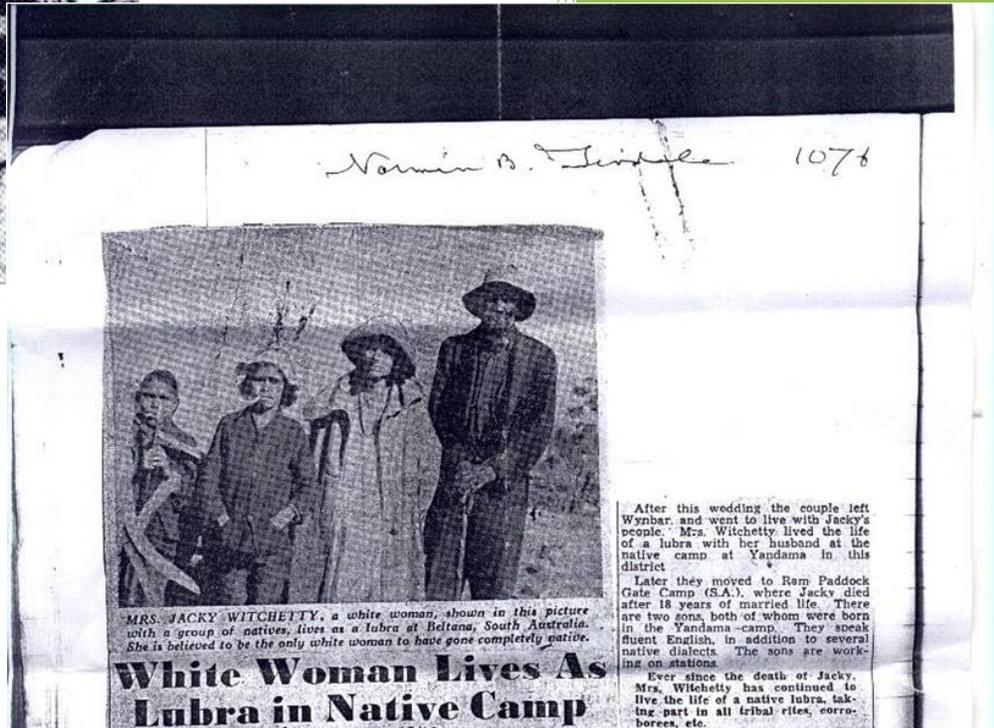




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Thesis Title:

White Lives in a Black Community: The lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha community

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Volume Three Appendices Creative Life Writing
Section A: Introduction and Journeying

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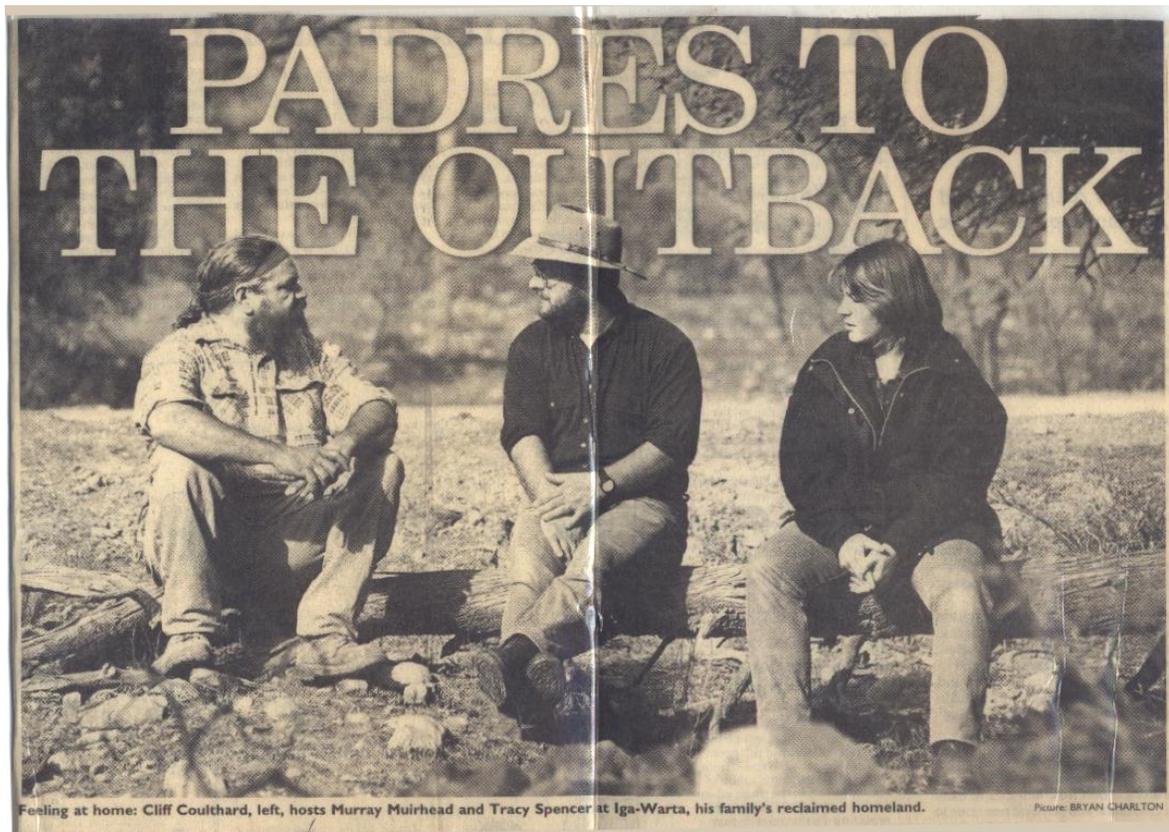
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Life Writing Chapter One

‘A Church worker like me, a white woman like me...’

Nepabunna, Adnyamathanha *yata*¹, South Australia, during the decade of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia, 1991 – 2001.

I can't quite remember how or when I first came to Nepabunna, only I must have come fresh in the throes of love. My new partner, and soon to be husband, was already a familiar visitor to this Flinders Ranges Aboriginal community, and I stood a little to the side of him, hanging back, waiting to learn how to say hello. My only Aboriginal word was 'Murrumbeena', the name of the Melbourne suburb in which I had grown up, although I had never given any thought to the people who might have taught some map-maker that word, much less the people who may have once called my home theirs. And still might.



Photograph reproduced in The Age, 17th June, 1999

This story is about the people who gave Nepabunna its name, and called it home.

You entered Nepabunna with a gentle thud of your tyres greeting sudden bitumen, firm and black after the pale loose dirt road that has led you east into the Northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. The ground was a thin skin of powdered ochres evaporating slowly into the still air. In sudden places the dark shale had worn through to the surface, like a graze or a memory. The morning sun cast the blue shadow of Mount McKinley—Wayanha—standing sentinel to the east, watching for those who might wander into its folds and shadows.

Nepabunna was a self managed Aboriginal Community in the Northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia, fenced about by ranges, which alternate orange, dark green and blue. The entrance was marked by brightly painted concrete gate posts arcing towards you as you pass

through. Figures of kangaroos, euros, crows, eagles and fire crowd each other so you could barely read the raised writing: 'Nepabunna.'

You could see the whole township from where you parked at the top of the rise. There was one new Community Office with terracotta-coloured-corrugated-iron walls curving around lawns and gardens; one covered sports court with a huge mural of day and night painted down one side by anti-Uranium activists; one health clinic in an old cream bungalow and, next door to it, one school, closed but in the process of being turned into accommodation for educational tour groups. There was one playground in the one park, where plaques with lists and lists of names of those men who took part in the last ceremonies in 1937 and 1947 were set into large boulders.² The last of them passed on last year. In each direction from the park and beyond the houses lay the four cemeteries.

