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Abstract

A Secretary's Wife is a work of historical fiction that draws from real events and people who emerge from the journals and letters of Lady Anne Barnard while she was in the Cape for the period 1797–1802. Lady Anne Lindsay marries a younger man without title or fortune. When he lands a position as secretary to the governor of the Cape, she is determined to go with him. They make the journey on a crowded ship to Cape Town and, on arrival, find the Cape expensive and turbulent. Narrow-minded people complain incessantly, slavery and hangings are rife, and shortages of wood, flour and other commodities are commonplace. Life improves after they are offered accommodation in the abandoned old Government House at the castle. They set up a home and try to understand the culture, the people around them and each other. Barnard begins to thrive leaving Anne to her own devices. At the same time, she come to terms with being barren within the context of her society. The use of a country cottage called Paradise helps the Barnards reconnect, but when Lady Anne suspects Barnard's infidelity with a slave woman and, due to ill health, the governor leaves the Cape, life can never be the same again. In writing this work, I have attempted to reimagine Lady Anne Barnard's life, in particular the personal aspects to which she may have made fleeting references, otherwise it is entirely fictional.

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A proposal

1793

The courtship surprised Lady Anne more than she would ever care to admit. Before Mr Barnard arrived on her doorstep with a letter of introduction from his father, the Bishop of Limerick, she often felt a sense of loss, that age had caught her unawares. She'd gone about life as if there'd always be time, her hopes stored in a place known as the future. And then, by some cruel ploy, she found herself confronting a 40th birthday and a fate she forced herself to accept – condemned to be an old maid. At least, that is how her father would have put it.

Anne only ever knew her father as a good-natured but elderly gentleman. She lost him soon after her 18th birthday. James Lindsay, the 5th Earl of Balcarres, had been a bachelor all his life until, rather than fade into old age, he gave his heart to the plump and fair Miss Anne Dalrymple. By then, the Lord Balcarres was a grey man of 60 with hollow cheeks and a powdered wig. Miss Dalrymple was young enough to be his granddaughter.

The first time the earl proposed, he did so with gallantry, on one knee. Once kneeling, he nearly didn't manage to get back up again. Not without using the support from a table to pull himself back upright. The whole business left Miss Dalrymple uncomfortable, and she declined. The earl, however, was smitten, and, for a while, he took his broken heart to bed, where he stayed for several weeks.

One morning, invigorated by the sight of buttercups and cow parsley flowering in the dell, the earl mustered up his inborn Lindsay fortitude, put his brigadier wig back on his head and set about winning over Miss Dalrymple. There was nothing the earl loved more than to ride across the country on behalf of a woman's needs. In Edinburgh, a visit to his solicitor

was all it took to sign half of his slender fortune over to her, a gesture so magnanimous that, overcome, Miss Dalrymple experienced a change of heart. Almost nine months to the day after the wedding, the Lady Anne Lindsay was born – the first of their 11 children, who would come to shred the countess's nerves and turn her into a crotchety, stern mother whose solution, in general, was punishment.

The Lindsay children were healthy and spartan, and their parents allowed them a large amount of freedom. They could roam the surrounding countryside and wade in the burn that flowed through Balcarres Den. They could visit the farmyard daily and check in on their friends, the oxen, pigs, and pigeons. They were free to attempt to ride a cow and snack on a turnip or scatter grain for the cocks and hens. Sundays were for rest and psalms at the parish church, after which a dinner at the parents' table always ended with the old earl handing out sweets from a tin of bonbons.

They were an unruly bunch, the Lindsay children. Adept at breaking out of nurseries and schoolrooms to commit raids in the domains of the old housekeeper, Mammy Bell. The countess could strike hard, and her chastisements included imprisonment in dark closets, fasting and doses of rhubarb tincture or extract of malt, administered to all the culprits according to offences that ranged from the tearing of dresses to running away.

Of all her siblings, Anne was the hardest to punish. She could put up with bread and water, philosophically using the time in solitary to write poems or sketch. From her mother, Anne learnt to endure, and from her father she inherited the ability to try and find the best in any situation.

The family estate, Balcarres House, had seen better days. Upon the dark grey walls of the mansion, patches of green moss thrived in the shadows. Built in 1595, these ancient walls held the memories of the Lindsay ancestors, a resolute but faded reminder of their heritage. It was situated three miles from the coast, in a rather out-of-the-way corner of Fife. Looking out

of its upper windows on a clear day, it offered a rambling view of a wide and fast-flowing estuary where four Scottish rivers converged, flowing into the Firth of Forth in the cold North Sea . Through these same windows, on evenings when the mist cleared and the last of the sun hit the lofty terraces of Edinburgh, this glimmering city – like some magical place – would beckon to the Lindsay children.

As a grown woman, Anne often joked that people seldom liked the person they married because they seldom married a person they actually liked. At 17, her initiation into romance began under mounting pressure from her family. They were adamant she should marry Mr Henry Swinton. Swinton was wealthy and grey. He'd made his money as a merchant but his most memorable feature was the cork arm that hung limply out of his sleeve. Swinton lost his arm in an accident at sea when, although his life had been spared, this unlucky occurrence also left him blind in one eye. Even with the responsibility of her family's financial dire straits on her narrow shoulders, Anne could scarcely bring herself to look at Swinton, never mind marry him. Known as a kind person toward almost everyone, in this case Anne found it impossible. Her mother said her feelings for him were irrelevant and insisted that Anne would get used to Swinton's faults. Luckily for her, when her parents discovered that Mr Swinton's wealth was not as sizable as he'd led them to believe, Anne was released from her obligation to the dubious man. He was the first of many suitors who, in the end, almost cured Anne of any desire for marriage.

When Andrew Barnard began his frequent visits, always enthusiastic to spend time with her and, perhaps, meet her well-placed friends, everything changed. He'd arrive by horseback rather than carriage, to the house Anne shared with her sister Margaret. Both women were now in their early forties. Margaret was a widow after a disastrous marriage that culminated in bankruptcy for her husband and then his untimely death. Despite her unwedded

status, Anne had acquired several important friends and rather liked her life as it was by then. Their house was a narrow Georgian affair, with a large drawing room on the first floor and a row of windows in the attic. Unannounced and offering a shy grin, Barnard would stand in the doorway, his hands behind his back while he rocked on the balls of his feet, and tell the maid, "I was in the neighbourhood. Thought I'd take my chances to see Lady Anne." Once he'd been admitted, he would click his heels together in a sign of respect, a habit he'd picked up in the military, and bound up the stairs to the drawing room. He had a way of presenting himself as though he happened to be in the vicinity and was stopping in on the spur of the moment, yet he seldom arrived empty-handed.

"For the woman whose company I savour most in this world," was the kind of thing he'd say, as he offered a gift. It might be a silk pouch of sugared almonds or a tin of fashionable gunpowder green tea. On one occasion, he'd thought to obtain for her an Ann Radcliff novel. Barnard was a good listener and he'd picked up from their conversations that she liked to read.

Anne's feelings toward this young man flummoxed her. At first, she felt sorry for him when he deprecatingly told her his fate may be to marry a rich old widow. Years had passed but she'd never forgotten the anguish of the pressure to marry Swinton. Barnard needed to find his way in the world. He'd reached the rank of captain in the military but, after contracting an illness in the West Indies, he was only on half-time and half-pay. Physically, he was a good height and strong in the leg. Despite fair hair and skin, he did not appear ruddy. Most of all, Anne admired his easy attitude to life – the way he approached problems with a youthful optimism – and how he seldom had a bad word to say about anybody.

But why, specifically, she encouraged these visits from this unworldly chap she did not want to analyse. It is true, he enraptured her with tales of dust storms and pyramids and camels that walked the streets around the markets of Cairo. He described the white palaces

that lined the Bosphorus River, the glittering dome of the Hagia Sophia in the distance, and the moving calls to prayer that floated over the city from every mosque. To hear of all the places he'd served, remote and exotic compared to the familiarity of London and Scotland she knew, opened new worlds to Anne. And so it was, despite her usual set of upper class, sophisticated friends, she looked forward to Barnard's visits.

In his presence she became more animated, quickened, and this effervescent effect he had on her would linger even after he'd gone. It was coupled with something like desire and a motherly urge to smooth his tousled hair.

For his part, as the relationship progressed, Andrew Barnard revealed himself to be kind and easy-going. Around her friends, especially the outspoken ones, Barnard would laugh at their jokes but, perhaps because of his age, he seldom told a story of his own or offered an opinion.

On Anne's 42nd birthday, he was a guest at the dinner she gave for her closest friends. She could not move without him jumping from his seat to follow her like a puppy. After the party had broken up, Barnard lingered for a one-for-the-road raspberry brandy. He seemed calmer, now that it was just them. Never one to be still for long, Barnard seized the poker to cajole the fire back to life, then pulled a slim velvet box from his coat pocket. He brought the box over to where Anne sat with her feet up on a small stool and flipped open its velvet lid. Inside was a chain with a pretty silver locket, crafted to hold a tiny pot of pomander.

“Happy birthday

Anne. 'Tis the only way I could be sure your world smells always of rose water. I trust you will dab a spot of it under your lovely nose whenever you need it.”

Anne was glad that under cover of the dim light he probably wouldn't notice her blushing like a young filly rather than keeping her wits about her as the woman of 40 she was.

"Sweet Mr Barnard, this is a thoughtful gift." She held the locket up to fasten it around her neck. Barnard was behind her fiddling with the clasp, so close she could smell him.

"Not something I get to do every day," he said, unable to stop himself from laughing. "I'm afraid I am all thumbs!"

Anne placed her hand at her throat to feel for the locket and let her fingers explore the fine indentations of the engraved silver. She was aware of the place on her neck where Barnard had touched her.

"I shall wear it always." Her voice was low and earnest. They were quiet then, the fire being the easiest place to look rather than into each other's faces. Barnard was the first to move, when a knock at the door startled him. Mrs Hughes put her head around the door to say good night and stopped mid-sentence.

"I best wait for Mr Barnard to leave before I go down," she said.

It was all Barnard needed to understand that it was time for him to leave.

Anne was not a ravishing beauty. Hers was a soft and friendly face which, without personality, could easily have been forgotten. Her blonde hair, when curled with strips of cotton cloth, was good enough for court. The upcoming fashions of simple dresses with empire waists complemented her long frame and showed off her elegant arms. And yet, left to her own devices and away from society, she was happiest dressing exactly as she pleased, preferring the layered look of a gypsy. There was still a fair bit of that queer Scottish accent in her speech, and among her friends, Anne was often described as eccentric.

People saw her this way largely because she was unafraid to make her own decisions. Her most attractive characteristic was her ability to find humour in just about any situation. She was fortunate that what made her most attractive did not rely on youth and would stay with her throughout her life, often manifesting in her infectious laugh, which travelled through her entire body as she threw her head back with glee. While it was louder than it should have been for a refined woman, it never failed to lighten the mood.

Still, compared to the lovelies of the day, like Lady Emma Hamilton, Anne had moments of feeling terribly dowdy. She'd been especially low after witnessing the show Lady Hamilton famously put on for the admiring dinner guests of her ambassador husband. Dressed in a simple white Grecian gown, Lady Hamilton would move her body through a series of artful postures pulled from Greek antiquity, like a moving statue. Anne saw Emma's captivating performance at a dinner on a trip to Naples, and it left her feeling crumpled and frumpy when she returned to her lodgings at the end of the evening.

Barnard was most at home outdoors. He grew up at St Wolstan's Priory some ten miles from Dublin, where a cantering river, alive with salmon, ran through the well-laid grounds. It was here that he'd learnt to fish and hunt. Here that he developed his love of roaming the countryside surrounded by a rowdy pack of dogs, a love that remained with him until death. Always kind to dogs and horses, on evenings when he dined alone, he'd drop titbits under the table and talk to the dogs that lay sprawled around his feet. He once told Anne that, apart from hunting and dogs, his favourite pastime was to swim. To her, this demonstrated Barnard's enlightened thinking, after all, many still harboured suspicions about activities that involved water – like taking a bath, let alone swimming. Indeed, it was the smell of Barnard she loved first, an aromatic blend of leather, spicy clove and sandalwood, sometimes mixed with sweat. Only once they lay together did she uncover the intimate and natural sweetness of his male skin, his body unmarked by the wear and tear of age.

