

Doc. (a novel)

&

Dying Room. Was the Wyndham
Native Hospital eugenic?

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Annabel Stafford, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctorate of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney has been written by me unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. Any help that I have received in my research and preparation of my thesis itself has been acknowledged.

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Abstract

Australia, 1937. To escape the fallout following a patient's death, Ada Fraser signs on as ship's doctor with a cargo vessel bound for London. One of the few passengers on board is another young woman, Eve Pope, who has been sent to sea with her aunt in the hope it will cure her of a mysterious nervous condition. Eve's aunt makes it clear she doesn't want Ada—or Doc, as she's known on board—treating her niece, but Ada defies her and treats Eve in secret. As the *Delphic* makes its way up the 'untamed' North Coast of Australia and Doc journeys into Eve's psyche, she begins to question her own faith in scientific progress—and the story she's been told about her patient's illness.

The dissertation examines the Wyndham Native Hospital, established in the Kimberley in 1937, as a window on the way eugenically influenced thought and policy operated in Australia in the first half of the 20th century. I argue the Hospital arose from a belief system that conflated Aboriginality with disease and infection and which devalued Aboriginal life, while at the same time viewing that life as economically useful. Through a conceptual framework provided by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and the Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton, I will conclude that the Wyndham Native Hospital was eugenic in the Chestertonian sense insofar as it treated the inmates as economic tools and sought to manipulate their fertility, health and dependency much as if they had been slaves.

Doc. (a novel)

Part One

Chapter One

1937

Glynn had told me I'd think my ship the most beautiful on the water. 'You'll love her like she's your very own,' he'd said. But, standing there on deck the night we sailed, her cold steel under my hands, I knew I'd never think the *Delphic* beautiful. Or mine. Maybe it was because she was so female, with her hidden spaces and the way the sea water slid over her, or maybe it was the air of possessiveness she gave off, but the *Delphic* didn't seem like she could be owned by anyone.

There are times when something changes in the colour of the sky or the way the epithelium of your skin reacts to the air and some ancient part of your brain signals that something is wrong. And it was like that the day we left Sydney. The day I first saw Eve. Something in the way the world fit together slipped out of place. It was only a slight change, a tip of half a degree, but enough to make my lungs feel too tight. I put it down to what had happened with Mrs Connolly. Even when the Ship had sailed, and I'd escaped, still the feeling of discordance lingered. I told myself it was

all Mrs Connolly. I just had to get used to the Ship. I was a scientist. I didn't believe in instinct; I believed in psychology. Rationality. Progress.

And I had to be on board, whatever I felt. It was possible I had killed someone. So it was thought best I leave Sydney, at least until everything had settled down. Glynn's mother knew people at the shipping company and persuaded them to take me on. Her persuasive skills only went so far though. The Master told me the day I signed on that he didn't want me. But that had nothing to do with Mrs Connolly. That was because I was a woman.

So there I was, standing on the passenger deck, willing the Ship to sail. The Master had insisted I be on board no later than 14:00, but now it was almost five and getting dark. The ash cloud from the power station glowed red. For three hours, I'd been expecting the Ship to slip anchor any minute, because none of the crew had said a word to me except the steward, Mr Bowyer, who'd taken me to my cabin, pointed me to the hospital and dispensary, and left me to it. If I'd known I'd be waiting around for three hours, I'd have gone out and stocked up on supplies for the hospital, which didn't even have the basics. 'Hospital' was too grand a word; it was a cabin with linoleum floors, a double bunk and a few metal cabinets. Apart from being practically empty, it was right at the end of the ship, nowhere near my stateroom.

Down on the main deck, two storeys below, a derrick operator swung a load of wool bales across the deck. A tall man standing at the edge of the open hold grabbed one of the ropes as the cargo swung past him. He shouted at the derrick driver to slow down, for Christ's sake.

It was the first mate, Jack Halton; I'd met him at the Company offices just after the Master had said he didn't want me. He'd called me 'Doc', and I'd thought he meant it as an insult. But later I found out all the ships' doctors were called Doc. Just

like all the electricians were called sparks and all the ship's captains were called 'old man' even if they weren't old and weren't married. It was like a uniform you stepped into, only the uniform didn't fit me, or I didn't fit it. They didn't want a woman doctor. Still, it became my name. 'Doc'. It became more my name than Ada.

I didn't want Halton to think I was watching him, so I looked back towards Pyrmont. I looked back at the power station and the Quarryman's Hotel, about to set its drunken men loose on their wives in Peel and Union streets, the wives who already had too many children and dark circles under their eyes that no amount of sleep would ever get rid of. But I didn't think about the wives, I just willed the streets to stay empty, willed the hospital officials and the Peel Street neighbours and Mr Connolly to stay away—just until we'd sailed—as though I could keep them back with the force of my mind.

As I looked, there was a flash of light as a motorcar crested the hill of Union Street. I polished my spectacles on my skirt, as if that would help. Then I followed the headlights as the car wound down the Port road and passed in front of the railyard, headlights flicking shadows across the sandstone. It pulled up in front of the Wharf and, though it didn't make any sort of noise, the dockworkers, who were still loading cargo, stopped for a second and stood up straight and quiet, like animals listening for a bushfire. The hum from the hull went quiet, too. And, for no reason at all, I imagined myself down below deck, sinking amongst the wool bales.

It didn't occur to me to jump off the ship or run away or hide. I was frozen, waiting for whatever would happen to me. I still couldn't work out who it was. The car was 200 yards away and, though it was parked under a street light, it was obscured by the chicken-wire fencing of the wharf gates. Still, I could see it was pale blue, expensive and shiny. It wasn't official. It wasn't one of the Hospital's nor anyone

else's I knew. And no one Mr Connolly knew; no one from Peel Street could afford a motorcar. As I watched, not daring to relax, as if that sort of cockiness would be enough to turn the car into something more sinister, someone got out of the driver-side door and went around to let the others out. From that distance, the figures were no bigger than a finger joint, but I could see that there were three of them and they didn't seem in a hurry. They weren't trying to stop anyone.

I let my breath escape and became aware of the noise of the wharf again. The men shouting, the winches stretching arthritic arms, metal shrieking and clanging against metal. Three dockworkers wheeled the companionway up alongside the Ship's flank and Halton hurried over from loading the cargo, quickly joined by the Master. The two of them scurried down the stairs and along the wharf, which was hemmed in by two ships on one side and a two-storey warehouse on the other. A group of dockworkers were getting the next bundle of corpses ready, piling them onto a wheelbarrow looped around with a rope. Soon the rope would be hooked onto a derrick and the derrick would lift and the rope would go tight, like the rope at a hanging.

Halton and the Old Man had gone straight to the people with the car, who were now getting luggage out of the bonnet. I finally realised they were passengers. The ship took up to four passengers, at 60 pounds a passage, which was cheap compared to the cost of a proper cruise. Still, there were no connections from home, no parties, or shuffleboard or whatever else they did on board the liners. No one to care whether you wore the latest beach pyjamas or which school you had been to.

There was meant to be a booklet, a guide to the ship that said something about each of the passengers, and me and the chief engineer, as well as the names of the master, mate and steward, like they had on the liners. But there had been a problem

with the printing, so we hadn't got one and didn't know the passengers' names. I'd met two earlier that day in the saloon, Mr and Mrs Lawton, who were on their way to visit their daughter and new granddaughter in Cornwall. The other two staterooms were empty, so I'd assumed they were the only passengers. Mrs Lawton looked hypertensive but her husband seemed relatively healthy so it had appeared a light load. Passengers were the worst, according to Glynn; not used to being at sea.

Halton and the Old Man lead the party from the car to the ship. A dockworker followed them, pushing their luggage in a wheelbarrow; I wondered if it was one of the ones that had been used to gather cadavers. In the twilight, the figures seemed to clump together then divide and clump again, like cells dividing. As they got closer to the Ship, I saw why: two of them, a man and a woman, were helping the third one along. They had their shoulders under her armpits as if the three of them were in a rugby scrum.

And that was when I knew there was something wrong with her, the one in the middle. Eve. Not that I knew her name yet. But, as I watched her make her way towards me, the fear that had quieted itself flared again in my chest. Something was wrong. Her upper back was hunched and there was a roll in her walk. At best, she had scoliosis of some kind. At worst, polio. It was some sort of defect.

They took a long time to reach the ship. While they were still just a few feet from the wharf entrance, the one being carried drew back towards the car, as if she were trying to get away, and a man standing by the corpses took a step towards her with his arms out, like he was going to try and catch her. This all took only a moment, then they were walking towards us again. I told myself she'd just dropped an earring or got a heel caught in the gap between the wooden boards.

If there was something really wrong with her she'd have been in a chair. She wouldn't be sailing at all. I comforted myself with these arguments. They wouldn't let a defective on a cargo ship. Another ship sailed past and ours caught on the wake, and bumped into a pylon so that I struck my knee on the metal edge of the railing and swore too loudly. Halton, who was still 200 feet away, stopped and looked up at me. I felt like a peeping Tom caught out. Like one of those vultures who came out into the street after Mrs Connolly died. I turned to go back to my cabin and bumped into Mrs Lawton coming the other way.

‘Who is it?’

‘I think it's some more passengers.’

‘Oh! What's wrong with her?’ Mrs Lawton was hanging over the railing. ‘That one in the middle.’

I went back to the railing, telling myself it was all right to watch some passengers come aboard. I couldn't sit in my cabin all day, morning to night, seeing what I always did when I wasn't careful—Mrs Connolly's baby, skewered through the windpipe with a bellows, turning blue.

‘Are you all right? Doctor Fraser?’

And I was back on deck, coal dust in my nose and Mrs Lawton poking me awkwardly with her finger.

‘Yes. Sorry.’ I looked down at the wharf several storeys below. The passengers were almost at the foot of the gangway now, the cripple shuffling forward like her legs were twisted back to front and her heels were stuck where her toes should be. Whatever was wrong with her, it was more than scoliosis. A dockworker with a cigarette between his lips and a hessian bag on his back stopped to look as she went by. A cripple. And no one had told me. The Company hadn't mentioned a thing.

I ran my thumb over my wrist and found my pulse. It was too fast. Why hadn't they told me? There were risks in taking a defective to sea. Risks that I, at least, should have been prepared for. If the defects were a result of polio or syphilis, she might have a bad heart or a mental disorder, she'd certainly be weaker than normal. If she were mentally defective, she could get in an accident; fall down a staircase or into one of the holds. I'd stitched up God knew how many lunatics at Callan Park after they'd run into a door, imagining they were Napoleon or Jesus Christ or Joan of Arc.

I dug my thumb deeper into my wrist. It didn't make sense. The Company was so careful with the crew. They'd had to fill out forms more detailed than the histories we took at the hospital. Stiffness in limbs, heart disease, hernias, eyesight, hearing; the list went on and on. A lot of it was about whether or not they'd be good workers, but it was also about insurance—the company didn't want someone coming aboard with a hernia then pretending they'd got it on the ship and making a claim. So why let a defective passenger on? Then again, they'd taken me, a woman doctor. Maybe they'd been forced to take her, too.

Now someone was shouting down below, loud enough for us to hear over the din of the wharf, and I looked down in time to see the cripple fight her way free. Then—and I had to blink to check I was seeing properly—she seemed to grow suddenly so that, within an instant, she was eye to eye with the other woman, exactly the same height, the curvature of her spine miraculously gone. It was such a strange sight that, for the briefest moment, I thought maybe I'd witnessed something not entirely natural.

‘And he picked up his mat and walked.’

‘What?’

And then, like someone had lifted scales away from my eyes, I realised the old woman wasn't a cripple at all. She hadn't been limping or walking on twisted legs: she'd been trying to get away. The others hadn't been helping her to walk; they'd been dragging her to the ship.

'She doesn't want to get on.' Mrs Lawton was whispering. She seemed to know, like I did, that we shouldn't be watching.

'No.'

Even at her new height, the woman was tiny compared to the ship and I wondered what it looked like to her: that mammoth wall of black steel blotting out the stars and harbour lights like it had sucked them into itself. No wonder she didn't want to come aboard. And, suddenly, I wondered whether the woman below felt it too, that revulsion I'd felt towards the Ship; whether there was some connection between her and me. Then I wondered, just for a moment, before I realised how unscientific it was, whether there was something objectively wrong with the Ship. Something outside my own mind. If two people felt it, was it a truth of some kind?

Just as I was thinking all this, the woman looked up at me from underneath the rim of her felt hat. Her cheekbones cast strange shadows and she had freckles on her white face. She wasn't a cripple and she wasn't old. She was about the same age as me.

Chapter Two

I stayed awake until almost one a.m. that first night. I watched the three new passengers come aboard, watched them cross the deck and disappear into the bridge house underneath us and then emerge silently from the black hole at the top of the staircase. The Master tried to introduce us, but the man, who I would later learn was Eve's father, said he had to get to dinner so they all hurried past into the staterooms. They weren't so fast, however, that I couldn't see how tightly Eve's father was holding her upper arm. A few minutes later, the two men emerged from the passenger corridor and hurried past us again. Then Mrs Lawton and I watched Eve's father drive off in his blue car. He didn't even wait to wave the ship off and the two women didn't come out of their stateroom again. After a while, Mrs Lawton got bored and said she was going to her cabin to read. I found a deck chair on the starboard side of the passenger deck and pulled it around to port, got a blanket from my cabin and sat up to watch the Harbour Bridge and the North Shore ferry launch, and the Heads disappear into the night. And when it was all just black, I went back to my stateroom.

When I woke up the next morning, we were somewhere up the east coast of Australia, between Sydney and Brisbane.

When the *Delphic* was built in 1928, she was a star: diesel-powered engines, electric power for everything and a top speed of 40 knots but, by '37, the men were already calling her a rust-bucket. There was not a lot of choice: not many cargo ship companies were willing to hire a woman as the ship's doctor. Jean said there had only been one before me, a woman who'd gone across to England in '35. In any case, the *Delphic* was the only ship that Glynn's mother could get to take me and, as Glynn said, I couldn't wait around for the perfect boat and lose my mind in the meantime. I needed to start again. And I was to start again with him, in London.

But I wasn't sure I could start again. Being a medical student was easy. I could get top marks and win the Dagmar Berne Prize. Everyone was proud of me. And Glynn wanted to marry me. We had done all the tests; we'd have healthy stock. 'Rudely healthy,' Glynn had said. It was lovely in theory. But being a doctor wasn't theory. You had to save people. And I couldn't.

That first day, after breakfast, I tried to get my bearings: the hospital and dispensary in the poop deck right at the stern of the ship, the passenger staterooms and crew areas, the saloon and the smoking room. I climbed up to the bridge deck to see the steering room and chartroom, the Master's dayroom behind them. I was just about to climb back down the metal ladder, when I saw the Master's grey hair through the dayroom window and knocked on the door.

'Come.'

He didn't look up when I opened the door. He was sitting at a writing desk. There was a jam jar filled with fresh kangaroo paw on it and I wondered if he had a wife at home.

‘I came to ask about clinic hours—’

He didn’t look up at me. ‘Clinic is an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. Thank you. Dismissed.’

I didn’t understand what he meant so I stood there for a moment. Then he looked up at me and spoke slowly.

‘Dismissed, doctor.’

I walked around the corner to the top of the stairs and hit the metal handrail as hard as I could; the pain would stop me from crying. I was glad I had, because a minute later I ran into the Mate on the way back to my room. He was coming the other way, probably going up to see the Master.

‘A girl doctor,’ he said. ‘What is the world coming to?’

I pretended not to hear him. ‘Hello, Mister Halton.’

He had his hands in his pockets. ‘I said, “What is the world coming to?”’

He was picking a fight. I looked out over the railing. The sun was reflecting off the ocean so the horizon was lost in a glare of light.

‘I’d say it’s coming to its senses. Have a nice day.’

I could hear him laughing as I pushed my way into the passenger corridor and out of the glare.

I tried to keep busy that day: I started a letter to Glynn and a letter to Mother and Dad, but didn’t finish either. I tried to read my obstetrics notes, but the letters wouldn’t stay still on the page. I made a list of all the things I needed for the Hospital. But I couldn’t keep busy enough to smother the dread. I couldn’t get rid of it, no matter how much I told myself it was all related to Mrs Connolly and it would disappear in time.

Before I'd even known I'd be on board, before Mrs Connolly, I'd read about another doctor on the *Delphic* and how he'd managed two cases of acute appendicitis. Another vessel in radio distance had lent its surgeon as an assistant, then it had sailed on in front to give the doctors a smooth slipstream in which to perform their operations. That doctor had been a hero. And now they were stuck with a woman doctor who'd been forced on them, a doctor who was only sailing because she couldn't do her job properly. And now I had some sick girl to look after. I couldn't have a complicated case. Not now. Not while I was the only doctor around. Even though I didn't want to sail, I was happy to be on a cargo ship instead of a liner. There would be fewer passengers but, more importantly, fewer women. Or, more precisely, women's troubles. Don't worry, Glynn had said, the worst he'd had on board was a sprained ankle. I wouldn't have to do a thing.

I didn't meet Eve properly until dinner. And the longer it took for her to appear, the more convinced I was that there was something wrong. I'd met her aunt, Claire Rodwell, at breakfast. She had the same dark hair as Eve and the same slender body. I might have mistaken her for Eve but, in the wrong light, she had wrinkles around her mouth. She'd shaken my hand like she couldn't muster the energy to shake with someone like me. I'd asked where her niece was, but she'd lied and said Eve was seasick; the ocean was so flat it couldn't have made even a Ménière's patient sick. Still, Miss Rodwell told the same lie that evening when we were in the smoking room for a pre-dinner drink. This time though, she was proved a liar by a flutter and a cloud of apricot silk, which floated into the room before she'd even finished speaking.

'Hello, Aunt,' the cloud said.

Miss Rodwell, who was sitting on a bar stool, the Master, the chief engineer and I all standing around her like minions, drew her shoulders back.

‘Hello, Eve.’

No one else said a word; we just stood there staring until Eve giggled, slipped a gold case from a tiny gold bag and plucked out a cigarette. She’d barely got it between her lips before Chilvers, the engineer, had produced a matchbook and lit it for her.

A genie’s twist of smoke snaked from her mouth.

‘Thank you.’

The room seemed to hold its breath, like the night before when Eve’s car had pulled up and everything had paused. But now I knew I’d misunderstood something about last night because nothing about the girl in front of me now said you could drag her anywhere.

Miss Rodwell took the cigarette case from Eve and got out a cigarette. She waited for Chilvers to light it, but he was too busy staring at Eve and his match died. I was just about to grab the matchbook and light the thing myself, when Chilvers finally noticed her waiting. Then he made the whole thing worse by apologising for not noticing her, which only drew everyone’s attention to the comparison between her and Eve.

Miss Rodwell bent quickly to light her cigarette then drew her shoulders back and looked away. Chilvers was oblivious.

‘Aren’t you going to introduce us?’ he asked.

Miss Rodwell took a long drag. ‘This is my niece, Miss Eve Pope.’ She looked down at Eve from her bar stool. ‘You’re ill. You should be in bed.’

Eve laughed. ‘I’m perfectly fine. Though I’d love a glass of champagne.’

Then, even though there were two gentlemen present, and Chilvers had just given her a light, Eve turned to me.

‘You must be the girl doctor Aunt’s been telling me about. I’ve been desperate to meet you!’ She leant back a little, like she wanted to get a proper look at me, as if I were some adorable child. Then she took another drag of her cigarette, still smiling at me. It didn’t occur to me until later that she couldn’t have been all that desperate to meet me if she hadn’t been out of her room till then. All I could see was that there was nothing wrong with her. She was perfect. Around 25, the same age as me. No scoliosis, no kyphosis, no sign of mental defect or instability. She was still smiling at me and I couldn’t think of a thing to say. The lightness in my chest was almost excitement. I watched her turn back to the others and laugh with her plump, glossy lips, apricot silk sliding over her hips and breasts like it was her own skin. Behind her, Miss Rodwell sat on her chair and smoked.

Dinner was in the saloon next door and the Master wanted us to swap seats after each course so we could get to know one another more quickly (although there were only eight of us and we had six weeks at sea, so we’d get to know each other far too quickly as it was). When I found I’d been seated next to Mrs Lawton, I quickly calculated it would be dessert before I could talk to Eve again. I wouldn’t sit next to Halton at all. Mrs Lawton prattled and I tried not to be distracted by the tinkle of Eve’s laughter from across the table or by the rows of bangles sparkling and flashing from her wrist. She didn’t seem unhappy to be aboard. In fact, she seemed euphoric. That should have been a warning sign, but I was too relieved and too infatuated to think clearly.

Mrs Lawton thought she’d seen Eve in *The Weekly* dressed as Diana, the goddess of beauty and love. But, Diana wasn’t the goddess of love. I wanted to ask

Mrs Lawton whether she meant Aphrodite because the difference seemed important. But then Mrs Lawton said Miss Pope was an heiress and I forgot all about Greek goddesses.

‘Her father is Arthur Pope.’

‘An heiress? Really?’

I knew rich people. Jean and Glynn both had their own motorcars and even we were well off for Orange, before Dad’s stroke. But I’d never heard of an heiress, not an Australian one at least.

‘Where does the money come from?’

‘Banking, I think. Or sugar. One of them.’

I had to sit next to Chilvers for the main. He thought Eve was exactly like Louise Brooks, except for the curls, but that just made her prettier than Miss Brooks. And she was charming, too. He was surprised she wasn’t in the cinema, but then she didn’t need to work because of her father. Worth a fortune.

‘What does Mr Pope do?’

‘He’s the draper. Or his father was. Pope’s Wholesale Drapery? Worth a fortune.’

The only person who didn’t talk about Eve was Mr Lawton. He wanted to know how I’d become a doctor and what it was like delivering babies. And what did I want to do next. I’d have loved these questions six months earlier; I’d imagined myself answering just those kinds of questions while I’d been studying for my residency, imagined the admiring looks I’d get from my patients and friends. Now, just hearing the word ‘babies’ made me nauseous, because I felt the great chasm between what I was meant to be and what I was. I knew now that a doctor was not a real thing. It was a mythical being. It seemed solid when you were a patient but, the

closer you got to the centre of secrets, the solidity, the thingness of it just melted away and you realised it was all a pretence. Like the Wizard of Oz. But of course, when you were close enough to realise all this, like I was, you couldn't give the secret away. I drank more champagne and changed the conversation.

Dessert arrived. Chilvers and Mr Lawton moved up a seat so that Mr Lawton was on my right and there was an empty seat on my left, waiting for Eve. Finally, she slid in next to me.

'God, how boring. Except for the First Mate. What's his name? Halton? Tasty, don't you think?'

I didn't know how to answer.

'He won't hear you. Admit it. He's delicious.'

I nodded quickly to change the topic before Halton overheard us. He was talking to Mrs Lawton just opposite.

'Miss Pope—'

She slapped me on the arm and told me to call her Eve like all her friends did. Then she pouted and asked if she really had to call me Dr Fraser.

'No, of course not. It's Ada.'

She transferred her cigarette from her right hand to her left and we shook hands.

'Don't let anyone else call you Ada, though. It's too delicious watching the men choke on "Doctor". Don't you think? You must adore it.'

I did adore it, not that I could ever admit it without sounding vain (in my residency dreams, I'd always answered questions about how I became a celebrated doctor with great humility). But I imagined Eve could admit something like that and it would sound like she was just stating the facts. Or like she couldn't care less if you

thought her vain. And she probably didn't. Being an heiress. And with her looks. On anyone else, those freckles would have been a pity, but on her they looked perfect. There was one right in the middle of her bottom lip. I wiped my mouth with a napkin in case I'd left any sauce.

Eve pushed her dessert away, untouched, and called Bowyer.

'Be a darling and bring Doctor Fraser and me some more champagne.'

My head was already buzzing from the first glass, but I didn't want to be a bore and everything felt so safe and cotton-balled. Eve was not sick and I was on the ship away from Sydney. I said yes.

Eve thought that Mrs Lawton looked like a carp. 'You know those big fat ones that barge around the fish pond, pushing all the other fish out of the way?' She opened and closed her mouth and made her eyes bulge out. I had to suck in my lips to stop myself laughing.

'She does. Doesn't she?' Eve raised her elbows to make fins of her skinny arms.

'And what about Mr Chilvers? He's a meerkat, don't you think? No. A *leer* cat.' She made her eyes bulge out again, this time to ape Chilvers, not that I'd ever seen Chilvers leering at anyone except for Eve. I smiled but felt guilty making fun of the other passengers. Then I felt unsophisticated for feeling guilty.

Bowyer returned with our champagnes and Eve announced we were going down to the main deck. I thought maybe we should wait until everyone had finished their dessert, in case the Master wanted to make a speech to welcome us, but Eve was already marching out the door, champagne in one hand and the hem of her dress in the other.

'We're going stargazing.'

It was rude to leave before dinner had finished, but impossible not to follow her. She had an air about her that said wherever she was going was where everything important would happen. If you weren't with her, you'd miss out. By the time I'd caught up, she was already hanging over the railing on the starboard side. The sea was still flat but I was in my heels and woozy with the champagne so I picked my way carefully around the bolts and hatches and derricks, remembering to bend my knees against the swell.

Eve was shouting and pointing at the ocean. I squinted after her finger but all I could see was ocean, smooth and dark, as though there was a film over the entire thing holding it all together with perfect tension. At first, the silky grey backs seemed like just more of the same smooth fabric until the dolphins broke the surface and began to dive, one after the other, in great arcs towards the front of the boat. Eve pushed off the railing and ran after them up to the bow. I followed, first walking then running too, propelled faster and faster by the ship's momentum, skimming around the derricks and funnels and hatches, until I was flying across the deck like a spirit.

'Can you see them?' Eve had climbed up onto the forecastle deck and was hanging over the very tip of the bow, the dolphins leaping and diving about her. The wind flicked hair across her face and she scooped it out of her mouth with her finger, gulped the rest of her champagne and told me to climb up. We hung there, on the edge, until the dolphins disappeared.

Then Eve stepped up onto a circle cut out of the solid metal railing. I thought she was looking for the dolphins, but then she spread her arms and leant out even further and it suddenly occurred to me that she was going to dive in. My mind was screaming at me to do something, before she jumped, but nothing came out of my mouth. Something clicked and I remembered how Eve had been dragged aboard the

night before. I took a step closer, and was getting ready to yank her back on deck when she took hold of the rail of her own accord and stepped back down.

‘They’ve gone,’ she said sadly.

As we walked back to the bridge, its bay windows glaring at us like two huge eyes, I told myself Eve had just been looking at the dolphins. I pushed any darker thoughts from my mind, trying to hold on to that sense of wellbeing I’d had earlier in the night, when Eve had arrived in her apricot silk looking perfect.

Chapter Three

It's probably human nature to cling to the normal and the everyday, to the daylight rather than the night, even when everything points to the dark being the real truth. Just look at Neville Chamberlin making peace with Hitler. As it turned out, that first dinner was a mirage. A mirage I clung to for much longer than I should have, because I wanted to believe that Eve was perfectly fine. In fact, her neurosis started to show itself the very next day.

We sailed into the Brisbane River just after lunchtime. Eve had still not emerged from her cabin, which was not surprising. When I'd left her the night before, listening to the gramophone with the others in the Master's stateroom, she'd slurred her words when she made me promise to see Brisbane with her. I'd been tipsy, too, and I was tired but my mind, filled with fears and possibilities, moulded by years of study and work into needing constant stimulation and activity, wouldn't let me sleep. I rested my forearms on the sun-warmed railing and tried not to think of anything.

The banks of the Brisbane River were still almost wild, with only a few houses: large latticed villas decorated with frangipani and hibiscus, their windows

catching the morning sun in bright momentary blazes. Beyond them, a gentle mountain range smudged purple across the horizon. Even as we sailed upriver and the water became clogged with smokestacks and derricks and the steel rise of the Storey Bridge, the palm trees and frangipani still peeked from behind rosy sandstone walls, and sunlight winked through the smoke of the motorships. The air was warm, holiday-scented, safe.

I heard footsteps and turned to see Miss Rodwell click neatly up the passageway towards me. She nodded and took a place next to me at the rail. A pair of tugs trailed the *Delphic* like rubber duckies, another cargo ship muddied the blue sky with smoke.

‘Like we’re in the country,’ she said, disdainful.

I was about to agree with her but then I saw that Miss Rodwell, one hand on her hip, wasn’t appraising Brisbane, she was appraising me. Her eyes flicked over my navy dress. Then she shook her head. It was a slight movement, but meant to be noticed.

The frock was one of my best: a graduation present from Dad. I’d worn it especially for my day out with Eve. But now I remembered the grease stain under the top button and tried to hide it with my hand.

Miss Rodwell, of course, looked perfect: a salmon silk blouse tucked tight into her black trousers. A black curl artfully escaped her felt hat.

I was wondering again how old she was—over 40—when there was a bang and Eve emerged from the passenger’s corridor.

‘Hello, Doc.’ She slid a cigarette case from her trouser pocket and offered it to me.

‘No, thank you.’ I wished I knew how to smoke and from whom she’d picked up ‘Doc’.

Eve lit her cigarette and leant her elbows on the railing. Miss Rodwell, who still hadn’t said hello to either of us, was now studying Eve. It was hard to see what she could be studying. Eve looked almost identical, except that her blouse was blue and she didn’t have a hat.

‘You need some colour.’

‘Oh? You didn’t say so before.’ Eve didn’t look up.

‘You know how washed out you look in photos.’

Miss Rodwell stepped around me, took Eve’s cigarette case and helped herself.

‘If you look terrible, it reflects badly on Arthur and the rest of us.’

‘Yes, Aunt.’ And that was the first sign. How meek she sounded, like she was used to taking orders from Miss Rodwell, or afraid of her. It didn’t seem at all like the girl I’d seen last night, more like the one from that first evening. Who was dragged aboard.

‘I’ll put on my paint before we dock.’ She turned to me. ‘Will you come and see Brisbane with us?’

I started to say I’d already agreed to that, but then I realised Eve couldn’t remember asking me. She’d been even drunker than I’d thought.

‘Yes, I’d love to. Only, I have to go and get some clinic supplies, too, while we’re here.’

‘You can go after our shopping trip. But you have to meet us later for dinner at Lennon’s. The Mate, Halton, is coming too—to dinner. Aunt asked him. I think she’s trying to marry me off. He ticks all the boxes. Could be worse. Could be Chilvers.’

‘For God’s sake, Eve, please don’t snort. You’re not a pig.’

Marry her off, I was thinking, to Halton?

Miss Rodwell finished her cigarette and ground the end under her heel. She looked at Eve. ‘We’ll be docking soon.’

‘All right,’ Eve said, then she turned to me. ‘You’re not wearing that?’

I was still trying to find something to wear when the Ship docked with such a thud I almost fell onto the bed. The cabin was only six square feet, like a water closet. Not long after, Mrs Lawton came banging on my porthole to tell me there was a newspaper man there to take photos of Miss Rodwell and Miss Pope.

They looked like small bright butterflies, flickering amid the smokestacks and cargo piles and muddy water; the way they moved, hips thrust forward, in frames like a flipbook. The photographer wanted to know what they’d be doing in Brisbane. Oh, this and that, Miss Rodwell said. Dining at Lennon’s, taking in the sights. And why were they going to London? Oh, this and that, Miss Rodwell smiled. Sightseeing, visiting, you know. She said all this without letting her smile drop or changing the tilt of her head and I wondered whether the lines around her mouth were still visible with her head at that angle, then wondered where the meanness in me came from.

Suddenly, the flickering stopped and Mrs Lawton and I leant forward to catch what the photographer was saying. There was a light breeze and the words came through intermittently. An inquiry. Eve had let her pose drop and her arms hung by her side.

‘I thought you were here for the social pages,’ Miss Rodwell said.

And then disembodied words: Parliament, inquiry, Mr Pope, mental deficiency. Miss Rodwell started walking back towards the companionway, but the

photographer waved his hand as if erasing whatever it was he'd offended her with. And then he nodded and nodded and, after a while, the photos began again.

'I thought Mr Pope was in drapery?'

'Yes. He is.' Mrs Lawton was practically falling over the railing.

'But what's this about an inquiry?' Is it the mental deficiency one?

'I haven't a clue. You'll have to ask Miss Rodwell.'

There wasn't much point in doing that, given how quickly Miss Rodwell had shut the photographer up. I had heard about the mental hygiene inquiry. It had been going on for a year or two and, every now and then, there was something about it in the newspaper or on the wireless. They were looking at segregation or sterilisation or something, so the poor things wouldn't have children who suffered like they did. My psychiatry professor, Dawson, had been in the paper about it, and Dr Brigstocke from Callan Park; beyond that I didn't know much. What could a draper have to do with it, unless he was worried about his taxes being spent on idiots and imbeciles?

'I told you, didn't I?' Mrs Lawton was up on her tiptoes now, as if that would give her a better view. I wasn't sure what she'd told me, but I didn't want to be seen with her when she was gaping like that.

We spent the afternoon shopping. Eve insisted on buying me a lipstick, Helena Rubinstein no less, in the Finney Isles department store. It cost more than I would have spent in a week. She made me take off my glasses and look in the mirror.

'That's better. You're actually quite pretty.' As though I were the child and she the adult, as though money could do that.

We watched shop models parading the season's ensembles and Miss Rodwell bought herself a camel-coloured cape with pale blue trim. She had to get fitted for it,

so while she was away I asked Eve if her father had made any of the cloth. She flared her nostrils and picked a hat off a mannequin, turned it around in her hands, then put it back.

‘I’m bored. Let’s go and find Aunt.’ That was it.

I left them soon after. The lipstick and my faux pas had changed the atmosphere between Eve and me—I felt like I was getting on her nerves, which made me want to make her like me again and resentful that I felt the need to. It was easier to be on my own, even if I did have to keep busier to stop my mind from tripping over the same memories.

But keeping busy that afternoon was not difficult. There was so much to buy to stock up the surgery: catgut, bromide, sutures, disinfectant. I would disinfect as much of the ship as I could every day, make my own *cordon sanitaire* around my charges. I even bought French Letters to hand out to the men when we were in port. I didn’t want any VD to deal with and Glynn had told me the native women up north were riddled with it.

Once I’d delivered the supplies to the hospital, I went back to my cabin to check my outfit. White trousers: the most fashionable thing I had with me. I was ashamed of myself for being so eager to win Eve’s approval, but not ashamed enough to stop trying. I put on my new lipstick, too, turning the gold-ridged tube as though it might break, polishing my fingerprints off the gold once I’d finished. It was a peachy shade—‘barely there’—but still, what with the trousers, I didn’t look like me anymore. I took off my glasses and leant in to the mirror but, as soon as I got close enough to see my reflection clearly, I was too close to see what I looked like. I put my spectacles back on. It didn’t matter. No one would see me with or without my glasses; they’d be too busy mooning over Eve to notice what I was wearing. Eve and her dark

hair that curled perfectly and her big brown eyes and those exotic freckles. I remembered how Chilvers had scrambled to light Eve's cigarette, how Halton had stared at her across the table last night and realised I was clenching my teeth. Poor jealous me.

One of the first things I noticed when I walked into Lennon's that evening was a woman smoking in a wicker chair near the doors, wearing a rose georgette from the display we'd seen at Finney's. I shivered, though whether it was from the cool of the marble lobby after the hot street, or nerves, I wasn't sure. Tucked away in the corner of the lobby was a cluster of glass-topped tables surrounded by potted palms. The bar. All the tables were full of people talking and there was a man playing piano, too. Even still, I heard Eve.

‘How would you like to be told you shouldn't have children?’

Miss Rodwell, legs crossed and leaning back in her chair, had a champagne glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other. ‘Of course, I can understand how it must be upsetting to a person like that. But if I knew it was for the good of the race, then I think—’

‘What do you mean, “like that”? Like what?’ Eve said.

But Miss Rodwell had spotted me and said a half-hearted hello. The others turned to look and Halton started to stand up, but hit his head on the potted palm and sat back down laughing, rubbing his head even though he couldn't possibly have hurt himself bumping into leaves. He nodded at me, still laughing at himself. He wasn't embarrassed like I would have been in his place, and then I thought maybe he and Eve would make a good match. Eve said I looked lovely in my new lipstick and asked Halton, *Didn't I look lovely?* As though I were a pet dog.

He looked at me then. Appraised me. ‘Yes, she does.’

Eve got drunk quickly. At first, I’d thought she might have been slimming, not that she had any need to, but she drank so determinedly I soon realised that the drinking was the point. By the time we’d moved through to the dining room and been brought the mock turtle soup, the mood she’d been in since Finney’s was gone and she’d drunk herself back to the charming dimpled girl of the night before. She was the focus of the party, telling funny stories about herself in the way that beautiful people do when they’re trying to seem ordinary.

‘—and I turned the opposite way and the League president was in the audience asking everyone who the stupid girl in the front row was and that was the end of me.’

She snorted and Miss Rodwell told her not to snort for God’s sake and not to make things up, she hadn’t been kicked out of the League at all, she’d chosen to go herself.

I kept expecting Miss Rodwell to stop Eve from ordering drinks, but she didn’t. And, by the time our ice creams were taken away, Eve’s untouched, the snorting and dimples had disappeared again and she stared into her lap, rubbing her stomach. A party of five businessmen on the other side of the room were all talking at the same time and our waitress, the apron of her Victorian costume skew-whiff, leant against the pale green wallpaper, inspecting her fingernails and making a big show of yawning. Miss Rodwell called her over and asked her to bring the cheque and some more drinks to us in the bar.

‘It might be livelier in there.’

But when she and Halton got up to go through, Eve didn’t move. She just sat there, staring into her lap and rubbing her stomach. For a moment, I hovered there

until Miss Rodwell made it clear I was meant to be the babysitter. She put her arm through Halton's.

'Perhaps you ought to have some coffee before you come through.'

I sat back down again and pulled my chair closer to Eve's. One of her fingernails, bitten down so far it was bloody around the edges, had caught on the fine silk of her blouse and she stared at the pulled silk, her eyes watery. I asked if she was all right. She cocked her head and looked at me like I was speaking a foreign language.

'You're rubbing your stomach. Do you feel ill?'

Her face twisted and suddenly she looked so completely different it sent a chill through me. She dropped her head into her hands, and I watched the spasms move across her back until I realised the room had gone quiet. I looked up and the waitress scuttled away; the businessmen weren't so polite and stared openly. I told Eve I'd take her back to the ship, but she didn't move. I managed to get my arm around her back to hoist her up, but she was a dead weight. I couldn't get a grip on her.

'You wouldn't be so nice to me, if you knew who I was,' she said.

I told myself it was the dramatics of a drunk. I'd seen it dozens of times before at the Alfred and Sydney Hospital and all-around Newtown. But there was something more, that feeling of something discordant, which had begun that first night on the ship. I ignored the feeling and concentrated on lifting her out of the chair. But then, abruptly, the life shot back into her and she pushed me away. Her mascara had run into kewpie-doll lashes and her lipstick was smudged on one side so that her mouth looked frighteningly crooked, like Dad's did after the stroke.

'You don't know what I've done.'

I could feel the businessmen staring at us, mouths slack, and I was desperate to get Eve out of there. I called for the waitress to get Halton then Eve started to fit, or rather began rocking like a catatonic, except that her face kept twisting and contorting. I told her everything was all right and stood up in front of her to shield her from the view of the businessmen, who were still staring as if it were a night out at the pictures. I don't think they knew who she was, only that she was wealthy, from the diamonds on her wrist and the fine black silk she was wearing.

Then Eve sat straight up. She asked me what she'd done again. And then she was sick.

I was still trying to wipe Eve's face with the napkin and apologise to the waitress when Halton came back into the dining room. He was on his own and I wondered if the waitress had said something to Miss Rodwell about the vomit. In any case, the businessmen finally remembered their manners and two of them came over to ask if they could help carry the lady to a taxicab? As I led them down the curved, pebbled driveway to the waiting cab, I saw Miss Rodwell watching us from its back window, an expression of frank disgust on her face. I talked myself out of it that night, explained it away as an effect of the shadows or of my own unsettled emotions, but I had seen what I had seen: hatred.

We drove back to the wharves in silence. Even the cab driver was quiet. Only Eve made a sound, whimpering unconsciously, her head lolling and snapping back as she came to and then going limp again, her whimpers eventually turning to deep, drunken breathing.

Miss Rodwell, sitting opposite Eve, prodded her niece's leg with her toe, like she was something rotting that had washed up on the beach.

Miss Rodwell let herself out of the cab as soon as we got back to the wharves, leaving Halton and me to carry Eve back. We had an arm each, but Halton was a good five inches taller than I, so one of Eve's kitten-heeled feet dragged all the way along the wooden wharf with a dull screech. On the floodlit jetty, a group of men hauled stiff beef carcasses into a cargo net. The cows had been skinned and their white fat and tendons glowed in the dark like funeral sheaths. We struggled up the gangway to the main deck, Eve's weight still dead on my shoulders. No one noticed us.

Miss Rodwell was waiting for us at the door of the cabin she shared with Eve. She stood quietly as we carried Eve past her to the bed and watched as we took Eve's shoes off. She didn't even tell us which of the beds was Eve's, though I knew as soon as I saw it. It was the one closest the far wall, unmade, a nightgown trailing out from under the pillow and a full ashtray next to it on the little table.

Once Eve was in bed, Mr Halton got up to leave and Miss Rodwell thanked him. I finished tucking in a sheet and began to follow him out, but Miss Rodwell put a hand on my arm. I thought she was going to thank me, too, but she left me in the doorway, walked over to Eve's chest of drawers and lit herself a cigarette. Then she turned back and exhaled a tight column of smoke.

'If anything about my niece's performance were to find its way into the newspapers or ship gossip, my family and I would be very upset.'

She might as well have slapped me. 'I don't gossip,' I said.

'Good. Mr Pope's work is important and this could be very damaging.'

'I don't gossip.'

Miss Rodwell's pencilled eyebrows made her look like a Punch and Judy puppet.

‘Well, as I said, that is very pleasing to hear. And wise. Arthur is very careful when it comes to protecting his interests.’ She picked a loose piece of tobacco from her lip and flicked it away.

She was threatening me. I wanted to grab her head and rub her eyebrows off with spit. I knew my silence seemed to her like kowtowing, or dumb fear, but all I felt was rage. Rage at her eyebrows and her endless cigarettes and the way she left her sick niece for someone else to clean up; rage that, even though it was completely unfair, she *could* threaten me.

‘I’d be grateful if you’d talk to Halton about this, too.’

And before I could tell her to do her own dirty work, she’d shut the door in my face.

Chapter Four

The next day, I understood for the first time what it meant to be at sea. The idea of the ocean falling away beneath me for hundreds and hundreds of miles, stretching out to every horizon, the ship bobbing improbably on top. God help us if the tension broke. It felt a lot like claustrophobia: the panic that started in my chest when I let myself think about the sea, and me floating on top of it like a fleck of dust blown off the land. And so, I tried not to think.

I went up to see Halton in the wheelhouse first thing, after worrying all night about whether or not to pass on Miss Rodwell's message and finally deciding I'd have to. But when I got to the wheelhouse, he wasn't alone. The river pilot was hanging over his shoulder and the third mate was at the bow window, shouting out directions because we were leaving port. The sight of him concentrating and directing the men was enough to convince me my errand was stupid so I turned to go, but by then it was too late and they'd all seen me.

'Is everything all right?'

'Oh yes, it's nothing serious just ... Could I talk to you for a minute?'

Halton told the third mate to take the wheel and ushered me round back, to the cramped passage behind the Master's dayroom. I told him what Miss Rodwell had said. It took him a minute to understand and, when he did, he looked like he'd swallowed a fishbone. I might have laughed if I hadn't felt so sick about having to tell him in the first place. I was Miss Rodwell's emissary, like one of those pathetic schoolgirls who deliver messages for the strong ones about a fight behind a school gym, or a tryst with a boyfriend.

'Did she threaten you?'

A tugboat honked and I pretended not to hear him. The river folded up like a lady's fan in the Ship's wake and a window winked at me from the bank. Then someone shouted from the wheelhouse because they were getting near the shallows and it was going to be tricky to get around the mudbanks. They needed Halton. He took a step towards me so that I couldn't look anywhere but up at his face and I felt like I'd get an electric shock if my skin brushed his clothes. I wasn't sure if he was trying to intimidate me or romance me or both. I hoped he couldn't see the sweat on my upper lip.

He grinned, revealing a snaggle tooth. 'All right, Doc. I won't tell anyone.' He stepped around me and I turned to watch him go; he ran one hand along the railing as though it were a woman's waist.

He wasn't at breakfast later that morning, which made me worry he was either avoiding me for insinuating he was a gossip or, worse, he'd dismissed me for being one of those messenger-type girls. Eve wasn't there either, but I hadn't expected to see her after what had happened in Brisbane. I tried to calm myself down by concentrating on whatever it was Mrs Lawton was talking about, but my mind kept skittering off to things Eve had said or to the contempt in Halton's grin.

I got more anxious as the day wore on. After breakfast, I went back to my cabin and tried to study my notes again, but I had to keep re-reading the same paragraph over and over. I started another letter to Glynn but, two pages in, I realised all I'd done was whine and no one wanted a wife like that, so I scrunched the letter up and went down for a walk around deck.

Some of the men were repainting the ship's funnel, which was on top of the bridge structure, about 80 feet high. I had to crane my neck back to get a proper view of it and hold the railing behind me so as not to lose my balance. Perhaps the craning, and the way the ship rocked underneath me, made the whole thing seem more precarious than it was, but the way the boys dangled from the smokestack on tiny planks of wood held up by small pulleys and knots gave me vertigo.

I shouted at them to be careful, but they waved and laughed at me and one of them kicked himself out from the funnel, like he was abseiling down a cliff. I couldn't watch anymore.

It took me just over five minutes to walk all the way around the main deck. I counted as I walked; my legs were so full of energy I thought I might break into a run if I didn't count. As I passed the entrance to the hospital, it suddenly seemed to me like a burial cave in the white wall of the poop house. I told myself I was being stupid and made myself go in. There was work to be done.

In the clinic, I sorted through what I'd bought in Brisbane. I put the bottles into the wall cabinet, which had wooden bars across the shelves to stop the bottles from falling out. I put them in alphabetical order, then changed my mind and organised them with the medicines I was most likely to use in the middle, where I could reach them, and the less important ones about the edges. I put disinfectant and antiseptic in the centre because, if I used them enough, then I could stop most

infections. Hyoscine hydrobromide for seasickness, sodium chloride tablets for heat cramp, codeine. As I sorted through them, I felt the familiar flutter in my chest. There were so many things that could go wrong on a ship. I put the bottle of silver sulfadiazine next to the codeine and thought how easy it was for someone to be burned. Proguanil, for malaria, was next. I remembered reading reports of malaria in the north of Australia in the latest *British Medical Journal*. Procaine—a local anaesthetic, I forced myself not to think about that. I kept aside the drugs I had to lock up until I'd finished sorting the non-lockable ones, then I put them in a metal strongbox: opium injections, Veronal, phenobarb. I locked the pharmacy door behind me, and went to the hospital to disinfect the floor. I used three parts iodine and two parts water—much stronger than the recommended concentration, but I had no idea when the place had last been cleaned. I had only just finished the first swab when there was a knock on the door. I opened it to find three of the boys standing there, smirking.

‘Martin’s got a hernia, Doc.’

‘It’s Doctor Fraser. You look all right.’

‘No. I’m no good, Doc. Got an awful ache.’

‘Isn’t that funny? It’s usually a very sharp pain. Well, you’d better come in then.’

I picked up a scalpel and cleaned my fingernails with it. ‘Well, go on then, off with your uniform and up on the bed. You don’t want to let a hernia go untreated.’

He was an oily sort of fellow. His eyes slid around. ‘Actually, I feel a lot better all of a sudden, Doc.’

‘A miracle. Thank God for that. And I’d prefer to be called Doctor Fraser.’

The three of them laughed all the way down the stairs as if they were the first men to have thought of the joke. I locked the clinic door behind them.

I didn't see Eve again until the following night, a Sunday, the day before we were due to arrive in Townsville. I'd started to worry about her (as well as everything else) so I went by her cabin on the way to dinner to check everything was all right. It was diagonally opposite the corridor from mine—the corner cabin.

I didn't have to knock. The cabin door was ajar and she was lying in full view on the unmade bed, smoking, her skirt caught up to the thigh. It was middle-class of me to notice something like that, let alone be shocked, but a part of me already felt irritated with her, too, irritated that she thought she could just do whatever she liked and to hell with manners and other people being uncomfortable.

She beckoned me in. 'Get yourself a drink, dear. And I'd love a gin while you're at it.'

There were three bottles on the dresser: scotch, gin and another one with no name on it. I couldn't see any tonic water, so I just put the gin in on its own, hoping it was the right way to do it, desperate not to seem unsophisticated.

I pulled up a chair and the two of us sipped in silence for a while, Eve resting her glass on her stomach so it made a wet circle on the delicate blue chiffon. The dress had to have cost 50 pounds or more, but she wore it like it was an old housecoat and I felt suddenly fussy in my butterscotch rayon. I wore it too carefully, that was the problem, like it was new and saved for special occasions, which it was. I sipped my drink, letting a tiny bit of whisky warm my lips and seep onto my tongue. It was too strong to actually drink.

'How are you feeling?'

'I'm sick of the stupid sea already. How about you?'

She flicked her wrist and some ash fell on her dress. She'd get another. She lay back and closed her eyes. I thought how nice never to have to work, to live off the rest of the population with nothing to do but pursue pleasure and ease. There was no point trying to make conversation so I stretched my legs and looked around.

The dresser between the beds was messier than it had been the other night. Among the bottles of Gordon's and Teacher's and a silver-plated ice bucket, there were gold-plated lipstick tubes, a stained handkerchief, a half-full water glass and a white knitted thing, small, like a baby's boot. There was a funny noise and I looked over to see Eve had fallen asleep. She was snoring lightly, cigarette still burning, a column of ash threatening to topple off onto her dress. I watched the red line of flame crackle closer to her finger then I felt ashamed of my own meanness and took the cigarette from her.

Eve sat up. 'What?'

'Nothing. You fell asleep.'

No apology, no embarrassment, no thank you: Eve just took her drink back and left me to dispose of the cigarette. I suppose she was used to having servants. I ground the cigarette out then stepped over to the dresser to pick up the bootie, but I'd barely taken hold of it before she jumped up and snatched it out of my hand. I felt like I'd been caught stealing.

'I'm sorry. I didn't realise it was special. I thought you were knitting it for a friend.'

She didn't hear me. Just dropped back onto the bed and gulped the rest of her drink as though it were orange juice. Then she put the empty glass on the bedside table and lay back on her pillow. She was in a completely different place. Somewhere I didn't exist. She was staring like the war neurosis patients did, the ones who were

still stuck in the muddy hell of Passchendaele, fighting the same battle over and over again. She ran her hand through her hair and yanked a strand from the crown of her head. Then she plucked out another and wound the strands around two fingers, and did it again. I grabbed her shoulder and gave it a little shake.

‘Hey. Wake up. It’s time to go to dinner.’

It was then I admitted to myself that something was very wrong with Eve, something that was completely independent of my feelings about Mrs Connolly or having to be on the ship. Something was wrong with Eve: the dragging aboard, the drunkenness, how she was around her aunt, the hair-plucking, the detached look she got in her eyes. I needed to start treating her.

Later that night, I sat up with a start; something had woken me. I held my breath, listening carefully. There was the hum of the engine and the intermittent thudding of the ship’s bottom against the waves; a swell had come up. And there it was again: a knock. Very quiet. Like someone was ... I pulled on my dressing gown and opened the door a crack.

It was the steward, Bowyer, looking like he was about to pounce right through my door. He grabbed my arm and yanked me into the passageway, ‘No time for slippers,’ and I knew, without asking, that it had something to do with Eve.

The Ship rocked and pitched as we made our way along the passenger deck and down the stairs to the main deck. The spray had come up and the rungs were slippery. I almost missed a rung, and had to steady myself for a moment, Bowyer begging me to hurry up for Christ’s sake, the whites of his eyes glowing in the darkness, something squeezing around my heart.

We ran, aft, against the Ship's momentum, skirting around the hatches and the windlasses and ropes. The wind whipped my hair and sucked the breath out of me. I felt like that night with the dolphins, I was flying, but this time the exhilaration was closer to terror.

By the time I saw the figures at the rail, we were almost at the poop house. The moon was behind cloud, so I had to squint to take them in. One of them looked strange somehow, like its arms were broken, or maybe my eyes had it confused with a stay or a cable or something. But then, no, I realised that whoever it was had their arms bent back to hold the rail behind them: they were on the wrong side of it. As soon as I understood this, I knew it was Eve. Halton was on the right side of the rail, a foot or so away from her.

Bowyer slowed up and signalled for me to do the same. We crept forward. Halton's face was dark against the glow of his white uniform, so dark that I couldn't read his expression. I only saw him nod before he turned back to Eve and quietly cleared his throat, reminding her of his presence, trying not to scare her, the way you hold out your hand to a skittish horse before you try and stroke it.

'Doc's come.'

Eve didn't move. She was still in the blue chiffon, no pullover, even though it was chilly.

'You mean Ada? Hello, dear.'

She didn't turn around, just kept staring at the ocean, arms bent back behind her. She sounded lucid, even cheerful, which might have seemed a good sign, but I had worked at Callan Park and I knew it wasn't. It was the opposite. I knew I needed to sound very calm and in control. I needed to take the emotion out of the situation, like Professor Dawson had said.

‘What are you doing, Eve?’

Eve shuddered, but I couldn’t tell if she was laughing or just cold and I was worried she’d fall in moving around like that. I told her to come back over the rail. She did laugh then, a harsh, joyless trill. Without warning, the Ship struck a wave and her foot slipped. It was only a little slip, all her weight was still on deck, but the muscles in her arms went taut and stayed that way even after she’d pulled her foot back up. Maybe she didn’t want to jump after all. Most of them didn’t really, when it got down to it, they just wanted some attention.

Eve said something, but her voice was too low and the wind too strong for me to catch it. Something about missed opportunities. I was soaked and shivering with cold, but under my arms was slimy with sweat.

I told myself Eve was just another patient, like the ones at Callan Park, one that needed a strong hand and someone to be in charge. She was no different to that. And I’d dealt with plenty of those. But, in the corner of my vision, I could see Halton gripping the rail like he was getting ready to hurdle over it if I mucked everything up.

‘Come back over now, Eve.’

‘No. Sorry. Can’t.’ She wasn’t laughing now. The wind strummed the guy wires, a low vibration. Using my hands, I told Halton to grab Eve’s arm, but he shook his head to tell me he couldn’t or wouldn’t. Bowyer was shuffling softly from foot to foot like he had to go to the lavatory.

Then Eve twisted around awkwardly to catch my eye.

‘I am sorry. Really.’ She turned back to face the sea. ‘I should have jumped right away. Then no one else would have got caught up in all this. But I waited, of course. Coward. Just can’t do what’s expected of me.’ She kicked her heel against the railing pole and I felt a sudden surge of hope. She didn’t want to die. But what on

earth did she mean, expected of her? The Ship tipped forward and back again. I told her to come back over.

‘You think you know everything, Ada dear, and I don’t mean that as a bully, I think that’s just science. X equals Y and therefore it IS and there can’t be any disagreement because those are the facts but, actually, there’s a lot you don’t know and you can’t fix—’

‘I know no one expects you to jump. How on earth could you think that?’

Eve kicked the pole again and made a sound like a growl. ‘No one tells you, Ada. No one needs to tell you. It’s just, it’s just ... understood. I can’t explain. Haven’t you ever heard of *hara-kiri*?’ She flung an arm out and lost her balance, just slightly, enough to make her grab the rail again. Bowyer whispered a curse.

The clouds broke and the moon shone through, white and nearly full, and the ocean danced with millions of tiny moons. The Ship, too, seemed to lose its momentum, as if we’d been becalmed. I shivered. I knew this was our chance. I stepped hard on Halton’s foot and cocked my head in Eve’s direction, making a pulling motion with my arm and hoping to God he understood. He shook his head, but I knew he had. I stomped on his foot again, did my pantomime and, before he could stop me, I turned to Eve.

‘Well, Eve, you’re being a brat.’

She turned in surprise and Halton lunged, grabbing one of her arms while Bowyer caught the other. Eve, realising the trap, threw herself forward and, for a sickening moment, dangled there. One of her shoes slipped off and I felt its long drop to the ocean in my stomach. But then they pulled her up, Halton catching her by the waist, hauling her over the railing and onto the deck. He held her there with one hand, as though she were a fish that might flip off as soon as he looked away. Then, when

he'd caught his breath, he scooped her up and carried her back up the deck, placing her down again between hatches four and five, where the derricks on either side made a sort of cage.

Eve curled up on her side and lay there shivering, till Bowyer came to his senses and ran off to get blankets. Halton sat back on his haunches and lit a cigarette. I was going to ask for one, too, but then Eve recovered enough to smoke and Halton handed his over and I suddenly didn't want one anymore. I told him I needed a minute and I walked aft, just beyond the main mast where no one could see me, and swore into the wind, over and over, until I was calm enough to go back.

We couldn't get anything out of Eve, just forced laughter and that she'd had too much to drink again, wasn't she silly, she was awfully sorry and all that. When I pushed, she just seemed to move further away, to dissipate like the smoke of her cigarette.

'I'm awfully tired,' she said finally. And she closed her eyes and lay back down on the deck.

Chapter Five

The cabin was no more than 15-foot square, but Miss Rodwell hadn't even noticed Eve's absence until we turned up at one a.m. She stood in the doorway, watching us drip and shiver in the corridor, Halton shifting Eve around on his shoulders like she was a sack of cargo. Finally, she came to her senses and pointed Halton to the bed closest the portholes.

'Drunk again,' she said.

Halton put Eve down on top of the covers then stood up. 'You'll need to get the wet clothes off her.'

Eve giggled. It was the first noise she'd made since we were back on deck. There was a movement in one of the mirrored wardrobe doors and I saw one of Miss Rodwell's hands flutter, before she slipped it into her dressing gown pocket. It must have been awful to be woken like that in the middle of the night. And Eve's giggles, swallowed quickly in the suffocating cabin, made me feel like I was in a nightmarish funhouse. I couldn't imagine what Miss Rodwell felt like. She was still hovering in the doorway so I led her over to one of the armchairs and told her to sit down. Then I

sent Bowyer off to get her a cup of tea. He looked relieved to escape, but Miss Rodwell didn't sit or say thank you; she just stalked over to the dresser, got a cigarette and turned to look at me like I was dirt.

'Thank you. You can go now.'

Halton looked at the lump of clothes on the bed, as if checking it wasn't going to move or giggle again, then came over and stood next to me. He'd only been a foot or so away from me before—I could have reached out and touched him—but I was glad to have him next to me.

We'd decided back on deck not to say anything about Eve's suicide attempt—I wanted to speak to Miss Rodwell when Eve wasn't around. But Miss Rodwell was so rude and, after her threats the night before, I was possessed by an urge to hurt her.

'We found her wandering around on the main deck,' I said. 'Didn't you notice her leave the cabin?'

Miss Rodwell arched an eyebrow but didn't say anything. Then Halton jumped into the silence to say it wasn't unusual for someone to be confused when they'd mixed alcohol and seasickness. It was like he wanted to lessen the seriousness of what had happened, which would make my job of telling Miss Rodwell the full story harder. Maybe he was just uncomfortable with the silence. One of those people who needs everything to feel comfortable and civil all the time. He hadn't seemed like that type. He certainly wasn't with me.

Miss Rodwell still hadn't said anything, so I prodded.

'You did say Eve was seasick?'

We all knew she'd lied about Eve being seasick and I wanted to embarrass her, but she wasn't embarrassed. She looked me straight in the eye, her lip twitching;

she wasn't embarrassed at all. It was stupid of me to think she'd care what couple of bourgeois thought of her.

But there was something else underneath the contempt, something she didn't want us to see, the thing she tried to hide by fiddling with a handle on the dresser drawer and smoking and keeping the other unoccupied hand in her dressing gown pocket. It was the same thing that had made her hand flutter earlier. I'd taken it for distress, but it wasn't that. It was rage. I could see it in the shape of her hand, clenching and unclenching, in her dressing gown pocket. In her jaw muscles. The way she flicked her eyes in Eve's direction just for a moment, as if she couldn't bear to let them linger on her niece any longer than that.

'You could give her something. To make her sleep.'

I hadn't thought about what to do with Eve for the rest of the night. The suicide attempt had sucked everything to the present moment, to threat and safety, an animal sense of time, a continuous present and I still hadn't calmed down enough to think about the rest of the night. Or the rest of the trip. Sedating Eve wasn't a bad idea. She wouldn't try to kill herself again. Still, there were dangers in mixing barbiturates with alcohol. I explained this to Miss Rodwell.

'Well, I can't be expected to watch her. I might fall asleep.'

She took another drag of her cigarette and blew the smoke right at me so that I had to concentrate very hard not to cough.

'I'll stay then. To make sure there are no adverse reactions.'

'If you want.'

The last thing I wanted was to stay in that tiny hot cabin, with the cigarette smoke and the stale sweet smell of alcohol coming off Eve, and the prickly feeling in the air that came from Miss Rodwell. I wanted to go and sleep for three days or

scream and howl at the moon and forget about Eve hanging off the side of the Ship and Mrs Connolly and her blue baby and the sea that never stopped around me.

I went to get my medical bag.

I gave Eve one tablet of Veronal, sent Halton away and asked Miss Rodwell where I could find some dry clothes for Eve. Had it been up to her, she would have left her niece sopping. I suppose she thought it was her fault for getting drunk and soaked, so she should pay the consequences. She did, eventually, tell me where I could find a nightgown but then just sat on her bed, watching me, as I searched through the drawers for something suitable.

By the time I'd found something, Eve had fallen asleep. I had to pull her up to a sitting position and shake her a little bit to wake her up so I could get her clothes off. The wet silk was stiff and awkward. I'd just managed to get it up over her hips when suddenly Miss Rodwell was there, pushing me away and tugging the gown back down again.

