

Margaret McKlusky was disappointed with her voyage on the Divine Vessel so far. It was not as she had expected or imagined. She had fantasised about being looked after by the all male crew and being given guided tours of the ship, her opinion sought on all matters culinary or domestic, helping with any minor medical emergency (having been a nurse, well a veterinary assistant, many many years ago) and of course being the guest of honour in one of the many dresses she had brought with her at the Captain's table. In fact, the crew would be wondering what they would do without her when she disembarked in Auckland, and of course, should a romantic situation develop she would have taken it in her stride. But above everything she had been looking forward to being special, simply for being herself, just for a few weeks. But the reality of the situation was that the crew rarely spoke to her, no-one had asked for her advice on anything, she sat at the Captain's table every night along with the other guests and officers but there were no grand dinners or occasions for dressing up. Margaret had been, as was the history of her life in general, living in a fantasy world and had suffered another blow by real life, again.

Margaret was born during the second world war and was in a similar situation as many other female baby boomers in the new millennium. Along with all the other women who had given up jobs to have children and look after their husbands in the sixties as times changed they got left behind. Their husbands divorced them, their children grew up and resented them and they were left with no chance of a career in a one bedroom flat waiting for their pensions. Margaret had begun to receive hers a couple of years ago, but as she had been out of the country for long periods it was not as much as she would

have liked, so she was supplementing it with baby sitting for her rich daughter and doing odd bits of caring at the local old peoples home. It was not what she had expected to doing in her sixties, she was of course disappointed again, but she tried to keep cheerful and live life to the full, such as taking this trip to New Zealand. Not that it had been her idea.

She had moved to New Zealand when she was just twenty, having grown up just outside Newcastle. At the time there were lots of jobs available to skilled workers and she had just qualified as a veterinary nurse. She went in search of better weather, which she didn't get and a man, which she did. Franz was a Austrian marine biologist and had come to the Pacific in search of a job (naturally there is little nautical work in Austria). He had liked Margaret's pettiness and mass of blonde curls and soon they had two daughters. His work had taken them all over the world and Margaret had lived in many exotic seaside cities. He had insisted that the they all spoke German at home so she had even learnt a second language, which she had forgotten now. But in the eighties they had lived in Hamburg and Franz, bored with his career and inspired by the Beatles, who had played some of their first gigs there, learned to play the guitar, retired early and started a rock band. Margaret thought this was great to begin with, the girls had left home and as long as they got the monthly cheque were no bother, so she started wearing denim and tying her hair in a pony tail. Unfortunately Franz did not see a part for Margaret in his new rock and roll band or lifestyle, in fact he found her new zest for life and all things rockabilly quite ridiculous. But Margaret was just doing what she always did, following him, and when he told her to find her own interests and find out what she really wanted to do she was stumped. Even when she discovered a Polaroid of him being given a blow job whilst playing the guitar, filed under G in his cabinet (he was naturally organised being an Austrian) she was confused at what to do. He even knew that she had been looking at it as she mistakenly put it back under P, for Poloroid. Not thinking about the bad things in life was how she ran things under her

mop of curly blonde hair, now streaked with grey, and so she continued ignoring, until finally the divorce papers came through. I mean, she thought, Franz normally sorts these things out and I just sign them, which she did.

Franz now lived in a villa in Spain, playing guitar in the local hotels and sleeping with the holiday makers and Margaret lived in a one bedroom ex-council flat in south London, which once belonged to her mother. 'But I mustn't grumble,' she said frequently, which of course, inwardly she did, all the time.

This trip to New Zealand had been a present from her eldest daughter. Rich from her husband's family connections she had thought it would make a good birthday present (she couldn't possibly come herself mind, she just couldn't get away) and would get her mother off her back for a couple of months. Mark, her husband had arranged everything which is why Margaret was travelling the long way and the cheap way back to her favourite place. Margaret had, of course, been delighted with their generosity and mortified that she had to do it all alone. But when she expressed this to her daughter she was accused of ungratefulness, so here she was, on a ship headed to New Zealand just as she had been nearly forty three years ago, albeit her arse a little wider, her chin a little hairier and rather than looking forward to a whole new life she was wondering about how much she had left.

Margaret looked at her watch and popped another hormone replacement pill. She had to be on time with these little capsules of youth and feminine charm, otherwise she would end up like her mother, who had ended up looking more like her father. The crossing from Osaka to Yokohama was a little rough and Margaret had slept very little as she bounced around in her bunk. She had been sitting up in bed drinking Nescafe and finishing a condensed Maeve Binchy from Reader's Digest. The sun shone in under the blinds creating an orange glow to the room.

'Hmmm, it's going to be a lovely day,' she said to herself. 'I think I'll go for a walk before breakfast.'

She got up releasing a large amount of trapped air from her vagina as she heaved herself out of bed. She made a mental note to herself to do more buttock clenching exercises.

The air on the top deck was cold. The sun had only risen about half an hour before and the low clouds around it were a rich apricot colour. The sky above was bright blue and a plane had left a white trail, the end evaporating and dispersing. Black headed gulls called out as they circled the many fishing boats dotted around. Japanese men and women were making their firsts casts from the boats, sipping tea and looking forward to a relaxing Sunday fishing.

Margaret was leaning forward on the hand rail watching an able bodied seaman welding on the deck below. He was stretched out along a metal arm of a crane and was working on a pulley. Margaret knew who it was, she could see the shoulder length curly hair poking out from under his welder's mask and his cute round arse poking up as he leant right over. She moved further along the rail just in case she wasn't in his line of sight before and waved.

Fuck, thought Millian. It's that stupid passenger again, and he continued welding.

Oblivious to the thought that he might be busy or that it might be dangerous to attract a welding man's attention high up on a moving ship she called out, 'Morning!' Millian didn't hear her. She tried again. 'Sweetie!' and retrieved a bag of liquorice allsorts from her slacks and waved them at him.

Millian glanced up under his mask and ignored her. She's a fucking crazy woman, he thought.

Margaret frowned and moved her hips from side to side as if she was doing some kind of morning exercise and ate a blue cog. She went to shout again and then decided against it. What a rude man, she thought, I've no idea why I even bother with these sailors. I mean the captain and officers are always talking to me. He's no more than some common darkie. Which of course was half the attraction, the other half been those tight little buns.