

Over my long life I can count the number of people that know the true me on one hand. I never wanted to interact with regular folk that I knew I was destined to see die, so I was always at pains not to engage with people. I knew loss too well. I've seen my friends and loved ones die through the years, their anger, confusion, loneliness and fear at the time of their passing. When the love of my life at last found me, it was a complete surprise as I had hidden myself in a place where I felt I was secure from the world, alone on an island.

Tiritiri Mātangi had always been an important, if isolated, outpost for the Kawerau people as it was close to the important shark fishing grounds nearby. The grounds were an important winter food resource for many tribes so the area had been heavily fought over, that is until the Ngāpuhi people had swept the land clean during the musket wars. Some of the Kawerau tribe reoccupied it in the 1830's but all Maori had left by 1856.

The island had been controversially included in the Mahurangi Purchase which was disputed by multiple tribes that claimed ownership. In the 1867 Land Court Case, Māori tribes pointed out that the island had not been included on the purchase documents, with the Crown being unable to produce the deed of sale. Despite these facts, the judge decided that the Crown should continue possession of the land, especially seeing as the government had built the country's first lighthouse in 1865 to mark the approach to Auckland's Waitemata Harbour. The land had been cleared by the Crown and farmers who would burn off any bush or trees, sow grass seed and run large numbers of sheep.

The year that Norman Simpson fell hard for me, and I likewise, was 1890. Never wanting to be too far from the places I loved, I had disappeared to my island retreat, walking the deserted beaches, looking out across the water to the Whangaparaoa Peninsula and beaches and headlands of the mainland, my home for close to a century. The only other person on the island was the lighthouse keeper, who was easy to avoid as he was a drunkard. Occasionally a small boat would arrive with supplies for him or some farm hands, who would make their way out to check on the sheep, but they too were easy to deceive. Upon sighting any boat I would launch my small waka and make my way into the channel, lowering my line to fish for my dinner, just another ignorant native in their eyes. This was where Norman must have first seen me, as he made his way out to his posting as the new lighthouse keeper.

For the first few months of his tenure I managed to observe him from a distance as he walked the fields and coastline. The winter was not a harsh one but he wore the clothes fit for men of the ocean, with a woollen crew neck that framed his bearded face, a blue overcoat with shiny gold buttons and a white and black captain's hat. He strode around the island with purpose, taking in the air at dawn everyday, often idling in the small valley that still clung to the last of the original stand of brush. This was where I had settled, in one of the shacks built by the unfortunate Chinese workers that had been marooned here for months after the crash of the boat *Triumph* in 1883. Chinaman's Bay was this place's

name now. Here, Norman listened to the chorus of bird calls made by those that were improbably seeking a mate in their small sanctuary. He would do his best to encourage their song by mimicking them and dropping small pieces of bread around him. On his way back to the lighthouse he would check on fences and have conversations with the sheep. I empathised as I found loneliness often resulted in lengthy discussions with oneself.

I often spotted Norman completing one of his key tasks as keeper - the cleaning of the lighthouse mirrors and windows. The day that we officially met saw Norman hanging precariously from a rope which had caught round his lower leg. I had been alerted by his cries for help which were piercingly loud and also rather strange as Norman knew the island only had sheep that could hear him. He really was a helpless creature when I stood above him as he swung in the breeze, bumping into the lighthouse on each pass. I had clambered up the 77 steps of the red brick tower and now was able to pull him up and over the safety railing. His relief was evident with cries of, "thank you miss," stated over and over. When at last he stood on the narrow catwalk, I admonished him for being so reckless with his mortality stating that, "you only have one life, you should value it!"

In the days and weeks that followed I spent a good deal of time with Norman, marvelling in the endless views and sense of wonderment experienced from the top of the lighthouse. He doted on me, preparing meals, offering me the spare bed when the weather got rough and explaining all the important jobs he undertook each day. We seemed to be kindred spirits, understanding each other's need for solitude and secrecy. We spoke about the stories that made us who we were over endless cups of tea, me carefully leaving out my run in with death and my extended long life. This was the one area that Norman would often push me on, trying to pry open my secrets, using my statements from his rescue; What did I mean by one life? Does that mean you have had more than one?

Seasons, then years passed, Norman and I sharing our lives of isolation together. The comfort we felt with each other was something neither of us had experienced before, a sense of harmony, trust and acceptance that had eluded the both of us. It went unspoken that Norman began to grey around the temples and accumulate lines on his face, whilst I remained steadfast against the ravages of time. The eight years that we shared came to an end when his superiors, fearing that his lengthy stay of 'isolation' would harm him mentally, moved him back to a posting on the mainland. He knew it was for the best. If he had stayed he knew I would eventually have seen him die, gone like all the others.

In bed at night, when thoughts linger, I recall my first love and in truth, I wish for my end. Oh I'm sure I will die eventually, but I know I will have wished for death long before death finds me. We each owe a death, there are no exceptions.



- 1) Who is Wikitoria's, "Love of my life"?
- 2) Why was it for the best that Norman went back to the mainland?
 - a) Because he was very lonely.
 - b) Because he had stayed eight years.
 - c) Because if he stayed, Wikitoria would see him die.
- 3) Why was Norman described as being a 'helpless creature'?
 - a) Because he had fallen.
 - b) Because he was very lonely.
 - c) Because he spoke to sheep.
- 4) In what year was the country's first lighthouse built?
 - a) 1856
 - b) 1865
 - c) 1867
- 5) What was the main influencing factor in the judge's decision to let the Crown have the island of Tiritiri Mātangi?
 - a) The land had been cleared by the Crown.
 - b) The Crown could not produce the deed of sale.
 - c) The Crown had built a lighthouse.
- 6) Which of these was not a job for Norman?
 - a) Checking the fences.
 - b) Making endless cups of tea.
 - c) Cleaning the windows and mirrors.
- 7) What were three reasons why pākehā travelled to the island?
- 8) Why did Wikitoria describe the Chinese workers as unfortunate?
- 9) Have you ever realised that you are talking to yourself? If you do, what is it that you are usually saying?
- 10) Briefly explain how you think it was possible for Wikitoria and Norman to "share lives of isolation together?"

Word Salad

There are many unusual words and phrases in the story you have just read. Complete the following tasks to ensure your understanding:

- 1) Find the definitions of the following English words.
 - a) idle
 - b) maroon
 - c) mimic
 - d) admonish
 - e) kindred
 - f) doted
 - g) steadfast
 - h) linger
- 2) Use each of the words above in its own sentence - check to see that it makes sense!

Parts of speech: Conjunctions

The following sentences use a conjunction, a word that joins two sentences together. Identify the conjunction in each sentence:

- a) After the pā was emptied she left to go north.
- b) Alice Eaves lived on the land before she left it to Auckland Council.
- c) Wikitoria wished for her end because she had seen all her loved ones die.



This is the Triumph that ran ashore on Tiritiri Matangi in 1883. Legend has it that the ship's captain was drunk and left a junior officer in charge, telling him to aim for the big light - which he did very successfully, running into rocks directly underneath the lighthouse!