

Unreliable Narration: The Exploration of a Technique to Destabilize Reliable  
Narration in Prose, and, *I Am Tree*: a novel

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## ABSTRACT

Unreliable Narration: The Exploration of a Technique to Destabilize Reliable Narration in Prose, and, *I Am Tree*: a novel

Humans are the only animals that attempt to make sense of their lived experiences by telling stories. We narrate so that we might understand the past and negotiate the future. But narrations are infinitely varied in content and form. Any inquiry into how humans construct stories is also an inquiry into reliable and unreliable narration; it is also an inquiry into the relationship between author, text and reader, and goes to the root of what it means to be human.

This thesis is comprised of two parts, a creative project and exegesis. The creative project, *I Am Tree*, is a series of interconnecting tales. A different narrator tells each tale, each speaks from a different period in time, but all have in common the place where their story is set. In the first tale, (that begins and ends the novel), fifteen-year-old Will Martin tells of his 1796 sailing trip along the south coast of New South Wales. In the last futuristic narration, a patient, Nada, (whose deceased human brain has been awakened and placed in a new body), is being membanked as part of the Yestermem project. Each narrator reports or misreports a violent incident and in each tale the landscape is ever changing and ever present.

The exegesis analyses the creative writing process by doing a close textual reading of one story as a case study, the interrogation in this instance being of a text that is in the process of being written rather than an extant text. The research

question investigates the ways unreliable narrations function as a destabilizing mechanism in prose and the research findings are applied to the narration techniques used in the novel, *I Am Tree*, submitted for examination. The research involved diverse approaches: theoretical, historical, and ecological research; field trips; interviews; and reading and researching the work of novelists. The theoretical approach was drawn from rhetorical and cognitive criticism with particular reference to James Phelan's theories (2005 & 2007) on rhetorical purpose and rhetorical ethics, and Vera Nünning (2004) and Bruno Zerweck's (2001) theorizing of historical and cultural positioning. The historical research investigates historical figures and exchanges between the First Australians and European colonizers.

This thesis argues that when creating historical unreliable narrators, and when the rhetorical purpose is to suggest multiple readings around a single historical event, then a certain amount of historical reliability is needed for the authorial audience to accept as credible the fictional interpretation of the historical figures and events depicted. The research indicates, however, that when approaching Indigenous historical narrators certain cultural protocols are required. My own nervousness about creating Indigenous narrators was eased through the research phase by my growing comprehension of the place story has in Indigenous culture. My conclusions, at the end of the study, suggest that unreliable narrations, by encouraging the reader to make judgments about narrator motivation, refute the idea that there is a single perspective on an event, reminding the authorial audience that counter-stories exist even if they are not being heard.

'I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.'

Signed:

Catherine McKinnon

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I Am Tree

Catherine McKinnon



1796

by Will Martin

*Thursday, 24th March*

My oar stabs the side of the *Reliance*. We push off and pull away from the ship. Venus is out but the sky still has some light. Mr Bass and I boat the oars and hoist sail. Lieutenant Flinders takes the helm. *Tom Thumb's* sail snaps at the breeze and air-filled we bounce across the water.

'To dare is to do!' Mr Bass shouts our motto.

'To dare is to do!' the Lieutenant and I reply.

Seawater sprays across the gunwale. We sail past stony Pinchgut. A man or woman, I cannot tell, stands on the shore. I see a hand rise to wave. Or is it a trick of the eye? Only the wicked are left there. No one on Garden Island. The ships moored in the harbour soon disappear. Larboard and starboard, only darkened forest. Indian fires glimmer between skeleton trees.

We're charged with discovering where the deep river, that Hacking has eyed inland, flows to the sea. He's guessed south of Botany Bay. The Lieutenant and Mr Bass say if we find it our names will be shiny buttons on English coats. For our journey good Mr Paine has clinker built a new *Tom Thumb* with steamed frames of spotted gum, red cedar planks, and shiny copper fittings. We're kitted with a mast of flooded gum, a linen lugsail, a sweep sail and well-crafted oars. Less than twelve foot so a small boat to sail in. There's no anchor spare in the

colony. Our anchor is a lump of rock that the sea has speared a hole through and under Mr Bass's instruction I've threaded it with thick rope. We've only two muskets to contest pirates or cannibals, supplies for ten days, no more, and the danger is great. The Governor himself tried to dissuade us.

'The risk of young lives lost, with so much yet to give, outweighs the cause,' he said.

But Mr Bass spoke for us all. 'Sir,' he said. 'Audere est facere.'

The water darkens melting into the night sky. Mr Bass tips his head to stargaze. He is almost as long as *Thumb*. The Lieutenant sits, one hand on his knee, as he reads the wind. I button my jacket against the cold. I see the fire beacon flaming on South Head. We are off. We are off. The water goes, slap, slap, against the side of *Thumb*. Slap, slap, to dare is to do.

Near Shark Bay the wind drops. Mr Bass and I get upon the oars and pull to the shore. I jump from *Thumb*, splashing in the shallows. The surf foams and spits as we haul our boat to the sand.

Mr Bass and the Lieutenant stand on the beach and shake hands.

'Mr Bass, congratulations.'

'Lieutenant Flinders, congratulations.'

They are pleased to have nine days exploring, with no pipe whistling when to wake, eat, and sleep.

The dark sea is furrowed by starlight. I spin on the sand. Only now is the creak and cramp of the *Reliance* forgot. Behind, tall eucalypts stand like bark-coated marines, guarding the beach, their leaves, tangled buttons tinted by the moon. A massive rock looms to one side. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant, inky shapes, are climbing to the top.

‘Will, bring me my red waistcoat,’ Mr Bass calls.

Yesterday he gave Hoary Bogarty a bottle for it. Hoary Bogarty won it in cards from a convict, who’d won it at dice from a marine. I fetch the waistcoat and goat the rock to where they stand. For a tick-tock they slip into their Lincolnshire thees and thous, like Quakers at prayer—think thee, Mr Bass, won’t thou, Lieutenant—as though our arrival needs marking. Then prayers are over and Mr Bass tears at a branch to swat mosquitoes.

The Lieutenant has lost his droop and the change is Mr Bass’s doing. Many times, on the *Reliance*, I’ve been below deck and have spied how the Lieutenant, on hearing Mr Bass’s boot above, will down pen and hurry to greet his friend. On deck, as they pace, the Lieutenant’s cheeks begin to shine, as though Mr Bass himself has brought the sun into the day.

The two sit on the rock, talking of the Governor’s latest orders, while I go about collecting wood. In the first order, the Governor forbid the pulling down of palings or the keeping of pigs near the Tank Stream, it being the only fresh water Sydney has and now badly tainted. But all disobeyed that command. The worst offenders? The marines that have huts along the stream. So the Governor put out a second order saying that when he gives an order he expects it to be obeyed. If I

were the Governor I'd have the marines whipped, but the Lieutenant says they are boorish and wield a new sort of power, whipping would only cause them to rise in revolt.

I set a fire on a flat rock that has a view of the bay. We supped before embarking, and, as we intend to sail before sunrise to catch the morning breeze, I stretch out to nap. But with the sea splash, frog croak and insect buzz, napping is all pretence. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant sit fireside, drink medicinal beverage and argue the politic.

'You take too many risks, mingling with seditionists,' the Lieutenant says.

Mr Bass pokes at the coals. 'A risk only for the lily-livered who hang on the tail of public opinion.'

It's a criticism but the Lieutenant pays no heed.

'You made a show of attending Gerrald's funeral,' he says.

'Never a show to grieve a death,' says Mr Bass.

I myself did not weep at the news of Mr Gerrald's death, but I don't say this. In the months before his passing, he'd often detain Mr Bass and me at his house, for hour after hour, giving speeches about universal manhood suffrage. Mr Bass was there to treat him, and this a kindly act, because Balmain, the colony's surgeon, refused to medicate a seditionist. But the upshot of Mr Gerrald's universal manhood suffrage was that more men should be like him and to my mind we had enough drunks in Sydney Cove as it was.

Mr Bass and the Lieutenant get as noisy as convicts at rut-time. When their beverage has spiked their drowsiness, they lie down and snore. I, flat on my back

on hard rock, eye the winking sky and listen to the night. The sea never stops with its caress of the earth. Swish, swash, swish, swash. On land, old-bone branches crack and crash. This place is an upturn of the natural world, each step, new and old together. But to walk into the tree gloom is more than man should dare.

### *Friday, 25th March*

An owl hoots. Yow, yow, yow, yow, yow, yow. I sand the fire and scramble down to help haul *Thumb* to the shallows. We shove off and jump in, wet feet slapping wood. My eyes don't want to stay open but they must. It's dark and the moon is our guide.

Mr Bass and I pull out of the bay, then hoist sail. The air is cool. *Thumb* skips over black water and through the twin heads of land to the ocean. The South Head burner is still flickering. A lone red coat will be tending but I see no one.

Through the heads and the breeze drops. It paddles us along until dawn, then departs. The sun peeks over the edge of a grey-blue sea. Miles of watery dunes. Mr Bass and I set to the oars—splish, splash, splish, splash—the never-ending of it. I know now why sailors say the splash of wood in water is a mariner's dirge.

Mr Bass and I pull at an even pace. The Lieutenant sits at the helm, eyeing the coastline. Behind him, the English flag is limp. Seabirds fly overhead, black fringes sailing from their heads, flags for their kind. They look down on us—carrik, carrik—and head for land. The Lieutenant's eyes narrow as he flashes his timepiece and compass, scribbling calculations in a book that he keeps wrapped in

seal hide. Mr Bass and I are hour hands of a clock, slow and steady, the Lieutenant, the seconds darting by. We pull and pull.

The sun fires so hot it is dog days, even though it is March. My arms shake like a fish on a hook. At Mr Bass's nod we boat the oars.

'Water,' he says.

I ferret the barica from beneath the thwart. Mr Bass twists to sit side on and fill his cup from the barrel. He leans back to drink but in a tick-tock water spurts from his mouth.

'Blasted spoiled!' he shouts.

The Lieutenant reaches forward, snatches the cup and sips. He too spits it out. 'Will, this is water in a wine barrel!'

I feel a rush of heat and curse Bogarty and his ruddy head, for water held in a wine barica is quickly poisoned. The Lieutenant eyes me and sighs. His brother would not make such a blunder. Samuel is not a clot but he whines like one. I am on the sail over him, thanks to Mr Bass.

'Will is as strong as a man,' Mr Bass had argued.

'I saw no evidence at Georges River.'

'Were you looking?' asked Mr Bass, offended on my behalf.

He stayed firm and the Lieutenant gave way.

But to be without water is grim. I press my toes into the wood to press away the horror of my mistake. Mr Bass scratches at his neck.

Bogarty, yesterday morn, was as slow as a wet whistle, because his hip was playing up and because of his rotten head, which, he said, was not due to drink, as I suggested, but caused by my mouth going pell-mell. I took the barica from his store without my usual look-to. The error is mine. Check and re-check all your tasks, is what Mr Bass instructed at Portsmouth. One substance should never taint another. Medicines must be stored with care. It's a sin to lose a life through recklessness. That's what he said. I burn with shame and hear the creak of *Thumb* above the slap of the sea.

Then I remember Palmer's costly gift. Keep safe young friend, he had said, handing over melons newly plucked from his garden. I scramble to the bow to fetch them. Mr Bass eyes me with relief.

'We'll search out a stream when we land,' he says, turning to the Lieutenant. 'It's that fool Bogarty we should punish. The old goat sniffs rum from ten rods away, surely he has the nose for a wine barica.'

I lay the melon on the thwart. Mr Bass slips his blade along the thick skin, careful as he splits it not to lose any juice. He quarters the melon and we sit in the heat, sucking the moist flesh. Mr Bass recommends we chew the seeds. He fills his cup with the poisoned water, splashes the contents over his head, and shouts, 'To dare is to do!' He fills it again, hands it to the Lieutenant, who does the same. This is how he lifts the mood.

I take off my hat, pour the spoilt water over my bare head and feel less sore about my mistake. But when I glance at the Lieutenant I know he has not forgot. The Lieutenant stores a secret ledger in his memory. Each person has two

columns, for and against, and the Lieutenant always knows where a person is placed. It's not surprising to hear him tell, in bitter words and months after the event, of some small injustice he has suffered at the hands of another.

'Mind, give that barica a good scrub before we fill it,' Mr Bass whispers as we start to pull.

Mr Bass doesn't keep ledgers but he does take measure of his fellow man. How he does it? In his mind, he begins to draw a portrait of a particular fellow, and at every meeting he shades the portrait one way, then another. It might take several meetings for a full colouring, but once a portrait is complete, Mr Bass sticks to his opinion. The Lieutenant is more precise and, for good or bad, the ledger is always open. I can see my own name in the Lieutenant's ledger and my against column is nearly full up.

We pull southward. The sun is overhead. The sail flaps. We set taut the line to catch the breeze from south-south-east and steer for shore. We skim across the waves.

'We're nearly three knots,' calls the Lieutenant, pleased with *Thumb's* pace.

'Is that Cape Banks?' Mr Bass is at the helm now.

The Lieutenant shouts, 'Over there! Is that Hat Hill?'

I scramble to the bow to spy the land.

'Can't be Hat Hill,' Mr Bass replies. 'Hat Hill is fifteen leagues from Port Jackson.'

Cape Banks, the mark of our destination, is a far shorter distance.



Mr Bass leans forward. 'Surely we've not sailed that far?'

Looking northward, I see the land is not at all like the land around Botany Bay, but, with its continuous arm, it *is* more like the flow of land around Hat Hill, or, how I remember it from when Master Moore pointed it out to me on our sail to Port Jackson.

'There's the hill Captain Cook called a hat,' our master said, chuckling at the navigator's wit.

On that day, more than a year ago, I'd stood on the deck eyeing Hat Hill for as long as it remained in sight, stirred by the thought that I, Will Martin, was sailing the same sea as Cook.

'Hat Hill it is,' I call from the bow. 'See the land to the North.'

Mr Bass laughs. 'We've overshot the mark!'

The Lieutenant looks at the water. 'Who would suppose it? The current must be strong.'

The wind is from the north and forces us to continue our sail south, away from Botany Bay. We must find a place to land and search out fresh water before the night falls. Clouds race along the coast, shifting from white to grey to inky black. The sea swells become frothing giants hungry for our boat. We tack for shore. To the west the sun falls behind the arm of the mountain and darkness arrives in a rush. The wind drops. The Lieutenant and I pull for a bend in the coast. We're still four miles from land. The sea is choppy even though the wind is slight. The early

moon tickles the water with light. Finally, we near the beach, but the white surf is gnashing at the sand.

‘Landing is out,’ the Lieutenant shouts.

Mr Bass and I heave up the stone anchor and tumble it into the sea. As it sinks the rope uncurls from its loop. We bob on the ocean. I look to Mr Bass. The moon catches his face as he clears the line but his thoughts are disguised. My belly rattles. There’s been no landing to boil beef, no chance to make bread cakes the way our cook showed me. I pull out another melon, place it on the thwart and cut it open. There is nought else to add but raw potato. I serve our meagre meal and as we chomp I eye the night sky.

‘Mr Bass, what shall we name this place?’ the Lieutenant asks, then sinks his teeth into the melon.

On our Georges River trip all had been named before we arrived.

‘Moody Bay?’ Mr Bass says.

‘The theatrical interpretation?’

‘Too emotive?’ Mr Bass asks.

‘According to Bligh, when naming unknown territory, the name must allow others to imagine its function. How it might serve future settlements.’

‘Anchor Bay,’ I say.

‘Too much the impression of large vessel anchorage,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘And this is not a bay, it opens too much to the east.’

He says it with ease but I hear his dismissal. I vow not to speak, except to agree. This is best with the Lieutenant. The only way to stay on the right side of his ledger.

‘And yet,’ Mr Bass says, surveying the surrounds, ‘there is something sheltering about it. And that cliff there does remind me of the big old barns from home.’

Mr Bass throws his melon skin into the sea and wipes his mouth on his shirt. He grins at me. I bite into my melon to hide my pleasure. Sheltering is not so far from anchoring, is it? For both conjure safety. And was he saying so because he knows the Lieutenant keeps a ledger? How I wish to be like Mr Bass. All is ease. Glorious ease.

‘Barn Cove,’ says the Lieutenant. ‘It has a lyrical touch and yet, enough description.’

‘Barn Cove, why not,’ says Mr Bass.

We jostle to find a sleeping nook. Not a simple task as Mr Bass’s legs, which do seem longer than a horse, jerk about. The Lieutenant, thinking himself in privacy perhaps, begins souring the air with foul odours. I tuck one arm under my head and bury my nose in the other. I don’t know if sharks can smell, but if they can I’ll put coin to it that the Lieutenant’s inner winds, once released, will keep them distant.

I think of the fish swimming beneath me. Do fish sleep? Slap, slap, to dare is to do. Slap, slap, to dare is to do. Mama you did never imagine me an explorer?

Your stage set could not compare to this. What this? For this is no *Reliance* with its shuffle of crew, it is three of us rocking in a tiny boat on the great ocean. This is my second night away from the *Reliance*. I think now that no other tale ever had this shiver or this shine.

### *Saturday, 26th March*

The third day of our journey and I wake. My throat is blistered. There is water about but the wrong kind. I'm hot even though it's cold. I say this out loud then regret it.

'Remittent fever,' Mr Bass teases.

Mr Bass likes to scare me with horrid diagnosis. Does he not remember that Mama had a terrible remittent fever that caused him to stay with her night after night until she was cured?

'More like putrid,' the Lieutenant adds with a sniff at my being.

'No,' I say, 'it's every bone in my body rattled by strange foot-kicking in the night.'

Mr Bass laughs, rubs his hand on my head. I pull away. I'm too old for such things but Mr Bass refuses to acknowledge it. To him I'm still the boy he hired.

Mama had just finished singing on stage when he told her of his offer.

'No,' she said, her face puffed and red.

'Don't do this, Isabella,' Mr Bass replied, calmly crossing his legs as he sat beside her dressing table. 'Don't cosset the boy.'

Mama took off her wig and thumped it on the stand. 'He has a gift,' she said, holding out her glass for more liquor.

'He wants the walls cast away, not the walls closed in,' Mr Bass said, in his deep-sea voice. 'He wants the rise and fall of waves, not the stage.'

'It's lucky you're not a writer, George, with bad poetry like that,' Mama said.

But Mr Bass could convince a fishmonger to buy fish and he proceeded to convince Mama to let me go to sea. I'd begged him to do it, having had my fill of rigging stage ropes, and cleaning floors, of holding cushions for kings while dressed in hot fabric. His convincing involved buying more expensive liquor.

'You are the victor,' Mama said to me two bottles later.

She put her hand to my cheek and laughed. I jumped around her dressing room.

But that was more than a year ago and since, I've travelled farther than most have ever dreamt, and despite what Mr Bass thinks, I am not that same boy!

Our need for water is urgent now but we cannot land as the waves are forceful close to shore.

'North, the cliffs are high. No place to land there. And south is away from our river,' the Lieutenant says.

'Yet south, low land is visible,' Mr Bass says. 'We can land and perhaps a stream might be found.'

'But is to continue south a stretch of our agreement with the Governor?'

‘How can it be a stretch when the weather is telling us what we must do?’

Mr Bass reasons.

‘I can see the reckoning,’ the Lieutenant says, but is still unsure.

‘Remember, this far south no man has stepped,’ says Mr Bass. ‘Save roaming cannibals, and one or two pirates, who do not warrant merit as they’ve made no map.’

Map-making for the Lieutenant is like honey-making for a bee.

‘Cook’s map in this area is scant on detail,’ Mr Bass adds.

It’s all the convincing the Lieutenant needs.

‘South it is,’ he says.

We hoist sail and steer south.

At first, the coast is like the walls of a falling down castle, only walls where shrubs have rooted. It’s forbidding and eye-gobbing. This is not a land of fairies and goblins, but more like monsters and ghosts. Then, the castle walls fall away, the land shrinks and is covered with scrubby trees. It becomes sandy beach and stony head, sandy beach and stony head, as if God had been practicing his Port Jackson craft before he created the main event. We spy a likely spot for a stream and sail through a gap in the reef but still we bob about and cannot land as the surf is in a beheading mood.

‘Anchor,’ the Lieutenant calls.

Mr Bass and I drop anchor well before the surf. My throat is now a hollowed out log. One of us must swim to shore to search for water.

‘Are you up for it?’ the Lieutenant asks.

‘Yes,’ I say, pleased for the challenge.

I begin to strip off my clothes. The white sandy beach is curved like a butcher’s knife. Scrubby trees beyond the sand and a forest of green that stretches up to the hills. Before we left Port Jackson, stories of cannibals had been all the talk. I stare at the trees.

‘Will, who be the best swimmer, you or me?’ Mr Bass asks.

‘Your stroke has mightily improved,’ I say, unable to take my eyes from the trees.

Mr Bass laughs too loud. I meant improved so he could swim with me and say so.

‘Then I could fight all the cannibals that came my way,’ I add.

‘Both cannot go,’ the Lieutenant says. ‘Two men lost to cannibal supper is unseemly.’

‘Then, as I will no doubt make the best stew,’ Mr Bass says to me, ‘should not I be the one to swim to shore?’

I see now this moment is a mark. We’re in a place where no European foot has stepped. It’s Mr Bass who should have the honour. I empty the barica and throw it into the ocean.

‘In the sea I’m a dolphin,’ Mr Bass shouts and dives in after it.

‘Don’t forget to scrub that barica,’ I tease, because the mood has turned easy and I don’t think the Lieutenant will mind my jesting.

Mr Bass floats on his back, takes hold of the barica, and begins a backward stroke. We cheer him on but are soon called to action because the current is strong and despite our care when dropping anchor we've drifted to where the waves break.

'Here, Will, take the helm,' the Lieutenant snaps, spying the danger.

He scrambles to take hold of the anchor rope and begins to haul us back to our dropping point. Safe again, I watch Mr Bass, his arm like a great oar rowing to shore.

'The anchor is lifting,' the Lieutenant shouts, as a growling dog of a wave sluices in and picks up *Tom Thumb*.

All is a dazzle of blue sky and salt spray. I just have time to steady the helm. We're riding the wave with terrific pace and I cry out with excitement as *Thumb* crashes in the surf. But a second wave scoops me up, out of the boat and into the water, tumbling me in white froth until my shoulder hits wet sand. I lay coughing and spluttering. There is grit in my nose and ears. I'm a wet rag in need of squeezing. I let my cheek sink to the sand, spy shells like white pearls. The Lieutenant, mud-covered, as if newly born from the earth, staggers to his feet.

'Will,' he calls to me, 'we must use the next wave to haul *Thumb* up to dry sand.'

He starts limping towards *Thumb*. I stand and splash after him. Mr Bass comes running from the surf. He throws the barica out of reach of the waves. I grip the gunwale so tight my knuckles turn white. A boisterous wave romps toward shore. When the wave lip splits around *Thumb* I heave with all my might



and run with the smash and crash of water, pushing the boat to the edge of dry  
sand. We're safe. Mr Bass and I whoop with pleasure and race around *Thumb*.  
And there, in our mad calls, is that nameless thing we share, all fluid and light,  
like an invisible bird

pulling us up from

the earth.

I hear the slow

flap of wings and

see pelicans, flying

in a perfect V,

their white feathers

bright against

the blue

sky.

## Hawker Speaks, Big Sister Speaks

1822

### Hawker

Five bastard pelicans land on the water and set my dogs barking. The roo I've sighted, down for its nightly, thumps off before I get a shot. I aim at the pelicans, want to shoot every damn one of them, but hear horses galloping. I run up the bank, through the stand of trees I've yet to clear, to the cornfield. I holler for Binskin but he's playing native again. Three men on horses canter around the field. I make out Neale on the stallion. On the brown mare, his brother. Then Toole, last.

'You're late,' I call, as they pull up.

'A day or two,' says Neale, licking dust from his lips.

'Trouble?' I ask.

Neale doesn't answer. Likes to play top dog. I smile but the man's a cunt and if he leaves me dry again I'll slit his throat while he sleeps and say the Blacks did it.

The three dismount. I tighten my grip on the gun to mask the shake of my hands. The brother has a yapping pup tied to his saddle. My dogs run at the horses barking until I quiet them. Three rough mutts but they do what I say. Neale's brother sets free his pup. It runs and yaps, stirs mine up again.

Neale and his brother go to hitch their horses to the trunk-posts that front the hut.

‘Not there,’ I say.

Neale eyes me. Turns to his brother.

‘Forgot to tell you, brother. Hawker don’t like to step in horse shit.’

They lead their horses to the side of the hut where I’ve set the rail. Toole’s gelding bucks and pulls away. Neale’s brother tethers his horse then takes hold of the gelding. Toole stands back, unashamed.

‘William, the horseman,’ he says.

‘A trusting touch,’ I say, though that’s not what I think.

William is thin with wrists like a woman. The horse calms at his touch. But there’s malevolence in the man. He’s one would steal close at midnight and with sharpened knife unseam a sleeping mate, yet come sun up be all yawning innocence.

My dogs are digging their bones but the pup keeps yapping at their heels.

‘William, shut that mutt up,’ Neale calls.

The brother turns to him, offended. The pup is a sore point. I watch it sniffing. The brother goes to it, rubs its neck. The pup is his weakness.

‘We’re out of everything,’ I say to Neale.

‘Flour?’

‘Not flour.’

‘Tea.’

‘Not tea.’

Neale claps his forehead. 'Lord, you mean grog, and here's us and we forgot the supply!'

'Ever the joker,' I say.

He's forcing me to smile again. Neale unsaddles his horse pleased with himself. The brother takes the pup to give it water so it's Toole who unpacks the grog. He does it slow, like he has his grave in sight. Yet, he sports a sly smile. Being recent arrived he thinks he's better than Binskin and me. Thinks he'll outwit death. Toole is bony sharp all over but soft inside.

Toole has the grog on the ground. I don't go for it. I don't show my need. My mouth feels like dirt.

## **Big Sister**

If she were a fish she'd be small and fast. She'd dart away so no bigger fish could catch her. The water in the lake is warm. She's up to her thighs. Little fish dart between her knees and all around but they're slippery buggers and she can't catch one in her hand. It's mullet runaway time and those fishes are all excited cos they're heading out to sea. The big fish are slower than the runty ones. She's looking for one that would make a good feed. An old one whose time is up. She'll get that fish with her bare hands. It's more fun than dragging one on the end of a line.

She turns back to eye the shore. Her dog in the water, waiting for her. Her little sister and little brothers and her aunties, like trees on the sand. Her mum warring with her dad and the uncles and her big brothers. Those men are walking

away. Yelling and more yelling. All about the skinned ones. There's a boat come in and the tree-cutters have the mad juice. Her mum hates that mad juice with a passion but her dad is all for it. It gives him power, he says. Her mum is yelling how he is to stay at the camp but her dad is friends with those tree-cutters and he wants to go.

Big Sister turns away, blocks out their yells. Her mum reckons she can't catch a fish with her bare hands. Her mum says only her older brother can do that. He's the man. She wants to show her mum how she can do it too. Just because she hasn't done it yet, doesn't mean she can't do it at all. She stops still and waits. All around the edge of the lake the trees dance.

'Hey, Big Sister,' they say. 'You catch that fish.'

'I'm catching that fish,' she says back. 'That fish is ready for me,' she says back.

They're dancing at her, those trees. They're happy for her, those trees. She waits.

But that fish she's looking for is not coming her way and the others are all too fast. She waits some more. If a slow fish don't come her way she'll need to go back for the line. She left that line on the sand. If she gets the line she can catch some little fish maybe. Some of those fast little buggers.

She waits some more.

Patience is what she has plenty of.

## Hawker

Neale calls me to walk with him. He speaks the strange click those born here speak. A meeting between English and native. The land is a canker even to speech. We stride the boundary of the cornfield. Neale wants to know why the corn isn't harvested. I need to tell Neale a thing or two. Like, I'm not a dog. Like, don't call to me the way you call a dog. But my lips won't open.

Neale eyes the corn like a crow but he has no nose for when it's ready. Still, he will be judging.

I force words from my mouth. 'This is Indian corn. The crop needs two more days sun,' I say. 'Got to dry out from last week's squall.'

The lie is not a lie because there's truth under it. I might have started harvest yesterday but for the shakes and the too hot sun. Same today. It will take two days of grog to get me steady again. I never tell a lie with no truth in it.

'And I've got Binskin to deal with,' I say.

'I'll tell Binskin to pull his weight,' Neale says.

'Good.'

Binskin is the slacker, not me.

'William, Toole, and me, have to muster at Kangaroo Ground,' Neale says.

'You're the corn man.'

'Why don't you stay a day or two?'

'Brooks won't like us staying longer than a night,' Neale says.

Brooks is a cocksucker who is making his fortune on my labour, courtesy of the government. It's Neale I need to befriend. Get a good crop in and he'll want me at Appin. He's the one who'll convince Brooks.

'I'll shoot a roo. We'll have a big feed.'

Neale laughs. He likes to eat.

'Brooks won't know from these lips,' I say.

The sun has dropped behind the mountain and the dark is coming on quick. Neale has me tell him about the peach trees and the potato field and the pumpkins growing at the back of the hut. I push my hands into my pockets because they won't stay still. The birds start up their unholy sound. So loud I can't hear what Neale is saying.

## **Big Sister**

Big Sister is cooking a fat lizard on the fire. Her dog is staring at it, waiting for his share. Her mum comes over and sits near to her.

'It's a big one,' her mum says.

'You caught a big one.'

'You don't have to prove nothing to me,' her mum says.

'No.'

'You don't like me saying?'

'Not that.'

'You'll catch that fish tomorrow.'

'I know.'

‘Yeah, you don’t like me saying.’

‘You can say all you like but this fat one here is near ready to eat.’

It’s just the women there, and her old uncle who doesn’t like the mad juice. He’s too old now to do much but sit by the tree.

Her mum stares into the fire, dust devil stirring up inside.

‘They shouldn’t have gone,’ her mum says.

‘Those tree-cutting men are the devil men,’ her aunty says.

The little ones come up and sit, moaning.

‘I’m hungry,’ her baby sister says.

Big Sister is cooking too late. That moon is on its way. She’ll have to burn the bones quick to get rid of the smell.

‘This one here is near ready to eat,’ she says to the little ones.

## Hawker

Binskin walks out from the trees. He’s smelt the grog. He’s bare-chested and wears a red cloth strapped around his neck.

‘The man is turning native,’ I say to Neale and he belly laughs just like I want him to.

Living with Binskin is a trick just for guessing his next ruse. This morning he complained of shocking cramp. Spent hours in the trees, returning to the hut to particularize each stool. Then he couldn’t work the potato field because his left toe hurt. Described the pain as if he were a ruddy physic. Binskin is worse than a Black. Blacks don’t pretend to work.



‘One thing I hate is pretence.’ I don’t mean to say this out loud but I do.

‘Him, not you,’ I say.

Neale gets my meaning. ‘It’s the lowest of the low,’ he says.

When we walk back to the hut Binskin walks behind, like the servant he is.

The hut is one room with a fireplace. Toole has boiled up pork to go with the grog. Two steadiers is all I need. After we eat I spread skins in front of the fire and we lie down. I like the sound of Neale’s voice but I’m not listening to what he says. Night, with the fire, with grog, is the time I like best. This land is not a gaol then. I’m king of the night then.

### **Big Sister**

Possum comes to visit. There’s nothing left to eat but he sniffs around near the fire. He’s too old and mangy to be food, plus, he has a big sore on his side. Big Sister lifts her head and that possum stares at her. He’s not scared of nothing.

Everyone else is sleeping. Even the dogs.

‘Can I have your coat when you’re dead?’ she asks him.

She wants to make him feel good about his mangy coat but he takes it the wrong way.

‘I’m not dying just yet,’ the possum says.

‘I didn’t mean now,’ she says.

‘Manners would be not to ask.’ The possum speaks all uppity. ‘Manners would be to wait until after the event.’

‘Manners would be for you to stop sniffing at me,’ she says. ‘We’ve no berries anymore if that’s what you want. Those skinned ones have come and put in a cornfield.’

‘Oh.’

‘So no more berries, got that?’

The possum stares at her. He didn’t know the berries had gone.

‘Have you been up to see the cornfield?’

‘No.’

‘Did you try that corn once before?’

‘No.’

He speaks all miserable. That’s the way she hears it. All the animals speak to her. The trees too. Her mum says she’s making up a good story. She says to her mum, it’s not a story. It’s not like they talk the way I talk. It’s like I can hear without them saying. When she told that to her mum, her mum laughed. You’re a storyteller, her mum said. It’s true, she said. Not a story, she said. That made her mum laugh more.

‘Some night soon I’ll get you some corn to try,’ she says to the possum.

The possum doesn’t answer.

‘I think you’ll like it,’ she says.

The possum keeps staring. He used to really like those berries.

‘Wait until you try the corn and then decide,’ she says.

She gets up to put more branches on the fire. The boobook is calling and the frogs are yakking. The possum fossicks in the trees. She feels sorry for him

but it's best she doesn't show it. Those possums are a proud lot. She can talk and be friendly to them, night after night, but they'll not return the favour. Not like her dog, who is always with her and licks her nose in the morning. But still, she likes that old possum. When she goes back to sleep he's still there.

## Hawker

I walk from the hut into the light. Neale and the others sleep on. I don't wait for them to hunt, but trek off through grey trees, gun cold in my hand. The forest is alive with insect buzz. My mutts sniff around. They know how to hunt. It's only bastard pelicans set them off. I eye sideways, raise my gun. Only a crow, I thought a Black. I don't want a Black. I want a roo. Can't eat a Black.

Don't like the way the Blacks stare. Their staring can go on. It's not meant personal. If I was savage and saw me, I'd kill me too. It's not personal but I don't like them staring. They're maybe one step above an animal but cunning for it. A dog you can trust. Blacks you can't trust. Winter they took our potatoes. It was meant to be a deal but they didn't follow through. When we went to their camp to get the promised women, the men raised their spears.

'We had a deal!' Binskin shouted at them.

But the Blacks were aiming to throw, so we left. Since then we don't let Blacks near our place.

But Blacks or no Blacks this land is wild and the weather steaming. A man could rot here. I can't last here. I need Neale to take me to the cool of Appin.

I don't find a roo but down two pheasants in one shot. The heads for soup, bodies for stew. The meat is sweeter than a roo. On the walk back to the hut, with the dogs running alongside, I feel myself swell. This is what it is to be a man. But when I walk into the hut my mood sours. I don't like that they've started on the grog.

'They're called lyrebirds,' William says when I lay the birds down.

'He's into animals and birds,' Neale says. 'He sends away for books.'

'I don't trust people who read,' I say to William, who thinks he is better because he was born here, born free.

Neale laughs. 'William don't read. Can't even sign his name. He looks at the pictures.'

On another day it would irk, Neale speaking for his brother, but then he says the birds are a bugger to shoot.

'Hawker the hunter,' Neale says, and I laugh.

Binskin and Toole are talking about their ships.

'No, no, no! I said, the *Prince Regent*.' Toole puts his mouth around the word like it's a ship that carries royalty.

'Thatswhattasaid,' Binskin says. '*Princeregent*.'

Binskin's still sauced from last night.

'He came on the *Larkins*,' I tell Toole.

'Fuckingbastardofacaptain.' Binskin makes his mouth finish each word but they still don't separate. The effort exhausts him and he slumps.

‘Fucking bastard of a sea,’ I say. ‘If man was meant to be on the sea he’d have flippers or fins. Legs is what we’ve got for walking on land.’

‘Give over,’ says William. ‘Where are you from? The Dark Ages.’

‘Man shouldn’t be moving about as much as he is,’ I say.

William shakes his head. ‘We can swim, you saying we shouldn’t swim.’

‘Only for as far as you can swim,’ I say, which for me is nowhere at all.

That’s the other thing about the born-heres. They swim like ducks.

‘If we all thought that way there’d be no ships.’

‘He’s a dreamer,’ Neale says.

Neale is shrewd even though he’s young. But I don’t get why he thinks his brother is a goddamn deity. Most would be fooled by William’s paleness but his heart pumps dark blood.

‘Tell you something,’ I say. ‘With all his animal loving, I wouldn’t take too kindly to being in one of his dreams.’

Neale laughs, but the brother shuts up.

‘Or yours, or yours,’ I say to Binskin and Toole.

Neale is doubled up with laughter. I laugh too but the others only stare. I feel it now. The power I have. It’s rising in me.

## **Big Sister**

They’re walking on the banks of the stream, towards the sea. The rain has stopped and they want some of those oysters they can scrape off the rocks. Her mum shows them the tree she hid behind when she first saw the skinned ones.

‘I peered around the trunk like this,’ her mum says.

Her mum has a look of fear in her face that makes them all laugh.

‘What’s that?’ her mum asks, peering across to the opposite bank.

‘Devil men,’ says her baby sister, who knows the story.

‘Three devil men,’ says her mum. ‘It was like they had skinned their faces and hands. I didn’t want to show my face to no devil men. So I hid and watched. Our men went there.’

Her mum moves around the tree carefully, not making a sound.

‘One devil man went that way into the trees,’ her mum says. ‘I didn’t follow. He came back. They were here mucking up our mullet season. All our mullet were on their way out to sea, just like now, and those devil men came with their boat muddying up that water track for the mullet to get to sea. Our men tried to tell them about that track but those devil men are stupid too. All those devil men care about is preening themselves. I saw them from behind this tree. Over there it happened, right there.’

They look to where her mum is pointing on the opposite bank. There is only sand and bushes but her mum can bring those skinned ones back to life.

‘What happened then?’ her baby sister asks.

‘They go away but before they go they spook our men.’ Her mum claps her hands together and they all jump because the noise she makes is loud.

Her mum laughs. ‘That’s just what our men did,’ her mum says.

They all laugh now too.

‘I was young then,’ her mum says. ‘And when I was grown up those devil men come again. Different kind. They walked that way into the trees. We stayed away but for days we could hear their noises. Clunk, clunk, clunk. We never heard that sound before. A devil man sound. So we moved further away but still we could hear it. Clunk, clunk, clunk. All the time. Clunk, clunk, clunk. We moved further away. But still that sound. Clunk, clunk, clunk. Until one day we woke and there was no devil sound. Maybe a trick, so we waited a few days. No sound. So we came back this way.’ Her mum creeps out from behind the tree. She is being her whole family, all of them, walking along listening out for the devil men. ‘We snuck through the forest following their old tracks. Nearly three moons had passed. We were calm now. They were gone. But then we looked up from the tracks.’

Her mum is looking at the trees, a scared look on her face that makes them all lean forward.

‘What did we see?’ Her mum asks the littlest one.

‘I don’t know,’ the littlest one says, scared.

Her mum looks again.

‘We saw that they had taken the forest with them. It was gone, all gone. Just stumps of those trees in the ground. Imagine that. No Kurrajong for seeds. Where do we get our fishing line now? All those other trees there, gone too. All gone.’

The little ones are all staring, like they can see everything gone from the land.

‘Whenever they come those skinned ones take away everything they see. Everything. Even our men. So don’t you go near them. We stay away from them. We run like this.’

And her mum turns and runs to show the little ones what to do.

When her mum reaches the high sand she stops and calls, ‘Come on, show me how you run when you see those devil men.’

And those little ones run. And Big Sister, she runs too.

## Hawker

Two days drinking and my head is sore but I want to hunt. Neale and Binskin come with me. William stays to play with his pup that hasn’t stopped yapping. Toole is so boat fresh he can’t walk in the forest without haunting himself.

Binskin has a spear, thieved from the tribe that camp near the lake. There’s thirteen women for five men and the kids are so many you can’t count.

‘Unjust, all that Black cunt going to waste,’ Binskin says.

‘I wouldn’t go near Black cunt,’ Neale says, as we hike through the forest.

He’s got white cunt on demand and four brats to prove it so why would he go looking?

‘Black cunt is like dirt,’ Neale says.

Binskin has a fit of hysterics, like Neale has just said the most hilarious thing in all the blasted world. Binskin and I don’t say about our own experiences with Black cunt that time with Billy Graham.

‘I hate Black cunt,’ I say.



We walk on through the trees and stop when we come to the creek.

Afternoon light shines on the water and it starts raining leaves.

‘Fucking gods of the forest,’ I say.

Neale squats, cups water into his mouth. ‘It’s got it advantages, this place.’

Binskin runs up and back along the bank, spotting fish. I wash my feet in the cool water and stretch out on the grass. I don’t feel like hunting now.

‘This is the life,’ I say.

‘This is the life,’ Neale says, like it’s me who’s in charge.

Neale washes his feet and lies down too. And then, Binskin. And we all yawn. It’s like the forest has put a spell on us.

When we wake, it’s night. The air is a wet cloth and the owls are spooking. We walk back to the hut in the watery dark, a full moon sailing through ghost trees.

## **Big Sister**

She tells her mum they can get the corn on their own. They can go to the field and pick it. Her mum isn’t for it. Her mum wants to wait until the men get back from the mad juice and the tree-cutters, but she tells her mum that the moon is bright now.

She says to her mum, ‘Us women can go. We’ll leave the dogs to protect the little ones and old Uncle can stay. He can’t move anyway.’

She walks on ahead. Tells her mum she’ll wait on the track. She’s keen for the corn, hungry for it, but she likes walking in the moonlight too. When she sees

her mum come along the track, walking with the aunties, she feels good. She didn't know if her mum would listen to her, so she feels good, like a Big Sister should.

'The little ones want to come but I said no,' her mum says to her.

'They'll make too much noise.'

'I told them,' her mum says.

'My dog will look after them.'

'He's a good dog,' her mum agrees. 'And tomorrow we'll give those little ones some corn.'

The women walk through the trees, laughing and whispering, and the shadows run ahead of them.

## **Hawker**

Night-visions stir those sleeping before the fire. I sit at the window staring out. The green tips of the corn gleam in moonlight. I told Neale I'd harvest come dawn but I'll not see the sun rise. Too much has been stolen from me. Is it just to send a man from his land? Is it just to treat a man like a dog? All good feeling has leaked away. Not even grog can ease me now. I stare at the gun. It's heavy in my hand.

I look to my companions and the firelight makes them men I might choose to be with, instead of blackguards I'm bound to while I wait out my time in a prison land where the heat hurts more than damp English cells ever could. But firelight is knavery and day will bring the march to nowhere. Each day the same. Each day my prison. One pull of the trigger and I'm free.

The dogs start barking.

Neale wakes.

'Hawker?' he says.

'Blacks,' I say.

The spell is broken.

It's the Blacks that make this place a prison. What work I do they take away. I was punished, why not them? I open the door and let the dogs out. They bolt into the field. I follow the dogs, running through the corn. Up ahead, there they are. Wretched thieves, stealing my labour. I lift the gun and pull back the hammer. I almost fall from the blast.

'I've got one, I've got one!' I shout to Neale.

But I'm not sure I have.

'Reload,' Neale calls, running up behind me.

I want to go on but he pulls me back to the hut. 'Reload, reload,' he says.

Inside the hut the others are up and shouting.

'Blacks,' I say. 'Arm yourself.'

The dogs are still in the field. I'm in a hurry to see how many Blacks I can shoot. I am ramming the cartridge as I run back out. The others follow. Binskin takes hold of his spear. Toole has the axe. Neale, a pick. We spread through the field but Toole sticks too close. I can't shake him. I want to shoot a Black, shove Toole's face in the wound and say, this is what men do here.

I see a Black, moonlit, on the edge of the field. I stop and raise my gun.

The Black turns to face me. Runs at me, shouting. I fire and the Black falls.

‘What is it?’ Neale calls.

‘Got one,’ I say.

The Black is on the grass between the cornfield and the trees, making noises, so not dead. The dogs are barking. I peer into the deep gloom. Nothing moves.

‘Are there more?’ Neale says.

‘No.’

‘There are,’ he says.

‘No.’

We walk towards the moaning Black.

‘It’s a woman,’ Neale says.

I reload and fire into the trees. ‘Scat now or I’ll shoot you dead!’

Neale tells Binskin and Toole to check in the trees.

‘Don’t want a spear through my chest,’ Toole says.

‘You’d have one already if they were still here,’ I say.

## **Big Sister**

All of the women are together by the old fig. They hear the skinned ones shouting.

Big Sister speaks to her aunties.

‘My mum isn’t frightened of those men. She saw one coming. She said, go, go, go. I ran then but something hit my shoulder. It was from that skinned one’s stick. I didn’t know that stick could hurt so.’

‘They can surprise you like that,’ her aunty says.

‘My mum came and helped me along. I could still run but not as fast. I thought they’d gone but then those skinned ones were coming again, crack, crack, through the corn, and my mum pushed me ahead. Keep running, my mum said. I ran with my hurt shoulder into the forest. I ran to you and stopped here by the old fig where my sister was born.’

The aunties hear her speak and are angry. They shake their fists.

She can’t hear what the trees are saying. Too much is stirring. She listens to the barking dogs. She waits for her mum.

## **Hawker**

Toole and Binskin scout in the trees but they’re quick to return. I pick up a net of corn near the moaning woman. Nearly a peck.

‘Would’ve wiped us clean,’ I say.

The woman has fallen on her face. From her backside I know it’s not one of the young ones. I go to turn her over.

‘Don’t,’ Neale says.

‘What?’

‘You’ll have to report at Appin tomorrow.’

What’s he doing? Making it seem all wrong.

‘Brooks wouldn’t want his corn stolen,’ I say.

The dogs bark and run to the trees.

‘Better if you’d shot a man,’ Neale says.

‘What difference?’

Neale whistles to the dogs. They come to him. He gets down and rubs their necks.

'Set to it,' he says, kicking the Black's leg.

The dogs lick him, not understanding.

'What you doing?' I say to Neale.

'Dogs mauled this woman,' he says.

'I shot her!'

'The dogs mauled her, and that's what we'll tell the magistrate,' Neale says.

I get him now. He's proved it now. He's a friend now.

'Get it, get it,' I shout, and the dogs bark and growl and rip at the Black's stomach, tearing the flesh.

William has not come out. He's not watched. I see him standing in the doorway, lit up by the firelight. I raise my gun, so the moon catches it. I want to show him that we've shot a Black. He turns and walks inside. He doesn't like his killing in the open. He likes it on the quiet. That's the sort he is. He doesn't know what I did to his pup. He doesn't know I buried his pup. Yapping until the last and now it's gone. But still, Neale's brother grates on me. Tonight I'll let him be. Tonight I've saved the corn.

As we walk back to the hut, the wind in the trees like a flock of birds, I say it in my head.

I'm the corn man. That's what I am.

The corn man.

1796

by Will Martin

*Saturday, 26th March*

The wind is gusting, kicking up waves, so they lick the dry sand. It checks our high spirits. The Lieutenant begins pulling soggy supplies from *Thumb*.

‘Will, bail the boat,’ Mr Bass says, feigning sensibleness.

I pick up the bucket and begin to bail, remembering the wave, the rush of wind. It’s how it must feel to fly. I want to whoop but dare not. It would displease the Lieutenant. I dip my bucket and bail. My arms ache but in a good way.

I stop to rest when the water is ankle-deep. That’s when I see it. A thin trail of smoke drifting up from the scrubby trees. I try to speak. No sound comes. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant face away. Don’t see me pointing.

My imaginings are bloodied and boned. The howls of darkest nature are in my head. I see how we are, as if from above. Us three caught between the snapping ocean and the scrubby foreshore, the boat no more than a young one’s toy. Beyond us stands, like a thousand hairy men, the jangling forest.

I slip onto the sand, seize Mr Bass’s arm and point to the smoke. Mr Bass, still naked, stares at the forest. The Lieutenant does the same.

I’ve heard tales of cannibals living south of Botany Bay, but hearing tales is different to standing on a beach knowing I could soon be hunted by one. Every part of me is jingling, as though I can touch without touching, see without seeing,

hear without hearing. As if death and life are wrangling twins and I'm standing in between.

The tall forest trees that back the beach, twist in the wind and lurch toward us, belching forth a flock of wild birds with yellow crests and enormous wings. They spread as they fly above, arc south and wing the coast, screeching like the monkeys I saw caged at Rio. Their spooky calls echo long after they vanish. I look to the forest again. There are strange beasts around Sydney but who knows what peculiarities we could meet this far south.

We three are hushed. As if being here is a step too far beyond our knowing. When I first learnt my letters I stumbled over those that wouldn't jiggle together. I whittled away at them until one day I shaped a word. I felt so shiny with myself for having a whole word in my grasp. But, a day later, when my uncle, Hilton, gave me one of his books to read, I fell so low. Before I started my lessons I didn't notice words at all, but that day I did, only I hadn't reckoned on there being so many *more* to know. Here in the new world it's like we're all just learning our letters.

The Lieutenant is eyeing the thin trail of smoke. 'If natives were to come now, running from those trees, we'd never have time to get *Thumb* through that surf.'

I peer into the tree gloom. I see leaves shuddering on the bushes. Animal or man I know not but something is there for certain. I stand like stone, staring, staring, only the splash of waves marking time. But nothing comes out from the bush shadow, except a chill that goes right through my bones.



Mr Bass picks up one of the muskets and shakes it. It's wet and filled with sand.

'Get *Thumb* out past the surf now,' Mr Bass whispers urgently. 'I'll swim the provisions out.'

'Will, take the boat!' the Lieutenant says, his face flushed. 'I'll stay with you, George. Carry stores to meet you waist high in the water, while you swim back and forth to *Thumb*.'

'And when the cannibals arrive have us both made savage supper with your dog paddle!' Mr Bass snaps.

The air is full of fine ropes stretched tight. I can't breathe.

'Bass, my man,' the Lieutenant whispers. 'I'll not leave you alone on this beach.'

'No more on it, Matthew, you *can't* swim.'

When he wants, Mr Bass is commander of all. The Lieutenant knows he has no talent in the water. If cannibals came he couldn't save Mr Bass let alone himself. His face is like furrowed land.

'I'll pack what will spoil,' he says, and that is his agreement to the plan.

Mr Bass eyes me.

'From your vantage point at sea,' he says, 'you can spy the whole coast. If you see movement, holler with all your might.'

My friend, Na, has showed me how to call across distances with cupped hands to push the sound. I tell Mr Bass this is what I'll do if I see a cannibal. I pick up the oars. One is cracked but nothing can be done. I take hold of the boat,

ready to launch. The Lieutenant signals me with a nod. We slide *Tom Thumb* along the wet sand, through the surf and jump in, sitting together on the thwart. We pull out past the worst crash of the waves. Mr Bass takes hold of the lead line and splashes back to shore. The Lieutenant and I pull further out, and drop anchor well past where the surf breaks.

‘Where are the muskets?’ the Lieutenant says.

In our rush we left them on the sand. He goes to holler but I stop him. I put my cupped hands together and call. Mr Bass looks up, searches the forest first, then the beach, then back to us, a quizzical look on his face. The Lieutenant stands and his mime, at another time, would set me laughing. Mr Bass picks up the muskets and waves them at us. He claims the lead line and runs into the surf. When the water is to his chest, we pull on the lead line, pulling him toward us. He holds the muskets in the air. We heave, feeling Mr Bass’s weight. The creak of *Thumb*. Heave. Sea water splash. Heave. Then—Snap! The line breaks, we fall back, Mr Bass sinks and the muskets dip into the sea. When I scramble up, I spy Mr Bass kicking through the water on his side, holding the muskets above his head. When he reaches the boat, I grab the muskets. The Lieutenant hauls in the rest of the lead line.

‘Damaged as we were dumped,’ he says.

Mr Bass clings to the side of *Thumb*. ‘Lash those oars together, Will, I’ll need to raft the rest in.’

I uncoil rope and the Lieutenant and I wind it around the oars.

‘It’s not stable enough, George,’ the Lieutenant says, and then he is up and at the mast. ‘Will, help me here.’

We unstep the mast. Mr Bass clambers into the boat to help lash the mast and oars together.

‘Now we have a tolerable raft,’ the Lieutenant says, grinning. ‘But let’s not tell the marines about our near musket loss, else they’ll mock us for *not* preserving our artillery.’

I look to the beach. Our stores are safe. Can cannibals swim? I wish I’d asked more questions of Na who says he has met some.

We lower the raft. Mr Bass climbs onto it and paddles to shore. He surfs a wave to the shallows, drags the raft up on dry sand and begins lashing stores to it. I eyeball the beach but see only sand glare and tree shadow. Smoke is rising up from the forest but it comes in short puffs. Outward, I am calm, but inside, there is a great bellowing. I know now the true weight of my error. If I’d checked the water barica we’d not be here and so one error tumbles into another.

I think of the story that had been the rush of Port Jackson before we sailed.

This event happened a way back but the final details were written up in a Calcutta newspaper and transported to us by a vessel from that region. The story told of how a small boat, with a captain and eight men, set out from the main ship to explore an island. Rough seas caused them to lose sight of their vessel. As they pulled towards the shore the Indians gave off friendly and with waving arms showed the men a safe place to land. Three of the nine tramped up through the trees to the top of the hill to see if they could eye their ship. Some of the Indians

went with them. The captain and five crew stayed with the boat. The three sailors were near the top of the hill, when one of the three, the only one with a musket, became suspicious of the Indians. He whispered to his two companions but they assured him the natives were friendly. At the hilltop they could not see their ship. Only sea and more sea. On the trip down the man with the musket spied one of the Indians moving toward him, too fast for friendship. He shot off his gun. The Indians attacked, spearing the second sailor and cutting the throat of the third, before they ran. With the help of the musket man, who was unharmed, the wounded men staggered back to shore but there they saw blood on the sand. They followed the blood trail. First they spied an arm lying in the shallows, a few steps on, a leg. The limbs of the captain, hacked from his body. The men had barely taken in the sight when they eyed three of the crew floating, head down, in bloodied seawater. They turned the men over and saw how their throats had been cut from ear to ear. The three survivors, one holding his own throat, the other pressing on his wound, now waded towards the boat and saw two more sailors lying in it, face down. They climbed in beside the dead men and, sick with fear, pulled away from shore just as the Indians, which they now guessed to be cannibals, rushed across the sand, yelling and howling. The three pulled far enough not to be pursued. The Indians set up an unholy racket and began dragging the dead bodies towards a large fire. The three survivors sailed on but had a terrible journey, with only salt water to heal their wounds, and no food. After paddling through too many windless days, they made it to Sarret, near Timor

Land, where the Indians gave them food and water. The three survived to tell their tale, although one of them died soon after from fever.

This story I tell to the Lieutenant as we watch the shore for any sign of wild men. The Lieutenant says he knows the tale.

‘Don’t think on it, Will, for it’s bound to be greatly exaggerated.’

He is stacking away the goods that Mr Bass has rafted in. He is being his sensible self.

‘For a start,’ he says, ‘why would the cannibals leave the boat and the bodies unattended? Where did they go?’

‘To light the fire,’ I say.

‘Why did they not leave a guard?’

‘Because they’re cannibals, they don’t have guards and soldiers and armies like we do.’

‘And why did the three survivors not see the fire burning before they set sail?’

‘They were in great fear and shock.’

But the Lieutenant will not be convinced. I curse him silently. If Na was with us we would be safe. Na had begged to come on the journey. Mr Bass had been for it but the Lieutenant was against, saying he’d need the Governor’s permission and that would delay our departure.

‘And Na eats for ten,’ the Lieutenant had added.

‘Na is needed to sweep in the hospital,’ Mr Bass had finally said.

But Na knows how to ward off cannibals with his death rattle stare, which he has showed me, revealing the whites of his eyes, and it is truly terrible.

It is mid-afternoon when a red-raw Mr Bass climbs on board and flops down, exhausted. There's no way to quench his thirst. I untie the raft. The bread is spoiled, he says, and the tea and coffee. He left them on the beach. The Lieutenant reports on the rest of our supplies. The sugar is half wet but the flour not at all, nor the cakes of soup. The rice and beef and pork are good too. We have no fresh water but the barica is back.

'One horn dry, two wet,' the Lieutenant says, checking the gunpowder. 'And I can't pull the rod from the musket.'

Mr Bass lies gasping, like a caught fish. With the Lieutenant I step the mast and hoist sail, a breeze catches and we are off, safe from danger. Mr Bass attempts to dress in damp clothes, but his skin is too sun sore and he can only suffer a shirt. The Lieutenant sits at the helm and navigates towards the islands in the distance.

I sit at the bow. When we are near the first island I see it's screwed for landing.

'Not here,' I call.

The wind rolls around us. The Lieutenant steers further south, Mr Bass asleep at his feet. We again pass beaches and headlands that look like practice Port Jackson. The wind drops and I clamber back to the Lieutenant.

'Can we land?' I ask.

The Lieutenant looks to the sails to read the wind, then to the trees on land.

‘The wind is gusting to the west and will soon be with us.’

He reads the invisible by close attention to the visible.

‘See that double saddle,’ he says. ‘We’ll pull to the other side.’

I watch the Lieutenant watch the water.

‘It’s the currents you need to understand as much as the wind,’ he says to me, in a kindly voice.

We douse sail, shift Mr Bass’s feet so they lay between us, and get upon the oars. We pull but gusts come from all directions. Slap, slap, to dare is to do. Slap, slap, to dare is to do. On the other side of the saddle we’re out of the gusts but the sea drums the rocks beneath the cliffs.

‘Anchor,’ the Lieutenant shouts.

Mr Bass wakes, his skin is tight and red and although he is hot to touch, he is shivering. He lies on his side and rocks with the boat. The Lieutenant and I sit by and try to cheer him.

‘Will, how do you think those cannibals would have broiled us?’ the Lieutenant asks me, as if it is a serious question.

‘The slow broil, I think.’

‘Slow broil you say, yet our cook might give a different counsel on the best way to broil human flesh,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘He might indeed,’ I agree.

Our cook on the *Reliance* has seven different broiling methods, which he feels a need to test on us each day. All on ship are in the habit of remarking, oh it

is the tough broil today, or, yes, yes, cook has outdone himself with a feat that defies nature, he has given us the dry broil!

‘What say you, Mr Bass, what advice would our cook give the cannibals?’

I ask.

Mr Bass can only manage a whisper. ‘He’d say roast for my carcass. Too fatty for much else.’

‘What if they were not cannibals at all?’ the Lieutenant says. ‘But the kindest of Indians?’

‘What if the smoke was only young ones left by the campfire for the day?’

I say.

‘What if it were the smoke smouldering from a fire caused by a lightning strike?’ Mr Bass adds.

We laugh at what might have been and our spirits are eased. But talking is hard with the drumming sea. I lie down and watch the sky fade and a fire-orange moon rise. When I learnt I was in Mr Bass’s employ, for days after, everyone wanted to jaw my journey. I was a bright star. On the sail out, it was Mr Paine that convinced Mr Bass I’d need to improve my letters if I was to contribute to the rise of man. Without my letters properly learned, Mr Paine said to me, I was an animal, no better or worse than a pig. But if I followed on with Mr Paine’s idea of who was animal and who was man, and if it all came down to knowing your letters or not, then most people I know are in the pen with the pigs.

