

## GREAT AGAIN

ANDREW STIGGERS

*Bloody foreigners - why don't you bugger off back across the Channel?* Frank had spied them through the tiny window set deep into the thick wall on the landward side of his tower. Judging from their general appearance, the young couple were from the Continent. What a shame he didn't have a working rifle, he thought. A couple of good shots would've solved the problem.

For years, tourists had visited the hamlet and gawked at his home on the shingle beachfront. In fairness, it wasn't just foreigners, but they were the only ones who had the arrogance to trespass up his walkway, bang on the door and ask if they could view inside. "Clear off! This is a private residence, not some museum."

Instead of approaching the raised entrance, the couple took the gravel path around the tower. Frank rushed over to the seaward side and kept vigil at another window, waiting until he'd caught sight of them again. *Good riddance*. They were treading their way up the beach along the shingle bank.

Nothing would ever breach this wall, Frank knew. Martello Tower No. 55 was one of the forts built along the south coast to protect the country against an invasion, which never came. Over the centuries, most had become ruins or had disappeared, but *not* his – no, his home was redoubtable, repelling everything nature had unleashed upon it, and would survive long after he was gone.

He'd first come across a Martello Tower – No. 28 – in the village of Rye Harbour whilst touring the region on holiday. Overlooking the river, the derelict fort

— named the Enchantress, after a cruiser that had grounded in the harbour — stood abandoned in an empty moat, half-covered in ivy with some of its interior brickwork exposed. “So beautiful... haunting. Like something out of a Romantic painting,” his travelling companion had observed. All Frank had seen was the horror of slow, creeping decay.

His sister was shocked when she'd discovered Frank had spent all his money buying and renovating No. 55. “An obscene folly,” she'd called it. He'd disagreed — this was a grade two listed building of historic significance and he'd already given instructions in his will to gift it to English Heritage. *This is my legacy.* She should be glad — *everyone* should be glad — that he'd made this tower great again. If only the same could be done with the country.

Frank traversed the cavernous chamber, his main living space, and placed the palm of his hand against the central brick pillar. He felt strong, secure, thinking of the immense firepower that used to be stored on the lower floor beneath him, an arsenal of gunpowder and cannonballs for a garrison of twenty men.

*Someone's outside.* He'd missed them at the window but Frank was sure they were now climbing up the walkway.

He positioned himself behind his entrance door. “Who is it?”

“It's us, Uncle Frank.”

*Abigail? They're early.* He unbolted and unlocked the door before opening it and peering outside, to see his niece and great-nephew waiting with their bags. He'd

invited them to stay the weekend after being pestered again by his sister. “You have to make an effort, Frank. They’re the only family you’ve got.” In truth he didn’t mind their company, and the boy had shown a keen interest in the tower - *what boy wouldn’t?*

“Hello, you two. You better come in.” He scanned down the walkway.

The boy leapt over to hug his great-uncle, catching him off guard. “Hello, Uncle.”

“Steady on, Lucas.” Frank gripped his great-nephew’s shoulder. The boy had grown considerably taller since they’d last met.

“Sorry about that, Uncle Frank. Lucas has been so excited to visit you again.”

“Right.” He patted the boy’s head. “We’re going to have fun, aren’t we, Lucas? Are you ready to help me man the fort?”

“Oh, yes, Uncle.”

“Excellent.”

Frank observed his great-nephew from his armchair. The boy had been admiring the old artwork and ornaments around the chamber and was now inspecting the brass bugle in one of the alcoves.

“Lucas, you really should come back and finish off your orange squash.”

Abigail patted the space next to her on the sofa.

The boy returned and sat next to his mother.

“Is that new, Uncle Frank? I don’t remember seeing it when we last visited.”

She studied the lion skin splayed out on the floor, its mouth gaping open, baring its teeth. Lucas had already toyed with it.

Surely, that rug would be hard to forget? Frank reached over to replenish his niece's tea from the pot. "Yes, I found it in a shop in Brighton last summer." He handed her the cup.