Two of the cemeteries stopped being used around the late fifties and early sixties. These were the moiety burial areas for Adnyamathanha: one for *Mathari*, the south wind people, and one for *Arruru*, the north wind people. Mounded earth marked with stones or wooden windbreaks, grouped in small clusters around a gully, between the hills, on creek banks. Safety fences pegged them out now, and it was only the memory of old women and men, picking their way cautiously over the uneven ground, that still recorded the names and relationships of the spirits resting there. 'Hello *Ngamarna!*³ Hello Grandfather! It's me here, and these other people too', they would call out, 'Now *wonga wonga*: you stay here and don't follow us!'⁴

The third cemetery—the only one still gaining members—crowned a small hill in the bend of the creek. This graveyard was started in the 1960s under the supervision of Brother and Sister Hathaway of the United Aborigines Mission so that husbands and wives could be

buried together irrespective of moiety divisions. Low white rails separated the rows. Neat, white, concrete rectangles stud the red-brown ground, barren save some weeds at the edges. The body length ridges threw shadows in the morning light. The old women I went there with lay bright pink and red artificial flowers by the headstones of husbands, brothers, children.

The fourth cemetery was no more than three metres square, bounded—or not—by a falling down mulga and chicken wire fence reached by a dirt track winding up behind the community buildings. I was first taken there by Cliff Coulthard, who I had met in my first year as a Uniting Church minister, when my husband and I called in at the homelands he was turning into an Adnyamathanha cultural tourism centre. Cliff was a burly Adnyamathanha man with a hat and greying beard, moving large rocks a wheelbarrow at a time, to carve out camping areas and walking trails, and taking curious groups of tourists on a Social History tour of the area. Cliff had invited us on one of these, which ended at this small cemetery on the outskirts of Nepabunna. A mulga cross stood stubbornly at the head of a wide rectangle of white gravel, gathered by small hands and large, from the hillside. ‘Jesus saves’, was carved deeply into the iron hard wood, and then ‘James Page. 22nd Dec 1935.’

‘He was the first missionary with our people’, said had Cliff, his voice a soft nasal burr. Then he had turned to us. ‘You, you’re like Jim Page.’,

At right angles to James’ grave was an oblong heap of dirt and gravel.

‘Who’s that?’ I had asked.

‘That’s Rebecca, Rebecca Forbes. Old Mrs Forbes. She was a white lady who lived with our people.’

A white woman, like me. Buried with a church worker, like me. How had they come to be here, buried near but not quite amongst the Adnymathanha community they made their home? How did they come to belong here? How could I?



Monarto, South Australia, 2004

I sat at my computer some years later to write the stories of the lives and deaths of these two people, whose stories flow into mine without my bidding. Black and white photographs of Rebecca on my wall constantly mirrored my own white, female face, and the United Aborigines Mission ‘Two Ways’ poster pinned to my wall challenged me with the promises and the failures brought to Aboriginal people by Christian ‘missions’, missionaries and ministers. In my mind I heard the voices of Adnyamathanha people I had come to know well,

and remembered trips in the car together, conversations in dusty driveways, drinking strong cups of tea, and grieved those who had passed on. As I sat so long in reverie, my screensaver appeared on my computer screen showing ridge folding on range—the peaks of Yourambulla, Yappala, Druid Range, Elder Range, Aroona Valley, Wilpena Pound—in the country that had been my home, if only for seven years.

I was not an objective researcher capturing a moment in history. I had lived with these times and places and people, even while gathering stories of the dead. Even the dead change with time. I knew that: since I started the research, a sturdy wire fence had been built surrounding the tiny cemetery, and a headstone dignified Rebecca's grave with a brass plaque incorporating an oval photograph of her, looking out and away from Jim's mulga cross.

To tell these stories, I would need to thread together moments in Jim and Rebecca's histories, and my own, and yours too, so that the living story of Rebecca and Jim with the Adnyamathanha people could take shape in our own time.

Copley – Nepabunna Rd, Flinders Ranges, 2001.

The stories of Jim and Rebecca were known and told best by those who knew them, and lived with them, and who had been hearing and telling their stories for seventy years and more.

So I travelled to Copley, an hour west of Nepabunna, where a group of elderly Adnyamathanha women lived. Copley is the forgotten and tired cousin of the new Leigh Creek, the mining town that provides South Australia's power source. The coal train rail line bisected Copley, where once everyone gathered on a Saturday evening to watch the Marree Mixed pulling up at the station, breaking its slow crawl north to Oodnadatta, and later Alice Springs. On the far side of the railway line, were the sleepy fibro houses with broken cars

and toddlers in the driveways. The houses were painted the muted greens, creams and blues of the Aboriginal Housing department. This was where my friends lived, looking east out their windows to the hills where they used to catch rabbits together in the early morning light, when they were just girls, living with their families at Ram Paddock Gate when Mr Page first came to the Adnyamathanha community.

We were all together in Granny Dolly's house, huddled around the wood burner, and I asked them about Mr Page. Dark eyes squinted at the flames, remembering, and silver and black heads lowered a little.

'Nyanga, Mr Page. He was a good one'.

The women looked away from each other to another time, and then Rosy said in her crackling voice:

They cried for him when he passed away. My mother and father were working on the property up Blinman way. The boss come round and said 'Mr. Page died'. They cried, you can't make them stop their crying. I was just watching. We didn't know all about it. That was it. They ringed up and someone told the boss, 'He died,' and them—mothers and all—cried, on a Sunday My Dad and old Jackson the old man said, 'Oh, what does he want to do to himself?'⁵

After a moment's quiet, Dolly added in her quiet clear voice:

My family were at Beltana for the hospital when Jim died. They heard about it on their way back when they got to Patsy Springs and Mr Whyte told them: 'That missionary has killed himself.' And Dad said, 'No, that can't be right,' but it was. Mr Page killed himself on a Sunday morning and there was no church that day.⁶

Dolly's hands clasped and unclasped each other as she fell silent.

Nyanga, they said—often—as they recounted what they remembered and what they had heard. '*Nyanga*' was *yura ngarwala* (Adnyamathanha language) meaning the speaker feels 'sorry' or 'sad' that that person is no longer with them. It prefaced remembrances of those

who had passed on, and the tone in which it was said filled the small room with quiet, and we all looked at our laps for a time.

I travelled east from Copley, toward Nepabunna over varying grades of gravel and crossing and recrossing the elusive Finke Creek and its tributaries. Past Depot Springs Station, and Mt Serle, and Angepena. I slowed down as I passed by Minerawuta, also called Ram Paddock Gate, part of the old Burr Well Station now subsumed into Depot Springs. To the left I saw the piles of shale where the huts had been, and to the right the small campsite studded with two rows of forked sticks that had once held up a camp stretcher. I continued over a raised grid, and past the sign welcoming travelers to Adnyamathanha lands, until I turned right into Cliff's homelands, known as Iga Warta. In an open shed he had erected as a camp kitchen, Cliff told me what the last generation of elders told him about Mr Page:

And to me now, and even to elders that I spoke to, it is that when he committed suicide, they were feeling no good because it happened before Christmas. It gave them a bad Christmas in 1935. And for a missionary they got to really know and love. They had a lot of time for him. But they felt that he was stressed out. They said 'nyanga', 'nyanga this udnyu wants to do something for us, but he can't, you know'. 'Nyanga' means he's trying his best, but he failed so he took his life. Maybe he was trying to get attention from the rest of the state or rest of Australia saying: 'You know there's these people. Don't forget these black people'.⁷