Mr Bass paid particular attention to my spelling for he said it was a sin to stick in and take out parts of the English language without law or licence, and it



was he who, with his painterly way of shaping a foreign word, sparked me to learn the Indian language. Mr Bass was attending Baneelong, who was mightily ill. This, on the *Reliance* sail to New South Wales. Baneelong was journeying back from living the high life in London with Governor Phillip. For the first part of the journey Baneelong lay on his bunk staring at the boards above. He made no motion other than that made for him by the rock of the sea. I spied him once for a full hour. Stillness itself. Mr Bass said, after the high jinks in London it would be a cruel trick if he were not to reach home. But Baneelong rallied once we'd skipped across the equator. As if he could sniff his homeland on the breeze. It was then he taught us his language. The word for the Milky Way, only seen in the southern hemisphere, he called Warrewull. The Pleiades are Moloomolong and the moon, Yennadah.

Now I see the stars and moon every night and speak them in two languages, where once I didn't look to see at all. And now I see how big the world is. Before, not knowing the world's bigness meant that tomorrow looked like yesterday. But knowing the bigness of the world makes it harder to spy what lies ahead. Now, I see that tomorrow is unmade.

I wake cold to the bone and eye Warrewull above. When I sit up I see it's not only the sky that is rippling with light, the sea too is covered with flecks of shining. All between is inky black. If the world were being born again this is what it would look like. There is only the splish, splash of water. I uncoil a rope— splish, splash—and twirl the end in the sea—swoosh, swoosh—like a whirligig—

swoosh, swoosh. It goes round and round stirring the water, round and round, so it  
throws off

thousands  
of  
sparklings  
as  
though  
sea  
and  
sky  
are  
sending  
signals  
to  
each  
other  
by  
shining  
shards  
of  
light.

I think I will never see anything so beautiful again.

# Mary

1901

I walk from the barn into the early morning, already bright with light. Bud, our dog, is out in the paddock, with the cows. He's still young and it's not work for him yet.

When I come inside Dylan is stirring porridge, holding the pot over the flames. He's used water with the oats, hasn't waited for milk.

'You were too long with Bess,' he says.

Bess was playing up today, but her milk is always sweetest.

'Tastes better with milk, that's all.'

I hoist the pail onto the table.

'Add some milk in, if you want,' Dylan says.

We eat, sitting with our feet on the hearth. I watch the flames. They rise up and dart about. Makes me think of children playing.

'Brogden wants paying today,' Dylan says, scooping porridge from his bowl.

'You know I don't like going.'

'You gonna fell trees?'

This is how he runs in front.

'We haven't got all the lease money,' I say.

Dylan won't answer.

'I'll use the horse money,' I say.

'Not yet, that's separate.'

The stubbornness is in his eyes, only there. I know he needs that horse.

'Brodden raised the lease in a hurry,' he says. 'Let him wait. Only use the horse money if we have to.'

'I think we might have to.'

Dylan stands, sets his plate on the table. Even his shadow bristles. Out into the yard he goes. Tenderness absent, like rain.

I never knew it could turn this way. Light things becoming heavy, silence becoming noisy.

I sit there, watch the flames.

I walk to the side of the house, kneel down, press my hand on the dirt.

'Hello you,' I say.

I wasn't scared to have her. Named her when she first kicked. But don't say that name now.

I don't know how long I'm there. It's a robin stirs me. Fat yellow belly and quick flapping wings. Its head this way, that way, searching for insect feed. I pat the ground, say my goodbyes.

I cut through the paddock, climb the fence and go along the road, jumping wheel ruts and potholes. The cows look up as I pass, grass hanging limp from

their mouths, eyes following my every step. Last year's calves poke their heads through the slat fence, making little groans, as if they all have belly aches.

Mrs Patrick is out feeding her pigs. She'll not see my wave because she'll not look up. That's her way. Head down all day. Mr Patrick is heading to the stand of trees beyond their side paddock. He has four acres cleared. Likes to be ahead of Dylan. 'Might be old but I'm tough.' He says that each time we meet. Next farm on, Dempster's old place, noisy with hammering. Building a six-roomed cottage, Mrs Patrick said last week, unimpressed. Five black dogs run to the gate, barking. They used to be Dempster's dogs. Two months ago, not able to make his payments, Dempster left. I watched him from the washhouse, walking down the dusty road, wearing his Sunday best, not saying goodbye to no one. Dempster. Old man, Dempster. It was him I was fond of. He had a kind word, always. He'd been the longest on the estate but that didn't save him.

People talked, the next church meeting, pitying words.

'No,' I said, 'I think he's brave.'

'Brave?' Mrs Sinclair might be mellow but she's not for anyone speaking too plain.

'Sometimes staying is easier than walking away,' I said.

The Reverend laughed.

'What did I say?'

I have to crane up, the Reverend's so tall. He's the tallest man in the district and as straight as a bean.

'Endearing,' he said.

I was worried he'd get attacked by flies so syrupy was his tone.

A southwesterly is blowing coke-work smoke across the plain and the stink nettles my nose. I grew up on the mountain, Kembla not Keira, and the air around my aunt's place sometimes sooty from the mines below. I used to come down here, with my aunt and my sister, and we'd walk through the trees to the beach. Shade all the way and chattering birds. Everything smelt of eucalypt. Hear the sea from four miles west. On hot days we'd sit on the wet sand, let the waves rush around us. One jetty, not two, back then. Or we'd walk to Red Point and watch Oystercatchers, black with scarlet bills, wade through the shallows plucking oysters from the rocks.

'Does the sea ever stop?' I once asked.

'It's forever,' my aunt said.

But not all things are forever.

Fathers aren't forever, children aren't forever.

People move fast now, like time is running out, I've noticed that. Men ride coal trolleys down the mountain and gallop across the plains to the jetty, only to sit for hours, legs jiggling, because the wind is up and the ships can't dock. Up on the hill at the back of the beach there are workers shovelling coke into sixty-two ovens that burn through the night. I stand outside our place and watch the flames. On still days I hear machine hiss and clatter above the cows and roosters and pigs and dogs, and the slow clunk of axes. I have to go to the forest to hear birdsong.

Behind me is the lake. Brogden's is five miles ahead, near the lagoon and right on the edge of the Wentworth estate that was once one large farm, not thirty-eight small ones.

The front of the house has a wide verandah and when I get there I see chairs set out, ready for someone to sit and catch the morning sun. They've time for that here. A woollen rug is bundled on one of the chairs but no one about. I don't go to the front door. Did that once and only once. Mrs Brogden answered, dressed in starched white, led me through the tomb of a house, the furniture shiny like expensive coffins.

I take the path along the side past the kitchen garden. Thomas is digging up vegetables. He's like me, a canny ear. He looks up and waves his fork. He's panting from digging, his round face as red as a spring apple. I asked him his real name once, he wrote it in the ground. It looked like stick houses. It took me six goes to say it. Tai Tian Huan. Meaning, he said, tranquil shining.

I step towards him but hear the kitchen door slam. 'I'll come back, Thomas. I want to catch Dot.'

Brogden's office is next door to the kitchen. Whenever I make a payment I stand in the doorway between the kitchen and the office keeping up a conversation with Dot while Brogden writes my receipt. He's a frisky old goat and I don't trust him. Were my aunt alive her tongue would give him a lashing.

I knock on the kitchen door and wait. Blue wrens land near me, rise again, and land again, as if spending the day echoing sea waves. My aunt once said the sea is melody and all else harmony. That seemed strange from a river dweller. She

said, we're all made of water. She had a prophet's way of speaking that wasn't always clear.

I peek into the kitchen. Soup simmering in a pot on the grate. Dough wrapped in a damp cloth. An empty bowl and spoon on the long wooden table. Dot could be collecting eggs from the coop. I walk that way but stop when I hear laughter. Two voices, not loud and jolly, but familiar, tender. I'm on my way back to Thomas when I hear my name.

'Mary?' Brogden is at the back of the house, tucking in his shirt.

'Morning, Mr Brogden,' I say, walking back to him.

His face, hard and flat, with deep lines etched into every part of it. He is mid-height and muscular.

I undo my hanky and hand over the money. He counts it out in front of me.

'What we still owe will come next week,' I say.

'You're already late.'

'Waiting on the Co-op payment, won't be longer than a fortnight.'

His eyes drop and trail where they shouldn't, then lift again.

'Possibly next week,' I say. 'The Co-op said I'll have the money next week, but at the latest a fortnight.'

'Come in,' he says. 'I'll get your receipt.'

He smiles, as if we're old friends.

'Thank you. I'll stand here and wait.'

I step back, make a show of tipping my head to get the sun on my cheek, feigning confidence and pleasure when I feel the opposite. Brogden is a moonless



night. He steps inside the house and I breathe again. When he returns, I go to take my receipt but he lifts it too high and reaches over to clasp my shoulder. I step back before he can grip. This is our seesaw. I can't lose my concentration. I extend my hand now. He holds the receipt above my palm. I wait, hold his gaze, and when I think he's wavering, I seize the receipt.

'Regards to Mrs Brogden and family,' I say, as though his sad game has cheered me up.

I run by Thomas, who calls, but I don't stop to look back until I'm out the gate. Brogden has ambled down the path and is leaning against the wall, arms folded, watching me, a wry smile on his face. To him the game is never sad.

Mid-afternoon I walk to the lake to fish. Dylan doesn't like me fishing but gives no good reason why. He's no patience for it himself. With money short it's food on the table, that's what I say. I'm small and slight but my aunt taught me how to stand up for myself.

It was she who taught me to fish. It had been river fishing, so different to the lake. She taught me to look for water ripples and air bubbles, to spot fish lingering beneath rock ledges, or swimming in narrow channels, to hook one cleanly and kill it quickly.

'You're frail things,' my aunt said, when Celia and me were delivered to her.

This was after our father went missing in the Hill End heading. We hardly knew her but she stood before us in a red coat.

‘A remnant from my misspent youth,’ she said.

My aunt lived on mountain land no one wanted. It belonged to her and so she prized it. My father had called her a hermit. But I soon learnt that her friends were the wild animals: birds, wallabies, echidnas, wombats. She’d even talk to the fish, calling out, ‘Hey, you wily thing, don’t you hide from me.’

I liked going to the river with my aunt. Celia didn’t and stayed indoors.

‘Too cold on the mountain,’ she said.

If there’s a breeze blowing out west Celia feels it. She had a low opinion of the cottage too.

‘Draughts,’ she said.

She was only seven when we arrived but she was always fussy. As soon as she was old enough she was off to Sydney, got herself a factory job. By then Miss Fox had taken us in and we’d been on trips to the Sydney museum.

A factory job was not my way. I’m not shy but I like my own company. I used to spend hours on my own, walking along the riverbanks, or fishing in small streams. No one has the right to make that out of bounds, not even Dylan.

At the foreshore I take off my boots and stockings and hoist my skirt. I pull the hand line from my pack and open the flour sack that holds the worms. I pick out a fat one, slip it on the hook, and step into the water. The air is dry and the sun, bright. Before me the blue water is an enormous belly shuddering. Currents swirl around my thighs. Maybe I’ll get flathead today. Or bream. White clouds drift in

the sky, their ghosts follow in the water. Nature is full of echoes. I dig my toes into the mud, reel in my line and cast out again.

I've three flathead in the bucket when I hear a scream come from the beach. I turn to see a girl fall through bushes at the top of the sand dunes. She tumbles down like tumbleweed. I reel in my line and wade out, cross the sand to where she lies. She's sitting up, her face a gritty mask, laughing.

'You had me worried,' I say.

'Feel like all my bones are broken but pay no attention because I'm the princess with the pea when it comes to feeling things.'

She looks older than me, maybe twenty. I pull her to her feet. Her boots are covered in mud and her dress is not for outdoors, green silk, but cut loose. Her hair is as orange as a King Parrot's head and looks like a bird's nest at the end of spring.

'I was trying to follow a Pardalote. There are so many up there. Jemima Lee-Scott,' she says, holding out her hand like a man.

'Mary Tucker,' I say.

'I'm so clumsy, I sometimes walk along a path and trip over air. Do you know the Spotted Pardalote?'

'No.'

'It's a tiny bird you can hide in your fist.' Jemima cups her hands together. 'It has a streak of white at the eyebrows and a sweet yellow throat. You spot it by the fine white dots on its black tail and on its head.'

'That's the Diamond bird,' I say.

‘Diamond bird, I like that name.’ Jemima picks up a notebook and pencil from the sand. ‘It’s true name is *Pardalotus punctatus*.’

Latin? I learnt a little from Miss Fox but it never stayed in my head.

‘I’m learning to separate one bird song from another and it’s like discovering the notes of a hundred different symphonies.’ Jemima writes on her pad, not ordinary writing, just marks on a page. ‘It starts off slow, the call I mean, minor key but high-pitched.’

She tries the call but her voice slides away into an ugly sound.

When I stop myself laughing, I whistle it for her. ‘*Slee-dah-dee*.’

‘You sound just like the bird!’

‘It has a soft sad song too,’ I say, and close my eyes to get the note of the small bird that’s always in my secret grove. I see the bird jumping along a thin branch, searching for insects, its call high, short and mournful. ‘*Dah-dee-dee. Dah-dee,*’ I whistle. ‘*Dah-dee-dee. Dah-dee-dee.*’

When I open my eyes the sun is in it, sharp and hard.

Jemima makes scratches on her pad again.

‘What’s those scratches?’ I ask.

‘It’s shorthand,’ Jemima says. ‘I learnt it from Edith who writes articles. I intend to make ornithology my life’s work. It helps greatly to be systematic and keep notes. My parents, Edith and Richard, say if I’m not to marry, and Mary, I’m determined not to, then I must have something to stop my mind going dippy and I’ve settled upon birds.’

She's a talker but I'd like to catch another fish before I leave for milking. Everything around milking. Always. That's my bind. I walk back to the water's edge but she follows.

'What about that bird? Do you know its call?'

Jemima points to a bird flying low along the shore. Its head seeming too big for its body.

'It likes to hunt that one,' I say. '*Ketchew, Ketchew*. Or it can go, *Hoo. Hoo. Hoo.*'

Jemima scratches her pad. 'How do you know their calls?'

'By listening.'

'What about that one?'

'I have to fish now,' I say, wading into the water, but when I look back she's taken off her boots and stockings and is wading out to me.

'Oh, I see, I'm being eccentric.' She still has her pencil and pad in hand and her dress is sopping. 'You must excuse me. Apparently I've a streak but I'm learning to tame it. My life's work will help. But to explain. I'm to follow in the footsteps of John Gould. Richard met him once in England and was impressed even though Gould was an old man. I'm writing everything down, observing details, and with my sketches, I'll put together a book on birds. Birds of the Illawarra. I'll tackle the Illawarra first and then perhaps other places. Places that Gould didn't go. I could go to Africa. Or Turkey. Or Arabia. Do you think they have birds in the desert? But I'm starting here, close to home. Richard and Edith have given me a horse to ride, so I can go wherever I choose, and I'm not to be

restricted, and I don't need an escort. We're theosophists and trust very much in the goodness of the world. I'm making notes of everything to do with birds, including their calls, and in spring I'll observe their breeding habits. Oh, look up there, a sea eagle!

Jemima points to the sky. I tip my head back. High above us the sea eagle rides the air currents, searching for a feed. Slowly, slowly, the bird begins to flap its great wings.

'How magnificent,' Jemima says. 'Every time I see one I wish I could fly. Do you feel like that?'

The bird's wings shimmer in the afternoon light.

'Sometimes,' I say. 'Sometimes I do feel like that.'

The air is warm as we walk to church. There are others ahead, on the road that circles the lagoon. We're always last, not from milking, but from Dylan fussing with his clothes. God doesn't care about dressing up, I said. I do, was Dylan's reply. He has that showman side. It gets squashed by weekly labour, but peeks out on a Sunday. When I first saw him, he was riding down the main street of our mountain town, bareback and bare-chested. He grinned wildly at me as he galloped past. Spirit free, I thought.

I look to him as we walk. Dark hair covering his serious face that matches his determined stride. Can a spirit disappear? And if it does, can it return?

We see Reverend Irving crossing Tom Thumb Lagoon. He is knee deep in water, leading his black brumby that is just broken-in but still yearning freedom.

It's a grey day and clouds have gathered in the sky, promising rain. But a hot wind blows from the west, shuddering through the golden wattle and tea trees that grow near the marshes. Brown ducks and honking moorhens swim among the reeds and a gliding pelican dips its enormous bill into the murky water searching for a fish. Sand dunes separate the lagoon from the sea beyond. In stormy weather I've seen ocean waves splash over the dunes and nuzzle through the mangroves and reedy swamps like a randy dog.

'Hold my horse, Dylan? Water in my boots,' calls the Reverend as he splashes out.

He stands on one leg to shake off his boot. He's dressed in black, and his brown wide-brimmed hat, blown off during the crossing, is hanging down his back, held in place by a cord around his neck.

I turn to where the sand dunes fall away to the beach and see Mr Downie and three other men struggle to carry the church harmonium along the shore. They pass the native huts, but those people are down at the shore, collecting pippies. They pass the canvas tents where the monthly workers live. The workers have Sunday off and most are hunched around their campfires watching their billy boil. They pass the jetty that has walkers on it today, not workers, and carry the instrument across the sand and up the stairs to the little house that is our church one Sunday a month.

'I'm running late,' says the Reverend.

'Mr Downie is late with the harmonium,' I say.

The Reverend squints his eyes. 'So he is. So he is. Then we're all late.'

The Reverend pulls on his boot and we three continue walking, with the Reverend asking all about Dempster and the other farmers on the estate.

‘We’re all struggling,’ Dylan says. ‘Brogden raised the lease fees without notice. Now the Dairy Co-op tells us they can’t pay for our milk.’

‘Their last two shiploads of butter arrived to Sydney, all spoiled,’ I say.

‘There’ll always be work for the likes of you, Dylan,’ the Reverend says, looking up at the coke-works.

‘It’s the farm life I like, not shovelling coal,’ Dylan says, sourly.

‘I know that but this is the region of the future and a man like you has the capability to do anything.’

‘True enough.’ Dylan smiles.

He’s cheery now he’s been flattered, takes hold of my hand.

Four horseback riders come bolting along the road from the direction of Red Point. We have to jump into the swampy ditch to get out of their way. As they gallop past I see Jemima is one of the riders. I wave and Jemima, seeing me too late, calls back, her words lost in the wind.

‘Do you know them, Mary?’ the Reverend asks, dusting himself down.

‘Remember, at the lake,’ I say, turning to Dylan. ‘The bird lady.’

The Reverend peers after the riders.

‘It’s the Lea-Scotts, yes,’ the Reverend says. ‘You’d be wise to stay away from their influence.’

‘Reverend?’ Dylan asks.

‘Theosophists,’ the Reverend says, gravely.



The riders disappear into the forest.

Dylan seems to take the Reverend's words as gospel but I know from when I was young it's always best to make my own judgments.

The church, all weatherboard, squats on dunes at the back of the beach. The waves crash onto the shore and run up to the soft sand where children stand squealing. Dylan takes the Reverend's horse. He'll lead it around to the trough, he says, so the Reverend can prepare to preach. Dylan is fond of the horse and wants to spend time with it.

'He's a man God would be proud of,' the Reverend says, as we pick our way through the seaweed and up the front steps of the church.

'A man God would be proud of?'

'A good man.'

The Reverend believes in goodness but he didn't know our mountain pastor who made goodness seem bad. We enter the church that is a schoolhouse in the week and the Reverend makes his way to the front of the congregation. Once, I would have stored his words up and made a play of it for Dylan as we sat by our night fire. We would have laughed at such conviction.

Not all changes are violent, some are slow, some are invisible. At my daughter's birth, Dylan was the one to tell me of her stillness, but what should have brought us together did the opposite.

The little church is full. Before being a church and a school it had been a storehouse for the coal company. There's still a forge in the corner, covered with

cloth, and the room, despite being cleaned, is all grit and steamy bleakness. The schoolmaster's desk has been pushed to one side. On it the Reverend places his missal. Mr Downie is running his fingers along the keys of the harmonium, testing its tone. His wife, Connie, and their four children—three girls in pale yellow dresses, with hair in neat braids, and one boy, in a stiffly starched shirt—are with him. It's Connie who plays during service. Like an angel, some say. But Connie is a dark angel. I spy her daughter, Alice, with another eye bruise. Connie will say later, my Alice has two left-feet that cause her to fall. But clumsiness is never so precise.

Once, when I first came to the estate, I was having tea with Mrs Sinclair and she asked me about family. My aunt and Celia were my family but I made up another, with father and mother and children, who lived in a house with curtains on the windows, and a parlour room, just like the Downie's.

I wouldn't do that now. I know more now. There are silent spaces in every house but if you know how to listen you can hear what others can't.

Dylan comes into the church when the Reverend is halfway through the reading.

'If anyone who is counted among the brethren is debauched, or a miser, or an idolater. Or bitter of speech, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, you must avoid his company; you must not even sit at table with him.'

'Dear lord,' I whisper to Dylan. 'He's just described the congregation.'

Dylan smiles and squeezes my hand so tight it tingles up my arm.

After church, when everyone else is talking, I ask Alice about her bruise. She says she is clumsy and I'm not to worry. She hugs me and says she is sorry to have caused concern.

'It's no concern to ask after your distress.'

'It was an accident,' she says, innocent and wide-eyed.

We lunch at the Sinclairs and walk home in the heat, in time for milking. No rain in sight now, but Dylan is lively with chatter. That night, I sit on the bed beside him, help unbutton his shirt, put my hand to his chest. His rough hand on top of mine. He runs his finger over the ring he spent his savings on.

'It's your time, isn't it?'

I kiss his salty shoulder. 'Yes.'

He kisses my forehead, pushes me away, so I feel ashamed. Did his desire die with our daughter? I climb into bed, turn away, pull the woollen blanket up around me.

Dylan and Willie Harris—who carts our milk to the Dairy Co-Op—are loading milk cans onto Willie's cart. I bring out water buckets for the horses.

'Heard talk of you in town, Mary,' Willie says.

'Did you now.' I put a bucket down in front of each horse.

'You, the fisherwoman.'

Willie laughs and I do too. I like that people know of my skill. I pat one of the horses, its chestnut coat sweaty from the morning's work.

'This is a good horse,' I say, looking at its strong legs and solid hoofs.

I turn to Dylan, thinking to say, it's the kind of horse we should buy, and sees he is flushed. He stares at the ground.

'What did they say in town?' I ask.

Willie laughs.

My hands go hot. And I'm a child again, walking into class with Celia, made to go to school when our aunt had not bothered to send us, and confused as the children laughed. Miss Fox hushed them, asked us to sit with her at lunchtime. She shared her hot food, as we had none. Later, we found out the stories told about us. Wild fancies. None of them true.

I leave the buckets where they are and walk back to the cottage. I put a log on the fire and sit down before it, staring at the red coals as they fall through the grate. If my aunt was here I'd ask her, is his shame fair? But I know she'd take my side.

When I hear Willie's cart leave I go outside, pick up the slops bucket, carry it to the pig pens. The big pink pig is rolling in the mud. He raises his head and comes running. The sow comes running too and the two pigs push at each other to get at the slops. Soon squealing piglets are nosing for a position. I cannot laugh at them like I usually do. I feed the chickens and take hay down to the growing calves that are in the small paddock next to the house. Dylan is already on his way across the main paddock, axe over his shoulder, Bud trotting beside him. Dylan never lets me help with the tree felling, although I've often said I'd prefer it to rolling dough.

At the side of the cottage I kneel by the grave, touch the ground.

'Hello,' I say, and then again, 'Hello.'

I sit listening to the wind in the trees, the sharp calls of the magpie larks, the deep moans of the cows, and Bud's intermittent barks.

The next day, after I've caught two mullet, I walk along the shore and scramble through the bushes and trees to Fisherman's Bay. I've not been before but the bay people are known for their fishing skill. I remember how, when I was young, fishermen would search out my aunt, ask advice on river currents, or where the fish were biting. They'd listen to what she said. Their talk was lures and ripples and river bends and rocks. It was wily fish and slippery fish and sharp-eyed fish and foolish fish. It was not idle chatter.

I walk out from the trees and put my bucket on the sand. An old man is standing in the shallow water, pulling in nets. He wears rolled-up pants and an open vest and has long thin scars on his chest and arms. His grey hair is tied up in a knot. Two boys are helping but the old man is taking all the weight. Behind them, barrels are lined up on the sand, waiting to be packed with fish. I've seen Gory carting the barrels to market. Beyond the barrels, two small children run in circles around a campfire, playing a game with sticks. To one side are three bark huts and back through the trees, a little timber house with a cross nailed to its roof.

The old man, hunching now, looks up as I step forward. I hold up my fish, so he knows who I am. He smiles, a brief smile, but also, there is pity there and I

don't know why. I pick up my bucket and walk away. Don't know now what made me come.

The next week, I'm fishing in my usual spot and see the old man out on the lake. I turn away. But a week on, I'm lacing my boots, and he comes slip-sliding down the dunes behind me.

'Good catch?' he asks, pleasantly.

His voice is deeper than I expected.

'Flathead,' I say. 'Nothing else biting.'

'Tide's not turning.'

'I have milking,' I say. 'Can't wait for tides.'

He laughs as though I've made a joke.

'You from Duncan's dairy?'

'No, smaller than Duncan's. The other side of Berkley wood.'

He points over to where the creek runs out onto the lake. 'Good stream of fish running around that way. Want to go, I can row you.'

'I wouldn't use up your time.' I continue lacing my boots.

'I can get there like that.' He snaps his fingers.

There's something familiar about the way he speaks. It's hard to tell his age. Old though.

'Is that you boasting?' I say.

'Just a true story,' he says and laughs.

I look to where the creek meets the lake. The sun streaks through a break in the clouds, making the water bright. I turn to thank the old man for his offer, but he is gone, walking up the sand dunes.

‘Hey,’ I call after him. ‘I’m Mary.’

He holds his hand up without turning back. ‘Xavier,’ he says.

I’m walking home when it all stirs up. I see my daughter, straight from my womb. Hands closed into fists as if she’d been fighting until the end. After she was buried, Dylan borrowed Brogden’s trap to take me to the doctor in Crown Street. The doctor spoke crisply, not unkindly.

‘It’s possible you may never have another,’ he said, staring at a point somewhere to the side of my cheek.

She was always on my mind but it was only when I was well enough to work again that I could talk about her. Dylan refused to speak even then. Days went by, weeks. If I tried to say her name he’d walk away. And in his look there was blame.

What’s stirring in me now is my own violence coming on. For can he feel her loss more than me?

I put my fishing pack down by the back door and walk to the paddock to shepherd the cows to the barn. I see Dylan in the distance, striding out of the forest, axe in hand, but I continue on my way, breathing deeply, trying to calm my thoughts. When he walks into the barn I’m having trouble getting Bess into the stall.

'She's getting bigger,' I say.

'She bullies her way to the feed.' Dylan pats Bess's rump. 'She can sense lean times coming.'

I set my bucket under her teats.

'What names have her young ones?' Dylan asks.

They'd been born last spring but he's never asked their names.

'Miss Cuddles, for the shy one. She was always at her mother's legs. And Chomp for the other, because that's all he does.'

'You're good at naming,' Dylan says.

He never did hear the name of our child. On the cross he wrote *Young One* and the date. I see the slingshot in his back pocket.

'Did you get any rabbits?'

'Not today.'

'What, and you the best shot on the plains?'

'I'm still the best shot.'

He stands there, watching me.

'What you thinking?' I ask.

'Just counting cows,' he says.

'There's still plenty want milking.'

He makes to go, but stops again.

'If I did another kind of work, how would you like that?'

'As long as it's not mining,' I say, thinking of my father.

'Coal loading?'



‘You wouldn’t like that and you know it.’

‘I know it.’

‘It’s not that bad yet.’

‘You said the Dairy Co-op won’t pay up.’

‘We have the horse money.’

‘I know,’ he says, and goes into the next stall to milk.

A winter chill creeps through the air. The sun still shines and the sky is a brilliant blue, but in the shade, or when the sun dips behind the escarpment, the warmth is threadbare. I stand in the lake shallows, casting out my line. A northwesterly ripples across the water. I see a man in a boat, coming in from the sea, rowing with ease. When he is closer I see it’s Xavier. He ships his oars and lets the boat drift.

‘Waragal,’ he calls, holding up a long silver-blue fish.

I reel in my line and wade across.

‘Caught, over Nitoka way.’

‘Nitoka?’

‘Nitoka. You know it,’ he says.

‘No.’

He looks at me with suspicion. ‘That Red Point,’ he says.

‘Red point, yes,’ I say.

So he calls it Nitoka. I remember a story I was told, about the five islands being daughters of the wind, and begin to ask Xavier about it, but he points to the

shore. I turn and see Jemima standing on the top of the sand dunes near to the forest. I wave but she steps back into the trees and is gone.

‘She has trouble,’ Xavier says.

I wade out and drop my line on the beach, run up the sand dune and into the woods. It’s late afternoon but a soft light shows the narrow path. Spindly leaves spike my bare feet. I find Jemima kneeling next to a tree, a pile of leaves on her lap.

I look down and see a row of dead birds lined up on the dirt. Some of the birds have lost their heads, some their wings. There is dried blood on the ground. But it’s their tiny bodies so brutalised that is the most disturbing.

‘There are four blue wrens, two Gold Whistlers, and five—five—little robins,’ Jemima says.

‘What happened?’ I ask.

Jemima begins covering the birds with leaves.

‘I don’t know, but there’s more.’

She stands and pulls me further into the woods, stopping beneath a eucalypt. Another twelve birds are lined up on the ground.

‘See, the bower bird, he’s only young. And look, one of the green catbirds. Two wrens, seven honeyeaters and a forest pigeon.’

The forest pigeon lies with her head tucked under. A red claw reaching out from her brown speckled body, as though her last breath was drawn as she was rising up.

Xavier strides down the path, stops a distance away and stares at the birds, disbelieving. The forest is quiet. Hardly an animal moves. As if they have all witnessed the event and have been silenced. Xavier starts to speak. His words have a strange rolling rhythm, one word tumbling into another.

‘What did you say?’ Jemima asks when he has finished.

But he shakes his head and turns away, walking back along the dim path.

We cover the birds with the leaves Jemima has collected. Xavier is waiting for us at the edge of the forest. When we arrive he leaves without a word, trudging down the dunes and across the sand to his boat. We follow him down and as I sit to put on my boots, he rows away.

‘Who would do such a thing?’ Jemima asks.

‘Boys,’ I say, remembering how my aunt often discovered young boys at the river shooting birds just for fun. She’d send them packing with a mouthful of abuse.

‘I’ll go to the school and ask,’ Jemima says, decisively.

As I twist to reach for my fishing bag, I see Dylan standing at the top of the dunes, staring down at us. Jemima keeps on talking, trailing her fingers through the sand. Dylan turns and walks away.

‘What is it?’ Jemima asks, staring at me, and then looking behind to the sand dunes.

‘Nothing.’

‘I’ll get Edith to come to the school with me. She is scarier than Richard. If it’s boys with their slingshots she’ll get it out of them.’

She digs a hole in the sand with one hand and fills it up again.

‘You must come and meet my parents one day. Richard will be so impressed with your bird calls. He will call you a *font of knowledge*.’

When I get back to the farm Dylan is shepherding cows to the barn. Bud is running up and down, barking.

‘Mary, you have to make an effort.’

He’s doleful, as though his disappointment is weighty and he doesn’t know where to put it.

‘Your aunt is to be blamed,’ he says. ‘For the way you’ve been raised.’

‘There were dead birds in the forest. Killed by a slingshot.’

‘What?’

He squints his eyes, his expression mocking, but a vein quivers in his neck.

There are things he doesn’t tell me, I know that.

‘Was it you, Dylan?’

He walks away, refusing to reply.

The dark comes on quickly. Outside, the wind pelts through the trees. I stoke the fire, take a bucket of water to the table, and mix water with flour to make a dough, kneading it until I shape a flat loaf. I push the coals back from the fire, making a place on the hot hearth to flop the damper down. Then I cover the loaf with coals. When Dylan comes in from the barn I’m cooking the fish whole over the flame, as

my aunt used to do. When the food is ready, we eat together, listening to the fire fizz. As we wash the plates, Dylan kisses me, says he's sorry for the harsh words.

'But why were you there?' I ask.

'To see you were safe,' he says.

'I'm safe.'

'In Sydney women don't walk around on their own.'

'We're not in Sydney.'

Later, in bed, lying close, I think it was wrong of me to accuse him of shooting birds. What reason could he have? The wind has dropped and the moon shines through the window. I turn to him, trace my hand along his arm. He's not sleeping but he keeps his back to me. I let my fingers run towards his belly. He does not take my hand, instead, rolls onto his stomach, his head turned away.

'Dylan,' I say, softly.

He won't answer.

I lie back and stare at a knot of wood in the ceiling. Dylan never cared what people said about me. He seemed wild, like me. But his wildness is different. People think he's been tamed, the Reverend thinks that, but Dylan's wildness has gone elsewhere. It hides beneath containment. He's a mystery to me.

I watch a spider crawl across the ceiling and disappear behind a beam.

Sunday, in dusty grey light, Reverend Irving stands at the front of the assembly preaching on the dangers of fornication.

'Husband and wife,' he says, 'have claims over each other's body.'

It's like he has been in our home with us.

'Do not starve one another, unless perhaps you do so for a time, by mutual consent, to have more freedom for prayer; come together again or Satan will tempt you, weak as you are.'

I steal a look at Dylan but his eyes are on the Reverend.

After church, we stand on the grassy patch, listening to Mr Downie's plans for the breakwater. Later, I walk away, down to the shore to watch the children build sandcastles. When I see I'm not missed, I take my chance and stride along the beach towards Red Point. I can see the rough shape of the rocks ahead. Xavier called the place Nitoka but did he mean the rocks, the hill behind, or the sea in front?

They're building a railway from the quarry to the top of the hill. Sleepers are piled up, waiting to be laid. When it's done, trolleys will lug quarry boulders to the cliff edge. Men will push the boulders over, enough so they roll down into the sea to build up a wall.

'Taming nature,' Mr Downie had said. 'Gone, wasted days with ships sitting off from the jetty. Gone, waiting for wild seas to calm.'

I watch the mist drift over the ocean that writhes like a living thing. Can nature be tamed? Maybe not tamed but contained. My shoes sink in the sand. I want to take them off, dare not. I can't see the Oystercatchers that my aunt so loved. But they don't like noise. Railway hammering has moved them south. Nothing in this world is forever.

I hear my name called. Dylan is waving. If I stay longer he'll say, it's how you were raised. But I think, it's how I am now. I could walk into the swirling sea and never return. All my stirrings gone if I did that. The wind blows and the sea explodes into waves that jostle their way to the shore.

On the walk back I smell rain.

I don't go fishing. I do my chores, keep my mood steady. Things go along, but if I said the stirring stopped, it would be a lie. And although the rain came, it touched the land and then was gone. Each day I visit my daughter, but only for a few minutes, never when Dylan is near. I am contained. But sometimes, in the afternoons, I go to my secret grove and listen to the birds and my breath comes in short gasps and my eyes swell.

When I wake the world has disappeared. Outside, we must carry a lantern to see a few steps in front. I do my chores. When I finish, the mist is still heavy. I remember Mrs Sinclair's offer, last week at church.

'Dylan's shirts are fraying,' she said. 'Buy some material, Mary, and we'll sit together sewing new ones.'

I wrap myself in my aunt's old red coat that has held through many winters and set off along the road. Mount Kembla and Mount Keira, to the west, have vanished. It's like walking in a cloud. A gate, then a tree, then a bull, slowly take shape before me, disappearing into the mist as I pass. But each, isolated from all

else, I see in a new way. I hear horses galloping, step off the road but keep walking in the ditch. A black trap pulls up beside me.

‘Mary, climb on up,’ Mr Brogden calls.

Mr Brogden is without a coat but Mrs Brogden is bundled up against the cold.

‘Thank you, but I like to walk,’ I say, brightly, waving them to go on and not halting in my stride.

‘Come on, girl, save your strength now.’

‘Thank you, Mr Brogden, but I do enjoy the walk.’

Mr Brogden persists, trotting the horses along beside me, saying he will not drive on and leave a woman in distress.

Mrs Brogden, dressed severely in blue, soon gives me a grim smile.

‘Please do as he says.’

Reluctantly, I climb up.

‘Where are you off to?’ Brogden asks.

‘Blackwoods.’

‘Same as Ettie,’ he says. ‘You can shop together.’

It seems he says it to irk Mrs Brogden but I cannot tell as her head is an arrow pointing north.

We canter away from the farms and the lake, along the Five Islands Road. As we pass the Aboriginal camp that fronts Tom Thumb Lagoon, a man steps out from the mist onto the road, waving us down. Brogden slows the horses to a trot.



‘Don’t stop,’ Mrs Brogden says, sharply.

‘The man needs help,’ I say.

‘Don’t stop, Mr Brogden!’ Mrs Brogden leans across to take the reins.

Brogden pulls them out of reach, but he whips the horses and we gallop past the man.

Mrs Brogden settles back in her seat. ‘Thank you,’ she says.

I turn back and see the man standing in the middle of the road. A woman appears beside him, her hand to her head as if distressed. Then they’re gone, swallowed by the mist.

The trap rattles down Crown Street and Brogden pulls up in front of Blackwoods. He jumps down and strides around to help Mrs Brogden, who remains seated, awaiting attention.

‘Thank you,’ I say, as I climb down and begin to walk away.

‘Wait Mary, I need quick word,’ Mr Brogden says.

‘We’re still waiting that payment from the Diary Co-op,’ I murmur, as Mrs Brogden hurries into the store.

Mr Brogden places his hand on my arm, squeezes it tight. I look at the ground, not at him, step away, but he tightens his grip.

‘They’re late with their payment,’ I say, gazing up at him now, something wild stirring.

‘Be friendly, Mary.’

‘It’s all promised by Monday and Dylan will be over to pay you then,’ I say.

I try to shake his hand from my arm but his grip burns. His hot stale breath is too close. We battle in stillness. Finally, I push my free hand into his chest, with all the force I can muster, but he does not budge.

It’s then I hear Jemima.

‘Here she is, Mary!’

Jemima is beside me.

‘Mary, this is my parents, Edith and Richard.’

I cannot take my eyes from Brogden.

‘Is everything all right here?’ Jemima’s father says, picking up what Jemima has not.

Brogden lets go of my arm, laughs, and walks away as if it was all a joke.

‘Are you all right, Mary?’ Jemima’s father has a shiny face and thoughtful eyes.

‘Yes, thank you.’

‘Are you sure?’ It is her mother who speaks now.

‘Yes.’

Brogden whips the horses and canters away.

‘You don’t look all right,’ Jemima says. ‘Edith, she doesn’t look all right, does she?’

‘Do you need our assistance in any way?’ Edith says.

‘No, please, no. I feel a little dizzy is all.’

‘Sit,’ says her father, leading me to the bench outside Blackwoods.

‘We’re on our way to Sydney, Mary,’ Jemima says, sitting beside me.

‘We’ll stay there a week and then come back. Oh, but why not come with us?

Edith, you agree it would be a good idea? Mary, would you like to come?’

‘Oh no, I couldn’t. I have work. The dairy. I can’t.’

‘Yes. I didn’t think. Of course. But you must come to dinner, you and your husband, when we return. I want to prove to Richard that you know as much as Gould, if not more.’

I feel a rising in me of a softer mood. She is the first friend I have made who likes what comes to me naturally. We talk more of birds and when they leave to catch their train I have almost forgotten Brogden.

I walk into the brightly lit shop. The two Mr Blackwoods, elderly brothers, and their young female assistants, are attending to other customers. I walk to the back of the store and search through the rolls of fabric. Mrs Brogden is choosing buttons. Two women, one wearing a fine yellow dress, the other in deep greens, hide behind the shelving next to me.

‘Who do you mean?’ the woman in yellow whispers.

‘The Brogden woman,’ comes the reply. ‘Don’t let her see me, she’ll be over in a second.’

‘So that’s her.’

‘She came to tea the other day and I couldn’t get her to leave.’

‘Gracie, you never want to ask one to your house.’

‘I felt obliged.’

'I miss home, where the poor keep their distance,' the woman in yellow says.

'You are a snob, Sophie. It was her conversation that bored me, tedious beyond belief.'

I think now how strange we are in our most ordinary of habits. Those few times I went shopping with my aunt I heard people whisper. How little they understood her, but how happy she was not caring. I doubt Mrs Brogden would be the same.

I find a material suitable for a shirt and take it to the counter. But after five minutes, when no one has come, I decide it doesn't matter and walk from the shop, setting off along the road, cheerful, despite not making a purchase. I have never liked sewing anyway.

The mist is lifting now. Town gives way to forest that gives way to farmland. But forest vines still creep over fences. Near the Aboriginal camp a crowd has gathered. I see ahead of me, Mr Gory, standing on his cart, shouting, as the Reverend Irving climbs up next to him. Mr Gory whips his horses into action and they take off, cantering towards me.

As they pass by the Reverend shouts, 'Mary! Tell Mrs Patrick I can't come today! This man here is badly burnt.'

'I will,' I call in reply.

I watch the cart rattle along the road and on around the bend. Someone had been burnt. That was why we were hailed. Why did I not make Brogden set me down if he would not stop? I cannot blame him for that. Ashamed, I move away

from the road and take the path that runs along Berkley woodland and only when I'm halfway home do I stop to rest on a tree stump. I undo my coat, glad to be away from the town.

High up, flying from branch to branch, is a little whistling bird. *Dee-dee-dee-ah-whit!* Her yellow breast quivers, and her black head twists, back and forth, as if checking who might be listening.

In my fourteenth year, near the end of the winter, my aunt went fishing one morning and never returned. When my sister and I came home from school the cottage was empty. I went looking for my aunt at the river but could find no trace. Celia cried. The next day we went to the police, they too searched the riverbank. They found the ashes of a campfire, still warm, but my aunt was gone. Her body was never found. Miss Fox took us in and we stayed there several years. Neighbours said later, that the old woman had lost her footing and had fallen in the water. But my aunt was the most sure-footed woman I had ever known. Miss Fox blamed the loggers who were desperate to fell the cedar trees on my aunt's land and had pressured her to sell. Miss Fox imagined a murder. But the trees were never felled and no approach was ever made to buy the land.

Her disappearance is a mystery. I sometimes imagine that she turned herself into a bird and that she takes on different forms, visiting me, first as one bird, then another. I look up at the little yellow bird. If you were my aunt what would you say? *Dee-dee-dee-ah-whit!* whistles the bird. But I know what my aunt would say: Forget that man Brogden, he does not matter. Only, learn to live true.

I button up my coat and continue walking along the path.

When I get back to the farm Dylan is sitting in the middle of the paddock among the cows. Bud is lying nearby, his head resting on his forepaws. The dog jumps up and runs towards me, barking. I pat him and walk over to Dylan, who looks at me, and it's as if he hadn't heard me arrive, for he scrambles up and walks away.

'Dylan,' I call after him.

But he puts his hand out to shoo me off and continues walking across the paddock. I watch him disappear into the trees.

I let the cows out through the gate and Bud shepherds them to the barn.

But when I set my stool down beside Bess, I lie my head on her side and whisper, 'What's happening, Bess?'

Then next morning, after milking, Dylan picks up his axe and walks to the edge of the far paddock to continue clearing. I feed the pigs and then the chickens. I sit on the back step and feel the sun on my face. Then I go to the storage box at the back of the house and pull out my fishing bag. I dig up worms from the kitchen garden and plop them in the old flour bag. Before I leave for the lake, I walk across the paddock to the trees that border it, and on through them to where Dylan has been clearing. I cannot hear the axe. I walk among the fallen trees, but he is gone. And then I see it. A small honeyeater, dead on the ground, its head missing.

I shake as I walk to the lake, a feather from the bird's wing in my pocket. I fish for an hour, thinking only of unanswered questions. At noon, having caught nothing, I

walk along the shore to Fisherman's Bay. When I reach the lake camp I see two women, one quite old, the other young, sitting by the campfire. A dog, with sleek coppery fur, sits up on its haunches. I put down my bag and bucket. The elderly woman pushes a stick through the coals then turns to me.

'Is Xavier here?' I ask.

The woman waves me away.

'When will he be back?'

'You want fish?' The younger woman won't look at me. Stares out at the lake.

'No,' the elderly woman says, making a gesture with her hand. 'Fishes for herself.'

'You that one?'

The younger woman turns but I cannot tell what she knows of me.

'Okay,' I say. 'Thank you,' I say. 'Please tell him I came by.' I turn to leave. And then, turning back, I add. 'Tell him, Mary, came by.'

'You with that dairy farmer there? You that one?' the younger woman asks.

'I'm that one,' I say and walk away.

But as I reach the trees I hear my name called.

'Hey Mary!' The younger woman is standing now.

'Yes.'

'No need to come here no more.'

'You understand?' the elderly woman calls.

‘Ask Gory,’ the younger woman says.

I stumble through the trees, but only on the road home do I stop. I remember a day, soon after I went to live with my aunt, when two people came searching her out. They sat with her on the riverbank. I stared at them until my aunt told me it was rude. And then I stared from a distance. My aunt talked easily that day, laughing all the time, while I played on the banks. I remember the face of the woman. It was the old woman at the campfire. And the man? Could it have been Xavier? Something in his look that first day tells me it was him. And Gory, what does he know?

When I arrive back at the farm I can’t see Dylan, and I don’t know yet what to say to him. I spot Mrs Patrick in the neighbouring paddock and I remember Reverend Irving’s message. I had forgotten to deliver it. I run across to the fence that joins our properties and call to her.

‘Reverend Irving couldn’t get to you yesterday. Someone was burnt at the camp.’

‘Yes, the Reverend came today,’ Mrs Patrick says, walking over to me. ‘A sad story.’

‘How is the man now?’

Mrs Patrick shakes her head. ‘A good Christian soul, delivering fish to the camp and a terrible accident.’

‘Fish?’

‘The weather being so bad he decided to wait until the morning to return to his home. But sleeping by the fire, some logs rolled onto him.’



I clench my hands. Gory. Gory was driving the cart.

‘Are his wounds terrible?’

‘Mary, he died. Last night it was. He died in the Reverend’s care. But he had his final blessing. At least he had that.’

‘Do you know the name of the man?’ I ask.

‘A fisherman from the bay. A fisherman like our good lord.’

‘Did the Reverend say a name?’

‘I don’t think he did say a name. Gone to our heavenly father now. Ah, no, Xavier, that was his name.’

Back at the farm I see the cows milling by the barn. I put my bag and bucket by the cottage door and step inside. I light the fire, wait until the flames are flickering red, then go outside and walk across to the barn. Inside, the light is dim. Dylan has begun milking. I stand looking at him, but find I have nothing to say.

I set my stool down and begin to work. I pull and squeeze, pull and squeeze. Milk dribbles over my fingers and tinkles into the bucket. There is the shape of a story that I ache to remember, about that day on the river, the day Xavier and the old woman came to visit. I cannot reach that story but I know it is there. As I move from cow to cow, milking with tense purpose, it comes to me that I must go back to that place, to the river and to my aunt’s old cottage, high up on the mountain. Only in that place can I put the story back together.

A new thought takes shape, hard to say out loud, yet not to be denied. For if I go, I know I won’t return.

That night I prepare dinner as usual but do not go to bed. Instead I doze in the chair. In the morning, Dylan rouses me. He has the fire lit.

‘I’ve made porridge,’ he says.

‘Have you milked already?’ I ask, pulling myself up.

‘Come when you’ve eaten,’ he says.

Slowly, I eat the milky porridge. I dress and step out into the early light. In the barn, I stand by Dylan and he smiles. I remember his spirit as it once was. I go to the next stall and begin to milk.

After we’ve finished our work Dylan sets the cows on the path. Bud guides them to the paddock while we stand by the barn door, eyes to the ground. Dry mouth but I must speak.

‘You’ll need help with the milking,’ I say.

Dylan doesn’t answer.

‘I’ll be away.’ I say, to make it clear.

His face, all pale and tight. I go to touch him but he jerks away. He takes a step, stares around the barn, looks past me not at me, and then he strides away. I watch him pick up his axe and make his way down the track and across the paddock to the trees.

I hear the high-pitched whistling of the currawongs. How powerful words are. I cannot take them back. I walk along the track to the paddock. Thick wafts of smoke drifting through the trees. Bud has herded the cows in and I stand patting Bess, before I shut the gate. I bend down to Bud, ruffling his neck the way he likes.

‘Go on,’ I say to the dog. ‘Go with Dylan, good boy.’

And the dog bounds off across the dirt.

I feed the pigs and the chickens. At the cottage I pack what I can carry. I take off my ring and leave it on the table with two thirds of the horse money. That will pay the rest of the lease. One third of the money I take for myself. I write Dylan a note saying I’ve promised Brogden payment this week.

Outside, I kneel down by my daughter.

‘Hello,’ I say. ‘I cannot stay.’

And then I cry. But there is some other possibility for my life and I must try to find it. When I rise from my daughter’s grave I see, high up and in the distance, the sea eagle gliding over the lake. But when I set off along the road, the morning light giving colour to the sky, so it turns from white to the palest

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1796

*by Will Martin*

*Sunday, 27th March*

I wake and spy a sea eagle swerving in a blue cloth sky. I'm cold but remembering the sparkling night brings on a shine. My breath, in out, in out. And Mr Bass sighing. He wears only a shirt. Holds his head a prisoner in his hands. I see blistering on his calves but say nothing as he can't abide fussing. The Lieutenant, eyes me good morning, then tips his cheek to catch the breeze.

I watch the sun bounce across the waves. Not warm yet, but promises to be. Then a voice. Heard above the swish of the sea. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant hear it too. We turn our heads together, like ducks on a river when they hear the press of human feet. I spy two Indians in the surf, jumping and waving so as to catch our eye. I hold my breath.

'Only fish gigs,' Mr Bass says.

But their fish gigs have sharp prongs. The Indians call again. I can pick out words. Only then do I ease and breathe. Cannibals would not speak like Na.

They hold up a fish. My belly yelps.

'They're friendly,' the Lieutenant says.

We all have eyes for the fish.

'I'm for it,' says Mr Bass.

The Lieutenant and I get upon the oars and pull in their direction. Mr Bass sits gingerly at the helm. On the beach seabirds squawk and flap their wings. It's calm enough to land but we stop pulling when we are still some distance from the Indians. One is a giant. His body is burnt black and glistening with water. His hair and beard are like bushes, knotted and wild. His eyes are dark and when he looks at me my breath goes tight and my chest hurts. But his mouth is merry.

Mr Bass talks, using what language we know from Baneelong, asking the giant's name.

'Dilba,' the giant says.

The second Indian does not say his title. He is twig thin but strong. Both men a match for Mr Bass in height. Bones through their noses. Do they suffer it for strength? The second Indian wades through the water towards us, a palm leaf bowl held in his long fingers. The bone through his nose is pointed at one end, like some I've seen before. He offers the bowl to Mr Bass, who takes it and sips. Hands it to the Lieutenant who does the same, then he to me. Water, clear water. I sip and it cools my throat. But after drinking I only want more.

The giant, Dilba, offers fish but we have no trade. Mr Bass finds a handkerchief. I spot two potatoes wedged under the thwart and pull them out. We offer these to Dilba who takes them, trading two silver fish of medium size. I throw them in the pail. Mr Bass has perked up. He likes to practice the language Baneelong taught him.

Dilba's friend grins. His teeth whiter than any on board the *Reliance*.

'Is one from Broken Bay, the other, Botany Bay?' the Lieutenant asks me.

‘Yes,’ I say, although I haven’t been listening properly and am not at all sure.

I want to ask the Indians if they sailed down here in a canoe or if they walked. Na swears that he could beat me to any place, he walking and me in a canoe, even if we both set out at the same time. I can’t always work out what is fibbery with Na, as everything in this land is strange, and what appears strange may not be. Na has told me that his uncles walk south for garaabara. I want to ask the Indians if that is why they are here. Are you here for garaabara? I decide to ask when Mr Bass has finished talking.

I am sitting forward ready to speak when I spy, on shore, several Indians striding down a sand dune. These are soon followed by more, and more again, until a large number have assembled, all calling and shouting, raising an almighty racket. The two Indians with us call to those on the shore.

‘George?’ the Lieutenant whispers. ‘What do they say?’

Mr Bass has his ear cocked. ‘A different language,’ he says. ‘Can’t make out a word.’

The Lieutenant turns to me. ‘Will?’

I’m frightened by the shouting, it sounds like one big roar. I listen with my ear cocked, like Mr Bass. ‘Not a word,’ I say.

‘Pull out,’ the Lieutenant says. ‘Too many are gathered.’

We take up our oars and pull away. The two Indians turn back, surprised at our hasty retreat.

‘To Port Jackson,’ the Lieutenant calls.

I start to pull north, even though the wind is the wrong way about and slaps me in the face.

The Lieutenant hisses. 'Will! Where are you going?'

'Port Jackson,' I say.

'We go south around the saddle,' he says.

I change direction. *Tom Thumb* slides about in the water.

'For pity's sake,' the Lieutenant says.

'Matthew, ease up! We're safe.' Mr Bass laughs.

He doesn't look scared but with him it's hard to tell.

'When you know not your opponent's next move,' the Lieutenant says to me, 'make sure your own is difficult to comprehend. I told them north precisely because we're going south.'

'Ah,' I say, as though the strategy is clear.

Yet, will they not see us going south?

We pull out of the bay and around the point. We pull and pull and I am weak with thirst when we haul *Thumb* up onto the sand.

Mr Bass stands in the shallows. 'No blasted water here.'

'We'll eat first, then search for water,' the Lieutenant says.

I feel dizzy as I collect the sticks for a fire and have to sit. Mr Bass takes the pail to the water so he can gut the fish. I pile sticks on top of each other and set them alight with a flint, blowing until the flame sparks. When the fire is crackling I lay our clothes near it to dry. My stomach has its own voice.

‘Hunger must be the most fearful death, I would rather a spear through my heart,’ I say.

‘You may get both.’ The Lieutenant smiles as though he relishes the idea.

‘The land is a book waiting to be read.’ Mr Bass returns with his gutted fish. ‘Learn to read it and you will never go hungry.’

‘Not strictly true, George. There are many causes of hunger. You may read the land well but still go hungry if your government fails you.’

Mr Bass slaps the fish on the fire. ‘But I agree with Will, hunger is a terrible thing.’

‘Disagree,’ says the Lieutenant, suddenly lively and spoiling for an argument. ‘Hunger can be good, as long as it’s not you that is hungry. France. Howe.’

Mr Bass scoffs. ‘What? Are you saying Howe won because he captured the grain ships?’

‘Yes.’

Mr Bass finds a stick to stir the fire with. ‘It was an unnecessary move on Howe’s part. I would almost venture dishonourable. But that’s not why he won the battle.’

‘Howe used every tactic he knew in order to win. Hunger was one of his weapons and knowing how to employ it was his wisdom,’ the Lieutenant says.

There is a conflict that now and then rises between the Lieutenant and Mr Bass. Both have been cheek by jowl with the carriage of death but Mr Bass, being in the healing trade, thinks more on healing, while the Lieutenant, being in the



business of defending, thinks more on that score, and that makes them ride the talk of death differently. But it has to be said that when both are hankering for exploring, they take the same carriage.

The Lieutenant squats before the fire.

‘I know the *Bellerophon* story,’ I say to him. ‘They talk of it on the *Reliance*.’

The Lieutenant looks surprised. ‘Do they?’

‘They do,’ I say, though this is not what I mean. What I mean is that when I was first on the *Reliance* I would squat near the wardroom and hear the talk, and several times I heard the Lieutenant’s story of the Glorious First of June battle, led by Admiral Howe. The Lieutenant was on the *Bellerophon* under his patron, Pasley. He did not tell his version with the same verve as my uncle, Hilton, who was fond of telling that battle at London inns. His way of getting free grog. Yet, when I overheard the Lieutenant, he was not without style.

‘What do they say?’ the Lieutenant asks.

There is no *they*, but I cannot say I was listening in.

‘You wish me to tell how *they* say the story?’

‘Yes, Will, yes.’

I cannot look at him if I’m to speak. But I set myself up for the tale, in the manner I’ve seen my uncle do before an oration.

‘See, the French are hungry after the Revolution,’ I begin, improvising on my uncle’s version.

‘They start that way?’ the Lieutenant asks.

‘Yes,’ I say, remembering I must agree with him always, if I’m to stay on the right side of his ledger. ‘The French people have the heads of nobles, but they don’t have a plan for what to do with the heads. Not only that but the people are helter-skelter with the business of revolution. With a bit of bad weather, the crops fail and in a tick-tock the whole country is desperate for a feed. War is trumpeted between England and France because Old George doesn’t want dirty revolutionaries crossing the seas and messing up what he has nice and orderly. When someone high up hears, by use of a spy or two, that a hundred and twenty Yankee ships are sailing for France, loaded with grain, this makes English legs quake. The French fed are strong. The French hungry are a weaker foe.’

‘Ah,’ says the Lieutenant, smiling now.

This last is a line stolen direct from him. The rest is part his in content, part Hilton, but all mine in style.

‘See,’ the Lieutenant turns to Mr Bass. ‘The French hungry are a weaker foe, even Will agrees.’

Mr Bass turns the fish on the fire.

‘So Old George decides to keep the French hungry still, and he sends Wrinkly Lord Howe, who is like a wolf when it comes to stratagems and spoils, to capture the grain ships. Lieutenant, you were only two years on my fifteen when you were on the *Bellerophon*, is that not so?’

‘It is so.’

‘The fleet sails out of Spithead with twenty-nine warships and fifteen frigates. Hundreds of white sails battling the winds. A glorious sight! And Lord

Howe has a plan. He knows the French will sail out to meet the Yankee grain ships and guard them into port. The French are under Admiral Louis Villaret de Joyeuse. Howe plans to get to the Yankees before the French, take hostage the grain ships and guide them back to England, then turn on the French.

Out on the Atlantic, Howe's Channel fleet patrol day after day but there are no sightings of the Yankees. Howe gets hungry for battle so he leaves nine warships on guard and, with the remaining fleet, sails to the French coast. His new plan is to trap the French as they leave Brest. But all goes hubble-bubble when he discovers the French have already left. Undeterred, Howe sails in pursuit. On the twenty-eighth day he sights the enemy. They have twenty-six warships and smaller vessels too. This is a tough match for the Channel Fleet because they are now less nine ships and less ships means less guns. The blustering winds cause sea swells that tower above the English ships. Rain falls like sharp swords. But still the English chase the enemy. Gun ports are flung open and cannons rumble out.'

As I tell the battle beginning, I make the noises Hilton style.

'There must be theatre in the telling,' he has often instructed.

His style is what assured him free grog. Sometimes, when we used to go roaming, setting up our theatre in town squares, I'd be with Hilton to warm up the crowd for the theatre that would follow and would join him in parts of a tale. Yet this telling to the Lieutenant and Mr Bass has something of the firstborn about it.

'All the sailors are in a fever for battle,' I continue. 'The *Bellerophon* first sees a frigate and fires. Bang go the cannons and the frigate sails off. Only now,

alongside them comes the great shadow of the *Revolutionnaire*. It is big and black like a killer whale and has a thousand men on board and a hundred and ten guns. Cannons blast back and forth. The roar is deafening and the smoke so black it's hard to make out the figure of a man two feet in front. The maincap of the *Bellerophon* is hit and the ship lurches to one side, like a wounded walrus. The sailors drag the topsail and soon there is a mess of rigging on deck. The *Bellerophon* has to retreat to repair the damage. So too the *Revolutionnaire*. And soon these two foes, like giants of the watery deep, lose sight of each other. Night comes. Lanterns flash. The sailors on the *Bellerophon* work on through until morning. All that can be heard above the sea rush is a hellish hammering.'