He'd spent years collecting imperial-themed décor for his home, proud of his heritage and the time when Great Britain ruled the world. After he'd retired from the company and researched the family tree he'd discovered he had ancestors in the military who had been stationed in India and Africa. A pity. If he'd known this when he was younger he might've joined the army and become an officer. *Life could have been so different.*

"And that gun is new too, isn't it?" She pointed to the antique rifle mounted above the fireplace.

"Actually..."

"Is that a *real* gun, Uncle Frank?" asked the boy.

"Lucas, you mustn't interrupt." His mother squeezed his thigh.

"That's all right, Abigail." Frank smiled at his great-nephew. "Yes, Lucas, it's real, although sadly it no longer works."

"Cool." The boy stared at the gun.

Frank finished his reply to Abigail. "I'd actually had that gun in storage for years and only got it restored recently."

"Well, they've done a terrific job, Uncle Frank."

"Yes, I'm very pleased." He noticed that Lucas had turned his attention to the

stairway. *Of course the boy remembers.* “Shall we go up top, Lucas?”

“Yes, please.”

“Do you mind, Abigail?”

“No, you go ahead. I’m going to finish off my tea and head back downstairs to unpack.”

Lucas followed his great-uncle up the narrow stone stairs to the top of the tower.

The stone parapet rooftop was Frank’s favourite part of his home. A cannon used to be mounted on a raised platform and could shoot lead balls a mile out to sea – foreign warships had no chance at all. The weapon had long since been removed and the rooftop area was now enclosed by a modern roof and windows, though an outdoor section was still accessible through a glass door. Every morning at dawn, Frank would step out the door, raise the Union Jack flag up a pole and watch the sun rise in the east. And every evening at dusk he would lower the flag as the sun set. Forty-foot up, the panoramic views of the sea, coastline and land were stunning.

“Uncle Frank, I forgot something. Can I go back downstairs and get it?”

“Yes, of course.” Frank wondered what could be so important.

On the fixed seating in the centre of the room — the iron pivot that used to rotate the cannon was hidden beneath it — he waited for the boy to return. When Frank first renovated the tower he’d considered restoring the parapet rooftop to its former glory with a mounted cannon, but he’d changed his mind, knowing it

would've been a minefield to get the plan through council.

Lucas came back up the stairs.

“What’s that you’ve got there?”

“Binoculars. Mummy bought them especially for me to use here.”

“Let me see.” Frank examined them. Cheap, nasty plastic. He found a marking underneath, *Made in China*. Everything’s made there nowadays. China this, and China that. *Bloody Chinese* - Frank didn’t trust them. “Don’t use them, Lucas.” He fetched another pair from a cabinet. “Here, use these instead.”

The boy swapped binoculars. “What happened to the other ones I used last time, Uncle Frank?”

“Oh, I still have them, but these are better.”

“They’re heavy. Are they old?”

“Sixty years old and British-made. Just be careful with them. Now, Lucas, like last time I want you to keep a lookout across the bay for any ships with foreign markings. Do you know what? I think you could be tall enough now to view from this ledge. Try it out. Can you see all right?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent, I’ll leave you to your duty, gunner. I have a few things to do downstairs, but call me if you spot anything.”

“Yes, Uncle.”

Frank took Lucas’s binoculars away.

Abigail trapped him in the kitchen when he was washing up the tea set. She was just like her mother, badgering him. “Are you sure you’re managing on your own? Isn’t this place a lot of work?”

“I can manage.” He knew she meant well. “How’s your mother?”

She poured the milk from the jug back into its container. “Good. She sends her love.”

Frank nodded.

“You should call her sometime.” His niece held onto the milk container.

“She does worry about you.”

“She needn’t worry.” Frank dried his hands and took the container away from her.

“Mum says you really need to get out more, Uncle Frank.”

He placed the milk back into the fridge and swung round. “How does she know what I get up to?”

“I...”

