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Disenchantment: a novel for young adults

With a discussion of representations of Indigenous Australians and Native Americans in
books for children and young adults

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Abstract

This thesis is in two parts. The first is the creative project, a love story called *Disenchantment*, which is a speculative fiction novel for young adults. The novel consists of the testimony of an imprisoned girl, indigenous to a fictitious island, explaining how she has ended up in a prison cell condemned to hang for a murder she did not commit. As she relates her story to a visitor, a tale emerges of love and betrayal set against a backdrop of colonialism and violence.

At first, Neka is an awkward and fearful little child, suckled by a half-dead mother and weaned by a bitter old Healer. The adults remark what a pity it is that the bright light of her mother was snuffed out by such a dull child. But then she is chosen as assistant to Elu, the beautiful and vibrant rebel girl from another clan, who is to be the new Healer. They embark on their training together, drawing closer, learning the secrets of the clan, healing the sick, talking to the dead, encountering the god of lightning, and awakening the god of spring. Neka starts to find her place in the world, and her love blossoms – love for her land, her people, and most of all for Elu.

But then their island is invaded, and the land violently taken. The most powerful new settler is the Administrator, George Addlington, whose affection for Elu seems to hold the power to save them all – but at what cost?

The second part of this thesis is a critical essay and exegesis entitled “Savages and stockings: representations of Indigenous Australians and Native Americans in books for children and young adults”. This academic exploration arose from the background and setting of the novel – that of colonialism. It traces postcolonial discourses around representations of indigeneity, provides a textual analysis of a selection of novels, and gives an exegesis concerning the ways that my academic research changed my approach to my creative project. It argues that attempts to posit an authentic indigene against inauthentic white representations are doomed to failure, and that it is more productive to examine how stereotypes and clichés come to be perpetuated, and thus how they might be avoided.

Drawing on the work of Clare Bradford and Nikolas Rose, the essay examines a small selection of recent books written for children and young adults that deal with 'first contact' between indigenous and settler characters in America and Australia. I argue that representations of indigenous people have moved beyond the simple racist stereotypes of the past and that these recent works show ambivalence towards (post)colonial power relations, and indeed to the notion of 'race,' in line with liberal values that emphasise commonality between humans. The essay makes an original contribution to the field by examining liberal western values through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to analyse representations of indigeneity in fiction for young people. In particular, it looks at the ways in which authors are faced with the challenges of dealing with the on-going impact of discourses that treat European values as objective, and, also in line with liberal values, still promulgate as universal the ethical values of western-style rationality, individuality and self-actualisation.

The essay then demonstrates some ways in which my academic studies have aided my own creative work, and shows some of the techniques I used in an attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls discussed, when writing my own work. I especially address the following: self/othering; idealisation and fetishisation of the indigene; the 'Othering' of the indigenous body; 'invisible whiteness'; the promulgation of western style 'rationality'; portrayal of the indigene as static and unchanging; and above all, the understanding of the indigene as being of the past.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Publications during candidature

No publications.

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None.

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Disenchantment: a novel for young adults

Official transcript of the testimony and confession of the
native girl aged approximately 15 years,
known as Neka or Nicky Clay

Island of New Devon, 1854.

I cannot give you the confession you ask for, my friend. I have nothing to confess. And whether I explain myself to you or not, my fate will be the same. But you have been a friend to me these past few days, bringing me candles and bread and your company – so I will tell you what happened, to fill these last hours, and I will allow your doctor friends to measure my head and fingers, and record the contours of my skull.

And yes, the clerk may record my words, scratching the paper with those black marks that Elu learned to understand. To my eyes, they still look like lines of angry ants.

You are also in this story, my friend, though you do not yet realise the consequences of your actions. If I am to tell this story, I will not spare you. *The whole truth and nothing but the truth*, as I would have said if they had granted me a trial.

I admit I do not know how to capture the truth in your language; the words carry colours I do not recognise. It is a garish tongue, straight-edged, grasping, bisecting the world into endless bite-sized twos. Up and down, hot and cold, black and white, us and them. It is a language for counting beans.

But I could not tell you this story in my own language, even if you spoke it. The events that interest you occurred in your world, and my tongue lacks the words. *Door, paper, hay. Police, prisoner, manacles*. We would have made new words for these things, of course, if we had been given the time.

Even the words the newspapers use to describe me have a different texture in your language, solid and immovable. *Evil. Depraved. Murderess.*

So, my friend, I will translate my tale to you, and you must remember that the words I am forced to use will not always hold the whole truth. Perhaps much of my meaning will be lost. But that, too, is fitting. Ever since your people met my people, most of our intentions have been lost in translation.

Six weeks ago, as I hurried across the meadow in the southernmost part of the land that once belonged to my clan, none of this was on my mind. I was thinking only of the note in my pocket. The black scrawl seemed to scuttle over me, searing into my skin. I needed to find someone who could decipher the marks.

The smell of the land is different since your people came. That afternoon, the air was thick with the scent of smoke and the men were singing in the top field as they burned off the stubble from the fields, sending whorls of black into the sky.

The lower meadow was still unburned and my skirts swept through the brown grasses, collecting clumps of speckled seeds. Mr Henderson had ordered me to clean the old slaughter shed for what he called his *new guest*. I'd seen the shed before, from the crest of the hill by the top fence, but I had taken it to be a rickety shack. Now, up close, I saw it was built of huge square stones half the height of a man, blistered with white paint and roofed with bluestone slabs. Split planks barred the window.

The heavy door unfastened with a *thunk*, releasing a murky whiff of damp, and something worse – something that reminded me of all the quivering animals whose last moments had leaked away in there, dishonoured and disregarded. For a moment, I saw them all, gazing up at me through the gloom: hundreds of wet horrified eyes.

As you will understand, my friend, I have recently been thinking about those eyes.

They faded as the room took shape, and there was Elu, perched on the rusted iron bed, staring at her hands.

I hauled in the cleaning things – rags, mop, bucket and scrubbing brushes.

Elu did not look up. ‘You can just open the door,’ she said.

‘Yes. Why? You can’t have been stuck in here.’

She smiled at her hands.

I showed her the key. ‘I had this, that’s all.’

Elu leapt up and examined it, so close to me, the metallic gleam reflected in her eyes. ‘How long have you had a key?’ she asked.

‘Mr Henderson gave it to me an hour ago.’

‘Oh.’ Elu sat again.

I showed her the note. ‘Can you read this?’

Elu hardly glanced at it. ‘Of course.’

I pushed down the irritation I felt. ‘Tell me.’

‘It says *I know you want to escape.*’ Elu examined her hands. ‘Will you go?’

Kneeling to hide my face, I began scrubbing the floor. You will never have scrubbed a floor, my friend, by virtue of your class and sex. You will not know the pain of your kneecaps grinding against stone, your fingers stiffening in the icy bore-water, the soap stinging the little workaday cuts on your hands. But this time I scarcely noticed. I struck at the stones with the hard brush, filling the narrow space with a bristling hiss, scouring Elu’s unanswered question from the air.

The note was written on Mrs Henderson’s gilt-edged foolscap. I wondered if it was a warning from her. Or had someone stolen a sheet of paper just to send me a note? It seemed an incredible risk.

‘Do you clean a lot?’ asked Elu.

‘Most of the day.’

‘Every day?’

‘Yes.’

‘Things never used to need so much cleaning,’ said Elu.

‘We didn’t have the same kinds of things.’

‘No.’

I followed her eyes to the slaughter chain attached to the wall. ‘Remember the cavefish man’s face at the festival?’ I asked, smiling, though the memory stung my eyes.

Elu didn’t answer.

I stood to find the scraper. On the matchwood desk in the corner was a mess of torn papers, old rubber seals and broken pencils. A curled photograph with brown edges caught my eye. ‘Look!’ I said, ‘It’s that old photo of you, Elu!’

Here, friend, bring a candle, look. I still have the picture. It is dark and finger-smudged, as you see, but it is Elu. She’d been ordered to stay still, but no-one told her about the flash and she jerked her head so her face is blurred, her eyes bigger than they should be, her mouth open, the bottom lip stuck out in surprise. The photographer was delighted: *You look like a wild animal*, he’d said.

‘I’m not like that anymore,’ said Elu. ‘Everything’s changed. The baby. Neka, I –’

‘Don’t worry,’ I said, or some words like that. My mind was still on the note and I didn’t hear the urgency squeezing her throat, though now it tugs at my memory like a thread through time. ‘It’s not important any more,’ I muttered, and made soothing sounds without listening.

This is how I was, my friend. You have a word in your language that describes the way skin hardens through constant abrasion, and the way a heart will do the same. Callous. That is what I had become.

But as I held up the photograph I felt myself smiling. There was the Elu I longed for. The Elu who wore nothing but the name-belt she’d woven from the blazing fur of a firebird. Her black hair rollicked defiant and wild. Her oiled thigh muscles gleamed, and her large nipples faced the lens like staring eyes.

I glanced over to this other Elu, the shadowy one, perched on the edge of the bed, hands in her lap. She was dressed in a long shapeless nightgown buttoned up to the collar and was gazing through the open door.

‘I didn’t realise how naked we used to be,’ I said.

‘It’s like the story Mrs Henderson told us,’ said Elu, her voice quiet as breath. ‘The one about the man and woman who lived in the beautiful garden

among the animals, and took their food from the trees, and didn't know they were naked till the snake told them to eat a banana.'

'An apple, I think.'

'Whatever it was, we must have eaten it, all of us.'

I swiped at a clump of cobwebs in a corner of the ceiling. 'I suppose that makes Mr Henderson a snake. And Mrs Henderson,' I said.

Elu did not laugh. I could not remember the last time I'd heard her laugh.

'It wasn't Eden though.' I turned my back to her and knelt again, by the wall, to tackle a dark congealed stain. 'Do you want me to go?' I asked.

Silence.

I looked up, but Elu was gone.

It was Elu who was chosen, not me. It was late one afternoon near the winter solstice, an evening bristling with tree-spirits, crackling with possibilities. Pink clouds ruffled the horizon, pointing pale fingers of light at the earth.

We do not count our ages as you do, but it was perhaps twenty months before my first bleeding. Elu was older by about the same amount of time, and by a small pair of rounded breasts. The younger children had been playing a running and hiding game we called *Hunted*, and now that it was late, they'd gone looking for winterberries to take to the evening meal.

Elu and I sat shoulder to shoulder in the curling branches of a snailbark tree, her skin giving off warmth as if she had stored the winter sunshine inside herself. We were waiting for a flat-nose lizard to leave the hollow where it had laid its eggs.

I do not recall how it was that we two came to be the last ones there – whether Elu had selected me to be with her, or whether I'd at last found the courage to claim a place beside her. I felt dizzy and wild with the privilege. She was new to our clan, having been given to us from the Lami people, and she had been the centre of attention for the three months she had been with us.

I swung my legs below me in the air, and Elu, giggling, kept trying to catch one of my feet between hers. I let her do it, just once, to feel her toughened skin surrounding mine.

At that moment, Healer Patlia appeared between my feet, far below us. Without looking up, she shouted, ‘Elu! You must come down now. You are chosen. It is your time. You are to come with me and learn to be the next Healer.’

The old woman had been hounding her for days.

‘No thank you,’ said Elu. ‘I know it is meant as an honour, Elder Patlia, but I don’t want to be a Healer.’

The old woman’s face turned to us and twitched.

I believe we are an ugly race to your people’s eyes, my friend, with our dark eyes and sensuous lips, and we find your faces flat and strange, with such wide blank spaces between your features. But Patlia had the ugliest face I have ever seen anywhere, with a chin broad as a hairy kneecap, jutting out past her bent nose. A scar the colour of deer liver gouged one side of her face, and the eye above was clouded.

I had heard the story of the scar once when I was small, helping the unmarried women wind rope vines to repair the fishing nets. The other children were up to their usual mischief in the blacknut woods, goading the young man Vantin into telling them tall tales of the hunt. I had never quite grasped the skill of being at ease with other children.

The women sat in the afternoon sun on the flat rocks by the shore, their hands twisting and knotting the vines as they talked. I was nearby, soaking fresh vines in the rockpools to shrink them, and watching the hairy-legged hermit crabs scurrying away from my shadow.

While the women’s fingers worked on the nets, they gossiped about Patlia, saying that she had not yet identified a successor because of her bitterness at the loss of her eye. That had been a sorry business, they agreed – a grieving man had slashed the Healer for failing to save his wife, who had fallen ill and died only weeks after giving birth to her first child. Several of the women glanced up from their work to look at me then, and Thenona mumbled something about the smallest creatures having the biggest ears.

I splashed about in the rock-pools as if I couldn't hear.

'And what happened to the man?' asked Granyia, though she knew the story well enough. She was to be married soon, and clasped these occasions with her friends to her as one might clasp a water-pouch before crossing a desert.

'Offered himself as a meal to a rakhut!' said Thenona, with a certain relish in her eyes. 'Mad with grief.'

'Grief, pah!' said Senyun, tugging another vine into her broad lap. 'That was Patlia's vengeance, I tell you. She made him do it.'

They argued happily about this for a while, until Senyun said, 'Whoever it was, the madman or the Healer, they both should have thought of the child first.'

The women coughed, and looked down at their work. I knew then that they were talking about me. I tilted my head at a narrow rock-pool and poked a finger in the weed to startle the minnows, hoping the women would say more. But their conversation turned to teasing Granyia about the man who was to be her husband.

I'd had nobody to claim me as a daughter. My people don't restrict ourselves to two parents. Usually a baby like me would be cared for by another of its mothers – you would call them aunts, but we made no distinction. In my case, though, there was no other mother. One had died in childbirth the year before. Another had moved to the Aynia clan for love. The third lay in the summer village to the south, dying from a poisoned spear thrown by a man whose suit she had rejected. In other times, many willing mothers would have offered to adopt me, but there had been no child born or conceived for almost twelve months, and there were no wet breasts to feed an unweaned baby.

Tull, one of the Elders, would not allow me to starve a torturous death. Following the custom, he carried me up to the sea-cliffs and had his axe drawn above my throat when a breathless Patlia caught up with him and told him to stop. She pointed out that my birth mother still lived, and though there was no hope of her recovery, she might take many weeks to die, and until then I was her child and could not be legally killed.

Your assistant has paused in his writing, my friend, and looks at me to let me know he thinks me a savage, from a savage race. Perhaps he forgets that I have been to your country, and seen how you treat your unwanted children.

My birth mother never woke again, but by the time she died, Patlia had used her herb-wisdom to wean me, so they let me live. I became the daughter of the whole clan, though the special child of none. With no close kin I had fewer duties and more freedoms than most, but as I grew up I did not make much use of this, as Elu would have. The adults knew me as an unremarkable and deferential child. To my face they praised me for being good. When they thought I was out of earshot they sighed and shook their heads and said what a pity it was that a bright light like my mother's should be snuffed out by such a dull child.

You see, my friend, you think because we lived within our traditions we had no place for difference. But in truth we valued those who burned brightly like they said of my mother, and like Elu. We called them *rubas* souls. *Ruba* is the word for those sparks of fire that explode from a green log into the night air, blazing brighter than the others, darting and spiralling through the night air, holding your eyes against your will, till they fade to nothing, all in the space of a single breath.

Perhaps you value obedience more highly than I, my friend. When the guard let you into my cell, you said you do not agree with what they are going to do with me. You took off your raincoat and shook the water from your hair, saying what a pity it all is. Yet here you are, following orders, questioning me so the clerk might take down a version of my words. Words that your authorities will use to justify themselves.

You look surprised. Did you think I don't know what the document is for? We natives are simple people, to be sure, but even in your language simple is not always the same as stupid.

No, don't explain yourself – it is not necessary. I have come to understand, finally, that one must do what one must do. Some things cannot be helped, my friend.

Well, then, let us continue.

Patlia was circling our tree, sprinkling lilac sand. As she worked she shouted, 'I don't care what you want, Elu. Would I choose you if you wanted the job? No-one who desires power should be granted it. Come down.'

Again Elu refused: 'I won't.'

With a flick of her hand, Patlia whipped a leather rope up the tree trunk, through the branches, and around Elu's waist.

Elu screamed.

The old Healer tugged.

And here is the true version of what happened next, which I have never told another soul. I had been leaning into Elu, to look down at the Healer, and when the rope lashed itself around Elu's waist, I was knocked off balance. I grabbed onto Elu's arms to steady myself, and as the Healer pulled on the rope, I fell to the ground with her.

I landed hard on my left hip and wrist. Blue leaves and slivers of bark rained onto us.

The sand had saved our bones from breaking but it did not stop the pain. I felt as though I had been speared. While we twisted and groaned in the yellow dirt, Patlia flicked her wrist and sent her rope snapping around Elu, binding her arms behind her.

All the while, the old Healer was glaring at me. 'Neka. *You* dare defy me?'

I stared up at her. My lifetime of quiet obedience had not prepared me for such a confrontation. I could not even find my tongue to protest.

'Leave her alone,' said Elu, pulling at the rope. 'She's my friend.'

As one who once knew her, you will understand, I think, how my heart blossomed at Elu's words, though the truth was that she had never paid me much attention before that afternoon.

Healer Patlia looked at me as a spearbill regards a frog it is about to impale. 'Is that so?' she said. 'Then she will come with us, and be your Second.'

'No!' said Elu. 'Leave her alone. She's never done you any harm! She was only trying to protect me.'

But by then the Healer had snapped her rope around me and I was trussed as deftly as Elu. Patlia dragged us back, her rope binding our hands behind us and

above our heads so that we were forced to bow to her bare backside. She bellowed forth a song in her gritty voice, proclaiming the reasons for our capture, so that people knew not to greet us.

She stopped singing as we reached the camp, and we walked through silent stares, everyone frozen in their tasks. Gantol, crouching over the fire pit, burned his fingers on the smoking strands of tndermoss he held. Desia dropped her water pouch, the liquid snaking across the dry ground. Above, a crystalbird piped a bright empty note into the air.

As we passed, Almaya clapped a hand to her mouth and turned away.

You see, my friend, how life turns on chance, as much among my people as yours. I did not try to save Elu from Patlia – the thought did not occur to me. It was only that the Healer’s rope unbalanced me, so I clutched at the first thing my hands found, which was Elu.

You see also, I think, that my friendship with Elu was born of my cowardice and deception – just as it was to continue.

But it grows dark outside now, my friend, and the rain is still falling. Listen to that wind! Return tomorrow, and I will tell you everything you need to know.

I am instructed that, for the purposes of the law of this island known as New Devon, I must speak to the record, and no longer address my friend who nonetheless still sits here beside me, listening to my tale as the storm howls outside. It is not my history that interests him, of course, but that of the Healer. He watches my face as I speak, but when I say her name, he is unable to hold my gaze.

After I left the old slaughter shed, I was too busy to do anything about the note. I swept the stairs and polished the floors, the perspiration wetting my eyelashes. Then I washed Mrs Henderson’s best petticoats and hung them out to whiten in the

glare of the sun where they kicked and danced with more joy than I had ever seen in their owner. We were almost out of washing-soap and I hoped to find time to make more. In the meantime, I made bleach from potash and lye for the bed sheets. While they were soaking, I sewed on some buttons and darned Mr Henderson's socks.

As darkness gathered outside, Yega, the other housemaid, began cooking the dinner and shooed me out of the steamy kitchen.

I was laying the table in the stifling dining room when Mrs Henderson came in. 'Neka,' she said, 'will you accompany me outside for some air?' Her pale eyes flicked over the English silverware and rose-patterned china that I was setting out. She leaned towards me. 'I'm afraid to go alone,' she whispered. 'It's so dark here at night.'

Mrs Henderson was about my age, only fifteen or sixteen, and I thought her young to be a wife. Her husband was three times her age and often away from home, leaving her with no-one but the servants and wardens for company, and no other settlement within an afternoon's walk. Sometimes, when the doctor had not called and her eyes were less glassy, I sensed a kind of hope in her that we might be – not friends exactly, but companions of a sort.

I placed the last spoon on the table, wiped my hands on my skirts, and nodded. Mrs Henderson took my arm and led me outside. Together we stepped off the verandah onto the grass under a sky fizzing with stars. Mrs Henderson's fingers tapped lightly on my sleeve as she hesitated there, poised between two worlds.

Behind us, through the yellow window, was the world she knew. The solid logic of furniture. The square edges of an oak sideboard, a glass-fronted bookcase and fluted mantelpiece. A brass carriage clock slicing up the seconds.

But ahead, beyond the dead lawn and curled rose bushes, was a scrap of that other world. My world. The forest. Just beyond the fence I could see the tops of the redcone trees, and could almost taste the sweet buttery flesh of the nuts that my clan had eaten on that spot in this season since the beginning of time. My mother, my grandmother, her grandmother ... I had the wild thought that I would

go there in the morning to collect some cones, climb over the fence, maybe keep running. But I knew I would not.

Mrs Henderson's grip on my arm tightened as she stared into the dark remnant of forest. 'I keep asking Hector to clear it,' she said. 'I think he leaves it because he knows it frightens me.'

I tried to picture it through her eyes: a chaos of scrabbling trees, bushes rampant with leaves that grasp at you like warm flesh, vines throttling ancient trees, everything stirring and jostling, though there was no breath of air.

And the noises. Noises to make a settler's breath stop dead. A twig snapping close by. A spitting hiss. A high-pitched shriek like a knife scraped against bone. All those unruly feather-and-leather bodies, small lives being snapped in beaks, new lives being gruffly made ...

And beyond that, just in the shadows, the possibility of natives.

A month before, to the south, there had been a rush of attacks. A settler farm razed. A pedlar killed as he relieved himself by the roadside at dusk. A mother and daughter gone missing from their home. Mr Henderson had ordered the guards to patrol in twos around the house and garden, as well as the compounds.

The newspapers buzzed with rumours of the Oya clan – a *gang of depraved savages*, they thundered, *surviving wild in the mountains*. The editorials fumed over the *unfettered desires of native men*, and the threat they posed to *the pale flesh of our women*.

I blinked at the shadows.

Just then, the dark figure of a man emerged from the trees.

Mrs Henderson grasped her throat with one hand and clamped my arm with the other. Her fingernails dug in to my flesh. She dragged me back against the railings.

We could not reach the door without crossing in front of the lit windows. And that would cast long shadows over the man and betray us. Instead, Mrs Henderson pulled me down, into the herb border beside the steps. We crouched there, breathing the scent of mint and our own sweat.

The man hissed as he approached. Or was that whistling? Yes, whistling a non-tune between his teeth.

The steps of the verandah shook as he jumped into the yellow light. ‘What the hell are you doing, woman?’ It was Mr Henderson. He glanced at his wife, up and down, a wild joy in his eyes. Around his mouth, his beard was wet. His tongue flicked out, leaving a slick across his swollen lips.

I drew back into the shadows.

‘Oh, Hector,’ said Mrs Henderson. ‘I thought you were a native.’ She stood up, under his stare. ‘I mean, I thought ...’ She pressed the back of her hand to her cheek.

‘Hoping to catch the eye of an Oya warrior?’ he said, turning away. ‘Ha!’ He stamped inside, slamming the door behind him.

Mrs Henderson cradled her face in her hands. We waited until we were sure her husband had reached his study, so it would be Yega who responded to our quiet knocking.

That night I lay in my little room off the kitchen, thinking of the note and staring up at the stars that blazed green through the thin curtain. Each glow seemed like a small explosion of hope as I thought of setting foot outside of Sweetwater.

But what of Elu? Could I do it?

I took the photograph from under my pillow and held it to me. Memories pierced my mind. Elu’s palms elegantly upturned, begging for rain. Elu’s face close to mine, silhouetted against a jewel-hard sky. Elu lounging amidst the crimson of a puzzlepod tree, her eyes flicking past the bare slope of some stuttering boy’s shoulder, finding me, smiling. Elu’s black hair, shining wet from the lake, refracting into liquid rainbows in the sun.

The Ceremony of Manmaking was to be held on the third day of the Moon of the Blue Leaves, two moons after Patlia had called Elu. As the drums began, Elu and I were hiding behind a yellow boulder near the Cave of Women's Sorrow, just off the track from the sweetnut wood towards the sea.

We'd known we'd be in trouble, and now Elu jutted her chin at the distant commotion of raised voices and the summoning-horn. We peered through the rope-bark trees that lined the beach and saw, silhouetted against the bright water, the grey angles of old Three-Tooth Deggallon thrashing through the thornbushes with his hunting pole. He grumbled at the sound of the horn and headed back.

'It's all Korab's own fault,' I whispered.

'Shh!' said Elu, giggling. 'I know.'

And it was. He'd been swaggering around for three moons, practising commands on all the girls, rejecting the women's graincakes, and wrestling skinny little Racott to the ground again and again to fart in his face.

For weeks, the whole clan had made allowances. Even Elu, her smooth face serious, had told the young children they should take into account his paralysed arm, and what must surely be his fear, deep down, about his initiation. So, when Korab shouted for hot water, the women brought it. When he called us *children* – even Elu, who was older than he was – we let it pass. When he demanded late-season honeyberries, I searched for two days until I found some on a shaded vine near the falls of the blue lake, where the mistbirds had not yet found them. I gave him my own share as well, and turned away unacknowledged from the sight of the sweet golden goo dripping down his chin.

As Elu's Second, I was supposed to help Korab in the morning by bringing him herbs and smokewood to clear his mind while he sat silently by the fire, among the children for the last time. Later I would present him to the clan before the men took him away. But as the smoke started to twist round his legs he stood, glaring at me, and informed everyone with a wave of his hand that I was not required.

'You needn't even attend the presentation,' he said. 'Your presence is nothing to me. You're only a little girl. And an ugly one at that.' He turned to Elu, his mouth curling. 'But you can help, if you like.'

I turned away.

Elu said nothing to him, but elbowed her way through the children and grabbed my hand, anger in her grip. As the sun climbed high, she marched me all the way to the stand of devil-trees near the salt lagoon. Without comment, she wrapped our fingers in strips of palm leaf, and took a sharp stone from her belt.

‘This is how to take from a tree without harming it,’ she said. ‘Patlia showed me.’ She cut a wrinkled flap of bark from a devil-tree, exposing the bone-white wood underneath.

‘I thought you weren’t supposed to show me the secret ways.’ I twirled a leaf fibre around my thumb. I did not know what she was doing, and I was afraid of her new knowledge.

Elu shrugged. ‘I just don’t want you trying this and ending up like Elder Shiny-Head Tathijo, that’s all. You know how she lost her hair?’

‘No.’

‘When she was young she smashed up a parasol tree in a rage, and the next day she was struck bald. Forever.’

My hand flew to my head.

Elu laughed. ‘That’s exactly what I did when Patlia told me – checked my own hair was still there.’ She prised open the little flap of bark. ‘Come here and scrape this while I hold it open. Don’t breathe it in or you’ll have a coughing fit.’

With Elu’s stone, I scraped careful lines down the inside of the bark flap, stripping it of its lining of orange fibres, and pushing them onto the wide blueleaf that Elu held. Despite my hand wrappings, the heat of the devil tree tingled up through my fingers.

‘That’s enough.’ Elu pressed the flap back against the branch to heal. She tipped the orange fibres onto a rock, picked up a stone, and started to pound them, her smooth back arching, and her black hair swinging in the sunlight.

There are many wide flat rocks such as that across this land, dimpled with little rounded wells. The rock Elu chose that day had been smoothed and sculpted by countless generations of women grinding devil-tree fibres, for magic or healing or mischief. Women with hope in their breast, or envy, or laughter. Many such

rocks remain, monuments to where our powerful plants once grew. Now grazing cattle rub their lice against the stones, indifferent to human history.

Once she'd ground the fibres to dust, Elu wrapped them in a leaf, tucked the package into her belt, and told me her plan.

We found Korab alone in the middle of the sacred sweet-water river performing his cleansing. He'd left his ceremonial gourd-sheath on the soft mud of the shore. Elu had told me to yell insults to distract him, and I waded out until the water was over my knees, trying to summon the courage and the words. I thought at first that it wasn't in me, and that I would let Elu down. But I thought of her heart-shaped face, the high arch of her eyebrows that always made her look sceptical, her slow broad smile and her black eyes specked with flecks of golden brown like laughter in the night. I placed a hand on my hip as she often did, and imagined I was her, and the right words began to bubble up inside me. 'Hey!' I shouted. 'Korab! You don't need a gourd to hide that maggot! You should use a winkle shell!'

Well, I was still only a child.

Korab smashed his fist into the water at his waist. 'You watch it!' he shouted. 'When you're old enough I'll take you for my wife and beat you every day.'

Elu was squelching through the mud behind Korab's back, sprinkling powder into the gourd.

'No-one can marry me!' I shouted. 'I'm the Healer's Second!'

At Elu's signal I turned my back on Korab's swearing and sauntered away. I joined Elu at the crossing paths, and we raced all the way to the beach, barely able to see through our laughter.

As we ran, we could hear the drums in the distance announcing the start of the ceremony. By the time we reached the yellow boulder below the Cave of Women's Sorrow, Korab's distant roars were sending dark-winged birds reeling into the sky. Our eyes wide at what we'd dared to do, we held onto each other and laughed at Korab for failing to stay silent and manful through the ceremony while his penis blazed with the fire of the devil-tree.

I wish I could hold that moment still forever, when Elu and I hid behind the yellow boulder, our laughter skipping over the rocks. The air was scented with pink clay and salt.

My blood was afire with triumph and fear.

Elu's tears of laughter slid in wavy lines down her cheeks, and I reached out to brush them away with my fingertips.

Our last few moments before everything changed.

A monstrous gargling from behind made us jump. I thought the devil-tree had sent a spirit to slather our skin with boils as punishment for misusing its power.

'Is there a woman grieving at the moment?' asked Elu, knowing the answer.

I shook my head.

Elu scrambled up the rocks and reached the cave mouth first, so she was the first person of the clan ever to see him. He lay in the straw among the statues of the dead, just inside the entrance to the cave – the Cave of Women's Sorrow, where he should not have been. He goggled at us and gasped at the air, his ribs stretching the skin of his chest. His flesh had the same pale translucence of the blind fish that swam deep in the waters of the dripping-rock caves to the west. I thought he must be one of them, turned almost human by a vindictive spirit. He smelled fishy too, and sour, like strips of silvershark left too long in the sun.

I clenched with fear. 'What's he doing here?' I said, unable to look away. 'Why's he making that noise? Can't he breathe the air?'

The man looked at us. He had the same eyes I once saw on a cornered sand-deer, looking from one human wielding a knife to another raising an axe, and no hope of escape.

'Fetch some water,' said Elu.

Glad to be told what to do, I ran.

Outside, I cracked open a puzzle-seedpod – I was still young enough to feel pleasure at having the knack of it – and tucked it into my namebelt at my back. Nesting flintbirds cried out as I hauled myself up towards the top of the cliff. When I reached the twin springs that formed the weeping eyes above the cave-mouth, I stepped onto a narrow ledge and held the puzzlepod under the water. I lingered a while to catch my breath as the droplets splashed over my skin. Then I picked my way back down the cliff-face, one hand steadying myself against knotted tree roots, the other balancing the seedpod. I stumbled back into the cave, sloshing water over the ground.

I was going to throw it over the fishman to help him breathe, but Elu took the water from me and held it to his lips, cupping the back of his head with her hand, just as if he were human. She helped him sit propped against the wall of memory, his strange pale flesh pressed against the paintings commemorating dead women's lives.

The man drank like herds of indarra in autumn, draining whole lakes as they stock up for the dry season. I lost count of the number of times I had to refill the seedpod and my legs began to ache from struggling up and down the cliff. Finally the fishman sank back, satisfied, but his stomach rejected so much liquid and he threw it up, with added slime, over my feet. Yellow maggots wriggled over my toes leaking a black stinking filth. I screamed, stamping about and squashing them. The stench of vomit filled the cave and I covered my face with my hands.

Elu knelt by him. She took a handful of straw from under him and wiped his face. 'Who are you?' she said. 'Where have you come from?'

The man's eyelids fluttered. His chest rose and fell, wheezing like a dying dog's.

'He has the oozing worm.' Elu stood and turned to me. 'He must have eaten wasting-root. Fetch Healer Patlia and the Elders.'

'But ... Korab's gourd ...'

Elu looked at me, a hand square on her hip. 'We'll be in trouble. We knew that. But it'll wait once they see what we've found here.'

'What *have* we found?'

Elu shook her head. 'I don't know.'

Three of the old women were peeling water fruits in the shade, and keeping an eye on the cavefish man. Patlia had sent Elu and me to help them while she tried to ease the passing of the old Seer Bagbuc, whose time had come.

The young man called Vantin sauntered up and joined us, acknowledging the older women with a tip of his handsome head. He threw himself down beside Elu and me, and picked up a stick, gazing up at Elu. Her status as Healer-in-Training had not dimmed his persistence with her, though he must now know it was hopeless. ‘I saw something last week, during the big storm out at sea,’ he said, stabbing a hole in the earth.

‘Don’t tell me,’ said Elu, ‘Another vision that you should be chief?’

The old women chuckled, and Shiny-Head Tathijo threw the young man a peeled waterfruit.

He caught it between thumb and forefinger. ‘No! This was, it was something very ... strange.’ He popped the fruit into his mouth.

‘And yet you didn’t tell us at the time.’

He rolled onto his back and looked up at the sky through the trees. ‘I thought you wouldn’t believe me,’ he said through a mouthful of red fruit pulp. ‘I almost didn’t believe it myself. But now ...’ He waved his arm in the direction of the cavefish man who lay shivering at a distance, eyelids twitching. Elu had given him medicine earlier – the first time she had made her own without supervision.

‘Tell us then,’ said Elu.

‘It was raining and dark and the clouds were thrashing like violent waves –’

‘Bah! He thinks he is the storyteller now!’ laughed Elder Rabilumum.

‘All right, all right. I only meant I couldn’t see very well. But an island appeared in the sea, near the horizon. It had wings – No, really, it did. Great white triangular wings billowing in the storm.’

Elder Rabilumum looked at him through narrowed eyes. ‘A winged island,’ she said.

‘And it was moving! Towards the shore it came, but then – I don’t know if the sea claimed it or what happened – it tipped sideways and floated for a moment like a bloated corpse in a river. Then it was gone.’

‘Hmmp,’ said Rabilumum. ‘There is no mention of a winged island or anything like it in our history.’

I joined in with the chuckles of the older women.

‘I knew you wouldn’t believe me,’ said Vantin.

‘Of course,’ said Elu, pointing her finger to the fishman’s back, ‘there is no mention of any man as strange as that one, either.’

When we returned to Patlia, Bagbuc was near his last breath. His young wife Herovi sat close to him, her hand on his shoulder. He opened his milky eyes wide to the shivering canopy above and gripped Patlia’s hand. ‘Before you join me,’ he said, ‘you will see our world destroyed.’

Herovi stroked his cheek. ‘Quiet now,’ she said. ‘Your work for the clan is done. Save your breath.’ But he had gone, and did not hear her.

She dipped her head. ‘You were a good husband,’ she whispered. ‘Thank you, my love.’ She kissed his forehead.

Patlia went to prepare the funeral pyre with the other Elders and left us to wash Bagbuc’s body. His wife wept in silence. I started at his feet, sponging scented water over his toes. It formed dark runnels along his dusty skin.

At first, we did not notice when Bagbuc appeared beside us. ‘Mind my elbow,’ he said, as Elu bathed it. ‘That one’s always sore.’

I bent to my work, glad that I was still washing his lower legs and had not yet travelled upwards.

Herovi smiled up at him. ‘Not any more, you fool,’ she said.

‘No, I suppose not,’ he said, gazing at his body. He put his head to one side and regarded his body. ‘I was very small. I thought I was bigger.’

‘Big in wisdom,’ I said.

‘Pah! Lickspittle!’

‘Bagbuc,’ said Herovi, ‘don’t insult the people who honour your body. What are you doing here, anyway, besides getting in the way?’ She smiled.

‘I came to tell you,’ he said, ‘it has begun. That strange man is the first of many. Soon we will be destroyed.’

‘Are you still worrying about that?’ his wife replied. ‘Don’t be ridiculous. You were always so vain. You think the whole world will end without you! The fishman couldn’t even stay alive without our help!’

At the end of the summer, when the other water sources ran dry, we lived near the stones in the Old Ones’ forest to the west of our land, near the shallow spring-fed pond that never dried out, although the water tasted of the eels that lived in it.

The overgrown stones were the ruins of the Old Ones’ pride – thick walls with broken doorways that led to nowhere, collapsing tunnels made of mossy slabs that were intensely green, even at this time of year. Yellow flowers grew between the fractured squares of the flagstones. Elu and I had taken some of the younger children to the ruins for relief from the heat. Plunging into the tunnels was as cold as diving into dark water.

The smell inside was stale and ancient, the children’s voices behind us muffled. Elu and I exited a corridor into a square shady space that had once been roofed but was now open to the trees. The walls of the square were carved over and over with identical figures of a man, his nose blunted by countless rainy seasons, his empty eyes staring at his own image repeated opposite him. The same stone face was repeated all along the walls, streaked with lichen, peering out from shadows, from under branches and between the buttress roots of huge trees that had not even been seeds when the Old Ones lived. Generations of trees had lived and died here. Leaves had been blown into spaces between the stones, forming pockets of soil. Seeds had dropped into these and grown, forcing their roots between the stones and over the roof-tiles, spilling over the buildings like water, at once propping them up and breaking them apart.

The children, led by little Yonal, were prodding at a fat yellow toad they'd found living under a stone, and in the treetops, bright parrots laughed at the rising sun. I breathed. Outside the tunnels, everything smelled of earth and leaves. Patlia had sent us away for the morning after Elu had stumbled and kicked one of Patlia's finest clay pots, cracking it. We were glad of the break, because we had been working hard for weeks collecting and preparing ingredients for the ceremony in the mountains to call the rains. I was happy. I had Elu beside me, and a morning off from work while Patlia fussed over things. Elu had been with our clan for less than half a year and my world had changed.

We clambered to one of the rooftops and sat to watch the children.

'Oh look,' said Elu, 'there's Elder Tam.'

I looked over to the pathway through the forest. 'Where?'

'Up there,' said Elu, pointing to a cloud in the shape of pointed face with a nose as long as the head was wide. My laughter bounced around the walls below us.

Insects hissed in the branches among the last fluffy red blooms of the sour-fruit trees. We lay back looking at the clouds, pointing out fantastical monsters to each other in the shapes. We ate sour-fruits and pulled faces as they sucked the moisture from our tongues.

We watched for a while as the clouds unwound into threads and disappeared into the blue.

I shut my eyes against the incandescence of the brand new sky. The insides of my eyelids were the burnt orange of summer. I could hear the children laughing.

'I'm not going to do it,' said Elu.

'Do what?' I asked, my eyes still closed. I was sleepy.

'Be the Healer.'

I felt a shadow fall across my eyes and opened them to see Elu's face, very close to mine, dark against the light.

'I've never wanted to do it. And I'm not good at it.' She sat up, and threw a sour-fruit kernel to an olnox parrot. The bird took it and flew to a pile of sharp stones to crack it open for the oil inside.

‘You will be, if you try. Patlia must have chosen you for a reason.’

‘She chose me because the Elders of my clan wanted to get rid of me. They asked her to take me.’

I sat up. I had wondered why Elu had appeared in our clan the way she had, but I had never had the courage to ask her. ‘Why did they do that?’

‘There was ... something happened. There was a man. It wasn’t my fault. I didn’t want him. He kept following me around and wouldn’t leave me alone. So I pushed him into a mudsink.’

I laughed.

‘He was an Elder. They said I was dangerous.’

‘Oh! No wonder.’ I could see how it had happened. Every man who saw her wanted Elu. She was beautiful, but more than that, she radiated life. It was hypnotising. Even if she had married, there would have been trouble. They must have thought it would be safer to send her away. No man could ever have a Healer. They would still want her, of course, and some of them might still always find themselves near her, like Vantin of my own clan did, but every man understood she could not be touched.

‘I hate it. I hate being a Healer. The work, the learning, the responsibility, the illness, the dead bodies – all of it.’

I put my hand on her arm. ‘It’s always hard learning something new.’

‘It’s not me, though. Being Healer you don’t get to have friends. You’re on your own.’ She turned her head to look at me. ‘Oh, except for the Second of course. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that. It’s just – all the work, all the travelling. And going with Patlia into the mountains to learn, we’ll be away for months. Or years if I don’t learn quickly enough. Can you imagine spending all that time, just you and me and Patlia?’

I brushed some sour-fruit peel from my lap. My stomach wrenched. I had not realised Elu was unhappy.

‘She should have chosen you,’ Elu said, nudging into me with a grin. ‘It would suit you better.’

‘A Healer who is afraid of her own shadow,’ I said. ‘A fine leader I would be.’

Elu laughed. ‘And that’s the other thing. All the politics of it. Making decisions. Horrible. And having to leave all my friends and family behind.’ She frowned. ‘Maybe she would train you, Neka, if I left. You’d learn to be less timid. And it would be easier for you.’

She meant that I had no friends or family to miss, and she was right. The only person in my world was Elu.

Below us, the children started singing the words to a game.

‘What,’ I had to clear my throat for my voice to work, ‘what will you do?’

She sighed and lay back again, closing her eyes and wriggling her shoulders. ‘I’m going to stay here until the fuss dies down. Then I’m going back to my clan.’

I traced my finger over the jagged edge of a roof tile. ‘But she won’t let you. She’s chosen you.’

Elu smiled. ‘She’ll let me go if I’m the worst Healer-in-Training ever. I’m going to get everything wrong. Forget things, use mouldy ingredients, make smoky fires.’ She looked at me. ‘And break the pots.’

‘You did it on purpose!’

She giggled. ‘I’ll be gone before winter. Trust me.’

I pulled my face into what I hoped looked like a smile.

Alone in the forest, early in the morning, I knelt by Abapanoa's pool. It was a small pool, perhaps ten paces across. The arching branches of the whisker-trees met high above the water, forming a domed roof, the long whiskery leaves hanging down like a waterfall. The filtered light shifted over the water, which glowed blue, lit from within. This is where Abapanoa lived.

My task was to collect the blooms of the starflowers that grew along the edges of the pool. Elder Tam was sick with a fever, and the petals would cleanse his blood. Patlia and Elu had asked Abapanoa's permission, while I waited, out of sight. Once Abapanoa had assented, Patlia had gone back to the summer village.

Elu was nearby among the trees, looking for a gift to leave in return for the flowers.

The air was still and stifling. My knees cushioned by the damp moss, I worked as quickly as I could. Starflowers are tiny, each bloom half the size of my smallest fingernail, and I needed to fill a basket the size of seven cupped hands. As I picked the white flowers, they released a heavy musky perfume. It would take all morning to gather enough.

A sound came from across the pool, a shuffling sound of weight heaving from one foot to the other. It could not be Elu - she was somewhere behind me, and anyway always moved in silence. This was something huge and heavy. From nowhere, a gust of wind brushed the back of my neck. My spine stiffened.

I shook my head to clear it, and leant back to my work, reaching out to a clump of flowers, but my fingers were suddenly clumsy, unable to grasp the tiny blooms. Just beyond them, the light on the water changed. I looked up.

There was something in the trees.

A bright white light, like the sun of a blaring midday. It dropped down over a branch, covering it. The light was thick and viscous. I almost expected it to drip, like incandescent honey. It waited.

I watched, unable to move, my arms locked, still stretching out absurdly towards the starflowers.

The rustling sound was louder now, filling my head, the hissing of all the leaves in the forest stirring at once. The white glow gathered into itself and grew brighter, forming a ball among the leaves. It rolled impossibly up an arched branch, and then down. Towards me.

Abapanoa.

He paused, less than an arm's length from my face, pulsating like a heartbeat. I felt watched, known, turned inside out. My face burned with his heat, and with shame. I wanted to scream, but my body would not obey me.

Abapanoa was reading me.

The light expanded, engulfing me, searing through me. The white hot noise scoured the inside of my skull.

Time stopped.

I do not know how long I knelt there. I was an insect trapped in amber, a fossil in stone.

A soft rustle of leaves behind me, and Elu's voice called out. 'Hey, Neka!' Abapanoa vanished, dousing the light, pitching the pool back into its blue gloom.

I fell forward onto the moss, crushing starflowers beneath me, gulping air as though I'd been underwater.

'Hey, aren't you finished yet? Patlia's going to be – Neka! Are you all right?'

I felt Elu's hand on my back. The ground rolled and lurched under me. I was nauseous and dizzy.

'Neka! What is it?'

I rolled onto my side, feeling as though I'd left my head behind. Elu's hand slid to my shoulder. It was warm and firm – human.

'It was,' my voice was a whisper, 'It was Abapanoa. Did you see?'

She recoiled. 'What?' She looked up at the trees, the arching branches, still now, and silent. 'Abapanoa? Are you sure?'

I closed my eyes and nodded, still nauseous.

'I didn't see anything,' she said. 'I came around the bend there and you were lying on the ground. Are you all right? What happened?'

I opened my eyes. Her face was close to mine, reflecting the blue glow of the pool. Her eyes looked like the night sky.

She held her hand to my forehead. 'Can you stand? I think we should leave.'

She helped me to my feet and led me away, her arm around my waist, supporting my weight.

It was late afternoon when we reached the first hut of the summer village, and it was only then that I realised I had left the basket with its meagre crop of starflowers behind.

Patlia was furious when she saw us. 'I need those starflowers! Tam will die without them! Who do you think you are, coming back without them?'

My legs were weak and I thought I would vomit. Elu helped me sit on the floor before I could fall.

'She saw Abapanoa,' said Elu.

Patlia froze. 'What?'

'She saw him. By the pool. That's why she's...'

'Pah!' Patlia glared at me. 'Nonsense. Why would Abapanoa be interested in this, this fleck of lizard crap?' She bent over to shout in my ear. 'Lazy girl! Fell asleep, did you? Go back and get them!'

'It's true,' said Elu. 'I - I saw him too. We both did.'

So she had seen him after all. Why had she lied to me?

Patlia straightened, and regarded Elu, narrowing her good eye. 'You saw Abapanoa?'

Elu looked down at me. 'Yes.'

Patlia frowned, and leant against the wall. 'That is ... That is ...'

Elu crouched down beside me and stroked my hair. 'What does it mean, Healer?' she asked.

Patlia hesitated. 'Nothing good.' She kicked at something invisible on the ground. She thought for a moment. 'But it must have been you he wanted to see. He'd have no interest in the girl here.' She picked up her stick and turned to leave. 'Give her some boro-root and send her back to get the flowers. Don't go near there again, Elu, ever. Stay away.' She paused at the doorway. 'We'll talk about this later. I must go. I have a sick Elder to attend. I will need those flowers by first light tomorrow.'

She left.

Elu brought me boro-root from Patlia's stores, and helped to prop me against the wall. After a while I started to feel less nauseous, but I was still weak. A stone was digging into my left thigh, but I didn't have the strength of will to move. Elu sat beside me, staring at nothing, holding my hand. Outside, dusk was approaching.

'The flowers,' I said. 'I have to go back.'

‘I’ll go,’ said Elu, standing.

‘You can’t! Patlia said – ’

‘That’s because she thought I saw him too.’

‘You didn’t see him?’

‘No. I told you. But Patlia didn’t believe you.’ She shrugged.

I tried to stand, but my head felt heavy. ‘You can’t go there, Elu. What if it was you he wanted?’

‘If he’d wanted me, he’d have found me.’

‘Don’t go. Please. I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if something happened.’

‘I’ll just go, pick up the basket, and leave. I won’t wait around. Who knows what Patlia will do to you if we don’t bring her what she needs.’ She slipped out of the hut.

I called after her, ‘No! It’s too dangerous. Elu!’ I tried to follow her, but by the time I had crawled to the door, she was out of sight.

As darkness came, I berated myself for my weakness. I should have told Patlia that Elu was lying. I could have tried harder to stop her. Anything could happen.

Hours passed and Elu did not return. I fell into an empty dreamless sleep.

The sun was rising as I opened my eyes. I watched the pink light claiming the wall opposite me. Its warmth felt like an antidote to the blue glow of the pool, the searing white of the ball of light. It felt like medicine.

Elu appeared at the doorway, smiling. Under her arm was a basket filled with starflowers. She must have spent the whole night collecting them to have so many. For once, Patlia would not be able to scold me.

‘There,’ said Elu setting the basket down next to me. ‘That should keep her quiet.’

‘Did you see him?’ I asked.

Elu shook her head. Her eyes were puffy from working all night in the dark, but she watched me calmly. ‘No,’ she said. ‘It wasn’t me he wanted.’ She turned away. ‘Now,’ she said. ‘I need to work out a way to make a mess of this medicine without killing Tam.’

Madeleine Henderson gripped my arm above the elbow, and blinked. 'You and I are friends, Nicky, aren't we?' she said.

'Yes, madam,' I said. 'Of course.'

Mrs Henderson had tried to integrate herself into New Devon society. Despite the distance between Sweetwater Farm and anything she recognised as civilisation, she joined various church groups and sent cakes and pastries from the bakery to the neighbours with friendly notes.

Occasionally, other settler women from around the area would come to call, and a few made the attempt to befriend Mrs Henderson, sending over baked slices and inviting her to tea. Hector refused to let her have the carriage for these afternoons away from home, and he found fault with each of the women who called: 'She's beneath us,' 'She's a bad influence on you,' 'There's a scandal in her family - you're shaming me associating with her.' When the women called, he left the room abruptly without acknowledging their presence. Eventually the friends dropped away, one by one until there was no-one left. 'You can't even keep the interest of those silly twittering fools!' said Hector. 'Nobody wants you as their friend.'

'Nicky is my friend,' she said, too quietly for him to hear.

She persevered with the other settlers, but nothing worked. She came back from the church meetings covered in dust from the journey in an open public cab, and more often than not she was distressed by some slight from the other women, or something she herself had said that had been misinterpreted in the worst possible way. The cakes and pastries sent off to the neighbours were received in silence.

She was no better at hosting dinner parties. She would spend weeks beforehand planning every detail with Yega and me, clutching a recipe book to her bosom, and instructing us on how to make breadcrumbs in the mincer, how to knot a pudding cloth and glaze a ham, and insisting on practice runs. But there were never the right ingredients, and instead of changing or scaling down her plans, she

would say, 'Well. We'll just have to substitute then!' with a bright little smile. For smoked salmon she used mudfish, which turned to leather in the smokehouse. For oysters she used the gritty little watersnails that clan people only ate in times of hardship.

Mr Henderson ate the rehearsal meals without comment, sawing ostentatiously through the tough meat and removing pieces of gristle from his mouth, lining them up on the side of his plate.

He refused to try some dishes, like the bright green jelly that, in the absence of blueberries, Mrs Henderson had flavoured with sourfruit. 'But I need to know what you think, Hector,' she said.

'Believe me my dear,' he said, 'when I tell you that you are much better off not knowing. Neka, bring me some bread and cheese from the kitchen.'

His goading didn't stop on the evening of the dinner party. He picked apart the food, and complained about the menu.

'My wife,' he said, 'fancies herself quite the epicure!' and he roared with laughter.

The guests looked at one another. One of the younger women shot a sympathetic look at Mrs Henderson, who was looking at her hands in her lap.

After a few of these gatherings, the guests started to decline invitations to dine at Sweetwater. Hector was enraged. 'You serve them inedible food,' he shouted at her, 'and you have no conversation whatsoever! You've made me a laughing stock.'

When his birthday approached, Mrs Henderson started keeping a little money back from the housekeeping each week, saving a few pennies on candles here, a shilling there by buying cheaper ink and writing paper for her letters home. As the day approached, she found she didn't have quite enough, and sold a simple locket her mother had given her. She bought a fine brass telescope and stand for Hector. When he undid the wrapping at the breakfast table, he looked at the lovely thing and stared. 'Where did you get the money for this?' His voice was dangerously quiet.

I poured the tea in silence.

‘I - I saved, Hector. From the housekeeping.’ She didn't mention the sacrifice of her locket.

He looked at her and smiled nastily. ‘Then that would explain why the food around here has been even worse than usual recently.’ He stood, wiped his moustache with a napkin, and walked out, leaving the telescope untouched.

Mrs Henderson tugged at the cloth it had been wrapped in. ‘I thought you would like it,’ she said to the air.

It was because of days like these that I wondered if the note I had found in my pocket had been sent from Mrs Henderson herself, as a warning, perhaps, or even as a plea from a friend not to desert her.

Mrs Henderson was in bed for three days after her husband's birthday, and eventually he called in the doctor. He was a tall, bald man with a mild and distracted air about him, smiling and blinking at nothing in particular through half-moon spectacles. He had an oily moustache that he was in the habit of smoothing with his index finger, to punctuate his sentences.

It was dark outside and the lamps were lit. I was serving the two of them drinks in the drawing room, and the atmosphere between them was sombre. My mind was on the note. If Mrs Henderson had sent it, then the promise it had seemed to offer of escape was a false one. But if someone else had sent it, it could mean anything. A threat to inform on me, perhaps. Or an offer of help. I could not risk showing it to anyone other than Elu.

‘The fact is,’ the doctor was saying, ‘these climes are simply unhealthy for the ladies. The harshness of the sun, the dryness of the air, the lack of a single drop of moisture anywhere ...’

The doctor didn't look as though he was coping well with the climate himself. His shiny pate was slathered in baubles of sweat as big as frogspawn. He dabbed at them with a kerchief and fingered his moustache. ‘But most of all, the issue is one of their nature. It is woman's nature to nurture, and there is so little here that responds to the feminine touch. I believe your wife had a garden?’

A single nod from Mr Henderson, who was staring into the empty grate.

‘Roses. A failure.’

‘How could it be otherwise in this cursed place?’ asked the doctor. ‘No rain for ... How long is it now? Since we saw a single drop?’

‘Well over a year.’

‘It’s hell, I tell you, this place. I should have gone to Australia or New Zealand. But I came here. I thought it would be like King George’s Island, you know? You must have heard the stories.’

Mr Henderson shot the doctor a look of contempt. ‘My wife, doctor.’

‘Yes, of course.’ I think the issue is one of a lack of means to express her proper nature. She needs some way of expressing her feminine virtues. She needs something to love, to care for, to occupy her time and her thoughts.’ He looked at Mr Henderson with what I thought might be a glint of malice. ‘She needs a child.’

‘A child!’

‘Indeed.’ The doctor gave an ingratiating smile and waved his glass at me to refill it. I took it to the sideboard. ‘You have been married now for ... two years, is it?’

‘Two and a half.’

‘And yet, no progeny!’ the doctor exclaimed, smiling. I handed him his brandy.

Two red circles the size of coins formed on Mr Henderson’s cheeks and he spoke through stretched lips. ‘I fear she may be barren,’ he said, addressing a spot above the doctor’s head.

‘You are, ah, familiar with the biological facts of reproduction?’

Mr Henderson bristled. ‘I am a man of science. Don’t be absurd.’

The doctor leaned forward, the lamplight gleaming in his eyes. ‘Are your, er, relations ... normal?’

Mr Henderson was on his feet in a moment. ‘Good Lord, man, what could you mean? Of course they are!’ He put his hand on the back of his chair to steady himself, and leant there for a moment. ‘Of course.’

‘Calm yourself, dear sir,’ said the doctor. Leaning back into the armchair, he placed his glass on the table by his side and smoothed his moustache. ‘I’m sure

she will conceive in time. In the meantime I suggest some sort of arrangement by which she can express her feminine nature. A project of a sort.'

Mr Henderson was still on his feet. 'You will recall, doctor, we have tried giving her a project before.'

'Ah, yes. But even so.' They were silent for a moment, the doctor's face thoughtful. 'These natives are forever dying, are they not? There must be orphaned babes?'

'I ... yes.' Mr Henderson looked at him. 'What are you suggesting?'

'Only that she be given something to nurture. The garden failed. And we cannot afford another incident like the one with the milk calf last year ... Let us give her a native child to take care of for a short while. Just until she's herself again. It will probably help her to conceive her own child, too. Adoptions do bring on the maternal instincts in that way, you know.'

'A native child.' Mr Henderson was staring at his own reflection in the window.

'It's a scientific solution, and a practical one. And at the very least, it would be good practice for the real thing, eh?'

Hector turned his face to the doctor and flashed a tight smile. 'I suspect you're right. It should be easy enough to arrange.'

Because Mrs Henderson did not feel well, she asked me to help in the schoolhouse the next day. The women were herded inside and made to sit on the narrow wooden benches the men had made in the workshops.

We learned that their new occupation was to be embroidering cushion covers and blankets, which could be sold to raise money for the farm. On the desk by the door was a heap of plain square covers that had been sent over from Lowerwood School, where the children from Sweetwater were sent at the age of three.

The women crowded around the cushion covers and examined them with their backs turned to Mrs Henderson, sniffing them and rubbing them, hoping to

gather some sign of which cushion had been made by which child. And before long, Koinia found one with a tiny knot of stitches in the corner, shaped like a crooked star. She knew then that it was made by her sister's child Freha, and she held it to her breast, the women closing in around her to shield her from Mrs Henderson's gaze. They looked harder at the covers, giving little cries as they found signatures in nearly all the covers.

'Really,' said Mrs Henderson, 'all this fuss! It doesn't matter which one you take. They are all the same.'

We settled ourselves in hot rows, damp with cotton petticoats and itchy woollen jackets, the sweat running behind our boned corsets and down our legs, but we knew better by now than to scratch. Mrs Henderson taught the women the stitches and they nodded as they learnt the names – running stitch, chain stitch, arrowhead stitch, barbed wire stitch, whipped backstitch, crown of thorns.

I sat and watched. Mrs Henderson did not seem to require anything of me apart from my presence. I thought of the chores I could be doing, and of the note in my pocket. Whenever I thought of escaping, I felt nauseous with fear and hope.

Mrs Henderson pinned pictures to the walls, of flower gardens, butterflies and baskets of kittens, to inspire the women's designs, and gave them a needle each, and a selection of threads in the colours of parrot feathers. The women dismissed the pictures as meaningless with one glance, and bent their heads to watch their fingers, which, though new to embroidery, were skilled enough at weaving stories into baskets and knotting designs into belts.

They stitched their sorrow into their work – a husband missing, a daughter taken. To my left, Dalo's work told the story of when she met her husband under a bent blacknut tree, sheltering from the rain, and how the silver drops caught in his eyelashes and the goosebumps rose along her arms when he laughed at her jokes.

In the row in front, Grioli told the cushion cover the story of her daughter, whose small arched feet had walked lightly on the earth for only twelve years, until the settler men found her when she was collecting berries, and took her to a room above an inn at the port, where they made money from the sailors who visited her. She had died there not long afterwards.

The kittens watched from high on the walls as they sewed. Outside the cicadas buzzed and clicked as they always had. The women swatted at flies and sang hymns as they stitched, songs that praised the dying man with the sorrowful blue eyes, that told him how great he was and how merciful. They punctured their fingers with the needles so their blood seeped into their stories.

I thought of Patlia.

Patlia cut the tip of her thumb and squeezed a drop of blood onto each of the grinnippa leaves.

‘Do you remember Unaph, my Second?’ asked Patlia, as she held a twist of leaves over her fire.

It was a few days after I had seen Abapanoa. I sat on the other side of the fire because I was supposed to be observing how to prepare and dry grinnippa leaf. It was the first time I had ever been alone with Patlia and the fear of her that had always festered in me now threatened to break into panic.

‘Not really,’ I said, watching her hands so that I did not have to meet her eye.

‘Hmph,’ said Patlia, sniffing the herbs to see if they were sufficiently smoked. ‘You were very young when she died. Here, take this.’

I took the leaf and held it in the smoke. I glanced up at the Healer. In the writhing light, her scar wormed over her face.

‘She was the one who saved you,’ said Patlia, watching me.

I dropped my eyes to the herbs and turned them over. ‘I thought that was you.’

‘Yes, yes, I was the one who weaned you. No, child, keep turning it or it’ll be black down one side. Haven’t you learned anything yet? Hmph. That’s better.’ She picked up another bunch of herbs and held them next to mine. ‘It was because of Unaph I weaned you. She lied to me. Said your mother was recovering, had begun to speak a little, and had asked for you. *Ha!* All lies! But lies that sent me racing up the hill after Tull to stop him sharpening his axe on your neck bone.’ She

cackled at the thought and slapped a saggy thigh. ‘When I found out she’d lied to me, I beat Unaph with a stick.’ She grinned. ‘But it turned out your mother still had milk enough to feed you, though she didn’t know she was doing it. Didn’t know anything going on around her by then. Those are done. Do these ones now.’

She threw another bundle at me and I held it in the smoke, my eyes stinging.

‘These are for Selsha,’ said Patlia. ‘Her milk isn’t flowing. I gave this to your mother, trickled it down her throat with water three times a day. Had to give you this stuff,’ she indicated a pile of spineflower, ‘to get you weaned fast.’ She threw her dried grinnippa onto the pile. ‘I sometimes wonder if that is why you’re – she flicked a speck of ash from her knee – ‘the way you are. Because you were nursed by a woman who was half-dead. Who wouldn’t be fearful of life with that start?’

She leaned over the fire and grabbed my chin, jerking it upwards so I had to look into her eye. ‘Listen to me. If Unaph hadn’t lied to me, you wouldn’t be alive today. Do you understand what I’m telling you?’ Her arm was almost touching the flames.

I nodded, and dropped my eyes.

‘Hmph.’ She let go of my chin and sat back.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I understand.’ But I did not. All I heard at the time was that Patlia, the one living soul whom I’d thought had ever valued my life, had not done so after all.

‘Neka.’ Patlia sighed. ‘There is power in being a Second. I know you are fearful, and you will never do anything yourself, but your words can make things happen. What you say to Elu can change the choices she makes.’

I concentrated my eyes on the smokeleaf. Did the old woman know that Elu was planning to leave?

‘I was like her when I was young,’ said Patlia. ‘Oh, don’t look at me like that. I was never beautiful. I don’t mean that. But I was ... impetuous. I made bad decisions. When people needed me, often I would take offence at their words, especially with the other clans. Treating me as though I existed only for their benefit. I never mastered the other languages, and of course it was Unaph’s job to

interpret for me. Over time they stopped offending me. It took me years to realise that Unaph was not always translating their words to me literally. She was a diplomat, Neka. That is what a Second must be. You can help her, and help yourself at the same time.'