Barnard was prone to extravagance. In fact, his worst shortcoming was this tendency to live beyond his means. While Anne was secure in the knowledge of her status as one of the aristocracy even when threatened with financial difficulties, Barnard was a man of the middle classes. His ability to earn a living and the material items he owned all contributed to his identity and sense of self.

As a planner and a schemer, he was always onto that next thing: a new horse, an unusual investment that promised better than usual returns, perhaps a new barn. Inevitably, his schemes accumulated debts and his modest income of £800 per year consistently fell short.

Despite his legacy as a bishop's son, he had a taste for age-oaked brandies and finely crafted leather boots. He was partial to deals and the thrill of acquisition, but quickly lost interest in any debt he'd accrued once the transaction was over. Whatever money he might then owe no longer interested him and he usually waited until the last moment to settle it. With his amiable manners and fresh, honest face, traders never doubted he would pay them. During the excitement of an exchange he probably believed it himself.

Anne, on the other hand, had grown up in the genteel poverty of a thrifty Scottish household, where hand-me-down clothing, homegrown turnips and a pet pig destined for the dinner table were all acceptable. She had no claim on the manor of Balcarres, which belonged to her brother. Her financial security came from the inheritance of a small income left to her by a thoughtful friend, and a house in Berkeley Square. She believed they could manage on her income alone, if it were necessary, but Barnard always resisted as if this would alter the way he viewed himself as a man.

“That money is your own money, Annie, and it must be used for yourself,” Barnard would object if Anne tried to offer him financial assistance or to pay off one of his debts. To

alleviate the situation Anne made it her business to improve his prospects, even before they published their wedding banns or went to church to make their vows.

She first approached her brother, the 6th Earl of Balcarres and governor of an island in Jamaica, but his scrawled reply was swift and disappointing. He was unable to offer any help since positions in Jamaica were scarce. Next, she honed in on her old friend, Henry Dundas, Britain's Minister of War. Anne was not afraid to remind Dundas that he owed her a favour, which he could repay by finding Barnard a position within the sprawling empire's offices. Despite her attempts to use her long list of connections, no opportunity for Barnard arose.

In the green expanse of London Park on a lively summer day, Anne lounged on a rug and watched Barnard slip leather straps out of buckles, lift the clasp and flip open a picnic basket's woven lid. Everything about the day felt perfect, other than her new brocade shoes that had started to pinch the moment she left home. Barnard busied himself with the picnic and she found herself unable to take her eyes off his well-proportioned hands: hands she wished to touch with her lips; hands with soft brown hairs that spilled out from his cuffs, a hint of the soft, private hair she imagined she'd find on the rest of his body ...

It must be the claret and such an unusually warm day, she flushed, forcing herself to admire the network of patterns formed by the sunlight as it found its way through the tall leafy trees.

Anne was oblivious to Barnard's own anxieties at that moment. He laid no claim to any domestic ability. He was good with horses; could even shoe them. He could clean a fish or pluck a pheasant. Yet, it had taken him the better part of yesterday to prepare this picnic. He'd remembered plates and even cutlery. From the basket, he unpacked two lamb pies wrapped in brown paper, a potted cheese, a loaf of crusty bread and sugar plums for

something sweet. When he topped up her glass and handed Anne a plate for her pie, a slight tremor in his hand was the only clue he might be nervous. With the knife midway in the crusty loaf he'd been cutting, he stopped to dust the crumbs from his hands, looked intently into her eyes and asked her to marry him.

With these words finally spoken there was only the rustling of leaves in the breeze. The proposal lay on the rug, next to the food. The rumbling of carriage wheels, the pleasant sounds of children in the distance – all ceased, as Anne set down her plate for fear that she might drop it, she felt lightheaded.

It was true that, on such a day, at such a time, in an age of enlightenment and scientific reason, she could find no rational reason to accept. Barnard was a man without a title and just a small annual income. Worst of all, he was only 30 years of age, and she already 43.

Yet oddly, even as she considered these sober facts, she knew she would find it difficult to turn him down. More importantly, this was a man she genuinely liked. She had given up on marriage and yet, here in the park, she could see the possibilities: To spend her life with kind and easy Barnard; to be referred to as a wife rather than a spinster; to escape from being only a daughter, an aunt, or a sister. And, was it possible she could let in the slimmest of hopes, that she could still be a mother?

Anne took a sip of wine, for her mouth had gone dry and it helped to slow down her thinking.

“Dear Barnard,” she began with caution, as there was no going back from whichever answer she gave him. “My life up until now has been such a mix of flattery, hope and disappointment ...”

“We’ve all had our share of that last one, my Annie.” Barnard fidgeted and tugged at bits of grass as he spoke. “But, best of human beings, can we not forget the past, and be here for each other in the sweet present?”

Anne couldn’t take her eyes off his masculine hands rolling up a ball of grass. In the rhythmic movements of his fingers, she found something sensual.

She tried to divert her attention and focus on the expanse of tree and sky above. In the richness of leaves contrasting against the sky’s blue, she remembered how much larger life was than the two of them, and at what speed it would pass.

“If you think that we can make it, and if you think I can make you happier than you already are ...” Barnard dropped the ball of grass and Anne grasped his hand, “I will marry you ... yes. Indeed, I will marry you even if the world does not understand us and laughs.”

“We can have a good life together, my Annie, I won’t concern myself with the world and neither should ye.”

Seeing how happy she had made him, Anne felt sure she’d done the right thing.

Back home in Berkeley Square, Anne flopped down onto the velvet sofa, unpinned her hat, and kicked off the torturous brocade shoes, which had left pink marks on her toes. Mrs Hughes was in the kitchen knocking the poker against the grate as she stoked the fire. The blaze would soon have the cast-iron kettle boiling and next would come the clinking of teacups being set out on a tray.

“You are a saviour, Mrs Hughes,” she said to the woman she often felt she’d be lost without. Mrs Hughes set down the tray and enquired if she should light a fire in the drawing room. Anne didn’t even hear the question, her mind preoccupied with the day’s events.

When Anne told Margaret she had accepted Barnard’s marriage proposal she was disappointed to Margaret grow pale.

Margaret tried to speak, fumbling over her words, “I must confess Anne, you have taken me by surprise. Barnard is an unusual choice. I can see how he is, well, he is at least good, and steady. But I must ask you, are you sure, Anne? I can think of many people who will not approve.”

“Oh Margaret, I am aware that this may be a shock. Of course, Barnard is not a match for me in years, neither is he my equal, but in other more important ways he is just what I need. I cannot explain why I feel joy in his presence, but I do, and he’s good to me, you know. Around Barnard I feel as if my opinion matters. He cares what I think and does not treat what I say as the trifling ideas of a woman. I’ve made up my mind to see our differences in years and rank simply as a challenge to our normal way of thinking. Why should it matter, when Barnard is considerate and easy to get along with? Of course he’s not perfect, but who among us can lay claim to such an unattainable state?”

Margaret set her teacup down and used a burning oil lamp to light a few candles. The flames flickered and danced and might have helped to dispel the gloom from Anne’s news and the fading daylight, but an uncomfortable silence remained. Next, Margaret began tying up a small stack of letters with a ribbon, giving herself something to do and avoiding further conversation.

This was going to be more difficult than Anne had anticipated in the park, shielded from the opinions of others in the private bubble she shared with Barnard. When she could bear it no longer, Anne left the parlour to escape the tension, using the excuse of taking the tea tray to the kitchen. Padding down the rug in the hallway, she reminded herself that in life one cannot have everything.

The door to the kitchen was shut. Anne was about to call Mrs Hughes when she overheard voices from the other side and could not resist, for a moment, putting her ear to a panel to listen to what they were talking about.

“... I ask you, could she have made a more untoward choice? After all this time as an independent lady, and nothing wrong with being a spinster. Why now, when she’s already in her forties? It isn’t decent! Lord have mercy, I heard she turned down a number of proposals as a young lass, but this Mr Barnard can only be a fortune hunter, or worse, a crook! Her father, the late Earl of Balcarres, is sure to turn in his grave. But then, she’s always been too headstrong. And, with all those fancy friends, why on this green earth did she accept that ordinary young man’s proposal? Tongues will wag, I tell you. We might have to consider our own reputations if we continue to work in this house!”

Anne changed her mind about entering the kitchen and left the tray on the floor outside the door. With not a flicker of brightness remaining from her day, she sought the privacy of her bedroom. As far as she was concerned, Mrs Hughes had no right to discuss her private life. Servants were always too opinionated and wily; they should know their place. Come to think of it, how had she known anyway?

Mrs Hughes must have been listening at the door and overheard Anne give the news to Margaret. But, then, Anne herself had just done exactly the same thing. It was clear to her now that Mrs Hughes and Margaret’s disapproval were only the beginning of the reproaches she may still have to face. Why was it, she wondered, that people were incapable of minding their own business?

Nuptials

Lady Anne Lindsay and Mr Andrew Barnard were married on a frosty day in October 1793. Barnard looked every bit the dapper groom in his red army uniform. Unable to stop himself from smiling, he was all neat white teeth and brass buttons flashing in the autumn sun. Anne beamed at him from out of the lace neckline of a simple ivory dress. The flash of blue and green from a peacock feather in her hair was the only hint of the unconventional. After the simple ceremony was concluded, Margaret and the friends who wanted to wish them well hung back on the steps of St George's to shower them with rose petals.

After the ceremony, the events from that day in the park when Barnard proposed became a game they liked to play, a little enactment in which only they knew the script. He'd ask her why she chose to marry him. She'd laugh and say that, of course, it was because her shoes had begun to pinch, or the day was too warm. Then Barnard would ask again, and she might add that it was because she felt she could tell him anything or give another of her reasons. Always, the game ended with them holding onto each other and laughing. At that point, Anne would put on her most smouldering voice and say, "In truth, Mr B, it was your hands I just couldn't resist."

Show of force

A note of apology for his absence at the wedding arrived through the letterbox from Henry Dundas. In the thick of Britain's war with France, he was sorry that he had missed it, it was unavoidable.

"It is most regrettable," Anne muttered as she turned the note over, hoping to find some additional writing. Not only was Dundas one of her oldest friends, but she was also desperate for him to meet Barnard because the War minister's influence was exactly what they needed to find a position for him. As she studied the note, Anne was unaware just how significant a role the political troubles that kept Dundas from attending her wedding would come to play in her life.

The small colony known as the Cape of Good Hope was the latest in a series of problems for Dundas. It was a backwater, of little interest other than being a vital point on the empire's route to the East. It was only possible for merchant ships bound for the sultry climes of India to make that treacherous journey if they stopped over at this tiny harbour town, scattered around the hem of a table-shaped mountain. It was a place for ships to be repaired, their food supplies and water barrels to be restocked, as well as much needed rest for the crews on dry land. Dundas, therefore, had to ensure it did not fall into French hands.

After the wedding, the Barnards chose to depart from London, and the gossipmongers of high society, to visit Ireland and Barnard's family. While they were immersed in tipsy family dinners with the old Bishop of Limerick, who couldn't stop congratulating himself on bringing them together, Britain's parliament gave the approval for Dundas to go ahead with his plan: Britain must seize the colony from the Dutch, before the French could.

Within a few months, a small fleet of British naval ships emerged like phantoms out of a thick fog that swirled around Cape Point. Flying the white flag to signal they were

friends to the Dutch, the ships camped in False Bay for more than a month. It was a long enough time that people on land began to forget about them, with the ships becoming part of the everyday nautical landscape. No sooner had the Dutch had been lulled into a false sense of the ships' innocuity than the British navy executed a surprise attack. They marched from Simonstown to Muizenberg, firing cannonballs in a bloodless and tactical show of force that enabled them to take the Cape. While residents of the Cape contended with the news that they'd been outnumbered and outwitted, the Barnards prepared to end their honeymoon. And, while the Dutch had no choice but to surrender after a century of ruling the Cape, the Barnards had their own problems to confront once they returned to England.