“Look, if she really must know, tell my sister that I go to my local pub once a week, and visit the bandstand and theatre in Eastbourne whenever something good is on.” *God, Chrissy’s worse than Mother ever was.*

“Please, Uncle Frank, I didn’t mean anything bad by it. We’re only concerned that you’re always cooped up in this place. Mum wants you to meet people.”

*Make friends* – he knew that was what she was implying. Frank could hear his sister’s voice in Abigail, and remembered Chrissy’s relentless pushing at him to get married. *It’s none of your business.* So what if I didn’t get married? He’d accepted

his fate a long time ago. *He had to.* The image of the Enchantress came back to him. *The crumbling brickwork. The boarded-up window.* No, I have my magnificent home now. I don't need anything else.

His niece picked up a used saucer still on the tray. "And she..."

He snapped, "Abigail, that's enough." He snatched the saucer out of her hand and placed it into the sink to wash up, beginning to regret inviting them to stay.

#

Frank made his excuses and escaped for a walk along the beach after being overwhelmed by another barrage of questions.

Braving the cold south-westerly, he crunched his way over the pebbles alongside the wire fencing of the neighbouring holiday homes, each with upturned dinghies and kayaks dumped on the shingle outside their back doors.

Why couldn't his relatives understand that he preferred his own company? That he was content to live in this remote and isolated place, wedged in between the sea and the flat marshland? During the summer months the nearby caravan park would fill up with holidaymakers who'd make use of the beach, but for the rest of the year, like today, there was hardly anybody about except the occasional windsurfer. Frank viewed the bay. He was surprised no one was out there taking advantage of the strong wind.

Passing by some weathered groyne poles protruding out of the shingle, Frank walked up along the raised sea defence until he reached a flotilla of little boats resting

on the pebbles outside the next coastal settlement. Amongst the vessels one of the local fishermen was mending his nets.

“Hello, Frank.”

“Hello, Tom. Good catch this morning?”

“Not bad. A few bass.”

“I see you’ve moved the boats further up the bank.”

“Had to. Tide’s been reaching up higher these past few months. They say the sea level’s rising.”

“Must be this global warming.”

“Well, whatever it is, at this rate you’ll have to shift your Martello too.” The fisherman chuckled.

Frank watched him at work for a while. Shortly after setting off again, he turned round to survey his tower.

Waves rolled in and washed up between the groynes all the way along the shoreline up to his home. He couldn’t see from this distance but wondered if Lucas was still on the rooftop. Frank had forgotten to tell the boy to finish his shift when he left for his walk.

He buried the tip of his boot into the shingle.

The last time he talked to his sister she’d called him a mad old fool hiding away in his ivory tower. “Sell up, Frank. Come and live near me in Surrey.” He didn’t bother to argue with her – he’d given up trying to make her understand why he was so passionate about the Napoleonic fort. Why not be proud of our past, our traditions and way of life? *Like other countries.*

He kicked up a pebble.

The decision had been easy to make when he'd discovered the building was for sale. No way in hell was Frank going to let this tower end up in ruins like No. 28, or worse still, bought by some foreigner.

#

"That's it, Lucas." Frank helped him to unhook the Union Jack after the boy had lowered the flag down the pole. "Good job."

"There you are, you two." Abigail appeared at the rooftop door, her hair blown over her face by the wind. "Come back inside, Lucas. It's cold." She swept her hair back.

After they re-entered the room, Frank made sure to lock the door behind him. Although he considered it inconceivable that someone could scale the wall and break in from the rooftop, he wasn't taking any chances.

"I can't get over these gorgeous sunsets. You're so lucky, Uncle Frank." Abigail gazed out to the west, the South Downs in the distance darkening beneath the deep amber glow of the disappearing sun.

He folded up the Union Jack. "Thanks."

"Uncle Frank, I've decided we're going to take you out for a meal tonight. My treat."

"No, no. That's not necessary."

"And I know the perfect place. I saw a Chinese restaurant in the next village."

I'll drive us there.”

He held on tightly to the flag. “I don't...”