A few more kilometers up the road and I arrived at Nepabunna to visit Granny Gertie Johnson, one of the oldest Adnyamathanha women. The kitchen tap dripped in the background while we talked and ignored her grandson noisily making himself a late lunch. Gertie's gaze was piercing under the floral head scarf holding back her white hair. The laminex kitchen table was covered with my recording equipment and microphone leads and her letters, reports and articles about uranium mining. She was a young teenager when Mr Page first came to the community, and remembered everything:

When he was cutting his throat here, he was talking about it, saying, 'I got to weep it. I got to weep it.' He wasn't sick or anything like that, but maybe God made him think about it. 'I've got to weep it,' he said while he was dying. People were talking about, 'Oh, what's he talking about weeping it?' Here some people know that while he's going to weep it, he can do something about it. But he had that razor in his hand. They should have taken that away from him. He left it there inside, and he waited until the mail truck came. When the mail truck came he went in to get the mailbag and did it. Because he didn't want any of the black fellows to get the blame for it. That was Sunday morning. The mail truck loaded the mail, then went and told the people. There was no funeral. The policeman had to do it see. That was Mr. Waterhouse then, from Maynards Well. He did it. He had to do it. There was no way we could do it good. If the mission was here, we could have had a good funeral for him. He's the one that has sinned, you know. Oh, we couldn't rest. Everybody was crying. Everybody was crying for him. We had no church that morning.⁸

Adelaide, 2001

My first sortie into the South Australian State Records office yielded the Coroner's Report made of Jim Page's death.⁹ It included interviews with several people then living at Nepabunna and the police report made by Mounted Constable Thomas Rosewall from Beltana. The two Adnyamathanha men interviewed, Andy Coulthard and Ted Coulthard, both made mentioned of a letter: 'Since last Friday when the mail arrived at the mission, Mr Page seemed a different man and very worried'; 'Mr Page seemed all right until he received the mail at about three pm on Friday last'. Attached to the coroner's report there was a letter that MC Rosewall found amongst Jim's few effects, although it was dated August 1935. No other correspondence was found. The entry in the South Australian Government Gazette lists his meagre belongings as 15 pounds, one letter, and clothes, and nominates a brother in England as his only known relative.



Hawker, Flinders Ranges, 2003

It took me some time to find anyone who had been present at Mrs Forbes's funeral in August 1959. Not even her family were present: her youngest son, Raymond, had to return to his work, and her eldest, John, and his grown family, had been granted unconditional exemptions from the Aborigines Act in 1950 and made only rare visits to the mission, with permission by the missionaries.¹⁰ Finally, I found an eyewitness visiting with her niece in Hawker, in the central Flinders Ranges. Sylvia Brady spoke directly, and her memories were sharp.

I was at Mrs Forbes's funeral. We had a little service around the graveside and then Mr Hathaway's motor wouldn't start. He was going to give us a lift down but the motor wouldn't start so we walked. We thought, 'Oh, she won't let us go.' I remember we sang *There's a land that is fairer than day.*¹¹

'Nyanga, the old girl,' chimed in Vicki, Sylvia's niece, sitting on the back verandah, listening. 'She was a good old lady.'

'She got me,' continued Sylvia. 'She was the midwife. Mrs Forbes gave me my name, after her friends or relatives in England.'

Melbourne, 2003

During a trip to the Melbourne offices of the United Aborigines Ministries, when the bushfires in the Snowy Mountains filled the air with ash, I read and copied foolscap page after foolscap page of neatly typed reports from Brother Bill and Sister Florence Hathaway, the senior missionary and his wife at Nepabunna since 1955, and the equally neatly typed responses sent on return mail from blind Pastor Samuels in the United Aborigines Mission (SA) office in Adelaide. On the first of August 1959, the Hathaways note that: 'Mrs Forbes has been ill with a heavy cold for a little more than a week and she is very far from well. It really looks to be the beginning of the end and we have brought her family into camp'.¹² A week later, on the eighth of August, they wrote:

Mrs Forbes seems to be getting weaker, She eats almost nothing and would seem that the end is visibly closer. She is alone most of the time except for her son Raymond who has been here all the week but who is going away again tomorrow. As we can't just leave her there alone we are planning to bring her over here tomorrow if the doctor will give us the OK to move her. Florence goes across to her about five times a day but even that is not satisfactory so we hope something can be done.¹³

The next document was a Telegram sent to Samuels via Broken Hill: 'Mrs Forbes passed away this morning. Tell Eatons'.¹⁴ The next regular mailing included a description of Mrs Forbes's last moments:

Thanks for the wire re Mrs Forbes. We passed same on to the sons. We brought the dear old lady over here on Monday morning. Florence had spent the night with her as we could not let her remain alone after Raymond went back to his job. We were busy with her a little after 4am and it appeared then that the end was near. It was about 10.20am that Florence went to her and found that she had gone quietly in her sleep. She knew she was going and had said earlier, "this is my last day". On several occasions Florence spoke to her of the Lord and she affirmed that she was trusting and she did not seem at all afraid. The Flying Doctor who was already on his way over before the end, came just the same and will send the certificate. At her own request she was buried next to Bro. Page. That occasion was orderly and without any unnecessary commotion. We got a casket from Leigh Creek for which I had enough of her money to pay for.¹⁵

Quorn, Flinders Ranges, 2002

In 2002 Mrs Forbes' grandchildren and great grandchildren were finally able to erect a headstone and plaque over her grave. Her granddaughter, Daisy Shannon, had some photographs of it to show me when I arrived to interview her at her home in Quorn, in the southern Flinders Ranges. Daisy was perhaps in her sixties, with a warm round brown face and long straight black hair which she kept pinned back with bobby pins. I had first known her as a member of my congregation in Quorn, and knew her to be a quiet and careful person. She had several family photographs to show me, kept together in a plastic envelope, and was apologetic she didn't have more:

When [Granny] passed away, people used to burn things in those days. My mum even went and burnt all the newspaper cuttings and papers she collected. I should have picked it up when I just read it. I should have picked it all up.... She used to write to us every week, and Mum used to answer her back for us every week. I don't know if she wrote back to her family. Mum burnt a lot of things. She wouldn't have kept any.¹⁶

I looked carefully at the small images, creased and lined with a family's musings. In one photograph was an elderly Mrs Forbes in a hand-made felt hat, flanked by bright and blonde missionary children, and holding a cat on her lap while she smiled straight at the camera.



In another, in sepia tones and with white creases across it, a young Mrs Forbes in a white shirt and skirt with a grey hat as she stood beside her taller husband Jack, who wore a white hat over his dark face and a cardigan done up over a white shirt and black pants. In front of them were their two boys, young Jack in the light and his younger brother Raymond in the shade. Behind them was a wall of leaves: a bough shed or camp.



The third photograph was a close up of the plaque on her headstone, which an English friend of the family helped research and arrange. I read it out, so as to be sure to capture it on tape in the interview:

In loving memory of Rebecca Forbes nee Rebecca Castledine. Born London England 1878
Died Nepabunna 1959. From the land where time begins to the timeless land. Loving Wife
of Jack 'Witchetty' Forbes. Fond mother of John and Raymond, mother in law of Joyce.
Dearest Grandmother of Daisy, Daniel and Darrell. Our loving great and great great
grandmother. Peacefully Sleeping. A true friend and companion of the Adnyamathanha
people.¹⁷



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Life Writing Chapter Two

‘From the land where time begins to the timeless land.’

