

A  
CARAMEL  
SKY

## ACCLAIM FOR A CAMEL SKY

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‘*A Caramel Sky*, Kayleen Hazlehurst’s moving historical romance novel, is a heart-breaking love story set in wartime New Zealand and bookended by 21st century vignettes. Hazlehurst’s prose is a love letter to this beautiful country.’

MAGGIE TRAPP, KETE BOOKS, NZ

‘Taut, swiftly paced, engaging. Scenes beautifully textured and vibrant with dialogue, personality and mood.’

MARK SPENCER, FAULKNER AWARD WINNER, USA

‘*A Caramel Sky* is in one aspect a family saga, and in another a historical coming of age tale. [Hazlehurst’s] interpretation and retelling of this period is truthful. I also enjoyed the fact that this novel is “real” and treats life with cool clarity, rather than rose coloured glasses.’

ESTHER PERRIAM, ELDERNET GAZETTE, NZ

‘This was a mighty read. I feel certain that such stories happened in real life. The war stories in the book are harrowing. The romance story was harsh at times. The writing had me lock, stock and barrel. I would recommend it to anyone that enjoys a good New Zealand story. It’s a long time since any book has moved me to tears. I just loved this book.’

TERRY TONER, BOOK SHOW, RADIO SOUTHLAND, NZ

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KAYLEEN M. HAZLEHURST

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*To Bunty and Doug,  
and their sweet generation,  
for their stories told and untold.*



*Their bodies may linger on earth  
but their spirits travel in the immensity of space.  
For as thoughts widen and become illumined,  
they acquire the power of flight ...*

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Master

Narratives by Kayleen M. Hazlehurst

A CARAMEL SKY

WHO DISTURBS THE KŪKUPA?

THE ANTIQUE CHEF

SONGS TO THE UNSUNG

THE SCIENTIST AND THE LION

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# CELTS OF THE PACIFIC

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2012



Emma McCallum rested her hands on the perimeter fence and let a breeze cool her face. Lime and cream mosses clung to the pickets. Currents of air stalked over the ridge and curled between the weathered gravestones, catching summer-dried grasses and shaking their heads of seeds.

She had a strange sense of coming home at this place. Her father bought the last two burial plots at the historic cemetery soon after the Second World War. The elders of St David's Presbyterian Church granted this privilege to Duncan in acknowledgement of the family's long affiliation. Five generations of McCallums rested on this wind-swept knoll, overlooking the rural valley and grey-green forested hills—these Celts of the Pacific who spoke to her of forgotten times.

Her skirt swished the pebbles as she wandered through the enclosure. She paused to read the oldest inscription: *Mary Anne McCallum 1824–1883, beloved wife of James Dugald McCallum.* James, a younger son, left the whisky distillery in the Inner Hebrides with a young wife and an endowment of £50. According to family legend, James was fifteen when he glimpsed young Mary across a fairground and knew at once she would be his bride. The couple took passage from Greenock aboard the migrant vessel *Jane Gifford* on 9 June 1842. After sixteen weeks at sea, the ship dropped anchor with its surviving 238 souls in the Waitematā Harbour.

James and Mary lost their firstborn during that terrible voyage from Scotland, one of seventeen infants to perish along the way, but with later children they laid a foundation for prosperity on the fertile river land north of Auckland.

A plaque was laid in the cemetery for Uncle Jack, who died at Gallipoli: *John McCallum 1888–1915, much loved husband of Sarah.* Jack's dog had howled behind the farmhouse for seven nights, then abruptly stopped.

It was weeks before the family received official notification that Private McCallum had gone missing during a frontal assault on the Turkish trenches.

Lastly, Emma visited her adventurous sibling: *Janice McCallum 1945–1968, dearly missed daughter and sister*. When her ashes were returned to them from New York, a place for Janice’s urn had been made between the reserved gravesites of their parents. Emma recalled her own premonition two days before that fatal accident—how ice had entered her veins as she stepped into the family car.