I kneel near the fire. The Lieutenant holds a twig in his hand and he now draws a ship in the sand, illustrating my story for Mr Bass who has heard it before but not like this.

'At first light Howe orders the fleet to form a line of battle. He has a new cunning plan. He wants the English ships to sail straight for the enemy—this is bold and never done before—and cut off the rear of the French line to confuse them. The English set sail but some cowardly captains don't carry out Howe's order to the letter. They think the plan too dangerous. Still, the tactic catches the French on the hop. The English have full stomachs but the French do not. There are loud shots—crack, crack!—and a mass of thick grey smoke. The *Bellerophon* aims for—'

And here I hesitate for in my rush of Hilton style theatrics I forget what the *Bellerophon* did.

‘The space between the second and third ships,’ the Lieutenant says, prompting me.

‘The English sailors fire cannons,’ I say. ‘Boom, boom! So too the French. Boom, boom! Then comes the loud crack of timber as masts fall. Wails of men. All is desperate. Confusion. The *Bellerophon*’s forward rigging is slashed to pieces.’

‘It truly was,’ says the Lieutenant, remembering.

‘The French, also, are badly mangled. The *Bellerophon* limps off to repair. That night, time slows. A fog covers the sea like a dirty old coat. The next day the fog is still there. On the *Bellerophon*, bloodied men appear and disappear, they carry hammers and bits of timber, and all day the sound is just this infernal hammering, on and on. This is a cold misty hell, not a burning hell, but it is a hell.’

‘You tell this story well, Will,’ says the Lieutenant.

‘The morning after, fog again. Later, it clears. The English eat, but do the French? No. They cannot eat. They have little food. The English wait to attack, they hold out another day, in order to make the French tremble, in order to make the French weak. Then they sail, setting a diagonal course from windward. They smash through the centre of the enemy, attacking the ships from leeward. The *Bellerophon*, second in line, opens fire on the French *Eole*. The two ships are so close that any one of the men, if they chose to, could reach out and touch an enemy sailor. Fighting breaks out. Black smoke. Gunfire. Screams and clashing

iron. Turmoil. The *Bellerophon* receives a heavy pounding from the French *Trajan*. You were standing where, Lieutenant?’

‘On the quarterdeck.’

‘And you saw when a shot smashed through the barricading and hit Rear Admiral Pasley?’

‘I did. Pasley’s leg was gone.’

‘Blood was splattered on the faces of sailors around.’

‘*They say this?*’ the Lieutenant asks.

‘They say this and more,’ I reply, and the Lieutenant smiles, pleased his bloody battle is so spoken about on the *Reliance*. ‘Old Pasley has copped it bad,’ I continue. ‘Bleeding, he is carried below. And you, sir, were at the cannons so fiery was your mood.’

‘It was indeed.’

‘Yet, Howe’s plan has worked and the hunger of the French means it is not long before seven French ships surrender, too weak to continue fighting.’

‘And that goes to show that in war there are many ways to defeat a foe and hunger can be used for the good of a nation,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘And yet the grain ships got through, did they not?’ Mr Bass says.

I look to the Lieutenant. Surely not? But a curt nod proves Mr Bass correct.

‘And the French claim victory of the exact same battle.’ Mr Bass laughs and turns to me. ‘But that was well told, Master Martin.’

It is now that the Lieutenant looks over my head and gasps. I follow the direction of his gaze. Standing on top of the sand dunes are Dilba and his friend.

‘They’re alone,’ the Lieutenant says, quietly.

The two Indians run down the hill, calling out. They have no weapons with them. But even if they had, I would not be afraid. My story has filled me with courage. We stand to meet them. Dilba comes up to Mr Bass, takes his arm and points north.

‘Ah,’ says Mr Bass. ‘He thinks we don’t know where Port Jackson lies.’

The Lieutenant had said we were going north but we went south. We cannot tell Dilba about our stratagems, yet he thinks us stupid. If your enemy thinks you are stupid, what then? Might it not make them braver? Is it not better for them to fear you?

‘Thank you,’ Mr Bass says to Dilba, who I remember cannot be our enemy after all, as he speaks the Port Jackson tongue like Na, and like Baneelong.

The Lieutenant mimes how we had wanted to eat first. Dilba and his friend watch the Lieutenant closely. They look to each other and laugh.

The green sea is shiny. The yellow sand is warming. We are stood around the campfire. The scissors that Mr Bass has used to scale the fish lie glinting on the sand. Dilba’s friend picks them up, curious. He walks away, holding the scissors, and the sand goes whoosh whoosh like silk on a lady’s dress. The Lieutenant mimes what you can do with scissors. Then, with friendly gestures, but with a nervous air, he walks across the sand and takes the scissors from the Indian. Dilba steps forward. For a tick-tock all I hear is wave crash. All I see is eyes back

and forth. The Lieutenant, laughing again, takes hold of Dilba's beard. Dilba jumps back. So does his friend. Eyes back and forth.

I spy the stick I've used for poking the fire. A weapon if needed. One step and it is in my hand. But I wait. Ark, ark, a crow calls. Are we friends or enemies? It is yet to be confirmed.

The Lieutenant holds up a clump of his own hair. He snips it off and offers it to Dilba who takes it, staring down at the hair. The Lieutenant reaches for Dilba's beard again but this time he moves slowly. Dilba follows his every move. The Lieutenant snips and holds the clump of beard in the air. Tick-tock. Dilba grins. The Lieutenant leans forward, takes another snip. Dilba's friend laughs and points. And so the Lieutenant snips and snips until Dilba's beard is cut and his hair too and the friend is holding his sides he is laughing so much.

The Indians laugh like us, only they laugh more. This is my discovery.

Dilba's friend wants a haircut now. We all come closer as the Lieutenant snips at the friend's beard. Mr Bass sings a barber's ditty and Dilba sings it after him, in perfect English, in perfect tune. Hilton and Mama would be amazed. The Indians are our friends, it is clear. I don't need to keep my eye on the fire stick.

Gulls circle above and the fire spits. We sit to eat and invite our friends to join us, and we pull the flesh from the fish. Our friends eat it the same as we do. This is proof that they are not cannibals.

'Bado?' Mr Bass asks Dilba, scooping up imaginary water.

Dilba points south. 'River,' he says. 'River, there.'



He speaks only some words of English, but his accent, Mr Bass says, is splendid. Dilba raises his head the way Na does to indicate direction.

‘River?’ Mr Bass points south to confirm.

‘Yes,’ Dilba says. ‘River.’

Mr Bass and the Lieutenant look to each other. Maybe *this* is the river Henry Hacking has talked about? Or if not, it may be another river, not yet seen, by Hacking or anyone, except for Dilba and his like. The thrill of it. Maybe this is the river that, with waters deep, will lead us to the heart of the land. Maybe this is the river that will make rise our monument.

What strange twists of fate. We would not have come this far south if not for water in a wine barica. And where I had felt bad about the troubles we have endured, now the fate of those actions may lead to a great discovery.

But this swelling does not last more than a tick-tock for, as Mr Bass and the Lieutenant debate the river, I spy Dilba’s sly look to his friend. A look with malice. I remember the cannibal story from Calcutta. I remember also the Lieutenant’s words. Do not let your enemy know your next move. Could the Indians be feigning friendship? And what might be *their* next move? Dilba’s eyes are half-open. Eyes half-open mark men that are slippery in their thoughts. Hilton told me this. The Lieutenant and Mr Bass, blinded by the desire of discovery, see none of it.

‘The wind is the wrong way about for returning North,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘It is,’ says Mr Bass, with a wink to me. ‘And are we not in desperate need of water?’

How to tell what I know without giving away the game? ‘That drink we had was plenty,’ I say.

Mr Bass thinks I’ve made a joke and laughs.

‘We could not return north without water,’ says the Lieutenant.

He is speaking to me as though I am to decide. I am baffled but then I see the ruse. Already they are planning what to say to the Governor about our journey south. All their meaning is between words, or behind them. This river could change our destiny is what they think.

‘So that is that.’ Mr Bass stands and rubs his hands above the fire.

‘That is that,’ the Lieutenant agrees.

‘We’ll sail to the river,’ Mr Bass says to Dilba.

The Lieutenant mimes us all getting in the boat and sailing south.

Dilba claps his hands and points. He will show the way.

Mr Bass and the Lieutenant begin to pack our things. I stand by the fire. If I don’t move Mr Bass will notice me. Then I will signal by my eyes that we cannot go. But Mr Bass and the Lieutenant continue packing. They are reckless with ambition.

I’ve no choice but to run to Mr Bass. ‘Sir, what if they mean to trick us?’ I whisper.

‘It was we who asked them to show us water,’ Mr Bass says.

‘We must obey the Governor’s order.’

Mr Bass gives me a sour look.

‘And that was to find a river. Will, what do you fear?’

I see he will not change his mind no matter what I say, and worse, he thinks me a coward.

‘Nothing’ I say.

I curse the day I did not check the barica was clean. As I stomp out the fire I spy Dilba watching me. I see his hand flick up. A signal to his friend? I pretend not to see.

We shove off from the shallows, Mr Bass at the helm. The Lieutenant and I step the mast and we set sail. Dilba sits near Mr Bass. His friend sits at the bow but is silent, as if he does not like to go. I will have to watch them both. The wind picks up and we are off.

‘To the river,’ Mr Bass says.

Dilba watches him. ‘Yoorongi,’ he says and points south.

‘Duck?’ Mr Bass asks. ‘Yoorongi in water place?’

‘Moremme,’ Dilba says.

‘What else?’ Mr Bass asks.

A wave comes crashing over the side of *Thumb* and when I look up, wiping water from my face, Mr Bass and Dilba are laughing.

‘What?’ the Lieutenant leans forward to hear.

‘Dilba says that at this river there is a beautiful woman for you,’ Mr Bass says. ‘A white woman at that, and Indian corn and potatoes.’

'If only that were possible, my friend,' the Lieutenant shouts.

Dilba points to me and this makes Mr Bass laugh louder. I feel my cheeks heat up and turn to let the breeze cool them. Usually it is Moore, the ship's master, who stirs me about women. I always feign boredom. I know what goes on. I see it all over the Cove. If a man has stirrings, no mind the flavour, anything can be supped. White or black, woman or boy, even child, all is there and up for trade. If no coin is had, spirit will do, even flour. When Mr Bass lets me have free roam, Na and I kick around the campfires at night. We see those that go cock-a-hoop for a bit of flesh. Hoary Bogarty growls most of the day but to see him with a woman by firelight and watch how he fondles her bosom is to see how he fair turns into a dribbling pup.

Mr Bass calls out. 'Dilba is offering you a white woman.'

The Lieutenant shakes his head. 'No white woman could live so far from civilization,' he shouts over the splash of waves.

I look across the sea to the land that is scrubby. Two escaped convicts are reported living with Hawkesbury tribes. But there are farms on the Hawkesbury that the escaped men raid. This far south, there are no farms to be had. Fewer animals. That is why there are cannibals. To live here would be too great a risk.

I fear now for our lives. We are too far south. This land is wild. Even Cook did not land here. I spy the silvery back of a dolphin. There are more, romping in the water alongside us. Their fins flicker as they duck under the boat and criss-cross in front of *Thumb*. They come up for air with newborn squeaks. Some swim beside us. I eye one for his scarred back and I swear he eyes me in return, as if to

warn me of the danger we are in. They swim off in a hurry. I look starboard and see there is a feeding hub-bub that would please any fishermen in Port Jackson. Sharks, their fins dark in the grey-blue sea, circle silvery fish that are jumping from the water, and these jumping flapping fish are feeding on smaller prey, as white winged gulls cruise above. It's as if all creatures of the sea and air have come to join a circling, snapping, flipping, flapping dance that will end in death.

I grip the gunwale.

It must surely be a bad omen.

The land before us is low. The long arm of the escarpment cradles the scrub and through the spindly trees and sand dunes flows a river. We strike sail and take up oars. Splish, splash, splish, splash, to dare is to do.

'But it's no more than a stream!' the Lieutenant calls, when we are near the shore.

His disappointment is deadly, like the sudden lurch of a ship in a storm that sends sailors overboard. But there is no time to think on it. The entrance to the stream is a yeasty beast and the wind howls like a child in tantrum. No way to enter yet Dilba starts to call directions, like a ship's captain, and Mr Bass follows his pointing and arm waving. We navigate the surf like a rocky path, first going straight for it, then to one side, then the other, and soon we are through and pulling upstream against a strong tide.

Dilba and his friend jump out of *Thumb* and splash through the shallows. They begin to stride the wide sandy bank beside us. They call out but I cannot

understand a word. Our boat scrapes the bed of the stream. I turn my attention to pulling. The Lieutenant pulls with me. Then, from shrubs on the shore, men appear, like tricky spirits, first one, then another and then another, as if the land is coughing them up. Dilba and his friend have their backs to us. I cannot spy their countenance. The Indians from the bush stand and stare, first at us, then at Dilba and his friend. No one speaks. They have a spirit way of talking. It must be that. I count the Indians. Nearly twenty have gathered. Then, at some unknown sign, they all begin to shout and stroll along the bank. Their dogs run to the shallows. They don't bark. They are devils in dog's bodies. The men babble and gesture. Some have grizzled beards that go to their navel, teeth in their hair and sharp bones through their noses. They wave friendly, but friendly could be a trap? The men call to us, Solja, Solja, as Mr Bass has on his red waistcoat and it's the same colour as a soldier's coat. The stream is wide but shallow and we keep scraping the bed.

'We're too vulnerable,' Mr Bass says.

Dilba, ankle deep in water, points to the hills. We look that way and eye what seems to be a lagoon.

'The stream is scarce deep enough to get us there,' says the Lieutenant.

'And if we made the lagoon,' Mr Bass says, eyeing the men on shore, 'we'd then have to wait for the tide to get us back down.'

'We need to be armed,' the Lieutenant whispers urgently. 'Dry our powder, clean the guns, or else we have no safety.'



## Bel

2010

When Sapphy tells the story of our rafting, he tells it different to me. We often argue about specific events. I might say, 'No, that final day with Kristie was nothing like that!' He'll get all uppity and reply, 'The problem, Bel, is that your memory can't be trusted!' In an attempt to diffuse the debate we'll go to Tarak, who has grown to be the steadiest of us three, but inevitably he'll have yet another take on what happened. There seems to be no way to solve it and we usually end up agreeing to disagree, each claiming our version of events is the more reliable.

I was only ten when I first met Sapphy and Tarak. School had broken up for the two-week spring holiday. I was home with my father, Jonathan. He was in his office trying to rescue his Ph.D. from sinking under the weight of too many subordinate clauses. He'd made me promise not to venture beyond coo-ee of our backyard. I'd been, up until that spring, a more-or-less obedient, more-or-less quiet child. More-or-less obedient because my obedience had never been tested. More-or-less quiet because I hadn't felt the need to talk. Evie, my mum, would constantly introduce me to people, saying, this is my daughter, Bel, and then there'd be a long pause while everyone waited for me to talk. When I didn't, Evie would say, 'But she's not come out of her shell yet,' and go on speaking.

I always sensed there'd come a time when I'd emerge from my shell and see the world in a new way. I was obsessed with transformation in the insect



world. This particular day I was down at the lake, out the front of our place, watching two dragonflies buzz above the water. Their gossamer wings had hundreds of tiny lines and their long bodies glowed blue. They were mating and the tips of their long stick-like abdomens connected to form an upside down heart. I'd seen hundreds of upside down hearts that week. With Jonathan's help, I'd looked up dragonflies on the computer. They live in their nymph state underneath the water. When the time comes for them to transform to an adult dragonfly, they climb up a reed or across rocks, moult one last time, begin to breath in oxygen and when their wings have dried out, fly. I desperately wanted to witness this transformation, but so far I'd been unsuccessful.

It was a blustery spring day. The air was moist and had a sweet taste, as though there was the tiniest drop of honey in it. I was lying on the grass at the water's edge when I saw two boys and a dog, all settled comfortably on a raft, emerge from the nearby creek onto the lake. The boys were using oars to push rather than row the raft along. One of the boys looked near my age, the other, a good few years younger. The huge wolf-like white-haired dog sitting between them looked in complete command. They poled their way along the foreshore until they were floating two metres in front.

'Do you need anything rafted?' the older boy asked.

I shook my head.

'Do you want to get on,' the younger boy asked, and moved over to make room, as though certain I would say yes.

He had one of those faces that look young and old together, the way babies sometimes do. A pug nose and deep-set brown eyes, with long black eyelashes that curled up. He was wearing floaties. The older boy was thin and bendy, like a tree branch, had straight dark hair, and eyes that were heavy lidded, like a bluetongue lizard. They beamed smiles at me and so despite my promise to Jonathan, I stood and began rolling up my knee-length shorts.

‘We’ll come and get you,’ said the older boy. ‘So you don’t have to step in the goo.’

The one major drawback to our coastal lake was that thick black sludge, slimy to walk on, covered the lakebed. Some neighbours called it a cesspit. But that wasn’t right as the water itself was crystal clear. Others called it a lagoon, saying it was too shallow to be a real lake. At its deepest point it was only three and a half metres, although the stretch of water that fronted our house rarely rose above a metre.

Saphy and Tarak used their oars to pole the raft closer to me. Bending my knees, I leant forward and dropped my hands onto the raft. My body now formed a bridge across the shallow weedy water. It was then that the dog stood and the raft rolled away, just enough to prevent me from climbing on.

The younger boy pulled at the dog’s fur. ‘Sit, Zeus, sit!’

The dog barked but remained standing.

‘This is Zeus,’ the boy said. ‘I’m Tarak.’

‘Are you Bel?’ The older boy asked.

Surprised that he knew my name I went to speak but didn't, yet the older boy, as if reading my thoughts, said, 'I told you this was the place.'

But the two had lost concentration and the raft drifted even further away so that my body stretched out to form a longer sleeker bridge.

'Saphy, she's gonna fall,' Tarak yelled.

'Whoah! Hang on there.'

Saphy rammed his oar into the lakebed and pushed the raft back towards the bank, closer this time. I crawled on easily and sat between the two boys. Zeus towered above me, but his face was so friendly I wasn't frightened.

'All set?' Saphy asked.

He let loose his oar and we drifted away from the bank.

The raft had four big forty-four gallon drums—one on each corner—roped to a wooden frame. Strips of wood had been laid across the top to form a platform, although they'd not been evenly laid, and I could see down to the water.

'How come you know my name?' I asked.

'Cockatoo Conner,' Saphy said.

'He said if we go exploring, come get you,' Tarak added.

Cockatoo Conner and his wife, Grace, lived next door, at number seven. They had four grown-up boys, who Cockatoo said, loved home so much they decided never to leave. Sometimes there were five cars in their front yard, sometimes only one. On weekends their backyard was noisy and full of uncles, aunties, sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren, but during the week it was quieter, as if everyone was resting up for the coming weekend.

Often Cockatoo would lean over our adjoining fence to have a yarn. He had owl eyes and cheeks that hung down really low. One time he asked how come our place was so quiet. I could tell he didn't like it like that. But I told him it was fine to be quiet because then I could eavesdrop on all their conversations.

'How d'you know Cockatoo?' I asked.

Both boys looked at me blankly and shrugged their shoulders.

'Dad knows him,' said Sapphy.

I'd never been out on the lake on a raft. Jonathan had once hired a rowboat so we could have a 'lake experience' but it had been a short trip because, as he explained, his muscles were the kind that got smaller not bigger as he grew older. We never went fishing. Jonathan didn't know how to fish and Evie didn't trust fish caught in a polluted lake even if it was fish caught where the fresh seawater washed in. Some families were out on the water all the time, although very few people swam in it. Our relationship with the lake was, according to Jonathan, more metaphysical. Evie explained this meant we liked looking at it more than being in it.

I let my legs dangle over the edge.

'Good raft,' I said.

'Do you want to come and fight the horse girls with us?' Tarak asked.

'The horse girls?'

'They bring their horses down to our bit of the creek to have a drink and leave horse poo and we don't like it because it's where we hide our raft, so we're going to go raaaah.' Tarak held up his hands and began roaring like a lion.

‘That will only scare them if they are like six months old,’ I said.

‘Yeah, but then we get Zeus to attack them,’ Sapphy said.

Zeus sat down and put his head between his paws. He didn’t have the appearance of a fighting beast, although, as Sapphy pointed out, he had wolf-blood in him, so he didn’t need to *look* tough.

Despite their obvious lack of weapons I agreed to go fight the horse girls.

‘I’m seven going on eight,’ Tarak said, as we poled along.

Sapphy was ten and a half. They’d just returned to the Illawarra. Sapphy had been born here, only the family left when he was two and went to live in England where they’d seen hedgehogs. They now lived across from Mullet Creek and they only had one rule in their house and that was that no one was ever allowed to say no.

‘Try never saying no for a day,’ Sapphy said. ‘It’s not easy.’

‘No, no, no!’ Tarak shouted.

‘We say no all the time when we’re on the raft,’ Sapphy explained.

‘What do you say instead of no?’ I asked.

‘You have to be inventive,’ Sapphy said. ‘But if Dad is making a salad, and he says, do you want some salad? Then I always answer with a question. Like I say, can I have that salad another day?’

‘What if he says no?’

‘He can’t say no. It’s banned.’

‘Oh.’

‘Answering with a question always throws him.’

‘What about your mum?’

‘She’s dead,’ Tarak said. ‘But we’ve got her ashes. They’re on Dad’s bedside table.’

I looked to Saphy but he seemed to be pretending not to have heard what Tarak had said. Meanwhile, Tarak was waiting for me to speak. I’d had little experience of death and was unsure of what to say.

‘It’s nice they’re by his bed,’ I said, eventually.

‘Yeah,’ Tarak agreed.

We rafted down Mullet Creek but the horse girls hadn’t showed, evidenced by there being no fresh horse poo. As we waited for them to arrive I pointed out two dragonflies mating, for there was, to use one of Jonathan’s expressions, copulation in abundance on Mullet Creek. But I couldn’t spot a nymph in the process of transforming. A loud buzzing, right by my ear, nearly made me fall off the raft. Saphy rolled up his tee shirt sleeve. He had a large black watch strapped above his elbow. It was a scindiving watch that had belonged to his mum. The alarm meant it was time for them to go home and have lunch. They rafted me back to my place and, as their grandmother had planned a school uniform shopping expedition that afternoon, we agreed to meet again the next day.

I raced inside, trailing mud across the floor. Evie, just home from her tutoring job at the university, helped me clean up, and I told her all about my new friends. Jonathan came out of his office as I was finishing my story.

‘Jonathan, did you know about this?’

Without blinking, Jonathan said, ‘Didn’t you say a few adventures would be good for her?’

Like Saphy, he was answering a question with a question. I was full of admiration for my new friend who obviously knew things about the adult world that I didn’t.

‘Come on, Evie, she can swim,’ Jonathan said.

‘You said this year I was to try and mature,’ I argued.

‘But not on a raft with two violent boys.’

Unfortunately, I’d told her about our plan to attack the horse girls and she couldn’t see Saphy and Tarak’s side of it.

‘Not just two boys, there’s Zeus too,’ I said.

‘A wolf-dog!’

That afternoon and night we three had serious negotiations about my rafting future and Evie took some persuading. It was Jonathan who got her to assent by suggesting a conditions-of-rafting agreement. As Evie had to go to university early the next day, it was left to Jonathan to come down to the foreshore, when Saphy and Tarak rafted in, and broker the deal. In his calm and seemingly casual manner, Jonathan elicited a firm promise from each of us that we would not raft further than two metres from the shoreline, would not get into strange boats, and would check in with him regularly.

Days of glorious rafting followed. Tarak and Saphy and Zeus would pick me up in the morning and off we’d go. We soon developed a habit of pretending to be explorers, or stranded sailors, sometimes survivors, often pirates, whose

crusty rough-talking language we spoke with zeal. Zeus also took on various roles: mostly a packhorse, occasionally a wild animal that we then set about taming, and now and then a flying wolf, which was his least favourite role as it required all three of us to sit on his back and pretend to fly. We'd pole along the foreshore and pull our raft up on land to look for objects of interest. By the end of the first week we'd amassed a stash of treasure: animal bones; bird feathers, one white one from a sea eagle; two street signs that someone had vandalised and thrown away; an old bike handlebar; a tee shirt with Never Buy Retail printed on it. We stored all our goods in our secret hidey-hole in among bushes on the banks of the creek. On the Saturday we saw the horse girls and attempted to scare them off by running at them and raaahing, half-lion, half-zombie. Zeus, in the role of hungry wolf, refused to go near them. Even when we'd go, 'Get em, wolf,' he'd just lie down and pant. The oldest horse girl eventually gave us a bored haughty glare and said, 'Grow up.' It hurt more than a swear word would have.

That first week we enjoyed best scavenging in Swamp Park. It was not a true park but flood-land that could not be built on and therefore had been left as it was. It was full of dead or spindly trees. Green vines twisted through the tree branches and tough lantana bullied its way between the trunks. There was one majestic old fig that grew on a rise and had roots as tall as Tarak. A clear trickling stream ran through the park, but also, there were dark groves where spider webs stretched across stagnant pools of slime-covered water. It was the perfect place for us to create all sorts of dark imaginings.



On the Monday of the second week, we were trekking along a path in Swamp Park, Zeus in the lead, followed by Sapphy, then Tarak, and me taking up the rear. Sapphy had a rope looped over his shoulder. We intended to tie it around Tarak's waist. The previous week, when we'd first climbed the fig tree, Tarak had become stuck when he reached the first branch. He kept saying, 'I can't do it, I can't do it.' No matter how many times we said to him, stop acting like a six-year-old, he'd refused to budge. It took ages to get him down. So Sapphy came up with the idea of a rope harness. We'd gone off the path, and were walking through the trees, our fig in sight, when we spotted, pushed into the lantana and lying on its side, an enormous suitcase.

'Could hold treasure,' Tarak said, beginning one of our pretending games.

Sapphy and I stared at the suitcase. Its ordinariness made it all the more curious. Zeus moved closer for a sniff.

'What if there's a dead body in it?' Sapphy said.

Sapphy was obsessed with dead things and the last few days he'd been trying to terrify Tarak and me with dead body stories. To prove I wasn't so easily scared, I bent down and tested the lock. It clicked open. I'd been all bravado but the idea of a dead body took hold of my imagination. I shot up and took a step back.

'What if there *is* a body?' I asked, keeping my voice steady, as if I was simply checking the procedure for finding bodies.

'We won't be able to touch it,' Sapphy said. 'And we'll have to be careful not to mess up the crime scene.'

We studied the suitcase that moments before had been a curious object but had now become sinister.

‘You ready for this?’ Saphy whispered, as he knelt down to lift the lid.

But he’d only lifted it a tiny bit when Tarak screamed, ‘Don’t!’

‘It won’t be a body,’ Saphy said, but he snapped closed the suitcase.

‘Look, it can’t be a body, a body wouldn’t fit in here.’

‘Cut up it would,’ I said.

We looked again at the suitcase, imagining a body hacked to pieces. Zeus began to bark and that only frightened us more.

‘Do we open?’ Saphy asked, when Zeus was quiet.

Tarak shook his head.

‘Bel?’

I could tell Saphy wanted to open the suitcase so I took hold of Tarak’s hand and squeezed it tight, mimicking the way Evie calmed me whenever I was panicked.

‘Tarak, I was only kidding about the dead body,’ I said, gently. ‘There probably won’t be any body bits in there at all.’

‘Promise?’

‘Or if there is, just a finger or something. But if there’s just a finger or something, or a leg, or more, we’ll close the lid straightaway and go back and tell Jonathan. Okay?’

Tarak nodded his head.

‘Do we open?’ Saphy asked.

‘Open,’ I said.

‘Open,’ said Tarak.

Sapphy opened the suitcase and we saw a jumble of clothes, as though someone had dumped all their dirty washing in the suitcase to go to the Laundromat. Zeus lost interest immediately and padded off. We squatted around and began a closer inspection. We found skimpy tops, jeans, sarongs, a long skirt, boots, underwear, thongs, three small bags of makeup, and two jumpers. Zeus began to bark and Tarak ran to bring him back. That’s when we heard a scream. Sapphy and I scrambled up and sprinted through the trees to Tarak. He was standing at the edge of a grove, pointing ahead to the fig. There, lying in the shadowy roots of the tree, was a dead girl. She had dark curly hair and was wearing black jeans and a short red tee shirt that showed her stomach. There were shiny rings in her belly button and bangles on her wrists and ankles, all bright against her dark skin. Her feet were bare and her toenails were painted with orange nail polish.

‘She’s dead,’ Tarak said softly.

‘No, she’s breathing, see!’ Sapphy pointed to her belly that suddenly moved in and out.

The girl’s eyelashes quivered and her eyes opened. She lifted her head and yawned.

Tarak sat down beside her. ‘My dog’s name is Zeus,’ he said.

The girl leaned out from the shadows and patted Zeus. Her cheek was swollen and had a cut across it.

‘My other dog in England was called Tingle and I loved that dog. I wanted to call Zeus, Tingle, but my dad said Zeus was already his name.’

‘Zeus is good,’ the girl said.

She had a mischievous grin and her eyes, which sometimes looked hazel and sometimes looked brown, were large and comforting.

‘Zeus is a god,’ she said.

‘A dog!’ Tarak said.

The girl laughed. ‘Your dog has been named after a god, follow me? Hey, how long you guys been here?’

‘Not long,’ Saphy said.

‘Oh boy, I was sleepy,’ she said, yawning again. ‘Got anything to eat?’

‘I have, I have.’

Tarak lifted off his backpack and pulled out a pear and gave it to the girl who ate it quickly. She licked the spilt juice from her fingers with such intense pleasure that we could only stare in fascination.

‘How d’you cut your cheek?’ I asked.

‘Is it cut?’ She pressed her finger lightly against the cut.

‘Do you want a ride on our raft?’ Tarak asked.

Tarak glanced back through the trees towards the foreshore. The girl followed his gaze and saw the suitcase.

‘My suitcase,’ she said, jumping up and running to it.

We followed and collected around her as she stood looking down, her jumbled belongings even more jumbled after our fossicking.

‘We thought it was a dead body,’ I said.

The girl’s laugh was light and bright. ‘That’s good news! I thought it was someone else who’d opened it.’

‘Someone else who?’ Tarak asked.

‘Just this dodgy bloke I know.’

‘Didn’t you know it was here?’ Saphy asked.

‘I lost it sometime last night,’ she said.

She knelt down, searched through the bag and found a clean tee shirt and changed out of her dirty one into it, revealing a bright purple bra with red stitching. She said her name was Kristie and she lived in a house further along the foreshore with Ned, who, yes, was her boyfriend, but who, no, did not own the house. They were renovating the house for Ned’s dad, who, according to Kristie, thought she and Ned were incapable of doing anything useful, because he, Ned’s dad, just didn’t understand the concept of enjoyment, and thought life should be full of angst and pain.

‘But last night Ned and I had a way-too-big fight,’ she said. ‘I stormed out, but halfway down the street I realised I’d left my money back at the house. I wasn’t going back there, and I was in no fit state to go roaming around, so I came here. This is my secret place.’

‘And then the dodgy bloke came?’ Saphy asked.

Kristie laughed as though he’d said something funny.

‘I’d really like a ride on your raft,’ she said.

All promises to Jonathan were forgotten under Kristie's spell.

'Let's row to the middle of the lake,' Kristie said, as soon as we had pushed away from the bank.

We didn't even consider not going. We all took turns rowing, floating past the small island that had become a bird sanctuary, and out to the middle of the lake. Everything looked different away from the foreshore. Things that had been solid and strong on land, like houses, seemed toylike and movable. The bays we rafted in became smaller and more connected to other bays. We stopped rowing and let the raft drift on the current. Kristie lay back next to Zeus and stared up at the sky. She put her hand on top of mine and linked our fingers together.

'I'm looking for seahorses, what are you looking for?' she asked.

'I'm looking for seahorses too,' Tarak said.

'See one?'

'No.'

'There's one.' Kristie pointed at a cloud above us.

We all lay down next to her to get a better view.

'I see,' Saphy said.

'What about you?' she asked, squeezing my hand. 'What else can you see?'

'A stingray.' I pointed to a cloud near the horizon.

'So there is,' Kristie said.

We lay like that for an hour, the four of us and Zeus, bobbing on the water, picking out shapes in the sky. Stare at something long enough and you see all kinds of things you didn't see before.

Saphy's alarm buzzed. It was time for us to check in with Jonathan.

'Fantastic watch,' Kristie said.

'My mum's.'

Kristie leant over to give the watch a closer inspection.

'She died,' Tarak said.

'She killed herself,' Saphy said.

It was the first I'd heard of it and it shocked me so much that I was not sure I'd heard correctly.

'She got sad,' Tarak said.

'People have a habit of doing that,' Kristie said, carefully. 'What does your dad say about it?'

'He doesn't say much but he left his girlfriend in England and we came back to Australia.'

'Ah,' said Kristie, thoughtfully.

Her 'Ah' seemed significant. As though she understood the whole situation. We drifted on the raft, hearing the water lap and the birds in the distance, but the three of us had our eyes on Kristie.

'So what's the best thing you used to do with your mum?' Kristie asked, eventually.

Tarak and Saphy turned to each other.

'Run. We used to go running all the time,' Saphy said.

'She loved running,' Tarak said.

'Did you like running with her?' Kristie asked.

'Yeah,' Tarak said.

'We'd run around Hyde Park and then later we'd get an ice-cream,'

Saphy said.

'There you go. Running. Do lots of running. It's the best way to remember her, by doing something you all loved doing together. A wise old person told me that once.'

'Who?' Tarak asked.

'My Nan,' Kristie said, suddenly enthused. 'Go for a run each day, promise me?'

Tarak and Saphy promised, although Tarak was the only one who seemed cheered by the idea. We rowed back to Swamp Park as quickly as we could.

'Back to my tree,' Kristie said, as she jumped onto the bank.

'Are you going to stay here all day?' I called, as we were drifting away.

'Why not? Maybe all night too.'

If it's possible for children to *fall* in love, in the way that adults *fall* in love, then we three, simultaneously, fell in love with Kristie that first day. Perhaps it was her way of talking, and her unhurried way of waiting for our replies, that allowed each of us to open up to her. Or, perhaps it was her laugh, which was infectious. In any case, we all felt an instant devotion.



We got home to my place, pulled the raft up on shore but heard shouting from MP's house. MP lived at number eleven, with Lily Lewis, an artist and recluse. According to MP, Lily was a creative someone who didn't get on with people but had enough sense to know it.

We crept closer to MP's back fence and peeked over. MP was sitting on a chair beneath a tree, surrounded by her wild bush garden that she tended every afternoon to keep away Alzheimer's. She had a pad and pen in her hand and was leaning forward.

'You're late,' she shouted, with a jerk of her hand, and then scribbled on her pad.

Her head was bent over and her hair was held up on top of her head by a peg. She started to mutter and then suddenly she stood up and paced about, like she was angry. 'I smile but the man's a cunt and if he leaves me dry again I'll slit his throat while he sleeps and say the Blacks did it.'

Tarak gasped, but I knew what was happening and signalled not to talk. I didn't want to disturb MP. The month before she'd forbid me and Evie from neighbourly trespass before 1 p.m. Evie being Evie refused to take the ban seriously and would regularly send me over, usually to borrow some garden tool. I would reluctantly slink across and stand outside the glass door of MP's backroom office and wait until she spotted me. She was always at her desk, eyes fixed on her computer, busy writing her book full of historical figures that had no children in it except ones that knew how to say thank-you and please. She'd take ages to notice I was there. When she did, she'd always say, 'Is it 1 p.m. yet?' And I'd have to

say, 'No.' And she'd say, 'What did I say to you?' And I'd say, 'It's not me, it's Evie!' And she'd say, 'That woman has no respect!' Then she'd get me what Evie wanted.

'She's only writing her historical novel,' I said, when we'd crept out of earshot.

Sapphy and Tarak's dad was waiting for them at our house. He was a softly spoken man, with hair that flew out everywhere, like it was electrified. I tried to imagine him sleeping each night next to an urn of ashes and wondered if that is what made his hair so wild. He told Sapphy and Tarak that their grandmother on their mother's side had come to visit and they had to go home with him straightaway. They waved goodbye looking like they'd just been told the holidays were over.

That night, I sat at the kitchen counter with Evie and Jonathan, eating dinner. It was pitch black outside and the dangling light above the kitchen bench was the only light on in the house. Isolated lights often made me melancholy, as did the sometimes grey light that came at twilight. My parents were both in their tracky dacks and tee shirts and I was in my pyjamas. Evie was laughing, asking Jonathan if he wanted mushrooms with his salt.

Watching them I felt a rush of emotion, so strong, that I started to shake. I felt as if my knowing them, this certainty I had of them always being with me, was slipping away. I had an overwhelming sense that one day a great chasm

would come between us. The horror of that feeling whipped up in me the way the wind whips up leaves and then subsides. But I was left feeling intensely sad, realising for the first time not only that everything must change, but also, that everything must die.

Later, sitting on the couch watching television, I curled close to Evie and she put her arms around me.

‘Bel?’

‘Nothing.’

She gave my shoulders a squeeze but paid me no more attention, knowing that is what I wanted.

The next day Sapphy and Tarak’s dad dropped them at my place and after waving goodbye, we ran down to the foreshore where we had left the raft. We poled to Swamp Park. Sapphy refused to share his oar claiming that his one year on me and three on Tarak meant he had special rights. He was, I noticed, unusually obstinate. Their grandmother, Tarak said, had asked them too many questions. Tarak and I took turns using his oar and when I wasn’t poling I was stroking Zeus, who lay on the raft as if he were a king awaiting attention. We told each other we were going to Swamp Park to climb our fig tree, but secretly, I think we each hoped to see Kristie.

The sky was full of dark clouds and Swamp Park was steeped in shadow. Even the birds seemed subdued. We tramped off from the narrow path, through

the trees to our fig that stood with its large limbs stretching out across the land. Kristie was not near the tree. Zeus sniffed around as if trying to find her scent.

‘What if the dodgy bloke came and got her?’ Tarak asked.

‘She probably didn’t want to spend the night here,’ Saphy said.

‘She said she might,’ I argued.

We searched the rest of the park, traipsing in and out of dim groves where we stood listening to the slow plop of water, and then scrambling along the banks of the stream, and on through the spindly trees, all the way to Mullet Creek. Zeus nosed his way into bushes and found rambling paths that we’d not yet explored, but no Kristie.

We spent the rest of the morning rigging up a way to climb to the top of our fig tree, whose higher branches were difficult to reach. We had to return home for lunch, but after eating our cheese sandwiches with unnatural speed, we were off again. By the end of the afternoon we’d rigged ropes and pulleys and all three of us had climbed our way up to the second to highest branch. Standing on it, we could see over the lake, and the surrounding suburbs, right to the sea.

On the following days we returned to Swamp Park, hoping for Kristie to reappear, but each day we were disappointed. On the Sunday afternoon, the last day of our holiday, it was unusually hot, and we stayed out on the water, poling past Swamp Park, and around into the next bay. We came to a row of dilapidated houses with backyards that ran down to the lake. Even though the gardens were mostly overgrown, in the bright sunshine and against the blue sky, the old houses

caught our interest. One stone house had a yard full of palm trees and old car parts, another had Kikuyu grass taller than we were, a third was tropical and lush.

‘There she is,’ Saphy shouted, pointing to the last house in the row.

Kristie was lying beneath a hills-hoist that had been covered with material to give shade, and that stood in the middle of a tiny patch of lawn, surrounded by overgrown plants. A man, wearing jeans but bare-chested, was lying next to her, his head on her lap. We waved and rowed over. I slipped into the shallows, braving the sludge, and pulled the raft to the bank. Saphy and Tarak jumped off and we ran across the foreshore lawn, up to Kristie.

‘Greetings friends,’ she said, magnanimously. ‘This is Mr Ned.’

‘Hey,’ Ned said, dreamily.

He was sitting up now, tying his dreadlocks into a ponytail. When it was done he lay back and almost immediately fell into a deep sleep. Zeus, as if exhausted from rafting and taking his cue from Ned, lay down in the shade of the hills-hoist, resting his head between his paws.

‘We’ve started on the kitchen,’ Kristie said, waving at the pile of old cupboards and sinks piled on the grass behind her.

‘Want to raft?’ Tarak asked.

‘Not today, sweet pea,’ she said, but seeing Tarak’s disappointment, added, ‘How about a lemon drink?’

Kristie led Tarak inside. Saphy and I followed. The large kitchen was an empty shell, with only the plumbing and light fittings visible. A fridge and small table had been set up in the wide hallway. Incense was burning, the smell, sweet

and spicy. Kristie went to the fridge, took out some lemons and squeezed them, adding water, sugar, mint and ice, then she ushered us along the hall and into an enormous room, empty of furniture, where we settled down on cushions that had been spread around on the timber floor. Bits of material had been draped over the tall windows and kept fluttering up with the breeze. There was an elaborate ceiling rose, although no light hung from it. Music was playing. The language was foreign but the strange rhythms were soothing. Kristie told us stories but what exactly she said I have no recollection of. What I remember most is her presence in the house. Somehow she filled the space so that the rooms became all the more mysterious and interesting for being empty.

When we went outside Zeus and Ned were sleeping under the hill-hoist. Kristie called Ned her sleeping beauty. She gave him a kiss and he opened his eyes and smiled. As we left on our raft the sun was setting and the clouds turned a brilliant orange.

School started again and as the term went on the days got warmer and longer. I still had not seen a dragonfly emerge from its nymph state and begin to fly, despite having spent plenty of time on the raft looking for one. Jonathan said it was just one of those things I'd get to do in the future and I had to be patient. I was studious at school but my weekends were devoted to rafting. The only exception being on some Sundays, when we'd have a family lunch, usually with both sets of grandparents, who, whenever they got together would talk about how

the world had changed from when they were young, but who couldn't agree on whether it was better now or before.

By the beginning of summer, Saphy, Tarak and I had our routines well established, rafting in and out of the small bays near to us, trekking through Swamp Park, or visiting Kristie and Ned. The warmer weather brought more people out on the lake, boating or windsurfing or fishing. Families came down to the grassy banks after work and had picnic dinners. Jonathan and Evie cooked a barbecue most nights and we would eat, sitting out on the deck, staring at the dark blue lake and the industrial outline of Port Kembla and the smokestacks that blew fire into the dark sky.

In December, Saphy, Tarak and Zeus began to stay every Friday night because their dad, a nurse, had taken on nightshift work at the hospital, working in emergency. One hot Friday night, after dinner, while Evie and Jonathan were doing the dishes, Saphy, Tarak and I strolled out into the cool of the garden. Cockatoo Conner and MP were sitting down at the foreshore.

'Hey Cockatoo!' I called. 'Hey MP!'

They were so engrossed in their conversation that they didn't turn around or acknowledge my call. I was about to open the gate and run to them, when Grace Conner stepped out from the shadow of a tree.

'Bel, leave them alone now,' she whispered, from her side of the fence.

'Sorry, Mrs Conner,' I whispered back. 'I was just saying hello.'

Grace stood in the half-light, looking across to her husband. She was a very handsome woman, with intense brown eyes and short dark hair.

‘Questions, questions, she won’t stop with those questions,’ Grace said.

‘What questions, Mrs Conner?’ I asked.

‘All the past,’ Grace said, shaking her head. ‘That woman doesn’t understand. Some things can’t be spoken about.’

Cockatoo and MP suddenly burst into laughter, and both lay back on the grass holding their stomachs.

‘Are you going to lock him out tonight?’ I asked.

‘I haven’t decided,’ Grace said. ‘But if I do, don’t you go giving him a bed.’

‘I won’t.’

Last time MP and Cockatoo had one of their big discussions they had stayed out talking most of the night and Grace—who disliked MP on account of her voice which Grace said was too like a mans—had locked Cockatoo out of the house. He’d slept at our house and the next morning, when Grace came over looking for him, Cockatoo told her he was having such a great time playing snap with me that he didn’t want to go home ever.

School broke up a week and a half before Christmas Day. Jonathan and Evie gave me their yearly lecture on how Father Christmas was a capitalist invention. They had never been inclined to pander to childhood fantasies and they loathed Father Christmas the way they loathed other unnecessary or false additions, like the package wrapping around apples in the supermarket, or the fat-free labelling on ice-cream.



‘The most important thing about Christmas,’ Evie said, ‘is to spend time with the people you love.’

‘Or failing that, spend it with your family,’ Jonathan said.

Evie punched him in the shoulder. ‘Jonathan, I’m trying to be serious.’

‘So am I!’

Tarak and Saphy and Zeus came over early on the day before Christmas. We’d decided to make Kristie and Ned a present and had settled upon a papier mâché sculpture. We still hadn’t mentioned our friends to our parents, so we had to make the present without being observed and deliver it without being discovered. As soon as Jonathan went into his office for one of his long writing sessions and Evie left to do last minute food shopping, we began. With glue and paper we slowly built a rough model that bore some resemblance to the house they were renovating, that felt to us like their house. We filled it with stick figures that were meant to depict them, ourselves, and Zeus.

‘Is it good?’ I asked, sitting back and contemplating our creation, which had turned out far more abstract than I’d imagined.

‘It’s better than good,’ said Saphy, with the kind of confidence he was to develop later in life.

We let our creation dry, wrapped it in red paper, and slid it into Tarak’s backpack. I called out to Jonathan that we were going rafting, and we ran down to foreshore before we could be stopped.

Poling past Swamp Park, delighted that we had escaped without our creation being discovered and needing explanation, Saphy spotted Kristie pacing through the trees.

‘Kristie!’ we chorused.

As we poled over to her, Zeus began barking. Kristie saw us and came down to the shore.

‘Hey guys, don’t come here today,’ she said, her face tight with worry.

‘What’s wrong?’ Saphy asked.

‘Nothing wrong, but not today, okay.’

We sat on the raft, staring at her. It was a warm day but she wore a jacket buttoned up to her neck, as if she was cold. She looked different. Tired, but more than that.

‘I’ll see you tomorrow, okay,’ she said.

‘It’s Christmas tomorrow,’ Tarak said.

‘Yeah.’

‘Are you going to see your Nan?’ Tarak asked.

Kristie stared out at the lake.

‘Or Ned’s dad?’ I added, realising with sudden horror that she had never said whether her Nan was alive. Nor had she ever mentioned her family.

‘You guys have a great Christmas, hey, and I hope you get lots of presents.’

Kristie’s mobile rang and she pulled it from her jacket pocket to check who was calling.

‘We made you a present,’ I said.

‘What?’ she said, as she clicked her mobile off.

‘I said, we made you a present.’

I didn’t quite get this new Kristie. Saphy unzipped Tarak’s backpack, took out our present and handed it to her, but he added one from his pocket that was wrapped in blue paper.

‘Don’t open them until tomorrow,’ Saphy said.

Kristie sat down on the bank and put the presents in front of her.

‘Thank you,’ she said, softly.

‘We made it,’ Tarak said.

‘I really appreciate it,’ she said, still looking at the parcels. ‘But you’d better go now. Someone’s coming.’

‘Is it the dodgy bloke?’ Tarak asked.

‘The dodgy bloke?’ Kristie asked, puzzled.

‘We can’t leave you with the dodgy bloke,’ I said.

‘Go on now,’ Kristie said. ‘I don’t want you here just now. I’ve got something I have to deal with. I’ll see you after Christmas. It’s never a good time for me. But you’ve made it so much better.’

‘Zeus could stay with you,’ Tarak said, and Zeus barked as if agreeing.

‘No, no,’ Kristie said. ‘Go on, I need you to go now.’

We had no option but to push off from the shore.

‘Have a good Christmas,’ Saphy called back across the water.

Kristie stood up, and taking the parcels with her, moved off into the trees.

Christmas Day I woke up and raced into Jonathan and Evie's room. They were both lying on the bed, snoring. But it was too loud snoring so I knew they were faking. I jumped on the bed and crawled between them.

'I know you're awake,' I said.

They both kept on snoring. Jonathan even scratched at his chest, and did a little turn and a roll over, like he was a gorilla.

'Academy award, Jonathan.'

Evie started to laugh.

'Got you,' I said.

She opened her eyes and started to tickle me.

'Can we do the tree now?' I asked, hoping that enough time had passed so they would not say I was disgracing myself and turning into the child of a capitalist.

Christmas day rolled along with ease. We had never, as a family, made a big fuss of presents. That year was no different. The morning was spent preparing food for our guests which included both sets of grandparents, my aunt, Louise, who was Evie's older sister, and who called everyone a loser, and my two uncles, Jonathan's two brothers, Dave and William, who didn't speak to each other except at Christmas. Lunch was barbecued seafood and all went well except that Dave kept on flirting with Louise, and offered to take her to a restaurant on Boxing Day where they served fresh lobster, which annoyed William, who had once taken her

out. Jonathan said it was that annoyance that caused William to drink too much, and that was why he had to lie down in my room in the middle of the afternoon, not because Dave had given him a too-hard brotherly punch. And my grandmother said she did not cry because of the too-hard brotherly punch but because she always cried on Christmas day because she was so happy to see me still a child and not yet a disappointment.

After Christmas day, Tarak, Sapphy and I resumed our rafting. When it was just us three and Zeus, we stayed close to the foreshore, but when we were with Kristie, we did all sorts of things we weren't supposed to. One time we rafted right down to the ocean and ran all the way along the beach. Another time, Kristie announced she was taking us somewhere special. We poled our way along the foreshore until we came to a rocky beach hemmed in by clay cliffs.

'Why are there no houses?' I asked, looking up to the vacant land on top of the cliffs.

'Used to be a power station but they've demolished it,' Kristie said. 'See the power lines. They go all the way up to Mount Kembla.'

We climbed the clay cliffs and walked along until we came to some trees. Kristie stopped and made Tarak put Zeus on a leash. She picked her way through the tall grass, staring intensely at the ground, and after a few steps she gave a yelp and knelt down. We came up next to her and saw a small deep green plant growing flat to the ground. It was shaped exactly like the ribbon rosettes I'd seen given out on sports day.

‘What is it?’ Saphy asked, disappointed.

‘It’s a native orchid. In winter these leaves will wither but by then a long stem will have grown and by next spring there’ll be small green hooded orchids all along it,’ she said.

‘How do you know that?’ Saphy asked.

She touched him on the nose. ‘You think I don’t know things?’

He blushed like he always did when Kristie touched him. ‘No.’

‘I was doing a study of them, before I—’ and then she stopped and looked at the sky, ‘before I decided that uni wasn’t for me.’

This was the first time she’d mentioned study of any kind.

‘Why was it not for you?’ I asked.

‘That’s a long complicated story and it might have to stay untold for the time being.’

This is how she sometimes spoke. As though life was full of mysteries that we shouldn’t always try to unravel.

‘We’ll come back and check on these orchids in winter, and then spring,’ she said, looking fondly at the plant. ‘There’s only five places in the world you can find them, and this is one of those places.’

We were late home for lunch that day and Jonathan asked where we’d been.

‘Sorry Jonathan, we lost track of the time,’ Saphy said.

This wasn’t a lie as Saphy hadn’t been wearing his watch and we’d simply guessed at the time. My silence to my parents about Kristie and Ned’s

existence is a puzzle. But I knew, without really understanding why, that if I told them about my new friends it would be the end of rafting, or, at least, of seeing Kristie. It was like understanding a word in a sentence because of its context and yet not knowing its exact meaning.

Apart from a niggling worry at my deception, the rest of the summer holidays were happy times. Not all our days spent with Kristie and Ned were blissful but we adapted to their infinite moods and took them in our stride, much like the weather. Sometimes, when we visited their place, Kristie would come to the door and say, 'We're not in today.' And we'd know to leave them alone. Other times, Kristie would be out on the lawn, scraping old bricks back to reuse. It's true that we saw less of Ned. He was often up on the roof, or inside the house, and we'd hear him hammering but he'd not come out while we were there. When he did come out he'd play with Zeus, promising to help train him, but never finding the time. Although we noticed that Kristie occasionally had a big bruise on her arm, or a cut lip, she always made light of it. A couple of times we saw Kristie at Swamp Park, she'd be there when we arrived, lying beneath the fig tree, reading a book, or sleeping. Sometimes she waved us away before we got near the bank, saying the dodgy bloke was coming. We didn't know who the dodgy bloke was or how he figured in their lives, but he grew in our imaginations.

In February we went back to school. The weather was moody and there were storms every week. A day might begin with a blast of heat but late in the afternoon the clouds would squash into dark bunches and down would fall large

drops of rain. Often there'd be low loud rumbles of thunder followed by quick sharp cracks of lightning. It was an altogether tempestuous time as though the weather was a person demanding to be noticed.

The days got shorter and there were less and less dragonflies on the water, until there came a time when it was hard to find one at all. Summer was over and I would now have to wait until next summer to watch a dragonfly nymph emerge as an adult. And yet, this was a small disappointment compared with the excitement that each day offered.

One night in March, as I was eating dinner with Evie and Jonathan, there came a sudden violent rainfall that hammered our tin roof so loudly we stopped eating and ran to the windows. Little pellets of ice began to fall on the ground.

'Hail!' I shouted with glee.

The power flickered off but came back on shortly after. By then the ground was covered with white ice. The hail stopped and the power went off again but the rain kept pelting down. We finished eating by candlelight and went to bed early with the rain drumming on the roof. I awoke in the night. The rain had stopped but the wind was hissing around the house and lifting up bits of the tin roof and banging it down again. The hissing was like cats squealing, and it hurt my ears. All the windows were rattling. I pulled my covers tight around me. When I could bear it no longer I ran into Evie and Jonathan's room and climbed up on the bed and crawled in between them. Evie had a pillow over her ears. She gave me a pillow and told me to do the same. I lay there, facing her, pillow on my ear,



Jonathan's hand on my hip, Evie holding my hand, and only then, with their breathing constant and reassuring, did I fall asleep again.

The next morning, when we went outside, there were tree branches everywhere. Sheets of crumpled tin from MP and Lily's garden shed were scattered across our lawn. One sheet was jammed into the fence. Evie's potted plants that she was growing for her Hill of Peace community project, were all tipped over. Some had rolled away and the twig branches of the small trees were bent or broken. Out on the street a river was running down the gutters. Cockatoo Conner came out of his house and joined us on the road.

'Something's been stirring,' he said, staring at the sky.

The following weekend Saphy and Tarak came over to our place to help Evie re-pot the trees for her project. Jonathan sat on the deck and kept us entertained by reading out bits of the Saturday paper. He read out a story about a skeleton that had been discovered shortly after the big storm by two locals out on a walk.

'Gruesome,' Evie said.

'No, it's an ancient skeleton,' Jonathan said.

'How old?' Saphy asked.

'Doesn't say. But an archaeological dig has been set up and Ray Conner is one of the consultants.'

'Can we go see it?' I asked.

'Can we?' Saphy and Tarak chorused.

'You won't be able to see anything,' Evie said.

But we persisted with our plea and eventually Evie relented and said she would take us.

The beach where the skeleton had been found was north, but when we arrived the esplanade was choc-a-bloc with cars, so we parked a few streets away. It was windy and misty by the ocean. Large waves rolled in and crashed onto the shore, splashing white frothy water onto the sand. Sapphy, Tarak and I ran on ahead to the excavation site. We had Zeus with us on a leash. There was a big tent on the sand covering the actual dig and a lot of surfies standing around with their boards. We saw Cockatoo Conner come out of the tent and call to an old man, who was standing down by the water's edge, staring at the sea. The old man was dressed all in black and wearing a baseball cap. On the back of his black leather jacket was an emblem of the Aboriginal flag. He didn't turn back to Cockatoo immediately, but when he did he turned slowly, looking up and down the beach, as though there was something he was trying to see. The wind blew up sand near to him, and the waves rushed up to where he was standing, lapping at his boots. He held his cheek to the wind, as though he was feeling it on his skin, the way Evie sometimes put soft material to her cheek. Then he walked to the tent at a slow steady pace. We called out to Cockatoo and he waved to us before he ushered the old man inside.

'See,' Evie said when she caught up with us. 'Can't see anything.'

But I thought I had seen something, although I couldn't explain exactly what.

That night Sapphy, Tarak and I sat on the front fence waiting for Cockatoo to return from the dig. When we saw his red ute turn into the street we ran towards it.

‘Hey Cockatoo,’ I called, as he stepped onto the pavement.

‘Is it a man or woman skeleton?’ Sapphy asked, excitedly.

Cockatoo stood there, jingling his keys and eyeing Sapphy. ‘A Karadji man,’ he said, eventually.

‘What’s that?’ Sapphy asked.

‘A clever man.’

‘How can you tell he’s a clever man?’ I asked, imagining a brain inside the skeleton that had somehow stayed intact.

‘What’s buried with him,’ Cockatoo said.

‘How old is he?’ Tarak asked.

‘Old.’

‘Older than MP?’ Tarak asked.

‘Older than MP,’ Cockatoo said, grinning. ‘Could be five thousand years old, maybe more.’

It was difficult to imagine anything being that old and I said so.

‘But your dragonflies are three million years old,’ Cockatoo said. ‘This land here, this land you’re standing on, it’s old Bel, it’s ancient.’

The next afternoon, Tarak, Sapphy and Zeus, came to pick me up and we went out on the raft, searching the shore for bones that might have been washed up in the

storm. Finding none we lay back on the wooden slats, drifting, and staring up at the clouds.

‘Do clouds get old?’ I asked.

‘They’re just made of water,’ Saphy said.

‘Does water get old?’

‘I think it must.’

At Swamp Park, when we began walking through the trees, a flock of Cockatoos landed on nearby branches, screeching their mad high-pitched screech but by the time we’d climbed to the top of our fig tree they were gone. We lay on different branches, talking about all the old things in the world.

‘I’m never getting old,’ Saphy said.

‘You will one day,’ Tarak said.

‘Everyone does,’ I added.

‘Not everyone,’ Saphy said. ‘My mum didn’t get old.’

In the last month of autumn we had school holidays again. Even though our families were now relaxed about our rafting, and considered us experts, we were still bound by promises—which we made and broke—to stay close to the foreshore. Somehow, we succeeded in under-reporting the events of each day to exclude anything that seemed counter to our agreement. In this way we convinced ourselves that we were not actually lying. On the fifth day of the holiday, when I ran down to meet Tarak and Saphy, I saw that Zeus was not with them.

‘Where is he?’ I asked, climbing onto the raft.

‘In the laundry,’ said Tarak, miserably.

‘He bailed up Mr Zasmani when he was bringing Nada home from hospital,’ added Saphy.

The Zasmani family lived at the end of our street. The month before, Nada, who was six, had been playing on the road and had been run over by a car. Luckily the driver wasn’t going too fast. Nada survived but had an arm injury. The whole street had anticipated her arrival home from hospital.

‘Why did Zeus bail him up?’

‘If Zeus thinks someone is scared of him, then he goes for them,’ Saphy said. ‘It’s like he becomes whatever they think he is.’

‘Dad says he’s in disgrace,’ Tarak added.