'Is that ... the languages. Is that why you chose me? As Second?'

'No. You have a talent, but not an exceptional one. Others could have learned. I chose you because Elu respects you, and you have a cautious spirit. You can calm her.'

I had always understood other languages with ease, and even as a young child had been called twice, when no-one else was available, to help my clan's Elders at meetings with the other clans. But it had never occurred to me that there was power in this. I had always translated every word as faithfully as I could. But it would feel like lying not to do so. Was Patlia suggesting I should lie to my only friend?

'I don't just mean that you should be diplomatic when you're interpreting for her,' said Patlia. 'Being Healer is difficult, and it's not something she has embraced.' She put the smokeleaf down and looked at me, a hand on each of her knees. 'If you speak to her, she will listen to you.'

I put my leaf on the pile and stared at it. 'What do you want me to say?'

'Oh, wake up, Neka, you fool!' Patlia said. 'She is *trying* to fail! Do you want to lose her? Do you want the clan to lose her? There is no-one else on the island who would be a fine Healer like her. And now Abapanoa has seen her. It must be significant. Think. Think about what Bagbuc said – perhaps he is right. Perhaps bad times are coming. We need her. All of us. I'm too old!' She lowered her voice. 'Neka, I know you are afraid of your own footprints, but you must have courage to face what may be coming. Do you want to face it alone, or with Elu by your side?'

Patlia and Elu often travelled without me in those early days of her calling, journeying to the far off territories of the other clans – the wide grass plains of the

Aynia clan, the steep windswept hills owned by the Oya, and even the twin peaked pine mountain to the southwest where the hermits lived. Everywhere they went, they gathered the healing and learning of the island.

Elu's absences left me in a kind of fever. I tortured myself, thinking of her constantly, and gorged myself on the memory of her face. She filled my head so completely I was nauseous with it. Each time she returned, the earth tilted and threw me off my feet. Yet I was walking taller than before, through a world dripping with significance.

As for how others saw me during that time, I suppose they thought me transformed because I was the new Healer's Second. It was not a high status position, exactly, but I had a place in the clan now. No child dared taunt me anymore, and the adults offered a grudging respect. And if I mentioned Elu a little too often, well, it was understandable that I would be absorbed in my new job.

Even when Elu and Patlia were home among the rest of us, I was not always required, and it was everything I could do to stop myself pestering them. At first I waited nearby, just sitting and plaiting grasses into ropes too thin and frayed to use, or I walked in wide agitated circles around Patlia's hut. I'd glimpse the top of Elu's head as she sat among the sacred spine-thorns chanting, or I'd catch sight of the curve of her back as she bent to pluck a handful of ant eggs from a nest in the ground. But Patlia caught me watching and shooed me away. 'Stop bothering us! We'll call when we need you!'

So I spent more time with Huffma See, learning his language and trying to discover things I could tell Elu. I even started to feel an affinity with him during those afternoons as we sat both of us staring into the blue, longing for something just out of sight.

One day, I found the cavefish man sitting on the beach, squatting propped against a rock. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his arms over his head, hunching between his shoulders. When he saw me coming, he turned his back, shuffling his feet in the sand. He no longer looked like pale leather stretched over a skeleton.

His skin had first turned the pink of uncooked meat, and then to pale beige, and he had filled out a little, but he was still angular and sharp-featured.

I sat down beside his back, and looked out to sea. Weeks had passed since the conversation with Patlia, and winter was near an end. It was a clear day and the breeze carried the scent of seaweed and the blossoming blackfruit trees.

I had been thinking about what Patlia had said about the power of being a Second, and had tried talking to Elu, to persuade her to stay – I had told her the clan needed her, the whole island needed her to be Healer. I had told her that Patlia had said bad times were coming, but nothing I said had made a difference to how she felt. She failed every test Patlia set her. She brought the wrong herbs, or used the wrong incantation, or started using the wrong method of distillation. Three days ago, she had wandered off in the middle of lessons and the old Healer had found her hours later, leading a canoe race against the boys up the river. Yesterday she had somehow managed to set fire to Patlia's winter hut.

But it had been Elu who saved the fishman and it was he who caught her interest. He appealed to the adventurer in her – a strange man from a land unimaginably far away. But he had been unable to speak to her, or to any of us, and spent his time gazing out to sea or sitting hunched in despair. I thought if I could learn his language, or teach him ours, he might have tales to tell that would be interesting enough to Elu to keep her with us for a while, until I thought of something better.

At first I had thought he had no language, having tried every one I knew, and even pointing to objects and saying their names as I would to a baby, waiting for him to try to learn to speak. For weeks, as Patlia and Elu purged the worms from his guts and reintroduced him to food, I had listened to his mumblings, trying to pick out sounds. Whenever the men passed nearby and glanced at him, the cavefish man would thump the ground with his fists and cry like a child, shouting over and over, 'Huffma See! Huffma See!' Thinking this was his name and custom, the men banged on the ground with their spears and shouted their own names, ending with his to show they understood. But still he cried. The men began to avoid him.

But Elu was fascinated. So I sat beside him, day after day, trying to communicate, and whenever she could, Elu joined us, and watched him, with something like wonder in her eyes at the sheer foreignness of him.

Today we were alone. He turned side-on without looking at me and pointed upwards.

‘Sky,’ I said.

Huffma See nodded, and pointed to a redcone.

‘Tree,’ I said.

He nodded. They were all just trees to him. He pointed to me.

‘Neka,’ I said.

He shook his head. ‘No.’ He wanted me to use the name he had given me.

‘Debble,’ I said.

He nodded, and looked away, bleakly satisfied.

I followed his eyes to the sea. ‘You home?’ I asked.

‘Far,’ he said, pointing north over the sea. ‘Very far.’

‘Days?’

‘Many months. Moons. Very many moons.’

I wanted to ask how he had come so far. Had there really been a winged island that night? But I still lacked the words. ‘You stay?’

Huffma See shook his head and shrugged. ‘No. I go. This very bad place, Debbles.’

I looked around. At this time of year the sea was an almost purplish blue. A breeze stirred the bright leaves of the ropebarks. A shoal of silverfin leapt from the water, pursued by frenzied gulls and a solitary eagle. Behind us, the boolia trees let their fruits fall, and our conversation was punctuated with soft thuds. Parrots squabbled over the spoils. A group of oystercatchers took off into the air, and turned their white bellies to us, glinting like sparks.

‘Leave how? On sea?’ I drew a canoe in the sand to show I would help him find transportation.

He laughed, a sour hollow bark. I had heard such a laugh only once before, when old Snayut lay dying and his kneeling wife told him she loved him, though everyone knew she did not.

Suddenly, Elu had arrived, bringing salve for Huffma's boils. She stood before us, glowing in the sunlight, her hair waving in the breeze. I sat up straight.

'Hello!' she said, in our language. She smiled at Huffma See. Her eyes shone.

He did not smile back. His glance flicked over her once and he did not look her way again.

Elu laughed, unoffended.

I treasured these moments with Elu in which we were alone, apart from the cavefish man, who hardly counted. Usually Patlia kept Elu so busy that she had no time, and we were not allowed to talk. In any case, she was so miserable and defiant during her lessons that she hardly seemed to notice me. But she was interested in the fishman, and therefore needed me now.

She smiled. 'Ask him why he doesn't look at me.'

I asked him.

'She has no clothes,' he said, grabbing a pinch of the rags that wrapped his waist and legs to show me what he meant.

'I no clothes,' I said.

'Yes, but you very ugly,' he said.

I did not see the connection.

'What did he say?' asked Elu.

I had been thinking more about what Patlia had said, and the power of the right words. 'It is a custom of respect among his people,' I said, 'not to look a Healer in the eye.'

Elu was so delighted by this answer that I was glad I had lied.

'He thinks you're beautiful,' I said. I knew that part must be true. She was the most magnificent thing I had ever seen. The most magnificent thing the world had ever seen.

Elu shrugged this away and placed the salve next to him, indicating he should remove his clothes.

'No,' he said. 'Leave it. No touch me. Bad, very bad. Debbles.'

She raised an eyebrow at me.

'He doesn't want you to demean yourself,' I said.

Elu smiled. ‘Respectful,’ she said, ‘that’s good. I suppose he can put ointment on his own backside.’ She watched him for a moment. He turned a little away from her gaze, and raised his chin like a child. ‘He’s interesting, isn’t he,’ she said. ‘So different. I wonder what his world is like. Do you think he looks normal there?’

‘I doubt it!’

‘Hmm. He must know some interesting things.’ She regarded him, her head on one side.

I pushed down the snake’s head of jealousy that rose in my breast. ‘What things?’

‘I don’t know. Different things.’

I looked at him. I could not see the fascination. I did not know his age, though he was not old. He was thinner than any man I had ever seen, but his shoulders were broad and his arms were muscular. His hair was long and straight, the colour of arrow-wood. A sparse beard started below his cheekbones and softened his square jaw. His nose was too long and too thin. His eyes were like none I had ever seen, the colour of the horizon where the sea meets the sky.

‘He doesn’t even know how to feed himself! A baby would know not to eat wasting root.’ I laughed.

‘Shut up!’ he shouted, making me jump. ‘Debblebabble! No talk. No laugh.’ He stood up, snatched up the pot of ointment and marched off down the beach.

‘What did he say?’

I hesitated. ‘He is anxious to go home.’

Elu nodded. ‘Of course. The poor thing.’

On the occasions when I was able to see Elu, it was always under Patlia's eye, and I would have to calm my breath, rearrange my face and find a voice not squeezed to a squawk so that I could greet them in the proper order, a bow of the head to Patlia and a casual wave to Elu.

‘Hello,’ Elu would say, her smile burning into my heart. ‘What have you been, er,’ a slow blink, ‘up to?’

‘Oh ... nothing,’ I’d reply lightly. ‘Nothing much at all.’

Elu would look at me then, with a slow crooked smile, as if all the knowledge of the world were inside me, and she could hook it out like a fish.

‘Elu!’ Patlia yelled. ‘You have burnt the tarrum! We’ll have to start again. You are the worst Healer-in-Training who ever existed!’

Elu grinned at me, and winked.

My heart flipped. She was still trying to fail.

Then one day she came back from one of the trips away and something had changed. There was still the brightness in her eyes, the mischievous humour that lit her from within, and still that sense that at any moment she might explode, but now she poured her energy into the work and did what Patlia told her in stoical silence. She never again mistook a herb or slipped on a word in an incantation, never failed to snap the neck of a green turtle cleanly.

A few days after this transformation, we were at the salt marshes and we had wandered just out of Patlia’s hearing. It was the first time we had been this close to being alone together since the conversation with Huffma See.

‘Are you happy?’ Elu asked, keeping an eye on Patlia.

We were searching the bulrushes for the little blue saltworms we used to make a poultice for infected wounds. She squatted down and parted some rushes, peering up at me through them with a wry expression.

‘Yes,’ I said, grinning down at her. How could I not be?

‘Good.’ She turned her back and rummaged through the roots of some taller reeds. ‘Patlia gave me the choice, last time she took me away. She took me to the edge of my own clan’s land. She said I’m no good at this and I’m not even trying to learn and that I should go back home.’ She glanced up at me over her shoulder, and over at Patlia who was watching us. ‘Pretend you’re looking.’

I crouched down and put my fingers to the reeds. I didn’t know what to say.

‘She said if I wasn’t going to try I had to leave. I told her I would try. I begged her to let me stay.’

‘But... why?’

Around us, the vast salt marshes glared so they hurt my eyes. The dry reeds rustled against one another in the breeze. Not much lived here apart from the blueworms, but a cormorant flew overhead, whooping. Behind Elu, the waves sloshed up to the shore.

‘I realised I want to stay,’ she said. ‘Because of you.’

A single crescent fingernail of Elu’s lay on the dark earth floor of Patlia’s hut.

Patlia had gathered up the others, with Elu’s shorn hair, and taken it for burning to the little funeral pyre, at the top of the hill. Elu was kneeling by the pyre, mourning herself, to confuse Haraepa, the local spirit who lived in the great oak tree, known for his jealousy of apprentice Healers.

From where I stood I could just see Elu through the black scrawl of trees – a shorn silhouette, head in hands, bowing towards the flames in grief. Everyone else was there, too, wailing and beating the funeral drums. Putting on a good show.

I should join them.

Later there would be a banquet and songs. An excuse for maudlin laments and smokeleaf, without the sorrow of a real death.

I knew Elu would be having no difficulty crying at the pyre. She would be thinking of everything she must endure now she had to be Healer. Her shorn hair and ragged nails would grow back. But ahead of her were years of Patlia’s temper. A lifetime of toil.

Of course, I would be the one doing the physical work. It would be my flesh gouged by the thorn tree as I climbed it and cut off its crown. My feet would be the ones blistering on the purple sands of the desert as I searched for the right type of cactus flower. And it would be my fingers scrabbling to grip onto the yellow sea cliffs as I dodged the predatory beaks of the fish-eagles whose nests I was stealing.

The fingernail lay on the dark earth, a bright moon in the night sky.

A fingernail is strong magic. Harrapea could use it to addle Elu's mind, make her walk into the sea or poison us all in our sleep. Or a devious admirer could use it to make Elu fall obsessively in love with him. A Healer needs to have a clear head.

Elu could now never become what everyone had expected her to become – the bright laughing sunshine at the heart of the clan. Instead, she must prepare bodies for funerals, take part in all the long discussions of the Elders, and bear the weight of making political decisions. She must always be available to any sick person of any clan, even in wartime, even if it meant trespassing on enemy lands, risking her own life. She would be revered by the leaders of all clans, but a friend to no-one. Mother to no-one. Lover to no-one.

Close to nobody but her Second. No-one but me.

Patlia's thin keening rose above the other voices. The drumbeats were faster now.

What if I failed? Vessilla the Second had failed her Healer. It was long before I was born, but they said she'd died after lying to the Healer about the freshness of some swampseed. It was too far to walk to get fresh ones, she'd had a swollen ankle, and she'd thought it would be all right to use the ones she had to hand. Some said the Healer had poisoned her patient as a result, and then made Vessilla drink the same medicine.

The smell of roasting tree deer crept into the hut. Up near the pyre, two of the children held a howling competition. The singing would start soon. Elu would enjoy that part. And afterwards she would be permitted to speak to the clan again, for the first time in months. I smiled at the thought. No-one else would be doing much talking tonight.

I picked up the fingernail and examined it. It was a pearlescent white, the glow inside a seashell.

With my tongue, I tested the point of its crescent. It was sharp – sharp enough to pierce the skin of my tongue if I were to press too hard. It tasted of salt and earth. I rolled it around my mouth with my tongue. It pricked at my gums. I held it out between my teeth, the swell of my bottom lip filling the curve of its crescent. It cleaved to my flesh, warm and wet.

This piece of Elu, this dangerous piece of her body.

How could Patlia have been so careless, leaving something like this here? Her sight was fading, of course, she must have missed it. But still. A fingernail contains a person's essence.

I chewed, just a little, thinking of the power of fingernails. Each one is a weapon, a tool, a little shield protecting the end of its finger from harm. You can prise open nuts with a fingernail, to feed yourself or another. You can draw fine lines in the soil for a stranger, mapping the way to water. You can scratch an itch, pop a flea. You can scar flesh or destroy an eye.

You can do the right thing with a fingernail, and you can do the wrong thing.

I knew I should take it to the funeral pyre straight away, and cast it into the flames. That is the function of the Second, to look after the Healer, to help guard against evil influence. I must burn the fingernail.

I swallowed it, binding Elu to me forever.

It clawed at my throat all the way down.

We had all been watching the evening sky for weeks to see when the last of the seven sister stars would appear over the horizon, signalling the time for the spring festival. When the first sister star appeared, Elu and I were summoned by Patlia to begin making the sacred joishu brew. Now that she had completed the first stages of her training, she was officially an Apprentice Healer, and the spring festival was an especially important test of her skills. If she proved successful, we would then journey inland to learn to make the most potent and secret medicines. And later we would learn to call the rain.

I was not allowed to learn anything about the brewing process for the joishu but I had to gather all but the most secret of the ingredients. I was kept so busy searching for them that I hardly saw Elu for days, and when I did she was puffy-eyed and irritable. She shouted at me when she spilled some longsap juice, even

though I'd been nowhere near it, and complained about the smell of the ballfern leaves I'd brought. The bad smell of ballfern leaves is well known.

Every morning I would take the ingredients I had gathered overnight to Patlia, and receive my instructions of what to gather and what time of day or night I had to gather it. Every morning she would shout at me for some shortfall in quality or quantity of what I had found. The waterberries weren't large enough, and the fort-root was not young and fresh enough. Once I brought blueleaf that she'd asked for, and I'd spent all afternoon searching for, only to be told that what she'd actually wanted was bluestalk, an entirely different plant. She berated me for spending too much time with the cavefish man and not spending enough time at my work. Patlia was so bad tempered with me that I was sure Elu must be on the receiving end of worse.

But when the seventh star appeared, the brew was finally ready and everyone was in a festive mood. We all journeyed south along the coast together that evening to the Black Beach, where the clans met every year at this time. It was just out of our clan's land, but it was sacred to everyone on the island and at this time of year we were all welcome. The land here was steep and craggy, apart from the three smallish and rounded green hillocks huddled together near the path to the beach.

The path wound between the three little hillocks to the edge of the steep cliff path leading down to the black sandy beach. The young men were shouting and laughing and racing each other, showing off to the girls. The adults were laughing too, and calling out to old friends they hadn't seen in many moons. Sisters now living in different clans embraced each other and teased each other about their big bellies. Even Elu, exhausted and nervous, smiled to watch the children playing.

The smell of roasting salt lizard and smokeleaf always made me feel festive. We were all gathered there, every person from every clan of this island. Babes in arms, the elderly, the sick who had to be carried – everyone was there. The Aynia from the grass plains, the Fenagara from the saltwater lakes, the Ishwa from the far south of the island, and Elu's clan, the Lami. The Oya were there too, who for the rest of the year vanished into the mountains and would kill anyone

who crossed their land without permission. Even the two old hermits were there, who had each lived on one of the twin peaks of the pine hills since before anyone else there was born.

As we reached the main group of revellers near the big bonfire, the sun was beginning to fall behind the cliffs, and I looked behind me to the black cliff-face and the yellow spring rock that half-protruded from it. The rock was the colour of a summer's day, and I could see its covering of ancient carved symbols that looked from this distance like fur. This was Arriggaea, the god of spring.

The rock was huge – as tall as a tree, and an unusual shape, with its top forming something like the ragged head of some kind of beast, sticking out from the cliff. Under the head, the rock tapered to a shape like shoulders and the suggestion of two fused and slender front legs. The impression was of a monstrous creature just emerging from the sides of the earth, but frozen there.

As the sun spilled its red guts into the sky, people threw herbs onto the fire and passed around fermented pinkcap to drink. There was far too much food, with all the clans competing to be the ones who had brought the finest fare. There were seedcakes and oysters, and forest deer and salt lizard. And then hot baked winterfruits dripping with sweet juice. After the feast, pipes were passed around and smoked, lovers kissed, and the musicians of the Fenagara clan played.

The cavefish man sat alone on a rock near the base of the cliff barely eating the food I'd brought him, morose and lonely. I sat with him for a while and tried to talk, to explain the reason for the party, that tonight we would be bringing the spring and warmer weather to our shores, but he turned away from me and gazed over the sea at the rising moon. I gave up and returned to the party. I had more important things on my mind than him.

The sister stars appeared over the horizon, which was the cue for us to crack open the sacred joishu brew, which dissipated the veil between the human and spirit worlds.

The moon rose higher, and its white light struck the carvings on the flank of the spring rock.

The carvings began to move.

At first they just seemed to wriggle, and then they joined together and formed into something else, something alive and breathing, and the skin of the rock started to pulsate and move with the music. Arriggaea was awaking.

The beast's head started to move, almost imperceptibly at first, the neck just stretching a little from one side to the other. We danced and sang encouragement, our eyes never leaving the face of the god. By the time the moon had gone behind the cliffs, taking its light with it, the head of Arriggaea had freed itself, its great jaws drooling, and was nudging its shoulders against the back cliff to try to free itself. The massive front paws, each the size of a man's head, began to twitch and raise themselves up. The children ran away, squealing, but the rest of us waited, still singing, but more quietly now, all of us in awe at the power of what we were seeing.

With a great final heave, the beast ripped itself free of the cliff, and stumbled towards us, the ancient symbols on its flank wriggling in the firelight. It roared with outrage at being called by us, at being disturbed from its slumber. It was disoriented and confused. Arriggaea had sometimes been known on first waking to take a swipe and kill anyone who came too close.

As apprentice Healer, it was Elu's job to offer the huge basin of fermented pinkcap that she had spent so much time brewing. She approached the god slowly, her eyes watching its face, its sulky furrowed brow. She placed the basin just out of its reach, and retreated. The beast stepped forward and bent its great head, sniffing from a distance at the basin, suspicious and angry.

The deep gouged symbols on Arriggaea's flanks surged in the fire. He refused to approach the brew further.

There was a groan from the gathered clans.

Some years before, a Healer had failed to please the god with her brew, and he had shown his displeasure by eating her. I held my breath. Elu approached him, speaking so softly I could not hear the words.

The beast looked to the sky and roared.

Elu dragged the great stone jar closer to the beast, so close she must have smelled its fiery breath. He sniffed at the basin again, slaver falling in great strings from his jaws. His shoulders dipped, and he drank.

A great roar went up among the clans, the music started up again, and the beast, having drunk up all the brew in one go, looked up and around at us, and grinned. We all danced to welcome the spring, the beast kicking up sand among us, splashing in the sea, scratching itself against the trees, letting the children swing from its mane.

Spring would come this year, and it would be kind. We danced on, drunk and dizzy in the dying firelight.

The night wore on and people started to settle in groups, chatting and laughing. I saw Elu talking alone with Harben, a young man from the Oya clan who would one day be their chief. He had wanted to marry her, before she became a Healer.

Later into the night, when the children were already sleeping, Arriggaea lay down near to them and howled at the seven sister stars. Such a sound that it bubbled up inside you like tears and joy and centuries of pain. By sunrise he was petrified again into solid rock, stuck in the face of the cliff.

It was not until late the next morning that I realised the cavefish man had gone.

Some of the young men from my clan had seen what happened. Huffma See had simply stood up and set off up the cliff track. Some boys from the Fenagara clan had followed him, and held him back. It was too far for Huffma to try to make his way back to my clan's land, and it was dark. He would be eaten by a rakhul, or simply fall from a ledge and break a bone.

But the cavefish man fought so strongly that in the end his legs had to be tied together before the boys could bring him back down the cliff. They took him to Elder Sardor from their clan who told the boys to leave him tied up, as no-one had time to pursue a maniac in the dark on the night of the spring festival.

The fishman yelled out his name and struggled as they secured him to a rock. One of the boys from my clan had to build a fire near him to burn some smokeleaves to try to make him fall asleep.

Instead, he started screaming to the sky. Once he had quietened and fallen asleep, Yaro from the Aniya clan felt sorry for him, still tied to the rock, so he and a friend loosened the ropes a little.

Huffma See woke up, and kicked out at them both. He broke free of his bonds and cracked their faces with his fists, running off down the beach in screaming zig-zags.

‘Why did he do that?’ asked one of the children, who had been watching.

Yaro looked down at the rope. ‘Perhaps it’s a shame the only rope we thought to bring with us was the one we use to carry a beast to the cooking fire.’

The children roared with laughter, and all that day, as they travelled back towards the lands of their own clans, they ran around pretending to kill and eat each other.

Elu’s success meant that we left our clan behind and journeyed inland to the mountains to learn the more advanced healing skills. The days were hard. Patlia kept Elu working through all the daylight hours, and sent me away on long journeys to fetch ingredients. I travelled alone through the secret passes of the foothills, managing to lose myself on more than one occasion, and once I was confused by a sandstorm in the purple desert, and lost my way, without water. I was only saved by a chance sighting of a river eagle I followed to a distant spring. Many nights I spent on my own, far from Patlia and Elu’s camp, looking up at the stars and thinking of Elu.

But on some nights, when Patlia had not sent me away and she was tired and slept early, Elu and I would sit by the fire and talk in whispers until the sky began to brighten. On those nights the very air was infused with magic.

Spring turned to summer. Then, as the air turned to steam and the season of rains approached, Patlia decided to take us to Yellow Mountain. It was a long

journey, taking concealed and complicated routes through the foothills. The air hissed with the heat.

The ancestor rocks are hard to miss. They rise up at the peak of Yellow Mountain above the tree-line – two huge twisted figures. The taller one has the shape of a man, his featureless face looking down over the horizon, one arm placed around the shorter rock, which is huddled and turned into the tall one as if afraid. A gigantic father and son, carved in stone.

If the settlers had ever managed to make it far enough inland to see the rocks, they would have said the peculiar shapes result from the action of the wind. My people say the same. Thousands of years ago, the wind fell in love with a human man, and they had a son. But she became jealous whenever the sun and rain came near them, and she blew clouds across the sun and drove away the rain. She wrapped herself around the man and boy in an eternal dusk of drought, caressing them with her body, whipping their hair, stripping the moisture from their eyes and mouths, blasting them with the sandy earth, slowly turning them to stone. When she saw what she had done, she left that place, and never returned.

To this day, even when a great storm batters the island, there is never the slightest breeze at the top of Yellow Mountain.

This is where Patlia took us to learn to call the rain. ‘It’s the best spot,’ she said. ‘No wind around with its own ideas.’

Even for those who know the secret paths, it is two weeks’ walk from the coast through the desert and up to the mountains at the centre of this island. Slogging up the dusty tracks to the top of Yellow Mountain took us another two days. Even here, beyond the desert, the plants were dying of thirst – we could hear the leaves crackling as they curled. Heat pressed down on our shoulders like a burden of fire.

All the while, Patlia was instructing us on calling the rain, anxious that nothing should go wrong. ‘You must try to feel light, like air, become like the sky, or at least like a bird. Your mind must float. Touch the sky lightly, the slightest caress.’

By the time we arrived at dusk on the night of the new moon, we were exhausted. Patlia and Elu laid marsh fruits at the feet of the ancestor rocks while I

built a fire and cooked the lily bulbs we had brought with us. While they ate, I crushed the amber and shredded the herbs, ready for the calling.

Patlia was still lecturing Elu. ‘And once you’ve made the connection,’ she said, through a mouthful of mashed lily bulb, ‘once you’ve touched the sky – just touch, don’t grab at it – then let go. Stop dancing and *let go*. If you don’t, you’ll flood the plain. It’s happened before, with untrained Healers. I’ll be behind you with a stick.’ She picked it up and waved it at Elu with a smile. It was more of a club than a stick. ‘I’ll take your legs from under you if you don’t let go as soon as you’ve made the connection. Even if I have to break your bones.’

Elu coughed. ‘What?’

‘Don’t look at me like that,’ Patlia said. ‘We can’t have you starting a flood. The union with the sky will be strong, irresistible. Sometimes there’s nothing for it but a good *thwack!*’ She mimed it, with some satisfaction. ‘Neka,’ she said, without taking her eyes off Elu, ‘are you supposed to be crushing the amber, or sitting staring at us with your mouth open?’

I ducked my head back to my task.

‘Rest now, Elu,’ Patlia continued, ‘You’ll need your strength tomorrow. Calling the rain is hard to get right. It takes time. You need to approach softly, reach out to the sky with respect. Then, as soon as she gives you what you want – *bam!* You drop her. Like a selfish lover.’ She flashed a gummy grin.

Elu’s nod was solemn.

Patlia’s good eye scanned the stars. ‘Sleep now. I’ll make sure your useless Second gets everything ready for the morning. It should be a good day for it.’

In silence, Elu lay down by the fire.

Patlia wandered up and down, shouting orders at me. ‘Don’t shred the herbs too coarsely. Make sure the amber’s properly crushed. Lumps will help no-one. Are you *trying* to make this fail?’

When I was finished, she picked up the two gourds that held the last of our water, and poured it away into the parched earth. ‘Nobody drinks till it rains,’ she said.

Early the next morning, Elu and I took our places on the square patch of sunburnt grass at the feet of the father and son. The space was flat, surrounded by

squat yellow boulders, which concealed the site from the path. On three sides, the ground rose up, forming a natural arena. The fourth side, opposite the ancestor rocks, gave straight on to the slope of the mountain. I had already set the little heaps of herbs and amber to smoulder on top of the rocks.

Patlia propped herself against a boulder, and began to tip her songstick from side to side, releasing its sliding call over the mountainside.

Below, on the little foothills clustered at the base of the mountain, snailbark trees waved in the morning breeze. The purple desert shimmered beyond. But where we stood, the air was muffled and thick, still as death. The sky stretched above us, tight and flawless.

We held our palms out, weighing the sun's early heat. My tongue was dry from thirst.

Despite the morning light, Elu's skin looked dull, and there were deep downward lines at the corners of her mouth. I guessed she had not slept well.

We looked at each other. Elu closed her eyes and nodded, once. We stretched out our arms, palms to the sky, and began to spin.

I thought of Patlia's words: *You must become a thing of the Sky to take your message to her.* I tried to feel light. The hot perfumed smoke hung motionless around us, clogging our lungs as we danced. Together, we chanted the ancient song to the sky: Great Mother, cry for your thirsty children. Hear us, Mother Sky. Dizzy, I fell, once, twice, but was back on my feet before Patlia's club could reach me.

Shapes reeled by – the shiny black of Elu's hair up close, the pearly sheen of the horizon in the distance, a flash of scarlet flame trees below us. Once, right by me, the meaty pink of Patlia's yawn. Before long, everything was just strips of light. I was dancing in a dome spun from colours.

Pink morning sunshine changed to yellow, then to a midday of incandescent white. My feet grew sore, then numb, until I felt I was dancing on stumps. All the while, the heat pressed down on my head, and thirst scorched my throat.

Time passed. Shadows shrank, disappeared, then crept over us until we were dancing under the stars.

The rain did not come.

Finally, Patlia told us to stop, and we fell to the lurching ground, sick with dizziness. We lay on our backs and stared up at the dark shapes of the ancestor rocks in silence.

Patlia, if anything, seemed pleased with our failure. She loomed over us waving a firestick, and grinned at Elu. 'Not so clever now, are you, girlie?'

'I can't do it,' said Elu.

Patlia shrugged. 'Then we'll all die of thirst up here.' She trudged off to sit by the fire.

The next day was the same. The air sizzled. We sang until our voices cracked and we stamped our bloodied feet into the earth, raising clouds of peppery dust, but we could not call the rain. In the evening, we sat by the fire in silence.

By now, Patlia was incensed. 'Ay!' she yelled, picking up her stick and waving it at Elu. 'Lazy girl! I should have picked a better Healer. Nerilla. I should have picked her. And some other Second. *Any* other Second! If you can't bring the rains, the land will die, and everything on it. That includes you. And more importantly, me. Get up. Dance!'

I could barely move, but Elu stood, walked a few paces away from us, and started again. She spun round slowly on the spot, her eyes closed, her body glossy in the firelight. She danced for hours, well into the night, even after Patlia started snoring.

Patlia kicked us awake early the next morning and stomped off to her post to watch for rain clouds.

'I can't do this,' Elu whispered, as we winced our way over to the ancestor rocks. 'I'm not a Healer. Patlia's going to have to admit she chose the wrong person.' There was a moment's pause while we both contemplated the impossibility of this.

We positioned ourselves and waited. Elu's skin sparkled in the sunlight.

Patlia's music started up and we began, once more, to spin.

The colours of the land stretched out before us once more. Elu and I were alone in the sacred space of the dance. The sun glided across the smooth sky.

Shadows swung round to point towards our coast. We danced on, the sun holding our palms so we could not fall.

At some point I lost the feeling of where I was – even of who I was. All that existed was the living song to the ancient sky. The song, and Elu.

Our slippery bodies spun themselves around each other and up into the sky – two translucent strands in a single gossamer thread. As one, we floated upwards, easy as falling. We drifted high above the mountain, remote from the world, aware only of each other. We were beyond language, beyond place, beyond time.

And then the thunder.

It ripped itself open from inside the earth, charging through the ground and into our feet, scuttling up our spines to our electrified scalps. It tore apart our connection to the sky, and sent us tumbling to the earth. The ground bucked and rocked, trying to throw us off, back into the air.

I dug my nails into the soil among the withered roots, clinging to the ground. Cold raindrops, fat as berries, burst over my burning skin.

I looked up. Elu's eyes were still closed. She licked a drop from her lips. 'Rain,' she said, dazed. 'We did it.'

But the shower lasted no more than a moment.

A high-pitched moan escaped from Patlia, and she slumped to the ground with a thud. Still light-headed, I could only crawl over to her on my knees. She lay on her side, shaking. I thought she was dying. As I approached, she thumped the ground and rolled onto her back, drawing great heaving breaths. She wiped a tear from her good eye and I realised she was laughing. Laughing so hard she could hardly breathe.

'Pitiful!' she gasped. 'I could hold more water in my hand!' *Snort*. 'Useless girls.' *Howl*. 'And I was worried you'd cause a flood!'

The evening after we called the rain, Patlia brought us gourds full of sweet brushwater. Elu and I added our handprints to the others left by all the past Healers and their Seconds on the wall of rock. Patlia showed us the spot near the entrance

to the overhang where her big paw-print was, smudged because she'd moved her hand away too quickly. Beneath it was the smaller print of her Second, Unaph, missing its middle finger from the time when she had caught it up in a fishing line.

We both pressed a hand into the slippery dish of red ochre that Patlia held out to us. Elu found a bare spot on the wall near the centre and placed her left hand against the face of the rock, holding it there. I held my right hand next to hers, the tips of our thumbs just touching. When we took our hands away, the prints looked as though they belonged to one person. 'That's there forever,' said Elu, and smiled at me.

Patlia watched us in silence, frowning, her jaws working away at nothing.

That night, as we lay in the shelter listening to the soft patter of the rain outside and warming our faces by the embers of the fire, I looked up at our dark handprints.

Elu's eyes were on me. 'What are you thinking?' she whispered.

Patlia's snores were like the growling of a desert cat.

I looked at Elu. She had become thinner in the time that she had been away from the clan learning medicine, and her cheekbones were highlighted by shadows. The last few days had been hard on her, and dark hollows had formed under her eyes. But she was smiling and the embers of the fire shone in her eyes.

I smiled back. 'You did it,' I said. 'You're a Healer now. You called the rain.' I rolled onto my back.

'*We* did it,' she said. 'Together.' She shifted closer to me and looked into my eyes. 'It was incredible,' she whispered, 'being there with you like that.'

I looked away, and nodded at the ceiling.

She reached out and stroked my hair, moving closer, her body nudging up against the length of me. Her face appeared above, and she pressed her forehead to mine, our noses touching. So close her eyes merged into one.

I couldn't move.

'You're amazing,' she said.

A stone struck my leg. 'Shut up! Go to sleep!' Patlia shouted.

Elu giggled and rolled away.

Outside, a ginger owl called. Patlia's snoring started up again.

Elu reached for me.

Later, much later, when Elu finally slept and the grey dawn crept up the wall, I lay there, blinking at our new handprints, hardly daring to believe in the future.

We stayed for three more days at the top of Yellow Mountain. The days seemed long and slightly unreal, because I had to continue to act in my accustomed role as the Second, and to share Elu's presence with Patlia. It was only after dark that she was mine.

Each afternoon, Elu called the rains, with me by her side. On the evening of the third day, we rested under a rock overhang next to a fire that was roasting our dinner.

'Set out the water pouches,' said Patlia. 'We return to the clan tomorrow.'

I looked at Elu. Elu looked up at Patlia. 'You mean it?' she said. It was such a long time since we had left the clan.

Patlia's smile twisted her scarred face. 'You've learned everything I can teach you. Now you have to go out there and test your skills. And try not to kill anyone.'

Elu blinked. 'But you will still be here to guide me.'

'For a while perhaps. But I am old. When we reach the clan I will inform them that you are now the Healer. They will begin to come to you when they are sick.'

'But I don't know enough to be a Healer! I don't know anything like as much as you!'

'You'll be surprised at what you can do now,' said Patlia. 'You've learnt more than you think. You proved you were worthy of learning the most secret medicines when you awoke Arriggaea. Since we've been gone, you've learnt birth medicines and life medicines and death rites. You made the best sleeping tincture I have ever seen. You successfully called the rain.' A pause. '*Eventually.*'

Elu looked at the ground. 'But-'

‘Quiet, Elu,’ said Patlia, ‘I am very pleased. You will be a good Healer. Not one of the greats, but quite good.’ She leant back against the rock wall and closed her eyes. ‘Yes. I have done extremely well.’

For days after I had met Elu in the slaughter shed, I woke at dawn, and before I was even properly awake, felt for the note under my pillow to be sure it was still there. As I dressed I put it in my pocket, where it stayed, heavy beyond its weight, dangerous as a stolen diamond. Late winter had arrived, and still it had not rained. The air was cold and greedy, sucking the moisture from my skin and eyes.

The day before, Yega had been caught trying to steal a bottle of ink and had been sent away so I had to do her work as well as mine. I could not imagine what Yega, who could not read or write, would want with a bottle of ink, but I had work to do. I did not spare a thought for where she was.

First I polished the grates in the downstairs rooms, the corners of the folded note nudging at my thigh. Then I laid the fires for lighting later. I fetched water from the well, which was running low, and lit the stove, which was usually Yega’s job, so I spent some time struggling with it, having never learnt the trick of it. Once I had it alight, I set the water to boil and went out to feed and water the hens, collected the eggs, went back to the kitchen and made tea and toast for Mrs Henderson, which I took up to her room. While she ate, I took my time laying out her brushes, noting that their shine was a little faded and making a mental note to polish them later in the afternoon before I could be reprimanded.

As I laid out Mrs Henderson’s clothes and brushed her hair, I stood behind her, so that she could see herself in the mirror. I always tried to avoid catching sight of myself in the glass. Of all the settler inventions, a looking glass is among the cruellest. A reflection in a pool of water is much easier to bear because it is open to interpretation. But a mirror confronts you with what everyone else must see – and what I saw was a plain, lumpy face, pocked and scarred, with small narrow eyes and a nose like a small potato. The first time I had seen myself this

way, I had at once realised the futility of a plain person loving one who is beautiful.

‘What is the matter with you, today, Nicky?’ said Mrs Henderson. ‘You’re off in a daydream this morning.’ She looked at me in the mirror, and I met her eyes. I wondered if she was waiting for me to say something about the note. It might be a warning from her, or it might be a test. If I did not report it, she might decide she could not trust me. Settlers played tricks like this on their own servants all the time, even in London. They would hide a coin under a rug, and if it stayed there it meant the servant had not cleaned properly. If it disappeared, it meant she was a thief and must be dismissed.

Mrs Henderson was waiting for an answer. I should tell her about the note. I opened my mouth to speak, but she held up her hand. ‘Never mind. Go and see to Hector. He will be wondering what has happened to his breakfast.’

I took Mr Henderson his tea and laid out his shaving soap and brush, keeping my eyes averted from his crumpled form in the bed.

Throughout the day as I worked, the note was foremost in my mind – the threat or promise that it held. I hovered around Mrs Henderson whenever I could, but she gave no indication that she had sent it, and lost her patience with me more than once. She was pale and her hands moved in agitated circles when she spoke. When I responded to her bell at mid-morning, I found her standing with her face against the wall, muttering to herself.

I began to clear away her uneaten lunch. Mrs Henderson stood up, steadying herself against the table. The air in the room smelled of last night’s fire, which had been left burning longer than usual because of the fuss about Yega’s petty crime.

‘Ah, Nicky,’ Mrs Henderson said, closing her eyes. She had never become accustomed to having a servant of her own age, and her voice had an over-emphasised authority in it, like a small child commanding a dog. ‘I want to talk to you,’ she said, turning to open the English oak bureau. She stared without comment at the writing paper. Heat spread across my thigh from my pocket, as if the paper itself were crying out to be discovered and reunited with its fellows. I

snatched up the teapot and teacups, banging them against the silver tray and turning to leave as if I had not heard her, but she called me again.

‘Wait, Nicky,’ she said. Her voice was soft, and I thought she would tell me that the note was from her, that she meant it as a warning that I must not try to escape. I opened my mouth to start denying any wish to leave when she said, ‘I need you to help me with something.’ She held her hand to her forehead and sighed. ‘I want to translate the Lord’s Prayer into the native language, so we can teach it to them this Sunday.’

I looked down at the tray in my hands, and made a fuss of replacing it on the table, folding the napkins while my breath returned. ‘Yes, Mrs Henderson,’ I said, ‘but – I was going to, um, make butter today in case there’s rain later. Butter won’t come in a storm.’

‘Rain?’ she said. ‘There won’t be any rain, Nicky. There is never any rain.’

I glanced away from her stare. ‘And they don’t speak my language, madam,’ I said. ‘The others. No-one here speaks it anymore except for Elu and me.’

‘Elu? Which one is Elu?’ With her forefinger, she smoothed one of the grey pouches under her eyes.

‘I mean Ellie, madam.’

‘Ellie!’ Mrs Henderson knocked her pen off the bureau. It clattered onto the floorboards. ‘Nicky, that must stop!’

‘Yes, madam.’

‘It must stop.’ She picked up the pen. ‘Well.’ She collected herself, and smiled at me, bright and brittle as a bone china cup. Up close she smelled of old rose water. ‘You do speak with the other natives, I think?’

‘Yes, madam, but not in my language.’

‘Nonetheless.’ She settled herself at the bureau, neatened the angle of the writing paper, and held the pen aloft. She indicated a chair for me. ‘Now. What is the word for father?’

It took all afternoon to translate the prayer, as I struggled to find words that would make sense to the inmates, and Mrs Henderson laboured over how to skewer the native sounds to the page. By the time I was allowed back to the kitchen, I found that the stove had gone out and the stableboy Janto had not fetched more kindling. I was not allowed further than the courtyard without special permission, and there were guards to ensure that I did not stray. But I did not want to trouble Mrs Henderson again, so picked up my kindling basket and stole away to the quiet darkness of the woodshed.

I sat for a moment on the chopping block, breathing in the scent of chopped wood and watching motes of sawdust swirling in the rods of light that pierced the rough plank walls. I pulled my skirts up over my knees to cool my legs. If Mrs Henderson had not written the note, I could not guess who had. No-one was allowed in the room except for Mr and Mrs Henderson and me. Not even Yega was allowed in there since last month, when she had accidentally dented a leg of the Brazilian rosewood card table while folding it up. She had been punished that time, too, though she was not sent away. For the first time, I wondered what had happened to her. I sighed, and was about to stand and start filling the basket with kindling when I heard a whisper. ‘Hey, Neka! Did you get my note?’

Patlia kicked me awake before the sun was up. ‘Come with me.’ she whispered. ‘Don't wake Elu.’

Outside, the sky was just beginning to shed its dark skin of night. The silence was absolute. Not a breath stirred the leaves. The ancestor rocks were two looming silhouettes.

I helped Patlia sit down on the stone seat that she'd been occupying these past days while we had been calling the afternoon rains. She faced away over the scrubby bushes, down over the mountainside. I sat beside her, waiting for her to speak, watching pink light starting to bleed into the sky.

Patlia cleared her throat. ‘You're bad for her,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘You're bad for Elu.’

I felt as though she'd struck me a blow with her stick.

‘What do you mean? I don't understand.’

‘You're ... too *close*, the pair of you.’ She stared away, sucking her teeth noisily.

‘I ... I don't know what you-’

‘You know exactly what I mean, Neka. Don't take me for a fool.’

I looked at the ground. A shiny new rain beetle, half the size of my smallest fingernail, climbed up a stalk of grass. When it reached the top, it waited there, feeling the air with its legs, searching for a way onwards.

‘It weakens her,’ she said. ‘If you were found out ... she would be left without a Second and with her authority in doubt. The whole clan would be compromised. We can't afford that, especially not at this time.’

The crown of the sun appeared over the horizon. A new day.

Patlia had dug out a small round stone from the ground and was warming it in her hands, palming it from one to the other. The skin at the top of her arms wobbled and flapped. She hawked up a glob of phlegm and spat it at her feet. ‘You know the right thing to do,’ she said. ‘For her.’

‘I-’ I had to cough to find my voice. ‘I can't.’

‘Before we left, there was an offer for you.’

My mind was slow to work. ‘An offer?’

‘Jundi, from the Ayniya clan. He saw you at the spring festival. Offered to take you. Not a bad marriage for a girl like you.’

‘No!’ I was on my feet. ‘I won't!’

‘You will do what's best for Elu, and what's best for the clan.’

‘I'm her Second!’

Patlia waved this away. ‘She can get another.’

‘She's a Healer now, she can make her own choices.’

Patlia slapped an insect on her arm. ‘She's a Healer when I pronounce her to the clan.’

‘I won't go!’

She stood and looked down at me. The sunlight struck the scarred side of her face. Her dead eye was grey and spongy. ‘The decision is made. Now, I need you to go and fetch more water for the journey home. And not a word to Elu about this yet.’

At this time of year, the clan would have moved from the redcone forest and the grasslands near the coast, towards the northwest of our land where it bordered Oya territory. It was a walk of fourteen days from Yellow Mountain, along the intricate passes through the lower mountains, across the central plain, and up again through the forest-clad mountain range we called Greygully. Even in the winter, the journey would have been a hard walk, but now the morning air was thick with steamy heat. We travelled on, the dark green light slicking our skin with moisture. Every afternoon, the ferocious rains plummeted down on us, stirring up the claggy mud that sucked at our feet, and drenching us through.

My feet squelched deep into the mud with every step and my muscles ached. It was too hard to talk, and every sound around us was something wet – distant crashing waterfalls, gushing rivulets nearby, or the white water noise of rain crashing onto leaves.

It was hard to find meat on the journey, even in the Greygully Hills. Usually, when the rains came, there would be an exodus of indurra and fenhams from the east towards the central hills, and you would see flocks of needlebills squabbling over possession of the best new unfurling fern leaves or the highest roosting perches, but this year we saw only three or four small herds of fenhams, and a couple of reduced flocks of needlebills. The usual nocturnal cacophony of night creatures was reduced to the burping of frogs and the occasional moan of a black owl. We ate granna roots and went to sleep still hungry.

But in the daytime there was joy in Elu's stride. She marched through the thick mud, her arms swinging beside her, her hair bouncing, spraying drops of

water. She had called the rain. She was a Healer. She was going home, no longer a child apprentice, but that rare thing – a woman with power. She glowed with it.

Patlia was quieter each day, her thin lips pursed tight as she chewed on a bitter blacknut. Her breath was laboured, and we had to rest often. She was old, and perhaps sick, but it was more than that. She hardly spoke for days. She walked hunched over, not looking up, as if she didn't want to think about where we were going. When I tripped on the buttress root of a rojin tree and sent all our water and most of our food over the ground, she said nothing, and hardly even seemed to register my clumsiness. That night she ate her share of our reduced rations without comment. She looked broken, her expression conveying a kind of appalled grief.

I thought perhaps she was jealous of Elu's youth and beauty, and her future as the Healer. Perhaps teaching Elu the secret ways and giving her this gift of status meant that Patlia herself had to give some of that up. It would be understandable to feel anxious about her place in the clan. Who would choose to go to Patlia now, and be scolded for being sick, when they could instead choose to gaze upon Elu's lovely face, and feel the reassuring touch of her warm fingers on their arm?

From time to time, Patlia would tell us to stop walking, and she would clamber up like an ancient crab to a high viewpoint. Sometimes she would disappear for an hour or more, coming back with a grim face and no explanation. As we started the descent from the Greygully hills to the coastal plains, she stopped us often, holding her hand in the air to silence our chatter, standing still with her head to one side, like a bird eyeing a worm. As we walked on again, she sniffed at the air and shook her head.

Eventually we reached a gap in the trees giving us a clear view down to the coast. We could see the bright ocean, silver grey from here, and the narrow white stretches of sand, and in between, the soft greens of the forest. But something was not right. The forest was too bare. It seemed to be balding, so you could see the ground between the trees, even from far away. Some areas were completely naked – just straight-cut squares of grass. There were creatures standing around in there, but we couldn't make them out. They didn't look anything we had seen before. Had these creatures done this to our forest? What were they?

And there was smoke. Not great walls of it like a wildfire, and not small friendly plumes from a cooking fire, but thick constant streams of it, going straight up into the air.

Elu had gone on ahead without pausing to look, so she saw none of this, and she did not see Patlia give a grim nod, as if all her fears had been confirmed.

She fixed her good eye on me. ‘Hmmp,’ was all she said. She turned her back on the sight, and set off after Elu down the slope.

We had been gone for seven months.

When we reached the foot of the Greygully hills, we were back on our home ground, and the familiarity of the pathways almost made me weep. It was dusk, so we stopped and made camp in one of my favourite spots on our land, a small natural clearing by a bend in the river that came to life in the rains, erupting with red and purple flowers and shiny fluttering insects. We had baked arrowpalm hearts, and had trapped a tree deer – the first we had seen in a long time. It must have been the smell of cooking that brought the man to us.

When a figure appeared between the trees in the darkness, we were not afraid, and greeted him. We had no reason to hide our presence on our own land. But he was cautious, concealing himself from us behind some flowering bushes. ‘Come,’ called Patlia, ‘eat with us, friend.’

When he heard her voice, he approached. ‘Healer,’ he said, ‘where have you been?’ It was Gantol, a clumsy young man from our clan, who had once burned his fingers over the fire in surprise the day Elu was called. He was thin, and looked older – much older than when we left.

Elu beamed with pleasure at seeing him. During our time away, we had been obliged to hide ourselves from all others, as any chance meeting with another person would have meant an end to Elu's training and failure for all of us. We had seen only each other and Patlia for all this time. Another member of our clan, another face, seemed like a feast to gaze on, to all of us, even if it was only Gantol.

Elu handed him too much food and started asking him questions about the clan. She stopped when she realised he was not listening.

Gantol ate as if he were starving, shoving huge chunks of meat into his mouth, and not even stopping to peel the roasted star bulbs before devouring them. When he had finished, he spoke, but to Patlia, not Elu. 'Healer,' he said, 'why didn't you respond to our messages? We sent people to the mountains to mark the trees. We've been trying to call you back for months.'

Patlia stabbed at the ground with a stick. I recalled the markings on many of the trees we had passed. I had known them as a signal to contact home, but Patlia had simply tutted and ignored them.

'Didn't see them,' she said now. 'Anyway, it was the new Healer's training. I couldn't just leave.' She lifted her chin as if daring him to challenge her, but her single eye slid away from his face.

'You didn't understand,' said Gantol. He looked at the ground, and nodded. 'How could you? We were there as it happened and we didn't understand it ourselves.'

'What?' said Elu. 'What's going on?'

'We've been invaded,' he said. He used the closest word we had to describe such a notion, but it really meant no more than a temporary incursion of the type that happened from time to time among the clans. He had to explain at some length before we understood. Strangers had come and were staying on our land, in one place. They had built structures out of rock like new versions of the crumbling towers the Old Ones had made. They had gouged out the earth around rivers, poisoned the water and killed all the fish in order to take away some stones that they wanted. They had cut down the forests over vast areas and put barriers around them to prevent anyone from entering. They had filled the void they had made with big alien beasts. 'If we try to cross the barriers, we are killed. The strangers have powerful weapons. We can't access the springs for fresh water anymore, and the hunting grounds at the Blue Lake and Long Grass Plain are gone. If we try to take one of their beasts to feed ourselves, we are killed. So many of our men are dead. We tried to fight, but their weapons. We've never seen anything like them, Healer. They kill from a huge distance. The strangers need no courage.'

He paused. No-one spoke. The weight of the news made it seem unreal.

‘Are you alone?’ asked Elu, finally.

‘Yes. I am heading south to try to find my sister. Others have gone northwest, near Oya land, to try to avoid the strangers, but the Oya attacked them and sent them south. The Oya have had a lot of their land taken, too, and are trying to take some of ours.’

‘The *Oya* have had their land taken? But who could fight the Oya?’ asked Elu.

He shook his head. ‘Their weapons, Healer...’ He trailed off.

I wondered if Elu had registered this first use of her new title, but she was staring at Gantol.

He bowed his head. ‘Some Oya decided to head for the mountains,’ he said, ‘but there's not much to eat up there even in good times, as you would know better than any of us. The word is that they're starving up there.’

The Oya had been up in the mountains all the time. They must have known we were there. I looked at Patlia, who glanced away, and I realised she had known they were there. Those times when she had disappeared, she had been with the Oya. She already knew everything Gantol was telling us. She had not said a word.

Gantol drew his knees up to his chin and rested his forehead on his knees. When he spoke his voice was indistinct. ‘Our clan has broken up. The young women were taken away,’ his voice cracked. ‘Desia. My wife. That was just after you left. We don't know what happened to them. People with relatives in other places have travelled to see them, to see if things were any better for them, but they returned with stories of destruction everywhere. Death. People don't know what to do - everywhere we go, we are turned away. And now there's a disease. People are dying. They have need of you, Healer. You must go to them.’

‘What sort of disease?’ asked Patlia.

‘We don't know. There was a gift ... some strangers who seemed more friendly than the others left us some warm coverings to wrap around ourselves at night, and some thin waterproof materials to make shelters.’

‘Why would we need those things?’ asked Patlia.

‘That's what the Elders said, but some of the younger men – Akeen and his cronies – said that these new things were better, and so they took it. Elder Sendan said it was probably cursed and would go nowhere near it. He was right. Then the boys got sick.’

‘Where are they?’ asked Elu.

‘To the north, near where the mangroves used to be.’

‘Used to be!’

‘They're gone.’ He groaned. ‘Everything is gone.’

‘We will head north,’ said Patlia.

‘If you're going that way you should keep as close to these foothills as you can, to avoid the strangers. If they see you, they will turn you away, if you are lucky. If you aren't lucky, they will kill you before you even see them.’

‘Who are these people?’ asked Elu. ‘Where did they come from?’

‘We don't know,’ said Gantol. ‘They arrived by sea to the south of us in Aynia land, and north of us, in Oya land. Then they came for us from both sides. They look strange – small and stick-like, clumsy. And pale. Very pale.’ He looked at Elu. ‘They look like your cavefish man.’

‘Did you get my note?’

The stable boy, Ebnal, emerged from behind a pile of logs. I tugged my skirts back over my knees, embarrassed that he had been there all that time, watching me sitting in the dark. Ebnal was a fine-looking young man, with smooth skin that had escaped smallpox. Yega often spoke his name, and I had heard the girls in the milking shed gossiping and giggling over his long graceful limbs. He had unusual amber eyes and a ready smile – which was now directed at me.

‘What note?’ I said, and stood to leave.

‘Wait! Please!’ he said, and his tone stopped me. ‘This might be our only chance to talk.’ He loped towards me and stood so close I could see the necklace of sweat around the curve where his neck met his chest. He smelled of the oils released by chopped wood, and I closed my eyes against the scented, sunlit memory of men cutting trees to make canoes before the wet season.

‘Neka.’ Ebnal touched my arm and I opened my eyes to the dim woodshed. ‘I can’t trust anyone else,’ he said. ‘I have to get out of here. I’ve been watching you. I know you want to get away. I can help you. You need to help me. We’ll go together.’

My skin tightened. ‘What? No. I can’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘I just can’t. I’m too afraid.’ I turned away.

He caught my shoulders and turned me back to face him, dipping his head to stare into my eyes. ‘Neka,’ he said, and the sound of my real name was silk. ‘Is it true you once saw Abapanoa?’

‘I – I don’t know. Probably it was just a trick of the light.’

He raised an eyebrow. ‘Ha! A trick of the light? Well, yes, I can see how that would be an easy mistake to make.’

‘Who told you?’

‘Elu.’

‘Elu? Have you seen her?’

He frowned and looked at me curiously. ‘Not recently. Have you?’

I looked at my feet.

‘Neka,’ he said. ‘Listen to me. You have to do this. For Elu.’

I looked up. ‘Did she say that?’

He smiled, and dropped his hands from my shoulders, taking a step back.

‘No. But she doesn’t have to. You know it’s true.’

‘But where would we go? Afterwards, I mean.’

‘I don’t know. Northwest, to the salt plains maybe? Or into the mountains. We could join the Oya.’

‘Mr Henderson says it won’t be long till they discover the passageway through to the mountains. The Oya will be finished soon, like the rest of us.’

He looked around the woodshed. ‘Well ... You could come back here if there’s nowhere. Say I forced you to come with me.’

‘I – I can’t.’ I turned to leave.

‘Wait!’ he said. ‘Don’t forget your kindling.’

I took it from him and marched towards the house.

‘You’re right, Neka,’ he called, to my back. ‘You can’t have seen Abapanoa. It must have been a trick of the light.’

I thought about that conversation for a long time. Why would I take such a risk? There might be nowhere left to go. We could not survive on our own in the mountains for long. And it was only a matter of time before the settlers found a way to force someone to show them the passageway through the Greygully range anyway.

But there was Elu. She was still bound to me by a fingernail. I owed it to her.

But they would catch me, and make an example of me. A lesson for the others, to show them what happens if you try to escape. They might even execute me.

And what would happen to Elu then?

Days passed as I worried about it. Every morning, Hector would ride out to one of the neighbouring farms for news of the Oya. The police were on the lookout, for the Oya and their leader Harben especially. The ‘ringleader’ they called him, or the ‘mastermind’ – words that describe criminals rather than the opposite side in a war.

In the evenings, Hector would disappear for hours, ‘patrolling the grounds,’ he said, leaving his wife twisting her embroidery in her lap, and staring out into the darkness, alone in the house but for me. From outside we must have been lit up like goods on offer in a shop window.

Elu came and went. I would find her in the kitchen or the henhouse, and she would watch me while I worked so that I almost forgot myself and told her to help me instead of just standing there. She hardly spoke or looked at me. She did not ask me to do what I knew I must. She was so unlike herself – neat and passive, her eyes lowered – I could have cried. The settlers had at last managed to civilise her.

For my part, I asked her nothing about herself, where she had been, where her child was, what had happened to her – in my cowardice I thought I could not

bear to know. So I filled her visits with bright brittle chatter about the best way to scour a pot or darn a stocking. My craven heart was glad she did not look me in the eye, as I was afraid of what she might see.

‘Has there been any word from him?’ she asked one day, as I was collecting eggs. The acrid smell of the hens made my nose itch, and their blank-eyed placidity when I stole their eggs made me faintly angry. Why did they not fight me?

I looked at her. ‘Who?’ I knew who she meant, but I wanted to hear his name on her lips. I was torturing myself.

‘George.’ There. The knife slipped into my guts.

I shooed a broody hen away from her nesting box. She squawked, but did not defend her egg.

‘No, Elu. Nothing.’

‘He will keep his word. I’m sure of it.’

I slapped the egg into the basket so hard that it cracked. I picked it up and threw it to the ground. I was angry with her for still believing in George, and guilty that she believed in him at least partly because of me. She watched me scooping the wet yolk from the bottom of the basket.

I was the one who spoke. ‘I’m going to go.’

‘But how?’

I breathed in. The decision was only made as I spoke. In Elu’s presence – even this washed-out version of Elu – things seemed possible. ‘I think I have a way to get out.’

‘What? How?’

‘Ebnal has a plan.’

‘Ebnal?’ She looked doubtful. ‘Really? Was that note from him?’

‘I’m going to go, Elu. To the cave.’

‘Then where will you go? Afterwards.’

‘I don’t know. There might be nowhere left.’

‘But if George –’

‘You need to stop thinking about George. He’s not going to show up now. We’re on our own.’

She bit her lip, but said no more.

Ebnal's plan had been playing on my mind. He had almost convinced me that it would succeed. We had met again in the woodshed and he had told me he had spent a year teaching himself to read and write, and to copy a particular style of handwriting, getting his hands on any scraps of paper and broken pens he could, and when he could not, practising in the dirt with a stick.

Then, last spring, Hector had taken Ebnal south to New Exeter. They were away for two nights, and on the second, as all the guests in the inn grew drunk and careless and Hector was snoring next to a whore, Ebnal crept out of the stables and past the nightwatchmen, to break into the house of the Chief of Police.

He cut at the latch of the grand sash window with a knife he had stolen from the farrier, and slipped into the police chief's moonlit office.

He started to search in the drawers of the desk for a travel permit, not to steal it – as the theft would be discovered by morning – but to copy it.

There was a jacket slung over the desk chair and in the pocket was a key that opened a safe-box, so he did not have to cut into the lock. Inside were papers, money and a permit. Ebnal sat at the chief's desk for four hours as the moon slid over the house. At last he had a perfect copy, onto which he wrote his own name – or the name that the settlers had given him, Jimmy Pipe, for the flutes he made from bamboo.

But there was one thing missing, and without it his whole enterprise was wasted – the official seal of the administration. He combed through the desk, the safe-box, the jacket slung over the chair. Nothing.

He pocketed his work and took a blank sheet of watermarked paper so that he could make another permit at his leisure. At this point in his story he had shown me the sheet of paper with the black angry scars across it, and pointed at what he said was my name. 'See!' he'd said.

'But what about the seal?' I asked.

'In the shed,' he said, 'the one in the lower meadow. I saw two of them on the desk last year when I moved the bed in there for Mr Henderson. I should've taken them then but I didn't know what they were. He's a sly old dog, that Henderson. He must have pinched them from the old Administrator, his brother-

in-law. That way he doesn't have to go crawling to the authorities when he wants to move us around. He can give us away to someone. Or lose us somewhere if he likes.'

I put down my basket of split logs and crossed my arms. 'Why don't you break in and get the seals?'

'I tried, but I can't break the lock. I went there night after night and worked at it, but the lock's too strong. Only someone with a key can get in there.'

'I don't have a key.'

'But you will. He's bound to send you there to clean it again once his current guest leaves. You can steal the seals, Neka! Do it for Elu.'