Druid Vale Station, Flinders Ranges 2003

I lived at Druid Vale Station, in the Flinders Ranges, where the earliest Ediacran fossils had been found. Rebecca’s headstone bore the epitaph: ‘From the land where time begins to the timeless land.’ Both the commentary and the funding had been contributed by an English friend of Daisy’s family, who became enamoured of Rebecca’s story recorded in Ernestine Hill’s *The Great Australian Loneliness* when he realised his own mother had been born in the same place and time as ‘Becky’:

‘My name before my marriage was Becky Castledine ... I come from Greenwich, where they tell the time ... Although I was born within the sound of the Bow Bells, the whole of my early life was spent in the shadow of the big Observatory.’¹⁸

Beck was born on 3rd March 1873, although the bronze plaque on her grave will forever read 1878, after a smudge made on a print of her birth certificate. She was the second child of George and Eliza, brought up in Walworth, the heart of the old City of London, where the streets were lined with wares and the damp air was thick with cockney slang and the accents of Empire as foot and carriage traffic made its way to or from the nearby docks where the gray Thames sucked at its cobbled banks. Her older brother died in infancy, as did another of her brothers; a third, Jim, died at twenty-two years of age in the Boer War, and the fourth, Bob, survived to start a dynasty in Canada. Photographs of the young family sent to me from Rebecca’s Tasmanian niece Grace Denison show firstly a sombre family of two preschoolers, and later Beck as the oldest sister of a neatly arranged quintet of children after her two sisters came along.





Photographs courtesy of Grace Denison

Later, when Beck was sixteen, baby Alice was born, and the family seemed complete. George Castledine was a 'cheese monger', at least at one stage of his life, and Eliza was recorded as wife and a bearer of children at regular two year intervals.

Each record of the family tucked away in my folders—birth, death and marriage certificates, census information—found the family at a new address until I thought I had lost trace of them in the 1901 census. And it was true they were no longer living as a family then.

Eliza died first, of a ‘fatty heart’ in 1896, and less than two years later, George also died, aged 55, at yet another address in Tottenham.¹⁹ Cause of death was ‘natural’: ‘apoplexy due to alcoholism.’²⁰ His final occupation was ‘messenger to a betting man’.

It is then that the family—bereaved, down on its luck and now orphaned—began their drift beyond the English Register Office records, and beyond the centre of the British Empire. Jim was buried in South Africa and never saw his medal from Queen Victoria.²¹ Alice, only twelve at the 1901 census, lived at the Robins Nest Children’s Home in Heybridge, Essex. Flora was a live-in general domestic servant at Hornsey, and Cissy trained to be a nurse. Bob emigrated to Canada in 1912, followed by sister Cissey and her soldier.²²

Beck—twenty-seven and single in 1901—lived where she worked at 340 Hornsey Rise, Islington. A nice address for genteel domestic service. I imagined shiny dark-brown balustrades curving open at the bottom of a set of wide stairs and imperious but kindly voices calling for her service, although perhaps it was nothing like that.

Islington, London 1908

‘Beck! Rebecca! Father will have his tea now!’ an older woman calls down the stairs. Alice Trafford is the head of the house. She is widowed and does not work, keeping house for her aged father, his second wife, and Alice’s working daughter, also named Alice. Five years Becky’s senior, Alice Junior is a certificated nurse, committed to her profession, brisk and brief in her comings and goings in the house.

Still, she is company for Beck at times in the kitchen, taking her hot cup of Bovril after shifts.

‘Your family’s had some interest in nursing, haven’t they? Yes. Well, today it was bedlam—I mean it. The ward for fallen women was overflowing and more beds had to be found. I suppose some will leave their babies with us, so they can get back to work. Where’s that nice place your Alice is at now?’

Becky looks up from her steaming cup, drawing in her breath before preparing to reply. Her maid’s cap hides all but stray wisps of her dark hair, and her strong cheekbones are accentuated by it. Her face is plain, but when she smiles it is wide and warm and you can see her small dark eyes sparkle, if you look closely. But at work, she makes only small smiles and keeps her eyes hooded. She is preparing a quiet and short response to Alice’s question but is saved the trouble, as the other woman rushes on. Becky lets out her breath slowly again, with relief, and clasps the warm sides of her cup in front of her

‘Oh, it’s a shame,’ Alice continues. ‘I don’t know what’s becoming of London. Mother says that too. I’ve half a mind to go back to India one day: that’s where I was born, before mother brought me home for schooling and father stayed on but succumbed, I’m afraid.²³ The green and the sun and the gardens ... ‘maidan’, I remember. I might just go back. They’re always wanting nurses to go out to the colonies, girls are talking about it all the time. Australia’s the place. Celebrating something called Federation; it all looks very fashionable.’

Becky nods: she has seen the pictures in the newspapers, too.

‘And all women in Australia have the vote: did you know in South Australia women have had the vote for seven years, and the sky hasn’t fallen down!’²⁴ I’ve a mind to join Mrs. Pankhurst: it’s a slur on us, when even the colonies have the franchise. But I don’t know about the blacks. There’s to be a screening of a film some fellow named Spencer has made of

their rites and songs, at the museum, although I daresay I'll be at the wards.²⁵ Thanks for the tea, must rush.'

Beck thumbs through the newspaper she collected with other used things from old Mr Trafford. The paper is creased and furrowed, Like a map of Mr. East's day, Beck thinks, as she smoothes it out again and takes in the news of the world ...

A woman throwin' herself off Niagara Falls in a padded barrell to pay her mortgage. And here, look. The American president invites a black man to dinner: Booker T Washington. He's got a friendly face. She tucks a stray piece of hair back beneath her starched maid's cap. Ah, and that book, 'Heart of Darkness.' It was tucked away in her bedside drawer. Ruffled a few feathers, and she chuckles to herself. Wonder if that Marlow gets out of that blinding white fog alive? And what's here? she thinks, turning another flimsy page. Still ain't beating America with our yachts, our navy boys is playing with their ... what's it called?—submarine?—they don't know how to use, and we're still poisoning the Boer's we didn't shoot before.²⁶ Me poor brother Jim: he's buried over there, with all them others, and what for? Not even the old Queen could see it through, God bless her. I miss the old Queen, though the young one is pretty enough for her Edward, that Alexandra. She folds the paper with her last sip of Bovril and begins to ready the kitchen for the morning ...

In that same great city, breathing the night air made milky in the cool glow of gas light, around forty baby boys bearing the name James Page are variously asleep or fractious. It will be some three decades before one of them will meet Becky on the other side of the world.

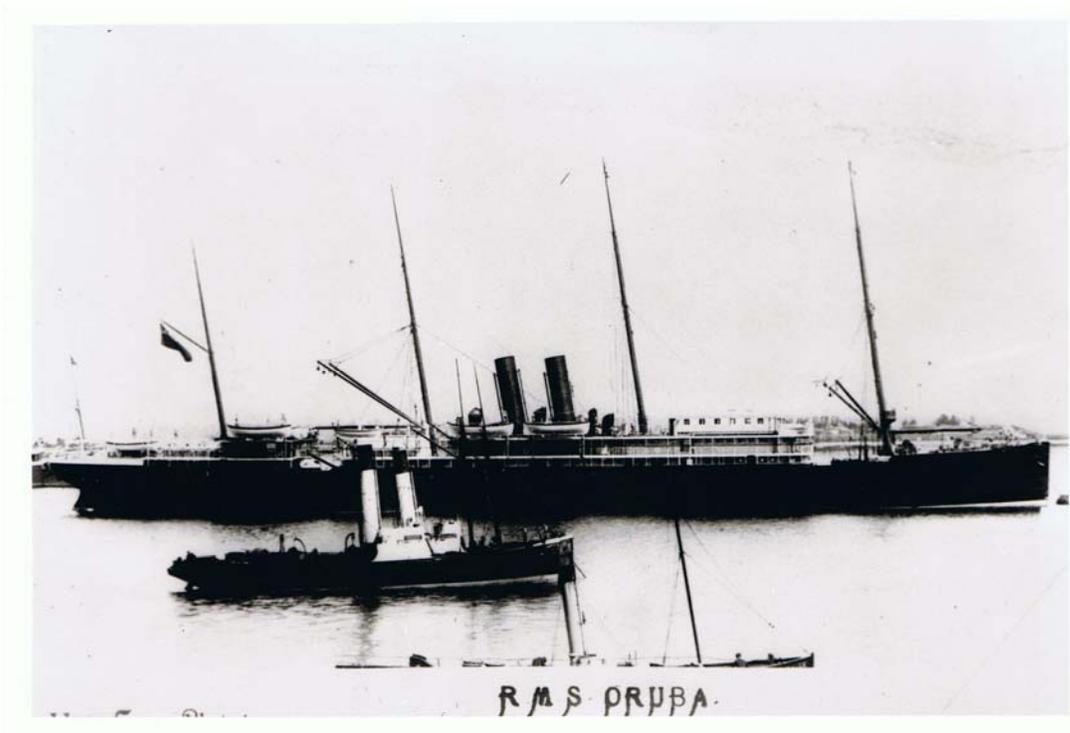
Quorn, Flinders Ranges, South Australia, 2001



