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Richard MacAndrew

Excerpt

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Chapter 1 *From Fiji to Christchurch*

Ian Munro was lying on a beach on the Fijian island of Viti Levu. The sun was hot and the sea was warm and blue. Next to him a tall beautiful Fijian woman was putting sun oil on her long dark legs.

‘This is the life,’ Munro thought to himself.

Just then a man with a phone in his hand ran along the beach from Munro’s hotel. He was wearing a white shirt and dark trousers – one of the hotel workers.

‘Mr Munro! Mr Munro!’ he called.

Munro sat up.

‘Telephone, Mr Munro,’ said the man, giving Munro the phone. ‘Your father. He says it’s important.’

‘Thank you,’ said Munro. He took the phone. ‘Hello?’

‘Munro,’ said a voice that Munro knew well. It was Naylor, his boss.

‘Hello, Dad,’ said Munro.

‘Forget the jokes,’ said Naylor. ‘Are you with someone?’

‘Yes,’ replied Munro.

‘I know you’re on holiday. But I need you. Are you free?’

‘No, but I can be,’ replied Munro.

‘Good,’ said Naylor. ‘Get yourself to New Zealand. There’s a plane tonight to Christchurch. Your ticket will be at the airport. Cochrane will meet you at Christchurch airport. You know Cochrane?’

Munro did know Cochrane. He always had a lot to say for himself. Too much, actually, thought Munro.

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‘Yes,’ he answered.

‘Good,’ said Naylor again. ‘He’ll find you at the airport. And he’ll tell you what the job is.’

Munro smiled to himself. Naylor never left Britain on business or on holiday.

‘Any questions?’ asked Naylor.

‘No,’ said Munro. Naylor finished the call. Munro looked at the woman next to him. Then he spoke into the phone again.

‘Oh no! That’s terrible,’ he said. ‘Yes, of course I can. I’ll get a plane as soon as I can ... OK, Dad ... Yes ... Yes ... I’ll call you from the airport ... OK. Bye.’

He turned off the phone and kissed the woman softly.

‘Sorry, my dear,’ he said. ‘I’ve got to go. My grandmother’s very ill.’

‘Oh Ian!’ she said, looking up at him with a half-smile on her face. ‘Every time you come to Fiji one of your family gets ill and you have to leave early. What is wrong with all you Munros?’

Munro laughed.

‘I’ll call you,’ he said, touching the side of her face. Then he stood up and started walking along the beach.

* * *

Twelve hours later Munro’s plane arrived at Christchurch airport. Munro watched out of the window as the plane moved across to the airport buildings. Fiji was a wonderful place, but it was good to get back to work.

Munro was one of a number of people who worked for British Intelligence. Many years ago people called them spies. Today they were ‘foreign executives’. Same job, different name.

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Cochrane was waiting for him, a small bag in his hand, a smile on his face. He was wearing a dark brown jacket and light brown trousers. He looked like someone who sold used cars.

‘Good holiday?’ he asked. ‘Fiji, I hear. Lovely place, lovely people.’

‘Yes,’ said Munro.

‘Let’s get a coffee, shall we?’ said Cochrane. ‘Then I’ll tell you what the old man’s got for you.’

Naylor? The old man? Munro smiled to himself. He couldn’t see Naylor liking that.

Five minutes later they were sitting at a table in a corner of the airport coffee shop. Munro looked around at the other people. Cochrane saw him.

‘Hey! Come on, Munro,’ he said, laughing a little. ‘I can do my job, you know. Nobody followed me here.’

Munro said nothing. He just waited for Cochrane to begin.

Cochrane put his bag on the table and opened it. He started taking things out and putting them in front of Munro.

‘Map of New Zealand,’ he said. ‘Car keys. I’ll show you the car when we’ve finished here. Phone. My number is in the address book. Address of safe house.’ He gave Munro a piece of paper. ‘Nobody knows about this place except you and me. And the old man, of course. Remember the address and give me back the paper.’ Munro read the address twice and then passed it back to Cochrane.