Spring

1796

A flush of bluebells flowering on the woodland floor announced an early spring. With the promise of warmer days came a steady stream of letters, pushed under the door by creditors demanding to be paid. One especially angry merchant arrived at the Berkeley Square house to collect what he was owed in person. He banged on the door with a fist and waved a crumpled promissory note in his other hand.

Anne, who was seated at her writing desk, dropped her pen in fright and spun around to look at Barnard, who was as still as a statue on the sofa.

“Mr Barnard, you owe me!” the merchant shouted at the front door.

When there was no response, he began agitating the flap of the letterbox to make more of a din and even put his angry mouth on the opening of the letterbox to bellow down the hallway.

“You’ll not get away with this, I tell you. It’ll be debtors’ prison for you next, Mr Barnard!” He snapped the flap back and forth on its hinges.

“Debtors’ prison!” Anne hissed at Barnard in a whisper. “Can he do that?”

Barnard held his finger to his lips gesturing for her to remain silent. But Anne couldn’t bear it and jumped to her feet, grabbed him by the hand and pulled him toward the kitchen.

“Go and hide in the lane behind the house,” she said in a flustered whisper, trying hard not to be heard in earshot of the front door.

Barnard stopped just outside the doorway with one foot in the lane and pulled Anne into his chest. “Don’t trouble yourself, pet,” he said, trying to make light of the

situation. Her ear was pressed against his chest, his heart beating at a slow steady pace that calmed her down.

“Yer man will get every penny he’s owed, there’ll be no going to prison. Why couldn’t he just send an express, like a civilised person, or show a little patience,” Barnard said into the top of her head before releasing her to run down the lane.

Anne took a breath, adjusted her face to look, she hoped, vaguely confused and reasonable enough to go to the door. She must send him away herself for it was not a matter she could leave to the servants.

Later in the day, when Barnard returned, he took the front steps two at a time and stepped into the hallway, bringing cold air and the smells of the street with him. He called up the stairs for his Annie, as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place and, over a hot meal, they laughed about the angry man at the door.

Before dawn, Anne awoke to find Barnard had left the bed and was putting on his boots to go and exercise. She concluded, although he wasn’t saying it, that his worries about money had ended his sleep.

The horse ride left him damp with sweat and visibly calmer and, in the sober light of a grey afternoon, they agreed, without any bitterness on either side, it was time to economise.

Clothes would have to be mended rather than shopping for new ones and they could cut down on household expenses by limiting their entertainment and only eating meat twice a week. Barnard would sell one of his two horses and they could burn tallow candles during the week and save the tapered wax type for special occasions.

Every time Anne tallied her accounts, she was moved to write Dundas another letter. She cajoled and she pleaded. Sometimes Dundas answered, making no mention of

Barnard, and sometimes no letter at all was forthcoming. Anne could not understand why a small position could not be found within the vast network of governmental offices.

In the weeks after Barnard sold his horse to pay the angry creditor, Anne took it upon herself to solve a different problem by paying a visit to her physician. She wanted to know what she should do to conceive. The physician was not a young man – one of the reasons she liked him and knew him to be capable. He spoke to her in medical parables, on the difficulties of unbalanced humours, which hers obviously were, whether God would open her womb, or how – perhaps – it might be twisted. He enquired of her monthly cycle by asking whether she was regular in “bringing down the flowers”. He mentioned that too much high living could vitiate the humours and play havoc with a woman’s fecundity because, he explained, he seldom saw a barren woman among the labouring poor and yet it was common among the affluent.

Anne would never have classed herself as affluent, especially now that they were living so frugally, but she thought better of explaining this. It didn’t matter anyway; the sole purpose of her visit to her physician was for a solution, perhaps a tincture she could take to help her fall pregnant and was relieved when he offered a prescription.

She should eat meats with good juice and raise the heat of her body and womb. Galingale, rocket, pepper, ginger and cinnamon should be steeped in boiling water and Anne must then stand over the boiled herbs and allow the vapours to penetrate up into her.

“Do you know that the womb has the ability to smell?” he enquired, looking at her through his small little eyes. “It is affected by odours. There is a theory that you can test if you are fertile depending on whether you can smell the fumes in your nose or taste them in your mouth. If so, then the womb is not blocked.”

Anne listened, smoothing out her dress with her hands, and wondered if she should be taking notes.

“In addition, after coitus you and your husband should not part too soon because it lets in cold air that could spoil his seed. Rather, lie together and let the womb close,” he said, putting his hands together as if he were praying.

“After that, your husband can leave, but you should rest quietly and avoid all troublesome thoughts. Even better, raise your legs up to help keep the seed in place, and don’t talk or cough or sneeze while you rest.”

At the end of the consultation, after Anne had settled the bill, she no longer had enough in her purse for a liver dinner, but she was sure the butcher would let her pay him at the end of the month.

After too many potato and egg dinners, with Anne putting something by for meat with good juices whenever as she could; and at a time when she dismissed a servant to save the salary; and when Barnard’s good clothes had worn out, forcing him to replace his fine linen shirts with plain calico ones – an envelope arrived in the letterbox.

It was a typical envelope, white and small, except for the stately seal and recognisable script of Henry Dundas. Addressed to Barnard, the letter was written in a neat hand, and it contained the following brief outline of recent events: Britain would be sending an experienced governor to the Cape, where sound leadership was desperately needed in the empire’s newest colony. George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney, after years in diplomatic positions across the globe, had been chosen as the governor and Dundas, remembering his old friend, was offering a solution in response to Anne’s letters. He proposed that Andrew Barnard take the position as the governor’s official secretary.

While the offer could not have come at a better time, a remote outpost at the Cape was not what Anne had had in mind and, at the first available opportunity, she made a trip to Wimbledon to see Dundas at his country house.

Her carriage clacked up the gravel driveway of his sprawling, fashionable redbrick retreat, also known as the unofficial war office, where Prime Minister Pitt spent so many nights that he had his own bedroom.

Anne let out a sigh of relief when, instead of the usual line of carriages, she found the driveway deserted. This would give her the opportunity to speak with Dundas alone. An austere footman emerged from the house to meet her. While he struggled with her carriage door, it occurred to Anne that she could have had this life, had she chosen differently.

“You need to lift it a little, otherwise it has a tendency to stick,” she told the footman, giving the door of her second-hand carriage a shove. The footman, his face impassive, folded out the two steps and then, in a flourish, led her through an enormous front door into a wood-panelled library. Dundas was obscured behind the daily newspaper with no company for Anne to contend with.

She crossed a small sea of deep-red oriental rug to reach Dundas. He did not get up from his wingback chair, but gave her a wan smile. He looked exhausted.

“Dear Henry, I thought I’d seize this opportunity for a quiet word ...”

Dundas crumpled the paper into his lap.

“Always a pleasure to see you, Anne,” he said, although it was obvious that he didn’t feel that way on that morning. Anne could not know she had, indeed, picked a bad day for Dundas. His head throbbed from several bottles of port consumed the previous evening with Pitt who, as usual, had been the main instigator. As the evening progressed, Dundas had grown incredulous at Pitt’s slurring arguments which, annoyingly for the War minister, included further indecision about the Cape’s strategic importance. Long after midnight, when they had eventually retired to their beds, amicably at least, Pitt went to

sleep the moment he snuffed out his candle, while Dundas stared into the darkness, vexed by his leader's contrariness but determined to push on with his plans for the Cape.

"Dear Harry, are you alright?" Anne saw how haggard he looked, as she seated herself on a low ottoman to be near him.

"I first want to tell you that Mr Barnard and I are grateful for the friendship and support you have extended to us. With reference to the letter, I know Mr Barnard is delighted by the idea of the Cape, but I ... well, I confess I would have preferred lesser employment if it were closer to home."

Even though Barnard was loyal and affable she knew that, in truth, he had little to offer in terms of any real accomplishments. Nevertheless, she was here to establish just how much she could negotiate.

"Good God!" Dundas got up from his seat. "Do you mean *you* would go and live with the Hottentots?" This outburst, from a man who moments ago was sunk into his chair, caught Anne off guard and, for a moment, she was unsure how to respond.

"Harry, be reasonable. How can I not?" she asked, looking up at him. He peered at her down his long nose, towering over her thanks to the silly ottoman.

"I don't think you have any idea what you are letting yourself in for." Dundas frowned while he spoke: "You'll spend three months at sea in cramped conditions that simply aren't suitable for women, especially a woman of your status."

Anne was embarrassed and annoyed. She did not like being made to feel feeble. Should she stand rather than remain beneath him, she wondered; she wasn't a peasant after all. Doing her best to maintain her dignity, she only told him that she did not look forward to the journey but that her main concern was that, if she didn't go, such a long time apart could ruin the couple's newfound closeness. Even worse, it might result in them both

becoming too used to independent living. It never occurred to her that these sentimental feelings for Barnard not only irritated Dundas further, they made his head throb.

“You’ll find no luxuries in this new territory, Anne,” he said, “A journey to the Cape is not for the faint-hearted.”

She got up from the ottoman that made her feel childlike and inept, and walked to the window. Just then, the same footman appeared with a tea tray, allowing for a pause. Dundas looked bleakly at his newspaper while the footman poured tea.

“It is my duty to support my husband and, therefore, I see no alternative but to go with him, should he be posted in Africa. You must remember, we have not been married long and I would never forgive myself if something happened to either one of us during a time when we had wilfully chosen to live apart.”

Dundas returned to his seat to sip his tea and study Anne. He appeared to be calculating his next response and Anne dared to hope that he might be coming round to her way of thinking.

“You will be required to live with the utmost economy, with none of the pleasures of decent society and the gaiety of a life you are accustomed to. Then, there is the nautical impossibility of the place and, I hear, the want of inland navigation, all of which could make it fall to the ground. Am I unable to dissuade you?”

Anne’s confidence dropped as quickly as it had risen. She hadn’t prepared for the way this conversation was going. She lost her resolve and sank back onto the ottoman. She’d been foolish to believe that Dundas might offer some level of understanding, the kind she had shown Dundas when he’d discovered his first wife’s affair a few years back. In the throes of the initial shock, Anne had gone to great lengths to console him, visiting him frequently until, gradually, Dundas began to recover.

What she hadn't bargained on was that, as they grew closer as friends, Dundas began to see her as a possible option for a new wife. She was no longer young, but she came with a title. He wasted little time, and started to woo her. Anne was not convinced. She'd always enjoyed Henry's intelligent company, but he could be brusque and impatient and her natural response – the only response she was able to give him – was to be warm and charming, while keeping him firmly at arm's length.

Eventually, her mixed signals and inflexible reserve had worn him down and, while on an election tour of Scotland, bolstered by a third bottle of claret, Dundas surprised everyone, including himself, by proposing to the brittle, but wealthy, Lady Jane Hope. At the time, Anne did not foresee that his engagement would fuel his loyalty to her and instead experienced it as a betrayal, despite her real and impenetrable reluctance to marry him in the first place. After Dundas became engaged to Lady Jane, Anne continued to harbour the belief that he owed her something, as if he had broken an unspoken contract between them.

Bolstered by this recollection Anne tried again: "Henry, you should know that if the position is the only one on offer for Mr Barnard, I have made up my mind to go to the Cape despite the difficulties of the place, and I trust that you will at least make our situation there respectable."

"Ha! Respectable?"

"I mean, in terms of Barnard's rank." Anne straightened up and patted her hair. "I confess, I am ignorant on these matters but, from Margaret, I have learnt that the rank of secretary is a nominal one and not that high as to be of any real consequence. I am also led to understand that the salary for Mr Barnard's rank is inferior by £1 000 per annum, compared with a certain Mr Wallace who serves as secretary to the government in Madras and Bengal."

Dundas narrowed his eyes and rubbed his thumb over his top lip. “Madam, the position is no more or less than originally stated. Your Barnard is free to take it or leave it but I recommend you desist with further talk of position or rank.”

Outside, it began to drizzle, darkening the library as if it were late afternoon. Other than the soft rain, all Anne could hear was the sombre ticking of a clock.

“I must ask, however: Did Barnard put you up to this?”