I was so lit up inside at the dangers and the possibilities of his plan that I didn't register all that he said. What echoed through my heart as I carried the logs back to the kitchen was only that I must steal the seals and run away, to do the right thing for Elu.

The time came. It was early morning and as I entered the kitchen to light the stove, I found Yega was back, already stirring a pan of sloppy porridge. I was about to ask her where she'd been when Hector appeared in the doorway and ordered me to clean the shed. I tried not to snatch the key that was swinging from his fingers as he leaned against the doorjamb, smirking at Yega.

I was so bound up in the plan that I was glad of his attention being on her rather than me, just as I was glad of the layers of cloth that covered the thudding of my heart.

When I reached the shed, I set about cleaning it, scrubbing the floor, changing the sheets, all the time feeling as though watchful eyes were upon me. When I had finished cleaning, I edged sideways towards the table without looking and pocketed the seals while staring at a cobweb, which I then swept away with a flick of the broom.

I clattered out of there, knocking the bucket against the doorway, my face burning, not stopping to look at what was right before my eyes.

The water pail at Sweetwater Farm was kept outside the kitchen door against the wall, where the soil was loose and sandy. On the day I stole the seals from the shed, before I went to bed I scooped out a little hollow in the sand, hid the linen-wrapped seals in it, and replaced the pail over the top.

I lay awake that night, with sleep a wild dance on the horizon. The following night was to be my last night in that bed. The grey lumpy walls of the tiny space loomed in on me as they had the first time I had spent a night encased in stone – but that time, I had been thinking only of Elu, who lay near me, bleeding. Now I thought of the times to come, of the consequences of what I was doing.

And still it was all for Elu.

I gripped the covers. For the first time, I admitted to myself that I was angry with her, for giving up and diving into misery, submerging herself helpless in its seductive folds. And leaving me on the outside.

And still she asked after George Addlington, almost every time I saw her, though it had been so long since any of us had heard anything of him. What did she think he would do now?

Dawn cracked open that morning like an egg, dribbling yellow ooze across the sky. My room was suddenly unbearable and I crept through the kitchen and outside in my nightclothes. Firebirds were jabbering across the pale sky, praising their sun god for returning.

I held myself steady and kept my eyes averted from the flogging platform.

Cold droplets of water had formed on the water pail – I picked it up from its place by the wall, as on any other day, and paused only a moment when I saw the seals were gone. Ebnal would have our documents ready the next day, and tomorrow night we would break out. Ebnal had said there would be some way to go before we could feel safe – first we must escape from the immediate search party, and then we would have to travel far enough that no-one would doubt our documents.

I did not believe there was any such place left on the island.

But I had to go.

I had not told Ebnal about my plans yet, not wishing to risk upsetting him. We would have to travel north to start with, and only later to the mountains in the west as he planned. We would be walking for a month or more.

I lowered the pail into the muddy well, noticing the tiny perforations like wormholes in the stones that lined it, the creaking of the hairy rope, the way my muscles stretched and pulled through the movements without me. Everything was slow and intense with detail – my breath loud enough to wake the house, my veins full of lustrous quicksilver. My second last day as an unpaid servant to the settlers.

I forced myself back into the kitchen and lit the stove. Yega bundled in, all thick elbows and rustling skirts. She did not seem to notice that I was still in my nightclothes. She stood by the open door looking out at the horizon. When I came back dressed she was still there, watching the sky. She was quiet all morning, speaking to me only when she had to, and going through her tasks with jerky angular movements, her round face creased and closed.

I was making up some laundry soap in the washhouse when I heard a woman screaming from the direction of the vegetable gardens. My first thought was that it was an attack, and I raced outside and up to the brow of the hill to warn the others. What I saw from there was not the Oya warriors, but a dark naked figure, shouting to the backs of a cluster of male inmates who were hoeing between the rows of onions and cabbages as if nothing was happening.

As I scrambled down the hill towards them, I saw that the naked figure was Mrs Henderson, and she was shouting not at the prisoners, but at her husband, who was hurrying towards her from the other side of the garden with a blanket. Closer now, I could see that she was smeared with dark mud that smirched her pale skin, stinking like sewage. Her hair was tangled with thorny twigs and tattered leaves, and her face was scratched and bleeding where a thorn had ripped her cheek.

Her glassy eyes were fixed on her husband, her palms outstretched. ‘Is this what you want, Hector?’ she called. ‘Is this what I must do?’

Mr Henderson threw the blanket around her and hissed through his teeth. ‘I will never forgive you for this shame. *Never.*’ He held the blanket at her neck with a fist, and looked at me. ‘Don’t stand there with your mouth open. Fetch the doctor.’

I ran to the stables to tell Janto to send for the doctor. As I emerged from the stables Mr Henderson was escorting his wife across the courtyard. I ran to help her, but Mr Henderson waved me away. He held her stiffly, his chin held high, as he tried to walk her towards the house. She wailed at him, and rubbed her face over his, her tears and mucus leaving slimy trails in his beard. ‘What did I do wrong?’ she said. ‘Why don’t you want me?’

He stared ahead at the wall.

Patlia never again mentioned that I should leave Elu. Perhaps in time she would have. Perhaps she intended to separate us as soon as she had seen the new Healer going about her work. But as it turned out, time was something that Patlia did not have.

We travelled north to find the clan and try to heal the new disease that had been given to us with a gift.

When we arrived, the Elders took us to their hut and summoned the handsome young man Vantin, who told us what had happened. Some days after the men had started sleeping under the new blankets at night, Akeen had come to the elders complaining of a bird inside his head eating his brain. Ten days later, he was dead.

I brought water for Elu and Patlia, as they squatted by the embers of the fire. It was early morning and it had been a cold night. Droplets of water had formed on the bamboo poles of the shelter.

Patlia watched Vantin through narrowed eyes, rolling her tongue around the front of her teeth. He squatted before us holding a handful of earth, and told us of Akeen’s decision to take the gift from the settlers, and of the other young men who had taken his side. They had been warm and dry sleeping under these new things, and other young men had soon joined them, including Vantin himself. Now his head felt as though someone had speared him in the eye, many of his friends were dead, and he was frightened.

‘This is what happens when you defy the wisdom of your elders,’ said Patlia.

A pattering of anger darted across his beautiful face before he could control it. He dipped his head. ‘You are right, Healer.’ He let a handful of earth fall through his fingers.

Patlia acknowledged his statement with a nod and stared at the embers. ‘And Matali and little Udakata and the others? How are they?’

‘I ... don’t know. I haven’t seen them this morning.’

Elu looked up. ‘They didn’t attend the men’s meeting at dawn?’

Vantin shook his head. ‘They – they don’t always go to the meetings any more. Sometimes they prefer to sleep.’

A sucking noise escaped from Patlia’s mouth. ‘How do they expect to become elders and learn to take care of the clan if they do not attend the meetings? How will they become men?’

Vantin said nothing. A sheen of sweat glossed his face. I handed him a cool grass sponge. He wiped his brow with it and threw it to the ground without looking at any of us.

‘Will today’s young men grow up to be our killers?’ asked Patlia. ‘Let us all starve, betray the spirits of the land, anger the gods, bring curses upon us?’

Vantin stood. He was tall and his hair brushed the ceiling of the shelter. ‘The world is changing, old woman. People will have to take care of themselves. Agh, my *head!* Can you help me?’

‘Take me to the others,’ said Patlia.

We found the other young men near the stream. They were sleeping in flattened patches among the long grass, like a pack of young juffas. Their skin glistened in the early sunshine as though they had been rubbed with goose grease. They were shuddering and gripping the blankets to them.

Patlia whacked them with her stick. ‘Get up!’

They moaned, but did not wake.

Valin crouched beside the young man Brantol and shook his shoulders. Brantol flopped in his hands like a slaughtered beast.

‘Get those covers off them,’ said Patlia. ‘They are cursed.’

The men were too weak to resist as we unwound the blankets from their bodies. Patlia and Elu took them away to burn. Blue smoke rose from across the stream and I could hear them both chanting to release the curse.

I held a gourd of water to Matali's lips, but he couldn't swallow it. Strings of saliva dangled from the corners of his mouth. His eyes opened for a moment and he looked at me with unfocussed eyes. 'Have I been speared?' he said. 'My head.'

That year, the month of the first rains became a blur of activity for me as I helped Elu and Patlia make medicines. More people were falling sick. At first, it was two young women who had lain with one or other of the boys under the cursed blankets. But then it started spreading to people who had been nowhere near them.

I had to fetch many of the medicines, and worked through long days climbing to the tops of the web-trees near the lagoon, and digging deep into the wet earth of the salt lake for fever-root. Patlia and Elu worked through the days and nights without stopping.

At first I put the aches in my muscles down to all the extra work I was doing, but once my skin started burning I knew the curse had claimed me.

Elu made me lie down in an empty shelter on the edge of the camp where it would be quiet. She brought me fever-root tea but the nausea turned me inside out and I emptied my stomach on the ground. As Elu left to tend others, I stepped off a cliff into blackness.

Something shadowy was stalking me.

I walked through rivers of fire and ice. When I turned my head, the shadow-thing fled, but it was always there in the corner of my eye.

As I fell into a tunnel of ice, the thing launched itself at me and spread burning filth over my skin. At first I thought it was the devil-tree Elu and I had used for mischief many months before. But then I saw it was a great bird with white feathers and a blue eye. It was twice the height of a man and as I lay by the shore of the black lake crushed by the midday sun, its beak began to peck at my skin.

The shadow thing danced and bobbed.

A great fish made of ice raised its warty head out of the lake and grabbed my feet in its jaws, pulling me down, down into the icy black heart of the lake. I held my breath for as long as I could, but, my lungs collapsing, I had to breathe in the black water. I felt its darkness spreading through my veins, splintering my flesh into frozen shards.

The fish raced with me to the surface and flung me high up into the sky, so high that I was in the fire of the sun, burning, and then I was on the funeral pyre. I could smell the mourning leaf smoke rising around me but I could not open my mouth to tell them I was alive – the fire was already melting my tongue. Spears shattered my bones.

The shadow thing leapt at me.

Hopeless, said someone. Leave her and help those who can still be helped.

A hand on my forehead, cool like spring water.

A sob.

Drops of water trickling into my mouth.

A wasp crawling over me, injecting eggs under my skin. The eggs growing, burning, erupting.

The backs of my eyelids were blood. I opened them but I had vanished. Around me was wailing, raised voices. A pair of feet ran past at eyelevel. I held my hand in front of my eyes but it wasn't there.

The shadow thing began to pull me under the earth.

Then nothing.

I don't know how much later I opened my eyes. Patlia lay beside me, staring empty-eyed towards the sky. Her mouth was frozen in anger.

Her face was covered in knots. I reached out to touch her, knowing she would never feel a touch again. The sight of my arm made me scream. If I could have, I would have run away from it. It belonged to a huge warty toad, with pits deep enough to hold a gecko egg. As I moved my arm, scabs fell off me like leaves from a tree.

I slept.

'Neka. Neka! Are you awake?'

I opened my eyes.

Elu was cradling me in her arms. Tears dropped onto my face from her eyes. 'I thought you were lost,' she said.

As I recovered my strength over the next few days, I dragged my unsteady legs through a changed world. Almost all our young men were dead. Patlia was dead. Many of the young women were dead, and their babies lay in startled heaps next to their mothers. There were too many to count.

Vantin lived, but he would never be handsome again. His face was warped with scars and pitted, like mine.

Some escaped the curse. Elu was one. Her face was as smooth and perfect as it had always been. There were a few others who still looked the same.

But less than half the clan had survived.

A small pale woman in a long grey skirt and high-necked white blouse stood on the path, one hand shading her eyes from the sun, the other on her hip. She was frowning into the trees.

When we walked out of the shadows, she jumped, and turned around to make for the door. She took two hurried steps, and then turned again to face us, as if thinking it was best not to turn her back on us. Her hands fell to her sides and she looked in one direction and then another, as if for help or a weapon.

'Go on, Neka,' said Elu. 'Say something.'

I approached the woman, carrying the basket of star bulbs. 'Hello,' I said, in the cavefish language. 'We no hurt you. We bring food.'

Or that is what I tried to say. It had been a long time since I propped myself against a rock next to Huffma See.

The woman's jaw opened and shut. Her eyes skimmed over my scarred face and arms. As we approached, she gripped her skirts in her fists and her mouth twisted. I could see, close up, that she was young.

I took the basket of precious star bulbs. We had each only eaten two to stave off hunger for now, so that we had enough to give as a gift. Perhaps forty were left in the basket, plump and white, emanating a light herby scent. It made

me feel lightheaded. Food had been scarce since the disease had come. We were too weak as a clan to try to take back our land or even to steal from the newcomers. So we had decided to try to trade.

I placed the basket in front of her, and she peered in as if expecting to see a pile of excrement. What she saw meant nothing to her, of course, English women not being accustomed to eating star bulbs. She lifted her face and looked at me, not knowing what to make of the gift.

‘Taste good,’ I said, and took one from the basket to hold it out to her.

She took a little step back.

I took a bite from the bulb, smiling as its sweet pulp coated my tongue.

‘Good,’ I said, and smiled.

She watched me without smiling, but squatted by the basket, selected a bulb, and bit into it. ‘Good,’ she said, ‘yes.’

‘Cook in fire. Better.’

She stood, wiping her hands on her skirt, and pointed to herself. ‘Me Mrs Wilkinson,’ she said. ‘You?’

I introduced us, ‘Elu, Simha, Renjo, Banati and Neka,’ I said. She repeated the names, stumbling on the sounds, but nodding at each of us. I remembered another word Huffma See had used. ‘Debbles,’ I said, pointing at my clan.

She frowned for a moment, but picked up the basket and carried it up the path to the house. At the door she held up her hand and said, ‘Wait.’ She went inside, closing the door.

We waited, the men on edge and nervous in case it was a trap. But the woman returned, almost straightaway, with a large joint of cold cooked meat, which she handed to me. From the shape and smell of it, it was from one of the strange animals, and not from one of our own, but I took it. We needed meat.

The woman watched as I handed the joint to Simha. ‘You are not devils,’ she said. ‘Understand? Not devils.’ It seemed important to her that I understood, but I had never known the meaning of the word that Huffma See had used for us, and did not understand it now.

With friendly nods and waves, we left.

‘A trade,’ Elu said, when we had reached a safe distance. ‘They understand trade. That's a start.’

The next day we set out for another settler's home, with the last of the star bulbs. Banati wanted to keep back some of the food back in case the next people had nothing to trade, but Elu insisted that we had to make generous exchanges to start with in order to make a good impression.

The place we had in mind was an hour's walk from the site of our encounter with Mrs Wilkinson. It was by what had once been the southern end of the sweetnut wood, where it gave way to the open plain. A much larger house than Mrs Wilkinson's now stood there, right on the spot where we camped on our hunting trips.

We had eaten the meat the night before and though it had tasted strange, there had been enough for all of us. It had given Renjo a bad case of wind, so he was walking some way behind the rest of us.

Perhaps eating the carcass of such a large slow beast had made us stupid, because we did not see the strangers.

We were still laughing about the noises coming from Renjo's backside when there was a fierce bang, like thunder. A soft thud behind us. Renjo was on the ground, dead, with blood gushing from his face.

More loud cracks. A man cried out. Someone else fell – I didn't see who it was.

And I –

I ran.

I leapt over the brack bushes and dodged between the sparse rope trees. The undergrowth had been cut or burned away and the ground was clear for running, but the trees had been thinned so I was visible from far away. There were footsteps running behind me but I did not dare to turn to see if they were friendly.

Someone called my name, and I turned, just in time to see a stranger striking the side of Simha's head with a weapon.

Elu ran towards him. 'No!'

The stranger lifted his gun.

He pointed it at Elu.

It exploded into noise, and she fell.

She landed on her knees and stayed there for a moment - a point of silent stillness in the whirling noise around us - and slumped onto her side in the dirt.

I had not thought of anyone else. I had not even looked for Elu. I had just run.

The man raised his gun and pointed it at me. Then Simha was there, his temple bleeding. He held a rock in his hand, which he dashed into the stranger's skull. The stranger fell, a carcass now.

Simha picked up Elu, and we ran.

We kept running, long after the shouts of the strangers faded. When we were sure we were no longer being pursued, we stopped. Simha, Banati, the lifeless body of Elu, and me. I did not know where the others were. The sight of Renjo's bloody face hung before my eyes. My limbs were traitorous – heavy, clumsy, and not under my control.

I vomited into the grass. Everyone was talking at once.

The trees around us shuddered. It began to rain.

'Is she-?' I asked, and retched again. 'Is Elu-?'

Simha had laid her down on the grass and now squatted beside her and brushed the hair from her face.

Elu. Her eyes were shut, her arms and legs at odd slack angles. Just above her right hip, her torso was a bloody mess of butchered flesh.

Simha shook his head. 'She's breathing, but I don't know what to do. I'm no Healer. You have to do something.'

'Me?' I was useless.

Everyone was looking at me.

'I don't even know how these weapons work or what they've done to her,' I said. 'We don't have medicines against them.'

I looked at Elu.

'But maybe we know someone who does,' I said.

Simha carried Elu all the way to the house where Mrs Wilkinson lived.

He held her like a baby, cradling her head against his chest. Her blood ran down his thighs. One of her arms fell down at an angle and flopped about like a dying fish. I stopped him and tucked her arm away. Her face was starting to change colour.

I have never known such fear. That Elu – Elu! – could die seemed as impossible as the death of the sun.

I raced on ahead and pounded on the back door. Mrs Wilkinson answered, wearing a floury apron and wiping her hands on a cloth.

I try now to picture the scene through her eyes. Five or six naked savages barging in to her flour-dusted kitchen, bleeding, wild-eyed and stinking of fear, jabbering meaningless sounds at her.

I know now that at that time, most of her people still believed that we had no language or reason and the churchmen declared us soulless.

Simha's hand had disappeared in Elu's blood. It streamed down to his elbow and onto Mrs Wilkinson's scrubbed floor.

She hesitated for only the briefest moment. She led us into the bedroom and motioned that we should lay Elu on the bed. She fetched towels, which she placed against Elu's wound, and instructed me to hold them there. She left the house and called towards the woods for her husband.

If Mr Wilkinson was surprised to find bleeding savages in his bedroom, he did not show it. His wife spoke to him in urgent words I did not follow, and he left in a hurry.

I do not recall when my clan folk left, though I remember them staring uneasily at the walls and shuffling their feet. They had never been in such a solid confined space before and it made them uneasy, like being buried alive.

They were gone before the doctor arrived. He was a short man, balding, with a round face. He carried a black case and his clothes smelled of smoke. When he saw his patient he stopped, and looked back at Mr Wilkinson, in the doorway.

He asked a question, and Mr Wilkinson answered. The doctor nodded, and approached Elu, dismissing me from her side. Her breathing was shallow and her eyelids were still closed.

The doctor plunged two fingers into the hole in Elu's side. She moaned, but did not open her eyes. His hand reappeared, red and wet, with a bullet held between his middle and index fingers. Mrs Smith handed him a bottle and he threw a foul-smelling liquid onto her wound – it smelled of scorched earth and made her skin flinch. I still cannot smell whisky without remembering that first whiff of it, the fumes filling the little room, seeming to set alight the smell of Elu's blood.

Mrs Wilkinson brought some thread and a needle she had blackened over the stove. The doctor sewed Elu up with quick spidery stitches, said a few more words to Mrs Wilkinson, took something from Mr Wilkinson's hand, and left, shaking his head.

We stayed in that room, Elu and I, for a month or more, as Elu slowly grew stronger. Mrs Wilkinson brought food for us – flavoured water with pieces of chewy meat that smelled of dung, gritty and tasteless slices of something she called *bread*. She watched us in silence as we ate, and took the dishes away without comment. She helped me get Elu to the chamber pot, holding her up on one side as I held her on the other. She gave us blankets and did not understand why we were afraid of them.

She did not often try to talk to us, but sat with us sometimes on a wooden chair in the corner of the bedroom, while she mended a tear in a shirt by the firelight, or cut a worn bed sheet down the middle to sew the outer edges together. We did not realise they were poor. She let me watch her sewing, and, as if I could not see it was sharp, she warned me not to touch the point of the needle, by pricking her finger and showing me the bright bead of blood.

The doctor returned from time to time, to hold Elu's wrists between his fingers and stare at the golden ticking thing he took from his waistcoat pocket. As she became stronger, Elu liked to hold it to her ear and listen to the sound, like the tiny heartbeat of a moth. The doctor lingered over these visits, spending less and less time attending Elu and more and more just watching her, but he was always

certain to take the freshly-beheaded chicken or the joint of meat that was his payment.

So it was that Elu and I were dressed in nightgowns when we met the Administrator.

‘Here is your new guardian,’ said Mrs Wilkinson one day, peering out of the window at a tall figure making his way up the garden path to the door.

‘My what?’

‘Your guardian. Like a father. He’s the Administrator of the Island. The chief representative of the Company.’

That man? The one with the thin face and red whiskers? They believed he was my father?

‘Of all of you, I mean. He is going to look after all the natives.’

I was translating this for Elu as the man came in through the door and Mrs Wilkinson took his hat. She seemed to bend a little from the middle in his presence, as though she were permanently bowing.

‘It is so good of you, Sir,’ she kept saying. ‘Mr Administrator, Sir. So very kind to condescend, Sir.’

‘Ah, this must be them!’ said the man, and held out his hand. He was the first settler ever to make this gesture to me, though I had observed it before. ‘I. Am. Pleased. To. Meet. You,’ he said, a little too loudly, moving his lips slowly as he sounded every letter. ‘I. Am. George. Add. Ling. Ton.’ He nodded. ‘The. Ad. Min. I. Strat. Or.’

I took his hand and he squeezed my fingers, lifted my hand up once and then tugged it back down as though we were chopping wood with the same axe. I liked the gesture.

He dropped my hand and waited.

‘Tell Mr Addlington your name, dear,’ said Mrs Wilkinson.

‘I am Neka. This is Elu. She is the wise woman of our clan.’

The Administrator closed his eyes for a moment, and nodded as though this were information he already knew, though he could not have, as Mrs Wilkinson had never even asked our names. He squeezed Elu's hand as he had squeezed mine, and then held a finger up for our attention, took a breath and surprised us by speaking words in our language. 'Welcome, yellow lizard. I suck your tongue a few words only.'

Elu sputtered. 'Who's he calling a lizard?' she said. 'He's the one who keeps licking his lips!'

'I think he's nervous,' I said.

Mrs Wilkinson was looking at me. 'What did she say, dear?'

'She says she is honoured to meet Mr Addlington.'

'No way is he going to be sucking my tongue,' said Elu, still laughing. 'He's so thin. He might try to eat it.'

Mrs Wilkinson and the Administrator exchanged glances.

'And,' I said, 'she asks could you please explain what you mean when you say you will protect us.'

He cleared his throat and spread his fingers over his jacket lapel, swelling his chest like a man doing the pigeon dance. 'Well, er, Nicka...'

'Neka.'

'Neka. I am the chief here. I represent the Company that owns this island. And I will ensure that your people are fairly treated.'

Elu eyed him, taking in his scrawny neck with its prominent Adam's apple, his thin shoulders, sparse red beard and stooped gait.

'The day we need his help, we really are in trouble,' she said.

He straightened up, and looked at me.

I looked him in his watery eyes. 'She says we are honoured and grateful.'

'Ah yes yes, good good,' he said, blinking and nodding.

Elu turned away so that he could not see her smile.

We left the Wilkinsons' cottage a few days later. Mr Wilkinson gave us a leather water pouch, shook my hand and clapped me on the back as if I were an English gentleman. He tipped an invisible hat to Elu.

Mrs Wilkinson gave us bread and cheese wrapped in cloth and hugged us both. Then she took Elu through to another room ‘I have a small gift to give you,’ she said.

I was left with Mr Wilkinson.

‘Where will you go?’ he asked. He stepped in close, his breath sour in my nostrils.

‘Back to our people,’ I said, my tongue still knotting around the strange sounds.

‘Where?’ he said, stepping closer. ‘What place are you going to? Where are they, your people?’ He smiled.

‘We go north to green lake,’ I said. ‘West of green lake there is a big meeting. People from all the clans will be there.’

He nodded.

‘There,’ said Mrs Wilkinson, returning. ‘Doesn’t she look pretty?’

Elu followed behind, dressed in layers of greying petticoats and a very large straw hat.

Mr Wilkinson stepped back, and ran his hand over the back of his head. ‘Ah yes,’ he said. ‘That she does.’

Elu spoke in our language through a fixed smile, without moving her lips. ‘If you laugh at me, I will bite you. Let’s go.’

As we left by the back door, I noticed the basket we had traded weeks before. It was still full of star bulbs, now rotting, and beginning to turn black.

The first thing we knew of it was the sound of hooves, thumping in our chests like far-off drums.

Clans had gathered from as far as Cat’s Tooth Mountain in the south and Green Pearl Falls to the west. Once, it would have been a gathering of more than two thousand people. Now there were perhaps as many as five hundred. Still, we had feasted on the fat spring nuts, roasted tree deer and sand lizard stuffed with the

sweet lily bulbs, and baked tubers wrapped in sweetfern leaf with ears of golden wild corn. We sang the old songs and told the old stories and swapped gossip. No-one mentioned the settlers. They were dotted along the coast and we were far away from them. There was no reason to think they would find us here.

But we knew this sound – at least twenty horses, and shotguns being fired into the air. Grown men whooping.

I was sitting with a group listening to Granyia, who had once sat on the rocks talking about my mother while winding vines for fishing nets with the women from my clan. Her face was marked with pox scars. Her voice was quiet and I was leaning in to hear. She was talking about her daughter.

There was laughter coming from the huts, young women squealing and men making playful growls.

On the other side of the cooking fire, Elu was at the centre of a group of young people, mostly men, involved in some kind of acrobatic competition that involved drinking and backflips. Korab was there, a married man now, on the edge of the group, eyeing Elu, his withered arm tied to his chest.

It seemed we all heard the hooves at once.

Five hundred people froze and looked at one another.

We were too slow, stupid with too much food and flirting. By the time the first person shouted ‘*Run!*’ the men and their horses were breaking through into the camp, firing their guns, swinging machetes at anyone within arm’s reach, trampling the children beneath their horses’ feet, and shooting at the backs of anyone trying to escape.

Elu dashed past me. ‘Run, Neka!’

I ran.

But I slowed. I had run once before and left Elu behind. This time I looked back, to see if there was anyone I could help. I turned, just in time to see a man on a grey horse swing an axe at the back of Korab’s head, cracking it open in a cascade of blood. He fell to his knees and stayed there for a moment – a point of silent stillness in the whirling noise around them – and slumped onto his side, eyes open, face squashed against the earth.

I heard bones breaking, flying spears, cries of agony and triumph. And thuds as bodies hit the ground. Guns fired and people fell. So many people. So much blood.

Someone seized me by the hair and pulled me into the air against his horse. My feet scrambled to find ground that was not there. The horse-rider clamped his hand under my arm and over my breast with a cry of victory – a prize hunter lifting a trophy – but as he swung me round towards him, I jabbed at his eyes with my fingertips. He roared and dropped me. I fell heavily.

Before I could get to my feet, I looked up and saw the rider's face. It was Mr Wilkinson. Had he been trying to save me?

A young man from the Oya clan was aiming his spear at him. Mr Wilkinson had a gun in his hand, but he did not raise it. The spear lodged in his throat and he fell from his horse, not five paces from me.

I was still on the ground. Another rider saw me and cried out, bringing his horse about to trample me. I rolled, made it to my feet and ran. I did not look back.

When I could run no further, I hid in the canopy of a wide-trunked parasol tree, leaning over at intervals to vomit, my limbs treacherous and clumsy. I did not know what had happened to Elu. In the distance, where the camp had been, thick black smoke hung in the air. Leaves shuddered in the breeze as the ashes began to fall. I wondered if Korab's body was burning, and if they had taken Mr Wilkinson's remains back to his wife. What would she think of us now? Did she know he had come here?

The smoke stung my eyes.

I stayed up in the tree for three days. I could not leave its green canopy. The thought of my feet on the ground felt like death.

A white owl landed opposite me one night and scowled at me. *Yoo*, it said. *Yoo yoo*.

The skin on my arms was mottled with dried patches of someone else's blood.

Elu found me there, and coaxed me down. She was unharmed. She had food with her – nothing much, just a handful of honeyberries and bitter leaves, but it was all I had eaten since the feast. She watched in silence as I ate.

When I had finished she said, ‘It is happening all over the island. They are moving inland, and chasing people away wherever they find us.’

‘Where will we go?’

‘The Oya have said anyone may join them who is willing to fight. The strangers have not yet made it into their mountains. It’s the only safe place.’

‘The Oya always were all about the fighting.’

‘But in this case they’re right. There’s no other option now.’

I looked down at my hands. Elu had washed away the blood before giving me the food to eat, but I could still see it there. I could still hear people’s bodies thudding against the earth.

‘They have guns. We don’t. We can’t win.’

Elu looked away. ‘I know.’ Her hands were shredding a scrap of bitterleaf. ‘But there’s nowhere else to go.’

I remembered being lifted into the air by my hair, a rough hand on my breast. Blood raining from somewhere. I blinked, and my eyes fell to the scar above Elu’s hip. I recalled Simha carrying her lifeless body through the woods, the terror of losing her ripping me inside out.

I knew I could not fight. I knew I could not bear to see her fight. She would die, and the world would end.

‘There is one other place,’ I said.

‘Your people have been wronged, Neka.’ The Administrator declared.

Perhaps I nodded. Perhaps I just looked at him with these eyes that I am told so disturb settlers with their emptiness.

We were seated in his front parlour, dressed in nightshirts given to us by the Housekeeper, Mrs Hitchens. She had given us tea and now hovered with a

plate of little pink cakes. The air was dusty, and thick with some kind of floral perfume. My nose itched.

The Administrator looked away from me towards Elu and continued, ‘They have broken the law of our King as well as the laws of God.’

This was news after all. When I translated to Elu, she asked, ‘They have laws?’

I said, ‘You have laws? Right ways, wrong ways?’

Mrs Hitchens laughed. ‘Of course we do! What a question!’

‘Indeed,’ said the Administrator. ‘The Company is a representative of the Great British Empire. Our Empire has the greatest system of justice on earth.’

I decided it was best not to translate Elu’s response directly.

‘Your people do wrong to us. Every day,’ I said.

‘Yes. And I am here to stop that.’

‘Mr Addlington is the Administrator. He is a very important man,’ said Mrs Hitchens, tilting her wide face.

Elu was sceptical when I translated. ‘He doesn’t seem very important to me. I think we should go back and join the Oya. We should fight.’

My stomach tightened at the thought. ‘No, Elu, listen. This is what we need – a powerful ally who knows Settler ways. And if there are laws, we have a chance of redress. He will help us.’

‘You think?’ She looked at him. ‘Yes, perhaps. He has kind eyes.’ She smiled at him.

All the while, his eyes had been on her. At the time, I thought this was because she was the wise woman and the one who would be making the decisions. When she smiled, he flushed, and looked away.

‘Tell him this,’ said Elu. ‘Say very good, you will be our guardian. And you must teach us settler ways. We will teach you our ways.’

As I uttered this last, a small noise of alarm escaped Mrs Hitchens’ throat, which she disguised as a cough.

To his credit, the Company Administrator did not laugh at the suggestion. ‘Indeed,’ he said, tipping his head. ‘I would be most honoured to learn more about the ways of your people. For now, unfortunately, I must leave you in order to

attend some business affairs, but Mrs Hitchens will show you to the gardener's cottage, where you are welcome to stay for as long as you wish.'

Towards the end of winter, as the crisp days lengthened, the first of the eight sister stars began to appear in the evening sky. We were staying in the gardener's cottage on a tract of land outside of the new town. It was a small two-room, stone-built structure with thick uneven walls. Mr Addlington visited us for an hour or two on most evenings, sitting in an armchair so low that his knees pointed upwards like arrowheads, and eating little cakes that he brought with him, closing his eyes and moaning as he swallowed them. He had an odd habit of pulling at his earlobes, first one side and then the other. He asked after our comfort and Elu's health, and twitched and nodded and smiled at us, his head cocked like an intelligent puppy.

One day, Mr Addlington decided to take us into New Exeter.

The town was a place of dust. It was built around the heart-shaped bay where the Aynia people had once fished. There were two short dirt streets running wide and parallel, and one other that crossed both of them at an angle.

This was our first sight of a town. The Administrator showed it off with evident pride, giving us the tour. He spoke incessantly, and I sometimes found it hard to follow him, though my English had been improving over the seven months that we had been living apart from our clan.

Mr Addlington showed us huge wooden warehouses by the docks, where men were unloading grubby burlap sacks from a ship. 'Flour from Australia,' he said, 'for bread.' He leant on his cane and watched, a small smile on his face, while the dust swirled around our ankles. Next he showed us the grand warehouses, taller than the tallest tree, wider than a village, built of stone, and pasted with dust to a height above our heads.

Elu and I exchanged glances when we saw the stone blocks, as they were so similar to the stone ruins of the Old Ones. On our way to the main street, we passed by a crowd of dark rough log cottages all squeezed in together, near a wide grassy space. 'That is the area designated for workers' accommodation,' said Mr

Addlington. 'We may have to expand the boundaries. We are growing far more quickly than I anticipated.' He peered at a huddle of dilapidated huts. 'Yes, more space required, I think.'

That day we learned about shoes and dust and blisters, but also commerce, shops and workshops. We were introduced to shopkeepers, farriers, blacksmiths and pie-men, all of whom interrupted their work when hailed by the Administrator, and who watched us with inscrutable expressions, speaking with careful politeness. We saw barrels and ladders, carriages, buckets, tools for growing crops and managing animals. Elu was entranced by the images hanging up in the window of the photographer's studio. 'Would you like to have your image captured, Miss Elu?' he asked. 'I can certainly arrange that in due course.'

We saw ladies dressed in wide glossy skirts and fitted buttoned jackets, attended by servants who carried parcels and held parasols aloft 'To protect their mistresses' complexions,' said Mr Addlington. 'To stop their skin from turning, um... And this is the haberdashery!' A stocky maid with a closed face came clomping out of the shop. She was wearing shabby frayed clothes and shoes that were too big for her feet. She curtsied to the Administrator, shot an incurious glance at Elu and me, and stomped across the road avoiding the piles of horse manure. From her hand trailed a streamer of scarlet ribbon.

We learned the distinction between *horse* and *pony*, as we watched them being tethered at the drinking trough. *Cow*, as three of them wandered unconcerned down the street. *Goat*, several of them munching their way through a pile of something that smelled bad. 'Rubbish,' said the Administrator. 'Things we discard. The goats will eat most of it and the rest will be burned or buried. Sanitation is most important in a new town.' I had only the vaguest notion of what he was talking about, and struggled with translating for Elu.

She told me to ask him where the people were.

He looked surprised. 'All about you!' he said, and looked at her, his eyebrows raised.

'She means the other people. The people who were here before.'

'Ah,' he said. 'Well, they were. They had to be... It was unfortunate. There were misunderstandings. If I could do it all again...' He stared down the hill

over the sea. 'We came from there,' he said, pointing towards the ocean. 'We anchored just there and came ashore onto the beach. The natives were afraid, anyone could see that, but perhaps no more than the men were. We managed to get along. Once we had offered them some ship's food - which they didn't eat, and who could blame them? - they understood we meant no harm. We lit a fire on the beach, they brought some sort of meat and something the men said tasted quite like watered beer. There was even a little party among them with some of the natives. Dancing, good-natured hijinks. But.' He sighed, and leant forward on his cane. 'It seemed we were only welcome as long as they expected us to leave again. Once we started erecting buildings and making roads, harvesting the timber about here, and so forth, they became aggressive. I am afraid we had to defend ourselves. Some were killed. Most survived. Of that I am justifiably proud. There was no carnage. Some had to be jailed, but most moved on, inland, to the west. Often you see one or two of them, coming into town for some business or other. They are welcome if they conduct themselves in a peaceable manner.'

I translated this for Elu, and she gave a small nod to show she understood the meaning of his words.

'Can you believe what he is saying?' I asked her.

Elu shrugged. 'It's what I expected to hear,' she said.

It was lunchtime when we saw Prutho of the Fenagara clan. We did not know him well, but recognised him as he always wore his hair in plaits. He was outside a two storey wooden building, and was the centre of attention of a small crowd of rowdy settler men. They were laughing at him, and urging him on to something. 'Get it dahn yer gullet!' 'That'll sort yer!' We watched from the other side of the road, as Prutho poured a dark liquid down his throat to the settlers' cheers. He stumbled, wheeled around, and fell to the ground, to wild applause. Two or three coins were thrown at him.

Excusing himself from us, the Administrator marched across the road to the revellers, and a silence fell.

'What is going on here?'

Silence.

'Answer me.'

One of the men removed his cap and spoke. 'Beggin yer pardon sir, we's just havin a bit a fun with the fella there. Being friendly, like.'

'Are you aware that corrupting the morals of a native is a punishable offence?'

'Beggin yer pardon again sir, but it weren't us buying the liquor for the feller there.'

'Then who is responsible?'

The men looked at each other and made exaggerated shrugs.

'If you do not tell me this instant, I shall have you all clapped in irons!'

The men looked at their feet. 'It's the landlord, sir,' said a young boy just on the cusp of becoming a man.

'Shhh!' said his father.

'Is this true?' the Administrator asked the older man.

He sighed. 'Yes, sir. He gives the natives 'ard liquor for free sir. They ain't used to it so they gets drunk right quick, sir. Then he calls the constabulary in, to get the poor blighter thrown in gaol. It ain't right, sir.'

'This is a deliberate action by the landlord?'

'Yes, sir. He don't like the natives being in town, sir.'

The Administrator stepped into the middle of the street and called to a group of men a few buildings down who were sitting round an outside table eating. There were six or seven of them, all dressed in identical blue jackets and beige trousers. When he called them, they left their food and rushed over, lining up and facing him. They stood as stiff and straight as men about to face their deaths.

Only when they were lined up in this way did I notice that they carried guns. A squeak escaped my throat and I shrank back against the wall.

'Men, you are supposed to be keeping order, and that applies even when you would prefer to be enjoying your victuals. Arrest the landlord of this establishment and put him in irons immediately. And arrange for this poor wretch to be convened to the native prison.'

The guards emerged moments later with a chubby, protesting man. 'It ain't true sir! It's lies. All lies!'

‘Then how do you explain this?’ The Administrator indicated Prutho, being hauled to his feet by two guards.

‘That weren't my doing, sir. I never serve the natives sir. Not even when they have the money, which ain't hardly ever.’

‘Nonetheless you have a legal responsibility to see that your liquor is not dispensed to natives, do you not?’

‘I hadn't noticed this one, sir.’

‘Then let us hope that a flogging will remind you to be more attentive in future.’ He nodded at the guards. ‘Go.’

The guards left with their two prisoners.

The Administrator crossed the street and joined us. ‘Forgive me, ladies. Shall we resume our tour?’

We must have stood there gaping at him. This man, this strange-looking creature with his fiery red whiskers and twitchiness, this man who closed his eyes and moaned when eating a tiny pink cake, had the power to command an army with his words.

After this, Elu warmed to the Administrator. Indeed, she seemed to become convinced that he might prove to be some kind of saviour. I was glad she no longer spoke of joining the Oya, but her zealous newfound faith in the Administrator worried me. In those weeks after the massacre, her eyes shimmered, but they never rested in one spot for more than a moment. She was full of energy so bright and brittle that I worried she might have a fever.

‘They just need to learn that they need us, that's all,’ she said to me in the sitting room of the cottage one afternoon. ‘They can't bring in the Spring without us. Once he sees that, we'll all be safe. Things will be better.’ She smiled at a wooden chair, a vase, a portrait of an old woman on the wall.

‘Elu, I'm not sure-’

‘You'll see. Mr Addlington won't let us down.’ She turned away.

The only time I saw her optimism falter was when she sent me out to gather the ballfern leaves and the bluestalk to make the sacred joishu brew. It was much harder now for me to find the things I needed. Where the ballfern had once grown along the muddy shoreline of the river, the mud was churned up and cratered with cattle tracks, and not one of them could be found. I spent days searching other possible sites, but found nothing. In the end I had to substitute it with starfern, which grows in the denser parts of the forest. When I handed them over to Elu, she peered in at it and looked up at me, her smile disappearing into the basket. Without a word, she took it and turned away.

When I went for the pine bark, which I had always collected from the Sweet Spring in the redcone forest, I found the whole forest there had been turned to stumps, and the spring itself was fenced off and dammed. The bluestalk should have been collected when the sun was at its height, but I had to wait until nightfall to break in through the fence, and I had only just started collecting when the settlers' dogs caught my scent and came after me. I raced to the fence and escaped them, but as my heart regained its beat I realised I had dropped and lost all the bluestalk.

I didn't tell Elu about these difficulties, or the way our home was slowly being taken from us, piece by sliced-off piece. And she didn't ask. She hummed to herself as she worked, smiled and laughed as she always had, certain in her optimism that the Administrator would change everything for us once he understood what we could do.

When the brew was ready, she told me to ask him. 'Tell him to meet us tomorrow prepared for the journey.'

I had known this was coming, but still I was shocked. 'No!' I said. 'You can't!'

'Tell him.'

'No. The spring festival is secret. You can't let a settler see it. It's too powerful.'

'That is why he must see it. Power brings respect.'

'You know nothing about him.'

'I know that he is going to help us. Tell him.'

So I did.

Elu believed in this strange bony man, and even to me he seemed a better choice than facing certain death alongside the Oya.

The day came, and I was afraid. I was certain it was wrong to take the Administrator with us to a sacred festival, and I was frightened about how the people there would receive him. Even with Elu's position as Healer, she might not have the authority to protect him. And if something happened to him at a place to which we had taken him, there was no telling what might happen to us.

Elu wouldn't listen to my concerns, so I tried to warn the Administrator directly that he might be in danger. I approached him one afternoon as we waited for Elu to join us.

'Oh,' he said, 'Ha, ha, ha. I don't think that will be a concern.' His red whiskers were fiery in the slanting light.

'It is a sacred festival for all the clans of the island,' I said. 'If they do not want you there, they will hurt you. Maybe kill you.'

'Oh, I think I can look after myself,' he said. 'And, ah, how are the preparations going? Does, ah, *Elu* have everything she needs?' He lingered on her name, and his cheeks flushed. I had seen that foolish grin on many a man with Elu's name on his lips. I thought then, *This will end in trouble.*

'She's fine,' I said. 'My concern is the other clan members. They are many.'

His smile vanished. 'Perhaps not as many as you expect, Neka.' Blue eyes met mine. 'Natives are not ... as ... ah ... free ... to roam anymore. This part of the island south of New Exeter is still sparsely settled. Other areas are ... ah ...' He trailed off and looked away.

I had not thought of this. Crossing this land was difficult now unless we went inland and kept to the Greygully hills. It would be harder for clans whose territory had no hills. The strangers were taking the flat and fertile land. The deer plains to the east would be taken. The mudflats around the river to the south would be taken. If the clans could not cross either of these, it would be impossible for many of them to make their way to the beach.

Another thought: 'Is our land taken? Between here and the beach? Can we cross?'

‘The area is settled, yes, but you will be travelling with me and there will be no danger to you.’

Danger to us. I had not even thought of it. Danger, in our own home.

He misunderstood my reaction. ‘You have my word, Neka. I will protect you.’

‘The people will be angry,’ I said. ‘At the festival. If they have had their land taken from them by strangers, they will be angry with any stranger. If they discover that you are the Administrator...’

‘I understand that,’ he said. ‘But I will address them directly, and you will tell them my words.’ He held his hands behind his back and nodded. ‘I want only to help. I will be there to learn about your ways, that is all.’

A saying of the Oya I once heard, *If your enemy knows you, he can defeat you.*

‘I don't think they will like it.’

‘Neka,’ he said, with a closed smile, ‘Please don't worry yourself over this. No harm will come to us. I am sure they will listen to reason, and if not, well.’ He blinked at me and smiled again. ‘I always have my gun.’

I stared at him.

‘Of course,’ he said, turning away and rubbing the back of his neck, ‘I will only use it to shoot into the air.’

When the day came the three of us set out south towards the beach. We were obliged to wear clothes now, and the layers of heavy linen and woollen cloth tugged at my muscles and made me clumsy. The Administrator had insisted that we use horses for the journey and Elu had said we must oblige him by riding the beasts, though neither of us liked to do so. We had never ridden before, and copied the way he sat, as we'd never seen side-saddle. Our skirts were a hindrance, but we managed, and we set out at a walking pace. A mule followed behind, carrying the precious clay jar of joishu brew.

As we walked, I breathed in the scent of my chestnut ride, watching her muscles moving under her skin, and the flick of her ears. I was charmed by the rumbling of her breath and her soft whinnies. She held my attention for some time, so I barely looked up around me.

That is not quite true. It was more that I fixed my attention on her rather than seeing what I knew must be there. We travelled along a road. I watched the rutted surface moving below the horses' feet. At the corner of my awareness, I knew that most of the trees were gone, and the only animals there apart from our own rides were sheep and cattle, the occasional goat clearing a verge of weeds, and guard dogs slaving up against gates and fences. I kept thinking, *Before long we will reach the limits of the strangers' incursions, and enter a place that is free of them. A place where everything is still as it should be.* But the hours passed, and the road and the lines of the fences went on.

As we approached the beach, we knew something was wrong. A handful of people from other clans milled around near the point at which the road bent towards the cliffs, their heads down and shoulders slumped. Some talked in low voices. Others sat staring at nothing. No-one did more than glance up at us and away. There was to be no attack, it seemed.

Elu shouted out to a group of women sitting near the road. 'What's the matter, what has happened?' She didn't know how to stop her horse from walking on, so she had to twist in her saddle as she passed.

'Arriggaea,' an older woman yelled at her. Her eyes were white with fear.

I thought perhaps the beast had come to life early, been angered by our absence and the lack of joishu, and gone on some sort of rampage. But as I looked along the road, I realised that instead of following along the cliff tops as our own path had done, until it reached a gentler slope down to the beach, this road – the one we were on right at that moment – simply carried straight on down to the sea. It didn't follow the contours of the land, but had been cut straight through it, a gouge in the earth. Artificial cliffs stood either side of the road, which went straight to the beach, and down towards the sea.

We had to look. We rode down to the beach, and Elu dismounted in a heap. Her legs were weak from the long ride, but that is not why she fell to the ground.

Arriggaea was gone. Where once had been a magnificent creature, the God of Spring, half-caught in the cliff-face, there now was empty space, a void. The road, smooth and featureless, had simply annihilated him on its journey to the sea.

The air around me set solid. I was so cold I could hardly breathe. I found myself on the ground, scrabbling with my hands at the road.

I stopped when I saw what I was striking. The gravel on this part of the road was a different colour from the rest – a golden tawny yellow, dusted here and there with black sand from the beach. The golden gravel was flecked with bright specks that glinted in the late sun. I picked up a small stone, half the size of my fist. On it I could see the remaining half of a deep-carved symbol.

The road itself was made from the body of the God. Spring would never come again.

‘I understand this is difficult for you,’ said the Administrator. He smiled at Elu. ‘I do understand.’

We were in the little parlour of the gardener’s cottage. The Venetian blinds were open, and the sash window was raised. Afternoon sunshine came into the room in dusty slabs.

It was six weeks since the spring festival should have taken place. The warmer weather and new life of spring had been slow to come this year, but they had come. Without Arriggaea. The scent of spindle-flowers drifted in on the breeze, and the blinds tapped against the window frames.

‘It is important, you see, that these things be recorded,’ said the Administrator. ‘While they are still fresh. Lest they be forgotten.’

Outside, a roundbill called to its mate from its hiding place in the vivid new leaves.

I translated the Administrator’s words for Elu without suggesting that the festival might ever be forgotten. It was the Old Ones who had first worked the magic on the beast – we knew that because the symbols on its flank were not from our people. The festival had taken place at the end of winter since the beginning of

time. It was what chased away the darkness and cold weather. It was what brought the new life of Spring.

And yet.

Elu had been quiet for a few days after the season turned, and on the subject of the festival she had said only that the God must have granted us one last spring with its dying breath. I did not point out that this version of events made no sense.

And I did not ask what she thought would happen next spring.

Now Elu perched on the chaise longue in the parlour, clothed in layers of linen and lace. She described the spring festival to him while I translated. Mr Addlington sat, his long legs crossed at the knee, side-on to a plain mahogany writing desk, taking notes.

Elu was interested in the process of writing, of making marks that permanently recorded sound and meaning. When she described Arrigaea to him, she mentioned that his flanks were carved with symbols. She paused for a moment while he wrote this down, and then asked him, 'Were they writing, do you think, the symbols?'

He was delighted. 'Miss Elu,' he said, 'the quickness of your intelligence astounds me. To be introduced to the concept of writing with quill and ink in one moment, and then to recognise it in the next instant in such a different form! I believe these symbols are a form of writing, yes.' As I translated for her, he took from his pocket a small piece of yellow rock, perhaps the very one I had held in my hand that dreadful day, and ran his finger along the circles of the carving. 'Indeed,' he said, without looking at Elu, his face even brighter pink than usual, 'Indeed your clan chose their wise woman well.'

He looked up at her and their eyes met for a long moment.

The Administrator was the first to look away. He cleared his throat, and placed the little piece of rock on top of the bureau, in among his collection of some creamy whorled misk shells, a selection of dusty parrot feathers, and the cracked porcelain skull of a tiny baby tree deer.

Elu continued with her description of the festival. When we reached the part about the joishu, Mr Addlington nodded, and said, 'Ah yes! The tincture! I had the opportunity to examine it after the, ah, event.'

‘Examine it?’ I asked.

‘Yes, after it was left here. I examined it for its constituents. I have identified many of them, I think,’ he smiled, ‘with science! The tincture is quite fascinating. We have something very similar, I believe.’

‘What's he saying?’ asked Elu.

‘He is saying,’ I spoke through a tight smile to disguise my anger from the Administrator, ‘this *lunatic* is saying that he examined the sacred joishu brew in order to discover its secrets.’

Elu sat forward, her hand clapping over her mouth. The she blinked, and fell back. ‘It doesn't matter.’

‘*What?!*’

‘Neka, how can it matter?’ For the first time since the festival, she showed she felt something – her voice cracked, and I thought she might cry. But she coughed, once, and looked at me. ‘Arriggaea is gone. The joishu will never be needed again. It's a complicated brew and I don't think he will discover much about it, but even if he does, it was only sacred while Arriggaea could still roam the black beach.’

‘But still, it is sacred, Elu. The only people who have ever known its secrets have been the Healers.’

Her voice was hollow. ‘There are no Healers anymore. There is no Arriggaea. If Mr Addlington wants the precise instructions for joishu then I'll give them to him! We need his help because of our,’ she used several imaginative expletives, ‘situation. In any case,’ she said, ‘what he has there isn't even real joishu. Half the ingredients you brought were wrong. It might not have worked anyway.’

‘I did my best,’ I said.

The Administrator was watching this exchange between us like a happy little child, his face swinging from Elu to me, and back again.

‘I know you did.’

‘I couldn't get all the ingredients. I never told you why, Elu, but the reason I couldn't get all the right ones was because-’

‘I know why you couldn't get them,’ she said. ‘I know what's happened out there. Why do you think we've been staying in this house for so long? We have no guns and almost no land left. We have to make use of what we can.’

‘Make use of ...?’

She jutted her chin towards the Administrator, who was still watching us with a smile. ‘We have this.’

‘What is she saying?’ he asked, with a wide smile.

I swallowed, and lowered my eyelids. ‘She says she admires your intelligence greatly, and would be interested to learn about your sacred brew, also.’

He blushed, and stood, turning away and clapping his hands together.

‘Well, let me see what I can do about that,’ he said.

He returned moments later with a small bottle in his hand made of blue glass.

‘I'm a man of science, you see,’ he said. ‘And there is something you must understand. This will be hard for you. Elu, listen to me.’ He looked deep into her eyes. ‘There is no such thing as magic, and your rock was not a God. I will prove this to you.’

‘What's he saying?’

‘I'm, I'm not sure.’

‘Yes you are, Neka. Tell me.’

So I translated for Elu while George Addlington told us about brain tissues and chemical substances that affect the senses, that while it seems that things are happening in the outside world – a rock coming to life, for example – really it is only the senses that are affected, and the world outside remains untouched. ‘Your world, your lovely make-believe world, is gone now. You must learn to believe in science and truth, not superstition.’

I had never thought our world was make-believe. It had seemed real enough when we were living in it. As I listened, I saw a new world rising before me. The real world. A world of brick and glass and gunmetal. A world where a ship could not be mistaken for a winged island, and where a rock was only ever a rock.

Elu nodded and smiled politely, her eyes glazing over a little. Now and then she made little encouraging noises to him, as one might when encouraging a babe to take the teat. She feigned to ask a few questions, and tried not to laugh at the answers.

And then he poured us both a glass from the blue bottle.

‘Aha! Look at this!’ George Addlington's voice sounded as if it came from underwater. His eyes had a protective sheen over them, radiating a thick light, and his long fingers twitched and danced to music I could not hear. He chattered, pacing a weaving line through the furniture towards Elu, who was sprawled on the settee. She lifted her head and spoke to me. I tried to hear her, but my head was already full. Blood fizzed in my eyes. The room sagged in the heat.

Mr Addlington's face had looked sly when he handed us the tincture to drink. It was a sludgy red-brown colour, and he'd warned us of its bitter taste. He hadn't warned us about the vomiting. A rush of heat infused my body, sweat coating my skin to ice. I vomited again into the spittoon. I thought I might be dying.

A fly was breaking itself against the window – four, five, six times it battered itself, then fell onto the sill on its back, circling as if pinned in place, its elegant legs twisting in the air.

I thought I heard George Addlington saying something to Elu. ‘You see?’ he was saying. ‘Elu, this should change everything for you.’

Did he mean the fly?

Suddenly his face was close to mine, burning. I shut my eyes against the light of him. I knew I had drifted loose, but I could not find my way back. I grabbed at his words like a slippery rope.

‘It's only science, you see. Simple human biology, in interaction with chemical stimulants.’

The words meant nothing. I was falling away.

Elu's voice: ‘The rules have all gone.’

I sucked in air. Elu understood. She was going to help me find my way back to the world, where the rules still made sense.

‘Thank you,’ I said.

Mr Addlington paused in his pacing for a moment and looked at me sideways, a line slicing between those disturbing shiny eyes.

‘Good, good, you understand,’ he said. ‘You see now.’ He grabbed my hand.

His skin was cracked and dry, and felt sore to the touch. *But at least someone has hold of me now*, I thought. *He is going to haul me out of this aspic world and pull me into the real one. He is meant to be our Guardian, after all.*

I breathed in the humanness, the warmth, the fleshy linen scent of him. *Perhaps*, I thought, *if he just keeps hold of my hand, it might be enough.*

He backed away, burbling, waving his agitated hands. He was saying, ‘There are no miracles, no miracles, no miracles.’

I tried to concentrate. The fly had stopped spinning and was still. Viscid blood clumped its way through my body. My lungs mechanically sought air. The sinews in my feet made small adjustments, straining to keep me upright.

Through my canvas house shoes, I felt in my soles a tiny unevenness in the floor, a scar in the board that had once been a living being. And beneath the boards, I felt the untold earth spreading out, stuffed with the roots of the floor's living cousins, full of tiny grubbing burrowing lives, lives of blind energy and unthinking purpose.

I lurched. My hand steadied me, resting on the table next to the leather-bound Bible, wrapped in the skin of an animal that had died far off in an unimaginable land.

The immensity of it all.

‘Exactly,’ said Mr Addlington, and I realised I'd spoken aloud.

He was sitting over at the rosewood card table, shuffling a pack of cards, mesmerised as they moved from one hand to another in a shimmering line, a great whispering caterpillar under his control.

He was grinning at Elu, who was staring at the ceiling in thought. ‘Do you see, Elu?’ He looked at me, and the glaze in his eyes melted, dribbling down his cheeks and shattering into colours of shocking purity.

I was afraid to look away.

‘You understand what this means, Elu,’ he said, still looking at me. It was a statement, I thought, not a question. She stared at the ceiling and said nothing, ignoring the whispering creature between his hands. Its body twisted, its head turned to me and stared. It grew a mane, glowing yellow in the lamplight, and leered at me.

Elu’s silence felt worse than the betrayal of my own eyes that had brought this abomination to my brain.

The monstrous golden creature snickered.

‘What difference does it make?’ Elu asked. ‘He gave us a drug, and we saw things that weren’t there. So what?’

We were in the garden of the Administrator’s residence. It had been ordered into neat square flowerbeds, divided by straight gravel paths. A low stone wall enclosed us and separated the garden from the farmland beyond. It was a warm morning and laughingbirds were calling.

I was still weak from the opiates we had been given, and had to shade my eyes from the sun. We were clothed in loose cotton shift dresses. I still had not become accustomed to the sensation of buttons around my neck and soft cloth stroking my skin in the breeze.

‘Spring came, Elu.’ I gestured at the effervescent greens, the unfurling leaves and bright spring flowers.

‘So?’ She looked away.

‘Elu, look at me. Spring came. There was no festival this year. Arriggaea is gone. Spring came.’

She turned to look at me. Her eyes were red. ‘What do you want me to say, Neka?’

‘What if the Administrator is right? What if everything we believed was just ... not true?’

‘I don't know what happened this year, but I know that Arriggaea was not some kind of drug-induced dream. Don't ever doubt that, Neka. If you lose that, you lose everything.’

‘We've already lost everything.’

She put her hand on my forearm. The morning light touched the edges of her skin, outlining her with a glow. Where the curve of her neck met her collarbone there was a heart-shaped shadow. ‘We didn't lose it. They took it.’

‘They haven't finished yet. They'll -’ But I couldn't speak of the future. The settlers would keep coming – the Administrator had told us as much. They would march across the island like terrible children, taking anything they wanted, only concerned with themselves. They would not deliberately annihilate us, but they would give no more thought to us than to the insects in the forests they destroyed.

Elu sighed. ‘We have to make them go away.’

‘How? We don't have the weapons.’

The hunched figure of the Administrator appeared at the gate. His face changed when he saw us – or rather, when he saw Elu, as he seemed scarcely aware of my presence. His smile transformed his angular face, and altered the proportions by widening his jaw. He was almost handsome, despite his ungainly limbs and odd red hair. His happiness changed the way he carried himself – he stood upright, and pushed his shoulders back. He became almost graceful.

‘Elu!’ he called, waving. He was so anxious to catch her that he fumbled with the latch of the gate and had to take a breath before trying again. He bounced on his heels as he did.

‘This is our weapon,’ she said.

‘My powers are limited,’ said the Administrator. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

‘You're our Guardian,’ said Elu, smiling.

‘Yes, but ... The colony’s first priority, its whole reason to exist, is to make money.’

This made little sense to us at the time and I wasn't sure how to translate it.

‘The power is not here, you see,’ he said. ‘It is over there.’

‘Then you must convince them,’ said Elu. I translated.

‘You don't understand, Elu. This island seems very small to them, and far away. None of it quite seems real from so far away.’

‘Then they must come here and see.’

A single barked laugh from the Administrator. He looked at his hands, bit his thumbnail. ‘Alas, no.’

‘Then we must go to them.’

‘No, Elu, it's not possible.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because ... because we would need a ship, and it would take a long time. It's a dangerous journey. You might never make it back here.’

‘You will find us a ship. We will go. Speak to them so they understand. You have laws. Stealing is not legal. This is what we will do.’

He frowned as I translated this for him. ‘I – I.’ He tugged at his earlobe.

Elu took a step closer to the Administrator, and dipped her chin, smiling up at him. ‘You help us?’ she said. The first time she had spoken to him in his own language.

He closed his eyes and nodded as if he were in pain.

George Addlington sent us into town with his housekeeper to acquire clothes for the journey. Over several days, we were fitted out with new boots, hats, gloves, petticoats, stays, dresses and shawls. Some we wore, and others were folded into travelling trunks. We became used to the noise and smells of the town, and people there came to know us by sight as the Administrator's natives, who were to be treated with respect. Sometimes he accompanied us on our shopping trips and gave an opinion on a bonnet or a pair of gloves.

When we were dressed in so many layers of clothing we could hardly walk, George Addlington stepped back, looked at us, and pronounced us complete. He sent Elu to be photographed at the studio in town. 'It's all arranged,' he said. 'Just do as he says. It will be a wonderful piece of propaganda to take with us. The native princess.'

At the dockside, the HMS Crediton squatted low in the water, a great beast of a thing made up of a huge belly, bare masts and draping cobwebs of rope.

'She's showing her age, I'm afraid,' said Mr Addlington, 'But she's seaworthy. She'll get us there.'

A small boy up in the rigging was being subjected to a tirade of abuse from a purple-faced man on the deck below.

'Our illustrious captain,' said Mr Addlington, with a twist of the mouth.

'Why is he angry?' asked Elu. I asked Mr Addlington.

'He is captain of a ship. It's his job to be angry. He means to frighten everyone into doing what he tells them.'

Elu nodded as I translated.

'Oh, but don't be alarmed,' said Mr Addlington. 'He won't address you in that manner.'

‘If he speaks to me like that I’ll put devil powder in his gourd,’ murmured Elu.

I laughed, but I was worried. These people only seemed to understand shouting, loud noises and threats of violence. We would just have to hope that it was different where we were going. We had only words with which to defend ourselves.

Two natives appeared and took away our trunks. They were the first we had seen since the spring. They didn’t look like the people who were from that part of the island, and I tried to catch their eye to talk to them. I used several different languages, but they did not look up, and hauled our trunks away as if I had not spoken.

Mr Addlington’s housekeeper had filled our trunks with the things we would apparently need for the journey, and she had helped us with the mysteries of settler-style undergarments, but she would not be accompanying us on the journey. There was, though, to be another woman on the ship, Mrs Mason, the wife of an important company man, and at whose house Elu and I were to stay in London. She had promised Mr Addlington that she would help us with anything for which we needed female advice. We were dressed simply by their standards, in plain unpatterned cotton with no flounces, lilac for Elu and brown for me. The neck of my outfit was too tight and I picked at it to try to stretch it.

