

MY NEW ZEALAND STORY

**GOLD!**

The Journal of Mary Brogan,  
Otago, 1862

Written by  
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**SCHOLASTIC**  
AUCKLAND SYDNEY NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO  
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# DUNEDIN

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*September, 1862*

Wednesday, 10th September, 1862

I have a secret!

I am good at keeping secrets, but this secret is the biggest one I have ever needed to keep. The feelings it gives me – excitement, anticipation, hope, sometimes fear – keep buzzing about inside me so that I think I shall burst if I don't tell someone! So I shall let it out of my head on to this paper, into this journal, and maybe that will cancel the urge I have to tell someone.

I am going to the new goldfield.

Alone.

Reasons:

1. I don't want to leave school.
2. I don't want to end up as a washerwoman like mother, or as any sort of maid.
3. I want to be a teacher.
4. I hate Uncle Rupert.

(Mr Riley, the teacher we had last year, used to say to anyone who he thought was sitting looking confused, "Make a list, child. Tidy up your mind by sorting out

the main points. Make a list!” And I learned the habit. A list does tidy up my mind.)

That list of four reasons adds up to one overall reason that has made me decide to go to the Dunstan Diggings, which is what the newspapers are calling the new goldfield. We need money. However I am not intending to search for gold. I am going to search for my father.

### *Thursday, 11th September*

It would never have occurred to me as a possibility had I not overheard mother and Aunt Ruby talking when they thought I was still out buying eggs from Mrs Worthington.

I didn't have the intention of eavesdropping until I heard Aunt Ruby saying, “. . . and that husband of yours will be there, I'll be bound.”

I stopped short, clutching the basket of brown eggs, some still faintly warm. I dislike the way Aunt Ruby sometimes harangues Mother about my father. I can't bear seeing the look that crosses Mother's face, even after all this time. Before entering the room, I waited,

hopeful that Aunt Ruby would go on to some other subject.

“He’ll be chasing this new gold, I’m telling you.”

Mother must have looked doubtful.

“Oh, I know you think that if that’s the case he would have been in the first rush at Tuapeka, and that Rupert would have spotted him there.” (What did she mean that Rupert would have spotted him?) “Well, not every Australian digger crossed the ocean for that, but now there’s this Dunstan field discovered – and who knows how many more finds to come – there are plenty from Victoria either on their way or here already. You mark my words; your husband will be one of them. He always thought getting rich quick was a better option than steady work . . .”

On and on she went and I stole away and sat outside a while.

We had all lived in Australia once: Mother and Father, my little brother Billy and I. We were coming to settle in New Zealand because Father believed he had accumulated enough gold to buy some land here. Then a sudden streak of luck put him onto a really rich find. Mother and Billy and I came on out to Wellington as planned while Father stayed on to take

advantage of the easiest gold he'd had the chance to mine. He was to follow in no more than six months. But he never came.

I feel ashamed to know he thought so little of us, so I tell no one that story. If anyone asks about him, I say that he is dead. Billy doesn't even remember him and Mother still sometimes cries when she thinks of him. I try not to think of him at all.

We waited a long time, and in the end, we moved from Wellington and came all the way down to Dunedin because of Mother's sister, Ruby, being here. When Billy says, "Why didn't we stay in Wellington?" which he thinks would be much more exciting, Mother says, "It's good to have family close by."

Maybe it is some comfort to Mother. It certainly isn't to me.

Even though I had heard Aunt Ruby going on about it before, I'd never really believed that our father might be in New Zealand. Yet suddenly, sitting there in our scruffy little garden that Mother never has time to tend, I knew it could be true. Our father, who didn't bother coming to New Zealand to catch up with us, could be out here chasing the gold. The new finds are astounding and there are shiploads of people coming

into Dunedin and streaming out the other side heading for the Dunstan “to reap the golden harvest.” (I read that in a newspaper Uncle Rupert left lying about and thought it was a wonderful way to describe the search for the treasure of gold.)