“Mr Barnard doesn’t know I have raised any of this. He is ready to go to the poles and back for you. Patronage and salary never enter his head other than that there should be enough to keep us, and a few funds left over to go toward paying any debts at home,” Anne replied, pulling her shawl tighter and fretting at her folly in raising the issue. Yet, if she was to leave behind all she held dear, she’d be damned if she wasn’t going to try to make it worthwhile.

“I suppose this is what a wife ought to do,” Dundas suddenly said, leaning back in his chair.

“I cannot help wondering, if I were in a similar situation, if Jane would make such a journey. I think not. Barnard is a lucky devil.”

Anne squirmed a little. She did not know if she should read more into this comment, given their history, but she sensed the shift in his mood.

“Oh, Harry, discard what I have said about rank and respectability, as if it were a bad letter into the fire.”

“There is one other thing that will no doubt please you,” the now visibly calmer Dundas said. “Lord Macartney will not be taking his wife to the Cape, which means you will have the position of first lady.”

Anne raised her eyebrows, and tried to take this news in.

“You will, of course, do what you can to reconcile with the Dutch.” Dundas reached for his paper. It was more a declaration than a request.

Only after the footman bundled her back into the carriage did she have a chance to consider the idea of being first lady. Yes, she would have to put up with the sea voyage as well as the difficulties of life in a remote colony, but how it pleased her to have been given a role, to be of value, no matter how small, in the success of the empire’s new colony.

Somewhere in Portsmouth

February 1797

“Still no word from Captain Urmston?” Barnard asked, while he poured three glasses of port. His unanswered words hung in the air and mingled with the odours of old cooking sea salt and coal trapped by the closed windows and heavy drapes of the sitting room in their lodgings. A foul wind rattled the doors.

“Another ruddy night in Portsmouth ...” he went on, speaking to no one in particular, unable to hide the frustration he felt after such a fruitless delay.

Anne took a sip of her drink, enjoying how it burned at the back of her throat.

“At least it gives us one last opportunity, Mr B, to obtain anything we may have forgotten.” She hoped this reminder might soothe his tension. “That is, until our purse is quite drained!” Anne added with a laugh and a shrug. “And, since we have no idea what we will find on the shores of Africa, it is bewildering to know what to take.”

The choice of what to pack for the Cape had preoccupied the Barnards for several months and, until they had left the English coast behind them, Anne continued to make small purchases in the town’s shops.

“Aye, ’tis the truth, my Annie, but we need to begin the journey.”

Earlier in the day, Barnard was alarmed to bump into a creditor who’d come to Portsmouth looking for him. He’d told Anne about his encounter, but continued to make light of it. But, the sooner they got going, the sooner he could start to earn and reckon with them.

Accompanying the Barnards to the Cape were Anne’s maid, Mrs Hughes, and Barnard’s personal servant, Mr Pawell. There was also Barnard’s young cousin, Jane Barnard, an immature 20-year-old whose plan was to find a husband. The youngest member

of their party was Barnard's eight-year-old son, Henry. Henry was an illegitimate child from one of Barnard's previous, short-lived relationships. Barnard wasn't moved to marry Henry's mother, and she had never insisted upon it either, there being other men in her life that she showed more interest in. With such a start in life, Henry was a complex boy, prone to problems.

"He needs the firm hand of a father's presence," Henry's mother had insisted when she asked Barnard to take Henry into his care, a decision she when the Barnards had their hands full with preparations to leave England. Because the Barnards were kind and easily moved, and because they had so far produced no children of their own, they agreed to take Henry in the hope that the child might create more of a family.

Henry sat with his legs crossed on the carpet, as close to the fire as possible, and prodded a long twig into the flames, doing his best to ignite it.

"Mind that fire, Henry," said Barnard, usually amiable with his son but unable to hide his irritation on this particular evening. Anne liked to see him in this role as a father and she was fond of the boy, even though she felt unequipped to even attempt to mother him.

Barnard stoked the fire with a poker, "How was your meeting with the agent, my Annie?"

"When I met him this morning, his advice was clear. We should take as little as possible. He believes that, as the Cape belongs to Britain now, everything English will soon be imported in abundance," Anne said, looking at Barnard to read his face.

"Did he ...? Well, that certainly flies in the face of everything I heard from Doctor Gillan," Barnard said, running a hand through his hair. "Gillan lived there for some time and was adamant that the Cape is destitute of every common comfort."

Anne could see the uncertainty of the Cape made Barnard uncomfortable. He felt responsible for what they were about to do and, at times, this responsibility weighed heavily

on him. He got up from the chair he'd only moments ago sat down in and, in an act of solace, topped up Anne and Jane's glasses.

"Here's to the Cape," he said without a lot of enthusiasm. "Apparently, there is no furniture to be had in the colony for love or money. Rumour has it, the Dutch would sell their noses off their faces if they could get a good price for them," Barnard continued.

"That reminds me," Jane chimed in, "remember to tell Barnard about Mrs Campbell, this Dutch woman we met who will sail with us."

"That I shall," Anne said, feeling more relaxed thanks to the heat of the fire and the alcohol.

"Jane and I met her yesterday in the village, while shopping. Mrs Campbell was actually born in the Cape, and she was very firm when she told us: 'Take noting, noting – no carriages, no servants, no stock. I know de place and you can get everyting you want in 10 minutes!'" Anne's imitation of Mrs Campbell lightened everyone in the room. Even sullen Henry couldn't stifle his laugh.

Since that first bold decision to go to the Cape, Anne had made a point of hiding her apprehension. She had her moments when she questioned what she was doing. Was it madness to think she could make that arduous sea journey? And the journey itself was just the beginning. She felt certain that life at the Cape would be unquestionably rudimentary. Why had she agreed to leave the city that she loved, never mind all her people? What if Dundas was right, she thought again, and took a large sip of port. She preferred to keep these fears from Barnard, worried that he'd make her stay behind if he knew how she felt.

After a supper of pepper steak and boiled potatoes, brought in on trays by the mistress of the house and a servant, the Barnards retired to bed. All the bedrooms led off a musty, carpeted landing, accessed by a narrow staircase. On the final step the ceiling hung low, making it necessary for Barnard and Anne to stoop their heads.

The lodgings were a few streets up from the harbour of old Portsmouth, crowded with merchant and navy ships in need of protection from the wild and stormy sea that lay beyond the narrow mouth. Outside, the oil lamps cast a weak, yellow glow onto slicked-wet cobbles. Portsmouth was packed with frustrated crew, agitated travellers and merchants, biding their time until the weather cleared.

Early the next morning, the clack of cartwheels and muffled whistles of dockworkers in the wet street below pulled Anne from her sleep. Under the canopy of a four-poster bed that sagged in the middle, she wrapped an arm and leg over Barnard's warm body. Pulling the blankets and quilt up under her chin, she wondered if the weather had turned. Barnard was also awake and pulled her closer.

"At least here, we still share a bed," he said, running his hands over her thighs and belly. "I sleep best when I'm next to you."

"I dread having to sleep away from you in the separate cots on the ship," she said into his neck, savouring every physical detail, the warm weight of his body on hers, his breath coming faster in her ear and the pleasurable fullness when he entered her. Anne moved to his rhythm, adrift on a river of her own need, while below that current of pleasure, there was also a chance to conceive.

She'd been following her physicians' orders, eating good meat when she could and warming her uterus with steam from the herbs. She'd tried to understand how her relationship with Barnard had produced this primitive ache. The urge to know the warmth and weight of an infant swaddled in her arms. The fear: that without a child of their own, their life would remain incomplete had taken hold. And yet, month by month, little by little, her body punished her with that dreaded stream of blood from her womb.

In the tenderness that followed, she felt his limbs grow heavy with a brief, sweet post-coital sleep. Anne rolled onto her back and held her legs in the air, hoping to keep his seed warm and safe.

Despite the erratic and varied reports of life at the Cape, the Barnards had decided to take as much as they could. They reasoned that any surplus of household items was sure to fetch a good price in the colony. Anne had spent weeks acquiring liqueurs, sweetmeats, and pickles for the larder. As a reader and writer of journals, she also wanted to take her portable library, especially since she planned to capture their adventure on paper. In preparation to playing hostess for Lord Macartney, she procured six dozen Windsor chairs, all without cushions, that could be easily packed because their legs screwed off. With entertainment in mind, she also packed a large collection of Staffordshire dishware, glasses, lamps, and shades, and even bedsteads. The couple had no doubt they'd be in need of a garden and decided on a collection of plants and fruit trees, including Anne's favourite strawberries.

Barnard's own possessions were a testament to his interests: a variety of guns, a collection of English leather saddles, and a pack of dogs. One dog was his beloved Franny. He had rescued the white pointer when she was a neglected and hungry pup. After nursing her to health, Franny seldom left his side. Always partial to a drink in the evening and dubious about the wine they produced in the Cape, Barnard stowed a good stock of dark English stout, claret, Madeira, and port.

At the eleventh hour, he faced a disappointment.

"This news is most vexing," he told the agent, looking grave. The Gentlemen of the Committee of Shipping had just passed a new resolution which forbade Barnard from taking his favourite horse.

"The horse is already on the ship and she is a fine one. I'm certain such horses cannot be found in the colony. What can be done to get around the resolution?"

“It is exasperating, sir, for the committee to make such changes to the shipping rules without any warning. There were no such issues with horses being carried on previous voyages,” the agent replied. “I’m afraid they are firm on these matters.”

The next afternoon, beneath a sky as cold as a sheet of steel, a small throng of dockworkers and fishermen congregated on the pier, their curiosity piqued by a distant commotion on the water. A small boat, carrying two men and a large black horse, rowed away from the towering six-mast vessel of the stately *Sir Edward Hughes* in the bay. One of the men worked the oars while the other held the reins of the horse, his head so close he may have been whispering to the animal. An unexpected wave from the choppy sea slapped over the side of the boat causing the throng on the pier to cry out in unison. But the oarsman held the boat steady until Barnard’s beloved mare was off-loaded onto dry land to face an uncertain future.

A fair wind

Long before the village cockerels began to crow, the mistress of the house rapped at the Barnards' bedroom door with news that the captain's messenger was at the front door.

"I come to tell my lady, the wind is fair," he said, between breaths from a sprint. "I'll return in one hour and hope to find you ready." After tipping his hat he turned to go, heading for the port down a vacant cobbled street.

Barnard squeezed Anne's hand in response to this news. All their frustration from the limbo of the past two weeks was over. Not even the lack of sleep, or the unholy hour, could compete with their anticipation and excitement. Clothes and shoes, hairbrushes, hats, and even the dog's blankets, were thrown into trunks. They dressed in haste, conducting final inspections of wardrobes and peering under beds to ensure nothing was left behind.

After little more than a crust of bread and coffee for breakfast, Barnard reminded everyone to use the chamber pot.

In the dimly lit street, Anne took one final look at the black-and-white Tudor building that had been their lodgings for the past few weeks. During that time, the journey ahead was just a thought in her head. But there was no turning back now, it had begun. Whatever lay ahead, she must look to the future.

Weighing anchor

It was still dark when a small rowing boat ferried them through inky-black Portsmouth waters to their ship. In the eerie glow of a lantern, the rowing boat pulled alongside the hull. Anne stared at the wall of wood looming above her. It was hard to imagine how people made it onto the ship. When it was her turn to be hoisted on the captain's chair, she tidied her hair, gathered her skirts and reminded herself to breathe. Only young Henry enjoyed the ride. When it was his turn, he laughed and, fearlessly peering over the edge, waved down to his father. One by one, the passengers crossed the threshold from land life to sea by way of that chair.

In the pale light of a winter's morning on the fifth day of February, the *Sir Edward Hughes* and three other ships in the convoy raised anchor to depart. Dressed in finery, their huge sails billowed in full appreciation of a benevolent breeze that ushered them out of the bay.

Sunlight spun gold on the water, while all about the *Edward's* deck the crew were busy. They tied knots, they coiled ropes, they climbed the mast and adjusted the sails. In addition to the crew, the passengers and tonnes of cargo, a veritable farmyard of cows, goats, sheep, pigs and chickens, added a pungent, noisy and chaotic element to some areas of the ship. The atmosphere on the ship felt optimistic and good.