'I'll do it.'

I was behind Eve and Miss Rodwell was in front, both of us holding the wet nightgown; I had it at the shoulders and Miss Rodwell at the bottom.

'I'll help then.'

'I'd rather do it on my own, thank you.'

I might have thought she was worried or protective, except there was nothing in her expression that suggested it. It was rather as if she didn't want me to see Eve naked. That would have been understandable, but I'd seen nothing in Miss Rodwell so far to suggest she was a modest person—in fact, back at the Finney Isles store in

Brisbane she had wandered about the change rooms in her underwear without batting an eyelid. I was surely in the category of those shop girls; my eyes didn't count.

But she wouldn't even take the nightgown off until I'd turned my back. The night had turned the portholes to mirrors and I studied them, trying to see what was happening behind me, but the images were too murky. Eventually, Miss Rodwell said she was finished. When I turned back, Eve was lying on her pillow, covers pulled up almost to the neck, as if even the nightgown was now too revealing.

Miss Rodwell went to the dresser and seemed to be looking for something, pushing things out of the way here and there, but then perhaps she wasn't because she got a cigarette and an ashtray and went back to her bed.

'Did she drop anything?'

'Pardon?'

Miss Rodwell blew out some smoke. 'While she was ... doing what she was doing. Did she drop anything overboard?'

I missed it then: how Miss Rodwell had known Eve was close enough to the edge to drop something over.

'No. Oh, wait. Yes. She dropped her shoe.'

Miss Rodwell, who'd tensed when I'd said yes, sunk a little bit.

'She may have dropped something else. I didn't get there till later. What do you think she dropped?'

She took a drag of her cigarette and blew out the smoke slowly, but too slowly, for the nonchalance to be real.

'Just a scarf of mine. She had it with her earlier. A Schiaparelli.' She was pretending not to care about my answer but her body was tensed, waiting for it.

'I didn't see a scarf.'

I should have asked more. But Miss Rodwell flicked off the light and I was in the dark, watching Eve's chest by the dim illumination from the portholes, making sure it rose and fell, evenly, both sides as inflated as each other, looking for signs of hypoxia, as if you could see that in the gloom.

Eve had freed one of her hands from the covers and it was so pale against the coverlet I had the awful thought that a part of her was already dead. Her fingernails were bitten down, the cuticles flecked with dried blood, like she'd been clawing something, or clutching at it.

During my placement at Callan Park, we put on a picnic for the patients in the grounds of the hospital one day, set it up on the smooth sandstone boulders down by the bay. After sandwiches, the men played a game of cricket and I took one of the patients, Marjorie Chappell, for a walk to pick wildflowers—tiny white star-shaped ones and some pink orchid things. I fed the stems through Marjorie's braid so she looked like Ophelia.

Later that day, a few hours after we got back from the picnic, matron called me to the supply closet and there was Marjorie, strung up by her neck, tongue sticking out, one of the white stars dangling from her braid. When the wardsman came to cut her down he said, 'They don't give up,' and I thought, isn't that funny, he's a wardsman, I'm a doctor, and he knows better than me. It was exactly what Professor Dawson had said in his book and I'd forgotten it until that moment: 'No matter how much he assures you of his recovery, the suicidal patient rarely abandons his plans. Careful surveillance is paramount.'

The Ship was rolling slightly and I couldn't tell in the dark if Eve's chest was really rising or if it was the Ship moving. I held my hand above her lips until I felt the warm breath. If anyone had seen me they would have thought I was planning to

smother her. I thought of Professor Dawson and his argument for careful surveillance and wondered if he'd ever been a ship's surgeon. Surely not, or he would have seen how impossible it was to keep watch on someone when you were surrounded on all sides by possible death, when it stretched out in all directions to the horizon. The familiar panic started in my chest. To control it, I recited in my mind the process by which Veronal was synthesised. Diethylmalonic urea plus sodium ethoxide. I timed what I thought was the rise and fall of Eve's chest but which might have been the ship's path over the waves, counting the seconds because I couldn't see my wristwatch in the dark. I put my ear close to Eve's mouth three times and, on the third, it sounded heavy and rhythmic, then I counted another 20 minutes, in case she was only pretending to be asleep.

When I finally stood up, my legs were stiff from the cold. I was still in my damp nightgown. As I walked past Miss Rodwell's bed to the doorway, a voice came out of the darkness, clear and unexpected. I nearly screamed.

'She's not dead, is she?'

It sounded like she was joking and I couldn't control myself. 'She did try to kill herself tonight.'

Miss Rodwell was silent, then there was the hiss of a match against a matchbook and the end of her cigarette glowed and crackled and smoke cut through the darkness like a searchlight.

'I said: she tried to kill herself tonight.'

'Yes, dear. I heard you the first time.' There was a wet sucking sound, another searchlight, a sigh. 'I need to get some sleep now. If you wouldn't mind—'

'Don't you care?'

'Of course I care. What a ridiculous thing to say.'

I realised that Miss Rodwell knew—had known from the moment we turned up at the door of her cabin—that Eve had tried to kill herself. I tried to see her face in the dark, but it was too dark, and there was her cigarette smoke muddying things up. No one would have had a chance to tell her and I didn't think she'd seen anything—she had certainly been shocked when she'd opened the door. So the only way she could have known was if it had happened before. I reached for the door handle, desperate to get out of that tiny cabin, but my hand was slippery with sweat and I couldn't get a proper hold on it.

Miss Rodwell sighed through her nose as if the whole thing was tiring.

'She's your niece.'

'I've seen it all before, dear. Several times. She never succeeds. Obviously.'

She laughed at that and her smoke came out in puffs. 'She doesn't want to.'

I tried the door again and this time it opened. The air in the passageway was smoke-free, salty. I wanted to leave, to escape, but that was how I'd felt after Mrs Connolly's baby. I knew I couldn't leave, not now, not if I wanted to save Eve. Miss Rodwell sucked again on her cigarette and the wet sound made me shudder. I took a deep breath of the corridor air and turned back to the cabin. I tried to think medically, pretended I was Professor Dawson faced with an interesting problem. *Apparently suicidal patient, family believes she's malingering.* But it was past two in the morning and I was wet and I couldn't summon the energy to understand what was going on, let alone take a history.

'But why bring her to sea?'

Miss Rodwell exhaled another beam of smoke. 'To cure her of this nonsense. The pretending to leap overboard ... the nerves or nervous condition or whatever you call it.'

I had heard of people sent on cruises to cure their nerves. It was not unusual. The sea air and forced rest were supposed to help. But those people were never seriously ill and they were sent on liners with 20-bed hospitals and nurses and padded cabins and all the latest medicines and restraints. They were not sent away on cargo ships. The only reason you would send someone away on a cargo ship, especially if you were as wealthy as the Popes, was if you wanted to hide.

Miss Rodwell cleared her throat. The cabin had such strange acoustics; the sound disappeared into it as if down a well. I might have shivered.

‘Does the Master know?’

‘No.’

That was something at least. The thought of the Master knowing about Eve and not telling me, setting me up to fail, would have been too much.

‘He’d have every right to sue you, you know. When we get to London.’

Miss Rodwell clicked her nails against the wooden bed guard, click, click, click. It was a harsh little sound. I could almost see the nails, painted red, jarring against the wood. I could understand the logic in choosing a cargo ship—they wanted to hide Eve’s condition from the public. But why keep Eve’s condition from the ship’s surgeon? The one person who had any chance of healing her? Why keep it a secret from the Master, who might at least be able to help stop her from throwing herself overboard?

I felt I had to see Miss Rodwell. There would be something in her expression or in the way she held her body that would help me understand. I reached for the light switch, very quietly and slowly, hoping to ambush her. But when I flicked it on, she just smiled at me as if she’d been expecting me to turn it on all along. Then she lifted

her chin and peered at me from under her hooded lids, like she was looking down at me from a great height.

‘Why didn’t you tell me at least? I can treat her—’

‘No. I don’t want you treating her.’

‘But surely you want to help her?’

‘I don’t want you to treat her. No.’ When she spoke again, her voice was the reasonable voice of a doctor talking to a lunatic. ‘We have spent hundreds of pounds taking my niece to the best psychiatrists in Australia. I do not want their work undone.’

I adopted the same tone. ‘Then I will have to ask the Master to make it a condition of your passage. I can’t keep her safe if I can’t treat her.’

Miss Rodwell stared at me with a smirk until I stopped talking. The look on her face dared me to try speaking against her to the Master. The look told me she would win. I was so tired, I couldn’t argue with her anymore. I’d pick up the fight again in the morning. I opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. Miss Rodwell’s voice followed me. ‘You may tell the Master about tonight. No one else.’

‘You are not my superior officer, Miss Rodwell, but I will discuss it with you in the morning. And we will discuss Eve’s treatment, too—’

‘No!’

The way she spoke made me turn back. She’d broken her cigarette and the tobacco spilled from it like straw from a scarecrow. She saw me looking at it and slipped her hand over it.

‘You will not treat Eve.’

I'd been in Eve's cabin for least an hour but, when I came out, Halton was waiting for me at the end of the corridor. I hadn't noticed him before and when I saw him now, I got a rush. I told myself it was relief at seeing a friendly face, that there was something about his height and the width of his chest that seemed safe. But he wasn't friendly or safe. That snaggle-toothed smile and the things he said: *A girl doctor, what's the world coming to?*

We went out on deck. The moon had dipped below the clouds and it glinted off the oily blackness of the ocean, animating it somehow. The ship was rocking just enough for us to need to hold the railing and the spray was icy. It was silly to be outside, but there was nowhere else we could be in the middle of the night without causing gossip.

I told him suicidal patients usually tried again and that Eve would try again. He pointed at the portholes just behind us, warning me that Miss Rodwell was probably still listening, though I didn't see why she shouldn't hear us. It wasn't until he pointed down at the main deck that I realised he wasn't worried about Miss Rodwell hearing Eve was suicidal. At first I didn't know what I should be looking at but then a figure formed out of the darkness, broke away and walked aft towards the hospital. Halton steered me down the stairs away from the cabins. He told me he'd put two men on watch where they had a view of Eve's cabin and of the passenger deck. They could get up there quickly if need be.

He was trying to help, but the thought of that tiny piece of darkness trying to break away from the night filled me with despair. It would have been better to have no help at all. Even if the watch did manage to see something, Eve could fling herself off the deck before they could get to her or she could climb higher to the bridge. She could poison herself in her cabin. They couldn't keep watch for the entire journey.

Halton put his hands on my shoulders and I realised I was babbling like a lunatic.

‘You’re tired, Doc. We’ll talk about it in the morning.’

I wanted to take him back to my cabin.

Chapter Six

I didn't sleep again that night. Once upon a time, after a difficult case at the hospital I used to go back to my room and sleep and sleep. Dreamless, wakeless, sleep like death, even if it was in the middle of the day with light breaking in around the curtains and shouting and laughing in the College corridors. I'd put my head down and just like that eight hours would have passed, fifteen once, and I'd be due back at the hospital. It was only after Mrs Connolly's baby that the insomnia started.

At four a.m. I gave up and went down to the hospital. The air was close and warm on deck, like being in a secret. I kept to the centre, moving from one derrick to the next, from hatch to funnel. The sea was still choppy, the deck slippery and if I went overboard I wouldn't be found. I would disappear. The idea was wonderful and terrible at the same time. There was a tiny red glow, the size of a match head, off to port side. A native's fire. In medical school, when I was alone in the middle of the night, studying, I'd imagine all the other night owls working away and imagine myself in community with them, a secret commune. And now I imagined the gins

across the water could see me. I sent a message back to them when I flicked on the hospital light. My own fire calling to theirs across the dark. Help me, it said.

I sat down at my desk and got the scalpels out of the drawer. They were kept in a roll-up case made of leather, each blade with its own little pocket. The rust was already starting in on them. Dull thickenings on the steel grain like blackish moles. It would get worse once we hit the tropics but, already, the men were out every day repainting the funnel and the bulkheads, scouring and scratching at the rust, trying to keep the ravenous salt at bay. I scoured the amputation blade with steel wool, humming to block the screech of metal against metal, but the frequency was too deep, it travelled up through my fingers and across the skin of my scalp. I washed the brown flakes away, dried the blade with a chamois, then ran it along the leather strap, back and forth, like dad sharpening the carving knife on Sundays before the stroke. I coated it with vaseline so the rust couldn't get in and wrapped it in gauze. Then I started on the next one.

Scouring, washing, smearing. I got so lost in the rhythm of it that, when I looked up, it was light and the coastline was only a few hundred feet away. We were tacking for land. I put away the knives, washed my face and patted down my hair, then went to find the Old Man. I was not going to fail Eve. I was going to leave her in Townsville.

After the last time I'd called on him, I was not looking forward to knocking on the Master's door, but he'd been expecting me. Halton had already told him about Eve. He opened the door and waved me to the armchair under the square window, then turned his own chair around to face mine and sat down. He had a smudge of black ink on his left cheek. The desk behind him was covered with what looked like ledgers.

‘You are here about Miss Pope.’

‘Yes. I want her committed in Townsville.’

He rubbed his cheek.

‘It’s too dangerous to keep her on board. She’ll try again.’

He took a pipe and a bag of tobacco out of his jacket pocket. He put a pinch of tobacco into the bowl, lit it and puffed until it had caught. He sighed deeply through his nose. ‘I’m assuming you have not spoken to Miss Rodwell about this.’

‘Why? Has she been to see you?’

He put up a hand to slow me down. ‘It’s not yet seven a.m., Doctor. I only assumed you hadn’t spoken to her because she wouldn’t be out of bed.’ He put his pipe back in his mouth and took another puff. ‘The Mate did tell me how she was last night. How do you think she will take it?’

‘It doesn’t matter how she takes it. Miss Pope must be—’

He put his hand up again. ‘All the same, it is worth thinking about, if only to help us decide how to approach it.’

The two portholes over the Master’s desk faced aft so, with the ship berthed in port, they were facing directly east. Suddenly, the rising sun shone full in my face; a blast of light. I put up a hand to shade my eyes. ‘Well, she won’t like it. She threatened me. Did Mr Halton tell you that?’

I opened my eyes again and for a moment the room was red. A seagull squawked outside the window.

‘Yes.’ He was studying me. ‘You’re worried she’ll threaten me, too?’

I nodded.

‘Maybe. I don’t know exactly how they came to be on board at the last minute, but I do know they pulled some strings with the company chair in New Zealand.’ He looked over my head at the window. ‘But that is not unusual.’

My cheeks burned, but he was still looking out the window.

‘I don’t see how we will be able to get Eve off the ship if her aunt refuses and the company backs her up.’

‘What if the police came and took her to the reception house?’

‘You mean by surprise?’

‘Yes. And by the time the chairman got involved we would have sailed on. If they wanted, they could get on the next ship. And you could say you were doing your duty. It’s not like Miss Rodwell could demand you be sacked for trying to make her niece safe.’

He smoked and I looked at him then the carpet, which was in the oriental style, red and oranges and browns. There were floating patches of fuzz in my vision. I closed my eyes.

‘All right,’ he said eventually. ‘I think I’d rather be fired than have that young lady jump. I’m only a few years off retirement anyway.’

He bit down on the stem of his pipe. ‘Hard to be young now. Nothing to believe in. Nothing higher than this,’ he waved his hand around the cabin then looked at me. ‘What’s the point?’

‘Life, I suppose.’

‘Is it?’

I thought of Eve hanging off the railing. Imagined her dropping into the sea, the small circular splash where she’d disappear, the water smoothing over.

The Master coughed. ‘All right. Go to the police. See if they’ll come this morning. Halton will row you in.’

After breakfast, Halton rowed me upriver to the town jetty. As I got off the boat, the jetty seemed to tip up towards me and I almost fell in the water. Halton called it sea legs, but it was the earth that bounced and tipped, not my legs. I wondered if it was physiological or psychological. Maybe the fluid of my inner ear still moved by the tide and the waves from the ship. Or maybe my body had accommodated for its changed situation, when the world had become fluid, and there was a lag in accommodating back again. It was not the movement itself that disturbed me. What disturbed me was that reality, that objective mooring, could be so changed. And that I didn’t know which reality was real. There was no way of telling. If more than half the earth were fluid, and rocked and tipped and moved, then maybe constant movement was the overwhelming reality. Not stasis. Halton and I thought we were seeing the same things, but we were not; we were seeing different worlds altogether.

‘Here we are.’

We had walked several blocks from the jetty and had reached a bomb site, or what looked like it: half a wall, asbestos hanging off it in rags, metal pipes and broken bricks and clods of earth and a rusted-through wheelbarrow and two white goats picking through the mess.

‘No. Here.’ Halton steered me across the road to a two-storey bungalow with wind-around verandahs and a white portico covered in vines. He pushed open the chicken-wire gate and we walked past a Moreton Bay fig to the front door. It looked like a school boarding house, country-townish, and I felt my stomach relax.

But the police inside weren't country-townish. The Constable who led us through to the interview room kept ushering the air behind us to get us to hurry up. The windows of the interview room were barred so that the sun cut the dusty air, making the bars reach all the way through the room to paint stripes across the Constable's face. Criminals were interviewed in that room. Murderers. I looked at the chair to check it was clean and it leapt up at me. It was the jelly legs—*mal du mer*, the sailors called it. I sat down opposite the Constable, who was speaking to Halton, and told him I was the doctor.

'Oh, I'm sorry. So what's the problem?'

I told him that Eve had tried to jump overboard, once, possibly twice, and had displayed bouts of mania and melancholia before that. I told him about her history of suicidal behaviour. The room kept billowing, so I closed my eyes, but that only seemed to make it worse.

'You all right, Doctor?'

'Hasn't got her land legs yet.'

They laughed.

'She needs to be committed. As soon as possible. You can send a car to the port.'

When I opened my eyes, the Constable was shaking his head. 'It's not that simple, I'm afraid. I can only commit someone if a relative makes a petition to the judge.'

'Yes, but what about a summary order? You can detain a lunatic if they're not under proper care, if they're neglected. And she's neglected. She wouldn't be out alone in the middle of the night trying to jump off the ship—'

'Very difficult to prove. What would the young woman say?'

I remembered Eve being told to put on her makeup; she'd say whatever Miss Rodwell wanted her to. Still, if the police came and saw what Eve was like, it would be harder for Miss Rodwell to argue she was all right. 'Would you come and see her at least?'

Someone knocked.

'Just a minute.'

The person behind the door said something about a phone call, but I hadn't heard a telephone ring. I realised the Constable had asked them to knock after a certain amount of time so that he could get rid of us. I'd done the same myself, but the thought of him doing it now made me panic. Eve was going to kill herself and he wasn't taking me seriously.

'I said, it's all right,' he bellowed at the door. He sucked his upper lip. 'All right, we'll come down. But, as I said, unless the aunt puts her in, it'll be very hard to commit her. You can only prove neglect over a long period.'

'But how do all those people get put in the reception house? Surely they haven't all been sent in by their relatives?'

'Quite a lot.' He squinted at me, wondering how I could be a doctor and not know this. I couldn't tell him I'd only be a doctor for five minutes, and only at Callan Park for half a minute. I couldn't tell him I didn't know anything.

'The ones we bring in, we've picked up on the street. Drunk, usually. They don't have relatives. If they do, they're usually in next morning to collect them.' He grinned. 'Unless they want them committed, of course.'

I knew young women at Callan Park who had been committed by families who couldn't control them, worried they were what the VD campaigners called 'amateur prostitutes'. Those parents were neglectful; they couldn't be bothered to care

for their children. Miss Rodwell seemed of a piece with these parents; she couldn't be bothered to watch Eve and make sure she didn't jump. *I can't be expected to watch her*, she'd said, *I might fall asleep*. Having Eve committed would surely be a relief for her?

Out on the street, the dusty bitumen sprang up at me. The Townsville Show was on and there were horse droppings and cow pats to negotiate. Goats, too, wandering across the road and milling about in front of shops. Dozens of them wandered the streets like minor deities in a Hindu country. The Post Office clock tower was bending in the late morning heat. Beyond it, the ocean flashed harshly and the Ship was out there somewhere, waiting, her black hull striped with rust. I needed to sleep.

'Is there a park? I need to sleep.'

The police weren't coming to the Ship until that night; I'd asked the Constable to hold off until then. That way, Eve would be drunk and at her worst when they arrived and Miss Rodwell wouldn't be able to pretend nothing was wrong. I didn't want to go back to the Ship until I had to. I needed to sleep with the sun on my face and with the solid ground beneath me. We walked the length of the high street, turned left at The Strand and stopped in front of the oriental arches of the Queens Hotel. It can't have taken more than five minutes, but I was almost crying from exhaustion. It was as if, by the time I'd recognised the billowing and bouncing of the world for the tiredness it was, it had riddled my bones and my brain.

'Grass or sand?'

'Grass.'

Halton put his jacket down under a solid palm tree and I thought vaguely, *He's put his jacket out for me*, but I was too tired to think more than that. I lay down next to the palm tree. And there was the baby again.

It hangs off the bellows like a piece of limp washing hanging off a line. I squeeze the balloon and its stomach swells. It's the wrong part of the body. But the ribs stop the chest moving. Squeeze, swell, squeeze, swell. It looks like a magic doll, one of those ones that urinates or does some other trick. And apart from the swelling tummy, it's turning blue.

'Nurse. Cyanosis. In the lips.'

'Yes, doctor. What would you like me to do?'

Do? Do?

Mrs Connolly is calling out. 'What's happening? What's wrong? What is it?'

'The placenta has come, doctor.'

The nurse is pushing me away, edging herself into my place next to the wooden sideboard on which the baby lies, taking the bellows from me. And I am holding the smooth livery pillow of the placenta, running my bloodied hands over it as though I were blind and it were brail. Mrs Connolly opens her mouth and a low wail comes out, an ancient noise.

I opened my eyes. The crown of my head was pressing against the palm tree, but Mrs Connolly was still screaming. I sat up, felt around for my spectacles and put them on. It wasn't Mrs Connolly; it was a ship's horn, coming from across the harbour.

I looked at my watch. It was past noon and I had slept for almost two hours. Across the harbour, the Ship sat heavy in the water, a hole in the bright blueness. It

was warm that day but I shivered at the sight and turned away to the friendly noise of the Queens Hotel.

The show crowds had come in for lunch and, with the floor-length windows swung open, their happy chatter floated out on the warm air. I let the ordinariness of it soak into me and wondered if I could go in for a drink on my own without anything to read. There was always some man ready to pounce on you if you didn't look busy. But then Halton emerged from the glass doors and came across the lawn towards me, his uniform glowing against the bright green grass. He'd been keeping watch on me from the hotel. He'd laid his jacket on the ground for me and he'd watched me while I slept. I wondered if he was just being a gentleman, but then I thought of the way he'd grinned at me. He wasn't a gentleman. I felt a thrill that I shouldn't have.

The hotel lobby was packed. Patrons squeezed between ferns in oriental pots and Romanesque columns painted white, wicker rocking chairs and arm chairs and glass-topped tables. The marble floor made everything echo, so the noise was doubled as though twice the number of people had crammed in. I heard fragments of the conversations around me: Hereford, crossbreed, Spanish. It was hard to tell if they were speaking of livestock or the Spanish war. In the middle of everything, a woman in a mauve cloche hat sat reading a novel, stroking the long thin leaf of a fern.

Halton found us a table near the window and called the waiter over. I was happy to let him choose the drinks. The thought of having to pick one from the 10 or so on the menu was exhausting. As he spoke to the waiter, I slipped a foot from my shoe and lay it on the cool marble floor, which had by now stopped moving.

'Are you feeling better?'

'I wasn't sick, was I?'

‘No. I meant tired.’

‘Oh. Yes. Thank you.’

The waiter came back with our drinks, a gin and tonic for me, and I escaped for a moment into the bitter taste. Halton reached across the space between our chairs, took my hand, turned it over so the palm faced upward, then traced the line between my thumb and my forefinger that the gypsies call your lifeline. I felt the same thrill I’d felt seeing him outside. My palms felt sweaty and I didn’t want him to notice so I took my hand back. He sipped his drink.

‘Don’t worry about Miss Pope. I’m sure she will be all right. I’ve had men try to—’

‘How on earth can I not worry? It’s my job to worry.’

I’d spoken too harshly and gulped my drink to cover up the overreaction. Doctors were supposed to remain cool and in control, and I was the opposite. I took another gulp and almost finished the gin.

‘Slow down, Doc. You’ll get drunk if you’re not careful.’

On the way back to the boat, we stopped into the Post Office so Halton could collect the ship’s mail. I wanted to stay in the sun for as long as possible so I waited for him on the street, enjoying the gin buzz in my head and watching the show crowds promenade along Flinders Street and up onto The Strand. One man in particular caught my attention, most probably because he walked with a limp from a shortened leg or scoliosis. He was well dressed in a flannel suit and a hat and reminded me of Glynn but, as he got closer, I noticed he was an Oriental. I had heard there were Orientals in Townsville, but the fact of his slanted eyes beneath that hat gave me a

little start. Maybe I had expected him to be in a bamboo cone. He nodded at me and, suddenly, I remembered Glynn.

There would be a letter from Glynn; it would be postmarked England and Halton would ask me about it. Nothing had passed between us, except perhaps the way he'd held my hand earlier in the hotel, but there was already an understanding, a heightened frequency the spiritualists might have called it, and I didn't want him to know about Glynn.

I went to go into the Post Office, thinking I'd take the letter before he'd had the chance to read the back of it, but then that would only raise his suspicions further. I could just say it was from a colleague in London, someone at the maternity hospital who was helping me find a room. Relaxed by the thought, I closed my eyes to the sun and slowed my breathing down. I was getting neurotic about everything. I'd have a breakdown myself soon, if I didn't stop. I prepared myself for the letter from Glynn, ground my heels into the ground, so when Halton emerged from the darkened arches of the Post Office it took me a moment to understand what he was saying.

'You have a telegram from Sydney.'

Ever since the war, a telegram had meant death, and he held his arm behind my back as if he were worried I was going to collapse. He was thinking of Dad or Mother or a friend maybe. But I knew straight away it was Mr Connolly: he'd found out I was on a ship, travelling and living my life, while his wife and baby were dead. I had thought that only my conscience could follow me across the ocean.

Halton put his hand on my back. 'It might be nothing. Why don't you wait till you read it?' He led me to a bench under the Post Office awnings. It was cold in the shade of the verandah and I began to shiver. 'Do you want me to read it for you?'

‘No.’ I tore the side off and pulled out the note. It was from Jean. I was in such a rush to know the bad news, I got confused by the vertical bars on the page, which split the sentences into babble. *Inquiry Stop Witness Evelyn Connolly Stop Death Coroner Stop advice.*

‘What is it?’

I didn’t know what it was.

‘Has someone died?’

‘Yes. A patient. A patient died.’

He smiled. ‘Oh, thank goodness. I thought it was someone close. You went completely green.’

I read the telegram again, ignoring the lines, forcing myself to go from left to right. *Coroner’s inquest re: Evelyn Connolly death. Stop. Drs called as witnesses. Stop. Refer to earlier advice. Stop.* It was from Jean, my best friend, who worked at the hospital with me. *Thank God*, I thought. *Thank you thank you thank you, God.* I didn’t believe in God, but I had to thank something that at least the inquest hadn’t tracked me down or subpoenaed me or whatever they did.

When I’d worried about going away, Jean had said the *Delphic* was a good idea. I should go away till everything settled down. Only it wasn’t settling down. I felt like I could scramble out of my own throat. There was going to be an inquest. I couldn’t penetrate the idea beyond that. It was like a wall beyond which my consciousness couldn’t go. I was vaguely aware that I shouldn’t have let Halton see the telegram, or let him see me so upset by it. I could not deny having got it now, unless he became part of the lie. At least he hadn’t read it.

He grabbed my free hand. ‘You’re frightening me. What’s happened?’

I forced myself to smile and crumpled the telegram up in my other hand. ‘Nothing, really. Just a flat I was counting on for London has fallen through.’ I needed some space to think everything out. I hadn’t been called by the inquest. I hadn’t received a formal summons. I might not even have known about it if it weren’t for Jean’s telegram. And, if the ship left port soon, I’d be at sea when they did call me.

‘When do we leave Townsville again?’

‘Thursday.’

It was only Monday. There were two more days for the inquest to catch me, possibly three.

‘Thursday morning?’

‘Well it depends on the loading, and the tides. Why do you want to know?’

I forced another smile. ‘Just thinking of Miss Pope.’

I wasn’t thinking of Eve at all. I was thinking about myself and how I would escape any telegrams that might find me while I was in Townsville. But then, as I said her name, I did think of her again. My worry compounded upon itself. It extended beyond the confines of my body and right out into the warping glare of the sunlight and the pulsing footpath. The blood flooded into my head and made my vision opaque at the edges so that I had to grab onto the palings of the Post Office fence. The world seemed to be ending. Eve would die and there would be a public outcry and then someone would notice that the doctor who was responsible for Miss Pope was responsible for Mrs Connolly.

The splintered edges of the pickets felt good under my palms. The piercing of my skin was comforting; it confirmed a reality outside myself.

‘What are you doing?’

I looked down at my palms. There were nicks and flecks of white paint like a strange rash. Halton grabbed my right wrist and picked three splinters out of the palm with his fingernails. Then he did the left. His face was only an inch or two away and I could hear him clicking his tongue as he took the splinters out. I could see the cut he'd made in his cheek shaving that morning.

‘Are you all right?’

I nodded. He opened the fence and tried to usher me back into the Post Office. He wanted to take me back in to get some plasters, but I managed to convince him to take me back to the Ship. After all, I had a whole medicine chest there and the cuts weren't bad. Just a few little splinters. And we had to try and get Eve drunk before the police arrived.

Chapter Seven

We didn't even get to see Eve before the police arrived. I knocked on her cabin door, but Miss Rodwell answered and said Eve was sleeping. I tried to get in anyway, to ask if I could just check up on her, but Miss Rodwell kept the door open just a few inches, as if she thought I'd try to force my way in. I comforted myself with the knowledge I'd be doing that soon enough anyway.

The police came just after seven o'clock, when we were still having dinner in the saloon. Eve still hadn't come out of her cabin. I knew they'd arrived when Bowyer walked straight over to the Master and whispered in his ear. The Old Man looked at me and nodded, very slightly. But Miss Rodwell, who was sharing a table with him, knew something was up. She got up quickly from her seat and made for the door.

'Miss Rodwell,' the Master stood up.

She turned around, her hand on the swing doors. She looked at the Master then her eyes found me. 'What have you done?'

‘Miss Rodwell.’ The Master walked over, took her arm and pushed the door open. He lifted his chin at me, signalling for me to follow them. The police car was down on the jetty. Miss Rodwell flung the Master’s hand away.

‘Let’s talk about this in my dayroom,’ the Master said.

‘I need to see my niece first. Where are the police? I hope you haven’t let them into the room. That would be trespass.’

‘No, no. Of course not.’

There were voices coming up the stairs and then the heads of Bowyer and the third mate appeared, followed by the Constable and another policeman. He was young, with red hair. He looked too skinny to be able to restrain anyone. Miss Rodwell looked at the police then at the saloon door, which had just swung open again to show Halton with the Lawtons and Mr Chilvers behind him.

‘Wonderful,’ Miss Rodwell said. ‘My brother-in-law will be so pleased to hear about this visit. Delighted.’ She spat the words.

I felt the Master tense beside me.

‘Mr Halton. Please accompany us to Miss Rodwell’s stateroom. Mr Chilvers, Mr Bowyer, take care of Mr and Mrs Lawton. Constable, if you would follow me.’

But Miss Rodwell had marched off already and disappeared into the corridor that led to our cabins. She wanted to warn Eve, put her on guard. I rushed after her, telling the others to hurry up.

We lagged only by a moment or so, but it was long enough for her to look at Eve in that way she had. And that warning look had a miraculous effect. When we came in, Eve was sitting up at the writing desk, brushing her hair. There were pinch marks on her cheeks and a drop of water on her lips. She got up as we came in.

‘Hello, Doc. Hello, Master and Mr Halton and ... oh, some policemen!’ She smiled and motioned for us to sit on the beds. None of us did. I moved closer to the portholes so we could all fit in the room and Halton and the Old Man followed me. The Constable and his man stood in between Eve and Miss Rodwell, who was still in the open doorway.

‘I’m sorry, you’ve caught me in my dressing gown. I’ve had a bit of a headache today. But what can I do for you?’

‘Yes, Constable, what do you want?’ Miss Rodwell said.

‘Well, Miss Pope. The doctor here tells me you tried to jump off the ship last night.’

Eve laughed shyly. ‘I suppose it might have looked like that. Yes. I was a bit silly. Drank too much. All the excitement, you know. A holiday and all that. And I was trying to see the dolphins.’

‘Dolphins.’

‘Yes. They came the first, or no, the second night. Didn’t they, Doc? We watched them together. Anyway, I wanted to see them again, but I’d had too much to drink and my shoe fell off and I think Doc thought—’ she twisted in her chair and smiled at me. ‘I’m sorry, dear. That must have been awful for you.’

She was a completely different person. Measured, demure, charming. The change was chilling.

‘You tried to jump, Eve. Mr Halton saw it, too. And Bowyer.’ Everyone was looking at me. ‘Didn’t you, Mr Halton?’

He looked at me then at the Constable. ‘It certainly looked like that to me.’

‘But you couldn’t be sure?’

‘Yes. I’m sure.’

Eve laughed. ‘Oh goodness. What on earth did I say?’

I started to remind her about how she’d said it was expected of her, and how she’d talked about *hara-kiri*, but none of it made any sense. And she hadn’t ever said the words *I’m going to kill myself*, only vague sentences that could have meant anything.

The Constable was talking to Miss Rodwell. ‘The doctor thinks your niece ought to be hospitalised. Says she’s likely to hurt herself. I could take her into the Reception House, if you make a petition to the judge—’

Miss Rodwell smiled. ‘Why on earth would I do that? You can see for yourself, my niece is perfectly fine. It’s all been a misunderstanding.’

The Constable looked over at me with a look that said, *I tried*, even though he hadn’t tried at all. He apologised to Eve for the intrusion. Miss Rodwell made eye contact with me and her eyes gleamed in the dull cabin light. As the Constable turned back, she became the loving aunt again.

‘I would never do anything to put my niece in danger, Constable.’

The Constable and his policeman left, accompanied by Halton and Bowyer. The Master and I stayed with Miss Rodwell and Eve.

‘I really wouldn’t let Eve stay on board if I thought she was in danger, you know.’

The Master put up his hand. ‘Of course, you wouldn’t but—’

‘The whole point of this trip is to cure her of her nerves. Putting her in a gaol won’t help at all.’

I felt Eve’s eyes on me. She was still sitting twisted around in her dressing table chair. She smiled at me apologetically then turned to face the mirror and got a

cigarette out of a case on the dresser. The fresh smoke over the top of the stale, fleshy smell of the room reminded me of dissection classes. She looked at herself in the mirror and smoked as we talked about whether she was going to kill herself.

‘If she is to stay aboard, she needs to be treated by Doctor Fraser.’

Miss Rodwell shook her head. ‘No.’

I couldn’t help myself. ‘I don’t see why you would object to my treating her—
,

The Master spoke quietly. ‘Surely having her under a doctor’s care—’

Miss Rodwell, who had been standing the whole time, walked over to her bed and lowered herself onto it. ‘I would not object to her,’ she looked over at Eve then back at the Master, ‘getting help with sleep. But I do not want Doctor Fraser doing a psychiatric session or psychoanalysis or anything else she is, frankly, not qualified for.’

‘But how am I to treat her if I don’t know what’s wrong?’

‘I have told you what’s wrong: she has a case of nerves. That is all. You, looking around for some dark reason behind it all, will not help her cure. Forgetting about herself will.’

The Old Man looked at his watch. ‘It’s getting late.’ He stood up. ‘I will make it a condition of Miss Pope staying on the ship that she check in with Doctor Fraser.’

‘I—’

He put up his hand. ‘Just to ensure she is sleeping and not,’ he looked over at Eve, who was still smoking at herself in the mirror, ‘in distress. If you wish, Miss Rodwell, you may be present for these check-ins.’

‘I believe your Chairman will be most unhappy to hear that you have put conditions on our passage. Indeed, I suspect he will put some conditions on *your* passage when I contact him tomorrow.’

The Master closed his eyes and I imagined his thoughts: It was close to nine o’clock and he was close to retirement. There was cargo to be loaded and delivered so he could make a profit for the Company. There were men to look after. It was not his job to look after some society girl.

‘Fine, Miss Rodwell,’ he said. ‘We will adhere to your wishes. Doctor Fraser will not treat your niece. But I would be obliged if you could sign a waiver absolving us of all responsibility if—’

Miss Rodwell laughed sharply. ‘Yes, that’s what it’s about, isn’t it? If you wish.’

I followed the Master out of the stateroom.

‘We tried,’ he said as he left me at the door of my cabin.

I took phenobarbital that night.

I could hardly keep my eyes open at breakfast, which might have been a blessing. Only the Lawtons were there when I arrived. Mrs Lawton started whispering at me as soon as I came in.

‘What happened last night? We saw a policeman. And I thought I heard, though Mr Lawton tells me I couldn’t have, I thought I heard something about Miss Pope trying to jump—’

The doors swung open and Miss Rodwell walked in, Eve behind her. They sat down at the other table and Miss Rodwell glared at me. Eve looked at the tablecloth. We ate in silence after that, until Chilvers came in and tried to engage Eve and Miss

Rodwell. Mr Lawton had got a copy of the *Townsville Bulletin* in town the day before and asked me if I'd like a section. I scoured the news pages quickly: nothing about Mrs Connolly and the inquest. The Master came in after half an hour and said something in a low voice to Miss Rodwell before coming over to tell me, in an equally low voice, that there was to be a meeting in his dayroom after breakfast.

'To sign the waiver,' he said.

'This is getting very tiresome,' Miss Rodwell said as she bent over the Master's desk to read the waiver he'd written. She took a few moments then scratched a signature at the bottom. Then it was Eve's turn.

'What about Doc?' she said.

'What do you mean?' the Master said.

'This says that the Company and the crew won't be held responsible. But what about Doc? She shouldn't be either.'

'For God's sake, Eve, nothing will happen. Just sign the form,' Miss Rodwell stepped over to the desk and stabbed at it with her finger.

I had felt that all the injustice had been directed at me. I'd felt I was the one threatened, abused, at risk of losing a patient. But Eve was at risk of being lost. She was still in the same nightgown from last night and it looked dirty in daylight.

I told Eve it was all right. 'I'm part of the crew, so I'm covered that way.'

She smiled at me, Miss Rodwell still leaning over the waiver at her right shoulder, like a dark angel.

After the waiver-signing, I took more phenobarbital so I could get through to the afternoon. The worry over Eve had partly subsided, but there was still the inquest. I

promised myself I'd stop taking the drugs as soon as we escaped Townsville, but I didn't think about what I'd do if a summons arrived for me. I had asked Bowyer to tell me if he was going to the Post Office, and when he hadn't been by lunchtime, I went myself. I didn't want anyone to intercept a message for me. There was a large pile of mail for the *Delphic*; I stood at the counter and skimmed through it. There were more than 20 envelopes, but only one for me. It was from Glynn.

'There's no other mail for the *Delphic*? D-E-L—'

The man behind the counter shook his head.

'Can you check again?'

'You expecting something?'

'Yes, sort of. Could you check for me? That there are no telegrams or anything?'

He went back out to the sorting room and made a show of peering into the empty pigeonholes, which were in view of the doorway. He came back out.

'No, Miss. As I said, nothing there.'

Nothing there.

'I never seen someone so happy at not getting a letter.'

As he said it, I realised I'd been too conspicuous. He'd remember me now, remember how relieved I was not to get a letter: it was proof I'd known about the inquest.

I went straight to Buchanan's for a drink. I was alone on the second-storey balcony, hidden from the street by the fussy iron filigree that covered the verandah. I let myself cry quietly with my tissue held just beneath my eyes. There was no way of crying on board ship. Someone could always be listening at the door or be about to come around the corner, and then there was the Ship herself. She saw everything.

That night, Halton arranged a party to go into town to see the motorcycle champion, Putt Mossman. He and his troupe were performing in the Show's main arena. Everyone wanted to come, but the Master and Halton and I had another motive. We would try to get Eve drunk so the police would have to pick her up. It was a last attempt to get her off the ship.

The wooden benches around the arena were full when we arrived and our little party from the *Delphic* had to divide between two. Halton, Eve, the Lawtons and I were on one bench; Miss Rodwell, Mr Chilvers and the Master sat two rows in front. Mrs Lawton did try to carry on a shouted conversation but no one could hear her to begin with and, after the motorcycles started, she gave up. The roar obliterated everything.

Mossman rode like a madman. He put a hessian bag over his head and used a broom handle to guide himself along the white fence that separated the arena from the spectators. He had a lady stand on his shoulders as he rode. He attached a six-rung wooden ladder to the motorcycle seat then climbed up and down as the driverless machine roared around the track.

He'd spent his whole life doing this: thinking of ways to ride his motorcycle more and more dangerously. At some point, he would have to fall off and break a leg. If he was lucky. If he wasn't lucky, he'd break his neck and be paralysed for good. It seemed so idiotic: such a perfectly good man, so able bodied, not damaged in the war, to risk himself like that. Here he was, deliberately courting death and being feted as a hero, while I, who tried everywhere to stop it and to help, was being hounded. He had a lot of lovers, too, according to the newspapers. They must have been very brave or very stupid.

I looked around at the others. With their open mouths, they looked like the clowns in a sideshow alley, turning to and fro, waiting for someone to choke them with a ball. Eve was leaning forward just like the others. Whatever had been worrying her seemed forgotten. So, whatever had been causing her nerves could be affected by external circumstances, which meant it had to be psychological, rather than organic. It may have involved an inciting incident. Eve felt herself being watched then, and looked over at me, mouth still open, then she smiled and turned back to the show.

Afterwards, we caught taxicabs back to the Queens. Buchanan's was closer to the police station, but much rougher, not the kind of place you could take first-class passengers. We got a table, but could only find two chairs, which were given to Miss Rodwell and Mrs Lawton. Mr Lawton and Mr Chilvers were talking with the Master, and Halton was off getting drinks, so I asked Eve what she thought of the show. It was awkward. She looked at me in a guarded way, as though I was going to hurt her.

While I was still at the University and Dad was up in Sydney, seeing specialists after the stroke, he came to visit me in College. I was standing on the steps with Maida Gough when he appeared, hobbling across the lawn towards us. Maida had winced at the sight of him, as if he were the hunchback of Notre Dame. I made some excuse about needing something inside so I wouldn't have to say hello to him with Maida still around, so I wouldn't have to admit he was my father. After she'd gone, I went out from the side of College and quickly brought him to my room. Dad pretended he hadn't noticed, but the look in his eyes reminded me of a dog that had been kicked by its master. He wouldn't let me give him my arm for support. He just struggled away on his cane, ashamed of his limp, his jaw bulging with the effort of trying to lessen it, a dribble of sweat rolling down behind his beautiful felty ear.

I pushed the memory away and forced myself to assess Eve. She told me in a clear strong voice that she loved the show. There was no apathy in her manner, nor any mania. She smoked but otherwise displayed no abnormal degree of activity. Her nails were clean and the fresh cherry-coloured paint was unchipped. Her dress was neat with all the buttons done up, the lapel sitting flat. There were no creases. She had no tremors, no abnormality of gait.

‘Are you all right?’

‘Hm?’

‘You’re examining me.’

‘Oh. Sorry.’

‘I really am all right, you know.’

Eve grinned at me like the old Eve would have. As though the night before and the jumping overboard and Brisbane had never happened. I should have been happy that she seemed well, but I wasn’t. I needed to get her off the Ship. I needed to get her drunk enough for the police to pick her up and hold her in the Reception House until the psychiatrist came to assess her. Halton had ordered champagne but Eve hadn’t touched it. He proposed a toast to Mr Mossman and another to the *Delphic*, but Eve, though she lifted the glass, didn’t bring it to her lips. She put it back down and asked the waiter to bring her a mineral water. Nervous disorders do wax and wane. But it seemed so unlikely she’d have an acute episode and then, overnight, be perfectly all right. It was too convenient to be mad in the middle of nowhere and suddenly sane when you were out in public. Organic nervous disorders weren’t controllable and most psychological ones weren’t either.

We picked through Mr Mossman’s tricks, talked about the goats, which were all over Townsville, wondered where the Townsville people got their clothes and

through it all, Eve's glass, the one with the champagne in it, stayed full. After an hour or so, it must have been past 10.30 p.m., I said I had a headache and had to go to bed. It was an inconvenience for everyone because it meant they all had to go back, too, unless Halton was happy to row me back then return, which, thankfully, he was. I knew that if I stayed any longer to watch Eve not drinking, to imagine her jumping and my hands stretching to catch her, too late, trying to grasp hold of a silk train or chiffon bow, I wouldn't be able to keep my nerves hidden.

Halton and I walked back to the jetty without speaking but, at some point, he took my hand and I didn't pull away. Neurosis is a bit like vertigo, or a centrifugal suction dragging you into darkness and away from the ordinary and everyday. I pretended I was holding his hand just to stay anchored to the everyday. I pretended not to feel his finger stroking mine. We got into the rowboat and he pushed off from the jetty.

'There was only a chance, you know.'

I could tell he was disappointed but he only knew the tiniest detail of the dilemma I now faced. I was stuck aboard a ship with a woman I couldn't save, running from a woman I hadn't saved, and that was what I was meant to do. Save people. That was what doctors were for. And I couldn't do it. There were millions of stars that night and I tried to imagine myself in comparison to them: insignificant, momentary, but the facts of my life had exploded through the border of my person to infect the whole world, even the stars. Even the sound of the oars being swallowed by the water seemed sinister and, when the ship came into view, a sheet of blackness against the starry night, I couldn't shake the feeling that she had stood there, on purpose, for me.

Wednesday, our last full day in Townsville. The postman knew me as soon as I walked in the door.

‘Nope. Nothing. No telegram. You’re all right.’

I walked out onto Flinders Street and lifted my face to the sun. There was a dragging feeling in my gut. I’d expected to feel relieved. But the inquest would just find me in the next port. Or have someone radio the Master. They probably wouldn’t make me appear by then—the inquiry would be over before I could get back to Sydney. But the Old Man wouldn’t want me anymore. And maybe I’d be arrested for running from an inquest. A goat walked past me then stopped, lifted its tail and defecated. I almost laughed.

When Halton came to my stateroom that afternoon and told me we should go into town, because it was the last time we’d be on land for weeks, I agreed.

Townsville’s lights were clustered at the base of Castle Hill like phosphorescence at the bow of a ship and, as we got closer to land, the darkness grew, blocking out more stars. As we walked up from the jetty to Flinders Street, I remembered the goat and laughed properly this time.

‘What’s funny?’

I couldn’t stop laughing. Halton stopped and looked at me.

‘Are you laughing at me?’

The laughter had taken hold of me, like contractions took over a woman in childbirth; it convulsed me and opened me and wouldn’t be stopped.

‘I’ll have to shut you up, you know.’

It was past eight o’clock but all the shops and hotels were still open, still full of show crowds in their best dresses and suits, though getting dusty now. A man had

gone to sleep against the wall of the Bartlam's building, hat in his hand. The goats were still wandering about. I kept laughing until Halton kissed me.

Chapter Eight

Eve wasn't better. That was clear a day out from Townsville. And I wasn't allowed to treat her. Not properly. So I wrote notes.

Unmarried woman, 27, above-average intelligence, severe anxiety/melancholia. Suicide attempt(s). Believed to be an only child. Daughter of well-known businessman. Father now unmarried. Widowed?? Patient in the care of an aunt, father's sister, aged early- to mid-40s. Conditions of infancy, schooling, etc. unknown.

Care of person and appearance generally good. Nail biting. Prevailing affect of depression and apathy with periods of excitement/theatricality. Doesn't eat. Alcoholism?

Previous attacks of mental disorder??

I felt like a child playing make-believe, but there was nothing else I could do so I kept writing. I put down everything I could remember from Dawson's chapter on case taking, all the things that could lead to madness: an age gap between mother and father, poor relations with siblings, privation, a traumatic experience in childhood, trouble with schooling, trouble with a childhood nurse, extra-marital relations, marital relations, masturbation, lack of intimacy, intimacy, too much ambition, too little ambition. It was a wonder the whole world wasn't mad.

As I wrote *childhood trauma*, there was Dad, lying on the kitchen floor, twitching and frothing at the mouth, Mother screaming at me to get Dr Byrne. Father with aphasia, closing the practice and walking up Peel Street to visit Mr Hughes, limping on his cane, me trying not to skip ahead because that would just make him feel like more of an invalid. *Privation*, I wrote, and there were the potatoes and potato soup for dinner and the new house in Morton Street where we slept on the verandah and where Cilla slapped me on the hand for complaining of the cold, but then hugged me and said 'there, there, chook, just climb in with me, why don't you?' *Mother, father, family relationships*. Mother, who used to laugh, and married Dad even though people said he was fast; Mother, who used to stand so straight in her black blouses with the puffed sleeves and who stood up in the Town Hall and said women should be able to go to the University and Australia should only take the best immigrants, there was mother growing lines on her forehead and taking in sewing from Mrs Byrne, the doctor's wife. *Shame, ambition, thwarted wills*. And me learning to cross my feet, one over the other, so the other children wouldn't see the holes in the toe of the shoe that had been Cilla's and Jane's and Faith's before mine. And Miss Webb, the school teacher, noticing and telling me not to worry, because I was clever and clever meant I

wouldn't always have holes in my shoes. And I wrote and thought: *These things are just life. They don't send you mad.*

But there were other things I remembered from Dawson, darker things, things that Freud and his colleagues went on about and which I felt filthy even thinking of: *incest, oedipal drives*. I remembered the matter-of-fact way Dawson spoke about them in the lecture hall, and how the boys in the row behind, the same boys who teased us about peroxidizing our hair, were suddenly talking about sexual desires for your father or mother without even blinking. I told myself I was a doctor and wrote: *latent sexual desires?* and then I wrote: *guilt over sinful thoughts*; then I caught myself and scribbled it out. Sin didn't come into medicine. Guilt, maybe. I thought again of Mrs Connolly and her baby and pushed the thought away. I pushed it away and pushed it away but it bobbed there, refusing to go under until, eventually, I gave in and took some more phenobarb, but just enough so I could function.

Professor Dawson's book suggested diagnostic tests such as word associations and dream analysis and even hypnosis, but these were out of the question if Miss Rodwell wouldn't even let me have sessions with Eve. I thought word associations might be possible if I pretended it were a parlour game, but couldn't see how it would help anyway. For example, it took me three seconds to think of 'fork' after writing 'knife', but I had no idea what that said about my state of mind. Dawson said a normal reaction should only take two seconds and that a delay of more than four indicated a complex of some kind, as did a failure to respond. Also: a senseless reaction, a repetition of 'fork', the same reaction to lots of different words, using a phrase or an explanation instead of a single word and misunderstanding the stimulus. He didn't say what kind of complex though. I put down my pencil, went out on deck

and lifted my head, let the sun shine blood-red through my closed eyelids, let the vibration of the Ship's engine hum through my legs and up into my temples.

It was half-past three and, down on the main deck just aft of the bridge, the men had strung up a pool. The Lawtons and Miss Rodwell bobbed around in it like it was a huge bath. Mrs Lawton's cheeks bulged from her too-tight bathing cap. Eve and Chilvers were sitting in deck chairs on opposite sides of the pool, which meant Chilvers had arrived first—otherwise he would have been next to her like the limpet he was. Eve had flung a pale forearm over her eyes and I saw, with a wave of nausea, a scar running from her radial artery, elbow to wrist. It was the kind of cut that killed ordinarily and I wondered why it hadn't killed Eve. Just then, as if she were aware of me watching her, Eve tugged the sleeve of her silk bathing wrap up to her wrist.

I wiped the sweat from my lip and raised my arms just slightly, hoping for a return of the sea breeze that had died. My blouse was soggy and my legs slimy like I'd wet myself. I checked no one was watching and wiped my calves dry with a handkerchief then wiped up under my skirt. I thought about leaving clinic early. I wasn't accomplishing anything. I was just inventing things, writing for the sake of writing. And down there I could at least ask Eve about her wrist while Miss Rodwell was busy doing her calisthenics. I could ask Eve why she wanted to kill herself. Or why she was pretending to want to kill herself because I hadn't ruled out malingering, despite the scar. A rich, bored girl with nothing to do ... I cracked my neck, turned to lock the clinic but then the ship creaked, a long slow screech, like a fingernail being dragged across a blackboard. I thought I wouldn't go to the pool after all. I had a ridiculous premonition that, as soon as I left the Clinic, one of the men would be injured. They'd be burnt in the engine room or cut by a swinging wire or have a finger severed. They'd fall into an open refrigerator three storeys down and break their back.

I knew the moment I let down my guard would be the moment something would happen. It was stupid and unscientific, but I couldn't shake the sense that the Ship was waiting to catch me out.

It took me a moment to recognise Halton out of uniform and in his black bathing trunks. He'd stopped to talk to Chilvers, who was trying to cover his flabby stomach with his book. Then Halton moved on to Eve, who was still hidden under her arm, which was hidden under the robe, everything tucked away, concealed. He dropped his towel on the end of her deck chair. It seemed lascivious somehow, the way he let it fall, as if he was putting out a challenge. Eve lowered her arm to talk to him and he took her hand and helped her out of the chair. She let the wrap slip from her shoulders for him to catch and I felt like I was watching something I shouldn't, then I was angry at them for making me feel that way. They walked over to the pool and, even though the ladder was barely six-foot high, Halton put his hand on Eve's back as she climbed up it. I wondered if he was trying to make her fall in love with him. For all their talk about being objective and sensible, men couldn't maintain detachment, even when it was a matter of life and death; I'd seen it often enough at the hospital. He was powerless before a pale, helpless body like Eve's; some germ plasm in him couldn't resist the urge to save. It was just nature. He couldn't help himself. And I couldn't blame him for the way he was made. He took a run-up and vaulted himself into the pool in a single movement, splashing everyone. A peacock fanning his tail.

I was so absorbed in the display that I didn't notice the Master approaching. He was almost right beside me when I finally saw him. I flushed at being caught spying like that, my desire and jealousy naked and on show. *Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid.* One of the portholes reflected the sun like the beginnings of a migraine.

‘It’s a pity we couldn’t get the police to take her in.’

I heard his comment as a criticism. I should have managed it.

‘Is there a way—’

‘To keep her from jumping? No. Not really.’

Sweat trickled down my stomach into my waistband and the porthole flashed again. *Maybe it was a migraine.*

‘You know, I wouldn’t have let her on if I’d had any idea. It was the Company Manager who booked them. *Keep them happy*, that’s all I was told. I found out they’re paying an awful lot.’

‘For what?’

He laughed, but I hadn’t meant it as a joke. If they were paying more than ordinary customers then they had to be expecting more, but Miss Rodwell and Eve were still sharing a cabin, even though there was one spare. So what were they getting for their money?

‘Keep them happy, no matter what. That’s what the Manager said.’

‘What does that mean, do you think?’

The Master shook his head. He stuck his forefinger in his mouth then up into the air to check which way the wind was blowing. ‘I thought it had to do with their luggage. They have a lot. And they wanted some of it in the freezer.’ He stepped closer to the railing and I followed his gaze to the pool, where pink faces bobbed in water darkened by the black oilcloth that contained it.

‘Can you keep her sedated?’

‘No. Not the whole way. Not without dangers.’

He exhaled through his nose and put his hands on the rail.

‘You’ll have to treat her. Despite what her aunt says. Try to do it as a friend, if you can. Don’t bother about running the clinic unless someone needs you, just see if you can get to the bottom of all this without making it seem like you’re—’

‘Being a doctor.’

‘Yes.’

I had a speck of light in my vision. I shut my left eye, then the right, trying to work out whether it was the ship or the headache, then I realised the Master was watching my strange routine. Something had changed between the Old Man and me. He seemed, for the first time, to be treating me as an equal or at least as he might have treated a male doctor. He wanted me to treat Eve without Miss Rodwell realising. The dread rose in me. It would have been easier to sedate her all the way to London.

Miss Rodwell laughed then, improbably, a hard staccato laugh that floated across the deck and up to where we stood outside the clinic. I wondered if her eyebrows were waterproof.

‘Go and have a swim. I’ll call if there are any emergencies.’

I checked myself in the cabin mirror before I went down: ran my eyes over Mother’s thick yellow hair, her proud cheekbones and my hockey-strong arms and thighs. I was not the kind of girl who’d collapse at the first sign of a cold. It was a pity about the glasses. Nobody wore spectacles in the ‘Come to Australia’ advertisements. I peeled them off and was reduced to a pinkish smudge. I’d never make it to the pool without them. It was a stupid thing to worry about anyway, considering everything. I put the glasses back on and pulled my cheap cotton bathing wrap around my waist. Just as I was about to go out the door, I turned back and got a quarter-grain tablet, then locked the door behind me.

I'd climbed up the ladder and perched on the edge of the pool before the others even noticed me. Halton, when he eventually saw me, waved and shouted at me to come in. I dipped a toe in the water, waiting for the cool, but I couldn't feel a thing. I thrust my foot deeper, all the way up to my shin, but still there was no relief. The pool had only been up a few hours and, already, the water was as warm as the air. The others waded over, pink-skinned, their damp hair sticking to their cheeks under rubber bathing hats. They looked like they'd been boiled and I thought of what Dad used to say, the best way to boil a frog was to do it slowly in the pot, rather than just chucking them into the already boiling water—that way, they didn't notice the temperature rising.

'Come in. It's refreshing.'

I ignored his hand and slid in on my own. It was not refreshing at all. Halton splashed me and covered my glasses in drops of water so I couldn't see properly. I took them off to clean them but then realised I didn't have anything to wipe them with. He said he was sorry, but I could hear him laughing. I concentrated on the water so I wouldn't look at the wrong place on his face and show him how blind I was. When I put my glasses back on, everything was blurred and watery, and I hadn't taken enough phenobarb to stop me from feeling like I wanted to hit him right across his stupid grin. As if he had heard me thinking, he leant over and took my glasses. 'You look very pretty without them. But you're as blind as a bat, aren't you?'

The others were all clustering around me, too, but I couldn't work out which pink blob was who. I smiled in their general direction and wished Halton would hurry up, then he was fitting the spectacles back around my ears as though he were my mother and it wasn't his fault, they were wet in the first place. I swatted his hand away and finished adjusting them myself. They all asked me whether it wasn't lovely

in the water, all except Eve, then Miss Rodwell and the Lawtons went back to doing some sort of calisthenics. Miss Rodwell was teaching them. They twisted back and forth and circled their arms and looked stupid, but at least they were occupied.

‘It’s not that refreshing, actually. Shall we get out?’ I hit Halton on the thigh as I said it, hoping he’d get the message and understand what I was trying to do. He seemed to, because he said he was getting out. He had to get back to the bridge and check on the third mate.

‘Shall we get out, Eve?’

She bobbed under the surface of the water and stayed under long enough for Halton and I to raise our eyebrows at one another, then she resurfaced.

‘Ready.’

After we’d dried off and Halton had left, we pulled our deck chairs over to the port-side railing so we could watch out for land. Eve lay back, placing her arms carefully by her sides, sleeves held tight, palms facing down and closed her eyes, leaving me alone. We couldn’t see the land after all. There was no end to the blue sea, or the blue sky, dotted here and there with benign cotton wool. The beauty of the afternoon and Eve’s beauty and her wrists, all of it, made me feel almost unbearably sad, so that I didn’t know how I’d speak, let alone get a history from Eve. But then there was a splash and the echo of a jumping fish patterned the water and the sadness was gone. I thought of what I needed to ask first, of what was the most important thing to know, but it all seemed important: family history, previous attacks, ideation, delusions. Any one of those things could tell me what it was that was trying to kill her. *Just start*, I told myself.

‘Are you missing home yet?’

Eve’s eyes were closed. ‘No.’

‘Family?’

‘There’s only Father.’

‘Is he very strict?’

She shifted in her chair. *Mm-ed*. Her eyes were still closed.

Another splash in the water and more concentric circles. Sound waves written in the ocean. The gulls would come soon.

‘How long will you stay in London for?’

Eve made a noise from somewhere deep inside her chest.

‘I’m not coming back.’

‘Have you got somewhere to stay, then? Some relatives or something?’

She opened her eyes and looked over at me. I realised she wasn’t talking about London. Something on my face must have betrayed the realisation because she pressed her lips and drew her knees up to her chest, as though she had just remembered I was a doctor, not a friend. We stared at one another, like dogs circling, then I squinted back over my shoulder at the pool. Through the glare of sunlight, I could see Miss Rodwell wading towards the ladder. There was no point pretending to be Eve’s friend. No time. I needed to be the doctor.

‘Are you feeling better?’ I asked her quietly. ‘After the other day, I mean.’

Eve nodded.

‘It must be hard to be without your usual doctor.’

Miss Rodwell was climbing the ladder.

‘Usual doctor?’

‘Your psychiatrist.’

‘I don’t have one of those.’

A few feet away, Miss Rodwell stared at me as she towelled herself.

‘Who do you talk to about your worries?’

‘I don’t. Aunt says it’s better not to ... better just to take my pills.’

‘Pills?’

‘Yes.’ And then Miss Rodwell was standing between us, towel over her shoulder, hands on her hips. One of her eyebrows was smudged.

Chapter Nine

I found out why Eve was sick somewhere between Townsville and Wyndham. I say found out, but that's misleading. It makes it sound like I had something to do with the discovery, like it was some skill or talent of mine that uncovered it. It was just chance.

The days in between Townsville and Wyndham were indistinguishable, never-ending. The sun was so unrelenting it became a darkness of its own—it ate away at everything, turning the shipboards into salt and bone.

