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Thompson was white, fat, middle aged and had soft hands, already showing the first hints of the catastrophe to come: patches of pigment that would, before many years passed, become liver spots. Rough spots that left untended would turn into skin cancers. The skin on the back of his hands was dry and finely wrinkled, like old onion skin paper.

Looking at his hands, pecking at the key board, shuffling names and sales figures and product numbers from column to column, Thompson readily imagined them as like his grandfather's towards the end of his life, when he no longer walked five miles along the beach every morning, before heading into the shed to craft lures and rigs in readiness for the evening's fishing. After the dementia set in, old Jack mainly wandered from room to room, introducing himself over and over to his wife, his middle aged daughter, his grown grandchildren, each encounter brand new: 'hello, I'm Jack Anderson. Are you a visitor here too? I'd like a cuppa?'

His handshake was soft, the back of his hands spotted and deeply wrinkled, the nails hard and yellowing. His smile was shy, the request for a cuppa almost a child's whine. Thompson would introduce himself ('Darryl Thompson, Jack, Netta's boy'), but the old man never registered a flicker of recognition to any of the old names: Thompsons, Andersons, Wylies, Days and Wilkies. You might just as well have said Ng, Tjapaljari, Huang, Papastergiadis. Everything was foreign. He was no longer burnt into the landscape, no longer tethered by his stories to this patch of land, a hot-footed dash through the scrub to the sea. He had cleared the scrub by hand: surely some trace of memory of the axe blows remained? He and Ella had made each brick by hand, dug the clay, pumped the water, made the moulds from salvaged timber: surely the walls spoke something of this almost Biblical epic to him? Not a whisper. His muscles were slack, his smile bewildered.

It was, on those last visits to Andanooka, hard to imagine this same man had ruled his family (two sons, three daughters) with an absolute discipline; that he was, according to the older cousins, 'a bloody tyrant'. It was an iron will that made his children obedient to his wishes long after they had left the farm, married and raised children of their own, that same iron will which ensured they all came back to their father's retirement house by the sea each summer. And then, one day, it was simply —gone.

Old Jack was soft and dry and disconnected, he shuffled from room to room in the old house, restless, rootless, aimless. Thompson found it harder still to equate that shuffling little man with the crossed braces and shy smile with the vigorous old man who outpaced all but the biggest and fittest of the grandchildren as they strode up

the beach for miles, lugging bait and rods and rigs to which ever spot was deemed ideal for the night's fishing.

Old Jack had made the land conform to his wishes, and in his retirement he was going to bring the sea under control as well, at least as far as he could cast a line. The grandchildren were called upon to aid and assist, instructed in the ways of tides and gutters and weed and bait and side casts. They made their own sinkers and spinners. There were rigs for tailor, whiting, herring, mullet and snapper, and precise times of day and places for the catching of each species. Jack even made his own rods until he finally conceded fibreglass was better than cane. Fifty years on the farm, twenty now beside the sea, Old Jack was weather beaten, then, finally, just beaten.

For his many grandchildren, farm kids mostly, those summers by the sea were weeks of swimming and fishing and tearing through the scrub. The mob broke off into several distinct gangs, sorted by age largely, and degrees of familiarity: the two Anderson families lived on neighbouring farms and went to the same school, and Andersons formed the nucleus of each of the sub gangs. The Thompsons, Wilkies, Wylies and Days were scattered across the countryside, and summers at Andanooka were the only time the cousins caught up, and the quieter ones were shy to start, slow to join. Summer by summer, the girls grew breasts, the boys grew awkward. And then, one by one, as they turned 17 or 18 or 19, they made other plans for summer, and eventually the grandchildren only dropped into Andanooka on surfing trips north, had a cuppa, a quick cuddle with Nan, a shouted exchange with Old Jack, then back in the car, hoping to make the Murchison by nightfall.

That was then. Now, it's summer again, and this morning it's already pushing 25 degrees at 7. Looking at his sagging self in the mirror, still wet from the shower, Thompson was almost nostalgic for those lost summers, when his body was lean, his hair dark and thick, his bare feet as tough as leather. He was never brown, just burnt: they were a dark haired tribe, but pale skinned, and in those remote years, a smear of thick white zinc cream across the nose was the most you needed before shooting through.

Memory might burnish the image of those summers, but the genes are not nostalgic, Thompson reflected as he stood there dripping onto the bathmat. He was woven from centuries of Scottish Highlanders and dour Danes and pale Englishmen. In this country we burn and peel, burn and peel, trying to burn ourselves into this landscape, but always shedding. The genes conspire, and cells go wild. Our skin betrays us.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tony MacGregor.*