The guests, many of whom had never sailed before, spent some of the morning exploring their new wooden world. Six cramped cabins offered private accommodation for those lucky enough to have it. At the front of the ship, the cuddy, with its saloon-like interior and large bank of windows, looked to be the place to socialise. The toilet at a far end of the ship, known as the head – an open platform with holes opening to the sea below – was shared

by men and women. A bucket of sea water was made available for rinsing. For many of the women, this toilet would take some getting used to.

Captain James Urmston, patrolled his deck, his hair flying and the tails of his coat flapping, exuding a comforting air of confidence. This was his second voyage in charge of the *Edward* and, as a man of the Company, Urmston never tired of telling everyone how he relished his duties at the helm of an East Indiaman. He was familiar with the route from Portsmouth to Bombay and, therefore, keenly aware that the delay in Portsmouth could be cause for concern. Unless the weather remained favourable for almost the entire journey, they would reach the Cape later than he would have liked. The closer they got to the middle of the year, the Cape's winter, the more likely it was that the ship would encounter storms around Table Bay. Although Urmston liked to claim himself as a man of reason, he was as superstitious as any sailor. It being a Sunday did at least count in their favour because, in common sea lore, to embark on the day of rest always brought luck.

The *Edward* was a ship prone to sluggishness. Her builders at the Bombay Dockyard had never considered speed as paramount. Rather, it was her capacity that should make up for it. She was roomy enough to carry several tonnes of cargo, house a large crew and offer space for paying passengers. She carried more than 100 guns, some of which were rammed through the portholes, ready to be fired should they face an enemy. As a modern ship, less than 10 years' old, the *Edward* had been designed with built-in cisterns to carry fresh water for the voyage. The additional free-standing barrels were to be used for the plants and animals. Urmston never missed an opportunity to regale his guests about the old days, when all the water was stored in barrels. Those great oak tuns would begin to smell over time, and eventually, become infested with grey worms. Urmston chuckled at the look on Lady Anne's face, enjoying her nervous reaction. A cup dipped into the barrel would bring out a brew alive with tiny, squirming bodies.

“Hold your nose while you drink and use your teeth as a sieve. ’Tis what we seamen loved to tell the uninitiated,” he teased her with a wink, and then turned his attention back to the sea, lifting his spyglass to his eye.

Despite the cold, the morning did feel glorious, and Anne could not think of any other time in her life when she had felt so free. Anne and Jane remained on deck to thaw in the winter sunshine. Such weather was not to be missed after weeks of tiresome wind and rain. From their cabins, they had to climb a ladder to reach the cuddy – a large room with windows all around it, and a fireplace. They also found the captain’s salad garden, a delightful discovery for Anne.

“I’m determined to make a sketch of this before the journey’s over,” she declared to Jane, looking more closely at the large, low-sided wooden box, with watercress and lettuce sown in neat rows on a piece of damp flannel. In this same corner of the ship were her own botanical treasures: wooden boxes of strawberry plants and citrus trees. Jane bent to inspect the fragile plants, with their leaves fluttering in the sea breeze. When she looked up again, Anne could see there was no colour in her cheeks. Her face looked sallow, even green.

“Oh, heavens, with all this rocking I fear I will be sick,” Jane cried out and dashed for the side of the ship.

Anne disliked attending to anyone sick in the stomach but, as Jane shook violently with every heave, Anne decided she’d better do something. How unpredictable life was. Only a moment ago they’d been basking in a newfound freedom, enjoying the open ocean. Now, that moment was utterly turned on its head. Remembering the clean handkerchief tucked into her sleeve, she offered it to Jane, who wiped her face but kept her head drooped over the side.

“Oh, how sorry I am that biliousness had taken hold of you. They say it only lasts until you find your sea legs. I remember feeling like this on a voyage to Spain ...”

Jane dabbed at her mouth with the handkerchief, unable to speak. Anne decided that not speaking may be best and instead rubbed Jane's back.

"I'm going to lie down," Jane said, as she began to move unsteadily towards the ladder.

Anne called after her, "I'll go and find Mrs Hughes and ask her to bring some mild claret for you. I hear it composes the stomach."

No sooner was Jane out of sight than Anne began to fret that she'd not done enough.

As long as conditions allowed it, dinner was an occasion for paying guests to be seated around the captain's table. On that first evening, the dinner was filled with the kind small talk made by strangers attempting to get to know one another.

Mrs Campbell, a Dutch woman with a pointy face, was onboard with her husband, Captain Donald Campbell, who would become the port captain when they arrived in Table Bay. Mrs Campbell had been born in the Cape and, though the rest of the table did not know it yet, her birthright would become an increasingly irritating fact as she lorded it over everyone.

Then there was Mrs Saul, a harmless, amiable Irish woman with a ruddy complexion, whose husband was already stationed in the Cape. Her conversation extended only as far as food and her fond reminiscences of her life as a young girl; nothing could come close to the lovingly roasted potatoes or suet puddings produced by her old nana.

The worldly and, perhaps, stuffy General Hartley was en route to India. He was sure of his opinions and his rational thinking would be called upon often over the coming weeks.

A purple-faced Mr Murray was the ship's physician. When he wasn't nicking the veins of his patients to administer the treatment known as bloodletting, to balance their humours, or wrapping up wounds, Mr Murray preferred to give all his attention to the gin and

beer aboard the ship. In fine weather, he was frequently found asleep under the awning on deck.

Lastly, there was Mr Keith, a young man who, most likely, had descended from dubious circumstances. He was bound for India in search of a future, where, for a stretch of the voyage, he harboured the notion that Jane should have a place.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” Captain Urmston held up a hand to silence the chatter around the table. “You must forgive the tumult of our first evening. In future, I assure you that, weather permitting, dinner will be served at seven.”

There was a murmuring from his dinner guests, presumably eager to offer their polite acceptance. Everyone, that is, except Mrs Campbell. Not much older than 30, Mrs Campbell could have been handsome, if not for her disagreeable manner. She sat with her body slightly turned, giving a good view of her back to poor Mrs Saul.

Although it was now well past 9.30 pm, the ship’s cook, in the spirit of the first day, had prepared a great spread. The table heaved under a roast leg of mutton, two hams, a pair of ducks, bowls of stewed cabbage, potatoes and, for dessert, a huge plum pudding.

Anne was rather hungry by this point and, feeling uncertain of what sort of meals were to come (she’d heard such differing reviews about food on these journeys), she ate a little of everything without complaint.

At the end of the meal, Mrs Campbell rearranged the uneaten food on her plate saying to her husband within earshot of her fellow diners, “This vos not such food as I’ve been used to. God knows I may starve on this ship.”

“Madam, if you saw what the crew ate, you might think differently,” General Hartley tried to intervene.

In the awkward silence that followed, Captain Urmston cleared his throat, pushed back his chair to get to his feet and raised a glass. "May every departure equal its own landfall!"

"Hear, hear," General Hartley said, not missing a beat. "I've no doubt that whatever dangers are to come on this journey, we will outsail any storm or enemy."

Mrs Saul's offer to clink glasses with Mrs Campbell was ignored and, just for a second, Anne could have sworn she saw Urmston roll his eyes before he gulped down the last of his drink and said something vague about being needed on deck.

The Barnards were almost too tall for their narrow cabin, and they'd have to remember to stoop under the low doorway. Furnished with a small and lumpy sofa, a wooden table and two green hammocks, there was a lantern attached to one wall and a row of brass coat hooks. It was cramped enough that one of them had to be seated on the sofa or at the table while the other dressed or searched for something in their luggage. They were lucky to have a porthole that, on calm days, offered a view onto a glistening sea and, more importantly, caught the breeze when left open, helping to flush out many unpleasant ship odours. That first night, the Barnards took turns to watch through the portal as the lights off the coast of England faded into the darkness.

Even though the first day had been a long one, Barnard lay awake in his cot. For Anne, the problem was the cold. She struggled to stay warm as the chill from the icy sea crept up into the cabin. Barnard fussed over her, rearranging her blankets, tucking in the feather comforter, and insisting she wore both her coats.

Whether Barnard's insomnia was due to the anticipation of what lay ahead, or the fact that he was unable to completely straighten his legs, he couldn't be sure. But he didn't allow the lack of sleep to rattle him. Instead, he spoke soothingly to Anne and climbed repeatedly

out of his cot to cover little Franny with his coat. To take their minds off it all, Anne asked him to teach her a bit of the Dutch he'd been learning and before long she had fallen asleep.

Sea perils

First came a hard pit-pat from above, like the sound of hailstones falling. Next came the lowing and moaning of cows some distance away. It took a little while for Anne to figure out that the pit-pat sound was grain landing above the Barnards' cabin when a kitchen boy fed breakfast to the hens and ducks. This set the cows off, waiting for their pile of hay.

These regular noises woke Anne each morning, rather too early for her liking. It was impossible to avoid the insidious familiarity that flourished in the confined space of life at sea: The minutiae of every person's daily habits, each one laid bare for examination, each one available to be made fun of or criticised.

General Hartley repeated the same joke – that, in such circumstances, it was possible to make lifelong friends or deadly enemies – a little too often. Mrs Saul was an early riser who liked to stretch her legs and get some air first thing. Weather permitting, she climbed the ladder to the top deck every morning, paid a visit to the head rather than using the chamber pot in her cabin, and then spent time looking out to the horizon, a small, stout woman with her bonnet pulled low on her head.

The weather and mealtimes dominated everything. Breakfast began at seven. It was always the same – stodgy ship's biscuits, which everyone avoided, or leftover bread from the previous day, baked with flour from the heavy hessian sacks, that the cook's assistant worked hard to keep dry. When fresh, the bread was round and crusty, but it hardened quickly in the damp sea air so that the thick buttered slices served at breakfast were more palatable when dipped in tea. Without fail, tea and coffee had a distinct musty taste, as if they had been brewed with water kept away from light and air for centuries.

Despite this rudimentary breakfast menu, Mrs Campbell, who was a great believer in breakfast being the most important meal of the day, never missed it. She had wasted no time

in getting the cook to prepare her own special brew each morning and, as soon as she had her pot of ginger tea in front of her, she set to the task of sawing the crusts from her bread and mashing the butter at the edge of her plate.

These habits of Mrs Campbell set the normally affable Barnard's teeth on edge. Not that Barnard himself was beyond reproach. His dogs were a source of entertainment for some and a nuisance for others.

"Honestly, I wish those dogs were dead!" Mrs Campbell had shrieked, when his pack of hounds, all various shapes, ages, and sizes, scampered across the deck. Their claws made a rasping sound on the floorboards, which she complained was alarming. She also thought them unruly and feared that, at any time, one of them might jump up or thrust its nose into her hand or, even worse, attempt a sniff at her lady parts.

Barnard took his dogs and his duty seriously, walking Franny and the rest of the pack on the deck every evening, even when the sky was low and leaden, or an icy wind whipping the sails kept all the other guests bundled up around the fire in the cuddy, or in bed.

Anne roamed about, her curiosity stimulated by her new world. She examined the captain's logbook, trying to decipher his scripted entries made in neat columns across the yellowed pages. She was seldom seen without her own leather-bound journal tucked under her arm or a sketchbook propped up on her lap. She made a small expedition out of her visits to the ship's garden, climbing the ladder and passing coiled ropes, the chickens and water barrels. When she reached the garden in its remote corner of the ship, she spent time watering the plants and studying the vines for new shoots.

March would prove the month of storms as the winds howled around the ship and the ocean swelled. One evening, as Barnard prepared to take the dogs for their walk, he had to coax little Franny out from under the sofa in their cabin. Out on deck, only the watchman was

about, his coat pulled tight around him with the collar up to shield his face. The wind slapped at Barnard's ears and sea foam spilled onto the deck making it as slick as a slide.

None of this fazed the dogs who wagged their tails and sniffed eagerly at the cold, damp air. When it happened, there was no time for Barnard to react: Franny slipped. Down into the fizz of waves she fell. A small, white dog, whose soft, pale fur blended seamlessly with the frothy sea. For a moment, her pointed face with its little black nose bobbed above a wave as she paddled. Stricken, Barnard called and yelled out into the wind. Then she disappeared. Just before her fall, she'd licked her master's hand; a final display of affection. Barnard called her name through the wind and the rain, but his voice was swallowed by the waves.