She only came out for meals now so the difference in her appearance, which might have been subtle if I was seeing her all the time, was doubly shocking. The ditches under her eyes were like the ones people got in the Depression. And her affect was so like that of a war neurotic, I started to think she must have suffered some great trauma and that was what was causing her illness. She sat without speaking, spooning food around her plate, staring at the tablecloth or out the windows, watching something completely different from the reality in front of her.

Apart from her appearance, I didn't have any clues about her state of mind because Miss Rodwell kept her close, blocking her whenever she looked like she was

going to come and sit with me or shutting her up whenever she threatened to speak. Ever since the day by the pool, when I'd confronted Miss Rodwell for lying about Eve having a psychiatrist, I was the enemy. Not that Miss Rodwell had responded to my accusations, she'd just stared down at me in that imperious way she had until I was on my feet, yapping at her like an angry little dog. Then Eve was apologising and saying it was her fault and, yes, she did have a doctor.

'My silly old brain. I just forgot. Yes, yes. Doctor, Doctor ... oh, I forget his name. I do go and see him, talk, a lot.'

Miss Rodwell had been almost completely still. So still, I almost didn't notice the way she pressed the fingernail of her index finger into her thumb so hard the skin blanched.

After that, Eve only came out at meal times. I was not only failing Eve, now I was failing the Master, too. He'd asked me to treat her, even if surreptitiously, and now I couldn't even do that. To feel better—less paralysed—I watched her obsessively, trying to find any tears or lesions that threatened to turn septic.

The cuts on Eve were not so simple though. They might have been caused by anything: attention seeking or alcoholism or death of a mother or even just clumsiness. Psychiatry was not a matter of symptom, disease and cure, it was a labyrinth that no string or trail of breadcrumbs could necessarily lead you through.

One crumb though: how Eve dressed. It struck me one night when she came to dinner in a black silk gown appliqued with white birds, and she looked so beautiful it was almost frightening. I wanted to go back to my cabin and change out of my cotton dress. Chilvers kept opening and closing his mouth until I wanted to slam it shut for him. It was not just her dress. Her black hair was brushed and shiny, her lips flushed and her upper-class cheekbones were highlighted with little balls of pink blush. She

was breathtaking and yet, at the same time, there was something unsettling about her, something not right.

Back at Callan Park, the patients with nerves or melancholia sat around in pyjamas or stained shirts or with their cardigans inside out. Their hair was uncombed until the nurses saw to it and you couldn't get too close to them when they spoke, because their teeth were rotting and their breath stank so much it took your own away. But Eve looked like a film star. As I stood there looking at the embroidered birds, little shiny white beads on the tips of their feathers, I realised that it wasn't just that evening: Eve was always perfectly dressed. Or—and this was important—just a fraction *off* perfectly. There were little things: like her shirt coming untucked from the waistline of her shorts, or her lipstick bleeding over the outline of her mouth or fading away in the centre of her lips because she'd forgotten to reapply it. Or that day in Brisbane, when she'd forgotten to put lipstick on at all and Miss Rodwell had picked her up on it. I fingered the notebook in my pocket. Later, I'd take it out and scribble it down like it was the way out of the labyrinth: *Personal care and grooming are not abnormal as expected in patient with this degree of neurosis.*

It wasn't just that the insight would help me treat Eve, the reason I wrote it down so feverishly and pondered it so often was that it allowed me to tell myself that I was not an imposter and that I could save her. I got information from the passengers, too.

Mrs Lawton for example, thought she had heard that Miss Pope's mother had died many years ago, perhaps while she was giving birth (I added *Mother died during parturition?* to my notes).

Chilvers told me more about Eve's father, Arthur Pope, the draper. He'd made a fortune selling fabrics and he was high up in the Australian Hygiene Society. He

gave lectures all over the country about birth control and better births. Chilvers thought he might even have been a friend of the NSW Health Minister, though he couldn't quite remember. He offered to ask Miss Rodwell about it, but I told him not to bother her.

Chilvers put his book down. We were in the saloon with Mrs Lawton, waiting for Bowyer to bring afternoon tea. Mrs Lawton said she'd seen photos of Eve at a hygiene society thing. 'Do you know what's interesting? It's been a very long time since I've seen any photographs of Miss Pope in the newspaper. Does that strike you as strange?'

'Not especially.'

'Oh, very strange. How long has it been, do you think?'

'I couldn't say exactly, Mr Chilvers. But it must be coming up to a year. Perhaps she isn't going to any balls? But then she seemed happy to be photographed in Brisbane—and Miss Rodwell is still in the papers all the time, so it's not as if the family is out of favour.' Mrs Lawton lowered her voice. 'I wondered if there was a scandal. That Year she wasn't in the papers?'

Mrs Lawton said, *That Year*, as if both words started with capital letters. Then she answered her own question.

'No ... No. I'm sure there wasn't. Miss Pope is so glamorous, isn't she? Just wonderful!'

Chilvers nodded. 'Wonderful.'

The morning before we were due to arrive in Wyndham, the sea was very calm, almost flat. The Ship left a white frothy wake in the aqua water as though reaching back to a place she didn't want to leave. It was only just after eight and the heat was

still gentle enough: a presence, but a kindly one, like a tepid bath or a soft warm breath, not yet the weight under which you felt your knees might buckle.

Down on the main deck, two of the cadets were checking that the hatchways were watertight, another was abseiling over the side of the hull to repaint it. A fourth was following Miss Rodwell, placing a thick rope in a rectangle she'd marked as the arena for the morning's calisthenics session. Miss Rodwell surveyed the area, then stepped to the middle of the rectangle and did a routine, reaching up to the sky, down to the deck and all over again. Mrs Lawton arrived, dressed in a knee-length skirt and short-sleeved blouse and Mr Lawton came shortly after, walking much more slowly than his wife. Chilvers, however, had a definite bounce in his step. Miss Rodwell took them by the shoulders, one by one, and led them to their positions in the roped-off rectangle. They watched her reverently, knees bent against the movement of the ocean, as though waiting for a starter's gun. Miss Rodwell lifted her arms till they were in line with her shoulders and twisted to the left. Mrs Lawton went the wrong way and stopped the class to ask, should she follow Miss Rodwell like a mirror or do the opposite? I couldn't see from up on the passenger deck, but I imagined Miss Rodwell's jaw clenching at the question.

There was a hand on my back. Halton.

'Have you been avoiding me?' He smelt of soap and he was standing too close. I took a step away and looked down at the exercise class to check no one had noticed.

'Well?'

I shook my head, but I was lying. I had been avoiding him since the pool. Partly because I was jealous of the way he'd flirted with Eve, but mainly because I didn't know what to do about him. He gave me goosebumps and I couldn't remember

if Glynn had ever done that. The sun was behind him and I must have squinted because he stepped forward to block the sun for me. He was too close again.

‘Well, Doc, if you’re *not* avoiding me, let me take you on a tour of Wyndham tomorrow. There’s a little hospital there run by a Doctor Cole, who I think you will like. And a native hospital, too ...’

Glynn had told me about the native hospital. He’d seen it on his way through Wyndham. Set up just a year or so ago to treat VD mostly. Halton was holding his hand up against the sun now, but a strip of it still slanted through his fingers.

‘Come on, Doctor Fraser. I don’t bite, you know.’

I had a delicious fluttering in my chest.

‘All right.’

Suddenly, the Ship dropped with a bang, as though we’d driven over a pothole, and I fell into him. Just for a moment I stayed where I was, his hands on my waist, my head against his chest, not looking at each other, not saying anything. But the Ship had righted herself and there was no need for him to hold me. I came to my senses, pulled away and went over to the railing. Down below, Mr Lawton and Chilvers were helping Mrs Lawton to her feet; the wave had knocked her over.

Miss Rodwell, who hadn’t noticed the casualty, was still shouting, ‘Right hand to left foot.’ Soon the exercisers were all hanging in strange angles and turning red in the face.

‘I get tired just watching them.’

I laughed.

‘How’s the plan going? With Miss Pope, I mean. Have you worked out what’s the matter?’

He said *Miss Pope* too casually, like he was trying to show me the name meant nothing to him. I stared at Miss Rodwell's bronzed arms. Did he think that diagnosing someone was like clicking your fingers? 'I've hardly seen her.'

'Why don't you go and see her now?'

He nodded towards the corner cabin; its portholes were the last two along the passageway.

'Now?'

'Well, the Aunt's busy and, if they do notice you've gone, they'll just think you've gone off with me.'

Gone off with me. My breath caught. I started to say I didn't want them to think that but then I thought that wasn't what he'd meant and I was just being presumptuous.

But then he took my elbow and steered me towards the door that led to the passenger corridor. He said, 'Or, of course, you *could* just go off somewhere with me.'

'Don't you have to go on watch or something?'

We'd reached the doorway.

'Yes. But don't think I won't kiss you again.' And then he was gone.

I stood there for a moment, trying to breathe properly. Everything was happening. Colliding. Eve and Mrs Connolly and Halton. I suppose I could have stopped the Halton thing then, told him about Glynn, taken control of my emotions. But lust is a bit like possession; you need an exorcism before you can be in control of yourself again. And in any case, the exercise class would be finishing soon and I had to get to Eve before her aunt returned.

I went to the corner cabin and knocked. When there was no answer, I knocked again, louder, and then louder again until I thought I heard some muffled sounds from inside. Time was running out. I looked quickly over my shoulder then turned the door handle.

The first thing that hit me was the smell of the room. There was the smoke, of course, stale and having gained several more layers since I had been in the cabin last. Then there was a sweet, sex smell underneath which reminded me of something. Only I was distracted by the sight of Eve before I'd had a chance to think what it was. She was lying on her cot; her dressing gown had fallen open and she was naked underneath. Above the black patch of pubic hair, her stomach hung, loose and streaked by vertical red scars. It was like someone had taken a knife to the centre of a Monet and slashed it, not just once but again and again and again in a frenzy, trying to destroy the beauty at the centre of it. The skin had been stretched so far it couldn't go back. Only one thing could have stretched it like that. I remembered what Mrs Lawton had said: *I wonder if there could have been a scandal.*

Without knowing it, I had walked right up to the bed. I drew Eve's dressing gown around her poor accordion stomach, tried to straighten the twisted sheets around her, to pull the undersheet back to cover up the faded stripes of the mattress.

Eve mumbled something and I leant down close.

'Eve? It's Ada. Doc.' I wanted to put my hand on Eve's shoulder and shake her awake but I was afraid of what I might see in her face. I told myself to stop being silly. It was just Eve. Then, because I was feeling angry with myself for being afraid, I said 'Eve!' more sharply than I meant to and Eve sat up, blinking puffy eyelids. Her dressing gown slipped off one shoulder and her pillow had left a crease in her cheek. She blinked again and leant forward, opening her eyes very wide as if forcing them to

stay open, then her head fell to her chest. Just as I was wondering whether she'd fainted, Eve lifted her head again and squinted, but the effort seemed too much and she dropped her head again.

I waited for a moment, watching Eve with her head on her chest, wondering if she might wake again, but felt cruel and I laid her out on the bed. Eve mumbled in her stupor, but I couldn't make out the words. She'd been sedated.

I darted over to lock the door then went to the chest of drawers beside Eve's bed. There was a lipstick and some tissues on the top. I opened the drawers one by one and went through them, apologising to Eve in my head. There was nothing but expensive clothes and toiletries. Then I had a thought and shut the drawers. I checked the porthole and, seeing nothing, went over to the chest of drawers by Miss Rodwell's bed. I couldn't stop my hands shaking as I opened the top drawer and picked up bottles of face cream and hand cream and headache pills and then a bottle of little white pills with the original label scratched off. I brought the bottle closer to my face. There was a shadow of the old script on the scratched-out label, *Miss Claire Rodwell*. Just seeing the name made me jump and I quickly put the bottle back and shut the drawer. Then I unlocked the cabin door and, after a thought, pulled it wide open—if Miss Rodwell asked me what I was doing, I could say Eve had called me in through the open door.

I went out to check on the exercise class. The Ship was pitching quite a lot now, but they were still going. I had some more time. I grabbed the handrail and made my way back to Eve, but I wasn't even sure what I would ask her, or if she was in a fit state to answer questions anyway. I shook her gently by the shoulders, but she squeezed her eyes tight like she was trying to ignore a nightmare.

'Eve, it's important.'

She opened her eyes.

‘Did you have a baby? Is that why you tried to jump?’

No answer. She closed her eyes again. But this time it was not because she was sleepy. Her lips wobbled and she pressed them together.

‘It’s all right.’ I put my hand on hers and we were silent for a while. But I didn’t have much time.

‘Have you taken a sedative?’

‘Hmm?’

The Ship was rocking wildly now and Eve lolled from one side of the bed to the other. I steadied myself on the bed guard.

‘Did your aunt give it to you?’

I looked over at the open door, then at the porthole, panicking. Miss Rodwell would be back soon.

‘Eve?’

‘Yes. Yes. Please, just let me sleep.’

‘What did she give you?’

Eve murmured then, in time with the ship’s movement, she rolled onto her side, so her back was to me. ‘Two a day. No. Yes. One in the morning and one at night.’ Her back twitched. She was giggling.

‘One in the morning and one at night keeps little Evie quiet, all right.’ Eve’s back shook again.

The ship bucked underneath me. *Not now*, I told it. ‘Why do you have to be quiet?’

‘Because I keep babbling, blabbing, blabbing all over the place, embarrassing Aunt and Father, and it’s not fair.’

‘What’s not fair?’ And I was thinking: *Please Eve, hurry up, she’s coming back soon.*

‘Well, it’s not *Aunt’s* fault, is it? It’s not Father’s fault, it’s not Aunt’s fault.’ Eve was speaking to someone invisible, shaking her finger at them. ‘She didn’t do anything so stupid, and now she has to be stuck on a ship in the middle of the ocean, all because of you and the least you can do is be quiet and stop talking about it all the time, you never shut up, Eve, why don’t you just shut up—’

I could hear voices coming from the stairwell.

‘You mean, about your baby?’

‘I promise I won’t talk about it. Not anymore. Can’t do any good, anyway, can it?’ She was groaning now, curved over on herself like she had a stomach-ache.

The ship rolled to one side and I heard laughter outside. ‘Don’t go overboard,’ someone shouted.

‘Eve, what won’t you talk about?’

Eve murmured something, but I couldn’t hear her and desperately needed to. Maybe it was the sight of her pregnancy-scarred stomach, or an intuition there was more to this than an illegitimate child but, whatever it was, I couldn’t stop myself from pushing her, even as I felt a presence at the open door behind me.

‘Eve, what won’t you talk about?’

But I didn’t hear anymore from Eve that day. Miss Rodwell was back.

‘Get out,’ she said.

Chapter Ten

We ate dinner outside on the poop deck that night. It was the night before we were to land at Wyndham and the sea was sparking like frayed electric wire. Bowyer and the men had set up a table on deck so we could watch the sunset. Halton said there was no sunset like the one at the top of Australia and he was right about that. I've never forgotten the sight of that great red ball, so hot it warped the air around it, dropping into the sea to be snuffed out in a moment. Then again, maybe it was what happened afterwards that burned that sunset into my memory.

The loose skin on Eve's stomach, the funny smell in that cabin, had haunted me all afternoon. I kept seeing the raised red scars, so similar to the ones on her wrists, the crêpey flesh monstrous on that smooth marble body. It was the explanation I'd been hunting for, the reason for her nerves. But I didn't feel any relief. This was a reason for her sickness that couldn't be talked or hypnotised away. Then again, I told myself, war neurotics had been cured, even after they'd seen their friends ripped apart on the battlefield, blown into brains and guts and bones, even after being sure they'd be next to die. But I was lying. None of the war neurotics I'd seen in Callan Park had

been cured. They were all still there, almost 20 years after the war. None of us had been cured.

I told myself other lies too: that I hadn't really understood the telegram from Jean. That whatever was going on between Halton and me was not. I thought, as you always do until it's too late, that I could control it. Or maybe I didn't think that at all. I don't really know anymore. Everything was ending at that point. Speeding headlong into destruction. There almost seemed something beautiful and brave and romantic about it all. When I went up to dinner that night, Halton was standing at the top of the stairs that led to the poop deck, holding out a hand.

'Hello.'

'Hello.'

He pulled me up the stairs and leant down to whisper in my ear so that I shivered. He smelled briny and warm. He told me I looked beautiful then went off to speak to the Master, who was standing at the very back of the boat, staring off beyond the stern. Bowyer arrived with a tray of champagne glasses and I took one. The sun was still up, but it had started rouging the clouds and painting the ocean so it was like a shimmering floor, with no world beneath. Halton and the Master were still at the stern. With their backs turned, the two of them looked like they were at a urinal. Like they were making fun of the gods, tempting Fate: brave and stupid. Mr and Mrs Lawton came over to chat, then Miss Rodwell marched up the stairs, Eve behind her. She'd just opened her mouth at me, when there was a hand on my back. Halton.

'Time for dinner,' he said.

Dinner was prawn cocktails followed by lamb and potatoes, and ice cream for dessert. There was so much to worry about, I couldn't stay on a single worry long enough to really think through it. The fears chased each other round and round in my

head so I focused on the taste of the lamb, the pinprick of champagne bubbles on my tongue, and the warmth and weight of Halton's hand on my thigh. I'd reached the collision point and I was through on the other side. It was exhilarating. I drank two glasses of champagne. Put my head on Halton's shoulder. Laughed at Mrs Lawton getting wobbly and dancing from starboard to port as the ship rolled.

After dinner, the Master asked everyone to come back to his stateroom. As Halton guided me down the stairs from the poop deck, he said we weren't going.

'All right then.'

He drew me aside to the railing just under the poop deck house and we stood next to one another. I wondered vaguely whether we'd be missed at the Master's stateroom. I was numb. We stood at the rail in the soft hot night with the darkness like a blackout sheet around us, the only light from stars that pricked the dark here and there like moth holes, and from the orange glow of a native's fire on the shoreline.

When I woke it was still dark and Halton was sitting on the edge of the bed, his back to me. He was shrugging a shirt over his bare shoulders. He turned, as if I'd said his name. I shut my eyes and pretended to be asleep. He ran a finger down my cheek and I battled to keep my breathing slow and to stop the goose pimples rising on my arms.

'Doc?'

Leave, I thought.

He whispered my name again and stroked my hand and I had to keep myself from jerking it away. His voice was whiney.

'Can't you hear me? Dearest?'

The word, *dearest*, in that whiney voice, revolted me. I prayed he would leave.

Finally, the door clicked and I opened my eyes to slits until I was sure he was gone. I sat up, clutching the sheet to my chest. My breath came out with a strange animal noise.

I pulled at the straps of my nightgown. I couldn't remember changing out of my clothes. I couldn't remember anything very clearly. It had been so hot. After that, there were just flashes: bare skin and sweat and lips on mine.

I massaged my eyebrows, trying to get rid of the nauseating thud in my head, then I picked up my watch and squinted at it in the dark. It was just before four a.m. Halton was on first watch. I relaxed just a little bit—no one would see him leaving my cabin, at least. But my nightgown clung to me and a smell of salt and sweat and unwashed sweetness hung in the air. I felt between my legs. It was damp there, too. I groaned and bunched my nightgown in my fist and took some phenobarb. The first time since Townsville.

The next time I woke, it was to loud knocking and the cabin door swinging open. I opened my eyes to see Bowyer hovering in the doorway, holding a cup of tea.

‘Sorry, Doc. You’re usually up and about at this time ...’

‘Oh, I just—I have a bit of a headache.’

I sat up and tried to cover my nightgown with the sheet.

‘Can I get you anything for it?’

‘No. Thank you, Bowyer.’

I realised he was waiting for instructions and told him to put the teacup on the dresser.

‘Right you are.’

Then he stopped, just for a beat, in front of the chest of drawers. Following his gaze, I saw, with a sinking stomach, what had stopped him: Halton had left his watch.

‘I think we’ll have another hot day.’ Bowyer put the teacup down too quickly and spilled some tea. He apologised too fervently and ducked out of the cabin, closing the door behind him.

I got out of bed and went over to look at the watch. The black leather band had been polished so much it shone like a public schoolboy’s shoes. I picked up the cup of tea with my eyes still on the watch. Glynn’s watch had a brown leather band, which was scuffed and cracked because he never took care of it. Just like he never took care of his shoes and hardly ever brushed his hair. *Too much to do*, he’d said, the one time I had mentioned his shoes, just before graduation dinner in the Great Hall, when Dr Hickman Dodds was coming to address them. Dear, absentminded Glynn. It didn’t really matter if his shoes got holes in them, or his watchband broke. He could always buy another. He’d never have to look after something so it would last for years and years.

Halton’s watch bounced a ball of light onto the opposite wall as I sipped the tea. It was lukewarm, too milky and I hadn’t even wanted tea. I put it back into the saucer, and a little slopped out over the sides because my hand was shaking. I picked up the watch: the band was half as thick as my wrist. I touched the face, making a single fingerprint, then quickly rubbed it off with the edge of my nightgown. Glynn’s watch was so grubby you could hardly read the numbers. He was always digging about in the garden or tinkering with the car or mucking about in the laboratory.

I’d have to give it back: the watch. Later. I pulled my dressing gown on over my nightdress, took another one grain tab of phenobarb and went to the bath.

I needed to wash before the drug pulled me back into unconsciousness. I smelt like sweat and salt and bodily fluids, like the women who came into the hospital pregnant with their eighth child, their breasts droopy, their faces lined and their stomachs loose and puckered and crêpey like Eve's. I filled the bath only a couple of inches with cold water and washed quickly, soaping my underarms and breasts and between my legs, once then twice then a third time, getting into the folds of skin, trying to clean what couldn't be cleaned away. I felt a delicious pull like riding on the big dipper at the Orange show when I was 10, before Dad's stroke, my stomach suddenly left behind as I swung into space, free and falling but not caring a bit about how I was going to land. Somehow, I forced myself to get out of the bath and into my dress and down the corridor to my cabin and fell, thank God, face first onto my bed. And then I was in a room washed in red and, somewhere behind me, there was a clock on the wall, the hands were at 9:55 but they had been there forever and time wasn't moving at all. And then someone was pressing me hard on the chest so I couldn't breathe properly, and I couldn't open my eyes to see, but I knew it was Miss Rodwell and she was cross because I wasn't keeping up with the calisthenics class.

When I woke again, the room was bright with sunlight and moist with the heat. The ceiling fan whirred quietly—whoop, whoop, whoop—churning the hot air, an accompaniment to the low, subterranean hum of the Ship's engine. The clouds outside my porthole were golden pink and the sky below, pale blue. It was not the middle of the day. But I had no idea whether it was morning or evening. Had I slept through a whole night? The others might be worrying about me, might decide to break down the door and check I was still alive. I imagined Mrs Lawton, red-faced, fist aloft, shouting at Chilvers and Mr Lawton, as they tried to break down the door with a paddle from one of the lifeboats. I laughed. I knew now why Dr Anderson had warned

us so much about phenobarb. There was a warm buzz around me, as if I had somehow found the key to the universe and was now resonating along with it; my worries seemed as though they belonged to someone else or were simply interesting scientific propositions. I had slept with Halton. It seemed a fact, nothing more. I took Halton's watch from under my pillow, where I'd hidden it before my bath. It was 5:45. But I didn't know if it was 5:45 in the morning or 5:45 in the evening. Then I was ravenous and I realised that, whether it was morning or evening, a meal of some kind would be taking place soon. I pushed off the covers and went over to the wardrobe.

I found the mauve dress I'd worn the night before, the one I'd meant to save for Glynn. It smelled of Halton. I tossed it back into the cupboard and got out the blue one from Dad, pulled it over my head and fitted the material loops over the buttons one by one. It seemed to take forever but, when I looked at Jack's watch again, it was only 5:49. I slipped the watch over my wrist but it slid off. I looped it around my fingers and walked outside.

The world closed in on me. The turquoise water had turned the colour of milky tea and the vast unending ocean had shrunk to a bay hemmed in on one side by a steep rock face, fringed at the waterline with mangroves and salty mudbanks. On the far bank, perhaps a mile or so distant, the muddied water solidified into mudflats that went on for the length of several football fields, until a tabletop mountain pushed abruptly out of the earth. Miss Rodwell was standing at the railing just outside the corner cabin, a neat oblong of sweat on the back of her pale-yellow blouse. A pearl of sweat slipped from under her black bob down her neck and into her collar. I remembered Halton's watch and slipped it into my pocket.

'Hello.'

Miss Rodwell didn't turn.

‘We could be in hell,’ she said.

Part Two

Chapter Eleven

Thursday, 22 July. Almost two weeks at sea. And now we were in Wyndham. Miss Rodwell was right: Wyndham was hell. The mudbanks had been baked for so long and with such heat that, everywhere you looked, the earth was cracked or peeling away like burnt skin. My dress was wet with perspiration and I'd only had it on for 10 minutes. The stench of rotten eggs from the mangroves at low tide was so strong, I had to breathe through my mouth. Kites wheeled overhead, cawing and screeching, before they disappeared into the shimmer above the swamp. The phenobarb was beginning to wear off.

The ship was berthed at the end of a J-shaped jetty, maybe 500 yards long, but the water only started half the way out so the ship couldn't get any closer without being beached. Another mile or so inland, along the rail tracks that carried the meat to and from the ships, the low galvanised iron roofs of the Wyndham Meatworks hunkered beneath a looming rock face, the cliff so close to the water it seemed to be trying to shove the town off its shirttails and back into the sea. We were on the portside of the ship so the sun was setting behind us and it had already dropped

behind the bridge, leaving us in shadow. I looked down at the brown water. As I did, a thick snake wound its way close along the ship's side searching for rats perhaps, or the ship's waste. I pointed it out to Miss Rodwell.

She barely acknowledged me, though she did look where I'd pointed. The dregs of the sedative in my blood made everything hazy and timeless and slow. If I'd been thinking more clearly, I might have considered how best to approach Miss Rodwell, how best to get her to tell the truth. As it was, a kite screamed and another creature, maybe it was a dingo, howled. I told her:

'I know about the baby.'

She barely moved and I almost thought she hadn't heard me—or even that I'd thought the words rather than said them—but then I saw her nostrils flare. There was a sucking sound and the snake slipped under the hull.

'And she never had a psychiatrist.'

Miss Rodwell stared at the water.

'You lied about her having a psychiatrist.'

She slapped a mosquito on her forearm then flicked its bloodied corpse away.

'That's because it's none of your business.'

'It's my job—'

'No. It is not your job. Not unless I hire you. And I haven't. I don't agree to medical treatment.'

'Actually, for mental—'

'You'd have to get a court order. And you've tried that already.'

The darkness seemed to gather then, the shadows stretched across the cracked banks. Inside me, too, I was aware of a sort of coagulation, as though all the blackness was quickening and spreading. That the infection, which had begun with Mrs

Connolly's baby or maybe even as far back as Dad's stroke, was gathering. I felt queasy and Halton's watch hung heavy in my pocket. I didn't want to ask any more about the baby. I didn't want to be on that deck, watching hell darken and being somehow a part of it by digging and probing and lancing into a wound. Suddenly, Miss Rodwell seemed on the side of good, helping her niece to get over the loss of her child, protecting her, even if it was with lies and threats. I didn't know what side I was on. I was just about to retreat to my cabin when Eve emerged from the internal passageway and hovered for a moment, unaware of our presence, until Miss Rodwell called her over.

We had barely spoken at last night's dinner though it had seemed to me Eve might have wanted to, in the beginning, until she realised she couldn't get me on my own and that anything she did say was going to be overheard. She cowered as she walked towards us now. If she didn't remember telling me about the baby, then Miss Rodwell had clearly filled her in. She looked up at me from the bottom of her eyes, like someone pleading for their life. She hadn't even reached us when Miss Rodwell started on her.

'Eve, Doctor Fraser wants to know about the baby.'

The words made Eve curl around the little bundle of clothes she was carrying, as if someone had punched her in the stomach. Which is what Miss Rodwell wanted: to wound Eve and show me how cruel I was to interfere. Suddenly, Miss Rodwell had pounced on Eve and was trying to get the bundle of clothes out of her niece's hands. They tussled for a few moments, Miss Rodwell clawing at the thing in Eve's hands. Eve balled over it and struck her aunt on the head with her free arm, then grabbed a chunk of her hair and pulled it so hard Miss Rodwell's chin snapped back. Still, neither of them said anything, just grunted, and I was so stunned I didn't move to help

or separate them, until Eve elbowed Miss Rodwell so hard that she stumbled backwards into me and I had to catch her to stop her from going flat on her back. Right then, Halton appeared from the stairwell at the end of the passenger deck. He rushed past Eve, over to where I was standing, took Miss Rodwell from me and hoisted her back up to standing.

‘Are you all right?’

Miss Rodwell flicked him away with her hand and smoothed down her hair, but she missed a bit and it stuck out at the side.

‘I just felt faint. The heat, I think. Eve. Help me back to the room.’

Eve unfurled a bit and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. She still had the thing tucked tight under her left arm; it was white with orange bits on it, with a gleam on it like silk and a trail of frayed cotton or tassels. It was the scarf. The one Miss Rodwell had asked me about the night Eve tried to jump overboard.

‘What is that?’

But, by the time I’d asked, Miss Rodwell had steered Eve back down the passageway and out of sight. It was twilight now and Halton and I were alone for the first time since the night before. He took my hand before I’d had a chance to wipe the sweat from my palm, stooped down and kissed me. I pushed him off.

‘It’s too hot.’

I took the watch from my pocket and handed it to him quickly.

‘I wondered if I’d left it.’ He buckled it back around his wrist, then put his hands in his pockets and winked at me. I told him Bowyer had seen the watch when he’d brought my tea. Halton grinned, as though it were funny. There was a splash below us and I imagined the snake twisting around the bottom of the ship, several of

them, slipping over and around and through each other, until all the muddy water was a mess of snakes and I was starting to cry. I rubbed my face. 'Sorry.'

He looked confused. 'Have I done something wrong?'

I shook my head.

'Do you wish last night hadn't happened?'

'No.' I did wish it hadn't happened. And yet, standing there with him, I wished it would happen again.

'Would you like me to speak to Bowyer?'

'But what would you tell him?'

'That I leant you the watch, or it fell off and you found it for me.'

That would just make the lie more obvious; Bowyer knew. And I wasn't just worried about Bowyer suspecting an affair. I was worried he would ask Halton about the Glynn I kept writing to in England. A mosquito buzzed in my ear and I hit myself on the cheek but the buzzing continued, a taunt.

'Miss Rodwell didn't fall.'

'What do you mean?'

'Eve pushed her.'

He laughed. 'I wish I'd seen that.'

I shook my head, remembering the two of them wrestling over that package, Eve tearing at her aunt's hair then, suddenly, following her meekly again as though nothing had happened.

'They were fighting over something. Something Eve had.' It sounded so small when I said it aloud, not at all like the scene I had witnessed. I had to ask Eve about the package.

'What kind of thing was it? That Eve had?'

‘A scarf? I don’t know.’

He looked out across the tram tracks towards the Bastion. The birds were calling more incessantly as nightfall approached: there was cawing and warbling and the open-throated groan of a crow. The air still pulsated with heat. I couldn’t think of anything to say to Halton, Jack, and the two of us stood there, side by side, the awkwardness getting worse until, partly just to end the awkwardness, I kissed him.

That night I slept as if I’d been concussed. I didn’t hear Halton get up for his four a.m. watch and only woke after eight because I’d perspired so much the bed was wet.

Chapter Twelve

The water coming from the tap in the bath was brown and it stank of hydrogen sulphide like the mangrove swamp outside. As soon as the water was deep enough to cover my ankles, I took off my nightdress and stepped into it, lay back against the cool, stained porcelain and closed my eyes. I let the water run onto my calves then over my legs; let it wash away the sweat and the sex and the last of the phenobarbital. I cupped my hands and splashed the water onto my face until it tingled. For the first time in two days, I felt clear and awake. The sun was shining and the white-painted walls of the bathroom made it light and airy, comfortingly ordinary. The dark visions and strange contortions of time, which had accompanied me the past few days, had gone. I felt vaguely guilty about Halton but, under the influence of sleeplessness and sedative, the guilt had heightened to something nearer fire and brimstone and damnation. In the white bathroom, bright and unshadowed, it receded to a vague unease buried under a not-unpleasant feeling of having a secret.

I took my time washing, then went back to my cabin to dress, got my obstetrics notes and went down to the hospital to study. It was an article from the

British Medical Journal, trials of new chemotherapy drugs for puerperal haemolytic streptococcus infections. I would have to know about the latest aniline derivatives at the Queen Charlotte but just reading the words *the reduction in the mortality rate ... Protonsil*, my brain went fuzzy. Someone knocked at the door and I got a fright and got up so quickly from my chair, I banged my knee on the desk.

‘Hello? It’s Doctor Cole, Doctor Fraser. The town doctor.’

I swallowed the curse I would have liked to have said, rubbed my knee and opened the door. Dr Cole was standing no more than a foot away, as if he’d been leaning his forehead on the door just before I opened it. He stuck out a hand. He had the look of someone who was just about to laugh at something or everything or at life in general. I invited him in. He came over and looked at my desk, picked up my notes.

‘New treatment for chronic leucorrhoea. Is that a type of diarrhoea? No? Really? Not diarrhoea? God! How do you do it? Obstetrics was my worst subject. Terrible marks.’

‘Where did you study?’

‘Sydney. You too?’

I nodded. I didn’t want to compare notes.

‘So why are you in Wyndham?’

He laughed. ‘Yes. Why? That is a question I ask myself often. Not really. It’s actually not a bad spot once you get used to it. Lots to do. And I’ve never been more important. Town doctor and magistrate and liquor licensee. Yes. Also the tea lady. It’s not all roses. Oh God! I’d forget my own head!’ He reached into the breast pocket of his short-sleeved shirt, pulled out an envelope and handed it to me. ‘The post mistress asked me to deliver it. Oh. It’s not bad news, I hope?’

I tried to smile, shrugged as if I didn't know what was inside the envelope, but my heart hammered so much I had to put my hand on it. I smoothed out the envelope, which had been folded in half, and ran my finger under the flap. It was postmarked Friday 16 July. What day it was today? Thursday. Sent almost a week ago. From the NSW Coroner.

Inquest into death of Mrs Evelyn Connolly. Stop. Calls Dr Ada Fraser as witness. Stop. Please report immediately. Stop.

I was vaguely aware of Dr Cole getting up from his chair and shutting the hospital door. The room felt tiny and the smell of disinfectant burnt my throat. The metal bolts, painted white, reminded me of tumours or growths. He sat back down again.

‘Are you all right, doctor?’

I looked at my hands and they were shaking. The telegram, too. I don't know what made me do it, what made me trust a person I'd only just met, but I handed him the telegram.

‘Read it.’

He put his elbows on his knees and read and stayed bent over for much longer than it would have taken to read the telegram. Then he sat up and squinted at me.

‘Would you like a cigarette?’

‘No, thank you. You can though.’

He lit one. ‘So. Who was Mrs Connolly?’

‘A patient. She had a baby. Stillborn. Then she died. Septicaemia.’

‘She was your patient?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you think it's your fault.’

The way he said it so directly, said words I barely let myself think, perforated something in me, some fine membrane stretched tight across. A noise came from somewhere in me, a long monotone note, like I'd been winded. I watched myself with curiosity. It was like a reflex action. When the noise had finished, the tears came like relief.

Dr Cole moved his chair around so it was next to mine and put his non-smoking hand on my back. I cried out the guilt and the worry and the blood-soaked mattress and Mr Connolly's screams and that little limp body. Eventually, it was all gone. There was nothing left and I was exhausted.

Dr Cole gave me a brown hanky and I wiped my face. 'You've been having a tough time of it, looks like.'

I laughed.

'Does anyone know? On the ship?'

'No. I'm here under false pretences.'

'Stop it. Who says you have to rush around, telling everyone your life story? You're not the first doctor to have a patient die on them.'

'Two patients.'

'Oh, darling. Stop.' He tapped the top of my head. 'You need to sleep. You're exhausted.'

I nodded. I was so exhausted I could barely get out of my chair. Dr Cole hugged me and said he'd come and see me the next day. After he left, I climbed up to the top bunk—if anyone came into the hospital they'd be less likely to see me—hooked my glasses around the wire frame of the wall-mounted stretcher, curled into the wall and slept.

Halton woke me later that afternoon; I hadn't turned up to lunch. He had to shake me to get me to wake up and I hadn't even taken phenobarb. Still half-asleep, I put my glasses back on. We were lovers, but I trusted him less than I did Cole, with whom I'd spent less than half an hour. It was something to do with Cole being a doctor. He knew what could happen when life and death were so close to one other. He knew that the whole thing was a farce, a Wizard-of-Oz mirage, and that we were all still waiting for that moment—surely it would come soon—when we finally felt like real doctors.

‘What time is it?’

He looked at his watch. ‘After two.’ Then he smiled, walked over to the door and locked it.

The next day was Friday and Bowyer had arranged for us to take a tour of the Wyndham Meatworks, which the state government had built with great hullabaloo a decade before. It was still meant to be the biggest freezer works in the West. Halton couldn't come because the Old Man wanted the bulkheads and hull repainted and he had to supervise the work, so Cole had been roped into chaperoning us. He was waiting for us on the jetty and I felt a wash of relief when I saw him waiting at the bottom of the gangway.

Thankfully, it was a short walk to the Meatworks, because it must have been 104 that day. We followed the tracks for the Meatworks engine, whose name, Cole told us, was *Helen*. There wasn't much to see: a few dozen beer bottles and some scrubby grass sprouting from the cracked dirt like hair on an old woman's jaw. The salt crust on the mudbanks glittered in the sun and there was a shadow where the most recent tide had come up. The meatworks stood out like a lighthouse in the emptiness. The main building was several storeys high and it seemed to grow the closer we got.

There was a long, thin black chimney rising behind it, 'for the cremations,' Cole said. And behind that the Bastion; the rock that towered over everything, threatening to push the meatworks and the town and everything back to where it had come from.

A tall man trotted over. It was the manager of the works, a Mr Visser, who smiled widely but didn't offer his hand. Later, I found out he'd lost it in an accident.

The main building looked ramshackle, like bits had been added here and there whenever someone had thought of something else they needed: the cattle run, a white lean-to hanging off the eastern side, bits of scaffolding. The corrugated iron was already rusting in places and buckled, too, so the whole structure looked like a child's cardboard construction put together with string and glue.

We went inside and were given black wellington boots and white paper caps 'to keep the nasty bits out of your hair.' Then Visser took us through two large wooden doors at the rear of the building and into a yard filled with a hundred-odd head of cattle, just come from Victoria River Downs in the Territory. The cattle jostled and kicked up the red dirt. On the far side of the yard, a native man leant against the cattle run, one leg up on the bottom rail. Visser called him over.

'How long does it take you to drive these cattle from Victoria Downs?'

The native mumbled something and swished his hand at a fly buzzing around his eye.

'Speak up!'

'Bout a month there, boss.'

'A month,' Visser told us. 'And only the five-year-olds. The younger cows will lose too much condition on the way.'

'And now you're going to kill them?' Eve asked.

'Yes.'

‘Poor things. I feel rather sorry for them.’

It was the most Eve had said in days. I’d almost forgotten about her—or forgotten that she was more than a paper diagnosis. But now I looked at her again. She had pushed her paper cap back on her head, revealing a strip of hair like a black velvet headband and, in her big black boots and hand on one hip, she looked strong again, like a character in an Olive Cotton painting. She was staring at the native, who was studying the ground, waiting to be dismissed.

‘What’s your name?’

Mrs Lawton sucked in her breath and the man looked at his manager.

‘Mind your manners, boy, and answer this young lady!’

‘Windella, Missus.’

‘Oh. I’ll never remember that. I’ll call you Frank.’

‘Yes, Missus.’ Frank looked at Visser again.

‘You may go now.’

Frank bowed a little, shoved his hat on his head and stalked back to the run. A worker in white coveralls was just entering the pen. He had a metal cattle prod.

‘He makes a wonderful stockman.’

‘Do you mean Frank, Mr Visser? Or Aborigines in general?’ Chilvers asked.

‘In general. But the half-castes only. Not the full-bloods. They’re not fit for it.’

Miss Rodwell lit a cigarette. ‘I thought they weren’t allowed in town.’

‘No, they are not,’ Visser said. ‘That is correct. They need a permit for the town. But not for the Meatworks. They come here only for delivering the cattle.’

‘But they stay with the other men? With the white men?’

‘No. Usually at the Three Mile—’

‘That’s where the nearest Aboriginal settlement is,’ Cole added.

The air began to fill with the sound of hooves on packed earth. The cattle, only separated from us by a chicken-wire fence, began scrabbling, stirring up the red grit into a dust cloud as they were herded into the run. The stamping and slapping got louder and there was another noise underneath it: a moan that seemed to come up from the ground.

Eve asked if it was the cows.

‘Yes.’

‘Do they know they’re going to die?’

‘No, of course not.’ Visser was smiling. ‘How can they know? None of them have ever been up.’ He inclined his head towards the open run, which, it suddenly struck me, was just like a gangway, the open door into which it disappeared just like a porthole in a ship. ‘It is just dumb panic,’ Visser was saying. ‘They’re very stupid animals, cows.’

Frank threw the run-gate open and the other man shoved the first cow in. The beast tried to turn, to get back out again, but the chute was too narrow. It was quickly stuck sideways, but kept trying to push itself through the wooden fencing.

‘Carrrrn!’ someone shouted from the top. The men pushed another cow into the run and the first stumbled forward up the rise.

‘They go now to the killing room,’ Visser said. ‘The cow is stunned before killed because the blood will run better that way. Here is an interesting fact. Did you know a cow has four stomachs?’

Eve giggled.

I hadn’t heard Eve laugh for weeks. Maybe she was feeling better. Or maybe it was mania.

‘Yes. It’s correct. One for digestion. Second one for more digestion. Because the grass is very, mmm, what is the word?’

‘Fibrous?’ Cole said.

‘Perhaps. It doesn’t sound like the right word.’

As Mr Visser led us around the pen, I tried to look at the thing scientifically, administratively. I wondered how many cattle they could get up the run in a minute and then tried to extrapolate how quickly they could process 500 head and how much profit they’d earn. I wondered why the men rounded them up in a circle, like a whirlpool, and whether it was on purpose. I tried not to hear the cattle who had made it to the second story of the slaughterhouse: the wild scrabble, a sort of staccato—tat, tat, tat, tat, tat—as each cow disappeared into the building and saw the bolt gun or sensed, somehow, that they were about to die, and tried to back down the chute again. I tried not to notice the brief quiet before the next scrabble.

We stepped through a doorway into a shed. A smell like cold fat, only metallic somehow. The blood, I think.

‘*God.*’ Eve had her hand over her mouth.

‘Are you all right?’

Everyone turned back to look and Visser laughed. ‘There’s always one sensitive one.’

The shed was filled with hanging carcasses—some skinned, some still covered with the red dust of their death walk, all headless, their necks surprisingly ragged, not at all clean as I’d expected them to be. Different to the bodies we dissected in the Anderson Stuart building. Those bodies were cold, the blood had long since stopped flowing, but these were still dripping. Through a gap, I saw the quick movements of a man skinning a carcass and worried we’d have to push our way through the hanging

animals as if through drying sheets. Then Eve bolted for the far side of the shed and I followed. She was vomiting just out back, framed by the open doorway, within view of the abattoir workers. I turned to see if Miss Rodwell was going to follow her, but she caught my eye then deliberately turned back to the man skinning the cow.

Cole and I went out. When Eve had stopped being sick, Cole led us along the back of the shed to a bench made of two tree stumps and a plank of wood pushed against the back wall into the sliver of shade thrown by the roof. The Bastion was in front of us, so close it blocked the sky. The ground in front shimmered with mirages but, for once, I was thankful for the heat; it seemed to burn away the smell.

‘Thank you.’

‘Quite all right. You’re not pregnant, I hope?’ It was a joke. Cole was laughing, but Eve said *No* too sharply and he realised he’d said the wrong thing. He turned to me, on his other side, his eyes wide with questions and I shook my head at him, mouthing, *Later*.

He lit two cigarettes at once, handed one to Eve. ‘It takes away the smell.’

Eve took one and sucked so hard on it, it crackled.

‘Remember dissection classes, Doctor Fraser?’

Back at the University, we used to wait until the men arrived before we started our dissections: their smoking lessened the smell. And something about the casualness of smoking made it all right to look at a foot slipping out from under a sheet or to pull the eyelids back on an eye that had turned milky and blind, that made it possible to feel like you weren’t bothered by the emptiness of a dead body, that you weren’t thinking about how one day it would be your own body. Cole started to explain to Eve about the smoking and how it got rid of the smell of death.

‘Could you stop talking about it, please?’

She didn't say it rudely. It was more of a plea.

'Of course, dear. What a boor I am. Anyway. I have been dy—hoping to ask Doctor Fraser for all the gossip from the University. We were just a year or two apart, I think. Thirty-five you graduated, is that right?'

It only took him three names to get to Glynn's.

'Yes. Actually, I'm going to London to see him.'

'Oh! You're an item. Engaged? No? Soon obviously, if you're going to see him.'

He leant forward and around, the way you do when you're waiting for details, and so I could see Eve in the gap behind him, trying to work everything out.

'But I thought you and Halton—?'

She asked the question like she didn't understand something; it was not malicious. But Cole understood and got up quickly and tried to change the subject. He was red.

'Do you remember Doctor Taylor? Miss Pope, Miss Pope, you wouldn't have believed Doctor Taylor, not if you'd seen him in the flesh.'

I tried to tell him it was all right.

'He couldn't say vagina. An obstetrician!' He pretended to be the doctor, 'Veee-v-gina! We used to find ways just to make him say it.'

Eve was still looking at me.

'Yes. Halton and me. Are—'

'Having an affair?'

'Well, I don't know.'

'Does he know about what's his name?'

'Glynn? No.'

She raised her eyebrows. ‘Oh. I didn’t expect that.’

Cole was looking desperate. ‘Anyway, perhaps we should just keep this between ourselves. I’m sure Doctor Fraser can work it out on her own.’

‘Oh God, I don’t care. Not at all. You do what you like and I won’t tell anyone. You just didn’t seem like the type of person to have a secret. I was surprised, that’s all.’

It was only later I wondered what type of a person Eve thought could have a secret. Outside the killing room, the heat of the weatherboard wall pulsing against my back, I just felt relieved.

‘Thank you, Eve. Thank you, Dr Cole. I will sort it out—’

Cole flapped his hand. ‘Pish. Like Miss Pope said, it’s quite your business.’ He crouched down so his chin was practically resting on my knees, like he was about to propose.

‘Now, you wouldn’t come with me to the native hospital tomorrow, would you? There’s a gentleman with a laceration to the hand that won’t mend and I wouldn’t mind a second opinion.’

‘Of course.’

‘Really? You would? I’ll pick you up around ten a.m.? If that suits?’

‘Yes. But I don’t know if I’ll be able to help much.’

He stood up again. ‘I dare say someone who’s won the Dagmar Berne—yes, Doctor Fraser, I know about that, too—anyway I’m sure she’ll have something to offer. And even if you don’t, it will be wonderful to have any opinion other than my own.’ He cocked his head to one side and affected a nasal accent. ‘What do you think, Doctor Cole?’ Then he cocked it to the other side and resumed his normal accent. ‘Oh no, I defer to you, Doctor Cole. What do you think? See? I am driving myself mad.’

Nothing in my situation had changed, Mrs Connolly was still dead and I was still in an affair with Halton and Eve was still sick and yet, somehow, I felt for that moment everything would be all right. Almost like Father had somehow come up from Orange and possessed Dr Cole for a few moments, just to reassure me.

‘Why don’t we go back inside ... that’s if, Miss Pope, you’re feeling up to it?’

A worker in blood-stained coveralls was explaining the origins of different cuts of meat. When he saw us, Mr Visser announced they were just on their way to see the tallow works but Cole jumped in and said that we might go directly to the Bloodhole if that was all right.

‘We don’t want too many upset stomachs.’

The Bloodhole sounded just as bad as the tallow works, but Cole knew what he was doing so I nodded and said I was feeling a bit sick, too. So it was agreed, Visser would take Mr Lawton and Chilvers around the tallow works and they would meet us later at the Bloodhole.

Cole had his car at the Meatworks so he drove us to the Bloodhole. It wasn’t far to walk, but it was safer in the car. I had expected a purpose-built funnel jutting out into the Gulf, but the Bloodhole—it had been called that by a famous author and the name had stuck—was no more than a channel dug roughly into the riverbank. With the tide out, it had dried into a swamp of congealed, muddy blood that bubbled and gurgled like one imagined the ground at Passchendaele had. On either side, where water met land, the earth was red and flaked like a scabbed knee. Cole said we had better stay in the car. We only had to wait five minutes.

‘Look. Out there.’

Cole pointed at something through the passenger-side window. There was a flash of movement then a line of knobs gliding, just above the waterline, towards the drain. As the crocodile got closer to land, it opened its maw and seemed to gather the bloodied water into itself without even swallowing. It seemed to be smiling. Then there was another mouth and a third. The third crocodile, not getting enough blood, snapped the tail of one of the others and, all of a sudden, there was an almighty thrashing as the beasts turned on one another.

One or two bites later, one of the crocodiles decided the meal wasn't worth it and scrabbled up the bank away from the drain. It seemed to skim across the ground, surprisingly fast on its short stubby legs.

Cole whistled. He was leaning across me, almost on top of me, staring out the window. I turned around and saw Mrs Lawton peeking out from above her hands and Eve, with her legs tucked up underneath her, looking wide-eyed back at me. Miss Rodwell though, was sitting quite relaxed in her seat by the open window, a faint smile across her face.

'Now, that is just what Mister Darwin was talking about,' she said, gazing at the victorious crocodile as he luxuriated in his bloody bath. 'Survival of the fittest.'

'Oh, my Lord. I have never. In my life. Seen anything so terrifying!' Mrs Lawton flapped her hanky in front of her face.

Cole shuffled back to his side of the car. 'Neither have I. How exciting!'

'Perhaps they were competing to be head of the tribe,' Miss Rodwell said.

'Do crocodiles have tribes?'

I thought I heard contempt in Eve's voice, but I wasn't sure. Then there was the rattle and drone of a motorcar and a dusty white utility pulled up alongside us. Visser, Chilvers and Mr Lawton were squashed up together across the front seat. The

windows were wound down and everyone spoke all at once, until Miss Rodwell was the only one speaking and she told the story of the glorious crocodile that had seen off all his rivals. The men were disappointed to have missed it all. Then Cole said he thought we could tempt them back. He hopped out of the car and ran to the boot, opened and shut it, as we all screamed at him to hurry before a crocodile came and got him. He jumped back in the front seat and I saw he had a little tin tucker box with him. He opened it up and pulled out a piece of bloodied liver or kidney then plopped it back in.

We drove closer to the Bloodhole, Cole reassuring us a crocodile would never make an attempt on a motorcar. Then when we were only a few yards away, he stopped the car, and the white truck pulled up next to us.

Very quickly, with the box open on the seat next to him so that only I could see what he was doing, Cole took a piece of paper from his pocket and tied it to one of the pieces of flesh in the box. Then he lifted the package, just a little, from the pile of giblets and blood, and grunted to get my attention. He held it still long enough for me to see the piece of paper then dropped it back into the box. He leapt out of the car and flung the contents of the open tucker box off into the Bloodhole,

‘Dinner’s ready, boys!’

‘Oh, get back in, for God’s sake!’ Mrs Lawton looked like she was going to have a heart attack.

Cole was back in the car and the water was beginning to move in long streaks towards the place where the circles made by dropping meat were still disappearing. I tried to keep my eye on the place where Cole had thrown the subpoena, but it was too difficult with all the thrashing and blood and, even if it wasn’t eaten, it would never

be found now. After 10 minutes, the heat was getting unbearable, the Morris' black canvas roof turning the car into an oven, so we drove back to the *Delphic*.

As I got out of the car, I thanked Cole along with everyone else.

'Can I collect you at ten o'clock tomorrow, Doctor Fraser?'

I'd forgotten about the native hospital. 'Are you sure you want me? After Mrs Connolly? The woman who—'

He put up a hand. 'Stop. You're coming.' Then his face changed and I turned around to see Halton striding up the jetty towards us. My stomach churned at the sight of him. I waited until he was in hearing distance before I answered Cole. I said 10 a.m. would be perfect. I don't know what I was doing, only that I got a thrill to see Halton's face cloud over.

Halton walked me back to the Ship. The other passengers were with us, so he kept his voice light when he asked whether I was going somewhere with Dr Cole.

'Yes. I'm going to see one of his patients at the native hospital.'

His relief annoyed me. For all he knew, Dr Cole was in love with me. Or me with him. But, even as I thought about the possibility, I knew it wasn't true. There was something brotherly or fatherly about Dr Cole. He didn't even seem interested in Eve. Perhaps he was like Cilla that way. Or just not interested in sex at all.

Chapter Thirteen

I was early for my meeting with Cole the next morning; I needed to get off the Ship.

‘Yes, it must be awful stuck in that thing.’

I liked the way he referred to the *Delphic* as ‘that thing’, how he spat the words towards the Ship like he was spitting them at the feet of a drunk. We hopped into his Morris and bumped over the dirt road into town. Although ‘town’ wasn’t the right word for it. It was just a wide dirt road lined on either side by low-roofed clapboard buildings, the two-storey Wyndham Hotel at one end, a boab tree shaking its arms out front, like a fat Baba Yaga. Opposite the Hotel, there was Lee Tong’s general store, the Airways building—advertised with a lopsided wheelbarrow and MMA painted in white letters along the back and sides—and the courthouse with its cells out back, which Cole said were always filled with natives collected as witnesses to cattle killing, or as suspected VD cases waiting for the sergeant to transport them out to the native hospital. We had reached the end of the town and we drove out to the Three Mile, where the Hospital was, the Bastion at our backs. More salt marshes and burnt grass. Cole said the natives lit fires for hunting and the kites spread them when

they picked up burning coal in their beaks and dropped it again when it burnt. They weren't being malevolent; they just liked the look of the embers. Like bower birds with blue, only more dangerous, Cole said. Beer bottles caught the sunlight in brief electric sparks and everything was so dry I got thirsty just looking and had to ask Cole for a swig from his camel skin.

‘Thank you for asking me today. For trying to make me feel better about—’

We hit a pothole and his words were lost in the bang of metal and tire and packed earth.

‘What?’

‘I said, I’m not trying to make you feel better. I need your help.’

We went over another hole and I slid into him. I shifted back to my side of the seat, trying not to move my head too much; I was starting to feel sick.

‘You all right?’

He slowed the car so that it putted along the raised brown road and the dirt didn't rise as high as the window anymore. I tried to nod, but my head was spinning.

‘Sick?’

I mumbled. He stopped the car and I scrambled out and vomited not a foot from the wheel. The ground swarmed at me like it had in Townsville. Or perhaps it was the sky pushing down. The pressure of everything was wrong: it had been ever since Mrs Connolly, bearing down, pressing in, suffocating.

Cole was trying to help, but this would only make it worse: giving me another patient to harm. The panic reached up and threatened to pull me down into a well so deep you couldn't hear a rock touch bottom. Cole offered me the camel skin again. I took a swig, swished the water around my mouth and spat it out. I took another sip. Kept the water down. It was warm and tasted like sulphur. We were silent a long time,

leaning against the bonnet. A galah coasted on an invisible wave of wind into the branches of a eucalypt. There were already dozens of birds in the tree, laughing and cackling. One of them, perched on a branch that jutted out from the rest, looked at me and cocked its head.

‘I can’t help you.’ The road shimmered where it hit the sky as if the earth itself was evaporating in the heat.

‘Of course you can. You’ve just lost confidence—’

‘No. No. I think I killed her. Mrs Connolly. I don’t know.’

‘You didn’t try to kill her.’

‘No.’

‘You tried to save her.’

‘Yes. But—’

‘What would you have done differently? If it happened again?’ The galah cried out again and there was a crackle in the grass off to my left as a snake slithered away. My heart thumped. The baby looks just like limp washing the way it hangs. Its head is cocked all the way back, its legs droop and the bellows are like a spine in the wrong place. I pump the bellows, praying. *Please, God.* Mr Connolly hammering at the door. Mrs Connolly crying out. ‘What’s happening? What’s happening?’ *Please, God. Let him breathe.* The tiny stomach inflating like a puffer fish, the wrong place for air. It should be higher.

The nurse’s hands firm on mine, stopping, pulling out the bellows, taking the baby from me. The placenta’s coming. Mrs Connolly, ‘Where’s my boy? Where’s my boy?’ and so much blood. God knows I don’t believe in him. He’s not helping. Mrs Connolly is haemorrhaging.

‘Just push, Mrs Connolly.’

‘But, where is he? What’s happened? What’s happened?’

Mrs Connolly roars at the contraction or maybe at death, a roar that seems to shake the floorboards, and the placenta slithers out and there is blood, too much, all over me and the bed and the floor. We need to get her to the hospital, Doctor. The nurse is older than I, experienced. She would have left the baby. She wouldn’t have let Mrs Connolly bleed like this.

Mr Connolly pushes the door open and sees his blue baby on the wooden table and his wife on the blood-soaked bed and me with my arms red up to the armpits. He rocks back a little as if someone has belted him across the face.

‘Mr Connolly. You need to phone for an ambulance.’ Nurse sends him up the road. Mrs Connolly is crying. Keening. And I stroke the placenta in my arms. It is so smooth, velvety almost, and warm, like life. I run my blood-covered hands over and around it, stroking, my hands slipping through the blood. Cole took my hand off the placenta. Galahs. Red dust so bright it could be dried blood.

‘You’re not God, you know. Sometimes things go wrong. You were trying to save her.’

But I didn’t believe in God. I believed in science. If I had followed the procedures correctly then she would have been all right. Would have lived. Mrs Connolly.

‘Patients die.’

I knew patients died. But knowing and seeing were different. The baby’s open mouth, the way he hung like his backbone had been reinserted through the front of him, that hot thick blood pulsing out: those things had stripped the world back to its underlying reality: death and suffering and darkness, and now all I could see was reality.

Cole opened the passenger door for me. He was changing the subject again.

‘Right, well, best not keep Charcoal waiting.’

He stood there.

‘At the Native Hospital. He needs his hand fixed. You can do a dressing.’

The Three Mile had been chosen for the Native Hospital because it was far enough away from the main town for the diseased natives to be kept away from the whites and, Cole said, to keep the white men from having sexual relations with the gins. But three miles was still close enough for Cole to visit every few days. It had opened earlier that year, even though the building was still not finished. The contractor kept nicking off and disappearing and the manager, Mr Ministon, was beside himself. Ministon seemed like the type of man who’d always be beside himself about something. He told me, before he’d even asked my name, that the government had had to build the hospital because the men from the meatworks were getting VD from the lubras. There weren’t enough white women round Wyndham.

‘Lubras get it from the Asiatics who work the ships. Buy themselves favours with a bit of opium or tobacco. Treating them is difficult. Doctor Cole will tell you. We only bother with the ones that show signs but even still, they keep escaping. Another one last night. You know that Essie that Mister Khan brought in last week? Definitely contagious. We need screens over the windows.’

Cole interrupted Ministon to ask about the contractor, but he hadn’t shown for work again and Mr Ministon was pink-faced and straight-backed about it. The Chief Protector would withhold payment until the job was done, if Ministon had anything to do with it.

Cole interrupted him again to introduce me. ‘This is Doctor Fraser.’

Mr Ministon's mouth hung open.

'She's going to help me with Charcoal. He's still here, I hope?'

Mr Ministon nodded, his mouth still open. 'Doctor, you say? Medical doctor?'

'That's right. Amazing, isn't it?' Cole flicked me in the back as he said it.

'Anyway, you'd best take us to Charcoal.'

Charcoal was lying on a dirty mattress in the skinny shade of a eucalypt. His breathing was shallow and his hands shook and his eyes kept rolling backwards into his head. His right hand had been bandaged from elbow all the way to the tips of the fingers and the bandage was pus-stained and dirty. Cole said he'd got worse and asked Ministon when he'd last changed the dressing.

'It's very hard to get near him. He points at me in a very, well, I don't know how to describe it, in a very menacing way.'

'When did you change it, Mister Ministon?'

'The day before yesterday, but—'

Cole raised a hand to silence Ministon. He knelt down next to the stained mattress. When he lifted the arm, Charcoal screamed through closed lips. Cole apologised for hurting him and unwrapped the bandage. His fingers were black and the dorsal skin looked close to bursting, the juices seeping out at the edges of the dead skin. Cole turned the hand over, the palmar skin looked like burnt, blackened paper and the finger pads melted into smoothness, all the lines of the fingerprint were gone. I couldn't even see the original wound the gangrene was so bad, it was seeping all over and bleeding all around the edges. The native skin, whatever people say, and whether it belongs to a half-caste or a quarter-caste or an octoroon or full-blood, is not black. It is brown, chocolate, caramel. Warm. Tinged with red underneath. Tinged

with life. The black of Charcoal's fingers was tinged with blue, like the skin of Mrs Connolly's baby. There was no warmth in it. There was no way to get the blood supply back to that dead flesh. Not with lancing or draining or bellows, not if you were God or science or anything. Soon, necrotic tissue would spread infection all through him. There were no marks leading up the arm though, so that was something. Cole got up and pushed Ministon by the elbow to the far side of the boab. Ministon tripped on a tree stump.

‘Get the operating room ready. Antiseptic everywhere. Also, the narrow blade scalpel, two pairs of Spencer Wells forceps, small bone-holding forceps, the saw. And lay out the silkworm-gut, and cutting edged needle, and double-oh catgut.’

Ministon scurried off.

‘Stupid fucking man.’

‘What are you going to take?’

He cracked his neck. ‘His fingers are cold.’

‘Is there a radial pulse?’

He shook his head and didn't say anything else although the list of equipment had given gave me a pretty good idea of what he planned to do. Still, he seemed to need me to say it for him and so I did.