We boarded, plunging ourselves into the cramped and creaking darkness that was to be our home for several weeks. The cabins were tiny and smelled of fish. Elu went to find Mr Addlington, and I escaped up top to the deck as soon as the ship began to move. I watched as the dockside slid away, first the people blurring, then the buildings, and then the island itself diminishing. The crew were in good spirits, whistling, laughing and shouting.

I stood alone at the afterdeck for a long time, watching the trail of foam that marked a line back towards the smudge that was our island. Water slapped against the hull. Timbers groaned like sea monsters. Our island faded to a distant splotch, and was gone. Sails snapped against the lonely blue.

Then the rolling and heaving began. One moment I was weightless, hanging onto the rail so that I did not fly away, and the next moment my body was so heavy I thought I would plunge through the deck.

It was terrifying. I did not know how many people there were on board, but now I feared for us all. I counted the souls on board. There was Mrs Mason, an oily insurance agent with greased hair, two mild-mannered Company clerks and their wives, a talkative solicitor, Elu, Mr Addlington and me. Among the crew, there were green smooth-faced boys and sailors with long salty beards, a tattooed cook from a place called New Zealand and a doctor who drank too much. There was nothing around us but ocean. The vast empty ocean, and all our lives cradled in the unfeeling wooden belly of this weathered creaking beast. It had seemed a huge ship by the dockside, but was now a puny creature in all this watery space. I was certain we would all die, and I hated myself for encouraging Elu along this path to her doom. Better to have died with the Oya.

The deck lurched downwards, leaving my stomach high above me, sending me sprawling onto the timbers.

I was sick for days.

Almost as soon as I recovered, Elu fell ill, so I stayed out of our cabin as much as possible to let her try to sleep. Mrs Mason taught me to play cards, and took it upon herself to improve my English and my manners. There were so many strange rules of etiquette, and odd exceptions to these rules, that I wondered how anyone learned them. I told her I was struggling to understand, and she said, ‘Of course, you will never have encountered the concept of manners before.’

I stared at her. ‘We have our own ways,’ I said.

She had never asked about my people. ‘Of course, dear. Of course you did,’ she said. ‘And now you can learn the *right* ways.’ Her smile was kind. She liked me, I think.

I was not the only person whom Mrs Mason felt lacked manners. That evening when we were in the captain’s mess, the insurance agent was talking to her about his many travels. Elu was still confined to the cabin. ‘They’re all cannibals,’ he said, ‘these dark types. Have to show them the musket or they’ll make stew and dumplings out of you! Ha!’

Everyone stopped eating and all eyes looked carefully away from me. It was Mrs Mason who spoke into the silence. ‘Mr Fenwick,’ she said, ‘you should be ashamed of yourself. These unfortunate people have not had the advantages of civilisation, and without these, perhaps you yourself would have been a savage. Certainly your manners would suggest that is so.’

‘My apologies, madam,’ he said, with a bow of his greasy head. ‘I did not mean my words to offend. I only hope your, ah, optimism, proves correct. And yours, sir.’ He threw Mr Addlington a look of contempt.

The Administrator was unaffected, and simply said, ‘I have every confidence.’

‘What does the crew eat, captain?’ asked one of the clerks’ wives, and the conversation turned to the discussion of hardtack and the benefits of lemons. No-one spoke to me for the rest of the meal.

Days came and went. I became used to the darkness and smells inside the ship – fish guts, pipe smoke, men’s sweat, the excrement of the animals kept below. And always the clouds of rum on the breath of the crew.

When Elu recovered, and showed herself in the captain's mess at dinnertime, she was greeted as a heroic survivor. The captain himself congratulated her on her recovery, and Mrs Mason stood up and hugged her. ‘My dear, my dear,’ she said. ‘We are all so glad to have you with us.’

The air had shifted now that Elu was there. Something was present that hadn't been at the dining table all the time she had been hidden away. Conversations cantered along, with everyone speaking and laughing at once, then suddenly stalled into silence, before being rescued by the solicitor saying ‘Well, isn't this jolly!’ or ‘Capital!’ The faces around the table were flushed, the eyes keener, the glances more surreptitious. Knowing looks were shared between the clerks’ wives whenever Mr Addlington spoke to Elu. The wine poured more freely, but the talk seemed to flow around something invisible, something you could tell was there only by the shape of its absence.

Weeks passed in a salty daze. We fell into a sort of routine. In the mornings I would speak with Mrs Mason and try to improve my English. She attempted to teach me to read, but I never learnt the trick of it. Sometimes Elu would join us,

and she learned the sounds represented by a letter at first attempt, and could read many words aloud from sight, but she had no aptitude for the language itself, and lacked the patience to learn what the sounds she was making meant. 'I have you for that,' she would tell me, with a little shrug, and she would wander away to find Mr Addlington.

In the afternoons, when the weather was good, Elu and I would walk the decks, getting under the feet of the crew, feeling the sunshine on our faces and the fine salt spray on our lips. I felt happiness of a sort. We were alive, with the sun on our skin. We were together. The days we shared with these peculiar strangers, and Elu had to spend too much time with Mr Addlington, but the nights were ours alone.

Sometimes we saw dolphins, and they would join us alongside, playing in the bow wave of the ship just as they did with our canoes at home. They swam sideways, looking up at us with curious laughing eyes. Once, the men tried to harpoon them, but the creatures were too quick, and vanished into nothing.

For a while we saw islands here and there – long white strips fringed with green, or distant mountains repeating themselves: purple, lilac, grey.

Then there were no more islands.

Time stretched and compacted in unpredictable ways. A meal at the captain's table could seem to last all day. But then a new dawn arrived, night fell, and dawn arrived again, all in the space of a wink. I lost all sense of how long we had been at sea. It felt as though we would drift forever.

In the evenings after dinner, I went to the deck again to watch the moonlit water sliding beneath us. The scent of the ocean at night was the cleanest smell I had ever breathed. The sounds soothed me. The soft slosh and swoop of the waves, the creaking and cracking of the timbers, the men singing below.

And above it all, the bright blazing stars, and on the mizzenmast, our brave little yellow lantern swaying in the darkness.

I thought of how, when we returned home, I would never be able to tell of this. There could never be the words to describe how far away we had been.

It was there, on the deck, listening to the men playing music below, that I understood what Mr Addlington had meant about the Company thinking our island

small and far away. It seemed unreal to me too, from out there. The goods we were bringing from it – the timber, the sheep, the gold – were real enough, but the place they came from would seem a mirage, as hazy as the shimmering air above the summer ocean.

We had to try to find the words to make it real, to populate our island with living people in their minds, people who knew of love and hatred, heartbreak and triumph, jealousy and pride. People who belonged to a place of mountains that sang, winds that loved humans, and gods who brought the springtime, even after they were shattered into pieces.

Out on the ocean, rocking in the vast black nothingness, I realised we could never convey any of this. I no longer believed in such a place myself.

When it seemed we had been on the ship all our lives, the lookouts began sighting islands again, and we docked at one to take on supplies. It was a bleak, wind-dried island, almost flat, and featureless apart from the low scrubby bushes and tall clumps of grass, sharp-edged as spears. The light was grey and lifeless, and the inhabitants bent and weatherworn, like the sparse crooked trees at the water's edge.

Mr Addlington had a mild fever, and Elu was busy attending him, to the indignation and disgust of the ship's doctor. But I went ashore with Mrs Mason, my legs objecting to the obstinate stillness of the ground.

Just past the loading area of the docks was a cluster of grey crumbling block buildings, and in between, along a crowded narrow street, was a cobbled square with a market heaving with traders. The place scared me, with so many people pressed in so close together, all going about their individual business, no-one stopping to acknowledge anyone else. There was a look of hunger in the eyes of everyone there, but when any person's eyes met mine they slid away as if they had not seen me.

Mrs Mason wanted to look at the stalls for Indian cloth, so I went with her. A man dressed in a dirty dinner jacket and a broken top hat blocked our way. 'How much?' he asked.

‘I beg your pardon?’ said Mrs Mason. ‘Please move.’

‘How much? For the slave.’ He indicated me with a jerk of his chin. ‘One fifty?’

‘*What?*’ Mrs Mason looked up at him, and then around at the milling crowds. Many of the best-dressed people were accompanied by assistants who were carrying their purchases or their luggage. Mrs Mason had not taught me the word *slave* but their demeanour suggested to me that they were somehow not free in an important way.

‘Miss Clay is not a slave! Leave us alone, you despicable worm.’ She tried to go around him.

He stepped in front of her. ‘That don't really matter much around here, missus, if you know what I mean.’ He touched the side of his nose with his forefinger. ‘She looks like one, so she is one. None the wiser, and you that much richer.’ He beamed at her, holding up his hands, palms out, fingers spread wide. ‘I could stretch to two hundred.’

I looked around me. Not all the well-dressed people were pale skinned, or as neat and glossy as Mrs Mason, but all the slaves were dark-skinned. Many were darker than anyone I had seen before, but some had skin about the same shade as mine. Many of the dark-skinned men were almost as naked as Elu and I were accustomed to being. But the un-free women, trailing behind the well-dressed pale ladies I had thought were their friends, and carrying bags and babies, wore simple cotton dresses much like the one that I wore. I understood then, with a shot of fear, that my clothes and my very skin were marking out my status. I was beneath them. Beneath Mrs Mason, and beneath even this cringing little man in his bent top hat.

‘Absolutely not!’ said Mrs Mason. ‘If you do not remove yourself from my path this instant, I shall call for a constable!’

‘A constable! Ha!’ He laughed, but stepped away, and bowed to her with a flourish. ‘Suit yourself, lady. It was a fair price I offered. Could of bought yourself plenty more a those pretty bonnets with that.’

Mrs Mason grabbed my arm. ‘We must go back, Neka. This is a terrible, wicked place.’

She held on to me as we turned round to leave. Near the corner of the square where we had come in, a line of dark-skinned women in chains was being brought in. I have never seen eyes so devoid of hope and humanity. One of them looked at me as I trotted along beside Mrs Mason, and she muttered as we passed. ‘You cannot trust them,’ she said. ‘Not one.’ Her words squirmed around my head as we made our way back through the narrow streets to the ship.

Back on board, I found Elu in our cabin, lying in the bunk, staring up at the ceiling. We could hear the crew moving around overhead. As always, our cabin was dark, but rods of light sneaked in through chinks in the timber. Elu played with them, pretending to try to catch the light in her hand.

‘Did you have a good time?’ she asked. ‘See anything interesting?’

Someone ran over the boards just above Elu's head, and the ceiling bowed.

I had no words for what I had seen. ‘No,’ I said. ‘You? How is Mr Addlington?’

‘He is getting better,’ she said. ‘He'll be on his feet tomorrow.’

And he was. The two of them started to spend more time together after that, and his manner around her was freer, less formal. They stood close together and watched each other's faces. I was pleased. Elu was throwing herself into our mission at last, to enlist the help of this powerful man. They were learning to communicate with each other through gesture and mime, and they managed without me most of the time. But one day he called me up to the afterdeck to help him explain something to Elu that was important to him.

‘Things are, well, different. In London, I mean,’ he said, holding on to the railing, and looking out to sea with his head held high.

‘What sort of things?’ asked Elu. Her hair, which was badly pinned back, was springing free, tress by tress, and waving in the wind.

‘Everything. The way we do things. It's all so ... different from what you know.’

‘In what way?’

‘Well, there are shops. Companies. We manufacture things in England. That's what makes us great. We have very grand houses.’ He saw Elu look at him. ‘Oh no! My house isn't grand! And we have very different ways of doing things, socially. Different rules.’

I did not know the word. ‘Socially?’

‘Yes. The way we are with one another. The way we share our resources. It's based on merit and hard work. We value hard work.’

‘I see.’ Elu looked bored. Her eyes followed a swooping seabird.

‘And, and ... everything else is different. The way we work, the way we enjoy ourselves. We have theatres and concerts, operas.’

Although I had learned of these things from Mrs Mason, I struggled to translate the concepts for Elu. Mr Addlington waited until I had finished.

‘And,’ he said, ‘the way we make friends is different. The way we ... love.’ He blushed.

‘Hmm?’ Elu looked at him.

‘There aren't the same restrictions. I've been studying your people. You can only marry someone from a specific clan, I believe? And only choose from a certain number among them?’

I nearly said, she cannot marry anyone, because she is the Healer, but Elu spoke first, in English. ‘That is right.’

‘Well, in England, anyone can marry anyone they wish!’

Elu was shocked. ‘*Anyone?*’

‘Well, no, I mean, almost anyone. Not a close relative of course, and the match would usually be appropriate in terms of status, but there is no rule against, um, against marrying someone fundamentally different from oneself.’ He cleared his throat. ‘For example.’

‘I see.’

He could not meet her eye. ‘In some ways, things are more correct. Rules of behaviour and so forth. Men and women do not, um, associate, there in the same ways as your people allow. But in other ways, it is much freer, less restricted than your people's rules.’ His face was so red now that it must surely be painful. I was fascinated by it. He saw me looking, and turned away to watch the horizon.

‘And the food is very different as well, of course,’ he said. ‘Coffee, tea, chocolate...’

Elu was no longer listening, and Mr Addlington did not notice when I stopped translating. He was cooling his cheeks in the breeze.

After that, we hit a calm and sat motionless for days, the sailors stewing in their quarters. Fights broke out below and spilled up onto the decks. Someone was knifed. The captain ordered a flogging, and Elu and I hid below in our little cabin, cowering and blocking our ears.

When it was over and the men had returned to their duties, I asked Elu, ‘How are things going, do you think, with Mr Addlington?’

‘Hmm,’ she said. ‘I think they’re going quite well. I believe in him. I think he really does want to help us. They won’t leave, he says. Not altogether. But there are laws to protect us. He just needs the resources to enforce them. And we might have some land set aside for us. George is a good man.’

So, it was no longer Mr Addlington. It was *George* now.

After some days, the wind picked up again. We passed more islands, some no more than bald rocks, some ringed with creeping mangroves, some lush and dark green, tangled with forests and mist. I ached at the rich greens and earthy reddish browns after so many weeks of watery blues and greys.

With Elu spending more and more time with the Administrator, I was left alone much of the time. I was haunted by thinking about just how different things would be in London. Mr Addlington had said things were freer, the social rules not so strict. I wondered what that meant for Elu and me. I did not know enough at that time to realise that the only rules we really notice are the ones to which we are not accustomed.

Every morning as we sailed towards the rising sun, the light seemed to emanate the promise of a better way of life. The settlers were kind to us, and they were assured they were right, that everything they knew and everything they had

was superior. That theirs was the right way to live. That they had the answers. It was often hard for me not to believe them.

I do not know Elu's thoughts at this time. At night she was always either already sleeping or absent when I came to bed or awoke. During the days she was distracted by Mr Addlington and she seemed stiff and coiled to pounce at any moment. Her movements were less fluid under all the heavy clothing, her shoulders squarer. She developed the habit of flexing her fingers out into stars and then into fists to make the blood flow.

Perhaps she was nervous of the future too.

‘If things are different there,’ I said to her one day, standing midship, watching a shoal of glittering flying fish. ‘And if our world is gone, then-’

She turned on me. ‘Our world isn't gone! It isn't! We have to believe that.’

‘But if ... if we can't save it ... If it's hopeless.’

She flexed her hands.

‘I mean,’ I said, ‘we could stay there. If it's better. You and me. We could be ... together.’

She lowered her eyes. ‘Neka,’ her voice was soft, water on sand. ‘Oh, Neka.’

I did not know what I was hoping for. Was I really asking her to put me – us – above our home and our people? I had never been brave.

She gripped the handrail above the manrope. ‘Neka, our people need us. It's more important than, than ... other things. More important than what any one person might want.’

‘I know.’

She turned away and went below deck.

I watched the sparkling drops of water exploding from the flying fish, their sleek bodies grey against the bright water. It was not that I no longer cared about the others, but it was all so far away.

And ever since I had met her, it had been the case that everyone who was not Elu was less than real to me. Any other person was a faded, lesser version of her, weathered and tarnished, a poor shoddy copy, when held up against the original.

We stopped again at a group of small, steep-edged islands that were crossed with cobbled lanes and flanked by square white houses too bright to look at in the sun. Donkeys carried panniers full of vegetables down to the ship. We took on lamp oil and olives, fresh tomatoes and fruit.

Four days later, we arrived in London.

The day of my planned escape arrived. Mrs Henderson rose late because she had been given a sleeping draught after the incident in the vegetable garden the day before.

She had come out to this island when she was only sixteen or seventeen, to marry a man she had met twice. Her parents had lost their money in land speculation in the Americas, and she was packed off to this island, to marry a friend of the family. It was so far away from what she knew that it could have been on the moon. But she had tried, as many settlers did, to make the place like home. She had rose bushes sent over from Holland, apple trees and seeds for hollyhocks, lupins and delphiniums. She spent hours directing the men how to build up flowerbeds, how to care for stone fruit trees, and how to prune hedges to a uniform shape. All the while she'd be asking me my opinion, her hand touching my arm. 'You've seen the gardens at home, Nicky,' she'd say, 'what do you think?'

Nothing lived. It became a war for her – a war against the soil, which was not suited to these plants, a war against the blazing sun, which took moments to wither any pale seedlings foolish enough to sprout, a war against the island itself. She had the men dig sheep manure into the soil, carve out irrigation channels, erect sailcloth for shade, till the front garden was as damp and overcast as an English spring. But there was nothing she could do about the heat. The plants she chose quailed at it, put out long tender feelers, weighed the weight of the sun, and curled up into brown paper.

She was distraught. The way she spoke of it to me it seemed to be a moral failure in her eyes, that she couldn't civilise the very ground she walked on by turning it into a little corner of England.

Whenever she mentioned her garden to her husband, he rolled his eyes or cleared his throat and picked up a newspaper.

'You want the garden to be nice, don't you Hector?' she asked at lunch that day.

'I want whatever you are able to ... manage, my dear,' he said. A pause while he turned the page. 'Which seems very little, all things told.'

The baby was crying upstairs, unheeded.

I was standing facing the table, my back to the door. I had served the stew and now picked up a bread roll from the platter with a pair of tongs to pass it to Mrs Henderson. I was going over in my mind the plan for the night. Wait until everyone is asleep, and meet Ebnal by the well.

Then, without warning, Harben was there.

He stood naked in the doorway, preposterous among the lace and floral teapots, his eyes deep and angry.

I stepped back, holding the tongs out in front of me.

Mr Henderson knocked his bowl of stew into his lap. He ignored it, staring open-mouthed at Harben.

It had been a long time since I had seen any of the Oya. Harben's skin, tattooed in blue with Oya markings, exuded a powerful smell of earth and freedom. I had forgotten the fresh scent of a human body that does not sour all day under layers of cloth. He glanced at me, and I was ashamed of my own smell.

The baby was still crying.

Harben stood formally, watching the Hendersons, his spear at his side. He addressed them English. 'You must leave this land,' he said. His voice was deep and thick as mud. 'Strangers go now. Release the people.'

I dropped my eyes, embarrassed for him. Did he not know that battle was lost?

The Hendersons stared. Harben kept his eyes on them, but spoke in Oya to me. 'You serve them willingly,' he said.

‘No! No. I – ’ I glanced at the Hendersons. I knew they could not understand the Oya tongue, but still I hesitated. ‘I’m leaving. Today. Escaping.’

He looked at me and snorted. ‘You will remain here. Abapanoa’s day approaches.’

‘What? No. Abapanoa?’

‘He appeared to you.’

I remembered at the spring festival, Elu and Harben appearing from behind a boulder. She must have told him.

The Hendersons looked from Harben to me, and back again.

‘Be ready,’ Harben said.

‘Ready for what?’ I asked.

‘I will return. With my fighters.’ Harben raised his spear and threw it over Mr Henderson’s head, piercing a picture on the wall. It was not an ordinary battle spear, but a fine ceremonial one, carved and decorated in the Oya way, with a barbed point. It lodged in the painting, vibrating and humming.

When I looked back, Harben was gone.

Mrs Henderson’s hand was at her throat. ‘He missed! Oh, thank the Lord!’

Her husband cleared his throat. ‘Damn poor shot for a native,’ he said, in a tight voice. ‘No wonder they can’t feed themselves.’ He wiped his face with a trembling napkin, and looked down at his lap. He started to dab at the stew there, and gave up. ‘Nicky,’ he said to me. ‘Send one of the boys to fetch the District Inspector. And find someone to remove this ... object.’ He indicated the spear.

Mrs Henderson was regarding me with a new wariness.

‘Eat, Madeleine,’ said her husband. She bent to her bowl.

I looked up at the ruined painting. It was a hunting scene, in a white alien landscape – straight-backed men in red jackets on horseback, with a pack of demented dogs at their heels. Astride a chestnut stallion was the small figure of a dark haired man with a thin bearded face. I had always thought it looked like Mr Henderson. The tip of Harben’s spear now lodged in his face, obliterating it.

Harben, still believing in the rules, was giving them fair warning.

Mrs Henderson retired to her bed, so I was sent to the schoolhouse to give the women their English lesson while Mr Henderson spoke to the Chief Inspector.

The women sat in sulking rows staring at me, fanning themselves with their books. Outside, the sky was white. Everything was still.

‘Teach us to call the rain.’ It was an old woman from the Lami clan.

‘What? I can’t do that. Turn to page thirty.’

‘You’re the only one left who knows how.’

Outside the window I could see the parched grass, the trees dropping their leaves too early, the men in the distance hoeing the crisped vegetables back into the dusty soil. There was no water to spare for irrigation. Even the well for the house was so low now that the water was full of sludge and had to be filtered through cheesecloth.

‘The rains will come when they come,’ I said.

I did not say that the idea of people calling the rains was ridiculous. Mother Sky, we had sung, have mercy. But the sky was just the sky – gasses, the Administrator had said. And emptiness.

There was no Mother, and no mercy there or anywhere else.

A young girl from the Ishwa clan spoke. ‘Neka, we need you.’

‘I’m here to teach you English,’ I said. ‘If I’m caught-’

‘Fine.’ The girl sat behind the bench and spread her hands on its planed surface. Her fingers were long and slender. I thought of Elu. ‘You’re quite right,’ said the girl. ‘We should forget our own knowledge, and learn all about their God and their language and their history.’

‘Stop asking her!’ said a girl my age. ‘She’s not allowed to tell us sacred secrets. Only the Healer and the Second can know how to call the rains.’

‘Then everything we know will die!’ said the Lami woman.

I closed my eyes and thought of Yellow Mountain, of spinning in the air with Elu by my side. I remembered the firelight on her face the night the rains had come. ‘You’re amazing,’ she had told me. I saw her pressing her fingers into the wet ochre paste, and our two handprints, together forever, on the rock wall.

No-one would ever see them again.

The land had already been dying back then, the spirit draining away in front of us, the mercury seeping through the rivers, the trees and their spirits being felled, the people falling to bullets. The cancer had been spreading through our island, and we had not even known it. Patlia had known, though, and had been too afraid to do anything.

‘You have to go to Yellow Mountain to call the rain,’ I said. I could not be caught in any wrongdoing today. My heart flipped in my chest as I thought of escaping with Ebnal.

I felt a hand on my arm and opened my eyes. The Lami woman was there. ‘Maybe someone will get there, one day. There are always plans to escape. Aren’t there.’ She looked into my eyes.

I looked away.

‘Teach us, Neka. Please.’

I glanced around me. All the faces were turned to mine. They still believed in a future. If I refused, I would be making them see the truth – that there was no hope. There was nowhere left to go, no way to get to the mountains without being shot. I suddenly felt certain I would die within hours of leaving Sweetwater.

‘All right,’ I said. ‘Let’s get these desks moved to the side.’

Time crawled by that day. I could not escape until after dark, and when Mr Henderson rang the bell for afternoon tea, I felt the day had already lasted a week. The more I looked towards dusk, the further it seemed to recede. It was like trying to catch a handful of mist.

I took the tray to the parlour. Mr Henderson stood with his back to the fire, talking to a seated man I did not recognise. Mrs Henderson sat looking at her hands.

‘Ah, Nicky,’ said Mr Henderson, puffing out his chest with his hands behind his back. ‘Go and fetch Eunice. I wish to speak with you both.’

I turned away abruptly, forgetting even my ‘Yes, sir.’ He must not see my face.

Yega's eyes widened when I told her we were wanted. Her occasional outspokenness meant she had sometimes been accused by the Hendersons of having some sympathy for Harben's warriors, and I hoped it was because of the recent Oya attacks that we were being summoned. Hector had questioned us all on this topic before.

'This is the chief of police,' said Hector. 'You will answer his questions truthfully or there will be grave consequences.'

The chief had a walrus moustache and a powerful round belly. He stood very close to me looking into my eyes. 'Where is Jimmy Flute?' he asked.

The floor swirled. 'What? What do you mean?' I said. 'Sir.'

The chief smiled maliciously. 'Come now, he's a wily fox, but he can't have absconded without any of you natives knowing a thing about it.'

'He's left us, Nicky,' said Mrs Henderson. 'He ran away from here last night.'

My face would have betrayed me but for Yega. She fell to her knees, wailing. 'No,' she said. 'Nonononono. He was supposed to take me!'

Yega and I were not the only ones who had been taken in by Ebnal. Yega had stolen pen and ink, a farm boy had pilfered bread and cheese and a hessian bag. A young girl who worked in the bakery had stolen clothes from the store in town. Two days after the chief's visit, we heard that the maid at his house, who was known as Ruby, had killed herself by drinking arsenic – and I remembered the way Ebnal's eyes had slid away from mine as he told me about breaking in by means of a homemade knife. That was why he had been unable to find the necessary seals in the chief's office – he was never there. Ruby had risked everything for her freedom by taking a permit to the stable at the inn where Ebnal was staying, waiting while he copied it, and sneaking it back into the chief's desk.

Lies. All of it lies.

The farm boy and the girl from the bakery had been accused and confessed. The farm boy was to be flogged the following day. Yega had given herself away, and had yet to learn her punishment, but it seemed likely she would be sent to Bracken Island and would never be seen again.

As yet my part in Ebnal's escape was undiscovered. They knew about the documents but had not yet considered the matter of the seals.

I told myself to stay calm and arrange my face to seem innocent. I must try to find out what Ebnal had done with the seals. He might have taken them with him, but that would be a risk – if they were discovered on his person they would prove that his travel documents were forgeries. I thought it more likely that he'd left them somewhere at Sweetwater.

I had to find them.

I witnessed many a flogging at Sweetwater Farm. There was a flogging platform in the courtyard just outside the kitchen where I worked. I will never forget the terrible sounds that rupture from a man's throat when his skin is removed, strip by strip, or the stink of him as the muscles of his back and shoulders are ripped open and he loses control of himself.

The natives were always gathered to bear witness. Hector Henderson had the children stand closest to the victim, because he believed that children still might learn. He had long ago given up on the adults.

If you stand too close to the person being flogged, you will find yourself speckled with flecks of flesh that will not wash off no matter how you scrub. The sight of children stained with gobbets of someone else's flesh is something I will never forget.

My duties that particular day meant that I did not have to attend the flogging and I found if I hummed to myself while I worked, most of the sounds from the courtyard could be blocked out.

Yega usually watched me sideways when I sang on these flogging days, and tutted and sighed and muttered about who was being punished that day, and why. A young lad for trying to escape, a young woman for laughing too freely, an old woman for speaking in her own tongue, having failed to master the new one. She would watch my face as she gave me the names, their ages, crimes and the number of lashes. Always a precise number of lashes, as though cutting open a human's flesh and exposing it to the air were a rational and calculated thing to do. She would watch me for a spark of something – pity, revulsion, anything – and complain when there was none. *I've seen ghosts with eyes more alive than yours*, she would say.

On this occasion, though, Yega said nothing. She seemed incapable of speech, and she was made clumsy with the fear of what would become of her.

We knew the flogging was over when Mrs Henderson burst into the kitchen with such force that Yega dropped her scoop of dried peas. They scattered over the flagstones, bouncing and circling like cooped hens fleeing a fox.

Mrs Henderson stood in white-faced shock in the centre of the room and looked at me. '*Gobbets!*' she said, and started to claw at her clothes and her face. '*Gobbets of flesh! Get them off me! It's flesh! A man's flesh!*' She gripped the corner of the table to steady herself, and threw up on the floor that I had just finished cleaning. Little chunks of vomit swam in runny bile into all the cracks and corners between the stones. It would be the devil to get out.

Yega had grabbed a brush and was sweeping up the dried peas before the vomit could reach them, so it was left to me to wipe Mrs Henderson's face with a damp cloth and try to wash away the flecks of flesh. Getting them off her clothes was easy enough, though the blood would probably stain, but getting her skin clean was more difficult. The gobbets stuck to her, flesh to flesh, as if wanting to cleave back to a human body. They were strangely bright, a pinky orange like lozenges.

I wondered if the colours would be the same if it were a settler's flesh. I supposed it would be, but knew I would never find out. I knew that settlers flogged their own, but not where natives might see it.

Yega was wiping up Mrs Henderson's vomit but her hands were trembling so much that she was doing a bad job of it, just spreading it around, unable to find the strength in her wrists to wring the cloth out.

'My medicine,' said Mrs Henderson. 'I need my medicine.'

Mr Henderson was still outside supervising the prisoners back to their cells, so I took Mrs Henderson up the servants' stairs from the kitchen. Once I had her sitting up in bed in her nightgown, I fetched her laudanum. She swigged from it as though she were dying of thirst, and clutched it to her breast like a beloved child.

Her eyes soon grew their protective sheen, shiny like the shell of a beetle. I held up her hair to sponge her neck.

'I came here to help you,' she said.

I wrung out the sponge into the bowl.

She gripped my wrist. 'I want you to believe that, Nicky,' she said. 'I went to see a lecture at the Royal Society, back in England. He painted such a sorry picture of you. Cannibals, hardly above the animals. With no knowledge of the true faith.'

I watched the blood dissipating in the water like smoke, curling in on itself and fanning out into nothing, tinting the water pink.

'There were those,' she went on, 'who believed there was no point in trying to save the souls of a doomed race, but I believed even if you were doomed to die out, we could help you. Ease your suffering with civilisation and the knowledge of God.' A sudden giggle erupted from her throat and she took another swig.

'Benefits,' she said, looking fondly at the bottle. 'There are some. Oh yes. And this is one of them.'

I eased the bottle out of her hands and placed it on the washstand out of her reach.

'It was a fine lecture about the ways of the savage,' she said.

I laid her back against the pillows and brushed her hair from her face.

'I'd always been curious about the place, of course, with my brother here already, but he hardly ever mentioned the natives at all. Except for Ellie, of course.' She waved her hands vaguely. 'I mean he didn't mention the real ones. The real natives, not you. Not Ellie. The wild ones.' She closed her eyes. 'What

was izname he gave susha good lechure he was sooo handsome. I member, izname, it was Caswell. Dr William Caswell.’

I knew then that my heart was barely alive when it scarcely even flopped in my chest at the name.

Every month, Sweetwater Farm held an open day for visitors.

The visitors that day, as with every other visitors day, were mostly holidaymakers staying at Seaton. Others were up from New Exeter, which could now be reached by the new road in a matter of two hours. They were from all walks of life – clerks, importers, funeral directors, coopers, the occasional curious ship-hand, servants on their day off. There was also always a group of wives of important gentlemen, sometimes accompanied by their husbands, but more often in groups of women from their churches.

I stood at the front of the steamy classroom, waiting for the visitors, who were talking outside. There were women from every clan around me. No-one spoke. No-one acknowledged me, even by meeting my eyes. I wondered why I had taken the risk of teaching them the raindance. They had been happy that day, laughing and so boisterous that I had feared we would be discovered. Several of them had hugged me.

Now they sat at their plank benches, dressed in clothes washed and pressed for the occasion, the long tables arranged in straight rows. They looked less like people and more like copies of one another. I thought of something Elu had said to me one night of the Londoners. ‘They like everything to be ordered and straight,’ she'd said. ‘Straight fences, straight lines in a cross, straight rows of people - even in the graveyards!’

‘And the straight lines of their mouths,’ I said. She had laughed, delighted.

The women’s faces were closed. They did still not look at me. For the first time, it occurred to me that, bad as things were for me, there were those worse off.

An audience of twenty or more visitors crowded into the schoolroom and watched as the clanswomen stood and bowed their heads for the Lord's Prayer. It

was written on the blackboard in Mrs Henderson's copperplate script. I could not read it, but made gestures at it as the women shaped their mouths around the familiar sounds.

Madeleine Henderson stood among the audience, nodding and smiling. It was one of her good days. She enjoyed having visitors.

When we had finished the prayer, I moved to one side and Mrs Henderson told Junya from the Fenagara clan to read a passage from the Bible she passed to her. 'This passage, please, Jenny,' she said. 'On charity.'

Junya read in a bold, accented voice, 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.'

As they listened, I watched the faces of the day-trippers. A thin housemaid was dressed in her Sunday best, her chapped hands fidgeting with her sleeves at her wrists, gawping at the sight of savages reading. Probably she herself could not read very well. A gentleman with a cane and a blue checked cravat leant against the wall, his eyes almost closed. He was here on sufferance, I decided, having consumed too much wine the night before. His young wife was dressed in a muted rose plaid and brown bonnet with matching ribbon, and she stood, enraptured, with her gloved hands folded, a closed silk parasol dangling from her wrist.

When Junya finished her reading, the crowd agreed that it was fine work being done here. The woman in rose plaid turned to her husband and said, 'This place makes sense of the terrible smallpox epidemic the poor creatures suffered.'

He stood up straight and stifled a yawn. 'How so, my dear?'

'It was God's way of bringing them to us so they might find Him,' she said. 'It was to save their souls.'

She must have known we could speak English well enough to understand.

We sang a hymn, and then another. An older woman dressed in grey who held a small leather Bible in her hands asked, 'How long have they been inducted into the ways of Our Lord?'

A bell rang to announce lunch. ‘Ah yes, I will tell you something of our history over lunch,’ said Mrs Henderson, ‘Follow me please, ladies.’

As they left I heard them asking other questions. ‘How many women are here?’ ‘How many men?’ ‘How many hours do they spend at study, and how many at work?’

They liked these types of questions. They wanted to have the facts to hand. Earlier, in the vegetable gardens, the ladies had covered their faces with handkerchiefs against the odour of manure as their husbands inspected the clansmen, who stood stiff as staked vines, lined up next to the labelled rows of plants. The gentlemen asked Mr Henderson how many varieties of beans were grown, and how many barrels of pork were produced. It was all about the quantities of things. And in the bakery, swatting at flies and surrounded by the scent of warm currant buns, the women asked Mrs Henderson how many loaves of bread were produced each day, and how much flour and yeast was required. When they received the answers they nodded and blinked, calculating.

After lunch, the male visitors went to the piggery with Mr Henderson, and the women stayed behind and went back to the schoolroom where I was now in charge of appearing to supervise embroidery sessions. Samples of finished work for purchase were arranged on the first row of benches. This was the business end of the day. The visiting women flittered about, holding pieces up to the light and exclaiming on the unusual designs.

‘Traditional native motifs,’ said Mrs Henderson. ‘It teaches them industry and productivity, with the aim of self-sufficiency. All funds go to the upkeep of Sweetwater, of course. Every penny.’

The more affluent women went first, and selected the finest bedcovers with bold bright motifs, and intricately-beaded silk drawstring purses. The wives of clerks and accountants bought cushion covers and pillowcases with embroidered borders. Lastly, the servants bought handkerchiefs with tiny flowers and butterflies in one corner, and sometimes a well-priced warm blanket with a decorative edge. Mrs Henderson noted everything down in a ledger, as no actual money should change hands in the schoolroom.

I wondered if it would ever occur to them that the motifs had meanings. The nightflowers on the handkerchiefs indicated the Aynia clan, because those flowers grew in the foothills there, and the jagged wands of the saltrushes indicated the Fenagara clan. Other motifs gave the name of the woman who had sewn it – a mournful owl, a rainbow, drops of dew, a spindle tree. We had all knotted our own namebelts with these motifs once. The bedspreads and quilts gave the name and clan of every man and woman at Sweetwater, and a flame beside a name indicated someone who had died there. I was there, too, on many of the items for sale – a fern leaf print on a round clay jar. I stopped by a bedspread and stared at my motif. These women had remembered me, and thought there might still be someone left who cared if I lived.

To the larger pieces, the clanswomen had added water and honeybees, to mean Sweetwater, and some had included other names - of daughters and sons, husbands, parents, sisters, friends - circled in chain stitch to show they were thought of.

The women were sending messages. We are alive. This is where we are. I love you.

I knew there were other mission farms and native schools around the island, and others of us were living as servants to fine households. Almost no-one lived freely anymore. Only the Oya. Harben, their chief, had stood naked in the Hendersons' dining room just days before. He had told me I would still be here, when I had believed I would be gone. He had said he would return, on Abapanoa's day.

I did not believe in their fight. Our world was gone forever. But I still needed to get away from Sweetwater, if only for a few days. For Elu.

And that is when I had the idea.

Elu, Mr Addlington and I stood at the main deck of The Crediton. The sun was just rising through a brown fog as we sailed up the Thames into London. The air was so thick and heavy it was an effort to breathe. The soupy fog smelled of fire,

but not fresh fire – not a cooking fire or a wild fire, but like fire gone putrid, the bloated corpse of fire, oozing poison. We covered our faces with handkerchiefs.

At the docks, as we waited for Addlington to locate a cab, the smog was so thick Elu and I could not see more than twenty paces ahead. Figures loomed out of the miasma like demons being born. There were so many of them. Today I could look at those people and understand something about them – I could see them as a Londoner would. A baked potato man pulling his charcoal oven on a rickety wooden cart, the disowned son of minor gentry exiting a brothel to the catcalls of the women, a shoeshine boy kneeling over the boots of a clerk. But to Elu and me that day they were inexplicable. A churning mass of human activity, directed towards creating a boisterous chaos. We understood nothing of the signs a Londoner would read from their clothes, their demeanour, and their cries.

We made no more sense to them, two savages dressed in good clothes, alone on the docks. The foul mist clung to the wool of my jacket. I covered my nose. A small crowd gathered around us and started to stare. I could not understand much of what they were saying, but they seemed angry with us about something. I tried to talk to them, and Elu smiled and nodded. They started to jostle us. Elu almost lost her footing and I had to catch her arm. A little boy picked up a rock and aimed it at us. He missed, but picked up another.

‘Hoi!’ It was Mr Addlington, returned with a cab. He waved his stick at the crowd and they disappeared into the fog.

Elu was gripping my arm, all her confidence gone. ‘What is this place?’ she said to me.

George Addlington bustled up to us, solicitous of Elu, and helped us into the cab, with encouraging sounds like one might make to a child, and dark murmurings of self-reproof. ‘I am so sorry, so sorry,’ he kept saying, ‘should never have left you, here we are, just step up there, so sorry, will never happen again, just rest your feet on there, that's right, I'm such a fool, should have sent a boy, so sorry.’

The cab set off and we had our first look at the dingy London streets, but we were cold and confused, and frightened. The air stank, the daylight was dim, and I was shivering and wet from the fog. Everyone seemed to be shouting, and

the din of the carriage wheels clattering up and down the streets hurt my ears. The cobbled road jolted us up and down as the wheels carved through the mud and dung. When we paused at a corner, people started shoving things in at us, begging us to buy, until they saw our faces, and recoiled.

I wanted it all to go away, and wished I could wipe London off the earth and out of my mind.

Suddenly I understood the urge to destroy that the settlers had felt when they saw our forest. To them, it must have been every bit as disturbing as this was to me. The uncanny birdcalls, the poisonous thorns, the unknown devils waiting underground, ready to pounce.

It occurred to me that this place must once have been forest too, and I wondered about the people who had lived here then. What had happened to them? Had they wanted this? Is this what the settlers intended to do to our island? Those fenced off squares of land they had taken near the rivers, the roads they had gouged through the land, the little towns appearing, made of rock. Was it all with the aim of creating something like this place? Our blue skies would turn brown, our rivers would become sludge. Our land would smell like this one, of rotting fish and sewage, and fire gone bad.

Would we learn to pass one another with no greeting, without even a glance? Would we, like that couple just over there across the road, learn to pay more attention to something on display in a lit window than to an old man dying of a cough, not ten paces away?

‘We've made a mistake,’ I said to Elu, ‘We shouldn't have come.’

When people ask my most lasting impression of London, most expect me to mention the great cathedrals and the grand marble facades of the banks flanked with rows of columns, and the way the streets are crowded with gigs and wagons and coaches and private carriages, or the way everyone bustles and bristles with money and private purpose. They might expect me to describe the smell of fresh paint and the flash of newly-minted coins. Other, more romantic souls, might

expect me to say that my eyes were more often drawn to the destitute beggars swaddled in rags, toothless prostitutes and limbless soldiers, the dirty street children picking up dog turds. It is true I saw all these things. I even saw the occasional slave.

But these are not my most vivid impressions. Instead, I recall the markets, the department stores, and little bow-faced shops lining the streets. In the windows, objects were spot-lit on little silk-draped altars like idols. Idols without meaning, or perhaps with whatever meaning one chose. Posters peeled from the brick walls, cajoling us into being happy – as happy as the mother who has just given this medicine to her child, or as happy as the man whose servants use this hearth polish.

One day we were in a haberdashery shop, and a young woman came in with her friend, and found a little beaded bag. She was delighted with it, exclaiming over the pattern and sparkle of the beads, and snapping the clip open and closed, until her friend said to her, ‘Oh, Amelia, that is delightful! I gave my grandmother one just like it, three or four years ago.’

The woman called Amelia blinked, and smiled, and cast the bag back onto the shelf. It was now worthless to her, even though it was the same object as it had been before her friend had spoken.

This is my lasting impression of London – the endless rage for the new. Even in the short time that we were there, things became desirable, were bought and coveted, and then became undesirable, and were given to the poor or discarded.

And of course, Elu and I were not immune. We built up a stash of possessions. We already had clothes, but we were given many more by well-meaning donors. Some of them were even still in fashion. And there were many other things within the reach of the generous pocket money that Mr Addlington gave us. Ivory buttons, half yard cuts from bolts of bright silk, pale spools of ribbon, jet earrings and jade pendants, even musical instruments - I bought a banjo, and Elu acquired an accordion. We spent an afternoon making a terrible din with them in the Masons’ parlour, and then set them aside. We bought sheaves of thick creamy foolscap paper, even though we could not write, a hard bristle shoe

brush in the shape of a creature called a hedgehog, a porcelain tea set, a venetian glass vase for a parlour that we did not have, and an ivory and rosewood chess set that we did not know how to use. Unnecessary, wanton, irresistible things.

Nothing had prepared us for so many things, so much physical *stuff*. It was what London seemed to be about, the whole purpose of it. You saw something, and then wanted it, in that order. You bought it, owned it, loved it and then discarded it when something else came along that enticed you. It was like being under a spell, an enchantment of wanting.

It reminded me a little of those early days with Elu, when I had made myself drunk on the thought of her, forever wanting more of her, feeling the lack of her even when she was there.

I had thought if we came to London we might find another way of life, but this was not what I'd had in mind.

One day, not long after our arrival, Elu, Mr Addlington and I were on our way to the theatre. We were on foot because it was a pleasant evening and the theatre was close to our lodgings. Elu and Mr Addlington walked ahead of me, their heads leaning in to each other.

'Here!' Mr Addlington spotted a grubby little street-girl of four or five years, selling posies of violets with simple heart-shaped leaves, the petals mauve splashed with yellow. Wide-eyed, the little girl held the little damp posies to her waxy face as though they were the single solemn truth in a spoiled world.

When she saw us, she drew away from Elu and me, but she gave up all her posies when Mr Addlington dropped two coins into her hand. Then, with a wink, he gave her another, which made the tiny thing smile so we could see her swollen gums.

Elu's eyes followed the child as she darted away into the crowd with her prize, but Mr Addlington had already forgotten the girl as he held out the posies to Elu, watching her face.

'For me?'

'For you.' As an afterthought, he kept one posy back and gave it to me, without taking his eyes off Elu.

We held the posies to our faces – the scent was delicate, yet it overpowered the stench of diseased dog excrement, the sweat and damp woollen odour of the crowds, and returned me home for a moment, motionless on the white shore of the blue lake, looking up at the dark spiky tops of the ancient redcone trees.

‘Beautiful flowers,’ said Elu, and George Addlington was pleased because it was the correct thing to say, though she had said it only because she meant it. But then she remembered the custom to thank a person for a gift. ‘Thank you, George,’ she said – a simple enough utterance, that was perhaps not quite enough to explain the sparkle in his eyes.

We ambled through the streets, accustomed by now to the stares and cries of alarm, the people who shrank away from us and eyed Mr Addlington – a wealthy gentleman who should surely have kept us on a leash – with reproach. We no longer smiled and greeted every face we saw, nor even felt them as fellow human beings whom we were obliged to acknowledge. We had learned to let our eyes skim over faces with polite inattention.

Mr Addlington pointed out features of the city – this is where the new cathedral is being constructed, that is a monument to a great soldier, here is a bakery, there is a draper’s shop. Elu read some of the shop signs aloud for his pleasure. His eyes, like mine, were always drawn back to Elu, while hers flitted everywhere – half-built churches and railway stations still showing their wooden skeletons, steaming horses and liveried cab drivers, chimneys tall as redwoods belching soot, darting bone-thin children chasing a shrieking rooster.

We stopped to admire the yellow-lit window displays of the shops: a silver snuff-box and cigarette case, a monogrammed crystal set of glasses, pairs of coloured leather gloves arranged in a fan and discreetly labelled. We were the faithful, gathered round to exclaim and adore them.

Elu stopped short on our walk when she saw a little girl sitting in the streaming gutter, weeping as the crowds bustled past. Mr Addlington did not recognise her, having hardly glanced at her earlier, but we knew her for our flowergirl. Elu crouched before her and the child was too distressed to flinch from her dark touch.

‘What happens?’ asked Elu, not yet as adept at your language as she would become.

‘Me money!’ cried the girl, her face shiny with tears and slime. ‘Someone pinched it! It’s gorn!’

Elu understood the girl’s meaning, if not her words. She opened her little purse of coins, emptying its contents onto the girl’s lap.

‘No!’ said Mr Addlington. ‘That is not – you should not...’

Elu ignored him. The girl stared from her to him, stuffing the coins away into her clothing. She could only find enough of her voice to whisper, ‘Are you an angel, miss?’

Elu laughed. ‘No. I am a savage!’ She stroked the girl’s head. ‘You good now?’

‘Yes, miss, thank you ever so. I would’ve been whipped, miss.’ She leapt to her feet and ran, before Mr Addlington could stop her.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked Elu. He spoke as if to a slow, beloved child. ‘How will the girl learn to take care of things? That money was for you to spend on yourself, for things you want. It is part of learning how to be ... how to be like us. And it was a gift. It is very impolite to give away a gift.’

‘Money for me, you say,’ said Elu. ‘You say it for me, do as I please.’

‘Yes, but – ’

‘It please me, give to girl.’

He tried to reason with her. ‘You don’t understand. If you give away a gift, you reject the sentiment behind it. Elu, I give you gifts because I, because I ... As a token of my high regard for you.’

A fist squeezed my heart as I watched him twisting his hands and stuttering before Elu. Something dangerous had crept into the air between us, something that needed to be handled with prudence, like a fishing blade.

Elu was oblivious. She beamed, and tapped his arm. ‘You think I give away you regard. How I give this thing away? I give coins, is all. How I give away you regard? Is gone now?’

‘No! I ... of course not!’

Elu laughed, and grabbed his arm with both hands – he was so pleased he forgot to notice it was not a ladylike gesture – and she led him over the muddy cobblestones to a stationers, asking questions, concentrating on his words, flattering his attention. She held onto his arm as if she could not walk unaided, nodding at him and smiling.

He spoke over his shoulder to me, without looking away from Elu's face. 'Watch out around here,' he told me. 'Look after your purse. It's an area notorious for pickpockets.'

I followed them, the mud weighing heavy on my boots.

What I remember most about London is that you must hold on to what is yours, or it will be taken from you.

'An invitation to a ball at the Cunninghams'!' announced George Addlington one day shortly after we had arrived. 'This is marvellous news! It will be because of the press attention, of course.'

A story had appeared in *The Times* calling Elu a native princess, and praising her beauty. Invitations to society events had started to arrive the next day. And so began our introduction to the people who might save us, with nothing more than the weight of their opinions.

In the ballroom of Mr and Mrs Cunningham's London house, everything gleamed – the waxed mahogany sideboards and cabinets, the silver bowls used for serving punch, the polished floors, the shining oak panelling on the walls, and the glossy golden vine pattern of the wallpaper. Crystal chandeliers sparkled above, and the dark varnished portraits of the family's ancestors reflected the lights, each disapproving face looking down on us from beside a burning moon.

I watched the dancing from the side of the room. Satins and silks swirled by – the dark-haired women in hot purple, sky blue, teal, and the fairer ones in pale greys, rosebud pinks and soft lavenders.

Mr Addlington was talking quietly to Elu. She leaned in close, and he bent his head down towards her. They were often to be seen this way now. Even when

they were not huddled together, there was a connection between them – an invisible fishing line strung from one to the other, a little pull here, a little loosening there. Everyone could see it. When he visited us at the Masons' house, Mr Addlington would sit to one side with Elu while I played cards with Mrs Mason, and I noticed that her eyes kept straying over to the pair of them, her mouth tightening at the corners.

Now he was pointing out notable guests, suggesting an approach they might take towards a kindly middle-aged woman, who had lost a daughter when young, or to a Colonel, who despite his pragmatic air, was a man with a deeply-held faith. We had all agreed that what we needed was powerful allies, people who were influential in London society, and would petition on our behalf to the Company that now governed our island.

‘The poet John Barratt is going to be here,’ Mr Addlington was saying. ‘He is a good prospect. He is writing a poem about you, so I have heard. He’s very fashionable, and can make you fashionable, too.’

I did not know how much Elu could understand of what he was saying. She nodded and smiled, and met his eyes with the frank, level gaze that made him swallow. I could see why it did, looking around at the young beribboned girls dressed in gauze and lace. They dropped their eyes whenever a man was near, and pouted their lips. When they thought themselves unobserved, they turned away and pinched their own cheeks to make them brighter. When they were observed, they emptied their eyes to make their minds appear less bright. Only rarely did they allow their true faces to show, and then they were neither vacuous nor pretty. These girls were hungry.

The married women fingered the jewels at their décolletages, eyeing the young girls with a kind of proprietorial commiseration, exchanging rolled eyes and wry comments with the other married women over the empty dance card of the hapless Miss Atkinson, and bustling over to some kind-hearted officers to enjoin them to ask a wallflower to dance.

As I wandered among them, listening, our commission seemed hopeless. There were more important things at stake for these people than the fate of some unknown native tribe in the middle of an ocean of which they had never heard.

There were alliances to make, inappropriate infatuations to quash, suitable matches to be made.

I completed the circuit around the huge space, and found Elu again. Mr Addlington was still babbling on, and they leaned into each other, their foreheads almost touching.

The air was fat with the stink of overripe fruit, cigar smoke, alcohol fumes and sour breath. Even the flowers had been sprayed with a heavy artificial perfume. The music grated on me with its inane saccharine repetitions and measured precision. Dance shoes hissed across the polished floor.

I had a headache from it all.

I sat down in a lump just behind Elu and Mr Addlington, on a wooden chair set against the wall, my legs thrown out in front of me, exposing my wrinkled stockings, until a woman with a matronly bosom reminded me to cover myself. From there I could see all the pointed glances directed towards Elu and Mr Addlington, heads inclining meaningfully from a distance, words muttered through fixed smiles, as they indicated to one another the presence of the cannibal princess and the Administrator of New Devon. *Don't look now, but there they are. Over there, see? No, don't stare.*

A brave little group of gawkers approached, to interrogate the Administrator about Elu. I stood up and went to her side, ready to translate.

'So,' said a walrus-faced man in a straining cummerbund, 'She's a princess is she?' He spoke in the deep hearty tones one might use to tell a joke. 'Ha, ha. Is she really a cannibal? Is it just for special occasions?' he asked, 'Or do they have human chops with their peas every Sunday? Ha, ha.'

'Really, Henry' said his wife, mildly.

'Steady on,' said Mr Addlington.

The man blundered on. 'I say, watch out, Addlington, she looks as though she'd like to sink her teeth into you! Eh? Ha, ha, ha.'

Elu inclined her head and smiled. 'How do you do,' she said. 'I am delighted to make your acquaintance.'

He could not have looked more surprised if a bearskin rug had sat up on its haunches and sung God Save the Queen.

‘I say,’ he said to Mr Addlington, ‘how extraordinary!’

This became the pattern at these dances. The women would step in and elbow their blundering husbands in the ribs. ‘Is there a mission there now?’ they would ask Mr Addlington. ‘Are the natives converted?’ or ‘Oh! I have the most wonderful idea! We must send them the dresses you’ve outgrown, Cecelia.’ Or they would turn to their husbands and ask, ‘Surely we could make a small donation to one of the farms, couldn’t we, Alfred? Natives are always so good with animals. They could learn to farm quite well, I am sure. Would. You. Like. That. Elu? Cattle. And. Sheep?’ Sometimes they would include a little mime to help the native girl understand – two crooked fingers either side of a forehead for cattle, or both hands forming a snout for a pig. I looked at them in their colourful preening groups, bobbing their heads and chattering, and all I could think of was squawking parrots.

I knew I was being unfair. These people wanted to help us, wanted to give us things that made sense to them. They were only offering what they thought we needed – farms, Bibles, clothes.

‘No. We need our own land,’ Elu said, and they nodded, the colonels, the vicars, the businessmen.

‘Yes, yes,’ they said, ‘how very true. A farm of your own.’

‘No,’ said Elu. ‘Land where we can live our own way.’

‘Oh goodness gracious!’ said a grey-haired woman, who was dressed in purple. ‘You cannot mean you want to go back to, to live as – not after you’ve – you cannot want to.’

‘Why ever not?’ asked John Barratt, the poet. Unlike every other man in the room, he was not dressed in black and white. He wore a purple waistcoat, green neckcloth, and pale yellow trousers. ‘They lived in perfect harmony with nature.’

I wondered if I was the only one who noticed his use of the past tense.

‘You see, Princess Elu,’ he continued, ‘Your people lived in harmony with the natural world, whereas mine ...’ with one flourish of his hand, he dismissed the other guests, the clutter of the room, the embroidered screens set back against the wall, the sideboards, tables, and ornaments. He gazed at Elu in an ecstasy of pity.

Mr Addlington cleared his throat.

‘Mr Barratt would have us all living in caves!’ said a pretty young woman. She flashed the poet an affectionate glance, and blushed.

John Barratt was oblivious. ‘They knew no war, no poverty, no hunger,’ he said. ‘Think of it!’

‘And no clothes either, from what I hear!’ said a drunk man.

I knew by now to hold my tongue. This was the strategy. We must paint ourselves as something better, something these people secretly longed for. Something that had meaning – it did not matter what meaning. In fact, the vaguer the better – that way they could pin anything they wanted onto us. Children living in idyll, frozen in time. A lost tribe, unknown to God. Cannibals in need of civilising. Innocent creatures, eating nothing but fruit, wearing only fragrant garlands of flowers, wandering through summer meadows with vacant smiles on our faces.

‘We have forgotten how to live,’ John Barratt was saying. ‘We fill the cities with smoke and muck, build factories that consume the lives and limbs of little children, and fill their eyes and lungs with lint. The countryside is devoid of honest peasants now – they’ve all moved to the cities and are dying of cholera.’

‘Honest peasants,’ said a drunk man. ‘Steal from you as soon as look at you. Why don’t you try your hand at being a peasant, eh Barratt? Pig farming or some such. Try it yourself before you inflict it on the natives.’

‘But,’ said a tall woman with blonde hair, ‘they must be taught about the one true God, before it’s too late. ‘ She chewed her lip. ‘I mean before they, to save them from ... ’

Elu understood only some of this. ‘You can teach us, yes,’ she said. ‘Teach us things you know. We teach you things we know.’

‘Teach *us!*’ Everyone exchanged indulgent glances. The laughter was only just polite.

‘Do you have slums, in your country, Princess?’ asked John Barratt.

‘Factories where children must work in darkness and risk their health for a crust of bread? Does your tribe force young children up into chimneys to sweep them, or work in textile factories producing cloth for fine ladies to wear?’

I translated this as best I could.

‘No,’ said Elu, in English. ‘No chimneys. No factories. She lifted her chin. ‘No cloth.’ Her laughing eyes held everyone’s attention. ‘No clothes!’

The women gasped.

‘My point exactly!’ said the drunk man.

The women turned away, and their men gave Elu one last lingering look before following.

‘I assure you it was perfectly innocent,’ said Mr Addlington, to their backs.

Things became quieter for a while, with fewer invitations. ‘Oh, it’s only the turn of the season,’ said Mr Addlington. ‘It will pick up again.’

But as the weeks passed, we were no closer to our goal. ‘Don’t worry, my dear,’ he said. ‘They adore you, Elu.’

I started to consider the possibility that George Addlington was a fool.

He took us out to distract us, to fairgrounds and circuses and lectures. One day he found a flyer for a talk by someone called Dr William Caswell. ‘Why don’t you two go to this?’ he asked. ‘I cannot go, unfortunately, as I have business to attend. But you might find it interesting.’

I hardly glanced at the flyer, thinking that Elu would not be interested in attending a lecture when her English was not good enough to understand it, but she surprised me by exclaiming at the leaflet, ‘Oh yes! We must go!’

I looked at her and she winked. I picked up the leaflet. I could not read the writing, but there was a sketch of the man giving the lecture, this Dr Caswell. It took me a moment to place him, but when I did, I could see why Elu was so keen to go. Dr William Caswell was none other than Huffma See, the cavefish man.

Huffma See stood at the podium in the lecture hall, blinking up at the crowded rows of seats with a vague and myopic smile. He was no longer skin and bone, but

a rounded, almost portly figure, and he seemed much older than he had been when we had last seen him. But we knew him.

We sat towards the back of the lecture hall. It was hot under our veils, but Elu had insisted that we should wear them to add drama to the moment we revealed ourselves. Looking at the world through pale cream lace lent an air of unreality to the bulky shapes around me and I felt safer than I had since arriving in England, despite the fact that we were jammed in on all sides by Londoners. The room was arranged like a theatre, with tiers of seats rising in semi-circles above the stage. Most of the audience consisted of eager young men, with pen and paper to hand, but there were some older men too, sucking on their pipes with a sceptical air, and filling the stuffy room with smoke. Near the front, set slightly apart and to the left, was a small group of women, sitting up very straight and paying close attention to the speaker.

‘This, gentlemen,’ Dr Caswell was saying, ‘is a diagram that indicates the positions of the races of man on the evolutionary scale. You will see that at the top is the Anglo-Saxon, then the Normans, through to the Celts and then the various Asiatic types, and here,’ he indicated the bottom of the chart, ‘we have a cluster of the lowest rungs of humanity, the primitive natives of various outposts of the colonies of the British Empire.’

‘What’s he saying?’ asked Elu.

A man cleared his throat behind us. I told Elu to keep her voice down.

I was not certain that I had understood the doctor correctly. He was using words with which I was not quite familiar, and the heat of the bodies and pipe smoke were making my mind feel fuggy. So, to keep her quiet while I listened, I told her that Huffma See was outlining the parts of the globe from which different peoples hailed.

‘The Native Americans,’ he was saying, ‘cover this area, and the Aborigines of Australia, are of course to be found only here.’ He pointed to the globe. ‘Later, I have a special demonstration concerning the investigation of the Australian Aboriginal type, but for now, our concern is with *this* part of the globe.’ He pointed to our island. ‘It was my – uh – *involuntary incarceration* towards the north of this island which was to prove both shocking and enlightening to me. On

a personal level, it was a time of the deepest despair. On a professional level, however, my ordeal was to bring great good fortune. And for science, the discoveries that I have made during this time will prove to be of profound and everlasting importance. What I saw, gentlemen, was evolution in action! That is correct, gentlemen. Oh, and *ladies*, of course' – he gave a supercilious nod to the small group of women near the front – 'we have the final proof! The natives of this land,' he thumped our island with his fist, 'are the lowest race of all humankind!'

My heart raced. A ringing started up in my ears. I could not believe I had heard him correctly.

'... Savage beyond comprehension,' he said, 'cannibalistic, and scarcely a half a step away from the apes. I witnessed women suckling animals, mothers roasting their own children, men desecrating themselves with their own faeces.'

Nothing he was saying made sense. Elu looked at me, waiting for a translation. I shook my head.

'... This weak race, having come into contact with ours, is already almost extinct after only a few years. That is evolution in action. An inferior race may languish for years in an evolutionary backwater. It is only when a weak organism comes into direct contact with another, superior organism, that it realises, so to speak, that its era is over, and that it is time to make way for the superior organism.'

If I had not been so afraid, I might have laughed. Huffma See, superior?

I looked around me. The hall held perhaps five hundred British men and a scattering of women. All eyes were on Huffma See, Dr Caswell, the cavefish man, and distinguished scientist. Some were nodding and smiling complacently, and others wore little frowns of concentration, watching as he drew diagrams and pointed to charts. He held up two skulls and began comparing the measurements.

Elu was growing restless. 'What's he saying?' she said, 'What is that picture for? Is he saying he'd be dead without us? Has he got to the bit where we healed the boils on his bum yet?'

A man in front turned to us and gave us a barely civil ‘*Ssssh!*’ I suspected her offence was as much that she has spoken in our own language as that she had spoken at all.

‘He is saying that skull shapes differ across the world,’ I whispered. I had been forgetting to breathe and gasped out the last word.

She sat back. ‘Hmpf. Well, I could have told him that,’ she said.

Dr Caswell now held up the skull of a dog and an ape and made certain observations about the size of the brows and brain cavities.

‘And now to the point at which my own personal experiences and observations can shed light upon the matter at hand ... ’

‘What else is he saying?’ asked Elu.