Cochrane showed Munro a photo of a man – just the head and shoulders. The man had short fair hair and blue eyes. He was wearing a light blue shirt, open at the neck.

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‘Longstaffe,’ said Cochrane. ‘One of ours. Do you know him?’

‘I know who he is,’ said Munro. ‘I don’t think I’ve ever spoken to him.’

‘That’s OK,’ said Cochrane putting away the photo. ‘He knows who you are too. He’s a good man.’

Cochrane shut his bag and drank some of his coffee.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘This is the job. Go to Haast Beach ...’ He started to open the map, but Munro stopped him.

‘It’s OK,’ said Munro. ‘I’ve been here before. I know where Haast Beach is.’

‘Oh!’ Cochrane stopped speaking for a moment. Then he went on: ‘Well, Haast Beach. Longstaffe’s coming in there

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at one o'clock tomorrow night from a Norwegian ship. The ship is on its way back home from Antarctica. You meet Longstaffe and take him to the safe house in Queenstown. Longstaffe has some important information and we need to make sure he, and the information, is safe.'

'And then?' asked Munro.

'Then ... I don't know.' Cochrane smiled. 'You wait and see. I only found out about this job yesterday morning. I've done everything Naylor asked me to so far: car, phone, safe house, meeting you. I don't know what happens next – but when I do, I'll let you know.'

'OK,' said Munro. 'And why the meeting on the beach? Why doesn't Longstaffe just take a plane to Christchurch like everyone else who's in a hurry to leave Antarctica?'

'Something to do with the information he has,' said Cochrane. 'A lot of other people want it, I believe. Better for Longstaffe if not too many people know where he is. You know what I mean?'

Munro didn't reply. He finished his coffee. First he turned the phone off and put it in his pocket. He didn't like mobile phones. Sometimes you really needed them. The problem was that when you turned them on, people could find out where you were. Next he put the map in the side pocket of his bag. Then he took the car keys off the table.

'OK. Where's the car?' he asked.

* * *

Ten minutes later Munro was driving along the main road from the airport to the city. Two minutes after that he knew he had a problem. A large dark blue car was following him – and there were two people inside.

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Chapter 2 *Christchurch*

Munro turned left and the blue car followed him. Munro turned right. The car followed again. It wasn't a mistake. The car was following him.

Munro turned back onto the main road into the city. He thought as he drove. He needed to get away. But he also wanted answers to some questions. Who was in the car? Who were they working for? And how had they found him so soon?

Munro drove into Christchurch. In the centre of the city is the beautiful building of ChristChurch Cathedral, built in the late 1800s. As Munro drove past, he saw that there were a lot of tourists around it. Just what he needed – people.

He left his car not far from the cathedral and walked back. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the blue car stop by the side of the road. A tall dark-haired man got out, wearing jeans, a black T-shirt and a black jacket. He was about fifty metres behind Munro and was talking into his phone. Calling for help, probably. Munro needed to move fast.

Standing by the front door of the cathedral was a group of Japanese tourists. A young Japanese woman was speaking to them. Munro walked quickly past the group and in through the main door. Inside the cathedral he looked around quickly. He didn't have much time. There was a door to the visitors' centre on the left and two young women were just going through it.

On the right was a small room, the Pacific Chapel, with a few seats, and flags and clothes from different Pacific

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islands: Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands. Munro walked across and into the chapel. Now it was difficult for anyone to see him from the main door.

A few moments later the man from the blue car came in through the main door. He stopped and looked around the cathedral, but couldn't see Munro. Then he saw the door to the visitors' centre. Walking across, the man went through the door.

Munro came out of the Pacific Chapel, moved quickly back to the main door and out into the warm December sun. About fifty metres away a man was standing on a chair and speaking. He was wearing a long black coat and a tall black hat. A large group of people was listening to him. Munro remembered this man from his last visit to Christchurch a few years before. He was the Wizard, a strange old man with funny ideas, who often came and spoke to people outside the cathedral. Munro hurried over to this group and then moved in between the people who were listening.