‘There's full-thickness skin necrosis on the palm.’

He nodded.

‘He's not my patient, but I think there's no choice really. You have to de-articulate the wrist.’

As we'd been speaking, a native woman, slender and still, materialised next to the mattress on which Charcoal was now writhing so I could see the huge oval of sweat his feverish body had left behind.

‘That’s Essie. His lubra.’

She had a penny-shaped sore on her lower lip. A chancre. Essie. I remembered then, she was the one Ministon had been complaining about. The one who’d escaped from his Hospital. Cole went across to speak to her. He spoke in a low voice so I couldn’t hear what was said, then she turned her head to look at Charcoal, before taking off across a dried-up creekbed that bordered the property and disappearing into the scrub.

Cole walked back to me.

‘I told her we’d have to take the fingers. Maybe more. We’ll send him back when he’s better.’

‘What about her treatment? Didn’t Ministon say—’

‘I’m not letting that man near Essie. I’ll treat her myself.’

The Hospital was a small clapboard bungalow across from a larger main house where Ministon and his wife and child lived. It was divided into a kitchen, where the natives made their own food, a room with six cots, a surgery, and a store, locked with a padlock. Ministon was mopping the floors with antiseptic when we carried Charcoal in, most of his weight across Cole’s shoulders, but I was holding the rotting arm and I had to breathe through my mouth so as not to choke on the smell.

Ministon helped Cole get him on the operating table, but not until he’d asked him to disinfect the table in front of us.

‘I’ve already done the table. Did it—’

‘Do it again, then. While I watch.’

Ministon turned pink.

I saw Cole's eyes as he tied his mask around his nose and mouth. He barked at Ministon to get him a wet cloth and because I was closer I offered to do it myself, but Cole stuck an arm out to stop me. 'No. He can get it.'

While Ministon was out of the room, Cole leant down and kissed Charcoal on his sweaty forehead. It was the sort of kiss a father gives a son but, even if it had been a lover's kiss, I couldn't have been more surprised. Ministon came back in. 'You. You stay. Wipe his forehead when he looks feverish. Watch what you've done.'

We washed our hands. The smell of ethanolic iodine was not enough to cover the stench of Charcoal's arm. The scalpels were laid out on the metal gurney next to the saw, a lopsided oblong with a serrated edge, empty in the middle. Just like the kind of saw you'd cut a log of wood with. There was nothing delicate about amputation. There was something ancient and medieval about it, as if all our advances in reason and science had been erased and all we were left with was the hacking of limbs, the spurting of blood, the yellow pus.

I was to do the anaesthesia. Ether. Cole would cut in between the carpal bones of the hand and the radius and ulna bones for the forearm. He had to make sure the skin flap on the palmar side was longer than the dorsal, so it could be sewn neatly over the stump, and wasn't so tight it restricted the movement of the arm.

As well as holding the anaesthesia mask, I'd pull out the tendons so they wouldn't shrivel up to be shorter than the stump when it healed. I positioned the arm so that it hung off the table at the point we needed to cut it, the dead hand flopping palm up, the black fingers swollen and shining. Then I put the mask over Charcoal's nose and mouth and tried to reassure him but he wouldn't look me in the eyes. When he'd gone to sleep, I nodded at Cole: it was time.

He picked up a scalpel from the gurney, walked around to my side of the table, let out a huge breath and slid his knife into the wrist where the cavity of the radio-carpal joint is. He blasphemed as he did it, *God*, as if his windpipe was half-closed.

Charcoal's chest rose and fell as he floated on the anaesthesia. His eyes fluttered and I wondered if he knew we were about to lop off his hand. Surely, he must have: his blackened fingers, the pain of the past few days. I told myself that he was too full of fever and ether to realise, but then his eyelids fluttered again and for a brief moment his eyes stayed open. Something about the movement convinced me that he did know, after all. And yet he'd been so calm before we'd knocked him out. He hadn't screamed or tried to bargain his way out of it.

'Sorry, Doc. I don't think I can do it.' I looked up and Cole was leaning on the bed, a hand over his masked mouth. 'Hacking off ... I just know him too well.'

I hadn't done anything surgical since Mrs Connolly. They'd kept me in the outpatient clinic and then I'd come on the Ship. My fingers went cold.

'I'm sorry,' Cole said again. He pulled his mask down. 'Do you think you could manage?'

I nodded, flicked my fingers one by one to get the blood back into them. *I can't do it*, I thought. *I can't*. But then I thought: I didn't have to save or heal anybody. I just had to cut and hack and destroy. Deal with something dead.

'Are you laughing?'

I suppose I might have been. I didn't know. I felt separate from myself. Mr Ministon was standing at the foot of the bed and I told him to get a bowl ready to take the hand out as soon as I'd cut it, to take it outside and burn it.

I did the skin flaps first. Ran the scalpel along the smooth brown skin at a ratio of two to one, so the palmar flap would be longer than the dorsal, bloody drops

surfacing in the wake of my knife, like the holes that Cilla's dressmaking roller made in pattern paper. Then I cut, half an inch beyond the ulnar and radial styloids.

It's not long before the knife gets through the top layer of skin to the tendons and, when the knife goes through, them they snap back like a piece of rubber being cut. Ping ping ping. Then the muscles. I cut them longer too, so they could be sutured to the bone for padding.

I ligated the smaller vessels, did it twice for the arteries, then it was time to open the joint. I switched to the saw and sawed back and forth through the bone. Like cutting through gristle on a steak. I thought I saw the hand flick up as the saw went through the wrist before it fell backwards to land with a thud and a metal swish as the bowl overbalanced and rolled on its side. I bevelled the ends of the bones. The saw ground against the bone until I felt it in my teeth.

Medicine is often theoretical. Rote learning anatomies, daintily coloured pictures of tendons and muscles and bird-sized finger bones, but this was butchery. Hacking and sawing and blood and cauterising the arteries, veins and flesh shrivelling up backwards into the stump, away from the hot metal rod, the stench thickening: burning flesh layered on sweet rotting flesh and Ministon running out to vomit loudly just beyond the surgery door. And I realised I was happy.

There was nothing high or god-like about this kind of medicine. I was in the trenches, a workman hewing out the rough, not an artisan or an artist or a life-giver. And I realised I could *do* the trench-work. As long as I wasn't called to be the creator or the god or the one who breathed life into anything.

Cole offered to suture the wound, but I wanted to. My hands weren't shaking anymore, they were steady and my eye felt sharp and even the smell didn't seem so bad as it had. I felt powerful. I could glimpse on the edge of my consciousness,

though barely put it into words, that when I didn't need to be a doctor, I would be free. I could do the surgery, give the medicine, deliver the babies and sometimes they would die and I would be up to my elbows in blood, but it wouldn't be my fault and I could sleep soundly. I wasn't directing life, I was just observing it unfold. Maybe helping it along here or there. After I'd finished sewing and Cole had cleaned the wound and given Ministon instructions and promised him we'd be back to check on the patient just when he didn't expect us, we washed up and hopped back into the Morris.

We rode back to the jetty without speaking, pretending, without saying so, that the rattle and crash and clank of the car made it too hard to hear. When Cole pulled up to the end of the jetty and hopped out to open my door, he thanked me.

I started to say I hadn't helped much. 'I wish we could have saved the hand.'

'You couldn't have saved the hand. You did a wonderful job.' He rubbed his eye and, suddenly, I knew he hadn't felt too sick to do the amputation after all.

I hugged him quickly. 'Thank you.'

He smiled and we stayed there at the end of the jetty, leaning on the Morris, the sun like a blowtorch, and talked about Charcoal and Mrs Connolly and Eve. The suicide attempts, the dyspepsia, and the baby no one knew she'd had.

'That has to be the cause.'

'Yes, I think it must be.'

'And do you think she's still suicidal?'

'Maybe. Yes. Nothing much has changed since Townsville. Except now I know about the baby and no one else does.'

I decided that, when I told the Master about Eve's baby, I was going to tell him about Mrs Connolly, about why he'd been forced to take me on as the ship's surgeon.

'Would you like me to come with you? When you tell the Master?'

'No. It's all right.' And it was. Dad and Mrs Connolly and the baby and Halton and Glynn and the blood and black skin and hacking and Cole saying, *Oh God*, like he was vomiting up his own soul. It *was* all right: everything destroyed and overturned and me coming through it like I'd shot through into another plane of reality where everything was clear, like looking at a microcosm in a beaker. I would tell the Master everything and he would do what he would do. I would try my best to save Eve but maybe I couldn't and that was just that.

Chapter Fourteen

As soon as I was back on board, I went straight from Cole to see the Master in his dayroom. He looked worried when he saw me.

‘Is everything all right? Is Miss Pope—’

‘She’s all right. Well, she’s not, but this isn’t about ... could we sit down?’

For all the grand ideas I’d had while I was operating on Charcoal, I found, as I sat down in the armchair under the square window, that I was clenching my fists. I tried to move my mind back to that vantage point I’d found during the amputation, that plane or separate reality or whatever it was, where the things that normally mattered didn’t. But it turned out not to be the type of place one could get to just by willing it.

The Master sat next to his writing desk. There were yellow kapok flowers in a vase on the cabinet next to his desk and I wondered if he’d picked them himself. They quivered in the breeze from the ceiling fan, which churned the hot air. The thermometer above his desk said 108. I wiped my forehead.

‘What is it, Doctor?’

‘I was looking after a patient. A woman. She had a stillborn and then, not long after, she died.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘That’s why I’m on the ship. Why, I think, you were told to take me as ship’s doctor. My ... friends arranged this job for me.

‘But now I’ve been called by a coroner’s inquest. In Sydney.’ The words were stuck in my head. *Inquest into the death of Mrs Evelyn Connolly. Stop. Calls Dr Ada Fraser as witness. Stop.* ‘There was a telegram for me. At the Post Office in town.’ I didn’t tell him about Townsville.

‘Can I see it?’

I shook my head. ‘No. I’m sorry. It’s been lost.’

He frowned. ‘You’d better tell me about it then.’ He pulled down the panel on his desk, took out a cigarette tin and lit himself a cigarette. I told him about Mrs Connolly and her placenta and how I may or may not have left a piece of it inside her to start the infection off. The dayroom was aft of the wheelhouse, its doorway and two portholes looked back over the stern and, beyond that, to the open sea at the top of Australia. I couldn’t see any of this from where I was sitting, portside, below the level of the portholes and yet, I felt the never-ending flatness of the sea, its surface and its depth and my littleness and the smallness of that room and the two of us at that point in time on top of the vast ocean washing over rock, cutting it down to granules of sand over millions and millions of years.

‘When did this happen?’

‘A month ago, I think. The thirty-first of May. A Monday.’

He squinted at the porthole above my head, moved his jaw from side to side, loosening it. ‘So, you’re running away.’ It wasn’t a question otherwise I would have

said it shouldn't have been in the present tense. He shouldn't have spoken in the present tense, because I had been running away but I wasn't anymore. I was telling him. But it was so hot it was hard to breathe and I couldn't get back to that place where I'd been during Charcoal's operation.

'The infection killed her? Your patient?'

'Yes.'

'But if you left a piece of the placenta, shouldn't one of the other doctors at the hospital have got it out?'

'Yes. But the original fault was mine.'

'Maybe.'

'Maybe.'

'You feel guilty, whether or not you are—'

'No, I—'

'I hadn't finished. You feel guilty and you want to pay for the guilt somehow. Parade it. Weep. Say you're sorry.'

His shoes were perfectly polished, not a smudge. His trousers fastidiously creased. He had no idea what it felt like to have a person's life on your conscience. He smoked his cigarette. Looked at me. He was waiting for me to respond, but I couldn't speak without crying and I didn't want to cry in front of him.

'Sounds like self-indulgence to me. They can work out if you're guilty or not without you there, surely?'

'The widower—'

'I can't afford for you to go to this inquiry. I need a doctor on board. Insurance company won't let me go without a doctor and I can't get another one now.'

'But I could be arrested—'

‘I am the ultimate authority on board and I say you can’t go.’

I looked at him. He was so sure of his own standing. Like the ship was a kingdom and he was the king.

‘If you leave against my orders, *I* can have you arrested.’

He took out his pipe, packed and lit it. ‘I’ll deal with the inquiry. I don’t see that we need to respond to the telegram, especially if it has been lost.’ He seemed to be purposely not looking at me. ‘We will wait till the next telegram comes. Which won’t be until we’re at sea.’

‘And it will be too late then.’

‘Well, if it’s so important for you to appear, they should have wirelessly.’

I should have been relieved, but maybe the Master was right. Maybe I needed to stand up publicly and say it was my fault and be absolved, to have someone say I was all right, just a girl trying her best. I needed my slate washed clean, but perhaps it never would be, inquest or no.

‘How is Miss Pope?’

A cloud went over the sun and the cabin went dark for a beat before the light streamed in again.

‘She’s had a baby.’

‘What?’

‘Some time ago, a few months I think. Her abdomen is consistent with having given birth and I managed to get Miss Rodwell to confirm it—in a sense, anyway.’

‘Miss Pope herself hasn’t told you?’

‘Not directly. She did mumble a bit when I asked her about it, but she was sedated and drunk. It was hard to get sensible answers.’

‘But what did Miss Rodwell say?’

I tried to think what Miss Rodwell had said but, as I went back over our conversation, I realised she hadn't actually said anything. None of her answers had either confirmed or denied that Eve had had a baby. All she'd said was that it was not my business. That their lives were not my business.

'But you're sure of it? That she's had a baby?'

'Yes. I'm sure. Also, there were never any psychiatrists or recommendations of a cure-by-sea or any of that.'

'So she's not suicidal?'

'Yes. I mean, yes, I think she *is* still suicidal, only for different reasons than I thought before. Something to do with the baby. Perhaps she didn't want to give it up.'

'But then, why are they on board? If it's not to save Miss Pope?'

I shook my head.

'Maybe they're running away, too.'

The words hurt. I pushed the red pile of his rug with the toe of my sandal.

'Possibly.'

He stood up, opened the door and waited for me to leave. 'If they'd asked me, I would have told them no women—passengers or crew. Most trouble I've ever had on a job.'

I saluted him at the door. 'I find that very hard to believe, Master.'

He looked at me in surprise and seemed to think for a few seconds before he laughed, a proper laugh.

'That's fair. And you're right. It's not the most trouble I've ever had. There have been worse jobs. But this is getting close.' He stepped out of the dayroom onto the walkway and flicked his cigarette off the side of the bridge into the brown water. The sun was at a 45-degree angle to the land. About five p.m. Dinner soon.

‘What do you propose to do about Miss Pope?’

I had no idea what to do about Eve.

‘I can’t have her killing herself on me. Company could get sued and I’ll lose all the profit on this job, won’t be able to get another one.’ He leant his elbows on the railing.

‘The only way I can guarantee she won’t is if she’s not on the boat and then she’ll still probably kill herself, just not on board.’

‘Ship. Not boat.’

‘Ship. Sorry.’

I thought about Miss Rodwell and Eve, lying about the psychiatrist and the baby and why they were on board. Why were they really travelling? The sun was dropping and a shadow slid up the Bastion.

He rubbed his face. ‘You’ll have to try to stop her, treat her without the aunt knowing. Worst comes to worst, I’ll have her locked in the cabin but, given the pressure we’re under to take her as a passenger, I’d rather not have to do that.’ He sighed then pushed himself off the railing and stood like a soldier at attention. ‘Right. Talk to her as soon as you can. Find out about the baby. Do you want a whisky?’

‘Yes.’ He was treating me like he would Halton. Almost equal. Equal enough to drink with.

The entire Bastion was now in shadow and electric lights were flickering on like fireflies in the Meatworks. Amid the corrugated roofs there was a rectangle of yellow light; the outdoor cinema screen. The workers, washed of blood and fat, would sit in on the wooden pews and watch *Call Again Soon*, and tomorrow they’d go back to the killing floors or the skinning or ride back to the stations they’d come from. The year 1937 was to be a year of record killing. Hundreds of thousands of cattle. Prime

frozen beef shipped off to England and New Zealand and elsewhere. The lowing of hundreds of thousands of cows cut short with a bolt gun to the head and the heavy thud of flank falling to floor. Tomorrow, a couple of hundred would be loaded into the number two freezer. Headless and stacked one on top of the other.

The Master came out again. The whisky was warm except just around the edges of the ice cubes, burning and freezing. The birds called as the sun went down. The rolling whirr of the waterbirds, rising at the end of every few notes, like an excited woman, a whistle, an almost ear-piercing trill. Above us, some giant bird flapped its wings in a sudden flurry to get somewhere or to escape something and, down below in the water, some invisible creature splashed. The Master slapped his arm.

‘The mosquitos are awful around here. Better go down for dinner soon if you don’t want to get malaria.’

Everyone was already at the tables when we got to the salon and the Master nudged me towards Eve. I didn’t know whether to ask about the baby. Or that strange package she and her aunt had been fighting over. Or the psychiatrist. Any one of those topics could shut her up for good. How did I still know so little about her and why she was sick? It had been more than a week since I’d seen her stomach, three days since I’d bought it up with Miss Rodwell. I suppose I’d had some vague idea that it was bad to plunge a psyche straight back into trauma, that to do so might sever it irreparably. But then there’d been Halton and Charcoal and the inquest and, the truth was, I hadn’t really wanted to ask her about it. I’d been too scared to treat another patient after Mrs Connolly. Running away again.

The overhead fans were on, but they weren't doing much, and the women had flimsy paper ones, too.

'Do you want Bowyer to bring you one?' Mrs Lawton asked as I sat down. 'Bowyer! A fan for the doctor, please. And a champagne, too.'

I nodded at Bowyer who was still struggling to look me in the eyes. I wondered if he would tell Halton about Glynn before I could. *Possibly*, I thought. His loyalty was to his first mate, after all. Not to me. I looked across to the other table where Halton was sitting and he caught my eye before looking away in an obvious snub. It took me a second to remember I'd teased him after he'd seen Cole drop me home the day before, then I hadn't called on him once today. He was jealous. The pinkness of it rose up from under his white collar into his jaw. He fingered his fork carefully but I kept staring at him until he must have felt it in the hairs on the back of his neck and he glanced over and grinned.

'What are you doing?' Eve asked.

'Hmm?'

Eve had been watching this silent lovers' tiff; I'd forgotten that she could still watch.

'You haven't told him yet, have you?'

She was murmuring, a smile on her face disguising what we were actually talking about so, to anyone watching, it might have looked like we were speaking about Spain or something.

'Do you actually like him?'

The surprise in her voice made me angry. As if it was unbelievable that a man like Halton was attractive. As if only a desperate girl would fall for someone like that. I couldn't say that to her though. I couldn't admit to being offended and so I said:

‘What happened to the baby, Eve?’

The smile stayed frozen on her face but it dropped away from her eyes, until all that was left in them was fear and hurt. I might have slapped her across the face.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

‘The baby that you had. Where is it?’

The sun was sinking into the Gulf, a red, apocalyptic ball. There was a dying flash bright enough to leave spots in your eyes, then the room turned dull.

Eve wasn’t smiling at all now. ‘Don’t ask me about that.’

‘I need to ask you.’ I tried to sound kind, but she was on guard now, because of how I had used it as a weapon before, when she’d offended me over Halton.

She made a small movement with her head. Across the table, Miss Rodwell had stopped speaking in the middle of a conversation with Mr Chilvers. She was looking at us with her head cocked to one side.

‘I need to ask you. I’m worried. You’re ... you’re going to try to hurt yourself again, because of the baby, but you don’t have to feel so unhappy ...’

Eve looked over to Miss Rodwell. Then she mumbled to me in a low voice, barely moving her lips, ‘I know you’re trying to help, but I can’t.’

‘Would you please not worry about your aunt? She doesn’t control you.’

She fumbled in her purse, which was slung by the strap off the side of her chair, so her face was turned and her mouth close to my ear. ‘I can’t talk about it now. I’ll meet you at the hospital. After eleven.’

Then she turned away and lit a cigarette. After a while, Miss Rodwell stopped looking at Eve and me, then Bowyer came in carrying the first of the entrees. He’d heard in town that a crocodile had taken a Chinaman the week before last.

‘Chin Huey, I think his name was, he was out fishing on the little jetty, the one nearer town. ‘Least everyone thinks he was fishing but no one knows. Anyway, it was last Thursday. Some natives who saw it reckoned he just fell off all of a sudden and there was some splashing in the water and then he was gone.’

‘How idiotic. To go fishing where there are crocodiles.’

‘That’s what I thought, Miss Rodwell. Ask me, I reckon there might be something nasty behind it all. Like maybe someone pushed him or something.’ He nodded and there was a suitable hush before he remembered the rest of the entrees and excused himself.

The Master told Halton it’d be an idea to tell the men, in case any of them had any stupid ideas about racing crocodiles or getting drunk at the hotel and walking down the jetty late at night. Eve chain-smoked and drank two glasses of champagne in a few minutes. She didn’t say much for the rest of the meal. I asked her if she felt better after the meatworks, but she just looked confused. I had to remind her she’d been sick. But it wasn’t like she’d forgotten so much as she was tangled in something that was holding her back from the surface.

I went to the hospital straight after dinner. I climbed onto the top bunk to rest until Eve came.

A loud knocking woke me. There was no porthole where I expected to find one and the knocking was coming from a strange place for the door. Then I remembered where I was and scrambled down from the bunk.

I turned on the light and beckoned her in. ‘Have you been waiting long?’

Eve checked over her shoulder.

‘Could we keep the light off, please?’

I turned it off again.

‘Was she asleep when you left?’ I asked.

‘I think so, but it’s difficult to tell. I’ve thought so before and she hasn’t been.’

‘She’s followed you?’

‘Yes. Once or twice.’

Eve looked over her shoulder again. She was twitchy.

‘It’s all right, Eve. I’ve locked the door.’ I led her in. ‘Watch out for the bunk.’

We found the chairs and sat down. I had the porthole at my back and Eve was a dim outline in the light that came through it. She lit a cigarette and the smoke came out in uneven puffs, quivery, like she couldn’t hold a breath. She kept shifting around too, half-standing, sitting, looking around behind her, putting her hand to her head until I started to worry the ash would fall on her hair.

‘Are you all right? You seem jumpy.’

‘Haven’t had my medicine.’

‘That your aunt gives you?’

‘Yes. Makes me too tired.’

I started to ask her if she knew what it was, the medicine her aunt gave her, but she was so twitchy I thought she might jump out of her chair and bolt for the door. I had to concentrate on the main thing.

‘What happened to your baby, Eve?’

She sucked on her cigarette. ‘Bertie.’

I tried to speak slowly to calm her down. I told her it was a nice name.

‘Thank you. It was Albert, really. Bertie’s a nickname.’ Her knee jiggled up and down, I could see the movement of it in the dark, could hear the sh-sh-sh of her shoe on the linoleum.

‘Did you have to give him up?’

‘What?’

‘Bertie. Did you have to give him up for adoption?’

‘For adoption? Oh. Yes. Yes, I suppose—’ She stopped speaking and started out of her chair and stayed frozen there like a runner at the start of a race.

‘Did you hear that?’ The smoke from her cigarette twisted between us. The water slapped against the hull and a dog howled. ‘I thought I heard steps.’

‘Do you want me to look?’

‘Could you?’

She was whispering and I was caught up in her anxiety. I tiptoed to the door then flung it open suddenly so I could catch anyone snooping outside. The corridor was empty. I looked up and down, just to be sure, then stepped fully into the corridor to let my breath out. It was lighter out there than in the surgery and I tried to read my watch to see what time it was. The face was bright but the hands kept dissolving in front of my eyes. I came back in and sat down again.

‘Corridor’s empty.’

Eve was in the same position I’d left her in. I helped her to sit down again.

‘What would your aunt do if she knew you were here? I mean, she knows I know about the baby, so why does it matter if you talk to me?’

‘Why does it matter? Why does it matter? Why does it matter?’ The words came out of her like a tic, a reflex. She sucked on her cigarette and but didn’t blow out the smoke, just let it escape as she spoke. ‘It’s meant to be a secret. She’d, I don’t know what she’d do, but she’d hurt you somehow. If she knew we were talking.’

‘Doesn’t anyone know about the baby?’

‘Only Father and Aunt. And the midwife.’

‘But the new parents?’

Twitch, twitch, twitch. She shook her head.

‘No. They didn’t know he was mine.’

My eyes were adjusting to the dark and Eve’s eyes were like small black holes in the glow of her face. ‘But what about when you were pregnant? Surely people must have seen you?’

‘No. They sent me away. To Orange.’ She was touching her head again, patting the crown with her fingers. ‘When I came back home to have Bertie, I had to stay in my room.’

‘What about Bertie’s father?’

She didn’t answer me, just twisted in her chair to look at the door, as if someone were about to come in. She sucked the air through her teeth. ‘I’ve got to go.’

‘You must miss him.’

‘He’ll always be with me.’ She said it mechanically, like words she’d rote-learned. She stood up again.

‘Do you think Bertie is why you feel so ... why you try to hurt yourself?’

She laughed, a short sarcastic laugh. ‘I’d say so, yes.’

It was such a bleak laugh, I wanted to hug her. I asked if I could try to make her feel better.

‘But how could you do that?’

And I couldn’t answer her. I had another of those horizon-tipping moments that I’d had in Townsville. What if Eve was the one who was seeing things clearly? And me, the one trying to make her well again, I was the one who was mad? How could you be well after that? And then, what if the war neurotics at Callan Park were the sane ones because they refused to carry on after they’d seen their friends blown

into brains and intestines, or after they'd killed a man they'd never met before. I saw the mania of psychiatry. Its insistence on constant equilibrium; on 'normality'. But then she was just standing there, looking at me hopefully.

'We could talk about it? Sometimes it feels, you know, just better to talk about things.'

'I don't think that would help. I have to go back, before Aunt notices. Please don't say anymore to her about Bertie. Or anyone else. You haven't told Halton, have you?'

'No.' I was glad to be able to say that. Glad she didn't ask me about Dr Cole or the Master.

I followed her out into the corridor and locked the door of the hospital behind me. 'Can I walk back with you?'

She put a hand on my forearm. 'No. I don't want my aunt to see us.' She darted off down the stairs. I followed her down and watched her flit across the deck and disappear amidships. Her paranoia seemed to have worsened. But then, so much of it seemed justified. I looked up at the sky. It was cloudless and the stars covered it in a dome. Down on land, off to the west of the Bastion, I could see the red glow of a fire and I wondered if Essie was there. Then I turned and went back upstairs to the surgery. I'd sleep there for the night. Halton would be less likely to come to Hospital and I didn't want to see him tonight. Not till I'd decided what to do.

I turned on the light just for a moment to see where I'd left my pullover. There was a strange pattern behind the chair where Eve had been sitting. I looked closer and saw it was hair. Eve's hair. Strands and strands of it—enough for a lock or two—scattered over the white-painted floor. I remembered that night at the Brisbane Hotel when she'd got drunk and kept plucking the hairs out of her head. It had become a

compulsion. I was too tired to get out the broom and sweep; I'd clean it up in the morning. I turned off the light and scrambled up to the top bunk again.

Chapter Fifteen

At breakfast the next day, the Master said we'd be leaving Wyndham early the following morning. The cargo would be loaded by then, earlier than expected. Miss Rodwell said 'Thank God for that,' then Eve spilled her coffee and, when some of it dripped off the table onto her lap, she barely moved. Even her eyelids seemed to open and close in slow motion. One of her eyelashes had fallen out and it was sitting on her nose just near her nostril where it would have itched, but she seemed oblivious to it. Her affect was completely flat. Trancelike. It was so different from the twitching mania of the night before, I thought she must have taken a sedative. Maybe the pill she'd talked about by the pool that day. *Aunt said it's better not to talk about it. Better just to take my pills.*

The dread that had seemed to dissipate after Charcoal began niggling again, still quiet enough for me to push back, but there: an anxiety that I couldn't save her. I wonder now if there isn't something animate about fear. Something infectious. Back in 1937, even after everything that had happened with Eve and Mrs Connolly, I wouldn't have put it like that. I do think I would have admitted that the sight of

another person's terror could make you more fearful than the object of that fear. The memory of Eve rushing into the surgery, looking over her shoulder, looking, looking, and her jagged-breath smoking, the hair all over the floor, made my heartbeat quicken.

It was eight a.m. I wanted to see Charcoal and make sure the stump was healing. And I wanted to see Cole. I wanted to ask him about Eve. To think up a plan. I just wanted to be around him, safe, for a little while longer. But I didn't want to leave Eve alone. I didn't think she'd try to kill herself while we were still in dock because I was still expecting her to jump overboard and she wouldn't do that in the Gulf where the tides might wash her up or the crocodiles get her. But her behaviour and moods were so unpredictable, I couldn't be sure. I asked her to come with me into town and visit the hospital. *Our last time on solid ground for weeks*, I said. She barely responded. But Miss Rodwell, who was sitting across the table, invited herself along and soon Mr and Mrs Lawton were coming too. I hoped Cole wouldn't mind. For my purposes, it was perfect because as soon as I realised all the passengers would be going, I worked out it would give me the opportunity to get into Eve's cabin and get hold of the pills her aunt had been giving her. That way, I'd at least know for certain what kind of medication she was on and whether or not it was helping. I told the others to meet on the jetty no later than ten o'clock next morning and, when the Master got up to leave the saloon, I followed, explained my plan and asked him to get Bowyer to slip a key under my door. I'd get into Eve's cabin after they'd all gone down to the jetty.

Later that morning, we walked into town. Three children were straggling across from the tin-roofed settlements of the 'Gully', where the poorer abattoir workers and half-

castes lived, on their way to the one-room schoolhouse. They looked like spirits, rippling in the morning heat. The street sweepers hadn't been round yet and around the Wyndham Hotel, broken glass sparkled in the morning sun.

The Wyndham Hospital was further down the road, opposite the MMA offices and Lee Tong's Store. The white bungalow with its lattice-shaded verandah was a contrast to the stained grey weatherboard of the Native Hospital. Yellow-green saplings struggled to make their way in a front garden marked out by a chicken-wire fence and the only clue that it was a hospital came from the small 'Hospital' copperplate tacked next to the front door. I climbed the steps first, hoping to explain all the other people to Cole and give him a few seconds to get used to the entourage. The door opened before I'd had a chance to knock. He was still doing up a sleeve. He beamed at me.

'Hallo, Doc! What a lovely surprise.' He caught sight of the others waiting on the other side of the chicken wire. 'Oh look ... it's all of you. Of course, I don't mind. I thought you were my first patient for the day. But ... Oh! Are you sick? No? Oh good. Just a visit, then? Good-oh! Come in, Come in.'

Cole showed us through to the enclosed part of the verandah, where there were four cane chairs and not very much else. I explained they wanted to see the new hospital and Cole called the nurse to bring us tea while he went to get his bag.

Everyone wanted to come to the Native Hospital so it was a squeeze in the car: Cole, Eve and I in front and Miss Rodwell with the Lawtons in the back. We were just passing the Three Mile gate, when Ministon came out of the main house looking cranky then, when he realised it was Cole's car, fearful. There was a young woman, perhaps still a teenager, leaning against the trunk of Charcoal's tree. She shuffled

herself up when she saw us, knees out in front of her like a shield. Her dress was wet. Gonorrhoea.

‘Hello, Ministon.’ Cole hopped out. ‘Some visitors from the *Delphic*.’

Ministon bowed like a Chinaman, up down up down. *Hello, hello*, and a special *hello* for Dr Fraser and then he told us how well the patient was doing, and how he had just this morning changed the dressing on the wound.

‘Good. Doctor Fraser and I will go and check. Could you give these people a tour of the place, please?’

‘Oh. You don’t want me to come with you while you see the patient?’

‘And have you intimidate him? No.’

Mrs Lawton scuffed the red dirt in embarrassment, but Miss Rodwell looked frankly at Ministon and then at Cole as if deciding which one most deserved her contempt. Eve, too, was looking at Mr Ministon, but only because he was the thing in front of her. He could have been a tree. I reminded myself of what I had brought to give to Cole.

Ministon, bowing again, had already launched into the background of the hospital. How Mr Davis had found in his travelling medical inspections of 1934 that the natives were rife with VD and that they needed treatment, particularly in a place like Wyndham where the lack of white women meant white men sometimes took comfort in black arms.

Mrs Lawton covered her mouth in shock.

‘So it’s about protecting the men as much as anything,’ Miss Rodwell said.

‘Protecting the race. Yes.’

Miss Rodwell exhaled through her nose. ‘If they’re stupid enough to do it in the first place, I would have thought they weren’t worth protecting.’

Ministon looked around at Cole, hoping he'd answer the criticism for him, but Cole was enjoying himself.

Mrs Lawton asked if there was any chance we could be infected from being around the inmates and Miss Rodwell said not unless she was going to sleep with one of them.

'Have fun!' Cole said, then put his arm through mine and marched me off to the treatment room.

There were only three beds in the treatment room and Charcoal was in the one closest to the window, which looked back towards the Bastion. He was looking out the window when we came in, and I imagined he was pining to be outside again but, perhaps, he was just trying to get a whiff of fresh air. The smell of disinfectant was very strong. Cole and I pulled up chairs on the side of the bed furthest from the window and Cole touched Charcoal's upper arm very gently. It was the amputated arm, but I got the feeling he would have touched him like that even if the arm had been whole. Charcoal turned his head and seemed to wince at the effort of doing that, even though he tried to hide it.

'Lo, Doc,' he said. His voice cracked as though he hadn't spoken for a long time.

Ministon had done his job this time. The wound was well dressed and clean. There were no signs of sepsis and Charcoal's fever had gone. Cole asked him gentle questions about whether he was in pain and had Essie been to see him. He was trying to take Charcoal's mind off the way he was moving the arm stump, something he had to do to ensure the skin didn't shrink as it healed and restrict his movement. Then Charcoal closed his eyes and he seemed to drift off. I got the envelopes out of my

handbag, while Cole reached into his shorts and pulled out an ivory pipe and a tobacco tin. Cole stuffed his pipe with a pinch of tobacco then took the envelope from me. He tipped the little white pills into his hand.

‘This what Eve’s been taking?’

‘Yes.’

He picked up the pill, which was perhaps a fifth of an inch and licked it. Then he popped it back in the envelope. ‘Phenobarb.’

That had been my guess, too, though more from Eve’s behaviour on those times she wasn’t manic than from the taste of the drug. I wondered if Cole had had a lot of experience with barbiturates. I had thought of Cole as a friend or a kindred spirit but, suddenly, I saw that I was merely on the outside edge of his life and knew nothing about him. We were all like that: billiard balls clinking and bouncing off one another. There was an entire universe in each ball, but we never knew anything beyond the surface.

He lit the pipe and puffed on it until the flame took. I had actually never tried to look into his depths though. I had been like a neighbour content not even to peek over the dividing fence, not even interested.

‘What happened to the baby, by the way? Did you find out?’

‘Adopted out.’

‘Poor girl. Phenobarb’s probably not a bad idea.’

‘But did you see her today? She’s practically catatonic. Anyway. I wondered. Could you get it tested for me?’

‘You don’t think it is phenobarb?’

‘Probably. I just want to be sure.’

There was a cloud of white smoke forming around his head. He took the other envelope from me and raised his eyebrows when he saw what was inside.

‘She’s pulling out her hair.’

‘Nerves? Or postpartum?’

I hadn’t thought of postpartum. I supposed it was a possibility. The sun was coming through the shutters in stripes and I let a strip warm my ankles. Outside, Mrs Lawton was asking about Salvarsan and how would you know for certain that a native was cured. A dog barked. My dark feelings, which I couldn’t even coalesce into words, seemed suddenly ridiculous. Cole was waiting. Then Charcoal groaned and opened his eyes.

‘Fingers.’

Cole reached for Charcoal’s good hand. ‘My friend. We had to take them. I’m sorry.’

Charcoal closed his eyes and winced. ‘They hurt. Hurt like buggery. Like the fence cut just yesterday. Except how can they hurt?’

The nerves of his amputated fingers were still sending signals to his brain or perhaps, the memory of his pain was so deep that it caused a groove in his brain, so that the pain kept replaying, over and over and over. Cole tried to explain phantom limbs, but it sounded like a cruel joke. He asked when Charcoal he’d had his last shot of morphine.

‘I’ll get Ministon to give you some more soon.’

‘But when will it stop?’

‘A couple of months or so. It’s hard to be exact.’

Cole was lying. It would take six months at least for the pain to go and it might be with him for life. The ghost of his arm. Useless and a constant source of pain.

We met the others outside. They had toured through Ministon's house, 'the married quarters' and now he was going to show them the treatment room. Cole asked them just to poke their heads round the door, because he didn't want Charcoal disturbed.

'All right,' Ministon said, then he asked if Charcoal had said anything about being cursed.

Mrs Lawton looked excited. 'The bone? Was it a bone pointing?'

'I don't know. He was just mumbling about how he'd been cursed, the arm was a curse. I think it's over that woman, Essie. The one that keeps escaping, you know?'

There was a breeze and it made the dry grass hiss at our feet. Ministon shuffled uncomfortably.

'I'm only telling you because, you know, if I can't make him eat ...they can will themselves to death, you know.'

'And you don't want to get the blame.'

'No.' Ministon didn't even realise he'd given himself away. The grass kept hissing. If there had been even a spark the whole place would have gone up in seconds. The corrugated iron sides of the ward were dull with dust.

'I think they should just take them away from the person who cursed them, you know, keep them locked up so that no one can get to them, and show them how silly they're being.' That was Mrs Lawton. She was nervous. She only wanted to fill

in the tense quiet rather than being particularly wedded to what she was saying, but her words woke Eve up.

‘How are they being silly? By dying?’

Mrs Lawton was red from the heat and there was a drop of sweat hanging off the end of her nose. ‘Well, I. Yes, I suppose. I mean, you can’t actually will someone else to die, can you?’

Eve spoke slowly, woodenly. ‘I think you can. Look at the voodoos and the Japanese. It happens all the time.’

‘Yes, but, if you’re rational about it, you just don’t listen. Block it out.’

The breeze rattled the dry twigs of the tree branches and, inside the treatment room, Charcoal moaned.

‘I don’t think it’s possible. To survive, if everyone in your world thinks you should be dead.’

Miss Rodwell had picked up a stick during the tour and she whacked it against the dry ground, releasing a puff of red dust. ‘Don’t be stupid, Eve. Can we have a look inside now?’

They were like a tour group at the zoo, clumping up the steps to the treatment room to peer at Charcoal. They were in and out. Mrs Lawton was holding her sleeve over her nose and mouth. Then Cole offered to take us to see where the patients with VD were held.

The two huts were at the back of the site, a quarter of a mile away from the main quarters. Boxes made of corrugated iron with holes punched out for windows and a door. They had been built in front of a creek bed, which had dried to stinking mosquito-breeding mud. You could see the insects hovering around the huts from

three feet away and I remembered what Dr Cilento had said about the possibility of malaria coming to this part of the tropics.

Eve and I were the only ones who wanted to see inside and I had second thoughts as soon as Cole opened the door and the hot air rushed out like he'd opened an oven. It must have been more than 115 Fahrenheit. Eve stepped into the middle of the hut and stretched out her arms so they reached the walls on either side. There was a bedding matt pushed up against one wall. 'People live in here,' she said.

'Well, they stay here, while they're being treated. Like that girl under the tree.'

The walls were very thin and Ministon, who'd been listening, piped up.

'Only the ones with VD,' he said. 'There was another one, too. Essie. But she escaped. The department won't put bars on the windows, so they keep escaping before we've finished with them.'

Outside, someone clicked a tongue.

'How do you get them here in the first place?'

'Police,' Cole said.

The *Delphic* left Wyndham, as planned, on the morning of the 25th. The muddy tide bore us away from the cracked brown riverbanks and broken bottles and the milky brown water hiding its snakes and crocodiles and blood.

Cole came to see us off even though it was only just gone six a.m.; 'I'll already be up!' he'd said, when I told him not to bother. I felt safe when he was there, like he was an incarnation of Dad or Cilla. Telling Halton about Glynn didn't feel as frightening when I imagined Cole standing beside me. Taking care of Eve, keeping her alive, facing Miss Rodwell: none of it seemed so daunting or serious when Cole

was still around. The way he spoke, his twinkling eyes and the way he made fun of me, made even the most serious thing seem like a joke.

I stood on the passenger deck and watched him get smaller and smaller, until he and the Morris were just a speck of black at the end of the jetty. As he shrunk, my sense of unease grew. It grew larger as the Ship sailed further from Wyndham, as the Ord River emptied into the Cambridge Gulf and the Gulf emptied into the Timor Sea. When the Ship had left the land behind and forged ahead into the open ocean, where there was nothing but blue until it folded off the edge of the earth like some monumental waterfall, I felt as though a lifeline had been cut.

On most ships, Sunday morning meant a church service, conducted by either the Master or the ship's surgeon. But there were no services on our ship, so it might have been any other day except that we were leaving Wyndham. There seemed something apocalyptic and profound about it all. And I would have liked somewhere to put those feelings.

Part Three

Chapter Sixteen

Sunday, 1 August. Halton found out about Glynn in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

It had been nearly a week since we'd left Wyndham and I was on my way to Eve's stateroom. She was teaching me Bridge, which was the only way I'd managed to find a way to keep an eye on her, when the *Delphic* shuddered suddenly and her electric hum cut out. I stopped and listened to the wind whistle around the corner of the bridge house. There was a clatter of footsteps and Chilvers rushed up the stairs and straight past me without saying word. After a moment, I followed him up the stairs.

He was in the chartroom. The Old Man and Halton were there, too, and Halton looked exhausted. A little corner of his collar was bent the wrong way and I fought an urge to fix it for him, to run a finger along the inside of his collar.

'It's a valve in the refrigeration pipe,' Chilvers was saying. 'It's split somehow. Machinery room 'tween deck. Henderson's been hit in the face. The men are bringing him to the Hospital.' Chilvers' hand was shaking.

'You've turned the condensers off?' the Master asked.

‘Yes. Just now.’

I asked what Henderson had been hit with and Chilvers turned, surprised to see me.

‘Ammonia.’

I was aware of them watching me, trying to work out from my bearing how serious it was. ‘Has it been washed, do you know? The wound? It’s got to be ... Can you call down to the hospital from here? Was anyone else in the room?’

Chilvers shook his head. The Old Man came out from behind the table, put his hands on Chilvers’ shoulders, and told me to get to the hospital right away. Urgent fragments of conversation chased me down the stairs. ‘The room’s been sealed? And the leak?’ And then there was a hand on my shoulder. It was Halton. He was coming with me to help with Henderson.

Henderson was lying on the single bunk, a ripped blue work shirt wrapped around his temple and left eye. A thin layer of skin hung from his lower face and, for a moment, I thought it was the frayed edge of the makeshift bandage. Halton had called one of the deck boys, a thin boy called Mick, to come with us. The two of them tried to hold down Henderson’s arms and stop him from clawing at his face.

Halton grunted with the effort. ‘Is it his eye?’

‘Yes. We need a bucket of cold water from the dispensary.’

Halton sent Mick across the corridor of the bucket.

‘Mr Henderson?’ His breath stank of ammonia. His skin was pink though. Pulse good. ‘We’ve got to wash your eye. We’re going to put your face in a bucket of water and I want you to blink and blink and blink and blink, all right?’

Henderson started to agree, but the words became a cough. A wet sound. Mick returned with the bucket and I told him to put it on the floor and help us get Henderson off the bed. We guided his face to the bucket, pulled the bandage off his head, let him take a breath, dunked him. The metal bucket clanged against the linoleum and water slopped over the rim. Henderson drew his head out and he was shaking, his eye was closed and the skin around it was raw.

‘You’ve got to open your eye in the water, all right?’

He nodded and opened his mouth but a strange noise came out: a sort of monotone groan. He opened his eyes and looked at me. The white of the left one was red with the haemorrhaging and it bulged out around the cornea, which was already starting to turn opaque at the bottom. The skin on his temple was like meat in a butcher’s shop.

‘Can you go again?’

He nodded and put his head back in the bucket.

I had to go back into the dispensary and I told Halton to keep Henderson dunking. He nodded. I felt a sudden flash of rage at Glynn and Jean who’d said how easy it was, working on a ship, how it was all tennis and swimming and washing whites and learning Bridge, and it was the only way to put Mrs Connolly behind me.

My reflection moved across a metal cabinet on the other side of the room and I remembered Charcoal. The carpentry I’d performed there. I pushed down and down and through the failure and the burns and the blood, plumbed all the way down to the depths where there was no oxygen anymore, no room to hope or fulfil expectations or do anything except act. I pushed my glasses back up. Morphia for Henderson.

I gave Henderson a tincture of morphine then had Halton hold his eyelids apart so I could wash them in castor oil. While I did it, Henderson gripped the sides of

the cot so hard his cheeks shook, but he didn't make a noise, and I felt like telling him it was all right to cry but I knew that kindness would make it harder for him to hold it together. Once the morphine was working, I took the dead skin off his left cheek, dressed his face, arm and torso with Hexyltan jelly. I told him I'd be back, told Mick to mind him and told Halton to follow me to the dispensary.

'Was anyone with him?'

'Henderson? No, don't think so.'

'And who fixed it?'

'Chilvers, I think. And some of the sparks. Or the fridge boys.'

'Go and make sure they get out of their clothes, the ones they were in down there. Then get them to bathe. I'll need to check them for exposure. They were wearing masks, I hope.'

Halton was smiling.

'What?'

'Nothing. You're just very good at this.' He kissed me. 'My Doc.' Then he disappeared down the stairs.

I smoothed down my skirt. I wasn't his Doc. I was Glynn's Ada. We would only be at sea for three more weeks and he would find that out. Glynn would find out about him, too, if I didn't end it soon. I went back into the hospital and told Mick he could go. I touched Henderson lightly on the shoulder. He winced, but didn't open his eyes. The burnt one was badly swollen and his eyelashes stuck out of the raw bulbous flesh like the hairs on a cactus plant. Elsewhere on his face, the burn looked like a scald from hot tea. The skin was pink, but it hadn't gone past the epithelium. It would heal all right. I dropped Boric acid into the slit of his eyelid until it ran down the side

of his swollen cheek into his ear and he shivered. Then I dried his ear with gauze, but it was too rough and he groaned.

‘More morphine, Doc?’

‘It’s too early. Soon.’

I heard Halton’s footsteps on the stairs, a funny flat-footed sound that only he made. Slap-slap, slap-slap. He came in holding a gas mask and his hair stood up from where he’d run his hands through it. There was the red crease from the mask on his face. I knew immediately he’d been down in the ’tween decks, checking the broken compressor.

‘What have you done, Jack?’

I’d said his name without thinking. Now Chilvers came into the room, the look on his face made it clear he’d heard me and he knew we were lovers.

He told me he’d showered and was fine and barely waited for an answer before he scuttled out the door.

Once he’d gone, I made Halton sit down. His colour was good. I picked up his wrist; felt his pulse galloping under my thumb, his blood pressing against my flesh, until I had to let the wrist go.

‘Did you have a suit on the whole time?’ I fiddled with the lid of the boric acid dropper, so I wouldn’t have to look at his face.

‘Of course.’

‘And the mask? The whole time? Yes? Good. And it’s all fixed?’

‘Yes. At least, I’m almost certain. The Old Man turned the condensers on again and nothing came out. The temperature will have dropped for a bit in number five though—’

I couldn’t help myself. ‘For Christ’s sake. While you were still in there?’

‘It’s the only way to tell if the leak’s fixed, Ada.’

‘You could have been killed.’

Henderson sucked wetly at the air, the ship thudded against the waves and the condenser hummed with satisfaction. I hadn’t even noticed it come back on. Hadn’t even noticed the moment when Halton might have died.

I had promised myself, when we left Wyndham, that I would finish things with Halton. I thought I’d just let it cool without having to say anything or at least nothing more than a little lie about it not being a good idea. I had planned to end it while it was still just Eve, Bowyer and Cole who knew, while it was still hide-able. But whether it was because of the operation on Charcoal, when the bottom became the top and death became life and the end was the beginning, or whether it was because the feeling I had now—seeing him unharmed—was how I’d felt about him all along, I hadn’t been able to do it. We had spent every night since Wyndham, and some of the days, in his room or mine and, even when I was engrossed in my study of Eve, when I was trying to analyse her every move and word and expression, a part of me was always attuned to his presence or absence, a part that sparked as soon as he appeared.

But the feeling I had now scared me. It was too big. It was a feeling that could destroy lives: mine and his and Glynn’s. The words rushed out of me.

‘There is someone else. Waiting for me in London.’

I had to look at the floor; I didn’t want to see his face. I could hear him running his fingers around on his scalp, the way he did sometimes after he’d been wearing his hat too long. It was a scaly sound.

‘What?’ he asked.

He hadn’t understood.

‘I am meeting someone, a man, in London.’

I looked up now.

Halton was studying me like I was a piece of machinery he was trying to decipher the workings of.

‘Jack?’

He squinted. A swell was building and spray flicked onto the porthole like fingers drumming. Jack stood up and walked out into the corridor and I followed.

‘Jack? Say something.’

He stopped, but didn’t turn. He was facing the wooden wall.

‘Are you ... is he your fiancé?’

‘No.’ I put a hand up on the wall to keep my balance.

‘But you are going to London to meet him?’

‘Yes. He ... his mother got me this job.’ A wave crashed against the side of the ship.

‘So there must be some understanding between you,” He sounded like he was talking to himself, working it out in his own mind.

‘Yes.’

‘But why did you—?’

Make love to you? I thought. Fall in love with you?

‘Are you in love with him?’

I could see the ocean through the opening at the end of the passageway. It churned. White sputum on steel grey. I didn’t know anymore. Here I was with Halton, hoping for a big wave that might knock us together, and I felt ready to risk everything just for a moment of being with him. I didn’t want to be Glynn’s sensible, well-chosen match. I wanted to be the woman I was when Halton looked at me.

‘Doc?’

‘I don’t know.’

And then, just like that, we were up against one another in that tiny passageway, the waves getting stronger, Henderson floating on morphine on the other side of the wooden door, Glynn waiting for me in London, Glynn who had saved me from Mrs Connolly, and Halton’s lips were over mine and the smell of him, sweet and salty, coming over me like a spell. Then there was a step on the stairwell and we sprung apart. It was Bowyer with tea. The rush of red to his face made it clear he knew what he’d interrupted.

‘Sorry, Mister Halton. Doc. I thought you might like tea. Shall I—’

‘Just put it down on the table inside. Thank you, Mister Bowyer.’

We shuffled around each other and Bowyer asked Halton about Henderson. Asked him. Not me.

What do you care? a voice in my head said. *You want to be in love. Well, there it is. You’re a woman. No ‘doctor’ for you anymore.* But that would happen anyway, if I married Glynn: he’d be the specialist, the tropical medicine expert. I’d be his assistant. Or I could be a family GP, if I was lucky and could manage to fit it in around the children. *Still, further than you’d get with Halton, Doc.*

Being in love makes you feel so unique, as though you’re the only two people who’ve ever felt like you do when, all around you, all the other lemmings are doing exactly the same thing, giving up their lives and jumping without looking where they’re going. It’s how we’re designed. Instinct and all that. All that talk about science and rationality in the lecture halls is illogical, when you got down to it. If nature acted rationally, ensuring survival of the fittest, then there was no space for an individual to act rationally. All those surveys and questionnaires about healthy

marriages and healthy stock were meant to make you think, help you make a logical decision but, if nature was rational, if evolution was rational, then why did we need the surveys? A rational nature would arrange all this to its advantage. If I was to be a good citizen, I needed to ignore my best interests and go with nature's best interests, which were, if my body was right, Halton. I felt like there was a rip in my brain that was getting wider.

Halton asked Bowyer to keep an eye on Henderson. 'I need to speak with Doctor Fraser,' was what he said.

The metal steps were wet and slippery, but I didn't want to hang on to Halton. I gripped the railing as the waves bounced us about. *It's ending*, I thought.

We reached the main deck, stood in the small shelter offered by the poop house.

'Do you love me?'

I wished he hadn't asked me so suddenly. That we'd had more time. I squinted at the sky. Cumulous clouds grew as I watched, new forms appearing from nowhere.

'No.' It would have been too self-indulgent to cry, when I'd made the whole mess. I bit the inside of my cheeks to stop myself and, when I was sure my voice would hold, I told him I was sorry. He opened his mouth as if he was going to laugh, but no sound came out.

'I don't believe you. Which is worse than if I did, because it makes me think badly of you.'

I could feel the distance growing between us even as he spoke and I realised, all at once, that he was right not to believe me, but that I'd lost him now anyway and I didn't want to.

'Because it means you're a coward.'

I wanted him to love me, to see me like he saw me, not as a doctor, not as a credit to her sex, but as Ada.

‘It’s simple for you. You’re a man—’

‘Don’t.’

‘Don’t what? You don’t know what it’s like. I can’t just fall in love like you can. I’ve got to think about what it will mean—’

‘Mean—’

‘For my practice. I couldn’t be a doctor if we, well ... I don’t know that I can be a doctor if I marry Glynn.’ I looked at the clouds unfolding. ‘Maybe that’s why I let this happen.’

This time, Halton did laugh. Bowyer’s voice came down the stairwell. ‘Doc? Henderson needs you, I think.’

Halton leant close and poked a finger at my chest. ‘The truth is, you were getting a bit of attention and you liked it.’

There was a small freckle just under his right eye. And a sort of energy—a heightening—around him, a heat that drew me in but even now was solidifying into a barrier. He was almost hissing.

‘Being a girl, a doctor, that’s got nothing to do with it. You got carried away and you didn’t want to stop.’

Bowyer’s voice carried down the stairs again. ‘Doc?’

‘She’s coming up now.’ Halton turned and walked back towards the bow.

I caught him by the elbow. ‘Wait. I’m sorry. I really am. Maybe I am a coward. But. Well. I just, I hoped that ... that you might be able to keep what happened between us.’

Halton looked down at me.

‘Please.’

‘You need to see Henderson. You’ve wasted too much time already.’

Chapter Seventeen

I stayed with Henderson for the rest of that day. When I came out onto deck, it was already dark and I'd forgotten about dinner. Bowyer must have felt sorry for me because, when I got back to my cabin, I found a plate next to my door. The smell from the beef, rich and oversweet, filled the corridor. After the ammonia, it was nauseating. I checked no one was around then snuck to the scullery and scraped dinner into the bin. I took the plate back up to my room and left it by the door with a thank you note.

I was too tired to bathe, and I didn't want to risk running into anyone—it was not yet nine—so I got into my nightdress and fell into bed. Despite my exhaustion, my nerves wouldn't let me sleep. There was so much trapped energy in my arms and legs, they felt like they were about to burst out of their skins, like a sausage you've forgotten to prick with a fork. They jerked like I was possessed, and I was: possessed with a dread that seemed attached to nothing and to everything, that coalesced first around Halton, then Henderson, then Eve and, eventually, I had to get up and pace the cabin.

I wondered whether Halton had told the Old Man about the two of us and about Glynn. If he had, it wouldn't matter if I saved Henderson's eye or not. It wouldn't matter what happened to Eve. Even if I delivered the two of them safe and sound to London, I wouldn't be a celebrated ship's surgeon like the last one. I'd be another woman beset by passions, at the mercy of my femaleness. There was a book, Dr Hare's, lying on my bedside table and I picked it up and threw it as hard as I could at the floor. But it didn't even make a proper noise; the thump was muffled by the ship's engine. I got dressed. I would go down to the surgery. A half-grain would help me sleep.

As I came out of the corridor, I saw Eve at the other end of the passenger deck, bent over herself and disappearing round the end of the bridge. I hurried after her and was just in time to see the top of her head, hood pulled over it, vanishing down the stairs. I followed.

I climbed down as quickly as I could without making a noise on the metal rungs. When I got to the main deck, I hesitated for a moment over which way to go then thought I heard something, a click, from aft of the bridge. I crept from the stairs to the bulkhead, and peered around.

There were three figures moving around the hatch. One was holding an electric torch and the light flicked over the deck and across the hatch before it was extinguished. No more than a second. There was no moon, no lights from the ship's bridge and I strained to distinguish the figures from the deck. I remembered the night Eve had tried to jump overboard and how Halton had tried to comfort me by pointing out the bits of night breaking away from the darkness. There was another low clicking noise and a bit of the hatch cover lifted, just the very last bit closest the bridge house, or it looked like it had; it was so hard to see in the dark. It was the number five hatch.

For frozen cargo. I had watched them loading frozen beef carcasses into it at Wyndham. The cover was broken into hinged sections like an accordion; to open it, you had to push one section up until it folded against the next one. Two of the figures were doing this now, winding a sort of wheel at the side so the cover folded up and left an opening to the freezer hold. One of the shadows climbed inside. There was a glow of torchlight from the depths of the ship and then it was extinguished.

I turned my attention to Eve. She was black, a silhouette against more darkness, but her outline moved with frenetic energy. She paced in front of the open part of the hatch and, when she stopped doing that, she twitched—hands, arms, head—moving, moving, moving. She didn't smoke though and neither did the other figures; they probably didn't want to draw attention to what they were doing. With a sudden movement, Eve leant over the hatch then stepped aside to let a shadow slither out. The other shadow wound the wheel and the cover closed again. Click, click, went the cleats over the top then the three of them darted right at me and I had just enough time to hide behind the bridge house.

I forgot about my desperation for sleep and the half-grain I'd been off to get at the hospital. I waited down on deck till I was sure they were gone, then climbed the stairs and went back to my cabin.

I listened out for anything unusual from the cabin next door, but all I heard was the ship's hum. *What could Eve want out of the hold*, I wondered? It had to be something that needed to be kept cold or something she wanted to hide. I went through the faces of the men I knew from the refrigeration department and the deck department, the men who might have helped her, but I couldn't narrow it down to a single person and I didn't want to ask the wrong man and alert the whole ship to whatever was happening. I also knew that, as soon as the Old Man found out someone

had forced the hatch, he'd haul out the whole ship's company for questioning and I'd never find out what Eve had been doing. I'd have to get to the Master before he found out from someone else.

I went to the Master's dayroom first thing the next morning to tell him what I'd seen. Halton was on watch and he stiffened when he saw me walking past the navigation windows. To see him do that, tense up to protect himself from me, brought back the sick feeling I'd had the day before. It had been a relief to think about Eve and what she'd been doing, so much easier to try and eavesdrop on the cabin next door, to work out other people's problems, than to think about my own. But, seeing him now, I knew again I had broken something and could never fix it. The best it could ever be was just mended and waiting to break again, probably not even that because there was nothing in his eyes anymore except wariness. I nodded and said I had to see the Master. He nodded back.

The Master and I decided I'd search Eve's cabin when everyone else was at dinner so the Old Man could keep an eye on them. He wouldn't say anything about the cargo until after that, though I could be damn sure he'd sue Miss Pope and her father if there'd been even a smidgen of a rise in temperature or if any of the meat had spoiled.

The day passed slowly. Eve came to the hospital to help me look after Henderson and to teach me bridge, which I'd asked her to do as a way of keeping an eye on her moods and making sure the flatness didn't flick into mania too quickly (a patient is in less danger when they are suffering from the worst melancholia; it's when the condition eases a little that the person gathers the energy they need to kill

themselves). Miss Rodwell usually joined us but that day she had refused. I had no idea why and it made me uneasy.

We dragged chairs to the foot of Henderson's bed and Eve dealt out four piles, one for each of the three of us and one spare—like for a ghost, but in fact for Eve herself. Because she knew the game, Eve played two hands as if she were two people on the one team; Henderson and I made up the other team. My mind kept tripping back to the day before, kept churning over the way Halton had looked at me, so I kept forgetting which suit was trumps and how to take a trick and, eventually, Henderson said he was tired and would we mind if he caught forty winks? Eve and I went outside, climbed the ladder to the poop deck and Eve lit a cigarette.

People with nerves often wear masks. They don't do it intentionally. It's a physical effect, maybe a result of all their internal struggles. In any case, their facial muscles slacken. That's why it's come to be called a 'flat affect', I suppose. They don't laugh or cry or, if they do, they don't do it properly. It's as though they're following the instructions for a dance they don't know how to do. It's true that Eve was not always flat. There had been those times in the surgery, in Brisbane, when she was more manic and, in any case, I had come to think that her flatness was not a result of nerves, but of the medicine her aunt was giving her. Still, she was often flat. But that day there was something different. Something behind the slack cheeks and jaw. It was in her eyes: a pained look. But pained sounds mild and this thing I saw was not mild. It was like the look in the eyes of the cattle at the meatworks, before they went up the cattle run to their deaths. A dumb terror. I thought better than to try to speak to her. So we stood at the poop rail, looking out over the back of the Ship and I wondered if she remembered the night she had tried to jump over.

That night, it was a Monday night, Bowyer called me during dinner to say Henderson wanted me, as we'd arranged. After he closed the saloon doors, he led me quickly aft along the passenger deck. He stopped outside the portholes of Eve's cabin where he was to keep watch and I kept going.

I opened the door to the internal corridor and the air came out in a whisper. I stepped over the lip of the passageway entrance and into the corridor. My footsteps were so loud I was sure Miss Rodwell would hear me. But their stateroom was right at the end of the corridor so she'd have to walk past Bowyer then back the other way down the entire length of the passage before she found me. So I had time.

I pushed open the door and the smell of old smoke and something else, something sweet, rushed out at me. I breathed through my mouth, like I had done during dissecting classes, epiglottis closed with my tongue, breath heavy like I was wearing a gas mask. The curtains had been closed over the porthole, and the place was dark. I went over to open the curtain and stood on tiptoe to check that Bowyer was standing guard. His face was distorted through the glass.

