

the time, Lamerton said that everyone was entitled to privacy without a fat kid staring at him. The fat boy had the knack of being where he was least desired.

There was a certain effrontery about the fat boy. He appeared in council chambers during the discussion in committee on a special dispensation from the town planning scheme. The deputy-mayor was declaring that no present councillors had any connection with the consortium which had made application. He became aware of the fat boy watching him from the corridors of the Town Clerk's office. The fat boy's face trembled a little as his mouth stretched in a cavernous yawn, and without taking his hands from his pockets he tapped with his shoe at the wainscoting, the way boys do. One of the councillors went from the meeting to confront the fat boy, but he must have slipped away through the offices the councillor said.

The deputy-mayor thought that in all of his considerable experience he had never seen such a shy one as the fat boy. He said that somehow he could never bring himself to trust a fat boy; just never could bring himself to trust one, he said.

The fat boy was seen at the IHC centre the day before Melanie Lamb was found to be pregnant. The air was warm; sparrows chirped beneath the swaying birch catkins and pecked at a vomited pie in the gutter. The fat boy stood before the railings and held one of the iron bars like a staff. The children smiled at him as he watched, and were content in his presence, but the supervisors saw him there and remembered when the doctor said that Melanie was pregnant. The music teacher who lived next door to the Lambs thought it a very significant recollection. He said that when he came to think of it he recalled the fat boy standing in the evenings by the hedge outside Melanie's house. A very fat, ugly boy, the music teacher said, and everyone agreed that such a unique description fitted the fat boy perfectly and must be him. It was a terrible thing the music teacher said to think that the fat boy could take advantage of Melanie's handicap, even if she was physically advanced.

More than any of the other things it was what he did to Melanie Lamb that enabled people to close ranks against the fat boy. They recognized in him a common enemy. Vigilante groups organized from the King Dick and Tasman hotels began searching for the fat boy. Not many days before Christmas they caught up with the fat boy by the gasworks. Artie Compeyson was drowning kittens in the cutting, and saw the fat boy watching, but did not get on. The fat boy was stolid

at the top of the cutting; his pudding face and medieval hair showed clearly in the moonlight and against the grimy storage tanks of the old gasworks. He was still waiting when the vigilantes came, and they surrounded him there in the patches of light and shadow. The fat boy didn't care, he only sat. He watched them converge, his thick legs apart and his hands pushed deep into the pockets of his short trousers. He was sly alright.

They managed to overpower him they said. Nigel Lamerton, with his experience as a wife beater, got in one or two really good thuds on the fat boy's face before he went down, and the music teacher, who had an educated foot, kicked the fat boy between the legs. Everyone knew the fat boy must be made to pay for what he had done.

No one seemed to know what happened to the fat boy's body, and such a body was 'heavy to hide. The moon seemed to go behind cloud just at the time the fat boy fell, and the vigilantes became rather confused after the excitement of the night and the debriefing at the King Dick and Tasman. Although the police dragged the cutting they found only the sack with kittens in it, and five stolen tires.

Nearly everyone was relieved that the fat boy had been got rid of God, but he was evil they said, that fat boy, all the things he did. It didn't bear thinking about they said. And no one likes a fat boy watching them you know. They shared, among other things, a conviction that life would be immeasurably better for the all with the fat boy gone.