I did not know what to say to her. How could I tell her that Huffma See, the man whom she had brought back from the edge of death, was at this very moment explaining to his audience that she was a cannibalistic ape?

‘In the natural way of things, of course, they are doomed to extinction. To suggest anything else is womanly sentimentality.’ He looked at the group of women, who rearranged their faces into those of impassive and impartial scientific observers. ‘This is,’ he continued, ‘a tragedy of sorts, of course, but overall it is in fact a great blessing for the human race. I myself witnessed their barbarity on a daily basis as they mocked my appeals to their higher faculties – faculties that I reluctantly had to concede did not exist, or were so undeveloped that they might as well not have done.’ He held up a finger for emphasis. ‘I am not ashamed to admit that, in my darker moments I prevailed upon these creatures for that which they could not offer: *Have mercy*, I begged them. *Have mercy*.’ He looked around at the audience. ‘But they simply laughed and repeated my words back to me, like mocking birds. *Have mercy, have mercy!* they jeered. They were saying it even as they tied me up with their ritual sacrificial rope and stoked the fire over which they intended to cook me.’

He paused. The room was silent, every face staring up at the doctor.

He smiled. ‘Fortunately, of course, they are very dull-witted’ – he gave a wave of his hand – ‘and I was able to outwit them and escape. But even then they

mocked me as I fled, and I could hear their terrible taunts as they pursued me through the jungle. *Have mercy*, they ridiculed, *have mercy.*'

The way he said it, in that particular tone, made it sound exactly like mockery. Even Elu could sense that. She looked at me. We had simply thought we were calling for him by his name. Huffma See.

The crowd was indignant on the doctor's behalf, and shifted in their seats, muttering.

Something must have been showing on my face by now, because Elu was watching me. 'What?' she asked. 'What is it?'

'Shhh!' The man behind us was losing patience.

I had a choice. I could tell her the truth, to stop her from revealing herself to Huffma See. She was imagining the talk was about something else entirely, the healing powers of our people, or a plea for understanding our people. She was going to reveal herself to Dr Caswell and expect friendship and gratitude from him – perhaps even applause from the crowd. Some sort of appreciation that she could turn to the advantage of our people, a nice little piece of propaganda for our cause. I tried to speak, but my mouth was so dry I only squeaked.

If I told her what was happening in that room, I knew what she would do. She would stand up and reveal herself anyway, speak to them, try to expose the cavefish man's lies right there and then in the middle of this crowd.

If we were apes to them, why would they listen to us as humans? If we were wicked cannibals, might they not kill us on the spot?

'Now unfortunately,' the doctor was saying, 'I do not have a specimen of their type to hand. But I do happen to have here, lately of Arthur Square where he was a guest of Lady Mickenden, the skull of an Australian Aborigine!' A covered trolley was wheeled out by two assistants. 'This unfortunate creature fell, as his people inevitably must, to a simple childhood disease that any healthy British child would have shaken off. Gentlemen, we are about to reveal the inferiority of this type' – he removed the sheet with a flourish – 'revealed in the very skull itself.'

Elu gasped at the sight. I grabbed her hands, squeezed them. 'Keep quiet,' I said. 'Quiet.'

The doctor held up the skull, talking all the while.

‘We must leave,’ I said. ‘Quietly.’ We were not safe, as types of the kind he was lacking.

Dr Caswell was pointing out the shape of the brow.

Elu leapt to her feet and I thought we were leaving, but she shouted, ‘Stop this! No!’ But she forgot to use English. A hundred pale faces turned to us. Elu removed her veil and threw off her hat. She thought to try English. ‘Regard this man,’ she said. ‘You must deep regard him.’

In their eyes she must have been a madwoman, her hair flying out when she threw off her hat. She jabbered in a mixture of our language and some English words, her eyes wide in shock, her arms flailing as she clambered past men’s knees to get to the aisle. ‘Stop!’ she was shouting ‘Stop!’

Dr Caswell stood frozen as she ran down the steps towards him. In his arms he held the skull.

‘Huffma See!’ shouted Elu. ‘It’s me! Elu! Huffma See!’ Then in our language, ‘I cured the boil on your bum. You must stop this.’

His pale cavefish eyes locked onto hers in recognition for just an instant. ‘Stewards!’ he called. ‘Escort this, er, *lady*, out of here.’

Throughout this, I had been unable to move. Two stewards grabbed Elu, one on each arm, and hauled her up the steps and out of the door. She was still shouting when they slammed the door behind her, and stood with their backs to it, arms folded.

‘Ahem,’ said the doctor. ‘Proof not only of what I have been saying with regard to the lesser races – and who knows where that one came from? – but also further evidence, if such were needed, that females are quite unsuited to the more, ah, indelicate aspects of doctoring.’ A warm chuckle washed around the room, and the shoulders of the group of women tightened. ‘Now,’ said the doctor, throughout this discussion, gentlemen, you will note that...’

At last my legs carried me out of the hall. I found Elu on the street, her face and head uncovered. Her hat and veil were still in the hall and I had not brought them with me. She was surrounded by a small group of staring children.

‘I don’t understand,’ Elu was saying. ‘I just don’t understand.’

I knew then it was hopeless. I knew I should explain what had happened in there, what the subject of the lecture had been, tell her that all her efforts at diplomacy had failed, that we must return home and prepare for war.

But the words would not come.

That evening, our carriage pulled up at the Kensington mansion of Mr and Mrs Whitlock. We had been receiving fewer dinner invitations of late, and Mr Addlington had been pleased when this one had arrived. ‘They are influential in society,’ he said. ‘We must try very hard to win them to our way of seeing things. This is a good chance for us, Elu.’

Something about the way he said it made me wonder if he thought it was also our last chance.

On these occasions, there was always the problem of what to do with me. The press had declared that Elu was a native princess – albeit a reformed cannibal princess – and she was therefore considered an appropriate guest, but I was understood to be something akin to a lady's maid and should not therefore dine in company. But I was also Elu's translator and my presence was necessary.

The dining room belonging to Mr and Mrs Whitlock was the largest I had seen. Walking into their dining room was like entering the bloody internal organs of a mythical beast. The velvet drapes were crimson with gold, and the walls were papered in scarlet and gold flock.

Each of the twenty-four diners sat in a chair allotted by the hostess. I took my place at a mahogany side table, from where I could see all the faces, even of those with their backs turned to me, because of the gilt-framed looking-glass that took up the whole breadth and height of the chimney breast. The guests' faces were glowing pink from the fire, and as the ladies removed their gloves, they smiled at one another with neat rows of pointed teeth. A grand gassolier sputtered above the table, which was laid with a white cloth and a dark red runner, with three spectacular vases of red flowers of a type I did not know.

Red everywhere, the colour of sex and death, which I thought a strange choice for people who seemed to acknowledge neither. I closed my eyes and tried to recall the warm browns and earthy pinks of the soil of my homeland, the green leaves and yellow summer grasses, the grey-blue ocean. But the angry red burned through my eyelids and I could not capture them. I ached to go home.

I opened my eyes and saw the servants ladling soup from a silver tureen that was set on the monstrous carved mahogany sideboard. One of them set before me a bowl of hare soup, a side plate of oyster patties, and slices of mutton with mashed potatoes.

After admiring the display of dishes and desserts on the table, the guests began to eat, and I followed suit.

As always, Elu quickly became the centre of attention. The hostess, Mr Wickham, a large man with a broad crooked smile said, 'Mind your manners, gentlemen, there's a princess at the table!' He chuckled and smiled at Elu.

The man sitting to her right exclaimed, 'Indeed, is that so? Do tell us about her, George. Where is she from?'

'Miss Elu is from the island colony of which I am Administrator,' said Mr Addlington. 'New Devon.'

'Ah yes,' said the man, holding his wine glass up as a maidservant refilled it, 'One of the Company's more recent acquisitions, I think. And how are you finding the, er, relations with the natives? They are not too savage, I hope?'

Elu beamed, not following.

'In fact they are very far from being savages,' said Mr Addlington. 'They know nothing of the urge that it pleases us to call primitive in which one man settles his argument with another by taking up arms.'

'How marvellous,' said Mrs Wickham. 'They know nothing of war?'

'Indeed, they lived in pure innocence,' said Mr Addlington.

'Oh! Like Adam and Eve,' said a young blonde woman, and blushed as the men's eyes momentarily flicked to her.

Sitting opposite Elu was a man built like a bear. 'Oh come now, Mr Addlington,' he said. 'That's surely just a children's tale. A savage is a savage.'

They all kill one another at the drop of a hat. I'd wager the princess here has speared a few overzealous men in her time. Maybe eaten them too.'

'Oh, really!' said Mrs Wickham. 'Mr Cavendish! The princess is a guest in my home!'

'What are they saying?' Elu asked me. Everyone was silent while I told her. 'No,' she said in her untested English. 'I eat animal I kill. Never I kill a man.' Pause. 'Yet.' A wicked smile.

'Ahahaha!' said Mr Wickham. 'That put you in your place, Harold.'

'Oh, can we please not talk of killing at the table,' said a woman with pearls at her throat.

Elu looked at me and I translated again.

'Why this?' said Elu, winking at her. 'This here dead horned beast. This dead fish. No eat him alive!'

'Um,' said the woman who had spoken. The other women exchanged looks, but the men were entranced.

'Tell me, your, er, Highness,' a young man said to Elu, 'How do you like London?'

This question Elu understood, having heard it many times before. 'Many fine thing,' she said. 'Many tall building. And,' she flashed Mrs Whitlock a gracious smile, 'many very fine thing to eat.'

George Addlington began to relax, and accepted a third glass of wine.

'And what do you eat in your country, my dear?' asked Mrs Whitlock.

The servants were moving around, as invisible to the diners as ghosts, pouring sauces and refilling wine glasses. As a maid poured water into Elu's glass, her hand shook slightly – perhaps because she was afraid to stand so close to a cannibal princess – and a little splash of water fell onto the tablecloth.

'Birds,' Elu said, 'animals, plants, fruits, same as here.' Elu rubbed at the spilled water with her index finger, spreading it into a dark star on the linen. The young man's eyes were fixed on Elu's pink fingernail.

'The same? I doubt you can find sirloin as fine as this in New Devon,' said another man, flashing an ingratiating smile to his hostess.

Mrs Whitlock inclined her head to acknowledge the compliment.

‘Animals still,’ said Elu, looking up. ‘Different animals. Not same. Tree deer good but very small. Big fat salt lizard is my best.’

‘Lizard! Oh gracious!’ said Mrs Whitlock.

‘And,’ said a grey-haired man, ‘Did all the tribes really live in harmony, as Mr Addlington would have us believe?’

Elu nodded. ‘Before, many moons go by, no fight.’

‘But there were ... battles? Sometimes?’ He raised an eyebrow at George Addlington.

‘Sometime, if man do something wrong. Take canoe not belong his clan. Take wife not belong him.’

Mrs Whitlock looked startled, and her hand covered the emerald pendant at her throat.

‘Of course there would be fighting,’ said a man who had not yet spoken. He had been announced earlier as a soldier of some status, but I could recall neither his name nor his rank. ‘All societies have war. Human nature.’

‘More fighting now,’ said Elu. ‘Since your people come.’

‘Heavens!’ said Mrs Whitlock, ‘You don’t mean to suggest that civilisation has *increased* the disharmony?’

Elu shrugged. ‘Less land now for my people. More fighting.’ She put an overloaded fork to her mouth.

‘But you don’t mean to suggest that Mr Addlington here,’ Mrs Whitlock smiled at him, ‘and the other settlers are actually causing tribal wars. That would be absurd.’

‘Why not?’ said the soldier. ‘Easier to conquer them that way. No offence meant, Miss Elu, er, your Highness.’

‘But we are not there to conquer them! We are there to civilise them,’ insisted Mrs Whitlock.

The soldier laughed. ‘Look around you. Almost everything in this room has been taken from somewhere else. Potatoes from the Americas, where the Indian once roamed free. He put up a good fight, but he lost, so the potatoes are ours. The spices in this delightful mutton curry here are from India, which we grabbed by force. The dye of your elegant dress, Mrs Whitlock, indigo from the Americas, and

probably grown by slaves. They would, I think we can assume, not choose to be so. The sugar in these delicious desserts before us – and I am particularly looking forward to trying the blancmange – the sugar is also certainly grown by slaves, in the West Indies. All plundered. All of it is built on the strength of British arms, the musket and the canon.’

‘That is a very jaundiced and particular way of looking at the Great British Empire,’ said Mr Whitlock. ‘To characterise our greatness as simply being the product of superior weaponry. If it were true it would make us quite immoral.’

‘Human nature!’ said the soldier. ‘They’d do it to us if they could.’

A dark-haired young man who had not once taken his eyes off Elu during this exchange spoke. ‘Tell me, Princess Elu, what do you think of our social organisation here? Our inequalities?’

‘Oh, we mustn’t talk politics,’ said Mrs Whitlock, with a tight smile.

‘Never mind young Alfred here. He’s always onto politics. Thinks himself quite the radical!’

Nonetheless they waited while I translated the question to Elu.

Elu looked at her plate. She was unaccustomed to having to weigh her words, and spoke carefully. ‘Different here. Some people have many good things. Some not have so many.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs Whitlock, ‘an industrious man may improve his station in Great Britain above anywhere else in the world!’

‘Well, quite,’ said a man who had not yet spoken. ‘An educated Englishman has the wherewithal to improve his lot, whereas, with all due respect, an illiterate tribe running around naked in the woods, spearing one another with Stone Age weapons clearly does not.’

‘You don’t understand,’ said Mr Addlington. ‘They lived as if they were in Eden. The people are not savages. In many ways they are superior to us, as were Adam and Eve.’

For the first time, I considered whether Mr Addlington believed this Adam and Eve story about us that he liked to tell his countrymen. I had, of course, noted the way he looked at Elu, but had never before given much thought to how he saw us as people. Now I realised that the way of life he was trying to help us survive bore

no resemblance to the lives we actually lived. We shared everything, and rarely ate meat, he said. We knew nothing of farming and little of warfare. We never felt envy or pride or shame. We gave our possessions and assets freely to those other tribes that needed them, and were not contaminated with the notion of trade.

‘We are the ones who brought canons and rifles to the colony,’ he went on. ‘There may have been mild skirmishes before we arrived, but they only knew spears and arrows. It is correct that we take these places by force, in order to profit ourselves. We *stole* the land that belonged to these people! You must understand they are not an inferior race. They are by far the superior race. *We* are the savages!’

‘Steady on, old boy,’ said Mr Whitlock. ‘My wife is present.’

Mr Addlington looked up. Everyone was staring at him.

‘I – I don't mean to make any personal remark about the people here,’ said Mr Addlington. ‘I simply mean that Elu's people know things. Justice and fairness. And they know things we do not know, or things we have forgotten. They have extraordinary knowledge of ancient medicine, for example. Elu herself cured me on the ship. I was very unwell with a fever and she cured me with powerful herbal medicines.’

‘How extraordinary,’ said Mrs Whitlock, glad to be back on safe ground. ‘Did you learn this from your mother, Miss Elu?’

‘No,’ said Elu. ‘From old Healer. She dead now.’

‘Her knowledge is extraordinary,’ said Mr Addlington, staring into his empty wine glass. A servant stepped forward to refill it, but Mrs Whitlock gave a tiny shake of her head and the servant retreated. Mr Addlington did not notice.

‘What is the most important medicine known to your people, Elu?’ asked Mrs Whitlock. I noticed she had dropped the ‘Miss.’

I translated. ‘Oh,’ said Elu, in English. ‘Most important is tarram leaf. Stop shits. You get shits, tarram leaf stop you shit yourself to death!’

Everyone froze.

‘Oh!’ said Mr Addlington. ‘Ahaha. Please forgive Elu. The sailors on the voyage here, they have clearly been teaching her some ... colourful ... conversation.’

After the dinner at the Whitlocks', there were no more invitations to the grand homes of influential people. George Addlington remained optimistic, but it was becoming clear, even to Elu, that our plans had slipped away from us. We were no longer the latest fashionable cause, and people began to take an interest instead in setting up schools for slaves in the Americas. There had been native uprisings in New Devon, resulting in the deaths of some of the wealthier settlers, and this had set many people against us. Dr Caswell's ideas were gaining currency as well, and people looked at us with a mixture of pity and disgust, these pitiful creatures at an evolutionary dead end, doomed to die out to further the human race.

'It's too late, of course,' a school teacher had said to Mr Addlington one day, unaware that we could understand him. 'The natives have been mostly culled now, and the others are penned away like the beasts they are. Give it up, George. Send these two back where they came from and marry a nice English girl.'

He had shaken his head, and tried to argue, but no-one was listening anymore to George Addlington's views on the natives. That was last season's news.

When we did still go out, the houses were smaller, and the occasions less elaborate. Whereas before, at any gathering, all eyes had been on Elu, now only a small group would gather around us – women in last year's dresses and their anxious husbands, blinking with defeat. They chatted earnestly about missions and abolition and the Duchess of Hampshire's seven-year-old African pageboy who had run away and was presumed lost in London. The keen-eyed young men still wanted to stand close to Elu, but even they seemed distracted and furtive, looking around the room to see who might be watching.

I tried to talk to Elu about it, but she insisted that the Administrator would keep his promise and that everything would work out exactly as he had said. 'He is an honourable man,' she said, and closed her bedroom door in my face. She had closed the door in my face a great deal over the previous weeks. I never saw her alone.

‘Elu, talk to me!’ I shouted through the door, but there was no reply.

One afternoon Mr Addlington called at the Masons’ house where Elu and I were staying. Elu was out with Mrs Mason, and Mr Mason was in his study, so we were alone.

Mr Addlington paced the drawing room and railed against the hypocrisy of the press. ‘Listen to this!’ he said, reading from a newspaper, “‘In Defence of British Imperialism. In recent times it has been the vogue to decry the great achievements of the British Empire and to denigrate the civilising effects of our industrious and productive culture. The dangerous radical reformists who promulgate such unwarranted critique know nothing of the matters of which they speak, preferring to indulge in idle chitter-chatter in parlours than to venture overseas to witness for themselves the glorious achievements of British colonialism. Were these people to undertake such a venture, they would witness the most remarkable civilising transformations.’” Oh really! Whatever next. Where do they find these people? This hack has almost certainly never ventured outside his own city.’ He looked at the ceiling.

I started to speak, but he held up his hand to silence me.

‘Wait, wait! It goes on. “New Devon, for example, which has recently has been the subject of much discussion and *no small scandal*,” – I have no idea what that could even mean – “was until very recently a wilderness of untamed jungle and uncultivated plains, host to nothing but sluggish waterways. The most advanced technology the indolent natives knew was the stone axe. They simply relied on Mother Nature to provide for them, and were as incapable of directing themselves to a purpose as are irrational children.” Children, it says! “Now those dark jungles are productive homesteads, the plains are fertile farmlands, and the rivers are the energy and lifeblood of timber mills and factories producing sugar and tinned meat for export.”’ Mr Addlington smacked the newspaper against a side table, and let it fall to the floor.

I picked it up, folded it, and placed it on a side table.

‘Fools!’ Mr Addlington said. ‘All of them! And my own friends are no better! People whom I once thought fine examples of their nationality. So concerned with their own notions of polite society. Complacent in the face of

injustice! The women understand nothing beyond their own parlours and the men are interested in nothing but trade. Put *them* in the forest, and then see who behaves like irrational children!’

A servant entered and told Mr Addlington that Mr Mason would like to see him in his study.

Mr Addlington returned shortly afterwards, pale-faced and shaken, running his hand through his hair. He slumped down in the armchair opposite me and stared at a small square of paper in his hand.

‘It is finished, Neka,’ he said. ‘Over.’

‘What is?’ I asked.

‘All of it. Us. We are finished. We can never garner the support we came here to find.’

‘I’m sure if we-’

‘No!’ he shouted, making me start. He crumpled over on himself and spoke into his knees. ‘It’s all my fault,’ he said. ‘Mr Mason requests that you and Elu leave this house tonight.’

‘What? Why? Mrs Mason has been so kind to us.’

‘And as for me. I have been - *replaced*.’ He sat back with thump.

‘Replaced?’

‘The Company apparently no longer requires my services.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, Neka,’ he said, irritated with my slowness, ‘that I am no longer Administrator of New Devon, because the company is a *respectable* organisation.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Ha!’ He threw his head back and squeezed his eyes shut. ‘Nor did I, Neka. Nor did I. Then he showed me this.’ He held out the square of paper.

I crossed the room to take it from him. The room was gloomy even at this hour, and I took it to the window to see. It was a photograph of Elu, naked but for her namebelt, her thighs gleaming, her large nipples facing the lens like staring eyes. I remembered Mr Addlington suggesting she should have it taken, in New Exeter before we left. He had said she should have two different images taken, one showing herself as she was before the settlers came, and the other of her in settler

dress. Elu had enjoyed the experience, and been excited on her return from the studio. The photographer had been very pleased with her, she had said, and he had told her she looked like a wild animal in one image and a respectable lady in the other.

I stared at the image for a long time in silence. I had almost forgotten how Elu had once looked. I handed it back to him.

He took it from me and sat with his head in his hands. I noticed that his hair was thinning. 'It was supposed to be part of the campaign,' he said. 'To show that your people can be *civilised*. That you are not irredeemable cannibal savages as the local press there had it. I cannot have been in my right mind. I am such a fool!' He looked at the photograph, his thumb stroking one corner. 'I was forgetting how things are here. I have been away so long. King George's Island before New Devon. I had become accustomed to seeing natives as God intended them to be.' He looked up at me, in misery. 'But of course when I arrived here, I realised we couldn't possibly use this image. I had forgotten. But the photographer, Mr *Burrows*,' he spat the name, 'had apparently *not* forgotten how things are here, and he decided, like a good Englishman, to make some extra money from his endeavours.'

I did not understand, and told him so.

Mr Addlington sighed, and addressed the ceiling. 'There are dozens of copies of this image, Neka. Perhaps hundreds. They are all over London, being sold to filthy-minded gentlemen and grubby schoolboys at a penny a piece. Elu is disgraced.'

'This picture? Here in London? How? Who?'

'I know nothing of how it was conveyed here. I know the photographs arrived at the same time as we did and possibly came over on the same ship.'

I thought of the men on board *The Crediton*, exchanging furtive glances when Elu arrived in the captain's mess. The oily insurance agent, the clerks, and the kind but talkative solicitor. Had he bought a copy? I could not imagine it of him. But it was unlikely he had not been offered the opportunity to buy one. Unlikely he had not seen it. Someone – perhaps the insurance agent – would have

sidled up to him one day at the manrail and shown him. I could picture the scene. 'Native princess?' he would have said, '*Naked princess*, more like!'

We were doomed before we had ever set foot in London.

It was six weeks before Mr Addlington could arrange us passage back to the island. This time we were to travel by steamer, halving the journey time.

Elu and I boarded and stood on the deck in silence. I had nothing to say to her. I had not seen her alone for weeks, and whenever I had tried to speak to her, she had simply recited George's name to me like a sacred chant. She could not see that the man was a fool, and no longer even an influential one. We had gambled everything we had on this man, and we had lost.

I watched the brown river oozing around the hull of the ship. It was a cold, bitter day. We had failed. We did not know what the island would look like when we arrived. Steamers made the voyage every month now, each one as full as this.

The extent of our failure was spread out before us on the dockside. Hundreds of people were waiting to board – waiting to claim their piece of our island. Wrapped in warm clothing, they were gathered in a chaotic crowd of baggage and babies, porters and carriages. Their faces were full of wary hope. Hundreds of new settlers, every thirty days.

I had been in London long enough to recognize the types. There were genteel folks who had fallen on hard times, blinking up at the ship, breathing warm air into their hands, and picking at the frayed cuffs of clothes that had long since fallen out of fashion. There were servants and labourers in torn woollen jackets and threadbare shawls, carrying the weight of their families' expectations, holding dreams in their eyes of a patch of land of their own, a little cottage, and perhaps one day a servant of their own. They wanted a future away from the dreary cold of London, the filth and the brown abrasive smog. They thought of open blue skies, fresh salty air and sunshine. I could hardly blame them.

I had my own cabin on this journey, a room barely big enough to sit beside the bed. I spent long hours in there hiding away, my senses deadened by the din of the engines.

I lay alone on the hard mattress, curled up as if with a fever, unable to rouse myself, even when someone knocked on my door. In the mornings I could hear the laughter as the boatswain and his mate hosed down the decks, along with any of the long-john clad poorer passengers who felt the lack of bathing facilities sufficiently to withstand a public soaking. In the evenings there was singing and music from below, laughter and smashing bottles. For the first few days, Elu knocked on my cabin door in the mornings and afternoons, but I never answered. On the occasions when I had to venture out, I only saw her at a distance, with Mr Addlington forever at her side, leaning in together, sharing some secret joke, with not a thought for anyone else.

I ate in my cabin.

One evening I returned to my cabin from a brief trip to the afterdeck, and found Elu inside, waiting for me. She sat on my bed with her head down, her hair falling over her face. When I closed the door behind me she looked up. I was so full of rage towards her it took me a moment to notice that she was crying.

‘What’s wrong?’ I asked, not meaning to sound as curt as I did.

‘We failed,’ she said.

‘You noticed, then.’

She said nothing.

‘At least we’re going home,’ I said, and sat beside her.

‘But what are we going back to? George says we have to live with settlers now, on a mission farm. We’re not allowed to move around the island anymore. He’s going to move us in with his sister and her husband.’

It did not seem possible. ‘What are we supposed to do on a farm?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know,’ she wailed. ‘I only know we failed to do what we set out to do, and abandoned our clan for no good reason.’

I remembered my reasons for persuading her to go to London well enough. My fear of dying at the end of a gun, or worse, of something happening to Elu.

‘We thought we had a chance. We had to try anything we could.’

She sniffed, and wiped her face on her sleeve. ‘Anything?’

‘Yes.’

‘Neka, if there were still a way... For us, not to have our own land back but to have a place we could at least call our own, for our clan, should we do it? No matter what?’

‘Sounds as though there is no way.’

‘If there were, Neka ... If there were a way, but at the cost of your own happiness, would you do it?’

‘What happiness? How could we be happy, with no home and no clan?’

She held her hands to her face, her fingertips touching the arch of her eyebrows. ‘I failed everyone. It’s my fault. The whole clan ... They’ll despise me. They should despise me.’

I put my arm around her, and did not tell her I doubted there still was a clan. ‘Elu, you did everything you could. Everyone knows you would do anything to make things better for your people, because they know you. Everyone knows you would have sacrificed anything. Because you are a good, selfless, and wise Healer. That is who you are.’

‘I’m not. I’m not selfless.’

‘Of course you are.’ I stroked her hair and looped it over her ear. She leaned on me, her breath warm on my neck.

‘I do want things for myself,’ she said, and turned her face up to mine. She took my hand and placed it flat at the base of her neck on her collarbone, stroking my fingers. She looked at me, her eyes focussing on one of mine and then the other, and back again, as if she were hoping to find something.

I looked away. I could not bear it.

She pulled me towards her and there was no more talking that night.

Early the next morning, an attendant woke me by knocking on my door, and told me my presence was required in the stateroom. When I refused, he said the gentleman was most insistent, miss, and would I please oblige him. There was no sign of Elu.

The stateroom was a cramped space cluttered with tables and a scattering of armchairs. The sun was still low, shining in straight through the portholes. Elu and Mr Addlington were the only occupants, seated next to each other. When I entered, he stood, and wiped his hands on his trousers. Elu sat looking at her

gloved hands, which were folded over her skirts. She was wearing a little cap that covered the pins in her hair. The perfect portrait of an English lady.

‘We have some wonderful news,’ said Mr Addlington.

Everything was infused with richness from the sunrise. It striped the walls and lit the upper half of Elu’s face.

‘My dear?’ said Mr Addlington, and Elu stood up beside him, her eyes fixed on the floor. The stateroom was heavy with the stuffy smell of old cigar smoke and spilled porter. A clock stuck the quarter hour.

Mr Addlington took one of Elu’s hands in his, and placed it over his arm. He patted it. Still she did not look up. He watched her face as he spoke to me. ‘Elu has done the great honour of agreeing to become my wife. We will marry immediately on our return to New Devon.’

I sat. The armchair made a *whumpf*.

I breathed, cleared my throat, and tried to unclench my fingers.

‘That’s. Congrat-’ I coughed. ‘Congratulations,’ I said. ‘That is wonderful news.’

At last Elu lifted her eyes, but not towards me. She looked at Mr Addlington, her George, who was still patting her hand. She blinked twice, and beamed up at him.

Two days later, we arrived at the island now known to the world as New Devon.

Elu, Mr Addlington and I stood at the bow of the ship, watching the grey smudge of land taking shape through the day, growing from a thumbprint on the horizon to an island, a country, a world. The ship grumbled its way into the harbour at the mouth of the Manasti River. We knew it was the Manasti because of the twist in it, the shape of a frog's leg, at the point just before it joined the sea, and because of the twin hills to the north. But everything else had changed in the months we had been away. The river itself was clogged with detritus – sawdust and broken timbers, mashed twigs and pulp, brown froth spewing into the sea. The mudflats where the sea-lilies had bloomed in autumn were gone. The stand of redcone trees to the west was gone. The colony of rock seals, the saltberry bushes that had lined the shore, the needlebeaks picking over the sand – all gone. The grandmother tree on the hillock where Elu and I had once caught a laughingbird was gone, and so was the hillock itself – buried under what seemed to be some sort of fort. Roads cut through the hills, and buildings lined the roads – banks, shops, a post office, taverns and hotels. New Exeter was spreading.

I could hardly look Elu in the eye. Her betrayal sat within me like acid. She had tried to talk to me the night before, and had come knocking at my cabin door, but I had not answered.

The ship docked and in no time the wharf was boiling with people loading and unloading carts. Facing us as we stepped onto land was a government land office. Elu pointed to the sign: '*Claim your free acreage now!*' she read. 'Shall we try?' Her smile was furious. 'Oh, no, *for new immigrants only*, it says. Pity.'

In the streets, bony horses rolled their eyes against the strain of the carriages they were dragging up the slopes. Men cursed, dogs barked, or yelped when they were kicked. The smell of human excrement and rendered animal fat hung over everything. No-one paid us any attention, apart from a painted woman outside an inn who stared at our clothes.

Mr Addlington found us an open carriage and we climbed up. As we drew away, a man ran up to us alongside the carriage. He was a native, but dressed in what seemed to be some sort of sacking material roughly stitched together. He

raised his red eyes to Mr Addlington and swung an empty bottle from one hand. ‘Penny for a meal!’ he shouted. The cab driver raised his whip, and the man fell back, his arms still raised. He looked up and saw Elu and me for the first time. His mouth opened and he raised a finger to point at us. As the cab gained speed, we turned to watch. ‘Elu,’ he called. ‘Elu.’

Elu and I did not meet each other’s eyes. The man looked old, and his face was twisted with pox scars. But we had recognised him. It was Vantin, the young boastful man of our clan who had once told us a tale about a winged island.

The carriage approached the place called Sweetwater Farm where we were to stay with Mr Addlington’s sister and her husband. We were tired and dusty from the journey, which had taken four hours. The weather was blazing, and Mr Addlington told us there had been no rain on the island for months. I had spent most of the journey trying to empty myself out as we moved through a desolate brown landscape of dead grass and broken trees. Everything felt like death. There was no birdsong.

We left the road and travelled down a long driveway surrounded by more empty dry fields. An occasional bellow from a distant cow was the only sound apart from the horses’ feet and the thin wheels of the carriage grinding through the dirt. My throat ached.

We stopped at the end of the driveway in front of the garden gate to a little stone cottage. A tall man with a dark beard greeted us. ‘Welcome, welcome,’ he called. He stopped short when he saw Elu, and bowed.

‘Hector,’ said Mr Addlington, stepping down from the carriage and offering his hand to Elu. ‘Thank you for agreeing to accommodate my fiancée and her friend for the time being.’

‘My pleasure, I assure you,’ said the man. ‘Your sister is here somewhere. Ah yes, here she is.’ He only glanced in her direction before his attention was back on Elu. ‘My wife is ... a little delicate,’ he said to her, with a wink.

A small pale girl, no older than I was, appeared at the gate, leading a very young calf, with a ribbon around its neck. She was talking to it softly as though it were a child. 'Here they are, Daisy,' she was saying, 'our new guests are here and you must be polite and say hello.' She looked up. 'Oh, hello George,' she said, her eyes looking past us all to the trees beyond. 'I had not known you would be here too.'

'Maddie,' George Addlington said, and stepped forward and embraced his sister. 'Come and meet my betrothed.'

Mrs Henderson nodded to Elu as her brother introduced us to her and her husband, Hector Henderson. 'This is Daisy,' she told us, looking at the calf. 'Daisy, say hello.' The calf eyed us.

Mr Henderson clapped his hands twice. 'Well, George,' said Mr Henderson. 'It is good of you to drop them off personally. Will you stay for dinner? And overnight? Rest a little before you make the return?'

'Return?' said Elu.

'I told you, Elu. I have to go back to New Exeter to make all the preparations.'

'Today?'

'Now, in fact.' He turned to Mr Henderson. 'I'm grateful for the invitation but I have to be on my way.'

Mrs Henderson had been watching Elu during this exchange. 'My dear,' she said, 'it won't be for long. Will it Amelia? No, it won't be for long. And she can help us with the teaching in the schoolhouse, can't she? Would you like that, Amelia, having a little helper with us?'

'I assure you they will be well looked after,' said Mr Henderson to George. 'If your, er, fiancée, reads as well as you say, she will be of use in the schoolhouse teaching the nat- teaching her people to read.' He turned to Elu. 'We are doing genuine good here, with your people,' he said. 'We only want to help.'

Two natives I did not recognise came and took away the trunks without looking at us. Mr and Mrs Henderson did not acknowledge them.

While the two men were talking and Mrs Henderson spoke to Elu and the calf, I turned and looked around me. The land we were in had been forest, in the

south of the land belonging to our clan. It was not far from here that I had once believed I had seen a lightning god called Abapanoa. I felt ashamed at my ignorance. Still, I wondered if the pool had been left intact, or if it had been turned over to the purpose of watering cattle.

George was taking his leave of Elu. ‘Goodbye my dear,’ he said. ‘I’ll return in under a week. I will arrange the marriage permits and secure us our own land.’

Elu’s eyes narrowed a touch, and she nodded, turning away before he had a chance to kiss her cheek. Mrs Henderson guided Elu and the calf through the garden of dead rose bushes and up to the front door. I followed. Mrs Henderson was chattering about her Bible readings and sewing classes. At the door she stopped and hugged the calf, ‘You stay here, Amelia. Mummy will be back in a moment.’ She turned to Elu. ‘You’ll be baptised, of course, before the wedding,’ she said.

Elu was looking at her, and so did not turn to see George’s carriage leaving, but I did. The land all around us was parched to dust, and it rose up around the wheels like storm clouds.

Mr Henderson joined us in the parlour where his wife had left us. Now that George had gone, his manner was different – less the gracious host, and more the efficient businessman. ‘Come with me,’ he said.

We followed him to the kitchen, which was a large dark room with stone flags and a long wooden table. It smelled of boiled onions. A plump native woman dressed in an apron was tending the stove. Mr Henderson ignored her and she kept at her work.

‘You’ll be helping to run the place to start off with,’ he said to me. ‘Some household tasks – cooking and cleaning, that sort of thing.’ His eyes kept drifting to Elu.

‘To start off with?’ I said.

He opened a door to a tiny room off the kitchen, a servants’ room, with two narrow beds and a plain square window covered with a square of pale green

muslin. 'You'll sleep here,' he said to me. 'This one's yours, the other one belongs to Eunice there.'

I looked at Elu. Her eyes were wide, even afraid. It was up to me to address Mr Henderson. 'I thought we were guests,' I said. 'For a few days.'

Mr Henderson leaned against the doorway and looked at me for a long moment. 'Let's get one thing clear. My brother-in-law is not my master. He is no longer the Administrator of this island. He is no-one's master, except perhaps *hers*,' he indicated Elu with a sneer. 'So while you are here you will do what I command. This place is funded by do-gooders who want to see the natives civilised and trained to do productive work, so you will be trained as a maid. *She* will teach reading and writing and sleep in the schoolhouse. If there are any misdemeanours, you will be punished, in exactly the same way as all other natives are punished. You are not special here. You speak English, so you're useful. That is all.'

Elu was staring at him. 'But George –'

'A word of advice, for you, *Princess*. I wouldn't think much more about him if I were you. He is going to come to his senses very quickly when he learns what has been going on around here. Your people are no longer the victims of progress. You killed a lot of people, and now everyone just wants you all out of the way. I would wager everything I own that he will not be coming back for you.'

A week passed, then another. There was no word from George. The summer built itself into a fury, the steamy heat building into clouds every afternoon, but still no rain fell.

I had not seen Elu since the day we had arrived, but then, one lunchtime, we were told that all the natives, including servants, were to gather to eat in the refectory that the farmworkers used, as Mr Henderson had an announcement to make concerning work rotas and food rations. It was no secret that the farm was failing in the drought, and we knew we would be told that work hours would be increased, and food rations cut.

The refectory was already full when I arrived. It was a large room, with a low ceiling and small windows. Perhaps two hundred natives were there. I had not known there were so many. Men and women were kept apart by a shoulder-high partition that divided the room in two, lengthways. Guards walked up and down on either side, preventing conversation.

Mr Henderson was talking to his wife at the head of the room, near a makeshift platform. And there, beside them, was Elu. Her eyes searched the room, found me, and locked. She did not smile. I had made no effort to contact her, and I had not heard from her.

I looked away and collected a bowl of soup from the servers. I found a seat next to Yega without looking again for Elu, but in a moment she was there by my side. ‘Neka,’ she said.

Yega looked up before I could speak. ‘Oh, look it’s our great Healer and saviour,’ she said. ‘Where is our land, oh wise woman?’

People around us were setting down their bowls and taking their seats, but they were watching this exchange.

‘It is only a matter of time,’ said Elu, smiling, and turned back to me. ‘Neka, I-’

‘And how much time, exactly?’ asked Yega. How many more of us are going to die here, first? Do you know, six died last week? Six.’

I looked at the faces of the women watching us. They were thin and sick, with dark circles under their eyes and drooping jowls.

Yega was staring at Elu. ‘Where were you when the people of your clan were fighting?’

‘It will all turn out well,’ said Elu. ‘George will-’

‘George!’ said Yega. ‘Let me tell you about your George Addlington. George Addlington set this place up when he was still Administrator, and others like it around the island, so that we would all die nice and tidily, away from the sight of the settlers.’

‘No! George will-’

But Yega had picked up her bowl of soup, and she tipped it over Elu’s head.

I pushed Yega away, but it was too late. The room erupted. Elu stood frozen. Soup ran down her face like brown mucous. Lumps of gristle stuck in her hair.

Yega stood, hands on hips, laughing.

Two guards were bundling over to us and Mr Henderson was shouting instructions from a distance.

‘You’ll regret this, Eunice,’ he said. ‘I will have order! Guards!’

Two of the guards grabbed Yega and held her still. A third withdrew a thick baton from his jacket, and struck her over the head. She fell to her knees. Still, the two guards held her arms. The third guard raised his baton again.

I sometimes think that what separates those who are brave from those who are not is simply that they grasp things more quickly. I was still staring, unable to believe what I was seeing. Suddenly Elu was there, hitting at the guards. She fell over, and stood again, the discarded earthenware soup bowl in her hand. She slammed it into the face of a guard and turned to the other, shoving him away from Yega. All the time she was yelling, ‘Not this, no, not this. This is too far, too much. Not this.’

No-one helped her. We stood and watched as more guards came and took her away.

For my part in what had happened in the refectory, I was locked in one of the cells. The walls were damp and thick. Cold mouldy air hung heavy. I could hear occasional muffled sounds from outside – they seemed far away, and unreal. All that was real was the cell, three real paces by four. A real bucket in the corner. A real lock on the door.

In the mornings I heard the men shuffling past my window as they left to work in the fields, their voices low. I wondered if they knew I was there. I thought Elu must be in another of the cells, but when I shouted her name there was no reply. The silence was thick as fur.

Every evening as I gathered the blankets around me against the chill, someone opened the door a crack and threw in some bread and cold tea. Sometimes a settler man would come in, take away my bucket and leave a fresh one. I had given up counting the days.

Dusk. A mistbird called, a brief series of three shrill notes. The door opened. I lay on the straw mattress and did not look up, expecting nothing unusual.

A man coughed.

I sat up. It was Hamil, one of the men who worked in the fields. He was from the Fenagara clan. I remembered him from the time when Patlia and Elu had birthed his wife's first child. She'd had a hard time of it, but both mother and child survived. I remembered Hamil sitting cross-legged in the sunshine, cradling his child to his chest, his eyes wide at the new wriggling creature. He'd stared into the baby's eyes for a long time, the rest of the world shut out.

He took a step into the room. Behind him Hector laughed. 'Enjoy yourself!' he shouted, and banged the door closed. I heard the key turning in the lock.

Hamil was tall and took up more than his share of the small space. He looked at the floor. 'I'm sorry.' He spoke in my language.

'What for?' I asked in his.

'Being here.'

I misunderstood. 'It's all right. Some company would be welcome.'

He twisted his thumbs, and looked over to the bed. The room was starting to become dark.

'Why have they put you in here, though? Are all the double cells full? There's only one ... Oh.' Only one bed, was what I had been going to say.

'You're my reward,' he said. He smiled with his mouth turned down. 'For good behaviour.'

I backed up against the wall and drew my knees up to my chin.

'Don't worry,' he said. 'I won't hurt you.' He took another step towards the bed.

'Don't come near me!' I said. Or I tried to say it. My throat was frozen.

He put his hands up. 'I won't touch you. I promise. They haven't made me into a complete monster yet.' He put a hand over his face. 'Though I'm close enough.'

He looked around in the fading light and shuffled into the corner furthest from me, four short paces away. He squatted there, his back against the wall. 'They'll come and get me in the morning. I'll sleep down here. I'm sorry.'

I threw him the blanket. 'Your wife. Is she...?'

In the gloom I could just see the shake of his head as he wrapped the blanket around himself.

'Your little daughter? Shaji, wasn't it?'

He dipped his head. 'Gone. Both gone.'

We didn't speak for a long time. Light drained from the sky. When it was dark, I heard him shuffling about and caught my breath, but he was just settling down to sleep on the floor.

'What did you do?' I asked into the darkness.

'What?'

'To earn your reward?'

He said nothing. In the morning I woke to the clanging of the door behind him.

I had been at Sweetwater for less than a month.

Yega survived the attack, but almost a year later, she still bore the scar across her forehead. Now she would be punished again, for helping Ebnal escape. Two days had passed since he had fled, and I had not seen her. I tried not to think about where she might be. Another girl had been helping me in the kitchen, though the only thing she knew was baking bread.

I still had not located the missing seals. Every day that passed seemed to bring me closer to calamity. Mr Henderson was keeping a much closer eye on me now, so it was hard to search for them. Mrs Henderson was confined to bed and

summoned me frequently so I could not slip out of the house unnoticed. The baby cried often, and sometimes Mrs Henderson tended her. Other times, it was expected of me to attend the creature.

With Ebnal gone, it was Janto who had taken up much of his work. He was about my age, and from the Lami clan. His face was badly scarred, not from smallpox but from some kind of acid burn that he had sustained while in New Exeter. When he smiled, his whole face twisted grotesquely. He looked like chopped meat.

Janto's enthusiasm was for the horses, which he loved with an obstinate fierceness. As he brushed their coats into a gloss, he whispered the names he had given them in his own tongue. To him they were not Byron, Hercules and Admiral, but Nods-his-Head, Eyes-that-Smile and Sighs-in-the-Night. In the mornings, Janto would chop and carry the firewood, take care of the horses, pig and goats, oil the wheels of the wagon and the carriage and make repairs to the goat carts. In the afternoon he worked in the fields mending fences, helping the men. Nothing was growing in the drought, and the animals were becoming thin. There was no real farm work to do. I had never had much to do with Janto, but had heard Mr Henderson speaking of him as trustworthy, which made me wary of him.

That morning, as I sat peeling potatoes at the table, Janto brought the usual basket of kindling into the kitchen with some logs. I'd had occasion to tell him off the day before because the logs were too large to fit into the oven and I'd had to take the axe to them myself while he was out in the fields. This time, instead of leaving the wood by the door, Janto handed the basket to me, staring into my face. I had to look away from the pink burn marks.

'What's wrong with you?' I said, crashing it down on the floor. 'That's heavy.'

He said nothing, but took my hand and laid it on the logs, looking from my eyes to my face and back again with a deformed half-smile. I tutted and was about to tell him to get out when he asked, very softly, 'Is this more what you're looking for?' He brushed my fingertips against something soft under the logs. A scrap of linen. 'For burning,' he said, and, satisfied that I understood, he left.

'Huh,' said the new girl. 'What else would we want with split logs?'

I slipped the little bundle into my pocket. I did not know how Janto had worked out what had happened, or how he had found them. I did not intend to burn them as he suggested – if Mr Henderson discovered the seals missing, he would know I had taken them, as I was the only servant who had ever been given a key. I had to return them to the old slaughter shed before he noticed their absence.

Madeleine Henderson was sedated, and the house was still. Mr Henderson had given the baby to one of the female inmates with orders to take it outside for an hour or two, ‘for some air,’ he'd said, but it was really to get the creature away from Mrs Henderson's wet smothering embrace. I went upstairs to see if she needed anything.

She lay propped up against pillows in her bed with her eyes shut. Her face was white, and slicked with sweat. I dipped a grey cloth into the blue enamel bowl, wrung it out, and placed it over her forehead.

She opened her eyes. ‘Nicky,’ she said. She tried to smile.

‘Shh. Don't talk.’

‘Everything's slipping away from me, Nicky. Why did I come here? I wanted to help you all. Is this what helps looks like?’

‘Try to rest, Mrs Henderson.’

‘I wish you would call me Maddie. We're friends, Nicky, you and I. It's so hot.’

I opened a window, but the air outside hung heavy, full of steam that refused to drop. I wondered if this year would be the same as last, with the season of rains coming and going with all the rain remaining in the sky.

I went back to the bed and started to smooth Mrs Henderson's hair, but she grabbed my wrist. Her hand was a slimy pink pudding. ‘He thinks I've lost my mind. Hector. My *dear* husband. Ha! He's sure he's saddled himself with a maniac.’

I took my hand away, removed the cloth, dipped it in water, wrung it out and replaced it. A clock downstairs chimed for three o'clock.

Mrs Henderson closed her eyes. 'I was perfectly sound in my mind before I came here. And even after that, for a while. But it's this *place*, Nicky. It's evil.' She opened her eyes and looked at me, her glossy eyes searching mine. 'Can't you feel it? It hates us.' She looked away, sideways. 'Maybe not you. But it hates me. It wants me dead.'

'Lean forward.' I started fussing around her pillows, plumping them up, rearranging them. Hitting them a little too hard to stop her from talking.

When I was finished, she leaned back again. 'It's so bright in here,' she said.

I lit a candle, set it on the bed-stand and pulled the heavy curtains closed. I found the ridged blue bottle and poured a tiny dose into a medicine spoon. 'Here, take this.' I held the spoon to her lips. She swallowed, her hand on my wrist. Her wedding ring gave off a stolid glow.

'It was Black Beach that did for me,' she said, settling back. 'It was those rocks. The ground. On the beach near Seaton.'

'Hush now.' I turned to leave, but she gripped my arm.

'That was when I knew it. When I knew we were wrong to be here. This place ... I was out with Emily. You remember my friend Emily from last year? Miss Mitchell?'

I nodded, remembering a young woman with a serious mouth and yellow hair. One more of Mrs Henderson's friends who had dropped away.

'It was the end of winter, just as the weather started to turn warm. We'd been to the draper's shop in Seaton and had decided to walk back to her house because it was a pleasant evening for the time of year. It took longer than we'd thought and it was late. Getting dark. So we took the coastal path past Black Beach. We were nervous of what the men would say if we arrived back after dark.'

I placed the blue bottle out of her reach. Her eyes followed it.

'It's very steep and craggy around there. We were just passing the turn off where the road goes down to the beach, and we saw some natives there on the black sand. We didn't know if we should keep walking, they were so close. Pitiful creatures, dressed in rags. So thin their skin stretched over their ribs.' She closed her eyes and frowned. 'We turned round to find a different way, but then we heard

voices and we paused to look. They were singing, the natives, and pouring something dark over the ground. There's a big patch of yellow gravel there, and some yellow rocks. Different from the dark sand all around. Emily said it was black magic, and we turned to run, but my skirt was caught in a thornbush and I had to stop to free it.'

'You must sleep now,' I said. I wanted to leave the stuffy room. Leave this tale of hers where it belonged, locked up in a sickroom.

Her hands gripped the sheet. Her eyes were still shut, a dark frown line between her brows. 'What I saw Nicky! I can't have seen it. But Emily saw it too. She said we must never tell anyone, that our husbands would declare us lunatics.'

I loosened her hands from the covers and rubbed the whiteness from her knuckles.

'I've never told anyone,' she said.

'Perhaps you shouldn't tell me either, then.'

She sucked air in, like someone preparing to dive into cold water. 'Do you know what I saw, Nicky?'

'No, madam.' I said 'madam' to try to remind her I was only a servant, and not a person in whom she should confide. I did not want to hear.

She opened her eyes and looked at me. 'The stones came to life.'

I stepped back.

'I know, I know. It can't be true. But it's what I saw. What we *both* saw. The gravel rippled in waves along the road. The larger rocks seemed almost to be-' She laughed, a despairing witch's cackle. 'They were *dancing*, Nicky. All those little yellow rocks. They were *dancing* to the music!'

I took the blue bottle downstairs to keep it out of Madeleine Henderson's reach. I placed it on a shelf in the kitchen among the earthenware jars of dried peas and sultanas. I looked at it, its blue ridges dark in this gloom. I had lost my belief in the world because of a bottle like this one. George Addlington. He had fed us drugs and science and then he had left us. And when he finally returned, nothing went as it should have.

We had been at Sweetwater for five months and there had been no word from George Addlington. I had seen Elu only twice in that time.

Then towards the end of the time of year my clan call the moon of the bright stars, he sent notice that he was to visit.

Elu was waiting in the parlour talking to Mrs Henderson when I came in with the things for tea. Elu paused mid-sentence when she saw me, and gazed at me, her mouth half-open, half-smiling. I had not expected her to be there, and almost dropped the tray. I set it down on the table between them as Mrs Henderson chattered on to Elu about weddings on the island, and about George Addlington. 'It's wonderful, of course,' she was saying, 'that he is coming here. It can mean only one thing, my dear.'

My skin felt hot and the base of my throat pounded. I had not seen Elu since the day Yega had thrown soup at her. The image of her that I had held in my head all this time was worn out. The real Elu, here before me, was fresh and alive and buzzing with life.

I remembered to breathe and let out a sound that must have sounded like a sigh.

Mrs Henderson looked at me, 'Oh, Nicky, I am sure that they will find a place for you in their home. They will be needing servants.'

Elu snorted a laugh into her teacup and covered it with a cough. 'Absolutely,' she said. She smiled at me and held my eyes for a long moment. I could have cried.

Mr Henderson appeared at the door. 'He's here,' he said. He looked cheerful, almost jubilant, and I was so confused that I did not think to wonder why.

Mr Addlington burst past him. He radiated energy, and brought with him the scent of trumpet flowers that were in bloom at that time of year.

‘Elu!’ he said. He hastened across the Turkey rug and knelt before her, ignoring me, Mr and Mrs Henderson, and all the rules of etiquette. He placed the flowers on her lap and grasped her hand.

She inclined her head to him, smiling. ‘George.’

‘I have the papers,’ he said. ‘We can be married, and I have some land. Not enough, but there will be more in the future. It’s enough to start. We must make haste because there is talk of a change in the law to prevent a marriage such as ours.’ Between thumb and forefinger he held out a gold ring topped with a dark ruby. Elu would not meet his eye.

‘I had not heard from you,’ said Elu, looking at the ring.

‘What? My love? I sent letters. Every day.’

Elu and George both looked at Mr Henderson.

He had been watching the scene from the doorway, and now sauntered into the room. ‘I could not allow it,’ he said simply.

George Addlington stood and faced him. ‘You did not deliver my messages to my intended bride?’

Mr Henderson laughed. ‘Bride? You are as foolish as your sister.’

‘Hector!’ said Maddie.

‘You are not going to be wed to this, this native,’ said Mr Henderson. ‘I will not have a sister-in-law who would prefer to run naked through the woods.’

George looked as though he might hit him, but said, ‘It is not your decision,’ and turned back to Elu.

‘I hope,’ said Mr Henderson, ‘that she will not so shame you as to consent.’

George snapped. ‘I see no shame in a lawful marriage. And there is no law against it.’ He dipped his head to look into Elu’s eyes, but she turned her face away.

‘No law,’ sneered Mr Henderson, ‘indeed so. But there is this other matter. Stand up, Ellie.’

‘Hector Henderson,’ said George, ‘please address Miss Clay with the respect she is due. I must ask you to leave the room. This is a matter between Miss Clay and, and ...’

But Elu had stood, under Mr Henderson’s smirk. And George stepped back when he saw what I also saw for the first time. Elu was expecting a child.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Mrs Henderson.

I clutched the arms of my chair. I could not breathe.

‘No-one can blame you, George,’ said Mr Henderson. ‘Lascivious creatures, the natives. Everyone understands that. A man can’t be expected to control himself.’

‘I do not –’ George said, ‘I cannot –’ and he turned away, his knuckles to his mouth.

Elu tried to speak. Her voice squeaked and she had to clear her throat and start again. ‘Mr Henderson,’ she said. ‘If you would be good enough to allow me to speak to my fiancé in private.’

‘Your *fiancé*?’ said Mr Henderson. ‘I don’t think so, Ellie, not any more. Expect him to walk you up the aisle like that, do you? A gentleman like him, expose himself to that sort of scandal? *Fiancé* indeed! What do natives know about the proper way to behave?’ He addressed George. ‘It’s a good thing this has happened now. Make you see sense, man.’ He was enjoying himself. ‘I say,’ he said, ‘I suppose it *is* yours, is it? Or has she been at it with one of the prisoners?’

‘I –’ you said.

‘Of course it’s his child!’ I said, and turned to George. I had not known they had spent the night together and did not want to think of it. ‘Elu loves you! What does it matter if your first child will arrive a little early?’

‘Of course,’ said Mr Henderson, ‘by the time it’s born the law might have changed to prevent mixed marriages.’

The droop of Elu’s head somehow emphasised the swell of her belly. ‘Please George,’ she said, her voice a whisper. ‘If I could just speak with you.’

The slamming of the front door was all the answer she received.

I still could not believe the tale that Mrs Henderson had told me. Whatever else George Addlington had turned out to be, he had educated me, and shown me that spirits and gods and magic do not exist. For that I was grateful.

Visitors' day came around again. This time the designs of the women's work were very different, and I was nervous. When I had told them my idea, I had expected them to be sceptical, and to argue, but they had simply nodded, and begun their work.

I hoped that to find a moment during the day to return the seals to the shed, but the morning had been taken up with Bible readings and posing for newspaper photographs holding loaves of bread from the bakery. I also managed to persuade the photographer that it was his idea to take a picture of the women standing in front of one of the bedspreads with the new design. If it made it into the newspaper, more people would see it.

After the photographs, the male visitors strode off to inspect the piggery and animal pastures. As they left, they asked Mr Henderson what was the number of heads of cattle, how many bales of wool, how many pounds of bacon. By all these questions what they really meant was, *How much money?*

Mr Henderson understood this and replied, 'Hard times in the drought,' and 'There's no profit in it.' He paused, 'But that is, of course, not the purpose of Sweetwater Farm.'

One sarcastic farmer asked, 'And by how much do you undercut the real farmers on the price of a gallon of milk?'

A businessman leapt in to defray any disagreement. 'This place is for our women,' he said. 'Let them have their fantasy that they can salve the passing of a dying race. Soul-saving and whatnot. We know that this colony is really about men like you and me. It's about commerce. Isn't that correct, gentlemen?'

There was a murmur of agreement. Then the farmer spoke again, 'Not if we're undercut on the price of milk, it's not.'

They disappeared behind the outbuildings.

The women followed me to the schoolhouse, where they were subjected to another reading on charity, and then shown the women's embroidery for sale,

while the women sat in neat silent rows before them like exhibits. I am not sure that any of the visitors noticed the difference in the designs – perhaps these particular people had not seen the previous pieces. A tall woman in her forties gave me brief cause for concern when she placed a pince-nez on her nose and proclaimed herself an expert in native motifs.

‘Ah, yes,’ she said. ‘A lightning motif.’

Every native in the room held her breath.

‘It’s very common,’ said the woman. ‘It signifies light in the darkness.’

We breathed again.

A bell was rung for tea. We joined the men on the yellowing schoolhouse lawn. A dozen clanswomen had been outfitted in black servants’ garb, with white aprons. They served seedcakes and sandwiches from silver trays, and poured tea, and served sugar and slices of lemon with tongs.

I was hot and tired, and not allowed to eat in front of the guests. I was trying to find some shade around the side of the school building to plot my dash to the shed when I overheard the conversation about George.

‘We had a native maid for a short time last year,’ the wife of a clerk was saying. ‘But,’ she lowered her voice, ‘I cannot recommend it. I’d taken her from the Seaton home for fallen native women, and given her an opportunity.’

‘Oh, you have such a charitable heart,’ said her companion. ‘I would be too afraid to have one in the house!’

‘Well it was a mistake I should not care to repeat. The girl was lazy and ungrateful. Some natives seem entirely unaware of the debt they owe us.’

The other woman nodded. ‘The previous Administrator was far too soft.’ She looked around her but did not see me. ‘They say,’ she dropped her voice, ‘they say that he was enamoured of one of the females!’

‘Oh yes, I heard. The poor man was obviously quite deranged. He has lost his money now, of course,’ said the clerk’s wife.

‘Yes. He was attempting to buy a large tract of land, I believe. He was swindled.’ She popped a whole poppyseed cake into her mouth.

‘He was, but he was certainly inebriated at the time that he signed the papers. This is what comes of immoderation.’ She smiled over her teacup.

‘That is quite so. Though it does seem a pity that his own brother-in-law cannot help him. Mr Henderson expends so much here on these,’ she waved her napkin around, ‘these poor wretches. He might also think to help one of his own.’

‘He says he will not help him unless he helps himself. And there is no indication of that happening in the near future. Why, only a fortnight ago, my own dear friend Miss Morgan witnessed George Addlington, insensible with drink, putting a rock through the window of Mr Burrows’ photography studio. The chief inspector found him later, lying in the gutter outside a public house in New Exeter, insensible with drink, and crying like a newborn babe.’

Visitor’s Day was over. After I had cleared away and washed the dinner things, Mrs Henderson took to her bed with a sleeping draught. Mr Henderson went out on his nightly patrol of the grounds. It was the first opportunity I’d had in weeks to look for the key to the old slaughter shed. With the excuse of laying and lighting a fire for his return, I searched first his office and then his bedroom. I went through his desk and files, behind the books on the shelf and even under the rug. Nothing. Upstairs, I went through his chest of drawers, bedside table and every jacket pocket in the closet, but it was not there. Perhaps Janto was right, I thought – I should burn them. I returned to the kitchen and had one hand on the stove door and the other around the bundle in my pocket when I saw Mr Henderson walking past the window, whistling and twirling the key to the shed around his finger. He was heading for the lower meadow.

Grasping at wild schemes, I followed. Perhaps he would pocket the key and I could lift it out as I had seen little thieves do in London. Perhaps he would unlock the door and pause to smoke a pipe, or turn away to admire the moonlight, giving me time to creep up and throw the seals inside. Or maybe I would be forced to watch as he disappeared into the shed, found the seals missing and came storming out of there heading for my room. If that happened, would he remember to stop and lock the door behind him? If not, I might throw the seals inside under the desk where it might seem he had missed them.

All these thoughts scrambled through my mind as I followed him to the shed. He did not pause at the door to smoke a pipe, and did not seem to notice the swollen moon, but strode straight inside, leaving the door ajar. He lit a lantern, and spoke. Someone – a girl – answered. It was Yega’s voice. So that was where she’d been! Mr Henderson had promised the chief he would deal with her.

While he was talking to her, I thought he might be distracted, standing with his back to the door, and I could have a chance to throw the seals inside. I put my eyes up to a gap in the planks that barred the window and peered in.

At first, I did not understand what I saw. When at last I did, I ran from there, galloping up the hill to the house. I think I may have been crying. I threw up in the courtyard as Janto came running to see what was wrong.

I was not naïve. I knew about such things, but not like this – not with the girl chained by her neck to the wall and crying.

Now I understood why, on returning every evening from his ‘patrol,’ Mr Hector’s face was flushed with such rare triumph, the glint in his eye, the wetness around his beard, and his red tumescent lips.

The other times Yega had disappeared made sense to me now. It had probably been happening since before I arrived. The first time I knew of it, she had dented a rosewood table, and she had disappeared for four days and nights. When she returned, I found her sitting at the table in the dark as I came in with the dinner dishes. She had a knife in her hand, a sharp curved blade that we used for peeling root vegetables. She was carving the air with it, in slow careful circles, watching.

I set the dishes down. ‘Yega,’ I said. ‘Are you all right? Where were you?’ I lit a candle and brought it to the table.

She looked up at me, and I saw that her face was shrunken somehow, pinched in on itself, except for her eyes which were larger, full of something unspoken, unspeakable.

She held my gaze for only a second and went back to carving the air.

‘Yega?’

Her gaze flicked to the slab of beef left in its blood on one of the plates.

‘Are you hungry? Here.’ I pushed the plate towards her and took a fork from a drawer. I moved the candle closer to her and saw that her bottom lip was cut. One side of her face was swollen.

She pushed the plate away.

‘Yega, what happened? Who did this to you?’

The look she had given me then was one I shall never forget. Contempt. Rage. And – inexplicably – pity.