We were too despondent to think straight. Rafting without Zeus was not the same. We poled along the foreshore and pulled up at Swamp Park. We were now inveterate scavengers for offerings from the rising and falling tides and Swamp Park was our default destination. We tied off our raft, and, in disgruntled moods, took off through the trees. Saphy said he wanted to go to the dark grove at the back of the park, but Tarak and I wanted to climb the fig tree.

‘We’re going to the grove,’ Saphy said, and started walking.

‘You think you’re the boss, but no one made you the boss,’ I called after him.

Tarak and I had begun to walk the other way when Saphy came running back.

‘Hey,’ Saphy whispered. ‘Hear that?’

I thought he was making up a new imaginary game and was annoyed that here he was again, acting as if Tarak and I didn't have ideas of our own. I started to complain but Saphy clapped his hands over my mouth.

'Listen,' he whispered.

We all listened. And then I heard it—a faint moan. I lifted Saphy's hand away from my mouth.

'What do you think it is?' I whispered.

'Animal?' Saphy replied.

Tarak had crept closer to me.

'A dog?' he suggested.

The moaning came from some trees further along the twisting path. We crept towards the sound. As the path straightened out I saw two legs sticking out from a bush, but only when I was standing right in front of the man did I realise it was Ned. He had blood all over his face and was lying on the ground, caught up in lantana. We crouched around him. His eyes were open, but they had that glazed look, like when someone is drunk.

'What happened, Ned?' I asked.

He turned towards my voice and grunted.

'You look bad,' Saphy said. 'Shall we get an ambulance?'

Ned seemed to come awake at Saphy's question and he shook his head vigorously. He leant up on his elbows, and slowly, grunting all the time, he stood. But when he took a step, he stumbled.

'We'll take you home on the raft,' Saphy said.

Ned took a few more steps, but then stood, drifting back and forwards, like a tree swaying in the wind. Saphy and I grabbed hold of an arm each.

‘We’ll help you, Ned,’ I said.

Slowly we walked along the path. When we reached the raft, Ned fell onto it, water splashing up around him. In the sunlight we saw what a pulpy mess Ned’s face was. His moaning became more insistent. Saphy and I began to pole, as fast as we could, along the foreshore. A cool wind blew across the lake and the trees went shush, shush, like when paper rubs on paper.

‘Not long now, Ned,’ I said, when we had his place in sight.

Saphy jumped onto the bank and I threw him our tie-off rope and he hauled us in closer. We helped Ned off the raft and he staggered across the grass, into his backyard, up the stairs, and into the kitchen, stopping every now and then to lean on Saphy and me.

The kitchen had new benches and a new sink and the walls had been painted. There was a table and chairs set in the centre of the room but no lights had been installed and, as it was a grey day, the room was dim. Ned slumped onto a chair. I ran down the hallway and on through the lounge-room and into the bedroom, calling out to Kristie. Some of her clothes were laid out on an unmade mattress on the floor, but no Kristie. It was even darker down this end of the house. A chilly breeze blew through the room and Kristie’s makeshift curtains floated up into the air creating all sorts of shadows.

I bolted back to the kitchen.

‘She’s not here, Ned.’

Ned was wiping his face with a towel. He had a large cut that ran across his nose.

‘Thanks,’ Ned said. ‘I’ll be okay, now.’

He managed a smile.

‘Did someone bash you?’ Sapphy asked.

‘Something like that,’ Ned said.

‘Do you want us to call the police?’

Ned laughed. ‘Please Sapphy, don’t go all cop show on me. I’m fine.’

‘Was it the dodgy bloke?’ Tarak asked.

Ned looked down at him. ‘Dodgy bloke?’ he asked, shaking his head and searching in his pockets for his Drum. There was a half-used packet on the kitchen bench, and he rose to get it and began rolling a cigarette. And then he remembered something and began frantically searching in his pockets.

‘Shit,’ he said.

‘What’s wrong?’ I asked.

‘My wallet.’

He stopped and stared at his cigarette. He stood there for ages, just staring.

‘You okay, Ned?’ Sapphy asked.

He looked up, as if he’d forgotten we were there.

‘You kids go along now,’ he said.

We went out into the daylight. Back on the raft we discussed what might have happened. The dodgy bloke had bashed him up. The dodgy bloke had something on Kristie. He had something on Kristie and Ned.



‘He could be blackmailing them,’ Saphy said.

‘I don’t think it’s that,’ I said, as though that was a really dumb idea, although I was not sure what blackmailing was.

‘What happened to his wallet then?’ Saphy asked.

‘He could have lost it when he fell,’ I said.

‘Let’s go look for it,’ Tarak suggested.

The sight of Ned’s face had scared us, but also, it had thrilled us. We wanted to do something to help and searching for his wallet seemed a good idea. We poled back to Swamp Park, tied up the raft, and sprinted along the path to where we had found Ned. We pulled back the itchy tough lantana and looked for his wallet. There was a chip bag but nothing else. Still on the hunt, we tramped off the path into the nearby shadowy grove and were edging our way around the stagnant pond, when we saw, wedged into some bushes, Kristie’s suitcase. We stared at it, confused.

‘Should we take it back?’ I whispered.

‘We should leave it here in case she comes for it,’ Saphy said.

‘What about the dodgy bloke?’ Tarak said. ‘He might take it.’

‘What if the dodgy bloke bashed up Ned?’ I said. ‘He might have bashed up Kristie.’

‘Let’s take the suitcase back and tell Ned,’ Saphy said, changing his mind.

The suitcase wasn’t as heavy as last time. When we lifted it up we saw that one wheel was missing. We dragged it along the path and loaded it onto the raft,

sliding it into the centre. Tarak kept hold of it while Sapphy and I poled back to Ned's place. Lumpy clouds had assembled above the lake foreshore and now shot slivers of rain onto the red-tiled roofs of the houses, but by the time we clambered ashore, it had stopped. We negotiated unloading the suitcase. Sapphy and I carried it across the wet grass, but when we heard Kristie's voice, we left the suitcase at the back gate, and sprinted across the lawn, up the stairs, and in through the back door.

'Hi Kristie,' I called, as we ran into the kitchen.

Ned and Kristie were leaning against the wall. Ned was pushing his body into Kristie's. He had one hand on her chest. She had one arm raised in the air, and he had hold of her wrist. It was like they were kissing but not quite.

Tarak darted over to Kristie. 'We found your suitcase.'

Ned's face was twisted up, like he was in pain and the veins in his neck were pulsing. He pressed Kristie's wrist against the wall. Her hand was shaking, and I saw then that her whole body was shaking too.

'Ned,' Kristie whispered.

She and Ned were staring at each other, and it was as if one of them would fall if the other took their eyes away.

Tarak tugged on Ned's tee shirt. 'We had to tie Zeus up in the laundry.'

'Not now,' Ned said.

'But can you teach me how to train him not to bail people up?'

Ned kept hold of Kristie.

'He bit Mr Zasmani,' Tarak added.

It was then I saw a brown leather wallet lying on the floor.

‘Hey Ned, is that your wallet?’ I asked, running over to it.

I picked it up, carried it over to Ned and held it out. It felt heavy, like it was stuffed full of money. No wonder Ned was so worried about it. But surprisingly he didn’t look at the wallet. Instead, he kept staring at Kristie for what seemed like ages. No one spoke and small sounds, like the door creak as the wind blew and the buzzing of a fly, became loud. Then suddenly and dramatically, like he was throwing away something he hated, Ned let go of Kristie’s wrist. She slumped against the wall. Ned glanced down at me and I handed him the wallet. He walked over to a chair and sat down, tossing the wallet on the table. He slumped forward and put his head between his hands.

Kristie had not stopped staring at him, but now her body became rigid. Something was happening to Ned and Kristie, it was as if a current of energy was transforming their bodies, even their faces, so they were becoming different people.

It was Saphy who spoke next.

‘You want to come rafting with us, Kristie?’

His words hung in the air. We three had our eyes on Kristie but she didn’t take her eyes off Ned.

Saphy said it again, only firmer this time. ‘Do you want to come rafting, Kristie?’

‘Yes,’ she said.

Her voice was sharp, like she didn't want to come but was forced to. She walked over to the table, opened Ned's wallet, took out some notes and thumped the wallet back down, the sound so loud that Tarak and I jumped. She stared at Ned's bent head and then out at the lake. The room felt harsh and mean. I wanted to run from it but couldn't, not unless Kristie came with me.

Then, like when air gets let out of a balloon, Kristie's body sank.

'I'm going for a raft ride,' she said, sadly.

She bent down and kissed the top of Ned's head. He didn't look up but his whole body was trembling.

'Come on, kids,' Kristie said, as she walked out the door.

Outside, everything was still and grey, like on mornings after heavy rain when the birds stop singing. At the back gate, Kristie and Sapphy picked up her suitcase and carried it down to the raft. We scrambled on, all bunching around the case, and Sapphy used his oar to push us away from the bank.

'Where do you want to go?' Sapphy asked, nervously.

'How long before you have to go back?' Kristie asked.

'We don't do that any more,' Sapphy said.

This was a lie but neither Tarak nor I contradicted him.

'Let's go over to the park near the bridge,' Kristie said.

We rafted along the edge of the lake, drifting across green weed beds. The clouds, still dark and ominous, were now racing across the lake.

'What do you see?' I asked Kristie.

'Rain,' she said.

‘What else?’

‘Change.’

We poled to the jetty near the park, tied up the raft and walked to the kiosk. Kristie bought us an ice cream each and left us sitting on a bench near to the pond while she went to make a call. She stood leaning against a tree, talking rapidly into her mobile. I walked closer to the pond then, and squatted down, studying the water and rocks and reeds. When Kristie put her mobile away, she didn’t return to us immediately but stood breathing in and out, the way people do after running fast. Yet when she came back, she sat with one leg up on the bench, the other dangling down, as though she had no worries, as though this was a day much like any other. She licked her ice cream and told us that when she was little her mum used to make ice cream.

‘Does she still make it?’ I asked, wondering what her mum was like.

Kristie glanced up at the sky. ‘Maybe,’ she said.

‘Zeus went for Mr Zasmani,’ Tarak said.

‘You should take him to training sessions at that Oak Park place,’ Kristie replied.

‘Ned said he’d help me.’

‘Better you take him yourself, Tarak, don’t you think?’ Kristie said, gently.

This is when I’m sure I saw a dragonfly emerge from its nymph body. It had crawled up out of the water and onto a rock. When I saw it, its head had split from its old skin and it was trying to pull its long abdomen out. It took ages and a

lot of effort, but once it was done, it settled on the rock and spread its wings to let them dry. There it sat, wings fluttering in the grey light. After a time, it took off and flew across the water. Each stage of its movement I remember exactly. But Sapphy says this never happened. He says that weeks later we all discovered an old nymph casing on a rock, over at Mullet Creek, and I've simply made up the emerging part, and put it with Kristie's leaving as an unconscious reaction to the events that occurred. Tarak says we're both wrong. He says we never saw a nymph casing or a dragonfly emerging from one, but remembers instead, that on the day after Kristie left, we three, too miserable to raft, sat watching a television documentary on dragonflies.

What we all agree on is that when Kristie had finished talking to Tarak about Zeus, she said the words we'd been dreading.

'I'm going to head off now.'

Sapphy was staring at the ground. 'When will you be back?'

'Don't think I will be back,' she said, reaching out and touching his cheek.

'You know why, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'I don't,' I said.

Kristie leant down and kissed me on my forehead.

'That's cool, Bel, but when you're a bit more grown up you'll know, and then you'll wish you didn't.'

I took hold of her hand. She kissed Sapphy and Tarak, and then squeezing my hand, let it go.

‘I need to go far away so you’ll have to keep an eye on my orchids for me, Bel,’ she said. ‘Will you do that?’

‘Yes.’

She opened a zip on her suitcase and took out Sapphy’s mum’s watch and held it out to him.

‘I said it was a gift,’ Sapphy said, crossly.

Kristie continued to hold out the watch and Sapphy continued to shake his head, more and more furiously. Finally Kristie put the watch on her wrist, bent down and kissed Sapphy again. ‘Thank you, Sapphy, it’s a very precious gift.’

Sapphy still wouldn’t look at her.

Tarak stood up then. ‘Is this a big change?’ he asked Kristie.

‘Yes, it is,’ Kristie said. ‘But not all changes are good, Tarak.’

She stood there as if not wanting to go. I felt a pain in my chest.

Everything hurt. I didn’t move. Kristie touched the back of my head, softly, and then picked up her suitcase and dragged it across the glistening grass to the road.

Some people say that we live our lives as stories, that we each make up a narrative about ourselves and tell it to others, to make sense of the past, or to imagine the future. Stories, and our capacity to believe them, are what make us human. This is our uniqueness. This is what sets us apart from other animals. But, if it’s true that we live our lives as stories, it’s also true that we live our lives as untold stories.

There is so much more to know about each other that we grasp for, but never quite catch hold of. Perhaps too, there are certain events or feelings or emotions that are

not for being made into a story, but are instead for keeping inside. Perhaps this is our mystery and the attempt to understand that mystery is the stronger deeper dimension that some call spiritual. But one thing I think cannot be disputed, and that is that our imaginations help us in our attempts to fill the gaps and narrate those experiences, birth and death among them but also other great transformations,

such

as

love,

for

which

there

are

told

and

untold

stories.



1796

by Will Martin

*Sunday, 27th March ...*

Stick insects hover above the water. The Indians on the shore are shouting.

‘Are you for landing?’ the Lieutenant asks.

I am *not* for it. Yet they’ll think me cowardly if I say so.

‘Good,’ Mr Bass says, as if I have answered.

He jumps from *Thumb* and begins to haul the boat over to the sandy shore.

The Lieutenant and I join him. The Indians circle us.

‘Bado?’ Mr Bass asks, his voice authoritative.

I take hold of the barica.

Dilba points to the lagoon.

The Lieutenant hits the gunwale. ‘No,’ he says. ‘We must stay with our boat.’

Dilba eyes the lagoon, runs along the sand, pointing and turning back, jabbering, but too on the hop for me to follow. I eye the shimmering blue lagoon and the low purpling hills that circle it. I stand away to get a better look-to and an old Indian, with skin like tanned leather, grips my arm and hauls me into some shrubby trees before I can holler. His hair has human teeth in it. This is it. This is it. I will soon meet my end. A few steps into the trees, I stumble, and when I look up the old man is pointing to a puddle, almost a pond, but not grown enough for

that name. He smiles showing the pink of his mouth. Relief. It is water he is showing me. He has no thought for anything else. The teeth, I now see, are kangaroo teeth, like I have seen Indians wear around Port Jackson.

I kneel on the sand and put my lips to the water to test for salt. I've had worse at the Tank Stream. I drink in all I can. The old man sits next to me. Leaves dance in the air. The old man touches the earth. Runs his hand through the dirt. Pats it. But what he says I can not make out.

I fetch a rough stone and rub down the barica, sluice it with water and fill it as far as I can. The old man babbles in his own tongue. I talk to him with the Port Jackson speak I learnt from Baneelong but he does not understand.

'We're looking for a river.' I make my arms bend, like the flow of a river. 'Swoosh, swoosh,' I say.

The old man pats the earth.

'No, no, river,' I say, but know it is no good.

When we come out of the shrubs the Lieutenant and Mr Bass are in a huddle with the Indians. The old man lopes over to them. I follow but get seized by a branch and stop to untangle myself. The Lieutenant eyes me, shouts my name. Mr Bass strides over, runs his hand through my hair.

'Will, don't scare us like that again!'

They are both by my side, pleased to see me.

'I was getting water,' I say, holding up the barica.

The Lieutenant drinks first. He swallows in big gulps. Then Mr Bass takes his fill.

‘If water has been close by all this time why has Dilba been luring us to the lagoon?’ the Lieutenant whispers.

Mr Bass considers this. ‘To meet a darker purpose?’

Now is the time to say the old man showed me the water. But I do not. Because the Indian talk rises too loud and my old fears return.

Mr Bass drinks again. ‘Good work, Will,’ he murmurs.

‘Yes, Will, good man,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘Stow the barica in *Thumb*,’ Mr Bass says. ‘We’ll dry the gunpowder, then depart.’

We walk together to the boat. The Indians eye our every move. The Lieutenant takes hold of the powder horns. Mr Bass retrieves the muskets. I stow the barica then gather up the twine. The oar needs repairing. I hear the sea roar and wish we were back on the ocean. The Lieutenant spreads the gunpowder out to dry. Mr Bass kneels to clean a musket but the Indians begin to holler. Some run at Mr Bass, waving their spears. I take hold of the oar but Mr Bass stills me with his eyes. Slowly, he lays the musket down. This quiets the Indians. But still they hold their spears high and their eyes shoot back and forth, from Mr Bass, to the musket. Mr Bass calls for the twine and oar. I take them to him. He lays the oar across his knee and begins to wrap twine around the split wood. I stare at the Indians with their raised spears. Hear only my breathing. Then, birds in the shrubs, their faint twittering. I feel an ant crawl across my foot. The Indians lower their weapons.

One of the Indians, no older than me as he has no beard, comes closer and sits on the sand, observing Mr Bass's task. Another sits next to the first, picks up the ball of twine and threads it out as Mr Bass twists it around the oar. The Lieutenant calls me over and I sprinkle the gunpowder onto a dry cloth.

'This is the shock of the Indians,' the Lieutenant whispers. 'Savage one moment, child the next. Keep alert, Will, keep alert.'

But an easier mood settles upon our temporary camp. A long-bearded man now points to Dilba's short beard. Dilba, smiling, jabbars how the Lieutenant has snipped it. Dilba pushes through the circle of Indians surrounding Mr Bass to get to the Lieutenant who is wiping dry the inside of the powder horn.

Dilba speaks fast. I can pick out some words. Yarrin, the word for beard. Dewwarra, the word for hair.

Boodyerre, boodyerre,' Dilba says, miming the scissors cutting his beard.

'You have become famous, Matthew,' Mr Bass says. 'These men want their beards cut.'

The Lieutenant walks to *Thumb* to collect the scissors. But I find myself a sturdy stick. These Indians are warriors. I'm ready to fight if this beard-cutting be a ruse. To dare is to do. To dare is to do. I say this to myself over and over.

The first of these warriors sits on a log on the sand. It is the old man who showed me the water. His white-grey beard is an arrested waterfall upon his chest. He is a grandfatherly warrior and would have many a savage tale to tell. All the Indians eye the barbering. The Lieutenant grips the old man's beard. The old man, spying the blades, starts back and falls from the log. The Indians all start shouting.

I raise my stick. Dilba, knowing what scissors are, picks the old man up, jabbering to him all the time. The old man raises his eyebrows, nods and grunts, then sits again on the log. He stares straight into the eyes of the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant takes hold of the old man's beard and begins to snip. The Indians murmur. Soon shouting, like a soldier's huzzah, accompanies each snip.

'Mr Hogarth would find this man a fascinating subject,' calls the Lieutenant.

'What would he make of him?' Mr Bass asks. 'Could he divine his nature?'

'Better than I,' the Lieutenant says. 'Although the void between us might be too great, even for Hogarth.'

The sun beats down. The sand is hot. Insects nip at my skin. Indian dogs sniff at my feet. The first beard cut is finished. The Indians surround the barbered man and touch his shortened beard. A second Indian steps forward. The Lieutenant snips a large chunk of this second beard and holds it to his own chin. The Indians laugh.

One Indian, a tall man with many teeth twisted through his hair, and with muscles as tight as a barrel, now reaches out and touches the Lieutenant's forehead. The Lieutenant starts back, gripping the scissors. I watch the Indian who has wiped sweat from the Lieutenant's brow. He peers at the moist drops on his fingertips. His own forehead is covered in fish oil. It is the difference that occupies his interest. How strange it is that he finds us curious when to us it is the other way around.

The Lieutenant continues, one beard cut after another, hair as well, until nine men have been barbered. But the tall Indian's interest has bothered the Lieutenant and he calls me over.

'Will, pack that powder now,' he says. 'Wet or dry I think we must leave. They are friendly, but altogether too friendly.'

On the hop I filter the gunpowder back into the horns and stow them in *Thumb*. Mr Bass brings the muskets and mended oar to the boat. He does it quickly and the Indians, amazed at their new beards, do not see. Except for Dilba who spies us packing and comes towards us, again pointing to the lagoon. Mr Bass shakes his head. The Lieutenant gives me the scissors to stow. Dilba takes hold of the Lieutenant's arm.

'Lagoon,' he says, having already learnt our name for it.

The Lieutenant shakes free his arm and walks away. Dilba stares after him.

'Why is he so violent in his request?' the Lieutenant whispers to Mr Bass. 'We must put them off, George, in a friendly way, and make our escape without them suspecting.'

'Tomorrow, we will visit the lagoon,' Mr Bass calls to Dilba, feigning jolliness.

The Lieutenant points downstream to a green bank. He puts his folded hands to the side of his face to show that we must sleep.

'We must rest, very tired, we go to that green bank further down there.'

Dilba turns and speaks to the Indians. I cannot pick out any words.

‘The red waistcoat,’ Mr Bass says. ‘They still think I’m a soldier and are frightened of the muskets.’

‘I’ll distract them while you get going,’ the Lieutenant whispers, and walks across the sand.

Mr Bass and I slide *Tom Thumb* away from the shore. Dilba begins shaking his head at the green bank. He raises his voice, shouting. What could he object to? It is like any other bank. Mr Bass and I push *Thumb* into the deeper part of the stream.

‘Matthew, time to depart!’ Mr Bass calls.

The Lieutenant wades through the shallows and we climb in. Mr Bass is at the helm. The Lieutenant and I take up oars.

‘Keep a determined countenance, Will,’ the Lieutenant orders.

We begin to pull but four Indians splash into the water and climb into *Thumb*. They each have spears. More Indians surround the boat taking hold of the gunwales. I pull, fearing for my life, but soon see it is the pushing of the natives that is getting us through the water at speed. The Indians are whooping and begin to sing. Mr Bass eyes me and then hums a sailor’s shanty.

‘Sing, Will,’ Mr Bass calls out, sternly.

Soon we are all singing and such a savage clamouring I’ve never heard. There is much laughter, but there is *too* much laughter. Shall we get out of this alive?

When we are near the green bank, one of the younger Indians, who has climbed into *Thumb* with us, snatches Mr Bass’s hat and drops it on his own head.

He has no bone through his nose and no teeth in his hair, but his expression is all wildness as he jumps from the boat and splashes his way to the muddy shore.

‘My hat,’ Mr Bass shouts.

The wild Indian turns, raises his spear. My old friend, who showed me the water, shouts at the younger man, who shouts back. I let the oar rest and grip my stick. Is this it? Is this it? The young Indian splashes toward us, fierceness in his countenance. I plant my feet, steady goes. But the wild man stops. I don’t know how to explain his actions, but he takes the hat from his head and tosses it into the boat.

‘Shove off!’ Mr Bass shouts.

The Lieutenant pushes away from the shore and we begin to pull but the Indians, still pretending good spirits, begin to haul the boat to the bank.

‘Stop there!’ the Lieutenant yells.

Mr Bass joins in, calling the Indians to stop. ‘Halt! Halt!’

But the Indians, intent on what they’re doing, or shouting so loudly that they themselves can not hear, do not stop. My old friend sees our red faces. He takes his hand from the gunwale and yells. The Indians, hearing him, immediately stop hauling and stand back.

‘Pull, Will, pull,’ the Lieutenant yells and we pull away.

Mr Bass takes up one of the muskets, even though it isn’t working, just for the look. The men at the green bank stand in the shallows, eyes wide. Mr Bass keeps his musket cocked. They dare not follow. We pull towards the sea.

‘That was well suffered,’ Mr Bass says.



'We're not out of it yet, George.'

'Very nearly.'

'They have the numbers. They have the spears,' the Lieutenant says.

'If they wanted they could kill us all but they do not and the why escapes me.' Mr Bass lowers his musket.

'They have no definite plan,' the Lieutenant says. 'No strategy.'

The Lieutenant and I keep pulling. The Indians watch us. They do not move. We round a bend and they are gone.

'What was their laughing about?' I ask Mr Bass.

'Indian mood shifts like the weather,' the Lieutenant says.

We ride the stream to where it meets the sea. The waves are crashing towards us. The noise thunderous. Whoosh goes a wave, whoosh goes another.

'We cannot pull past the waves,' Mr Bass shouts.

'Anchor,' calls the Lieutenant.

We boat our oars, lift the stone anchor and push it into the sea just before where the surf breaks across a sandbar. The white foamy waves keep coming at us. It is fifteen yards on either side to the banks. But the water around us is deep thanks to the current running out from the stream.

'We're safe enough,' calls the Lieutenant.

We sit there, wet through, rocking in our boat. The Lieutenant and Mr Bass begin to clean and rub dry the muskets, both working at a feverish pace. We will need arms if the Indians come for us again. I eye the white sand and the scrubby trees. Gulls flap on the shore. My breath is slowing but then I see them.

'Here they come!' I shout.

Dilba and some of the men are tramping around the bend, along the sand.

They wade across the stream and stand on the point to the south of us. I cannot see Dilba's friend.

Dilba puts his hand to his mouth. 'LAGOON?' he calls.

'Why is he still at us?' I ask.

The Lieutenant shouts, 'YES, YES! IF THE WIND AND SURF DOESN'T ABATE, THEN WE SHALL.'

'LAGOON!' shouts Dilba.

'WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN,' Mr Bass calls.

Several times the Lieutenant, Mr Bass and Dilba shout in this way, like noisy magpies saying goodnight.

'Coing Burregoolah. COING BURREGOOLAH!' Mr Bass finally calls.

It is the Port Jackson speak for the sun setting.

'Let's hope that gives us some time,' Mr Bass says.

Why does Dilba insist we go to the lagoon? If I was to kill someone I would not flag it so.

'What is at the lagoon?' I ask Mr Bass.

'Death,' Mr Bass says to me. 'Nothing more than death.'

Mr Bass and the Lieutenant clean the muskets while I keep watch. We bob on the sea. The Indians on the point south of us sit on the ground. The sun drops behind the hills. The sea flickers with fading light and the clouds redden. Just

when I think we are safe, from the north I see five Indians come out from the scrub and splash into the water.

‘Look there,’ I warn.

The men wade toward us. What to do? I still have my stick and pull it out by my side. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant lift up their muskets. The Lieutenant has powder in his. The waves are choppy from the surf. We bounce up and down. The Indians make good time and the seawater is soon frothing at their sides. One of them looks like the man we traded fish with, Dilba’s friend, who did not give his name, but as there are five coming for us, with water splashing between them, and our boat in motion, I can not be sure.

The Lieutenant twists his body, raises his musket, and aims.

Mr Bass guides him. ‘Wait, wait.’

The Lieutenant holds his musket steady.

‘Fire!’ shouts Mr Bass.

The Lieutenant shoots. Boom! Gun powder smokes above the men’s heads. The Indians holler and wave their arms. The Lieutenant makes to reload his gun but it jams.

‘They’re going,’ I shout, as the Indians turn and splash to the bank.

When they reach the shore they don’t look back but disappear into the scrub.

‘Excellent execution, Matthew,’ Mr Bass says.

‘I only had one shot,’ the Lieutenant says, his face drained of colour.

To the south of us, Dilba and the other Indians raise their fists. Some walk back into the scrub. Others stand and stare. Then, slowly, the rest of the men leave the beach, until only Dilba is left. He stands, lonely on the shore, eyeing us. When the light is almost gone he too turns and walks into the scrub.

Mr Bass and I watch the darkened banks while the Lieutenant snores. The Lieutenant, used to battle, has the sturdier stomach. Mr Bass says he can't sleep. The day has had too much excitement. We wait together for the tide to change.

The water calms and the surf begins to roll into the land. The moon is part way in the sky. The Lieutenant wakes. He and I take up oars. Mr Bass stays at the helm. We pull towards the small islands off from the shore. Splish, splash, to dare is to do, splish, splash, to dare is to do. On and on we pull.

When we are near one of the northern islets, Mr Bass and I push the anchor over the side. I look to him. He is smiling, glad to be alive, but I do not feel it. Every part of me is shaken. I stare at the shore. If they wanted us dead why did they not throw spears when they had the chance? What was up at the lagoon? Mr Bass says death. But why must we go to the lagoon for death? I sit staring at the shore. I cannot eat.

'There is melon,' says Mr Bass.

But I have no stomach for food. Splish, splash, to dare is to do.

'We'll call these islets after you, Master Martin,' says Mr Bass.

The Lieutenant agrees. 'You handled yourself well today, Will.'

I look about me. The islets are the kind that vanish in heavy surf. Splish, splash. I see the old man pat the earth. Dilba's dark figure on the shore. I cannot speak. I start to shake and curl in upon myself to hide it. I wish I'd never ventured from home. I put my arms around my head. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant talk, but their voices are far away. Despite the cold, I fall into a deep slumber.

### **Monday, 28th March**

Our fifth day. The morning is bright and the breeze is up. According to the Lieutenant, I have faced a foe and survived.

'We left them puzzling our very nature,' agrees Mr Bass.

We step the mast and hoist sail but the breeze soon shifts, blowing one way, then another. The sea becomes a bubbling soup and the clouds lumpy dumplings. We strike the sail and pull for land. By the time the sun is above us, we are pulling close to shore. I can see the beach. We pull through a gap in a reef, into a shielded bay and haul to the shore. We climb out of *Thumb* like old men. Our arms are sore from pulling and our bodies ache from three nights of sleeping on a boat. But the sun is warm on my skin and there are no Indian footprints on the sand.

Mr Bass takes off his waistcoat and shirt. His blisters are terrible to see. He baths in the sea. The Lieutenant and I join him. I dive into the cool water and swim as far as I can, then float on my back. When I wade out I run along the sand to dry off, then light a fire beneath a shady tree and boil a soup cake. Mr Bass

wades out and, gently rubbing his body with a cloth, suggests I add salted pork to the soup.

‘A neat culinary trick,’ he says.

‘Come, Will, we’ll search for water,’ says the Lieutenant.

Mr Bass watches the soup while the Lieutenant and I scramble over slippery rocks. We find a place where water is dripping down from the cliff. I tip my head back to taste it. Sweet and clear. The Lieutenant does the same. He leaves me there to fill the barica. Drip, drop. Drip, drop. It takes an age to fill but I’m in no hurry. I see a gecko run across a rock. A spider drops down on a fine thread of web and dangles before me. Drip, drop. Drip, drop. Seagulls land on the higher rocks, squawking. Drip, drop.

I walk back to the camp, happy to have my feet firm on the ground. My sad spirit from the night before has withered and a new one has grown in its place. Perhaps this is what it is to be a man. To ride the waves of turmoil and find peace. I make wheaten cakes the way our cook showed me. The Lieutenant writes in his journal. Mr Bass fossicks in the scrub, picks up insects and inspects plants and bones. He stores his collection in the shade. I brew tea and we sup.

‘How would it be if all they wanted was to show us a river?’ I say, thinking of our trials the day before.

I dip some wheat cake into my soup but before I bite into it, I see that Mr Bass and the Lieutenant, having stopped eating, are staring at me.

I need to explain myself. ‘Because what if a larger river ran into the lagoon?’

Mr Bass looks to the Lieutenant. But the Lieutenant does not take his eyes from me. What I've said has offended him.

'Impossible hypothesis!' the Lieutenant says and, turning to Mr Bass, he adds, 'We must make sure the Governor realises that else he might doubt us for further endeavours.'

Mr Bass is staring through me now and I see I've unsettled him.

'A river of any strength reveals itself at the coast,' the Lieutenant says to me and continues eating. 'Impossible hypothesis.'

But Mr Bass does not look convinced.

Later, I walk to the sandy scrub to collect more sticks for our fire. The sun sets and the dunes take on new shapes. The sand cools beneath my feet. Small animals rustle in the grasses. The wood is dry and smells of the sea. The stars come out, like lamps in a faraway town. I will learn to hold my thoughts. I trail away further than I mean to but when I come back to camp, my arms full of sticks, something has happened between Mr Bass and the Lieutenant.

'The primitive mind,' Mr Bass says, angrily, 'does not just belong to the primitive but to us all.'

'Yes, my point exactly, take the French,' says the Lieutenant.

'Take them where?' Mr Bass asks.

The Lieutenant smiles. 'Take their inclination to rise against their king.'

'But we must all rise, must we not Matthew? For man is like bread, to improve his mind, he must rise.'

I feed some sticks into the fire. Mr Bass believes in the need for man to rise. He and Mr Gerrald talked of it often.

‘But it is the way of rising I’m thinking of,’ the Lieutenant says. ‘Progress needs order, and order needs hierarchy. You cannot rise in disorder, George.’

He lays out his thoughts, like neat piles of sand.

‘If you know where you are placed,’ he says, ‘then you know about form and if you know about form, you know about civilization. These Indians mock us but only because they have no idea of our superiority. Their ignorance makes them arrogant.’

He talks on and to his mind the lack of knowing top and bottom, like king and subject and such like, is what keeps the Indians in New Holland primitive.

‘That is why we cannot predict their actions,’ he says. ‘They did not attack us, not because they wanted to show us a river, George, but because they live in disorder using only animal instinct to survive.’

‘My own fear, I acknowledge it, but it could have cost the chance to discover a great river.’ Mr Bass is despondent.

‘How can I convince you of the truth of the Indian mind,’ snaps the Lieutenant. ‘It is no different to the French. You are equally as sentimental on that score.’

Even though I have just told myself to keep my own counsel, I interrupt and ask the Lieutenant to explain about the French.

‘Trying to rid their society of the order of things, the French did a great disservice to their country,’ says the Lieutenant, turning to me. ‘They have



exposed the primitive in their thinking. Causing such tumult they proved they were no better than the native. The French are a race that lack true intellect.'

'How do you account for the fact that the French have some of the best minds in science,' Mr Bass says, thumping his hand on the sand. 'And build the best ships.'

'But they are floundering where the British are flourishing. They think all can be equal, but equality will not aid progress. The thirst for destruction is primitive.'

'Such arrogance, Matthew, that thirst is in us all.'

'Agreed, it must be accepted that the primitive thirst is in us all. Though to my mind, less in some, than others. But it is the French *heeding* this primitive thirst that keeps them down, while they delude themselves that they rise. Delusion is the common feature here.'

'But perhaps we are deluded. You talk of top and bottom, Matthew, as if you have no place in it. But what about the middle, you forget the middle, to which you belong!' Mr Bass is all afire now.

'What concerns me is not the middle, George, nor the top, nor the bottom, but the future. The future into which we are sailing. And how it will be for men of England.'

Mr Bass is lying on the ground, he stares up at the sky and suddenly the anger dies out of him, like a fire being stamped out.

'Sometimes I look at men and see the flourishing of all that is good,' he says. 'But sometimes I look at men and see the opposite of goodness. But this to

me is not primitive, Matthew. It has nothing to do with the primitive thirst for destruction. Evil exists among the civilized as much as it exists in the savage, we all heed it, but the civilized disguise it better. The savage man has an excuse, whereas the civilized man, with his educated mind, does not.'

I stare at the dark waves that slurp at the shore. It's all very good, I think, them talking about top and bottom and middle, about good and evil, order and disorder, but think of it as water in a bucket, and what if that bucket has a hole? Then soon there would be no top, bottom and middle. No good or evil. No order or disorder. Only an empty bucket.

I am about to say this to Mr Bass when he rolls on his side and groans at his blisters. He stands quickly and walks away, whether this is because of the discomfort he is in, or his discomfort with the Lieutenant's argument, is hard to say. The Lieutenant motions me to speak no more. He bends his head toward the light of the fire and writes in his journal.

I lay on the soft sand to sleep. The breeze tickles my cheek as I sink into a sweet dream. I am at the theatre where Mama and Hilton are performing. They cheer when they see me walk into their dressing room and stand to admire my gold buttons.

*Tuesday, 29th March*

I awake from a dream to the sound of water lap. The sun is in my eye but the sand is still the white-blue of early morn. My dream comes back to me before I can rise. In my dream there was an Indian, with a coat of crow feathers, sitting by me,

but staring out in front of him. I stood, my arms fell off, and I grew feathers, and soon both of us were flying overhead. The Indian said to me, bird from far away, fly home. And I was so in fright of him that I did fly towards home, but then I felt it to be such a long way, and I was not sure I would make it. That is when I woke.

I sit up. Mr Bass has a fire on the go. He is sitting cross-legged staring at it. I remember the night before. I start to tell Mr Bass about water in a bucket that has a hole, but he shoots dagger eyes at me.

‘You know nothing, boy, don’t pretend you do.’

In his dark moods he sometimes speaks this way. I prepare our food and I am as silent as a mute.

Mr Bass speaks to the Lieutenant. ‘The soldier I attended before we embarked had been flogged for stealing peas from the store. His wounds were so deep they needed special care.’

‘I’m sorry to hear that,’ the Lieutenant says, evenly.

‘That is what hunger does, Matthew,’ says Mr Bass. ‘It turns us all into savages. The Indian abhors this flogging. The Indian turns and cries out in pain when he sees such a sight. Who then is the savage and who is the civilized?’

I want to shout at Mr Bass but do not. He raises up the Indians who might have killed him, why not those men who are with him day and night?

‘When you have a number of unruly men under your charge, sometimes measures, such as whipping, are required for the sake of order,’ the Lieutenant says.

‘We have to challenge that thought, do we not?’ Mr Bass snaps.

‘Where did that challenge lead your French radicals?’ the Lieutenant asks.

‘They committed horrendous crimes in the name of liberty.’

‘They changed who was top and bottom, but did not redress the system.

That was their mistake.’

‘And your Scots martyrs?’

‘The Scots have some of the best minds in Europe.’

‘And yet so little power. If you lack power, you lack everything,’ the Lieutenant says, turning away in disgust.

The wind blows along the beach, tumbling driftwood down to the sea.

There is a silence between us three. Us three? The Lieutenant’s theory of top and bottom is on my mind. I am thinking, if he is right, then I am not in the middle, as he is, but on the bottom and it is not a good place to be.

I stow our provisions into *Thumb*.

‘The tide is for us, George,’ the Lieutenant says, grimly.

We push off. Mr Bass and I sit on the thwart and pull out through the reef, then northward. The breeze picks up. We hoist sail, it rustles and flaps, before it is scooped up by the moody wind. As we pass the

point I hear

bird song but

see no birds.

# I Am NADA

FILE 30001115

3<sup>rd</sup> Session / 1<sup>st</sup> MemBank

*(Patient cautiously enters the room. Doctor follows.)*

**Patient**      Birds.

**Doctor**      Yes.

**Patient**      Wrens.

**Doctor**      Is that what you—

**Patient**      Oh, there—I feel that—there—on my face.

**Doctor**      What name would you give it?

*(Patient tips her head and closes her eyes.)*

**Patient**      Wind.

**Doctor**      It's our memsense pod. I've set it for breeze. And we also have the birds—sounds of the birds—you mentioned in our last session.

**Patient**      Birds. Yes. I am Nada?

**Doctor**      Yes. You are Nada. Very good. Do you remember why you are here, Nada?

**Patient**      Ah.

**Doctor**      Can you describe to me what you see?

**Patient**      I see—yes, lovely, the little yellow-throated whistler.

**Doctor** You know that name. Birds you know. And what else?

**Patient** Oh, there. Yes. I see—that is a—what is that?

**Doctor** Do you know?

**Patient** I think I do know.

**Doctor** Can you name it?

**Patient** Is it a tree?

**Doctor** It is a tree.

**Patient** A tree, I know that tree, that grew near—that is our fig.

**Doctor** Small-leaved Fig or *Ficus Obliqua*.

**Patient** And there behind the tree, ah yes, that is the escarpment.

**Doctor** Yes.

**Patient** Oh, but look—I can walk right through.

**Doctor** It's not real.

**Patient** It's not real?

**Doctor** It's a vismem, made up from images we've collected.

**Patient** I breathed here once.

**Doctor** Yes.

**Patient** This is the pod for remembering.

**Doctor** Very good.

**Patient** You want me to remember things.

**Doctor** Nada, excellent, you are making excellent cognitive progress. Now I will clip this to you. And you may not remember, but, in our last session, I said that I want to publicly membank what we say to each other today, for our

Yestermem project. If you don't wish to be publically membanked you have that right. May I publically membank?

*(Silence. Patient inclines head.)*

**Doctor** Nada, I can't go ahead until you say yes. You must verbally agree. This is a contract.

**Patient** Yes.

**Doctor** Thank you. Would you like to sit down?

*(Patient sits.)*

**Doctor** In a few minutes I will count you down into your personal membank.

**Patient** Do you have a personal membank?

**Doctor** Not like yours.

**Patient** Why not?

**Doctor** We can talk more at the end of the session. It's best we start with as little cognitive disturbance as possible. Do you remember the countdown?

**Patient** Ten. Nine. Eight.

**Doctor** And if you want to stop at any time raise your right hand. Can you raise your right hand? Very good, Nada. So, are you ready to go back to where you left off during our last session?

**Patient** Left off. But I don't, no, I don't remember where I left—

**Doctor** No need to panic, you will remember, trust me, when I count you down, that is when you will remember. Are you comfortable?

**Patient** Yes.

**Doctor** I'm here all the time, right by your side, this is your personal membank. It is what is past, not you breathing now, so no need to feel fearful. We do not need to fear the past only understand it. But things may arise that cause you difficulty, so if you want to stop, raise your right hand and we will stop. Clear?

**Patient** You're the Doctor?

**Doctor** I'm the Doctor. Sometimes I will prompt you. That way you'll know I'm here with you. Clear?

**Patient** Yes.

**Doctor** I'll count you down now. Look at the tree. Yes. And now close your eyes keeping the tree in mind. Very good. Ten. Nine. Eight. You are going back to that time, the time when you remember the tree, to the place where the tree was. It stood very near your home. Seven. Six. Five. You are going back to that place. Your home. Four. Relax and let your mind sink into that time and place. Three. Two. You are nearly there. One. You are there. When you are ready, describe what you see.

*(Silence. Patient's eyelashes quiver. It is some time before she speaks.)*

**Patient** A beating sound. I switch on my torch. The dripping dark around us, like the forest has slipped into the house. I shine the light on the window. A moth—pattering, pattering—against the glass. I watch its shivery dance. Then thump. A flash of claws. An owl. Grey feathers shimmer in the torchlight. Then gone. I lay back, hear myself breathing, reach out and put my hand on Gi's hip. He has lost too much weight.

*(Silence.)*



**Doctor** Gi. Lost weight.

**Patient** Food. We need food and medicine. In the kitchen. I cram water, food bars and my inhaler into a small backpack. May stands in front of me, on the other side of the breakfast counter.

**Doctor** May?

**Patient** My niece. She was staying with us when Frank hit. There was no way she could get home.

**Doctor** And you are both in the kitchen?

**Patient** ‘I need to go, today,’ I say. ‘I can’t wait—Gi is getting sicker each day. He needs medicine. We will soon need food.’ I zip up my backpack. ‘I’m coming,’ she says. ‘That’s not a good idea,’ I say. ‘It’s a long hike,’ I say. May is unhappy. She wants to come with me. ‘Maybe I can ring Mum from the medical centre?’ she says. ‘Even get on a helicopter there. More likely, don’t you think?’

I don’t know what to do. There were helicopters in the sky for the first few days after Frank. None came to our place. We thought it was a matter of time. And then nothing. Not for days and days. But then, May is right, they could be evacuating people from the centre.

**Doctor** How old is May?

**Patient** Fifteen. She’s fifteen. And I say to her, ‘If you evacuate you’d have to travel on your own?’ ‘I know,’ she says. ‘Only if we can talk to your mum,’ I say. We don’t know what damage has occurred elsewhere. ‘I want to talk to Mum, at least that,’ May says. ‘Okay,’ I say. ‘Wear your walking boots and take my

light rain-jacket. If we can talk to your mum and there's a safe way to get you back home, then we'll sort it. '

*(Silence. Patient moves in her chair. The fingers on her right hand start moving, as if tapping something out. They move through the air.)*

**Patient**        When the first warnings came I drove down to the hills that sit back from the coast. I got out of my car and stood looking across the beach suburbs to the ocean. Waves were running along roads and crashing through houses like they were cardboard cut-outs. Electricity poles became the new driftwood. And the sea kept coming.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        You have on your backpack. You are in the kitchen. May is coming with you to the medical centre.

**Patient**        But I want to walk down to Steve's first. I want to ask him to check on Gi.

**Doctor**        Steve?

**Patient**        My neighbour, Steve. Poor Nina, she died and that was ... Steve hasn't been doing so good.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        You have your backpack on and you are walking to Steve's.

**Patient**        The roadside paddocks down from our place are ripped to shreds, tree trunks thrown up from the forest are lying everywhere. The land is strewn with leaves, torn branches, rubbish, bricks and bits of tin. I walk by where Jack Cassis used to live.

**Doctor** Jack Cassis?

**Patient** He was the forest ranger. I see bits of Jack's roof sticking up through rubble, like a smashed up toy house. Jack's red Holden ute looks like a scrunched up chip packet. I try not to think about Jack. We don't know what happened to Jack and his son. We searched through the wreckage after Frank but didn't find their bodies. Steve's farm is two beyond ours. His house, like ours, was protected by the escarpment. I walk down the winding dirt driveway. At Steve's backdoor I stop and call out. No answer. So I go to the shed. He is leaning on a bench, his back to me. I tell him I'm hiking over to the medical centre. 'Will you check on Gi?' I ask. He doesn't look up. He is hunched over. It's like there's a great weight on top of him, pushing him down. I walk across and stand next to him. We are so quiet that red rosellas land in the doorway of the shed and begin picking through the bits of hay strewn on the ground. Steve is so still he could be petrified. 'You've lost the closest person to you,' I say. Steve stares at the ground. He rolls a stone about with the tip of his boot. I know he is tough but everyone has a breaking point. 'Wait a bit,' I say. 'See what happens.' He won't look at me. Before he bought the property he was in the army. High up. Publicity for him everywhere. The army's first Indigenous Commander. Tough man. But then he'd had enough of fighting other people's wars. That's what he said. And he and Nina bought their property and settled on the mountain.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** You are in the shed with Steve. He won't look at you.

**Patient** Steve won't look at me but he gives me advice about what route to take over the ridge. 'I'll check on Gi,' he says.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** Where are you now?

**Patient** I'm walking away from my house. May is with me. Gi is in bed. Gi is not well. I want medicine for Gi. And will there be a food drop? I need some contact with the authorities to know what is happening. But I stop on the path and look back.

**Doctor** What do you see?

**Patient** Our house. Our tree. The locals call it Hill of Peace. It was named that many years ago. I don't know who by. The house is nestled in greenery. The fig stands at the front its branches spreading out over the house. The escarpment, like an arm around them both. Strange. So much destruction around us and yet our home, our tree, both still standing. The tree is a thousand years old.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** The tree. An ancient tree. A thousand years old.

**Patient** It is a place of peace. My sister sent May to us for respite. 'She needs down time,' my sister said. 'Away from bad influences.' Our place has always been a retreat for people. A restorative place. May was on holiday here, and then, catastrophe.

**Doctor** How do you feel?

**Patient** Worried about my sister. Worried about friends.

**Doctor** You keep walking?

**Patient** We walk along the dirt path and climb over the fallen eucalypt that blocks the driveway. Wet bark against my skin. A gossamer rainfall, no mist. As we pass through the gateway and start down the road, the drip drip of a dull green world. I look up. A washing machine is wedged between the branches of a tall red gum. A bra and a purple dress hang on the lower branches, as if someone has casually thrown them over to dry. May is slightly ahead of me. Her red backpack is strapped to her body like safety equipment, her orange hat a beacon.

I walk to the edge of the road and look down on the valley. There used to be a village next to the river. Now, bits of tin roof are floating on water, rafts for the hundreds of seabirds that flock in daily. A church steeple poking through the water. Across from the steeple, an island, where black and white cows huddle around a lone cabbage tree, the grass eaten down to dirt.

*(Silence.)*

**Patient** We cut down through the forest. The river has swollen to ten times its normal size. Our first problem is that we need to cross to the southern side of the valley. The river is flowing too fast to swim across. There are three bridges but I haven't been down to check if they survived Frank. The ground is slippery. We jump puddles, skid on stones. Mud and more mud. And a knot in my stomach.

**Doctor** A knot? What do you feel?

**Patient** Frightened about what I'll find. If we make it across the river we still have to hike to the top of the escarpment, walk along the ridge for a kilometre, then take a route down the southern side of the range. The school where the medical centre was set up sits on high land. It should have been safe from

flooding. But I don't know for sure. We reach the boardwalk—it used to be a tourist path—and begin walking along it. The tough rubber slats, covered with debris, have survived Frank. The twisting escarpment acted as a buffer for the forest too. But even so there is damage. We climb across huge fallen trees and wade through piled-up leaf matter. We can hear the river but not see it. There is barely any light here because the canopy above blocks everything out. It's hard to see even a smidgen of grey sky. The air is warm. We both peel off layers of clothes as we head towards the first bridge. Everything is dripping and dark. The rich pungent smell of decomposition. Of death.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Do you keep walking?

**Patient**        We keep walking and finally we walk into the light. Before us is the river. Water gushes past, tumbling across rocks and splashing the banks, like an animal spitting and in pain. The sound is thunderous. But no bridge. The force of the water has pushed our first hope downstream. I take off my backpack and stand on the rocks, water spraying my boots. Should we give up the hike now? It seems naive to think we'll be able to get across. Surely the other bridges have gone too. FUCK! The evolutionary purpose of swearing, I decide, is to help humans come to grips with things we find difficult to grasp. May, ahead of me, has started walking along the banks. She turns back. Her eye catches mine. She wants me to continue.

**Doctor**        Do you?

**Patient** Reluctantly. The bank is muddy. So muddy. Slippery. And then the rain starts falling. We use our hands to steady ourselves. But it's hard with my left arm. I hate now that it has so little movement. I have to concentrate. When I look up, a sinking feeling. Like something has fallen away beneath my feet. The second bridge is gone too. I sit in the mud, exhausted, and I see, on the opposite banks, three enormous rocks. I don't clock it immediately, but after I've been staring at these rocks for some time I realise that I once sat and sketched these rocks. They belong to a group of rock formations further up river. There used to be a sign beside them that said they were two hundred million years old. Something that old, we think of as permanent. As never changing. But here are some of those rocks rolled downstream by the flow of water.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** Do you walk back or keep going?

**Patient** May wants to go on. We halt at a Strangler Fig to decide. Watch the rain fall on flowing water. The canopy protects us from getting wet. The tree beneath the Strangler has long ago disappeared. Thick vine is tousled through sinewy branches covered with ferns. The ferns looked like jade bracelets. We sit on the long narrow roots to rest. I eat a food bar, then do a few stretches. I take a few breaths with my inhaler. May sips water. But she keeps her eyes on me. 'Yes, okay,' I say. 'We'll keep going.'

We set off hiking again. The banks are rocky now. We keep slipping, sliding. And then, ha, May turns to me, grinning. Such a big cheeky grin. Up ahead I see the swing bridge. Originally it sat high above the river. Now water

rushes just beneath it. But it's up. It's up! May stands on the first plank waiting for me. It's only now I realise that if we cross the bridge, it's possible that on our return it won't be here. I hesitate. FUCK! If Gi has the virus and I don't go, he could die. The virus scare was bad enough. Then came Frank. As though one catastrophe invites another. The weather is holding. The river has stopped rising. If we keep moving fast we should make it back. I'll have to risk going. I grip the thick metal rails of the swing bridge and walk across. Wind gusts down the gully. The bridge swings from side to side. The water rushing beneath sounds like stampeding cattle. I reach the opposite bank and jump onto the boardwalk. May is right behind me. This side of the river the boardwalk is damaged. We tread carefully along parts of it, then step off into the forest to begin our hike up the escarpment. The ground is slippery and steep. We get on all fours and crawl beneath vines that knit the trees together. Mosquitoes bite at bare skin. I feel something on my leg and stop to flick it off. A leech. I try to steel myself against them. Leeches are the least of my worries. When we are two thirds of the way up we hit a dirt track. It leads southwest. We follow it along, below the line of the ridge. The clouds become heavy. Rain falls in large droplets. We find a track to the top of the escarpment. It's easier hiking even though it is steep. On top, the track runs through trees out onto a heath. The air is cold and cuts through my jacket. 'You okay?' I ask May. She runs ahead of me. Her nose is red. She smiles. She is thinking only of the chance to talk to her mother. We keep walking and cross to the southern side of the ridge. We stop at a cliff ledge that curves out. This was once a tourist lookout. But I'm not prepared at all for what I see. The



damage down on the plains is worse than I could ever have imagined. I can't speak from the shock. To the south I see that Port Kembla—in my childhood it had been a place of fire-blowing smoke stacks—Port Kembla is gone. That means the house I grew up in has gone. The lake has become part of the sea. There are no suburbs between Port Kembla and where I stand on the mountain, only tiny islands covered in debris. Everywhere now, is sea. Directly below us the green escarpment that once hugged a valley of housing estates is shrouded by a mass of low white cloud. To the east, we can see through the low cloud to the water. I spy chimneys and bits of roof. As we look, a body floats into view. I take May by the hand and we continue hiking. This is a new world we are living in. We haven't had time to adjust.

*(Silence. Patient raises her right hand.)*

**Doctor** One. Two. Three. You are coming up. Four. Five. Six. You are rising up to consciousness. Seven. Eight. Nine. You are nearly with me. Ten. And you are with me, you are safe, and you want to open your eyes.

*(Patient opens her eyes and stares in front of her for some time. The Doctor unclips her.)*

**Doctor** This is difficult for you. It must be difficult.

**Patient** I am Nada?

**Doctor** Yes.

**Patient** But here, what is here?

**Doctor** This is the Yestermem project.

**Patient** Before the project? I have no—

**Doctor** You will. This is a slow process. We will take it slowly.

**Patient** We are indoors. All the time we are indoors.

**Doctor** It's a good place to be. The air quality control on this ship is the best there is.

**Patient** We are on a ship?

**Doctor** You didn't know you were on a ship?

**Patient** A ship?

**Doctor** Ah, but not a ship like in your—not like you remember. This is a special ship. It floats on air.

**Patient** An aeroplane?

**Doctor** Like an aeroplane but bigger and faster, if we choose to move.

**Patient** Bigger?

**Doctor** You've been in our medical pod. The whole ship is as big as—let me see—as big as a town. It's like a floating town. It's called Yestermem Airship. It's dedicated to a single project. The Yestermem project.

**Patient** I don't remember coming onto the ship.

**Doctor** No.

**Patient** My berth.

**Doctor** Yes. You have a berth. And you remember the mess room, and the others in the project?

**Patient** The boy. Will.

**Doctor** He is in the project with you. And Bel.

**Patient** Bel is not adjusting.

**Doctor** No.

**Patient** I am adjusting.

**Doctor** Yes. It takes time. It's a shock for you to be here with us.

**Patient** There are so many doctors.

**Doctor** A lot of us.

**Patient** I trust you.

**Doctor** I'm glad.

**Patient** You're helping me remember.

**Doctor** Your cognitive facilities are being reawakened. This is a delicate time of adjustment. We, the doctors here, are trying to take you through this process carefully. But no doubt it is difficult for you. This is a new area of work for us too.

**Patient** Doctor, I want to ask you something?

**Doctor** Go ahead.

**Patient** Does my home exist?

**Doctor** The house, no. The land, it's there. It exists but it's changed. You would not recognise it.

**Patient** What happened?

**Doctor** This project is to collect the data from your personal Membank. This is the first time this has happened. That we have collected data, in this particular form, from those that are being awakened.

**Patient** Awakened?

**Doctor** Your mind has been asleep for a long time.

**Patient** I have no recollection.

**Doctor** You will. Be patient. Once we collate the data we will know more about what happened in your region. We will have a more reliable picture.

**Patient** Reliable?

**Doctor** More complete, because nothing collected in this way is truly reliable. But we're wanting to hear from you. Your experience, and what you tell of it, is important. Do you feel you can continue today?

**Patient** Yes, I can continue.

**Doctor** Sip this. It will help.

*(Patient drinks.)*

**Doctor** This work is valuable research. We will talk more at the end of the session. When you are ready I will take you back into your personal Membank.

**Patient** I am ready.

**Doctor** I am re-clipping you. Are you comfortable? Good. Ten. Nine. Eight. Just relax and feel yourself back on the mountain. Seven. Six. Five. You will soon be there. Four. Three. Two. Very nearly there. One. You are there.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** You are on the ridge of the escarpment. On Mount Kembla. You are with May. She has her orange, no, excuse me, her red backpack on. And her orange hat. You are hiking to the medical centre.

**Patient** We are hiking southwest. The heath turns to forest again. We hike along the dirt track that runs through the trees. The noise of small birds is overwhelming. Hundreds maybe thousands of wrens chirp and cheep in the bushes

beneath the trees. So many birds. After Frank first hit there were no birds. It was eerie. Just the sound of wind and water. Like the earth was suffering a breach birth. Now, too many birds. They all seem to come to the top of the mountain. I don't know why. We keep walking. It's midday by the time we come out from the trees to a spot just above the school. There has been a massive landslide and the once grassy hill behind the school, where primary kids used to build stick huts, is a heaped up mess of soil, tree trunks and branches, and all this is now cramming into the back of the school's better brick gym. The gym looks like a giant Lego block bursting out of the soil. But the gym and school buildings are all still standing.

**Doctor**        Lego?

**Patient**        You don't know Lego?

**Doctor**        No.

**Patient**        The name for a child's building block. A brand name.

**Doctor**        Ah.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Describe the school for me?

**Patient**        There are four school buildings plus the gym, built around a central quadrangle, with an oval on the eastern side. One building has a roof missing. Beyond the school, the land now falls away, and there is only water and debris. The amount of damage, of water, of rubbish, seems to be never-ending. But the relief I feel is that here there are people. Hundreds of people crowded onto the small patch of land. There are a few fishing boats on the water but the water is

filthy. Tents have been put up in the quadrangle and between the school buildings. Children run between them. People are cooking over fires. The oval is bare except for an army helicopter. Twenty soldiers, rifles slung over their shoulders, are guarding it. May takes hold of my arm, her eyes are fixed on the helicopter. 'But it's not flying,' I say.

**Doctor**        So no evacuations?

**Patient**        I can see a row of people walking out along the edge of the water, to the west. It's the only way to walk out. There are men, women, and children, all with bags over their shoulders, or rucksacks on their backs. The steepness of the escarpment on this side, and the mess from the landslides, are keeping people from reaching the top ridge, and hiking along it, as we have just done.

**Doctor**        Can you get down to the medical centre?

**Patient**        We have to take our time slip-sliding down to the back of the gym. The land beneath our feet feels aerated, like it might cave in at any moment. The land is too unstable to take much weight. We crawl along, scrambling through the branches stuck in the soil, to reach the gym roof. Using a drainpipe, we climb down to the ground at the side of the gym. We are covered in mud. The clouds hang low, like lumps of coal, but it's not raining. Everything here is covered in dirt. There's a queue snaking out from the gym. We walk by. Those standing in the queue look thin, weary. Two elderly women are slumped to the ground. They rest against one another, back to back. No one pays them any attention. People eye us warily. Nothing feels safe here. This is not what a medical centre should feel like. We halt at the doorway.