*... She was telling me, I think, three weeks, without ever seeing the land...²⁷
Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer and Daisy Shannon (pictured with grandson Elijah)*

A black and white photograph of the Royal Mail Steamship *Oruba* lay between Daisy and me on her kitchen table.

‘Why did Beck decide to leave England and come to Australia?’ I asked. Daisy’s eyes squinted a little and her high brown forehead wrinkled slightly, looking hard at the ship for a sign—a memory—of her grandmother’s voyage. Low and 430 feet long, the *Oruba* is 5737 tonnes of dark and solid steel, four masts and two funnels.



Acknowledgement to John Oxley Library, Brisbane

‘She just wanted to get away, and I think there was a king or queen’s palace got bombed or something? That was the year I think she come out ... I think she was fairly young when she came out.’ Daisy’s words weave a loose cloth to cover the form Becky might take.

‘I don’t think she just got on a ship and just worked the ship. I think she must have paid a bit of it. I don’t know what it cost in them days. ... Granny said about peeling potatoes on the boat coming out.²⁸ She was telling me, I think, three weeks, without ever seeing the land ... She come in her own will anyway. Something scared her ... She might have been scared of the war or whatever.’²⁹

Sylvia Brady had had another explanation:

‘She came from a big family—maybe 9,10,12 kids. Her Mum and Dad said, like white way, to send them off when they’re grown. She trained as a nurse and then came out with her friends looking for nursing jobs. She worked in the children’s hospital in Sydney. I think she said 1906 she came. Six weeks it took.’³⁰

Daisy contemplated the dull photo of the *Oruba*, waiting for the memories to make their way forward.

'There was a lot of people came out. There was another lady came out, she always talked about. She was Mrs. Mustan now... She come out too, that was the two. She always used to talk about her, but they didn't meet up with one another after they split up from Sydney. One come this way I think and got married around Port Augusta there, and the other one NSW.'³¹

I asked if it was an adventure for them coming out and if it would have been scary for them?

'I don't know if it would have been scary or what. My grandmother reckoned, Rebecca reckoned, if she meets her first Aboriginal man she's going to marry one. I think she done that. Yes, so she knew what she was coming out for.'³² Daisy was laughing at the thought.

We studied the picture again, and I slid a copy I had made of it from inside the plastic sleeve and gave it to Daisy to keep.

Islington, London 1908

As 1908 wears on, the German Kaiser becomes more and more strident in his criticisms of King Edward and England quietly stiffens its defences.³³ Beck has a habit of snipping neat rectangles from the flimsy paper of the daily's, and now she spreads them out in front of her, in order: things she cares about, worries about, what makes her laugh, and the serial novels she can't wait to get hold of each day. Ancient clippings of the Aboriginal cricket team in England from her father are sorted beside images of Australia's Federation, a ticket from Spencer's Lantern Slide show, and a more recent advertisement hurriedly snipped and tucked away, like a secret. She is thirty-five years old—nearly thirty-six—single, and restless.

Becky reads the small notice again: *'The Agent General for Queensland calls for interested parties to apply for passage to Brisbane. Westminster Chambers, 1 Victoria St, London SW.'* *Queensland!* She heard some Castledines went out there, once. *It won't hurt to enquire,* she thinks.

The package arrives promptly. *'Free passage for young women ... for domestic service ... intending to reside permanently in Brisbane, Queensland,'* she reads. *'No prior residence in Australia ... Medical examination and certificate required.'*³⁴ *Thirty-five ain't young, but I'm small and fit enough, if I can find the right doctor,* and there is that wide smile breaking over her face.

Becky's friend Agnes is up for the challenge, too. Together they pore over the Agent General's advice for emigrants. *'Shorter Emigrants Guide to Australia'* with quotes from Rev Aeneas MacKenzie. Pictures of smiling well-dressed women with tall strong men beside and tow-haired children around them, sheep and kangaroos, and views of the several two-storey buildings in the tiny city of Brisbane. The smile hasn't left Becky's face.

'Let's write to him, then,' she says, to her friend's answering grin, *'and put in a picture of us both too.'*

'Dear Sir

I would like to apply to immigrate to Brisbane, Australia. I am twenty-five years old, from a respectable family, and have good references as a domestic servant from Mrs. Alice Trafford of Islington ...'



Becky Castledine c. 1900. Photograph courtesy of Brian Castledine.

Both receive their acceptance, for departure from Port of London on the RMS *Oruba* on 16th October, 1908. Beck purchases ships trunks for her luggage allowance, and heeding the Agent General's warning, visits the London Bank to withdraw her savings, but then, leaves one hundred and twenty one pounds in her account, 'just in case'. They spend their last two nights in London at the Scandinavian House, at West Indies Docks, where the Queensland Government provides accommodation to emigrating passengers, giving time to be seen by the Dispatching Officer and receive their tickets.³⁵ Beck's sisters are there for the departure, lugging mother's old rockingchair and other small items Beck has to plead with the porters to take on for her. From the deck, she watches them waving until their faces are a blur, then they

are gone, and only the Observatory like a lighthouse anchors her gaze to the life she is leaving. Then the *Oruba* rounds a bend, and even that marker of place and time is lost.

At sea, below decks in her third class berth, Beck prepares her first letter Home. She sharpens her pencil and writes, as so many before her, and after her, will do, carefully making straight lines of print while her world rides the unpredictable ripples and rolls of the sea.³⁶

RMS Oruba, final voyage to Australia, 1908

RMS *Oruba*, Port of London, 16th October

All the bits of paper about emigrating say it is the right thing to write aboard ship, so I'll start, so I can 'write by the pilot' who can bring send this back to from Deal. They also say that seasickness is nearly inevitable, and I won't want to hold my pencil in a few days.. We are comfortable in our tiny cabin in steerage that holds ten in bunks. Although I think I am the most comfortable, being the smallest. No one knows my age! I'm on a lower bunk, and when I look out the porthole I've only just got me head above water. That missionary we saw has just been past, giving tracts to everyone, praying for our safety and our souls. He goes back with the pilot at Deal. But 'Life's a lottery' as we say, so wish me luck!

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 18th October

... The seas are a nightmare, and being on deck a deal easier said than done... This a sorry cabin. We was fine until we left the port of Marseilles. It's the last voyage of the Oruba on the Australian service, and the seamen intend to make it a good one.³⁷ There's two girls in our cabin who leave at Sydney, otherwise we're all domestics bound for Brisbane.. There are a number of families, several couples, and a fair collection of single men, mostly younger than me, and interested in farming.³⁸ Don't know what my duties on board is yet, and frankly I don't think I could face it whatever it was, right now. There's 'nominated' passengers on board too, and they seem to know a deal more about this place I've said I'll 'reside' than I do. Perhaps I should have got in touch with those relatives of ours...