The wooden wardrobe had been left open. I pushed the coat hangers aside then dropped to my knees to rifle through a pile of clothes on its floor. Silks and chiffons dropped and left like rags. But there was nothing bulky. Eve's bed, closest to the portholes, was unmade, clothes twisted up together with the satin bedspread. There were two suitcases shoved underneath the bed and I pulled them out one by one, my heart hammering. They were unlocked, but there were just more clothes in each. I tried the dressing table next. The three drawers on Eve's side, then those on Miss Rodwell's, then I checked on top of the table, pushed aside an overflowing ashtray and bottles of alcohol, as if something could be hiding behind or beneath them. The hammering was in my ears now; they would be back soon. The smell hit me again:

that curious mix of cigarettes and, *Was it pickles?* And I had a dreadful thought. About dissecting class and the formaldehyde.

I walked to Eve's bed and pulled back the coverlet all the way, so that only the bottom sheet was left on the bed. And there was the package, no more than a foot long, egg-shaped, wrapped in a scarf—silk, white, with camel and orange patterns. I ran my eyes over the package, not wanting to touch it, then I saw the tag: Schiaparelli. I remembered Eve and her aunt fighting over the scarf, remembered how Miss Rodwell had asked after it that night Eve had tried to jump overboard.

The smell was stronger than ever now and I thought I might be sick, but I couldn't stop. I didn't want to see it and yet something forced me to reach down and touch the silk, feel the firm padding beneath it and then, underneath that again, the feel of something firmer, but not hard. I turned the thing over and found where the end of the scarf had been tucked back into itself to stop it unravelling. Then I undid it. Under the scarf there was a blue knitted baby's blanket with a small brown stain in the middle. I stared at it for a moment, then there was a knock at the porthole and I almost screamed aloud. I didn't think then, just unravelled the baby's blanket and there it was.

I was still standing there looking at the tiny oval face, the strangely slanted eyes and mouth, when there was a horrible noise behind me. It was the noise of an animal, a dumb beast in distress trying to communicate without words all the pain in the entire world; I'll never forget that noise. Eve was there, pushing me out of the way and gathering up the wizened thing on the bed and pressing it into her chest and folding around it, pressing and pressing and pressing, as if she could somehow absorb it into herself like an amoeba swallowing a cell.

I don't know how long we stood there like that, in the dark, rank heat of that cabin, but I finally managed to gather myself together enough to speak.

‘It's dead.’

Eve made a noise.

‘It's not adopted. It's dead.’ I was seeing Mrs Connolly's baby then, blue and limp, eyes closed like this one. I was hearing Mrs Connolly bellow for her child and Eve bellow for hers and seeing two babies, one blue, one iodine-coloured and stinking of formaldehyde and with such a funny face on it. The revelation whirled and clicked into place; Eve's baby was defective. Dead and defective. The next thing clicked then, too. Dead because it was defective. There were more footsteps out on the passenger deck, another knock on the porthole.

Eve sprung to attention like an animal sensing danger. She put the thing on her bed and tossed the covers over it. ‘I saw you, asked you in for a drink. That's all.’ She walked quickly to the dressing table and was picking up a glass when Miss Rodwell appeared in the doorway.

Eve turned and smiled. ‘Hello, Aunt.’

Chapter Eighteen

Eve poured us a drink, but her hands shook so much she spilled gin on the dresser. Miss Rodwell wanted to know what was wrong with her and told her to clean it up. I stood next to her as she opened a drawer, took a nightgown out, wiped the gin up and dropped the gown back in the drawer. I felt her stiffen.

‘I left my ...’

‘Your pullover. Yes. Yes. In the surgery, but it’s in my cabin. I brought it back up. Why don’t you come and get it?’

Miss Rodwell’s eyes were closed and, before she could say anything, we were at the door.

‘I’ll just be next door, Aunt,’ Eve said.

I locked the door behind us. And then Eve sat on the side of my bed and told me about how she’d killed her son, while the floral patterns on my bedsheet blurred into purple whorls.

There was nothing wrong with her. No nervous condition or unconscious wounding that manifests as hysteria or any of those clever things that clever doctors

like me come up with. What was wrong with her was guilt. Guilt or maybe evil. She wanted to know what I thought of that. Evil. Was it real?

She lit a cigarette. Father didn't believe in evil or, not in the traditional sense, she said. It was evil to try and stop nature, the triumph of the strong over the weak. The survival of the fittest.

Eve didn't see it at first, when Bertie was born. There was so much pain like she was being turned inside out and she thought she might die. Then, although it couldn't get any worse, it did. But then he was there: pink and ropey, making clucking noises like a newborn chick. He latched onto her breast straight away and his suck was strong, expert. She'd read about how good breast milk was for babies and, even though she was going to give him away, she planned to give him a few feeds first to send him on his way. The midwife said most babies didn't feed very well when they first come out and Bertie looked very hungry. The way she said it though, made Bertie's hunger sound like a bad thing. Eve was going to ask her why but, before she could, the midwife had gone out to get her father and aunt, who were waiting in the hallway. They didn't come straight away and, in the quiet, she kissed Bertie's head. He was still busy at her breast and messy with blood. He smelled like blood. She squeezed his fat little arms and held each minuscule toe one by one.

Father and Aunt came back to take him away for the adoption people. Sometimes, the baby stays with the mother for a day or more, but Father wanted to protect the family so he'd arranged for an immediate handover. Eve asked if she could finish feeding Bertie first, but father told her she was being stupid; everyone was waiting.

He took Bertie without waiting for an answer. He kissed Eve on the forehead and she thought, maybe he did still love her, despite what she'd done. But then the air

around him stiffened because something was wrong. He grunted at Aunt to come over and Aunt was quiet for a few seconds, then she said, 'Oh'. Eve asked what the matter was but they just looked at her as if she had done something unspeakable, which she had and she would. She asked again, 'What is it? What's wrong?' But their stares made her stop asking questions. Her aunt said something she didn't understand, so Aunt said it again, louder, as if Eve were a foreigner and she was trying to make her understand.

'It's defective.'

She noticed then that her father was holding Bertie a few inches away from himself, as if he was infectious.

'It's a mongoloid. The agency people won't take it.'

Aunt Claire took Bertie from Father, roughly, and walked over to the bookcase. She motioned for Father to follow. There was a koel outside. Doo-whit, doo-whit, doo-whit. The two of them whispered and Eve strained to hear: *Can't give, could have been stillborn*, and they looked at her over their shoulders, like cartoon criminals. Aunt had Bertie tucked under her arm, like he was a football. He was crying and Eve's breasts hurt and still her father and aunt whispered. She mustered the courage to ask Father to bring Bertie over and, after a while, he did. She put Bertie back to her breast and he latched on straight away like he was made exactly for her body. But Father slapped her. 'Don't feed it, for Christ's sake!' Bertie started crying. It was a very small sound.

Her father said she needed to put it out of its misery. For a moment, she thought he meant her to feed him again. His anger confused her, but then he handed her a pillow, in a pink silk slip.

‘Yes. You can, Eve. You just put the pillow over and hold it down until I tell you to let go. I’ll tell you what to do.’

‘Can’t I—?’

‘No, Eve. You brought it into this house. You need to take care of it.’

She asked if she could keep Bertie. If the agency people wouldn’t have him, she could look after him. She didn’t work and they had so much money. Her father said, stop calling it Bertie. That thing would never live in his house and neither would she if she tried to keep it.

Eve had thought a parent’s love was unending, that it couldn’t be broken, but she saw now, in Father’s face, that she had been wrong. And strangely, it was just at that moment, when she was a mother herself, that she saw how monstrous the ended love was. She realised that she would do everything she could to protect Bertie. She loved him.

Father told her how selfish she was being, putting her own feelings before the good of the race. She had to think clearly, to think about the science. Couldn’t she see? To willingly allow genes like that to continue, to spawn more—

Eve said Bertie wouldn’t have children. He could live with her, with his mother. Her father slapped her again and she squeezed Bertie too tightly so that he squawked. She shouldn’t have interrupted. Of course, Bertie would have children. Mongoloids couldn’t control themselves and the government was too stupid to sterilise them.

Eve had never seen her father so angry. She imagined that anger turned on her son. And the anger of other people, too, the people who thought he was a threat to the germ plasm. They’d kill him. Or worse. ‘Take care of it or leave.’ And Aunt Claire

held her face still as though she were serious but Eve could see how happy she was, the stupid bitch, because soon she'd be rid of Eve and have Father all to herself.

Father leant down and shifted Bertie so he was lying on his back between Eve's legs. He handed her the pillow. She took it and pressed down. Bertie didn't move very much. His legs twitched then, after a while, father said she could stop now, but she kept on because now she knew she was saving Bertie.

Her aunt stepped in to take the pillow away and Father snapped at her to take the child too, for Christ's sake but, before they could take him, Eve picked him up. His round eyes were open and shocked, but other than that he was perfect: his wrinkly forehead and mouth shaped like the side of a violin and the roll of fat just above his wrist. Nine pounds, the midwife had said.

Eve opened her eyes. She looked down at the pillow in her white-knuckled hands and smoothed it down. Her mascara had stained the pillowslip where she'd held it to her face and now she wet her finger with spit and tried to rub the stain away, but it just smudged further. She scratched at the black with her fingernail. I told her not to worry about it and she put the pillow back where it belonged and got another cigarette. But her fingers were shaking so much, she couldn't get it between her lips.

'Can you?'

She couldn't keep the cigarette still for long enough for me to light it either, so I had to take it out of her mouth and light it myself. I sucked too hard and the hit of crackling heat on the back of my throat made me cough.

'Thank you.' Eve took a deep drag and blew the smoke up to the ceiling. She cradled the air and rocked it back and forth and crushed it into her chest. She stayed

with her arms wrapped around her until the cigarette burnt out and her fingers were singed where she'd been holding it. I let them singe.

She had such beautiful, shiny, black hair. And a dead, embalmed baby in her bed. I couldn't start anywhere. I couldn't think what to ask. I wanted to erase the picture of that dead face from my memory. That dead face and the blue one and Mrs Connolly and Charcoal's dead hand dropping into the metal bowl. Death was in everything now. The child preserved beyond death, Charcoal's hand dead before the rest of him; it felt like the borders of death and life had blurred and maybe, you could be partly dead and partly alive.

'Why is he here?'

'Bertie?'

The name, applied to that thing in the bed, the joining together of that living name and that mummified corpse, sickened me. I couldn't look at Eve. She frightened me.

'Who embalmed him?'

'The midwife. They do it when the baby's stillborn.'

I nodded because they did do that sometimes, when the parents wanted an open casket. But this wasn't a stillborn.

I had learnt embalming before the Ship left. Suturing the lips to make them look lifelike, closing the eyes. I wondered how many stitches would be needed for a newborn's lips. Three perhaps. I thought of sliding the needle into the carotid, pumping in the embalming solution, the blood and life draining out from the jugular. Pumping air into the stomach, filling the cavities with formaldehyde, painting the body with preservatives, so the body wouldn't rot before we made landfall. I didn't

ask why again; I didn't want to know. Any of it. I wished I'd never seen the thing in the bed, wished I'd never come on the Ship and never met Eve.

I knew why all this had happened: it was because I'd run from Mrs Connolly and her baby. I had tried to escape, but it couldn't be escaped. The Ship shrieked, metal scraping against metal, or maybe it was the wooden deck shrinking or growing with the wet, like Charcoal's tendons shrivelling away from my iron.

Eve, sitting on the edge of my bed, kept talking.

She was meant to throw him overboard in the middle of the Indian Ocean. She had meant to do it earlier, before Townsville but, when it came down to it, she couldn't. She needed more time. So she put him in the hold while they were loading cargo in Townsville. She told two of the men she had some butter that needed to be kept cold. When you are a 16-year-old apprentice and someone like Eve asks you to do something, you do it.

I remembered her dangling over the back of the boat just after Brisbane and Miss Rodwell not really caring and asking if she had anything with her, 'a scarf of mine, a Schiaparelli.' The revelations bubbled up like swamp gases. Eve had meant to throw the child in but couldn't. Then I thought, *Maybe it wasn't that she couldn't do it, but that she got caught just as she was about to.* Which meant she was only pretending to be suicidal and this last thought was the worst. I was meant to be a doctor, meant to be saving her from suicide, but the idea that she was not trying to kill herself, only to save herself, was monstrous.

She smoked, clinked the ice in her drink from side to side until it melted through the gin. Click, click. Click, click.

I asked her to leave. 'I need to sleep.'

She looked over at me, surprised. I was huddled behind my table because she took up everything in the cabin: The bed, the air. She could have been on the other side of a glass wall, she was so oblivious to me. She ran her fingers through her hair, plucked one out at the crown, and stood up. When she spoke, she was gazing at the door, over my head.

‘Are you going to tell? It’s just ... if you are, then I won’t have to put him in the sea. I can keep him with me longer.’

‘I don’t know. I need to sleep.’

‘Yes. Sorry.’ She crossed the room and opened the door. All of it had been pretence: The neurosis, the dyspepsia, the suicide attempts. The ‘sea’ cure. It was a cure, but not in the sense I had thought. Not a cure for neurosis.

I saw Eve holding a pillow down over that tiny body and saw her face contorted with horror and grief and determination. I was shaking.

Before she walked out the door, she lit another cigarette. ‘You expect love affairs to go cold, but I never knew a father’s love could dry up. I’d always imagined it was never-ending.’

It was nearly six a.m. when I woke up. I was still fully dressed, lying on top of the coverlet, and I hadn’t told the Master or anyone about Bertie. I hadn’t checked on Eve. And, I realised with a sick feeling, I hadn’t checked on Henderson for hours. I grabbed a dress; I was rushing so much I couldn’t fit the buttons in their holes.

Halton was at the hospital. The third mate had come to check on Henderson, found him sweating and in pain, and had gone up to take over the watch so Halton could sort it out. He pulled me into the dispensary next door. He was hissing, so he wouldn’t be heard, but it suited how angry he was. He said he shouldn’t have needed

to sort anything out. That was the point of having a doctor, wasn't it? There was a piece of spit on his lower lip and he had the know-it-all look of someone who's just read a two-penny book on anatomy and suddenly thinks he can tell you everything there is to know about the human body.

‘I made sure he had enough morphia before I went to bed.’

‘What time was that?’

I wasn't going to apologise. None of this was about Henderson anyway. ‘I think it was about twelve-thirty. Thereabouts, anyway.’

Halton hit the medicine cabinet and the bottles shook. ‘Thereabouts? Thereabouts? You left him alone for six hours, Doc.’

‘Well, why don't you break all the medicine bottles and that way I won't be able to treat him at all?’

‘He might lose his eye.’

‘He won't lose his eye.’

‘Yes, well. I'll bet if it was Miss Pope—or Miss Rodwell—you wouldn't have left them alone for a second.’

I started to say, *That's because Eve was in mortal danger*, but then I thought of Eve up there in bed with that thing.

‘What?’

The sun was starting to come up on the starboard side. It filtered through the salty porthole; I wanted to scrub the glass clean so we could see properly. Halton was frowning at me, though not as angrily as before and I had an urge to tell him everything. I had to swallow the horror back down, but it kept rising up, like vomit; a poison and I needed to score my skin and let it out, squeeze until the blood ran clear again. But I was Eve's doctor. I squinted at the medicine bottles. Their labels were

brown and illegible, but I knew their contents by heart, knew how much of each to give out. So easy. Headache, cured by two grains of aspirin. Neurosis, bromides. Later I'd have to decide whether to call in the police and send Eve to gaol for the rest of her life or maybe even to her death.

‘Doc.’

‘I really wouldn’t have left him, if I didn’t think he’d be all right.’

Halton rubbed his face with his hands, said he had to go back on watch then pushed past me into the corridor. I stared at the empty place where he’d been. In the medicine cabinet, the bottles in the medicine shelves clinked against each other as the ship cut through a series of small waves. Clink, clink, clink, clink. Giggling, sending dust motes into the air to be captured by the shaft of sunlight coming through a clear bit of the porthole, like ghosts captured in a photograph.

Then, like someone had just swept into the room, there was a smell of ammonia, so strong I had to cup my hand over my nose. I looked around, almost expecting to see the stench standing there, embodied. I ran out after Halton, suddenly afraid of being alone in the dispensary.

‘Don’t go.’

He was at the top of the stairs and turned around to look at me. ‘Why?’

I couldn’t say I was scared of the smell. ‘I just don’t want you to go.’

Halton reached for my arm, then pulled me into the passageway and pushed me up against the wall. With a look of confusion on his face, he ran his fingers through my hair, his nails scraping my scalp. He pushed my chin up as though he might have been going to snap my neck and kissed my throat roughly. My glasses were askew, but he had my arms pinned so I couldn’t fix them.

He kissed my ear. 'What if I do tell Glynn about us? Then you won't have to marry him.'

'Let go of my hands, Jack.'

'I'm going to tell him.'

He kissed my neck again, though this time the kiss was more of a bite. He was holding my wrists too tightly.

'I'm going to tell him. Because I think that's what you want me to do.'

He had pinned me to the wall, his leg shoved up between my thighs.

'You said you didn't want to be a doctor's wife. And this way, you won't have to be.'

'Jack!'

I struggled against his grip and, when he didn't loosen it, I kicked his shin. He swore and dropped to his haunches. I fixed my dress. He was rubbing his leg, his face hidden, but when he stood up he had tears in his eyes.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean—'

'It's all right.'

'It's not all right. I don't know what happened. Something possessed me. I'm sorry.'

'Really, Jack. Stop apologising. It was a mistake.'

He nodded, hardening again. 'I've got to get back to the wheelhouse.'

I said all right then. I didn't want to be alone, but I couldn't think of what else to say and, even with him there, I was alone anyway. He disappeared down the stairwell and the medicine bottles clinked again. I shut the door on them and went next door to the hospital.

Henderson was lying on his back, eyes closed, his breath coming out in a thin whistle. I went over to the bed and delicately lifted the bandage from his eye, trying not to wake him. The blood had seeped to the outer layers of the gauze and separated itself into rust and pus: a dark stain surrounded by a halo of light. I slid the scissors under the gauze and cut. Under the bandage, the flesh was raw, the eyelids bulging from gathered blood. I'd soaked a cotton pad and was just about to swab the wound when Henderson's good eye flicked open. The movement was so unexpected, I dropped the cotton pad as well as the forceps I was holding it with.

'Hello, Doc!'

I shrieked or swore, I can't remember which.

'Sorry, Doc. I couldn't resist. Gets a bit boring lying here.'

I leant down to pick up the forceps. I'd have to disinfect them again. I asked how long he'd been awake, hoping he hadn't heard Halton and me.

'Not long. Five minutes, maybe. The first thing I heard was you coming into the Hospital just now. Not another thing.' He looked pointedly at me, making sure I caught his meaning. I went over to the metal gurney on the far wall. Found the Syrette for the morphia and gave him another injection.

'You've been in a bit of pain, the Mate said. I'm sorry about that. I shouldn't have left you so long.'

'I'm all right, Doc.'

'Tell me when you stop feeling the eye and I'll redress it for you.'

I went to the cabinet and disinfected the forceps again, tore off another piece of cotton and soaked that with antiseptic, too. I felt of a piece with the rest of the ship's company out there, swabbing the decks and chipping at the rust, holding back the salt, holding back the infection.

‘How’s the eye feeling?’

‘Not bad, I suppose. What’s an eye meant to feel like after a blast like that? What I mean is, I s’pose it’s meant to feel pretty bad. In which case, this one’s doing all right.’ He licked his lips. ‘Think I’ll lose it?’

‘It’s a bit early to tell.’

‘You don’t have to be soft with me, Doc,’ Henderson licked his lips again, then squeezed his good eye tight like there was a piece of grit in it. ‘I’d sooner just know what to expect, you know? So I can get used to it before ... well, I s’pose before I’m out on deck again.’

I swabbed the swollen eye and trickle of water ran down between the lids and into his ear.

‘Maybe.’ I swabbed the eye again and this time Henderson winced. ‘Ammonia is alkaline, which means it can penetrate the tissues very quickly.’

‘I didn’t understand a word you just said.’ Henderson reached for my hand and patted it. ‘But thanks for trying, Doc.’

I nodded, then realised he couldn’t see me because I was on the same side as his bad eye. ‘Thank you, Henderson.’

It was very quiet in the Hospital. All the ship noises were still there, of course: the water slapping against the hull, the engines humming, the fridges buzzing, but the human noises—the chattering and whispering and laughing and gossiping and arguing—were not. I finished cleaning Henderson’s eye, irrigated it until his collar was wet, re-applied the jelly and bandages, and told him I’d give him more morphia in a few hours.

‘I won’t get addicted, will I?’

I laughed, but Henderson wasn’t joking.

‘Mrs Henderson might forgive me for the eye. Might. But she’d never forgive me for coming home an opium eater.’

‘I won’t let you go home an opium eater.’

He let himself fall into the morphia then; he stopped wincing and the muscles around his eyes and jaw went slack. He drifted off, smiling slightly—though not at me or even, I thought, some imagined person—he was just smiling. I wondered if it would be kinder just to give him over to the drugs, let him become an opium eater, save him from feeling the pain and the disability, let him just be happy. Henderson didn’t want that though, he wanted to look after his wife. But what use could he be to her half-blind; he’d be more a burden than a help. I looked at Henderson’s sleeping face and a memory surfaced of Dad twitching on the kitchen floor back in Orange, of milk puddles on the linoleum. Maybe usefulness wasn’t the point. But if life wasn’t about usefulness and it wasn’t about happiness, then what was it about?

And then I thought of Eve, too, and whether it wouldn’t be better for her to be dead. Surely you couldn’t live after killing your own child? And then I wished an awful thing: that Bowyer hadn’t found her that night on the deck and that she’d gone over as she’d meant to.

I pushed my glasses back up. Philosophising wouldn’t do any good. I pulled the sheet up to Henderson’s chest, went to the cabinet and took out the rolled leather case where I kept the scalpels and razors. I got a strop from my desk drawer and ran the razor up and down the leather, sharpening it. Henderson hummed quietly on the cot behind me.

I thought about what would happen if Halton did tell Glynn. Glynn would certainly break it off. My mind flashed to that moment on the poop deck just before Wyndham, when Halton first kissed me. Even the memory of it made me shiver. I

touched my fingers to my lips. We could find a home together. Make love. I could get work as a GP. I realised I'd stopped sharpening the razor and ran it up the leather again.

I made myself consider where it would all end: with too many children and not enough hours in the day. Him away on the ocean for most of the year and me in strange countries far away from Dad and Mother and Cilla and everyone. And how long would the happiness last anyway? Long enough to squeeze every last useful year out of me, if we were lucky? Long enough to extinguish any possibility of me being a proper doctor?

I tested the razor, rolling it lightly over the pad of my thumb. A line of blood surfaced and I sucked it away. Happiness was just opium in another form. Ending in dissolution or disappointment. It wasn't even a thing on its own, really, a thing that you could capture. It only ever came on you when you were busy doing something else. Like cutting through Charcoal's bone and tendons. Being covered in blood then suddenly coming to and realising I was happy and, as soon as I thought it, seeing the happiness flutter away so I couldn't get it back. I wondered if that was what had happened with Halton: that moment on the deck, just before Wyndham, when the sun was setting and he was holding me and he had so much desire in his eyes, desire for me. I suddenly wasn't sure if I wanted Halton or the feeling he gave me: of being wanted and beautiful.

My thumb was bloody again. I put it in my mouth and forced myself to think of Glynn. Glynn with his round, iron-rimmed glasses and blonde curls and kindly, short-sighted eyes.

‘You can help me in the clinic,’ he’d said. We planned to go to Reunion, so that Glynn could work for the British Government and find a cure for anaemia, which all the natives had; then the natives could fight for the British too, if it came to it.

‘You could help, too. We’ll get a governess.’

Would that be happiness? I wondered. Maybe not. It would be duty though. Looking after children, helping the sick, helping the Empire. I would be useful at least. I wouldn’t wake up 20 years from now and wonder what I’d thrown everything away for.

Henderson was snoring, though not loudly. It was a quiet, even sound, at one with the ship’s machinery. I put the razor back, packed the strop away and closed the door behind me.

Chapter Nineteen

Henderson didn't lose his eye. I'd applied silver sulfadiazine in between the Hexylan jelly, and the healing was remarkable. Within days, he was opening the eye and able to see out of it. Something had gone right for once. My medical track record was not all failure. But, amid the thankfulness, I had a queasy feeling that having a success in this case meant I had some bigger failure waiting for me. I'd have a reckoning.

I still hadn't told the Master what I'd found in Eve's room. I hadn't told anyone, because I knew, as soon as I did, the consequences that Eve had escaped, and that I had escaped ever since Mrs Connolly, would come rushing in like a held-back tide.

I was a scientist. I looked at the world rationally. I looked for logic and evidence. But looking was taking more and more of my will. Ignoring the superstitions, my bad feelings, required increasing effort and I was tired.

How do I explain the sensation of being on a ship? You see all the advertising and the pyjama suits and fashionable women and shuttle board and you get a certain idea of leisure and escape and sun. The actual feeling, once you are on board—and perhaps it's just on a cargo ship—is one of imprisonment. And I don't just mean

being trapped in the middle of the Indian Ocean, with no land for days and the sea so choppy you can't see beyond the surface of the water. I mean something more than that.

You feel not only trapped, but forgotten too; the whole world is carrying on without you and you realise it doesn't miss you at all. It doesn't need you; you are central to nothing.

There is the other part of imprisonment that I can't explain in logical terms. It is guilt. You feel guilt, inevitably, I suppose, when you are forced to sit for any length of time and consider yourself. And this was a surprising, no, a shocking thing for me. I was a scientist and there was really no medical, no Darwinian reason, for guilt but I couldn't stop it. I had been maniacally busy trying to be a doctor and, at the time, I told myself it was a necessary evil, something that I would change if I could; but when I was on the Ship, where there were no exams, no telephone ringing about a patient going into early labour, no family or friends or distractions, I wished I *could* have been maniacally busy for just an hour or two to stop the thoughts that surfaced and surfaced and surfaced. I took too much phenobarbital. There was no way I could sleep otherwise. But even with the phenobarb, I couldn't escape myself forever. There were the obvious things. And then there were things I fantasised about in the privacy of my own mind—that Eve were dead and my life easier, even that Glynn were dead so I wouldn't have to go through the shame of admitting my affair—that shocked me with their evil.

There is probably a scientific explanation for these types of daydreams but, even if there were, it wouldn't work at a practical level. The guilt felt so real.

I had to think about Eve. I hated her for telling me about Bertie. I hated her for letting me find him and for not being strong enough to stand up to her father and Miss

Rodwell. She probably hadn't wanted to stand up to them anyway. A defective child would have been a burden for a society girl. She would have found it hard to keep her place in the Women's League of Health and Beauty, and in the *Women's Weekly* and the rest of it.

I kept out of her way for days. I kept out of everyone's way. I kept to the hospital or to my room, my obstetrics notes untouched on the desk in front of me. At meal times, I ate quickly and said just enough not to be considered impolite, though not out of a desire not to offend people but just so I wouldn't draw attention to myself.

After trying to engage me in conversation a few times that first day after I'd discovered her secret, Eve didn't try to speak to me anymore. Her presence became stiffer and stiffer beside me, like she was turning into glass and the tiniest movement would shatter her all over the room. I would have been fearful of that before, but now I wasn't. I was even curious: *What would the shattering of Eve look like?* I wondered.

Miss Rodwell noticed my quietness, but it was clear Eve hadn't told her the reason for it. Miss Rodwell twisted the corner of her lip when she looked at me, happy with my silence; she assumed it was something to do with Halton and me. Our coldness towards one another didn't disabuse her of that idea either.

I couldn't decide what to do about Eve. Doctor patient confidentiality was only the start of it. I had to decide whether to tell the Old Man, which would mean Eve would go to gaol for life, but Miss Rodwell and her father would get off free. Or I could keep the thing to myself and none of them would ever be punished and, even worse, I'd be an accessory, bound to Eve for my entire life, connected to her, a murderer. I'd have to keep what I knew to myself so that it suppurated and rotted away inside me.

One morning, I went for a walk around the Ship before breakfast and had just come back up onto the passenger deck when I saw two figures down on the main deck, near the stern. It was Eve and her aunt. They were beside a small gap in the railing—no wider than half a foot. Eve was leaning against the rail and her aunt was just behind her, the two of them gazing backwards to the horizon, where a bank of clouds was being drawn up over the sky like an eiderdown.

It was hard to tell whether they were speaking or not. Their bodies were not giving anything away. It was odd, the two of them standing there together so early in the morning. But then again, I thought, I was up, too.

I looked out at the clouds advancing from what I guessed was the north; they were white and fluffy, friendly looking. It was a gorgeous morning. The sea was a tropical island colour and the sky depthless. Eve and her aunt had probably come down to look at the view. But when I looked down at them again, I saw the scene below was all wrong: Miss Rodwell had her hand on Eve's back, as if she were comforting her, except that Miss Rodwell never comforted Eve—or anyone else for that matter. And Eve was no longer standing behind the railing, but directly in front of the gap, with nothing between her and the sea. I watched, my hand frozen around the metal rung, as Miss Rodwell's hand travelled higher up Eve's back, from her waist to her shoulder blades. It was difficult to be sure at such a distance, but it looked as though Miss Rodwell was not touching Eve's blouse at all, which she would have done if she were really comforting her. It looked as though she was holding her hand ready to push.

Three things happened at once: I screamed, Miss Rodwell spun round and Eve dropped something into the water. Something with a streak of orange coming from it like a tail.

Eve turned and saw me at the rail of the passenger deck, then she looked back at the water, where she'd dropped her cargo, and leant through the gap in the rail so far it would only have taken the tiniest touch to send her into the ocean. Miss Rodwell, however, was still staring at me. She seemed, after the first moment of being caught, to draw up out of herself until she grew almost half an inch. Then she cocked her head to make it clear she was smirking before she turned away.

I looked beyond Eve and Miss Rodwell to the ship's wake. I looked for flecks of colour, any disruptions to the white frothy lines, but there were none. Eve seemed to have come to the same conclusion because she turned from the rail and began walking back amidships, Miss Rodwell stalking her. I wanted to run back to my stateroom and hide from them. I could hear my own heart hammering. Still, I forced myself to stand on the spot and wait for them.

Eve was wearing a pale green summer dress. There were dark spots where she'd been splashed. She had her hand on her stomach, patting it very gently. Miss Rodwell stood beside her like a shade.

'Isn't it a lovely morning, Doctor Fraser?' she said.

She retucked her blouse into her shorts, even though it was already tucked tight as a soldier's shirt.

'Yes,' I said. 'Some terrible looking clouds on the horizon though.'

'Oh, so you were checking the weather! I thought you might have been spying.'

I smiled at her.

‘What is there to spy on?’

Eve mumbled that she was going to the room and the two of them left me there on the deck.

Later that week, I was in the Hospital when Bowyer ran in, panting, to tell me the Master needed to see me urgently. My stomach turned; someone had seen the baby. The Old Man was alone in the wheelhouse when we found him. He quickly dismissed Bowyer and led me, still puffing from the stairs, through to the chartroom. The maps and charts that usually covered the table were all rolled up and tucked away in the storage area and the table was bare. The Master crossed to the other side of the room, as far away as he could get from me before he turned back to face me. He didn’t sit and he didn’t offer me a seat either. He plucked a folded telegram from his shirt pocket and handed it over.

‘This just came over the wireless.’

It was addressed to me, marked urgent.

*P/B CONTAINS THALLIUM STOP UNDETECTABLE IF
ADMINISTERED IN SMALL DOSES STOP CAUSES
BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES INCLUDING NEUROSIS, HAIR LOSS
STOP CAN'T SEE POSSIBLE USE OTHER THAN CAUSING
DEATH OF THE PATIENT STOP WILL ALERT POLICE STOP J
STOP COLE*

My hand shook as I re-read it, trying to understand. *Death of the patient.* I thought it might have been about Mrs Connolly, until the Master broke the silence.

‘Miss Rodwell is trying to kill her niece.’

She was trying to kill her niece. She was trying to kill Eve. The words clanged and I tried to fit them together.

‘How long have you suspected?’ the Old Man asked.

It took me a moment to pull my thoughts together so I could answer him.

‘Since Wyndham.’

‘And the father, Pope, does he know?’

The Master’s voice seemed to be coming from down the end of a long pipe or tunnel and I wasn’t sure if he was speaking to me. I remembered my first night on the *Delphic*, when I’d watched Eve being dragged aboard. I didn’t want to know if her father knew. The Old Man’s face was pale with shock and I wanted to ask him to sit down but I couldn’t speak. My hand was shaking so much the telegram made cracking noises. I thought of the wireless.

‘Have the police radioed?’

He shook his head. ‘Cole might not have been able to reach them yet. Or they can’t get the Ship. There have been storms.’ He looked through the chartroom to the navigation deck and beyond.

‘Why?’ he asked, finally.

He was asking the ocean, or God, or the Ship—not me—but I answered anyway.

‘Eve’s baby. She killed it.’

I told him everything and, when I’d finished, the Master handed me a handkerchief, but I hadn’t cried. He closed his eyes. He stood there with his eyes closed for a long time. I thought again that he’d gone into shock. But I just stood there watching him.

Finally, I managed to speak. ‘Master?’

His eyes were closed and he was grinding his teeth; I could hear the chalky sound of it. Ch-ch-ch-ch. There was an eerie rhythm to it: a dead baby, a dead girl, a dead baby, a dead girl.

‘Do you think Miss Pope has any idea? About her aunt?’

I turned and looked back out through the wheelhouse, past the abandoned wheel to the ocean. It was dark and metallic and the sun shone off it as if off a darkened window, hiding whatever lay beneath. I rubbed my arms. It was 104 Fahrenheit and they were covered in goosebumps. The Indian Ocean gets squally in winter, Halton had said, and sometimes there were monsoons, and the horizon was dark.

‘No. I don’t think so.’

‘We’ll have to tell her.’

I had told him Eve had murdered her own child. Had kept the embalmed body on board then, if I had seen what I thought I had, had thrown it overboard. But the Master was worried about telling Eve what her aunt was planning. I thought maybe he hadn’t understood what I was trying to tell him. Or did he not think she’d done anything wrong? Had she done anything wrong?

‘But what about Bertie? The baby?’

‘What do you mean?’ he said. ‘I don’t think we can do anything about that. We’ll tell the police, of course. But other than that ...’

He waited for me to answer, but I didn’t know what I meant. There was nothing we could do about Bertie.

‘At this moment, we need to stop Miss Rodwell,’ he said.

And when he said it, I realised I wanted Miss Rodwell to carry out her plan. Then she'd go to gaol for Bertie and Eve. And Eve wanted to die anyway and wouldn't that be better? There was nothing for her to live for.

He drew in his chin as if he knew what I was thinking and walked past me to the wheelhouse, where he took the wheel.

'I suppose we could arrest Miss Rodwell and keep her under guard,' he said.

'And Eve, too.'

'Yes.'

'And hand them both over in London.'

He breathed out loudly through his nose. 'How will Miss Pope react when we tell her, do you think?'

Clouds had gathered in the west, giving the still sunlit ocean a bright, otherworldly look. The Master turned the wheel slightly. He was asking me whether Eve would kill herself. There was a rumble of distant thunder.

'I couldn't say for certain. But given everything ...'

'Yes. You'll need to watch her extra carefully then, until we decide what to do. Make sure she doesn't take any more of those pills, or whatever it is Miss Rodwell is feeding her. Don't leave her alone with her aunt—or alone, even.'

'But how—without Miss Rodwell getting suspicious? And, I just wonder whether, I mean, how kind is it to stop her—'

'From killing herself?'

'Yes.'

There was another rumble of thunder, this time much louder. The Old Man stared at the horizon then picked up a set of binoculars and squinted through them.

‘We might need to change course,’ he mumbled. He lowered the binoculars. ‘I have to deal with this,’ he said, waving his arm through the window. I could tell from his gestures he meant weather was coming but, to me, the sea looked just as it had this morning: a bit choppy but no more. He’d sounded incredulous, angry, when he had asked me if I meant leaving Eve to suicide but now he sounded kind or gentle even, as gentle as the Old Man could.

‘Have you heard of Horatio Spafford, Doctor? No? He wrote a poem last century. After three of his children had drowned and he was sailing over the spot where it had happened. *It is well with my soul*, I think. I think ...’ he squinted very hard at the horizon and I thought he was about to cry. ‘I think that it can be well with your soul. That it can still be well with Miss Pope’s soul.’ He turned the wheel slightly to starboard. ‘We can’t judge potential. This could be a big storm. Go and find Miss Pope and stay with her. Don’t let her out of your sight.’

I nodded. I wished I knew the poem he was speaking about.

He flicked the telegram I was still holding. ‘Hide that.’ I put the folded paper in my pocket, but kept my hand on it, just in case.

Chapter Twenty

By the time I got to the passenger deck, fat warm drops of rain had begun to fall, and the lightning was so close it left red lights behind when I closed my eyes. I raced into the interior corridor, banging from one wall to the other in the swell, and knocked on Eve's door.

Three times I knocked, then I shouted. The Ship shrieked as she strained over the waves; the weight of her, half airborne, threatening to split her through the middle. I went back out to the deck and tried to see through Eve's porthole, but the rain made it impossible. I pounded on the glass but I couldn't hear my fists. I went back inside and tried Mr and Mrs Lawton's cabin. The two of them were alone and playing cards at their little table. Mrs Lawton made a joke about the storm, the way you do when you're trying not to be afraid. I'd just stepped out of their cabin when Eve emerged from the next door along the corridor. As she did, the Ship rolled and she crashed into me. She started giggling. I wanted to hit her, but I asked where she'd been.

‘Didn't you hear me? Why was the door locked?’

She was holding me by the upper arms, like she was going to kiss me and, even though it was well into the afternoon, she was still in her nightgown, her hair was a mess and her pupils were dilated. She'd taken something. The wave had swung the Lawtons' door open and Mr Lawton poked his head out into the corridor. He looked worried.

'Can I help you get her back to the cabin?'

The Ship was rocking so much that another person in the corridor would only have made it more difficult. I said I'd manage. It was only a few feet.

'Righto, then. Remember to shut the porthole!'

He watched us careen across the hall and into Eve's cabin before he disappeared back into his room. Eve's door was open and banged against the cabin wall whenever the ship rolled to starboard, which was every few moments. I shut it behind us as Eve picked her way across the cabin to the dressing table on the opposite wall. She pulled a yellow stole out of the top drawer and tossed it to me.

'You're wet,' she said. 'Dry yourself.'

'It's silk.'

She shrugged, manoeuvred herself over to her bed and lay down. Then, like an afterthought, she shimmied closer to the starboard wall and patted the space next to her.

'Come on. Lie down. Or you can lie on Aunt's bed, if you want.'

I looked over. Her bed was made, the covers smooth and tightly tucked in; no lumps. I had seen the orange flash of the scarf disappearing in the ship's wake. The corpse was gone. But then, maybe it wasn't.

'Where's Bertie?'

Eve jerked her head to look at me. 'In the water. You saw.'

‘I don’t know what I saw.’

‘In the water.’ She closed her eyes again.

I pulled the chair out from the dressing table and turned it to face Eve’s bed.

‘And where’s your aunt?’

‘I don’t know. Doing her exercises?’

‘Not in this weather.’

Eve made a noise like a shrug.

‘She left you alone?’

Eve pushed herself up on one elbow and considered me, or tried to: her eyes focused then dilated then focused again. I hoped it wasn’t the Thallium.

‘She left me alone.’ She squinted to make it easier to focus. ‘You’re still worried I’m going to kill myself.’

‘Are you?’

She smiled and her eyes rolled back for a moment. ‘No. Don’t think so. I want to. But maybe, I don’t know, it’s not up to me. *Father* thinks it’s up to him to decide, but it’s not, is it ...’

Her eyelids dropped and she sunk back onto the bed. I needed to find the poison and hide it before Miss Rodwell gave her any more of the stuff. Or maybe it was already too late.

I’d never seen the dressing table so tidy. The perfume bottles and lipsticks were still there, but the dirty hankies and the lipstick-smudged teacups half-full with gin were gone. I would have asked about it, but there was too much else to think of. I opened the top drawer: no medicine bottle.

Up until that point I hadn’t decided, despite what the Master had said, what I felt about Eve. I hadn’t decided what I felt about saving a murderer who had killed

her own child because it was mentally defective. What could be more defective than a murderer? But when Eve had said she didn't think she was going to kill herself, my chest had expanded and I realised I was relieved, no, happy, that she wasn't going to die or at least not if I could help it. Better: I didn't have to decide whether she should be left to die or made to live. I didn't have to work out how I felt, didn't have to work out whether she was worth life or deserved life or anything like that. *Maybe I don't have the right to decide.* I just had to do my job and preserve life as far as it was up to me, like with Charcoal. There was nothing in the second or the third drawer either.

‘What are you doing?’

Eve was up on her elbow again, groggy, trying to focus on me.

‘Where is your medicine? That your aunt gives you?’

She blinked hard then stuck out her lip, her face rubbery and exaggerated with the sedative. Suddenly, the ship rolled violently to one side, tossing me off the chair and sending the scent bottles and lipstick tubes crashing to the floor. One of the bottles smashed and the smell of Joy filled the cabin. A lipstick rolled across the floor, its ridged edge making a ticking sound, like time running out. I picked up a piece of broken crystal and some of the brown scent got on my hand: I'd need a broom.

I started to get up but the Ship rolled back the other way and I found myself sliding portside, towards the internal corridor. Eve had rolled off the bed and she was laughing as if it were all a joke. Then the door opened and Miss Rodwell fell inside. She was soaking and her slip showed through her white shirt. She reached out for her bed to the right of the door, and eased her way over to it. She licked the water off her top lip. She was breathing heavily.

‘Why are you here?’

‘I heard something. I came to check everything was all right.’

I was between Miss Rodwell's bed and the wall. Eve was pulling herself up onto her own bed and behind her, the ocean filled the porthole. Then the Ship rolled again and the porthole went white. I made my way to the door, past Miss Rodwell.

'Eve let you in.'

'Yes. Why wouldn't she let me in?'

Miss Rodwell lay back on the bed and closed her eyes. 'It smells awful in here.'

Eve explained that the perfume bottle had broken. 'The Joy broke,' she said then she laughed at what she said. She was sitting on the edge of her bed. There was less than three feet between her and her aunt.

'You should have secured things better.'

'But Aunt, you know how quickly the storm came. There was no warning.'

'There was plenty of time.'

The Ship thudded in the trough of a wave and Miss Rodwell grabbed the headboard of her bed. With her free hand, she pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket—it was wet too—and wiped her forehead.

'You can go now, Doctor Fraser.'

The Master had told me not to leave Eve alone and especially not to leave her alone with her aunt.

'Why don't you go and have a bath?' I said. 'It would warm you up. I'll stay with Eve.'

'No, I don't want a bath.'

I said Eve could come back with me to my cabin and we could leave Miss Rodwell in peace. It was obvious she wasn't well: she'd lost colour and she kept swallowing like she was trying to stop herself from being sick.

‘I’m perfectly fine. Eve will stay here. Help me clean up.’

‘I can help with that, too. Many hands make—’

‘Just go.’

But I wouldn’t back down and I could see she was too sick to really fight. I said I’d stay and make sure she was all right.

‘For God’s sake! I’m fine!’ She hit the mattress beside her thigh but even that movement seem to make her feel ill. She looked around urgently. ‘Where’s my towel?’

Eve pointed at the yellow stole, draped over the back of the chair where I’d left it. ‘Why don’t you use that?’

Miss Rodwell looked as horrified as I was at the idea of using it as a towel and my feelings softened. She was a spinster aunt, not the spoiled daughter of a rich businessman. It must have been hard to look after Eve. But then Miss Rodwell reached across and plucked the stole off the chair and rubbed it over her face and her chest then she twisted and twisted it until it coiled around on itself, as if it was the thing that needed drying. It was long, for a stole, long enough to form a noose.

Miss Rodwell stared out the porthole as it filled with ocean then emptied again. She might have been thinking of the stole, of how she could tie it around Eve’s neck while she was sedated and hoist it up. I looked frantically around the cabin. The fan paddles would break under Eve’s dead weight and Miss Rodwell wasn’t strong enough to carry Eve and drop her off the railing—she’d hit the main deck first anyway. There were plenty of other murder weapons though: pillows, shards of china, headache pills and the Thallium, still hiding somewhere in the room. Panic swelled like a tumour in my gut. Miss Rodwell was saying something.

‘I said, I would like some privacy now. I’m not well.’

‘I have some anti-nausea tablets—’

‘Do I have to call Bowyer to escort you out? Get out!’

I stepped over to her bed and stood over her. I tried to communicate in a stare what I knew, but Miss Rodwell’s blue eyes were flat, like someone had put black mirror paper behind them.

When I got back on deck, the waves were so big I had to cling to the railings so I wouldn’t fall off. The wind whistled around the bridge. I thought we could put Eve in the hospital, say it was Master’s orders, for her own safety, and lock the door. Then I wouldn’t have to worry about Miss Rodwell getting to her. But when I got to the wheelhouse, it was empty. As I was behind the wheel, the ship mounted the crest of a wave and climbed so high I couldn’t see any ocean through the bridge windows. She screeched and groaned then hit the valley between the waves and all I could see was a wall of water. I held on to the desk at the front of the wheelhouse, ready to ride the next wave up. *Where was everyone?* The sky crackled with electricity then the bow disappeared into the mountain of water before a wave swept up the length of the ship and crashed right into the bridge windows. The waves out to the side were covered in white veins of froth, on the crests the water danced like spirits. I looked frantically behind me, hoping someone would appear from the chartroom, but I was alone.

I made my way outside, lurched across to the railing, and fell into it so hard I almost bit my tongue. I manoeuvred myself so the railing was wedged firmly under my armpit and I wrapped my arms around it just in time for the next wave, which covered the ship and came right up to the bridge deck. The steel was so slippery and I wondered what kind of a fool had thought of steel for railings. Then there was the

sound of breaking and lightning stabbed the ocean 10 feet away, like God was aiming directly at me.

I was blaming God like I was a native or an ancient, so scared that I had to make sense of the world. But science had explained what caused a storm: hot air met cold air and so on. I shuffled my feet, which had slid forward with the rolling of the Ship, back underneath me and braced for the next wave. I tried to comfort myself with the unlikeliness of lightning striking a ship out there in the middle of the ocean, but it wasn't unlikely at all. It was highly likely; the derricks and the mast and winches would act like rods. The ship pitched forward into the gorge between two mammoth waves and my feet slipped. I scrambled up, but then the ship juttred into the air and dropped again and I thought my shoulder could pull out of its socket, it was so hard to hold on to the railing.

And the waves kept rising, towering, filling my vision. At some point, I managed to draw myself together enough to shimmy along the railing until I reached a post and I wrapped my arms and legs around it, arms above one rung of the rail and legs above another, threaded myself through as many gaps as I could, as if by weaving myself into the ship's structure I could stop myself from falling off. And then I closed my eyes to the towering, frothing waves and the lightning that stabbed like a magician stabbing a wooden box with his knife. I hit my forehead on the post; I would have an egg but still I clung to the post, my eyes closed. I kept praying and begging and pleading with God and the ship and the ocean, with anything that might have any power over what was happening and, eventually, there was a loud, too close crack of thunder and someone yanked my arm.

'Can you get up?'

Someone had come. I nodded, but I couldn't open my eyes. The grip on my arm got tighter.

'You have to let go of the rail.'

The ship pitched and I squeezed the pole tight between my legs. I would go overboard.

'I've got you, Doc. Grab my hand.'

I turned and grabbed and screamed all at the same time. Halton hauled me through to the wheelhouse then pushed me through the back to the chartroom and shoved me under the table.

I shut my eyes again and hugged my knees. If I was going to die I wanted it to be quick, not like this. I jammed my chin into my knees to try and stop my teeth chattering, but it wasn't enough. Halton squeezed in beside me and put an arm in front of my legs to stop me from sliding forward when the ship slid down the waves.

'Are you all right?'

I tried to nod without lifting my head from my knees. I couldn't speak. I squeezed my eyes tight against reality and went through the Table of Elements. Beryllium. Boron. Carbon. We tipped again, this time slightly to starboard, and I was squashed in between the wall and Halton, who tried to keep his weight off me by pulling himself up on the table leg. Over and over we went, tipping up so far we were vertical.

'Will we sink?' I dug my fingernails into Halton's forearm and my toes into my shoes as if this could hold me still amid the churning. Halton grunted and I could see the muscles in his neck strain as he changed his grip on the table leg. He hadn't answered me. I told myself he hadn't heard. He hadn't heard me, that was all. The

ship fell back as we rode up the face of a wave and I looked over at him. He was holding his breath.

‘Will we sink?’

‘No.’

The Ship slid out across the top of the wave then dropped down into the trough with a thud that shook the table.

‘Are you frightened?’ I asked.

‘Yes.’

I squeezed his arm tighter and waited.

Some time later, whether it was hours or minutes, I never was sure, I realised that I wasn’t banging into Halton anymore. I wriggled my toes—they were cramped—and let go of his arm. My fingernails had left cuts in his arm. The ship’s rocking was gentler now. The thunder had stopped and the wind, too. There was only rain, heavy and constant. I wondered if I’d been unconscious.

Halton stretched his legs out and leaned back against the bulkhead with his eyes closed.

‘I should go and see the Master. He’s in the bilge.’

I put a hand on his leg to stop him from getting up. ‘Thank you.’

He waved the thanks away like smoke and pushed himself up to his haunches.

‘You saved my life.’

‘It’s my job.’

I sobbed. Halton crouched there awkwardly until I stopped. He patted my knee.

‘It’s all right, Doc. About us. It will be all right.’

‘How will it be all right?’

‘Do you want to marry him?’

I didn’t know what I wanted. I hadn’t planned to follow Glynn then he’d offered me an escape and I’d run to him. I knew he wanted to marry me. I knew he’d make a good, kind husband.

‘It doesn’t matter. Don’t tell him about us. Start again.’

Halton was looking up through the bridge window; the rain had stopped and the grey clouds were thinning. I thought of the psalm: *What is man but a breath?*

‘Aren’t you going to tell him?’

‘No.’ He turned to read my face. ‘Unless ... Would there be any point in my telling him? You wouldn’t marry me anyway, would you? Even if you don’t marry him?’

‘No.’

He nodded.

‘I’m sorry, Jack.’

‘It’s all right.’

I was crying again. ‘Thank you.’

He held out a hand and I grabbed it and let him pull me out from under the table and up onto my wobbly legs.

‘I need to find the Master. Account for everyone.’

And it was only then that I remembered. Eve had been alone with her aunt.

Chapter Twenty-One

Miss Rodwell's seasickness was real and Eve was fine. There were some injuries among the crew—one of the deckhands cut his forehead falling onto the corner of a cabinet—but otherwise there was nothing serious, which was miraculous, according to Halton.

Early the next morning, I woke up to find the Ship had stopped moving and outside the fog was so thick I couldn't see more than a few feet beyond the railing. I'd left Eve alone for the night with Miss Rodwell. I'd let myself believe I was just exhausted after the storm and the telegram, but maybe I was giving Eve one last chance to kill herself. Or kill her aunt. Or both of them. One last chance to take everything out of my hands. And now the ship had stopped. I rang for Bowyer.

As soon as I saw him, smiling and relaxed, I knew it wasn't Eve.

'What's happened? Why are we stopped?'

'We're at Aden, Doc. Though you wouldn't know it would you, with the fog?'

He offered to get me a cup of tea and left. I sat down at my dresser. The mirror was cloudy with salt and I wiped it clean with a handkerchief. I hadn't realised I was

frowning. I tried to relax my brow, but couldn't. I stretched my mouth as wide as I could, juttied my jaw back and forth, trying to get the muscles to loosen. I studied the image in the mirror: The thick blonde hair, brown eyes magnified by the thick circles of glass. It was a serious face. Signs of murderous thoughts: none. Signs of humanity: none. Round cheekbones. I told my reflection that I felt relieved when Bowyer had explained why the Ship had stopped. I had stopped clenching my teeth and my stomach as soon as I knew Eve was safe. So I hadn't really wanted her to die. I hoped. There were still two fine lines between my eyebrows; maybe they were a sign of my disappointment in her refusal to kill herself.

Why should I want her to kill herself? The answer—even the question—danced away from the grasp of my thinking. Once or twice, I managed to hold it down long enough to almost think it through. Some ideas: that life had to be unbearable after what she had done. Her life would be unbearable. I couldn't bear to think of her living with what she had done. That was one reason. The other was this: somewhere in me there was an idea of what life was supposed to be and what it was for and, if life were to go on for Eve, in Eve, after what she had done, then that changed everything I had assumed. It was not about progress or overcoming or happiness or meaning. It was just about being.

I drank my cup of tea and went up to see the Master in his dayroom. The sun had burnt off the morning mist to reveal a dusty town of ochre and grey gathered in the low crater of a half-exploded volcano. There was something funny about all those buildings huddled right in the spot where everything would blow up. Cain and Abel had lived around here; I had read that somewhere. It did look like the victim of some cosmic curse: the white minarets like bones in the desert.

As I climbed the ladder to the bridge, the Ship must have stirred somehow or signalled she was awake because half a dozen fishing dhows suddenly came streaking towards us like water beetles. I stopped at the bridge deck to watch the natives throwing their weighted ropes up onto the main deck. They succeeded first go, most of them, and began brandishing their wares. The morning was still so I caught some of the words—‘Turkish Delight’ and ‘scarab’ and ‘cigarette’—and saw a bucket being winched up to one of the deck boys.

I knocked on the Master’s door and went in. He was sitting at his desk, the curtains drawn back from the porthole. He apologised for not coming to see me last night. ‘We didn’t finish checking the bilges till oh-one-hundred.’

He told me to sit down. The lounge was too soft and I sank into it until my knees were almost level with my chest. I shuffled forward to the seat’s edge, where I could hold myself properly.

‘Will we hand Miss Rodwell over to the police?’

He shook his head. ‘No. The Australian police got through early this morning. They want us to take her to England. She’ll be arrested there. Easier to extradite or something.’

It seemed incredibly risky to me. ‘How will we keep her from escaping? Or from killing Eve? Will you keep her locked in her cabin? Under shipboard arrest?’

‘Wait, Doc. Wait, wait.’ He frowned; he was thinking it through as he spoke.

‘Once we arrest Miss Rodwell, she’ll give up Miss Pope and we will have to arrest her, too.’

‘There’s no body now,’ I said.

‘No. But at least two witnesses.’

I finally had Miss Rodwell where I could keep her from harming Eve. Where I could watch her being judged. And I didn't want to wait anymore.

'So what shall we do? Keep pretending she's not trying to kill Eve?'

'If Miss Pope is aware of the danger, perhaps she can avoid it,' the Master said.

'Perhaps!'

'If we arrest Miss Rodwell and she gives up her niece, there's no way Eve will avoid gaol. Or worse.'

And the realisation spread through me like hopping into a warm bath, not only did I not want Eve to die, I didn't want her to go to gaol either. I nodded at the Old Man. His face was mottled brown and red, but the skin was still tight across his chin and cheekbones; he was not as old as I had guessed. He pulled at his collar and scratched under the sleeves. He wore his uniform uncomfortably, not with a puffed-out chest like most men. Maybe he just didn't like uniforms. He smoked and I perched on the edge of the settee.

Later that morning, Eve and I caught a taxi out to the Aden tanks. The dust from the pressed-earth road kicked up into a cloud around us and we held hankies over our mouths to stop the dust. There were no road rules in Aden: horse-drawn carriages tried to edge cars and hawkers off the road. The cars and hawkers pushed back and half the time I had to close my eyes to the view because the driving was so hairy. When we got to the tanks, the driver demanded, through a wad of tobacco, double the price Bowyer had arranged for us back at the ship.

Eve opened her purse.

'Shouldn't we even bargain with him?'

‘It’s nothing to me. Unless you mind?’

‘No.’

She asked the driver where we should start our tour of the tanks but he just jabbed his finger at the air and said something in Arabic before driving off.

‘That was nice. I wish I hadn’t given him double now.’

A small native boy, no shoes, tugged my dress. ‘Tour of the tanks, Missus? I give you top-class tour, Missus.’

Then there were four of them, all offering best-class tour, top-class tour and cigarettes and scarabs. The first boy tugged my skirt again. ‘Very cheap, Missus. And much history.’

I just wanted to talk with Eve. The Master and I had decided we wouldn’t hand Miss Rodwell over, and we wouldn’t arrest her yet. But for that to work, we needed her to think everything was normal. I hired the first boy as our tour guide.

‘But I don’t want you talking at us, all right? Just keep the other children away.’

The boy shouted at the surrounding children and waved his arms until, after some arguing back, they scattered in search of other income sources. He gestured for us to follow him up a path that had been hewn from the volcanic rock. The path was lined with hawkers selling blue scarab beetles and more coloured glass, boiled eggs and oranges. They thinned out the closer we got to the tanks.

The tanks were bigger than I’d expected: like small Roman swimming pools, and the neat brickwork and bridges and roads built for the tourists rising out of the bulbous volcanic rock-like sculptures drawn from molten glass. The water in the pools was low and a murky green colour, which made me thirsty. Eve leant over the crumbling wall of one of the cisterns and lit a cigarette. I signalled for our guide to

leave us alone and he stationed himself a few feet away, crouched on his haunches with his knees in his armpits and began smoking himself.

‘Eve.’

‘Yes?’ She looked at me. ‘What? What is it?’

‘The medicine your aunt has been giving you.’

She put her fingers to her lips, like she was looking for the pills. She looked at me, waiting for me to keep going, but I could see she had already begun to understand.

‘I gave some to Doctor Cole, in Wyndham, and he had them tested. Some of your hair too—’

‘My hair?’

‘You left some in the hospital one night. Doctor Cole sent it off and—’

‘Wait!’ She put a hand on my mouth. ‘Don’t. Don’t say it. I don’t want to hear.’ She took the hand away slowly. The realisations flicked across her face. I could hardly bear to watch.

‘Father?’

‘I don’t know.’

She turned and looked out over the tank, took a deep drag of her cigarette, blew out the smoke. ‘I’m just going to ... to sit down for a minute.’ She pointed with the cigarette. ‘Just over there.’

‘Yes.’

I watched her walk over to a flight of stairs and lower herself onto them. She sat there for a few minutes, smoking, then she got up, took a lipstick out of her shorts’ pocket and put it on. When she walked back over to me, I saw it was perfectly applied. Not a bit out of place. And I felt like a hypocrite. She had killed her child, but

only because she was protecting him from her father. And I, who had felt so morally superior because I hadn't killed anyone, had been content to let Eve die, simply because it was less difficult than making her live. Because I was a coward. I couldn't say any of that.

‘That colour suits you.’

She smiled. ‘Thank you.’

‘Listen, I’m sorry to keep talking about this. But you need to pretend you don’t know a thing. All right?’

‘That’s easy. I’m pretending all the time.’

‘But try to keep away from her, too. Come and sleep in my cabin, make an excuse and, whatever you do, don’t take anymore medicine. Put it under your tongue if you have to, then spit it out and give it to me. We can use it as evidence later.’

She closed her eyes and raised her face to the sun. ‘So if she’s not going to poison me, you think she’ll use some other way.’

I remembered seeing Miss Rodwell standing behind Eve at the Ship’s stern, hand raised at her niece’s back. ‘Yes. I think she’s trying to cover up—’

‘*Damnatio memoriae*. Have you heard of that? When someone in Rome had done something terrible, the Roman Senate would rule their existence be forgotten. They smashed their faces off statues, scribbled out their names in books. That’s what they’re trying to do, Aunt and Father. They’re trying to erase Bertie.’

I looked behind me and our guide was not where he had been a few minutes ago. I scanned the path and quickly spotted him climbing the steps, an orange in each hand, cigarette between his lips.

Eve was watching him, too. ‘I wonder what kind of a profit he’s made on those?’ She dropped the end of her cigarette and ground it under her heel so the only

thing left was pulp. I remembered the silky creature I'd met that first night and the impression I'd had: sophistication and exoticism and beauty and money and expensive lipsticks and fragrance and shininess, impossible shininess, shininess that somewhere in my subconscious I thought would never dull or get scuffed or sicken and die like the rest of us because it was like royalty, somehow part of the divine line, untouched and untouchable by the things that scuff and destroy the rest of us. It had been comforting, the thought that something survived, that certain things were immortal. That illusion was gone.

As we walked back down, we passed a teenaged boy begging by the foot of a ruined arch. I hadn't noticed him on the way up. He was blind, his eye sockets sunken and the eyelids sewn together. Our guide told us he was asking for mercy.

Eve stopped and opened her purse again. 'Doesn't it remind you of the Bible? The man begging by the Beautiful Gate?'

I didn't know. I hadn't read the Bible much. Eve put a folded note into the boy's hand and curled his fingers around it. Then she told our guide to tell the boy to keep it for himself, not to show anyone. She touched the boy's closed eyelid. I thought of saying something about the dangers of infection, but I didn't. Eve straightened up and was about to turn away when she stopped and pulled a ring off her little finger. It was a small gold band set with an aquamarine stone. She opened the boy's hand again and put the ring in.

'It was from Father,' she said.

We stayed in Aden for one night to take on water and supplies before we entered the Red Sea. We were three nights in the Red Sea; the heat turned out to be a blessing because Eve and I brought our mattresses out onto the passenger deck and slept

outside like we'd seen some of the sailors do. I didn't sleep well, but that was a blessing too: I had to keep a watch over Eve. Halton came past to check on us one of the nights, when Eve was sleeping. He knew all about everything by this stage. The Master had insisted and, though I felt anxious about telling him, it felt like a huge relief when he knelt down beside my mattress and held my hand and knew what I knew.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Eve insisted we sleep on deck, the night we entered the Suez Canal. ‘I just want to see the Canal,’ she said. I’ve gone over her words hundreds of times.

Halton woke us just before four a.m. on his way to morning watch. We sat up and watched all the lights draw together as the north-bound convoy formed. The ships honked at each other through the dark like an impatient gaggle of geese and our ship shuddered to life. As we moved off, the man-made lights grew fewer and fewer until only the fog lights of the ships in front were visible, reflecting in wobbly lines on the water. The flat sandy banks glowed strangely in the moonlight. There were stars everywhere, but there was no pattern in these stars; it was all chaos.

