

D-Day

Lisa Kenway

Snatches of music carried on the breeze, the notes warped and indistinct. Vera didn't put much store in the kind of rubbish the young ones listened to these days. Rap and doof doof. No melody, and no groove. She shuddered. The King was probably turning in his grave.

She hunkered down and folded around her Mills and Boon, tugging on the brim of her sunhat to block out the noise of the crowd. Squealing and giggling. The stench of coconut oil. If she kept her eyes on the sea, she could almost forget about the ruffraff on the beach. Her beach.

Attacking troops swarmed the shoreline, armed with boogie boards. It was like the Normandy landings, Vera thought ruefully, though rather than being invaded by the Allies, they were overrun by enemy forces.

Bob dug his tinny into the sand and threaded bait on a hook. He stood, bandy legs shoulder-width apart, and cast a line. It whistled past Vera's ear.

'Careful, Bob, or you'll catch me.'

'Catch you, Vera? Shoulda thrown you back years ago.' He grinned and winked.

Vera rolled her eyes. She stretched her hand out to admire the rock on her finger, a glint of amber in the afternoon light.

Behind her, a rowdy gang of kids were playing cricket. Their bare feet squeaked on the dry sand as they sprinted past, and the wet tennis ball thudded against the bat. The ball soared over Vera's head and landed in the tumble of surf at her feet, soaking her book. Salt on her lips.

A gangly teenage boy ran over to collect it, kicking up sand with his heels.

'Careful, son. Why don't you take your game somewhere else?' Vera said.

The boy glared at her. 'Why don't you mind your own business, you old hag?'

Indignant tears pricked her eyes. She turned away and pretended to survey the beach.

The crowd was finally thinning. The Sunday afternoon exodus. Like clockwork, she thought, the day-trippers made tracks as soon as the shadow of the clubhouse started to creep across the sand, trailing kids, eskies and mangled beach shelters.

A few metres away, a woman shook out her towel, and the wind whipped a handful of grit towards Vera, needling her skin. As far as Vera was concerned, they couldn't leave quickly enough. She wished they'd all just bugger off back to the suburbs.

As the last family made their way to the carpark, Bob peered at his fancy diving watch. ‘Seventeen hundred, on the dot.’ He turned to Vera. ‘Care to join me for a bit of recon, my love?’

Vera smiled and hooked her arm around Bob’s. ‘Don’t mind if I do.’

Bob lowered the bucket and fishing rod into the boot of the Falcon and pulled out his metal detector. He stroked the length of it and pressed his lips to the base.

Vera raised her eyebrows.

‘For luck,’ he said.

Bob waved the metal detector back and forth, sweeping hopeful arcs. The sun dipped below the surf-club building, and whitecaps gleamed in the deep-blue twilight. The beach now deserted.

Finally, the metal detector sang out: a glorious tone, crisp and clear. Vera swung her hips in time with the beat. She sunk to her knees, sifting handfuls of silt through her fingers. Her thumb brushed against something smooth and cool.

She raised her arm in the air and grinned, spinning a gleaming gold chain around on her wrist. ‘Victory!’ she shouted.