I do not know how many days passed before Janto spoke to me again. The image of what I had witnessed in the slaughter shed stayed before my eyes, superimposed over the world. I stirred the porridge through a maze of twisted limbs, scoured the pots through the clamour of Yega’s ragged cries. She had not returned, and every night as Mr Henderson set out for his patrol, I turned away from the sight.

I forgot to feed and wash myself, though my body still rehearsed the tasks it had been trained to do – bending, curtsying, crawling on its knees – while I drifted somewhere outside of it. I was aware of some ongoing commotion in the other parts of the house about attacks on settlers somewhere to the south, but it was as if the news came from another world.

At night I could not sleep but was terrorised by vivid waking dreams as I cramped and sweated in my little room, Yega’s empty bed beside me.

I found myself in the kitchen one day holding a utensil I didn’t recognise, not knowing how it got there or what any of the things around me were for. I opened the trap door to the cellar, climbed down the stairs without a light, and sat among the sandy crates of wrinkled turnips and sprouting potatoes, pressing my face to the cold wall.

When he found me, Janto pressed his scaly palm against my forehead. ‘Mr Henderson is looking for you,’ he said. ‘He’s angry that he can’t find you.’ He grinned, the scars pulling obscenely at his flesh.

I closed my eyes.

‘You must hold on,’ he said. ‘Abapanoa’s day is coming.’

I stopped listening. He talked on for some time and then took my hands, led me up the steps to the kitchen, and wiped my face with a damp cloth. At some point I realised Yega was there at the stove, dead-eyed, stirring broth. I wanted to say something – to put my arms around her and weep into her hair, but she stared at the wall with the unseeing eyes of a statue, and seemed unaware I was there.

It had been Yega who had helped me once before, when Elu’s time came.

I was in the kitchen when I heard the yelling. It was a hot day and the oven was lit. I was roasting a scrawny leg of lamb. All the lambs were scrawny now – their mothers' teats had withered in the drought, and the ewes blinked at their offspring, without hope. I wondered if at night they dreamed of lush green meadows.

‘Neka, it's Elu! Her time's here!’ Yega's voice from across the courtyard.

I had not seen Elu since the day George Addlington left us. Madeleine Henderson had said she did not want the shame to reflect on the farm, and so Elu had been confined to the schoolhouse on the other side of the ruined meadow. Yega took her meals to her, and even she was supervised at all times by the presence of Mr or Mrs Henderson. I'd asked her to try to whisper a message to Elu, just to let her know I thought of her, but Yega shook her head and frowned. ‘It's impossible,’ she said. ‘Don't ask it of me.’

But Yega did let me try to send messages in the trays of food I prepared. I'd send the largest egg, the precious rare greens from the vegetable garden. I'd cut slices of sweet potato into heart shapes before frying them. Once, I sent the plate decorated with a miniature dried gourd I'd found in the root cellar, and hoped it would make her smile and think of Korab.

The trays had been returning for days now untouched. The boiled egg at breakfast cut open, but the shell still full to the brim. A pool of gravy from the evening meal casting a brown congealed varnish over an untouched chop. There

was never any sign of a message in return. I'd examine the plate, the shape of the mound of mashed potato, or the ragged broken edge of a bread roll. I once found myself counting peas. But there was nothing.

I'd been adding flat-root to her tea for a while now to ease the birth. I knew the time was coming and I was prepared. Whenever I was sent out to take food to the workers, I managed to take a short detour around the edge of the fields where some of our plants still grew. At nights, when the house was sleeping, I prepared the concoctions as best I could. I'd helped make many a birthing tonic and knew the medicines for all the possibilities that might go wrong. No contractions called for armia lily. A bad tear would heal twice as quickly with a poultice of blueleaf and moflower petals. Too much bleeding could be stopped with a very strong dose of kirra tea. I had prepared all these, and more, for long silent hours past midnight. The brews gave themselves up slowly in the darkness, one precious drop at a time. I had only enough kirra tea to fill an eggcup, but that was enough.

'Neka!' Yega burst into the kitchen, carrying bloody blankets in a bundle. 'Boil some water. Now! Move! The range in the schoolhouse is cold.'

I leapt up and did as she said, keeping my eyes away from the bloody bundle. 'How, how is she?'

Yega was busy pulling things off shelves. Her lips disappeared as she considered what to tell me. Time stretched. Why wasn't the water boiling?

'It's bad,' she said. 'She's bleeding. Too much.'

'Oh! But I have the medicine for that,' I said. I took the little stoppered vial out of my pocket. 'Can you get this to her?'

Yega's appraising eyes roved over my face while she thought. 'All right. I'll take it with the water.'

She left and I sat back on the kitchen chair. The walls ran with sweat. I waited. The oven ticked. She had the medicine now. She would be fine.

An hour later, perhaps more, I heard Yega's footsteps across the courtyard, slower than before. She came in and sat down opposite me. She set the vial down in front of me, still full. 'I'm sorry. They won't allow it.'

'How bad is she?'

A pause. 'I don't know. I've not seen many births. This is the worst.'

I grabbed the vial and raced out the door. I could hear Yega calling behind me. I ran across the meadow, down the dip and past the old slaughter shed, and up again towards the schoolhouse. Dry weeds scratched at my legs. The ground crackled with the heat. The world was a blur.

I reached the schoolhouse. There was no-one there, and I ran up the stairs. Only one door was closed, all the other rooms empty. It was quiet. I turned the door handle. It was locked. I could hear voices.

A cry. Elu!

I hammered on the door.

A scream. A long string of swearing, in our language.

She can't be too bad then, I thought.

But then there was a cry so terrible it made the world stand still. It no longer sounded like Elu – it was the voice of a demon. Agony made flesh.

I knocked on the door. 'Let me in! I have medicine! Please!'

The door opened a fraction and the doctor stood blocking my view. He was dressed in dark trousers and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. His glasses reflected light at me and hid his eyes.

'Please,' I said. 'Sir, please. Please give her this.'

Elu's voice, barely recognisable. 'Neka?'

'Elu! I'm here. I have medicine.' I was bobbing about, trying to see past the doctor.

He looked at the vial I held out, snatched it away from me. 'What witch's brew is this?'

'It will stop the bleeding.'

'Haha!' He was actually amused. 'Haha! What nonsense.' He unstopped the vial, sniffed at it, and carefully re-stopped it.

Then he threw it against the wall.

I see it now, arcing, spinning over itself like the spokes in a wheel, sending little sparkles of light out from itself as if in play. Winking at me.

It hit the wall, and seemed to pause there for a moment, before breaking into two and exploding into twinkling pieces. Two thick splotches of reddish-brown bloomed on the wall. Viscous liquid ran down in rivulets.

This is the moment that is still stuck in my mind. Not Elu's cries, not her calling my name, and not what came after, but this moment of horror, watching the medicine sliding down the wall. Lost.

My ears roared. I saw, but did not hear, the door slamming shut against me.

Two dark stains against the pale wallpaper. Two handprints on a rock wall. The air spinning.

Another cry. An animal sound. A gasp.

I flung myself against the door. 'Elu! Elu!'

Silence.

Janto opened the door, his finger to his lips, and motioned me inside. He patted me once on the shoulder as I walked through the door.

The cell was windowless and damp. A smudge of light from the doorway pooled on the flagstones. I stood for a moment, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the murk. The air smelled of rust, mould and raw meat.

Against the wall on a low bed was Elu.

I couldn't move.

She was lying on her back. Someone had smoothed a white sheet over the swell of her milk-filled breasts and down to her toes, tucking it in under the kapok mattress.

I took a step closer and saw they had been too late to cross her hands over her chest in the settler way – she held them out to her sides, under the sheet, her hands in fists. She wore a yellowing nightgown with a starched collar. Where had they found that? It wasn't hers. Where were her own clothes?

The child had been buried already, or so Mrs Henderson had said. More likely stuffed into a pickling jar and labelled, I thought, bound for some gentleman's collection in London.

Elu's black hair traced damp curls over the pillow. In the gloom it looked like a halo of snakes. She was frowning at what was coming for her, but slightly, as if death were just another duty, like sweeping out the grate in the schoolroom.

Fury broke me open. I wanted to slap her, shake her, warn her.

Too late.

Her stillness filled the room like mist, seeping through the air, saturating the walls. I could hear the tiny gnawing of an insect.

She must have died lying on her left side – her cheek was flattened, and there was a deep crease of skin just under her cheekbone as though her face were still squashed against the mattress. I reached out to smooth it away.

The chill of Elu's skin sent a jolt through me. The flesh was stubborn and smooth, like set candle wax. The crease didn't budge.

At the time, it did not occur to me that it was the last time I would ever touch her.

I perched myself on the edge of the narrow prison bed and stroked Elu's hair instead of that cold flesh. Her eyelids were bruised, her lashes long and curled, still perfect, lightly coated with a white dust like icing sugar. Her lips were swollen. Between them was the faintest glimmer of a tooth. A purplish darkness had pooled at the base of her throat.

I could have saved her.

But this thing here, this body, with its creased greying skin, was not Elu, any more than a sloughed-off snakeskin is the snake. But then where was she? Not in the land, because the land was gone. In the heaven the settlers spoke of then, next to Jesus, trying to work out how to put devil powder in his loincloth?

A laugh rose to my throat, but it caught like a fishhook, tearing the sound inside out, rendering it into a scream.

Someone appeared at my side – it must have been Janto – and grabbed me, dragging me out of there, still screaming.

There were raised voices, a shock of icy water in my face. Then I was in the kitchen in front of the stove and Yega was spooning a sweet fiery liquid into my mouth. I hardly noticed the fuss around me.

Inside, I was still screaming.

At the corners of my world, I was aware of life going on around me. Even the hollow-eyed men working the vegetable gardens were still living. I saw them, when the guards' backs were turned, their clawed fingers suddenly nimble, ripping out a slender carrot and stuffing it under a shirt, or dropping a handful of peas into a ragged handkerchief. Later, as darkness crept into the yard, these men shuffled over to the corner wall, where there was a fist-sized gap in the stone through to the women's compound. They pushed their offerings through to be claimed after morning roll-call. A potato, a handful of beans, the split heart of a cabbage. Wordless declarations of remembrance and love. Perhaps even of hope.

It was beyond my comprehension.

There was no coffin. Elu's body was wrapped in sheets, as small as a child. Two of the farmworkers carried her to the grave. The stark light bleached everything to white; the grass, the little crosses, the wooden church. Everything was flattened out.

Everything except the hole in the ground, the deep maw into which Elu's body was about to be cast.

The priest, a grey-haired man with mutton chop whiskers wore black with a stiff collar and a white surplice. He spoke in the solemn voice of an actor on the stage: 'Man that is born of a woman has but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower: he fleeth as if it were a shadow and never continueth in one stay.'

The two men laid her body next to the blackness, stepped back removing their hats, and stood with their heads bowed and their hands folded in front of them. They had known Elu. Everyone had known Elu.

We were in the little annexe of the cemetery, the section reserved for natives, just west of the churchyard reserved for the settlers. Mrs Henderson had been pleased to tell me that Elu would be buried on consecrated ground. It was because of the wife of the new Administrator, that some church land had been set aside for the increasing numbers of natives who had use for it. There had been

arguments in New Exeter about it, Mrs Henderson said. A cartoon had appeared in the newspaper of a woman weeping by the side of an effigy of a pet poodle, the spire of the church behind her. But the Administrator's wife had said, 'They may be doomed to extinction on this earth, but I will not allow them to be doomed to hell.' All settlers bore responsibility for the eternal native souls, she said. In the end, the new Administrator had sided with his wife.

It meant nothing.

'In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?'

I kept my eyes away from the body and looked around at this spot they had chosen for Elu. It was a barren strip of ground, cut off from the paddock beside it by a wire fence and a row of papery thorn bushes. It lacked the tall solemn trees of the real cemetery.

The graves were set precisely parallel to one another in straight lines, men opposite women, and children at the far end. Elu would have hated the place.

Each wooden cross was identical in everything except for the English names in black paint. Molly, Daisy, Ethel. I did not know to whom they referred. Some of the crosses were already cracked and splitting, but there were many new ones. Too many. Our numbers were fewer each Visitors' day.

'Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy judge eternal ...'

As he spoke, the men picked up the bundle and lowered it into the ground with ropes. It bent in the middle and they stumbled a little. I looked away.

I was aware of her going down into the earth, but I did not really believe it was her. It seemed impossible. The cross, lying near the priest's feet, read *Ellie*.

I heard the thing that was not Elu hit the bottom of the grave. The men released the ropes, making a droning sound against the linen as they coiled them in. I thought of fishing lines and rope burns.

Mrs Henderson stepped forward, bent down to pick up a handful of dusty earth from beside the grave, and cast it on top of Elu. It made the sound of rice dropping onto flagstones.

Someone whimpered. I felt nothing.

The minister continued. ‘Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body...’

Elu's body. The warmth of it. The scent of her skin. Her breath in my ear. Her hand on my thigh.

‘We give thee hearty thanks, for that it has pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world...’

People were filing past now, throwing in earth and scattering pale brown petals from the lilac tree near the gate.

The crowd was moving forward, everyone filing past where Elu lay. I could not make my legs move.

‘... Hasten thy Kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory.’

I saw something beside me out of the corner of my eye and turned my face. There was Elu, standing beside me, almost as she had been in life. She was eyeing the priest, her arms folded.

‘What a load of shit,’ she said.

The evening after Yega had returned from the shed, the sound of horses’ hooves clattering over the cobbles roused me from my stupor. Through the window, I saw two men on horseback leading the figure of a young man, his feet chained, his wrists secured behind his back. The men were laughing and congratulating each other.

As they halted almost outside my window, I saw it was Mr Henderson and the police chief. The chained young man was Ebnal. They dismounted, slapping

each other on the back. Janto appeared, to take away the horses. He did not acknowledge Ebnal.

The two men tethered Ebnal to the wall like a mule. The police chief bundled Mr Henderson inside talking about paperwork, and accepting the offer of a cigar and brandy.

My wooden work-shoes clopped on the cobbles as I drew gritty water from the well and held it to Ebnal's lips. He could not look at me. 'I told them everything,' he said, 'they know you helped me. What will they do to you?'

'It doesn't matter. Here, drink.'

He gulped the water. 'There's nothing left, Neka. It's all gone. They're everywhere. Nowhere left for us. All smashed and ruined. Even in the north.'

'Yes.'

'They're taking me to Bracken Island.'

'I know.'

'You won't see me again.'

'Mm.'

His eyes slid around the courtyard. 'Can't be any worse than here, I suppose.'

'Are you hungry? I can fetch some bread and cheese and maybe a cold cut.'

'No.' He shook his head. 'Neka, I'm sorry.'

'Ruby killed herself.'

He blinked, nodded once. There was a distant flash of sheet lightning. Ebnal nodded towards it. 'It's Abapanoa's day today. Bad things happen.'

'Goodbye Ebnal.'

Late that night, I decided to take the seals back to the shed.

I lit a lantern and set out across the lower paddock. It was dry and the ground was hard. Dust billowed against my skirts as my legs carried me to the

shed. A laughing bird was calling for its mate. I closed my eyes as I approached the door and stood at the threshold, trying to breathe. It was ajar. There were lights inside.

I stepped up to the door. There was the same whiff of damp and death as before. The same rusted iron bed took up one side, and the other side was taken up by the desk where I'd found the photograph of Elu, just six weeks before. The desk was now cluttered with some kind of bulky ornaments. In the middle of the room, a trestle table had been set up.

'Yes, do come in, Nicky.' It was Mr Henderson's voice. 'Really. You are most welcome.' It was the same tone of exaggerated politeness he used with his wife when she was having a bad day.

I stepped into the gloom. In my pocket, the seals seemed to burn against my thigh.

Mr Henderson kept his back to me, working his hands inside whatever it was on the table. It was large, but mostly covered by a sheet. It smelled bad.

'It's extraordinary,' he said, still not looking at me. 'Natives are just the same on the inside. I can find no differences at all. And yet we try to civilise you, offer you the benefits of our wisdom and knowledge, our education and science, our culture, and you are incapable of grasping them.'

Something about the work he was doing started to make me feel cold. Something about the shape on the table. I could not move.

'In fact,' he said, 'what you do is lie and cheat and *steal*.' He flung back the sheet.

It was a man called Gamro from the Aynia clan. He had joined the long list of the dead two days before, whether by disease or misadventure I did not know. I had attended his funeral, and watched his body cast into the ground. And yet here it was. Mr Henderson had split open his belly and was removing his entrails as though Gamro were a fish. The smell was overwhelming. Blood coated Mr Henderson's arms to the elbow. There were liquid noises as he worked.

'It seems, Nicky,' Mr Henderson said, 'that you are made of the same meat as I.' He looked at me for the first time, an expression of bewildered wonder on his face. 'I cannot make any sense of it,' he said. He straightened up, twining one

end of the entrails around his left arm. The other end was still in Gamro's body. I could hear the sucking sound it made as he pulled them out. 'Perhaps after all, the secret is not in this meat, but in the brain. Or in the shape of the skull, as Dr Caswell would have it.' He swept his free hand in the direction of the desk.

I stepped back. What I had thought to be a clutter of knick-knacks and ornaments, much like those on every surface inside the house, were not. Instead, the desk was piled high with human skulls, and what seemed to be jars of pickled flesh. I thought I saw pickled brains, cut into wedges as though they were cakes.

Mr Henderson picked up a skull. 'Do you know how much this is worth?' he asked. 'More than you can imagine.' Alive, they cost me money. I have to pay for food, clothing, shelter, medicine – they're forever getting sick. But dead! Dead, I can sell the bodies to men of science. To museums, and private collectors.' He snorted, abruptly. 'You're worth more than a thoroughbred horse! Isn't that extraordinary!' He giggled, his filthy right hand across his face, his left arm still twirling entrails.

I thought I would be sick. I looked away, towards the empty eyes of the skulls.

'Oh no, no,' he said. 'I know what you're thinking, but you're quite wrong. Her skull isn't among these. It's not even among my own private collection, an extraordinary addition though it would be – that forehead! But no, Nicky. I am an honourable man, Ellie was buried with her body quite intact. I did not disturb her corpse. She was the mother of ... She was a fine, fine girl.'

My legs finally gave way and I threw up on all fours over the floor.

'Ah yes, yes,' he said. 'The grief still, of course. I am sure.' He picked up a rag and roughly wiped his arms. 'Now it's time for you to go. Oh, and please return my seals. I need them to move natives around, whether alive or ...' He nodded towards Gamro.

I dragged myself to my feet and took the seals from my pocket.

'Extraordinary to think how much money there is to be made,' he said, turning back to his work.

I turned to leave. It was then I saw something on the wall that I had not noticed before. There, over the bed, an arm's stretch above the filthy mattress,

carved into the wall was a symbol. Any other eyes seeing it would not have known what it was – perhaps thought it a crazing of the plaster, the lines were so thin. But I recognised it, because it was left as a message to me.

A firebird.

Elu.

I ran. I did not know where I was going, but I ran up the hill and across the fields. I stopped, vomited, and ran again. My ankles jarred against the hard-packed earth, my breath came in cries. It was dark and I did not have my lantern. I lost myself.

I came back to my senses lying on the ground near a pool under the arching branches of whisker trees. Large animals had been there to drink, and the earth was slimy with their excrement. The place stank of it. There were no starflowers. The pool, once a luminescent stretch of blue, was now a stagnant brown puddle that smelled of drains. I closed my eyes against the sight, but I saw Gamro's body again, the grey snake of his entrails wrapped around Mr Henderson's arm.

A shuffling sound came from the other side of the pool. I felt a gust of wind along my back.

I opened my eyes.

There was a light. On the other side of the stinking puddle, a small white glow had appeared. I blinked, trying to make it go away. I knew what it was, yet knew it could not be. It brightened, and seemed to shake itself, then hopped from one branch to another at a distance, as if anxious.

'No,' I said, my cheek still pressed against the earth. My limbs felt heavy. 'I can't. I don't want to see you. I don't believe in you. Any of it.'

The thick ball of light oozed along the ground until it was in front of my face. I squeezed my eyes shut against it. 'No!' I shouted. 'If you were real you would do something! Go away!'

I waved my arms at the thing as if it were a fly. It dodged me, shuddered, and brightened so much that I had to shade my eyes. I could not breathe. It pressed

close up to my throat, cold against my skin. It expanded, engulfing me. I felt myself charged with electricity, throwing off sparks of anger.

Then it was gone. I raised myself to my feet, gasping for breath.

My face was wet. ‘This is what I think of you!’ I shouted to the air. I spat into the water that had once been holy. I kicked cow dung into the pool of Abapanoa, the so-called lightning god. I lifted my skirts to pee there in his home, but my hand found the two namebelts around my waist under my clothing. Mine and Elu’s. A fern leaf and a firebird. I ripped them off and threw them into the filthy water. ‘Have them. Have all of me. All of her. We are all dead anyway. You did nothing!’

The namebelts floated for a moment, then the water accepted them, and they sank below.

Elu was waiting for me as I entered the kitchen, and my anger swooped in behind me, rising up like dust, swirling around her.

‘Why didn’t you tell me about what happened to you in the shed?’ I shouted.

‘I left you the message. I didn’t know if I’d ever see you again.’

‘But – why didn’t you? – I thought the child was George’s! I had everything wrong. You’ve been coming here all this time ... since you, since you died. Why didn’t you tell me?’

She looked at me, and her compassion was like hot knives on my skin.

‘You didn’t want to know.’

‘You didn’t want to know.’

Something was born in me as Elu spoke those words – something that was inside me but not part of me. A demon perhaps, or a dark, white-eyed angel with black spreading feathers and a sword of lightning.

I ran outside into the courtyard and yelled. ‘Abapanoa! Show yourself! This is your day. Avenge us! I call on you, you shit. Show me you exist!!’

As I called, a rainless storm began. Thunder cracked the sky open, and forked lightning ripped into the earth.

The flogging frame in the courtyard was struck and began to smoke. Then the stables behind me were on fire. Half a dozen guards ran to the well, shouting commands.

Nobody thought to stop me, a raving native shouting at the sky.

‘Abapanoa!’ I called. ‘Aren’t you meant to protect us? Have you been *asleep*, you bastard?’

Another crack of thunder. A blinding flash. The smell of burning.

Above the shouts of the guards, I heard Ebnal calling for my help to free the animals, but I had another rescue in mind.

Smoke was rising in black whorls from the roof of the house.

I raced back inside, picked up a knife and galloped up the hallway. But as I started up the stairs, the world broke apart with an explosion of shattering windows. Men shouted. A gun went off.

Men hurtled into the house, through the windows, through the doors, crashing through the hallway and into all the rooms. They were everywhere.

‘Natives! Natives! We’re under attack!’ cried Mr Henderson as he dashed down the stairs, knocking me aside. The police chief was in the dining room, wrestling with a naked warrior for possession of his gun.

I heard the baby crying upstairs, and raced up there. Mrs Henderson was in a closet, holding the child to her breast, trying to quieten it. I stood over her, the knife in my hand, watching the child as it waved its long fingers and creased its high-arched brow with impotent fury.

‘Whose child is that?’ I said.

‘Nicky, don’t – you’re not like them. You’re one of us, almost. Don’t hurt me.’

I waved the knife in her face. ‘Whose baby is it?’

‘Mine.’

‘No!’ I said. ‘Whose is it?’

‘It’s my husband’s, and therefore mine.’

Thunderous footsteps were hurtling up the stairs.

‘The mother,’ I said, and made a little arrowhead nick in Mrs Henderson’s white skin.

‘Don’t hurt me, please don’t hurt me! The mother was Ellie, but she’s dead, so I’m caring for her child.’

‘Her name was *Elu!*’ I shouted. ‘Not Ellie. *Elu!* Say it! *Elu!*’

‘Elu,’ said Mrs Henderson, squeezing her eyes shut, tears slipping down her cheeks. ‘Please don’t hurt me.’

The door burst open and there stood Harben himself in the doorway, an axe in his hand. He crashed into the room and stood in front of the closet where Mrs Henderson cowered. He took one look at me and shoved me to the floor.

He raised his axe above his head.

‘No!’ I said, ‘Not the child!’ I threw myself at the baby, snatching it from Mrs Henderson’s arms. I flung myself down beside her.

Harben glanced at me, and with a single swipe, heaved his axe into Mrs Henderson’s throat, almost severing her head. I turned away, cradling the baby as Mrs Henderson’s blood gushed in a torrent over my shoulder.

It spattered over the baby’s white shawl, blooming there like scattered rose petals.

So you see, my friend, the police chief is not lying when he says he saw me go to Mrs Henderson’s room with a knife and leave with the baby, covered in blood. But I did not kill Mrs Henderson. I did not kill your sister.

I did not try to save her either. Perhaps if I had asked Harben to show mercy, he would have spared her as he spared the child. Or perhaps he would have killed me as well.

In any case, I took the child. And that alone is enough to see me hang.

Harben's warriors smashed everything in Sweetwater. The fields and barns were struck by lightning, the house was set alight and razed to the ground. Yega was burned to death in the kitchen – did you know that? I imagine her sitting at the blazing table, peeling potatoes for tomorrow's dinner as the flames take her. Her death was not reported in the newspapers as Mr and Mrs Henderson's were, and as the injuries to the police chief were. One of the horses was killed, and Lotty, the gentle little dairy cow with the curling lashes. The animals' deaths were mentioned – loss of stock being noteworthy – but on Yega, the press was silent.

I found myself out in the courtyard. Someone hacked open the doors of the cells and dormitories, and men and women spilled out like beans from a split sack, stampeding in mindless circles. Some, too far gone, just stopped and watched the flames where they would later be found by the police, sitting among the smouldering charcoal.

But most of us turned our backs on Sweetwater and ran.

It was hard to find the Cave of Women's Sorrow – the spirit of the land around it has changed. Where the sweetnut wood should be is now the garden behind the three-storey hotel that overlooks the beach on a wide sloping lawn edged with the dying foreign plants. The ropebark trees that once lined the beach with yellow blooms are gone.

Settler couples with linked arms were promenading in circles around the dry lawns, the men lifting their hats. Their children played among the shrubbery, chasing one another, whirling their arms, falling over.

Janto and I crept through the scrubby trees that had been left around the rocky slope behind the hotel. News from Sweetwater would not take long to arrive here, so we picked our way in silence to the cave at the back of the grounds, behind the dustbins. There was a smell of rotting fruit and meat gone bad. A chain-link fence was rammed into the overhanging rocks, closing off the entrance to the

cave. There were two signs, with words I could not read and images of rocks falling on people's heads.

Two black hoses wormed out of the twin springs that once flowed like tears above the cave-mouth.

'I'll wait,' said Janto, lifting up the wire for me to crawl through. 'I'll keep watch. Give me the child.'

I handed the baby to him. Her fingers curled at his touch and she gave a milky sigh.

Inside, the cave was dry and cool. Underneath the stink of urine, it still smelled of pink summerclay and salt. As my eyes adjusted to the gloom, I could see that all the little clay figurines had been smashed to pieces. Each one had once been the testimony of a woman's grief – the rough, thumb-printed figures of lost babies, dead husbands, beloved mothers. Shaped by generations of women for a thousand years or more, they were now just scattered heaps of broken faces and amputated limbs.

Someone had whitewashed over the paintings of the women's lives, and written something in angry jagged black over the blankness.

I stared at the words, trying to make them out. This was where I first saw the cavefish man, Huffma See. His translucent skin seemed an aberration then, but now it was my own skin that was wrong, marking me out as a trespasser on my own land. In this spot, the words on the wall seemed like a message from him, though I knew he was in London, still promoting his memoir of life among savages.

Towards the back of the cave, where the ceiling was low, I found the sacred clay floor, scooped into a deep basin, and still fringed by the lines left by ancient women's fingers. The clay was still just damp enough to work, and I scooped out a handful, adding my own fingermarks to those of the grieving women of the past.

It was silent in there, muffled and still. I had the feeling of being the last person on earth.

I worked the clay into a shape. A small slender figure, with long wild hair and a high forehead, a long-fingered hand resting on a jutted hip. I used a shard of

hardened clay to carve two high-arched eyebrows, lending the figurine an air of sceptical amusement.

I had not found anything I could use for paint, but I drew a rough sketch in clay over the whitewash, a picture of Elu calling the rain. I should have done more, but I could hardly see through my grief. This would be enough to set her free from this earth. Free from me.

Finally, I drew a dark crescent on the tip of one of her fingers. A fingernail, regrown.

Long ago, I had bound her to me with a fingernail, and now I had released her.

As I turned to leave, Elu was there, standing by the cave wall. 'Thank you,' she whispered.

I tried to smile, and walked towards the cave-mouth. She was free.

'The child will be cared for,' I said.

'I know,' she said.

I started to leave.

'Neka,' she said.

I stopped, but could not turn to look at her.

'Everything I did was for you.'

I stared at the floor. 'Even when you stopped seeing me?'

'Yes. That most of all.'

I walked to the cave mouth. I did not look at her again.

'Neka. You will warn him, won't you? Please.'

The final yoke on my shoulders. I nodded, once, and left.

As Janto and I made our way through the scrub near the tree line of Yellow Mountain, I heard the distant sounds of a crowd. A man's shout, a snatch of song, children laughing.

We had been walking for days.

Grief was still twisting my guts with every breath. I would never see Elu again. Her child slept against my breast.

We reached the peak of the mountain in the middle of the day, the heat white all around us, the light as sharp as broken glass.

We rounded the yellow boulders at the feet of the ancestor rocks, and there they were. Hundreds of natives. The Oya were there, with their plaits and painted ceremonial spears. The Lami, the Ishwa, the Aynia and the Fenagara.

I recognised one of the men with the shuffling gait who had once tended the vegetable gardens at Sweetwater Haven. But these people were not all from Sweetwater. The word had gone out. The embroidered fripperies the settlers had admired so much had carried their message across the island. When the rainless storm had arrived, people had been ready. When lightning had started striking the buildings, everyone had known where to run. And more were still arriving.

Each clan had set up its own camps on the parched grass, a little off from the others, and few fresh cuts and bruises on the younger men showed that clan quarrels had not wholly been forgotten in these times. But right at the feet of the ancestor rocks was a huge pile of offerings – sourfruits, marshberries, and even some redcones. And to one side was a covered pile of firewood that must have taken days to haul up here.

The baby nuzzled into my neck and made a sound, a tiny *oh* of surprise.

The heat crackled.

‘People!’ cried Janto at the top of his lungs. ‘Here is Neka, of the Clay clan!’

Everyone looked up. Even the children paused in their games. I could smell roasting meat.

A voice came from the back of the crowd. ‘Neka, is it you?’ It was Vantin. His nose had been broken many times and half of one of his ears was missing. His eyes had the puffy, half-closed look of a laudanum addict. But he was of my clan. He looked me up and down. ‘And Elu?’ he asked.

I shook my head.

‘Then we’re the last, the two of us. We took the worst of it.’

A Lami woman looked at me and then at Vantin. ‘You will have to start the clan again, the two of you,’ she said.

We regarded each other with distaste.

A girl appeared at my side and shyly offered me a water gourd. I drank. It had been flavoured with brushflowers. I hadn’t tasted brushwater since I had last been on this mountain. ‘It’s good,’ I said, and the girl beamed.

I handed the gourd to Janto and glanced around for where we could set up a camp. But then a strange thing happened. A woman started up a song of hero’s welcome, and other voices joined in. Elders from all the clans approached me, and honoured me with greetings – even Senyun, who had once called me a dungfly.

I acknowledged the greetings and turned to Janto, who looked as surprised as I felt.

‘Come,’ said the Lami woman. ‘You can help us get the dance right. We’ve been trying to call the rain. Not a drop so far.’

So that was it.

Hundreds of faces turned to me as he led me over to the square flat patch of grass where Elu and I had once believed that we’d called the rain.

Had we, really? Had the lightning that struck Sweetwater and the other buildings been the work of Abapanoa?

‘The trick,’ I said, but too quietly, so I had to raise my voice and start again. ‘The trick is to make yourself as light as the sky. Take your message to her softly, like a lover.’

As the afternoon ripened, more people joined the dance. I sat where Patlia had once rested, looking out over the plain, watching for rain clouds. Janto sat a little distance away, watching a group of women who were tending Elu’s baby. She would have to be named soon. A real name, not the one the settlers had given her. She waved a square fist at the sky.

The air was fizzing with dry heat, and the grass was hard and yellow.

The rain would not come. I knew that now. We could not call it – we never had. We had just been dancing at the right time. Everything we had believed about the world was wrong. We had thought we were the only people on earth, that we could bring the weather, and that the seasons depended on us. We had not

imagined pale-skinned men the colour of blind cavefish, we had not imagined cities and steam trains and cathedrals. We had never thought about evolution and our apparent place at the bottom of the races of man.

But if we were going to fail, if our way of life was forever finished, then at least we would all be together. Most of my clan was gone, but these were still my people. Or more so than the settlers, anyway. This event, this heroic failure, would be the last time we were all together. The last great gathering of the clans. A final party.

‘Neka,’ Janto was by my side. ‘They want you to join the dance.’

I stood.

They made a space for me at the feet of the father and son rocks, and I began to spin, thinking of Elu, imagining that the sliding bell-notes of the songsticks were coming from Patlia’s gnarled old hands.

The air was still.

As I whirled around, chanting to the sky, at one with all the people around me, I felt something inside me cut loose. It did not matter if we could not call the rain. Nothing could matter ever again.

I gave myself up to the moment, to the song, to the sky, to my people.

The air thickened and clung to us stickily. There was a change in the light, just a slight dip in intensity. Everything seemed to be waiting. The sky held her breath.

Below us, over the foothills, I saw a playful gust of wind bending a line through the trees. Then another.

The sky took on a green tinge as the clouds formed.

‘Great Mother, cry for your children, hear us Mother sky.’

My mind was spinning itself out into a thread, a light gossamer thread, floating in the air, waiting to catch the breeze.

In the distance, the sky grumbled. I was aware of a quiver of excitement running through the crowd, but it seemed far away. Someone cheered.

The first few drops of rain were flung onto us like a handful of water. It fell on our skin like needles.

We danced on. We became a bird, all of us a single bird, flying out past the mountain, into the wind. Far below us, shadows raced across the plain in clumps. I could see it all from where I hung in the sky.

At the foot of the mountain, a tree deer paused, sniffed the air, and raced away. Over the plains, the creatures were stirring, the alien ones as well as those that belonged here. In no time, they were drenched.

The rain gushed over the parched earth. Rivers and streams appeared again, gullies gushed with life. From nowhere, frogs and fish appeared in the waters. I could see them all. Animals dropped to their knees to drink. Roots sucked up the moisture.

The wind skipped over the treetops, through the desert behind the mountain, whipping up the purple sand into ribbons that flowed like silk. Water seeped into the sands, awakening dormant seeds.

The wind skittered down the streets of the towns, rattled doorknobs and window casings, bringing the townsfolk out of their houses to stare at the sky. Black clouds were closing over them like a roof.

The storm sent them scuttling back inside. Set the gardens of foreign plants to thrashing their leaves. Woke the dogs into an ecstasy of barking. Sent a shingle crashing from a roof.

Rain drummed on the pavements, swirled around the cobblestones, gurgled into gutters.

Near the coast, my coast, where I had left Elu, the rain pocked the white sands, tuning them first grey and brittle, then soft and pliant. Clouds emptied themselves into the sea.

Then the heart of the storm reached the green air of the mountain. The sky let go in a great burst of water, soaking us. The noise was fierce, drowning out the songsticks, and our voices, rendering our human sounds puny.

The trees below us were bent double with the sheer weight of the water. The soil was saturated. Worms and insects crawled out of the ground, so that it looked like the earth itself was rupturing. Rivulets formed in an instant and rushed down the mountainside in great frothy waterfalls. Everywhere, in every direction,

to all shores of the island, the air was filled with sheets of water. It filled our eyes and mouths. It drenched our skin.

A great clap of thunder broke, cracking open reality, breaking our trance, smiting the settlers. Some of the dancers stumbled.

The song continued. 'Mother, cry for your children.'

'Hang on to her!' I yelled. 'Once you've made the connection, don't let go!'

I fell to the ground. The rain was relentless.

When I could stand, I said goodbye to the baby. I did not see Janto. I paused a moment at the rock wall where two handprints touched at the thumbs. I placed my hands over them, and tried not to remember that night.

Then I started down the mountain, to keep my promise to Elu.

It is considerate of you to insist on my right to a last meal, my friend. It is a curious custom, don't you think? It is one that springs from a culture in which food is an unequal resource, I think. What do the condemned usually request? Roast goose with all the trimmings, boiled swan stuffed with pigeon? Larks' tongues in aspic? Caviar and suckling pig? Or do they ask for the food their mothers gave them? Bread and dripping, a cabbage leaf wrapped around a boiled potato, washed down with small beer.

The meal I loved to eat with my family was fresh oysters, just plucked from the sea, and steamed under flat stones with redwheat in a wrapping of lapleaf, and eaten hot from the ground with my fingers, dipped in wild ginger, burning my fingers on the hot shells. Patlia would be there, grumbling under her breath about the grittiness of the oysters and her poor eyesight. Korab would be breaking the shells open with his one arm against a rock, hoping no-one would ask if they could help him. Elu would be gorging herself as the juices run down her chin, laughing at her own sensuous greed.

As for red meat, my friend, I do not think I could face the blood. Perhaps you could think of something to order for me.

Last night I opened my eyes to darkness thick as fur. With painful hope, I felt my way to the door and pressed my fingers to the latch. There was a bolt there I had never noticed before and it slid open almost as I touched it.

I stepped out of my cell.

The corridor beyond was dimly lit by popping gaslights. No guards were in sight as I walked along it, calm as a London lady might stroll down the hallway between the bedrooms of her sleeping children.

At the end of the hall, I turned to my left and was suddenly hit by the scent of summerclay and oceans. I ran through the wild meadows back to the sweetnut forest.

Elu was waiting for me by the salt lake, sitting on a boulder, dangling her toes into the water.

‘Where have you been?’ she asked. ‘The fish are getting hungry.’

I sat beside her, the boulder nudging its warmth into the back of my legs, the breeze caressing my hair, and I dipped my feet beside Elu’s into the water. Tiny fishes nibbled on our toenails. The waterfall frothed into the far side of the pool, scattering sparkling droplets.

Elu, giggling, kept trying to catch one of my feet between hers, and I let her, just once, to feel her toughened skin surrounding mine.

Patlia appeared on the other side of the pool, calling us to the feast. ‘Come on, Neka,’ she said, ‘we will all eat tonight in celebration of your freedom.’

A fingernail was floating on the water, casting a crescent shadow.

At the camp, everyone was excited about the great feast and the news that the settlers had departed our shores forever.

The light from the fire warmed all the faces I’d thought I would never see again. They sang a welcome song and we ate. I was free, and Elu was here, my clan was all round me, our land once again our home.

‘In the morning we must choose a new Healer to train,’ said Elu. ‘And a Second. We’re getting old.’

I looked at her and saw that it was true. There were dark lines around her eyes and mouth, and her jaw line was soft. I tried to brush the lines away with my thumbs but I must have had soot on my hands because the marks smeared into smudges.

She laughed and grabbed my hands. ‘Who should we choose?’

I looked around at my clan. Vantin and Korab were there, chatting. Children leaped in the firelight, leaving crisscrossed footprints in the soil where they would remain for anyone who passed by to see, and know there had been a great happiness here.

Every child had been helped into the world by Elu and me. Hafu, the bright girl, had arrived in the world feet first, but Elu had not even gasped at the sight, simply telling the mother that the child would not only survive, but bring a bright light to our clan because of her special birth. When Hapoya had been born the cord was wrapped around his neck and he was dead, but we rubbed his chest with a salve of kirra and deviltree powder to scare away the spirit that had him in its claws and to bring him his breath. He was now the father of two small children.

Something about the memory of the lifeless child with the cord around its neck made me feel uneasy, but I could not remember what it was.

‘I think Hafu for Healer,’ I said.

‘Yes,’ said Elu. The smudges around her eyes were turning to ink. ‘I think so, too. And the Second?’

My eyes were drawn to a quiet girl sitting apart from the rest. Elu and I had eased her mother’s passing to the next world just days ago. She perched in silence just on the edge of the shifting lake of light, observing everyone around her with solemn eyes. I had never realised before how much she looked like me.

‘I think that girl for Second,’ I said, pointing.

‘Yes,’ said Elu. ‘Sleep now.’

I lay back on the soft earth, my old muscles tight as knots. For a while I watched Elu’s face as she gazed at the men jumping and showing off. I wondered if she wished she had not been called as Healer, so she could have had a husband, and been a mother to children.

‘No,’ she said, and stroked my hair. ‘I have you.’

I closed my eyes and listened to the stars hissing like rain.

I woke to a murky light seeping through the bars. It was still pouring outside. The cold floor had turned my muscles to stone.

I see they have assembled the wooden platform outside. The rain is so heavy it is like viewing the sight through a dream of something else – something silvery and bright and shimmering with hope. But the trapdoor has been left open, a gaping mouth of darkness, a yaw of nothing. Even the rain does not sparkle there.

I wonder at the human body, feeling hunger at such a time.

Will there be many people there to watch me, my friend? Will the gates be flung open to a jeering crowd with wide angry faces and shaking fists? Will there be hawkers, a pie-seller, a pedlar holding aloft toy gallows complete with twitching corpse? Will little boys gaze up at me in glee beside their solemn-faced nose-picking sisters? Will they cheer when the trapdoor snaps open?

Will you be there?

The rain grows heavier, I think. Perhaps you could ask the guards for some sandbags in case of flooding. I have tried to keep myself clean, even though I must wear the same clothes every day and sleep on the floor.

I asked if I might have the materials to make a namebelt to wear, but they said it would be unchristian and I should instead spend the time repenting my sins. Is that what this is to you, my friend? Is this why we are still talking? Are you playing the secular priest to help me realise the enormity of my crimes?

There is no woman left from my clan to mourn me, to mould my features from clay and place my effigy among the others. No-one will paint scenes from my life on the walls of the Cave of Women's Sorrow.

Perhaps that is for the best. On the way down from the mountain, coming here to bring you this warning, I thought for a moment about stopping at the cave, making my own effigy, painting my own life. But there is nothing I want to commemorate. I would have to paint myself covering my eyes, stopping up my ears, turning my back. And this image would be there forever, with none coming after me to obliterate my time on this earth.

There are others though, from other clans. Their power survives. They are dancing right now as I speak, at the top of a mountain, above the lines of twisted trees, watched over by two vast figures, huddled together against the love that killed them. People from all the clans are singing to the sky, feasting, laughing, flirting. Preparing graincakes, building shelters, carving canoes. Making plans, making babies. Watching the sky.

Come here, my friend. Look at the place where I will be hanged in a few hours. The courtyard is filling with water. It slops in great toffee-coloured gushes over the roof tiles, the spouting, the inadequate gutters.

Above, the clouds are cracked open like the hard shells of blackfruit, dumping their dark glittering juices on the earth. The drains cannot cope, each one a frothing fountain. The earth cannot hold it.

Do you see, my friend?

Do you see how the earth can take no more, and rejects the water, spewing it back, just as the cavefish man's stomach once did? The brown fluid oozes out of holes in the ground, collecting grease and the corpses of tiny creatures.

Watch how it swirls and gushes in eddies, in whirlpools. How terrifying to be a mouse! Imagine the power of it.

In places, it is already knee-deep. Imagine if it rises higher – to waist level, perhaps, or up to your neck.

Imagine if it never stops.

Critical Essay and Exegesis

Savages and Stockings: Representations of Native Americans and Indigenous Australians in Literature for Children and Young Adults.

Essay Abstract

This essay explores issues arising from one strand of the creative work, this being the problem of representation of the Other in a postcolonial world. It takes as its theme and structure four main critiques of authenticist discourses concerning colonised indigenous peoples, as outlined below.

The essay makes an original contribution to the field by using the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to analyse representations of indigeneity in fiction for young people – in particular by analysing the ways in which authors of such works are faced with the challenges of dealing with the on-going impact of discourses that treat European values as objective, and still promulgate as universal the ethical values of western-style rationality, individuality and self-actualisation. Drawing on the work of Clare Bradford and Nikolas Rose, the essay examines a small selection of recent books written for children and young adults that deal with ‘first contact’ between indigenous and settler characters in America and Australia. It then discusses some of the ways in which the research-led creative component of this thesis was informed and shaped by the research-driven critical component, by providing an exegetical account of my process.

Section A consists of a brief introduction to defining the field of Children's and Young Adult Literature, and provides a general discussion of the key themes arising from my readings of postcolonial discourse that will be examined in the later sections of the essay. After some initial definitions of the field, I examine the self/other juxtaposition of settler and indigene. Second, I discuss the noble savage discourse and physicality of the indigene. Third, I look at invisible whiteness. Fourth, I consider the impact of invasion on, and consignment to history of, traditional indigenous cultures. I examine these in the wider context of postcolonial approaches to literature, and conclude that an approach seeking authenticist notions of indigeneity runs the risk of

juxtaposing indigeneity with settler identity in artificial and unchanging ways. It also minimises the impact of invasion, and fixes the indigenous cultures at a point in the past, mourning their passing whilst ignoring and denying their continued existence.

Section B provides a textual analysis and critique of a selection of books representing Indigenous Australians and Native Americans in the context of ‘first contact.’ I then perform an analysis of seven children’s books dealing with ‘first contact’ between an indigene and settler, in order to demonstrate that, despite increasing awareness of the above critiques posited by postcolonialism, these same problematic representations of indigenous people persist in contemporary books for young people. In particular I argued that representations of indigenous people have moved beyond the simple racist stereotypes of the past and that these works show ambivalence towards (post)colonial power relations, and indeed to the notion of ‘race,’ in line with liberal values that emphasise commonality between humans. I point out, however, that authors are still faced with the challenges of dealing with the on-going impact of discourses that treat European values as objective, and that they still promulgate as universal the ethical values of western-style rationality, individuality and self-actualisation.

Section C demonstrates the ways in which I made, in my own creative work, an active attempt not to reproduce the same stereotypes and misconceptions, and to render whiteness ‘visible’ by disrupting epistemological assumptions regarding the universal. First, I discuss the issues of self/othering, which I attempted to challenge in the creative work by showing diversity within the two groups of settlers and indigenes. Second, I examine the idealisation and fetishisation of the indigene as ‘noble savage,’ which I attempted to circumvent by creating complex characters. Third, I consider the ‘Othering’ of the indigenous body, which I attempted to challenge by minimising mention of skin colour and avoiding ‘animal-like’ metaphors for indigenous physicality. Fourth, I look at ‘invisible whiteness,’ which I attempted to challenge by not having credulous natives fascinated with, afraid of, or overly allured by western materialist culture. I also give an account of my attempt not to promulgate western style ‘rationality’ in the spiritual lives of my characters, which I tried to achieve by creating an ending that is a vindication and celebration of indigenous spiritual beliefs. I discuss ways in which I attempt to avoid a portrayal of the indigene as historical, static and unchanging, by showing my characters devising strategies and using tactics, and showing that the indigenous groups survive into the future, beyond the end of the story.

Introduction

Defining Children's and Young Adult Literature

In this essay I use the term CYA to refer to literature produced for consumption by children and young adults. As Eccleshare notes, “The demarcation of reading by age is always a tricky one” (Eccleshare 541), and I have not tried to make the distinction between ‘children’s literature’ and ‘young adult literature’, because categories vary widely, with age boundaries subject to constant redefinition over time (Falconer *Crossover Literature* 557) and across geographical space, and also because the terms were not well defined in the first place – ie there was no point in the history of such literature at which the categories were not blurred. Today, if anything, they are, as this section will demonstrate, becoming more so:

Categorisation is a dynamic and ever-changing process. It has to incorporate new elements like media and digital technology into the framework and interact with global social changes ... taxonomies are constantly modified to adjust priorities, incorporate new forms and omit the outdated. (Cherng Duh 13)

This section will therefore start from the position that it is an impossible and thankless task to attempt to define what distinguishes literature written for children, ‘tweenagers,’ teenagers and young adults. The latter, for example, is a term that usually refers to people in their teens, though not necessarily to all people in their teens, as older teenagers would sometimes be excluded from this category, and sometimes younger teenagers would be excluded. Trites (*Harry Potter*) argues that the Harry Potter series is all YA, meaning that the age of young adults would begin at around ten or eleven years of age. The contested *Wikipedia* article for Young Adult Literature defines the age group as fifteen to twenty-five, and contrasts it with teen literature, which it says is aimed at the age group of ten to fifteen (*Young-Adult Literature*). There is also the relatively recent invention of the term New Adult (NA) fiction, which features protagonists in the eighteen to twenty-five age bracket. St Martin’s Press first coined the term in 2009, when they held a special call for “fiction similar

to YA that can be published and marketed as adult—a sort of ‘older YA’ or ‘new adult’” (*New-Adult Fiction*). However, the majority of scholarly articles I looked at for this essay use the terms Young Adult (or YA) and define Young Adults simply as teenagers or, even less categorically, as adolescents. Despite these blurry definitions, it is possible to note some of the history of scholarship around notions of what constitutes childhood, young adulthood and literature for young people.

It was for some time considered that child readers could be distinguished from older readers by a certain innocence (eg Hazard, discussed below) and by the possession of a certain moral security or certainty that dissipates in adolescence, but this understanding of children’s literature has been more recently challenged by authors writing realist books for children dealing with, for example, abandonment, addiction and mental illness (eg Jacqueline Wilson, discussed below). Nodelman suggests that what distinguishes Young Adult literature from Children’s literature is that the former is defined by the absence of a polarity between adults and children. Young Adult fiction, he argues, is for “people in the process of changing from children to adults” and “it may not be coincidence that its key distance from [children’s literature] is its movement beyond the polarity between children and adults” that children’s literature tends to establish (*Hidden Adult* 96). For Waller, adolescence in literature, and in life, is distinguished by being not merely ‘other’ to adulthood, but also ‘other’ to childhood: “It is a liminal space onto which a distinct dichotomy of desires or fears can be easily projected”, but at the same time, literature for teenagers is “less blinkered with regard to the textual nature of its subject” because “the category of ‘teenager’ is a recent one and has had less time than childhood to build up those concrete layers of meaning in social history, art, religion, or indeed, fiction.” This means there is a more general acceptance of the teenager’s inherently socially constructed nature (Waller 6).

One of the founders of comparative children’s literature as a discipline for academic enquiry, Paul Hazard, created a pervasive image of world childhood, ‘*la république universelle de l’enfance*,’ which “still echoes through the halls of children’s literature” (O’Sullivan 14). Hazard is interested in a project of considering how children’s books form a specific cultural identity. Childhood, for him, is a natural, fixed category, ontologically distinct from adulthood and also far superior to it. The children in Hazard’s work are

innocent Others, and “decisively prelapsarian” (O’Sullivan 14), linked to a primitive state in the Romantic tradition:

‘Give us books,’ say the children; ‘give us wings. You who are powerful and strong, help us to escape into the faraway. Build us azure palaces in the midst of enchanted gardens. Show us fairies strolling about in the moonlight. We are willing to learn everything that we are taught at school, but, please, let us keep our dreams.’
(Hazard 4)

This vision of the ‘universal republic of childhood,’ is a republic “which knows no borders and no foreign languages; in it, the children of all nations read the children’s books of all nations” (O’Sullivan 14). As with western universalised conceptions of what constitutes great literature, this universalised conception of childhood and children’s literature fails to recognise difference and divergence – in this case, different experiences of childhood and the divergent development of children’s literature in different cultures.

One alternative to Hazard’s universal republic of childhood is the semiotic model proposed by Maria Nikolajeva. Her approach is an evolutionary one, as illustrated by her choice of title, *Children’s Literature Comes of Age*. For her, the primary indicator of a quality work is that it is complex. She believes that “children’s literature in all countries and language areas has gone through more or less.... four stages” of development (Nikolajeva 95). These are: adaptations of existing adult literature and folklore; didactic, educational stories written directly for children; canonical children’s literature with clear generic forms and gender specific address, whose characteristic feature is the typical epic narrative structure; and polyphonic, or multi-voiced, children’s literature. She characterises this final stage as “a convergence of genres which brings children’s literature closer to what is generally labelled modern or post-modern literature” (Nikolajeva 9). However, O’Sullivan argues that this “model ultimately negates the necessary coexistence of various forms of children’s literature” (O’Sullivan 17) and I would further argue that it is also universalising and ethnocentric.

Attempting to define what constitutes children's literature inevitably runs into the same problems as the attempts to provide the models discussed above, in that any definition of the field is likely to be overly homogenising, universalising and ethnocentric. As Nodelman (*Hidden Adult* 3) says, if we try to avoid such traps, we might prefer instead to use the definition that children's literature is "whatever literature that children happen to read" defined only by the fact that "certain groups of children do or did once read them". However, as he points out, this means that any book, from *Paradise Lost* to *Justine* might be defined as children's literature at some point or another. Nodelman goes on to suggest that nonetheless, there is some logic to defining children's literature as consisting of what children actually read, "at least in terms of the intention of its producers" (*Hidden Adult* 4). In this way they are, like Bourdieu's 'middlebrow' literature, entirely defined by their audience. Children's literature for Nodelman, then, is defined as texts produced in the hope of finding an audience that consists of children.

Children's books, though, are in a unique position in that the people who purchase them are overwhelmingly not the audience they are intended to reach. Jacqueline Rose has pointed out that the books are primarily written, sold, marketed, chosen, bought and consumed by adults, so they have always been only secondarily for children (*Peter Pan* 18). As Nodelman says, this means that "Its producers must make judgments about what to produce based not on what they believe will appeal to children, but rather on what they believe adult consumers believe they know will appeal to children (or perhaps, what should appeal to them, or what they need to be taught)." Thus the "children in 'children's literature' are most usefully understood as the child readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers, imagine and imply in their work" (*Hidden Adult* 4, 5).

Nodelman suggests that the same is true for books aimed at 'young adults,' who "are most usefully seen as the adolescent readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers imagine and imply in their works" and he argues that "the intended audiences are defined by their presumed inability to produce such books or make such decisions about purchases of books for themselves – an inability accounted for by their being younger, and therefore less experienced or capable than those who do these things for them" (*Hidden Adult* 5). However, the suggestion that the books are bought by adults is less true for Young Adult books than it is for children's books, as teenagers are much more likely to make their own purchases and their own choices, in part as a way of establishing

and asserting their own subjectivities. As Meek points out, “Adolescents choose their reading matter from magazines commercially sensitive to the shifting identities of the young, and from the novels that connect readers’ personal growth to a nascent interest in the world of ideas and beliefs, their nature and relevance” (Meek, 5). That is to say, adolescents are prepared to engage with complex subjectivities and social issues and to consider social and life choices. In addition, they are, argues Meek, prepared to tackle sophisticated texts in order to appear “in the know, adult-fashion,” and may also, feeling “pressurized by examinations and the social complexities of their age groups, take time out to read the books they came to earlier, and to ponder the kind of world they want to live in” (Meek, 6).

As Eccleshare points out, this leads to an expectation that “teenagers should read about the things that they themselves are doing, or would enjoy doing if only they could, while making sure that they are not ‘corrupted’ by anything too adult or explicit” (Eccleshare 542). Francis Spufford describes some of the changes that occur in the move from children’s to adult books thus:

Fiction recomplicates itself for you: you step up a whole level of complexity. Suddenly you are surrounded anew by difficulties and riches commensurate with your state of mind. From an exhausted territory, you have come to an unexplored one, where manners and conventions are all to find, just like the rules of your own new existence in your own new lurch-prone adolescent body. (Spufford, 10)

It is this ‘recomplication’ that makes young adults (or teenagers) a particular category, both in general and as readers. What matters to them is different from what mattered to them as children, and it is different from what will matter to them as adults. To make such a statement is simply to suggest that the concerns of young adults are shifting and complex, and is not intended to lend any credence to an essentialist view suggesting that children’s lives (or their reading tastes) follow a series of increasingly complex stages tied to specific stages of psychological development, as, for example, a theorist such as Caroline Hunt might posit (Hunt 4-11). Neither is it to suggest that there is one particular theme that emerges – as, for example, Trites argues when she suggests that “the chief characteristic that distinguishes adolescent literature from children’s literature” is that literature for adolescents

involves “a recognition that social institutions are bigger and more powerful than individuals” whereas “children’s literature often affirms the child’s sense of Self and her or his personal power” (*Harry Potter* 473).

These latter kinds of suggestions are easy enough to refute – the recent success of the *Hunger Games* series and other (especially speculative fiction and fantasy) books shows that tales of determined individuals overthrowing evil or corrupt regimes are among the most successful YA books. The same central theme can be seen in *Harry Potter* – indeed, Harry Potter’s individual power to overcome evils embedded in social institutions increases rather than decreases as the series moves from the earlier books (which more closely resemble children’s books) to the later ones (generally considered to be YA¹).

In any case, the developmental approach to childhood and children’s literature assumes a natural category of ‘child’ (and perhaps even of ‘teenager’ or ‘young adult’) that is in opposition to ‘adult.’ Anthropologists and sociologists have long argued that childhood is not a natural phenomenon but a relatively recent social construct. One sociologist, Neil Postman, believes that one of the main factors that began to separate child from adult was the printing press, and the new possibilities for secret knowledge that the printed word afforded. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to enter into the debates around this claim, but it is worth noting Postman’s observation that the new forms of text (especially virtual ones) have led to a reversal of that process, providing children with easy access to adult knowledge resulting in the ‘adultification’ of children. Postman, and later, Zipes, argue that the effect of this is that children are being homogenised by an adult-oriented consumerist culture. At the same time, we are witnessing what Postman calls the ‘childification’ of adults, or what other observers have termed the phenomenon of the ‘kiddult’ (or occasionally ‘kidult’) – one characteristic of the kiddult being that they enjoy reading literature aimed at younger readers (Falconer *The Crossover Novel*).

Therefore, as Flynn points out, “The boundaries between ‘children’s literature’ and ‘adult literature’ have shifted historically and have alternated between the rigid and the permeable depending on the political and cultural climate” (Flynn, 117). Flynn’s discussion centres on issues of the sexualised reimagining of children’s novels, but the point he makes is applicable in a much wider sense. Stories intended for one category of reader have often

¹ As mentioned earlier, Roberta Trites considers the whole series to be Young Adult fiction (Trites, 472).

ended up in the hands of others – few observers in June 1997 would have expected that in less than a year, millions of adults around the world would be engrossed in a book about pre-pubescent wizards, for example. In my middle school years, the most popular author among boys aged eleven was Stephen King, and I was that same age when one of my teachers lent me an old copy of *Valley of the Dolls* to read; it quickly became a sensation among the girls in my year. Stories intended for adults have also often ended up in the hands of children in a more widespread and culturally-sanctioned way, from ancient myths, arguably through fairytales and the Brontë sisters, Dickens, Conan Doyle to Harper Lee and beyond, all of which are now as commonly, and in some cases more commonly, enjoyed by children and young adults.

Eccleshare notes that the concept of young adults as a separate group to be addressed and instructed was first put forward by the educationalist Sarah Trimmer as long ago as 1802 (Eccleshare 552). Trimmer drew the lower age line at fourteen and suggested that “young adulthood” should last until the age of twenty-one. A defined young adult fiction market did not arise at that time², but in the absence of an identifiable teenage culture there were obvious settings or situations which would appeal directly to adolescent readers, such as school stories like Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886), Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* (1876), and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and later, William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) and J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1954) (Eccleshare 541-542).

A style of writing specifically aimed at teenagers began to be adopted in the middle of the twentieth century, around the same time that the concept of ‘teenager’ and ‘teenage culture’ came to be widely recognised as a distinct form of identity, with its own music, clothes, and so on. From the mid 1950s on, and with social liberation in the 1960s and 1970s, books for young adults were making their mark, attracting “serious writers, who recognised the potential market of intelligent, sophisticated readers who needed books that would acknowledge their growing awareness of the complex emotions and events they were experiencing” (Eccleshare, 544).

For, whilst teenage fiction may have come about from the “need to provide a vociferous band of readers with amusing stories about themselves,” it quickly became

² The brief discussion that follows is a sketch of Western English-language texts and is not intended to be exhaustive.

increasingly bleak, partly because of the bleakness of the social issues with which it dealt, such as homelessness, unemployment, war and so on, and “books for teenagers became increasingly daring in terms of explicit writing about sex in the 1970s, violence in the 1990s and drugs by the end of the century,” to the extent that today “there are serious concerns about what may and may not be suitable fictional fare” (Eccleshare 550). One of the first “tweenager” novels (ie a novel aimed at the pre-teen to early teen age group) was Judy Bloom’s *Forever* (1975), which dealt with teenage sex with a directness not previously attempted in a book for that age group. More recently, Jacqueline Wilson has been described as “the voice of the tweenage generation,” (O’Brien) and she writes ever more explicitly about divorce, abandonment and mental disorders. This has led to an inevitable reaction against the tweenager phenomenon, with commentators complaining that children are growing up “too fast” (as expressed by, for example Brennan, Baer, and Koehnecke).

As books for young people have begun to deal with more mature themes, the lines have become increasingly blurred, giving rise to the phenomenon of the ‘Crossover’ book – ie, books that cross from child to adult audiences, or vice versa (Irving 1996). The standing of literature crossing over from a young audience to an adult one is arguably higher than ever before (Falconer, *Crossover Literature* 556). In 1990, the Whitbread Book of the Year changed its rules to include children’s books. Walter Moers’s (1999) *Captain Bluebear* became a kiddult phenomenon around the world. In 2003, Niccolo Ammaniti’s kiddult novel *I’m Not Scared* was critically acclaimed, and Philip Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass* won the Whitbread in 2001. The *Harry Potter* books were reissued for adult readers with more sophisticated covers, and a higher price tag. The *Artemis Fowl* series by Eoin Colfer and the Lemony Snicket books were widely read by adults, giving rise to some fierce criticism of the kiddult phenomenon in the press (Falconer *Crossover Literature* 556, *Crossover Novel* 33) and more recently, adults have taken to the *Twilight*, *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* series. The boundaries between books for adults and books for teenagers has blurred until even publishers are not sure how to categorise them, with some books having been marketed to young adults in one country and to adults in another – Sonya Hartnett’s *Butterfly* and Marcus Zusack’s *The Book Thief* being just two examples. Adults are arguably “more engaged with contemporary children’s literature than they ever have been” (Falconer *Crossover Literature* 572), but the task of giving a clear definition of what constitutes children’s literature, or literature for young adults, is no longer possible – if indeed it ever was.