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He turned his head and saw his follower come out of the main door of the cathedral. The man looked around everywhere, but didn't see Munro. Munro saw him look at his watch, take out his phone and make a call. Munro turned back to the Wizard. He was talking about his ideas and what he believed. People were asking him questions and laughing at what he said. Munro looked around again and saw his follower start to move away. He was walking down Colombo Street. Munro waited a minute or two and then started walking behind him. Now he was following – and maybe he could get answers to some of his questions.

It is difficult to follow someone at the best of times. When they already know your face, it can be very difficult. For five minutes Munro and the man from the blue car walked along Colombo Street. Munro stayed well back on the other side of the road. The man stopped once to look in a shop window, but soon moved on again. At the corner of Dundas Street, the man stopped again. He looked around. Quickly Munro moved into a shop door. A few moments later he looked out. There was no one there.

Munro ran to the corner and looked along Dundas Street. He was just in time. There was a small street off to the left and the man was turning into it. Munro followed quickly. He turned left after the man. It was a short street with no way out. The man wasn't there. Munro walked along the street looking at the doors. Then he heard a noise behind him. He turned. The man was coming out of a door on Munro's left. He had a knife in his hand.

'You're not so clever after all, are you?' he said. The man spoke English, but it wasn't his first language. Munro

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couldn't decide where he was from. Eastern Europe, Russia maybe? The man's eyes were cold. He moved easily. 'He likes fighting with a knife,' thought Munro. Munro looked round for help – a piece of wood, anything. Nothing. Slowly the man came closer and closer. Munro watched him carefully, arms out ready. The man moved quickly. His knife hand came out fast, but Munro was faster. He moved outside the man's arm; his right hand took the man's wrist, his left took the man's elbow. He pulled with his right and pushed hard with his left. The knife fell. There was a breaking noise from the man's elbow. He cried out loudly.

Munro pushed the man away. The man turned, his right arm by his side. Munro hit him once hard on the neck with the side of his hand. The man went down. His head hit the ground, his eyes closed. Munro put a hand on the man's neck. He was dead. Quickly Munro looked through the man's pockets. Money, credit cards in the name of Mr A. K. Krikorian, but nothing else – no bills or letters, no passport.

Munro pulled the body to the side of the street so it was difficult to see. Then he walked back and out onto Dundas Street. He turned left onto Colombo Street and walked further away from the cathedral. It was too dangerous now to go back to his car or to the area around the cathedral. A little way along the road there was an office on the left: 'South Island Cars'. Munro went in.

'I need a car,' he said to the woman behind the desk.

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Chapter 3 *From Christchurch to Haast*

The drive to Haast was beautiful, but Munro knew it was just one of many beautiful drives in New Zealand. From Christchurch he drove through the mountains over Arthur's Pass to Hokitika. There he stopped and bought some dark clothes to wear that night on the beach. Then he continued down from Hokitika to Haast, with the sea on his right, trees and mountains on his left.

He arrived at Haast at six in the evening and drove down to Haast Beach. There was a small group of buildings, a few cars and a long empty beach. He left his car near the others and went for a walk. All along the beach were pieces of dead tree brought in by the sea. They gave the place a strange feeling. He looked out to sea: three or four fishing boats, but no Norwegian ship. Not yet. He turned to go back to his car and saw two small penguins run into the long grass behind the beach. He went back to his car and drove away. He needed something to eat and to change his clothes.

Later that evening Munro returned to the beach. There was a full moon and it was quite light. Out at sea he could see the lights of a large ship. 'That must be the Norwegian ship with Longstaffe on it,' he thought. Munro found a place in the long grass out of the wind and sat down to wait. He was wearing his dark clothes from Hokitika – black jeans and a black sweater. He looked at his watch from time to time. Then at ten to one he heard the sound of a small boat. He looked up and saw the boat close to the beach.