“Lucas, did you know that your great-uncle used to live in Hong Kong?”

“Really?”

Frank opened the cabinet. “That was a very long time ago, when we still ran the place. I hardly remember it.” *He lied – he did remember.* Frank placed the flag inside the cabinet and turned round. “Abigail, I wanted to take you and Lucas to the local pub, they serve a good roast there.”

“Come on Uncle Frank. Let's try something different. Lucas loves his fried rice. Don't you?”

“Yes, please Uncle Frank, let's go there. Please?”

He regarded his great-nephew, and then Abigail. “All right. But tomorrow it'll be a roast dinner.”

“Deal.” His niece smiled at Lucas.

Lit up, the golden sign above the restaurant — subtitled with Chinese characters — shone warmly through the darkness, luring in the couple strolling ahead of them.

Frank had travelled down this road countless times but never once been tempted to visit the place. Peering inside one of the front windows he could see that a few tables were still available. *Damn.* He'd hoped they would be turned away. Reluctantly, he accompanied Abigail and Lucas through the entrance.

As they waited to be attended Frank observed the staff and wondered how

many of them were illegal immigrants – they were all shifty-looking, especially the elderly man with glasses at the till. *Bloody Chinese*. He nodded to the couple waiting at the front for their takeaway.

“Hello.” An old Chinese woman greeted them with a wide smile. “Three people?”

“Yes, please.” Abigail followed her to a table with Lucas in tow, Frank a few steps behind them.

The aroma in the air was intoxicating. *You can't fault them for their food*, he thought.

“Okay. Here are our menus. You call me when you're ready, I'm Mrs. Wong.” She leaned in to Lucas. “Anything you want, young man, you tell Mrs. Wong, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Good, good.” Mrs. Wong glided away to another table, the beaming smile still on her face.

“See, Lucas – there's your egg fried rice.” Abigail pointed in her menu.

“Number thirty-six.”

The constant chatting around the restaurant was giving Frank a headache.

“So, what would you like to eat?” Mrs. Wong returned.

Frank checked with his niece. “Abigail, are we ready to order?”

“Yes, I'll have the sweet and sour pork... Number eighteen. And my son will

have the –”

“Number thirty-six.” Lucas held up his menu.

“Yes, that’s right – the egg fried rice.”

“And you, sir?”

“Number twenty-eight.” Frank thought of the Martello tower in Rye Harbour.

“Wah, good choice, lucky number, and tasty too.”

“Yes, I know – it symbolises double prosperity.” *Although it hadn’t been for the Enchantress.*

“You know about Chinese numbers, sir?”

“A bit.” But Frank hadn’t chosen the steamed Cantonese fish because of the auspicious number. It had been his favourite meal in Hong Kong.

“Good, good. The bass is very fresh, from the bay here.” She smiled. “Any jasmine rice?”

Frank glanced over to Abigail, who nodded. “Yes, two portions please.”

Mrs. Wong read back the order.

“Yes, that’s correct.” He gathered up the menus and handed them back to her.

As they waited for their order, Frank noticed his great-nephew playing around with his chopsticks. “Lucas, maybe you should use a spoon and fork with your meal.”

Abigail nodded to her son.

Frank stared down at his own chopsticks. He hoped they would bring out the food soon – he wanted to get home.

Mrs. Wong laid out the remaining dishes on the table. “Sik fan.” Her smile covered the width of her face. “Enjoy the food.”

She should stick to speaking English, Frank thought – this is England after all. He pulled his order closer to his rice bowl.

Frank couldn't deny it, his meal looked and smelled delicious. The moist piece of steamed fish was drizzled in sauce and generously garnished, and the fragrance of the ginger, coriander and sesame oil drifted up his nose. He couldn't help himself, he had to take a quick bite.

Mrs. Wong returned with more water. “How's the fish, sir?”

To the ignorant patron this would appear a simple dish to make, but the trick to a perfect steamed Cantonese fish was all in the timing. And this one was cooked just right with all the subtle flavours coming through in the taste. “Hou hou,” replied Frank.

