her stairs to the landing. A rather disconcerting photo of the late Mr Troubridge leered at him from a silvered frame on a wall-side whatnot and Maxwell remained glad he had never had the pleasure. He clicked open the door of the Spanish au pair's room. The bed was a tip, like one of those exquisite entries for the Turner Prize (although anything, it had to be said, was better than an original Turner). Clothes were strewn about, including the unmentionables that Mrs Troubridge hadn't mentioned, but were clearly foremost in her mind when she momentarily dithered about letting Maxwell go up there. There was a half-

read Wendy Holden beside the bed (which didn't surprise Maxwell at all) and a bra slung over it that looked as though it was designed to hold two pigeon's eggs. A Spanish newspaper, days old, had been tossed into a corner. Franco was dead.

Maxwell checked the wardrobe. The drawers. Difficult to tell if anything was missing. If you don't know how many skimpy tops a girl has to begin with, how can you do the calculations now?

'Hello!' He heard the dulcet tones of his neighbour waft up from two floors below. 'Is everything all right, Mr Maxwell?'

'Yes, indeed,' Maxwell called, muttering to Nolan, 'Except for the fact that the woman employed to look after you, sonny Jim, appears to have gone walkabout. The curious incident of the girl in the daytime, hum? That's an allusion to...' He looked at his little boy, who was reaching out for the girl's bra in a half-hearted way. 'Oh, never mind. We'll talk later.' And he whisked him downstairs again.

'You didn't see Juanita go out, did you, Mrs Troubridge? I mean, her car's not there.'

'Isn't it?' the old girl frowned. 'Well, how terribly queer. No, I've been at the back here for most of the afternoon. Even had my lunch on the patio. It's such a glorious day, isn't it?'

'It certainly is,' Maxwell beamed at her. 'Getting more glorious by the moment. Well, thank you, Mrs Troubridge. Er...when Juanita gets back, could you ask her to pop round? Nothing vital, just a little matter of dereliction of duty, neglecting a minor, abandoning a helpless child, that sort of thing.'

'Oh, Mr Maxwell. Juanita is a lovely girl. I'm sure she meant no harm.'

Maxwell nodded, intrigued by the old biddy's relaxed take on it all. 'Yes, so am I,' he told her. 'But all the same...'

'Yes, of course. It *is* rather short-sighted, I can see that. Shall I hold baby while you conduct a fingertip search?'

Maxwell frowned. The old girl had been watching re-runs of *Frost* again. 'Thank you, no. It's time for his tea. I'll see myself out.'

Peter Maxwell swore he'd never do what he was doing now. He'd placed Nolan in his bouncy thing and let him watch daytime television. True, it was gone six and technically evening television, but that wasn't the point. And to be fair to Maxwell, he did have an urgent call to make. And Nolan seemed quite enthralled by the way Jessica Fletcher was clearing up the unsolved murder rate in Cabot Cove. What a woman! Everybody's favourite granny. Jane Marple without the senility.

'Jacquie Carpenter, please.' He spoke into that weird plastic thing that Metternich had never understood, the one all these humans, except the little one, pressed to the side of their faces.

'Can I ask who's calling?' the disembodied voice asked in the ether and the magic of late nineteenth-century technology.

'Peter Maxwell.'

There was a pause. They all knew who Peter Maxwell was down at Leighford Nick. First, because he was Jacquie's partner and second, because he was an interfering pain in the arse. If he wasn't real, you'd have to make him up.

'Sorry, Mr Maxwell. I'm afraid she's been called away.'

'Away?' Maxwell repeated. 'But it's home time. She should have put her chair up on her desk and said her prayers by now.'

The desk man was Den Morrisey and he'd never really cottoned on to Maxwell and his off-the-wall take on life. He wasn't going to let the chance pass. 'Well, you see, unlike you teachers, we police persons don't keep regular hours. No doubt she'll be in touch when she can.' Click. Brrr.

Bitch.

What Jacquie Carpenter was in touch with that bright, impossibly sunny July day, as afternoon turned to evening and the shadows lengthened over Dead Man's Point, was all the ghastly reality of sudden death. She'd been here before, too many times if truth be told, and each time she wondered how much more she could take. They'd tied a yellow ribbon round the old oak trees that ringed the sandy slopes of the dunes. They were high here, higher than the herring gulls that glided below them on the air currents, shearing the sandstone face of the cliffs. The sea pinks nodded in the stiffening breeze and it felt suddenly chill.

Jacquie watched the surreal scene emerge as she had so often before. The men in white coats might yet come to take her away, but at the moment, they were taking photographs inside the hurriedly erected tent, measuring angles, microscopically checking broken twig-ends and teasing loose fibres into carefully labelled plastic bags. She was an attractive woman, thirty-something, with large grey eyes and a wave of auburn hair. Not far away as the gulls flew, the men in her life were doing their best to cope without her. Priorities. Always priorities. Putting her life on hold.

Silent, upon a peak near Leighford, stood Detective Chief Inspector Henry Hall, gazing, like his favourite sergeant, out

28 M.J. TROW

to sea. The gulls cried to each other, bickering as they circled, annoyed by the intrusion into their world. Beyond it all was the sibilant, rolling hiss of the surf, booming far below, and the line of wake that trailed behind a cross-channel ferry breaking the haze of the skyline.

'Dead Man's Point, Jacquie,' Hall didn't turn to her. 'How corny is that?'