**Doctor**        What do you see?

**Patient**        Inside, to my left, long queues lead to desks. Maybe twenty desks.

Two people behind each desk, all dressed in army uniforms, but looking so dishevelled that, for a moment, I don't realise they're army. At each desk, one person is writing information down, the other is giving out food. Behind the desks, piled up to the ceiling, are sacks of rice, tins of food, and packets of dried food.

Soldiers with machine guns guard the food. How much can I carry? How many tins have I at home? I don't want to leave Gi for too long. The ViMed is the most important. I can't risk standing too long in queues. The weather might change, the river could start rising again. I decide to hike back another day for the food.

Several people standing in the queue near to us start to mutter but it's only when a man speaks to me that I realise the problem. 'If you want food you have to go to the back of the queue,' the man says. 'I've enough,' I say. And he stares at me. And then he puts his hands to his lips, warning me, although I don't yet realise why. 'Ssh,' he whispers, 'don't say that out loud again.'

There are soldiers all around the gym. A long queue of mostly elderly people leads to a desk in the centre of the room. Above the desk hangs a sign that says: *Evacuations*. To our right are rows of seats. This is the medical area. Most of the seats are taken. People sit slumped over. Some are coughing. One man is whimpering, the sound like a dog in pain. Along the wall, to the right, are more tables. The people sitting here have medical equipment around them, some have doctor's coats on, others don't. There are eskies stacked beside them. Behind, is an enormous cool room. I can hear a generator humming. A female soldier walks

over to us. She's about thirty. Her hair is neat and cut short but her uniform is crumpled and stained. Dark circles beneath her eyes. 'Sharp left for food distribution. But go to the end of the queue, we've had enough riots today. Centre for evacuations. Right for medical,' she says. 'Are there any evacuations today?' I ask. 'No' she says, her voice toneless. 'Fuel's run out. You can put your name on the waiting list.' 'Can we call our family from here?' I ask. She shakes her head. 'No,' she says. 'Communication is down for now.' 'When will it be up?' 'Who knows?' the soldier says.

There is no queue for the medical desks. Just rows of chairs and a male soldier who walks along and directs each person to a particular doctor. The soldier holds a machine gun. He looks ready to shoot. Each time someone leaves the front row to go to a medical desk someone from the row behind moves up. We sit. 'I won't be going home today,' May says. She's worrying about her parents. 'They'll be okay,' I say. 'Eventually, you'll get home.' 'When?' 'Might be a month. Maybe six weeks. We have to give the government time to get things running again.' I think it will take longer than what I've said, it could take six months or more, but I want to comfort her.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        You are in the gym.

**Patient**        It's hot in the gym. There are people walking about with buckets of soapy water and wet rags, wiping down chairs and wiping over desks. They work without looking up. If someone is at a desk or in a chair they wipe around them as though they aren't there. Everything smells of disinfectant.



*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        You are in the gym. You are waiting to see a medic.

**Patient**        May and I have reached the front row. A group of boys and girls saunter through the big doors that front the gym. They laugh as they pass by. They are all young. Maybe twelve, maybe thirteen-years-old. They walk close together. I notice that they each carry a coat or jacket or a parcel of some sort but I don't think anything of this. The teenagers form a tight circle in the centre of the gym. The people in the food queue watch them closely but everyone else turns away. I'm about to turn away too when I see one boy pull a machine gun out from beneath his coat. Quickly, the others reveal their weapons and in seconds there are twenty machine guns pointing around the room. A few people gasp but that is all there is time for, before one of the boys raises his gun and starts shooting. The rat-a-tat of the machine gun in the gym is like pelting rain on a corrugated iron roof. For half a moment no one moves. Absolute stillness. Then the other teenagers start shooting and the soldiers are firing back. The noise is deafening. Four of the boys fall down dead. People scream and scramble for cover. The shooting continues. More people fall to the ground. I take May's arm and pull her with me to the cover of the closest desk. We crouch down. Near us the female soldier we spoke to earlier, lies dead on the cement. Next to her is a male medic. He is moaning. May and I drag him to cover but then his eyes go flat. He has died. More teenagers stream into the gym, shooting as they run towards the food stores. It's food they want. Tables are pushed over. More people take cover. The teenagers keep calling to one another to shoot. Anyone running is a target. Bullets are

pinging on metal. May and I press down as flat as we can. I see a soldier call instructions to a boy with a machine gun. The boy listens and then shouts instructions to the other teenagers. I realise it's soldiers, some of them at least, that are organizing the attack.

There are two boys guarding the door, facing away from us. They hold machine guns. Three older men, from the food queue, crouch on the opposite side of the door, whispering furiously. There are screams coming from all over the gym. More shots are fired. People are wailing. I smell shit. Two women stand and run towards the food piles. They're shot down. May is lying next to the medical esky. I see it is labelled ViMed. I open the esky, grab the packets of ViMed inside, shove them into my backpack. The three older men I spotted before are now standing. They make a sign to each other and rush at the boys guarding the gym door. The boys swing their guns around. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat. They keep shooting in an arc. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat. The men fall. Bullets ping off steel girders. The two boys begin to holler as they run to the food store, leaving the door unguarded. 'Follow me,' I hiss to May. We crawl to the entrance.

**Doctor**            When you get outside what do you see?

**Patient**            Outside there are more teenagers positioned on the verandahs of the schoolrooms. They have their guns raised but have stopped shooting. I see a soldier crouching on one of the verandahs. He's ordering the teenagers about. People are running in all directions across the quadrangle. A woman is yelling abuse at a girl holding a gun. The girl looks young, no more than twelve. The girl swivels her gun so it points right at the woman. 'Stop yelling,' the girl shouts. The

woman takes a step forward, finger jabbing in disgust. The girl shoots. The woman falls back, her head hitting the concrete with a crack.

The soldiers that have been protecting the helicopter are now running across the quadrangle. They shoot the girl down. They see the rebel soldier crouching on the verandah and shout at him. He shouts back and stands to shoot. 'Now,' I whisper to May. May and I crouch run to the side of the gym. Something is burning. Shit. I smell shit again. I push May before me. We keep going. She scrambles up the dirt, using the drainpipe to help her. I follow. But it's hard going with my arm. May climbs back down to help me up. When we are at the top we crawl to the pile of branches behind the gym. Only now do we stop to get our breath. I take out my inhaler and use it, peering back through the leaves.

**Doctor**        Tell me what you see? Everything you can remember.

**Patient**        Bare-chested soldiers storm out of a schoolroom, shooting as they go. A group of people are pressed against the sidewall of one of the schoolrooms, arms splayed, like bats before they take flight. Near them, dead people lie on the ground. Men, women, children, run from the quadrangle towards the track that goes west along the water's edge. It's all happening so quickly. 'Keep going,' I say to May. We shimmy our way through the branches and up the hill. Further along, on the other side of the gym, people try to run up the same hill, but rocks start falling, and the people slide back down, branches and dirt tumbling after them. A thundering sound beneath us. We keep crawling. The land is shifting but we are nearly to the top. An enormous boom. Deafening. We have just made it to the ridge when the landslide happens. Rocks and dirt hurtle down the hill covering

the people at the base, leaving a sheer drop from the ridge. No way to climb up or down. The entrance to the gym is covered in rubble. People are trapped inside.

The quadrangle is empty except for the dead bodies. They look like dead flies.

*(Silence.)*

**Patient** I don't cry or shout, there's no time. It's May that spots the—I call them rebel soldiers—I don't know what to call them. 'Look there,' May says. She points to a place behind the school, to the southwest, where a group of teenagers, a hundred or more, huddling together around a boat that has been pulled from the water. In the middle of the huddle are several soldiers, older men and women, issuing instructions. Two men are hauling guns from the boat and dealing them out.

May's eyes glaze over, like she is focusing on an inner world, not this outer one. 'Come on,' I say and pull her along. We half-run half-walk along the top of the ridge. Rain is falling. I keep off the track. I want the trees as cover. The flat pat-pat of our boots on wet leaves. We come out from the trees onto the heath and scramble from bush to bush, not stopping until we reach the path that we took on the way up. Here, we slump behind a rock to rest. Everywhere the prip prip of wren calls. Some trill up and up. It's a frightening sound when there are so many. I go to take the water bottle from my backpack. It's gone. I've left part of the flap open. My inhaler is gone too. I try not to panic. I know I have to stay calm and alert. May stares at me. The ViMed is there. I do up the flap. 'I don't need my inhaler now,' I say to May. 'I want it but I don't need it.' I try to keep calm. We

have the ViMed at least. May gets out her water bottle and gives it to me. I drink, then hand it to her. She drinks. Her eyes lock on mine. 'We'll be okay,' I say.

The day is darkening. A mist is coming in across the ridge. I stand, hoist up my backpack ready to hike, and, just in time, see three figures emerge from the bush half a kilometre down. They look young. Have guns slung over their shoulders. Their attention is on the ground. They're analysing something in the dirt, pointing out marks to each other. I realise, with a jolt, that they're following the tracks we'd made earlier. I drop down, put my hands to my lips to warn May. We crawl further around and have to flatten to the ground to hide behind the rock. We wait for the three to come up the track. 'No, it was Mess brother that wrote that song.' It's a female voice. Young. High pitched. 'How'd it start then?' This is a boy, definitely. 'Turn a sally on the dead. Turn a belly on the fed.' The girl again. 'Hey, the tracks turn here.' A new voice. Male. A little older than the other two. 'We're onto them!' they shout. Thump, pat-pat, thump. Three bodies flash by. We keep still. I press my stomach into the ground. They run along the track a few metres. I hear them stop and talk to each other. I can't catch what they're saying. Have they seen our tracks coming back this way? Slowly, I peer up above the rock. Two of them are staring at the ground but the third, a heavy-set boy with a shaved head, is lifting his backpack off. He rummages inside, pulls out a bottle of alcohol, and takes a swig. The backpack is stuffed full of tin food. Several cans fall from the bag. The boy picks them up and shoves them in his pack. Every muscle in my body goes rigid. These kids have been looting. Where? I think of Gi, ill in bed. I hope to God that Steve is with him. Because how many of these kids

are running loose? And are these three connected to the rebel soldiers back at the school?

The boy hoists his pack onto his back and follows the others as they take off along the track. I don't want to risk scrambling down the same path. We go further west and start our descent there. I hear water. A waterfall? There was not one here before. The sound is thunderous. We climb down rocks and crawl through bushes. And then we see the water spraying out into the air.

I try not to think about the swing bridge. Just keep going. But my breath is tight. We keep trekking down until I can't see the waterfall any more or the river. We have to crawl through knitted vines on hands and knees, sinking deep in thick black mud. Bugs tickle through our hair. We'll hit the boardwalk if we keep in this direction. I know it. Then I hear the river again, galloping along, thrashing and thumping as it hits the banks. The bizz bizz of hundreds of mosquitoes. We slap them away. My breathing is in shorter gasps. I need my inhaler now. My left arm is useless and I remember something I'd forgotten. Metal hitting me, hot rubber, the stink of bitumen. I was a child and a car hit me and my arm was hurt and suddenly the crash is all in my mind again. I'm dizzy by the time we reach the boardwalk. My chest aches. The rain has been light all the way back but the river could still have risen. The bridge could still have washed away. Adrenalin floods through me. Regret, for starting out on this journey, for leaving Gi. But the adrenalin pushes me on, short breaths, hurrying towards the bridge, limping along the boardwalk in the dimming light, my arm aching from the strain. May's face is streaked with black where she has wiped it with her muddy hands. She runs

behind me, clinging onto my tee shirt, her fist bumping into the small of my back. Spits of rain fall through breaks in the rainforest canopy. Just as the light is going we come to the swing bridge. Water is splashing onto the planks. 'It's there,' May says. The first words she's spoken the whole way back.

We run to it as fast as we can, cling onto the metal side of the bridge and hurry across it. It's wet and slippery. The escarpment begins to melt away, disappearing into the dark. Night is here. We reach the opposite bank. Wind gusts scoop up leaves and drop them again. I take the torch from the bottom of my pack and check the strength of the hooks and brackets that fix the bridge cables to the rock ledge. They are strong and tight. The rock ledge is thick and firmly set. On the way over I'd wanted the bridge to stay in place. Now we are safely back I want it gone. I want us cut off from those soldiers and teenagers with guns.

*(Silence. The Patient's fingers move slightly but no hand is raised.)*

**Doctor**        You are at the bridge. May and you. You are nearly home.

**Patient**        It's pitch black as we make our way down the hill to the house.

Inside all is quiet. I'm gasping now. Can barely breathe. I walk down the hall and scramble to get a spare inhaler from the medicine cupboard. I puff it into me, breathe, breathe. It's close. I've only just made it. It takes a few minutes for me to recover then I hurry to the bedroom. Gi is lying in bed with his torch on. His eyes are closed but I can see the rise and fall of his chest. Relief. Relief. 'Gi?' He opens his eyes. The relief is short-lived. There is something hollowed out about his face. But he smiles. 'You look terrible,' he says. He has this ability to make everything seem so normal. 'I could say the same to you,' I say. Dirt-covered, I sit on the bed.

I take his hand. May takes out a ViMed dose from my backpack and opens it up. She gives it to Gi. He drinks. I tell him what has happened. May retreats to the doorway, and stands there, listening. 'I don't think we're safe in the house,' I say, when I've finished my tale. 'We're safe,' Gi says. 'What if they come?' I say. Our house is hidden from the road by the trees, but if someone comes to it from the rainforest they could spot it easily. What if tomorrow those kids, those rebel soldiers, find their way across the bridge? It might seem impossible but all of this seems impossible. 'We're safe. Tomorrow we'll camp in the caves,' Gi says.

**Doctor**        Caves?

**Patient**        It's a good idea. The caves are well hidden. We used to camp in them when we first came to the property, before the house was built. 'I think we should move up there now,' I say. 'I do too,' May says, and she walks up to the bed. 'We must go now.' She convinces Gi.

**Doctor**        What happens next?

**Patient**        May and I take a ViMed dose each, then we put the remainders in an esky. I ask May to prepare some food boxes. 'Things we can eat without cooking,' I say. 'Or warm up on the camping stove.' Gi, feeble, gets dressed but then has to lie down. 'Stay there,' I say. 'I'll come and get you when we're ready.' I take my torch and run down the road to Steve's place. I want to tell him what has happened. Get him to come with us. I feel safer in the cover of night but still, I want everything done in a hurry. My torch guides me along the dirt driveway up to the house. I call out from the back door. No answer. It's open so I go in. Slowly I walk down Steve's hallway, calling, flashing the light. Empty rooms. My boots



clunk clunk on bare floorboards. I don't know where he could be. Gi said he didn't come by and that has me worried. He could be out shooting rabbits, he has shot a few since Frank, and given them to us. But he looked this morning like a man who saw no future for himself.

**Doctor**        You think he might have taken his own life?

**Patient**        I think that. And in all this mess, with all these lives lost, each life seems more precious, not less. I know Steve keeps his gun in the back shed. I run out the back door, down the steps and along the gravel path to the shed. I shine my torch across the three big benches in the shed looking for Steve's gun and spot it on the shelf above the second bench. It's there. He can't have used it for himself. But that's when I decide to take the gun. That's when I realise we need to be armed. I need to be armed.

**Doctor**        You didn't think this before?

**Patient**        Before when? Before this day there had never been a need. This day has changed everything. But still I hesitate.

**Doctor**        Why do you hesitate?

**Patient**        Steve uses his gun for shooting rabbits but Gi and I have never had one. We've never liked the idea of having a gun in our home. But I take it. Because I don't know where Steve is, or if he is coming back, and because we need it for protection. Steve usually keeps the ammunition in the cabinet below the shelf. I open drawer after drawer but see only wrenches, nails, nuts and bolts. Fuck, where is the ammunition? I shine my torch along the walls and see two packets of ammunition on the shelf above the gun. I find a box to stand on and

reach for the packets. If I don't meet Steve on the road I'll keep checking back here for him. Also, I'll need to warn Tom and Bill, the other couple living on our hill, about the threat of the rebel soldiers. But first I want to get May and Gi settled in the caves. My torch is dimming. Back at our place I take spare batteries from the boot room cupboard and pile swags and camping equipment by the doorway, with pillows and blankets. I get the medicine box from the hallway cupboard and walk into the kitchen. May is standing behind the counter staring at the three food boxes she has packed. She stares at the gun. I have it over my shoulder. 'Good,' she says. 'Can you use it?' 'I'll work out how,' I say. We turn off our generator. Gi hobbles into the room. 'We're ready,' I say. He looks at the gun. 'We need it,' I say. He keeps looking at it. 'What happened at the medical centre means we need to be prepared.' Gi stares up at me. This is when we both know we have lost the Hill of Peace. 'It will only be for self defence,' I say. May gets the wheelbarrow from the shed. 'We'll take what we can manage,' I say. 'I'll come back for the rest.' We load one of the food boxes, the water container, our backpacks and some pillows and blankets into the wheelbarrow. Gi leans on me for support. We take the lead, Gi has the torch. Slowly we make our way up through the bush at the back of the house. Gi stops, switches off the torch and listens. Boo-book, boo-book. Boo-book, boo-book. The calls are everywhere. Hundreds of owls. Their eyes glint in the dark. We get to the taller trees and weave our way through the forest at the lower part of the escarpment until we come to the entrance of the caves.

**Doctor**            Describe to me the caves?

**Patient**        There are three dry caves with a rocky wall that runs in front of them. It forms a natural corridor that is open to the sky. You have to enter the corridor from the northern side. Entry from above is impossible because the escarpment is sheer rock. To the south there is a small entrance, large enough to crawl through. As soon as we set our things down in the second cave Gi starts to retch. He hobbles out to a bush at the side of the entrance. I go to him but he waves me away. I go back to the cave and lay out a blanket and pillow. It's cold but I dare not light a fire. I realise I will need to get Gi's swag before he can lie down. The earth is too cold. May is setting up the camping stove in the first cave. I go back to Gi but he is still retching, so I continue on down to the house and get the swag and some towels and buckets. Gi is sitting outside the cave entrance when I get back. He has his head in his hands. I go to the second cave and set up our swag. Then I walk back and sit beside him. The leaves are wet. The torch lights the space around us. I take out my inhaler and puff. 'We're safe here,' I say, but I don't yet believe it. 'Yes,' he says. 'We've always felt at peace in this place.' 'Rest now,' I say. 'We can talk things through tomorrow.' I help him to the swag. He lies in it and closes his eyes. I sit there as he falls asleep. When I look up, May is at the cave door. 'I'm going to hike down to Steve's to see if he is back yet,' I say to her. 'Then I'll go to Tom and Bill's to warn them.' I have a practice with how I can hold the gun. My left hand does have some ability but not much. I need to press it against my stomach. But I work out a system and sling the rifle over my shoulder. 'You listen out,' I say to May. 'If you hear anyone or anything, don't try to warn me. When I return I'll flash my torch three times so you know it's me.'

**Doctor**            Why do you not rest first? Why do you go now?

**Patient**            Because the world has changed. Because I don't know what tomorrow will bring. Because I need to be prepared. I stumble through the darkness back to Steve's house. He's not there. The stillness is frightening. There has been no moon since Frank. A sky always covered in clouds. I hike on to Tom and Bill's. Their brick house survived Frank, as did the new concrete and steel house behind, where the Canberra couple have their weekender. Both protected by the curve in the escarpment. I bang on Tom and Bill's door. No light inside. No answer. The back door is not locked. I step inside and call out. Maybe an evacuation helicopter has come in our absence? Maybe from the west? That thought disturbs me. It's possible that Tom, Bill and Steve have been evacuated. It could be that May, Gi and I are the only ones left on our side of the mountain.

                          What is going on elsewhere in the country? I have no idea. Someone must be in control. What happened at the medical centre is madness. Surely the army will come? I have to keep going. Not think about it for too long. I leave and make my way back to our house. All night I move stuff up to the caves. I make May stay with Gi. Gi says it's possible Steve visited him when he was asleep. Twice more I go down to Steve's. He's not there. At dawn May and I cover both entrances with bushes. May says she wants to sleep in the same cave as Gi and me. 'I don't know what's wrong with him. I don't know if it's the virus or not,' I say. 'We've taken the ViMed,' she says. 'I don't know what he has, it could be something else,' I say. 'I can sleep near the entrance,' she says. 'But with you, near you.' So we stay together. I have a fitful sleep. In the early morning I get up

and stand at the entrance to the caves. I listen for voices. Nothing. Only birds. I peer through the leaves. The dull light shows a sky full of black clouds. It begins drizzling. The plop of water on wet leaves. I sleep again.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        What happens now? Do you remember?

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Do you wake?

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Water on wet leaves. I sleep again. That is what you remember. Do you wake from this state?

**Patient**        Do I wake?

**Doctor**        Yes.

**Patient**        Yes, I wake.

*(Patient raises her right hand.)*

**Doctor**        Ten. Nine. Eight. You are slowly rising up. Seven. Six. Five. You are becoming conscious of this room again. Four. Three. You are nearly with me. Two. Nearly ready to open your eyes. One. You are here, you are safe.

*(Patient opens her eyes and turns to the Doctor.)*

**Patient**        Who are you?

**Doctor**        I am Doctor Letite. I work in the Yestermem project.

**Patient**        There are things you're not telling me?

**Doctor**        You are progressing so well. You are doing so well.

**Patient** We are remembering. You said we are remembering. But why can't you remember?

**Doctor** All your cognitive functions have slowed. But they are adjusting.

**Patient** Adjusting?

**Doctor** Your brain has been resting for some time.

**Patient** Was I in a coma?

**Doctor** It was like a coma. But not exactly a coma.

**Patient** This is a ship. You said an airship. Why am I on an airship?

**Doctor** Nada, please, you must trust me. It would be better if we could finish our session and then discuss the airship.

**Patient** You think it will disturb me? You think knowing more about the airship will disturb me?

**Doctor** You must trust me. Will you trust me, Nada? Will you finish the session, Nada?

*(Patient stares at the vismem tree.)*

**Patient** What happened to the tree?

**Doctor** The tree?

**Patient** Yes, that tree.

**Doctor** I don't know. There are very few trees now, some, I don't know if that particular tree. Nada, you are here, that is what is important.

**Patient** You believe that?

**Doctor** Yes.

**Patient** You are the doctor?

**Doctor** Yes.

**Patient** And I am Nada.

**Doctor** Very good, Nada.

**Patient** Are you sure?

**Doctor** What do you mean?

**Patient** What if I'm the doctor and you're the patient? What if I have set a test for you?

**Doctor** Well, no. That, no. I'm sorry. This must be very distressing for you.

*(Silence.)*

**Patient** I will finish.

**Doctor** I will take you back down to your personal membank. Relax. I am here. Trust me. You can rely on me. Ten. Nine. Eight. You are sinking back down. Seven. Six. Five. Returning to your home. Four. Three. To the caves. Two. Nearly there. One. You are there.

**Patient** I wake.

**Doctor** What do you see?

**Patient** Gi. He can hardly raise his head he is so weak, but he says he feels better. May is sitting with him. She has heated up some packet soup on the camp stove and is feeding it to Gi. I take the gun and hike down the road to Tom and Bill's, alert the whole way for any sound. Only the drip drip of water on green leaves. At their house, still no one there. I walk inside and check through their cupboards. Most of the tins are gone. But the place isn't trashed. It's possible they

could be camping somewhere, like us. Or maybe they've left, hiking their way out, and have packed the cans in rucksacks. But if they were hiking out, surely they would tell us first. There are three tins of pineapple left and I stash these and some vitamin pills in a bag. I walk up to the house belonging to the Canberra couple. They were not here for Frank. I break in through one of the shutters. In the bathroom I find a packet of antibiotics and aspirin. I see a bottle of malt whisky on the shelf. I take that too. And I take whatever tins I can carry. I check around so I can remember what is here. I will come back later for anything else. I spend the rest of the day moving more stores from our place up to the caves. Food, matches, fuel, laptop, pods, extra blankets, extra towels, pots, cups, plates, cutlery, everything I can think of that might be useful. If looters come we could lose it all. I want to get as much as possible into our hideaway. Other things, like books, photos, and our spare laptops, I put in the dry cellar. I nail the cellar door down then nail a rug over it. Outside kookaburras start hooting. The noise is deafening. There are too many birds. I walk out and look at our fig tree. It is so majestic, so big. I will climb it tomorrow to look out across the land. Back at the caves I finally feel something like relief. The caves are a secret. They are our safe place. I don't even doubt that what we are doing is sane. I show Gi the stash of medicines. He takes aspirin and then eats a tin of pineapple. That night I don't sleep. I sit up staring at the dark sky. I cry when I hear the boobooks calling.

**Doctor**        You don't sleep that night?

**Patient**        The next morning everywhere is a grey mist. I can only see for three metres in front. I take the gun and hike down to Steve's to gather up any



spare diesel he might have. Later, we can use it for our generator. When I walk into the shed Steve is there. Arms on the workbench, head down. As though he had never moved from the other day. 'You're here,' I say. I'm happy to see him. He looks up and I go to hug him but something stops me. It's the look in his eyes. 'I thought you'd gone,' I say. He turns to the wall. The muscles in his neck tense up. 'I thought you'd gone too,' he says. There is silence but in the silence there is so much.

**Doctor**        So much?

**Patient**        So much words can't describe. 'I took your gun. If that's what you've been looking for, I'm sorry but I took it.' I put the gun down on the cabinet. Dust floats in shafts of light. It looks like ash. I tell Steve what happened over at the medical centre. 'This is the kind of thing that happens in other places, not here,' I say. Steve stands up. 'This kind of thing happens everywhere, Nada, just when and where will depend on circumstances.' We've never talked of his war experiences. Now I want to ask him questions, but I don't. Not yet. 'We need to bring down the swing bridge,' I say. 'Has Gi still got that oxyacetylene torch?' he asks. 'Yes.' 'We'll sever the hooks that hold the bridge cables,' Steve says. 'Our danger then will only be those that can get fuel. Get here by air or boat.' I like that he says, *our* danger. He will stay. He will help. But I don't ask him where he has been. 'Tom and Bill?' I ask. 'I don't know where,' he says. I think of those kids I saw. Could they have been looting from Tom and Bill's place? That would mean they've been over this side of the mountain. I tell this to Steve. When we get back to the caves, Gi is sitting up and May is arranging the stores into neat piles.

We talk about what to do. When we finish talking it is nearly night. We make a plan. We agree that tomorrow, first light, we'll get the equipment and sever the bridge cables. Until then we'll keep a lookout. We can't take any risks. I walk to the entrance of the caves to take the first watch. It's like a heavy blanket has been thrown over the world. It's impossible to see the stars. There are no other universes now, never a moon, only this earth. Down below me is our home. But what makes a home? Not wood, not bricks, safety surely. I think of all the times there were news reports, protests, referendums about national security, about individual safety, but the danger came from another direction altogether. It came from our home, only we didn't know what our home was, we thought it was bricks and mortar, but it is the land, and the sea, and the sky. We didn't tend to our home. Gi comes up behind me. He is wrapped in a blanket. We stand together looking out at the darkness. 'How did it come to this?' he asks softly. 'I don't know,' I answer. 'But from now on ... from now on everything is different.' He sits next to me, puts the blanket around us both. He falls asleep. I flick off the torch. I think I fall asleep too.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Do you remember waking?

**Patient**        I can't. No. I don't—I can't remember.

**Doctor**        That's okay. Remember I'm here, you're safe.

*(Silence. The patient raises her right hand.)*

**Doctor** Ten. Nine. Eight. You are rising up. Seven. Six. Five. You are coming back to consciousness. Four. Three. Two. Soon you will open your eyes. One. You open your eyes.

*(The patient shakes her head and opens her eyes. She stares in front of her at the tree.)*

**Doctor** You did very well, Nada. Thank you.

**Patient** I haven't seen Gi.

**Doctor** No.

**Patient** Or May.

**Doctor** No.

**Patient** Or Steve.

**Doctor** No.

**Patient** Are they here?

*(The Doctor's nodule vibes.)*

**Doctor** Excuse me. I will take this.

*(Doctor signs on nodule. Listens. The patient watches. Doctor signs off nodule.)*

**Doctor** We have been very careful in these last few days not to say anything that may disturb you. As I said, we need to be careful. But I can now deliver some information to you. It will shock you. The narrative you have been outlining for me today occurred to you a very long time ago. The world was very different then. But from that world your mind, your brain, was rescued.

**Patient** Rescued?

**Doctor** It has been stored for some time in our free-vault and only recently have we been able to revive it. Your first life was before the Evanesce. What we know of that period is fragmented. You are now in your second life. We have given you a new body. This information will take some time for you to adjust to. Also your body and mind are taking time to adjust to each other. They are new companions.

*(Silence.)*

**Patient** Gi?

**Doctor** Gi, May, Steve, their minds—their brains—have not been identified as yet. They may be in the free-vault. They may not be. Why and how your brain was stored was not recorded. The events before the Evanesce are still being explored. Giving you this second life is possible through new technologies that were not available in your time. You are one of the first to receive a new body. Now, and only with your permission, you are helping us understand some of what happened.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor** We appreciate that this information will be difficult to take in.

**Patient** You think you are the doctor.

**Doctor** I am the doctor.

**Patient** But in fact you are the patient. Only you can't see that.

**Doctor** Yes, this is difficult. Adjusting will take time. We are your community now and we take that responsibility seriously. You can rely on us.

*(Silence.)*

**Doctor**        Would you like to go back to your berth now?

**Patient**        What happened to my home? What happened to Hill of Peace?

**Doctor**        Not recognisable.

**Patient**        Can I go there?

**Doctor**        We will be able to show you vismem of that time. At the moment  
the air quality in that zone is high risk. You will not be able to visit. But air quality  
is improving. Who knows when it might be possible.

**Patient**        I died? You're saying I died.

**Doctor**        You have been through your first passing, yes.

**Patient**        Was that my—did I just remember my last—

**Doctor**        I don't know. There may be more memories to come.

*(Patient stares at the tree.)*

**Doctor**        You lived in a period of great upheaval.

**Patient**        I am tree.

**Doctor**        No. You are Nada.

**Patient**        No. I am tree. And I am the doctor.

**Doctor**        Nada, would you like to go to your berth now?

**Patient**        Yes. Thank you. I will go to my berth now.

*(Patient and Doctor rise.)*

**Patient**        I feel it again. The wind. And the smell?

Sea air.

**Doctor**        It will turn off automatically when we leave.

1796

*by Will Martin*

*Tuesday, 29th March ...*

The wind is brisk and we sail north, skimming the top of the waves.

‘Look there, Barn Cove,’ calls the Lieutenant.

He is being his jolly self and attempting to pull Mr Bass out of his dark mood.

‘Will, you were there at its naming,’ the Lieutenant shouts. ‘You must tell that to your family on your return.’

I look to the cove that is not really a cove. Perhaps there *is* something in being there when it was named. Perhaps I am rising. Man must rise, was that not what Mr Bass said. And when Mr Bass writes his book, could be my name will be known to the world.

The breeze turns, whipping strong from the north and blows us about. The Lieutenant steers us through a reef near a headland. Mr Bass and I get on the oars and pull towards the cliff to shield us from the wind. We drop anchor and sit idle in the rocking boat, waiting for the weather to change.

‘And there’s no river found,’ Mr Bass says, despondent.

‘We may come to it yet.’ The Lieutenant starts to repack our stores.

He has not stopped with his jollying. He pretends all in our little boat are cheerful and by the force of his pretence he hopes we will become so.

I think back to the lagoon. All that water must have come from somewhere? But if there was a river there, we will not be the ones to discover it. Is this what disturbs Mr Bass? Or is it seeing how slight we are in this strange world? Out here, away from Sydney Cove, this is what comes to mind each day. The vastness of the land and of the sea and of the sky.

*Thumb* sits low in the water. The waves bump us about like driftwood. I have voices in my head, like a hundred young ones calling questions. What is over there on land? Maybe there is a river there, behind the trees.

Mr Bass lies down gingerly on his side. His burns from the sun still cause him pain.

‘Mr Bass, may I swim to shore?’

‘What for, Will?’

‘To see what is there,’ I say.

‘If you wish,’ says Mr Bass and closes his eyes.

The Lieutenant sits watching me. He even smiles as though he is pleased with my spirit. I strip off and jump into the water. It is ice cold. I dive under and swim like a dolphin, before I surface. My body warms as I swim. When I reach shore, I stagger out and look back to *Tom Thumb*. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant are dwarfed by the rocky cliff and the swirling sea.

I tramp the white sandy beach. The cliffs at either end are like clay. Trees come all the way to the edge of the sand dunes. Seaweed lies in thin bands. There

are no footprints on the sand, only shells and driftwood. Halfway along the beach I discover a stream whistling out from the trees. It narrows in places and can easily be jumped. I kneel to drink. The water is sweet. If I could name what I pleased I would name this stream for Mama, and the bay for my uncle, Hilton. I paddle in the stream, that is cooler than the sea, and watch two long bodied insects hover above it, one of top of the other. If I could fly where would I fly to?

I walk along the banks of the stream and sit beneath a tall tree with roots so large they curve around my back. With a shell I scratch into the bark. **My Name is Will Martin** , and then I scratch the date, **29<sup>th</sup> March, 1796.** My stomach is twisted about like the roots. I climb to the top of the tree and look out over the ocean, and over the trees that surround me, and back to the hills covered in thick foliage. I think of Mama and her way of talking to me about the world. She could imagine her way into far away places, places she'd never even been. Now I have my own story to tell, only it is not imagined. When I return to the *Reliance* I will tell about this beach, and how I swam to it on my own and discovered a stream and was not frightened of cannibals. The Lieutenant's brother, Samuel, will pretend not to listen, thinking I'm beneath him. But others will slap me on the back. I will not tell them of my fears. For even Cook must have felt them, out here in this wild place. I am now a man and not a boy and fear is banished. To dare is to do. I hear it in the wind that is running through the trees. To dare is to do.



I run into the water and dive beneath a wave that comes right at me. Cheat it of its power. I kick along the sandy bottom before I surface and tread water, watching *Thumb* bob about beneath the cliff. What would happen if I never returned to England but stayed here? I look back to the beach. The white sand curves around like a seashell. The bushes on the sand dunes are a mush of green. The forest behind is thick all the way up to the hills. This is a wild place. Too wild for civilization. It is a place for adventure. I will remember this place in my dreams. I will remember it in the stories I tell. For, in this place, I first realised that if we are to rise, it will come by what we tell of what we dare. I kick out my legs and swim towards *Tom Thumb*.

Mr Bass hauls me into the boat. The sun has fallen behind the cliffs. It is nearly dark.

‘What did you find?’ Mr Bass asks.

‘A stream of fresh water,’ I say, wiping water from my face.

They say nothing about how long I’ve been on shore.

The Lieutenant eyes the sky. ‘The wind is from the south. We must make use of it.’

Mr Bass and I get upon the oars and pull away from the cliff and out through the gap in the reef. We step the mast and haul sail. The wind is moody, first it blows one way, then another. We cannot sail in it with any ease. The sky is heaving with inky clouds. They lumber above us as we ride the waves. And then I hear it. Boom, boom! The thunder makes me jump. Lightning, like giant spider

legs, flashes through the sky. Night comes. We strike sail and pull in to the shelter of another cliff. We lift the stone anchor and throw it in the sea. The Lieutenant leans over the gunwale, trying to guess our distance from the cliff rocks. In the dark it is hard to tell.

‘The cliff rocks are too near for us to stay long,’ he says, when lightning flashes.

We sit in the dark again. The sea crashes onto the rocks. Another burst of lightning and I see the Lieutenant at the helm, watchful, and Mr Bass holding the anchor rope. Then it is dark again. We wait, anxious. The wind shifts direction.

‘Pull, we must pull now or we will smash upon the rocks!’ the Lieutenant shouts.

Mr Bass and I haul up the anchor, get on the oars and pull. As soon as we are out from the cliff we boat the oars and hoist sail. We are rolling on the sea. Thin bands of lightning flash through the sky and I see high above us the crest of a wave bearing down. A wild whooshing and crashing, water everywhere, we sink to the dip of the wave, then rise again to ride the top. I have the bucket and bail. Another crack of lightning. Larboard, I see harsh-faced crags. *Thumb* tips toward them but again we ride to the top of the wave. I can hear the water smashing on the rocks. I pin my feet beneath the thwart and bail. The next wave pushes us towards the rocks but again we rise to the crest of the wave. All is cold and hard and urgent. Time is measured by waves and only waves. Lightning flashes and I see the Lieutenant, iron-faced. The sail flaps before me like a gigantic bird. Mr Bass fists the sail, his strong arms haul one way, then another. He keeps us riding

the wave crests but more waves come for us, like shape-shifting ghouls, emerging out of the noisy dark. It is death that comes and I fight it back. I scream it off. We will not die. To dare is to do, slap, slap, and roar. To dare is to do, slap, slap and roar. Glory for us, not death. Another flash of lightning and there I see it, a huge wave hovering above, dark and shiny and alive, like a magnificent Dark Angel. Oh, but this is not a battle of my daring. Nature is laughing at me. Ideas of manhood and mankind are nothing now. Everything hurts. My arms scream, but my legs hold on. Water crashes over me and I am pushed to the side. Bail, bail, I must bail.

‘Reef! Reef!’ the Lieutenant shouts, his voice barely heard in the wind howl. I eye away from my bailing and in the distance, through the pounding rain, I see white water breaking.

‘Get ready to strike sail!’ Mr Bass hollers.

I see the white edge of a break but what is beyond it? The end of the world? We edge the breakers. The Lieutenant leans back on his steering oar and *Thumb* flips into the wind. Waves smash over us and I heave on the rope and we strike sail and unstep the mast, in double-quick time. In the sheeting rain we get on the oars, wait for the slow between the racing waves and then pull. Every muscle in my body is screeching in pain. We pull and pull, rain hits my cheeks, pull, pull, my feet start to slip, pull, pull, my hands clench the oar, pull, pull, and then suddenly, oh, so suddenly, the sea swells disappear and everything is calm. We have slipped through a gap in the reef and an immense quiet crowds in, as though my ears are muffled in wool. I can feel by my oar that we are delivered

into smooth water. We keep on pulling. I see a sliver of white. It flickers as we pull nearer. Perhaps it is the edge of the world we have come to? Is this the Dark Angel? Has she pushed us here? But then I see it is a beach and I laugh inwardly at my foolish thoughts.

Mr Bass and I slide away the oars, and, slipping on the wet wood, feeling about in the dark, together we heave up the anchor and drop it over the side. We stop there in the pitch black. I hear our heavy breathing and am thrilled by the sound. The moon comes out from behind a cloud. The Lieutenant looks like a cat that has a mouse. It's infectious. We all laugh at the surprise of being alive.

'My God, there's grace in our protection,' the Lieutenant says as our laughter subsides.

'Not God, it was chance gave us safety,' says Mr Bass.

'Perhaps,' says the Lieutenant.

'We had only the option to choose movement or none,' Mr Bass says.

'And all the while we knew not where movement would take us.'

His voice is joyful and sad together.

'This time to safety,' the Lieutenant whispers.

'Yes,' Mr Bass agrees.

'This place is providential.'

'It feels that way.'

'Providential Cove, that is what we must name it,' the Lieutenant says.

'Will, do you agree?'

'That be the name,' I say, 'that most fits this place.'

And I see what it takes for me to be one of them. It was not about choosing or not. It was the Dark Angel that came to us. We battled her, and now, here we are, us three.

‘Did you see that one dark wave?’ I ask.

‘What about those crags?’ Mr Bass says, laughing. ‘One time, I thought we were to be smashed to pieces.’

‘More than once!’ says the Lieutenant.

Could be they didn’t see the Dark Angel the way I did. I say no more. I eye the clouds as they move swiftly overhead. The stars reveal themselves. It is a night not to be forgotten. It’s some time before I can sleep.

### *Wednesday, 30th March*

The glorious morn of our seventh day. I say this out loud as we pull toward the beach. I jump into the shallows and help haul *Thumb* onto the sand. Then stand and look about me. This cove is gentle. The rocky cliffs curve to a headland on each side and set a frame for the sea beyond. Feathery clouds are low in the sky and seabirds scatter in the blue above. Spiky green bushes grow in the sand and tall trees cast shadows in tidal pools. The water is like a turquoise jewel. I eye a stream at the back of the cove. Without waiting for instruction I take hold of the barica and run up the sand dune. The stream curves around the rocks like a snake. There are footprints leading down to the stream. They can only be from Indians but my feeling of gladness cannot be damped. This is a cove of peace. I spy the

ashes of a fire. When I nudge a burnt log with my toe, it is cold. Nothing bad can happen here. There is nought to fear, not from man or beast or sky or sea.

It is late morn. We push off and row and then we pick up a light breeze and sail. Our spirits are high. I think of this remarkable life. My Mama used to whisper me stories about journeys to places like Jamaica and Calcutta and other places that may or may not have existed. I'd listen and when she'd finished her tale I'd always say, how do you know about that, Mama? You, who have never been from England? Oh, she'd say, but in my imagining I've been to many faraway places, the future as well as the past.

Now, I have places to tell her that are more than imagining.

We sail on with Port Solander in sight. The cliffs turn low and sandy as we breeze into an open bay. The sun beats down upon water that is pond-like, and a tired wind pushes us along. The sky is pale blue, like faded uniforms, and on the scrubby shore, the green bush is flecked with silver.

It is near noon when we see it. We are sitting in *Tom Thumb*, coasting the northeast of the bay.

'There is our river,' the Lieutenant says.

'So it is,' I say.

'It was a long journey here,' says Mr Bass.

We strike sail and pull up the river and a little way along. It is scrubby on either side with rock ledges that hang over like bushy eyebrows. We pull back out to the bay.

‘It will not do for large vessels,’ Mr Bass says.

‘We’ll name the river after Hacking, who guessed it was here,’ the Lieutenant says.

This is not the river that will make monuments of our names but it does not matter now. Not after we have seen how each day is more than any monument could ever be. We sit rocking in our boat, watching the water tumble from the river into the bay.

‘This place feels older than time,’ Mr Bass says.

‘Yes,’ agrees the Lieutenant.

‘It should be our care, not so much to live a long life, but an honourable one,’ says Mr Bass.

‘Well said,’ agrees the Lieutenant.

They look to me and smile and in their serenity I see something of what it means to live. For in all the tumble of joy and anger and love and hatred and hunger and greed that is our life, there are moments like this, that lift a man into a quiet place, where the thanks and wonder is in the drawing of each breath.

We pull to the north side of the cove, drag *Thumb* onto the sand. The fan leaves of the palm trees are green clouds above us. I gather sticks from the back of the beach and flint a fire. I lay out our clothes to dry, stretch my arms and legs, and rub my toes in the sand. I turn and spy two Indians standing in the trees. How long have they been watching us? The two men smile. One is older than the other. They have no spears. Mr Bass calls to them in the Port Jackson speak and they walk across the sand. The Lieutenant, down by the water’s edge, hurries back. He

tells the Indians we are from Sydney Cove, but they seem not to know the name. We offer to share what food we have but they do not want it. They look us over from head to toe. The older man touches the freckles on my nose. The younger one strokes Mr Bass's waistcoat. I sit to tend the fire, and when I stand, I see they are leaving, as quietly as they arrived.

We take *Thumb* fishing in the calm water. I look to the hilltops but there is no sign of the Indians. The sharks slide alongside and eye us, as if curious to take a bite. We sit with our lines. Catch nothing.

We leave off fishing and pull back to shore. I dig up soft grass and throw it on the ground to make our beds. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant gather sticks for the fire. I boil water and we eat the last of the salted beef. The night is all stars. I pick out Warrewull. I am pleased that I can speak two languages. This wild place has taught me much.

### *Thursday, 31st March*

Our eighth day. Gulls greet me. Carick, carick! We push *Thumb* into the water—splish, splash—and the Lieutenant and I pull around Port Hacking. Mr Bass is at the helm. His long legs stretched out before him like he is napping. We boat our oars. The Lieutenant scrambles to the bow and ferrets out his compass and journal. Mr Bass and I rummage for hooks and line so we can fish. We talk about what we will say to our friends on the *Reliance*, about the currents being too strong so that we overshot our mark, about the dumping on the beach where the



thin trails of smoke from the forest alerted us to danger, about the cannibals that we nearly met, and our trading with the Indians, and barbering of their beards, about our escape from their clutches.

‘Was it escape?’ Mr Bass asks.

‘You know it was,’ the Lieutenant says.

They look to each other, then to me, and for a tick-tock I hold my breath.

Carick, carick! The gulls call out.

‘We were dead men in that place,’ I say.

‘We were,’ says Mr Bass.

‘Indeed,’ agrees the Lieutenant.

And we talk on about our battle with the storm.

‘What a story we have to tell,’ I say.

Mr Bass laughs and ruffles my hair.

‘I’m too old for that,’ I say pulling away.

‘Yes,’ he says. ‘You’re way too old.’ And he ruffles my hair again.

We start to wrestle.

‘Don’t get my journal wet!’ the Lieutenant shouts, as the boat rocks.

Mr Bass pushes but I push back. He is stronger but I am faster. We are poised for a fall.

‘The sharks will get us,’ I dare.

‘You think I’m frightened of sharks?’ he asks.

‘You tell me,’ I say.

We stay gripping each other's arms. Holding tight. My heart beating fast. Then, he pushes me as I push him. We tip together. I let go of my hold as I fall into the cool water. Down, down, I go, and then push up to the surface. I swim away from *Tom Thumb*, dive under again, and swim back to the boat, bursting up for air at the side. I climb in, quicker than I might normally do, for a dare is a dare but I don't want to chance sharks any more than I have to. Mr Bass stays a moment longer to prove that he can.

'Look there,' I say, pointing to the water beyond him, as if there is a shark.

He is in the boat in a tick-tock, with me sitting on the thwart laughing.

### *Friday, 1st April*

In the early morn of our ninth day I wake. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant are still sleeping. The sky is full of majestic ships, all white, like from a dream. I get up and walk along the beach, gathering sticks. I light a fire and set a pot of water above the sticks, splashing in it the last of our soup cakes. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant wake and we sup as though at a feast. We pack and push *Tom Thumb* into the water. I look back at the wide bay as we pull out through the entrance. The sail flaps in the breeze and we head toward Port Jackson.

At sunset we are in Sydney Cove, clapping the shoulders of friends on board the *Reliance*. Our excitement is so great, we climb down, pull to the dock and hurry to the Governor's house to make our report.

The Governor is in the garden listening to an owl.

'I'm pleased to see you,' he says to Mr Bass and the Lieutenant. Then he turns to me. 'Young Will,' he says.

He shakes my hand and his grip is firm.

'A drink is in order,' he says.

The Governor leads the way towards the house.

At the door Mr Bass turns to me. 'Go, enjoy yourself, Will.'

The Governor and the Lieutenant are walking down the hallway. Mr Bass folds his arms.

'Have the night off, you've earned it,' Mr Bass says and turns away.

I walk along the shore, kicking stones. The sky is clear. The half-moon is bright. At the hospital, Buckley, the surgeon's mate, is outside smoking a pipe. His dogs bark as I arrive. Na is not there. Na has my dog with him, says Buckley. I search the faces at the campfires near the Tank Stream but Na is not there. I look in our usual places. Na would have seen *Tom Thumb* come in, I'm sure of it. I scout along the edge of the stream down to the shore and along the sand. Na and my dog, George the Fourth—that is kept at Mr Palmer's place, Palmer's gift to me—are nowhere to be seen.

I climb around the cliff, to an outcrop of rocks and shrubs. In summer I came here to watch the chicks of the honeyeater. The chicks are long gone but the nest is still there. I sit on a rock ledge gazing out at the dark water. If I were born into a tribe like Na, what I would have to do to be a man is have my tooth pulled. But is not my journey, in a small boat, facing wild seas and treacherous cannibals,

equal to teeth pulling? They will be toasting at the Governor's. There'll be a fire blazing and they'll tell the story of our journey. But will they tell my part in it? I hear an owl hooting and dogs barking. I sit on the rock and eye the water slapping the shore.

Now

I

am

a

man.

This

is

what

it

is

to

be

a

man.

## Exegesis

### Unreliable Narration: The Exploration of a Technique to Destabilize Reliable Narration in Prose

#### 1 Introduction

If I wanted a one-sentence definition of human beings, this would do: humans are the animals that believe the stories they tell about themselves. Humans are credulous animals.

(Rowlands 2009: 2)

Humans are the only animals that use stories to help make sense of the world. An inquiry into how humans construct stories is also an inquiry into reliable and unreliable narration; it is also an inquiry into the relationship between author, text and reader and goes to the root of what it means to be human.

The research question I began with—How does unreliable narration destabilize reliable narration in prose?—was formed so I could discover how best to employ narration techniques when writing my novel, *I Am Tree*. This meant that I was analysing my own creative process, attempting to tease out what theoretical and historical research methods were and were not useful in the creation of a historical unreliable narrator. But underpinning both novel and exegesis was a desire to meditate on how and why humans tell stories, particularly stories that are unreliable.

The thesis comprises a creative project and exegesis and is best read in the order presented. The creative project, *I Am Tree*, is five tales set in the Illawarra, New South Wales. I call it a novel because although a different narrator tells each tale, and each narrator speaks from a different period in time, they have in common the place where their story is set. The changing landscape is ever present.

Part of the journey in creating each narrative was to discover whether to write a reliable or unreliable narration, using first-person, or to write in the third-person. Resolving each narrative voice brought the historical and theoretical research into constant play with the writing. The exegesis investigates this process by doing a close textual reading of one story, '1796 by Will Martin', as a case study, the examination in this instance being of a text that is in the process of being written rather than an extant text. In this way the exegesis fills a gap in current unreliable narration research where theorists have teased out the typological and theoretical permutations of the term and closely related concepts—such as the implied author and the authorial audience—have gone on to develop analytic tools and to then apply those tools to the creative product rather than the creative act.

The process of writing is often mercurial. Much about the shaping of a narrative will always be unacknowledged; the beginnings of a story lurking in the murky recesses of a writer's mind. I write for the same reasons I read, and my interest in unreliable narration stems from doors opened by early reading and writing experiences. I briefly turn to these experiences in order to unearth the buried sources of my relationship to fiction.

### ***Reading and Writing Fiction***

As a child I, along with several of my siblings, would be sent to bed every night at 7 p.m. for one hour of reading. I shared a room with two of my sisters and our beds, cream Queen Anne with pink candlewick covers, were all in a row. Each night we'd collect our books from the mantel shelf. In winter we'd be wearing flannelette pyjamas and carrying cups of hot milk. As we read, we'd hear the wind swishing through the trees that grew outside our room. In summer, it was light cotton pyjamas, water, cool sheets, the chirping of crickets and the croaking of frogs. One hour of reading was presented as something special. We were very fortunate, so went the parental narrative, to be allowed time to wander in 'fictional worlds' (Eco 1998: 87). The whole arrangement, I now realize, was an excellent parental strategy devised to get numerous unruly children—there were eight in total, two boys and six girls—into bed at an early hour. But reading in bed, with the sound of adult voices drifting down from the kitchen, was my first experience of leading a double life.

While reading, we are transposed to a realm outside our bodily existence, having the illusion of leading another life. We are with and simultaneously outside ourselves, and we obviously enjoy such a doubling. (Iser 2000: 312)

This double life carried on from childhood into teenage years. Each Christmas we kids were presented with a novel and throughout the remainder of the school holidays we'd swap the books around, reading stories that were meant

for older or younger siblings. I remember one in particular, about logging in America, perhaps meant for an older brother. I've never forgotten that invigorating story. I was fascinated by the hard life of the men and their physical endurance, especially the way they jumped dangerously from log to log. The lives and events depicted in the story were vastly different from my own experiences. Perhaps too, I was discovering something about how society defined work for men and women, for this story was a long way from the confined world imagined for women in *What Katy Did* ([1872] 1946) another Christmas novel read in the same period.

In *Six Walks In The Fictional Woods*, Umberto Eco meditates on the connection between fiction and real world experiences:

any walk within fictional worlds has the same function as a child's play. Children play with puppets, toy horses, or kites in order to get acquainted with the physical laws of the universe and with the actions that someday they will really perform. Likewise, to read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. (1998: 87)

Novels helped me comprehend my own reality and they opened up new worlds, but also, they held secrets. There was a little room in our house that enclosed a stairway up to two attic rooms. This stairway room had a white cupboard full of books and on the dark-wood top shelf were those novels that my parents had banned us younger children from reading. I remember climbing up to the top shelf and seizing one of these banned books, a battered paperback novel. I retreated to my secret place—up the stairs to one of the attic rooms, through a



small window, and onto the red-tiled roof of our house—to read it. The book was about a Nanny that drowns her charges. I found it thrilling but only because the story contained things I wasn't meant to know.

I travel to fictional worlds for enjoyment, enchantment, contemplation and discovery. My aim is to live for a short time in an imagined place so that I can return refreshed, understanding more about the real world. When writing I also spend time in imagined worlds, but unlike my reading experiences, I can shift text elements about until I settle upon a final creative product. The exegesis seeks to discover something of this shifting process. What follows is the broad outline of the two pieces of writing that represent the conclusion of my doctoral studies.

### ***Creative Project and Exegesis***

The first and longest tale in the novel, *I Am Tree*, is a fictional retelling of a first contact story: the journey Matthew Flinders, George Bass and Bass's servant, William Martin, took down the south coast of New South Wales in 1796 in a small boat called the *Tom Thumb*. The explorers struggle to find fresh drinking water and have difficulty landing their boat. On their fourth day they trade goods with two Koori men. Later, the two Kooris guide them to a stream, near Lake Illawarra, and they meet with locals. After an initial friendly exchange, the Europeans become frightened and retreat, firing off a shot. On the return journey home they get caught in a storm and narrowly escape death. '1796 by Will Martin', told by unreliable narrator, Will, investigates the fears that besieged the Europeans as they engaged with the land and its people, examining how those

fears tested the bonds between the three young men. This first narrative is interrupted by each subsequent tale, so the reader is always returning to this first contact story.

The second tale, 'Hawker Speaks, Big Sister Speaks', is another historical retelling, this time of the shooting of an unnamed Indigenous woman in 1822 by the convict worker, Seth Hawker. Hawker shares the narration of this story with a third-person teller, who reveals Big Sister's version of events. The fear explored here concerns a past that might be lost and a dreamed for future that might never be found. Both protagonists share a sense of other forces guiding their lives but each imagines these forces as vastly different entities.

The third story, 'Mary', is set not far from Lake Illawarra. Mary, and her husband, Dylan, run a small dairy farm, one of thirty-six small farm allotments leased from the Wentworth Estate at a reasonable fee in exchange for land clearing. The century has just turned and new industries are being established. The local Reverend claims the region is a place of hope. Mary, having just lost her first child, is less optimistic. Her husband rebuffs her intimate advances and she fears that local prejudice will soon crush her spirit. She finds relief from her distress by fishing in the nearby lake. She meets a Koori fisherman, and a young female amateur ornithologist, who influence how she imagines her world.

In the fourth story, the narrator, Bel, relates her childhood experiences rafting around Lake Illawarra with two friends, Saphy and Tarak. Their exploration trips are full of daily discoveries. The three meet up with Kristie, a teenager with a wild streak. Bel, however, keeps her friendship with Kristie a

secret from her parents, fearing their disapproval. Kristie's world seems magical but Bel soon discovers it contains dark recesses. In 'Bel' fear is double-sided, sometimes leading to danger, sometimes to imaginative freedom.

In the fifth futuristic story, 'I Am Nada', Nada, a patient in the Yestermem project, recounts her experiences during a natural disaster. Nada fears that her home, and the thousand-year-old tree that grew near it, are now gone, but her attempts to clarify the kind of world she is now living in, are continually, and mysteriously, frustrated. Her gradual understanding of the purpose of the Yestermem project cause her to claim a change of identity, insisting she is not Nada, but is, instead, the tree.

Elements of the natural world feature in each narration and form the transition from one story to the next. In each tale the protagonist is gripped by a fear, (or fears), which seem insurmountable and are connected to a violent episode that may or may not be correctly reported.

The exegesis section of this thesis analyses the creative writing process by interrogating a single tale from the novel. This tale, '1796 by Will Martin', required me to develop an eighteenth century unreliable narrator. To discover more about the technique of unreliable narration I researched the work of rhetorical and cognitive theorists, and from this research employed several different methodological tools for my analysis of the creative process. However, in this study, I also refer to other literary theorists, various historians, residents of the Illawarra, and several novelists. (The *Exegesis Chapter Breakdown* section of the current chapter describes this process in more detail.) As I wrote, new

questions arose. Were there specific narrative limitations when writing a historical unreliable narrator? What was the difference between history and fiction? Could I write an Indigenous narrator? The exegesis uses scholarly methods to interrogate my own practice and is therefore a self-reflexive critique.

A story, however, begins much earlier than the theoretical or historical research and before I move into a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the writing journey, I want to attempt to reach back to those early imaginings.

### **Origins: *I Am Tree***

Umberto Eco, in *On Literature* (2002), contemplates the beginnings of a novel:

There is no set of rules, or, rather, there are many, varied and flexible rules; and there is no hot magma of inspiration. But it is true that there is a sort of initial idea and that there are very precise phases in a process that develops only gradually.

My three novels stemmed from a seminal idea that was little more than an image: that was what seized me and made me want to go on. (308)

In writing *I Am Tree* it was indeed an Eco-like image that ‘seized’ me as I was walking, one winter morning, in the Minnamurra Rainforest, about half a kilometre from where I live in Jamberoo, New South Wales. Strong winds often sweep through Jamberoo each year, in July and August, yet on this occasion, the winter winds hadn’t been as fierce as usual and I expected the environmental damage to be minimal.

The first part of my walk went as normal, although normal is not the right word, because to enter the Minnamurra Rainforest is to enter a magical space. The light is always dappled and even on cloudy days has a greenish hue. Vines droop across the pathway and lyrebirds scratch in the leaf matter. The drip-drip of water is a constant beat beneath the birdsong. Some of the ancient trees have roots so large you can sit on them. One tree has a hollowed out trunk roomy enough to stand in. The natural environment is all encompassing, but also, in the back of my mind memories stir of childhood stories and fairytales where trees and vines were the entry points to enchanted worlds.

There is a raised pathway through much of the forest and three bridges that cross the several twists of the river. I was halfway up a hill, on a pathway that took me away from the water, when, stopping for a breather, I saw ahead that the enormous Small-leaved Fig that usually shaded the area had snapped in two. The trunk now rose into the air for only three metres, and a jagged section of bark went on for another metre, but the rest of the forty-metre tree lay, like a fallen giant, in the bushes behind.

I stood, mesmerized, disbelieving that such a tall strong tree, seemingly protected by the surrounding forest, could have been toppled by wind. Some months later, when walking through the reception area, I spotted a cut-through section of the trunk set out on a display table. The attached printed card claimed that the tree had been a thousand years old.

I could not get that wind-torn tree out of my thoughts. I saw it, in my mind's eye, growing from seed into a tall tree. It had been growing on that hillside

before Europeans had ever set foot in the Illawarra. This sudden rupture, natural as it was, was all the more a loss because so much rainforest had been logged from this once lush region of New South Wales.

The idea of disruption and what it does to our sense of continuity, inspired by the Small-leaved Fig, informed the structural scheme and themes of the novel, *I Am Tree*. I wanted to write a story that meditated on the transformations of life and landscape that had occurred, over the last two hundred years, in the Illawarra, and that contemplated the idea of violent unexpected death.