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 26th October

I have been quite ill for some time, and Dr Cormack had to visit me several times. ..I saw very little of the Suez Canal, I'm afraid, and by the time I was able to get up on deck, we were in open water steaming towards Colombo. They have started giving out our rations of lime juice...I am eating a little, mainly soup, a little mutton, and bread and jam. The coffee is terrible: mostly I drink hot water.

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 31st October

We are on our way now after putting in at Colombo. Our cabin's become a home to a herd of elephants: little black ebony ones we all bought ashore, with tiny white tusks. The dark wood is so smooth when you run your fingers over it, you'd think it stone, only softer. These last days I managed to be up enough to get on with my chores: peeling potatoes, and mountains of them! The ship seems steadier, and people are beginning to smile again and anticipate Crossing the Line!

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 1st November

I must tell you about Divine Service today—All Saints Day—led by Capt. Jenks. There were enough hymnbooks amongst the passengers for us all to follow, and the favourite was one from Sankey's, 'The Sweet By and By'. You know it? The words brought tears to my eyes—perhaps I'm still a bit under the weather.

'There's a land that is fairer than day

And by faith we can see it afar.

For the Father waits over the way (we sang 'waves'!)

To prepare us a dwelling place there.

In the sweet by and by

We shall meet on that beautiful shore.

In the sweet by and by

*We shall meet on that beautiful shore.'*³⁹

Then someone wanted 'O Come all ye Faithful', which reminded us of Christmas, and it has been a happy day ever since.

RMS *Oruba*, At sea 4th November

We 'Crossed the Line', as they say, and now the world is upside down. It started with a very funny play: two of our men from third—young Ralph Wittinall the bootmaker was got up as 'Young England in the Bush' and showing us his pockets stuffed with coins.

Meanwhile George Butt was 'Old England, back home, starving' in rags and empty pockets!⁴⁰ All the food is starting to smell the same, and gone hard, and if you walk past the door leading into the refrigerators you can feel quite light headed...

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 14th November

There have been sports on deck, tug of war and the like, and some of us have even tried skipping with that great heavy rope they use! If I'd missed my turn it would have cut me in two, I swear.⁴¹ Lucky for me I'm only little, and still have strength to skip to a hundred!

Our cabin is getting up a play called 'Black Justice' but I was shocked when the lads were all for flogging the black even though the convict commits the dastardly deed.⁴²

There are those on board who say Aborigines are vermin in Queensland and tell about manhunts, and the Bree-long murderers, saying that no white woman is safe outside the towns from the violent blacks in Queensland.⁴³ One of the lads had an old paper his friends had sent out, and he gave me a clipping. It says:

*The nigger is a treacherous, lying, double-dealing, thieving black brute with no sense whatever of honour, gratitude or fair play ... The writer never held a man guilty of murder who wiped out a nigger. They should be classed with the black snake and death adder and be treated accordingly.*⁴⁴ *Queensland Herald, February 1907.*

I think some of the lads must be teasing me, because word of my 'ambition' has got around.

RMS Oruba, At sea, 16th November

... When I finish cutting the eyes and bruises out of the spuds, I volunteer for other chores in the kitchen, just to keep myself busy... I walk on the deck at evening to see the stars and their reflection in the water. I never saw them much before, only when the clouds parted and the barges on the Thames were still. It's different: I haven't seen the North star for a fortnight, and the stars look all scattered without the constellations we learned at home. There is one the crew showed us that I can see now. It is called the Southern Cross, and there's two bright stars pointing to it. It is nice to think that a cross might hang over Australia, like the spire of St Mary-le-Bow watched over the streets of the City of London. Like God watching over us, even if you do have to twist your head around to see it like a Cross instead of a kite that's crashed to the ground, because the constellation is somewhat tilted. Strange: I'll have no winter this year. I wonder if it ever seems like winter in Australia?

RMS Oruba, At sea 20th November

We can see Fremantle, and the buildings look so close and pretty and pale like a child's drawing. We have been teasing each other in the cabin: we all heard, of course, that Australia is full of men wanting to marry, and tomorrow we shall have a look at some of them!

RMS Oruba, Port of Fremantle, 22nd November

We are back on board, after a glorious day in Fremantle! The lads disappeared in to the streets to find the pubs, and we just walked about and watched the day begin, listening to the strange accents in the shops, harsh, like a raven. I did hear a bird laughing, not singing, and there really were black swans on the river, not white. I didn't see any kangaroos, though, or any black faces amongst the hats and beards in the streets. ... But don't suppose it was like home, with all this talk of shops and pubs. Behind every building and at the end of each street there was nothing, just open space all the way to the hills, or up the river, or out over the ocean, or up the beaches to the coast. One strange tree had thin leaves like saws and red flowers like hairbrushes!

RMS Oruba, Port of Melbourne, 25 November

The last few days have been like sailing in heaven: a slow grand procession along the very edge of the continent, flat as a honey biscuit and the same colour. The Captain calls this the 'Bight', and it is the strangest thing I seen. You can't say there's nothing there: we

were on the deck all day, just watching the edge of the land slide by. Some thought it a desolation, but not me.

Except that each new place is so exciting after being three weeks at sea without seeing land at all, I was almost disappointed to see the neat, familiar town at Melbourne. This was a convict town once, but doesn't look it.

RMS *Oruba*, Port of Sydney 28 November

.... We are at Sydney, and it is the most remarkable place. I wish this were my journey's end! Port Jackson has everywhere inlets leading into rivers: fingers of tree-covered land reaching into the waters, little sandy beaches, and some tiny islands too. The buildings and streets piggyback over one another and just about fall off the hilly shores into the water, but everywhere, everything is moving. The wharves are crawling with people...

RMS *Oruba*, 1 December At Sea

The captain says we are two days away from Brisbane. Tomorrow they open the holds for us to get out our change of clothes, ready for Brisbane. I must say I am feeling disappointed at the prospect. Sydney seemed so wonderful, and I had such a lovely visit around the shops and shoreline. There were new houses everywhere, and I'm sure there would be plenty of work for domestics... no matter how hard we try, the tiny buildings of Brisbane look like a country town, and nothing like the city of Sydney. I have still seen no black faces on the streets although I did see posters up everywhere of Jack Johnson, the black American boxer fighting for the World Heavyweight Title. He looked like that Booker T Washington, although he had no shirt on in the picture, and two white women standing either side of him, smiling.

RMS *Oruba*, Pinkemba, Brisbane 3rd December

We are here. I am packed and waiting in my cabin for the order to disembark. I am nervous. When I think of you, my sisters, I wish I could be back with you all at home. What were Mother and Father thinking of, putting these ideas into our heads! I remember them saying 'We grown you up, now off you go!'⁴⁵ When I opened my trunk yesterday—and I had to be quick about it, with the crewman standing waiting—I felt such homesickness, remembering you helping me fold and pack my things. They even smelled of you, or at least of London. The paper had helped, but I think things may have become slightly damp. I left my work dresses and chose the blue serge, and now I wish I hadn't.