When he burst into the cabin with tears in his eyes, Barnard dropped at Anne's feet and tried to tell her what had happened.

"But is there no saving her?" Anne could not accept what she was hearing and threw a blanket around her shoulders to follow him back out into the cold. They had to move slowly because the deck was so slippery. It took Anne only one look into the churning, choppy water for her to understand the situation, and for the sorrow to hit.

"By God, I hate to admit it, but there is no saving her, pet!" Barnard shouted above the gale. "We're moving at five knots in this foul wind – it would take half an hour to get the long boat down."

"But we can't just leave her!" Anne said, lightheaded with shock.

"My Annie, it breaks my heart to say it, but even once we got the boat in the water, how would we find her? It's too dreadful to contemplate, but we must be at least a mile from the place where she fell."

Droplets of water clung to Anne's hair, her face wet with tears and rain. She pulled the blanket tighter, using her other hand to hold onto the side, her knuckles white from the

force of her squeeze. She'd only just been scolding Franny for repeatedly licking her paws. Franny, who had been safe in the corner of her straw bed, on her grey blanket. Why had she not talked Barnard out of making the dog go out for a walk. It was monstrous to imagine the little pointer being swallowed by the vast and unforgiving sea. She no longer noticed the cold or the rain as she tried to come to terms with what had happened. Even once they were back in the cabin, she kept looking at Franny's straw bed in the corner, expecting to see her curled up and asleep.

In the days afterwards, Barnard kept to himself, rarely speaking. He withdrew into a sadness that quickly manifested another episode of digestive troubles. It was back: the same bilious attacks he'd begun to experience in the military. They always surfaced in times of stress. Not knowing how to talk about the mortification he felt over what he viewed as his carelessness, and not wanting to explain to anyone what had happened to Franny, he was imprisoned for a while in their cabin, complaining to Anne that the ship was intolerably small.

“Honestly, all dis fuss about a silly dog,” Mrs Campbell grumbled at General Hartley, while lining up her bread crusts around the edge of her plate. The general responded with a cough and set his own cup slowly back in its saucer. Putting his hands together in an attitude of prayer, he turned to face her, “Madam, it is my belief that some dogs are better behaved than people. More's the pity the dog didn't fall during daylight when perhaps she might have been saved.”

Mrs Campbell remained quiet and waved a hand to signal for the steward to bring her tea. Anne didn't have the mental fortitude to dwell on the woman. Her usual thoughts about why Mrs Campbell couldn't be happy with ordinary Ceylon tea like the rest of them, were paused. All she could think about was how to protect Barnard. With his spirits so low, callous comments from this dreadful woman would only make him sicker.

Before Anne left breakfast, she buttered a few pieces of bread for Barnard and asked everyone present to refrain from reminding Barnard of Franny's accident. Her request elicited more throat clearing from General Hartley who promptly agreed not to raise the subject again. He tried to persuade Mrs Campbell, too. She lowered her eyes dramatically and said with a sigh, "I vil try, General, since you asked."

As it was, they had just entered the great arc of the Bay of Biscay, where a ferocious storm was brewing. By late afternoon, they were in the teeth of a wind that whipped across the seething sea, throwing the ship sideways.

In the quarter gallery, Anne just managed to stuff the cork back into her ink bottle before it hit the floor. Her quill fell and rolled away from her. The rocking of the ship made it impossible to continue writing. Through the rain-splattered windows, she watched a mountainous wave crash over the deck, drenching the crew, who looked to be running in every direction.

"I cannot see the sky in all the sea foam!" Anne shouted to Jane.

A sail cracked so loudly she feared the wind might snap the mast and she could just make out the second commander's words as he yelled: "Haul in mainsail – all – down – poop!" Pandemonium unfolded on the slick and treacherous deck.

One sudden and particularly violent pitch threw Anne and Jane hard onto the floorboards. Anne's elbow throbbed from the fall and, for a moment, she felt stunned.

" 'Tis not safe here!" Jane shouted to Anne, pulling herself up and holding onto a rail to stay steady. "We must try and get back to our cabins." She threw out her hand to Anne.

In the dark below deck, the terrified dogs howled. Their mournful cries and barks travelled through the walls, adding to the din of banging, sliding furniture. Anne lurched her way to her cabin, smelling vomit and fear in the musty, damp air. Too afraid to lie in her

hammock with the violent rocking of the ship, she curled her feet under her on the sofa.

Barnard staggered in, bearing a piece of heavy plank and calling her name.

“ ’Tis only hard weather, my pet,” he attempted to soothe her and then explained that he’d brought the plank so she could pin herself down. It was cold. Bitterly cold. When the normally harmless table crashed into the wall next to her, fear squeezed her throat.

“In all my life, Barnard, I’ve not experienced anything like this. Are we about to meet our makers?” It was dark and she could scarcely see his face. He stayed with her for a while but she could sense his need to get back out and participate.

“I want to check on our dogs, Annie, just stay where you are, don’t move.”

“Had I not had so much to lose, I might not have been this frightened,” she told him as he kissed her on the head. The persistent noise, the knocking, and the banging, the roar of destruction, terrified her most. Fixing her eyes on a coat hook, she tried to focus on breathing and keeping her thoughts occupied. What of her sweet Margaret ... what was she doing in this moment ... what if she never saw her again ... Dundas had warned her ... she could have made a different choice ... what was she thinking ... it was clear she’d been arrogant to think she could survive such a journey. And then it struck her, there had been no monthly bleed yet. Could it be? Or was any child she might have borne about to go down with her to the bottom of sea?

For hours Anne did not move. She had no option. Even though her damp dress made her shiver, even though she had a growing need to empty her bladder, and even though it was now pitch dark in the cabin, to move was out of the question. In her somewhat deranged thinking, she felt sorry she’d not retrieved her diamond bracelet from their stowed luggage. At least then she could drown like a lady. Barnard returned before dawn to see how she fared. Wide awake, Anne confessed her gravest fears.

After he helped her use the chamber pot and change her clothing, he insisted he'd fetch her some brandy to steady her nerves. Then he covered her with quilts and removed the chamber pot to be emptied. As she began to feel warmer, Anne's fears that life was about to end began to subside. It didn't take long for her to remember all their belongings: She was sure the strawberries must not have survived; she worried how their cows fared; she feared their cargo stowed in the bowels of the ship had been broken.

The storm raged on, forcing most of the passengers that were too fearful, too sick, or too bruised, to suffer through it without the relief of human company or a fresh change of clothes. All formal meals were on hold but, then again, so were most appetites. Only General Hartley could boast a cast-iron stomach from years of travelling. Even so, with the kitchen out of action, he had to stave off his hunger by nibbling on dry ships biscuits made all the more palatable by dipping them in quantities of claret.

On the second night, Henry crept to the Barnards' cabin with Jane close behind him. She'd fallen hard to the floor after one of her hammock's stays snapped and decided to look for comfort. The trio huddled on Anne's cramped sofa, their spirits lifted at the sight of each other.

"I am glad you found me, my boy." Anne felt a warm gush of tenderness toward the child, brought on by her recent awareness that she was more than a month late with her menses. If she was given the chance to have her own child, she was sure it would help her be a better mother to Henry.

"I'm not afraid, and you shouldn't be either," Henry attempted to convince the women.

"But Henry, listen to that storm, my boy," Anne pointed to the dark portal window.

"One should never be a flincher."

"I am not as brave as you," Anne said, pulling him closer. "My courage fails me."

She felt him shiver at the icy tendrils of draft that found every tiny gap.

Barnard returned, this time for some rest. With the others bundled on the sofa, he took his chances and fumbled his way into his hammock.

“Will this ever pass?” Anne asked.

Utterly exhausted, his eyes already closed, he answered: “Urmston thinks this levanter will abate soon. They are common in these parts.”

The wind subsided before the rain. Over the sea, rays of heavenly sunlight broke through the heavy clouds in a dramatic spectacle that lifted the spirits of all who saw it. They had sailed through the storm. Dishevelled survivors emerged from their cabins. Wrapped in coats, or huddled in blankets over their shoulders, they headed straight for the dinner table. It might be a hasty meal for Captain Urmston, but he took the time to greet each of his passengers and offered his compliments to every lady, regardless of their dishevelment.

All around the unusually gay table, eyes lit up and people shook with laughter. After what they'd been through, people's spirits were high, their appetites hearty. Such a simple meal of cold beef, bread and potatoes was, they agreed, as good as a feast.

Venturing onto the quarterdeck after dinner, a carpet of stars spread over the jet-black sky took the Barnards' breath away. What a joy to breathe that sea air. It filled their lungs, crisp and fresh, clearing any residues of the awful odours and mustiness from the past few days.

Shark fin soup

As the weather turned sultry, the crew shed their shoes and stockings. Activities took on a more leisurely pace as the warm trade winds ushered the ship further south. After trimming, the old sails, like deflated wings, lay strewn about the deck for mending. Frayed old ropes were converted into rags or used to stuff into crevices and gaps in the ship. With the easy sailing, it was time to scrub down the wooden deck boards and air out the bedding in the breeze. Every available surface was used to lay out the laundry to dry in the sun.

When the heat intensified, the ladies would appear at breakfast with their faces already shining and their strength usurped because they could not cool down. At night, it was so hot only a thin sheet was needed for sleeping. Anne lay with the door and window open, waiting to feel a benevolent breeze from the sea. Even hot tea no longer worked to cool down the English. They turned, instead, to more frequent consumption of alcoholic drinks, sipped slowly under the red canvas awning on deck, while they gossiped and gambled until late in the evenings.

By now, Mrs Campbell had established her monopoly on any information regarding the Cape. Over frequent games of whist in the round house, or lolling under the awning in the heat, speculation concerning their foreign and strange destination was rife: What did the houses look like, and were they easy to come by; would they be able to buy luxuries; what sort of food was most common in the colony; why did the Dutch still own slaves; exactly how big was the table top mountain; were there tigers and lions on the outskirts of the town.

Beyond the small world of the ship, the ocean waters were as busy as a city. Porpoises raced through the sea as if competing with the moving vessel. Some nights, glowing phosphorus streaked the water with an eerie green.

Then an unusual visitor set the sailors' nerves on edge.

"We don't want it here," the second commander said to the ladies, fanning themselves in the shade of the awning.

"Them birds can carry the departed spirits of East India captains," he went on, crossing himself, like a Catholic.

"A ship is no place for an albatross."

After the albatross came a shark. Caught one morning and hauled up onto the deck by four of the crew, its blue bulk stretched out across the wooden deck, on display.

"Wicked sinner!" a reedy man with wild red hair spat at the fish as he circled it. Anne tread carefully around the poor fish. About five-foot long, it would have looked sleek but for the large, ugly hook rammed through its jaw. A bloody, scarlet halo pooled around the fish's head.

"He may be a sinner, but put him out of his sorrow and remove the hook," she asked one man and then pleaded with another. But the sailors were tougher than nails and not about to change their ways, even for a woman with a title.

"He's a devil that sure as hell made a meal of many a brave seaman," another of the crew explained through a stream of blue pipe smoke that billowed out of his mouth and nostrils. He grinned to show his yellow teeth and lifted his eyebrows suggestively, "It needs seeing to, that's for sure. Ah, but we'll get to it after breakfast."

It was difficult to witness their cruelty, made worse by her own helplessness. Whenever she confronted this kind of brutality, it occurred to her that she'd lived a sheltered life. If she remained out on deck, the monstrous sight of the fish lying in a pool of blood with a vacant, lifeless eye would continue to draw her in, so she left. Later, curious to see what the rabble of voices above her was all about, she left her cabin and returned to the shark. It was now carved up into a gruesome pile of meat, with a rank and unholy smell.

A Chinese lascar could not hide his excitement at the sight of the shark, and insisted he be allowed to demonstrate the unique Chinese way to dress the fins.

“It is customary with sharks in China, old chap,” Hartley said, slapping the slight man, Tsao Totko, on the back.