When I had written my first novel, *The Nearly Happy Family* (2008), I'd followed the often-uttered maxim: write about what you know. Since I was the fifth-born in a brood of eight a story ruminating on family seemed an obvious choice. In my second novel I wanted to try a different approach. I wanted to write about what I didn't know. I wanted to understand more about the culture I was born into and explore what had—as an Australian—shaped my beliefs. I remember sitting at my desk, thinking up and writing down lists of questions. What does it mean (for me, for others) to be Australian? What, if anything, defines Australians as opposed to Tongans or Icelanders? What shaped the beliefs that we have (I have) about ourselves (myself) as Australians?

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in 'The Story of "I": Illness and Narrative Identity', says, 'we lead our lives as stories, and our identity is constructed both by stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves and by the master narratives that consciously or unconsciously serve as models for ours' (2002: 11). In attempting to remember the origins of *I Am Tree* I've constructed a narrative

that shapes the way I see myself, but also, how I want others to see me. Writing about the origins helped me make sense of a jumble of sensations and experiences, but it also swept up that early process and made it neat. This too, is what I've done by writing the novel presented here. Picked specific elements from a chaotic bundle of events and experiences that occurred in the Illawarra region and created a streamlined narrative. In attempting to explore, through the exegesis, the writing of '1796 by Will Martin', I hope to uncover the leftover bits of the cleaned-up fictional narrative. And yet, there is a conundrum here, for as I write a story of writing a story, something will always be left out. And how reliable is a reliable narration on unreliable narration?

### ***Exegesis Chapter Breakdown***

The research for the thesis took me in several directions: to explore the different historical periods and the historical figures depicted in the novel; to examine the theoretical material on unreliable narration; to analyse how other writers have used particular techniques to develop their narratives; out into the community to talk with people about their experiences living in the Illawarra; and to various locations in the region to look at the landscape itself and to then research the ecological changes that have occurred. These different areas of investigation had to occur simultaneously but for ease of narrative progression, although there is some overlap, they have been separated out into various chapters.

In Chapter Two, 'Forming Judgments, Rhetorical Purpose and Ethical Implications', I employ elements of James Phelan's (2005 and 2007) theoretical

inquiry into rhetorical purpose and rhetorical ethics to examine a nonfictional historical document, *Matthew Flinders' Narrative of Tom Thumb's Cruise to Canoe Rivulet* (1985), edited and introduced by Keith Bowden, (and hereafter called *Canoe Rivulet*). From this analysis I began to question the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of my fictional narration. What was I communicating to the authorial audience by fictionalizing a first contact story? I decided to attempt to create an open rather than a closed text, one that might inspire alternative interpretations of the events depicted in the nonfictional narrative. From here, new questions arose. How did unreliable narration work when the story was based on a historical nonfiction supposedly reliable narration? Were there any special limitations or considerations when writing a historical unreliable narrator? What kind of unreliable narrator should I create?

Chapter Three, 'Reliable and Unreliable Narration', charts the theoretical journey I took to comprehend the different ways unreliable narration had been historically understood and culturally mediated by literary theorists. I begin with Wayne Booth ([1961] 1983) who first coined the term in the 1960s. As I researched it became clear that the term unreliable narration, and those concepts associated with it, such as the implied author and authorial audience, have been in constant flux. This overview caused me to consider, more deeply than I had before, the relationship between the implied author and authorial audience. I then analysed the various unreliable narrator classification schemes devised by literary theorists and found Mary Patricia Martin and James Phelan's (1999) typological breakdown the most useful. I began asking myself more specific questions. Was



my narrator misreporting or overreporting? How did methods of reporting affect the authorial audience? Did the reader supplement the narrator's story or replace it with one they imagined? The work of cognitive theorists—Vera Nünning (2004) and Bruno Zerweck (2001)—raised questions about the historical and cultural reception of narrators. Unreliable narrators, I discovered, were not fixed entities and their unreliability depended, in part, on the period and culture they were being read in. I began to speculate about how an eighteenth century narrator, written by a twenty-first century writer, would be received by a twenty-first century authorial audience. Would I be wise to mimic narrators of the period, sticking to period conventions? Or create new fictional conventions?

Having set about forming the rhetorical purpose of my narrative, and having started to comprehend the concept of unreliable narration, the implied author and the authorial audience, and, having developed a whole new set of questions that needed answers, I began to delve further into the historical research in order to commence shaping my characters.

In Chapter Four, 'A Historical Unreliable Narrator: Historical Research and the Writing of Unreliable Narrator, Will Martin', I investigate how the historical and theoretical research impacted on the writing of several drafts of '1796 by Will Martin'. I launch this chapter by compiling the work of several different historians, thereby creating a picture of the colonial environment that my fictional narrator, (based on the historical William Martin), would have set out from. Then, in order to hypothesize about what attitudes the three historical figures might have had to Indigenous Australians, I examine clues offered by

historical documents, and more specifically, by Bass and Flinders' own narratives. The process of discovery and of writing creatively was not straightforward. Disordered order might be a good name for it and this chapter aims to capture an element of that dynamic flow by charting the changes that occurred over several drafts of '1796 by Will Martin'.

Chapter Five, 'Historical Reliability and Unreliability', interrogates how an author creates plausible historical characters. I explore the limitations and freedoms around writing historical fictions by discussing some of the arguments raised in Inga Clendinnen's *The History Question: Who Owns The Past?* (2006) (hereafter *The History Question*) and Lubomír Doležel's 'Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting the Postmodernist Challenge' (1999). I then examine the biographical background of George Bass and Matthew Flinders and attempt to show how I made decisions about what might be plausible to infer about each historical figure. Finally, I give examples of how I turned these inferences into fictional scenes that could be recounted by my narrator. I argue here that when creating a historical unreliable narrator, and when the rhetorical purpose is to open up multiple perspectives around a single historical event, a certain amount of historical reliability is necessary for the authorial audience to accept the events and characters depicted as credible fictional interpretations.

In Chapter Six, 'Writing White, Writing Black and Events at Canoe Rivulet', I examine how one of the thematic questions that guided my writing—What does it mean to be Australian?—led me to think about how to write first contact stories, and from there to research and finally take a position on whether

white Australian writers should write Indigenous Australian narrators. I examine the way some white Australian writers have misused Indigenous Australian identity for their own advantage. I go on to briefly discuss Anita Heiss's (2002) investigation into white writers writing about Indigenous culture, and then outline writer Kate Grenville's approach to creating Indigenous characters in *The Lieutenant* (2008). In *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders describes how he used deception as a strategy to retreat from the Koori men he met. He also suspects that the Kooris are deceiving him. In the final section of this chapter I analyse how Flinders wrote about deception in *Canoe Rivulet*, and from here, using the research into Indigenous culture and interviews with members of the Illawarra Indigenous community, hypothesize about what might have prompted the actions of the Kooris at Canoe Rivulet.

In Chapter Seven, 'Conclusion', I step back and reflect upon the creative journey, summarising how the theoretical and historical research became interwoven with my imaginings when writing my historical unreliable narrator. Some mention is made here of those aspects that were eliminated from the discussion. In my concluding comments I suggest that when creating historical unreliable narrators, and when the rhetorical purpose is linked to the fictional recreation of historical events, a certain amount of historical reliability is needed for the authorial audience to accept the events and characters depicted as credible fictional interpretations. The research indicates that when approaching Indigenous historical narrators certain cultural protocols need to be observed and my own nervousness about creating Indigenous narrators was eased through the research

phase by my growing comprehension of the place story has in Indigenous culture. My study also suggests that unreliable narrations—by encouraging the reader to make judgments about narrator motivation and by stimulating them to imagine alternative narratives—refute the idea that there is a single perspective on an event, reminding the authorial audience that counter-stories exist even if they are not being heard.

### ***Methodology***

In writing the novel and accompanying exegesis several traditional and differing strands of research were required: historical; theoretical; field trips; interviews; ecological; reading and researching novels by other writers. The historical research was initially library-based. Besides reading history, it involved sifting through historical records, databases and newspapers, or flicking through microfilm and reading copies of letters written by historical figures. It also included visits to museums to look at early colonial artefacts, such as guns, boats, or articles of clothing, or in one case, to view the replica of the *Tom Thumb*. There was even a sailing trip on the *Endeavour* replica. I attempted to fill gaps in the documentary material available on Indigenous history, specific to the Illawarra region, by taking field trips to locations that were to feature in the novel, and by interviewing Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Illawarra community. In the eight semi-structured interviews I asked each interviewee a series of questions about their life, their connection to the land, and their knowledge of the region's history. With Indigenous interviewees I also discussed

the protocols around the fictional telling of the two early contact stories depicted in the novel.

The theoretical approach was through rhetorical and cognitive criticism. Here my methodology included a literature survey, researching the broad scope of the theory of unreliable narration, then adapting methodological tools from the work of particular theorists to analyse my own creative process. These tools allowed me to break down the drafts of the fictional narration. I could consider if a particular scene was working along the narrator-authorial audience track, or the narrator-narratee track, hypothesize as to the effect the narration might have on the authorial audience, and from this analysis decide what changes to make in the subsequent draft. The methodological tools allowed me to make appraisals about whether the authorial audience was bonded to or estranged from the narrator. The theory helped me work through and take a position on certain cultural and ethical narrative problems, such as where I stood on the divide between history and fiction, and what I thought about Australian white writers writing Indigenous narrators. In answering these questions I also looked to the work of other authors to see how they had resolved similar issues.

The novel involved ecological research, and here I focused on scientific books (written for popular consumption) on climate change, as well as specific research concerning the ecological history of the region, including viewing nineteenth century paintings and photographs and reading nineteenth century narrations about the landscape. Although the ecological research does not figure in

the exegesis it was important to the development of the creative product section of the thesis.

Because the thesis is, in part, a creative writing project, it required, finally, an imagining of characters and situations from those aspects of the research that seemed relevant. Perhaps it is useful to say here that sometimes my methodological approach was to empty my mind of all kinds of active thinking and to wait and see what occurred. In analysing methods of approach in a creative writing thesis it seems important to acknowledge that stillness, the antithesis of action, is part of the process.

### ***Situating the Work***

In structuring *I Am Tree* I was influenced by David Mitchell's (2003) novel, *Cloud Atlas*. In this novel Mitchell employs several narrators, some reliable, some unreliable, to tell six stories that cross time and geographical space. Each story is interconnecting rather than independent. We read the first half of five of the stories in succession, then, the sixth story is told in full, before the second half of each of the previous five stories is completed. Each narrator or protagonist, as part of their character action, reads the letters, or journal, or story, of the previous narrator, and all bear a comet birthmark on their body. Thematically, the stories all connect to a central question: Is technological progress advantageous to all people?

Many other novels of diverse genres—such as Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1981)—suggest a novel form by juxtaposing story

fragments. Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming* (2009) is a series of narratives told by an unnamed narrator. Each story is linked by the atmosphere of dislocation, each tale revealing a person, family, couple, or group of people, who feel they are about to live, or are living, in a radically altered world.

What all the novels mentioned have in common, (and despite not all belonging to the same genre), is the notion that the stories they present, when placed in the one book, offer something beyond what each individual story could offer. (Indeed, one of the discontinued stories from Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* could not really be understood outside its framework as a novel.)

In *I Am Tree* what connects the stories most strongly is the landscape. The connecting narratives trace a metamorphosing of cultural identity without detailing what that identity is. The novel is not a grand narrative but instead seeks to offer one strand of a larger vision, a glimpse of a people and place. While each story could stand alone, together, the five stories might offer a way to reflect on what it means to be Australian. It is for this reason that I call *I Am Tree* a novel.

## 2 Forming Judgments, Rhetorical Purpose and Ethical Implications

### *Introduction*

Taking the broad historical view my relationship with Australia did not begin at my birth, or with the immigration stories of my grandparents, but with the arrival of the Europeans in 1788. Therefore, in *I Am Tree*, it seemed befitting that one of the tales be a first contact story. I began by researching eighteenth century narratives about explorers or whalers who had landed or had been shipwrecked in the Illawarra, although I was not sure, at this early stage, if I would retell a historical event or simply draw inspiration from it.

There were other options to writing a first contact story, such as retelling myths about the first Indigenous travellers to the land, or reworking unconfirmed stories of sixteenth century Portuguese landings. I even outlined a tale about a father and daughter set in a timeless drought-ridden land seemingly empty of other people. But I discounted these options early in the study, as I didn't yet have the authorial confidence to create an unreliable narrator with bloodlines different to my own.

I was attracted to fictionalizing the story of Matthew Flinders, George Bass, and Bass's servant, William Martin, sailing along the coast and landing near Lake Illawarra, firstly, because it was one of the early recorded contact events in the region, secondly, because the narrative threw up puzzling questions, and



thirdly, because the tale involved a series of dramatic incidents. I instinctively discounted creating a fictional Flinders to narrate a story that the historical Flinders had already written. The narrator would most likely be a fictional George Bass or a fictional William Martin, although other narrators were not yet excluded. My first task was to investigate the *Canoe Rivulet* (1985) narrative.

This chapter traces my early readings of *Canoe Rivulet*; my realization that I would need to analyse this nonfictional narration; my discovery of the theoretical tools, developed by James Phelan, on the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of character narration; my decision to test these tools—created for fiction—by using them to examine the rhetorical devices used in the nonfictional text; and from there to hypothesize about the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of that text. From this research I began to formulate my own rhetorical purpose in retelling the *Canoe Rivulet* narrative and to comprehend the ethical implications of my choices.

That my literary inquiries were leading me to think about the ethical and moral implications of the way a writer writes came as a complete surprise. It should not have been so. In *The Art of the Novel* (1993), Milan Kundera, repeating Hermann Broch, says: ‘A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral. Knowledge is the novel’s only morality’ (5–6). Through the research process I began to understand the importance of this statement. But if my research and writing practice is laid out here in an orderly step-by-step manner, a clear and easily mapped trajectory from lacking knowledge to gaining it, this is partly because I’m writing after the event. Navigating the

tension between the desire to explore unknown territory and the desire for narrative clarity was always a tumultuous process. And if I acquired knowledge, that knowledge was only gainfully employed by allowing it to sail side-by-side with nagging doubt.

***The Historical Manuscript: Matthew Flinders' Narrative of Tom Thumb's Cruise to Canoe Rivulet***

Flinders wrote two accounts of the south coast exploration trip he took with Bass and Martin, in March 1796. The longer journal version titled *Narrative of Tom Thumb's cruise to Canoe Rivulet* was passed down through the family and eventually edited and introduced by historian, Keith Bowden, as a published manuscript in 1985. The historian, W.G. McDonald, says in *Earliest Illawarra* that the journal 'must have been written up after the discovery of coal in 1797 [...] possibly from earlier notes' (1966: 15). The second account appears in the introduction to *A Voyage to Terra Australis* ([1814] 1966), which Flinders wrote at the end of his career after his return to England from his *Investigator* explorations. Flinders was, by the time he wrote the second account, a mature man and this version reflects his change in status from a young second Lieutenant to a respected Captain, explorer and navigator. In this exegesis, unless otherwise stated, I use the earlier journal version. It is more detailed, but also, Flinders wrote it when he was only a year or two older than the fictional Flinders I wanted to create.

### *The Second Tom Thumb Journey*

In October 1795 Flinders, Bass, and Bass's servant, William Martin, took their first *Tom Thumb* journey along the Georges River. A year later they embarked on a second exploratory sailing trip, their task to find the mouth of the river that Henry Hacking, a pilot, had sighted on hunting trips. Cook had only sketchily mapped this part of the coast and Flinders reports Hacking's suggestion that the river might come out 'very little beyond Point Solander' (1985: 2).

This second journey was taken in a second boat also called the *Tom Thumb*. What happened to the first remains unclear. Flinders wrote that the first *Tom Thumb* was 'a little boat of about eight feet keel and five feet beam, which had been brought out by Mr. Bass and others in the *Reliance*, and from its size had obtained the name of *Tom Thumb*' (1985: 2). The second was 'of nearly the same size' (2) and had been built at Port Jackson. Daniel Paine, the colony's boat builder, wrote in his journal: 'the Boat not being above twelve feet long [was] a small Boat to Coast in' (1983: 39).

On the second day of their journey a strong current took Flinders, Bass and Martin further than their intended destination. Discovering they had no water they headed for shore. Heavy surf prevented landing and compelled them to spend the night in the boat. McDonald suggests this location is the 'north end of Thirroul' (1966: 60). Bass and Flinders named it Barn Cove. On the third day, thirsty and again unable to land, Bass jumped into the ocean and, with a water barrel in tow, began to swim to shore. *Tom Thumb*, however, was picked up by a wave and

dumped on the beach. (McDonald proposes 'Towradgi Point' (60) as the site.) The three explorers salvaged food and equipment and baled water from the boat but when they sighted smoke in the forest they feared an attack by natives. They quickly relaunched *Tom Thumb* and Bass spent the next five hours floating their goods from the beach to the boat. The three set off again and spent another night sleeping on *Tom Thumb*. Waking on the fourth morning, and anchored in a bay, two Indigenous men called from the shore. Flinders later identified one man as Dilba but the other remained unnamed. The explorers rowed over and traded two handkerchiefs and a potato for fish and a drink of water. They sailed around Saddle Point, today's 'Red Point' (60), and landed. They again met up with the two Kooris. Flinders cut their beards and hair and asked about fresh water. The two Kooris agreed to join them in the *Tom Thumb* and guide them to a river. The river turned out to be a stream and Flinders named it Canoe Rivulet. Here they found fresh water, dried their gunpowder and were joined by twenty or so locals. Flinders took on more barbering duties. The Kooris wanted them to go up to the lagoon (Lake Illawarra) but the Europeans became frightened. They retreated, although not without firing off a shot. The three sailed back to their original destination, encountering a horrendous storm on the way. They discovered the river, called it after Hacking, and returned to Port Jackson.

### ***Judgments, Rhetorical Purpose and Ethical Implications***

My aim was to fictionalize the Flinders narrative therefore I needed to do a close reading of the nonfictional account. James Phelan's theoretical work, presented

across two books, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (2005) and *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (2007a), provided me with useful tools in which to hypothesize the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of *Canoe Rivulet*.

For the rhetorical critic the purpose of the narrative is a crucial part of analysis. In *Experiencing Fiction* James Phelan describes the rhetorical act as ‘somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened’ (2007a: 3). He proposes that there is a feedback loop ‘among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response’ (4). In fiction he postulates a double purpose: the narrator’s purpose in relating her tale to the narratee and the author’s purpose in communicating with the authorial audience (3-4).

Although Phelan (x) claims that readers do not experience the same narrative in the same way, he suggests it’s possible for them to experience it in similar ways. For Phelan (3) a reader’s understanding of narrative form evolves through the progressive judgments she makes of narrators, characters and authors. Both judgment and narrative progression are important components of the reader’s experience. In this experience, form, ethics, and aesthetics interact and are influenced by progressive narrative judgments. He proposes three types of judgements: ‘interpretive, ethical and aesthetic’ (x–xi) and develops seven theses around the concept of judgments (7–15), as well as ‘twelve aspects’ (xi) that he relates to progressions (17–22). In my analysis, however, I only use those theses elements that are specifically relevant to my task.

In his first thesis, Phelan maintains that there are two layers to fictional narrative involving both ‘a dynamics of character, event, and telling and a dynamics of audience response’ (7). Phelan’s first layer would typically include a sequence of connected events, where characters may change, and their relationships to other characters and to the reader may progressively alter or become unstable. There may be shifts in the mode of telling as well as in the relationship between narrator and narratee and between implied author and reader. In Phelan’s second layer a reader’s response will be formed by the progressive observations and the interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic judgments they make.

Phelan was writing about fiction but it could be argued that the actions of observing and judging are inherent in any reader response to a narrative. I decided to test his theory on my own responses to the *Canoe Rivulet* narrative. In nonfictional narrative the Phelan doubling effect could be said to depend on ‘the extent to which the author signals her difference from or similarity to the “I” who tells the story’ (4). If we assume that the ‘I’ in *Canoe Rivulet* was created to give the illusion that it is very close to the author ‘Flinders’ then we might assume that the rhetorical purpose was similar for the implied author and narrator.

In analysing the *Canoe Rivulet* text I first tried to examine what could be inferred from the writing style. The narrative has been written as a day-by-day journal creating the perception of truthful reportage. The prose is engaging but still retains some formal qualities. The excitement of the narrative progression, with events involving threat to the lives of the protagonists, formulates an interesting read. Flinders’ descriptions of wind patterns, currents, tides, and of the

topography of the land, confirms to the reader his nautical expertise and suggests that he believed his narrative might be of use to navigators and explorers at some later stage. These nautical details indicate that he probably took journal notes while on the sail and later used these notes to write up his account. Although the *Tom Thumb* journeys were small forays along the Australian coast, they were official trips that would have been sanctioned by William Waterhouse, commander of the *Reliance*, and Governor Hunter. On such official trips it was common practice to keep a journal. At the end of an exploration journey it was naval procedure to collect the journals kept by the officers and midshipmen. Several years before his arrival at Port Jackson Flinders had been ‘upset’ (Estensen 2003: 25) when Bligh had confiscated his journal before his *Providence* journey had ended, as this meant he could not continue his practice of writing daily notes. Anthony J. Brown and Gillian Dooley, in their introduction to *Matthew Flinders: Private Journal* (2005), detail the difference between a log and a journal. A log is a:

watch-to-watch record, signed by the officer on watch, of wind and sea conditions, the ship’s courses and speeds, unusual events, and of punishments, deaths and so on. The falsification of any of these details is a crime. An officer’s journal, by contrast, is less formal, providing his personal impressions of events on board, his observations on the running of the ship (and at times on his fellow officers), in addition to course and meteorological details. It remains, nevertheless, an official document and may be claimed by the Admiralty. (2005: xxiii)

Although the journey down the south coast was a simpler trip than that taken on the *Providence*, Governor Hunter and Waterhouse would have wanted to read Flinders' narrative. It also seems possible that the Governor retained a copy. In a letter to Bass, 15 February 1800, Flinders says, 'In the governors [*sic*] hands, you will find copies of the journal written by me, of our expedition to the southward' (2002: 44-45). Flinders also wrote a narrative of his sail to Van Diemen's Land on the *Norfolk*, so this could be the southern expedition referred to here, nevertheless the tone in *Canoe Rivulet*, a balance between formality and engagement, suggests the kind of official purpose outlined by Brown and Dooley.

Paul Brunton, who edited *Matthew Flinders: personal letters from an extraordinary life*, says:

Two overriding concerns run through Flinders' life from beginning to end and are reflected throughout the letters. The first is his search for economic security. The second is his dedication to hydrography in the hope that some day his name might be placed alongside that of the immortal Cook.

Matthew Flinders wanted to be rich, or at least comfortable, and famous.

(2002: 10)

The possible advantages of writing an interesting narrative were promotion, leading to greater economic security, and fame. In 1796 Hunter and Waterhouse were both in a position to promote Flinders, and his south coast exploration trip, if received positively, could further his chances of advancement. Although these two men may have been his prime authorial audience elements of



the text, (such as the introductory paragraphs outlining the limited exploration in the region), suggest that he thought it possible his narrative might reach a wider public. Fame could be achieved in a small way among colleagues and friends but Flinders would also have been familiar with the acclaim gained by writing nonfictional exploration narratives for public consumption. He presumably had read about Cook's ocean voyages. Watkin Tench's *1788* ([1798] 2000) was published well before Flinders left for Australia. When Flinders was in Port Jackson, David Collins was there, working as Judge Advocate and writing *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* ([1798] 1971), published two years after the second *Tom Thumb* voyage. Flinders may not have been thinking, at this early stage, of publishing his own book about the colony but he was aware that Bass intended writing one. In the letter written to Bass, in February 1800, Flinders offers his narratives for Bass's use 'either verbatim or merely preserving the sense' (2002: 45), but suggests that certain (and possibly promised) charts be published separately. In any case it seems clear given the historical circumstances that the style and content of *Canoe Rivulet* could have had personal consequences for Flinders.

Narrators have, according to Phelan, 'three main functions—reporting, interpreting and evaluating' (2007a: 12). Through his stylistic choices in *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders sets himself up as a reliable reporter, who only occasionally interprets and evaluates. In the opening paragraphs he describes the extent of exploration in the colony. He finishes by stating: 'Thus the particular knowledge of the coast was confined to ten or twelve miles on the south side of Port Jackson,

and to fifteen or twenty on the north side, in September 1795' (1985: 1). He seems to be speaking here to an uninformed (probably English) audience, and creates the impression that New South Wales is an unexplored land.

Phelan maintains 'narrativity encourages two main activities: observing and judging' (2007a: 7). He also says, 'there is an ethics of the told and an ethics of the telling, which includes the ethics of rhetorical purpose' (12). Phelan acknowledges that from an ethical standpoint different readers will evaluate the same narrative differently and states that:

rhetorical ethics involves a two-step process: reconstruction and evaluation. That is, it attempts to identify the relevant underlying ethical principles, to apply them to specific behaviour of the characters and techniques of the telling, and, ultimately, to determine the ethics of the overall narrative purpose. (2007a: 13)

As I read *Canoe Rivulet*, I noticed that Flinders didn't describe or reflect upon certain events, and these narrative gaps encouraged me, as reader, to view the journey in a particular way. In the narrative, for example, Flinders uses the first person plural pronoun 'we' when he refers to nearly all decisions, leaving unclear what were his decisions, what were joint decisions, or suggestions by Bass or Martin. The use of the first person plural pronoun is not uncommon in journals of the period when referring to general decisions, such as pulling into a bay, but Flinders uses it almost exclusively in his tale, creating the impression that there was no disharmony about the decisions taken.

In *Canoe Rivulet* when events don't go to plan, Flinders rarely attributes human error, especially his error, as the cause. For instance, when the three overshoot the mark of their intended location, Flinders states that it is due to the currents being strong, not due to any navigational error. He reports that their water supply was contaminated but doesn't reveal whose mistake this was. When *Tom Thumb* is dumped on the beach he suggests this was due to an unfortunate wave, not to an error of anchoring too close to the wave break. The decision to raft goods back to the boat, rather than take the time to pack and relaunch *Tom Thumb*, is outlined as a sensible plan given the rumour that cannibals may reside in the area. (It could have been that launching from the beach, weighed down by heavier provisions, may have been difficult, but this is not commented on.) These small elisions downplay 'cause' and shift the focus onto action and effect. The reader is encouraged to see the natural elements as unpredictable, with the three explorers simply acting in response to the events as they unfold.

There are, also, curious gaps in the story when Flinders describes trading with the two Kooris. He states that the men were armed but does not describe their appearance. Shortly after departing from these men, the three explorers met them again and Flinders cut their hair, yet Flinders delays reporting this event until later in the narrative when he is describing events at *Canoe Rivulet*. This first barbering experience was presumably amicable as it led to the two men guiding the explorers to the stream. By delaying reporting it, Flinders keeps any interpretation or evaluation of the Kooris to a minimum until he introduces the idea that they had malicious intentions.

To contemplate events in the colony from an Indigenous perspective was not unheard of among colonial writers. Lieutenant William Dawes, of the First Fleet, tried to understand the Indigenous point of view, as shown by his two surviving notebooks that contain ‘a vocabulary and grammar of the Eora language’ (ed. Flannery 1999: 112). Watkin Tench, Captain-Lieutenant of the Marines, in his account of the colony entitled *1788* ([1789] 2000), often, as Inga Clendinnen confirms in *Dancing with Strangers* (2003), sought to see things from the Indigenous perspective: ‘What made Tench incomparable among good observers is that he treated each encounter with the strangers as a detective story: “This is what they did. What might they have meant by doing that?” ’(59).

The two Koori guides (one Flinders identifies as Dilba, the other remains unnamed) wanted the explorers go up to the lagoon to get water. When the explorers refused, water was found close by. This made Flinders suspicious of the two men. (Chapter Six contains a detailed analysis of Flinders’ suspicion of the Kooris and his use of deception as a retreat strategy.) At this point in the narrative Flinders begins to interpret and evaluate the behaviour of the two guides: ‘This circumstance made us suspect that they had a wish, if not an intention, of detaining us’ (12). As Flinders describes their retreat he continues to interpret and evaluate the actions of the two guides and the larger group of Kooris:

Whilst we got down to the entrance, as fast as possible, they stood looking at each other, as if doubtful whether to detain us by force; and there is much reason to think, that they suffered us to get away, only because they had not agreed upon any plan of action: assisted, perhaps, by the extreme fear they seemed to be under of our harmless fire-arms.

The explorers anchored at the entrance to the stream and waited for the tide to change. Dilba stood on a nearby point and called out to them, requesting they 'go up to the lagoon' (12). Flinders reports that Dilba was constantly told that they would return when the sun went down, if the surf 'did not abate' (12). When some Kooris began to wade out to the boat at sunset, Flinders shot at the men. He does not, however, attempt to interpret, at this point in the narrative, whether the Kooris were wading out to help or to hinder. In next paragraph he says, 'Perhaps we were considerably indebted, for the fear they entertained of us, to an old red waistcoat which Mr. Bass wore, and from which they took us to be soldiers, whom the natives are particularly afraid of' (12).

***Conclusion: Hypothesis of the Rhetorical Purpose and Ethical Implications of Canoe Rivulet***

Matthew Flinders was a man living in a time when the English Empire was expanding. His fortune could be made if he became, like Captain Cook, an explorer and navigator. It could be hypothesized that his need to impress those higher up in the naval ranks, (in order to rise up the ranks himself and gain economic security), helped shaped the rhetorical purpose of the narrative. If naval and government dignitaries were his authorial audience, and the rhetorical purpose was to inform about the trip, it would have been necessary to show that he and Bass handled the unfolding events, and the exchanges with the Kooris, appropriately. The reader is persuaded by gaps in the narrative to identify with the

fears of the Europeans and not those of the Kooris. Ethically then, this narrative does not encourage the reader to view this story from varied perspectives, nor does it coax reflection on cultural differences.

These ellipses and narrative absences, however, provided me with an opportunity to imaginatively explore what might have occurred. Were the three explorers always united in their actions? What more was there to discover about their attitude to the land? What did the Kooris think of the Europeans? Would it be possible to hypothesize the Indigenous position? I also needed to ask myself what was the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of my fictional retelling of the story. I thought it would be interesting to allow the reader to imagine other perspectives. I did not want to diminish or alter the *Canoe Rivulet* narrative but instead wanted to create a fictional story that would provide an alternate view to the nonfictional one. I wanted to explore what was unknown in the original narrative, not in order to provide the reader with an imagined stable narrative, but to make the uncertainties of the journey all the more vivid.

It became clear that if I wanted the reader to contemplate other ways of viewing the *Canoe Rivulet* journey, unreliable narration, which encourages the reader to imagine other perspectives than that told by the narrator, would be a useful narrative strategy. But how best to juxtapose a fictional narrative against the nonfictional narrative and to examine the ethical gap? To find an answer to this question I needed to explore the theory of unreliable narration and I turn to that research in the following chapter.

### 3      **Reliable and Unreliable Narration**

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I delve into the theoretical permutations of the terms unreliable and reliable narration, and associated concepts, by first focusing on some of the historical theoretical shifts that have occurred. I then, more specifically, outline various typological distinctions. And lastly, explore how unreliable narrations have been culturally understood and historically positioned.

As I researched I kept asking questions. How do I understand and use unreliable narration? What kind of unreliable narrator should I create? What might need to be considered when writing a historical unreliable narrator? What became clear from my inquiries was that the term unreliable narration, and concepts such as the implied author (author) and authorial audience (ideal reader or reader) have been constantly renegotiated. As I teased out the different interconnecting threads of the relationship between author, text, and reader, new and more specific questions emerged. How did the authorial audience perceive the narrator? Did they believe what was said? Think it a lie? Think it a tall tale? The theoretical research covered here provided me with the methodological tools to hypothesize answers to some of these questions. I began to understand that the perception of narrator reliability depended not only on the reader but also on the cultural environment a text was being read in.

As this body of research formed the foundation of my analytical work it seemed useful to outline the different approaches and discuss what methodological tools I found helpful to my creative writing practice.

### ***Reliable and Unreliable Narration: Theoretical Approaches***

My first inquiries into reliable and unreliable narration began with the critic Wayne Booth. Booth was interested in the moral and ethical implications of fiction. For him reliable narrators commentate by giving us factual information and by evaluating events and characters, but also they become dependable guides ‘to the world of the novels in which they appear but also to the moral truths of the world outside the book’ (Booth [1961] 1983: 221).

Booth, in the early sixties, defined reliable and unreliable narration: ‘I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not’ (158–9). Booth suggested that unlike reliable narration, unreliable narration asks a reader to infer something about the characters or the narrative from what was *not* said. For Booth unreliable narration was a textual strategy used by the author to develop a clandestine communication with the reader: ‘Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point’ (304). From a Boothian perspective absolute reliability always belonged with the author: ‘For the present, it is enough to say that a fact, when it has been given to us by the author or his unequivocal spokesman, is a very different thing from the same “fact” when given to us by a fallible character in the story’ (175). Booth’s implied



author was ‘an “official scribe,” [...] the author’s “second self” ’ (71). He used the term to explain that the work was the product of a ‘choosing, evaluating person rather than as a self-existing thing’ (74). He also saw the implied author as the ‘governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work’ (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 86). Thus Booth, at times, represented the implied author in two differing ways, ‘as an external agent who constructs the text and [...] as a functional equivalent of the text’ (Phelan 2005: 39) and this created confusion in the debate that followed.

With the rise of reception studies the idea of the implied author came under scrutiny. The term was seen as privileging the author and the author’s intentions, and for providing critics with a way to accept or reject the author’s moral stance without having to state their own bias. Because, for so long, the reader had been left out of the equation, thought to be an empty vessel, there to take in all the author intended, the focus switched to the text itself and the way in which a reader received that text. Booth’s term for the implied author, devised initially to stop a fictional work being analysed in terms of the biographical story of the author, was redefined by some and completely rejected by others.

In the early eighties, Tamar Yacobi, ‘developed a model of readerly strategies of naturalization’ (Zerweck 2001: 154). Naturalization is the name of a cognitive process, ‘introduced by Jonathan Culler in 1975’ (153) to describe how readers revert to ‘real world models’ (153) in order to deal with textual information. Unreliability, Yacobi states in ‘Package Deals in Fictional Narrative: The Case of the Narrator’s (Un)Reliability’ (2001) is only one of five different hypothesis whereby ‘readers account for textual incongruities’ (224). Faced with

textual discordances a reader might appeal to four other resolutions, other than unreliability, what Yacobi calls ‘the genetic, the generic, the existential, and/or the functional’ (224). But with unreliability, or, as Yacobi terms it, the ‘perspectival mechanism’ (224), a reader attributes the textual incongruities to the narrator. This work, with its interest in how the reader understands a text, eventually led Yacobi to reject the idea of the implied author and locate unreliability in ‘the interaction of text and reader’ (Nünning 2005: 94). This meant that the emphasis was not on the morality (or lack of morality) of the author or author’s intentions. The author wasn’t controlling the discourse, the reader was.

In *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan describes a reliable narrator as ‘one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth’ (100) and an unreliable narrator as one ‘whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect’ (100). She argues against the concept of the implied author stating it is not a reliable basis for determining unreliability because the implied author’s values are ‘notoriously difficult’ (101) to determine. She continues, however, to employ the term clarifying her definition by suggesting that the ‘implied author must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text’ (87). For Rimmon-Kenan the implied author should not be seen as a subject and is best considered as ‘a set of implicit norms’ (88). This, she suggests, is preferable to defining it, as Booth did, as ‘a personified “consciousness” or “second self” ’(87). At this time several other critics argued to get rid of the concept entirely. Mieke Bal (1981) found the concept ‘vague and ill-defined [...]

since the concept designates neither an author, a narrator, nor a specific kind of textual feature, it seems elusive and unnecessary' (Phelan 2005: 41). Gerard Genette (1983) thought it redundant because the terms author and narrator could cover the 'complexities of narrative communication' (Phelan 2005: 41). Seymour Chatman in *Coming to Terms* (1990) redefines the concept of the implied author so that it becomes the text itself, getting rid of the notion of authorial intention:

Invention, originally an activity in the real author's mind, becomes, upon publication, a principle recorded in the text. That principle is the residue of the real author's labor. It is now a textual artifact. The text is itself the implied author. (1990: 81)

Ansgar Nünning, in the early 90s, weighed in heavily against Booth's definition of the implied author as it was developed by Chatman, claiming that it was theoretically confusing because an implied author cannot be two things, both a 'subject, an inventor or creator' (Phelan 2005: 42) and 'a whole text' (42). In 'Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches' (2005) Nünning gives more weight to authorial intention than he previously did, but suggests that readers and critics abuse the notion of the implied author to justify their own subjective value judgments about reliability or unreliability. Unreliable narration, he argues, is 'not only a structural or semantic aspect of the text but also a phenomenon that involves the conceptual frameworks readers bring to it' (95). Those frameworks include their knowledge of literature, the way they experience the world and the beliefs they have about it. Nünning says:

Determining whether a narrator is unreliable is not just an innocent descriptive act but a subjectively tinged value judgment or projection governed by the normative presuppositions and moral convictions of the critic, which as a rule remain unacknowledged. (2005: 95)

Nünning foregrounds the relationship between text and reader citing ‘cognitive and constructivist’ (94) approaches to unreliable narration to suggest it is ‘not so much a character trait of a narrator as it is an interpretive strategy of the reader’ (95).

James Phelan (2005) in *Living to Tell about It* maintains that Nünning’s definition lacks clarity. Nünning, rather than use the term implied author, prefers to ‘refer to “the structural whole,” a term that means something very close to what Booth means by “a completed artistic whole” and to what Chatman means by the “text intent” ’ (42–43). Greta Olson in ‘Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators’ (2003) compares and contrasts Booth’s model of unreliable narration, that is connected to the concept of the implied author, with Nünning’s model, that is reliant on the way the reader receives the text. She finds that Booth’s model employs an ‘intended and stable’ (98) concept of implied author, where the reader makes inferences about what the narrator says, but Nünning’s model argues that ‘every reading is limited and situational, and every reader is potentially unreliable’ (98). For Nünning ‘the reader constructs the text’s structure and, indeed, various features of the author’ (Phelan 2005: 44).

Lisa Zunshine in *Why We Read Fiction* (2006) focuses on readers by using the work from cognitive psychology (on autistic children)—where a theory of

mind reading, also called, Theory of Mind (ToM), has been developed—to investigate the cognitive satisfaction that comes from reading fiction. She suggests that ‘fiction engages, eases, and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity’ (4). Zunshine explores what she calls ‘meta-representationality’ (4) which is based on ‘our evolved cognitive ability to keep track of sources of our representations (i.e., to metarepresent them)’ (4-5). She proposes that we read or interpret stories by using several levels of cognition. Each level represents a more difficult narrative interpretive and tracking strategy. The reader knows she is playing a fictional game, one that she enjoys. With unreliable narration she may call her version of events the ‘true’ or ‘real’ story, as opposed to the narrator’s unreliable telling, but in doing this she understands the pretence while often being both engaged and exasperated by it. The pretence, however, is used as a testing place for situations in the ‘real’ world, a testing of our ‘mind-reading adaptations’ (20). For Zunshine fiction has a cognitive function. We humans enjoy reading because it helps out in our daily lives; we can practice judging people and the stories they tell.

In *Living to Tell About It* (2005) Phelan brings the debate back to Booth by refining and developing Booth’s original definition. Phelan is interested in the ‘feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response’ (18). For Phelan the implied author ‘is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text’ (45). Phelan’s implied

author 'is not a product of the text but rather the agent responsible for bringing the text into existence' (45). His model of unreliable narration assumes there is 'one text, two speakers (one explicit, one implicit), two audiences, and at least two purposes' (2007b: 224). He clarifies narrator functions (2005: 12) and makes two classifications: telling and character. The telling functions are divided further into narrator and disclosure roles. Narrator roles work along the track of 'narrator-narratee' (12) where the narrator is reporting, evaluating or interpreting. Disclosure roles work along the track of 'narrator-authorial audience' (12) where the narrator is 'unwittingly' (12) disclosing information to the authorial audience, (thus fulfilling the indirect communication from implied author to authorial audience). The character functions are mimetic, thematic, or synthetic. With mimetic the 'characters work as representations of possible people' (12), with thematic the characters reflect 'larger groups or ideas' (12), and with synthetic, the characters work 'as artificial constructs within the larger construct of the work' (13).

Distance or lack of distance of the narrator or implied author to the reader, has always been important to the debate about unreliable narration. It has helped explain why a reader might reject or accept a narrator, and informs arguments about authorial and text intention. In 'Estranging unreliability, bonding unreliability, and the ethics of *Lolita*' (2007b) Phelan analyses the various distances between the narrator and authorial audience. He comes up with two new distinctions. The first he calls 'estranging unreliability' (223) where the distance between authorial audience and narrator is increased, the second he calls 'bonding unreliability' (223) where the distance is reduced. In this extension of his previous

model Phelan provides new tools for analysis, especially with regard to a reader's acceptance or rejection of the ideas put forward by the narrator.

Dan Shen suggests in 'Unreliability' (2010) that the rhetorical and cognitive/constructivist approaches offer different ways of understanding unreliability. In the former the '*implied reader* (a critic who tries to enter into that reading position) deals with *one type* of textual incongruity—the gap between narrator and implied author—while Yacobi's constructivist approach tries to show how *different actual readers* deal with textual incongruities *in general*' (2010: 5).

In the writing and research period of my thesis the gap between the narrator and the implied author, and the relationship between the implied author and the authorial audience, via the narrator, and along with the narrator-narratee relationship, became crucial to my thinking about the unreliable narrators in my creative work. I therefore judged it important to spend some time detailing how the concept had been historically understood. In the exegesis I make particular use of Phelan's theories to analyse and discuss the shifts that occurred in the creation of the narrator from one draft to the next. While other theorists debated the implications of the terms, giving more or less weight to the author, text, or reader, Phelan's models, while sometimes overcomplicated, were of the most practical use. Yet I plucked from his theory only those aspects that were useful to my task. Phelan's models helped me comprehend how the narrative technique was actually working, but I still needed to think about what kind of narrator I was creating. Initially, I had asked myself simple questions—would my narrator lie or cheat or be unstable in any way? To discover more I researched how theorists had

classified the different types of unreliability and it is this area of the debate that I address below.

### *Unreliable Narration: Typology*

Theorists, over time, have marked out unreliability by a classification of character types—for example, youthful, criminal, insane, and biased—or by a breakdown of what unreliable narrators actually do—for example, whether they misreport, underreport, or misinterpret. In the early eighties, Susan Lanser (1981), made a distinction between a narrator who is unreliable and one who is ‘untrustworthy’ (Nünning 2005: 93). About the same time, William Riggan (1981), chose to describe unreliable narration in terms of character types: ‘“madman, the naïve narrator, the hypocrite, the pervert, the morally debased narrator, the picaro, the liar, the trickster, or the clown” ’ (Nünning 2005: 94). Shortly after, Rimmon-Kenan defined unreliability by the ‘narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme’ (1983: 100). Monika Fludernik put narrator unreliability into three categories: 1) narrators may be unreliable because their facts are incorrect, due to a lack of knowledge or because they lie; 2) narrators may lack objectivity, because they lack knowledge, or because they are morally compromised, racist or biased in some way; 3) narrators may be ideologically unreliable, whereby the narrator acts in a way that is consistent with his or her character but whose views are at odds with the authorial audience (Olsen 2003: 100). Dorrit Cohn (2000) splits unreliable narrators into two categories: misinformed and discordant. Misinformed narrators are unreliable because they have no access to reliable information, or are unable—because of



age or disability—to distinguish the truth. This is ‘a factual kind of unreliability that is attributed to a mis or disinformed narrator, unwilling or unable to tell what “actually” happened’ (307). Discordant narrators keep back information intentionally, because they are ‘biased or confused’ (307). These narrators are of an ‘ideological kind’ (307) and encourage a reader to look ‘behind the story’ (307) the narrator is telling to come up with a different version of events.

James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin (1999) come up with six different types of unreliability. In the first three—‘misreporting, misreading misevaluating’ (95)—the reader will ‘reconstruct’ (94) the narrated events, while in the second three—‘underreporting, underreading and underregarding’ (95)—the reader will complete the narrator’s version of events (94–96). They ‘posit an implied author behind the narrator and an “authorial audience” that is “the author’s ideal audience” not dissimilar from Booth’s postulated reader’ (Olson 2003: 100). They state that the function of unreliable narrators is to report, evaluate and interpret characters, facts and events, (this is also the function of reliable narrators), and they do this along three different types of communication axes—the axis of ethics/evaluation, the axis of knowledge/perception and the axis of facts/events (Phelan & Martin 1999: 93–96). In ‘Estranging unreliability, bonding unreliability, and the ethics of *Lolita*’ (2007b) Phelan acknowledges that the relation between the narrator and the implied author is understood to cover a ‘very wide spectrum’ (224). At one end there is what he calls ‘mask narration’ (224) where the narrator is no more than a ‘spokesperson’ (224) for the ideas of the implied author. At the other end the narration is unreliable along the three

different types of axes (224).

Two other theorists who discuss typological issues are Tamar Yacobi and Greta Olson. Yacobi suggests that once the reader has hypothesised unreliability, and attributed it to the narrator, they go on to explain the narrator's deficiencies as 'incompetence, untruthfulness, unawareness, misjudgment' (2001: 224).

However, Yacobi also claims that at any time a reader may also make other hypotheses that belong to different 'logics of resolution' (224). Yacobi finds limiting, definitions that simply 'divide tellers between polar portraits: the heterodiegetic, omniscient and /hence-reliable vs. the homodiegetic, who is limited in knowledge and/hence inherently unreliable, along with the rest of us humans' (224). Like Cohn, Yacobi suggests that unreliability is a much more complex issue, not so easily defined, and unlikely to adhere to rigid rules. For Yacobi, unreliability ultimately 'depends on whether or not the (un)reliability hypothesis offers us a way of resolving tensions in the text by attributing them to the narrator's shortcomings' (225).

Olson, using Phelan and Martin's idea of 'distinguishing between reading strategies' (Olson 2003: 101) argues that unreliability is too broad a term. She suggests that many homodiegetic narrators called unreliable, are not. They are often, as is the case in mystery and detective novels, narrators who 'conform to the normative values of their narratives' (101) and 'reliably report' (101). Such narrators attempt to solve puzzles but they 'cannot provide their readers with vital pieces of the puzzle until they themselves have found them out' (101). Olson developed three definitions—unreliable, untrustworthy and fallible (101–104)—to

cover what others had used to define one. (Dan Shen points out that Booth interchanged (2010: 4) the three words used by Olson to represent the one thing). Olson, for example, would define Huck Finn—a character often cited by theorists as being an unreliable narrator—as fallible.

From this research into typology I found some theorist's classifications were useful, others not. Greta Olsen's three definitions were too similar for my purposes and therefore unhelpful as a way to reflect upon my narrator's character. Instead, Phelan and Martin's rather detailed account, although initially a little overwhelming, did, when I gave it time, allow me to address specifically what the narrator was saying and to think about how the authorial audience might respond. I could not do this diagnostic work as I was writing. I found that taking on a narrator's voice, hearing it in my head, meant I could only think what the narrator was thinking. I also found I would physically respond to the narrator's mood. So, if the narrator was tense in the story, I was tense, typing out what he or she was saying. But after I'd finished writing, the next day, or whenever I returned to read over the story, I'd get out my 'Phelan and Martin list' and use it to analyse what I'd done. For me, specifying the ways my narrator was unreliable, and attempting to articulate the gap between implied author and narrator, proved a useful tool.

It was also important, however, to understand how the term unreliable narration had been culturally mediated, and it is Vera Nünning and Bruno Zerweck's work in this area that I address below.

### ***Unreliable Narration: Cultural Context and Historical Positioning***

Unreliable narrators are like terrorists, both labels are dependant on cultural context. An unreliable narrator for one cultural group, may be reliable for another.

An unreliable narrator as received by readers of a certain era may be understood as reliable in another. How do we judge unreliability? Who decides? Our interpretations are bound to vary.

Vera Nünning, in her article 'Unreliable narration and their historical variability of values and norms: the Vicar of Wakefield as a test case of a cultural-historical narratology' (2004), outlines how the attitudes of readers and critics have changed, regarding a particular narrator, over time, and thus proves how difficult it can be to define an unreliable narrator. According to Nünning the perception of unreliability depends on the period in which the text is or was read and on the value systems and norms connected to that period. She uses, as her example, the character of Dr Primrose, the narrator of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). Dr Primrose was judged reliable by most critics in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century when the novel was read as a 'novel of sensibility' (242). In the 1960s and 1970s the novel was interpreted as a satire, with Primrose as a satirical figure, and in the 1980s through to the 1990s, evaluations were more varied, with Primrose often, but not always, being considered an unreliable narrator. Nünning suggests that readers bring to the text 'ethical convictions' (237) and worldviews, which shape how they judge a particular narrator. Yet a narrator might also be considered 'unreliable because the story has internal inconsistencies or diverges from the reader's knowledge of the world' (237). Of prime importance is a reader's 'concept of what it means to be human' (237) because this forms the basis of narrator attributes they consider to be normal and '“plausible”' (237).

The notion that readers make their judgments without acknowledging their own set of norms and values by which they make assessments, and that these norms and values always reflect a particular culture and a particular epoch, seemed relevant, in terms of my project, to the historical nonfictional narrative *Canoe Rivulet*. Contemporary readers will be varied in the way they interpret the text, but also, a twenty-first century Australian reader is likely to have a different interpretation to an eighteenth century English reader. For instance, I know now that there are no cannibals living along the south coast of New South Wales but this was not true for Flinders, Bass, Martin, or their contemporaries. If I was to write an eighteenth century unreliable narrator it was important that I understood the thinking of that time and took account of my own value system when analyzing the research. I was creating an unreliable narrator, written from the twenty-first century, but set in an historical period, so certain conventions of the period would need to be considered. But would a twenty-first century reader view an unreliable narrator written by a twenty-first century writer differently to the way they viewed an unreliable narrator written by an eighteenth century writer?

Bruno Zerweck, in 'Historicizing unreliable narration: unreliability and cultural discourse in narrative fiction' (2001), argues that unreliable narration needs to be seen within the context of cultural development and historical positioning (151). For Zerweck, 'culturally determined frameworks and preferences' (155) will affect the several different ways a reader may decide to interpret a text. He claims that unreliable narration flourished in the late eighteenth century with the rise of the 'realist novel' (158). Yet in the nineteenth century, where notions of 'objective knowledge' (160) and representations 'of

reality' (160) were not doubted, unreliable narrations are 'rarely found' (160). (Although he cites Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, the detective novels of Wilkie Collins, and the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, as exceptions.) As the next century turned, however, and there was a transition from the 'Victorian to modernist literature' (160), narrator unreliability 'became a significant literary phenomenon' (160). Zerweck argues that in most post war fiction there is a further striking change and a large number of novels question the whole idea of there ever being a reliable narrator. He suggests that in a modern Western society there is a 'growing awareness of a lack of an ideologically and socially accepted counterpart of an unreliable teller, a "reliable" reporter of events' (162).

Zerweck employs the work of theorist, Wolfgang Iser, to discuss the relationship among the real, the fictive and the imaginary. Iser has never seen the fictive as standing in opposition to what is real. Unreliable narration is a fictional technique but it does not simply reflect back the real world: 'It mediates between the real—i.e., the extratextual elements a literary text can select from the empirical world—and the imaginary, which is evoked by the signs of the represented world. Since both the real and the imaginary [...] are subject to constant historical change, unreliable narration as a mediating fictionalizing act has developed along similar historical lines' (Zerweck 2000: 167).

Getting rid of the idea that fiction is the opposite of reality, Zerweck suggests, also means reassessing literary realism. The difference between realist and modernists or postmodernist texts is not about alternate principles but degrees of change. Unreliable narration requires a reader strategy that needs 'real-world frames of reference' (168) thus most texts from the twentieth and twenty-first century that use unreliable narration 'are not experimental, or at least are not radically anti-illusionist' (168). They do, however, suggest a 'new understanding

of reality, subjectivity, and (un)reliability' (168). Zerweck argues that in contemporary realist fiction reliability is not considered achievable and most readers would be skeptical of a 'report claiming objective truth and absolute authority' (169).

This seemed pertinent to a contemporary imagining of the Flinders narrative. That particular unreliable narrators had been interpreted as reliable in different eras highlighted the continual change in the interpretative mindset of readers. But the authorial audience's acceptance of my eighteenth century unreliable narrator would include their knowing the novel had been written by a twenty-first century author. I needed to discover how to acknowledge that within the text. Implied author, narrator and authorial audience were, as Phelan contended, interconnected. I would also need to consider my own place in the relationship.

### ***Conclusion***

Researching the theory of reliable and unreliable narration threw up a series of questions that needed to be tackled in the writing. What was the relationship between the implied author (via the narrator) and the authorial audience and how was it different to the relationship between the narrator and narratee?

Understanding that readers of unreliable narrators have changed led me to assess how a contemporary reader comprehends reliability. If, as Zerweck suggests, contemporary readers are more skeptical than those of the eighteenth century, how would this affect the narration? Should I mimic the style of an historical narrator? Should I find a poetic style of language? Could I use contemporary words?

I do not know at exactly what point I chose to write from Will Martin's perspective. Perhaps I had favoured him all along and yet I had written several scenes from Bass's point of view that made me incline, briefly, in his direction.

From the historical research I had begun to imagine Bass as erudite, engaging, enthusiastic and, due to his height—he was six foot—physically imposing. He was an interesting character and I remember being keen for him to be my narrator. I worried, though, that his worldview, although different to that of Flinders, might not be different enough. At some time in my unreliable narration studies I realized that if I wrote from the point of view of a servant I could interrogate the way the Europeans related to each other using a class perspective. I also thought it possible that Will's youth would give me more scope for unreliability when dealing with the relationship between the Kooris and the Europeans. But, if the rhetorical purpose of the Flinders narrative had been partly shaped by needs of economic security and dreams of fame, what might influence the rhetorical purpose of a servant? I was not looking to find the historical servant equivalent of the *Canoe Rivulet* narrator. Instead I wanted to meld elements of historical accuracy to create a historical unreliable narrator whose tale engaged a contemporary reader about contemporary concerns.

In achieving my rhetorical purpose, that of opening up multiple perspectives on a first contact event, the use of an unreliable narrator, I had decided, was definitely the right strategy. I needed to acknowledge, however, that fictionalizing a first contact story, thereby allowing it to be juxtaposed with the nonfictional one, implied an ideological and ethical position. I wanted the reader to remain open to the idea that there were many subjective viewpoints on a story and that we might not know them all. Yet my own ideological perspectives—for instance my belief that the Europeans misunderstood Indigenous people and their culture—would certainly shape my rhetorical decisions about narrative progression. Although the *Tom Thumb* journeys are not the most talked about



aspect of Flinders' life—his circumnavigation of Australia has more prominence—I was creating an unreliable narration, in relation to a nonfictional source, and using the tale to contest a site of the national imaginary.

The construction of the narrator, however, would also include historical research. A discussion of the particular way the historical and theoretical research combined to influence the writing of the unreliable narrator, Will Martin, forms the basis of the following chapter.

#### **4 A Historical Unreliable Narrator: Historical Research and the Writing of Unreliable Narrator, Will Martin**

##### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I analyse the imaginative journey I took to explore the possible gaps and elisions discovered in *Canoe Rivulet*. To do this I chart the interplay between the theoretical and historical research and the writing of several drafts of my unreliable narrator, Will Martin. I begin by telling a tale of the time and place—Port Jackson—in which Flinders, Bass and Martin were living, as it was here that the first glimpses of the historical Martin were to be seen. While the previous chapter was an account of contested discourses authored by theorists, in this chapter I take discourses provided by historians and the writings of certain historical figures and weave them into a story, giving a privileged, and, for the purposes of this study, unified view of the world that I drew on to create my characters.

This chapter includes a summary of the historical documentary information, including narratives written by Bass and Flinders, that I examined to better comprehend colonial attitudes to Indigenous Australians, and it also outlines my investigations into the life of the historical Martin. This research helped me to create a vibrant fictional figure and to begin imagining the fictional story, but I still needed to work out *how* Will would narrate. I was searching for his ‘voice’ and the fictional situation. Why was he narrating and who was

listening? In the final section of this chapter I address the interchange between the theory and historical research that animated several drafts of my story and demonstrate how I resolved questions of narrative style in the creation of Will Martin.

### *Place and Times*

At the evening of the 7 September 1795, at ‘about eight o’clock’ (Estensen 2003: 48), the *Reliance*, a 394-ton ‘three-masted, square-rigged sloop’ (2005: 31) dropped anchor in Sydney Cove. On board was John Hunter, the man who would, four days later, officially assume his position as ‘Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales’ (2003: 48). With Hunter were Matthew Flinders, master’s mate and acting second lieutenant, George Bass, surgeon on the *Reliance*, and William Martin, personal servant and assistant to George Bass. Flinders was twenty-one at the time, Bass twenty-four and Martin, just fourteen-years-old. The following year, on Thursday, 24 March 1796, (twenty days after Martin turned fifteen), these three would set off on a sailing expedition along the south coast of New South Wales, and would be, according to historian, Michael Organ, ‘the first Europeans to officially set foot in Illawarra’ (1990: 7).

On their first spring morning, after anchoring at Sydney Cove, these young men woke up to see a blue water bay, hemmed by rocky shores and sandy beaches, interspersed with silver-green foliage. On the east side of the bay was the governor’s residence. Daniel Paine, (the colony’s boat builder), notes in his journal that, ‘the Governor’s house is of Stone and situated on a rising Ground on the left hand side of the Cove, and has a pretty appearance on the Opposite side is

the Hospital and House for the Principal Surgeon' (1985: 33–34). Near to the Governor's house were the farmed gardens, today's Botanical Gardens. Around the cove, dirt paths weaved through rows of small houses made of brick, mud, wattle and posts 'plaistered both inside & out' (34). The Tank Stream, named because tanks had been 'dug out of the Stone' (33) to hold the water, ran down through gum trees and trickled 'over mudflats' (Smith 2001: 4). Initially a fresh water stream by the time Hunter took up his post as governor it had become badly polluted.

Michael Cathcart, in *The Water Dreamers: The Remarkable History of Our Dry Continent*, says:

Residents who had built houses near the stream (many of whom were officers) ripped off the palings to take shortcuts to the water. Some fattened pigs at the rear of their houses and, when it rained, a slurry of pig shit slithered into Sydney's drinking water. The result was so noxious that on 22 October 1795 Hunter decreed that people who broke the fences or kept pigs near the stream would be removed and have their houses demolished.

(2009: 30)

Fresh water was always important to successful settlement and Flinders writes in *Canoe Rivulet* that his first exploration trip along the Georges River, taken with Bass and Martin just a few short weeks after their arrival at Port Jackson, eventually resulted in the establishment of Bankstown (1985: 2).