One common feature of books for young adults is a certain anxiety about the state of adolescence as being unruly and unpredictable. Alison Waller says that the Young Adult books she looks at in her study have the potential to imagine adolescents forging lives that do not follow adult scripts, but that such deviance is almost always imagined as a threat to be controlled. She pinpoints multiple "anxious points of departure from normal developmental models" (Waller 41) in the fiction, as well as active points of adult resistance to adolescence's "shifting space[s] where existing social structures can be resisted and rebuilt" (Waller 91). The values invoked are "often conventional or even reactionary ... and display anxiety about adolescents transgressing what are considered to be their natural boundaries" (Waller 195). She argues that liberal humanist impulses endure in literature for young people, and adolescence is presented as a minor stage in the process of becoming adult, whole and empowered within appropriate parameters. She laments the lack of narratives "that explore the realm of adolescence without recourse to the teleology of development and adulthood" (Waller 189). For while the status of adolescence is continually shifting and being re-evaluated, "ideas of youth and 'growing up' remain bound by older frameworks" (Waller 188). This "fetishisation of individualism and personal growth" (Waller 195) may seem a 'natural' focus of adolescence and literature for young people, but it is distinctly recent and western – and as Cherng Duh says:

Due to the cultural supremacy that has derived from the influx of western cultural products of all kinds, people in other countries become accustomed to evaluating aesthetic products according to western criteria ... children's literature in English stands for the entire body of such texts, and this can exclude or marginalise literatures from 'other' countries ... because of the cultural logic of capitalist production (Cherng Duh 10).

Thus the emphasis in Western literature on the teleology of a stable, independent self-contained adulthood has the particular effect of colonising 'other' notions of childhood that might be held in, for example, more communitarian cultures. The fetishisation of a particular notion of growth and development can itself be seen as a kind of colonialism. Nodelman's cheeky paraphrasing of Said's *Orientalism* makes the point:

Child psychology and children's literature can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with childhood – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short child psychology and children's literature as an adult style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over childhood. (Nodelman *Literary Theory* 29)

In this quotation, Nodelman has replaced Said's terms referring to the Orient with terms referring to children. He says that while reading *Orientalism*, he was "continually astonished" (*Literary Theory* 29) by how often it suggested parallel insights into our most common assumptions about childhood and children's literature. These include inherent inferiority, inherent femaleness, a distorted gaze, inherent adult-centrism, silencing and inherent silence, inherent danger of the Other, the stability (fixed nature) of the Other, self-confirming descriptions, self-fulfilling prophecies, the Other Opposite, and the Other as inherently contradictory. The job of becoming an adult becomes one of recognising and rectifying these features. Jacqueline Rose's discussion of the 'impossibility of children's fiction' also works from the premise that children's literature is a form of colonisation, but she emphasises the ways in which it works to persuade children of the (western) adult version of childhood.

Critics working in children's literature have long recognised the participation of children's fiction in national projects of empire building. Bob Dixon and Jeffrey Richards have carefully delineated the role of writers such as WHG Kingston and GA Henty in the creation and reproduction of the late Victorian colonial mindset. At the beginning of the twentieth century, says Hugh Cunningham, children were commonly regarded as "the key to social advance" (*Children of the Poor* 219) and as "the nation's most valuable asset" (*Children and Childhood* 72) central to the "future of the nation and the race" (*Children of the Poor* 191). In this discourse, 'children,' 'nation' and 'race' are inextricably linked in ways that have lasting implications still widely felt today (Pennell 50). Waller argues that this worked in part through the relationship between the parent and child in Victorian England, which "was precisely that of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, precisely that of the relationship between the physically dominant and the physically dominated" (Waller 44). She argues that it was from this that "the child learned that the world was divided between those who physically dominate and those who were dominated."

She goes on to say that, “Moreover, power – as adult power – was always allied with moral authority. The child’s power was allied with savagery, wilfulness, indolence, wickedness and immorality.” Resistance to moral authority was a sign of one’s otherness and therefore justified even sterner ‘civilising’ measures (Waller 45). I shall return to this theme later in this essay when discussing Foucault’s notion of governmentality.

Key themes

The aim of this study is not to uncover the ‘truth’ of indigenous identities, or to oppose ‘false’ representations with ‘accurate’ ones, but to examine the ways in which the identities of settler and indigene are presented. Historically, the new western values of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and self-actualisation were introduced to the USA and Australia at precisely the time that self-determination was taken from the indigenous peoples. And as Veyne (see also Rose *Psychological Complex*) has argued, governors and governed are not simple historical universals. Governed individuals may be seen by their governors variously as members of a flock to be led, as legal subjects with certain rights, as children to be corrected and educated, as part of a natural resource to be exploited or as living beings who are part of a biological population to be managed. The subjective self-identity of governed individuals in each of these cases will be different. The question of indigenous representation therefore becomes vital.

This essay consists of three parts, each organised around the same four key themes. In Section A, I provide a discussion of some postcolonial approaches to literature, including a brief history of changing discourses concerning indigenous peoples, and an extended critique of the notion that there is an authentic ‘truth’ about indigeneity that can be juxtaposed with white falsehoods and forgetfulness. Because I am attempting to draw attention to some of the key points in postcolonial discussions of literature, I do not confine this section to discussion exclusively of children’s literature, but discuss some of the classic analyses of works such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. This section also includes a discussion of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality in relation to indigeneity and ideal forms of selfhood, in order to explore further notions of a ‘truthful’ and ‘authentic’ self, and in particular how indigenous selves may be drawn in relation to non-indigenous selves. I identify four key themes relating to the authenticist conception of indigeneity and group these under four headings, which I

later use to structure sections B and C. These four themes are: the juxtaposition of self/other and indigene/settler; the notion of the noble savage and the physicality of the indigene; the invisibility of whiteness and credulity of the indigene; and the impact of invasion and consignment to history of indigenous cultures.

In Section B, I provide a textual analysis of a small selection of CYA books, referring back to the four themes outlined in section one. For the purposes of this essay, CYA (Children and Young Adults) literature means books aimed at people aged up to the late teens, or books that would be considered eligible for consideration by such bodies as the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) and the Children's Book Council or American Library Association (ALA) children's book awards (including the Newbery medal) in the USA. It is not uncommon for a YA (Young Adult) book to be marketed as such in one country, but as an adult book in another; however, as far as I am aware, the books in this study were published exclusively for the CYA market. The origins of children's literature in English are commonly located in the nineteenth century, and these early children's books were expected to provide useful information and knowledge as well as moral instruction concerning appropriate social practices and attitudes, including those towards cultural inheritance (Lyons in Cavello and Chartier 327). Institutions concerned with CYA literature today, such as the CBCA and the ALA, often overtly subscribe to the tradition of 'reading as an instrument of social formation' (Petrucci in Cavello and Chartier 350) and see their task as, at least in part, as attempting to create a 'constituency of readers' (Van Putten 2001 18) with this notion of social formation in mind, and with the full awareness that their awards and purchasing lists (such as the CBCA's 'notable books') influence libraries and schools as well as individuals in their purchasing of books (Foster, Finnis and Nimon xv). This is not, however, to suggest these institutions hold the naïve conception of reader reception now referred to as 'impact theory,' commonly held in the past (Cawelti 1976), which posited a rather simplistic relationship between the content of a book and the influence on the mind of the young reader. Rather, reading should be understood as 'essentially an elusive, ephemeral and even an anarchical act' (Foster, Finnis and Nimon xvi). In similar vein, I claim no attempt here to assess the actual effects on the reader of reading the books in this study. Rather, the books are to be understood as part of a rhizomatic discourse (Deleuze and Guattari 1998), which both produces and reflects aspects of 'clumps' of social understandings. This concept is discussed more fully later in this essay.

For this study, I examined seven books that deal with first contact between settlers and indigenous³ people, written for children or young adults. I chose to examine books portraying Indigenous Australians and to compare these with books portraying Native Americans. I chose not to examine portrayals of other indigenous peoples because to do so would run the risk of (re)creating a dichotomy of European/Other, and of oversimplifying analysis of the representations. I made this choice, then, not in order to create a false dichotomy (with Indigenous Australians and Native Americans on one side, and European settlers and their descendants on the other) but in order to examine the differences in the portrayals of the two groups. Having read several books with indigenous characters before I started this project, I had an impression that there was a significant difference in representation between these two different indigenous groups – the Native American, I felt, was more often portrayed as noble and dignified, and the Indigenous Australian as chaotic and childlike. During the course of this study I discovered that the picture is rather more nuanced and less clear-cut than my first impressions had led me to believe.

I selected the particular texts for this study in an attempt to cover a fairly wide range of different types of novel dealing with early contact between indigenous people and settler-invaders. I selected books that appear to be self-consciously resisting stereotypical depictions of indigenous people in some way (the specific ways for each book are mentioned in the discussion of the works later in this essay). All the books are still in print and widely available in bookshops and libraries. I wanted to cover different reading ages (*Morning Girl* probably being aimed at the youngest readers (age 8-11⁴), and *Strange Objects* the oldest (age 11-16⁵)).

The texts were also selected to try to provide a wide range in terms of the authors' ethnicities⁶, which are mentioned later in this essay, and also the place and era of the story (the earliest setting being *Morning Girl* set in 1492, and the latest *Eye of the Eagle*

³ In this essay I will use 'indigenous' when referring to more than one indigenous group, and 'Indigenous' when referring to Indigenous Australians. I will also use the term 'Native American', though I am aware that this is a contested form. Where I use the work of someone identifying as an American Indian, I will use that term.

⁴ All reading ages are estimates partly based on my judgment and partly from other sources. This estimate is from information available at www.scholastic.com/teachers/book/morning-girl and from the Amazon listing for the book.

⁵ This estimate is from information available at www.eidolon.net/steven_paulsen/pulse6.html and from the Amazon listing for the book.

⁶ This issue is not always as clear as might be assumed. The author of *Morning Girl*, Michael Dorris, identified as Modoc (Native American), and this identity was central to his personal and professional life, but the Modoc tribal historian has stated that Dorris was not a member of their tribe (Cook-Lynn 78). However, it is not my intention to delve into questions of authentic indigeneity here. For a helpful discussion about author authenticity, see Cai (2002).

and *Apache*, both set in the mid-late nineteenth century), as well as the ethnicity of the narrator or protagonist (discussed later in this essay). I wanted to cover a range of publication dates, and whilst I originally included books from the 1960s and 1970s, they were so different from the more recent books as to make the analysis rather incoherent. For example, the 1975 *Mathinna's People* (Chauncy) was originally included, but the frequent references to the uncivilised and backwards nature of the Indigenous characters, and insistence that Indigenous Tasmanians are extinct, were more or less straightforwardly racist and defied any nuanced analysis. Therefore I decided to focus on more recent publications, ranging from 1990 (*Strange Objects*) to 2007 (*Apache*). Another criterion for selection in this study was that I wanted to study books that had been popular (for example, *Apache* was a best-seller in the USA and Britain) or influential (for example, *Strange Objects* was included in school curricula in Australia), or from series commonly included in school libraries (for example, *Journey to Jamestown* is from the popular 'My Side of the Story' series, which commonly features in school libraries in the USA)⁷. Three of the selected texts portray Indigenous Australians (*Strange Objects* by Gary Crew, *The Castles of Tuhbowgule* by Haidi Wilmot, and *Eye of the Eagle*, by Ron Bunney), and four portray Native Americans (*Apache*, by Tanya Landman, *Morning Girl*, by Michael Dorris, *Journey to Jamestown* by Lois Ruby, and *The Arrow Over the Door*, by Joseph Bruchac). Some are written from the point of view of the indigenous characters, some from the point of view of the settlers, and two (*Jamestown* and *Strange Objects*) alternate the viewpoints. *Jamestown* is an example of what Reimer calls a "double-focalized" text, presenting the alternating viewpoints of two focalising characters who "tend to have a metonymic resonance" in relation to public mythology of colonialism (Reimer 113).

Finally, in section C, I will provide a brief exegesis, again structured around my four key themes, discussing my attempts to address these issues in my own creative project, *Disenchantment*, which is a YA novel concerning a fictional indigenous group living a traditional lifestyle until the island is colonised by the British. This is not in an attempt to set myself apart as an author who has somehow managed to step outside culture—rather it is intended as an illustration for the thinking processes that went into the creative work.

⁷ Information concerning best-sellers and sales figures is often closely guarded as an industry secret, but *Apache* featured heavily at the time in promotions and six years after its release still figures in the top 150,000 of all Amazon sales. *Strange Objects* still features in study guides, such as the online 9English (<http://9english.ais.wikispaces.net/Novel+study+-+'Strange+Objects'+by+Gary+Crew>). Information on the 'My Side of the Story' series can be found at <http://us.macmillan.com/series/mySideoftheStory>

Section A: Postcolonialism and the problem of authenticity

For this section, I take postcolonialism as my starting point. Because I am attempting to draw attention to some of the key points in postcolonial discussions of literature, I will not confine this section to discussion exclusively of children's literature, I will also discuss some of the classic analyses of works such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, among others. This essay understands the term 'postcolonial' as referring to a critical discursive position which 'begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others, and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations' (Slemon 3). Postcolonialism thus combines political critique and an active sense of intervention with the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment (Young 57). One important aspect of this is the recognition and critique of the West's history of denying and destroying the culture and history of colonised peoples (Childs and Williams 8) and subsuming "Them" under a single category opposed to "Us" (Memmi). Indeed the "Us" of the colonial power has historically relied on the "Them" of the colonised in order to define and make sense of itself—constructing White identity against (imagined) Black⁸ identity, and Western identity against (imagined) Eastern identity (Morrison, Said). That is to say, "White discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, not allowing her/him space or autonomy, permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self" (Dyer 13). This process has at times been acutely discursively pronounced in the representation of indigenous peoples in literature for children and young adults (Bradford *Reading* 3).

Literary representations of indigenous people by non-indigenous authors have been a focus of academic attention for some time (see, for example McGillis, Khorana, Castle Richards, MacCan, Dunkle, Healy). However, as Bradford (*Unsettling* 7) points

⁸ I use 'Black' and 'White' here rather than 'black' and 'white' to emphasise that it is not a matter of referring to skin colour, but to artificial constructs and subjectifying discourses which nonetheless have implications for social inequality (Gilroy pp22 ff). In this context, use of the term is not necessarily restricted to those with 'black' skin but may include other ethnicities which have (at some point) been defined as an inferior 'race,' such as Asians, Jews, Irish Catholics, Romanies, and so on (Britton). For an extended discussion of these issues, see Britton or Miles and Brown.

out, these critiques tend to take the form of textual citations rather than systematic application of key ideas and analytical strategies—a challenge that Bradford attempts to redress in her own work, as does Reimer⁹, in her discussions about Canadian settlers and the notion of ‘home.’

Descriptions of stereotypes such as the ‘wicked and ugly’ savage, or cannibalistic natives, common up to the turn of the twentieth century (Collins-Gearing 35) have largely disappeared from contemporary CYA literature, though depictions persist of Native Americans as ‘warlike’ (eg Willis 17). Traces of the ‘noble savage’ type also persist, in somewhat wistful portrayals of an imagined unencumbered lifestyle (Stephens). For most of the twentieth century, these depictions still commonly posited ‘a lower form of civilisation’ (Kociumbas 254). More recently, however, the mythopoeic Arcadian lifestyle of indigenous peoples has connected with contemporary Western ecological and New Age discourses (Fulford and Kitson), in portrayals of indigenous characters as ecological and spiritual visionaries (eg Davison, Durack and Durack, or more recently Jeffers). Such portrayals rely on an idealised and static conception of the indigene, ignoring the impact of invasion and colonisation (Collins-Gearing 35, 36; also see Said 153-7). They are located in the nostalgic past of lost innocence that forms part of the ‘poetics of Empire’ (Low), and present indigenous characters as mysterious or ‘numinous’ (Otto)—inherently spiritual, otherworldly, and radically Other. They carry within them a critique of Western values (eg Willis 17; also see Valverde) and are, of course, as much a product of white imagination as were the heathen savages (Stott 15).

CYA fiction produced in the west, then, has commonly minimised the physical, psychological and spiritual displacement that indigenous peoples have experienced (Collins-Gearing 36, Bradford, Thompson, Foster), and authors have inscribed indigeneity with their own romantic views on nature, their criticism of capitalism and environmental destruction, and so on. Indigenous characters also sometimes serve to legitimise settler presence on the land, sanctifying the notion of historical immigration through a “passing on” of the land to a worthy child, who has proved some connection to it, or who has become indigenised in some way, such as learning traditional herbal medicine (Reimer 3,5). In this way the settlers lay claim to being the “old ones here” as

⁹ Reimer’s work is of some significance in the field of colonialism and children’s literature, but her focus tends to be on Canadian settler identity (and, for example the notion of “home” rather than on indigenous identities), and therefore I do not concentrate on her work as much as on Bradford’s in this essay.

they must “become native, and write the epic of the nation’s origin” (Reimer 6, Lawson 28); this is the “syntax of forgetting” of which Homi Bhaba speaks.

It is worth noting, then, that many CYA books overtly challenge binaries of “race”—for example, in *Apache*, the young protagonist discovers she is not “Apache”¹⁰ by birth, though this does not for long shake her conviction that she is “Apache,” or that of those around her: “He held my face. ‘Blood is nothing. Nothing! Would Ussen [the Creator god] whisper to one who was not Apache?’” (Landman 296). Similar ambiguities can be found in *Strange Objects*, in which the character Ela is of white European origin but lives among Indigenous Australians, and in *Jamestown*, in which the Native American Sacahocan has a (deceased) European father, resulting in split loyalties for her: when her kinsfolk are expressing the wish that the English would leave, she says “I cannot respond. In my heart burns this thought: if my father had left our shores, I would not be here at all” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 46). Later, when her kin are planning to mount an attack, she says, “I must warn the English. They are my people too” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 65). We can see, then, that in these examples of CYA fiction, the indigenous Other is usually more complex than a simple racist stereotype or fantastical object of difference. These representations of indigenous people often reveal a deep ambivalence towards ideas of ‘race,’ Otherness and postcolonial power relations (see also Said).

As I stated in the introduction, the aim of this essay is not to uncover the ‘truth’ of indigenous identities, or to oppose ‘false’ representations with ‘accurate’ ones, but to discover and examine something about the way the identities of settler and indigene are presented. The reason for this is that the ‘authenticist’ notion, that there is an objective truth about indigeneity that can be juxtaposed with the falsehoods embedded in the white imagination and in post-contact forgetfulness, is a flawed notion. It is flawed for four reasons, around which I shall base the structure of the rest of this section. First, it neglects the juxtaposition of indigeneity with the settler identity. Second, such authenticism is at the heart of discourses, such as that of ‘the noble savage’, which give white people the power to define indigeneity while apparently confining themselves to objective representation. Third, as advocates of whiteness studies have demonstrated, it treats indigeneity rather than whiteness as the thing to be explained, whereas they are

¹⁰ I use inverted commas here because the Ndee would not usually refer to themselves as Apache, which is an ‘enemy name’ (Slapin 2008).

objectively in equal need, or lack of need, of explanation. Fourth, as is observed above, it ignores the impact of invasion and colonisation, and minimises the physical, psychological and spiritual displacement that indigenous peoples have experienced. I shall now examine these points in turn, in the wider context of the postcolonial literary canon.

1. Juxtaposition of indigene/settler, self/Other and governmentality

First, on the essential juxtaposition of indigeneity with the settler identity, Marcia Langton observes that Aboriginality ‘is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation’ (33-34). Langton is writing in a specifically Australian context, but this is an observation that can be universalised. Aboriginality, or indigeneity, is constructed dialogically and dialectically. It is intrinsic to group identity that there is a dialectic of Self and Other, in which Self (or Us) is constituted as not-Other (or not-Them) and Other (Them) is constituted as not-Self (or not-Us). The literature on Orientalism (e.g. Laroui) even suggests that the West and the Muslim world have imagined each other as alter egos, and that this imagining has shaped the historical and cultural choices that each civilisation has made, thus creating a real divergence. In the Western imagination—popular, literary, and academic—this logic has been applied to indigenous cultures at least as much as to Arab or Muslim ones, giving rise to a discourse in which ‘We’ have history, while ‘They’ have culture; ‘We’ have technology, intellectual progress, and historical change, while ‘They’ live in an ahistorical world that has retained the prelapsarian virtues of the noble savage, but the essential function of which is to convey those virtues to ‘Us’ so that we can better understand our own prehistory. In short, ‘We’ have something that ‘They’ aspire to, while ‘They’ have something that ‘We’ yearn for.

On this point, Terry Goldie (12) makes a distinction between the radical Othering of the African colonised, as observed and criticised by Fanon (*Black Skin*), and, in the New World, a process of the sort that later writers have associated with governmentality (Moore, Lattas, Spivakovsky). Whereas the “black Other” is left as “object”, the Native American, Indigenous Australian and Maori “are Other and Not-self but also must become self. Thus... imperialist discourse valorizes the colonized according to its own needs for reflection”, which, in Gayatri Spivak’s (253) words, allows for the “absolute

Other” to be “refracted ... into a domesticated Other”. While Fanon points to the sense of inferiority that (in his early analysis) is associated with blackness, Goldie, without using the term, points to the governmentality implications of indigenous people ‘wanting’ to be like white people.

Governmentality (Foucault *Governmentality*, Dean, Rose *Freedom*) is usually¹¹ understood as being composed of the words ‘government’ and ‘mentality’. Foucault uses the term ‘government’ in its sixteenth century sense (Foucault *Subject and Power* 221), as the ‘conduct of conduct’ – a form of activity aiming to shape, guide, or otherwise affect the conduct of a person or persons. By ‘mentality’, Foucault means rationalities, mentalities, arts and regimes of government and administration.

Governmentality, then, includes the ideas, calculations, strategies, tactics and beliefs employed by diverse authorities as they seek to act on individuals and populations to promote health, happiness, hygiene, morality, and so on, in accordance with particular knowledges and in pursuit of certain goals. It is a “very specific, albeit complex form of power, which has as its target *population*” (Foucault cited in Rose *Inventing* 68). It has resulted, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs* (Foucault *Governmentality* 102). Foucault draws a contrast between sovereignty and government – the former having as its purpose the continuation of itself, whereas the latter has as its purpose:

[T]he welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc: and the means that the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all immanent to the population; it is the population itself on which the government will act either directly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of populations into certain regions or activities, etc. ... the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government (Foucault *Governmentality* 100).

¹¹ Dean (1994: 176) suggests that governmentality can be understood as a series of concepts addressed to the ‘will to know’, aimed at the rationality implicated in the exercise of governance.

The perspective of governmentality therefore draws our attention to innumerable programmes, proposals, and policies that have attempted to shape the conduct of individuals – “not just to control, subdue, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered” (Rose *Inventing* 12).

Foucault was particularly interested in government as an activity or practice (Veyne 1997), and an investigation of the rationalities of government is for him, therefore, the development of a system of thinking about the nature of practices of government (who can govern, what governing is, what or whom is governed) capable of making that activity thinkable and practicable. Work produced within this framework is concerned with *how* we are governed, and *how* we govern ourselves.

One of the ways in which government is accomplished is through the production of knowledge, which for Foucault is always implicated in power relations:

Power produces knowledge ... power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relationship without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault *Discipline* 27).

Thus knowledge and power are inextricably bound up with each other. For Foucault, the workings of power are ‘microphysical,’ mobile and localisable. Knowledge is used to select some techniques of power over others and to implement the chosen techniques. The knowledges drawn upon may be informal or formal, simple or complex, rational or irrational (Foucault *Discipline*). A particular policy, for example, may be based on formal and rational theories, models and evidence, and disseminated in formal (government or academic) papers, and less formal ways (such as through magazines, literature and film). A policy such as instigating compulsory alcohol restrictions in Indigenous areas, for example, could be based upon academic knowledge and a need to be seen to be acting on a particular ‘known’ problem (which may have originally been identified in the media), as well as on a ‘hunch’ about the way people (or a subset of people) ‘really are’ (see Valverde). It could also be developed according to whether or not particular aspects of the policy would find favour with local officials, and promoted through informal gatherings in clubs and tearooms (Kendall and

Wickham 35). Thus the development of policies, and indeed of recognisable ‘modern’ systems, happens in ways that are neither systematic nor ‘meaningful’. Culture is a set of practices aimed at producing certain sorts of persons, and the resulting institution is the result of a combination of the limited practical resources and knowledges that people are able to put to use to try to deal with limited, local problems. It is thus fundamentally contingent, with dispersed beginnings and piecemeal development.

Fundamental to governmentality, then, is the production of a certain kind of self—a self with particular attributes and aptitudes, certain proclivities and talents. In modern western societies these include self-determination, self-discipline, self-monitoring and self-improvement (Rose *Inventing*, Hazleden *Love*), and the ability to construct a plausible narrative of one’s life as a more or less logical linear progression in which things happen as a result of choices made and actions taken (Ricoeur). Indigenous peoples around the world, of course, had their right to self-determination taken from them at the point of colonization, but were (and in some cases still are) nonetheless subject to governmentality to a greater extent than non-colonised peoples (Valverde, Spivakovsky)¹². It was at the point of colonization that governments and other organisations such as schools, missions, churches, and so on, began to try to convert indigenous peoples such as Native Americans and Indigenous Australians away from a lifestyle perceived as passive, cyclical and superstitious, relying on the spontaneous hand-outs of nature, to one that was active, progressively linear, rational, and economically productive.

Pursuing the opportunity for self-determination and self-actualisation appears, in contemporary western culture, to be an unequivocally ‘good’ thing. It is an ethical obligation to determine one’s own life, make choices, take action based on those choices, and accept responsibility for any consequences. This is self-evidently ‘true’ in the way that some knowledges are granted the status of ‘truth,’ being “inevitable, unquestionable, necessary” (Hacking 4) or “within the true”, but others are unthinkable, or “outside of sense” (Foucault *Discourse*). In order to achieve this individually-determined life path, the western self must be adaptable, flexible, self-disciplined, and able and willing to take opportunities for change and personal ‘growth.’ We are to understand ourselves as free (in an historically unusual way) and the authors of our own

¹² That is to say that all modern populations are subject to governmentality, but the effects of this are uneven in both application and outcome.

stories (Rose *Inventing*). Human beings are understood as being *active* in this production of themselves as subjects, and subjects of power, and this requires, as Foucault suggests, an investigation into “their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word” (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 60):

This form of power applies itself to the immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault *Subject and Power* 212).

Foucault thus problematises our accepted understanding of the ‘individual,’ and locates its definition and invention in the nineteenth century – he points out, for example, that “the Enlightenment which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines” (Foucault *Discipline* 222).

In contemporary western societies, then, the ideal self holds within it particular attributes and aptitudes, including self-determination, self-discipline, self-monitoring and self-improvement, and is actively involved in its own self-government. Government intervention programs in both the USA and Australia have tried to ‘empower’ indigenous people to understand themselves in this way (Valverde). Programmes of empowerment are examples of governmentality (Foucault *Governmentality*) – or rationalities of government – that seek to initiate and cultivate the capacities of the governed to govern themselves, in the pursuit of governmental plans and aspirations that require active, but calculable citizens. They act upon us, directly and indirectly, to challenge the challenged, animate the inanimate, and motivate the unmotivated. This is what Rose (*Governing, Powers*) calls a *technology of citizenship*, a strategy or technique for the transformation of subjectivity from powerlessness to active citizenship. This requires technical activities, including the provision of appropriate advice and motivational practices as a strategy of recruitment, or conversion, to a particular type of transformed subjectivity, involving the capacity to make (correct) choices and

understand oneself as a particular type of motivated being (Hazleden *Whose Fault*) This involves the provision of a new identity – in which one recognises or discovers one’s inherent abilities, and the necessity of taking control of one’s own future, actively making choices, setting goals and devising strategies to reach them, in order to become happy, healthy and fulfilled. As part of these processes, we are prevailed upon to scrutinise and monitor ourselves for our motivations, the implications and repercussions of our past, the consequences of our actions, the outcomes of our choices – it is these that constitute the ethical formations of our relations with others. Self-understanding is a crucial part of this ethico-politics – it is “the domain in which our personal lives and our public selves are fused” (Hazleden *Whose Fault* 46).

As previously mentioned, historically, these new western values were introduced to the USA and Australia at precisely the time that self-determination was taken from the indigenous people. And as Veyne (see also Rose *Psychological Complex*) has argued, governors and governed are not simple historical universals. Governed individuals may be seen by their governors variously as members of a flock to be led, as legal subjects with certain rights, as children to be corrected and educated, as part of a natural resource to be exploited or as living beings who are part of a biological population to be managed. The subjective self-identity of governed individuals in each of these cases will be different. The question of Indigenous representation therefore becomes vital.

One would expect to find this both reflected and (re)produced in fiction for children and young adults. Indeed, Bradford argues that her study of CYA literature set in pre-colonial and colonial times suggests that “representational and narrative habits and patterns privileging Western over Indigenous perspectives are more entrenched in this genre than in any other” (Bradford *Unsettling*, 119). It is not the purpose of this study to test this claim, but the texts will be examined for the valorisation of certain attributes, aptitudes and concepts of selfhood.

2. The noble savage and the physicality of the indigene

It is undoubtedly the case that the noble savage discourse—popularly though wrongly attributed to Rousseau (Symcox, Baudet, Friedman, Dickason, Ellingson)—was often intended to be positive. Representations of the noble savage have faced the

temptation to romanticise as well as the urge to condemn; hence, I argue that there is good reason for the present-day writer to portray the relationships between indigenous peoples and settlers in a balanced way and to avoid one-sided condemnation of the settlers. Because of the self-Other dialectic in the representation of indigenous people and settlers, such homogenisation of the settlers creates an authenticity, which effectively homogenises the indigenous peoples almost as emphatically as overt racism. This is not to suggest that any writer can step out of their episteme¹³ – rather, it is a call to make the attempt at nuanced representation, which should in any case make for more interesting and compelling art.

Ronald Sanders (93-4, 123-4), in his classic exploration of the origins of American racism, points out that Christopher Columbus (no less) represented the *indios*, though not the *cannibales*, as kind and deferential. The sixteenth/seventeenth century writer Richard Hakluyt (*Voyages and Discoveries*) who promoted English settlement in North America, cites various travellers, including Francis Drake, in describing the people of Batjan (present-day Bacan in Indonesia) as ‘comely in body and stature, and of a civil behaviour, just in dealing, and courteous to strangers’ (186), the ‘Indians’ of Virginia as ‘most gentle, loving and faithful, void of all guile and treason’ (274), and the indigenous people of Newfoundland as ‘harmless’. Even the more threatening cannibals were admired for their courage and strength (Robe 45), as was the warrior ethos, even, paradoxically, when it was represented as violent savagery (see Goldie 85-106). The Scottish Enlightenment thinker Adam Ferguson cited with approval a Native American’s words to the Governor of Canada, ‘I am a warrior, and not a merchant’ (92), juxtaposing the courage and loyalty of the traditional warrior ethos, with the individualism, weakness and absence of honour in commercial society. Ferguson associated this warrior ethos with the Scottish Highlands, where he grew up, but the post-Culloden pacification of the Highlands had made this a thing of the past. Elsewhere, the warrior ethos is linked to a certain conceptualisation of youth—not only is the warrior an archetypal young man, but he represents the lost youth of the older reader and the lost innocence of a jaded Western society.¹⁴

¹³ I use this term in its Foucauldian sense: ‘I would define the episteme retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within ... a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the “apparatus” which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific [or true].’ (Foucault, *Power*)

¹⁴ In CYA literature, however, because of the youth of the protagonists, the warrior ethos is associated with the idealism of youth, something to which the reader can still aspire.

The physicality and embodiment of the indigene is often emphasised in a way that the physicality of the European is not. The representation of indigenous embodiment includes themes of strength and muscularity at odds with the child-like nature of the indigenous mind. Homi Bhabha points to the stereotypes of the masculine Other, both desired and feared, at once savage and servant, “the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child”, of melting into the shadows, of walking so quietly that they could not be heard (118), but the most central theme has undoubtedly been that of blackness. In Western discourses, this has long had a literal as well as metaphorical meaning, and the distinction has not always been clear-cut.¹⁵

Pre-colonial European travellers in the Americas, Africa and India frequently focused on the skin colour, hair type, and partial or complete nakedness of the indigenous peoples (Jordan, Cole, Hakluyt, Sanders). Later, in his famous critique of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe observes a ‘fixation on blackness’, illustrated by a frequent use of the word ‘nigger,’ and in the sentence: “‘A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms ...’” as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms!’ While Achebe intended this as a criticism of Conrad’s personal racism, to which I shall return shortly, it is perhaps better viewed as an observation about the generalised Western fixation on blackness. This fixation provided a pre-existing category within which indigenous people could conveniently be placed. It is, therefore, no coincidence that, among others, Indigenous Australian and Inuit people were labelled as ‘blacks’.

The texts in this study will therefore be examined for visible blackness and invisible whiteness, physically in terms of skin and hair colour, but also in terms of description of animal-like bodies, sexuality and innocence, and the abilities and instincts of indigenous characters.

3. Invisible whiteness and credulous natives

¹⁵ This is a point Benjamin Zephaniah demonstrates in his poem ‘White Comedy’: / I waz whitemailed / By a white witch, / Wid white magic / An white lies, / Branded by a white sheep / I slaved as a whitesmith / Near a white spot / Where I suffered whitewater fever. / Whitelisted as a whiteleg / I waz in de white book / As a master of white art, / It waz like white death. / / People called me white jack / Some hailed me as a white wog, / So I joined de white watch / Trained as a white guard / Lived off the white economy. / Caught and beaten by de whiteshirts / I waz condemned to a white mass, / Don’t worry, / I shall be writing to de Black House. /

Another powerful objection to the authenticist notion that there is an objective truth about Aboriginality comes from the field of whiteness studies, and its central contention that whiteness has been treated as the norm, *uniquely* lacking any need for explanation (e.g. Roediger, Dyer, Frankenberg). Yet whiteness is complex. At the simplest level, it clearly does not denote skin colour—even children observe that ‘white’ skin is not really white. But which ethnic groups are included? Although, as Miles and Brown (153) observe, whiteness in late nineteenth century Australia was “a sign of superiority *and inclusion*” (added emphasis), whiteness in Australia has been and remains an Anglocentric concept, and its application to Southern Europeans, for example, was for some time highly contested (Pugliese, see also. Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 45).

What is sometimes neglected both in the field of whiteness studies and in discourses that treat whiteness as the invisible norm is that, once again, whiteness and blackness are constituted *vis-à-vis* each other:

Ascribing real or imagined biological characteristics with meaning to define the Other necessarily entails defining Self by the same criteria. When Greco-Roman and later Northern European explorers and merchants defined Africans as ‘black’, they were implicitly defining themselves at the opposite end of a dichotomy or continuum, that of skin colour. The African’s ‘blackness’ therefore reflected the European’s ‘whiteness’: these opposites were bound together, each giving meaning to the other in a totality of signification (Miles and Brown 101).

It is not only in a general sense that blackness and whiteness are constituted dialectically, but, more specifically, the conceptualisation of whiteness as the norm exists in a dialectical relationship with the objectification of other groups, be they ethnic minorities, immigrants, or indigenous groups (see Essed). It is because whiteness is understood as the norm in this way that anything other than whiteness is in need of explanation. And it is because such explanatory discourses occupy so much space in Western discourses—popular, literary, academic—that whiteness becomes gradually invisible.

Perhaps one of the strongest criticisms of Western literary representations of an indigenous Other is that made by Chinua Achebe in his famous critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which, he argues, 'better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need ... to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.'¹⁶

Achebe argues that:

Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness.... Which is partly the point. Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world.

However, whether or not Conrad was a racist is little more than a matter of historical trivia. What is more important is Achebe's point that the *reception* of Conrad tells us something about the racist ideology itself. Edward Said, whose postcolonial credentials are in no way inferior to Achebe's, agrees that Conrad was imprisoned within a Eurocentric mindset, and argues, furthermore, that there was no escape from that mindset. However, he defends Conrad, not just as a product of his time, but as having transcended its limitations more than most, of being—while far from perfect—actually ahead of his time:

¹⁶ One can, of course, argue that this statement totalises the West and creates an authenticism of precisely the type against which I argued in the previous section. Nonetheless the point remains that Africa had often featured as the foil to Europe in the European imagination at the time the novel was written.

Conrad's genius allowed him to realize that the ever-present darkness could be colonized or illuminated—*Heart of Darkness* is full of references to the *mission civilisatrice*, to benevolent as well as cruel schemes to bring light to the dark places and peoples of this world by acts of will and deployments of power - but that it also had to be acknowledged as independent. Kurtz and Marlow acknowledge the darkness, the former as he is dying, the latter as he reflects retrospectively on the meaning of Kurtz's final words. They (and of course Conrad) are ahead of their time in understanding that what they call "the darkness" has an autonomy of its own, and can reinvade and reclaim what imperialism had taken for its own (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 30).

In other words, like Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, Conrad understood that the critique of imperialism could not be advanced on the basis of a prelapsarian idyll having been destroyed. The motives behind imperialism were mixed, and, as in *Things Fall Apart*, the consequence was one of Western imperial powers intervening in a bad state of affairs, and making it worse. Mixed motives can never constitute a justification for imperialism, but they do highlight the need to avoid and critique essentialist representations of the colonisers as well as the indigenous people (because the one necessarily entails the other), and one of the easiest ways to fall into such an essentialist trap is to portray the colonisers as irredeemably and homogeneously bad. And imperialism is not the end of the story, even if most Europeans of Conrad's time would have found it impossible to conceive of an anti-imperialist struggle in terms other than putting the clock back.

Achebe certainly avoids this trap of essentialising the colonisers in his novels. It is more questionable if he avoids it in his critique of Conrad. Perhaps surprisingly, Achebe includes a criticism of Conrad's history, complaining that Conrad was 'notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history'. He dismisses the argument that this is fiction rather than history by claiming that this is 'a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question'.

Without making the same accusations of extreme racism, Inga Clendinnen (200) made some similar complaints about Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River*, especially the section where a white settler slaps an Aboriginal man three times. This scene was based on an historical event, but Grenville sets it 30 kilometres away and 25 years later,

the white settler having become William Thornhill, a fictional boatman, rather than Governor Arthur Phillip.

While this can be dismissed, with some justification, as the complaint of a professional historian about the comparative fame enjoyed by some novelists, Clendinnen also raises an interesting question about narrative voice:

Grenville reveals a contemporary delicacy of mind when she declares that she will not attempt to enter the minds of her Aboriginal characters, first because of political sensibility (*there has been enough appropriation already*) but also because *that's not a story I could tell. I do believe that you have to draw on what you know to write well, and I don't pretend to be able to empathise particularly with a tribal Aboriginal person from 200 years ago; that's beyond me*. Yet she acknowledges no such difficulty empathising with assorted Britishers from 200 years ago, stepping so confidently into their minds that she is ready to diagnose not only “double-think”, which might be inferred from incompatible statements and incoherent responses, but “paranoia” (Clendinnen 19)¹⁷.

In representing indigenous subjects in literature, the white writer is always faced with a ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’ dilemma. To attempt to speak from the indigenous point of view is *a priori* appropriation, but not to make such an attempt is to ignore the indigenous people and banish them to the background, which is the substance of Achebe’s criticism of Conrad.

This is a real dilemma; it is not just a right-wing complaint about alleged ‘reverse racism’. However, the *a priori* nature of the accusation of appropriation is highly problematic. Certainly, indigenous cultures and histories can be (mis)appropriated by white authors who write from an indigenous point of view. But instead of dismissing this as inevitable, and consequently ignoring indigenous actors altogether, it is perhaps better to identify the ways in which such appropriation takes place, and, by extension, can be avoided. One of the ways in which it takes place is when the Western reader is placed in the position of having superior knowledge of the indigenous subjects to that of the indigenous people themselves. This does sometimes occur, even in YA and children’s literature (as we shall see), and this is especially problematic because it

¹⁷ Italics represent quotations from a radio interview given by Grenville.

makes indigenous people appear to be inferior, and indigenous adults as inferior in knowledge to the child reader.

An illustrative example of these processes can be found in William Arens's book *The Man Eating-Myth*. This book is best known for its contention that there are no reliable first-hand accounts of cannibalism existing as a cultural norm, but that it has routinely been an accusation made of other nations and neighbouring tribes—a contention that has since been widely criticised and which is not the subject of my discussion here. However, Arens (12-13) also recounts first-hand observations of beliefs in Tanzania about European cannibalism. In the locale of his fieldwork, it was believed that African victims would have their blood drained, the blood being transported by a fire engine to an urban hospital where it was made into capsules, which Europeans needed to stay alive in Africa. Furthermore, this belief was supported by circumstantial evidence: the British had appealed for blood donations, and there was nearby a fire engine that had never been used to extinguish a fire. Arens concludes (13) that: 'Upon reflection, similar beliefs about Africans on our part no longer seemed so reasonable.'

However, as Miles and Brown point out:

[W]hen this is recounted to a European audience, it can be seen as illustrative of the backwardness and ignorance of the Africans, since cannibalism is not normally practiced in Europe. On the other hand, European travellers' tales of cannibalism in Africa, the Americas and the Pacific Islands are not seen as illustrative of European credulity, but, also, of 'native' backwardness - either they really were cannibals, or there was good reason, based on their backwardness, to believe that they were (21).

In his content analysis of a speech by Arthur Balfour in the House of Commons, Edward Said reflects the Foucauldian principle of power/knowledge—in explicit contrast to Bacon's dictum that knowledge is power, Foucault contends that power is knowledge—by explicating Balfour's argument as follows: 'England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows.' Here is presented another way in which the Western reader can know more about the colonised or indigenous Other than indigenous people know about themselves. Their very definition is a Western project, so it is the Western discourses that are true by definition, and indigenous self-knowledge is to be evaluated

according to its closeness (or otherwise) to those Western representations. And it goes without saying that ‘Their’ (non-Westerners’) observations about ‘Us’ (Westerners) are, at best, to be indulged as the perceptive humour of a court jester, and, at worst, as irrelevant.

As Bradford argues:

While European characters in these narratives always comprehend Aboriginal culture and society—there being, after all, very little to comprehend—Aboriginal characters are commonly presented as naïve, credulous and superstitious in their view of white people (Bradford *Reading* 33).

The indigenous Other can be portrayed, or seen, in a number of ways. It can simply be invented, as pre-colonial travellers from Pliny the Elder to Walter Raleigh must have done in arriving at their accounts of Anthropophagi (eaters of human flesh), Cynocephali (dog-headed humans), Sciopods (who had a single, very large foot), and Blemmyae (headless people with eyes and mouths on their chests) (Friedman 8-2), although such inventions could be interpreted as constituting an imaginative European alter ego, and they have provided rich material for fiction writers. Also, writing about such peoples provides no possibility of appropriation, except when they are geographically located and associated with real groups of people. The indigenous Other (or First Peoples) could also be interpreted in terms of pre-existing Western categories, such as the representation of Indigenous Australians as ‘blacks’, which we have already considered, or of native Americans as ‘Indians’. The indigenous Other could be rendered comprehensible, to some extent, through the first or second-hand accounts - including fictional accounts - of Europeans who have ‘gone native’, including Thomas Blackwood in *The Secret River*, and (albeit in a highly ambiguous way) Kurtz himself. This seems to be a better strategy, though there is the danger of silencing the real indigenous people and refracting their histories through the European who has ‘gone native’.

The novels in this study will be examined to see if they privilege settler knowledge over that of indigenous knowledge and ways in which they may position the

(assumed) non-indigenous child reader in a position of superior knowledge over the adult indigene.

4. The impact of invasion and consignment to history

Authenticist notions of indigeneity ignore the impact of invasion and colonisation, and minimise the physical, psychological and spiritual displacement that indigenous peoples have experienced. I observed above that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reflects a situation in which European imperial powers intervened in a bad situation and made it worse. They did not create all the problems faced by indigenous and colonised peoples across the globe. But invasion, colonisation and displacement certainly changed the indigenous peoples and cultures, and consequently it makes even less sense to represent a prelapsarian indigenous idyll than would have been the case without colonialism.

Dialogue sometimes renders indigenous people as archaic, in keeping with the representation of indigenous cultures as prehistoric or ahistorical. Achebe draws attention to this in Conrad. For example, he cites the phrase 'Mistah Kurtz—he dead' and states that 'the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts.' Once again, the function of the indigene is to reveal something of the Europeans' own prehistory. And, whether the indigene speaks in incomprehensible grunts, rudimentary speech (for example Tonto talk, such as 'have um time for pow pow,' 'big heap magic'¹⁸), 'dialects' (as opposed to the 'grander' phenomenon of language), or archaic English (the 'register of antiquity' as Stephens calls it), when indigenous expression is juxtaposed with a modern use of English it reinforces the binary of static indigenous culture versus dynamic European history.

The indigenes, being of the past, are thus unloosed from the land, giving rise to the assertion of terra nullius, "colonialism's most enabling fiction" (Findlay 43). The indigene has a relationship with the land so spiritual that it is understood to belong to "nobody in particular and everyone as a group, a trust rather than a possession" (Reimer

¹⁸ Examples can be found in numerous films (eg *The Lone Ranger* from which the expression 'Tonto talk' comes), newspapers (eg <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/tontotlk.htm>), comics (see Sheyahshe), and television series, (eg Futurama, <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/stype231.htm>).

115). In this process indigenous people are depoliticised, de-historicised, and located in a kind of “timeless primitivism” (Bradford *Reading* 58). More specifically, “New Age discourses ... valorise indigenous knowledges and, arguably, commodify them by inserting them into an essentialised and dehistoricised sacredness” capable of restoring the spirituality that modernity has purportedly stripped from us in the race for material gain” (Bradford *Reading* 149). So, while the novels might portray (or attempt to portray) indigenous spirituality in positive ways, there is ambivalence concerning the relationship between these old, ‘pure’, ‘authentic’ praxes and their ‘exploitation’ by radical, modern political indigenes – who by implication use their sacred connection to the land in inauthentic ways for inauthentically modern ends (such as the pursuit of land claims). In Marcia Langton’s words:

The racism of the conviction that blacks are morally and/or intellectually inferior defines the ‘common sense’ perception of blacks. However, reversal of these assumptions using a positive/negative cultural formula (eg blacks are superior or more compassionate) does not challenge racism. It may, in fact, corroborate racism (*Radio* p 41).

Bradford replaces Said’s words ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Orientalist’ with ‘Aboriginality’ and ‘the Aboriginalist’, thus: “There is an order to these [texts] by which the reader apprehends not only Aboriginality, but also the Aboriginalist, as interpreter, exhibitor, personality, mediator, representative (and representing) expert” (*Reading* 110). She goes on to say that in Australian children’s literature, “the dynamics of Aboriginalism, knowledge and power operate by positioning child readers to assent to the versions of Aboriginality proposed by knowledgeable and sympathetic experts, who speak about and for Aborigines” (*Reading* 110).

Another area in which Western discourses have contrasted indigenous and European peoples is in the representation of indigenous peoples as passive, and Europeans as active. However, this is a complex and nuanced area of analysis, and these complexities and nuances are not always recognised by scholars of postcolonialism. For example, writing about Gary Crew’s *Strange Objects*, Bradford argues that Aboriginal people are “represented within discourses of victimhood”: they are “powerless against ... feverish illness”, they have “no physical strength to defend themselves against a [violent] interloper”, and “can do no more than wait for death in the face of these

powers” (*Reading* 34). Certainly it is necessary to emphasise that indigenous cultures around the world were not destroyed by European colonisation, even when concerted efforts were made to do just that. However, I would argue that it is appropriate to ask why it has become unacceptable to say that they were victims. Again, this is linked with governmentality. Historically, colonised Indigenous peoples were subject to strategies designed to induce a sense of personal responsibility for their own lives at precisely the time that this was taken from them. Because the Western ideal self is self-determining, the word ‘victim’ has become a derogatory term, and it is (presumably) intended as a mark of respect by Bradford and others, to assert that Indigenous people were not mere victims. Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that indigenous peoples did “no more than wait for death,” asserting that someone has been made a victim (of a crime, a genocide, of land theft, etc.) is not the same as an accusation of passivity. Even it were, I would emphasise that it is Western culture that stresses and values agency (especially individual agency) over almost all else, and some traditional indigenous cultures did not and do not. The Moriori people of the Chatham Islands and the Taino of the Caribbean are commonly held to have been passive (and pacifist) in the face of their colonisation, and held to that value to the extent of extermination, rather than fight and ‘become like’ their colonisers. Therefore, whilst it would be wrong to suggest that Indigenous Australians and Native Americans merely allowed themselves to be pushed aside without a murmur, I argue that it would be equally wrong to suggest that they were not victims of random and systematised acts of genocide—that is, victimisation. European survivor discourses have emphasised agency and rationality, but even there the agency is sometimes limited depending on the extent of the threat to which they are exposed. So Bradford’s argument that Crew’s “insistence on the powerlessness of Aboriginal people ... clash[es] with the novel’s anti-colonial and postcolonial strategies, and demonstrates the pervasiveness and longevity of colonial meanings” (*Reading* 35) is overstated, and neglects the equally possible pervasiveness of colonial meanings in analyses that reject the attribution of victimhood.

Bradford cites three inconvenient facts that are commonly ignored in literature about indigenous people: Indigenous Australians survived banishment from their lands; Aboriginal cultures have shown themselves to be adaptive and transformative; and issues around the rights of Indigenous Australian people to their ancestral lands are of great contemporary significance (*Reading* 8). Yet as this study will show, the readers of some YA books might be forgiven for thinking that indigenous cultures effectively

disappeared at the time of colonisation. The archaism of their speech appears to imply that they belong to a past age.

For this and other reasons, one intriguing area in which such stereotypes and ambivalences are highly pronounced is that of scenes of ‘first contact’ between colonisers and the (soon to be) colonised—that is, scenes in which an indigenous character (or group) encounters pioneering settlers for the first time (but not necessarily the moment of first landfall by the settlers). This is where disparate cultures “meet, clash, and grapple with one another” (Pratt 4). It is in these encounters where first impressions of difference and similarity are often expressed most overtly, and where we find telling portrayals of action, passivity, interpretation and misinterpretation, and so on. We also find articulated the assumption that this was the moment at which the indigenous culture began to die.

Thomas King, writing in a North American context, argues that for these reasons it has become very difficult for indigenous writers to engage with their own history:

It would be reasonable to expect Native writers to want to revisit and reconstruct the literary and historical past, but ... with few exceptions contemporary Native writers have shown little interest in using the past as setting, preferring instead to place their fictions in the present.... What Native writers discovered, I believe, was that the North American past, the one that had been created in novels and histories, the one that had been part of every school curriculum for the last two hundred years, that past was unusable, for it had not only trapped Native people in a time warp, it had also insisted that our past was all we had (King 105-6).

That said, the nature of these representations has changed over time. Early Australian novels describe Aborigines as pagans, heathens or devil-worshippers, and nineteenth and early twentieth century treatments of the Aboriginal sacred are caught between ‘the dominant colonial position that Aborigines have no religious beliefs, and an uneasy awareness of the existence of indigenous spirituality’ (*Reading* 48). Within such discourses, the land often functions as a locus of colonial unease concerning Aboriginal spirituality, a cause of the ‘transformations of people or aspects of people’ (Hodge and Mishra 144, see also. Murray, Penn) that are embedded in representations

of the white settler who has ‘gone native’. This unease can be perceived in representations of the ‘numinous’ or ‘uncanny’ (Otto pp. 16-18, 23), a mysterious presence that is wholly Other to the sphere of the usual and intelligible. Bradford (*Reading* 49) and Trites (*Uncanny* 142) both suggest that the indigenous sacred is most commonly represented in children’s books when the children encounter what Otto calls this ‘numinous’ phenomenon.¹⁹

Bradford also points to the representation of (some) indigenous people as mystic or sage, existing ‘on a spiritual plane that makes real and tangible struggles such as those for land rights somehow irrelevant’ (*Reading* 35) because they have been rendered ahistorical, and that they are sometimes disembodied to the point at which they no longer have to eat or drink (*Reading* 58). Commonly, the acceptance of or encounters with the spiritual or the supernatural are seen as indicators of childhood or childishness, and the protagonist must subdue them or cease to experience them as part of the path into adulthood, that is “departures from [white] consensus reality are associated with the state of childhood itself” (*Reading* 54). This is in contrast to books dealing with similar themes by Aboriginal authors in which “to understand and accept the role of spirit figures in is to enter into the world of adults” (*Reading* 54). However, there is also a tendency among white writers, especially those whose writing is influenced by ‘New Age’ sensibilities, to represent indigenous spirituality as a ‘locus of desire’ (*Reading* 48) for that which has been lost in the modern West. Although this is probably intended as a positive portrayal, it has political consequences. Spirit—the wise, spiritual Aboriginal type—is often portrayed in universalised and decentred New Age language (“his inner being”, “vibrations” and so on), subsuming Indigenous conceptions of spirituality.

The texts in this study will therefore be examined for the ways in which the indigenous characters express themselves (for example, using everyday speech similar to that of the settlers, rudimentary or dialect speech, or archaic vocabulary and modes of expression). They will also be examined for representations of the indigenous characters as active or passive, and whether or not the circumstances in which they find themselves render them victims. Finally, I will also examine them for notions of spirituality and the numinous.

¹⁹ See Murray for a discussion of this phenomenon in the context of Patricia Wrightson’s *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973).

Before I begin the textual analysis, it is worth a quick summary of my key points this far. By seeking authenticist notions of indigeneity, literature (including literature for children and young adults) runs the risk of juxtaposing indigeneity with settler identity in artificial and fixed ways, gazing upon the indigene's body and credulous, superstitious mind, and treating these as the things to be explained, while confining themselves to an assumed objective representation and 'universal' ethical values (and story structures) of individualism, rationality and self-actualisation. It also risks minimising the impact of invasion and fixes the indigenous cultures at a point in the past, mourning their passing whilst ignoring (or denying) their continued existence.

I will now examine some of these themes in the form of a textual analysis of a selection of CYA books that deal with first contact.

Section B: Textual analysis

Having established the key points I wish to examine, I will now set out my methodology and theoretical approach, and the way in which this differs from established approaches.

The books I selected for analysis are set in North America and Australia, and all have scenes of 'First Contact' between settler and indigene in them – though this may be just the first contact between two individuals, and does not necessarily mean 'first footfall' by Europeans. The selected books, as mentioned earlier, are still in print at the time of writing, and widely available in bookshops and libraries. I aim to cover different age groups of the readers (from about 8 to about 16²⁰), a range of the authors' ethnicities²¹, different geographical areas, different eras, and different ethnicities of the narrator or protagonist. I cover a range of publication dates (from 1990 to 2007). I excluded earlier novels on the basis that debate and analysis of depictions of 'race' and colonialism have transformed novels dealing with these subjects to the extent that earlier novels need to be omitted for the sake of coherence²².

²⁰ See note 2 regarding reading ages above.

²¹ See note 4 above regarding author ethnicities.

²² For example, *Mathinna's People*, as mentioned above.

Another criterion for selection in this study was that I wanted to study books that had been popular (for example, *Apache* was a best-seller in the USA and Britain) or influential (for example, *Strange Objects* was included in school curricula in Australia), or from series commonly included in school libraries (for example, *Journey to Jamestown* is from the popular ‘My Side of the Story’ series, which frequently features in school libraries in the USA)²³. Some are written from the point of view of the indigenous characters, some from the point of view of the settlers, and some alternate the viewpoints.

The books selected are as follows:

The Arrow over the Door, by Joseph Bruchac (1998) is set in 1777 in New York. It is based on a true story and the author provides a lengthy Author’s Note outlining the historical facts as known. The story concerns a young European Quaker boy and an Algonquin Indian boy, and is told through their alternating viewpoints. It draws parallels between their positions of seeking peace whilst caught up in battles between the British and the Rebels, and also some groups of Native Americans. Bruchac claims Abanaki and European origins. (Reading age 9-11.²⁴)

Journey to Jamestown, by Lois Ruby (2005) is set in 1608 in Jamestown, Virginia. Again, there are two main characters, one Native American and one European, and the story is told in from each viewpoint. In this case, however, the two viewpoints do not alternate – instead the book is designed so that the reader reads first the story of Elias, and then turns the book over and upside down to read the story of Sacahocan. The main parallels in their two stories is that they are both medical apprentices. Ruby does not claim Native American heritage. (Reading age 9-12.)

Morning Girl by Michael Dorris (1992) is set in 1492 on a Bahamian island. Michael Dorris was an anthropologist who identified as Modoc (but see note 2, above). This story is also told with alternating viewpoints, but in this case the two voices are both indigenous—Morning Girl and her brother Star Boy. The plot concerns the

²³ Information concerning best-sellers and sales figures is often closely guarded as an industry secret, but *Apache* featured heavily at the time in promotions and six years after its release still figures in the top 150,000 of all Amazon sales. *Strange Objects* still features in study guides, such as the online 9English (<http://9english.ais.wikispaces.net/Novel+study+-+'Strange+Objects'+by+Gary+Crew>). Information on the ‘My Side of the Story’ series can be found at <http://us.macmillan.com/series/mySideoftheStory>

²⁴ Reading ages are estimated, using data from Amazon, Scholastic, the ALA, CBCA and my own judgment.

relationship between the two, and it is only at the very end of the book that the invaders arrive. (Reading age 8-12.)

Apache: Girl Warrior, by Tanya Landman (2007) is set on the Arizona-Mexico border “in the second half of the nineteenth century” (313). Some of the plot elements (such as a massacre) are based on real events, but the ‘Apache’ individuals and tribes are fictional. The story is written in the voice of a young ‘Apache’ girl who yearns to become a warrior rather than live out her traditional gender role. Tanya Landman does not claim Native American heritage. (Reading age 12-15.)

Eye of the Eagle, by Ron Bunney (1995) is set in Western Australia. The year is unspecified, but it is during the time of first incursions into the hinterland by Europeans. The story is told from the perspective of an Indigenous (probably Pilabara Intjibarndi) boy, who, with his brother, witnesses the massacre of his family group and subsequently tries to find a safe place to live. Ron Bunney did not claim Indigenous heritage. (Reading age 13-15.)

The Castles of Tuhbowgule: the story of Pemulwuy retold for children by Heidi Willmot (1992) is set in and around Sydney in about 1800, and written from the viewpoint of a young Indigenous (Eora) man. It is a retelling of the story of Pemulwuy, who resisted British settlement, and based on the bestselling book by the author’s father, Eric Willmot, who claims Indigenous heritage. Heidi Willmot was fourteen when she wrote *Castles*. (Reading age 9-12.)

Strange Objects, by Gary Crew (1990) is set in Western Australia, partly in 1629 and partly in 1986, though it is only the 1629 storyline that features in this analysis, and this is told in the voice of Wouter Loos, one of two exiled survivors from the infamous Batavia shipwreck. His voice is deliberately intended to express some of the more racist and mistaken views about Indigenous Australians that people of that era might have held, and other sections engage with these to challenge the Eurocentric assumptions he expresses. Gary Crew does not claim Indigenous heritage. (Reading age 11-16.)

Methodology

Rather than using the approach Bradford (*Unsettling* 7) criticises for simply being a string of textual citations, or using Bradford's own approach of systematically applying pre-selected key ideas and analytical strategies against the texts, the following analysis will take the form of a data-led, interpretive, semantically-based textual analysis.

Following from the four points I made in section A, I will examine the texts for the following:

Indigene/not-Indigene: analysis here will include concepts of selfhood, ways in which settler and indigene are juxtaposed such as use of the language of 'Us' and 'Them', giving rise to the self-other dichotomy, Otherness and static identity.

The noble savage and indigenous embodiment: analysis will focus on the concept of the indigene as a warrior, 'good' indigenes versus 'bad' settlers, emphasis on embodied (physical and social) difference such as blackness and nakedness, invisible whiteness, and the rampant but innocent sexuality of the indigene.

Problematising whiteness: analysis will concern the privileging of Western knowledge over that of the indigenous characters, and the positioning of the child reader as superior in knowledge to the adult or child indigenous characters, through material culture and indigenous credulity.

The impact of invasion and consignment to history of indigenous people: here I will focus on spirituality, the numinous indigene, the portrayal of victimhood (or lack thereof), valorisations of particular types of (adaptive and innovative) selves over others (which may be based on tradition), and the use of dialogue to position the indigene at a fixed point in history.

I will then use these findings to ask the following questions (after Parker 23-42). What kinds of objects and people are referred to in the text (eg indigene/settler, spiritual/rational, active/passive, etc)? What can the people identified say, what right have they to speak, in what ways and in what kinds of statements (eg the roles the indigenous characters play in scenes of first contact, the ways in which what they say and do springs from their indigeneity)? What kind of worldview is employed, and what points of overlap exist with other discourses (eg scientific/rationalist, nostalgic, New

Age)? What kinds of distinctions are made in the text (eg between indigenous characters and settlers)? How are these differences signified (eg skin colour, clothing, beliefs and interpretations of the situation, etc)?

The aim of this study is not to discover ‘truths’ about peoples, but simply to discover something about the way the identities of settler and indigene are presented. Therefore, finally, the findings will be interpreted through the following thematic framework (adapting Rose *Inventing* 22-40, *Governing* vi--vii):

Ontology: What kinds of people the texts assume indigenous characters and settlers to be—their presumed characteristics, habits and motivations. Ways in which these may differ between Native Americans and Indigenous Australians, and ways in which these are distinct (and distinguished) from settler identities.

Epistemology: How we are to recognise and come to know these “types.” Through what techniques this recognition might be brought about.