His relatives were taken by surprise, and Lucas gaped at him. “Wow, you speak Chinese, Uncle Frank.”

“*Cantonese*. No, not much.”

Mrs. Wong clapped the tips of her dainty fingers together. “Good, good. You can learn well from Uncle, young man.”

Although Frank had never admitted it to anyone, the happiest time of his life was spent living in Hong Kong over thirty-five years ago.

#

The seafood restaurant on Lantau Island bustled with diners. As Frank ate his meal, locals and tourists waited in line at the entrance next to the glass tanks full of giant crabs, lobsters and rainbow fish. Large family clans occupied most of the other tables. A loud whoosh caught Frank's attention. He looked over to the steam-filled open kitchen at the back of the restaurant and watched flames flashing up and dancing around a wok. His view became blocked as a waiter hurried by with a heap of dishes, to place them one by one onto the revolving stand in the centre of the neighbouring round table.

The proud restaurant owner wearing his trademark straw hat came over to ask Frank and his companion how their food was. His smile revealed he was devoid of his two front teeth.

“Hou hou.” Frank had been practising his Cantonese.

The owner made a thumbs up. “Number one?”

“Yes, number one.” Frank nodded.

Although he and his parents had been excited to find out Frank had been given the opportunity to work in the company's Hong Kong office, he was still apprehensive about moving to the British colony in the Far East – apart from a short trip to France, he'd never been overseas. On his plane's final descent he'd gripped onto both armrests when he realised how close they were to nearby city apartments – he could see people in their living rooms as the plane prepared to touch down on the airport runway jutting out into the harbour. But after acclimatising himself to foreign city life, Frank understood there was nothing to fear about the place. He'd embraced the skyscrapers and high-rise buildings; the trend-setting crowds dressed in the latest

fashions and accessories; the giant advertising boards for luxury goods on every corner; the mass of taxis competing for business with the trams and buses; the multitude of malls, boutiques, gold shops, money exchanges, restaurants, Western burger joints and Eastern food stalls; the local and more touristy street markets; the bright neon signs of the pubs and clubs; the golf courses and racecourses; the barbecues amongst the hills and down on the beaches; and the international cruise liners, floating restaurants, yachts and container ships docked in port and out amongst the harbours and islands. *This is the London of the future*, he realised. And over time he began to fall in love with the vitality and vibrancy of the place — and with Wendy, too.

Frank smiled at his girlfriend across the restaurant table.

When they first met in the office, Frank had quizzed her name. “That doesn’t sound very Chinese.”

“My given name is Tsz Wai.”

“I’ll stick to calling you Wendy then.” They both laughed.

And that was the beginning of Frank’s lessons, feeling like a schoolboy with a crush on his teacher, eager to learn. Wendy taught him well — about the many local habits, how to use chopsticks, how to address people, and some Cantonese phrases. She even explained some basic facts he was surprised not to have known already, particularly that their culture was one of the oldest in the world, thousands of years old, and that they’d invented gunpowder, the cannon, the compass, *even tea*.

She was still teaching him now as they dined in the seafood restaurant, observing the other patrons. She told him about extended families and the respect for

elders they all had. It's a shame you don't see this too often back in the UK, Frank thought. All you hear about are tearaway teenagers and old people being shelved off onto retirement homes.

A garlic prawn dropped from the clutches of his chopsticks.

Wendy laughed. "Here, let me show you again." She went to his side of the table and, leaning in behind him, reached over to help him hold the chopsticks properly. "Now, try again."

Her warm breath on his ear and neck caused him to have that feeling in his stomach again. Like that time in Stanley Market at a stall when she pressed a "Made in Hong Kong" T-shirt against his back to confirm his size, or the evening they sat close to each other on the Star Ferry, holding hands, admiring the lights spanning the skyline over Hong Kong Island as they crossed Victoria Harbour, old junks sailing silently beside them.