Mother has told me stories of how treasure-hunting was in Father’s veins: “I used to suggest to him that we start a shop instead. The people who find gold spend generously in a shop and even the people who don’t find any still have to eat and clothe themselves. So they spend too. ‘I could help you in a shop,’ I used to say. But he wouldn’t be talked into it. It was the gleam of gold that he loved. He said it sang to him.”

When Mother said those words, I imagined golden notes dancing over the earth, and my father following. Our father could very well be out there on the Dunstan still following that song of gold. Aunt Ruby could be right.



*Sold!*

*Friday, 12th September*

If I could find my father and make him come home then Mother would be so much happier and so much better off, especially if he'd found some of his golden dream. And if we were better off, I wouldn't have to leave school at the end of this year, as Mother says I must to help her earn. Neither would I have to look after Aunt Ruby's seven grizzling children.

And I'd never have to be bothered by Uncle Rupert again. I have to be grateful for the fact that he pays for anything Mother cannot afford that Billy and I need at school, but that does not make me like him one bit. There are two things though that I am glad about right now.

Because of him, I realise that a girl going alone to the goldfields might find it difficult. Therefore I am going to the Dunstan pretending that I am a boy. And in my trouser pockets will be the shining sovereigns that Uncle Rupert gave me the last three Christmases.





*Saturday, 13th September*

Yesterday I stole Alfie Watkins' new boots and they fit me perfectly! That will teach him for being so nasty to Billy last year. I just wish he knew it was me that took them.

It was so easy. I just followed Alfie's gang after school until they stopped to play by the river. They all left their boots on the top of the bank before they climbed down to the water.

I knew Alfie's would most likely fit because I had to stand beside him when we lined up to go into school that morning and I realised that his feet were exactly the same length as mine.

I have them on now, before Mother gets home and while Billy is playing next door, and I'm going outside to kick stones and walk in the mud. Then they'll look as if I've owned them for ages.



*Sold!*

*Sunday, 14th September*

I asked Mother last night if Uncle Rupert ever went to Tuapeka looking for gold.

“Good gracious no,” Mother said. “Rupert is an inside man who’s used to being behind a desk.”

I said that I had heard Aunt Ruby mention once that he had gone to Tuapeka. “Really,” said Mother, and she stirred the pot as if it mattered. Vegetable soup again – and that didn’t need stirring. Just when I was about to leave the room, Mother suddenly said, “Uncle Rupert once had the idea your father might be there.”

So, he had gone to look for my father. I didn’t say anything. Stir, stir, stir.

“He didn’t see him, if he was there,” she said. I hated the sad look on her face.

“Well, it doesn’t matter, does it?” I said.

Mother didn’t answer me but a thousand reasons of why it did matter probably flashed through her head. If he’s there to be found, I will find my father.

While I am sitting in church this morning, I will go through my list of things I am taking and try and think of what else I need. I am planning carefully so that I shan’t have to carry too much.

Tuesday, 16th September

At present I have ready:

- 1 sack (and twine to knot it on my back)
- 1 shirt
- 1 pair of trousers (from a pile of clothes set aside  
for Billy to grow into)
- 1 pair of boots
- 2 pairs of socks
- 1 jersey (which I'll wear underneath the shirt  
because it looks like a girl's)
- 1 waistcoat
- 1 cap (Billy's. He won't mind that it's gone  
because it's too big for him. He gets a lot  
of cast-offs from Aunt Ruby's children.)
- brush and comb, hairpins, soap
- 1 large size tobacco tin (to keep my journal and  
pencils in so they stay dry)
- 1 enamel plate & 1 knife and fork

As well as stealing Alfie Watkins' shiny boots, I stole a shirt, too. I feel sorry about that, but not *too* sorry because the fence I snatched it off had 17 shirts hanging over it! I grabbed a grey one.

I didn't *steal* the waistcoat; I just didn't burn it. Mother was given it by a kindly lady who thought it might fit Billy. "She must have thought he was eighteen not eight," said Mother. Then she told me to put it on the fire. I didn't. It's a home-made, heavy one, not one with a silky back for wearing under a suit. It's big on me but it will be warm and it has handy pockets.

