

Everything felt heavier than it used to. Susan's legs, her feet, her organic cotton socks, and even though she only ordered five hundred grams of almonds from Taste Nature, the crumpled paper bag in her hand felt more like seven-fifty. When Susan first clambered up Jacobs Ladder she was eleven and it was summer and she did it because she could. Now Susan was eighty-two and sweating and she walked the steps all year round because her doctor told her so.

Good for the circulation, was the advice drifting from the far side of the MDF desk. Advice that obviously didn't extend to the varicose veins jagging across the doctor's own hands.

Susan had found herself nodding in the fluoro-lit office, as she knew the importance of circulation with her father having worked for the North Otago Times. She could still smell his ink-stained calluses despite the hands succumbing to soap and ashes. Ashes that begat a small ceremony of once-neighbours and uncles. Uncles that begat a wake of cheese and stale Saladas. All this was a million, or even a million-and-a-half steps ago, and perhaps if Susan had circulated her own love a little sooner it might have led to less steps. It might have led to less doctors. Being Catholic didn't help, being divorced even less, and as Susan gasped to the 279th and last step, she turned and caught her breath while gazing at the bay and a town short on men devoted to almonds.