Ethical telos: The possible outcome of the encounter that is presented as being most desirable (if any). The kinds of selves (if any) presented as authentic or true. Whether the presented selves are in opposition to (presented notions of) “true” indigenous and settler identities (if any) or in congruence with them.

1. Juxtaposition of indigene/not-indigene, self/Other

One of the ways in which the identities of indigenous characters and settlers are juxtaposed is in a fairly literal use of the language of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. For example, let us consider the following sentences: “He [the white man] thinks nothing of our laws” (Bunney 24) or “Our law tell us that we must look after our places” (Bunney 30). Here, the word ‘our’ plays an important and somewhat distancing role. If the sentences simply read ‘He thinks nothing of the law,’ and ‘The law tells us we must...’, then the juxtaposition of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ would not be so marked—the law would simply be, ipso facto, a fact in and of itself. This tendency is also to be found in in Ruby, whose Native American narrator indicates, “Over there, the statues of *our* gods ... a wooden

carving of *our* god Okeus” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 44), whereas it seems likely that pre- or early-contact Native Americans would have thought of these as *the* gods. In Willmot, the omniscient narrative voice distances itself fairly explicitly from its subjects in the opening sentence: “A long, long time ago in old Australia, there lived a family of people who *believed* that they were created from the earth by a great spirit. They *believed* that sometimes this spirit turned into a rainbow” (Willmot 7*)²⁵.

This tendency to use Othering language is noticeable elsewhere. For example, Landman’s “Apache” narrator states that “the ways a horse may pass are not so many as those a lone Apache may choose” (Landman 68), and one wonders why ‘person’ or ‘walker’ would not have sufficed instead of ‘Apache’. Similarly she says “In but two moons more, winter would be upon us. Our people were without provisions” (Landman 27). Here the phrase ‘our people’ acts as an Othering phrase, when the word ‘we’ would not have. Landman is particularly prone to frequent use of Othering narrative phrases—for example, her Native American narrator Siki, who has had almost no contact with other cultures, often makes explanatory statements such as: “It is the Apache way” (Landman 18), “It is the custom of our people” (Landman 26), “as is our custom” (Landman 33), “it is the common custom of my people” (Landman 41), “It is the custom of our people” (Landman 60), “This is the way of the Apache” (Landman 106), “as is the custom of my people” (Landman 179), and “as is the Apache way” (Landman 258). Occasionally, this can be unintentionally amusing, as when Siki says, “To be shamed is bitter indeed to the Apache” (Landman 53), as if shame were something other ethnic groups welcomed. The same Othering use of ‘our people’ occurs, with less frequency, in Ruby—for example, at a funeral: “We’d danced then, too, *as is the way of our people*, because we knew that Cougar had gone to the land of the Spirits...” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 27*). When Sacahocan complains to her friend that her brother is about to be offered as a human sacrifice, the reply she receives is, ““Yes, that is the way of our people”” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 84). Thus, the indigenous characters are portrayed as Other, as well as having static and fixed ways of being.

2. The noble savage and the physicality of the indigene

* denotes added emphasis.

²⁵ This is also a misrepresentation of the cosmology.

The theme of indigenous men as warriors runs through some of the books in this study. The warrior ethos is linked to a certain conceptualisation of youth—for example, in *Journey to Jamestown* the term ‘warrior’ denotes all men of a certain age. So not only is the warrior an archetypal young man, but in literature for adults, he represents the lost youth of the older reader and the lost innocence of a jaded Western society. In CYA literature, however, the warrior ethos is associated with the idealism of youth, something to which the reader can still aspire. To reach the status of warrior is a mark of adulthood in both *Journey* and *Apache*, and to a lesser extent *Arrow*, in the latter of which a younger boy admires an older one because “the look in his eye was that of a man who has been in battle” (11), and the chapter that introduces these two boys is called Warriors (11). Crew’s (unreliable) narrator in *Strange Objects* associates the warrior with the young and virile indigene: “Apart from the two old men . . . there were three fine and handsome warriors with short black beards” (115). Landman seems to divide the “Apache” into women, children and warriors: “In the mornings the warriors went to trade in the town, leaving behind a small guide for the protection of the women and children” (12), and “When he was small he had no mother to embrace him, so all the women of the tribe cuddled him . . . as he grew bigger, he had no father to grapple and fight, so all the warriors wrestled him” (10). For Landman, although all men are warriors, it is nonetheless not the case that all warriors must be men, for it is possible for a young woman to gain that status: “my destiny was not among the women. I must follow the path of the warrior” (27). Elsewhere, failure to be a warrior is equated with a failure of personhood: Sacahocan’s brother has an intellectual disability, leading her to lament that, “My people are ashamed of Quangtarask, who will never be a warrior” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 9). The warrior-like nature of these characters occasionally borders on the barbaric, relishing and revelling in war, or even human sacrifice; Sacohan’s step-father, on learning that her brother is to be sacrificed, remarks, “Think of the honour this worthless bag of bones would bring to our family” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 47). *Apache* is largely about the battles between Siki’s nation and the Mexicans and Europeans—including large-scale battles involving all the local tribes, and smaller skirmishes in which “each family took their own revenge, as is the Apache way” (Landman 258). In *Jamestown*, it is remarked of a newly-built canoe that it will be small enough “for two warriors to sneak up on the Susquehannocks up north. It would be a pleasure to battle someone besides the foreigners” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 30), and we are reminded that “It is an honor to die in a noble war, of course, but no honor to drag wounded bodies home” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 73).

The Arrow Over the Door, in contrast, is based on a true story about two groups of people (Quaker and Algonquin) finding a common interest in peace. Initially, the European settlers express misgivings about the Native Americans: “Thirty killed and scalped, sixty poor souls taken away to be tortured and killed or, worse yet, made into Indians...” (Bruchac 7) and “the fearsome Mohawk do trouble me” (Bruchac 7), but the non-aggression of the Quakers towards the Algonquin convinces them to leave a broken arrow above the Quaker Meetinghouse, as a sign that the people within should not be attacked. (The book does not address the issue of ownership of the land on which the Meetinghouse is built.)

I turn now to the subject of the depiction of physical difference. In the books I studied, the colour of indigenous skin is often mentioned. Crew’s narrator, who is intended to represent some of the worst excesses of the colonial mindset, says “It was then that I first sighted the black Indians of this Southland ... black against the sky” (Crew 109). But in other books, their skin colour also seems to be of interest to indigenous characters themselves: “He saw the red of blood mixing with the black skin of his people and he knew fear” (Bunney 11) and “Their black skins were shiny with water” (Bunney 23). Sacahocan notices “The colour of my arms—tan as the inside of a yam after the air has dried it” (Ruby *Sacahocan* 31), and comments on the “golden limbs” of her kinsfolk (32).

The Arrow Over the Door tells the stories of two boys, one European and one Native American. The European boy is introduced first and without reference to his appearance, but the Native American’s looks are described immediately that he appears: “his long black hair, the brown colour of his skin, and the Algonquin features of his handsome face revealed the fact that he was an Indian” (Bruchac 11). It is not until long after we have met the European boy (on page 1) that he is described simply as “a broad shouldered farm boy dressed in a homespun shirt” (22) and later still that his fair hair and blue eyes are mentioned (53). The significance of this is perhaps seen more clearly if we reverse the roles, and imagine that what was written was something like this: “His short blond hair, the pink colour of his skin, and the Nordic features of his handsome face revealed the fact that he was a European” compared with the matter-of-fact description of the Native American thus: “a broad-shouldered hunter dressed in a leather tunic.”

Naked indigenous flesh is of particular interest, such as one who is described as being “naked as a cannonball” (Ruby, *Elias* 26) and is accompanied by other semi-naked people: “Their bare chests glistened, as though rubbed with fat” (Ruby, *Elias*, 31). For Crew’s narrator, their beards apparently did not indicate the sex of the Indigenous Australians, but “Their nakedness made it obvious they were males” (110); this nakedness is remarked on in dialogue: “‘They are Indians,’ he said, ‘and naked’” (110) and in description: “the two old men ... were completely naked” (115).

For some of the non-indigenous characters, the appearance of the indigenous people is horrible: Crew’s narrator finds the Indigenous Australians he meets “terrible to behold” (Crew 110), and the young boy Elias in *Jamestown* observes the chest of the Native Americans “sporting markings of snakes and horned deer amid painted swirls in red and black, as did their *fearsome* faces” (Ruby, *Elias*, 31*). However, more frequently the physicality of the indigene is seen as something to be admired, particularly the silence and grace of their comportment and gait, which is often compared to animal movement: “Father taught me how to swim on land, careful as a turtle” (Dorris 2), and “As smoothly as a mink slipping among the rocks, he vanished from sight” (Bruchac 12); or with other aspects of the natural world: “That big man had slipped in through the door of the cabin as quietly as a breath of wind crossing the meadow” (Bruchac 69), and “Two Indians came up behind us, silent as snow” (Ruby, *Elias* 22). They also might have the ability to make themselves invisible: “They blended with the foliage. Until they wanted to show themselves they would remain invisible” (Bunney 41), and “he melted into the rocks” (Willmot 43). Such motifs, eliding indigenous presence with landscape is common in settler literature (Reimer 5, Hulme 156).

This natural silent grace is sometimes overtly contrasted with the lack of such in settler physicality. In Bruchach, one Native American says to another, “‘I heard you coming for the last fifty paces. You walk like a wounded moose,’” to which he receives the reply “‘I have been practicing how to walk like a white man’” (Bruchac 14). Similarly, Landman’s “Apache” narrator Siki claims that “None can move with such silent stealth as the Apache” (Landman 208). When her tribe captures two European farmers, Siki notes, “They were soft and could walk neither so far nor so swiftly as even an Apache child” (Landman 265). However, these admirable abilities also hold a

potential threat to the non-indigene: one boy fears the potentially dire consequences thus: “Our soldiers were inexperienced and weighted down with breastplates, helmets and shields, while theirs were nimble, trained as warriors and silent besides” (Ruby *Elias* 34).

3. Invisible whiteness and credulous natives

As noted above, cannibalism is a long-held trope of Otherness in many cultures. Crew’s book specifically tries to engage in a dialogue with itself about European misconceptions of cannibalism. The narrator compares the Indigenous Australians with the indigenous ‘Indians’ of Brazil, claiming to have some knowledge of “the frightful rites and habits of these Indians. Some gathered white skins, seeking tattoos, others human skulls, while others wanted nothing more than to feast upon the flesh of the white man, which tasted sweet and was flavoured more highly than pork” (Crew 112). There is also a ‘cannibal pot’ that features in the plot. These misunderstandings are commented upon and corrected by experts in separate sections, and the cannibal-fearing narrator is shown to be unreliable. However, this is the only book of the seven I studied in which such amusing misunderstandings emanate from the non-indigenous side of the encounter. Far more common is the portrayal of indigenous people misunderstanding Europeans. The Indigenous Australians in Willmot, for example, point out that, “Some people said that the strangers from the sea [ie, the Europeans] ate Eora people” (16). The Native Americans who first encounter Europeans in Jamestown hold the following exchange: “‘Isn’t it odd that the English have no fields of corn and no nets and weirs in the water? I see no one in the forest hunting deer or otters or rabbits. What on earth do they eat?’ ‘Each other,’ Lightning says” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 15). Further misunderstandings and credulous questions include, “‘Do they hide nuts and berries in all that fur on their faces?’ ... ‘Where are their women? We’ve heard that the men birth their babies—is it true?’” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 25). This perhaps reaches its nadir in the scene from Willmot in which the Indigenous Australians apparently cannot tell a human being from a chicken: “They saw other things that were actually cows, chickens, pigs and goats. They tried to talk to all of these alien creatures, but they got no response other than a strange series of grunts. Finally they decided that these must be animal aliens, not human aliens like the others” (32).

Furthermore, the indigenous people are shown as being impressed and confounded by European goods: ““We know you prize this beautiful metal to form *trinkets* for your warriors so they may be favoured with victory in battle”” (Ruby *Elias* 33*). A man who was taken hostage apparently “only lived to tell the tale by confounding his captors with a compass. ... No Indian had ever seen such an astonishing gewgaw” (Ruby *Elias* 82). European bodies also confound indigenous understanding, such as the assumption that European settlers had had “their bodies painted white for death” (Dorris 38), or the European boy who has pale blue eyes which the Indigenous Australians “could not comprehend” (Crew 119). The first sight of white skin is sometimes the locus of a superstitious Indigenous horror, different from the European fear of dark skin outlined above, which is located in a rational (if perhaps unjustified) fear of violence. White skin is viewed superstitiously: “After some deep consideration, he concluded that the man must be either dying or maybe even dead. He observed with horror that the colour had been drained from his skin” (Willmot 22). The first sight of clothing is also an occasion for misunderstandings: “the strange thing was that he had these materials spread all over his body. He must be ill, thought Yenowee” (Willmot 22), and again this is sometimes due to superstition or credulity: the narrator in *Strange Objects* relates an occasion on which he heard, “An awful cry ... [because] from its topmost point ... the white stocking had caught the sea breeze and now swelled out full of wind. It was the appearance of this white and ghostly limb, apparently living but attached to no body, which had caused the commotion” (Crew 116-117). When he takes off his shirt, “They screamed in terror ... in removing my shirt I had quite miraculously skinned myself, without losing so much as a drop of blood or uttering a whimper of pain” (Crew 118).

The awe-inspiring strangeness of European material objects is often dwelt upon: “strange things like floating islands had come to the coast” (Willmot 15). When the concept of ships being powered by wind is explained, “He thought this very strange” (Willmot 16), and when they see such a ship, even after it has been explained to them, “the boys stood gaping at a huge sea thing ... ‘Not too bad, is it?’ he said, putting on a front. ‘But what is it?’” (Willmot 22). The experience of eating a meal with friendly settlers is described as, “very strange. They sat again on these things called chairs, around a big wooden block which the aliens called a table, and ate tough pieces of salty meat. They also ate a hard crusty substance, white on the inside with an even crustier case around it ... They ate this strange meal with heavy, shiny tools. Each person carved

their own meat, and then stabbed it, presumably to make sure it was really dead” (Willmot 27).

This raises the question of language. Because the books are written in English, it is the Indigenous characters who lack the words for what they see, and this places the young reader in a position of superiority over the adult indigenous characters. Bunney, for example, has his characters see horses as huge dogs, rather than their being able to comprehend a new type of animal: “Man-shaped beings, as white of face as departed spirits, were on the backs of huge dogs” (Bunney 10), and “The leader of the ghosts also spotted them. It wheeled its massive dog and pounded after them” (Bunney 11). Willmot mentions the learning of English names for things many times, as in the paragraph above and others such as when her characters learn about “huge animals called horses” (Willmot 30). Sometimes this is deliberately used for comic effect at the expense of the Indigenous characters; for example, when they visit “a simple structure consisting of two rooms ... ‘Is this a castle?’ Bungaree asked curiously. Flinders smiled” (Willmot 30).

Notwithstanding scenes in which humans are confused with chickens and cooked meat is stabbed to ensure it is dead, it is likely that misconceptions not unlike some others of these did happen during times of first contact²⁶, but it is probable that they occurred on both sides—ie, it is unlikely that the only faux pas and misunderstandings were from the Indigenous side, and yet, with the exception of Crew’s narrator’s fears of being eaten, such European misapprehensions are absent from these books. It also seems likely that settlers—especially the very early ones—would have had an interest in indigenous knowledge. In the books in this study, often the natives are impressed by the technology of the Europeans (eg the ships in *Castles*) or frightened of it (eg the stockings in *Strange Objects*) but there is no real mention of reciprocal interest from the settlers. Perhaps in part this is historically accurate and the settlers were not interested in indigenous technologies, but it is worth remembering that in both Australia and America, it was often just such technologies and skills that kept the first settlers alive. It therefore seems likely they would have had some interest in learning about them.

²⁶ In the documentary *Contact* (Dean and Butler), a Martu woman from Western Australia describes seeing a dust-covered vehicle in the desert, and thinking it was a rock that had come alive.

It also seems probable that Indigenous reactions to first contact would have included warmth and amusement²⁷ rather than consisting solely of horror, fear and superstition. In a delightful scene of first contact in *Morning Girl*, the young Native American laughs at the oddness of the newcomers. “The strangers had wrapped every part of their bodies with colourful leaves and cotton. Some had decorated their faces with fur and wore shiny rocks on their heads ... what a backward, distant island they must have come from” (Dorris 69). This novel goes on to use the gap between what the reader knows and what the indigenous character knows, not for comic effect at the expense of the indigenous characters, but instead for a poignant and moving scene portraying the humane hopes of a young girl. “I was sure that we would find ways to get along together ... by midday I was certain we would all be seated in a circle, eating steamed fish and giving each other presents. It would be a special day, a memorable day, a day full and new” (Dorris 71).

Related to the issue of the difference in knowledge between the indigenous characters and the young reader, is the issue of communication; specifically how the indigenous and settler peoples come to communicate with one another. Most of the books get around this by introducing a character who can act as translator—for example, in *Apache*, Siki’s father is living among Europeans and understands their language. Sacahocan’s father was European, and taught her some English, but she still struggles with some words—for example, she calls Elias “Ly-iss” (*passim*) and struggles several times to pronounce the word “Cor-o-na-shun” (eg Ruby, Sacahocan 54, 55, 57). Where the story does not permit a translator—for example, in *Eye of the Eagle*, which is about the very first incursions into an area—the author is left with the dilemma of there being no dialogue at all between the different groups, or providing dialogue that the reader can understand, but the Indigenous characters cannot: “Gudap heard its voice but could not understand the strange sounds. ‘Well done, men. That’s another lot of vermin done away with’” (Bunney 13).

4. Impact of invasion and consignment to history

²⁷ Clendinnen chose to name her historical account of contact between the First Fleet and the local Indigenous people *Dancing With Strangers*, as by contemporary accounts, the two groups danced together on the shore.

Numerous examples were given above of statements concerning living according to custom, or “the way of our people,” and little attempt is made in any of the books to demonstrate indigenous capacity for change and adaptation. Occasionally this borders on the ridiculous—in *Journey to Jamestown*, the European boy Elias, who is rather ineptly training to be a doctor, and who has never before seen a stingray, let alone treated the victim of a stingray attack, nonetheless surmises that very hot water will help ease the pain. The young Native American girl, whose specialist medical knowledge has been passed on to her, rather than won or deduced, is amazed by this discovery. “‘Very hot water? I never knew!’ she said, full of admiration” (Ruby, Elias, 74).

However, the most striking way in which the static nature of the indigenous peoples is conveyed is through archaic language or word order: “‘Cry not, Yudang’” (Bunney 14), and “‘They think not of death when they fight’” (Bunney 82). This is especially apparent in indigenous dialogue: “‘Sacahocan, this stew I turn and stir, daughter, see? Squash and corn and deer flesh swimming together...’” (Ruby, Sacahocan 5), and “‘Let’s escape from such cruel ghosts who will not let people have their rest’” (Dorris 4). Again, it is Landman who is particularly prone to this, with numerous sentences ordered archaically, such as “‘Certain was I that I could approach him’” (Landman 65), and “‘Black burned my hatred of our enemy’” (82), or archaic verb construction, such as “‘When I had drunk of the clear water’” (Landman 50) and “‘I lay upon the dusty ground that I might refresh my body with some little sleep’” (Landman 66). Occasionally the effect is quite odd, recalling antiquated Biblical language: “‘stone is a living thing with its own life, even as the wood of my bow and the sinew of its string’” (Landman 111).

Of the books in this study, it is in *The Castles of Tuhbowgule* and *Apache* that the indigenous culture is portrayed as beginning to die at the point of first contact and the indigenous people portrayed as beginning to disappear: Willmot has a seer proclaim that, “‘If we do not drive the British from Tuhbowgule, then we will sleep again in the land and the land will be empty of us. The British will inherit this empty land...’” (Willmot 69). Later, it becomes clear that the Indigenous people cannot drive the British away because “‘we have no one left to use the weapons. All our people are dead or dying’” (Willmot 77). Towards the end of *Apache*, the protagonist Siki realises she is expecting a child and ponders whether she should join her father with the Europeans, or return to the Apache tribe with whom she was raised, speculating that if she does return,

she and her child will be “as helpless and doomed as the rest of the tribe” (Landman 301). Like Willmot, Landman also has a seer towards the end of the novel proclaim the end of an entire people: the seer has a vision of the future in which white men take all the land, and “The Apache nation is no more” (Landman 301). In the final scene of the book, Siki’s father tells her that if she remains with the Apache, she has no future. ““You will die!”” he says, and she replies, ““...but I will die proud. I will die free”” (Landman 311).

Another way in which indigenous characters disappear as described by Bradford is the mystic or sage who becomes so disembodied that food and water are no longer required, as mentioned above. I found a single example of this in *Journey to Jamestown*, when the Native American protagonist Sacahocan fasts, for spiritual reasons: “I close my eyes and pray for the hour when I will not be clouded by the need for food and water. Then will my mind be open to hear the teachings of the Spirits ... Will I be able to leave my body and fly to the place the Spirits call me to?” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 40-41).

Willmot chooses language that distances the omniscient narrator from the traditional beliefs of the Indigenous people in the story, but at the same time chooses to emphasise their beliefs by opening the novel outlining them: “A long, long time ago in old Australia, there lived a family of people who believed that they were created from the earth by a great spirit. They believed that sometimes this spirit turned into a rainbow” (Willmot 7). She also positions the young reader as superior in knowledge to the Indigenous protagonists when she states, “These first Australian people believed that women could not have children when away from their own land” (Willmot 8).

In *Journey to Jamestown*, there are two separate stories, of a European boy and a Native American girl. The boy’s story does not mention religion, though as he is an English boy in 1608, Puritanism is likely to have been a formative influence on him and his contemporaries. The Native American girl’s story contains many references to religion and religious practices. She is a medicine woman and gives thanks to the Spirit in the healing plants “and to the Spirit within our hands that allows us to heal” (Ruby, *Sacahocan* 17-18). The opening scenes also provide a practical and pragmatic European tone juxtaposed with a dreamy and ethereal tone for the Native American. The British boy’s story opens with an action scene thus: ““Cut, lad!’ said Master Whitman. I felt the man’s skin yield to my knife. I shouldn’t have looked into his pleading eyes...” (Ruby,

Elias 5). In contrast, the Native American girl's story begins with a much more unwordly tone: "Little Brother's face is like the moon. It is round and sometimes glows, but often a dark shadow slides across it ... our mother names him Quangatarask, 'owl,' for his eyes are wide at night, watching everything" (Ruby, Sacahocan 5).

The contrast between these two opening scenes also draws attention to the ways in which the active, productive work of the settlers is commonly contrasted with the reactive, ethereal indigenous lifestyle. However, it is interesting to note that of three books that have female indigenous protagonists, two (*Apache* and *Jamestown*) provide a story arc in which the girl finds and pursues a solo career path (in the other, *Morning Girl*, the girl is a young child). In *Apache*, Siki rejects as inferior the traditional female role and instead trains as a warrior. In doing so she alienates some of her tribe and loses her best friend, but as she must in a *Bildungsroman*, she follows a path of self-determination and finds herself. In *Jamestown*, Sacahocan rejects the suits of two boys and their promises of a traditional married life, and instead leaves her family and her tribe to journey alone to pursue an apprenticeship with a (male) Dream Reader. There is then, perhaps, an ambivalence here towards the place of women in these traditional cultures – the male role is seen as more desirable and self-determining, and thus traditions must be broken for the heroine to pursue the path of self-actualisation²⁸.

In contrast to these two self-disciplined and self-determining Native American girls, the Indigenous Australians in *Strange Objects* are portrayed as chaotic²⁹: "Hardly had I removed the cover ... than a great noise went up from the tribe and I was surrounded by pressing bodies and enquiring hands ..." says the narrator, and he asks them to desist, "but this had no effect and indeed, some of the little ones, overcome with excitement ... Were jumping upon the goods with great delight" (Crew 135). These Indigenous Australians are very excitable, and their conversations are described as "excited talk" (eg 141, 169) or "excited tones" (Crew 137). He also refers to the "excitement of the Indians" (Crew 216), "the excitement which prevailed" (Crew 217), a "joyous whooping and calling" (Crew 137) and says the indigenous people behave with "complete abandon" (Crew 137). At one point he declares that their "pleasure was now ungovernable" (Crew 216). They danced in a "frenzy" (184) and "merely took,

²⁸ In any culture, feminism can be seen as either a liberating force from male oppression, or a dangerous break with tradition. In non-western countries, it can also be seen as an aspect of western cultural imperialism. (See for example, De Souza and Pascale.)

²⁹ This is true not only of the Indigenous Australians in the first contact section of the book that is part of this study, but also in the section set in 1986, in which the Indigenous character Charlie Sunrise is a very disorderly individual.

offering nothing in exchange” (Crew 139), reflecting “the pilfering habits of the Indians” (Crew 170). Even the ways in which they travel are undisciplined: they “proceeded to wander off in what appeared to be a most disorderly fashion” (Crew 213) and took “meandering pathways similar to tracks made by cattle in their seemingly aimless wandering among the fields at home” (Crew 213). It should be noted here that many of these incidents are explained by anthropologists and other experts in separate sections of the book, but nonetheless the vivid depiction of the behaviours of the indigenous Australians does reinforce a trope of Indigenous disorder.

This notion of self-discipline is an important one. Because in contemporary western culture self-determination and self-actualisation are seen as ‘healthy’ and ‘good,’ self-discipline becomes a vital component of a healthy self, and necessary to live the ‘good’ or ‘ethical’ life. It is our freedom and our obligation to determine our own lives through the choices we make and the actions we take. In order to achieve this individualised life path, the western self must be flexible, self-disciplined, and willing to take opportunities for personal ‘growth’ (Rose *Inventing*, Foucault *History of Sexuality*).

It is perhaps here that we find the heart of some of the most pronounced ambivalence in the books in this study. Siki and Sacahocan both choose to embrace personal fulfilment through making individual choices to maximise their self-actualisation at the expense of traditional gender roles (and it is interesting to note that these two characters are also the two whose indigeneity is not ascribed to blood, as Siki is born Mexican and adopted into the tribe, while Sacahocan’s father is British). The Indigenous Australians in *Eagle* have little opportunity for self-determination, as they are effectively chased from one place to another by murderous whites, and the two young boys can only react by running away and trying to survive – and thus they ‘fail’ at self-determination and modern western selfhood. In *Castles*, Pemulwuy’s attempts at self-determination for his people result in defeat and death. The Native Americans in *Arrow Over the Door* are depicted as surprisingly passive in several passing references to changes in their lifestyle brought about by colonisation, such as when the narrator mentions that “his people had followed the bidding of the priests and come to settle close to the church” (Bruchac 13). The chaotic and disorderly, superstitious indigenes of *Strange Objects* lack self-discipline and self-determination, at least in the eyes of the narrator Wouters.

Again, this is a genuine dilemma for an author: in order to make a story coherent (to a western reader), one is obliged to privilege western narrative habits, and to some extent, western habits and values. For there to be a satisfying individual character arc, the indigenous characters, like Sacahocan and Siki, must be rendered at least partly western in pursuing an individualised life path. Alternatively, one can depict the indigenous people as victims who can only react to the violence and injustice of colonialism, but because western stories value self-actualisation, self-determination, and personal growth, this leaves the characters appearing to be passive or disorderly, weak and archaic, tragically unfit for the invading modern world.

A sea of good intentions³⁰: conclusions to textual analysis

All the books in this study seem to have been written with a view to challenging colonial narratives to some extent. *Strange Objects*, with its multiple voices, tries to engage with colonial narratives concerning notions of the savage and imagined savage practices such as cannibalism, but it sometimes makes assertions (such as those concerning the chaotic and disorderly behaviour of the indigenous characters) that reproduces certain stereotypes and these go unchallenged by the moderating alternative points of view. *Eye of the Eagle* is a compelling account of white violence and the massacres of Indigenous Australians, and *Castles of Tuhbowgule* gives an account of the need for resistance to white settlement, but both place the reader in a position of superiority over the Indigenous characters with the way that they choose to portray Indigenous credulity and their perceptions of white material culture and technologies.

The Arrow Over the Door is dedicated to ‘all those who believe in peace’ and this drives the narrative of the book. The Native Americans are portrayed as silent, observant, brave, and animal-like in their grace, and in conscious contrast to the stereotypical Indian warrior, they seek only to live in harmony with those of the European settlers who also desire peace. However, the issue of land ownership is simply excised from the book; as mentioned previously, the Meetinghouse in which the European Quakers hold their meetings is built on Indian land³¹ and this is not mentioned.

³⁰ The title of this section is a nod towards the article of the same name by Thompson.

³¹ This may be partly attributed to the author’s contention that the Native American group involved in this true story were possibly Abanaki and therefore had no particular connection to the land on which the events took place.

Journey to Jamestown explicitly tries to point out that there are two sides to the colonial story (and the book is from a series called ‘My Side of the Story’), but nonetheless still manages to reproduce colonial stereotypes of Native American society and culture as being static and fixed, while the European culture is changing and adaptable. Like *Castles* and *Eagle*, it also places the reader in a position of superiority over the indigenous character by showing her struggling with English and being fascinated by European material culture.

Of all the books, it is probably *Morning Girl* that is least Othering. The young heroine is an ordinary girl who struggles with her relationship with her brother, and what she does and says does not seem to spring directly or solely from her indigeneity, her identity as Other, in the artificial way that it does in, for example, *Apache* for Siki. It is difficult to judge, however, to what extent *Morning Girl*’s story represents an accurate portrait of a Bahamian girl in 1492. Perhaps the story of sibling conflict and parental intervention is a timeless and universal one, or perhaps it is one that has most resonance to a Western reader. This is, of course, always a dilemma for an author writing about an era or culture that holds (or held) radically different values. In order for the story to make sense to its intended readers, it must take the recognisable Western shape of a story.

Apache, in contrast, marks its indigenous narrator as Other on every page. Landman certainly tries to evoke sympathy for the tribe, pointing out the injustices to which they were subjected, but she frequently reproduces some of the worst aspects of the ‘poetics of empire,’ especially when she portrays the culture as being archaic, and the tribe as being hopeless and doomed to die out.

At this point is worth returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this section. I asked the following. What kinds of objects and people are referred to in the text (eg indigene/settler, spiritual/rational, active/passive, etc)? What can the people identified say, what right have they to speak, in what ways and in what kinds of statements (eg the roles the indigenous characters play in scenes of first contact, the ways in which what they say and do springs from their indigeneity)? What kind of worldview is employed, and what points of overlap exist with other discourses (eg scientific/rationalist, nostalgic, New Age)? What kinds of distinctions are made in the

text (eg between indigenous characters and settlers)? How are these differences signified (eg skin colour, clothing, beliefs and interpretations of the situation, etc)?

I also suggested examining the texts for the following (adapting Rose *Inventing* 22-40, *Governing* vi--vii):

Ontology: What kinds of people the texts assume indigenous characters and settlers to be—their presumed characteristics, habits and motivations. Ways in which these may differ between Native Americans and Indigenous Australians, and ways in which these are distinct (and distinguished) from settler identities.

Epistemology: How we are to recognise and come to know these “types.” Through what techniques this recognition might be brought about.

Ethical telos: The possible outcome of the encounter that is presented as being most desirable (if any). The kinds of selves (if any) presented as authentic or true. Whether the presented selves are in opposition to (presented notions of) “true” indigenous and settler identities (if any) or in congruence with them.

The kinds of people emphasised in the texts are primarily indigene and settler, juxtaposed in fairly straightforward (if non-racialised) ways, although in *Apache* there is also the figure of the Mexican, as opposed to the British, and in *Arrow*, there are the British and the Rebels as well as at least three named Native American groups, allowing for a more complex version of events than a simple Us and Them dynamic. The indigene can be known and identified and distinguished from the settler by physical signifiers (especially skin colour), clothing (or lack thereof) and physical prowess or grace, which are singled out for attention in a way that European equivalents are not.

The material objects emphasised are all the ‘Strange Objects’ that the Europeans bring with them, by which the indigenes are in turn fascinated, impressed, or terrified. Little or no attention is paid to indigenous objects, unless used as a marker of ethnicity (for example, clothing). Indigenous Australians are, in this selection of books, portrayed as fearful and credulous, chaotic and reactive. The character of Native Americans is portrayed as placing more of an emphasis on family and a conscious desire to protect tradition, or in the case of the two girls Siki and Sacahocan, the possibility of self-

determination by breaking free of those traditions. Much of what the characters say springs from their indigeneity, from the archaic ways they express themselves to their wonderment at all things European, and to Siki's continual insistence emphasising that she is doing things the Apache way.

The emotions of pride (especially in the case of the Native Americans) and fear (especially in the case of Indigenous Australians) are motivating forces. Settlers may be portrayed as greedy or violent, intent on pursuing rational economic ends, and uninterested in the indigenous culture. Indigenous people, on the other hand, are portrayed as having a static culture that begins to die when it comes into contact with change.

The identity of being indigenous does not seem to depend on blood, though both girls whose biological indigeneity is called into question do find their loyalties split at least temporarily when they discover their blood is not wholly indigenous, and both in the end choose not to follow the traditional indigenous path laid out before them—the western feminist values of equality and self-determination outweighing more traditional ones. The desirable outcome, or ethical telos, of the books varies from that apparent in *Arrow*, and possibly *Morning Girl*, in which it appears to be a peaceful coexistence of the two peoples, the individualised (and western) journey of self-actualisation in *Jamestown* and *Apache*, the simple survival of the main characters as in *Eagle*, the removal of the settlers (although we know this will not happen) as implied in *Castles* and *Eagle*, and the settler understanding of Indigenous culture as in *Strange Objects*. In *Castles* and *Apache*, though, another interpretation could be that the ethical telos is for the indigenous people to disappear (to fight, lose and die out) in order for the land to be acquired by the newcomers.

Section C: Exegesis.

The creative project part of this thesis concerns a fictional indigenous culture living a traditional lifestyle. My characters are therefore not—and were never intended

to be—characters from a real indigenous group, and I took care to ensure that the country in which they live is depicted with topography, geography, biology and botany that could not be confused with those of a real country. Nonetheless, I feel a certain responsibility to avoid clichés and stereotypes such as those outlined above—for artistic reasons as well as for ethical ones. As originally conceived, the story could be more conventionally described as speculative fiction, as it was set in an alternative universe, but in the process of writing, it changed towards something that is more realist in tone and aspect. As this process occurred, of moving from a fantasy world to one that is more true-to-life, and because this novel deals with colonisation, it became clear to me that it was important I should make attempts to avoid reinforcing or maintaining any of the common stereotypes of indigenous peoples that have pervaded children’s literature for 150 years (Bradford *Reading*).

The following discussion of some of the ways in which I have attempted to achieve a thoughtful piece of writing follows the same four-part structure as the previous two sections, ie: juxtaposition of settler/indigene; noble savage and physicality of the indigene; invisible whiteness; and the impact of invasion on, and consignment to history of, indigenous culture.

1. Juxtaposition of indigene/settler, self/other

In writing *Disenchantment*, I have tried to portray a diversity of viewpoints and personalities among the settlers. There is a need for the writer to portray the relationships between indigenous peoples and settlers in a balanced way and to avoid one-sided condemnation of the settlers. Because of the Self-Other dialectic in the representation of indigenous people and settlers, such homogenisation of the settlers creates an artificial authenticity, which also homogenises the indigenous people.

As mentioned above, Marcia Langton observes that Aboriginality ‘is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation’ (33-34). Indigeneity is constructed dialogically and dialectically—there is a dialectic of Self and Other, in which Self (or Us) is constituted as not-Other or not-Them) and Other (Them) is constituted as not-Self or not-Us), and imperialist discourse idealises and valorises the Other according to its own need for reflection (Spivak 253). This means that juxtaposing the universally ‘bad’ settler against the universally ‘good’ indigene simply dehumanises both, and in

particular renders the indigene a thing of Western imagination and critique, turning indigenous characters into a mouthpiece of political or moral critique (environmental, anti-consumerist, and so on).

I have therefore included scenes in which some settlers are kind (Mrs Mason, who offers Neka lessons in English and etiquette on the ship that takes them to London), and offer friendship (Madeleine Henderson in particular is intended to be a sympathetic, if misguided, figure) or are at least prepared to behave humanely (Mrs Wilkinson, who swaps a precious joint of meat for a basket of a food that is unfamiliar to her). Other settlers are violent (especially Hector Henderson), casually cruel (the men in the public house who give liquor to a dispossessed indigenous man in order to see him get drunk), or want to rid themselves of the ‘native problem’ but do not think through the true meaning of this until it is too late (Mr Wilkinson, who pays the doctor to take care of Elu, but later guides a group of murderers to an indigenous festival). The fate of Madeleine Henderson, perhaps the most sympathetic of the settler characters, is intended to portray the fact that it was not only the violent and cruel settlers who were killed. Her circumstances, unhappily married off, and living in a colony that does not suit or want her, are meant to convey that not all colonists were greedy, grasping, drunken, violent thugs, and that some (and perhaps most) were there simply because circumstances had led them there. In all the above I am aiming for a nuanced complexity that belies a lazy homogenisation of either group.

I also wanted to avoid scenes in which my indigenous characters are overly impressed with western consumerist goods and technologies, and to avoid the impression that Elu and Neka aspire to ‘become like’ the settlers. It is important to consider the flipside of the relationship in which ‘We’ (the Europeans) have something that ‘They’ (the non-Europeans) aspire to, while ‘They’ have something that ‘We’ yearn for (as discussed in section A above). Elu decides, as part of a well thought-out strategy, to attach herself to George, not because she wants to become like him, but because it seems the only practical opportunity that she has to wield any sort of power, and she believes that she might even manage to retain some land through this association.

Neka and Elu are not envious of western culture and do not aspire to western lifestyles. However, it is not my intention either to set them up as some sort of indigenous puritans who are above (or beyond) the material temptations of the western

world. When I was carrying out some initial research for the book, one of the most striking scenes I read from a non-fiction book was one in a book called *Professional Savages* (Poignant) in which two Indigenous Australians are in London, and acquire with their wages various modest material possessions. Thus, Neka and Elu enjoy London, at least to some extent, and are partly (though in Neka's case rather ambivalently) seduced by some of the temptations of consumerism:

[O]f course, Elu and I were not immune. We built up a stash of possessions. We already had clothes, but we were given many more by well-meaning donors. Some of them were even still in fashion. And there were many other things within the reach of the generous pocket money that Mr Addlington gave us. Ivory buttons, half yard cuts from bolts of bright silk, pale spools of ribbon, jet earrings and jade pendants, even musical instruments – I bought a banjo, and Elu acquired an accordion. We spent an afternoon making a terrible din with them in the Masons' parlour, and then set them aside. We bought sheaves of thick creamy foolscap paper, even though we could not write, a hard bristle shoe brush in the shape of a creature called a hedgehog, a porcelain tea set, a venetian glass vase for a parlour that we did not have, and an ivory and rosewood chess set that we did not know how to use. Unnecessary, wanton, irresistible things.

Further, I tried to avoid Self-Othering phrases by using a tighter viewpoint than that employed in, for example, *Apache*. Although the latter is written from the apparent point of view of a young 'Apache' girl, she nonetheless appears to be speaking to someone who has little knowledge of the culture – hence using the explanatory (or defiant, or sometimes apologetic) phrase 'it is the way of my people' and variations thereof. In my novel, the protagonist Neka is speaking to a specific person, who lives on the island of New Devon and who has some familiarity with the indigenous people. At one point in the novel, as Neka and Elu are in the newly-built town for the first time, Elu asks Neka to translate a question for her to George Addlington:

She told me to ask him where the people were.

He looked surprised. 'All about you!' he said, and looked at her, his eyebrows raised.

'She means the other people. The people who were here before.'

‘Ah,’ he said. ‘Well, they were. They had to be... It was unfortunate. There were misunderstandings. If I could do it all again...’ He stared down the hill over the sea.

Here I deliberately used the phrase “the people” rather than “my people,” for two reasons. First, the people from that area are not Elu and Neka’s people, as there are different traditional clans living on the island, which I created in order to show a diversity of indigenous peoples within the one geographic area and to avoid simplistic monolithic and homogenising notions of the indigenous people of the island as has commonly occurred with representations of “Indians” (as not-Cowboys). Second, the phrase is meant to convey that to Neka, the people who are absent are simply *the* people who should be there—that is to say, the people who rightly belong in that place.

2. The noble savage, and the physicality of the indigene

When writing *Disenchantment* I wanted to portray a convincing traditional society that could not be construed as a ‘lower form of civilisation’ (Kociumbas 254) by the reader, but also to demonstrate some of the colonial mindset that made such societies seem so, to nineteenth century Europeans. In order to do this I compressed into a few short years the ways in which discourses about indigenous people changed from the eighteenth century to the turn of the twentieth. Portrayals of the wicked, ugly and animalistic savages were some of the earliest representations, and persisted into the twentieth century, at least in children’s literature, if not in academic treatises (Collins-Gearing 35). The ‘noble savage’ was at least in part intended as a rebuttal of these portrayals, and traces of this still exist (Stephens) and include simple, strongly-held morals that align with western values – honour, self-respect, self-determination, and self-discipline. This romantic view of the noble savage led to a number of tropes that fetishised indigenous people, especially any who might be termed the ‘last’ of their people (see Goldie 148-169) and the discourse of the doomed and tragic indigenous figure was in turn in dialogue with the later view that there existed a racial ‘ladder of

evolution’ and that the ‘lower races’ were evolutionary dead-ends, destined to die out in order to benefit the species as a whole³².

Contemporary CYA novels do not espouse an evolutionary ‘ladder of the races’ ideology, but as we saw above, traces of the ‘noble savage’ trope remain. In *Disenchantment*, I wanted to convey something of the mistaken fetishisation of indigenous peoples that existed among the romantic thinkers of the era. The pre-contact version of the island is no more idyllic than any other human society—there are squabbles, and sometimes skirmishes, Neka is socially isolated, Patlia abuses her position of power, Korab threatens to marry Neka (by implication against her will) just so that he can beat her with impunity, and Elu is not given the choice of refusing to become the new Healer. Perhaps most pertinent, though, is Neka’s love for, and attraction to, Elu—an attraction that is not acceptable in her society (or indeed in the London of the novel). These facts are established early on, and contrasted later with George Addlington and the poet John Barratt’s idealisation of the native culture:

‘They lived in perfect harmony with nature.’

I wondered if I was the only one who noticed his use of the past tense.

‘You see, Princess Elu,’ he continued, ‘Your people lived in harmony with the natural world, whereas mine ...’ with one flourish of his hand, he dismissed the other guests, the clutter of the room, the embroidered screens set back against the wall, the sideboards, tables, and ornaments. He gazed at Elu in an ecstasy of pity.

Mr Addlington cleared his throat.

‘Mr Barratt would have us all living in caves!’ said a pretty young woman. She flashed the poet an affectionate glance, and blushed.

John Barratt was oblivious. ‘They knew no war, no poverty, no hunger,’ he said. ‘Think of it!’

And later:

³² For example, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines (An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races)* (1853–1855) by [Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau](#) and *Races of Man and Their Geographical Distribution* (1848) by Charles Pickering.

‘In fact they are very far from being savages,’ said Mr Addlington. ‘They know nothing of the urge that it pleases us to call primitive in which one man settles his argument with another by taking up arms.’

‘How marvellous,’ said Mrs Wickham. ‘They know nothing of war?’

‘Indeed, they lived in pure innocence,’ said Mr Addlington.

‘Oh! Like Adam and Eve,’ said a young blonde woman.

In the same scene, Neka reflects that:

[T]he way of life he was trying to help us save bore no resemblance to the lives we actually lived. We shared everything, and rarely ate meat, he said. We knew nothing of farming and little of warfare. We never felt envy or pride or shame. We gave our possessions and assets freely to those other tribes that needed them, and were not contaminated with the notion of trade.

In contrast to this prelapsarian vision, in the dénouement of this scene, Elu loses the goodwill of the Londoners when she is asked at the dining table what is her most important medicine, and she replies in unknowingly coarse language that the most important medicine is one that stops fatal diarrhoea.

In *Disenchantment* discourses invoking the prelapsarian trope of the noble savage and those invoking evolutionary inferiority exist contemporaneously in the mouths of different characters and in one newspaper article. Although these discourses were dominant at different points of history, this is nonetheless not an entirely improbable scenario, for discourses are always in dialogue with one another and never independent of one another—which is to say, they are rhizomatic, as Deleuze and Guattari (1998) have said. Patterns of knowledge, they argue, should not be seen as resembling a tree, with a unidirectional pattern of growth from roots through an approximately straight trunk and then up to the branches and leaves, but as being like a rhizome – resembling a jumbled collection of roots with no pattern to their growth, starting in local centres, appearing and disappearing in unlikely places, forming erratic networks and shapes, growing into each other and connecting and separating out again in unpredictable and irregular ways.

Whilst a discourse may be systematic and regulated, its rules will include those of combination with other discourses, or that acknowledge other discourses by establishing difference from them. An example of this would be the ways in which colonial discourses used religious discourses in an appeal to legitimacy, at the same time as entering religious discourse itself and perhaps fundamentally changing some of the tenets therein—for example, the idea that God made different families of human with different abilities in what is known as the polygenesis view of human origins (a view held by, among others, Voltaire and Hume, but especially associated with the work of Robert Knox). Thus, “the systematic character of a discourse includes its systematic articulation with other discourses ... every discourse [is] the result of a practice of production which is at once material, discursive and complex, always inscribed in relation to other practices of production of discourse” (Henriques et al 105-6). Each discourse is therefore part of a wider discursive complex, and is contained within an intricate web of contingent practices.

Today, discourses around indigenous people in America and Australia can be distinguished between the conception of the historical, ‘genuine’ indigene, who stands as a counter to the materialist west and especially to environmental degradation, or the contemporary ‘inauthentic’ indigene who may be political, demanding land rights (Langton), or simply a problem (of self-discipline, of housing, of employment, of alcoholism) that needs to be managed (Valverde).

In *Disenchantment* I have sought to avoid the stereotype of the undifferentiated noble savage ‘type’ by giving my indigenous characters different personalities—the vibrant and warm Elu and the timid and soft-hearted Neka, the violent and bitter Korab who threatens physical harm to Neka, the businesslike Healer Patlia, the kind stable boy Ebnal, and the deceitful Janto, who tricks Neka into risking everything so he can escape, among others. My main characters express some disgust at the environmental degradation that accompanies colonisation, but that is not the *raison d’être* of the characters and the issue is not dwelt upon. In terms of the ‘problematic’ indigene, there is one character in my book who goes from being a young boastful and slightly overbearing man, to being a drunk on the streets begging for pennies, and although his story is not followed, my hope is that the reader will be able to surmise for themselves

how this happened to him. One of my main European characters, George Addlington the Administrator, also ends up unemployed and drunk on the streets of New Exeter.

As noted above, the physicality and embodiment of the indigene is often emphasised in a way that the physicality of the European is not. The representation of indigenous embodiment includes themes of strength, sexuality and muscularity at odds with the child-like nature of the indigenous mind. Pre-colonial European travellers in the Americas, Africa and India frequently focused on the skin colour, hair type, and partial or complete nakedness of the indigenous peoples (Jordan, Cole, Hakluyt, Sanders). Although my indigenous characters, living in a warm climate, are largely unclothed, I have attempted to convey this in a matter-of-fact way, and to make the non-Indigenous characters' reactions to nudity seem peculiar and perhaps even prurient. When the shipwrecked cavefish man cannot meet Elu's eye, it is his attitude that seems odd:

She smiled. 'Ask him why he doesn't look at me.'

I asked him.

'She has no clothes,' he said, grabbing a pinch of the rags that wrapped his waist and legs to show me what he meant.

'I no clothes,' I said³³.

'Yes, but you very ugly,' he said.

Later, a photograph appears in London of Elu as she appeared before she started wearing western clothes:

[Addlington] looked at the photograph, his thumb stroking one corner. 'I was forgetting how things are here. I have been away so long. King George's Island before New Devon. I had become accustomed to seeing natives as God intended them to be.' He looked up at me, in misery. 'But of course when I arrived here, I realised we couldn't possibly use this image. I had forgotten. But the photographer, Mr Burrows,' he spat the name, 'had apparently not forgotten how things are here, and he decided, like a good Englishman, to make some extra money from his endeavours ... There are dozens of copies of this image, Neka. Perhaps hundreds.

³³ This exchange takes place very early on in Neka's learning of English.

They are all over London, being sold to filthy-minded gentlemen and grubby schoolboys at a penny a piece...'

Again here it is my intention to demonstrate that to Neka and Elu, and even to a European who has spent time in other cultures, nakedness is not the same as a display of sexuality.

In the course of describing the physical attributes of my characters, I tried to avoid the clichés of animal-like grace among the indigenous people and clumsiness among the Europeans. Elu, as an individual, is described as graceful, but no comparison is made between the indigenous gait and that of the newcomers. Considerations of skin and eye colour could not be simply omitted in the same way, however. I have deliberately left the geographical setting of New Devon vague (and indeed have 'steampunked' the geography so that it cannot be a real place) in order to avoid questions of the 'race' or ethnicity of the indigenous characters. I do not describe the shade of their skin anywhere, though it is mentioned in passing that it is lighter than that of some Africans and darker than that of the Europeans. The European character George Addlington shows a certain sensibility to the issue of skin colour in the nineteenth century:

We saw ladies dressed in wide glossy skirts and fitted buttoned jackets, attended by servants who carried parcels and held parasols aloft 'To protect their mistresses' complexions,' said Mr Addlington. 'To stop their skin from turning, um... And this is the haberdashery!'

However, the skin colour of interest to my narrator is the unusually pale skin of the first European she sees, which leads to his being nicknamed the cavefish man:

His flesh had the same pale translucence of the blind fish that swam deep in the waters of the dripping-rock caves to the west. ... He smelled fishy too, and sour, like strips of silvershark left too long in the sun.

3. Invisible whiteness and the credulous native

Above, I outlined Bradford's argument that, 'While European characters in these narratives always comprehend Aboriginal culture and society ... Aboriginal characters are commonly presented as naïve, credulous and superstitious in their view of white people' (Bradford *Reading* 33). Thus one of the most striking ways in which appropriation takes place is when the Western reader is placed in the position of having superior knowledge to that of the indigenous people. This is especially problematic in literature for children, because it renders indigenous adults as inferior in knowledge to the child reader.

My characters are perhaps underwhelmed to an unrealistic extent by the new creatures, technologies and material objects that the settlers bring to the island. I originally wrote a scene in which the people of Neka's clan discover a metal axe left behind by a settler, and ponder over it, and a scene in which they see farm animals for the first time—but however many times I reworked the pieces, they always resulted in cliché, and I could not find a way to convey the scenes without placing the reader in a position of superiority over the indigenous characters.

Similarly, Neka (who does have an aptitude for language) learns English at an unrealistically fast pace. This is to avoid situations like those I discuss in the section above where the reader understands dialogue that the narrator does not (which in any case results in a problem of logic and believability, when the narrator is the protagonist), and also to avoid the rather tedious constructs of 'the big square thing called a table' and so on, which again place the reader in a superior position, or make the indigenous person the butt of a joke. Although both Neka and Elu occasionally speak poor English, it is George Addlington's attempts at speaking the native language that produce the most humour:

[Mr Addlington] held a finger up for our attention, took a breath and surprised us by speaking words in our language. 'Welcome, yellow lizard. I suck your tongue a few words only.'

Elu sputtered. 'Who's he calling a lizard?' she said. 'He's the one who keeps licking his lips!'

'I think he's nervous,' I said.

Mrs Wilkinson was looking at me. 'What did she say, dear?'

‘She says she is honoured to meet Mr Addlington.’

‘No way is he going to be sucking my tongue,’ said Elu, still laughing.

‘He’s so thin. He might try to eat it.’

Because it looms so large in popular imagination, I also wanted to include a scene in which a European wrongly attributes cannibalistic customs to the indigenous people of the island. As it is written from an indigenous character’s point of view, the humour in the situation can be played out without falling into the trap of the European’s fears seeming normal or reasonable. The indigenous characters simply find the misunderstanding amusing, and have no reason to suppose there would be any consequences to it. His fears do, however, need to be plausible, so my European character, who is stranded among the indigenous people who have saved his life, is at one point tied up for his own safety, and escapes:

Huffma See woke up, and kicked out at them both. He broke free of his bonds and cracked their faces with his fists, running off down the beach in screaming zig-zags.

‘Why did he do that?’ asked one of the children, who had been watching.

Yaro looked down at the rope. ‘Perhaps it’s a shame the only rope we thought to bring with us was the one we use to carry a beast to the cooking fire.’

The children roared with laughter, and all that day, as they travelled back towards the lands of their own clans, they ran around pretending to kill and eat each other.

Later, this character uses his version of events to promulgate a new way of thinking about the indigenous people of New Devon, as being a lower race, more or less beyond redemption. In the scenes in London, a rather gauche dinner guest teases Elu about being a cannibal, much to the embarrassment of the other diners present.

4. The impact of invasion and consignment to history

As noted above, authenticist notions of indigeneity ignore the impact of invasion and colonisation, and minimise the physical, psychological and spiritual displacement that indigenous peoples have experienced. Invasion, colonisation and displacement changed indigenous peoples and cultures, and it is therefore nonsensical to represent a prelapsarian indigenous idyll than would have been the case without colonialism. And yet, as we observed above, dialogue ascribed to indigenous characters sometimes renders them as archaic, in keeping with the representation of indigenous cultures as prehistoric or ahistorical. This archaic English, or the ‘register of antiquity’ (Stephens) is juxtaposed with the non-indigenous characters’ modern use of English, and thus reinforces the binary of static indigenous culture versus dynamic European history. The indigenes are thus located in a kind of “timeless primitivism” (Bradford *Reading* 58).

In editing early drafts of *Disenchantment*, I did sometimes find, in scenes involving indigenous characters’ dialogue, that I had slipped into what might be construed as archaic dialogue (though I suspect this this was as much due to my difficulties in writing believable dialogue as any unconscious ‘poetics of empire’). I edited the dialogue many times before it seemed reasonably natural and contemporary. In historical novels there is always the dilemma of deciding to what extent one should use archaic phrases and obsolete words, but in this case I decided to use contemporary dialogue to avoid reinforcing the trope of archaism.

In a further effort to convey the indigenous culture as varied, adaptive and flexible rather than monolithic, static and fixed, I wrote scenes in which Neka and Elu discuss tactics and try different strategies with the settlers. They attempt trade, they attempt reason, and they attempt a propaganda campaign to win the hearts and minds of influential Londoners. Other indigenous characters declare war, negotiate, work for the settlers as servants, or become dispossessed, isolated and homeless. Most just try to survive in whatever way they can. Some of the young men of Neka’s clan use early disruptions caused by the settlers to try to gain a better position for themselves in their clan, by challenging the established power relations, defying the elders and accepting gifts of blankets.

The issue of land ownership—commonly excised from CYA literature (Bradford, *Unsettling*)—is central to my plot and is one of the two primary motivations of my indigenous characters (the other being love). The plot is driven by the stealing of their

land and their various attempts to regain it, or at least part of it. The climax of the story revolves around who wins this battle, how the battle is won, and at what cost. Land ownership then, is central to the plot, but I have not made Neka and Elu into anachronistic ecowarriors. The point for them is that their land has been taken, and not what is being done with it. They do observe with distaste the pollution and desecration of the land that colonisation has brought with it, but it is not this, but ownership, and the livelihood the land provides the people, that is their motivation.

As discussed above, spirituality is another area commonly presented in problematic ways in CYA books concerning indigenous characters. In the early stages of writing *Disenchantment*, when the setting was just starting to change from one in a purely speculative fiction alternative universe to a more realistic nineteenth century, I found myself obliged to rethink the issue of the spiritual beliefs of my characters. Initially, because my story is one about loss—of land, kin, way of life and self—I had intended to leave my main character in a state of absolute dispossession, including the loss of her spiritual beliefs, hence the title, *Disenchantment* (cf Weber 152). This is still a theme in the book, as George Addlington tries to convince Elu and Neka of the rational-scientific western worldview, and on the ship to London, Neka finds herself increasingly distant from her homeland:

It was there, on the deck, listening to the men playing music below, that I understood what Mr Addlington had meant about the Company thinking our island small and far away. It seemed unreal to me too, from out there. The goods we were bringing from it – the timber, the sheep, the gold – were real enough, but the place they came from would seem a mirage, as hazy as the shimmering air above the summer ocean.

We had to try to find the words to make it real, to populate our island with living people in their minds, people who knew of love and hatred, heartbreak and triumph, jealousy and pride. People who belonged to a place of mountains that sang, winds that loved humans, and gods who brought the springtime, even after they were shattered into pieces.

Out on the ocean, rocking in the vast black nothingness, I realised we could never convey any of this. I no longer believed in such a place myself.

However, while reading several ‘coming of age’ YA novels, I realised that I was interpreting the endings as depicting the move away from childhood into adulthood. If the same were to apply to my own story, the loss of traditional beliefs could be read as a metaphor for growing out of childhood. This left me in the uncomfortable position of seeming to equate the process of gaining mature adulthood with that of embracing secular Western values—a meaning that I had never intended. Therefore, my ending is now one in which my main character regains her beliefs and reconnects to her traditional values. The climax of the story revolves around Neka invoking Abapanoa, the god of lightning, and of the clansfolk together successfully calling the rain to end a drought.

Nonetheless, *Disenchantment* is still a western-style individualised account of self-actualisation. As Bradford (*Unsettling* 119) charges, western-style novels tend to subsume indigenous cultures and characters within ‘universal’ (ie Western) narrative schemata—in particular the *Bildungsroman*, which traces the progress of an individual from youth to maturity, and the achievement of goals such as self-actualisation and an individualised sense of purpose. It seems to me that this is almost inevitable. All stories that have a recognisable and—to the western reader—satisfying shape, must to some extent embody the western values of individualism, heroism, and character-testing. As a westerner writing for a western audience, I did not try to avoid this. Instead, what I tried to do was challenge some of the clichés about indigenous peoples, and portray a society with a different lifestyle, an alternative worldview and contrasting ethical framework—a society that makes no claim to be superior to the western one, but that simply wishes to assert its right to exist.

Conclusion

This essay has taken as its theme and structure four main critiques of authenticist discourses concerning indigenous peoples: the self/other juxtaposition of settler and

indigene; the noble savage discourse and physicality of the indigene; invisible whiteness; and the impact of invasion on, and consignment to history of, indigenous cultures. I examined these first in a wider context of postcolonial approaches to literature, concluding that, by seeking authenticist notions of indigeneity, such literature runs the risk of juxtaposing indigeneity with settler identity in artificial and unchanging ways, representing the strange Otherness of the indigene's body and credulous, superstitious mind, and treating these as phenomena to be explained, while remaining blind to whiteness/European-ness as a culture, and confining themselves to an assumed objective representation and 'universal' ethical values of individualism, rationality and self-actualisation. It also minimises the impact of invasion, and fixes the indigenous cultures at a point in the past, mourning their passing whilst ignoring and denying their continued existence.

I then performed an analysis of seven children's books dealing with 'first contact' between an indigene and settler, in order to demonstrate that, despite increasing awareness of the above critiques posited by postcolonialism, these same problematic representations of indigenous people persist in contemporary books for young people. In particular I argued that representations of indigenous people have moved beyond the simple racist stereotypes of the past and that these works show ambivalence towards (post)colonial power relations, and indeed to the notion of 'race,' in line with liberal values that emphasise commonality between humans. Thus the indigenous Other has been represented in recent CYA fiction in a way that is more complex than a simple racist stereotype or fantastical Other. However, I further suggested that these authors are faced with the challenges of dealing with the on-going impact of discourses that treat European values as objective, and that they still promulgate as universal the ethical values of western-style rationality, individuality and self-actualisation. Authors are still faced with the challenges of recognising several issues, such as the essential Self-Other dialectic of settler and indigene, the on-going impact of discourses such as that of the 'noble savage' and indeed any discourse that treats whiteness and European culture as normative, and the minimisation of physical, psychological and spiritual displacement that indigenous peoples have experienced as a result of invasion and colonialism.

Finally, I demonstrated some ways in which my studies have aided my own work, and showed some of the techniques I used in an attempt to avoid some of these pitfalls in my own work – especially the following: self/othering, which I attempted to

challenge by showing diversity within each group; idealisation and fetishisation of the indigene as ‘noble savage,’ which I attempted to circumvent by creating complex characters; the ‘Othering’ of the indigenous body, which I attempted to challenge by minimising mention of skin colour and avoiding ‘animal-like’ metaphors for indigenous physicality; ‘invisible whiteness,’ which I attempted to challenge by not having credulous natives fascinated with, afraid of, or allured by western materialist culture; the promulgation of western style ‘rationality’ in the spiritual lives of my characters, which I avoided by creating an ending that is a vindication and celebration of indigenous spiritual beliefs; portrayal of the indigene as historical, static and unchanging, which I avoided by showing my characters devising strategies and using tactics; and above all, to try to suggest that, although the novel is set in history, the indigenous groups survive into the future, beyond the end of the story.

Nonetheless I have, almost inevitably, produced a western-style narrative focusing on an individual’s life story; I have tried to do so in a way that still pays respect to more communitarian values. I began this essay by noting that western values of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and self-actualisation were introduced to North America and Australia at precisely the time that self-determination was taken from the indigenous peoples. Because these values have the same invisibility in our culture as whiteness, as European values in general, other authors, as I noted above, have ended their stories with their protagonists finding a way out of their (presumed) constraining traditional values, and onto an individualised self-determined (and sometimes overtly feminist) path. It was important to me to write an ending to *Disenchantment* that showed indigenous self-determination true to the indigenous culture I had created, rather than self-determination within the newly imposed constraining values of the colonial masters. This is why the dénouement of the book involves the clansfolk working together to produce rain through their traditional spiritual practices.

Ultimately, though, while taking into account the factors I have discussed here, and trying to write sensitively in a way that does not reproduce harmful discourses, my main aim has been to tell a good story. I hope I have succeeded.

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