*Wednesday, 17th September*

I can't take the only photograph we have of our father. Mother doesn't keep it on the mantelpiece, as most people do with their wedding photograph. She has it in her bedroom.

I suppose my father has changed anyway because Mother's photograph is fourteen years old now. My memories of him are years old too, and hazy. They don't even seem to match with the man in Mother's photograph. Would I even know him if I happened to stand alongside him?

I had just turned six when we left Australia and for seven years now I have tried not to think of my father because I am very angry that he didn't bother to come

after us as he had arranged. Now that I am thinking of him, I realise his appearance must have altered over the years.

Even so, if I call him by his own name he must make some response. Will Brogan. That could be easier for me to say than “Father.”

I have been practising with my hair and know how to pin it tight and flat on my head so that there are no bulges under the cap. If I get the braids in the right place, I can tug the cap over them. Then it stays firmly in place with no risk of coming off.

### Thursday 18th September

Two days to go. I have decided to leave on Saturday.

Sometimes I'm excited. Sometimes I'm scared. Most times I'm a mixture of both and if I could draw, I would make a picture here of a stomach full of circling butterflies.

Most of all, I'm determined. Mother deserves a better life. I don't want a life as exhausting and unrewarding as hers. I want to be able to go back to school next year and stay until I have learned everything I can so

*Sold!*

that I can become a teacher. I shall wear a grey dress with a white collar. My hands will never be split and bleeding because of being too often and too long in too much water and washing soda, like Mother's often are. I shall be kind to all the children, too (although it will be difficult if I have someone like Alfie Watkins in my class).

### *Friday, 19th September*

In school today, Miss Helliwell talked about the gold rush. My friend Susan says Miss Helliwell's fiancé is going to leave his job, as so many in Dunedin have done, and go after the gold. That may be no more than gossip. Mother says it's because some bakers are leaving to dash after gold that bread has increased in price. Many other things have become dearer as well, as other shopkeepers have gone off seeking their fortunes.

Miss Helliwell talked about the different routes the miners are taking to the Dunstan Diggings and we all had turns at looking closely at the map of Otago. She'll never know how helpful that was to me!

I can go:

1. Down to Tuapeka and then further in land following the Molyneux River right through to the Dunstan.
2. To Waikouaiti by boat from Dunedin - or on foot - overland north, then inland over a wide plain that meets with a river valley leading to the Dunstan.
3. Over the Mountain Track, which begins at Outram, crosses over several streams and then climbs upwards over a high place they call the Lammermoor. Then over the Taieri river, across a plain, over more hills and down to the diggings.

The first way sounds easy and was the way I'd thought I would go. But Miss Helliwell says it's sometimes hard for the miners to find their way on that route. She said the terrain is difficult, very rocky with steep sides to the river. She talked about the posters that are being put up around Dunedin warning people to take sufficient provisions. (I am secretly hiding any food that will keep. Yesterday I added a handful of walnuts.)

I loved the thought of the second route, but the first

part is difficult to walk and I can't spend my precious sovereigns on a boat trip. Māori women meet each boatload and piggyback passengers to shore. I'd like to do that!

It's the third route I'm going to take. While it sounds difficult, it's the shortest by at least 30 miles. It's also a more obvious route, beginning as a dray track into Blacks Station (one of the big inland sheep runs).

Oh, I sometimes feel so nervous, for the walk is a long one and I'll have to carry my own food. But I am going to do it. I am!

How I long to tell Susan and see the look of surprise on her face! But I daren't. Susan is a dear friend but she's as good at keeping secrets as a hen is at knitting. Thank goodness for this journal.





*Sunday 21st September*

I am still here! I am all of a dither. It is terrible to have a plan and have it go awry. However, in the long run, it may work out better than I intended.

I should be asleep now, as both Mother and Billy are. Instead, I stealthily lit a candle so that I could write the letter I must leave with Billy. Having done that, I feel beside myself with feelings. So, journal, here they are. Once I've put them on paper maybe I shall feel more like sleeping.