Memories ... Ghosts of memories ... All concealed in the leaning stones, the grass-choked shingle and earthen cracks and mounds of her neglected ancestors.

The valley was quiet now, except for the groaning of earth-moving machinery. They were tearing up more precious farmland in this mad push for development around the once tranquil township of Wakensfield. She knelt to pluck away a few weeds, securing a wayward hank of hair behind one ear with the back of a soiled hand. Hedge sparrows were her only companions. Who was she, if not the sum of all these people and places? At sixty-one and childless, she was the last keeper of family memories.

Her eyes were drawn to the distant hills. Streaks of cloud colour—gold and orange, magenta and grey-pink damask—had begun to caramelize the sky. After refreshing a vase with water poured from a Fowlers preserving bottle, she placed twelve yellow roses on her mother’s grave, arranging the flowers with fingers barely touching the petals.

‘These are for you, Mum. Charlie sends his love.’

CHAPTER ONE

GARDENIAS IN WINTER

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1935



## TWENTY PEARL BUTTONS

The year Grace Freeman turned seventeen the gardenias came out in June. She breathed in their sweet scent and plucked a flower near the gate to slip into her thick brown hair. Then, waving to her family who were watching from the kitchen doorway, she clicked the latch and hastened to the bus stop on Magnolia Terrace.

Grace was wearing her new frock with twenty pearl buttons down the front. It was a judiciously cut garment of fine wool crêpe, in cornflower blue to match her eyes. Grace's mother had cobbled the outfit together, using her treadle sewing machine, from remnants she'd bought at the sales. The tiny buttons had been rescued from an ancient blouse found at a church bazaar and about to be consigned to the ragbag. A white jacket trimmed with blue piping completed the ensemble.

When money was scarce, a bountiful button box was no small thing, and Nora's button box was splendid. Clasps and fasteners of every imaginable size, hue and rarity had passed through it. Over five hundred buttons were in there at any one time. Robert had counted them.

Nora Freeman had insisted she could afford to pay for Grace's bookkeeping course at Seddon College. These little extras for her children, Grace and Robert, were achieved by caring for the offspring of wealthier families. 'You're a capable young lady on your way to a promising career,' Nora had told Grace that evening.

Grace loved her mother but felt a closer kinship with her father. 'Beanpole', Henry affectionately called her. Long-limbed and gentle like him, Grace was five foot eight inches in her socks and seven and a half stone dripping wet. She was taller than most boys her age, yet she held her head high as her parents had taught her.

At the door Nora had given the white jacket a final adjustment. ‘There, dear. Now you will impress any well-bred person you meet at college.’

## THE FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH

Mrs Smith’s Quality Haberdashery was an enchanting place of employment for a young lady. This fabric and small-wares shop offered an assortment of lace, buttons, cuffs, collars, ribbons and bias bindings to smarten up any old garments.

Grace took up a casual position working two days a week and alternate Saturday mornings. Nora had made the initial enquiries, preferring to place her daughter in the company of three reliable women rather than within easy reach of working men from the larger stores. Over dinner, Grace shared her workday stories with the family.

‘I’m learning so much, Dad. Mrs Smith is such a clever businesswoman.’

Henry nodded. ‘A rare bird, indeed, by anyone’s standards.’

‘Maybe she’ll hire me as a bookkeeper once I’m qualified.’

Nora aligned her knife and fork on her plate. ‘It’s early days yet, dear.’

‘I know, Mum, but—’ She glanced back at her father.

‘You keep your nose to the grindstone, that’s my girl.’

Nora gathered up their dishes. ‘I’ll fetch the pudding.’

‘Will you be rich one day, Grace?’ Robert asked.

‘Don’t be stupid, Robbie.’

Nora trod heavily towards the kitchen with the words of her eight-year-old son trailing after her, causing a shudder of apprehension. *Will Grace do well in life?* Nora asked herself. She knew a great deal about social elevation and what it did to some people. She wanted prosperity not hardship for her children. *But if she becomes rich, will she still love her family?*