There wasn’t much to see; like the equator, it was a bit of a disappointment, one of the seven wonders of the world but not really wondrous at all and, after a little while, I must have dozed off. When I woke up, Eve was asleep, clutching her blanket tightly under her chin. In the blue light of the dawn, I could see the ghostly outline of a ship just ahead, slipping in and out of the mist.

I got up and went to the railing. The bald tip of the sun was just visible over the East bank. There were palm trees along the bank and, as the sun rose, it burned their silhouettes away and warped the sky around it, getting redder as it rose, dying the mirrored water the colour of blood. I wondered if I should wake Eve and how important it was for her to see the Canal. She was still clutching her blanket like she was in the middle of a nightmare. I thought there was not any nightmare that could be worse than waking, and so I let her sleep. The longer she could be oblivious, the better.

She woke up eventually and, for the rest of that last day, we read and lounged in deck chairs or played bridge and watched the flat sandy banks of the Suez. A road and a railway line ran along the side of the canal but, other than that and a cluster of buildings every few miles, there were few landmarks. Twice we saw men digging out the sides of the canal, like children trying to keep the moat around a sandcastle from collapsing, and once a diver in an iron mask came up from under the water near a little jetty and waved. White gulls dove and soared and screeched around us, hoping for scraps of food from the ships or dropping down into the milky green water to fish. The Ship seemed to slip over the sand as though we were driving down a smooth highway.

Just before lunch, we stopped at the Great Bitter Lake to let another convoy pass on its way south to the Red Sea. Mr Lawton said that the lake had once been a massive saltpan. Eve whispered to me that, if her aunt was going to push her, she hoped she'd do it here. The thought of her bobbing up like a cork and Miss Rodwell's face made me laugh aloud.

A large cruiser, the *Monterey*, had stopped alongside us. Girls in huge floppy white sunhats and white slacks hung over the railing, dangling cigarettes or skinny

floppy arms. The men too, were dressed in white ‘cruise wear’, crisp shirts and shorts and deck shoes. It was exactly Eve’s crowd, I thought, until someone shouted out, *Ada! Ada Fraser!* It was a man’s voice, but the only thing I could make out was a black cap. Eve was more worried than I.

‘How can someone recognise you from that far away?’

‘Binoculars?’

‘Eve turned her back to the *Monterey* and pulled her hat down further over her ears.

‘And it will be the same in London, too,’ she said. ‘Everyone knows everyone, you can’t get away.’

We were alone at the railing so I risked bringing up Bertie. ‘But no one knows, Eve.’

‘They will though, as soon as you try to get Aunt, she’ll tell about everything—’

She’d stopped taking the sedatives altogether and she was quite normal, lucid. I wondered if she was hoping we’d leave the whole thing alone. ‘If we don’t arrest Miss Rodwell, or catch her, she’ll keep trying.’

‘Yes. And if you don’t arrest her, I’ll never know if Father had anything to do with it.’

‘You think she’ll talk about that?’

Eve lit a cigarette. There was a piece of tobacco left behind on the freckle that marked her lip. ‘I don’t know. She’ll relish giving me up, but Father? She’s in love with him, so, maybe not. I’ll be able to tell though. By how he reacts.’

Three nights of poor sleep were starting to have an effect. My left eye twitched, a muscle spasm. We weren’t stopping in Port Said: too much opportunity

for Miss Rodwell to get away and we had all the supplies we needed from Aden. Knowing I would have to be watching Eve for the next few nights, I felt a wash of tiredness. She would be all right on the Canal. During the day. I rang for Bowyer and asked him to help me take my mattress inside. Before I collapsed onto it, I told him to keep an eye on Eve.

‘Tell Mister Halton I’m sleeping, so he needs to watch out for everything.’

I woke up and it was dark and Eve was not next to me. I ran out into the corridor, calling her name in a voice that was too panicky. She appeared in the doorway leading to the passenger deck and put her hands on my upper arms, gripped them firmly. *Look*, she was saying, *I’m still here*.

‘We’re passing Port Said,’ she said. ‘Come and see.’ She was smoking. ‘God, it’s so hot! How do the Arabs bear it?’

‘But how can you smoke?’

She held her cigarette in front of her face and looked at it quizzically. ‘Yes. It’s funny, isn’t it?’

I heard Professor Dawson, my psychiatry professor: *Dissociation is a common symptom of war neuroses*. The way Eve had spoken about herself was as if she were speaking about a different person altogether. I didn’t have a chance to think about it more than that. Not until later.

Port Said harbour was clogged with tugs and merchant ships and cruisers all honking and turning so the water was quite choppy and the *Delphic* rocked more than she had since the Indian Ocean. Though it was gone midnight, the banks were buzzing as people promenaded up and down a long wharf, cut down the middle lengthways by a stone wall. Behind them, a minaret in marbled white rose up, and the

elegant arches and sandstone of colonial hotels along the wharves clashed with the wheelbarrows and chickens and piles of wooden crates along the jetty.

‘Shall we call Bowyer to bring us a drink?’

I did feel like a drink, desperately, all of a sudden. Port Said looked so beautiful and gay it made me ache. We couldn’t get across to the beauty, that was part of it, but I had the sense—and I think from the manic way the crowds shouted and laughed and danced, that they had it too—the sense that none of this would last. The beauty was partly in the impending death, the feeling that I suppose everyone had in 1937, that we were speeding towards an ending of some kind.

We rang and Bowyer brought the drinks and the *Delphic*, which had been stuck at 15 knots all the way through the Canal, sped up so the wind blew our hair back from our faces and it felt like being let out of the gates. The golden aura of Port Said was disappearing fast behind us and we walked around aft of the passenger deck to watch the last of her.

‘I wanted you to know,’ Eve said, ‘that I was trying to help him.’

‘I know that.’

She was standing very still, holding her whisky glass in two hands. ‘I didn’t care before, what you thought of me. But I do now. I want to make sure you know why I did it.’ She nodded at the shrinking lights and drank the rest of her whisky in a gulp.

‘You were trying to save him, I understand that.’

‘Aunt will say that I was crazy or evil or something. I think that must be part of her plan, don’t you? To blame it on me.’

‘I won’t let them change the story.’

‘Don’t. Don’t let anyone forget that I loved him. More than anything. That’s why I did it, to protect him. Not because there was anything wrong with him. I never thought that for a second. There was nothing wrong with him, nothing. He was perfect.’

‘I won’t let anyone forget.’

Eve closed her eyes. The smoke from her cigarette snaked upwards until it disappeared in the darkness above our heads. She smiled. ‘He had such fat little hands. Did I tell you? Like chubby little starfish.’ She ran her index finger over the back of her hand, her eyes still closed. ‘I don’t know where he got that from. His father was quite skinny and I ...’ She opened her eyes and squinted at the sky. A white gull, glowing in the moonlight, wheeled and dove around the front of the Ship.

‘For all your killing off of God, you do rather act as though it’s all set out.’

I didn’t understand.

‘I’d always thought it was because of the Tower of Babel. We killed off God because He put the brakes on. But it’s not that, is it?’

‘I don’t follow.’

‘The problem is that God allows free will. Or, what’s the word?’ She touched the tip of her tongue. ‘Possibility. Or risk, maybe. Bertie might have done something great. Or he might not have. But he was not a murderer, not like Aunt and me, and yet our germ plasm was good.’

‘Eve, you’re not making sense.’

‘I suppose I’m just wondering, where does it end? Perfection?’

Chapter Twenty-Three

Breakfast was almost over when Miss Rodwell came into the saloon next morning. She was not her usual well-groomed self: her shirt was crumpled and untucked and she didn't have her lipstick on. She clung to the doorframe like she needed it to stand and she swallowed so hard I saw the lump travel down her throat. Maybe she was seasick again. There was no swell, but we were still travelling fast.

Bowyer was pouring Mrs Lawton's tea. 'I'm afraid Cook has stopped making breakfast, Miss Rodwell. But I could bring you some coffee?'

She shook her head. 'No. Is Eve here? No. Obviously. Have you seen her?'

No one had seen her since last night. I told Miss Rodwell I'd left Eve at about two a.m.; she'd said she was going to go back to her stateroom. After the Canal, the sailors had moved our mattresses back inside because the mosquitos were so bad and the wind made it too cold to sleep on deck.

'Have you checked the main deck?'

Miss Rodwell shook her head again, a terse movement that made it clear something was wrong. 'She left me a note.'

Mrs Lawton took a sharp breath in and everything stopped. The Old Man wasn't there and I realised I was going to have to be the one who asked.

‘What did it say?’

‘What you think it did.’

Halton pushed his chair back and Mr Lawton and Chilvers did the same. They started making arrangements to search the ship. Halton was getting the men, Lawton and Chilvers were going through the cabins, Bowyer went for the Master.

‘Where is it? The note?’

Miss Rodwell shrugged. ‘The wind blew it ... It went over.’

She was a lot stupider than she seemed if she thought I was going to let that pass. ‘Why would you throw it away? Unless it said something you didn't like.’

‘It was the wind, I said.’

‘There is no wind.’

There was an arm around me, a hand on mine; Mrs Lawton was stepping in to keep the peace. ‘Why don't we go and help look? I'm sure we'll find her.’

I stared at Miss Rodwell and the words threatened to rush out of me, but I held them back and let Mrs Lawton lead me down to the main deck.

The whole ship was searched; the Master had divvied it up between the sparks and the deck crew and the passengers. The Lawtons and Chilvers searched the deck, along with the deck boys. There were a lot of places where someone could go unnoticed, Mrs Lawton said: the lifeboats, the bottom of derricks, those piles of rope. Halton had five men with him to search cargo hold five; the one I'd seen Eve taking Bertie out of that night. No one else knew that though. Only the Old Man and Halton and me. Halton directed five men each to each of the other holds.

‘I want every corner and crack searched,’ he said. I had an image flash into my mind: a photo of a man’s body in the cargo hold of some other ship. I’d seen it in the newspaper, years before. He was curled up into the side of the ship like he was snuggling into his lover. *You’ll love her like she’s your very own.* But that was only the men; no woman had ever loved a ship like that.

There were men assigned to the bridge deck, the passenger deck and the engineers’ deck. More to the poop house and the bow. But the Old Man chose me as his searching partner and, if anyone thought that was strange, they didn’t let on. We searched ’tween decks, the space between the cargo holds, just under the deckhouse. It was the space where the compressor had blown and caught Henderson in the eye. I could see the spot where the leak had been patched up. The pipe fixed, but nothing much else.

When we were alone, in ’tween decks, his torch casting the only light, I asked him if he knew the words to that poem he’d mentioned, the one by the man whose children had drowned.

‘Not all of it, no.’

‘Oh, what a pity.’

‘But the first verse, I think. Yes.’ He sighed.

‘When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll;’

his voice wobbled and he stopped for a second.

‘Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul.’

He sighed again. ‘That’s it. That’s all I remember.’

‘It’s nice. Thank you.’

The Old Man said something to the darkness, about sending a message from Malta. And, had her aunt joined the search? I didn't answer that.

We stayed down there for a few minutes, not speaking, just sitting against the bulkheads. Eventually, the Old Man said, 'We'd better go back up. They'll be waiting.'

The daylight was blinding and I had to cover my eyes. As they adjusted, I saw that the Master and I were the last ones back. Mrs Lawton put a hand over her mouth.

There was nothing to say. The men looked down. I caught Mrs Lawton's eye briefly before she nodded and grabbed Mr Lawton. I wiped some dried salt crystals from the face of my watch. It was three minutes past 10 o'clock in the morning. Wednesday the 18th of August, 1937.

The telegram, addressed to Mr Pope, read:

20/08/1937 STOP Regret to inform Miss Eve Pope missing from

MV Delphic 18/08/1937 STOP One day from Port Said STOP

Presumed deceased STOP

Malta's Grand Harbour was as smooth as a bath after the open Mediterranean and packed with warships and cruisers and tugboats, all of them covered by the tiny dghajsas like the small fish that eat dead skin off whales. The island, the harbour, all of it, seemed like a fairy-tale. Malta itself looked as though it had been carved from a single piece of rose-coloured sandstone, graceful colonnades and arches arising suddenly out of rough stone. A cluster of warm brick buildings and a church steeple peered over the top of a 300-foot cliff fashioned into a garrison. Down in the harbour, the dghajsas were filled with natives in black caps and bright shirts. Halton called one

over, and he and I and the Lawtons climbed down the rope ladder into it. The boatman, in a yellow shirt rolled up almost to the shoulders, started off with gay chatter. *Where you from? American?* until Halton said, *No talking please, sir, there's been a death on board*, and after that he didn't say another word except to shoo off another dghajsa man, who came too close and tried to sell us Turkish delight.

We rode the lift, which ran up the side of the cliff like a crutch. There was a group of Italians in the lift, too, and they chattered in their own language as the lift shuddered upwards to the Barrakka Gardens, the steel bars around us like an unfinished scaffolding. It must have been close to a hundred feet up and the higher we climbed, the harbour became more and more a perfect circle. It was shallow enough to turn the water aqua and I thought of Eve's aquamarine ring and wondered when her father had given it to her and what he would think when he got the telegram. Mrs Lawton's cheeks shook with the movement of the lift and the Italians chattered and everything was so beautiful. Like Port Said again.

When we got to the Post Office, there was a telegram waiting for me from Jean. I'd forgotten all about receiving bad news, had thought only about sending it. But it wasn't bad news. The inquest had concluded and I'd been cleared of any negligence in Mrs Connolly's death. *Have fun with Glynn in London. Stop.* I folded the piece of paper, put it into the pocket of my trousers and walked outside.

Valletta was the prettiest place I'd ever seen. The narrow cobbled streets were filled with little shops with covered balconies and green painted doors selling filigree lace necklaces and silver cigarette cases. White star-shaped flowers poked out from the spaces between bricks and stones.

I ran my shoe back and forth over the cobblestone under my foot. It was smooth. I wondered how many thousands or hundreds of thousands of feet had stood

there, on that same spot, and read of death or birth or love or war. And stamped their feet at the universe, only to polish up a single stone in a small street in a tiny town on an island somewhere.

‘From Glynn?’ Halton had followed me out into the cobbled street. He smiled, or tried to. ‘He must be looking forward to seeing you.’

I handed him the telegram and he read it.

‘Your patient. Mrs Connolly.’

‘Evelyn Connolly.’

He looked at me smiling and took it for relief. But I had only just realised: Evelyn and Eve.

‘It’s not your fault.’

‘No, maybe not.’ Mr and Mrs Lawton were still in the Post Office. There was sun on my neck and sadness swelling in my throat. I put my arm through Halton’s.

‘Can we pretend we’re on holiday for half an hour?’

As we passed through a square under the shadow of a grand cathedral, a woman in a sparkling green headscarf walked in front of me and smiled and made the sign of the Cross.

There were to be millions more deaths very soon, in the war, tens of millions. But Eve’s was the first. Or what I think of as the beginning of that horrible time. When it would be hard to tell what was right and what was wrong; what was true and what was not. It seems clear looking back, but it wasn’t. It was chaos. The rules for playing had been taken away but there was still something inside you that said: there is a good and there is a bad, and good might be harder to find, but you’d better just look harder.

Chapter Twenty-Four

When we got back to the Ship after going to the Malta Post Office, the Old Man put Miss Rodwell under arrest. He had Halton and me and three of the men with him, to restrain her if need be. Still, he waited until she was alone in her room and most of the Ship's company was off wandering on shore or busy swabbing decks. 'No reason to make it worse for her than it will already be,' he said. I could think of plenty of reasons, but none that I wanted to say aloud, so I didn't say anything.

She answered the door in her dressing gown. She had a cigarette in her hand and, without her makeup, she looked old. She blinked at all of us standing there in the corridor and I remembered the night Halton and I had knocked on her door with an unconscious Eve.

'Miss Rodwell. Could we come inside?' The Old Man spoke very gently.

'Yes, come in.' Miss Rodwell backed into her stateroom to let us all through.

'Why don't you sit down,' the Old Man said. 'It will make this easier.'

'What easier?'

'Claire Rodwell, under the authority of the New South Wales Police—'

Miss Rodwell started up from the bed, but the Old Man put his hand on her shoulder so she sunk back down.

‘I am placing you under arrest for the attempted murder of Eve Pope. You will be confined to your stateroom until we arrive in London. You will be handed over to the authorities there.’

She had gathered herself together and was trying to laugh. ‘What on earth are you doing? Attempted murder of Eve?’

‘Doc had the pills tested—the ones you were giving her.’

‘And her hair, too,’ I said.

‘What are you talking about?’ Her voice was rising and her hands were fluttering. ‘Her hair? I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

I was standing behind the Old Man, who was crouched down next to her, as though she needed comforting.

‘You were poisoning her,’ I said. ‘Thallium.’

She laughed. Then suddenly, her face changed. It was an expression I’d never seen on it before. She looked up at me with eyes that suddenly looked like Eve’s.

‘Did she know about the pills? Before she—’

I nodded and she shrunk away from me. Put her hand over her mouth.

The Master told the two deck boys to wait out in the corridor. He told Miss Rodwell that there would be men stationed around her stateroom night and day, and they were there to stop her from escaping, but she could ask them for help too.

‘If you want me, just tell the boys and they’ll fetch me.’

He got up to leave and she grabbed his forearm. ‘Arthur. Arthur wanted me to. And now she can’t ever forgive me.’

The Old Man took her hands in his. His face was close to hers. 'I believe she can.'

We were at sea for another five days: the rest of the Mediterranean, the Bay of Biscay, Dunkirk. The change in Miss Rodwell after Malta was almost as much as a shock as everything else. I visited her several times and sat next to the bed as she lay there. Her once-sleek bob was frizzy, there was a tea stain on the lapel of her silk dressing gown and her thin lips seemed to sink into her mouth as she sucked on an endless chain of cigarettes. She didn't say much except to ask, several times, if there had been any word from Arthur. There was none. I did ask her once whether she wanted to talk to me about anything. I was giving her the chance to confess, to tell her side, I suppose, before we handed her over in London, but she just stared at the whirring metal fan bolted to the corner of the cabin.

We came under a heavy blow in the Bay of Biscay and I was doing the rounds to see if anyone needed anything for seasickness. When I got to Miss Rodwell's I found her lying flat on her back on Eve's old bed, an empty bottle clutched to her chest. The bottle had a scratched-off white label with a black border stuck to it. I recognised it instantly: Eve's pills. I had completely forgotten to try and confiscate them.

Miss Rodwell looked over at me. 'Where is my medicine?'

'Have you taken it?'

I walked over and tried to take the bottle, but Miss Rodwell clung to it so hard I couldn't get my hands on it.

'Have you taken the pills?' I asked again.

'No. There weren't any left. They were gone.'

I realised what had happened then. Eve had got rid of the pills herself.

‘She wanted me to suffer,’ Miss Rodwell said; her voice was matter of fact.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Like she did.’

She was still lying on her back but she looked at me. ‘You know she killed her baby? That’s why she jumped. It had nothing to do with me.’

I coughed and said what I would later be saying to the press and the court and anyone who would listen.

‘I saw conclusive evidence, in my consultation sessions with Miss Pope, that she loved her child, Albert Pope. I believe she tried to save Albert from her father and aunt, who had the child killed because he was a mongoloid.’

She sat up.

‘Who told you he was a—he was defective?’

‘I saw him.’

She looked up at the low ceiling of the stateroom. The fan was whirring quietly. ‘At least you haven’t left Arthur out of it. He was the one who insisted, after all. And he said it was our fault. Our germ plasm; mine and Bertha’s. His stock was good, he said.’

We entered the Thames on the morning of Thursday 26 August. It was green and misty at first. Then there was a family with a dog, mother in a yellow dress and hat and little girl in red swimmers, playing along the banks. Then we were into the Pool of London where it was very wide, like a harbour rather than a river. And it was grey. Armies of winches and derricks and cranes, a brown-sailed sloop and canal boats so low under the weight of coal and cargo, they were practically at the waterline. The tugs, red and black, with white life rings around them, livened things up a bit but still,

everything was dreary and oppressive and even the tugs belched black smoke to turn the white clouds tobacco coloured.

A tug pulled us into a wharf where two great cargo ships had already berthed ahead. I watched from the foremost point of the passenger deck as the dockhands passed up the rusted chain and Halton scrambled through the hawse pipe to attach it to the bow of the Ship. I wanted to call out to him to be careful, but Glynn would be here soon, if he wasn't already. I looked down at the wharf, covered the entire way by a two-storey warehouse, several of the shed doors rolled back to reveal bags of wheat or sugar or something else. Between the building and the *Delphic* a row of winches had been pushed up together, all in a row to save space, and from one end of that row came a sudden flash of light that left a red aura. Then there was another. My heart sank. Mr Lawton, who was standing in between Mrs Lawton and me, said 'They know,' and then several figures ran out from behind the cranes and made their way towards the ship. I stepped back from the railing so I was leaning up against the bridge house, not visible from the wharf.

'I didn't think the Master was going to tell the newspapers,' Mr Lawton said.

'He didn't,' I said. 'Someone else must have.' I scratched at a bit of rust on the corner of the bridge house. Had Mr Pope phoned the papers himself, or had someone do it for him—the better to play the grieving father? I saw him sitting in his club, smoking a cigar, whisky in one hand. I scratched the rust too hard, so that I ripped my fingernail. I risked a peek over the side of the Ship: the press were jostling back and forth, trying to line themselves up with where they thought the gangway would go, as if the Old Man would let them take a single step in the direction of the Ship. There was a police car, too, and a gaggle of police.

Mrs Lawton cocked her head in the direction of the corner cabin. 'Is she still in there?'

Before I could answer, there was a screech and I looked down to see the dockworkers bringing the gangway alongside. Someone on the main deck roared at the press to clear out the way or 'we'll fucken' squash you.' I smiled, despite the dread in my stomach. Mr Pope had sent a message via the Ship's wireless that his sister-in-law was no longer welcome at his London address. The poor woman. I had arranged for her to be taken directly to a psychiatric facility in London.

The police, four of them, marched up the gangway. There were footsteps behind us and I turned to see the Old Man.

'I'm going to go down and feed the vultures. See if I can shoo them away before you all disembark. I have already given the rest of the crew their instructions and they'll wait until all this clears.'

'Are you sure they won't talk to the press?'

'The Bosun will not hand out wages until I say.'

'And what about Miss Rodwell?'

'The police will deal with her.'

'And Mister Pope?'

'We have no evidence for him, I'm afraid. But you can talk about Eve. Tell people.'

'Yes, Sir.'

The Old Man laughed. 'I don't believe I've heard you call me that before, Doctor Fraser.' He saluted, then turned and disappeared around the side of the bridge house. A few moments later, we saw him striding across the main deck then, followed by Halton, marched down the gangway. He stopped just before the end of the stair

where two of the deckhands had formed a human chain, blocking the press from coming any further.

‘It is my sad duty to confirm that one of our passengers, Miss Eve Pope of Rose Bay, Sydney, was lost on the voyage to London.’

‘Did she jump? Or did the aunt push her?’

‘A thorough search was conducted of the Ship and, as no trace of her was found, she is presumed lost at sea.’ He placed just the slightest emphasis on the word *lost*.

Halton, standing a rung above the Captain, turned his face to me then tipped his head in the direction of the jetty. I followed the direction and saw a lone figure standing a few yards back from the press crowd, light glinting off glasses. A surge of joy rose up in me. I waved and Glynn waved back. Then I remembered all the press with their cameras, and Halton below, and drew my hand in. I looked at Halton. He mouthed something, but I couldn’t make it out so I raised my palm upward to show I didn’t understand.

He nodded and clasped his hands together to show it was all right.

Once he’d got my trunk through the press and off the jetty and into a motorcar he’d borrowed, Glynn kissed me on each eyelid, on the tip of my nose and my mouth. Then he kissed a big circle around the circumference of my face ‘just in case I missed a bit.’

‘So, what happened?’ he asked. ‘I want to know everything.’

‘Could I tell you later?’ I asked, resting my head back onto the cool black leather of the seat and taking my glasses off. ‘I’m awfully tired.’

Glynn wanted to take me straight back to his quarters, but that was an hour's drive from the wharves, so I asked whether we couldn't just explore London for the day. He was surprised I had the energy, but said all right then and we got a locker right there at the Dock and spent the day seeing the sights and spending too much money on a plate of Cumbernauld sausage and mashed potato, the prices expensive compared to Sydney, and my 'pay' as a Ship's Doc had only been one pound. We shared the sausage and potato in a milk bar filled with dockworkers in grease-stained coveralls.

As the dusk fell, about 4:30 in the afternoon, I asked if we could drive back down to the jetty to have one last look at the *Delphic*.

Glynn tucked my hair behind my ear. 'I told you, didn't I? Didn't I tell you you'd love her?'

'Yes, you did, know-it-all.'

We sat in the motorcar at the end of the wharf until the yellow street lamps and the lights that lined the wharf spluttered on.

'Shall we go home now?' Glynn asked. 'You must be exhausted.'

I leant forward and cleared a circle on the windscreen in front of me, like a porthole. 'Just a moment more, darling.'

Glynn started to protest then I saw a rope ladder slither down the side of the Ship and two figures clamber over the railing from the main deck and climb down. The figures stopped in a pool of light and leant in to one another before the shorter one walked, bow legged, into the wharf building opposite the *Delphic*. The other stood for just a moment under the light, as if deciding what to do, then ran the length of the jetty to a taxicab parked a few feet in front of us. Just before ducking into the back of the cab, the figure turned towards us. Whoever it was had their cap pulled low

over their face, but I thought I saw, through the dusk, a black freckle on their bottom lip.

‘Who was that?’ Glynn asked.

I raised my hand in a half wave that Glynn couldn’t see, before dropping it again. ‘I’m not sure. No one I know, anyway.’

I kissed him and said I wanted to go home.

THE END

**Dying Room. Was the
Wyndham Native Hospital
eugenic?**

Introduction

In August 1939, a doctor takes blood from ‘18 to 20 natives’ employed in the Western Australian town of Wyndham and tests it for venereal disease. The blood samples, all of them, test positive and the doctor writes to his superior. Will the Government pay for treatment? Or ‘am I to bother about treating them at all?’ (Sweetman 1939a)

That same year, there are other seemingly unrelated events: The Eugenics Society of Victoria proposes a birth control clinic to help Melbourne slum women plan childbirth along ‘medical, economic and eugenic grounds.’ (‘Birth Control’ 1939) A few months later, an article in *The Medical Journal of Australia* takes issue with limiting the reproduction of any white woman, rich or poor; they must all have more children if the West isn’t to face ‘a catastrophe comparable with the slow, agonising fall of Rome’. Eugenics shouldn’t be targeted at whites, the author argues, but employed ‘to eliminate foreign-grown unfitness’ (Fowler 1939, pp. 156-7).

A month after the Wyndham doctor writes to his superiors, Germany invades Poland and World War II begins. But it will be another six years before the horrors of Hitler’s genocide program are fully brought to light. In 1939, the idea that human beings can be bred much like animals has not yet been stripped of its acceptability.

The ‘unfit’ are being sterilised in countries including the United States, Canada and Denmark and Australians continue to debate whether they should be sterilised here.¹

Fears that poor women were having too many children, that white women were not having enough, and the question of whether one should ‘bother’ treating 18 natives with syphilis, all came from the same assumption: that certain lives were worth fostering and others were not. In the following pages, I will investigate the extent to which this assumption, and the policies and practices it spawned, were made with a vision of the future Australian ‘race’ in mind and, as such, could be described as eugenic. I will consider the origins of this binary conception of life—that is, worthwhile/not worthwhile—and, by considering its inception point, attempt to understand its role in the formation of the Australian nation.

Historiography has grappled with just how significant eugenics, the ‘science’ of producing better humans, was in Australia. Some, such as Diana Wyndham (Wyndham 2003) argue that eugenic influences were a significant formative force in the new Australia. Others, such as historian Stephen Garton (Garton 2010), believe recent historiography has been too quick to find eugenics in everything from physical health culture to milk pasteurisation and racism, thus blurring historical complexity.²

¹ In 1928, the Commonwealth commissioned a Report into Mental Deficiency, which included an assessment of sterilisation in other countries. The Commissioner did not recommend sterilisation of ‘defectives’ in Australia leaning toward the more ‘conservative’ approach of Britain where sterilisation was not pursued partly because it was not considered ‘generally effective’. He did, however, recommend other measures including ‘permanent segregation’ of some ‘defectives’ (Jones 1929, p. 16). Stephen Garton points out that legislation, which would have allowed for the sterilisation of ‘mental defectives’ was introduced into the Western Australian Parliament in 1929 but lapsed. Other eugenic legislation either did not pass state parliaments or fell short of eugenicists’ aims (Garton 2010, p. 247).

² This is a simplification of a complex historiographical debate that considers the comparative dominance in the Australian context of Lamarckian eugenics (which held that nurture played a part in race improvement and thus was less interested in practices like sterilisation) versus Mendelian eugenics (which held that heredity alone determined outcomes). For an overview of this debate, see Stephen Garton (1994). There is also debate over whether what occurred in Australia—not fitting the pattern of say, American eugenics—was indeed eugenics or something else again. Against this argument is pitted what Jones calls the ‘evolutionary, diffusionist model’, which sees eugenics adapting to fit the particular concerns of the localities in which it finds itself (Jones 2009, p. 64). Thus, while American

Garton points out that, while eugenic ideas were widely discussed in Australia, in ‘the more conventional eras of eugenic concern—segregation, sterilisation, marriage advice, maternal and infant welfare—the legislative record fell short of the hopes of many Australian [eugenicists]’ (Garton 2010, p. 249). He argues several factors, including Catholic opposition to interference in reproduction, the Australian legal culture and disagreement in the scientific community, prevented eugenics from really taking hold, though he concedes it did gain ground in social reforms such as maternal and infant welfare and in the operation of government bureaucracies³ (Garton 2010, p. 252).

In this dissertation, I interrogate the view of Australian eugenics as being a relatively benign movement that did not progress much beyond public debate. By focusing on a small hospital in the north of Western Australia, I aim to show that eugenically shaped policies and assumptions did, in fact, have a significant impact on Australian lives. The Wyndham Native Hospital, built in 1937, was established in one of the farthest-flung corners of the Empire.⁴ And yet, I will argue, this Hospital operated at the convergent point of some of the most significant forces in what historian Robb Watts has called ‘the age of eugenics’ (cited by Garton 2010, p. 252).

In the creative component of my doctorate, *Doc*, I use fiction as research practice to inhabit the consciousness of a female doctor of the 1930s and try to understand how someone living at that time might have failed to question beliefs that ultimately led to the sterilisation of thousands of women and the euthanasia programs of Nazi Germany. The idea began with a story my grandmother told me when I

eugenics was shaped by concerns over race and mental deficiency, the British version was shaped by fears over poverty and crime.

³ This was seen, for example, in areas such as the classification and segregation of ‘mental defectives’.

⁴ ‘But not flung far enough,’ according to my grandfather, who stopped in Wyndham in the 1930s. This remoteness appears to be a point of pride for most Wyndhamites. When I was in Wyndham in 2017, one local described it as ‘80 miles up the arsehole of the world’.

interviewed her for a journalism assignment. The story was about a young woman she had met while working as a cargo ship's doctor in 1937. The woman had had a nervous condition, which may or may not have been related to her conviction that she had done something terrible. In keeping with the practice of the times, she had been sent abroad in the hopes that an ocean journey would cure her. It didn't.

I was too focused on my grandmother's pre-war experiences in London to consider asking what she'd meant when she said the girl never recovered. Nor did I think to ask what the 'terrible thing' was, nor whether the girl had only thought she'd done it. By the time I did think, my grandmother had long since died. I searched for answers in historical records, but the young woman my grandmother had told me about disappeared from the record soon after she disembarked in London.

The eugenic storyline in *Doc* is an invention, but it was sparked by the ubiquity of eugenic views I came across while researching the 1930s and, in particular, medical science at that time. When I read the psychiatric textbooks that my main character, Ada, would have consulted when treating a nervous young woman, I came across words like 'feeble-minded', 'imbecile' and 'defective' written without apology, as though there were no disjunct between signifier and signified. I wondered whether, when Ada sat in lectures given by the prominent eugenicist Harvey Sutton—the first director of Sydney University's School of Tropical Medicine and Public Health—she accepted the eugenic views he expressed⁵ as fact. I wondered whether she was aware of his view of Aboriginal Australians as 'dysgenic' and 'incurable' (Rodwell 1998, p. 168), and accepted that too, as fact. Ada, like my grandmother on

⁵ Grant Rodwell writes that Sutton lectured 'very explicitly' on eugenics to his fifth-year medical students between 1930 and 1947 (1998, p. 167).

whom she is based, was secular, a feminist⁶ and a scientist. Did she assume, along with others like her—perhaps almost unconsciously—that some lives were more valuable than others? And did the way she treated her patients reflect this assumption? Perhaps before the horrors of the war surfaced, she might not have questioned either the existence or the effects of such assumptions. My grandmother once told me about seeing a German Jewish man in the queue for gas masks in London in 1939. He was upset and shouting about Hitler. ‘And I was so stupid,’ she said. ‘I thought he was being funny.’

How to judge our historical forebears? To what extent can we expect them to act outside the context of their own time? The novelist David Foster Wallace captured this problem with a joke about a senior fish swimming by two younger ones. The senior fish asks, ‘Morning, boys. How’s the water?’ To which they respond, ‘What the hell is water?’ (Foster Wallace 2009, pp. 3–4). Back in 1968, the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner—who will reappear in this dissertation—said something similar. ‘Fish swim in water, and what we do with our fins, gills and tails is not unrelated to the permissive-resistant medium in which we move’ (Stanner 1979, p. 215). Stanner went on to reflect on his own early work with Aboriginal people and his inability at that time to see beyond the existing ‘racial structure’. He said: ‘It was for everyone a very difficult struggle to escape from a style of thinking that unconsciously ratified that order of life as natural and unalterable’ (Stanner 1979, p. 207). Stanner, Biskup and others have also written about humanitarians who believed they were helping Indigenous people, but who had something akin to astigmatism; they could not see

⁶ Carey (2006), Bacchi (1980) and others have discussed the involvement of progressive social reformers and members of the women’s movement in eugenics. But Garton challenges historiographies like Bacchi’s, which pit ‘pre-war optimistic environmentalism’ (trying to improve the race through social reform) against ‘inter-war pessimistic hereditarianism’ (which believed nurture played no part in heredity) (Garton 1994, p. 165). He argues that there was not a clear-cut distinction and that ‘both arose from a common discourse on degeneracy and the role of both hereditary and environment in the production of “deficiency”’ (1994, p. 181).

beyond the paradigm of the times. For even these humanitarians, the situation of Aboriginal people was often seen in palliative terms, ‘a natural and inevitable part of the Australian scene, one that could possibly be palliated, but not ever changed in any fundamental way’ (Stanner 1979, p. 204). And yet, there were those who escaped the thinking of their own time.

In 2007, Pierre Ryckmans, writing as Simon Leys, recalled the story of Berliner Raimund Pretzel, who left Germany in 1938. Pretzel, whose memoir was written under the pseudonym Sebastian Haffner, witnessed no atrocities, simply a series of small, ‘fairly banal, daily surrenders’ until he was ‘softly enveloped into the all-pervasive moral degradation of an entire society’ (Leys 2007, p. 45). Haffner though, seeing the end point of the daily compromises and surrenders, emigrated ‘*to save his soul*’ (Leys 2007, p. 45, his emphasis). What was most terrifying about the Haffner case, Leys wrote, was that millions of others saw exactly what he did and yet there was ‘only one Haffner’ (Leys 2007, p. 45).

My novel is an attempt to embody that immersion in the historical moment, and to pose the question: how do you see and act differently, how do you stay conscious, when you’re underwater? It is an attempt to tackle, to borrow a phrase from historian Tom Griffiths, ‘the problem of living in the present’ (Griffiths 2016, p. 10).

As Griffiths writes elsewhere, history and fiction ‘offer different truths’ (Griffiths 2009, p. 74.4). Richard King has explored these divergent but related truths, arguing that when what is accepted as historical ‘evidence’ has been obliterated—in the cases of witnesses to the Holocaust and American slavery⁷—fiction can be a way

⁷ And, I would argue, Aboriginal witnesses to the origins of the modern Australian state.

to keep memory alive.⁸ Fiction can also, King contends, point to the truth of the past in a way that the current conventions of the historical discipline do not allow. But finally, and perhaps most importantly, fiction can ‘confront the historical sublime, the spirit of the people seeking vengeance and willing, if not always finding, meaning’ (King 1991, p. 186). Confronting the historical sublime—used, after Edmund Burke, to denote the unknowable, terrifying, chaotic side of history, a side that cannot be captured by the historical ‘middle style’ or ‘non-rhetorical’ rhetoric (Hayden White cited by King 1991, p. 186)—is particularly relevant in the study of eugenics, elements of which seem impossible to pin down and explain.

I might never have learned of the Wyndham Native Hospital except that I decided to have my fictional ship, the *Delphic*, follow the same route taken by the ship on which my grandfather had served as doctor. That way, I could ensure verisimilitude in the *Delphic*’s journey and draw upon on my grandfather’s observations, contained in letters he had sent my grandmother. When the *Delphic* docked at Wyndham, like my grandfather’s ship had before her, her cargo of beef had not yet arrived; cattle had to be driven overland to the Meatworks, sometimes for thousands of miles. My characters were stuck in Wyndham for a week.

Trying to give my characters something to do in this far-flung place, I read as much as I could find on 1930s Wyndham. I searched Trove and ‘Googled’; I contacted the local historical society. And, not very far into my search, I found an archival document typed onto a bright orange background and posted online. It was a register of patients who had been admitted to the Wyndham Native Hospital (CIFHS

⁸ Moreover, King writes, revisionists use arguments that render historians, hampered by their own ‘cognitive regime’, helpless to counter. For example, revisionists argue that because there are no survivors of the gas chambers, there is no concrete evidence the gas chambers existed. And where there *are* survivors, ‘by their very existence, the survivors of the camps either contradict the claim about extermination or supply “biased” anecdotes.’ (King 1991, p. 184)

2017). I had been aware of a *Government* Hospital in Wyndham, but not a ‘native’ one. In fact, as I was to discover, the Native Hospital had only just been completed when the *Delphic* arrived in 1937. The patient register included a column in which patients were identified as either F/B, H/C or ‘?’. I looked the acronyms up: they referred to ‘full-blood’ and ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal people. I soon came across other descriptions: quadroons and octoroons. The octoroons, having the least amount of Indigenous, heritage needed the least amount of control and ‘protection’. Full-bloods required the greatest.

The categorisations were reminiscent of the sliding scale of ‘intellectual defect’—from feeble-minded to imbeciles then idiots—described in W.S. Dawson’s 1928 *Aids to Psychiatry* (Dawson 1928, p. 225) in which each group was conceptualised as more inefficient than the last and requiring greater protection and control. I was not the first to see a similarity between the two categorical systems. In 1942, the then journalist Paul Hasluck said the legal status to which Indigenous Western Australians were confined had ‘more in common with a born idiot than any other class of British subject’ (Biskup 1973, p. 170).

It is the contention of this doctoral project that the treatment of Indigenous Australians, the mentally ill, the poor and those with disabilities had much in common in Australia’s eugenic half-century. This treatment emerged from the Modernist spirit of the age, a spirit captured by Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, which was performed by the Russian Ballet in Paris on the eve of the Great War. The historian Modris Eksteins has characterised this shockingly Avant-garde ballet—a celebration of life through a sacrificial death—as ‘perhaps the emblematic *oeuvre* of a twentieth-century world that, that in its pursuit of life, has killed off millions of its best human beings’ (Eksteins 1989, p. xiv). This spirit—contradictory, nihilistic and utopian—can only

begin to be grasped by acknowledging the relationships between the seemingly disparate groups that were conceived as obstacles in this pursuit of life.

Research approach

The research questions that drive this doctoral project are, firstly, whether and how it is possible for an individual to think outside the socio-historical milieu of their own time and, related to this, the artistic question of how one can depict the difficulty of reaching consciousness—in this instance of the racial structure and eugenically-tinged assumptions of the time—without apologizing for such assumptions and without modernizing the psychologies of characters. The second research question with which this project is concerned is the manner in which eugenic views infiltrated and inflected the foundations of the new Commonwealth and therefore whether they continue to shape the political structures of our nation.

These questions engage with Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács' view of the historical novel as a political act of remembrance, a way of showing the past as the *pre*-history of the present. Analysing what he calls the 'classic' historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, Lukács argues that these works arose from a 'new interpretation of the reasonableness of human progress' (Lukács 1983, p. 25). This interpretation of history as an inherently logical Hegelian dialectical struggle in turn arose from actual social conflicts—the decline of the old feudal system, for example—and a desire to defend the outcomes of such conflict. The decline of one form of society through—and this is crucial—a popular, mass movement arising from the needs of the people was held as proof that such decline, though perhaps painful, was necessary. These

classic historical novels, whilst perhaps recording the heroism and tragedy of the vanquished old order, nonetheless showed the necessity of historical progress.

But, Lukács argues, when the popular revolutions of eighteenth century Europe failed to be fully realized, the stagnation bled into the writing of history, which became an escape from the banality of bourgeois life rather than a political act of remembering. ‘History’ became nothing more than an elaborate stage set for whatever story the author wanted to tell rather than a realistic depiction of historical social forces, and of history as the precursor of the present. This had dire implications with the rise of Fascism in the early 20th century, because the lack of concrete historical understanding and the separation of the masses from their own past allowed totalitarian powers to present history as either unrelated to the present or as leading inevitably to their own ascendance.

The erasure of Australian history, particularly in relation to colonisation and its ongoing effects, has been called ‘the cult of forgetfulness’ (Stanner 1979, p. 123). And though the consequences of this forgetfulness may differ from the historical amnesia Lukács identifies, it too, is dangerous. This doctoral project engages with history *as the pre-cursor of the present*. It aims to commit a political act of remembrance and to show both the reasons that eugenics dropped from view and the continued existence of eugenically-inflected assumptions in the political and social structures of our nation. This project is therefore, as it relates to the frame of my creative practice, interdisciplinary. Historical research contributes to an understanding of how theories of racial hierarchy and eugenics emerged, thus engaging with the question of how individuals like Ada might have accepted them and the difficulty of thinking outside the orthodoxies of the time. Conceptual research into Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics, Giorgio

Agamben's theory of bare life and G.K. Chesterton's conflation of eugenics with slavery goes to the question of why and how eugenics manifested in Australia. Empirical research in the archives of the Wyndham Native Hospital contributes to the question of how eugenics was woven into the foundations of this nation by showing how eugenics and opposition to it emerged from the concrete realities of real lives. By showing this, empirical research also contributes the question of how one can present history without modernization.

In this dissertation, I depart from the traditional exegetical form to conduct a historical case study of the Wyndham Native Hospital. In this country, nothing highlights the horror of eugenics, nor its inner inconsistency, nor the strange way in which it has never been categorically repudiated, more than the treatment of Aboriginal Australians. Moreover, the very fact that eugenics was applied to so many different groups, with each application differently justified, revealed it as a bogus 'science'. It was a deliberate choice to depict different manifestations of eugenic thinking in the novel and the dissertation, a choice made to better reveal not just the irrationality of the movement, but also at the underlying power dynamics that propelled it. Thus, to allow my novel to truly engage with the question of how the Australian nation formed itself, how eugenic thought influenced this formation and how someone immersed in the scientific worldview of the time might have thought and acted eugenically (and here I define eugenics as G.K. Chesterton did, as the attempt to treat humans like industrial tools), I needed to research the history of how Aboriginal Australians were treated.

Why an individual hospital? There is much existing scholarship on the abduction of Aboriginal children but it was unlikely that my protagonist would have come into contact with children affected by it. The Wyndham Native Hospital,

however, she may well have. Medicine in the colonies was overwhelmingly a question of how the ‘white man’ could adapt to life in the tropics; indeed the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville was one of the first national health bodies and the forerunner to the School of Tropical Medicine and Public Health at Sydney University where Ada studied. The problems of tropical diseases such as leprosy had been also publicized across Australia through a 1934 Royal Commission into alleged mistreatment of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley—and the establishment of the Wyndham Native Hospital was one of the Commission’s recommendations. It is not unlikely then, that Ada would have been interested in seeing the Hospital. Nor was it unlikely that Dr Cole might have asked a visiting doctor to come and offer a second opinion on a patient. Thus the study of the Wyndham Native Hospital served the plot of my novel and provided me with the historical facts, which would create the world in which Ada moved.

More importantly for my novel, the Native Hospital brought together in one site many of the forces which collided at this point in Australian history: nascent nationalism, the legacy of colonisation, the desire to populate and develop the North as a buffer against foreign invasion and related fears over the ability of white colonisers to adapt to the tropics. Alongside these forces, theories of race, disease and genetics—all of which had eugenic overtones—worked themselves out in the politics and running of the Hospital. Lukács argues that the classic historical novel was successful because it portrayed the *collision* between the old order and the new and between major socio-historical forces, as it manifested in individual characters and dramatic events. Thus these novels portrayed the ‘social and psychological content of a particular personal destiny ... inwardly connected with the great, typical questions of popular life’ (Lukács 1983, p. 342). They showed that individual lives and events

were not simply the result of subjective choice, but were shaped directly by the historical forces of the time.

In the creative component of this project I use the genre of historical fiction as imagined by Lukács to explore the collision between conflicting historical forces of religion and tradition on one side and an eschatological Darwinism on the other. This conflict is embodied in Ada, who as a progressive white woman and a scientist, sees life as functional, in service to society, but at the same time loves her father, who with his disability is no longer ‘useful’. The conflict of the age is also embodied in Eve, who though a part of the upper class from which most eugenicists hailed, finds herself then in conflict with eugenic views when she has a child who is not ‘valuable’ in the eugenic/industrial view. In the Wyndham Native Hospital, the condition of Ada’s father and Eve’s baby is seemingly reversed: those deemed *dysgenic*, or damaging to the national gene pool, prove indispensable to the industrial/economic development of the nation in the contended and crucial zone of the North. Thus while in the novel the conflict is embodied in the dead but preserved baby, a life ‘useless’ but nonetheless so cherished it cannot be disposed of, in the Wyndham Native Hospital real lives, considered so ‘useful’ to the state that their free labour was often accounted for in land transactions, are so disregarded that they are dumped and left to die when invasion is immanent.

As stated, the aim of this project is to provide a historical understanding of how this nation was built and to explore the possibilities for consciousness within the constructs of one’s own time (possibilities that, arguably, increase only with true historical knowledge). In this sense, my historical study of the Wyndham Native Hospital served the needs of my novel. But as I began to research the Hospital, I was quickly confronted with the fact that there was little publicly available information.

As King argues, ‘fact and fiction are internally related (and) it is impossible to think of fiction except as it contrasts with fact/history’ (King 1991, p. 175) or (quoting Richard Rorty), ‘No constructors, no deconstructors’ (p. 175). That is, in order to present the historical, to think around the collision of social forces, I needed first to find them. And so I went to the archives. In this dissertation then, as well as serving the needs of my creative practice, I hope to contribute to the official history through what King, quoting novelist Toni Morrison, calls ‘re-memory’ or the countering of established facts with other facts (King 1991, p. 175) by bringing to light previously unexamined archival material relating to the treatment of Indigenous Australians in the Kimberley. Moreover, because of its links to the creative project and the related novelistic desire to inhabit historicity, this dissertation brings a previously unused conceptual framework to the study of Australian eugenics, namely the thinking of G.K. Chesterton. Chesterton’s work is relevant, not simply to the interpretation of whether what occurred in the Kimberley was eugenics, but also because Chesterton, like Haffner, was trapped in the historic moment and, like Haffner, stood in opposition to it.

The use of historical and archival research is not simply about teasing out the strands of the complex historical collision between old and new, nor of constructing the world of the novel through empirical fact, nor of putting on record material that has been forgotten. The great failure of historical novels post Scott, according to Lukács, was that their ‘point of departure is not *existence* but an isolated idea’ so that their only ‘approach to this idea is via modernisation’ (Lukács 1983, p. 228, my emphasis). This is problematic because the great historical changes emerge organically out of the lives of the people, not from abstract ideas. But because historical material is by its nature less resistant to the writer’s subjective views (unlike

contemporary reality which constantly surrounds and corrects the chronicler of contemporary times), there is a greater risk of abstraction, or of ahistorical depiction. Lukács prescribes the concrete realities of historical life—as they relate to the struggle between social forces—as a corrective ‘fruitful resistance’ (Lukács 1983, p. 294). Thus through historical and archival research into this hospital, I was able to find the material manifestations of the struggle between pre-industrial and modernist views of human life, and between racism and economic rationalism, in quotidian details like the way medicine was prescribed. The study of the Wyndham Native Hospital shows how resistance to eugenic, racist ideas emerged from these concrete manifestations, from the lives and the needs of the people—not from an abstract idea.

The research methodology that informs this dissertation is as follows. Michel Foucault’s theories on biopolitics and the state’s disciplinary apparatus, Giorgio Agamben’s theory of bare life and the camp, and G.K. Chesterton’s Distributism provide the core elements of the conceptual framework. In addition to this conceptual framework, I use eugenic historiography by national scholars Alison Bashford, Warwick Anderson and Stephen Garton, as well as international scholars such as Daniel Kevles, as an interpretative lens. Finally, I position my analysis against the history of settler/Aboriginal relations in Western Australia and particularly the Kimberley region as covered in accounts by Peter Biskup, Mary Anne Jebb and Chris Owen. I follow these historians in their framing of this history as largely divided into two: the relations between settlers and Aboriginal people in the southern parts of the State and relations in the Northern pastoral region.

Against this background of eugenic scholarship and Western Australian history, I analyse previously unexamined archival material from the Wyndham Native Hospital and the Department of Native Affairs. I also analyse other primary source

material from the National Archives of Australia, Western Australian Parliamentary Hansard and formative eugenic texts such as the works of Francis Galton. This is supplemented through the use of existing oral histories and material such as newspapers and novels of 1930s Australia, as well as fieldwork carried out in Wyndham.

In the first chapter, 'Foundations', I examine the foundations of the Hospital through a literature review of international and Australian scholarship on eugenics as well as related work on race and social Darwinism. I analyse the roots of scientific racism and its relationship to eugenics, with particular reference to Western Australia, to set up a foundation from which to argue that racialised population management can be read as eugenic even when it is not overtly about bringing biological benefit to the majority of the population.

In the second chapter, 'Something Must be Done', I examine the events that led to the establishment of the Wyndham Native Hospital through a framework provided by Michel Foucault's theory of 'biopolitics'. Foucault holds that the modern state's main function is to administer life and thus its power is manifested in the way it fosters lives, or disallows them. I will argue that the timing of the Hospital and its *raison d'être*—arguably to prevent the spread of venereal disease between Aboriginal women and white men—provides evidence of the state's desire to foster certain lives and not others.

In the third chapter, 'Quarantine and Segregation', I use Foucault's theory of the disciplinary mechanisms of the modern state, in addition to Alison Bashford and Warwick Anderson's work on public health, quarantine and epidemiology, to analyse the architecture and layout of the Hospital. Using these works as a lens, I look for evidence of racialised spatial management, to paraphrase Bashford, in disputes over

where the buildings will be laid and in anxieties over the Hospital's status as a 'native reserve'.

In the fourth chapter, 'The Hospital for Native Non-Citizens', I employ Giorgio Agamben's work on bare life and the camp to confront the difficult question of how a Hospital, traditionally understood as a place of healing and fostering life, might also be understood as a space in which lives were discounted. By assessing the Hospital in light of Agamben's theory that the nation state constructs itself through the power to designate that-which-does-not-belong, or 'bare life', I argue that the Hospital was part of a utopian nation-building exercise, where utopian is understood both in the narrow and the broadest sense.

Finally, in the chapter entitled 'Humans or Chattels?', I assess the Hospital through the work of the writer and Catholic activist G.K. Chesterton who argued that, at its root, eugenics was a capitalist attempt to treat human beings in an economically utilitarian manner. To this end, I view economic relations in the Wyndham area through Chesterton's critique of eugenics and argue that, in large part, the Hospital was an attempt to deal with the economic 'externalities' of pastoral expansion whilst protecting the profits of pastoralists.

One of the easiest ways to determine whether the Wyndham Native Hospital was eugenic would, of course, have been to ask those individuals who were sent there. There are a small number of existing accounts by Aboriginal people who were either patients or workers at the Hospital, which I have drawn upon in this dissertation. However, as is the case across much Australian history, Indigenous voices are largely missing from the official archives. This silence is part of the 'cult of forgetfulness' that Stanner identified in his Boyer Lectures and, I would argue in the case of the hospital, 'cannot possibly be explained by absentmindedness' (Stanner 1979, pp. 213–

4). These missing voices can compound original violence as Pat Dudgeon, Jackie Huggins, Kate Auty and others have pointed out.⁹ This silence can, however, also indicate *resistance* by those who may have refused to submit to ‘the non-Aboriginal gaze’ (Auty 2005, p. 14). And so, I have tried to read the archive taking these voices into account. When a white manager complains about Aboriginal people absconding from the Hospital, hiding from leper patrols, or being ‘a nuisance’, I try to keep in mind the ‘audacity and defiance’ that Dudgeon sees when she reads the official accounts, which depicted her grandmother as one of the original ‘mothers of sin of the North’ (Dudgeon 2017, pp. 114–5).

Still, I do feel some unease telling this story, given I was not affected by the Hospital nor involved with it. The primary aim of this dissertation is to interrogate the motives and thinking of the individuals and system that assumed Aboriginal Australians belonged in a segregated hospital. That is, it is an interrogation of the perpetrators of that Hospital and the ‘racial structure’ that gave birth to it. It is in the spirit of Stanner’s analysis of his own earlier thinking, his own previous racialised assumptions and to that end, focuses on the record left by the non-Indigenous settlers. Nonetheless, by virtue of the relative absence of Indigenous accounts in the archives I have studied, as well as the limited scope this dissertation provides for further research, it can provide only a sliver of the story—or, I hope, the start of it. For a fuller account, research into the impact of this Hospital on those who were sent there would be required.

⁹ Pat Dudgeon writes of the records of control and surveillance, which speak to the oppression of Aboriginal people, and wonders whether Aboriginal people were rendered silent because sometimes ‘it was impossible to speak the unspeakable and perhaps ... speaking it would make others think (they were) somehow deserving of the demeaning treatment.’ Dudgeon also cites Huggins, who writes that the trauma and oppression ‘can be so fierce as to make people mute.’ (Dudgeon 2017, pp. 108–9).

In the meantime, however, an examination of conscience/history can commence without all—even without most—of the impact statements. If this were not so, much of the work done into the causes of the Holocaust might never have been written. And in Australia, where there is a danger that an absence of work in this area will perpetuate ‘the cult of disremembering’ (Stanner 1979, p. 214) there is a clear moral reason to continue uncovering historical events even if only by increment.

There are those who would say that my conscience or this generation’s conscience needs no examining since *I/we* were not the ones who set up the Hospital. But such an objection sounds hollow when one considers that the results of that history and our failure to grapple with it continue and compound in, among other areas, the gap between health outcomes for Aboriginal and other Australians.

The unease I feel in telling this story is outweighed by my discomfort when I consider I might have behaved and thought the same way as Ada, had it been me that was living at that time. It is that anxiety that propels this account, an anxiety and feeling of responsibility that is in keeping with Stanner’s retrospection, that is of a piece with the National Apology. It is a feeling of responsibility that I can also explain, in a roundabout way, with this story: Not very long before she died, my grandmother, sight gone with macular degeneration, asked my sister and I to read to her from Thomas Malthus’ *An Essay on the Principle of Population* from 1798. This is the book in which Malthus argued that population naturally corrects to the amount of food and land available and which was used as an argument against welfare for the poor. Later still, it was wielded by eugenicists who feared welfare measures were undermining Darwinian natural selection and leading to race degeneration. It was used to justify as ‘natural’ the decimation of indigenous peoples in colonised

territories. My grandmother probably studied it at University. My sister and I looked at each other.

As my sister read, I watched my grandmother frown. She looked like she was concentrating and I imagined I saw an acknowledgment of responsibility, of regret, in her blind eyes. ‘I think he’s talking about land,’ she said at one point, sounding hopeful. Perhaps. Bashford (2012) has recently reappraised Malthus’ works in the context of the colonial expansion that was occurring at the time of his writing. It turns out he foresaw the removal of indigenous peoples from their country, warning that ‘the right of exterminating, or driving into a corner where they must starve, even the inhabitants of these thinly populated regions, will be questioned in a moral view’ (Bashford 2012, p. 104). Bashford compares Malthus’ views on the New World to those of Benjamin Franklin and Charles Darwin and concludes it was Malthus who was ‘clearest about the immorality of extermination—his word’ (Bashford 2012, p. 107).

Still, Malthus argued against the slave trade, but not against slavery. And his euphemistic language of population ‘correction’ arguably foreshadowed the banal language of evil used by the Nazis. Malthusian principles were used to normalise the ‘depopulation’ of country that colonists desired. Later, social Darwinism and eugenics built on Malthus to justify racism with scientific ‘objectivity’.

Not long before the reading incident, my grandmother looked on as her younger sister, my great aunt, solemnly bequeathed me a portrait of some of my predecessors, which I was to keep and then pass on to my grandchildren. The painting depicted a mother and her four children. My husband called the painting ‘The Ghost Children’ and said he would never hang it: it would give the children nightmares. We tried to give it to one of my siblings, but they didn’t want it either and I felt guilty for

trying to get rid of it, so it now lives in a cupboard in the front room. It's an awful painting, but that's not the reason no one wants it. On the back of the painting, my great aunt's spindly writing records the painting's subjects. The mother is Jane Malthus. Thomas' niece.

A note on language

Much of the language used in eugenic publications and other media of the period is offensive. I do not condone the use of these terms, but have chosen to include them in this project because language paved the way for the acceptance of eugenic worldviews, and for the dehumanisation of those who would fall foul of such views. To excise them now would sanitise this account and present these views as less shocking than they are.

Where terms such as 'Aborigines', 'natives', 'lubras', 'gins' and similar are used, it is because they are a direct quotation of another source or reflective of historical usage.

Chapter One: Foundations

Years before a brick was laid on the site of the Wyndham Native Hospital in 1936, the forces of industrialisation and modernity, as well as major changes in scientific thinking, prepared the ground for it. This chapter explores those forces without which the Wyndham Native Hospital would never have been built.

In 1883, the Englishman Sir Francis Galton came up with a pithy word to describe the study of the ‘conditions under which men of a high type are produced’ (1883, p. 30). ‘Viriculture’ had proved too oblique; eugenics was much better (Galton 1883, p. 17). A cousin of Charles Darwin, Galton had drawn upon his relative’s Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection to develop his idea that one could produce superior individuals not just through ‘judicious mating’ but through ‘all influences that tend in however a remote degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable.’ (Galton 1883, p. 17)¹⁰

Galton argued that the ‘race’ could be improved by encouraging its ‘eminent’ members to breed while discouraging the sick, defective or poor. He illustrated his point by describing European nations, which had prevented the procreation of ‘freethinkers’ by martyring or imprisoning them and had paid ‘a heavy penalty in the

¹⁰ Daniel Kevles (1985) provides a detailed account of how eugenics was influenced by Mendel’s work on hybridisation in plants, August Weismann’s theory of ‘the continuity of the “germ plasm”’ (Kevles 1985, p. 19) as well as Darwin’s theory of natural selection.

deterioration of (their) breed, as has notably been the result in the formation of the superstitious, unintelligent Spanish race of the present day' (Galton 1892, p. 359). Britain too, he warned, risked racial degeneration if the 'improvident and unambitious' (Galton 1892, p. 362) continued to breed, while the best of the race kept putting off marriage and childbearing.

Galton's theory was infused with fears over the finiteness of world resources, fears stoked by Thomas Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus' essay, first published in 1798, argued that population was always kept under control by the limited amount of food and space available. When population exceeded certain limits, starvation or disease through overcrowding resulted (Malthus 1798). But where Malthus' essay was written to argue *against* the notion that man could be perfected, Galton's theory embraced this idea. Indeed, Galton took issue with Malthus' failure to delineate between more and less valuable lives in Malthus' exhortation for people to delay marriage to prevent overpopulation. '[A]s it is put forward as a rule of conduct for the prudent part of mankind to follow, while the imprudent are necessarily left free to disregard it, I have no hesitation in saying it is a most pernicious rule of conduct in its bearing upon race' (Galton 1892, p. 356).

Galton believed a strong race necessary, not simply in the battle for scarce resources, but also to meet the needs of modern life. He worried that, unless its average ability was raised, 'our race is overweighted, and appears likely to be drudged into degeneracy by demands that exceed its powers' (Galton 1892, p. 345). Fitness was about morality, too. Galton argued that original sin (which he defined as a man's inability to do what he knew was right) was not a result of man's fall from grace, but simply the failure of his moral development to keep pace with the advance of civilisation. 'The sense of original sin would show, according to my theory, not that

man was fallen from a high estate, but that he was rising in moral culture with more rapidity than the nature of his race could follow' (Galton 1892, p. 350).¹¹ In the Galtonian view, modernisation and progress were equated with morality. To be uncivilised, or 'native', was to be immoral. Humanity was reconceived as a ladder reaching ever higher to sinlessness and 'civilisation'.

The successful races of modernity would be, according to Galton, those which could supply 'a large contingent to the various groups of eminent men' (Galton 1892, p. 337). Without defining exactly what he meant by race,¹² Galton calculated 'the comparative worth of different races' in that eponymously named chapter, concluding that 'the average intellectual standard of the negro race is some two grades below our own' while the 'Australian type' was 'at least one grade below the African negro' (Galton 1892, pp. 338–9). But the race could be improved:

There is nothing either in the history of domestic animals or in that of evolution to make us doubt that a race of sane men may be formed who shall be as much superior mentally and morally to the modern European as the modern European is to the lowest of the Negro races. (Galton 1892, p. x)

Eugenics might have remained confined to the writings of Galton and others, to 'an intellectual climate of social Darwinism' (Kevles 1985, p. 72), but for major social upheavals in Britain and America around the turn of the 20th century. Changes such as urban sprawl and migration, as well as statistics showing an increase in the

¹¹ See Daniel Kevles for an account of the way in which eugenics was seen, by Galton and others, as a 'secular faith' (1985, p. 12)—a religion to replace Christianity.