“Let me tell you, Lady Anne, shark fin is considered one of their greatest delicacies, you know. You may never get another chance. It is worth a try, I tell you.”

Tsoa Toko nodded his head and smiled, evidently pleased at this acknowledgement. He pointed to a lump of fish with the texture of cartilage.

“Shark fin soup, bery good for inside and will keep people young,” Toko said with great enthusiasm for someone who was usually quiet.

“It was when I was stationed in China that I learnt that the fins are considered to be a tonic and an ... aphrodisiac,” General Hartley added with a saucy smile.

What a curious idea, thought Anne, always open to the possibility of anything to help maintain her youth. Just that morning she'd noticed a slight slackening in the skin on her arms. Still, the idea of eating a shark fin was far from appetising, but it might soon be necessary, even just to humour General Hartley and Tsoa Toko. At least it would give her a story for future telling.

The other sailors, including the pipe smoker, were displeased.

“We don't care for 'em strange Chinese ways,” yellow teeth spat his words out. The cook also showed not the slightest interest in the delicacies of the East, insisting he would stick with the known way of cooking the oily hard fish, which was to fry it with a bit of salt pork.

“Only fin needed for soup,” Tsoa Toko held his ground. “We put in warm water first before we boil.”

Anne looked at General Hartley, as if asking him to tell these men to let Toko cook it. Hartley caught the look and said, “I declare, we’ll have a competition, then! Toko makes shark fin soup and the cook can prepare the flesh of the fish in the traditional way.”

Not wishing to spoil Toko’s moment, Anne found herself reluctantly agreeing to taste the shark not once, but twice, to humour the competitors.

Barnard's cheek

A fine rain pooled in little puddles, soaking anything inadvertently left out on deck. Anne, still in her hammock, looked across at Barnard. His cheek was swollen.

“Darling B, do you think you slept in a bad position that has caused this?”

“I cannot say. I feel in good health although it is a little tender.” Barnard was using Anne’s hand mirror to examine his face. “I trust it is nothing, but this lack of exercise bothers me.”

Anne nodded in agreement. “We all need to use our legs again. A ride for you, and I need a decent walk.”

As the day dragged on, the temperature dropped suddenly. It turned so cold, Anne had to dig out her winter flannel undergarments before leaving the cabin.

In the cuddy, she found several people huddled around a decent fire. With nothing better to do, Mr Murray passed around tots of claret.

“To warm your ankles,” he said, always cheerful at the opportunity to share a drink.

Anne hoped it might help Barnard’s throbbing cheek. In the middle of a verbal sparring with Captain Campbell, betting about which way the wind would turn, Barnard stopped to accept the drink and nodded his thanks to Mr Murray.

Mrs Campbell, who had been quietly sewing, looked up from her stitching, “I always vish,” said she, rolling her eyes, “each time I hear a bet about the wind, that I had a bar of iron to knock the teeth down the throat of the person who laid it.”

Anne wasn’t sure she had heard her correctly until Barnard started to laugh and, raising his glass in her direction, replied, “Would it not be the same, Mrs Campbell, if you were to use your elbow?”

That night Anne soaked a linen compress in a bowl of hot water before laying the hot cloth upon Barnard's cheek.

"My dearest and best," Barnard said, looking at Anne, his eyes bright with appreciation and feeling, "you are one of a kind, you know. But as for Mrs Campbell, she's the most odious woman I've ever laid eyes on, I think."

In the doldrums

The wind was replaced by a terrible calm. Around the ship the water turned brown, omitting a stench that hung in the air. The doldrums, this is what the sailors called it. Four-hundred miles from the Cape, the *Edward*, stranded in its position without wind or breeze to move an inch, stagnated in its own effluent.

Anne's state of mind matched the rest of the ship. She kept her porthole closed and dabbed rosewater pomander from Barnard's locket under her nose. There was nothing to do but loiter in her tiny quarters. She was even more vexed by her own natural cycles. During the journey, the Barnards had found ways to make love. Despite their tiny cabin, the separate cots, they had enjoyed coming up with innovations, like Anne straddling Barnard on the tiny sofa. The motion of the ship, added a sensuality to the movements of their own.

After two months without menses her hopes had risen, unsure if she should attribute it to her diligence with the physicians' prescriptions. It had not been easy to steam her quim in the cramped cabin when the ship was seldom steady. It was a task she preferred to do without Barnard's knowledge. As she'd begun to bleed again, this time more than normal, she was reminded of the shark in a pool of its own blood. Once again, she must endure the pain, the discomfort of menstrual cloths held in place by a cord around her waist, the twice-daily washing, and the laundry which, after being rinsed in salt water, became hard and crusty. The uncomfortable cramps were bearable and would not have bothered her if it weren't for their cruel confirmation that her womb was still empty, or twisted, but certainly unresponsive to any treatments.

It was more than the stink of the ocean and her body's crimson tide; difficulties with Henry had also arisen. The boy had grown increasingly insolent and unruly again, proving to Barnard that he was just as his mother had described him. Unsure of his ability to control the

child, Barnard reached his wits' end. There had been incidents reported by the boatswain. Twice he'd caught Henry swinging dangerously over the side of the ship on a rope. He was rude to the commanders, losing favour with them. In another skirmish, he was seen spitting at a young lascar who was supposed to be his friend.

Henry had been summoned to the Barnards' cabin and, as punishment, Barnard told him he would have to learn and recite French dialogues to atone for his behaviour. Henry shuffled from foot to foot and rolled his eyes.

"That stinks like this ship, and I won't do it," Henry retorted. "You can't force me to learn a stupid language I have no use for. You are being the most unreasonable man that ever lived."

Barnard – who was not a physically violent man – grabbed the boy by his collar and spoke through tight lips: "Woe betide, Henry, you had better do as your father tells you."

Henry squirmed under his father's gaze and his eyes grew as round as saucers. "What's the point of learning those things? I think all those writers should get the guillotine."

Anne stopped dabbing pomander under her nose and tried to intervene: "Henry, you don't know what you are saying. Resign yourself to your punishment and it will be over soon. Resist it and you stretch it out most painfully."

"Until you have come back and recited the first one, there will be no supper for you Henry," Barnard added.

But Henry would not back down. The more Barnard tried to rein him in, the more rebellious the boy became. When it culminated with Henry threatening to climb out of the portholes and ride the ropes whenever he wanted, Barnard lost his temper.

"Repeat those words again and you'll be beaten!"

Henry spat at his father's feet, unwilling, or unable, to back down. Barnard struck out. He caught Henry under one arm and flung him over the table to beat him. Anne's heart

thumped in her ears. She would rather be anywhere, even with the smell, than in the cabin. She backed into a corner and began stacking her notebooks to refrain from being an audience while the boy was flogged.

Later, Barnard lay in the dark in his hammock, his arms crossed over his chest as he stared at the ceiling. He had a handkerchief doused in orange water which he intermittently put to his nose.

“I don’t know who suffered more today, Henry or I. That boy keeps me awake at night. What if he becomes just like those revolutionaries across the English Channel? Look where that led the French! I don’t remember ever speaking to my own father that way.”

“My mother used to shout that whipping was too good for us children,” Anne said. “Instead, she might lock me in a small room, leaving only oatcakes and water outside the door, for a day. I made it worse by being stoic with her punishments. I could draw or write. She never worked out that she should have confiscated my quill and paper. But she left me convinced that whipping never solved anything. A tincture of rhubarb every day for a month and no pudding could be a new approach for Henry.”

Barnard rolled onto his side and reached across to Anne. He pulled the hanky away from his nose to smile at his wife, “I would like to kiss you now,” he said. “We can only hope he takes well to the Cape, or I fear we may have to send him back to school.”

Anne blew him a kiss and then settled down to sleep. As her cramps had subsided, she was physically more comfortable, but a vague fear nagged at her as she fell asleep.

Landfalls

“Holla, My Lady!” Pawell was outside the Barnards’ cabin door, shuffling from one foot to another.

“The land, My Lady, appears at 14 leagues distance.”

“Since when, Pawell?”

“Since five this morning.”

“How is the wind?”

“There’s little of it so it’ll do us no harm.”

“What do you say to this news, my poor Barnard?”

“Only that I wish we had arrived when I was well. But there’s no help for it, swollen face and all, I shall have to make the best of it.”

There was nothing like the sight of land to infuse the breakfast tea with an unusual freshness. The cook’s freshly baked scones – now that he could freely use up the last of the marmalade and flour – gave everyone a treat. Even the Campbells were in high spirits, spirits of an especially Campbell kind, cheerfully thanking God that, at last, they would be rid of the ship. For once, Anne felt impervious to the mean and emotionally impoverished duo. Not even the Campbells could ruin the feeling of lightness that arose from being so close to their destination.

For their last day, people sat under the awning, cracking jokes and writing letters to be sent home with the next ship to England. Seagulls and other land birds began visiting the ship, squabbling high on the coop and shouting their shrill calls. Bedtime came early in preparation for the events of the next day.

The following morning, the ship ploughed a frothy furrow through the water, moving at speed in a display of sails, full and proud. The sight of land was blocked from view by a fog so thick that it was necessary for a fishing boat with a tangle of nets to pull up alongside the ship and reassure Captain Urmston that, as long as they took care not to run afoul of other vessels in the bay, they would be safely sheltered by land soon.

“I can’t believe it. After all our anticipation to see the bold shore of the Cape,” Anne threw up her hands in frustration as she and Jane jostled along with the other passengers, eager for their first glimpse of the Cape. Anne had planned to capture her first impression, her sketchbook and charcoal under one arm. Around her legs, the dogs sniffed the air, ears alert and tails wagging, picking up on the anticipation of the people around them. Mrs Campbell, fortunately, was not around to be annoyed by them.

As the sun’s rays intensified, those who’d remained on deck gasped at the sight of the mist melting away, creating a sublime, ethereal pooling of light that found its way through wisps of whirling water droplets. As the wall of white disappeared, a sweeping section of the bay appeared, then a shaft of granite and, all at once, the distinctive flat shape of Table Mountain appeared with only a ring of clouds around its top.

“There is the Lion’s Head, to the right of Table Mountain. It looks like it’s wearing a necklace!” Jane could barely stand still.

Anne held her breath as she took in the vast bay, dotted with ships and fishing boats. In the distance, a small, tidy village clung to the hem of the mountain, dwarfed in proportion to the mountains that surrounded it.

“ ’Tis like a poet’s fancy, or a painter’s vision,” said Anne, squeezing Jane’s arm at the sight, unlike anything she’d encountered. She was at once sad that her sister was not with her because only those who shared this experience would ever truly understand it. Anne sat with her portfolio on her knee and started to sketch the landscape.

“Lady Anne! Pray tell me, how do I look?” Mrs Saul bounded up to Anne wearing a new blue ribbon in her old bonnet. Earlier, Anne had thought it prudent to advise Mrs Saul not to go surprising Mr Saul at his lodgings, well aware of the danger that such a surprise might mean for a husband who’d been living thousands of miles from his wife and who did not know that she was on her way.

“Ah! I think he must be with those people there,” Mrs Saul said, pointing to a small crowd of people further up the beach who’d come to receive the new governor. “I can’t wait to see the look on his face when he sets eyes on me.”

Anne didn’t say, but she hoped Mr Saul was not in for an unwelcome surprise. Then Mrs Saul started crying and blessing everyone before leaving Anne to her own frustration with her drawing, which she felt was poor and did not do the scene any justice.

A cannon boomed a greeting that reverberated across the bay and bounced hard off the splendid mountains. The firing of cannons ensured that no one in town would not know of the new arrivals. Barnard kissed Anne on her neck, tied a handkerchief across his face to hide his swollen cheek, pulled his scarlet coat on and smoothed down his hair. He got off the ship the same way he had got on months ago, being lowered into the rowing boat that would convey him to the *Trusty* and its most important passenger, Lord Macartney. Barnard was now in attendance to the new governor and when they reached the shore would meet the crowd with him.

“I dare say, he best be careful he doesn’t drop that handkerchief just as soon as he is out of sight,” Anne said with mirth to Jane as the two of them watched Barnard drop from view. It wasn’t long before they could see him again, with the commander, rowing in the direction of the *Trusty*.