The shape and sound of the landscape, for all those arriving by ship, was, according to Thomas Watling, a convicted forger transported in 1791, 'different from all that a Briton has been accustomed to see before' (ed. Flannery 1999:

131). Watling wrote that trees ‘wreathing their old fantastic roots on high, dissimilar in tint and foliage, cumbent, upright, fallen, or shattered by lightning, may be found at every step, whilst sympathetic glooms of twilight glimmering groves, and wildest nature lulled in sound repose, might much inspire the soul’ (129). For Watling ‘the whole appearance of nature must be striking in the extreme to the adventurer [...] The generality of the birds and the beasts sleeping by day, and singing or catering in the night, is such an inversion of nature as is hitherto unknown’ (131).

Flinders wrote of this shock of the new in the introduction to *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, saying, ‘A history of this establishment at the extremity of the globe, in a country where the astonished settler sees nothing, not even the grass under his feet, which is not different to whatever had before met his eye, could not but present objects of great interest to the European reader’ ([1814] 1966: xcv).

Flinders, Bass and Martin were encountering a land that would surprise them. They were, for a time, residing in a growing township, one that had already laid the foundations for a troubled relationship between black and white Australians. Sydney Cove, called by the Eora people ‘*Warrane*’ (Smith 2001: 3), had been colonised and renamed by Europeans in 1788. Seven years later the European population had swelled to ‘3,211, with an additional 887 (in 1796) on Norfolk Island’ (Estensen 2005: 42) while the local Indigenous population, whose people had occupied coastal Sydney for ‘10 000 years’ (Smith 2001: 10) and whose ancestors had been on the continent for ‘possibly 40,000 years prior to the white invasion in 1788’ (Organ 1990: xxviii) had greatly diminished. That the

Europeans had survived the early days of ‘near-starvation’ (Estensen 2005: 42) and had managed to develop a farming base with limited tools ‘and a desperate lack of almost every kind of practical equipment’ (42) was remarkable. But it was at the great cost of the Indigenous population. They not only had their land occupied, their hunting grounds and water supply interfered with, their fishing and hunting implements stolen as curiosities, but had been affected by foreign diseases, most especially the ‘highly contagious virus’ (Smith 2001: 34) smallpox.

The first governor, Arthur Phillip, was regarded highly by many for his governance of the new colony, yet he had a mixed relationship with the Indigenous population. Although he started out wanting to create good relations with the local people, according to the anthropologist, William Stanner, Phillip misunderstood much about the Eora culture and his orders were often confusing and frightening to the Indigenous inhabitants, such as the occasions when he ordered soldiers to ‘kidnap’ (2008: 173) some Eora men. In ‘The Boyer Lectures: After The Dreaming’ (1968) Stanner says that in the whole of Phillip’s ‘record with the Aborigines there is little that suggests wisdom or even a great deal of commonsense, and half a dozen episodes reveal him as a rather eyeless, uninventive man’ (2008: 175).

Phillip left the colony in December 1792, and Major Francis Grose became ‘Acting Governor’ (Clark 1992: 132). Under Grose the order and military discipline that Phillip had established was relaxed, and many, like Thomas Arndell, a ‘surgeon and a magistrate at Parramatta’ (Bowden 1962: 30), complained of the continual drunkenness around the ‘settlement’ (30) that led to a

surge in the amount of crimes committed, especially the more violent crimes of rape and murder (30). Grose gave out land grants to ‘non-commissioned officers, to privates, to emancipists and to expirees, the number of acres being decided [...] by their station in society’ (Clark 1992: 133). He encouraged his officers to ‘engage in trade’ (133) creating a military monopoly. It was he who allowed the convicts to work extra hours on officer’s farms by ‘permitting the latter to pay the convicts in rum’ (135). Grose resigned in ‘May 1794’ (141) and Captain Paterson became Administrator until Hunter arrived.

Phillip had taken Bennelong, from the wangal clan, ‘a clan name based on wanne, meaning “west” ’ (Smith 2001: vii) back to England with him and an ailing Bennelong had returned home on the *Reliance* with Hunter. George Bass nursed Bennelong back to health on the journey. On board ship Bennelong taught Bass and Daniel Paine, (then a passenger), some of the Eora language. Bennelong was the first Indigenous Australian that Bass, and presumably Flinders and Martin, would have known.

A sense of superiority, fear, and ignorance, underlay the early attitudes the colonists had to the Indigenous inhabitants. Daniel Paine writes in his journal: ‘The Native Inhabitants are the most irrational and ill formed Human beings on the Face of the Earth’ (1983: 39). But there was among some colonists, an appreciation of, and a curiosity about, cultural differences. In 1788, Watkin Tench, says:

We had lived almost three years at Port Jackson [...] before we knew that the word *bèeal*, signified ‘no’, and not ‘good’, in which latter sense we had always used it without

suspecting that we were wrong; and even without being corrected by those with whom we talked daily. (2000: 195)

Hobsbawm, in *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (1962) says the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century was a time of great transformation. In this period words like ‘ “industry”, “industrialist”, “factory”, “middle class”, “working class”, “capitalism” and “socialism” [...] “aristocracy” as well as “railway”, “liberal” and “conservative” ’ (1) were either ‘invented, or gained their modern meanings’ (1). In 1789 most Europeans couldn’t read and most ‘lived and died in the county, and often in the parish, of their birth’ (10). But this was a period that saw the rise of a ‘ “bourgeois” liberal society’ (1). Where previously a rise in status was only available through family connections, now it could be gained through competence and skill, although these new advantages usually went to men who were part of the newly emerging middle class (22). Although much of the world had been mapped, the details were sketchy. There were lots of ‘white spaces crossed by the marked trails of traders or explorers’ (7). The postal service and movement of goods over land was slow. Transport by water was more cost effective and ‘faster’ (9) and a ‘system of maritime trade currents, growing rapidly in volume and capacity, circled the earth, bringing its profits to the mercantile community of North Atlantic Europe’ (19). Great changes were occurring the world over. At the beginning of the eighteenth century witches were being ‘burned’ (21), by the end, some governments, ‘like the Austrian had already abolished not only judicial torture but also slavery’ (21). Many enlightened thinkers, however, assumed that a ‘free society would be a capitalist



society' (22). There was also a belief, held by many Europeans, that primitive peoples in far away places were not civilised. William Bradley, first lieutenant on the *Sirius*, captures the attitude: 'The governor's plan with respect to the natives was, if possible, to cultivate an acquaintance with them without their having an idea of our great superiority over them, that their confidence and friendship might be more firmly fixed' (ed. Flannery 1999: 55).

### ***Flinders, Bass, Martin and Attitudes to the First Australians***

What did William Martin think of the First Australians living in and around Sydney, and those he met in the Illawarra? To continue developing my hypothesis I investigated the experiences Flinders and Bass had with First Australians and the land.

Matthew Flinders encountered Indigenous peoples when sailing on the *Providence*, with Bligh. In one account, when Bligh was navigating a safe passage through Torres Strait, Flinders witnessed Indigenous people employing strategies to deal with potentially hostile strangers. A 'whaleboat and cutter were sounding a few miles ahead' (Estensen 2003: 21) of the *Providence*. The 'whaleboat was heading back to report what appeared to be a navigable passage. The cutter, with Lieutenant Tobin, a midshipman and seven crew, had remained behind when they sighted four large sailing canoes' (21). A palm thatch shelter stood on the lead canoe and the people in it were waving, but when Tobin would not come closer to them, 'a warrior sitting on top of the thatch shelter spoke to the others, and

immediately bows and arrows were handed from inside the shelter' (21). Their friendly approach had been a ruse.

The Europeans were often wary of Indigenous peoples, especially when first meeting them, but they did have naval codes of practice that sailors were expected to follow. In Tahiti, Bligh wrote out for the crew an example of such guidelines and Flinders copied these rules into his journal (17). The rules stressed that the men were to treat the islanders with goodwill but were also to watch for theft. European explorers viewed Indigenous people as being untrustworthy, or childlike, yet also, as potentially violent.

There were fears of cannibalism fuelled by fictional and nonfictional accounts. Flinders once wrote (Estensen 2003: 5) that his boyhood reading of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* ([1719] 2000) had incited his desire to go to sea. In this novel the protagonist, Crusoe, is shipwrecked on an island. One day, when exploring a distant part of the island, and aware that there had been 'savages on that place' (Defoe 2000: 140) Crusoe finds 'the blood, the bones and part of the flesh of human bodies, eaten and devoured by those wretches with merriment and sport' (140).

In some parts of the world cannibals were a reality and information fed to newspapers about grisly murders, heightened fears. Just before Flinders, Bass and Martin left on their second *Tom Thumb* journey a Calcutta newspaper story arrived at Port Jackson, brought by 'Mr. M'Clellan in the Experiment' (Collins [1798] 1971: 461). This gave an updated version of the events that had occurred some years before when a small vessel had landed on Tate Island. In the

newspaper account the islanders, who had initially been friendly to the nine sailors, brutally murdered six and wounded another two. As the three survivors were making their escape, the bodies of their companions were being dragged toward 'large fires' (463).

The relationship of the colonists to the First Australians was complex. The colonists needed to make friends with the locals in order to find out information. Flinders, for example, took Bongaree, (from Broken Bay), on the *Investigator* sail, to act as a translator. Yet Flinders, like many others, remained wary of Indigenous men. He writes in his *Norfolk* journal, in 1798, that after landing at Snug Cove to take latitude measurements, he met with a 'party of seven or eight natives' (ed. Flannery 2000: 10). He had a friendly discussion with them and then the men retreated to the woods. Flinders says: 'We could perceive no arms of any kind amongst them; but I knew these people too well not to be assured that their spears were lying ready, and that it was prudent to keep a good lookout upon the woods, to prevent surprise whilst taking the observation' (11).

On his *Investigator* journey, when in King George's Sound, Flinders studies the physical attributes of the Indigenous population: 'These do not, indeed, extract one of the upper front teeth at the age of puberty, as is generally practised at Port Jackson' (58). But he judges them to be unintelligent: 'They seemed to have no idea of any superiority we possessed over them; on the contrary, they left us, after the first interview, with some appearance of contempt for our pusillanimity (58).

Bass, in his whaleboat journal, reprinted in the *Historical Records of New South Wales* (HRNSW), reports on the Indigenous inhabitants seen at Western Port, and describes them in the same paragraph as he details the animals of the area: ‘There seem to be but few natives about this place [...] There are paths and other marks of them in several places, but none very recent. The want of water has perhaps driven them further back upon the higher lands. We saw a few of the brush kangaroo, the wallabah, but no other kind’ (1895: 324).

Bass and Flinders saw the land as something to be assessed for colonial benefit. Flinders, on the *Investigator*, and at Port Phillip, writes that the harbour would provide good shelter for a fleet of ships, and outlines the various difficulties of entry, adding: ‘The country surrounding Port Phillip has a pleasing, and in many parts a fertile appearance [...] It is in great measure a grassy country, and capable of supporting much cattle, though better calculated for sheep (2000: 111). Bass, in his whaleboat journal, spoke glowingly of the soil around Shoalhaven: ‘many thousand acres of open ground which never can be overflowed, whose soil is a rich vegetable mould’ (HRNSW 1895: 314). Yet, with an eye on future settlement, he added: ‘However capable the soil of this country might, upon a more accurate investigation, be found to be of agricultural improvement, certain it is that the difficulty of shipping off the produce must ever remain a bar to its colonization’ (315). But it seems there was little understanding of the First Australians relationship to the land, or of the idea of custodianship. Daniel Paine reflects a common attitude when he writes: ‘The Native Inhabitants [...] deriving as yet no benefit from Civilization although our Settlement has been formed near

ten years amongst them they have no Idea of profiting by the Example of our Settlers to sow Corn for a sure Provision' (1983: 39).

The general view that emerged from the body of research summarized here was that the Europeans, in the main, thought the Indigenous inhabitants uncivilized and unintelligent. Although some colonists were intrigued, and while others made friends and tried to learn about the culture, the First Australians remained, in the minds of the Europeans, a people who did not know how to make use of the land. What the historical Martin might have thought can only be imagined but it would certainly have been unwise of me to assume too much wisdom. I now had a starting point for shaping the fictional Will's responses to the Australian land and its people. But I was also investigating the life of the historical Martin and I outline that research below.

### ***William Martin: Historical Figure***

William Martin was baptised in Dartford, Kent, on the 4 March 1781. In November, 1794, George Bass and Henry Moore, the ship's master on the *Reliance* applied 'through Governor Hunter for a personal servant each, with wages to be paid by the Navy. The request was granted, and Bass hired, probably in London, a thirteen-year-old lad named William Martin' (Estensen 2005: 34). Bowden, in his notes accompanying *Canoe Rivulet*, writes of the typical employment protocols for servants and loblolly boys:

Various officers in a ship were allowed servants by the Regulations. The servant could also be an apprentice. The wages of the servant were paid by the Navy to the master.

Boys began their careers in the Navy at an early age; many entered the service when they were eleven years of age—some were younger. (1985: 25)

William Martin's duties meant he had to 'attend Bass personally and to assist in the ship's surgery' (Estensen 2005: 34). Bowden suggests, in his introduction to *Canoe Rivulet*, that Martin would have assisted with 'dressings, preparing medicines, sterilising instruments, helping at operations' (1985: xi). Typically a 'ship's sick bay was located on the orlop, the lowest deck, in candle-lit darkness well below the waterline, the area sometimes screened off by canvas dropped from the overhead beams' (Estensen 2005: 19). Patients brought their own hammocks and blankets to the sick bay. Canvas walls usually partitioned off the surgeon's cabin where personal requirements, plus the medicine chest and instruments—such as 'lancet, forceps and nippers, an amputating saw and knife, tourniquet clamps, a catling and a double-edged scalpel' (19)—were stored. Two journals, 'one for disease and another for surgery' (19) were kept, noting treatment details. Martin would presumably have slept near the sick bay. It was cramped conditions. 'There was the sound of the sea against the wooden hull and the stench of mould and bilgewater in the gravel or shingle ballast bellow' (19). Bowden suggests that Martin would have been known as the 'loblolly boy' (xi), and duties would have included calling the sick for treatment by striding the decks and 'banging the surgeon's mortar with the pestle' (xi).

What we also know of Martin, information gleaned from the Flinders narrative, is that he could swim well, an ability that Bowden suggests was ‘not possessed by all seamen of the day, including ships’ captains’ (1985: xi).

Matthew Flinders mentions Martin in *Canoe Rivulet* several times as a ‘boy’ (1985: 2, 5 and 14). Writing about the journey to Georges River, Flinders says, ‘In this boat we embarked on October 26th, which was the morning after our resolution had been formed, ourselves and a boy, constituting both officers and crew’ (2). In the *Terra Australis* version of the same trip he says they set off in ‘a little boat of eight feet long, called *Tom Thumb*, with a crew composed of ourselves and a boy’ ([1814] 1966: xcvi). In *Canoe Rivulet* he mentions William Martin next in the episode that occurred after *Tom Thumb* was dumped on the beach and the three relaunched the boat. Flinders says: ‘the boy and myself getting upon our oars’ (1985: 5). On day five of the journey, after anchoring near some islets, Flinders declares, ‘We called them Martins Isles after our young companion in the boat’ (12). As Bowden emphasizes, Flinders and Bass ‘used topographical features in naming the places they visited in the *Tom Thumb*. The islands named after Martin are the exception’ (25). On day six, Flinders writes, ‘In the afternoon, the boy swam on shore, and found a small stream of water running into the sea at this place, but we were not now in want of that necessary article’ (14). No more mention is made of Martin in *Canoe Rivulet*. In *Terra Australis*, the condensed account of the journey, Flinders mentions Martin twice. The first is already cited, the second reports Martin’s actions during the storm: ‘The task of the boy was to

bale out the water which, in spite of every care, the sea threw in upon us' ([1814] 1966: ci).

It is unclear whether Martin may have accompanied Bass on his inland trek intended to find a route across the Blue Mountains. Frank Bladen, editing the *Historical Records of New South Wales*, writes in his introduction that in about 'the middle of June, 1796 (the exact date is unknown), Bass set out with two companions' (1897: xlv). Collins, in his *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, doesn't mention Martin as being one of the two companions, merely stating, 'Mr Bass, the surgeon of the *Reliance*, and two companions set off in an attempt to round the mountains to the westward' ([1798] 1971: 484). There is no mention of Martin as part of the crew on Bass's exploration trip in a whaleboat, in late 1796, sent out to discover whether a strait existed between Van Diemen's Land and New Holland. The whaleboat, just under 29 feet, had 'food for six weeks and a crew of six naval seamen, four of them, apparently, from the *Reliance*' (Estensen 2005: 79). The only seaman known to have definitely been on that voyage is John Thistle, 'who had joined the *Reliance* in 1794 at age 22' (79). It's possible Martin took part in this voyage but neither his presence on the boat, nor the names of the other seaman, can be confirmed. Martin is not cited as accompanying Bass on the exploration trip he took with Flinders on the sloop, the *Norfolk*, in 1798. The *Norfolk*, was '35 feet in length and eleven feet in beam' (98) and had a 'crew of eight volunteers' (2003: 73) that had been 'chosen from the *Reliance* and the *Supply*' (73). It's possible to conclude, although there's not



enough evidence to confirm, that William Martin's New South Wales coastal exploration ventures began and ended with the *Tom Thumb* voyages.

Martin's name doesn't come up in any of Bass's letters home, or to friends, (although the bulk of those that survived were written after 1800). Martin stayed with Bass, serving on the *Reliance*, until he was eighteen-years-old. On '27 May 1799 Bass said goodbye to the assembled company of the *Reliance* and was rowed ashore from the ship for the last time. With him was his servant, William Martin [...] of whom there appears to be no further record' (Estensen 2005: 120). In *The Life of Matthew Flinders* (2003) Estensen says, 'Two days later they sailed from Port Jackson on the *Nautilus*' (90). In August the following year *The Times* newspaper states the 'the purser of the India Company ship *Woodford* had arrived at London's India House with a record of the journey and a list of passengers' (Estensen 2005: 126). George Bass was on the list (126), but no mention is made of William Martin. Whether Martin arrived back in England with Bass or not, remains unconfirmed.

Further clues about how to imagine the fictional Will were gleaned from researching the lives of Bass and Flinders, and I detail this research in the following chapter, but it was in the writing process that the problem of *how* Will narrated, and who he was narrating to, was resolved, and I discuss this process below.

***Case study: The Writing of Unreliable Narrator, Will Martin***

To write my eighteenth century unreliable narrator I needed not only to discover my own rhetorical purpose, but the narrator's purpose too. I kept in mind, however, Francine Prose's advice in *Reading like a Writer* (2006), where she states that for her, when writing a story told by a fictional narrator, 'the identity of the listener was a more vexing problem than the voice of the storyteller' (86). For Prose it has always been important to know 'not only who was speaking but who was being spoken to, where the speaker and listener were, and when and why the event—that is, the telling of the story—was occurring' (86).

To answer these questions I had to decide whether it was plausible that the fictional Will Martin was literate, or, would the fictional situation involve him merely speaking? The first narrative conceit I explored had Will Martin narrating his story with the intention of publishing it in a newspaper, or equivalent, on his return to England. Will was, like the historical Flinders, interested in fame. His story would be, in his mind, unique, written by a truth-teller, someone who could tell the story warts and all. My research revealed that many colonial figures, carpenters and sailors among them, wrote journals and narratives about their experiences in New South Wales, so the conceit seemed plausible. Will wanted to impress, to take a place in history, to develop career prospects.

In the first draft of this story Will's narration was written down by his friend Na. Na was a fictional character. My inspiration was Nanbaree, an Indigenous boy who had been taken in by John White—the 'surgeon-general to the First Fleet' (ed. Flannery 1999: 347)—in 1789, after smallpox had wiped out

a huge proportion of the Indigenous population. White let Nanbaree travel back and forth to visit kin and maintain duties to them (Clendinnen 2003: 49). The historical Nanbaree was possibly slightly younger than the historical William Martin. As Na wrote down Will's tale, he told Will about Pemulwuy, an aboriginal warrior who was attempting to stop the spread of colonial settlement. In my mind, I was attempting to challenge stereotypes. Initially, I thought it feasible that White might have taught Nanbaree to read and write. Possibly a long bow to draw. Certainly this is what I thought after an early seminar at Flinders University, where I was questioned about whether I was creating a narrator that was really a voice for the author's political views. (Was I being what Phelan had called a mask narrator?) There is no historical evidence that I've discovered of a literate Indigenous person in the early days of colonial settlement, although once the nineteenth century kicked in, this changed. To have Na not only reading, but also writing, would ring false for the reader. Inclusion of the Pemulwuy story reflected my own interest in Pemulwuy but in attempting to link a warrior tale to the Illawarra story I was diffusing the focus of the narrative. I soon realised that if I wanted to challenge stereotypes, I needed to do it in a way that still created a plausible story.

Post first draft I had to decide whether to create a literate Will Martin. Hobsbawm had suggested that most Europeans didn't read and rarely travelled, and, as newspapers were almost nonexistent, the circulation being very small, most news came to people through 'merchants and hawkers, travelling journeymen, migratory craftsmen and seasonal labour' (1962: 10) as well as

soldiers and other kinds of travellers. So was there any evidence of colonial servants being literate? In a letter Elizabeth Bass wrote to George on 5 February 1802, she says, ‘your Servants Mother came to thank me for having remembered her in my Letters [...]. She has had one Letter from him he says he is very happy and speaks highly of you’ (Estensen 2009: 141). This reference suggests that Bass’s servant—employed to travel with him on the *Venus*—might be literate, yet it was also possible that someone had written the letter for the boy. So I went on the hunt for further evidence and discovered that Governor Hunter had employed a literate servant, named John Price, who had travelled to New South Wales on the *Reliance* at the same time as William Martin. In 1798, Hunter sent John Price on an expedition ‘to explore the country west of the mountain range’ (HRNSW 1895: 819). Price travelled with an ex convict—a man called Wilson, who had lived for several years with Indigenous Australians—with another civilian, four prisoners and four soldiers. Historian, Alec Chisholm, reports that their task was to seek the ‘vague Utopia’ (1957: 177) believed by Irish convicts to be ‘south-west of Sydney, a New World of white people’ (175), and settle once and for all that it did not exist, and to also examine ‘as much country as possible’ (177). Price was told to write a journal. On 26 January 1798 Price writes:

We crossed one small river, the banks of which were so rocky and steep that we could scarce pass it. We saw no signs of any natives about it, but we saw several sorts of dung of different animals, one of which Wilson called a whom-batt, which is an animal about 20 inches high, with short legs and a thick body forwards, with a large head, round ears, and very small eyes; is very fat, and has much the appearance of a badger.

(HRNSW 1895: 821)

I found it particularly relevant that John Price's name, in relation to the journal, had been lost for many years. It was not until 1957 that Alec Chisholm, through a meticulous tracing of documents, discovered Price as the author. Hunter had kept Price's journal as part of his personal papers and later sent it, along with another journal written on a similar interior trip, to Sir Joseph Banks. In his correspondence with Banks, Hunter did not mention Price by name:

This young man went out with Capt. H. a boy, and one of his servants. As he grew up in that country and became pleased with traveling thro' the woods, he solicited permission to go upon the excursion then intended, and as he could write, he was instructed to enter in a paper the observations which their journey might suggest. He is an intelligent lad.

(HRNSW 1895: 820)

John Price's travels, as with William Martin's journeys with Bass and Flinders, suggest that Australian colonial servants with particular skills could enjoy certain freedoms, and have experiences that may not have been available to them in England. Although Price was a good four or more years older than Martin, his story, and the loss of his name in relation to the journal, was a useful reminder of Inga Clendinnen's warning that 'access to the actual past is slow, always problematic, and its inhabitants can be relied on to affront our expectations' (2006: 21).

From my researches it now seemed plausible that the historical William Martin might have been able to write. If Bass's servant was responsible for sorting

supplies, for labelling and keeping the medicines in order, it would certainly make sense that he would employ a literate servant. In the third draft of the story, Will says:

My preface holds no pardon because this tale—as I said before but best to say again—is the truest tale ever told out of Port Jackson because I, William Martin, (*hereafter known as Will*), have none to keep in good spirits save Mr Bass and so speak freely and not at another’s behest. For it’s common knowledge that there are more cuts from official documents and accounts of the colony than there are holes in a convict’s undershirt.

(April Draft 3 2009: 1)

By this time I using Phelan and Martin’s six modes—misreporting, underreporting, misreading, underreading, misregarding underregarding—as a guide for pulling apart the different strands of Will’s unreliability. I definitely wanted my fictional Will Martin to be the kind of narrator that bonded with the readers. At this stage I had decided that Will would mostly underreport, underregard and underread, thereby asking the reader to complete his version of events. He would have, I thought, a naive view on the political and social events he witnessed and this would be a central part of his unreliability. He would also be someone who told tall tales, thereby overreporting. Phelan keeps overreporting in the same category as misreporting, even though it means subtracting from the narrator’s account:

I find “subtraction” or “discounting” similar enough to “rejecting and reconstructing” that I do not create a separate category of unreliability to describe it. When we add to a

narrator's account, we have a stable base on which to do the addition; when we subtract, we don't have the same stability: in trimming the narrator's inflated account, we have to decide what should go and what should remain. (2005: 51)

As I developed the character, I kept reflecting upon what it meant to be fifteen now, and what it might have meant to be fifteen back in 1796, when some boys started working on ships at age eleven. After several drafts I began to question whether the voice I was using for Will was too naive. As I played with new ideas the narratee position also altered. To explain the process I will divide my work into nine drafts, although I would often write and rewrite my way to each subsequent draft, so there were drafts within drafts.

In the first five drafts the decision about Martin's ability to write or not was more important than it became in the sixth draft. The narratee originally was identified as a member of the public or a reader of tales of exploration. In these drafts the narrator used the past tense. In the first three of these drafts Will Martin was narrating the story a year after his *Tom Thumb* journey. He was still aboard the *Reliance* and the conceit was, he would seek out a publisher when he returned to England. In the first of these drafts, as mentioned, Na wrote and Will dictated. From the second draft on, Will either wrote or spoke his tale. In the first three drafts the narrator's sentence structure kept to certain peculiarities of the period, but I attempted to find a modern interpretation of it. In the fourth draft I began using writing conventions of the period, including odd spelling and employing capitals (unrelated to nouns) in the middle of sentences. In the first three drafts Will was incited to write his own tale after sneaking a look at Flinders' journal

and discovering that his name was not mentioned. He wants his name in the public domain, alongside that of Flinders and Bass. In the third draft Will tells a story about the early part of the trip, where he comes into contact with an opossum.

Will, overreporting, says:

Lowering my eyes, I caught sight of a wild animal sniffing at my feet. A fierce furry ball with pointed fangs, called here opossum. I dare not even gasp. If I moved it would leap at me and grip my throat. (April Draft 3 2009: 8)

This passage, along the narrator-narratee track, had Will telling a tall story. Along the narrator-authorial audience track these tall stories eventually suggested to the authorial audience that Will liked to make himself the hero of any adventure and that this penchant for fantasy was one of the ways he dealt with his lowly place in colonial society. This story was still in the fifth draft but the typeface was more reflective of the period. Will finished the story saying:

But, I had no Desire for such an attack & instead I exampl'd to the Opossum Na's death-rattle eyes. I can here happily Report that the trick works on cannibals & wild animals Alike. (December Draft 5 2009: 7)

It was between the third and fourth draft that I decided to do something about the naivety of Will's voice. To solve this problem I experimented with adding a frame story, where an older Will was relating the tale. I wondered whether William Martin might have come back to Australia as a servant or free settler. I searched through the Colonial Secretary Index for clues, chasing up the



references to the several William Martins mentioned, but although there were interesting possibilities, I couldn't establish a connection between any of these men and Bass's servant. While I could have imagined any scenario, I decided to leave my fourth draft narrator in England. He was writing his narrative for the benefit of family and friends, but most especially for his young son, who he'd named George. In developing this fictional situation I was influenced, in part, by *Sailing with Flinders: The Journal of Seaman Samuel Smith* (2002) edited by Peter Monteath. The journal, Paul Brunton claims in the introduction, is 'a view of the voyage from below decks' (xi). An obituary notice from the '*Manchester Gazette* of 10 February 1821' (xi) says that Samuel Smith 'kept a journal throughout his career at sea' (xi). The only section still remaining had been written up in an 'exercise book with paper watermarked 1813' (xi). Monteath says: 'The manuscript, hand-written in a neat, copperplate style, does not appear to be the product of daily entries made in cramped conditions aboard a vessel in almost permanent motion' (ix). It is not known if Smith himself wrote up the extract or someone else. In the fourth and fifth draft, I began developing a frame beyond the frame, a meta-frame. This new fictional conceit suggested that Will's manuscript had been kept in the family for many years, and had been reprinted two hundred years later as a historical document, scrutinised by a historian who had, in the published version, added footnotes. The tale, in the fifth draft, began:

\*Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1796 we was to Imbark on our 2nd Sail down the South'n Coast of New South Wales. I Arriv'd at the dock at 4 O Clock PM, & not—as Lt. Flinders Spoke it to the Governor—Night. Me being late for our Dock meet was down to Hoary

Bogarty. Mr Bass had Charg'd me with collecting Victuals from the Store, but Hoary Bogarty was as Slow as a wet whistle. (December Draft 5 2009: 1)

And, at the end of this page the footnote read:

\*The original manuscript is held in the Sutchfield Family collection. Several pages of the original, which presumably told of the first journey along the Georges River, were damaged in a flood in 1870 at Sutchfield House and have not survived.

(December Draft 5 2009: 1)

This meta-frame device developed Phelan's *telling* functions. The older Will told the tale with the verve of his younger self, and so along the track of narrator-narratee (the narrator role) the shift in voice from previous drafts was only subtle, but it increased his evaluating and interpreting functions. While the voice of the historian took over, at least in part, the track of narrator–authorial audience (the disclosure role) and increased the level of indirect communication between implied author and authorial audience. This meta-frame became a useful textual strategy for thematically exploring colonial attitudes to the Indigenous Australians. In this fifth draft, when Will tells the story of how *Tom Thumb* was dumped on a beach by waves, he says:

My imaginings were Bloodied & bon'd. The howls of darkest Nature were In my head.  
We stood, three lone figures on a Beach that curv'd like a butchers knife.

(December Draft 5 2009: 14)

And a second narrator, the fictional historian, added:

Stories of cannibalism occupied the 18<sup>th</sup> century imagination. It has been suggested by scholars that the local inhabitants promoted this view to the Colonists as a strategy intended to limit exploration. (December Draft 5 2009: 19)

Thus, in terms of telling functions, the narrator role was maintained but the disclosure role, split across two narrators, became more complex and the implied author via the historian narrative could comment on attitudes to Indigenous peoples and the locations of particular events from a twenty-first century perspective. The meta-frame increased the synthetic elements of the character narration so the reader became aware of text structure and shape.

Then, one day, I sat down and reread Phelan's essay (2007b) 'Estranging unreliability, bonding unreliability, and the ethics of *Lolita*.' I then reviewed the narrative techniques I'd employed. I'd been aiming to create a bonding narrator, but, on reflection, it seemed that increasing the synthetic component of the narration, adding the frame devices, had had a distancing effect. I also began to doubt the tall story elements of the narration. A reader, reading Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ([1884] 2003), where tall stories are a feature, knows they're reading a story from an author linked to a particular period in history. I began to suspect that to have a Huck Finn tall story tone, written by a twenty-first century author writing an eighteenth century character, might have a distancing effect rather than a bonding one. I had no simple way to confirm my suspicions, no 'proof', but writers don't work with 'proof' the way a scientist

does. I also had Vera Nünning and Bruno Zerweck's articles on cultural and historical positioning in the back of my mind. I was worried that if I maintained the fifth draft construction—using past tense, a tall tale element, period spelling and frame devices—the authorial audience would experience the story as the linguistic equivalent of a mix of mid-shots and long-shots, when I wanted close-ups and wobbly camera effects.

I had by this time read M.J. Hyland's novel *Carry Me Down* (2006) where Hyland creates unreliable narrator, John Egan. John, eleven-years-old and very tall for his age, believes he can tell when people are lying. The novel starts simply: 'It is January, a dark Sunday in winter, and I sit with my mother and father at the kitchen table' (1). Hyland makes no attempt to explain why or how her narrator is revealing his thoughts. There is no accounting for the fictional situation. John simply reveals his thoughts, and those thoughts, sometimes mundane, sometimes violent, often revealing vulnerability and confusion, are the key offering of the novel. From the first, as a reader, I was unsure whether John was a young boy going through a difficult adolescence, or whether he was mentally unstable:

My hands are in fists and my legs are shaking and all because of the hatred I have towards him now and, although he is holding the bottle of milk, and I have nothing in my hands, it is as though I am holding the bottle. I open my hands and can feel it: the coldness of the glass, the weight of it, and I feel my grip loosening on the bottle, and I feel the bottle slip through my fingers.

I hear the bottle smashing against the floor, and see the milk spreading over the slates and into the cracks between them but, when I look at my father, he is holding the bottle firmly. (2006: 55)

John's thoughts seem a probable angry reaction to his father's previous abuse but in the context of the novel this event, and others, kept me wondering about John Egan's sanity. I accepted the telling of his innermost thoughts as a convention of the novel that needed no explanation. In my acceptance, I was admitting to an indirect communication between reader and writer. Hyland didn't contrive a pretext and I didn't feel the need of one. She was saying, indirectly, this novel is not about the reality of the speaking moment but instead it's about the exploration of a mind. Hyland makes uncertainty the focus of her story, everything else she strips away.

Hyland's narrative style was a timely reminder that I didn't need to explain everything to the authorial audience and that the listener in a narrative situation could be the narrator himself. I decided to attempt to take the reader inside the mind of Will Martin. This meant an enormous change in the writing style. There would not be a sense of the narrator attempting to portray himself to the reader as a heroic person. Instead, the fictional experience would be more like the narrator was talking to himself. This also meant a change to the present tense. This is how the January 2010 sixth draft began:

I am in Mr Bass's cabin. He has to stoop as he is tall. The stench of bilgewater seeps through. I give it no attention. Mr Bass speaks. I do my listening. I want him to say, you

listen well. I want him to say, how singular it is that I have you with me. We are soon to embark on our trip. I am on it over others. He saw to that. I look right into his eyes. He likes that. Eye to eye, he often says, man to man. (January Draft 6 2010: 1)

This decreased the narrator-authorial audience track (disclosure role) so that the narrator-narratee track became more prominent and increased, at least in my mind, the bond between reader and narrator. All the research that had come before was included in this draft, even if only traces remained, but now there were new uncertainties to be explored. I needed, for example, even more precise details of Will's fictional environment. If Will was to hand Mr Bass a cloth, what was the cloth made of and what did it feel like? But I felt I'd found the right voice for Will.

There were still more changes to come during the following writing period. The idea that Bass had an interest in theatre, and that Will's mother was a performer, had been developing through several drafts. In the seventh draft, April-May 2010, I returned a few lines which meant that Will was narrating his story, sometime late in 1799, perhaps for an audience in a pub, or in a village square, or even in a theatre: 'I tell this tale. Hold nothing back. [...] Me, a few years younger, with a keen eye, but still with mush between the ears' (April-May Draft 7 2010: 1). This alteration returned the idea that fame and fortune played into Will's account, but also, by its connection to theatricality, developed the idea that the narrative's function was to entertain. But in the ninth draft, when I was working on the structure of the novel, I deleted this beginning and the narrative became a journal:

By Will Martin

*Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> March*

My oar stabs the dark wood of the *Reliance*. We push off from its massive side. Venus is out but the sky still has some light. Our sail snaps at the breeze. (September Draft 9 2010:1)

With a journal I could retain some sense of a personal narrative, important because of my attempts to reveal the changing dynamics among the three men, but also it gave a clear day-by-day structure. This seemed more necessary because I had decided to cut the Will Martin story up into sections, placing it between the other tales, so the reader was always returning to this first contact story. In order to orientate the reader back to Will's story I judged that the dates might be useful. I also did not keep the period spelling. I'd been attempting to create each new narrative voice in a way that embraced, through metaphor, the natural environment, and this, for me, was more important than the period spelling. It was also a signpost to the authorial audience that this story was not really about the illusion of historical accuracy.

### ***Conclusion***

With each draft, as decisions about how to formulate Will's unreliability changed, and his relationship to the narratee altered, the (indirect) relationship between the implied author and authorial audience also altered. When I placed the fictional narratee as a reading public, this developed the idea, through the narrator-authorial audience track, that financial gain and personal fame were part of the narrator's rhetorical intention and a focus of the story. When the narratee became family,

then that narrator purpose shifted, dealing with family history. With the addition of a historian, it shifted again to introduce family history *as* history. Thus in the fifth draft, on the narrator-authorial audience track, there was more exploration of the ideological and societal gap between the eighteenth century and the twenty-first century. Where previously that character narration and thematic elements had been more prominent now the story was constructed so that the synthetic, thematic and character narration elements were in equal play. Even though the framing devices may have made the story more intellectually engaging I felt it distanced the narrator from the authorial audience. In the sixth draft, when the narratee became the narrator himself, the focus of the narration shifted, so that the story became more about the psyche of the narrator. The narrator-authorial audience track was less prominent than it had been in the previous draft, however, I felt the narrator and authorial audience were bonded. The seventh draft developed the idea of the narrator as performer. In my ninth draft I went back to putting dates in, and cut the idea of performance, and yet retained a little of the lightness that came from that telling. I felt I had finally found the right tone to Will's voice and had discovered a pleasing balance to the relationship between the narrator-narratee and narrator-authorial audience.

All my theoretical justifications for the alterations in each draft had provided me with a way to understand the creative process and had assisted me in developing each draft. While historically the relationship of the implied author via the text to the authorial audience has caused much debate, and theorists over time have been unhappy with the concept of the implied author, in the end, as a writer,



employing Phelan's notion of a bonding or estranged narrator assisted me with making decisions about the closeness or distance of the narrator to the authorial audience. I could assess the closeness or distance in relation to the disclosure roles of the narrator and contemplate how certain narrative strategies would foreground or background the communication between the implied author and authorial audience via the narrator, and thus make the final alterations to the narrative voice.

The historical research was also important and I continued to go back to the historical data to check if the fictional situations I was creating were historically plausible. I listened to feedback from my supervisor and from my partner. I read and thought about what other writers, such as M.J. Hyland, had done when writing unreliable narrators. I would write a draft, or a section of the story, then read theory and other people's novels, reflect, research, then write again. The process I experienced is very like the one described by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean in their book (2009) *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Their 'iterative cyclic web' (8) model suggests that the research and writing process 'combines the cycle (alternations between practice and research), the web (numerous points of entry, exit, cross-referencing and cross-transit within the practice-research cycle), and iteration (many sub-cycles in which creative practice or research processes are repeated with variation' (8). Intuition about what might be right or wrong for the character was also part of the creative process. It was not uncommon for me to sit down with a plan to write a scene a particular way and for changes to happen as I began to embody the

character. This was an uncertain journey, complex in terms of the various influences. The research, the thinking, and the imagining were mixed together, elements discarded, others retained, or rearranged, to evolve into the final narrative.

## 5 Historical Reliability and Unreliability

One of the pleasures of writing a fictional version of the Flinders narrative was the chance to immerse myself in characters that had historical counterparts. I'd not attempted that before. I envisaged hunkering down to the research, absorbing all I could about the historical men and fashioning my imagined versions. But I hadn't anticipated how crucial the relationship between implied author and authorial audience was to this imagining.

While the previous chapter paid attention to the creation of the historical unreliable narrator, Will Martin, this chapter focuses on the writing of the fictional Bass and Flinders, those companions to the narrator, and on how their portrayals figure in the creation of unreliability, especially as concerns the relationship between implied author and authorial audience. I begin by reviewing elements of Inga Clendinnen's *The History Question* (2006), and follow this by discussing Lubomér Doležel's 'Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting The Postmodernist Challenge' (1999) and his deliberations on the differences between history and fiction. I then summarize the historical research, revealing how, from this source material, I made inferences about Bass and Flinders. Lastly, I reveal how I turned these inferences into fictional scenes that are recounted by my unreliable narrator.

I argue here that when creating a historical unreliable narrator, and when the rhetorical purpose of the narration is connected to opening up multiple perspectives around a single historical event, the authorial audience needs to

accept the narrator and events depicted as plausible fictional interpretations. To do this a certain amount of historical reliability is required. While it could be argued that this is necessary for historical reliable narrators, it is, perhaps, a more delicate balancing act with unreliable narration because the strategy encourages the reader to reflect upon narrator credibility.

### ***Going Back to the Past: The History and Fiction Debate***

We cannot, as historian, Inga Clendinnen, suggests in *The History Question*, know the minds of people who lived in the past by equating our experience with theirs: ‘We cannot post ourselves back in time. People really did think differently then—or at least we must proceed on that assumption’ (2006: 20). Clendinnen is critical of Kate Grenville’s notion that a fiction writer develops an understanding of the past by developing characters and empathizing with their situation. Clendinnen pokes fun at this idea, calling it ‘Applied Empathy’ (20) and disputes what she claims, Grenville, and other historical novelists, such as David Malouf, believe, namely that fiction can help readers imagine the past in a way that other forms of writing cannot. Clendinnen says, ‘the real past is surrounded by prickly-bushes of what I have to call epistemological difficulties’ (21). In other words, do we really know what we think we know? She cites, as an example, Lieutenant Ralph Clark of the First Fleet, who witnessed the *Sirius* breaking up on a Norfolk Island reef. Clark, onshore at the time, joined the rescue, going out to the ship on an improvised raft. ‘A convict pressed into service panicked, tumbled Clark off the raft and then fell in after him’ (25). Clark swam to shore with the man ‘clinging to

his belt' (25). Once the man had revived, Clark beat him with a stick. Clark might speak the same language as us, Clendinnen says, but 'we are in another country' (25). She goes on to say, 'Two hundred years ago people were more familiar with death than we are. Death, pain and violence were always at their elbow' (26). Researching and writing about the past can be a difficult business and Clendinnen is not impressed with the approach of some historical novelists, who, she says, 'spend time getting the material setting right, but then, misled by their confidence in their novelist's gift of empathetic imagination, they sometimes project back into that carefully constructed material setting contemporary assumptions and current obsessions' (27–28). For Clendinnen novelists can invent because their 'only binding contract is with their readers, and that ultimately is not to instruct or to reform, but to delight' (31). Novelists can fantasize about the future, she suggests, but historians must describe the past. Both forms of writing have, according to Clendinnen, different primary purposes: the primary purpose of a novel is aesthetic, of a history, moral (34). This difference occurs because the reader knows the novelist's creation is a fiction.

In 'Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting The Postmodernist Challenge' (1999) Lubomír Doležel begins with a discussion of Roland Barthes's essay, 'The Discourse of History' (1967), and Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973). Barthes's essay asks if historical narrative is fundamentally different from imaginative narrative and ends by answering in the 'negative' (Doležel 1999: 248). Doležel thinks it could hardly have been otherwise given the framework of the analysis. According to Barthes's argument:

(1) Language is incapable of referring to anything outside itself (the world, reality, the past); therefore, historiography has to resort to narrative in order to make its discourse meaningful and convincing. Narrative replaces, is a substitute for, the impotent language. And (2) history borrows narrative from fiction where it was developed; consequently, historical narrative becomes indistinguishable from fictional narrative.

(Doležel 1999: 249)

But Doležel, not convinced by Barthes's conclusion, argues that, 'Universal features of discourse cannot serve as distinctive features of discourse types' (248).

Doležel discusses Hayden White's study of nineteenth century history where White highlights the narrative component, suggesting that historians arrange past events using sequences of chronicled episodes, evoking a sense of story, using such story genres as, 'Romance, Tragedy, Comedy or Satire' (Doležel 1999: 250). According to Doležel any discussions about history and fiction since 'The Discourse of History' and *Metahistory* were published use the ' "historical narrative = literary narrative = fictional narrative" ' (251) equation, with no succeeding theorist developing anything 'new' (251).

Doležel wants to take the discussion further by analysing fictional and historical narratives within the 'theoretical framework of possible worlds' (247).

For Doležel:

Neither fictional nor historical worlds are inhabited by real, actual people, but by their possible counterparts. Yet there is a major difference between the fictional and the

historical treatment of transworld identity. Fiction makers practice a radically nonessentialist semantics; they can alter even the individuating properties and life episodes of historical persons when transposing them into a fictional world. Verisimilitude is a requirement of a certain poetics of fiction, not a universal principle of fiction-making [...] The persons of historical worlds—as well as their events, settings, etc.—have to bear documented properties. (257)

For Doležel the fiction writer can ‘roam over the entire universe of possible worlds, to call into fictional existence a world of any type’ (256), whereas historians, in creating their worlds, ‘are restricted to the physically possible’ (256). Those characters described in historical worlds must have existed, but this is not the same for fictional worlds. In historical fiction, fictional characters can mingle with and talk to historical figures. The reverse cannot occur. For Doležel neither the fictional or historical worlds created are complete. The difference is that in a fictional world it is the fiction writer who decides what will and will not go into the creation of a possible world. ‘Since fictional gaps are created in the act of world-making, they are ontological in nature [...] The gaps in historical worlds are epistemological, given by the limitations of human knowledge’ (258). Of course gaps in historical worlds may also be due to the ideological bent of the historian but the historian’s discourse is ‘subject to critical scrutiny within the community of historians’ (259).

In creating the fictional world of *I Am Tree* I was free to roam the history of the Illawarra, employ those events useful to my project, and imagine others. While the novel would not be classified as historical fiction, ‘1796 by Will

Martin', falls into that genre. Historical fiction, as a genre, may often conform to audience and publisher expectations, but at any time a fiction writer may challenge those expectations. How much or how little the writer must adhere to documentary material is debatable. In *The Plot Against America* (2004) Phillip Roth imagined an alternate version of historical events, depicting what might have happened if, in the 1940 presidential election, Charles A. Lindbergh had defeated Franklin Roosevelt. He took an historical event and imagined what might have happened if another event had occurred in its place. The historian must always narrate within the realm of possible worlds. The fiction writer traverses both but the choice about the fictional journey depends, I suggest, on the rhetorical purpose of the narrative.

Clendinnen reports how at a Brisbane Writers' Festival Peter Carey was questioned about the verisimilitude of certain events and relationships depicted in *True History of the Kelly Gang* and Carey answered: "I made it up." His interrogators were insisting he had written history. He knew he had written fiction' (Clendinnen 2006: 32). But Carey's *True History* is not completely made up. Despite the arguments of historians many elements of the plot, including the final shoot-out at Glenrowan, line up with historical fact, enough so that the reader can say, this is Carey's fictional version of the Ned Kelly story. Carey's rhetorical purpose might be described as the exploration of a myth to discover the man behind the myth. Therefore Carey's Ned needed to conform to certain inferences that could be plausibly made about the historical figure. Carey's Ned needed to be imagined by the reader, I suggest, as the kind of man that would call the Victorian



Police ‘a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splaw-footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or english landlords’ (ed. McDermott 2001: 63). Carey was writing historical fiction, he could roam in possible and impossible worlds—he could go into dreams for example—yet certain aspects of that roaming needed to adhere to historical facts.

My research led me to adopt a position in line with Doležel’s theory, acknowledging the narrative techniques that history and fiction share, but also respecting how they differ. Unlike Clendinnen, I don’t think that contemporary obsessions mar a fiction writer’s view of the past—although I agree contemporary assumptions do—but instead contemporary obsessions shape the rhetorical purpose of the narrative, which in turn informs the fictional style to be adopted. Working through and adopting a position in relation to the creation of fictional counterparts to historical figures was important to a discussion about unreliable narration because it helped me understand and appreciate the importance of the relationship, in this context, between the implied author and the authorial audience. Unlike Roth, I was not using history to write a what-if-this-happened-instead fictional tale, but was juxtaposing a fictional narrative with a nonfictional one, aiming to suggest that multiple narratives exist around a historical event even if we don’t always get to hear them. With this kind of rhetorical purpose, I suggest, I needed to create characters and events that the authorial audience would judge as plausible and interesting interpretations of the historical figures and historical events involved, in the same way that I, as reader, had judged and accepted Carey’s Ned Kelly and the tale he told.

I had confirmed my rhetorical purpose and had clarified my theoretical position in relation to the history and fiction debate, and I was beginning to understand how elements of reliability and unreliability would need to work together in my unreliable narration, but it was the historical research that would help me develop plausible characters and it is to an overview of this research that I turn now.

### ***Historical Research: Matthew Flinders and George Bass***

Matthew Flinders and George Bass became friends on the sail to Port Jackson. They were two very different men who nonetheless had much in common: both were from Lincolnshire; both had parents who wanted them to stay on land and practice medicine; both were keen on the idea of exploration.

Matthew Flinders, at twenty-one, had exploring and war experience, and had thought about, (or had tried to give the impression that he had thought about), what it meant to be a good man. On 10 March 1795, when he wrote to Anne Chappelle and Mary Franklin from Tenerife, he mentioned his younger brother, Samuel, speaking of him with paternal care: 'I hope he'll make a good Sailor, a good officer, and a good Man, which last is the Groundwork of the other two, and the Foundation of all Happiness' (2002: 38).

Born at Donington, on the 16 March 1774, Flinders was the firstborn child. His mother 'bore ten children' (Estensen 2003: 2), (although only five survived), and she died in 1783, when Matthew was nine. His father, a surgeon and apothecary, wanted his eldest son to take up the medical profession but young

Matthew was intent on ‘a naval career’ (5). Following advice from his uncle, John Flinders, Matthew prepared for his future by studying ‘geometry, trigonometry and navigation’ (5). Matthew’s father, however, was not convinced and in April 1790 he sent his son to work with Joseph Dell, a Lincoln surgeon. But after two weeks Matthew returned home. He’d received word that Captain Pasley, (at whose home his cousin was governess), had agreed to sponsor him into the navy. In May 1790, aged sixteen, Matthew ‘joined the *Scipio*, apparently as a midshipman’ (8).

Flinders’ dogged pursuit of a navy career reveals the determination, purposefulness, even stubbornness that were to become defining characteristics of the older man. In pursuing the career of his choice he was, at a young age, unafraid—or afraid but determined—of going against his father’s wishes. Juxtaposed against this purposefulness of character was a romantic streak. He was impetuous, and unafraid of declaring, at least in letters, intimate or complex feelings. In a letter to Ann Chappelle, 16 March 1799, he explains his desire to write to her: ‘It is like opening my bosom to thee – to a friend who can feel, and whose sensibility can inhale the rising thought’ (2002: 39). This romantic streak also fuelled a vision for his future. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Flinders once stated that it was Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* that had encouraged him to pursue a life at sea (Estensen 2003: 5). Wanting to understand more about Flinders I read *Robinson Crusoe* ([1719] 2000). It seemed a strange sort of adventure for the young Flinders to hanker after. There is rawness in the story—man pitted against nature—but little glory. But perhaps the truth of his ‘Crusoe’

statement is beside the point and what was important to Flinders was that others thought it true. He was creating his own narrative. According to Paul Brunton, who edited and introduced *Matthew Flinders: personal letters from an extraordinary life*, Flinders was a man who ‘wanted to be famous’ (2002: 4).

George Bass was three years older than Flinders. He was a tall athletic man with a vigorous intellect. He was born in Aswarby and baptised on 3 February 1771. Six years later, in ‘September 1777’ (Estensen 2005: 2) George’s father – an established tenant farmer – died, and the young Bass moved with his mother, Sarah, to Boston where they lived in the ‘Skirbeck Quarter, on the south side of the Witham River’ (3). Bass was ‘very bright, curious, fond of reading, and given to copying verses that he liked and to writing notes and comments in his books’ (4). Among his collection of books were ‘Cook’s *Voyage Round the World*’ (Bowden 1952: 4) and a ‘volume dealing with storms, shipwrecks and sufferings at sea’ (4) in which he wrote about the hardships of a seafaring life, vowing to one day ‘risk the dangers of the sea’ (4). Aged sixteen, he was apprenticed to Patrick Francis, a Boston surgeon, general practitioner and apothecary, and learnt how to mix up and utilize the drugs commonly in use, such as liquorice, jalap, ‘rhubarb root, cinchona bark, calomel, laudanum and other forms of opium’ (Estensen 2005: 5). He also became skilled in diagnosing diseases, breaking and setting bones, using leeches for bloodletting and preparing and employing clysters and poultices. After two years, Bass went to London to study surgery, ‘which mainly required simply observing treatments’ (6). Bass’s profession required him to build up a body of knowledge based on ‘concrete

experience, upon the observation and recording of facts' (7) and present it in a 'rational, orderly and useful form' (7). There were some advances in medicine—for example in the late 1700's smallpox inoculation became popular—yet the causes of many diseases remained unknown. Knowledge of contagious and infectious diseases was limited. Douglas Starr, in *Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce*, explains:

patients did not suffer from diseases like “tuberculosis” or “strep,” each caused by a specific pathogen; rather, they endured nonspecific ailments caused by humoral imbalances, such as “dropsy” (congestive heart failure) and “pleurisy” (chest pains), or “fits” and “convulsions,” or “decay” and “bloody flux.” They suffered an unending variety of fevers, including “intermittent,” “continued,” “remittent,” or “putrid” fevers – all without a clue as to the cause. (2002: 22)

Many of the methods used for treating illnesses, such as bleeding and blistering, were of little value. The skills of observation and analysis required for diagnosis were ingrained in the historical Bass from an early age and were pointers to how a fictional Bass might view the world. Like Flinders, Bass was someone who thought about and prepared for the future in a thorough way. His mother once said ‘that her son, very early in life, deliberately inured himself to hardship in preparation for a seafaring life’ (Bowden 1952: 13). In June 1789, aged eighteen, Bass qualified as a naval surgeon and went on to serve five years with ‘Britain’s Channel Fleet and on Atlantic Ocean patrols’ (Estensen 2009: 5). As the effects of the French Revolution caused many Europeans to shake in their boots, Bass travelled the seas, developed an interest in botany, and according to

Estensen (2005: 22), learnt the fundamentals of navigation. In April 1794 Bass joined the HMS *Reliance* and met Matthew Flinders.

Brunton writes, in his introduction to *Matthew Flinders: Personal letters from an extraordinary life* (2002), that Flinders ‘gained his sea training under William Bligh on the *Providence* voyage, 1791–3’ (2002: 4). On this trip he learned to ‘correctly mark the ship’s position on a chart, with every loose object on the table sliding about’ (Estensen 2003: 14). He observed Bligh’s handling of the ship and wrote out the regulations for keeping a ship clean and orderly (15). In Tahiti he had other experiences, at least one that led to venereal disease. On his return to England he joined his former patron, Captain Thomas Pasley, on the *Bellerophon*, and took part in the Glorious First Of June battle in 1794. By the age of twenty-one, when Flinders went on his second *Tom Thumb* voyage, he had travelled further than most of the people he grew up with and had fought to protect his nation.

For both men friendship was important. Flinders, in his youth, had formed a group of friends who gathered at the Franklin family home in Spilsby. It was here that he met Ann Chappelle, who was later to become his wife. He wrote to Mary Franklin on 23 January 1795, before he embarked for Port Jackson, saying, ‘ ’tho’ as comfortable as those around me how much does my Situation in Plymouth Sound suffer by a Comparison with the Comforts of a Spilsby fire side, the agreeable [*sic*] Chat and lively Jest of those Friends in whose favour we are so much prepossessed as to think every thing they say or do charming’ (2002: 37). In a letter to Ann Chappelle, 16 March 1799, he remarked that losing the friendship of

his female friends meant he would lose ‘the warmth, or rather that delightful energy of friendship which raises one almost above mortality’ (40). Much later, in a letter to Bass, dated 15 February 1801, he says: ‘How extremely happy have I been in my friendships; —Franklin—Wiles—Smith—Bass, are names which will be ever dear to my heart; and yet how different are the men’ (48). Despite this claim of difference, Flinders’ friends all seem to belong to a particular class, one that would be considered respectable. Of the friends we know about in New South Wales—and Brunton cites ‘Eliza and William Kent, Elizabeth and William Paterson, Philip Gidley and Anna Josepha King, Elizabeth Macarthur’ (20)—all had prominent places in colonial society. Indeed Flinders cultivated patrons, like Banks, that he sometimes called his ‘“great friends” ’(20), in order to further his career. What is unusual about Flinders’ group of friends, Brunton suggests, ‘is the number of women among them, unusual at the time for someone in his position’ (19).

George Bass also had an interesting range of friends. Dignitaries higher up in the naval chain-of-command were impressed by him. On 1 March 1798 Governor Hunter wrote enthusiastically to the Duke of Portland about Bass’s intellectual capacity and ‘disposition’ (HRNSW 1895: 363). Henry Waterhouse, commander of the *Reliance*, a gregarious man with a quick wit and a fondness for drink, later became Bass’s ‘brother-in-law’ (Estensen 2009: 9). But Bass also made friends with men known for their radical beliefs. Men like Daniel Paine, the colony’s shipbuilder, claimed by R. Knight and Alan Frost, the editors of Paine’s journal, to be a ‘non conformist’ (1983: xviii) and by Estensen, to be a ‘serious,

deeply religious young man' (2005: 64). Bass was friends with at least two of the Scottish Martyrs transported to New South Wales for sedition: the lawyer, Joseph Gerrald (or Gerald) and Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a 'Unitarian minister' (Estensen 2005: 62). Gerrald and Palmer were committed to ideas such as 'reduced taxation, universal manhood suffrage and more frequent parliamentary elections' (62), ideas that in the eighteenth century were considered radical. In Sydney, when Gerrald fell gravely ill, Bass attended him daily even though Balmain, the colony's surgeon, 'refused to treat a seditious' (63). Bass, it seems, was not frightened to be seen with men others scorned. In a letter Bass wrote in July 1797, to Norfolk Island surgeon, Thomas Jamison, he says: ' "It is society, the friendly clash of opinions that brings truths to light and exalts the human intellect to the highest pitch possible. Europe, Europe!!!" '(252).

This side of Bass's personality, his celebration of a 'clash of opinions' led to a possible difference between the depiction of the fictional characters, Bass and Flinders. Bass had followed up on a medical career, in which he tended to people, sought to heal their wounds, whereas Flinders had refused to take this on and had entered the navy, a profession committed to defence of the realm. Flinders, in letters to friends and family and patrons, rarely ventured a political opinion until he was imprisoned on Mauritius, when he himself became the subject of abuse. In his time in the colony there is little evidence to indicate what he thought about convicts and the transport system, or about the ruling classes. This does not mean that he did not have opinions, but suggests he did not freely write about them. Bass left nothing written down either, but, aside from the evidence in his choice of



friends, there are other pointers to his interest in the politics of the day. Elizabeth Bass, in a letter to her husband dated April 25 1801, mentions two books she has sent to him. One is *Crimes of Cabinet*. Of the other she says, 'I believe it is called out of Office' (Estensen 2009: 65). It was a book by Peter Pindar (pseudonym of John Wolcot) lampooning the politicians of the day. A list of Bass's books, made by Thomas Fyshe Palmer and headed ' "Inventory of Mr Bass's books. Sept 1800" ' (Roe 1987: 267), survives, although why the list was made is inconclusive. In 1799 Bass took leave from the navy, left the *Reliance*, and travelled back to London where he found investors, bought a ship, the *Venus*, and stocked it with goods he hoped to sell for a profit on his return to Port Jackson. Roe (1987: 267) suggests the list was compiled by Palmer and sent to Bass to prevent Bass buying books that he already had. Bass's list of personal books included: 'the *Iliad*, works of Hesiod and of Virgil, a volume of John Dryden's *Works* and, significantly, Francis Bacon's *Essays*, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*' (Estensen 2005: 66). Among the books he took with him to Port Jackson on the *Venus*, most probably for sale, were William Godwin's *Political Justice* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Roe 1985: 270–271). It seemed plausible to infer that these lists reflected some of Bass's personal interests.