Frank also had that same feeling as they'd stood together on his apartment balcony watching the fireworks that welcomed in the New Year. And afterwards, his passion intensified when he waited for her on the edge of his bed, transfixed on her silhouette behind the embroidered dragon screen. As she stepped forward into the soft light he became mesmerised by her porcelain face and petite red lips, her silk gown hanging loose to reveal one naked white shoulder.

Frank couldn't stop himself from opening up to her — he'd never done that before with anyone — and share his deepest feelings. He told her his intention to continue working in Hong Kong once his contract ran out so he could be with her. He told her he wanted to learn the language so he could talk to her parents. And finally

he told how much he truly loved her.

Wendy's alluring eyes trapped his gaze across the table in the restaurant. Enchanted, he couldn't physically move, only think through in his mind when to announce his intention to settle down with her... marry her ...

However, as with even the best of illusions in life, the magic didn't last.

After Wendy didn't show up for a date and return his calls, then hid from him at the office, Frank decided to confront her at home. He waited outside the apartment front door for her mother to fetch her.

"I can't see you again, Frank." Wendy had stepped out into the corridor, but kept the door slightly ajar behind her.

"Why? What's happened?"

"My parents don't approve of our relationship."

"Don't approve? What have I done?"

"You're a foreigner."

*A foreigner? Me?*

Chinese opera on the TV blared out from across the corridor as an old man left a neighbouring apartment.

"But I thought they liked me? We seemed to get along."

"I'm sorry, Frank. They don't want me to see you anymore."

Frank glared at the door behind Wendy. "Can I talk to them?"

"No."

“Okay, fine, but surely it doesn’t matter what they think?”

Her mother called out from inside their apartment.

“Yes, it does matter, Frank. I’m Chinese and they’re my parents. You must respect our ways.” Wendy placed her hand on the door handle.

“Don’t you love me, Wendy?”

She released her grip. “Yes, I do, but... I cannot see you anymore. Please go. You’re making this hard for me.”

Bewildered, Frank left the apartment block and wandered around, searching for a taxi. Not paying attention as he stepped off the pavement to cross the street, he landed in a pool of filthy water that splattered his office trousers.

Eyes stared at him. And in that moment he became conscious of himself and his surroundings, and realised how different he looked from the others. He sensed their disgust, their contempt. All of them. The old man who squatted on a stool and smoked outside a shop. The two uniformed students who brushed past him with their rucksacks. The women waiting at the bus stop who stared at him, whispering to one another, one raising her eyebrows, laughing.

Other pedestrians began to give him a wide berth, as if he were a disease-riddled leper. He stopped briefly to check the dirt on his trousers, and then with his head lowered, strode more briskly down the street. *Where’s a taxi when you need one?* Hurrying past a roadside food stall, he witnessed a hawker hack the head off a chicken on a wooden block.

#

*Bloody Chinese.* He dumped his chopsticks down and pushed the half-eaten steamed fish away from him. “I’m sorry, Abigail, I have to leave. I have to go back home.”

“But we haven’t finished, Uncle Frank.”

Lucas swallowed his mouthful. “What’s the matter, Uncle Frank?”

“Nothing. I just have to leave.” He got to his feet.

Abigail patted her mouth with her serviette and placed it on the table. “Do you want me to drive you back?”

“No, no, I’ll take a walk along the beach and meet you back at home.”

“But it’s pitch black outside.”

“I’ll be fine. I’ve got my pocket torch. Thanks for dinner.”

Frank ignored Mrs. Wong’s attentive smile near the front of the Chinese restaurant and departed out into the darkness.

Even though his torch helped to guide the way forward, Frank could barely see anything and had to trudge carefully along the shingle bank. With the faint lights of Eastbourne glimmering in the distance behind him and the homes all darkly quiet along the beachfront, his was the loneliest light against the vast emptiness of the universe high above his head in the cloudless night sky.