I have bitten my nails very short and had trouble with the hooks and eyes. I've been watching the north bank of the river all morning through my porthole, like being in a dream. We have stopped and are waiting for the tug to take us the last part of the way to the dock at Pinkemba. Here the land is nearly as flat as the river, and both of them brown and bare. There's a road from the wharf and a small group of low-roofed buildings that must be the reception center at Kangaroo Point. 'Yungaba', we've been told it's called.⁴⁶ I think that must be an Aboriginal word. We domestics can stay there until we find a job for around eight shillings a week. We've been warned against getting too friendly with the

*men at the docks. There's a men's tent camp not far away, and word is women are in high demand there.*⁴⁷

On the next flat spit, I can see some drifts of smoke, perhaps from outdoor fires. We have also been warned that blacks have camps around here, and to be careful. I haven't seen the buildings of the town at all yet: apparently they are further up the river. There is none of the bustle of Sydney. I want to cry, but I will not. I am here to make a new life, after all. This country is full of work, and opportunities, and none of the grind and long hours and little pay for what jobs there are back in London. Perhaps Brisbane will be better, once I see it. Forgive me, I'm just tired after the long voyage. I will send back some money to you, once I am settled in work, and you shall buy something nice for yourselves!

Brisbane, Queensland, 2001

In the Queensland State library I found a Local Women's History of Yungaba—or Kangaroo Point—where the migrant reception was located, although I could only strain to see its flat and industrial terrain from the window of the train as it sped me towards the airport and the end of my excursion to Beck's first port of call in Australia.⁴⁸ I tried to imagine I could see Beck stepping off the gangway, letting go of the rope railing with a hesitation only the wheeling gulls might see ...

Brisbane, Queensland, December 1908

You ain't here with me, and I'm not at home with you, she is gruffly telling the faces of her family that bob in a sea of homesickness in her mind. *I got to find my own way now: meet some people and see what luck turns up.*

Becky has already dismissed what she sees as a temptation to look up Castledine relations, determined to make her own way into this country, and into the new life she promised herself. Already, she is not the same. Her eyes are still bright from tears or the hard light, but they are set now in a face the colour of pale beach sand instead of the pallor of frost melting on cobbles. Her cheeks are flushed with windburn, and at her neck, colour rises above her

good dress, which is an attractive serge, but cloying in the humid air and under the beating sun. Others are scanning the crowds at the wharf, but she is all business. She doesn't have to be the twenty-five-year-old skipping girl any longer. While the trunks are being unloaded, she walks across to the small cluster of weatherboard buildings. A small piece of sharp gravel has worked its way past the top of her laced boot and rubs at her ankle. She won't stop to bend down now. Later, she thinks, I can take my boots and stockings off and feel the dirt with my toes. The thought surprises her. She hurries on to find the arrivals desk, and asks for a newspaper.

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Life Writing Chapter Three

Harbour Towns

Brisbane, 1908

Brisbane is a cluster of short weatherboard buildings leaning back from wide dirt streets, where the stones are sharp from lack of wear. Becky tries her bare feet on them, once, but it hurts. Her companions raise their eyebrows, and are quick to tell her about spiders, scorpions and snakes. She buttons up after that, and learns to look about her warily.

There is plenty of domestic work to be had for people like Becky, serving the local gentry who years or months earlier had themselves scoured the job lists at Yungaba. Between jobs, Becky retreats to the immigrants hostel at Kangaroo Point for the company and safety of other single women. Once or twice she attends the entertainment at the blacks camps – men dancing on thin legs painted like skeletons and the women with breasts swaying - and like the others gives a few pennies to the obsequious man in dungarees who comes whining to them afterwards when the others melted away into the shadows. She meets none of them, and says nothing.⁴⁹ Others say enough at the hostel, where the Flimsies' gossip columns compete with the Help Wanted advertisements for the attention of naive new chums. There is plenty still to be said about that Gribble family at Yarrabah Mission on the northern Cape, and Becky listens, tight lipped. *Absolutely scandalous: the old missionary Ernest moved into the Girls Dormitory when his wife left, took up with the house maid and there's that coloured Jeanie Forbes pregnant! He had a breakdown, of course, went to hospital in Cairns, but is back there just the same. All very well for the Bishop of Carpentaria to write about 'admixture of blood' was a grievous crime, but says nothing about the hanky panky that led*

to it, and not just one of them neither! Ernest's brother got another girl in trouble, but then that sister Ethel takes the cake! A year ago she runs away to Sydney with a boy from the mission, gets some crank to marry them, before the baby's born, then disappears.⁵⁰ Just as well, I say...

The conversations bounce along. *Not the only Ethel to get herself in trouble*, the gossips tell Becky, who tries not to show what she is thinking. *Ethel Governor* – and several roll their eyes - *marrying that murdering Jimmy Governor. What did she expect, marrying a half-caste? The terrible things that man did to them poor women and children at the homestead. There's no hope for their baby, no doubt the worst of both breeds, as it has been said.⁵¹* And then the voices drop, and whisper: *just like Hornet Bank Station*. The women are quiet, imagining a nightmare of black men, murder and rape. Becky says nothing of her 'ambition'.

Becky does not stay long in Brisbane. Despite widespread enthusiasm for the 'sunburnt country' of 'sweeping plains' publicised in Dorothea McKellar's poem that year, Becky did not head inland yet, either.⁵² As she would tell the journalist Ernestine Hill years later: 'After seven months in Brisbane, I went to Sydney and was employed as cook at the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and after that at Sydney Grammar School for another eighteen months.'⁵³

Sydney, 2002

I found Becky in the electoral rolls for 1909 in the State Library of NSW, listed at 231 Catherine St, Leichhardt, and so I went to find her home. Catherine St runs downhill towards the harbour, and I counted the numbers down to a row of single storey terraces that looked old enough. Numbers 220 – 224 nudged each other smugly. I crossed the street to find where

231 should have stood, to be confronted by a wire fence shielding an old quarry, in which a shabby warehouse squatted. So I imagined into the hole the earth and rock that had made up the hillside and built Becky's life upon it.

Sydney, 1909

From Catherine St, Becky catches a tram to the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute on City Rd, where she works in the kitchen to the blunt noises of the children and the too loud voices of the teachers who kindly coaxed words from their lips and fingers. Staff drop by her kitchen for a bite to eat between duties, and to share some news or rib her and Miss Scoular about being no bigger than the children themselves. There is good humour and pride in their work; it is a place to belong for a single woman in her thirties, where she can care for the children, and flirt with the younger men.

'There you go', tall Mr Love says one Friday, bending his frame to unfold a large broadsheet on the bench in front of her. 'You want to make something of yourself? Have a look at that.'

He points to an series of articles on page 6 written by Special Commissioner Charlie Bean, tracing the journey of wool from stations called Toorale and Dunlop on the Darling River right to 'the back of the man on the street.'⁵⁴ It is titled 'The Wool Land', and Becky wonders for a moment if he has noticed the darning in her clothes. Then a heading catches her eye:

'It Makes the Men.' She reads:

*Wool is making not only the country – carving it block by block out of the virgin bush and making it habitable for men; it is making also the men themselves. It carves out whole classes of Australians.*⁵⁵

'Classes?' Becky wonders, and glances quickly up at Mr Love, although he is wiping his spectacles from where they have fogged up from the hot tea she served him. Becky folds the paper and takes off her apron, patting down her worn blue serge skirts.

She takes the paper home with her and starts reading the piece to the rock and holt of the tram. *'Wool ... is making the Australian—the one sort of Australian which is really unmistakably Australian.'* *Unmistakenly Australian?* she wonders. A jolt blurs the print and she looks up, out the tram window smeared with Sydney's September drizzle, and the coal dust from briquette fires. The conductor calls out her stop: 'Leichhardt!' and, for a moment, she is back at Yungaba, listening to tales of the explorer who headed west into the heart of the country and never returned. The jostle of other passengers rouses her, and she hurriedly folds the *Sydney Morning Herald* into her carpet bag and dismounts the tram. Middle aged and single, but with no fear of the cold hearth awaiting her, Becky's imagination is bright with her new thought. *'Unmistakenly Australian.'* *What does that mean?*

After cooking for the boarders that Becky takes in to make her rent a little easier – new chums, mostly, and few stay long once they find work – Becky clears space on the table to unfold the paper again. The door opens unannounced, and she quickly folds it again. Walter Beames, her landlord, has let himself in, and is standing waiting for her to take his hat. Becky doesn't mind: the old man owned half the town of Leichhardt, and besides, he never tired of telling tales of the man he named it after, either. And Becky didn't mind listening.