Yesterday, Uncle Rupert came knocking on the door early, asking that I go to help Aunt Ruby. It often happens, even on school days, and I have to miss school to look after her three youngest children. They pay me a little, which helps Mother manage, but I'd rather be at school. Especially if Aunt Ruby simply wants me there to enable her to go visiting without the children. At least yesterday was a Saturday.

Again it was the three youngest that Aunt Ruby left behind. I felt so cross. It was the day I had planned to leave! Then Amy got into the flour bin and James wouldn't eat his midday meal and Bessie, usually a darling baby, cried a lot. So I felt even more cross. But my

feelings suddenly changed when Aunt Ruby and the other children arrived back. She had been arranging a week's holiday with her friend. This very afternoon they are both taking all their children away for a seaside holiday – never mind their schooling.

It has provided me with much a better chance to get well away without anyone realising I have gone. Mother is used to not finding me home because Aunt Ruby has called on me, so I'll leave the note (that I have already written to Mother) saying that Aunt Ruby needs me there for the week. And I needn't worry that Aunt Ruby or Uncle Rupert might call on Mother because Aunt Ruby will be safely away at the seaside and it is highly unlikely that Uncle Rupert will call, for he never calls on Mother without Aunt Ruby.

I feel bad lying to Mother. At least at the end of the week Billy can give Mother the letter that explains what I am really doing, which is going to find Father so that life can be better.

I'm not sure what she will do then but I don't believe she'll send anyone after me. It's too far, and whom would she send? I'm sure she'll understand that I will be coming back. If she did send anyone, they wouldn't find me anyway because I'll be dressed

as Harry. That's what I'm going to call myself. Harry Bannerman. Of course, I haven't told Mother that. I have been practising feeling that I'm Harry as I lie in bed at night, or sometimes when I'm walking to and from school. I imagine people calling me Harry, and I've been watching the boys in my class to see what makes them different. However, while I might try talking less and not ever giggling, I am not going to spit as I have seen some of the boys doing. I think it's disgusting.

At lunchtime tomorrow I'll tell Billy that I have to go to Aunt Ruby's and because Mother will be washing at Reeds' in the northern end of town, she won't know I've gone home. I have decided that if I wrap everything in the blanket I am taking from my bed, anyone who knows me and is curious enough to wonder what I am about, may think I am meeting my mother with a bundle of washing. I'll keep away from the main streets.

Mother, I'm doing this for us, for you. I will come back and I hope so much that I will bring Father with me. Please, please try to understand.

I'm very scared of not liking him. It will be hard to bring someone home that I don't like. And why

should I like him? I did, though, when I was little. Well, I think I did.

I am feeling very nervous now. I wish Susan were coming with me, or even Billy. I have been trying to make myself brave by thinking that, when I'm a teacher, I will be able to tell the children in my classes what it is really like to be on a new goldfield.

I hope Billy can keep the letter from Mother for a whole week as I'm going to tell him he must. I hope he won't be upset when he discovers I'm not really at Aunt Ruby's.

I hope I can find a hiding place just out of town where I can become Harry. Once I'm Harry, with a sack on my back, I'll feel all right slipping onto the track. I've seen them, the hopeful miners heading for the Dunstan. I know the way they go out of town and onto the trail. It would be preferable to start out early in the morning but halfway through the day is at least better than beginning in the evening. And maybe there won't be so many folk about.

I hope I can manage the long walk.

I hope Miss Helliwell isn't disappointed in me when she sees I'm not in school.

I hope my money will keep me going for a little while

and that I can run errands and do small jobs and earn some more. Goodness knows what errands a goldminer will want doing.

I hope I won't meet any man like Uncle Rupert who stands close to me and looks at me in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable without understanding why. Oh, how silly I am! I'm going to be Harry, not Mary. So if I want to, I can punch such a man right on the nose - unless he's a lot bigger, which is very likely, I suppose. Gracious me, I can't think straight any more. I'm going to sleep.

My last sleep in this bed for a while. Where will I be sleeping tomorrow?