He remembered how, shortly after the breakup with Wendy, he’d requested to

be transferred home – he couldn't bear to remain in Hong Kong, catching glimpses of her in the office, being reminded of her wherever he went. And upon returning to these shores Frank had buried himself in a mountain of work, trying to forget her, forget what her parents had said. *How dare they call me a foreigner!* I'm British, for Christ's sake. Doesn't that mean anything at all nowadays? They're the ones who should've felt privileged Frank had chosen their daughter.

In the darkness beside him, waves crashed onto the shingle and rushed back out to sea.

For years, he'd struggled to block her from his mind. But then that visit to Rye Harbour happened, and at the poignant sight of the Enchantress lying forlorn, forgotten in the dry moat, Frank's deep hidden anguish and sadness swelled up to the surface. The defenceless tower, half-veiled in a chiffon of ivy, vulnerable with its brickwork revealed, had reminded him of Wendy, emerging from behind the screen in his bedroom, the gown hanging loose, her naked shoulder. Even after all this time he still missed her terribly though it pained him to remember. *No, I can't bear it.* He'd dismissed the vision from his mind and retreated to another vantage point. Staring at the tendrils spread all over the Enchantress' wall, Frank grew fearful – he'd realised this same slow creep was inside him, and if he didn't act soon the decay would consume him. Unable to view the ruins any more, he'd turned away. *Now is not the time for weakness.* Presenting his best stiff upper lip, he'd called over to his travelling companion and said they should leave.

Up ahead a faint light from the rooftop of his tower appeared in the darkness, and the biting south-westerly nudged him towards it.

The sale of No. 55 had been a godsend. Immediately Frank knew he had to buy it, using his hard-earned savings from years of company service. He was determined to repair and reinforce the brickwork, seal it up, make it strong again.

Edging forward, Frank was guided by his tower's growing light. It burnt through the night as bright as the resentment and hatred he'd let fester these past thirty-five years. He took longer strides in the shingle.

He'd never forgiven Wendy and her parents for rejecting him. *You must respect our ways.* He remembered how embarrassed he'd felt in the street leaving her apartment block – the old man disapproving on the stool, the women laughing at him. *Undoubtedly they laughed again when our government gave away Hong Kong.*

Climbing up his walkway, Frank faced towards the dark bay. Divers had found the wreck of a warship in the seabed a few years ago, some speculating it was the HMS *Resolution*. He'd always thought that would be a good name for his tower.

*I'll make things right. I'll show these foreigners that we're still important in this world, that they're the ones who should be respecting us.*

#

The next morning he watched the rising sun in the east from behind his rooftop parapet, the Union Jack flying in the breeze above his head.

His great-nephew, still in his pyjamas and dressing gown, joined him outside. "Are you all right, Uncle Frank?"

"Yes, of course I am. Just had some indigestion last night." He thought about

telling Lucas to go back inside because of the cold air but dismissed the idea. The boy had to learn to toughen up. *After all, we had to.* “Why don’t you grab my two sets of binoculars from the cabinet and bring them out here?”

As he waited for his great-nephew, Frank patted the side of the stone parapet. Rock solid, nothing would ever break open this wall.

“Good boy, Lucas. Right, step up here next to me and we’ll both keep a lookout. I’ll give you a pound if you spot a Chinese container ship.”

“Uncle Frank?”

“Yes?”

“These binoculars are quite heavy. Can I use the new ones Mum bought me?”

“No, no, rest your elbows here so you can prop them up... There you go.

That’s better, isn’t it?”

Frank and his great-nephew kept watch at the parapet and scoured the English Channel with their binoculars.

**END**

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Author: Andrew Stiggers  
Country of residence: New Zealand  
Nationality: British/New Zealand  
Mother tongue: English



Of Thai-British heritage, Andrew Stiggers was born in France and has lived in various countries since childhood including Hong Kong, Brunei, Cameroon and Singapore. He studied English Language and Literature at Reading University in the UK. He now lives with his German/Swiss wife and children in Auckland, New Zealand. He is an award-winning short-story writer and his work has been published in international journals and anthologies. Visit his website: [www.andrewstiggers.com](http://www.andrewstiggers.com).