¹² As several authors have pointed out, in some some instances, 'race' was used to denote all of humanity. In other instances, it was used to refer to a particular ethnic group or people who shared the same physical attributes. In Galton's chapter on the comparative worth of races, he appears to broadly equate race with ethnic groupings.

pauperism and criminality, fuelled fears the race was degenerating and sparked a widespread eugenics movement.

The unique social changes in Australia at this time—including the move to Federation and fears about the declining birth rate—contributed to what scholars have characterised as a distinctively Australian eugenics movement. Indeed, many eugenicists conceived of the Southern continent as a sort of petri dish: English men and women could be taken out of the cramped and unhygienic conditions of their home country and transplanted into a sunny, healthy environment, isolated from sources of contamination and degeneration, out of which would grow a new race of strong, virile individuals.¹³ Garton points to George Arnold Wood's 1922 publication of the reassessment of the convicts, not as hereditary criminals but as strong peasants, forced by circumstance into crime, as crucial to this utopian push. The Australian convicts were examples of the “‘coming man’... vigorous frontier types untainted by the baleful effects of urbanisation, overcrowding and sedentary decadent lifestyles in Britain and Europe’ (Garton 2010, p. 248). The reported gallantry of the ANZACs in World War I, combined with British despair over its own ‘degenerated’ troops in the Boer War, reinforced this idea of the ‘coming man’ (Garton 2010, p. 248). As Isobel Crombie has pointed out, this Australia-as-potential-Eden bears a striking resemblance to the island of Hy-Brazil in Eleanor Dark's 1934 novel, *Prelude to Christopher*, on which the eugenicist Nigel Hendon tries and fails to found a eugenic colony (Crombie 1999). This Edenic view contributed to Australia's sporting culture, naturism and other euthenics or ‘healthy living’ movements such as the Women's

¹³ Isobel Crombie writes that many Australians believed that ‘if the right conditions were maintained’ their ‘own “island laboratory” would evolve a bigger and “better” population’ (1999, p. 6) while Bacchi notes the ‘hope which frequently became the conviction that Australia could surmount the problems of the Old World’ and which contributed to Australia's reputation as the ‘Social Laboratory of the World’ (1980, p. 200).

League of Health and Beauty. It was also expressed in the work of artists such as Max Dupain, whose depictions of virile Australians had strong eugenic undertones.¹⁴ But the eugenics movement was also fed by and fed into the anxiety Australians felt at being cut off from the rest of Europe, and potentially outnumbered or overpowered by ‘Asiatic’ races to the north.¹⁵

There was also what Ross L. Jones characterises as a ‘general mood of anxiety’ over apparent propagation of the unfit. This anxiety was embodied in the 1929 *Report on Mental Deficiency in the Commonwealth*, which found some 2.89 per cent of children in schools and asylums were ‘defective’ (Jones 1929, p. 7). The author of the Survey, William Ernest Jones, ruled out more draconian responses to the problem, saying it was unlikely Australians would allow restrictions on marriage or resort to sterilisation until the economic burden from lunacy was much more acute. Nonetheless, he did recommend segregation. Moreover, as Ross Jones points out, the Survey reflected a wider view, expressed in a leader in *The Age* newspaper, that ‘Society ... is becoming more articulate, more emphatic, in challenging (the mental defective’s) right to procreate’ (Jones 2009, p. 73).

Anxiety over racial degeneration was also expressed in attempts to cultivate individual responsibility around sex ‘alongside the widespread use of segregation of those deemed outside the civic body’ (Bashford 2003, p. 177). This segregation began offshore, in the immigration restrictions known as the White Australia Policy. Bashford demonstrates that these restrictions were in effect ‘eugenic *cordons sanitaire*’ (her term) employed to keep out ‘foreign-grown unfitness’, to paraphrase

¹⁴ See, for example, Isobel Crombie on Australian body culture of the 1920s and 1930s and its relationship to the eugenics movement (2004) and Jill Matthews on the Women’s League of Health and Beauty (1990).

¹⁵ In addition to the anxiety that more fecund ‘coloured races’ would out-breed the white (Bacchi 1980, p. 200), Australians had a ‘unique’ fear that their vast unpopulated tracts of land and isolation made them vulnerable to attacks from the north (Garton 2010, p. 245).

the doctor cited at the beginning of this dissertation. Thus migration was biologically constituted and ‘re-imagined in terms of the loss or gain of good or bad “stock”’ (Bashford 2003, p. 145). The White Australia Policy kept out coloured aliens as well as Britons who were ‘idiots and insane’ or had contagious or ‘loathsome’ diseases (Bashford 2003, pp. 150–2).

What of those who made it into the country or were here in the first place? There is continued debate over whether treatment of Indigenous Australians, including child abductions and arranged marriages, could be classed as eugenic. Garton argues that ‘absorption trumped eugenics in the regulation of indigenous peoples’ (2010, p. 254). Meanwhile, Russell McGregor summarises the arguments against reading child theft as eugenic, when he writes that ‘breeding out the colour sought to improve the nation’s complexion, not its gene pool’ and ‘no one attempted to legitimise absorption on the grounds that it would bring biological benefit to the majority population’ (McGregor 2002, p. 298).

In fact, several individuals—including Neville, who designed child-removal policies—*did* attempt to legitimise absorption on just those grounds. In *Australia’s Coloured Minority*, Neville quotes Professor Cleland of Adelaide University, who said absorption ‘will not necessarily lead in any way to a deterioration of type inasmuch as racial intermixtures seem, in most cases, to lead to increased virility’ (1947, p. 57). Neville also referred to a ‘famous scientist’ who stated that ‘if he were given the task of building a new race he would graft it upon the Aboriginal of Australia’ (Neville 1947, p. 58).¹⁶

¹⁶ McGregor (2002) acknowledges similar statements that appear to justify miscegenation on the basis it will not cause degeneration, but seems to dismiss these justifications because they are attempts at persuasion rather than firmly held beliefs.

Laws that allowed Aboriginal people to be segregated and their marriages to be controlled were arguably eugenic. The exclusion of Indigenous Australians from welfare payments was, too. Garton has written that the desire to ‘populate’ Australia resulted in maternity allowances and child endowments for all Australians, fit or unfit (2010, p. 253). But, in fact, the Maternity Allowance (*Maternity Allowance Act*), introduced in 1912, was not extended to most Aboriginal Australians until 1942 (*Maternity Allowance Act* 1942). In Western Australia, Biskup notes, the Maternity Allowance was only available to ‘persons of the half-blood or less; “civilised” aborigines with more than one-half of aboriginal blood had to wait for these privileges until 1942 and even then they qualified only if they held a certificate of exemption’ (Biskup 1973, p. 144). And when the Child Endowment Act was introduced in 1941 (*Child Endowment Act* 1941), it did not cover ‘nomadic’ or ‘dependent’ Aboriginal people.

Garton and others have argued that the policy of absorbing ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal people can’t be called eugenic because the motivating force behind it was population control rather than genetic improvement of the Australian population. There is, however, evidence that Aboriginality *itself* was seen as biologically undesirable, that it was conceived of as being linked to Aboriginal ‘blood’ and a cluster of attributes that made the bearer unfit for modern life. Sutton’s view of Aboriginal people as ‘incurable’ and ‘dysgenic’ (Rodwell 1998, p. 168) was an example of this thinking, which seemed to conceptualise attributes as being tied to skin colour much like a cluster of defects from a mutation on a single gene.¹⁷ Similarly, when Neville mused on the potential for ‘atavism’, he appeared to link physical characteristics such as hair and skin colour, as well as behavioural traits, to

¹⁷ See Kevles (1985, pp. 74–6) for a discussion of the genetic differences attributed to race.

‘racial blood’, betraying a view of Aboriginality as a sort of recessive gene. ‘The characteristics of the migrant race seem to predominate,’ he wrote of cross-cultural unions. ‘Thus persons of Negro-Aboriginal descent sometimes strongly exhibit certain deleterious cultural traits while in those of Chinese-Aboriginal origin, the good qualities of the Chinese may be present’ (Neville 1947, p. 58). This is not dissimilar to the ideas of British and American eugenicists who, Kevles writes, pontificated about the racial hereditary characteristics of non-white groups arguing, for example, that if a Jew and a Gentile mated, the Jewish gene would be recessive (Kevles 1985, p. 74).

Numerous scholars have stressed the centrality of ideas of racial difference to eugenics.¹⁸ While Europeans had long seen themselves as more civilised than other people,¹⁹ by the mid-19th century this prejudice was increasingly framed in terms of biologised racial difference. Kevles writes that the eugenicists adopted the standard views of the day ‘concerning the hereditary biological inferiority of blacks’ (Kevles 1985, p. 75). Philippa Levine meanwhile, points out that Charles Darwin’s work on the evolution of the species, which held that organisms with favourable characteristics won the competition for limited resources, was mapped onto the colonial experience in such a way that expiated settler guilt over the decimation of indigenous populations. The white European colonisers were seen as more civilised and advanced, as ‘the possessors and founders of modernity’ (Levine 2010, p. 47), while indigenous populations were seen as ‘dying or doomed races’ (Levine 2010, p. 43).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the ideas of inferior and superior races, and how these intersected with eugenics, see Marius Turda (2010), Nancy Stepan (1991) and Philippa Levine (2010).

¹⁹ Levine refers to the work of Nicholas Hudson, who ‘helpfully reminds us that Europeans considered themselves superior to other peoples long before race acquired its modern definition’ (2010, p. 47). However, economists Sandra Peart and David Levy argue that, prior to eugenics and scientific racism, difference between classes were generally seen as the result of luck, effort and environment (Peart 2003).

The ‘unfitness’ of these races meant they could not survive contact with modernity; their very destruction proved their inferiority.²⁰ Karl Pearson, Galton’s protégé, argued ‘superior and inferior races cannot coexist; if the former are to make effective use of global resources, the latter must be extirpated. To keep the nation to a “high pitch of internal efficiency”, its members should be replenished from the best stock.’ (Pearson cited by Paul 2010, p. 39)

Sandra Peart and Daniel Levy identify two theories of racial hierarchy popular around the turn of the 20th century. The first ‘held that there were races whose physical development was arrested prematurely, dead races incapable of elevation’ or progression. This view is evident in an 1863 text, *On the Negro’s Place in Nature*, which surmised: ‘They have been for thousands of years the uncivilized race they are at this moment.’ (Peart 2003, p. 263) The second theory, which Peart and Levy call ‘parametric racism’, ‘held that the inferior race differed from the superior (Anglo-Saxons) along some parameters’ (Peart 2003, p. 263). Certain races were held to be generally less intelligent, crankier or less inclined to work, but there could be exceptions to the rule: intelligent Negroes or hardworking Irishmen,²¹ for example. There were also different theories about the origins of different races. Some, like Darwin, believed all races descended from a single source (monogenists) while others believed races originated from separate sources (polygenists). These differences, however, did not always have a substantial effect on eugenic aims. The monogenists accepted the influence of environment, but ‘by acknowledging the

²⁰ One of the many internal contradictions of eugenic thought was that, although it objected to the idea of interfering in natural selection, it now proposed doing just that—encouraging reproduction among those it deemed eugenically fit rather than trusting nature to choose the most adaptable characteristics.

²¹ However, as Peart and Levy point out, critics often argued that the ‘exceptional Negro’ was not a real Negro, but in fact a dark white man.

lengthy history of difference they were not opposed to the polygenist view of insuperable racial difference' (Levine 2010, p. 47).

Theories of racial difference were widely applied to Indigenous Australians well into the 20th century. Aboriginal Australians had their skulls measured, blood typed, breathing rates compared with white races, mental development mapped, even their apparent response to pain analysed.²² The former Western Australian State Psychologist, Ethel Stoneman, a self-described expert in 'primitive and comparative' psychology and on the 'educability' of Aboriginal people, held that a greater proportion of Indigenous Australians were 'dull' and thus Aboriginal children should not be educated to the same level as white children ('Aborigines Commission: Views of Psychologist' 1934). White Australians were graded from idiot to imbecile to superior types; Indigenous Australians started further down the ladder and were less capable of ascent.

Both parametric and 'dead race' schools of scientific racism were evident in Australia, sometimes in the same person. When Neville argued in favour of his own child removal policies, for example, he recognised that many (but not he) 'saw the native as a "static" being incapable of advancement' (Levine 2010, p. 47). He also betrayed parametric racism in his writing, linking Aboriginality with a greater susceptibility to things like alcoholism, immorality and poor mental capacity. Western Australia's Public Health Commissioner Everitt Atkinson, who had much to do with the establishment of the Wyndham Native Hospital, appeared to see race in terms of hierarchy. On returning from a Rockefeller Foundation-funded study trip to the US, he remarked that the Southern US states 'were much more primitive (than WA), the

²² Warwick Anderson details how 'in or around 1931, Aborigines ... became sensitive to pain'. Prior to that, they were considered to feel pain to a lesser extent than other races. One 1914 missionary put this down to Aborigines having a less developed nervous system (Anderson 2005, p. 218).

negro population in some parts being as high as 60 per cent' ('America's Health' 1927).

Even if absorption policies were not justified on the basis that they would biologically benefit the majority population, they were justified on the basis that they would biologically benefit the minority. They would 'lift' the part-Aboriginal to the 'level' of the white—the whiter one was, the less susceptible (presumably) to things like immorality—and thus would eugenically improve their lot. When one considers Atkinson's view that parts of America were backward *because* of their relatively large African American population, 'breeding out the colour' comes to seem a method for 'lifting' the entirety of the Australian people.

Views that eugenics did not gain a foothold in Australia rely heavily on the absence of active policies such as sterilisation or euthanasia. This is curious, since eugenicists themselves saw their 'science' as a way of correcting man's interference in natural selection which, left to proceed in the normal manner, would have carried off all those not fit to survive.²³ In this sense, the ultimate eugenic measure was a policy of 'laissez-faire'. Laissez-faire eugenics is particularly relevant to the treatment of Aboriginal people since, up until World War II, the view persisted of Aboriginal people as a 'dying race'. This 'doomed race' theory held that indigenous peoples were destined to die out upon contact with the more 'civilised' culture of the white settlers. Neville betrayed doomed race thinking—and potentially laissez-faire eugenics—when he told the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Conference that the problem of preserving the full-blooded Aborigines would 'solve itself' because they were not getting enough to eat and being 'decimated by their own tribal practices'. 'In my opinion, no matter

²³ W.C.D. Whetham, for example, worried that 'social reforms and advances in medical skills extended life "for the members of weak and unsound stock" and—what was more significant—reduced their children's mortality rate.' (Kevles 1985, p. 74)

what we do, they will die out' (1937, p. 16). The Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Cecil Cook, told the same conference:

Were a policy of *laissez faire* followed, the aborigines would probably be extinct in Australia within 50 years. Most of the Aboriginal women would become sterilised by gonorrhoea at an early age; many would die of disease, and some of starvation ... If we leave them alone, they will die, and we shall have no problem, apart from dealing with those pangs of conscience, which must attend the passing of a neglected race. If, on the other hand, we protect them with the elaborate methods of protection which every conscientious protector would adopt, we shall raise another problem which may become a serious one from a national viewpoint, for we shall have in the Northern Territory, and possibly in North-Western Australia also, a large black population which may drive out the white. (1937, p. 14)

Cook presented himself as a devil's advocate at the 1937 conference, but scholar Samia Hossain has suggested there may be more to it than that. Hossain draws attention to a 1933 memo in which Cook asks his Commonwealth superiors whether he can legally sterilise 'mentally defective' half-caste children in his care (apart from making them easier to manage, this would prevent 'propagation of type' (Cook 1933). Cook's request was refused. Garton takes this refusal as further evidence of eugenics' failure to establish itself in Australia (2010, p. 251). But Hossain (2007) draws a line between Cook's memo and his comments to the Aboriginal Welfare Conference on

the sterilisation of women by gonorrhoea. Framing Cook's comments through Foucault's theory of biopolitics, which sees modern state power manifested in the ability to 'foster life or disallow it to the point of death' (Foucault 1978, p. 138), she asks: if authorities knew untreated gonorrhoea caused sterility, and knowing this, left it untreated, would that equate to sterilisation?

In the same year that the Aboriginal Welfare Conference was held, the new Wyndham Native Hospital opened. The establishment of 'hospital accommodation for the natives (including isolation for the treatment of venereal disease)'²⁴ had been one of the recommendations of the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission into the Treatment and Condition of Aborigines. When Dr Sweetman worried over whether to treat the Wyndham natives who had tested positive for syphilis, the Hospital had been running for close to two years. The Tuskegee Syphilis experiment—in which African American men infected with syphilis were purposely left untreated so that the US Public Health Service could figure out the effects of 'untreated syphilis in the male Negro' (Schuman 1955)—had been running for seven years. As historians such as Lombardo and Dorr have argued, the way was paved for the Tuskegee experiment by assumptions of biological racial difference that emerged from Malthusian theories of competition for scarce resources, from social Darwinism and from eugenics (Lombardo 2006).

Before 1937, according to the historian Peter Biskup, general health care—as opposed to contagious disease control—was virtually non-existent for sick Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. In the majority of cases, they were 'dumped in separate facilities that were known in the lore of the north as "dying rooms"' (Biskup 1973, p.

²⁴ Moseley went on to specify that the Hospital ought not to include any 'elaborate premises ... These natives do not require wards and beds with sheets—they would be uncomfortable and unhappy in them' (Moseley 1935, p. 10).

116). Like Cook's memo and his comments on untreated gonorrhoea, like Dr Sweetman's question about treating syphilis patients, dying rooms²⁵ could be read as evidence of laissez-faire eugenics, evidence of Foucauldian 'letting die'.

In 1948, allegations surfaced that two lepers—a woman and a boy—had been kept in a 'compound' on the grounds of the Wyndham Native Hospital for six months in 'inhuman' conditions ('Shocking Treatment of Aboriginal' 1948). Was the Wyndham Native Hospital just another dying room? Was it constructed in the interests of making certain parts of the population live and letting others die? And, as such, was it eugenic?

²⁵ The title of this dissertation is taken from Biskup's contention that Aboriginal people were dumped in what were known by local people as 'dying rooms'.

Chapter Two: ‘Something Must Be Done’

The Wyndham Native Hospital was built amid fears that venereal disease was rampant in the north of the country, ‘decimating blacks and menacing whites’ (‘Leprosy Rampant’ 1934). There had been reports of venereal disease among native women since the turn of the century and District Medical Officers had been complaining of VD for almost a decade before the Hospital was established. Indeed, at least two Wyndham doctors accused the Government of ignoring their reports of widespread VD. But it was the threat to whites that arguably provided the impetus to turn the first sod of soil on the Hospital site.

In this chapter, I will follow many eugenics scholars in using Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics as a lens through which to analyse the Wyndham Native Hospital. I will argue that the Hospital is proof of eugenic thinking in so far as it was built to foster certain lives, in this instance by shielding them from the threat of VD. That the threat was tied up with venereal disease strengthens the case for seeing the Hospital as eugenic because VD was considered dysgenic and a threat to the future of the race. Further, I will argue that the timing and impetus for building the Hospital points to, if not a disallowance of certain lives, then a willingness to let

natural selection ‘comb’ out ‘susceptibles’ (‘Leprosy: Report on lecture by E.H. Molesworth’ 1932, p. 311).

Foucault argued that the threshold of modernity was reached when life itself became the object of politics, the point of the state. When politics passed over this threshold, what had been a sovereign’s ‘ancient right to *take life* or *let live* was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death’ (Foucault 1978, p. 138, his emphasis). That passive ‘*disallow*’ is indeed *le mot juste* because in the new paradigm, where the state identifies itself as life-administering, death becomes ‘simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain or develop its life’. Paradoxically, ‘as soon as power gave itself the function of administering life (as) its reason for being and the logic of its exercise’, Foucault writes, it ‘had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others’ (1978, p. 138). That was because so much was at stake, indeed, ‘the biological existence of a population’ (Foucault 1978, p. 137).

Reginald Cyril Everitt Atkinson was a man uniquely concerned with the biological existence of his population. Born in New Zealand, educated in Edinburgh and registered as a general practitioner in New Zealand, Atkinson moved to Australia to become a Western Australian Government Bacteriologist in 1911 (Battye 1912). In 1915, he was appointed the state’s Public Health Commissioner. He proved a zealous incumbent. During the Depression, he gave advice to households on how to spend their money to achieve the necessary vitamin and calorific intake for optimum health (‘Our Daily Food’ 1930). He investigated public health methods, including milk pasteurisation and venereal disease prevention, on a Rockefeller-funded trip to the United States. And in 1918, he argued that tuberculosis sufferers ought to be isolated for the good of the population. ‘It is true this involves what is virtually penal servitude

for life for many,' he conceded, 'but must not the individual be sacrificed for the race?' He did allow that those who had passed through the sanatorium and 'learned how to live' might form their own tuberculosis colony where they 'may at least enjoy some of the advantages and pleasures of citizenship' ('Health' 1918). In 1926, Atkinson wrote *Hygiene Jingles*, a book of memorisable poems for youngsters, which included this couplet: 'never spit upon the floor or in a public place, remember you're the guardian of the future of the race' ('For the Young' 1926).

Atkinson's concern for 'the future of the race' was also evident in his support for the Eugenics Society of the University of Western Australia (Wyndham 2003, p. 140) and his concern with halting the spread of venereal disease. In 1918 he co-authored a book, *Sex Hygiene and Sex Education*,²⁶ which was lauded for its straightforward approach to sex and venereal disease. The book begins with a poetic description of a queen bee's fertilisation. Before the 'hostile madness of love' between the queen and her chosen suitor, 'the feeble and infirm, the aged, unwelcome, or ill-fed, who have flown from inactive or impoverished cities ... these renounced the pursuit and disappear into the void' (Atkinson 1918, p. 30).

For Atkinson, venereal disease was not just a threat to the sufferer, but also to future generations. His eugenic view of venereal disease was not unusual. Indeed, in the Commonwealth Survey of Mental Deficiency, W.E. Jones identified 'syphilitic inheritance' as one of the major causes of feeble-mindedness in children (Jones 1929, p. 15). Judith Smart, in her analysis of VD legislation and its effect on women during World War I, points out that, amid fears that venereal disease was 'rife' among soldiers, it came to be 'discussed in the language of public health and its centrality to eugenic improvement of the race and national efficiency' (Smart 1998, p. 8). These

²⁶ His co-author, William Dakin, was apparently a keen eugenicist from around 1920 until 1938 when he gave a radio interview that was highly critical of the pseudo-science (Wyndham 2003, pp. 139–41).

fears about national efficiency and reproduction centred on VD's ability to cause infertility as well as mental and physical disabilities that could be passed on to one's offspring (Bashford 2003).

In his Annual Report for 1915, Atkinson bemoaned the fact that smallpox led to 'the strictest isolation and the most stringent regulation' even though its contraction 'protects and in a measure gives protection to posterity', while VD cases were often concealed and not isolated, despite the fact that VD 'is visited upon the generations to come' (Atkinson, E. quoted in 'Venereal diseases: Health Commissioner's annual report.' 1916). In 1918 he said, 'The more people for whom treatment can be secured in the first year for syphilis the better for the community and the future of the race, the fewer the number of idiots and lunatics; the fewer the number of blind; in fact the fewer the number of people who are a charge on the state' ('The Health Bill' 1918). And, although he did not talk about sterilising syphilitics, he did elsewhere advocate sterilisation to prevent the kinds of 'defects' that syphilis caused.

Atkinson also presided over some of the world's most draconian VD laws. The 1915 Western Australian venereal disease legislation (*Health Act Amendment Act* 1915), under which doctors were compelled to alert the state government to any new cases, and to provide the names and addresses of patients who absconded before treatment was complete, were described in the *British Medical Journal* as being the most comprehensive in the world with the possible exception of Denmark ('Venereal legislation and administration in Australia' 1921). He wanted even tougher controls for Aboriginal people. In late 1916 and early 1917, Atkinson wrote several times to Chief Protector Neville, wanting to know what powers the Protector had in this area. 'From the point of view of infectious diseases and Venereal diseases, I desired to know what powers were possessed by your Department to hold aborigines in given

places or to transfer them from place to place' (Atkinson 1917, p. 6). That Atkinson wrote four times to ask the same question (about Aboriginal people, not VD suspects) gives an indication of how seriously he viewed the threat. Moreover, given that Aboriginal people were excluded from a Commonwealth-funded free treatment scheme for VD sufferers, it is fair to assume Atkinson was concerned not so much with treating Indigenous patients as isolating them.²⁷

Despite Atkinson's vigilance over venereal disease, he seemed relatively unconcerned about the reports of its prevalence in Wyndham. Successive doctors complained that they had been ignored. 'I have on several occasions pointed out to the Medical Department that venereal disease is allowed to flourish unchecked in this district but no notice has been taken of my reports' (Cotton 1930). Atkinson himself later admitted he'd dismissed these reports as exaggerations.

So why did the Government seemingly ignore venereal disease for so long, then suddenly decide to establish the Wyndham Native Hospital soon after the Royal Commission? If the sole aim had been to treat VD sufferers, then the Government could just as easily have increased resources at the town hospital. While not going so far as to suggest treating Aboriginal people in the Government Hospital, one doctor did suggest a compound on the same site (Fenton 1928). That a separate hospital was established—outside of town—suggests that the motivating factor was the desire to 'make live' the white population by protecting them from what was seen as a biological threat. Indeed, there is evidence from the archives that it was these influxes of white male population that provided the impetus for the establishment of the Wyndham Native Hospital. With the opening of the Wyndham Meatworks in 1919,

²⁷ Neville wrote to the Chief Quarantine Officer J.H.L. Cumpston in 1915 to ask how Aboriginal people would be affected by the new scheme and was informed that no thought had been given to the Aborigines 'and the scheme did not include them' (Neville 1916).

hundreds of single male workers sailed in on the State ship every May for the 'season', which lasted until September. One medical officer told the Health Department that to hold Aboriginal women in the European hospital 'in town' would make the place 'into a focus for the dissemination of disease as, at this time there is a large floating population engaged in driving cattle from various stations to the meatworks' (Cotton 1928). Neville worried that, with the advent of 'motor transport', young men had come into the East Kimberley and were consorting with natives. 'There is in consequence a greater danger of disease being spread amongst whites than in the past when the majority of teamsters and station hands were elderly men' (Neville 1928b, p. 11). Later, during the war, there was concern about soldiers catching venereal disease from the native women and a concomitant push to boost resources at the Native Hospital, which at that time was unstaffed (Box 1943).

When Neville first proposed a native hospital or, more precisely, an 'accommodation for diseased natives' (Neville 1928a, p. 5), it was in the context of the threat to whites. The District Medical Officer had raised concerns about the number of Aboriginal people with venereal disease on the cattle stations around Wyndham; he had treated 12 natives for VD in the past six months, and believed this represented only a fraction of the number of people suffering. The doctor had also treated four cases of disease in white men 'each of whom stated that he had acquired the disease from some lubra on one or other of the stations' (Fenton 1928). Dr Fenton recommended instituting regular examinations of 'all natives employed by, or otherwise in contact with, white men' as well as 'a compound ... for the segregation of venereal cases' (Fenton 1928). As it was, Fenton complained, 'female aboriginals are sent in for treatment, and males employed in the township have free access to them. It

is impossible under existing arrangements to prevent them from spreading V.D.’ (Fenton 1928).

Fenton suggested that the segregation compound be built adjacent to the town hospital, but Commissioner Neville argued that a native hospital ought to be built two or three miles out of town so ‘the susceptibilities of the local whites would not be offended by the presence of diseased natives in town’ (Neville 1928b). It was a position Atkinson enthusiastically supported. ‘I am of the opinion that the venereal position alone warrants the establishment of such a hospital’, he wrote. Such a hospital, by keeping native VD cases ‘out of the town (would) be a blessing to the townspeople’ (Atkinson 1929). Despite Atkinson and Neville’s enthusiasm for a hospital, the proposal lapsed after the Government’s offer of 200 pounds to buy the pub at the ‘Three Mile’ was turned down.

In 1930 a new doctor, Victor Henry Webster, arrived in Wyndham. In his first report to Neville (he doubled as local Protector of Aborigines and Magistrate), Webster complained about the way pastoralists and police treated Aboriginal people (he mistook police cells for ‘nice big kennels for the police dogs’). But he reserved his greatest criticism for the ‘evil’ that was ‘the great amount of sexual intercourse between the native women and white men’. Webster ‘conservatively’ estimated that 90 per cent of the white men had VD and about 99 per cent of the natives. ‘I know of three men “knocking about” in the bush, suffering from highly infectious gonorrhoea and syphilis and on their own admission cohabiting with native women.’ VD, he wrote, ‘appears to me to be a great curse both to the whites and the aborigines here’ (Webster 1931).

Neville forwarded Webster’s report to Atkinson, who argued that the problem could not be solved without ‘segregation of the aborigines, through the

establishment of a native hospital some distance from Wyndham town' (Atkinson 1931). A tragicomic flurry of communications followed: Neville demanded to know what Webster had seen of VD, Webster wondered aloud whether the authorities cared about any of the other miseries being visited on the Aboriginal people and said a white patient claimed to have contracted gonorrhoea from an inmate in the Government's own station at Moola Bulla. Such was the frustration with the Government's inaction that, in January 1934, a telegram was sent from 'Halls Creek' to 'Neville, Aborigines Department: If something is not done to check the spread of venereal disease in the East Kimberlies [sic] I will appeal to the public of Western Australia through the Press (Anonymous 1934).

Given that Webster was still the District Medical Officer at the time the telegram was sent, and he was a frequent visitor to Halls Creek, it is possible he was the source. He went on to be highly critical of the Government at the Moseley Royal Commission that same year, accusing it of ignoring reports of venereal disease. In his evidence to the Commission, Webster linked untreated venereal disease to widespread disability²⁸ and infertility among the Indigenous population of the East Kimberly, pointing out that 'a normal lubra 30 years ago had from four to six children, but to-day lubras never had more than two, and often none' ('Treatment of Natives in W.A.' 1934). Webster also accused Neville of lying. The Department's claim that the relatively benign granuloma was the most common venereal disease among natives was 'entirely wrong and must be contrary to the reports of his colleagues and predecessors as it was entirely contrary to his own' ('Native Problems' 1934).

When Atkinson appeared before the Royal Commission, he spoke of venereal disease almost exclusively in relation to its threat to the white population. He

²⁸ Webster told the Commission that around 10 per cent of the older natives were totally or partially blind due to the results of infection ('Treatment of Natives in W.A.' 1934).

testified that the venereal disease was extremely widespread ‘and to some extent there was a danger to the whites—there had been instances of white children on stations becoming infected from black children with whom they played’ (‘The Aborigines’ 1934)²⁹.

The suggestions by Webster and his predecessors that the Western Australian Government had ignored venereal disease among the Aboriginal population of the Kimberley until it threatened the whites, gives credence to Hossain’s suspicion that women with gonorrhoea were left untreated even though authorities knew this would render them infertile.

So does this: when Neville asked, in 1939, whether the natives who had tested positive for syphilis ought to be treated, Atkinson replied: ‘I do not think that we should consider the wholesale treatment of every native who shows a positive Wasserman test’. Indeed, he recommended treating only those with syphilitic lesions or women with infected children. ‘Natives showing no evidence other than the Wasserman Test, which may represent Yaws (another disease) or a remote taint which is congenital, are not are not likely to be infectious and may never show symptoms’ (Atkinson 1939). It is possible that Atkinson did not want to subject otherwise healthy people to a treatment that wasn’t certain, but it is difficult to imagine a similar response had the patients been white. Neville’s concern was that it would be ‘a costly business if we are to treat all these natives ... Moreover, if we begin to do this at Wyndham we shall have to do it elsewhere, but if it ought to be done I suppose the position will have to be faced’ (Neville 1939).

After Neville retired as Chief Protector of Aborigines he admitted that, more often than not, whites had only acted on Indigenous disease when it proved a threat.

²⁹ See also (*Transcript of the Royal Commission to Investigate, Report and Advise upon Matters Relating to the Condition and Treatment of Aborigines* 1934, p. 1570).

We have shown that in our belated attempt to stamp out disease in the North. Money has been forthcoming for that. Why? Because we are afraid of disease spreading to ourselves. Afraid the disease would lose us many useful cheap workers in the pastoral industry (Neville 1947, p. 32).

Insofar as the Wyndham Native Hospital was set up to prevent the spread of venereal disease, which was conceived of as dysgenic and a threat to the future of the race and, insofar as it was meant to prevent disease spreading specifically to the white population, then it can be read as eugenic in a Foucauldian sense. The construction of a Hospital to isolate Indigenous venereal disease sufferers suggests both an indifference to these sufferers prior to the Hospital's inception (otherwise such a Hospital would not have been required) and heightened concern over the wellbeing of Wyndham's white population. The Hospital is thus evidence of Foucauldian 'biopower' to foster (white) life or disallow it to the point of blindness, infertility and disability, and perhaps even death.

Chapter Three: Quarantine and Segregation

In February 1936, towards the end of the wet season when travel was difficult, five natives turned up at the Wyndham Government Hospital suffering badly from the venereal disease granuloma. The Wyndham Native Hospital would not be completed for another year. The resident doctor, R.J. Coto, wrote to the Chief Protector in annoyance: the only place he could put them was in a tumbledown tin shed on the grounds of the hospital. '[N]o segregation or control over their movements is possible, and they present a serious menace to the Town natives, with whom they are bound to associate sooner or later' (Coto 1936a). Four months later, Coto refused to treat two natives, one of whom was suffering tertiary syphilis and another granuloma. There were no facilities to accommodate the natives and no room for them to camp in the Hospital grounds. The nursing staff, moreover, were 'fully occupied in attending to the needs of the white patients and they cannot be expected to supervise the comings and goings of natives' (Coto 1936b).

Coto was not the first doctor or administrator to worry about the state's inability to segregate Indigenous patients and the effects of this on public health control. Supervision and separation were much-used words in the administration of

Aboriginal health in the 1930s. In 1931, after several years of reports of venereal disease from doctors resident in Wyndham, Atkinson said it was ‘difficult to see’ how the problems of venereal disease at Wyndham were ‘to be remedied without segregation of the aborigines’. In the absence of a ‘native hospital some distance from Wyndham town’, he asked Neville, ‘is there any possibility of a more rigid enforcement of the law regarding cohabitation with blacks?’ (Atkinson 1931).

When the new hospital did go ahead five years later, Atkinson and Neville ensured that it was three miles out of town. The first time he saw the site, Neville wrote to his Minister, Mr Kitson, that it was ‘most suitable’, noting ‘the previous site was altogether too near to Wyndham’ (Neville 1935). Neville also recommended that the Lands Department earmark no less than 10 acres because he planned to use the place not just for treating the sick but ‘I propose to also camp certain indigents now being attended to elsewhere’ (Neville 1935). He planned not just to send and segregate sick Aboriginal people at the Native Hospital site, but indigents as well, showing either a disregard for the health of those who were not sick or a conflation of Aboriginality with disease.

The location, regulations and layout of the Wyndham Native Hospital were designed to ensure containment, segregation and control of its inmates. In this, they were of a piece with the carceral and disciplinary tradition that Michel Foucault identifies as beginning with the exile and enclosure of early modern leper colonies and extending to the schools, hospitals and factories of today. They were also in line with the new techniques of public health management that emerged in the early 20th century, namely, surveillance and quarantine. In this chapter, I will argue that the desire to segregate, monitor and manage is evident in the design of the Wyndham Native Hospital to such an extent that it comes to seem the primary *raison d’être* of

the place rather than, say, the treatment of suffering of individuals or the protection of Indigenous people. That the Wyndham Native Hospital's central aim was segregation is relevant because segregation—particularly when it came to venereal disease—was about eugenics.

Just before construction of the Wyndham Native Hospital was due to begin, an engineer from the Lands Department wrote to Chief Protector Neville to inform him that the chosen site was unsuitable. He also included a lithograph drawing of an alternative site. Neville replied in alarm the following day. The new site was 'too near the boundary to be quite satisfactory and we should have difficulty in applying our Regulations in the circumstances,' he wrote. 'It is essential that the hospital be placed within the reserve of thirty odd acres which has been declared for the purpose' (Neville 1936b).

Neville's anxiety was over the site's status as a 'native reserve' under the 1905 Aborigines Act. Under the Act, the Minister could force any Indigenous person onto a reserve. Moreover, just prior to the Wyndham Native Hospital's construction, and arguably with the Hospital in mind, a 1936 Amendment to the Aborigines Act allowed schools, hospitals and other institutions to be classed as reserves. The Amendment also introduced tough new punishments for anyone who attempted to escape a reserve, trespass onto one or helped others do the same.

Reserves had been a key part of the colonial management of Indigenous Western Australians since the turn of the century³⁰ but, by the time the Wyndham Native Hospital opened, they had taken on a new function. They had long been used to control Aboriginal people, but now they were about quarantine, too. The site of the

³⁰ Peter Biskup details the system of reserves used to move people off prime farmable land and prevent cattle killing in the Kimberley (1973, pp. 101–6).

Hospital, three miles outside Wyndham, together with restrictions on entry and departure, was meant to stop infection—and not just from communicable disease.

Dorothy Porter explains how discoveries in bacteriology and disease transmission in the late 1800s caused health practitioners to turn their attention from the environment to the individual as a vector of transmission. Whereas in the preceding ‘sanitary era’ doctors had treated an ‘undifferentiated public’, now they grouped individuals into risk populations (Porter 2011, p. 52). Warwick Anderson too has written about how around the turn of the 20th century, the idea that disease was ‘located in a specific environment’ gave way to the concept that disease pathogens resided in populations (2000, p. 149). Thus, in 1932, Dr Raphael Cilento could tell a Medical Congress in Sydney that tropical disease had more to do with ‘tropical fauna’ than temperature, and was evidence ‘not of the unsuitability of the tropics for white men, but of results that follow the introduction among them of a disease-ridden class of coloured indentured labour’ (‘Australia’s Problems in the Tropics: Report on lecture by R.W. Cilento’ 1932).³¹ E.H. Molesworth could argue at the same congress that different races were more or less susceptible to disease due to the operation of natural selection over time and that ‘racial resistance to leprosy could be raised by the elimination of susceptible stock’ (‘Leprosy: Report on lecture by E.H. Molesworth’ 1932, p. 311). As Bashford has pointed out, Molesworth believed that the leprosy bacillus gained a heightened virulence by passing through a member of a susceptible (read ‘Aboriginal’) race, becoming a greater danger to the white race. Cecil Cook, who in 1927 completed a epidemiology of leprosy in Western Australia, thought leprosy was spread from Asians to the white race via Aboriginal women (Bashford 2003, p. 96). So overt was this racialised construction of leprosy that, in 1930, a

³¹ Remember also that, at this time, Aboriginal people were still considered to be ‘fauna’.

leading international leprosy expert, Sir Leonard Rogers, accused Australia of prejudice against Asians and Aborigines (Briscoe 2003, p. 161).

Atkinson, too, betrayed this kind of biologised racism when, in 1922, he called for a laboratory to be established in Broome, because there were a large number of natives who needed to be tested for hookworm and a population of 'Asiatics' who would afford the opportunity for scientists to investigate tropical and parasitic diseases ('Hookworm' 1922). He was more explicit in 1938, linking a reduced toll from tuberculosis to survival of the fittest and raised race immunity. He also noted that Western Australian deaths from tuberculosis were extremely low compared to American deaths, but 'pointed out, however, that many American states had big negro populations which might be more susceptible' ('Deaths from Tuberculosis' 1939). Atkinson's desire to control the movements of Aboriginal people 'from the point of view of infectious diseases and Venereal diseases' (Atkinson 1917) similarly appears to equate Aboriginality with infection.

Bashford notes that segregation was used to control racial contact and conduct in a bid to foster some lives and disallow others. Foucault used the term 'exile-enclosure' to describe pre-modern treatment of lepers, but Bashford argues that he could just have easily been describing the treatment of Aboriginal lepers in the first half of the 20th century (2003, p. 82). While in other parts of the British Empire, leprosy management was moving towards sanatoria and less crude forms of quarantine [partly as a way of distinguishing the administrators themselves from what they saw as the more primitive societies they had colonised (Bashford 2003, p. 90)], Bashford shows that in Australia the opposite was true: segregation was getting worse. Even after Sir Rogers accused Australia of barbaric and counter-productive treatment of leprosy patients (Briscoe 2003, p. 161), Australia continued to segregate

lepers. In 1941 this segregation and conflation of race with disease reached its apotheosis in the 'leper line', an amendment to the Native Administration Amendment Act, which prohibited Aboriginal people ('not lepers,' Bashford reminds us) from going south of the 20th parallel (Bashford 2003, p. 107). Leprosy was clearly seen in terms of race and imperial control.

It is through the lens of leprosy management that Bashford develops her theory of the 'racial *cordon sanitaire*', which saw 'an almost complete conflation of race and health spatial management' and which extended far beyond the leprosarium (Bashford 2003, p. 82). Venereal disease, hookworm and other illnesses were seen as justification for segregating Indigenous patients. Between 1908 and 1918, for example, Indigenous people deemed to have syphilis (many didn't) were sent to the small islands of Dorre and Bernier off the Western Australian coast, which, because they were so isolated, operated as lock hospitals. Even when these island hospitals were closed because they were too expensive and difficult to run, 'patients' were taken to Port Hedland, where the segregation from outsiders and between the sexes was almost as complete as on the island. In 1925, as Lewis notes, Western Australian parliamentarians argued about whether fencing around the compound and separating the male and female inmates was deterrent enough (Lewis 1998, p. 376). It was even suggested that barbed wire be used to separate the sexes or that a trench with netting be dug (Debates 1925b, p. 329).

By this point, Bashford argues, health spatial management was not only racialised but had also taken on eugenic overtones. '[E]ugenic culture and its public health expressions problematized the sexual and racial connection between the present generation and its progeny' (Bashford 2003, p. 166). Leprosy became, in the time of eugenics, 'a heightened hybridizing danger' (Bashford 2003, p. 107), because

it concerned not simply contagion but also sex and miscegenation. Lazarets and the leper line could be seen as an extension of the system of reserves for Aboriginal people, as was the Wyndham Native Hospital. They prevented disease but also interracial sex, which ‘by the “degenerating” and eugenic early twentieth century’ was conceived of as direct threat to the future of the race (Bashford 2003, p. 107).³²

The Wyndham Native Hospital was, to borrow Bashford’s phrase, ‘plainly segregative’. The design of the Hospital appeared to be aimed at preventing not just the spread of disease, but also, in its focus on separating white men from Aboriginal women, sexual contact between these groups. In addition to being located three miles out of town, and bolstered by harsh penalties for those who tried to leave or enter without permission, the Hospital was deliberately cut off from the outside world. A succession of hospital managers, matrons and doctors asked for a truck or a car to make it easier to drive into town or to pick up sick natives out bush. But Commissioner Neville replied that no truck would be forthcoming as ‘there will be no occasion for continual intercourse between Wyndham and the Hospital’ (Neville 1937a). On another occasion, Neville refused the request for a telephone that would connect the Hospital with Wyndham Town (Neville 1937b).

In its layout, with its insistence upon the ability of attendants to see and supervise inmates as well as anyone approaching the hospital reserve, the Wyndham Native Hospital is reminiscent both of Foucault’s plague town and of the panopticism he describes as one of the disciplinary tools of the modern state. When a plague first

³² Pat O’Malley would concur with Bashford’s conception of reserves and the leper line as segregationist. He has argued, in an analysis of the Western Australian government’s Central Aboriginal Reserve, that at a time when governments exercised extensive control over every aspect of an Indigenous person’s life, it was striking that some Aboriginal people were left so completely alone. Indeed, O’Malley argues that Neville purposefully moved Aboriginal people to the Central Aboriginal Reserve—while simultaneously reducing the financial support to the missions, which supplied rations to those on the reserve—as a deliberate policy of ‘ungovernment’ (O’Malley 1994).

entered a town, Foucault wrote, the town was closed, leaving was prohibited, the town was split up into partitions and the whole was governed over by a live-in attendant. This so-called 'intendent' would constantly report to his superiors outside, who would in turn report upwards to the magistrate. The magistrates had 'complete control over medical treatment' and appointed the doctors in charge. 'The relation of each individual to his disease and to his death passes through the representatives of power, the registration they make of it, the decisions they take on it' (Foucault 1977, pp. 196–7).

The Wyndham Native Hospital, like Foucault's plague town, was closed; none of the inmates could leave without risking punishment and visitors were not meant to enter without a permit. The layout of the Hospital, too, was carefully planned. When the newly installed Aboriginal Medical Inspector, Dr Albert P. Davis, inspected the proposed site in August 1936, he came away less than impressed. He wrote to Neville, recommending 'reversing the layout so the quarters are brought to the front (north end) and the native conveniences etc. are taken to the back of the site (south end)'. This would mean 'attendants could better overlook the natives for supervision purposes' and it would also put them at the front of the site nearest the road so they'd have a good view of people coming and going (Davis 1936). Neville agreed with his Inspector and the layout was duly changed, while the Eastern boundary of the reserve was extended to accommodate the changes (Neville 1936a). The site also had quarters for male and female patients, for venereal disease sufferers and a locked hut for leper suspects.³³

³³ Two former patients/workers that I spoke with, Biddy Trust and Ida Moore, confirmed that this was the case. Photographs of the site held by the Wyndham Historical Museum also confirm the buildings on site.

The Wyndham magistrate, like the magistrate of Foucault's plague town, had complete control over medical treatment because he doubled as the doctor. He would visit the Wyndham Native Hospital periodically then send statistics on to the Chief Protector: how many patients there had been, whether they were full-blood or half-caste, what complaint they suffered, and what had happened to them. This was for the purposes of reimbursement but also about monitoring the movements of Aboriginal people across the Kimberley. The degree of this panopticism is evidenced in the volume of correspondence about named individuals. Neville and his medical officers decide where Aboriginal people will be sent to work or marry, they correspond about where girls may have acquired VD (Davis 1940) in a similar manner to the way in which the movements of 'amateur prostitutes' were monitored around Perth.

Much like Foucault's panopticon, the Wyndham Native Hospital was also a way of monitoring and reporting on the activities of those outside the reserve who came into contact with it. That is, it was a mechanism for the state to monitor and control relationships between white and black Australians and hence prevent or manage miscegenation. Harrison wrote to Neville, 'At the three mile, the chief difficulty I am anticipating is not with the blacks at all—but with the low class white. I have been appalled to see and hear men who are otherwise fairly decent, discussing freely their experiences with the local gins—it seems to be the accepted thing amongst them all—without exception—that the gins are here merely for their gratification'. Harrison wanted to know 'what authority I should have in dealing with this class of individual when they trespass on the reserve?' (Harrison 1937). Interestingly, though Harrison wrote several times to Neville about the erection of a fence to surround the property and keep out trespassers, Neville did not reply to these requests, leading his Deputy Commissioner to conclude 'that the Commissioner may

have deliberately ignored the request for fencing' (Deputy Commissioner 1937). So perhaps the mechanisms of control were what Foucault would describe as the 'furtive' kind.

In conclusion, the layout and design of the Wyndham Native Hospital was influenced by eugenically influenced ideas about biological racial difference and an 'epidemiology' that viewed Indigenous Australians as disease vectors or dysgenic and, as such, needed to be segregated and monitored. It was what Bashford called a 'eugenic *cordon sanitaire*' that merged older methods of incarceration with newer public health measures of communicable disease control and sexual segregation, aimed at shaping future generations.

Chapter Four: The Hospital for Native Non-Citizens

Foucault's theory of biopower is a useful analytical framework for examining the impetus behind the establishment of the Hospital. However, it does have its limitations: whilst there were instances of neglect in the Hospital, there were also cases of care. On its own, Foucault's theory cannot account for these contradictions and it cannot explain the strange space occupied by the Hospital inmates who were neither citizens the state wanted to protect, nor enemies of that state.

In this chapter, I will argue that the Wyndham Native Hospital can better be understood as what historian-philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls a camp, in that it was a space in which the normal political-legal order was suspended and in which the inmates were conceived of not as citizens, but as what Agamben calls bare life. I will then argue that understanding the Hospital through this lens allows us to see its eugenic underpinnings more clearly.

The Wyndham Native Hospital was a camp because it was, to quote Suvendrini Perera (quoting Bernard Cohen), 'not-Australia' (Perera 2002). Its inmates were not-Australians, and yet they were not not-Australians either. Instead, they were conceived of as something else altogether: 'native non-citizens' (Commissioner 1959), or bare life. Agamben explains 'bare life' with reference to the ancient Roman

legal figure of '*homo sacer*' or sacred man, an individual who could not be sacrificed and yet was exposed to death, in that the sovereign would not punish anyone who murdered him. The ancient Greeks had separated life into '*zoe*', or simple existence, and '*bios*', the life of political and social participation, but the life of the sacred man was another existence again. It was less than '*zoe*', it was a life-exposed-to-death, a life stripped bare.

On 26 October 1959, a woman brought her six-month-old child to the Wyndham District, or 'white', Hospital. The child was apparently suffering from a bronchial complaint and had begun to choke, but the doctor refused to see it and told its mother to return to the Native Hospital, known as the 'Three Mile'. The mother ignored this advice and took her child to the home of the Native Welfare Department's local Patrol Officer, K.T. Johnson. Officer Johnson was not home, but his wife called the matron of the Native Hospital, who contacted the white doctor herself to ask that he come and see the child. He allegedly refused a second time and said he'd visit the following morning. The matron then came into town and took the child back with her to the Three Mile. It wasn't until 10:30 that night that the doctor came looking for the child at the patrol officer's house. In this instance, the officer wrote to his superiors, the child had recovered, but the child the doctor had refused to treat was the offspring of Western Australian citizens and they had complained³⁴. Patrol Officer Johnson backed the couple's complaint, arguing 'a Citizenship Rights holder is justly entitled to attend the White Hospital for treatment' (Johnson 1959a).

A few days prior to this incident, another baby had been brought from the Native Hospital to the white after failing to respond to treatment. On this occasion,

³⁴ In 1944, the Western Australian Government had introduced the Citizenship Rights Act, under which Aboriginal people could get a citizenship certificate if they had dissolved their native associations beyond immediate family, didn't have active leprosy, syphilis, granuloma or yaws and could speak English (*Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944*).

too, the doctor and nurses had refused to see the child. Later that same evening, Officer Johnson's wife brought the child back: it was getting worse. But again treatment was refused and the child died in Mrs Johnson's arms on the verandah of the White Hospital (Johnson 1959b).

The first child was, albeit belatedly, protected by the state and made to live. The second was designated as bare life—outside the state's protection—and thus exposed to death. The state did not kill the child and yet it held no one responsible for its death. When the then Commissioner for Public Health responded to Officer Johnson's criticisms of his officer, he said Dr Knowles was quite correct in insisting 'natives should be seen at the Native Hospital' (Commissioner 1959).

What is the value in seeing the Hospital as a camp and its inmates as citizens stripped back to bare life? In the following section, I will argue that viewing the Hospital through this lens allows us to see its eugenic underpinnings. This is because the decision over who could be sent to the Hospital—which was the decision over whether someone was a native or not—in the end, hung on the question of which lives were politically relevant to the new Australian state. And, in so far as this decision was made with a vision of the future Australia in mind, it can be understood as eugenic. It was also eugenic in that the decision over who qualified as a citizen was, by the early 20th century, informed by biologised racism, which saw different 'races' as more or less capable and more or less susceptible to disease. As Alison Bashford has pointed out, the eugenic moment in Australia occurred at the time of nation formation and alongside the emergence of the public health movement, making the link between race, health 'and the formation of a white civic body by exclusion (as well as selective inclusion) both formative and tight' (Bashford 2003, p. 138).

While Foucault held it was at the point of modernity that man went from being ‘a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence’ to ‘an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question’ (Foucault 1978, p. 143), Agamben argued life had always been the ‘secret’ basis of sovereign power. This is because in the state of nature that preceded the establishment of the sovereign, the sovereign constituted itself through an originating, violent act over other non-citizens or bare life. Agamben quotes Hobbes: ‘the subjects did not give the sovereign that right; but only in laying down theirs, strengthened him to use his own, as he should think fit, for the preservation of them all: so that it was not given, but left to him, and to him only; and (excepting the limits set him by naturall Law) as entire, as in the condition of meer Nature, and of warre of every one against his neighbor’ ([sic] Agamben 1998, p. 106). The foundation of sovereign power then, is not based on a pact nor on the subjects’ ‘free renunciation of their natural right but in the sovereign’s preservation of his natural right to do anything to anyone’ (Agamben 1998, p. 106).

Supreme power, in Agamben’s view, is ‘nothing other than *the capacity to constitute oneself and others as life that may be killed but not sacrificed*’ (Agamben 1998, p. 101, his emphasis). Bare life then, is at the centre of the state and yet only included as being that which is excluded. As such, it operates ‘as the referent of the sovereign decision’ (Agamben 1998, p. 85). Because the decision over what is bare life determines what is included in the sovereign’s ambit and what is not, bare life exists in a threshold space. It continually morphs between mere life and citizen. For Agamben, the foundational binary of sovereign power is not friend/foe, but bare life/citizen.

Before the advent of nation-states, Agamben argues, the question of bare life versus subject was largely theoretical since anyone born in the ambit of a ruler who could tax them was classed as a subject. But with the founding of nation-states, with declarations of rights and citizenship, came what Suvendrini Perera (2002) calls the disjunction between birth (or bare life) and nation-state (citizenship). It was the formation of nation-states that made bare life a *political* question.

Agamben identifies the first appearance of bare life as a political subject in the 1679 writ of habeas corpus, which put at the centre ‘the court of justice ... neither the old subject of feudal relations and liberties nor the future *citoyen*, but rather a pure and simple *corpus*’ (Agamben 1998, p. 123). In habeas corpus—which demands a body be produced before the court so that its imprisonment might be justified—Agamben sees the origins of the new political body of the West: the new basis of equality, and thus of the modern state, is the fact that all men are equally bare life to one another and can equally kill one another. (In this light, Western Australia’s suspension of habeas corpus rights for ‘natives’ takes on a whole new significance).

From the French Revolution onwards, citizenship ‘does not simply identify a generic subjugation to royal authority or a determinate system of laws, nor does it simply embody ... the new egalitarian principle; citizenship names the new status of life as origin and ground of sovereignty and, therefore, literally identifies ... “the members of the sovereign”’ (Agamben 1998, p. 129). This is why, during the course of the French Revolution, there was a flurry of provisions specifying who was a citizen and who was not (Agamben 1998, pp. 129–30).

That the Wyndham Native Hospital was no place for citizens, but only bare life, is clear in the anxiety over the site’s status as a reserve. This anxiety is seen in the 1936 Amendment to the Aborigines Act, which allowed hospitals and other sites

to be declared reserves, the gazettal of the Hospital site as a reserve and Neville's concern that all buildings be well within the reserve. The anxiety hinged on this fact: that a reserve was constructed for 'natives'. It seems a point too obvious to be stated, but the fact that it was a place for people stripped of their citizenship is highly significant: before the state submitted these individuals to its total rule (because where there is no legal structure, power is absolute), it also washed its hands of any responsibility for them. Agamben notes that one of the rules the Nazis always adhered to was that 'Jews could be sent to the extermination camps only after they had been fully denationalised (stripped even of the residual citizenship left to them after the Nuremberg laws)' (Agamben 1998, p. 132). No *German* could be sent to the camps. Likewise, no Australian citizen could be ordered to and kept within the Native Hospital. Only a 'native'.

What exactly was a 'native'? Up until 1936, Aboriginal Western Australians were called by different terms. At the 1937 Welfare Conference, Neville explained that his state had dropped the terms 'half-caste' and 'aborigines': 'we refer to them as natives whether they be full-blooded or half-caste. Quadroons over the age of 21 years are however, excluded' (Aboriginal Welfare Conference 1937, p. 10). In fact, Aboriginal Western Australians had, at least theoretically, been considered British subjects, like other indigenous peoples, until the end of the 19th century. Historian Peter Biskup details their progressive disenfranchisement after this point through a series of acts that made voting dependant on land ownership—as understood in the European sense—and on race.³⁵ Each new piece of 'protective' legislation further

³⁵ Biskup explains it was an 1893 amendment to the Western Australian Constitution Act that formally disenfranchised the colony's 'full-bloods' unless they owned freehold land, while white men could vote without this qualification. A further amendment in 1899 took the vote from 'person(s) of half-blood' except those who held a large-enough freehold block, then the 1907 Electoral Act took the vote from all full-bloods and half-bloods, regardless of the property they owned (Biskup 1973, p. 144).

reduced Aboriginal Western Australians from citizens to bare life. Each piece of legislation further curtailed the rights they had been entitled to; they could be sent to and contained on a reserve, they could be sent to and contained in a hospital, school or station. At the same time, the Government was expanding the category of native non-citizen to include ‘persons of the half blood’ and then anyone the Commissioner deemed to be a native, such that the category of people who were no longer afforded the rights of the citizen—who were no longer included within the state except as bare life—grew.

Biskup argues that the deterioration in the position of the ‘part Aborigines’ (and prior to that, the ‘full-bloods’) was partly economic, based on fears that a growing half-caste population would take ‘white’ jobs. Nonetheless, he writes, it is significant that it occurred alongside the process of nation-building. The disenfranchisement occurred, paradoxically, during a progressive period, which (here he quotes a writer of the day) was marked by ““experiments in the redistribution of national wealth, the greater equalisation of opportunity, the passage of humanitarian welfare legislation and the regulation of industrial life by processes of law”—for white Australians’ (Biskup 1973, p. 140). Bashford, too, links the exclusion of Aboriginality to the construction of the Australian identity, pointing out the commonalities between policies that allowed for the exclusion and segregation of Aboriginal people and the White Australia Policy. The latter aimed to keep out all migrants save, to borrow a phrase from Carey, the ‘best whites’ (2006); Western Australia’s Aboriginal ‘protection’ acts and other discriminatory legislation increasingly denied citizenship to anyone who had even a small fraction of Aboriginal heritage. In 1905, ‘half-castes’ who lived with an Aboriginal wife or husband or ‘habitually’ associated with ‘aborigines’ were included under the definition of

‘aborigine’ (Section 3, *Aborigines Act* 1905). By 1936, this category, now called ‘native’, had been expanded to capture all half-castes, as well as ‘quadroons’³⁶ whom a magistrate had classed as native, quadroons under 21 who lived a traditional lifestyle, and people who were ‘less than quadroon blood’ but born before December 1936. Aboriginal Australians were increasingly included within the state only as referents to the sovereign decision and as indicators to what the future ‘Australian race’ would not look like.

Much of the curtailment of Indigenous peoples’ rights, and their excision as citizens, was linked to the understanding of Aboriginal people as more susceptible to catching and spreading disease. As the medical discourse moved from the environment as the bearer of disease to humans, ‘a white Australia finally could be represented as a medical necessity, not just a national goal’ (Anderson 2000, p. 159). ‘As medicine was less obviously part of the environmental discourse, it became more centrally an element in the discourse of modernity and citizenship’ (Anderson 2000, p. 159)

As well as being the birthplace of the modern idea of citizenship, the French Revolution has been identified as the moment around which the concept of ‘health citizenship’ arose (Porter 2011, p. 1). Thus, the politicisation of bare life was coupled with a change in the conception of what it meant to be a citizen. Dorothy Porter points out that, simultaneous with the revolutionaries’ demand that the democratic state should provide its citizens with health, the state made citizens responsible for maintaining their own health. This ‘social contract of health’ was so central to the foundation of modern states that, she argues, the history of state expansion can *only*

³⁶ ‘[A] person who is descended from the full blood original inhabitants of Australia or their full blood descendants but who is only one-fourth of the original full blood’ (Section 2(f) *Aborigines Act Amendment Act* 1936).

be analysed alongside developments in health citizenship. She writes: 'In the new social order the individual was a political and economic unit of a collective whole' (Porter 2011, p. 1). In other words, the individual was a member of a sovereign body that had to be kept healthy. New discoveries in the methods of disease transmission and hereditary inheritance, as well as burgeoning theories of Social Darwinism and eugenics, also had major implications for citizen's rights and for the question of who qualified as a citizen and who was merely bare life. At the same time as the state's responsibility for the citizen's life became increasingly comprehensive, when this 'care of life' became, as Agamben says, 'absolutised', the possibilities for citizenship got narrower. As we have seen, prior to the advent of modern nation-states, citizenship was largely a matter of where and when one was born; and even those born at the wrong time or place could later become citizens. So, for example, most British subjects across the Empire were assumed to be citizens, in particular those born of British parentage, while subject races were seen as citizens in training.

But scientific racism and eugenics held that different types of people had fixed capabilities and deficits. The prerequisites of citizenship, which had been at least theoretically in the reach of every man (though not every woman), were now seen as unattainable by certain races in whom qualities like time preference or motivation or intelligence were reified (Peart 2003). When John Stuart Mill had argued that certain parts of 'backward society' were still in their nonage and were thus incapable of citizenship, he had assumed that they could be brought up to the point that they could be capable (Peart 2003). Colonial subjects, though unsanitary, could be taught sanitary habits. That is, they had the *potential* for citizenship. Ishita Pande has shown how, in the Indian colonial context, hygienic living was seen as an indicator of both an individual's as well as a nation's readiness for 'civilisation' and

thus independence. 'Filth' and disease were equated with backwardness and set against modern, clean, organised cities, resulting in a hierarchy of development (Pande 2010).

