



Source: Peter Gelling, 'On eve of Asian cup final, Iraq is the proud underdog', *New York Times online*, 29/07/07.

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It was difficult to describe Janine Crowe. Physically, she was nothing special—small and pale of skin and hair, not thin, not fat, a tiny nose and slim fingers, knobbly knees she'd detested as a teenager. She was mild in manner, although she was known to have the odd tantrum, but basically she was just a Plain Jane. In the world of success, she excelled at little. She had no home, no assets, and no degree. Her family who had stayed put in one place for seven generations were nonplussed by her constant roving and despaired that she would ever make something of herself, let alone get married and give them the grandchildren so desperately sought.

For the past ten years, Janine had rented the same apartment in Auckland for the same money from an elderly flute teacher, Mr Campbell—a gentleman who never asked for more money and never inquired into her personal life. What money she saved on not having a mortgage, she spent on travel. Since the beginning of government outsourcing in the 1970s, Janine, tired of working for fat white males in purposeless positions, thought she would set herself up in the one business she felt she understood—cross-cultural advice. All her travels had qualified her for such work, and her sprinkling of polite phrases in several languages convinced those who needed convincing.

Janine could hold a conversation with anyone in any situation pretty much anywhere in the world. Asian and Latin languages, Russian, Czech, Arabic, even a little Kiswahili. With her smattering of tongues and capacity to appear interested in the mundane, she chatted on street corners, in buses, on ferries, with all types of people. Nodding or shaking her head, pointing her chin, pouting her lips, tossing her hands upwards and outwards, blinking eyelids slowly, clicking her tongue, smacking her lips, gesticulations to suit the customs of the place.

The flash of her blue eyes in a sea of brown eyes, or her blond hair blowing amidst the dark, often settled the conversation in the minds of the listeners as memorable. An elderly Kurdish man with a drooping moustache in Ardahan, Northeastern Turkey had not forgotten his conversation with Janine at a street corner café some years ago. They had both been drinking thick black coffee. He was smoking a rough-cut cigarette she had rolled for him from her Champion Ruby packet. He had remembered her these many years. As had many others, from the papaya juice seller on the corner of Tran Khanh Du and Tran Khac Chan in Saigon to the pecan factory owner in Tehran whom she had met in the back of a bus careering its way downtown on a mid-winter's eve.

To her parents, no matter how far she ventured, Janine would always be their Greymouth Girl. Her girlhood in this small gold and pounamu jade mining town had been

a happy one. She spent most of it without shoes except for school hours and Sunday Service, running wildly along the beaches and diving into deep rock pools in search of live crayfish with her friends, Maori and Pakeha, white like her.

Her best childhood friend, Mahuika had gone on to become a lawyer in Auckland. They kept in touch. Janine sent Mahuika postcards. When she got back to town, she and Mahuika would sit on Punakaiki Beach staring into a blazing driftwood fire, breathing in the pure air. Occasionally, Mahuika would gently chide her saying, 'Moana, you wanna come home, girl. You are more Maori than me.'

Moana was the name Mahuika had given Janine—'You are Moana, girl, a big ocean, deep and full of secrets!' Janine would laugh but in her stomach, she knew Mahuika was right. She had always felt as if she was born into the wrong race. The nickname Greymouth Girl riled her to a fury. The man after whom this town had been named, George Grey, knighted by the Queen, was a murderer of the Maori. That she somehow belonged to a race of people like him who stole the land, was repulsive to her. And so she never seemed to fit, a strong Maori soul in a weak white body. Naturally, she was meant to be a wanderer.

And wander she did. One day, while she was waiting for Gilli to get off the phone, a small picture drew her attention. Gilli of Wild World Travel in Waitemata Street, had become a friend over these years of patiently booking air tickets to places Gilli could never dream of going. 'What, on my wages?' she would laugh through her heavily-lipsticked mouth. The picture was of the Nazca hummingbird in the corner of a map of Peru. Here, waiting at Gilli's desk, Janine noticed the magnificence of the patterns etched across the terrain to resemble monkeys, hummingbirds and other animals. The curiosity was that they can only be seen from a great height, as if from a plane. How was it that earth-dwelling people knew what they were drawing?

Gilli was on the phone, attempting to get Janine a flight to Kuala Lumpur, raising her eyebrows occasionally and whispering, 'Something so simple, and I get the morons on the line!' Janine waved her hand in front of Gilli's face. 'Gilli, stop, stop, I want to go there,' she said as she pointed to the small photo of Nazca, the map blu-tacked to the wall. Gilli put her hand over the phone receiver, looked at the photo, and said, 'You sure? Peru is a long bloody way!' Then she laughed, said sorry, hung up the phone, crossed her arms and looked at Janine over her pink-rimmed glasses. 'Okay then, let's start again!'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Miriam Taylor Gomez.*