'Evening, Miss Castledine, and I see you have the paper already. See they've got that Charlie Bean writing about the outside country?' Becky knows better than to answer his question. 'Guess you saw something of that, out from Brisbane, weren't you?' She sits, quiet. 'Hmm, I always wanted to go of course, and sent all the goods up with my man Leichhardt,

but in the end, well, you know, family.’ He stops, aware of his gaff, and embarrassed that his curiosity so outstripped his courage. Becky makes it easy for him, and tells him again about Brisbane, until he takes up the story of his hero again.

Leichhardt was larger than life when Beames had welcomed him home to Sydney in 1846. Having forged a route from Brisbane to Port Essington, he turned immediately to an east-west crossing of the continent, from which he would never return. He and his party were lost in the unchartered space that was Queensland’s south-west corner: that hot, dry and deadly terrain that had destroyed hopes of inland seas, undiscovered Edens, and shining reefs of Lassetter’s gold by its unyielding ferocity. It was said the party were all killed by Aborigines, although – and at this point in the tale, Mr Beames became conspiratorial – maybe that Adolf Classen is still out there with them, refusing to come in...⁵⁶

Becky shivers against the back of her chair as old Mr. Beames tells the tale, animated and perplexed. She lets him keep talking, while other figures nudged beside Adolf in her imagination. Eliza Fraser – what a story that had been! And she made a tidy sum from it – and Barbara Thompson, sudden white skin amongst a crowd of blacks, but they had been rescued to tell the tale. Not Classen.

‘What would make a man choose a one-way journey into the desert, and into the arms of the blacks—especially when the rest of the party was rumoured to have been killed by them?’ Beames says, mostly to himself. ‘If he is not dead, why has he not come back to tell us the tale? And he must be an old man like me. I live in comfort, passing my time with people like you and well cared for by my family. He in the wilds. No house. No kin ...’ Beames face settled into a frown. *He just can’t see it*, thinks Becky, and is not sure she can, anymore,

either, from her dark verandahed house overlooking the harbour and the ships plying back and forth to England.

Becky joins the conversation with a sudden question: ‘Mr Classen, what sort of man was he?’

Surprised, Beames answers. ‘Another German. Mid-thirties. A relative of Leichhardt’s. Quite educated, and been to sea, I recall. Leichhardt was quite happy with him. Said their principles and views coincided. Never been in the bush before, though.⁵⁷ I met him once: nothing out of the ordinary. Decent, just like you and me, I suppose.’

When Beames is gone at last, and the benches cleared, Becky unrolls the *Sydney Morning Herald* and skims the print until her eyes find her place: ‘From Back to Back’. As she reads, she imagines herself in that landscape—no walls, no streets—and feels again the excitement of seeing—no feeling—the *Oruba* leaving English waters. She relishes the memory: something letting go inside her, like a seam on a tight bodice, as she relaxed into that unwritten space that stretched to the grey horizon as Dover’s white cliffs fell behind her field of view. She reads on, the memory of that first horizon colouring from grey to red to green with the poetry of Charlie Bean’s words:

the seeds that are below the surface of the desert will live for 15 or 20 years at least ,
waiting for a favourable rain or goodness knows what other conditions to turn that desert
into country as well grassed, for the time, as England itself.⁵⁸

Becky finds the scissors and cuts out the article, and, taking it to her room, places it in an empty envelope in her trunk.

Every Friday until December, Becky collects cuttings of all *The Wool Land* articles. She learns a great deal about sheep, and bullocks, and how a shearer’s cook is elected. She learns,

too, that an 'Englishman in the bush' is assumed to be incapable but seems to be the one to do the solid, honest jobs anyway.⁵⁹ There are stories about men who lost their way and lost their life all in a paddock, the fences being so far and the country in a drought so deadly. There was no mention of Aborigines, except that the shearers preferred working with them in the sheds rather than Chinamen. Still, at least that meant Aboriginal people were out there. She was interested in it all, but her heart caught at phrases like 'the real Australia':

*the real red Australia of the ages, which, though the rivers have worn their channels through it and spewed black silt in narrow ribbons across it ... ironstone pebbles and river-worn quartz, and stony deserts and a thousand other relics across the whole face of it.*⁶⁰

Becky flushes at Bean's dismissal of the 'narrow city type', and longs to be counted 'unmistakably Australian', playing fair, fixing anything with nothing, 'trying it on' the boss, and standing up for their mates. 'And be a man' she thinks to herself. No doubt the Wool Land is a man's country - the scant mention of women are all about the lack of them. Yet there are grand homesteads out there too: someone has to cook and clean in them.

Becky visits the Workingmen's Institute regularly for the books, not the billiards.⁶¹ She borrows the books made of Bean's series - 'On the Wool Track' and 'Dreadnought of the Darling' - and others by a South Australian, Simpson Newland, whose dashing heroes also find their way to the Darling and the Outside country and whose Aborigines, when they were mentioned, are faithful servants, pitied or dead. She writes letters home to her sisters, urging them to borrow these books too, but the replies come back so full of news of weddings - Alice first, then Cissey marrying a Mr Brinkworth in Canada - that for a time she does not write back at all.

'So that's just me and Flora left old maids,' thinks Becky, *'And me thirty-seven in a few months ...'* Not that she tells anyone.

When work at the Institute for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind comes to an end, Becky thinks briefly about taking the train out west to Bourke—to the real Australia—but quickly finds work in the kitchens of the Sydney Grammar School instead. Every day, she walks through Hyde Park and watches the small saplings taking root behind the low fences where the sweethearts wait for one another. As the tram stops rattle by, she recognizes more of her neighbours, who smile but rarely talk, averting their eyes as married men must, or mothers pursing politely to save Becky the embarrassment of their talk of children and grandchildren. Becky is grateful. Most single girls had been snapped up three or four years after arriving in this country, especially at her age. Even Agnes had written to say she had found her Mr. Mustan—an Afghan man in Port Augusta—and followed him to some tiny mining camp buried in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Becky's letters carry no such news. Her ambition is unfulfilled, and with little prospect in the crowded streets of Sydney.

Quorn, 2002

'No, she never went back', Daisy confirms, imagining her grandmother's life in a city she had never seen but where her eldest son had become a successful Indigenous artist.

'Probably had a bit of money then to go back...but she just went to the station.'⁶²...She worked at the Deaf and Dumb orphanage at Sydney there, she was the cook, and when that closed down, and she had to get another job, she went to the station.⁶³...She used to write to her sister. I think she had a couple of sisters. But then she lost contact, I think, when she shifted from Sydney to the Station... Yes I think she must have lost contact with them once she left Sydney.'⁶⁴

When the stirrings of a wanderer shook her moorings in that harbour town, Becky headed west, to Bean's 'outside country' and the heart of the continent.

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¹ 'Yata' = country

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³ 'Ngamarna' meaning maternal uncle. Spelling from South Australian Department of South Australian Department of Education, *The Adnyamathanha People: Aboriginal People of the Flinders Ranges. An Aboriginal Studies Course for Secondary Students.*, Aboriginal Studies 8-12 (Education Department of South Australia, 1992).

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¹⁹ Brian Leslie Castledine, *Castledine: One Branch of the Family*, (2006), vol. p6

²⁰ Information from a Certified Copy of an entry of Death from the General Register Office, England.

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