Bass was not only a planner and careful observer, but also impulsive and a risk-taker. When Bass returned to England, with the intention of buying the *Venus*, an extremely risky venture, he eloped with and married, Elizabeth Waterhouse. Interestingly, Flinders too had a similar impulsive streak. When he

received command of the *Investigator* he married Anne Chappelle, and, without informing his superiors, took her on board the ship with the intention she accompany him to New South Wales. Yet, when he discovered his rash actions could cause him to lose his command, he quickly changed plans and left his young wife in England.

Flinders had apparently wanted to join Bass in his commercial adventures. He wrote to Bass, from Port Jackson, on 15 February 1800, saying, 'I have more than one [sic] hinted as much to you, that our speculations might fit in and be carried on together; but as this did never appear to meet your approbation, no direct proposal was made' (2002: 47). Flinders did not convince Bass to take him on as a partner yet he did appear to have a grasp on how to manipulate situations to his advantage. Brunton suggests that an example of this skill is revealed when, at age twenty-six, Flinders shamelessly circumvented 'naval procedure' (21) and sent a letter to Joseph Banks, 6 September 1800, soliciting 'a commission' (21).

In reading through Flinders' letters it became apparent that whenever he wanted to ask a favour from a friend, before he put in his request, he would inform the friend of what he could offer them. For example, Flinders writes to Willingham Franklin on 27 November 1801 from the *Investigator* saying:

I would have you a literary man, and probably it may be hereafter in my power to give you a lift into notice. Should this voyage prove successful, I shall not be unknown in the world; my acquaintance in Soho Square will introduce me to many of the first philosophers and literati in the kingdom; and if you should be what I sanguinely hope you will be, I shall have both pleasure and credit in introducing a coz. of your description.

(2002: 93).

In this letter Flinders suggests that he may soon be an important man, of use to Willingham, and then asks whether Willingham will help him write up his voyages: ‘What say you? Will you give me your assistance, if on my return a narration of our voyage should be called for from me?’ (2002: 93). He then goes on to explain how Willingham might prepare himself for the venture. Flinders thought strategically, planned ahead, and employed sophisticated methods of persuasion.

Both Bass and Flinders were witty. In letters home Flinders often teased his friends and family. He even wrote a book about his cat Trim. Bass too, in many letters, has a light touch. In a letter to his wife dated Jan 3 1803 he wrote, ‘Dear Wife, do my love get into the habit of spelling a little better; thou art a most notorious destroyer of good old english. I have mended my pen to give thee the above advice that thou might see it more Pointedly’ (Estensen 2009: 165).

Flinders took seriously his responsibilities to family. He wrote to his wife, on 4 July 1806, with advice about how Anne could guide his sister:

Next after considering the laws of her God, she ought perhaps in the next place to reflect, before giving way to the impulse of her feelings, what will be the opinion of the world upon this action. If the world will condemn, or draw from thence injurious consequences, it ought to be abandoned: Perhaps this rule ought to extend to all transactions of life.

(2002: 153)

Flinders valued correct conduct and was wary of how society perceived his actions. Brunton writes that Flinders had, ‘streaks of self-righteousness and arrogance and, at least in his earlier years, a willingness to wound an opponent emotionally’ (27). Brunton also suggests that Flinders had a ‘mania for self-justification’ (30). Yet the young Flinders, travelling with Bass, was, so the research suggests, intimidated by, or at least in awe of, the power of Bass’s intellect and personality. A strong indication of the nature of this early friendship comes from a letter that Flinders wrote to Bass from the *Reliance* on the 15 February 1800 where he says, ‘Without any thing conciliating in your manner, you yet possess the respect and esteem of all that know you intimately; your knowledge and abilities command the first, and your uprightness, integrity and humanity force the second’ (48). Flinders, it seems, saw Bass as intellectually and morally superior. He goes on to say: ‘My mind has often called you its Socrates [...] from you I have learned to judge of mankind more accurately’ (48–49). But he also chastises Bass:

There was a time, when I was so completely wrapped up in you, that no conversation but yours could give me any degree of pleasure; your footsteps upon the quarter deck over my head, took me from my book, and brought me upon deck to walk with you; often, I fear, to your great annoyance; but your apparent coolness towards me, and the unpleasant manner you took to point out my failings, roused my pride and cooled my ardor.

(2002: 48)

This extraordinary letter is full of passion, and also possibly, some attempt by Flinders at rejection: ‘and yet it is not clear to me that I love you entirely; at

least, my affection for Wiles reaches farther into my heart, —I would take him into the same skin with me!’ (49). Estensen says that to suggest ‘Flinders was somehow retaliating for Bass’s criticism by writing warmly of Wiles would have been contrary to his nature. Letters of the time were effusive in style’ (Estensen 2003: 91). But while she does not see this as a manipulative turn in the letter she does suggest that ‘Flinders’ admiration of Bass was profound [...] in many ways he was what the short, slight, reserved and relatively single-minded Flinders was not’ (90).

Tim Flannery says, in his introduction to *Terra Australis: Matthew Flinders’ Great Adventures in the Circumnavigation of Australia* (2000), that Flinders was a ‘complex individual [...] Driven, sometimes arrogant and occasionally reckless, [...] not always likeable, nor could he always see another’s point of view’ (2000: vii). Brunton describes him as ‘an engaging man, passionately devoted to his wife and his profession, witty, well-read, and in many ways high-minded, but nonetheless a man with more than a hint of arrogance and self-will’ (2002: 10).

Estensen says that ‘George Bass stands out for the man he was, a striking, charismatic figure of exceptional intelligence and outstanding energy, who shared in the application of science and reason that was creating the intellectual and philosophical climate that nurtured the modern world’ (2005: 203). And Brunton claims: ‘The famous Bass-Flinders partnership needs to be seen less as an example of young derring-do and more an example of hero worship’ (2002: 17).

I began to make inferences from this source material about the two men. Both were driven as young men by a vision of their future. Both prepared for the hardships this possible future would present and went against parental pressure to achieve it. Bass seems to have been interested in the way society functioned, its political and philosophical underpinnings. He was a well-read man and his letters reveal that he wanted his wife to educate herself. Flinders was, in some ways, conservative in his choice of friends, although he had more female confidants than was usual for the time. It seems both men were idealistic and certainly both were witty. Bass was interested in botany and he had followed through on a medical career. Flinders had seen battle, understood strategic planning, and had taken note of ship discipline. Yet he had a manipulative streak. Both men had opinions about correct behaviour, but Flinders judged Bass to be intellectually and possibly morally superior. These (summarized) inferences, along with the historical research, were beginning to work on my imagination, scenes began to form and the results of some of these scene imaginings are set out below.

### ***Inferences into Fictional Scenes***

As I'd been writing '1796 by Will Martin' I had developed dialogue that revealed Bass and Flinders to be keen explorers. Yet I wanted the authorial audience to see their exploration journey in relation to a larger story about human beings.

Therefore, I wrote a fictional situation, based on a historical situation, that I hoped would give the goal of exploration some deeper meaning, and I used it to set up the trip.

In the seventh draft of '1796 by Will Martin,' Will Martin, reports:

Mr Bass was not smiling as he reported this news. Wet from the rain, his hands wrapped around his body, he was staring back at the hospital, thinking of Mr Gerrald perhaps. Of the journeys that man would not make. There was a long silence before he spoke again.

'I pressed the case for the river to be found,' he said. 'Rivers do more than reveal secrets, Will, they can alter destiny.'

This is how he speaks.

When Mama met him she said, 'That man may have a Roman nose but he has the mind of a Greek God.' (April Draft 7 2010: 10)

This passage works along the narrator-narratee track, with the narrator reliably reporting what Bass said, and interpreting his demeanour. The line—*This is how he speaks*—works along the narrator-authorial audience track revealing Will's possible hero-worship of Bass and complicating the reliability. In the following line we get his Mama's admiration of the same man. The implied author thus gives the authorial audience, via the narrator, a larger picture of the figure Bass. It wasn't just Will who admired this man, others too perceived Bass as having tremendous presence. Bass is contemplating the death of Mr Gerrald, and the scene suggests that while Bass thinks exploration and discovery can change destiny, he also sees it as a way to rise above the grim reality of death. Economic security and fame are connected to the word 'destiny' as are death and fate. While the story as a whole may examine the theme of exploration as exploitation, I hoped, through sequences like the one above, that the story wouldn't offer one

simple interpretation of the theme, but would instead suggest a more complex reflection on exploration of the period.

Yet, for all the craft and thought that went into writing this scene, it was cut from the final version presented in this thesis. I place it here as an example of the complexity of the writing process. And even though this scene was cut, to my mind, traces of the sombre tone and the reasoning behind writing the scene, have filtered through into the story as a whole, thus making the scene less necessary than it once was.

The *Tom Thumb* journey took place in an early phase of the historical (and fictional) Bass and Flinders' friendship. How would the fictional Will view the friendship? I thought the fictional Bass might be likely to treat Will with kindness, and that Will's relationship with Bass might cause him to react negatively to Bass and Flinders' deepening friendship, despite this being inappropriate to a servant's position. I wanted the story to trace how the three young men viewed the Kooris, but also, how they viewed each other. In the following scene, from the seventh draft, on the first evening of the journey, Will says:

The surf foams and spits as we haul our boat up on the sand. Mr Bass and the Lieutenant, shake hands.

'Mr Bass, congratulations.'

'Lieutenant, congratulations.'

They say this to one another as though receiving a medal, then race to the rocks. They forget me, in their excitement. It is the Lieutenant that forgets. Or resents. I stand and look out at the bay. (April Draft 7 2010: 13)



Will reports and also interprets the exchange he witnesses—*They say this to one another as though receiving a medal*—indicating perhaps, the resentment he feels. When Will says—*It is the Lieutenant that forgets. Or resents*—the implied author is suggesting along the narrator-authorial audience track, that Will feels Flinders to be a rival for Bass’s attention and that therefore, Will may not always be reliable when reporting on Flinders’ actions.

I was developing the idea of that the fictional Flinders hero-worshipped Bass, but I also wanted Bass to admire Flinders. I thought it important for the power status to constantly shift back and forth between the two men. Also, I wanted to bring to the mind of the authorial audience the kind of battles that men of that period were engaged in, and to give the fictional Flinders a special claim to battle experience that Will could admire. The *Bellerophon* story reveals a change developing in Will’s relationship with Flinders. Flinders had seen and done things that Bass and Will had not. In the seventh draft, Will says:

The Lieutenant squats before the fire.

‘I know the *Bellerophon* story,’ I say to him. ‘They talk of it on the *Reliance*.’

The Lieutenant looks surprised. ‘Do they?’

‘They do,’ I say, though this is not what I mean.

What I mean is that when I was first on the *Reliance* I would stand outside the officers mess and hear the talk, and several times I heard the Lieutenant’s version.

(April Draft 7 2010: 43)

Will lies to the Lieutenant. He has not heard the men speak, but has heard the Lieutenant speak. Why he does this might be subjective. Is it a way of

gathering favour? Or is it the result of an emerging, even if awkwardly displayed, admiration for the Lieutenant? Along the narrator-narratee track Will's reporting of the battle is colourful but historically reliable. This is necessary to create the fictional credibility the rhetorical purpose requires. He also reliably reveals that he lied to the Lieutenant.

One of the thematic questions the novel explores is: Has technological progress meant social and intellectual progress? In '1796 by Will Martin' I had Will report on a debate between Bass and Flinders that deals, rather openly, with this notion. I thought it possible to infer that Flinders was slightly more matter-of-fact in his thinking about society. He, in my imagining, would have dismissed the French Revolution as rabble hysteria. Bass might retain some approval of the ideals of equality and liberty.

In the seventh draft, Will Martin says:

The sun sets and the stars flicker in the sky. When I come back to the camp Mr Bass is talking.

'The primitive mind,' Mr Bass says, 'does not just belong to the primitive but to us all.'

'Yes, my point exactly, take the French,' says the Lieutenant.

'Take them where?' Mr Bass asks.

The Lieutenant smiles. 'Take their inclination to rise against their king.'

'But we must all rise, must we not Matthew? For man is like bread, to improve his mind, he must rise.'

'But it is the way of rising I am thinking of. Progress needs order, and order needs hierarchy.'

The Lieutenant lays out his thoughts like neat piles of sand.

(April Draft 7 2010: 69–70)

As this scene progresses it develops what Phelan would call character functions, with the characters representing wider themes. I tried to make each argument persuasive, so that the reader has to decide what position they agree with. Flinders argues that an ordered society is intellectually superior, but Bass is dubious. This scene also works along the narrator-authorial audience track bringing to the authorial audiences attention the cultural period that Bass, Flinders and Martin were living in. It brings up issues of class and of economic security. At the same time the implied author is revealing to the authorial audience attitudes the Europeans had about the intelligence of the Indigenous men. Along the narrator-narratee track Will reliably reports but does little evaluating or interpreting. The scene concentrates less of Will's unreliability and more on setting up the world of the narrator. For the characters to present as credible historical interpretations Will needed to, at times, reliably report. But his reliable reports could easily blend with other unreliable tellings, occurring in other scenes, or even as part of the same scene.

### ***Conclusion***

The analysis of the scenes set out in this chapter clarified, for me, that at those times the implied author is attempting to disclose cultural and historical information via the narrator to the authorial audience, it is useful for the unreliable narrator to reliably report, so the focus for the reader is not on doubting the

narrator's story but on thinking about the historical world that the characters occupy. When creating a historical unreliable narrator, and when the rhetorical purpose is to promote the idea that there are usually multiple readings of a historical event, then key elements of the narrative and of the events and characters depicted, need to be historically reliable. This allows the authorial audience to accept as credible the fictional interpretations of the historical figures and events depicted, and to also accept the potential shifts in thematic focus that might occur within the narrative. While this could be said to be true for historical reliable narrators it may be that character credibility takes on stronger importance when creating historical unreliable narrators, because the narrative strategy itself brings up questions of truth and fiction.

But I want to be careful *not* to suggest that unreliable narration was a technique thought through first and then applied. I would most often write first, analyse what I'd written, and from this analysis make changes to serve my rhetorical purpose. And for the entire creative project there was a continual dynamic play between the theoretical and historical research and the imagining of the fictional world.

Yet, there was another area of the research that brought up an equally complex set of questions that were not so easily answered by using theoretical tools for analysis. This was how to depict the Indigenous characters in the story, and in the following chapter I discuss this aspect of the study.

## 6 Writing White, Writing Black and Events at Canoe Rivulet

### *Introduction*

Early on in the writing of *I Am Tree* I asked myself—what does it mean to be Australian? Attempting to find the answer, or, at least, to think more deeply about the question, led to questions about how to write first contact stories and how, as a white Australian, I was to approach writing characters based on historical Indigenous Australians. Could I, for example, create an Indigenous narrator? What were the lessons learnt from other writers? And how could I apply them to a fictional retelling of the Flinders narrative?

Flinders wrote the only account of the second *Tom Thumb* journey and if it represents his lived experience, it also represents certain colonial beliefs and attitudes. In Chapter Two I looked at how those beliefs might have shaped his rhetorical purpose, while in the current chapter I analyse how Flinders reported specific events. In his narrative Flinders' says that when he, Bass, and Martin, arrived at Canoe Rivulet, the Koori men began acting suspiciously. He implies that the lives of the explorers were in danger and states that he used 'deceit' (1985: 10) as a retreat strategy. But did the Kooris intend to kill the Europeans? Can we ever know? What other alternatives could be imagined?

This chapter also reveals the journey I took to resolve questions about how to approach writing the Indigenous characters in my fictionalizing of the Flinders

narrative. I begin by describing how some white writers have misused Indigenous stories, and then explore the advice given, by Indigenous and other writers, for how white Australian authors should approach stories involving Indigenous culture. When I was researching historical Indigenous figures in the Illawarra, I found that, compared with their colonial contemporaries, there was scant documentary evidence available. To fill this gap and to discover what cultural protocols might need to be observed when telling first contact stories, I interviewed Wadi Wadi elders and other Indigenous members of the Illawarra community. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of how ‘deception’, both European and Indigenous, was described or inferred in Flinders’ narrative, how historians have since retold that story, and finally, I give examples of how, in my fictional retelling, I dealt with the deception theme.

### ***Writing White, Writing Black***

Early on I had decided that the characters in *I Am Tree* needed to reflect the changing cultural mix in the Illawarra, but I shied away from creating an Indigenous narrator, or a narrator from a cultural heritage that did not in some way connect with my own. Writing in the third-person about an Indigenous character seemed to me vastly different than writing in the first-person. Writing in the third-person, I thought, more truly reflected my experience. Since I did not have an Indigenous heritage, I should steer clear of first-person narration. Too many people, I thought, had already appropriated Indigenous culture.

As I researched and thought more about this position, I saw the flaws. If I didn't write an Indigenous narrator was I really writing about what it meant to be Australian? If I couldn't write an Indigenous narrator did that mean I couldn't write a Greek narrator? Or a Turkish? It seems absurd to suggest that a writer should never write outside his or her own experience. People write from different ethnic positions all the time. What about *Mr Pip* (2008) by Lloyd Jones? Jones writes in the first-person, from the point of view of Matilda, a thirteen-year-old village girl from Bougainville. Could this narrative be seen as colonial appropriation? And how should I view Peter Carey's *Parrot and Olivier in America* (2009), a re-imagining of Alexis de Tocqueville's travels and experiences in America? Carey writes in the first-person, alternately, from the perspective of Parrot, an Englishman, and Olivier, a French aristocrat. Women write male characters, men write female characters. Writers write from the point of view of a murderer, having never murdered. So can a writer write from the point of view of any character? Surely nothing should be limited. Why was I so cautious about writing an Indigenous narrator?

My fear? I would get it wrong and perhaps offend the Koori community. Why did I think I'd get it wrong? Because, according to the story I told myself, my understanding of the deeper psychological make-up necessary for writing a first-person narrator, would be deficient when it came to writing a historical Indigenous narrator. I could never, my inner voice suggested, understand the Dreamtime the way an Indigenous person could, whereas a European tradition, leading back to Greek myths and Christian religious imagery, would surely be in

my bones. A contemporary Indigenous narrator I could perhaps write, but only if I created some aspect of my own heritage within that narrator's psyche—i.e. an Irish Indigenous Australian. It was murky thinking. Reflecting further, I realised that my fear also stemmed from the particular cultural situation in Australia, where, on many occasions, white writers had either taken advantage of Indigenous sources, or, had taken on Indigenous identities in order to get published.

Maggie Nolan, in 'In His Own Sweet Time: Carmen's Coming Out' (2004), reports how in 1994, Magabala books published *My Own Sweet Time*, an autobiography by Wanda Koolmatrie. The following year the book won the Nita May Dobbie Award given for 'a first novel by a woman writer' (134). It was put on the New South Wales high school English curriculum in 1996, and Gillian Whitlock included an extract in *Autographs*, an anthology of Australian autobiographical writing' (134). But in 1997, it was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* that Leon Carmen, a white male, who lived in Sydney, had written the book. Nolan says: 'Carmen and his friend and agent, John Bayley, designed the hoax to prove that it was easier to get published in Australia as a black woman than as a white male' (135). The motivation for this hoax, however, was out of step with the true position of Indigenous women writers in Australia.

Cath Ellis, in 'Helping Yourself: Marlo Morgan and the Fabrication of Indigenous Wisdom' (2004), writes about author Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under: A Woman's Journey in Dreamtime Australia* (1994) where Morgan writes a story about a white woman, also named Marlo, who 'is kidnapped by the "Real People Tribe" in an unspecified region of the Australian



mainland and is forced to go “walkabout” with them’ (151). The journey has a new-age pseudo mythic structure: challenges are put forward, lessons learnt, values altered. In the story Marlo learns that the ‘ “Real People Tribe” ’ (151) fear their ancient knowledge will be lost and so choose her to carry their knowledge to the global community (151). Morgan’s book was originally self-published as a personal story. Later, HarperCollins purchased the rights for around ‘US\$1.7million (Oder)’ (152) and the book had a ‘US\$250,000 marketing campaign that included a fifteen-city lecture tour for the author’ (152). HarperCollins published the story as fiction (153). The author, Marlo Morgan, an American health care worker, did come to Australia, but only for a few months. She didn’t visit the outback but spent her time working voluntarily in a Brisbane pharmacy (149).

In an interview with Illawarra poet, Barbara Nicholson, her eyes roll when I mention Marlo Morgan’s book. When Nicholson was teaching at the University of New South Wales she found the book problematic: ‘One of the big things we have with American students who come over here in their droves, to our universities [...] they have all read that and think it is wonderful’ (Nicholson Interview 2010: 25). Cath Ellis, whose article is prompted by the same experience as Nicholson’s, says, ‘This is disturbing precisely because the book, which is routinely taken by non-Australian readers to be an accurate, non-fictional account of Australian Indigenous culture, is in fact a complete fabrication’ (2004: 149).

Many white Australian writers, such as Kate Grenville, sensitive to the issue of Indigenous appropriation, have thought about how to approach

Indigenous characters. In *The Lieutenant* (2008), Grenville imagines a friendship between a white man, Lieutenant Rookes, and an aboriginal woman, Taragan. Her characters are based on two historical figures, Lieutenant William Dawes, an astronomer, mathematician and linguist, and Patyegarang, a young Gadigal woman. Her source was the notebooks left by Dawes. Grenville says: ‘The notebooks excited me because, for all their gaps and mysteries, they recorded, verbatim, conversations around which I could build a story. I’d have to invent the context for the conversations, and I’d have to speculate about the people who spoke the words, and I was uncertain about how appropriate it was to do that’ (Grenville n.d.: 2 of 4).

Dawes recorded the conversations he had with Patyegarang, and Grenville used these real conversations as the only dialogue between Taragan and Rookes. Grenville says:

In moving from the historical record into a work of the imagination, I set myself two broad guidelines. The first was not to invent any dialogue between the Gadigal people and the lieutenant. I would use only what was recorded in the notebooks. The second was – as far as my knowledge went – not to invent out of nowhere. (Grenville n.d: 3 of 4)

Grenville’s reluctance to make up any Indigenous dialogue reveals her disinclination to write adopting an imaginary voice based on a historical Indigenous person. Historian, Inga Clendinnen, in *The History Question* (2006) cites an interview Grenville did with Ramona Koval where the author states she was unwilling, when writing *The Secret River*, to enter the minds of Indigenous

Australians: ‘ “I do believe that you have to draw on what you know to write well, and I don’t pretend to understand or be able to empathise particularly with a tribal Aboriginal person from 200 years ago; that’s beyond me” ’ (2006: 19).

I began to realise that if I wanted to retell *Canoe Rivulet*, and explore further the events that occurred between the Europeans and the Kooris, and yet do this in a way that did not impose what journalist, Rosemary Neill, has called ‘a self-imposed imaginative separatism’ (2009: 7), then I needed to find some guidelines for writing a first contact story.

Author and academic, Anita Heiss, in, ‘Writing about indigenous Australia—some issues to consider and protocols to follow: a discussion paper’ (2002), details what some Indigenous writers say about the issue. Writer, Jackie Huggins, is ‘adamant that non-Aboriginal writers should not be writing Aboriginal creation stories’ (199), however, ‘she does believe that white writers can in some instances write on Aboriginal themes, such as on historical evidence and colonial literature’ (199). Heiss also quotes fiction writer Melissa Lucashenko: ‘When non-Indigenous people come in and write about us they are writing in ignorance. Ignorance of us and our lives, and ignorance of Aboriginal Law’ (199). Jennifer Martiniello, an Indigenous poet and academic, takes a different view: ‘For many issues there is also a white story, not just a black story—after all we didn’t create the last 200 years of crap all by ourselves’ (Heiss 2002: 200). Most of the Indigenous writers Heiss interviews call for good research to be done by white writers on Indigenous culture, for there to be consultation with the Indigenous community, an awareness of protocols, a thoughtfulness in portraying Indigenous

people speaking English, and a plea to stay away from stereotypes such as black trackers and domestic servants. Jackie Huggins also suggests that ‘the material have an empowering nature’ (202). Barbara Nicholson agrees with this consultative approach: ‘Contact history is shared history. I think you should be allowed to write about that. But I sort of think we need to observe the proper protocols’ (Nicholson Interview 2010: 28). Most of the white Australian writers Heiss interviews make comments in line with children’s writer, Nadia Wheatley, who talks about ‘the methodology of research appropriate to all good writing, as well as common respect and politeness’ (2002: 200).

This issue of taking real elements from people lives and using it in a story has always been controversial. The worry is—will the writer have used the material appropriately? This concern influences attitudes about whether white Australian writers should write about Indigenous society and culture, even if the story is about the disconnection or connection between white and black culture.

In Indigenous culture life stories belong to the individuals and their descendents. But story has a function. Illawarra community member, Jade Kennedy, explains that a story will orientate an aboriginal person about things connected with life, such as where to fish, and what to watch out for in a particular fishing area. Stories are, he says, ‘Information sharing. Knowledge sharing’ (Interview 2009: 15). He suggests that Indigenous people experience stories in a particular way:

aboriginal people don’t just retell stories, aboriginal people relive their stories through the retelling. They are oral people. [...] You can speak a story and they can visualize that

story completely and they'll be there with you in that story, the story is not being retold, the story is always being relived. (Interview 2009: 14)

Through my research I was discovering that when telling a first contact story, speaking with Indigenous elders, and seeking permission or advice about how to fictionalize the Indigenous aspects of that story, was important if respect was to be maintained for Indigenous culture. But this respect, Nicholson says, 'applies to aboriginal people doing the writing too' (Nicholson Interview 2010: 11).

I had started to conduct interviews with members of the Illawarra community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. I'd wanted to do this to get an on-the-ground feel for life in the Illawarra now, from different perspectives, but also, it was necessary to interview Indigenous elders to attempt to fill in the gaps in the documentary material and hypothesise aspects of the meeting between Flinders, Bass and Martin and the Koori men at Canoe Rivulet. I used these interviews to find new paths into the Flinders narrative and it is this specific area of inquiry that I turn to now.

### ***The Koori Men***

The research into *Canoe Rivulet* and the historical research into Flinders, Bass and Martin, had helped me develop an hypothesis about the rhetorical purpose of Flinders' narrative, and had guided me in developing a plausible fictional interpretation of the European characters, but it did not lead me to an

understanding of the Koori men living around Lake Illawarra, nor to be able to imagine some of the details of their exchange with the Europeans.

Yet, instead of knuckling down to the Indigenous research I became obsessed with getting the colonial details right. I kept putting the Indigenous research off, telling myself that it was a big job and I had to wait until I had time for it. The books on Indigenous culture that I'd begun reading sat at the bottom of a pile dominated by library books on aspects of colonial history, including numerous books on George Bass and Matthew Flinders. Then one day I realised that I was doing something very typical to white Australians. Even within my own research activities I put everything Indigenous into a big pile that was labelled—*deal with later*.

Understanding what keeps a community together, comprehending the unstated understandings that exist between members of that community, and teasing out how we imagine ourselves within our own community, is complex. Yet how we imagine our own community is key to how we imagine other communities. Benedict Anderson says, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), that 'In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (6).

The Indigenous people living in the Illawarra, at the time of Bass, Flinders and Martin's visit, were salt-water people. They had had very little contact with the colonists. The Europeans were what historian, Michael Cathcart, calls 'wet-

country people' (2009: 8). Both groups imagined their communities differently. When reaching back into the past to understand both communities there are many unknowns. But I soon discovered there was far less documentary information available on historical Indigenous communities in the Illawarra than on their colonial counterparts. Organ says in *A Documentary History of the Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines: 1770–1850*, that: 'By the 1850s the original local inhabitants / tribes of central and northern Illawarra were either destroyed, decimated, or dispersed along the coastline to the north and south, and even the west inland' (1990: xxviii). Organ goes on to say, 'No native Illawarra Aborigine recorded first-hand on paper his/her reminiscences of their people's history or aspects of their traditional culture during the period between first contact and 1900' (xxxix). The Illawarra aboriginal tribes were so decimated, that 'at the end of the 1830s' (xxxviii) there were less than one hundred of the original inhabitants living in central Illawarra.

In most of the documentation—history books, council papers, tourist information—about the Kooris living around Lake Illawarra in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the people are referred to as Wadi Wadi (or Wodi Wodi.) But even the name Wadi Wadi is questionable. Organ names the Wadi Wadi as the people living on the 'coast from Wollongong to the Shoalhaven' (xlii) but says:

the adoption of the term 'Wodi Wodi' in reference to the Aborigines of central Illawarra is based on the testimony of Lizzy Malone, daughter of a woman of the Shoalhaven tribe, who stated (Ridley, 1875) that Wodi Wodi was the name of the language spoken by the Aboriginal people of Illawarra, from Wollongong to Shoalhaven. At some stage between

1875 and 1983 the term 'Wodi Wodi' has been adopted / extended by white researchers to refer to the Aboriginal people of the Illawarra, along with their language. (xlii)

When I interviewed Roy (Dootch) Kennedy, Indigenous elder and activist, and asked what might be the correct way to describe the men Bass and Flinders met at Canoe Rivulet, Kennedy said:

The reference back then was the Five Islands Tribe, they referred to them as the Five Islands Tribe, and if they are referring to them as the Five Islands Tribe, it would be the story of the Elouera People that come from Mount Keira, because the Five Islands are the daughters of Oola-boola-woo, the West Wind, that is how they came to be there, and Mount Keira or Geera is the only daughter [left on land], according to the story. (2)

Much of the information about the people living around Lake Illawarra in the eighteenth century was written in the nineteenth century, when many members of tribal groups had died from introduced diseases or the groups themselves had been dispersed. Discovering particular information about historical Indigenous figures was not simply a matter of following the same research methods I had used for investigating the lives of Bass, Flinders and Martin.

Barbara Nicholson (2010: 7) suggests that although the historical information may be fragmented, we can attempt to understand aspects of early Indigenous culture by referring to universal cultural concepts and applying what is learned to the situation being explored. For example, one of the difficulties I had, in sorting through the story, was attempting to work out what kind of exchanges would have occurred between the two Koori guides, Dilba and his unnamed



friend, and the local men. Flinders said one of the guides was from Botany Bay, the other, Broken Bay. If Dilba was from Botany Bay, he could have been a member of the Kameygal, or Tagary, or Bediagal, or Gweagal clan group, and his first language could have been Darug or Dharawal (Kohen 1993: 20–21). If he was from Broken Bay, he may have been part of the Kuringgai Tribe, perhaps part of the Carigal clan, and his first language could have been one of several dialects, possibly Kari (22). The movement of Dilba and his unnamed friend down the coast would have included some specific cultural protocols. In my interview with Nicholson she said:

In the Dreaming Laws, and this is pretty universal across Australia, and if we apply that universality to this situation, you are going onto someone else's country, you sit [...] In fact you sit on a place where your physical presence is able to be seen by the resident, you sit and you do not even look at them, you look away [...] So those two people would have known that universal rule. That is a law from the Dreaming. The Laws of the Dreaming are pretty much universal across Australia but the particulars—ceremony, rituals and language—may vary. (2010: 7–8).

When I asked if the arrival at Canoe Rivulet would have included this kind of protocol, even if they had been in the area for some time, Nicholson said, yes, it would, 'Unless they have got like a passport [...] Something that says, yes, you have freedom to go. Maybe a sacred stone [...] So much of that is fragmented now, but so much is still extant in other areas, that (there is) the cultural borrowing from the known, to bring it back and reinvigorate' (2010: 8–9).

The Indigenous men and the Europeans had different attitudes to land. In Indigenous culture land is the people, they belong to the land and not the other way around (2011 Nicholson pers. comm., 18 January). Entering the land of another tribe required certain customs to be respected. European colonists found it hard to comprehend the ways that land was integral to, and interwoven with, Aboriginal culture:

the true tribal country is that in which the great mythical beings travelled or performed exploits, instituted rituals, created the most important local features, before perhaps disappearing into the ground or the sky or assuming a different shape. Through his links with these beings, an Aboriginal is deeply attached spiritually to his own land. Elkin (1954: 28) puts this very aptly, summing up a relationship which emerges particularly clearly in regard to their religion. He points out that there were, as far as we know, no wars deliberately designed to take over a stretch of country, or to conquer an enemy.

(Berndt & Berndt 1999: 37)

For the First Australians land was not something to be fought over. Jade Kennedy said, 'you have got to remember that this is their country, their backyard, their everything and anything' (Interview 2009: 10). Kennedy said that the colonists, 'couldn't understand the botanical and ecological reasoning behind things, where aboriginal people have learnt to understand all that' (10). Kennedy went on to say:

now ownership is a very interesting thing because aboriginal people believe in custodianship not ownership. But it is their land, their land to protect, their land to

maintain, their land to look after, hey, as opposed to 'it is mine', it is not about 'mine', it's about 'ours'. (Interview 2009: 10)

Indigenous people had custodianship of their land. If Dilba and his friend were visitors to the area, then at some time they would have had to introduce themselves to those who lived locally. Nicholson says there may have been many reasons why they were visiting the Illawarra:

See if they have come from Botany, that would have been ceremonial, there is no question [...] Two men travelling, they have come for a specific reason, it might have been bridal exchange [...] a marriage ritual [...] Ceremony. Sacred Business [...] Or they could have been emissaries to deliver messages, or bring people back [...] Or they could have been exiled from their own [...] whichever Tagary group they belong to. [...] If they had broken Law they may have been exiled and were attempting to find their way to another mob. (2010: 6)

Roy (Dootch) Kennedy, says that if Dilba 'was from Botany Bay and he was in the Illawarra he was obviously visiting family' (Interview 2010: 2) and his presence there 'Shows his connectedness to this area' (2). While I could not establish exactly why Dilba and his friend were in the area, I could assume, from my researches, that the Europeans did not understand the more detailed aspects of Indigenous customs and relationships. If some special greeting occurred between Dilba, his friend, and the local Koori men they met at Canoe Rivulet, then Flinders missed recording it. How was I to represent their arrival, and other events like it, in the fictional narrative? Flinders thought that the Indigenous men were

deceiving the explorers. But how was Flinders' own use of deception perceived by the Kooris? To tease out this question I analyse the way Flinders reports his own deception, and his suspicions of the Kooris.

***Flinders' Account: Deception before Canoe Rivulet and at Canoe Rivulet***

In *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders reports that he met Dilba and an unnamed Indigenous man on Sunday, 27 March 1796. During the events that follow there are several times when he tells these men that his intention is to do one thing, when in reality he has in mind a completely different act. For Flinders it is a strategy of retreat. The first time he says he uses deception was after trading with the Koori men, north of Saddle Point. It was by now the fourth day of the *Tom Thumb* sail. The two Kooris were fishing in the bay. Flinders, Bass and Martin had spent their second night sleeping at sea. No doubt they were tired. They had been without water since the journey began and had survived on the juice of melons. They woke, Flinders suggests, delighted to feel the warmth of the sun. The two Indigenous men called to them in the 'Port-Jackson dialect' (1985: 6) offering 'fresh water and fish' (6). The explorers rowed over. Flinders writes:

but other natives soon came up and increased the number beyond what was safe to risk ourselves amongst; we therefore put off without landing under pretence of returning to the northward, but with the intention to land in a shallow cove off the pitch of Saddle Point.

(1985: 6-8)

The explorers rowed south and hauled the boat to land to cook the fish. Dilba and his friend reappeared, Flinders cut their hair and beards and the five sailed together to what Flinders later named Canoe Rivulet. They arrived at their destination and 'rowed about a mile up in little more water than the boat drew, against a very strong tide' (8). The two Koori guides, who had already jumped from the boat, were met by and began to walk with 'eight or ten strange natives' (8). The explorers decided to go ashore, dry their gunpowder and find water, but once on shore they became worried about their safety:

On asking the two natives for water, they told us we must go up to the lake for it, pointing to a large piece of water from which the rivulet seemed to take its rise; but on being told that we could not now go, and again desired to get us water, they found some within a few yards. This circumstance made us suspect, that they had a wish, if not an intention, of detaining us: and on reflection, their previous conversation in the boat evidently tended to the same purpose.

(1985: 9).

Later, after taking up his scissors again, and cutting several of the men's beards and hair, Flinders used deception as a way of retreat:

Having completed everything, as far as circumstances would admit of, we got our things into the boat, and prepared to go out again. But to get away peaceably we were obliged to use deceit; for they kept continually pointing to the lagoon, and desiring, or indeed almost insisting, that we should go up into it; and the two Port-Jackson natives seemed more violent than any others. We appeared to coincide with them, but deferred it till tomorrow; and pointed to a green bank near the entrance of the river, where we would sleep; then putting on a resolute face, we shoved off the boat. (10)

The explorers rowed toward the green bank but were followed by the Koori men who were ‘shouting and singing’ (10). After some confusion at the green bank they pushed off and rowed to the mouth of the stream, but the surf was too strong to get their vessel out to sea. They anchored at a point where the water was deep. A few men—including Dilba—had followed them downstream and now stood on the point to the south of the boat. Flinders says: ‘This fellow was constantly importuning us to return and go up to the lagoon. He was as constantly answered that “when the sun went down, if the wind and surf did not abate, we would” ’(1985: 12). When the sun went down, Flinders writes:

a party of five or six natives were coming towards us from the other side. At that juncture, we had gotten the guns in order; and having a little powder in one of them, I fired it off; on which the party stopped short, and soon walked away; those on the point too were all retired, but Dilba, and he soon followed. (1985: 12)

Flinders does not clarify whether the other Koori men had understood his dialogue with Dilba. He does not contemplate whether the locals, perhaps taking him at his word, might have decided to help the explorers back to the stream. Instead, his narrative suggests these men meant to do him harm. In a footnote to this part of the narrative, as though to prove their intent, Flinders adds, ‘Dilba was the principal person concerned in spearing the chief mate and carpenter of the ship, Sydney Cove, about twelve months afterwards, for which he was sought after to be shot by Mr. Bass and others’ (12). The survivors of the wreck of the

*Sydney Cove* attempted to walk from Cape Howe to Sydney. According to Organ, ‘many of the crew died from exhaustion and starvation along the way’ (1990: 11) but two were killed by aborigines.

In *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders turns Dilba and his unnamed friend from being ‘friends’ (6) to being men with evil intent. This intent was supposedly proved by Dilba’s possible actions a year later.

Writing about the *Sydney Cove* events, Reverend Thomas Fyshe Palmer—one of the Scottish Martyrs Bass had become friendly with—had a different view:

In all the intercourse of whites with the uncorrupted natives of this country, they have found them, most kind, humane and generous. When the mate and the super-cargo were wrecked, no civilized Europeans could exceed them in kindness. [...] The mate, represented to be an amiable man, walked till he could walk no longer. Unfortunately, the carpenter staid to keep him company, and the rest proceeded and arrived safe. The carpenter, churlish and avaricious, and without sense or foresight, seized their fish and would give nothing in return, and offended them so much, that the first mate, whom they were fond of, fell a victim of his folly, and they both perished.

(Organ 1990: 16)

I was cautious of taking Flinders’ account of Dilba as a murderer as being accurate because it did not seem to be substantiated in any way. According to Palmer, Bass had been told by other Aborigines that Dilba murdered the first mate and carpenter (Organ 1990: 16). But hearsay is not proof. Nor did the *Sydney Cove* tragedy suggest that a year earlier Dilba and his friend had evil intentions when Flinders, Bass and Martin were at Canoe Rivulet.

Historians have faithfully recounted Flinders' version of events. Miriam Estensen in *The Life of Matthew Flinders* (2003) captures the mood of the Flinders narrative: 'Now escape seemed imperative. The Aborigines were insisting forcefully that they continue up to the lagoon. Their two guides were the most vehement, and their earlier promises of women and food now seemed sinister' (58). When Keith Bowden edited and wrote an introduction to *Matthew Flinders' Narrative of Tom Thumb's Cruise to Canoe Rivulet* he took on a little of Flinders' interpretation of events: 'Picture the dilemma of the young explorers when they were trying to escape from the aborigines at Canoe Rivulet, the estuary of Lake Illawarra, when four aborigines jumped into their boat, making a total of seven persons in that cockle-shell!' (1985: x). Tim Flannery also retells Flinders suspicions in his introduction to *Terra Australis*: 'The explorers were now in the company of Aborigines (one of whom was later accused of killing a castaway) who were trying to lure them into a narrow part of an estuary' (2000: xi).

The general tone of the Flinders' story, and the sense that his narration is reliable, is embodied by Flannery's use of the word 'lure', which has a sense of suspected mischief contained within it, by Bowden's use of 'escape' and by Estensen's use of the word 'sinister'. In all cases the result is to leave the reader with the sense that the Flinders' interpretation of this situation is the only interpretation.

It's clear from these examples that small details in a narration can easily be absorbed as factual by later retellings. But these small details can add up to a larger cultural picture and while it could be argued that they do not misrepresent,



but only represent one viewpoint of a story, that is precisely the point. This viewpoint has been considered reliable and therefore has had the effect of closing down many readers—including historians—thoughts about other interpretations.

***Deception: Assessing the Koori Perspective***

There were several possible options worth considering in reference to why the Koori men might have wanted to take Flinders, Bass and Martin up to the lagoon. On the way to Canoe Rivulet the Kooris told the Europeans that there were white men and women living at Lake Illawarra. Flinders reports he was ‘amused’ (1985: 8), indicating that he did not believe what he was told. But it’s possible the two Koori guides did know some white men and woman who were living up at the lagoon. Their motive thus could have been malicious or friendly. Certainly, by 1796, some convicts had escaped and did live with Indigenous people. For example, Collins reports in *An Account of the English Colony* that in February 1796, ‘two white men (Wilson and Knight) had been frequently seen with the natives in their excursions’ ([1798]1971: 458) and, in Collins’ opinion, incited them to ‘acts of hostility’ (459).

Jade Kennedy thought it possible that the locals wanted to take the explorers to the lagoon and give them fresh water. The water in the stream would have been mixed with seawater and was no doubt brackish (Interview 2009: 12). Barbara Nicholson says, ‘There are a number of possibilities. There may have been a ceremony. [...] Or it may have been that the route that Bass and Flinders wanted to take was crossing a womens’ site [...] there may have been some

initiation ceremony going on. There may have been some other secret business happening' (Interview 2010: 7).

Or possibly the Kooris wanted to take Flinders, Martin and Bass up to the lagoon and kill them. If this final suggestion is correct, it is then worth asking, why did Dilba and the others not kill the explorers at the stream? The idea of getting them up to the lagoon suggests a strategy. But Flinders says in his narrative that he thinks the natives had no strategy. Would it have been easier to kill the Europeans at the lagoon? Among such a large group of Kooris surely there were many that were expert at throwing spears. How frightened were the Indigenous men of the muskets? Were they incapable of realising that they could overcome the men and muskets if they chose? How does one explain their singing and shouting as they helped the boat along, if they were so frightened of the muskets and had the intention to kill?

Roy (Dootch) Kennedy, says that if the Kooris had an intention to kill and the Europeans 'were outnumbered they would have been slaughtered on the spot' (2010: 2). But when hypothesizing what might have caused Dilba to want the explorers to go up to the lake, he suggests there might have been something important the Kooris wanted to show the Europeans:

On Lake Illawarra in 1986, the Wollongong Council and the Shellharbour Council commissioned a survey and we discovered twenty-six major campsites at the lake. So in amongst those campsites there would have been ceremonial areas and major camps and probably he was trying to bring them back to the main camp. Speak to people higher [...] he wanted them to meet people of substantial rank, talk to them. (2-3).

In *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders states that Dilba was later reported to have killed two castaways. But even if true, does one action necessarily account for another? Jade Kennedy thought it a mystery that Dilba stood on the point calling out to Flinders (Interview 2009: 13) but warned that in detailing what was going on between the local Indigenous men and Dilba, it shouldn't necessarily be assumed they were a cohesive group (2010 pers. comm., 20 December).

### ***Writing the Canoe Rivulet Scenes***

The difficulty of understanding the past led me to think that it was useful to include within the narrative the idea of uncertainty. To encourage the reader to question the way the fictional Bass, Flinders and Martin viewed the Indigenous men. Firstly, I attempted to develop complex motivations for Will's behaviour throughout the sequence. In Draft Seven, I created a scenario where one of the elder Koori men led Will to a small freshwater pool. This occurs while the other fictional characters are busy talking. At first, Will is scared of the old man but then he realises the old man is helping him: 'The old man points out a puddle, almost a pond, but not grown enough for that name. He smiles showing the pink of his mouth. The relief shivers through my body' (April 2010: 57).

Later, Will doesn't explain to Bass and Flinders how the old man helped him find the water: 'Now is the time to say how the old man showed me it. But I do not' (58). Instead of explaining, Will lets the suspicion Flinders has formed about the Indigenous men increase. These two lines work along the narrator-narratee track with the narrator attempting to explain his own actions to the

narratee. But they also work along the narrator–authorial audience track, with the implied author inferring that there are many complex reasons for human behaviour. In this passage Will is pleased that Flinders thinks well of him for finding the water, and perhaps this swelling of importance, and a desire not to undermine his new found favour with Flinders, is why he doesn't mention the old man's help. But also, Will wants to leave Canoe Rivulet because he feels unsafe, and that may also be why he doesn't report all the facts. The implied author is suggesting to the authorial audience that there is not one easy explanation for why we might fear another human being, and our own actions may play into the escalation of fear.

One of the Canoe Rivulet scenes depicts Flinders' use of deception as a means of retreat. In Draft Seven, I wanted to make sure that the context of fear was clear to the reader:

'The Lieutenant calls me over.

'Will, pack that powder now,' he says between gritted teeth. 'Wet or dry I think we should leave.'

(April 2010: 61).

But I also wanted the ambiguity of character action to carry on through the scene:

'Why is he so violent in his request?' the Lieutenant whispers to Mr Bass.

Mr Bass sees Dilba watching us.

'Tomorrow, we will visit the lagoon,' he calls to Dilba.

The Lieutenant points upstream to a green bank. He puts his folded hands to the side of his face to show that we must sleep.

‘Now we must rest, very tired, we go to that green bank further down there.’

Dilba turns and speaks to the Indians. I cannot pick out any words.

‘The red coat,’ Mr Bass says to me. ‘They think I am a soldier and are frightened of the muskets, so we have that on our side.’

‘I’ll distract them while you get going,’ the Lieutenant says.

He walks across the sand to Dilba.

‘We will rest on the green bank,’ he says again.

Mr Bass and I slide Tom Thumb away from the sand. I keep my eyes on Dilba. Dilba, more urgently now, begins waving at the lagoon. The Lieutenant keeps pointing to the green bank. Dilba shakes his head at the green bank. What could it be about the green bank that he objects to? I look at the green bank but it looks like any other bank.

(April 2010: 61–62)

Will reports his uncertainty. The green bank becomes a site of the unknown. The question—*what could it be about the green bank that he objects to?*—works along the narrator-authorial audience track. Could there be danger there? Or are the Europeans jumping at their own shadows? The slow unfolding of the authorial audience’s judgments as the narrative has progressed might incline the reader to ask the same questions Will is asking.

And what about the lagoon? Why does Dilba want them to go up there? Later, in the same draft, when they are out at sea, Will thinks about the Kooris: ‘What was up at the lagoon? Mr Bass says death. But why must we go to the lagoon for death? (2010: 67–68). Here the implied author is encouraging the authorial audience to reflect on the events, just as Will is doing.

What I had understood from the research was that in attempting to recreate this historical period, and the events at Canoe Rivulet, communicating what was unknown was, perhaps, as important as communicating what was known. I could have done this through many different fictional strategies, but unreliable narration offered a continuing sense throughout the story that there was something to be discovered by the reader that was unknown to the narrator.

### *Conclusion*

I was attempting to explore through ‘1796 by Will Martin’ some of the beliefs—about racial superiority, about exploration, about the Indigenous people and of the natural environment—that were prevalent in colonial Australia. In the novel I wanted to question—through the juxtaposition of different stories across different periods of time—whether these ideas, or traces of them, lingered on and affected contemporary Australians. I was also attempting to suggest that uncertainty is always with us, especially in our dealings with each other. In ‘1796 by Will Martin’ I wanted to raise doubts about our ability to understand the people around us, especially people from different cultural backgrounds, but also, those from the same cultural background.

In this chapter I approached the question of how to write Indigenous characters by looking at what other writers had done, and by researching what other writers had said about the issue of white writers writing black characters. I started out wanting to shy away from writing an Indigenous narrator. But as I researched I began to pick holes in my position. I realized too how a particular

cultural attitude—that of putting all things Indigenous in the too hard basket—had had an impact on my own studies. The information available on the original inhabitants of the Illawarra was not as prevalent, or as easily accessible, as the documented accounts of colonial life. The interviews I did with various members of the Indigenous community currently living and working in the Illawarra provided an insight into a Koori perspective on the Canoe Rivulet incident. In *Canoe Rivulet* Flinders encourages his authorial audience to view the Kooris as having malicious intentions, and in this chapter I chart how historians have replicated his version of events. The Flinders narrative might represent his lived experience, but it also represents certain beliefs and attitudes of the period. So much about the First Australians in the Illawarra is unknown and it was this sense of not knowing, this gap in our knowledge, that I attempted to highlight to the reader by using the strategy of unreliable narration.

## 7 Conclusion

### *Notes on Unreliability*

As soon as you create an imaginary being, a character, you are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self? How can the self be grasped? It is one of those fundamental questions on which the novel, as novel, is based.

(Kundera 1993: 23)

In creating my imaginary being I was attempting to grasp at aspects of self. Where did I come from? How did I arrive? The self I was searching for was not a specific familial self, but a broader concept of self, one that reflected how I connected to the culture and society of my birth. But this process of discovery, of creativity—a time of thinking, researching, and writing—was not trouble-free, nor is the full tale discussed in the exegesis. Yet in writing an exegesis, about creating an imaginary being who tells a tale, I've also created a story, (as well as constructed an implied author), that while not fictitious, may not be wholly reliable.

The illusion an exegesis gives of an orderly research process is difficult to erase. It's true that I followed a structured approach to my writing practice, but it's also true that sometimes my method was chaotic, or, at least, not something traditionally called a method. Sometimes I did nothing at all.

Virginia Woolf hints at her writing practice in her diary on Tuesday, 1  
March 1921:



The truth is that I have an internal, automatic scale of values; which decides what I had better do with my time. It dictates “this half hour must be spent on Russian.” “This must be given to Wordsworth.” Or “Now I’d better darn my brown stockings.” How I come by this code of values I don’t know. Perhaps it’s the legacy of puritan grandfathers. I suspect pleasure slightly. God knows. And the truth is also that writing, even here, needs screwing of the brain—not so much as Russian, but then half the time I learn Russian I look in the fire and think what I shall write tomorrow. (Woolf 1982: 29)

I’d work on the exegesis and novel at different times and in different places: staring into the fire; walking in the rainforest; digging in the garden; on the train; or, occasionally, as a reminder to get the ‘bloody thing’ written, when paying bills. I’d often wake up from a night’s sleep and a scene would appear, like an in-the-mind movie, and I’d think, ‘Ah, that’s a good scene!’ It was as if my unconscious was busy working while my conscious mind rested.

There are, also, areas of research and drafts of stories not even mentioned in this exegesis. For example, I don’t mention the tales I wrote from the point of view of a tree or the connected research on illness narratives. My tree was anthropomorphic, very academic, erudite, and ill. There was even a twenty thousand word futuristic story set in an arid and air-polluted Australian landscape that received several drafts. This was deleted from the novel scheme in late 2009 although some traces of that story emerged later in ‘I Am Nada’. There were other

stories, (a nineteenth century ghost girl and several drafts of a twentieth century writer), and other areas of research, (ecological), that could not be included.

In retrospect, also, I might ask myself: Have I kept my focus too narrow by using a case study story? Should I have discussed each narrator in detail? These questions are not easily answered. What is presented in this thesis is necessarily edited because of the scope of the study and it is, therefore, only part of the story. But it is from this part that perhaps something of the whole might be grasped.

The creative project is a literary work and if the fiction is persuasive the authorial audience will not necessarily detect the techniques discussed in the exegesis. This exegesis, however, attempts to pull apart sections of the creative narrative component of the thesis and study the different narrative techniques that were employed, or could have been employed, in the novel.

Using James Phelan's theory to analyse and hypothesize on the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of *Canoe Rivulet* allowed me to identify some of the ellipses in that tale, consider other narrative pathways, and determine the rhetorical purpose and ethical implications of a fictional retelling. As I researched further, there were periods when I was unsure of my direction, when it seemed difficult to articulate what I was writing or why I was writing it. But gradually I discovered tools that were helpful. One of these tools, Phelan's classification of unreliable narration, was like a filter. By thinking of the text as having two speakers and two listeners, broader questions were refined. Now I asked: What is the implied author, via the narrator, suggesting to the authorial audience? What is the narrator saying to the narratee? For what purpose are they saying it and what

implications arise? I'd interrogate what might be inferred by a certain passage of dialogue, by a thought, by a single spoken word. These questions, by their specificity, pushed me to contemplate my deeper connection to the story. Why was I writing the novel? What effect did I want to create? Was I really doing what I told myself I was doing?

The research into the theoretical aspects of unreliable narration hammered into my head that writers had for years been thinking about the relationship between the implied author and the authorial audience. But when I realised that unreliable narration was a technique that caused the reader to imagine two fictional worlds, I understood that I had more to discover about the authorial audience's reception of the tale. According to Lisa Zunshine, in *Why We Read Fiction* (2006), fiction allows readers to test out their 'mind-reading adaptations' (20). Fiction, she suggests, helps readers understand other real world situations, to practice the abilities needed for comprehending other human beings. They practice observing characters and judging the reliability of a narrator's tale. In unreliable narrator stories what the reader will comprehend might not be said directly by the narrator, only implied by the text, therefore, inferences, what is not said, gaps in the narrative, become important to the authorial audience, allowing them to practice guessing at what an individual might be thinking. If a reader asks what might be the real or true tale, they might also ask, why is the narrator telling this tale? In this way unreliable narrator stories could be said to link motivation (or cause) with effect. If a story deals with effect only, the authorial audience is not necessarily concerned with judgments about motivation, yet, when cause is

highlighted, then judgments about narrator motivation seem almost inevitable. This does not suggest that unreliable narrator stories are more moral or ethical than other stories, or, that they are the only kind of stories that encourage a reader to contemplate interior worlds, but, by drawing attention to what motivates a narrator to speak, it may be more likely that the authorial audience will consider the moral and ethical implications of the narrator's tale. As a textural strategy, if unreliable narration stimulates the reader to imagine two stories, it might be possible to use such a technique to challenge the idea that there is ever one single perspective on a story. This is certainly what I attempted to do in the case study story '1796 by Will Martin'. Inga Clendinnen, in *The History Question* (2006), says, 'there is always one counter-story, and usually several, and in a democracy you will probably get to hear them' (3). Perhaps unreliable narration might be used as a strategy to remind the authorial audience that counter-stories exist, even if they are not being heard.

I understood, early on in the study, that if I was to use fiction to discover more about my place in Australian society then it might be useful to retell a first contact story. From my continuing research into *Canoe Rivulet*, I realised that when creating a historical unreliable narrator, for the authorial audience to accept the narrator and events depicted as a credible fictional interpretation, and when the rhetorical purpose is to suggest multiple readings around a single historical event, then elements of the narrative need to be historically reliable. This was especially important in '1796 by Will Martin' because I was working from documented history and offering a fictional alternative to the nonfictional narration.

During the research phase I also considered whether I could (or should) create a historical Indigenous narrator. When I began this study I was nervous about creating such a character. I thought I might offend members of the Indigenous community. I was worried that my deep roots in western culture meant I could never create a plausible Indigenous character. As the study developed, however, I realised that the technique of unreliable narration was vital to the creation of a novel form using multiple perspectives, especially given the particular cultural dilemmas the novel, *I Am Tree*, was attempting to address. It became clear, also, that the approach used when creating historical Indigenous narrators entails a different set of research strategies than the approach used when creating historical colonial narrators. It was important, I discovered, to seek advice about the cultural protocols that might exist around the first contact story being depicted. In the novel, this was necessary for '1796 by Will Martin' and also for 'Hawker Speaks, Big Sister Speaks'. It was also necessary to interview members of the Illawarra Indigenous community to fill in gaps in the documented history.

As I researched and wrote I discovered that the elements of discord, miscommunication and conflict between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, explored in the case study story, were re-emerging, in slightly different forms, in all the other tales. It did not, however, remain a binary theme throughout all the tales, but transformed, sometimes becoming merged into one character, sometimes splitting across several characters and intermingling with different ethnicities. Each different time period, in each subsequent story, examined or touched upon the changing make-up and plurality of Australian cultural identity.

There is no one way to write creatively, no certain set of rules, but the approaches I used when writing the narrator, Will Martin, helped develop and streamline the strategies I employed for writing each subsequent narrator. Near the end of the study, I did attempt to write an Indigenous narrator, named Big Sister, in 'Hawker Speaks, Big Sister Speaks'. There is not space here to discuss all the aspects of that journey, but the research for the study, the interviews with Indigenous elders, and also reading other writers, influenced how I approached this character. This tale is based on true events and while I felt pleased with the first-person character I had created, I reverted to a third-person narration for the novel presented for examination. Although I felt much more confident in approaching such characters, there were particular political and philosophical circumstances, that informed my final decision. As I understood it, from my interviews, some local Kooris could be offended at my use of the first-person with this particular story. Yet, by writing the character of Big Sister in the first-person and then moving back to third-person, and by employing some aspects of indirect discourse, there was, I felt, a strong sense of a speaker.

What I realised, as I settled upon final drafts for each tale, was that the technique of unreliable narration was crucial to a novel such as *I Am Tree*. If I was intent on using unreliable narration in the first instance, to suggest multiple perspectives around a single incident and investigate the dominant discourse contained in a single perspective telling, then it seemed illogical to restrict the narrators to one ethnicity or gender. In '1796 by Will Martin' my narrator is an English servant, but by using unreliable narration I could suggest that other

perspectives existed, even though they were not understood, or told. Will Martin's tale, also, by being linked to the other tales in the novel, played into the themes of each subsequent story. I discovered, by the end of the study, that any desire to create multiple perspectives, especially when writing about the cultural dilemmas explored in *I Am Tree*, also involves a decision to examine the protocols and processes that exist in different storytelling traditions. This process necessarily includes respecting cultural differences. It's important, however, to do this in a way that still allows a writer to imaginatively engage with the other in first-person narratives. Unreliable narration, in such cases, may be an important, and possibly essential, technique.

Wolfgang Iser suggests: 'Fictionalising begins where knowledge leaves off' (2000: 314). We can only comprehend 'inaccessible realities, (beginning, end, and evidential experiences), by staging what is withheld. This enactment is propelled by the drive to reach beyond oneself—not so as to transcend oneself but so as to become available to oneself' (314). This Iser notion of attempting to reach or understand experiences that are somehow beyond our comprehension, seems to me to be what this exegesis is about; we narrate in order to understand what is happening to us, all the time knowing that we might never quite grasp what it is we are seeking to hold.

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