Scientific racism fixed ability and flattened potential. Certain races became hereditarily incapable of being citizens. In 1929, the Professor of Racial Psychology at the University of Hawaii, S.D. Porteus, concluded a series of tests on Aboriginal people in central and Western Australia with the observation that Aborigines lacked the 'ethnic capacity' for civilisation (Biskup 1973, p. 92). It was not an isolated view.

Four years earlier, in September 1925, the Legislative Assembly of the Western Australian Parliament had debated a proposed amendment to the Electoral Act. Among other things, the amendment would have overturned a clause preventing 'half-castes' from voting. The National Party politician and former Premier, Sir James Mitchell, argued strongly against it. Aboriginal 'half-bloods' were 'not capable of exercising any responsibility'. Mitchell gave examples of countries ruined by enfranchised half-bloods 'unfitted ... to rule' (Debates, Western Australia 1925a, p. 841). He warned that there would be 'no stability or progress where such people exercise any considerable influence'. They were a threat not only to progress, but living standards, public education and moral outlook (Debates, Western Australia 1925a, p. 841). Others backed his view. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council on a technicality. Possessing Aboriginal 'blood' meant you were considered incapable of performing the responsibilities—education, health, moral—of a citizen.

Other changes to Western Australian legislation further excluded Indigenous Australians, confining them to a position of bare life/non-citizen. After 1936, natives could be examined for disease by anyone deemed 'suitable' by the Chief Protector, an

intrusion on liberty that even the Crown Law Department was concerned about.³⁷ Moreover, the examiner could ‘such means as may be necessary’ (Section 15(a), *Aborigines Act Amendment Act* 1936) to compel a person to submit to an examination. There was no right to appeal the diagnosis or examination and once a native was in an institution, such as the Wyndham Native Hospital, they had no right of appeal to another authority to be let out. Indeed, to ‘refuse to submit’ to a forced examination constituted an offence against the Act (Section 12 (15Ac) *Aborigines Act Amendment Act* 1936), as did attempting to leave a reserve like the Hospital. They were in indefinite detention.³⁸

That Wyndham Hospital inmates were constituted as bare life is also evident in their denial of habeas corpus rights. Garton, as we have seen, argued that eugenics did not progress very far in Australia, partly because Australian and New Zealand legal cultures were ‘committed to habeas corpus’ (Garton 2010, p. 248). Thus ‘compulsory incarceration, without extensive medical certification guidelines or unambiguous scientific evidence confirming defect’ (Garton 2010, p. 248) was not looked on kindly. But this was the white side of the story. Habeas corpus is a remedy that seeks to determine whether a detention is unlawful or not by the presentation of a physical body before the court. So, by *legalising* the removal, detention and banishment of Aboriginal people to reserves, the Western Australian Government

³⁷ Kate Auty reveals just how far the Western Australian Department of Native Affairs went beyond its political juridical bounds in this area, pointing out that the Government’s own Crown Law Department ‘raised objections to *ultra vires* regulations relating to Aboriginal people, which provided for forced medical examinations’ (Auty 2000, p. 168).

³⁸ Compare this with the treatment of white Western Australians. A person could only be medically examined by a medical practitioner and only if they were suspected of having a venereal disease. The suspicion had to take the form of a written and signed statement. If the person was found not to be suffering from venereal disease, they had the right to view the statements that had led to their arrest and examination. And while doctors had to notify the government if they had someone under treatment, they did not, unless that person absconded, have to disclose the person’s name. Anyone forced into treatment because they had a venereal disease in the infectious stage and were deemed likely to abscond was held for a maximum of two weeks, after which time the Commissioner had to apply to continue to hold the patient. The detained patient also had the right to ask for an examination at any time to clear the diagnosis and be freed. (*Health Act Amendment Act* 1915)

denied them this protection. This denial of habeas corpus can be seen in the 1938 comments of a Hospital manager, who planned to go out and capture natives not because they were sick but because they were proving a nuisance:

These natives have been there some time (outside the 20 mile prohibited area) and are a nuisance to the road-resurfacing gangs often camped there. They constantly elude the police who have been on the look out for them, and the only chance of getting them was my going out, as suggested, with a truck and a couple of boys ... and securing them during the night (Harrison 1938).

Deaths of Aboriginal people were generally not recorded, unless they were in the care of a government agency. Violet Rivers, who was taken to the Wyndham Native Hospital as a patient then kept there as an unpaid worker, remembers that ‘no Aboriginal person was able to be buried in the cemetery. They had to be buried outside the fence’ (Rivers 1999). Wyndham man, Reginald Birch, tells me of seeing dead bodies, about one a month, wrapped in a blanket and packed onto the back of the night-soil truck which his father drove. The bodies were then buried in unmarked graves outside town where they were later discovered when sand was being extracted from the area for building work. When he later became manager of a Wyndham Aboriginal corporation, Birch arranged for a plaque to be set up at the graveyard (Birch 2017) but the site has since been burnt out and it’s almost impossible to read the charred writing. It seems emblematic of the status of the inmates of the Hospital as bare life, life that, if taken, no one is responsible for.

Inmates of the Wyndham Native Hospital were also potentially exposed to medical experimentation. In a chapter on *Versuchspersonen* (VPs or human guinea pigs), Agamben points out that medical experiments on prisoners in Nazi Germany

were analogous to experiments that had been carried out on prisoners and other populations in America. That was because, ‘in both contexts, the particular status of the VPs was decisive; they were persons sentenced to death or detained in a camp, the entry into which meant the definitive exclusion from the political community’ (Agamben 1998, p. 159). Agamben argues that, because bare life occupies the threshold space between citizen and life-exposed-to-death, it is at risk of experimentation. No one will be punished if this life dies.

Those entering the Wyndham Native Hospital inhabited this liminal space between citizen and native. Were they also subjected to experimentation? In 1939, after Atkinson told Sweetman to treat only the syphilitic patients who looked infectious, he suggested that Sweetman might like to treat a few of the symptomless patients who had tested positive ‘with a view to discovering whether anti-syphilitic treatment renders the blood test negative’ (Atkinson 1939). Later, Sweetman wrote to Atkinson to confirm that, as agreed, the new Wyndham Native Hospital ‘policy’ meant that he had been testing every person that came into the hospital for syphilis, but treating only those who showed signs of being infectious (Sweetman 1939b). There is nothing further in the file to explain what Sweetman and Atkinson had agreed to and no evidence of a formal experimentation program. There are no other references to this system of recording whether patients had syphilis or not, nor to the effects of ‘testing a few’ to see if it rendered the Wasserman negative. Still, testing people for a disease you don’t intend to treat appears to be experimentation. Indeed, it recalls the Tuskegee syphilis experiments. There had certainly been previous experimentation on Aboriginal patients. Mary Ann Jebb, for example, has written about how doctors on the Island Lock Hospitals of Dorre and Bernier experimented

with new treatment for venereal disease until they decided it wouldn't help the sufferers (Jebb 1984, p. 77).

The Wyndham Native Hospital then, could be understood as a camp because those who were interned there were constituted as 'bare life' by the state. It also fits Agamben's definition of a camp in that it was a permanent space in which the normal political and legal order was suspended. It was a 'permanent state of exception'. The Hospital was within Australia and yet 'not Australia'. It was a defined space in which the Australian state suspended its own laws and political system. The site of the Hospital was the 'free juridically empty space' (Agamben 1998, p. 36) that Agamben identifies as the state of exception that occurs when the state is considered as though it had been dissolved. But it was not simply the state that existed prior to the sovereign's rule, because in a state of exception the sovereign remains, only now its power is unbounded by a legal system or the rights of citizens.

The designation of inmates as 'natives' removed many of the legal strictures governing the Wyndham Native Hospital as we have seen with the example of the denial of habeas corpus rights. There were also Regulations gazetted following the 1936 Amendment to the Aborigines Act, which gave the state if not absolute, then considerable, power over individuals in reserves such as the Hospital. The 1936 regulations stipulated that reserve inmates, including those in the Wyndham Native Hospital, had to 'obey all reasonable instructions and commands of the superintendent or manager' (Regulation 19, Chief Secretary's Department 1938), but did not define 'reasonable'. The superintendent or camp manager acted as a sort of semi-sovereign, limited only by the Native Affairs Commissioner's oversight and restrictions. These restrictions didn't give rights to the inmates but, instead, outlawed specific actions (such as shaving a girl's head or boxing a child's ears (Chief Secretary's Department

1938)). By omission then, they permitted much else besides. The regulations also allowed summary solitary confinement ‘not exceeding fourteen days’ but with the normal diet for, among other things, serious misconduct, neglect of duty, insubordination, or persistent breaches of the regulations. Again, there was considerable room left for interpretation.

Former patient and Hospital worker, Violet Rivers, remembers being treated like one of the patients long after her infected eye had healed and she was kept at the Hospital as an unpaid worker. ‘I used to get locked up at night with the patients and still eat the same food—ground wheat porridge for breakfast, rice full of weevils or, if you were lucky, sloppy old stew for lunch, and blue peas for supper’ (Rivers 1999, p. 4). ‘Anyone would cook, even the patients ... I worked there a long time, delivered a lot of babies, nursed a lot of people. But never got paid.’ Another former patient that I spoke to remembers leper suspects being locked in tiny corrugated iron huts, their meals pushed in through a gap underneath the door (Trust 2017).

If one accepts Agamben’s theory that the state constitutes itself by excluding bare life, then Rivers’ experience is not simply neglect. It is part of the *structure* of our nation. As Stanner puts it, ‘The primary axiom of settlement or at least of development—that Aboriginal and European society could not or must not be allowed to coexist—allowed little, if any, room’ for a practical policy to improve conditions for Aboriginal people (Stanner 1979, p. 188). The process of our nation-building was tied to the mistreatment of Aboriginal people, much like bare life is inextricably linked to the sovereign.

According to Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, there is a utopian impulse inherent in all nation-building; the nation-state is utopian in that it aspires to a ‘purposive unity’ rather than being a reflection of this unity as something that existed

prior to the formation of the state (Rajaram 2007, p. ix). Thus the nation-state depends on the creation of borders, both spatial and legal, that demarcate between belonging and not-belonging, 'between norm and exception' (Rajaram 2007, p. ix). Rajaram and Grundy-Warr's use of the terms 'norm and exception' is important, since it is with these words that Agamben describes the underlying power structure of the modern state. The exception or 'that-which-does-not-belong' is not simply a separate entity unrelated to the norm, but a crucial part of that norm in that one cannot exist without the other.

But the building of Australia was not just utopian in the sense of aiming towards a 'purposive unity'. As noted earlier in this dissertation, Garton and other scholars have pointed out that the possibilities that seemed inherent in 'transplanting' the white race to an island nation proved intoxicating to many. And if Australia, as an island nation, protected from sources of degeneration by immigration and quarantine restrictions, was a potential utopia then Western Australia, even more isolated, was too. With echoes of Arnold Woods, Atkinson told a newspaper in 1927 that, given the 'glorious sunshine' available in Western Australia, it was 'almost impossible to think that the physique of our boys and girls is not among the best in the world' and 'impossible to compare the physique of boys and girls of Australia ... with that of boys and girls of America where there were one hundred and one different nationalities' ('Physique of Our Boys' 1927).

Still, Atkinson was not complacent. He publicly supported birth control when 'there was a fear, or a prospect of some hereditary disease or undesirable tendency being transmitted to the children'. He tied birth control to finances and to the responsibilities of citizenship: 'Children brought into the world should have a decent chance of being properly nourished and of being made useful citizens' ('Birth

Control' 1935). In these comments, we see not simply the elimination of biological threats, though that is certainly there, however couched in 'protective' language it might be. With each statement on the race, or the ideal citizen, Atkinson is also constructing the non-citizen and excluding bare life. One of the markers of modernity, according to Agamben, is that sovereign power comes to be exercised not simply by rulers as traditionally understood but by police, jurists and medical doctors. Atkinson, as the Western Australian life-fosterer in chief, is an excellent example.

The comparative silence ³⁹ of the archives notwithstanding, there is no evidence of active eugenic practices such as sterilisation at the Wyndham Native Hospital. Even the hints of withheld treatment, such as for the patients with syphilis, are rare and, in this researcher's view, inconclusive. But the designation of a space as a 'camp' is not dependent, according to Agamben, on what actually occurs there, but rather on how the space is created: that is, in the suspension of the normal political-legal order. Thus, the holding space for illegal immigrants at the French airport is a camp, just as Guantanamo Bay is. 'Whether or not atrocities are committed depends not on law, but on the civility and ethical sense of the police who temporarily act as sovereign (in the camp)' (Agamben 1998, p. 174). Indeed, according to Suvendrini Perera, it is in the camp, where bare life confronts unbridled sovereign power, that the claims of the human are tested (Perera 2002).

By understanding the Wyndham Native Hospital as a camp, and its inmates as bare life, it becomes possible to explain the unmarked graves on the edge of town, the patients forced to sleep on cement floors, the imprisoned lepers, the possible

³⁹ Kate Auty details some of the 'powerfully oppressive silences in the official discourse, silences which provide for or allow the social and cultural construction of this jurisdiction as a benevolent one' (Auty 2000, p. 167) in her article on Western Australian courts on Natives Affairs as well as her book *Black Glass*. Chris Owen goes further, suggesting that gaps in the official record, where they correspond with reports of massacres and other mistreatment, suggest deliberate sanitising of history or cover-ups. He writes, 'there is a very curious correspondence between the absence of records and an area known to have had a large number of police involved in "dispersals".' (Owen 2016, p. 23)

experimentation and withheld treatment. It also becomes possible to explain the conscientious treatment of patients, the caring doctors and superintendents who worked there, the safe delivery of babies, the cures.

It also becomes possible to explain, though not accept, this: In 1942, after Darwin was bombed and military intelligence predicted further bombing in the area, the white women and children and many of the white men were evacuated from Wyndham and the Wyndham Native Hospital. The Hospital inmates were packed into a truck, driven out bush and dumped. They were told to hide from low-lying planes and to make their way to the native cattle station, Moola Bulla, a walk which would take them weeks. Some of the remaining townspeople took pity on them and commandeered some of the few remaining vehicles in Wyndham to drive out to where they thought the natives would be and to leave food and water. Sometimes, they were able to drive them a little way, but in the end, they were left exposed to the enemy and potential starvation (Green 2011, p. 98; Rivers 1999; Trust 2017). They were left as bare life.

Chapter Five: Humans or Chattels?

In 1922, the writer G.K. Chesterton, best known for his Father Brown books, wrote another title called *Eugenics and Other Evils*. In it he turned the microscope, which up until then had been focused on the degenerates, onto a new target: the eugenicists themselves. The eugenicists, Chesterton argued, were the capitalist class—or in service to it (Chesterton 1922).

In this chapter, I will argue that the Wyndham Native Hospital was a eugenic space because it conceived of its inmates in an economically utilitarian manner, a conception of the human that Chesterton and Foucault have pinpointed as formative in the development of eugenics. To develop my argument, I will show that the Hospital was established firmly within the political economy of the Kimberley region. Moreover, its establishment was driven by a desire to aid the pastoral industry by seeing off threats to that industry and dealing cheaply with the human fallout that development in the area had caused.

When Dr Victor Henry Webster arrived in Wyndham in 1931, this, according to his letters and reports, was what he saw: Aboriginal people living in packing cases or in tumbledown sheds with a few blankets on the floor. He saw native women prostituted out to white men, and met ‘responsible’ white station officials ‘who made no secret of the frequency and facility with which they gratify their appetite’ with

Aboriginal women. He visited a mission nearby and found a girl who had fractured her arm a year prior and was now paralysed because it had been splinted too tight and plunged into scalding water (Webster 1931).

Over the next four years he was in Wyndham, Webster would see a lot more. Because he was also the resident magistrate and Aboriginal protector, he had to both sentence Aboriginal people and act for them. It's not clear from the archives whether he ever had to do both at the same time. He sentenced a man to a month's gaol for escaping custody and he had to report the escape of six other individuals who had been gaoled for being on a prohibited area (Webster 1931). As a doctor, Webster saw an Indigenous man, known as 'Jimmy', die as a result of being shot by lay missionary Henry Smith at Forrest River Mission. A jury found Smith not guilty of manslaughter ('Death of Native' 1932; Green 2011, p. 72).

What he saw and heard in Wyndham, it seems, turned Webster into an activist⁴⁰. After leaving Wyndham, he joined the Australian Aborigines Amelioration Association (AAAA) and, in 1936, was elected a Vice-President ('Amelioration Association' 1937). He went on to represent the Catholic Archbishop of Perth and the Catholic missions in negotiations with the Government on Aboriginal policy⁴¹ and

⁴⁰ Webster was a contradictory figure. In 1933, after examining residents of the Moola Bulla station and finding several women with gonorrhea, he said that little would be gained from sending these women in for treatment. It could be that he thought the disease too advanced or not treatable; he did send other VD patients for treatment. He also argued that 'the control of venereal disease among the natives themselves is too big a matter to be considered here. The important thing is to keep them out of contact with the whites' (Webster 1933). In 1934, he argued in favour of neck chains for Aboriginal prisoners, saying they were more humane than wrist fetters ('The Treatment of the Blacks' 1934). He was also involved in a public bet in 1938 with a Mrs Throssell—otherwise known as Katherine Susannah Pritchard—when he argued that Catholics in Spain did not support the Government against General Franco ('Catholics on Spain' 1938).

⁴¹ These negotiations largely centred on Neville's efforts to get greater control over the missions, which the missions fought. But Neville threatened to expose a file of several salacious events that had occurred at Forrest River Mission, including a mission worker 'sodomising the mission boys' and a female worker taking and selling 'lewd photographs of the girls' (Green 2011, p. 65). Green reports that the editor of the Catholic *Record* (a friend of Webster's) likened Neville to Hitler, while 'another alluded to Neville's new title as the Commissioner for Native Affairs, with an innuendo in "affairs"' (Green 2011, p. 75).

was a frequent presence in the media on the treatment of Western Australia's Indigenous population. Webster the activist described the debate over the treatment of Indigenous Australians as a clash between the spiritual and the economic. A question, he wrote, of whether one held that 'human happiness is more important than pounds, shillings and pence' (1936, p. 20). According to Webster, 'it was futile to discuss the problem of the treatment of the aborigines without introducing the religious aspect, or even basing the whole discussion on it. It made all the difference as to whether we believed that they were human beings with a supernatural destiny, with immortal souls equal in value to our own in the sight of a common Creator, or whether we believed them to be a pathetic anachronism' ('A Christian View of the Aborigines: A Doctor on Religious Missions' 1936).⁴²

In 1937—the year that he became a Vice-President of the AAAA—Webster also became president of Australia's first Chesterton Club. The Club, founded in Perth in 1936, was 'dedicated to every form of Catholic action' and adopted the Chesterton name because 'it seemed to symbolise all that is best in the modern Catholic crusade' ('G.K. Chesterton' 1937). Chesterton, as well as being an anti-eugenics campaigner, was a major proponent of the theory of Distributism, which held that as many people as possible should hold the property and the means by which

The 'affairs' joke might have seemed particularly apt to Webster when, as a doctor at the Heathcote Asylum in 1938, he was embroiled in a very public fight with Neville over allegations that the matron of the Asylum was involved in an affair with Neville's Minister, the Chief Secretary, W.H. Kitson. The fight was ironically carried across another Royal Commission before H.D. Moseley, who had conducted the 1934 Commission into treatment of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley ('Heathcote Inquiry' 1938).

⁴² Webster was not alone in seeing a clash between the spiritual and economic in the Kimberley. A 1919 committee appointed to advise on the development of the Kimberley admitted there was no way to reconcile the 'material progress of the area with the spiritual welfare' of the Aboriginal people that lived there (Biskup 1973, p. 103). Notably however, this Committee did not seem to think that material progress ought to be sacrificed, lending credence to Chesterton's observation that in eugenics it is family and maternity that become the movable, business and profits the 'fixed points' (Chesterton 1922, p. 138).

to sustain themselves. Distributism had much in common with 1931 papal encyclical issued by Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, which held that “‘capital” has undoubtedly long been able to appropriate too much to itself ... hardly leaving the worker enough to restore and renew his strength’ (XI 1931). This encyclical, written to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Leo Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, was ‘the keystone of Catholic thinking on the problem of modern man in industrial society throughout the Depression years’ (Massam 1987, p. 102). Chesterton and other distributists, namely Hillaire Belloc, expounded their theory in the pages of *G.K.’s Weekly*, which ‘defended the individual against both big government and big business and saw the left (in Socialism and Communism) and the right (in monopolistic capitalism) as equally dangerous’ (Massam 1987, p. 102). Chesterton argued that eugenics was an attempt ‘to control treat some families at least as if they were the families of pagan slaves’ (Chesterton 1922, p. 10).

The Chestertonian language of slavery is important because, from the turn of the century until the period of Webster’s period of activism in the 1930s, the ‘Aboriginal question’ in the North was often a question about whether the treatment of Indigenous people was akin to slavery. Indeed, the 1934 Moseley Commission was formed partly in response to allegations of slavery made in the British press by missionary Mary Montgomery Bennett. Bennett was particularly worried about Indigenous women, arguing that tribal marriages and white exploitation were making them into ‘chattels’ (Biskup 1973, pp. 94–5).⁴³ Neville himself, in a confidential minute to his minister, characterised the treatment of Indigenous people as slavery, arguing that ‘under the existing conditions of employment in the North, the

⁴³ Webster was highly impressed with Bennett when he met her at the Forrest River Mission in 1931 (Webster 1931). Later, he would join with her in criticising the Government’s Moore River Native Settlement.

Aborigines are far too often regarded as the chattels of the white employer, and while actual cruelty is not alleged, coercion is undoubtedly used to enforce the employer's wishes, not only as regards working but also in regard to the disposal of women and dependents, savouring on a system of semi-slavery' (Jebb 2002, p. 133). Webster, too, in his evidence before the 1934 Commission, claimed allegations of slavery were 'not entirely unfounded' ('Disease among Natives' 1934).

In *Eugenics and Other Evils*, Chesterton made a causal link between loss of property and slavery/eugenics. Showing the clear influence of his distributist thought, Chesterton argued that slaves were rightly described as chattels because they could be moved around at the will of the master much like a chair or piece of furniture. When slaves were emancipated to the level of serfs, it was because they were linked to land and could not be moved.

The tiny seed of citizenship and independence there already was in the serfdom of the Dark Ages had nothing to do with what nice things the lord might do to the serf. It lay in the fact that there were some nasty things he could not do to the serf—there were not many, but there were some, and one of them was eviction. He could not make the serf utterly landless and desperate, utterly without access to the means of production ... There was therefore, both in theory and practice, some security for the serf, because he had come to life and rooted (Chesterton 1922, p. 103).

In the Distributist view, property was the basis for an individual's citizenship—even her humanity—such that to alienate a worker from property was not only to exploit and enslave but also to dehumanise, a concept to which I will return later.

Chesterton described the industrial revolution's alienation of workers from their property in terms that could readily have been applied to the alienation of Indigenous land during the pastoralisation of the Kimberley. This alienation has been widely documented by Biskup, Jebb and Owen among others.⁴⁴ Chris Owen, writing about policing in the Kimberley from 1882 to 1905, details the way in which settlers took up leases in the area then demanded that the Government provide police to protect those leases, and cattle, from 'aboriginal depredations'⁴⁵ (Owen 2016). He also describes the establishment of an oligarchy of Northern pastoralists, including Western Australia's first premier John Forrest, who either became politicians or maintained close links with them, thus heavily influencing development in the North⁴⁶ and the treatment of its original inhabitants.⁴⁷

In addition to being forced off their own country, Indigenous Australians in the Kimberley were prevented from going elsewhere, such that it became almost illegal to be Aboriginal. Under the 1905 Aborigines Act, Aboriginal people could be removed and kept within the boundaries of a reserve or moved from reserve to reserve (Section 12). The 1905 Act also contained a series of provisions under which Aboriginal protectors could remove Aboriginal camps (Section 37), police officers

⁴⁴ See Pamela A. Smith, Chris Owen and Mary Anne Jebb for detailed explanations of the way that Aboriginal people were moved off specific pastoral leases and controlled generally over the region. Owen delineates between settlers who took up leases in the West Kimberley (essentially to the West of Wyndham) who were largely the land-owning class from Perth and in the East, and who were generally from the eastern states and took up smaller-scale leases (Owen 2016, p. 94). He outlines how the allocation of leases from the late 1880s was essentially gamed by 'cartels' that included WA politicians (Owen 2016, pp. 95–7).

⁴⁵ Owen gives evidence that cattle losses and property damage, blamed on 'aboriginal depredations' (2016, p. 149), was often actually the result of poor farming or cattle thievery by white competitors.

⁴⁶ 'North West and Kimberley pastoralists were able to wield influence well out of proportion to the number of people in their electorates' (Owen 2016, p. 260).

⁴⁷ The cabal was so brazen that, in 1893, a Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Board complained to the Colonial Secretary that 'members of the present ministry are to a man directly or indirectly connected to sheep farming' and did not 'recognise the original title of the Aborigines to the land'. Their desire, he wrote in the confidential memo, 'in all ... [is] for cheap land, or labour or both, as the case may be' (Owen 2016, p. 263).

and JPs could order ‘loitering Aborigines’ to leave a district (Section 38), and the Governor could declare any place ‘to be an area in which it shall be unlawful for Aborigines or half-castes, not in lawful employment, to be or remain’ (Section 39). Broome and Perth were among the towns in which it was illegal to be an Aboriginal. Parts of the land around Wyndham, too, such as the ‘20 Mile’, were declared prohibited areas for Aboriginal people. The combination of prohibitions and land alienation created a situation for Indigenous people reminiscent of the situation of the ‘tramp’ that Chesterton described in *Eugenics and Other Evils*. ‘This man is not told to do something: he is merely forbidden to do anything ... When he was a serf they said to him: “let me find you in this field, I will hang you if I find you in anyone else’s field”. But now he is a tramp they say to him, “you shall be gaoled if I find you in anyone else’s field; *but I will not give you a field*”’ (Chesterton 1922, p. 106). Indigenous Australians *could* go to a reserve, but given they could also be kicked off it or imprisoned upon it, the ‘choice’ looks much like a tramp’s choice to go to the workhouse, which was ‘only in the same sense in which he is free to go to gaol, only in the same sense in which the serf, under the gibbet, was free to find peace in the grave’ (Chesterton 1922, p. 107).⁴⁸

In any case, the reserve was not property, in the Chestertonian sense of providing a person with bargaining power or security, because it was not owned nor was it inalienable.⁴⁹ Because reserves could be taken from the residents at any time—

⁴⁸ Chesterton’s reference to the serf’s freedom to find peace in the grave is interesting here, since Foucault in his theory of biopower commented that, in the modern state, the only place in which state power ceases, and in which the individual remains sovereign over their own body, is in death. Given the high rate of Indigenous suicides, it is worth considering whether the lack of sovereignty over one’s own country and body correlates with a greater propensity to self-harm.

⁴⁹ Indeed, Neville tried and failed to have Indigenous reserves made ‘A Class’ in 1929 so that they could not be wrested from Aboriginal control except by an act of Parliament. Neville also tried, in 1932, to change the laws to provide Aboriginal people with a share of the mineral wealth found on their reserves (albeit part of the money was to go to his department) but, according to Biskup, his idea ‘never received a moment’s serious consideration’ (Biskup 1973, p. 105).

or the residents taken from them—they did not provide, as property would have, the seeds of citizenship. After all, where Aboriginal Western Australians and half-castes had been allowed the vote, up until the 1907 Electoral Act (Section 18 (d), *Electoral Act* 1907), it had been on the basis that they were the owners of inalienable freehold property.

According to Mary Ann Jebb, land alienation and prohibitions forced people in the Kimberley to attach themselves to stations, which then provided the pastoralists with a free or cheap workforce, a fact that contributed to allegations of slavery.⁵⁰ The Kimberley was not unique in using forced labour for economic development:

‘[It] had been fundamental to the colonial culture of all European colonies during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The only cost of this labour was the prices of food and clothing. Little distinguished the manner of the employment except the names given to the labourers: convicts, slaves, natives’ (Smith 2000, p. 76).

In the Kimberley, free Indigenous labour was particularly important because convict labour was prohibited from use above the 26th parallel (Smith 2000, p. 76). In World War II, the Native Affairs Department issued orders to close all coastal rationing stations and to relocate inland any Aborigines in the bush around Derby. The fear was that they would be ‘liquidated by the enemy ... The labour problem after the War would then be most difficult’ (Jebb 2002, p. 149). By 1940, the Kimberley

⁵⁰ Biskup, however, argues that allegations of slavery were based ‘almost entirely’ (Biskup 1973, p. 39) on the penal sanctions in employment contracts, while most Aborigines were not employed under contract.

Aborigines had gone from being a pest that had to be cleared off pastoral land, or kept from killing cattle, to a crucial source of labour. The pastoralists were so reliant on indigenous labour they were willing to take action on depopulation in the Kimberley.

Biskup argues ‘the aborigines did not seem to mind’ (Biskup 1973, p. 111) being unpaid, particularly during the Depression years and that, in any case, most white stockmen did not get much more. In an observation relevant to our Chestertonian interpretation, Biskup characterises the relationship between a pastoralist and ‘his aborigines’ as ‘not unlike the contractual relationship between a European feudal lord and his serf, involving reciprocal obligations based on the recognition of certain common interests’ (Biskup 1973, p. 41). He argues that the government only turned a ‘blind eye’ to pastoralists failing to pay labour because those same pastoralists were providing rations for sick and elderly Indigenous people on their land (Biskup 1973, p. 108).

The idea that Aboriginal workers didn’t mind not being paid also disregards a series of restrictive laws ⁵¹ and practices, which forced Indigenous Western Australians to work for much less than they might otherwise have. Fyfe acknowledged these pressures in 1940, when he told pastoralists that the rationing system they opposed was a recognition of the fact that, and here he quoted the Native Affairs Commissioner, ‘as the years have gone by the natural hunting grounds have been alienated and native food eliminated’ (Fyfe 1940, p. 160). And although pastoral leases were in theory meant to give Aboriginal people access to the ‘unimproved’ parts of the land, this did not often work in practice. As Webster told the Moseley

⁵¹ These included, for example, the Kangaroo Act. Later legislation such as the Land Act Amendment Act in 1935, which allowed Indigenous people to enter any unenclosed or unimproved parts of land on a pastoral lease to seek their sustenance, and the 1950 Fauna Protection Act, which allowed them to take fauna from Crown Land (and other land with permission) (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council 2017) may have been aimed at reversing this trend. However, by setting out in which narrow circumstances a thing was allowed, it arguably restricted freedoms rather than added to them.

Commission, it took a rare manager to let Aboriginal people camp near waterways near the end of a season when the cattle were hungry⁵² (*Transcript of the Royal Commission to Investigate, Report and Advise upon Matters Relating to the Condition and Treatment of Aborigines* 1934). All of this meant that Indigenous people were increasingly dependent on settlers for sustenance, clothing and accommodation.

There is evidence that employers deliberately kept these provisions low in order to maintain the dependence of their workforce. Some employers argued against mandated improvements to the pay and conditions for Indigenous workers, complaining that they would reduce the dependence of workers, making them ‘independent and difficult to manage and retain’ (Fyfe 1940, p. 157).⁵³ Missions were opposed if they came close to pastoral areas and therefore threatened to take away a desperate workforce (Native Administration Regulations, Chief Secretary’s Department 1938). Provisions aimed at providing a minimum standard of housing for workers such as shearers and shed hands explicitly excluded ‘any aboriginal native’ (*An Act to Provide for the Proper and Sufficient Accommodation of Shearers and Shedhands* 1912). And if Indigenous workers tried to leave their boss and seek work elsewhere they ran up against what Webster and others maintained was an unspoken agreement between pastoralists not to employ one another’s Indigenous workers. This was dire threat, given Webster’s claims about employers cutting off workers who

⁵² Biskup writes that the establishment in 1908 of Government feeding depots in the East Kimberley and at the Moola Bulla cattle station were a tacit acknowledgement that pastoral and mining interests had threatened the sustenance of the Indigenous residents of the area, even though explicitly they were about preventing the loss of cattle (Biskup 1973).

⁵³ The pastoralists even tried to end the government and missions handing out rations to Indigenous people, arguing that it was making Indigenous people more ‘independent’ and less willing to work. Indeed, Kitson blamed missionaries for the murder of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory: they had treated ‘blacks’ as equals and therefore caused the trouble (Legislative Council. Debates. Western Australia 1938, p. 2332). The Government was self-interested in this because, when missionaries attracted followers, they found they were not in a position to feed and clothe them and there followed ‘the inevitable request that the government should supply their needs’ (Legislative Council. Debates. Western Australia 1938, p. 2332).

displeased them, leaving them without food and clothing, forcing them ‘into a condition of servile degeneration, approaching that of the “gib it baccy” degenerates along the trans-Australian railway’ (Webster 1931).

Webster’s language seems harsh, but the language of ‘degeneration’ was common at the time. It reflected a widespread anxiety that eugenics, in promoting ‘better births’, purported to address. But Chesterton argued that, at its root, eugenics was an attempt by industrial capitalists to fix a problem of their own making—without any loss in their own profits. Instead of admitting that workers, unpaid and mistreated, were likely to get sick and listless, capitalists began to construct the poor as a homogenous ‘race’, that shared inherently degenerative qualities. In other words, their situation was the fault of their genes, not their mistreatment.

The tool, ceaselessly used, was being used up. It was quite reasonable and respectable, of course to fling a man away like a tool ... but the comparison to a tool was insufficient for an awful reason that had already begun to dawn upon the master’s mind. If you pick up a hammer, you do not find a whole family of nails clinging to it ... The firm was not only encumbered with one useless servant, but he immediately turned himself into five useless servants’ (Chesterton 1922, p. 130).

Industrial capitalism, Chesterton wrote, had begun to create a new group of humans, ‘men who are certainly not mad, whom we shall gain no scientific light by calling feeble-minded, but who are, in varying individual degrees, dazed or drunk

sodden, or lazy or tricky or tired in body and spirit' (Chesterton 1922, p. 131). And that was where, Chesterton argued, eugenics came in.

Industrial capitalism had been built on the dependence of the worker, but now the dependence was getting out of hand 'not in the direction of freedom but of frank helplessness' (Chesterton 1922, p. 134). Where the right thing would have been, in the Distributist view, to improve wages and conditions for the workers and to ensure property for the masses, the condition of modernity meant that it was paltry incomes and lack of property that were considered as fixed (since they would cost money for the capitalist to rectify). Instead, to 'fix' the degeneration of the workforce, and to minimise the dependence (and dependents) that industrial capitalism had caused, the capitalist tried to intervene further and further into the worker's natural life such that 'marriage and maternity (became) luxuries, things to be modified to suit the wage-market' (Chesterton 1922, p. 138). To this, we could also add health.

By 1931, when Webster arrived in Wyndham, the frontier economy was having obvious effects on the Indigenous population. There was the dependence or 'servile degeneration' that Webster saw. There was also disease and depopulation, and the growing number of children of white fathers who did not always care for their children.⁵⁴ This was not only the result of 'the claims of Europeans for sexual access to females married or unmarried' (Berndt and Berndt quoted by Smith 2000, p. 83), but was arguably directly related to the pastoral economy. According to an anecdote from anthropologist Phillis Kaberry, when the pastoralist F.C. Booty was asked how he found his workforce, he replied, 'breed it myself' (Biskup 1973, p. 97). And Neville suggested that this was not simply an idle boast, writing of 'half-castes and

⁵⁴ That this was the case is reflected in the 1905 Act's provisions to make fathers pay for their children. Another provision, however, meant that a woman's testimony about who the father was not enough to establish parentage and this provision was made even more stringent in the 1936 Act (Section 22 *Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1936*).

nearly white' children who were looked on as 'merely a cheap way to keep up the supply of workers' ⁵⁵ (Neville 1947, p. 76). Pastoralisation had resulted in an 'Aboriginal' problem.

The Wyndham Native Hospital, along with several other outcomes of the 1936 Aborigines Amendment Act, was held up as the solution to this problem. But it was a eugenic fix in a Chestertonian sense, in that it aimed to treat some families like the families of pagan slaves.

As we have seen, the Hospital was arguably established in order to protect the white population venereal disease, but it was also about preserving valued Indigenous workers. In 1940, the Commission into the Pastoral Industry heard evidence from Albert Peter Davis, a medical officer of the Native Affairs Department, who stressed the 'invaluable and indeed essential' (Fyfe 1940, p. 161) nature of native labour to the pastoral industry. Davis explicitly linked the health of the natives to the productivity of the industry, warning that while supply of native labour was plentiful, 'infectious epidemics periodically reduced the number available' ('Pastoral Industry' 1940). Davis told the Commission that 'wise provisions' made by the Government to prevent the spread of leprosy—which he suggested were the establishment of leper compounds at Broome and Wyndham as well as the appointment of an additional medical officer to patrol for diseases—'could not but react favourably on the question of native labour' ('Pastoral Industry' 1940). The provision of health care was seen through the lens of economic efficiency rather than the flourishing of the people for whom it was apparently built. Still, as Foucault has argued, the utilitarian view of the

⁵⁵ He went on, 'Anyway they were "only niggers" and would never be anything else. The same thing was said of the negroes in America before emancipation, but the public auction of attractive, educated, almost white negress girls, fathered by white masters, helped to cause a change of view' (Neville 1947, pp. 75–6).

human is part of modern state biopower and this same utilitarian view of white workers and soldiers governed the response to venereal disease.

The Wyndham Native Hospital was also part of a system of policies and practices that either cleared people off land or created a captive workforce. Mary Ann Jebb has outlined how a campaign of leprosy patrols from 1934 to 1945 ‘focused on rounding up bush people and put pressure on northern people to settle with a pastoral manager and conform to station life’ (Jebb 2002, p. 136), whereas those already attached to a station were largely left alone. The Wyndham Native Hospital was part of this system of leprosy patrols.

Moreover, the Hospital helped maintain the cheapness of the Aboriginal labour force. This was because the institution of the Wyndham Native Hospital, together with travelling medical inspectors (one or two, depending on the year), was in lieu of coverage under the Workers Compensation Act, which white workers enjoyed. The pastoralists fought the inclusion of Aboriginal people under the provisions of the Workers Compensation Act (Biskup 1973, p. 110), and the 1936 Aborigines Act Amendment allowed them instead to pay a contribution to a Native Medical Fund, which would defray the cost of medical care for natives who went to hospital. By paying into this fund, ‘the holder of the permit ... shall not be under any liability for workers’ compensation to an injured native in his employ or to the dependants of any such injured native under the provisions of the Workers’ Compensation Act’ (Section 33 B(5), *Aborigines Act Amendment Act* 1936). Employers had to pay one pound per year to cover each permanent worker and their dependents, with a maximum payment of 50 pounds (Jebb 2002, p. 157). In 1940, Fyfe described the arrangements in terms of political economy: ‘The fund is important and essential in the interests of the pastoral industry, apart from its

humanitarian value, as pastoralists will not only be relieved of the payment of certain costs they have borne in the past, but the scheme should tend to preserve a source of labour for station work, which might otherwise have continued to become less each year' (Fyfe 1940, p. 159). It is easy to miss the fact that he is talking about humans dying, not tools being used up.

Apart from saving costs for the employer, the Wyndham Native Hospital was cheaper for the Government than footing the bill for treatment in Government hospitals. There was a requirement under the law for employers to provide for medical attendance where 'practicable and necessary' (Section 22, *Aborigines Act* 1905), but this was open to interpretation. Moreover, because the permits under which Aboriginal people were employed did not specify individual workers, station owners could—and did—deny a person worked for him once they got sick. There are numerous examples in the files of station owners claiming a certain patient was 'not their native'. The diary of Albert Davis suggests they did not always provide adequate rations either. In one of his reports to Neville in 1937, Davis commented that Indigenous people on stations did not have enough to eat, which was resulting in a high mortality rate. It was remarkable that there was 'not more evidence of malnutrition'. Further north, by contrast, Indigenous people had better health because they had better access to bush foods (Jebb 2002, p. 139). That is, they were better fed in the bush than when they were at a station.

Perhaps the most obvious evidence for the Wyndham Native Hospital being eugenic was its sheer existence. When the Hospital was established, there was already a hospital in Wyndham town proper which, under the law, was meant to cater to black and white people. Indeed, Webster had treated several Indigenous patients there, including a suspected leper. As we have seen, it was only in 1928 that Neville first

suggested a separate ‘native hospital’ outside of town and only with the introduction of the 1936 Act that the definition ‘native’ even existed as a legal category of person in Western Australia. The establishment of the Hospital on a separate site, segregating black from white was, as I have already argued, based on protecting the white workforce from contamination, maintaining a native workforce and controlling sexual relations between Aboriginal and white Australians.⁵⁶ The Hospital, by its very existence, suggested that natives had a different physiology and different health needs, therefore justifying and arguably perpetuating a different—namely lower—standard of care.

Arguably, this reification of the idea of the ‘native’ occurred as the consequences of colonialism, frontier conflict, economic and sexual exploitation became increasingly obvious to the white population. As people were alienated from their land and drifted into town, they became more visible and, as they lost other forms of sustenance, became more dependent on rations or turned to prostitution. The framing of the ‘native’ as a homogenous race, including everyone with more than a one-eighth percentage of ‘Aboriginal blood’ could be seen as an attempt to pin the results of exploitation on some ‘racial’ defect. Consider Chesterton’s comments on the modern poor who ‘are getting to be regarded as slaves in the separate and

⁵⁶ When it was suggested, before the Wyndham site was established, that the Native Hospital be built at the Forrest River Mission, Neville vigorously opposed the idea. Part of his motivation in sidelining the missions, was to maintain control over indigenous marriages. If, Neville wrote, ‘assimilation is the desired end, then question of marriage is of paramount importance. In the past much carelessness has been exhibited by missionaries and clergy in linking up people of ethnic unsuitability and against tribal laws’ (Neville 1947, pp. 63–4). He went on to boast of the government’s success that ‘after many years of unsuitable marriages and having in mind the desirability of preserving the purity of the race in view of assimilation, we at last succeeded in making it illegal for authorised persons to celebrate marriages to which authority objected’ (Neville 1947, p. 65).

sweeping sense of the negroes in the plantations ... as if they were a colony of Japs or Chinese coolies'⁵⁷ (Chesterton 1922, pp. 142,3). He went on to argue:

The poor are *not* a race or even a type. It is senseless to talk about breeding them, for they are not a breed. They are, in cold fact, what Dickens describes: "a dustbin of individual accidents", of damaged dignity and often of damaged gentility. The class very largely consists of perfectly promising children, lost like *Oliver Twist* or crippled like *Tiny Tim* ... They have nothing in common but the wrong we do them (Chesterton 1922, p. 143).

The establishment of a separate hospital for 'natives', which from 1936 onwards included half-castes, some 'quadroons' and anyone with any proportion of Aboriginal blood whom the Commissioner deemed 'native', can be interpreted as an attempt to reconstruct the negative effects of slavery and ill-treatment into hereditary genetic traits: a racial profile. The widening scope of the 'native' was, of course, in the economic interest of the pastoralists. The inclusion of half-castes into this category, for example, allowed pastoralists to continue using free labour; across the border in the Northern Territory, the 'half-caste' still existed and *was* paid. The way in which the definition of 'native' was expanded echoes Chesterton's characterisation of the changing definition of lunacy, which had occurred with eugenics in Britain. The only *justifiable* reason to call a person a lunatic and take away their rights was because they did not share the same reality as the rest of humanity. 'We can say to

⁵⁷ This comment might appear to suggest that, while Chesterton thought the poor could not be called a race, the Aboriginal Australians could, but he elsewhere argued against the idea of superior and inferior races. 'I have long hoped that I might some day hear a man explaining on scientific principles his own unfitness for any important post or privilege, say: "The world should belong to free and fighting races, and not to persons of that servile disposition that you will notice in myself" ... If I heard a man making a scientific demonstration in that style I might admit that he was really scientific. But as it invariably happens (by curious coincidence) ... the superior race is his own race, the superior type is his own type' (Chesterton 1925).

him, “do not steal apples from this tree or we will hang you on that tree”. But if the man really thinks one tree is a lamp post and the other tree a Trafalgar Square Fountain we simply cannot treat with him at all ... For this reason and for this reason alone, the lunatic is outside public law.’ Therefore, ‘you cannot deny that a man is a citizen until you are practically prepared to deny he is a man’ (Chesterton 1922, p. 38). But Chesterton argued that eugenicists were attempting to expand the definition of lunacy from exceptions to common humanity—understood here as shared humanity—to common humanity itself. And, to borrow the language of Alison Bashford, whole populations were suddenly classified as ‘unfit’ (or native) and subjected to ‘medico-penal’ incarceration in places such as the Wyndham Native Hospital.

As Hasluck argued, the Western Australian ‘native’ was trapped in a legal status akin to that of a born idiot (Biskup 1973, p. 170). Born idiots, like lunatics, were taken off their land, stripped of citizenship and set outside public law. They could be moved around, instructed who and how they should marry, left to die or moved in from the coast to prevent their being bombed. In short, they could be treated like slaves. Or tools.

Conclusion

In the course of this dissertation, I have tried to discover whether eugenics played a part in the establishment or running of the Wyndham Native Hospital. The Hospital was a small one, in the scheme of things: there were probably never more than a few dozen patients at any one time, and it ran for only a matter of decades. And yet, because it operated at the intersection of several of the most significant and formative forces in the new Australia—colonialism and nationalism, the welfare state and the White Australia Policy, the rise of science and modernity—it serves as a window on the way this nation was built.

I have explored the different conceptions of eugenics and, in the end, settled not on Galton's definition: producing men of a 'high type'. That definition, of course, begs a number of questions—including 'higher than what?'—and hints at the underlying motivations and power relations without which eugenics could not have arisen. Because of this, and given the broad sweep of activities that occurred under its aegis, I believe the most useful definition to follow is the one suggested by G.K. Chesterton, who called it an attempt to treat some people 'as if they were the families of pagan slaves'. That is, an attempt to treat human beings as tools. It may be countered that this is too broad a definition, but I hope to argue through the course of this final chapter that, in fact, the lingering echo of eugenics can *only* be grappled with when it is understood in this broader sense.

I have shown in this thesis that eugenics—both taken in the narrow, Galtonian, and in the broader, Chestertonian sense—played a part in why the Hospital was built, the way it was built and in its operations.

To begin with the *why*. That there was considered a need for a native hospital indicates first, that Aboriginal people were not being treated adequately prior to its inception. That Aboriginal people were not being adequately treated prior to the Hospital's building is evident in the reports of travelling medical inspectors, the correspondence of various Wyndham doctors and in the evidence given to the Moseley Royal Commission. This lack of treatment indicates that Indigenous lives were not considered to be as valuable as others; they were, in the Foucauldian formulation, 'let die' because their genotype was not thought worth fostering. Or they were, in line with the doomed race theory, destined to be 'combed out' through natural selection ('Leprosy: Report on lecture by E.H. Molesworth' 1932).

The revelations that Indigenous people were not getting treatment might have led to a simple increase in the efforts to treat them and to eradicate diseases. The fact that they resulted in a separate hospital suggests that the motivating concern was *not* only or not even predominantly the health of the would-be patients, but the threat of disease to the white settlers of the area. As we have seen, by the early 20th century, changing ideas about groups of people held that different races were more or less susceptible to different diseases and more or less capable of spreading these diseases. In Australia, many public health and tropical medicine practitioners believed that Aboriginal people were responsible for spreading diseases such as leprosy and syphilis, which had originated from the 'Asiatic' races. These beliefs manifested in legislation such as the leper line. Aboriginal people were viewed epidemiologically, as a public health threat that had to be contained and managed. This is a view that

Alison Bashford has done much to illustrate, highlighting the ‘eugenic *cordons sanitaire*’ that operated through the White Australia Policy and segregation of Aboriginal and other populations, and which were based on a conflation of theories of bacteriology and heredity, disease and race. Aboriginal people were quarantined/segregated so that neither their Aboriginality could be passed on (for example, in the policy of ‘breeding out the colour’) nor ‘their’ diseases of leprosy and venereal disease.

It is clear from the archival record that much of the impetus for the Wyndham Native Hospital came from eugenically linked concerns about the spread of venereal disease among white men and Aboriginal women. Concern over venereal disease was mixed up with eugenics because venereal disease was considered to be both physically and mentally degenerative, it was tied up with sex and because it could be passed on to one’s offspring. As Atkinson’s predecessor Dr Hope wrote in 1914, syphilis could do enormous ‘damage to the race’. Those affected ‘become a loss instead of a gain to the State, and more so in their offsprings [sic], who, instead of being a support and a backbone, may be defective, imbeciles, or in some way crippled and a hindrance to the State’ (‘The Hidden Shame’ 1913). Halting the spread of venereal disease was thus a eugenic pursuit because it was about protecting the future of the (white) race and preventing degeneration. This was a particularly potent concern in the North of the country, where the white population was still sparse and the threat of invasion from the North was keenly felt.

The epidemiological view of Indigenous Australians manifested not only in the reasons for the Hospital but in the way the Hospital was built: three miles out of town, along a panoptic design, using regulations that made it a punishable offence to try to leave, and with physical restraints for some inmates. These design and

legislative elements were not coincidental, but aimed at segregating Aboriginal women from white men. In the Native Hospital design, we see the same conflation—of disease and epidemiology with procreation and genetic inheritance—as Bashford highlights. The Hospital was to be a ‘great blessing’ to the Wyndham townspeople and nearby pastoralists, who were at risk of contracting venereal disease, and it would stop the mixing between white men and Aboriginal women, which was illegal but difficult to prevent in practice. The Hospital also, according to conversations that the author had with several former inmates, functioned during the time of Neville’s absorption policy as a sort of triage station for Aboriginal children, who were classified either as ‘half-caste’ and sent south to the Moola Bulla cattle station, or ‘full-blood’ and sent to the Forrest River Mission, thus keeping them within a state-sanctioned breeding program.

In several senses then, the founding and design of the Hospital can be understood as eugenic. Firstly, it can be seen as eugenic in that it aimed to prevent the spread of venereal disease by segregating (some of those) who had it. Further, it was eugenic in that it conceived of the susceptibility to that disease in racial terms—as belonging to a certain genotype, which was also tied to skin colour. Finally, it was eugenic insofar as it aimed to prevent certain types of sexual union, which were thought to be deleterious to the future strength of the Australian nation.

While the continuation of Aboriginal ‘blood’ was considered deleterious to the future strength of the Australian nation (and this fear worked itself out in different policies, all of which, however, shared the common aim of eradicating any trace of an Aboriginal population), Aboriginal workers were necessary for its economic future. So, while the Wyndham Native Hospital was concerned with minimising contact between white settlers and Aboriginal people, it was also concerned with bolstering

the system of cheap Indigenous labour on which the East Kimberley pastoral industry depended. In this sense, the Hospital was about maintaining the ‘tools’ of that industry and ensuring that these tools did not—by becoming too dependent or too numerous—become a burden.

It is more difficult to find evidence of eugenics in the treatment that was provided at the Hospital. There is, for example, no evidence of people being sterilised there. However, there is, in the correspondence over the Indigenous locals who had tested positive for syphilis, evidence of treatment being withheld. And because venereal disease was known to reduce fertility, the withheld treatment could be seen as eugenic sterilisation.

And yet, there is difficulty in calling what occurred at the Wyndham Native Hospital eugenics, because patients were also helped and healed there. Some doctors and matrons and workers advocated on behalf of the inmates. And those who built the Hospital—though they may elsewhere have sprouted eugenicist ideology—didn’t talk about the Hospital *itself* as being eugenic. So perhaps this place was—as Garton has characterised biological absorption policies—simply about population management? Or, as some of those involved in its building and management would have argued, motivated only by the good of the patients?

In the end, I come to something like the conclusion that Garton gives in his chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*: that eugenics in the Wyndham Native Hospital, like in Australia, was sometimes in evidence and sometimes it was not. It was everywhere and nowhere. Obvious yet elusive. It was, as the character in the film *The Castle* might have said, in the ‘vibe’ of the thing, and yet that vibe was undercut by some of people on the ground who actually lived and worked and made the Hospital run.

So why keep looking for eugenics? Why do researchers so stubbornly stick the eugenics tag to policies of absorption, even when these policies were not intended to impart a biological benefit to the majority population? If policies were not about ‘improving the gene pool’ can they really be called eugenic? The issues are difficult to think around. What *is* ‘breeding out the colour’ about, save about breeding and altering the gene pool? What is it about, other than getting rid of a characteristic that was not part of the vision of a white Australian nation? Viewed through a Galton-type definition: eugenics was an attempt to breed ‘better’ humans; absorption policies were about breeding ‘better’ Australians. Through a Chestertonian one: eugenics was about managing the tools of industry, absorption about managing the tools of the nation. It is difficult to separate the biological aim from the political: perhaps impossible. I think the inclination scholars feel to call certain policies ‘eugenic’ has something to do with that term being one of the only ones that comes close to appropriately capturing a system that viewed some lives as not only lesser or different, but as expendable, even unworthy of life. To echo Agamben speaking about the treatment of Jews⁵⁸ in Nazi Germany: racism is a completely inadequate description.

As I have written through this problem, I have come to think that the question is not so much: was it eugenics? Nor is the question so much whether the people who created a racially segregated hospital, who withheld treatment, who left people to fend for themselves when the War came, meant it for good or meant it for evil. The question is rather the question Agamben would pose: *how* could they have done what they did?

How is it that Aboriginal Australians, and not whites, could be sent to a segregated hospital where they had to sleep on the ground and share beds with

⁵⁸ While Agamben concentrates on the treatment of Jewish people, there were, of course, many other groups affected by the Nuremberg race laws.

contagious patients? How is it that they could be tested upon? How is it that they could be left with a disease that no white person would be left to suffer? The question could even be: Why is the question—namely, was it eugenics?—so difficult to answer?

Agamben noted a similar difficulty when he marvelled over the fact that Foucault, dealing with the biopolitics of the modern state, and Hannah Arendt, studying totalitarianism, never recognised that they were in fact working on separate ends of the same issue. ‘The fact that the two thinkers who may well have reflected most deeply on the political problem of our age were unable to link together their own insights is certainly an index of the difficulty of this problem’ (Agamben 1998, p. 120). To bring the two lines of inquiry together, Agamben goes back to 1920, to a ‘well intentioned’ (1998, p. 137) pamphlet aimed at decriminalising euthanasia.

He characterises this German pamphlet, *Authorization for the Annihilation of Life Unworthy of Being Lived*, as nothing less than ‘the first juridical articulation’ of the ‘fundamental biopolitical structure of modernity’ (Agamben 1998, p. 137). The formulation of life unworthy of life, Agamben points out, implicitly includes its inverse: the life worthy of life, and ‘implies a new decision concerning the threshold beyond which life *ceases to be politically relevant*, becomes only “sacred life” and can as such be eliminated without punishment’ (Agamben 1998, pp. 139, my emphasis).

Agamben argues that, if we can’t see the relation between Stalinism and Nazism, or if we can’t understand how, in the 1990s, Communist Balkan states could have so quickly descended into programs of ethnic cleansing, it is because we have failed to locate the ‘phenomenon of totalitarianism’ in the ‘horizon of biopolitics’. He relates laws introduced late in the Third Reich, which banned people with lung and

heart disease from having children, to the treatment of the Jews. Both, he argues, came from the biopolitical function of the modern state:

The sense of these laws and the rapidity with which they were issued cannot be grasped as long as they are confined to the domain of eugenics. What is decisive is that for the Nazis these laws had an immediately political character. As such, they are inseparable from the Nuremberg laws on ‘citizenship in the Reich’ and on the ‘protection of German blood and honor,’ which transformed Jews into second-class citizens, forbidding, among other things, marriage between Jews and full citizens and also stipulating that even citizens of Aryan blood had to prove themselves worthy of German honor (which allowed the possibility of denationalisation to hang implicitly over everyone) (Agamben 1998, p. 149).

In a sense, what we are dealing with in the conception of bare life—the *homo sacer* or person who can be killed without anyone being punished—is more than racism and beyond eugenics. Because in modernity, the state’s ultimate political task *is* life; there is a constant decision-making on which life is worthy and which is not. ‘Nazism’, writes Agamben, ‘determines the bare life of *homo sacer* in a biological and eugenic key, making it into the site of an incessant decision on value and nonvalue in which biopolitics continually turns into thanatopolitics and in which the camp, consequently, becomes the absolute political space’ (Agamben 1998, p. 153). The nation-state defines itself in the camp.

If we take Wyndham Native Hospital to be a camp—a state of permanent exception where the rule of the sovereign is absolute—then it was a space where the Australian state defined itself by ‘an incessant decision on value and nonvalue’ (Agamben 1998, p. 153). This would account for the changing treatment of the

inmates in the camp. It would account for the fact that many were treated well and cured. It would also account for the fact that some of the inmates were incarcerated in small corrugated iron huts for months on end despite the outcry from international leprosy experts.

Agamben shows how the binary between citizen and bare life led to the incarceration of people in Nazi Germany not for any crime but for the protection of the citizens. There is a reversal of this in Australia where Aboriginal people could be incarcerated in places, including the Wyndham Native Hospital, not for any crime but for their ‘protection’ (though arguably for the protection of the citizens). Agamben sees the binary in the fact that one of the rules the Nazis kept to in the chaotic last days of the Third Reich was the need to denationalise anyone who was sent to the concentration camps. And, as I have argued, only Australians who were denationalised, ‘native non-citizens’, could be sent to the Native Hospital. Finally, Agamben points to the ‘bare liveness’ of many of those individuals who have this century been subject to medical experimentation, precisely because they were liminal figures, without the rights of citizens, occupying the no-man’s land between life and death. It is certain that Atkinson would not have been able to casually suggest that his medical officer treat only a couple of those who tested positive for syphilis and keep the others as controls—if they had been classed as citizens rather than bare life.

In 1942, before the white residents of Wyndham were evacuated and the Aboriginal inmates of the Native Hospital were dropped in the bush and told to make their way south, a missionary met with an Army Major. The Major was from the Northern Australia Protection Force, which was tasked with protecting the north of the country from foreign invasion. The missionary John Best, from the Forrest River Mission, later told historian Neville Green about the meeting. The Major had told him

the Kimberley Aborigines were considered to be a threat in the instance of a Japanese army invasion and Best ‘took this to mean that the Kimberley Aborigines were expendable’ (Green 2011, p. 99). Best asked if there was an extermination order and the Major did not deny it, but ‘assured him that no aborigines would be shot while he was the officer in charge,’ Green writes. ‘Best’s concern was for the 939 persons counted at Kalumburu, Forrest River, Kunmunya, Munja and the Wyndham Native Hospital’ (Green 2011, p. 100). The Major’s name was W.E.H. Stanner.

Expendable, unworthy of life, bare life, mere life, not politically relevant: ‘racism’ is inadequate to describe such concepts. So, perhaps, is eugenics. If what paved the way for the Wyndham Native Hospital was racism or eugenics, then the task of understanding the place is arguably not as urgent since scientific racism has long since been disproved and eugenics been rejected. But if what permitted the existence of the Wyndham Native Hospital was the ongoing decision between valuable or relevant life on one hand and ‘mere life’ on the other, and further if this is, as Agamben contends, still the underlying structure of the modern nation-state, then the urgency remains. To take an example: When one considers the health gap between non-indigenous and Indigenous Australians, the difference in life expectancy and in the numbers of children who die under five, if one considers the coming ‘tsunami’ of type 2 diabetes among Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal youth suicide, if one considers all this as a legacy of institutional racism, one will see certain solutions. More medicine, better access to healthy food, more youth drop-in centres, for example. But if one considers it as a legacy of life categorised as ‘irrelevant’, or ‘not worthy of life’, the task is much bigger. If suicide is the only space where ‘bare life’—the fully subjected subject who has no rights as a citizen—has sovereignty over his or her own person, then the number of young Aboriginal people killing themselves

(the second coronial inquest in a decade into the suicide of young Indigenous people in the Kimberley began in 2017) surely tells us something about how that life fits or does not fit into the Australian state. And if, as Agamben contends, the excluded bare life and the sovereign are inextricably linked, if they give form to one another, then it also tells us something about how the Australian state creates and maintains itself.

There are a lot of ghosts in Wyndham. In 2017, according to locals, some elders and a local Catholic priest performed a smoking ceremony to rid the local hospital of spirits that had been scaring away prospective patients. The ghosts from the Native Hospital are harder to budge. When the Hospital was shut down in the 1970s and the site had been taken over by a local Aboriginal Corporation, workers rushed to leave the place before sundown each night lest they meet any wandering spirits. Reg Birch was the head of the Aboriginal Corporation then, and he often had trouble convincing his staff to help him move chairs from the Corporation to the town hall for council meetings. But he understood. When he was a child, Birch used to help his father, who had only one leg, to collect night soil from the Hospital along with any dead bodies. The bodies were wrapped in blankets but their feet, sometimes bearing the scars of leprosy, were still visible and Reg used to get nightmares. His mother sewed him a cloth bag and, whenever there was a body to collect along with the excrement, his father would tell him: ‘Put on your bag, Reg’ (Birch 2017).

But even after the bodies were buried outside town, in unmarked graves, the ghosts still haunted him. These ghosts seem to me akin to the inmates of the old Hospital who wandered in the liminal space on the edge of the state: not citizens and yet still subjects, mere life, sometimes valuable and sometimes not. And we are all young Reg, averting our eyes from what happened to them until they come back to haunt us.

When I was in Wyndham, I met an elderly woman who had been relocated there after her home in Oombulgurri—an Aboriginal community on the former site of the Forrest River Mission—was razed by the State Government over concerns the community was awash in alcoholism and dysfunction. Her home was destroyed and now she lives along with members of her extended family and several dogs in a corrugated iron Donga on the main road of Wyndham. A year or so ago, her granddaughter hung herself, age 13, a few metres away from the site of the old Native Hospital.

A life deemed unworthy of life.

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