First impressions

The last time Anne turned to look back at the *Edward*, she could scarcely pick the ship out among all the other vessels scattered in the crowded bay. Every ship anchored there connected the Cape colony to the rest of the world in some way, whether through the paying guests and fresh currency these ships provided, the exotic cargo and novel goods they carried from far flung places, or the vital service of carrying precious letters to family and friends across the seas.

This was, indeed, an unassuming arrival, Anne decided, while being carried in an ungainly fashion over clear, shallow water. She was deposited by the crew member onto the worn, slimy steps of a rotting quay that led to a beach of fine white sand and colossal grey boulders. The boulders nearest the water were draped in kelp. Standing on solid ground was a shock and her legs and feet felt unsteady as she sank into the sand. There was a pervasive smell of salt and fish in the air. The odour appeared to emanate from a cluster of men further up the beach. The cheerful sounds of their banter in the late afternoon carried pleasantly on the breeze while they emptied their nets.

From a group of people that milled about waiting to meet the ship, a man stepped forward, towards Anne, with his arms outstretched.

“Milady, Mr Strombom at your service. Welcome to the gracious Cape of Good Hope.” His grin hinted at teasing as he pointed to an old-fashioned cart harnessed to a pair of sturdy draught horses, “Your chariot awaits.”

Recommended by the Gillans, Anne had written to Mr Strombom almost a year ago to arrange accommodation in their first few weeks. Providing board and lodging to paying

guests was just one of the ways the Stromboms earned a living and, until such time as the Barnards found a place of their own to live, they would rely on these people for everything.

Strombom looked just like Anne imagined a good colonist should look: small, wiry and full of pluck and energy. His eyes crinkled when he smiled under his wide-brimmed leather hat. His boots were creased with wear. She imagined those boots were evidence that, in the Cape, priorities were different to those of men who frequented the coffee houses of London. They'd never done a hard day's work in their lives, flashing their shiny, buckled shoes while in the idle activity of a debate. Strombom looked as if he had better things to do with his time and something about his sprightly manner had an unfortunate effect on Anne, who, with sand lodged in her shoes and her unkempt, windblown hair, felt altogether damp and frumpy.

Despite her state of disrepair, Anne was not afraid to speak her mind. She hoped he would understand that, after all the time she'd spent at sea, more than anything, she wanted to walk.

Mr Strombom made another little bow and smiled through a neat beard. Anne asked, "Ah, kind Mr Strombom, would you take Mrs Hughes and Jane with you instead?"

Anne's mention of these other women caused a muscle in Mr Strombom's jaw to twitch and, without having to be told, Anne realised that the Stromboms had not prepared for additional guests. How such a detail could have been overlooked she could not fathom, but a solution was beyond her for now and, fortunately, Mr Strombom gave nothing else away.

"That footpath," he pointed, "takes you past the old castle and into the village. You will find our house on Strand Street." He rolled his tongue behind his teeth when pronouncing the letter *r*. "It follows the edge of the bay. The house is easy to find as it's the one with a palm tree beside the *stoep*. Always a good landmark for the place."

He tipped his hat and turned to issue instructions in Dutch to the black man that had been waiting behind him, as quiet as the colonist's shadow.

Anne didn't know what he meant by a "*stoep*", so she interrupted him for clarification.

"... Ah, you will pick up some of the *taal* while you are here – in other words, a veranda," Mr Strombom replied over his shoulder while giving Mrs Hughes a hand up into the cart. The silent slave did the heavy lifting, putting several valises and trunks belonging to the Barnards into the back of the cart. The rest of their belongings would stay on the ship until they found permanent lodgings. It was peculiar to Anne that the man loading the cart was barefoot and that the stony surface of the road did not appear to faze him.

Clattering along under its load, the cart disappeared into the dust, leaving Anne alone at last. She was alarmed and elated by this sudden freedom. The footpath quickly opened out onto a stretch of barren ground, known in the village as the parade ground. She did not see a soul as she walked by a low white wall, and barely glanced at the flat-roofed building behind it, its shutters closed. But the thick black poles towering in the yard caught her attention. These were the gallows. Two sets, side by side. They were innocuous to look at in their empty surroundings, just a few planks of wood. And yet, once she had identified them, her blood felt cold. She was well aware of the Cape's bloody reputation, but she couldn't imagine how many slaves had been executed in this barren place, strung up like hunted birds, decaying in the sun. She noticed how conspicuously placed this execution ground was: a warning to all new arrivals.

Anne walked faster to get away from the area. Mountains like giants reared up behind the buildings. Their forms were so dramatic it was hard to take her eyes from them. Further up, at the edge of the village, the grid of streets petered out into lush plantations and food gardens, partitioned by orderly grids of myrtle hedges.

After she passed the mossy, granite walls of the old castle, she found herself on the street along the seafront. It was wide and lined with oak trees. The houses were handsome and never taller than three storeys. The oaks were dropping their leaves for the winter and they rustled and swirled around Anne's feet with every gust of wind from the sea. Water gurgled pleasantly in the furrows and sluices that were opened twice a day to funnel water from the mountain streams to residents. Front steps were swept clean and, behind their wide sash windows with many glass panes, the dark interiors promised a respite from the cutting glare that bounced off the whitewashed walls that had begun to give Anne a headache. Privately, she was relieved at the neatness of the place.

Mr Strombom's palm tree was the only green tree among the oaks. It stood in front of an old-fashioned Dutch house, with reeds and Flemish gable-ends. Just as Strombom had mentioned, a wide terrace, or stoep, as he called it, ran in front of the house. It was shaded by a gnarled grapevine twisted across a trellis. Mrs Strombom opened the heavy teak front door herself. Dressed in sombre, old-fashioned clothes, she gave a short curtsy and opened the door wide for Anne to enter.

"Aw, it is such an honour to have you with us. Please, come in, come in, Lady Anne. Did you not want Mr Strombom to run you up from the quay? We've been all aflutter here, but he insisted on meeting you personally. He's very particular about these things, he is. Wouldn't want you being overcharged by one of the coaches that meet the people off the ships. We once had a guest, we hadn't known he was coming because sometimes people just arrive here by way of a recommendation they receive from another traveller, and he made it known that he'd been charged 20 guilders just for that short journey. I mean, everyone must get by, I know, but there is a tendency here for locals to hike their prices when they see an unsuspecting foreigner coming. Sometimes, when I'm at the market, they hear my English

accent and think I am none the wiser, but I quickly put it straight that I know exactly, to the guilder and *stuiver*, mind you, just how much a pat of butter costs.”

Anne started to explain about stretching her legs but Mrs Strombom listened only briefly before taking over the conversation: “Aw, we were sure you’d be tired from your journey but, please, you must have things as you like them.”

“What a pleasant house this is,” Anne interjected, hoping to assuage the Stromboms after she’d turned down the offer of transport from the quay. For the first time, Mrs Strombom stopped talking and smiled, giving Anne a shock. The sight of her teeth! So uncommonly and vexatiously discoloured. From that moment, every grin Mrs Strombom offered, left Anne devising a plan on how they might be mended, while trying to keep her eyes on other facial features rather than those teeth.

Regrettably, no offer of tea was forthcoming and, instead, a tour of the house was next. Mrs Strombom moved quickly down the dark corridor, letting in light every time she opened the door of another room off the hallway. The house was cool and minimal. The furniture solid and unrefined, as if it had been built from the remnants of shipwrecks. Heavy teak cupboards were built into the walls, which were noticeably bare of artworks. Red polished earthenware tiles covered the floors, every window had a shutter to block out the dazzling Cape sun. As Anne was to discover, these were essential during the long, hot summers.

At the back of the house was a courtyard with several outbuildings. There was space for the chickens and horses, and housing for slaves. They slept on mats on the floor above the large kitchen, reached by a ladder up to a small hatch, which they had to crawl through. Mrs Strombom stood with Anne on the threshold of the kitchen. It had a table and a few chairs. A cavernous fireplace dominated the room, with a variety of cast iron and copper pots and moulds hanging from nails in the walls. Two women with red handkerchiefs wrapped around

their heads sat at the table peeling a pile of vegetables, their bare feet folded under the chairs. They were silent, having ceased their talk the moment Mrs Strombom opened the door.

“Don’t take more than you have to with the peels of the carrots and the potatoes or there’ll be nothing left of those vegetables!” Mrs Strombom scolded. “And, where is Fortune? He must bring the tea to the front room.”

She steered Anne away from the kitchen and lowered her voice, taking Anne into her confidence: “You will learn to be vigilant with the kitchen slaves because they tended to have a heavy hand with all the supplies. We certainly cannot put up with such waste!”

Mrs Strombom never wasted an audience. She spoke fast, pausing only to suck in a mouthful of air between words. This way of speaking, Anne discovered quickly, made it difficult to get a word in and, later, Anne would decide, the only way into a conversation with Mrs Strombom was to talk over her. Mr Strombom had obviously had a lot of practice at this.

Far from home

Just before the sun dropped behind the mountain came the first of many knocks at the door. Dressed in military attire of scarlet or blue, men of varying ages and rank crowded into the parlour, filling the house with smells of tobacco, horses and sweat, and the hum of deep voices. Each one had come to welcome the new secretary. When, eventually, Barnard himself turned up, Anne could see his surprise at all the visitors and that, shortly after trying to show how pleased he was, he slumped deeper into his chair and pressed his head into the back of it. His cheeks appeared flushed with fever and his face was still distorted by the swollen cheek. Anne was doing only marginally better, still nursing a headache. In her own house, she could have summoned Mrs Hughes for camomile tea and she could have prepared a poultice for Barnard's cheek. But here, she had no idea what had become of Mrs Hughes and where she would spend that first night.

It was a challenge, being at the mercy of strangers, unaccustomed to the way things were done in a foreign house with unknown people. Anne felt some regret that they had not moved into a house of their own upon arrival. That way, they could have opted for a quiet evening and compared notes from the day. It was probably unrealistic, and easier to spend at least the first couple of nights in a house with some comforts already in place, but the Barnards had not expected such a reception, and so immediately.

As newcomers to the colony, the Barnards could not know that every new arrival, especially those with positions in government, was welcomed – and scrutinised – by a community who understood the power the government officials wielded.

One of the scarlet coats cleared his throat noisily and turned to Barnard, asking, “Have you any idea where you might set up a house?” He surveyed the room, twisting the

ends of his moustache between his fingers. “A house like this one has the advantage of a large dining room off the courtyard.”

The mention of houses caused a frisson in the room and provided an opportunity for the men to complain and offer opinions on the cost of property. “Of course, Strombom has the purse for a house like this one,” a blue coat observed.

“Gentlemen,” Mr Strombom had just walked in, “if you want to know, I purchased this place two years back. Five-thousand pounds at the time. The dining room was our own addition. Still, you know the situation, whether you choose to buy or rent, you face steep prices.”

Anne looked at Barnard, hoping to catch his eye. This was not what she wanted to hear, when they’d planned to save and settle any outstanding debts. Barnard saw the look in her eyes and mouthed back at her, “Do not fret, my Annie.”

“A furnished or partly furnished place would be right for us,” Barnard said to the rest of the room, propping himself up to appear more engaged in the conversation. His comment produced a lull until the moustached red coat went into a rather long-winded explanation about how it did not matter as, whether furnished or not, property owners in the Cape preferred to take in lodgers than let an entire house. Barnard sat back in his chair as the conversation moved on to the price of food, especially the cost of bread, which had become a rich man’s food as the Cape’s prices were worse than London’s.

Evening set in and the room was turning dark and gloomy. Anne went to look for Mrs Strombom to ask for wood for a fire and a few candles, not knowing that wood was another scarce commodity. She’d seen groups of men on her walk from the quay, their brown bodies naked from the waist up and crimson handkerchiefs wrapped around their heads. They were barefoot on the stony ground and on their shoulders were two bundles of wood, strung on either side of a bamboo pole.

These were the slaves kept expressly for the daily forage for firewood. They would leave early in the morning to roam the steep mountain slopes, inaccessible to waggons. In the afternoon they'd return (hopefully) bearing two bundles, one for the master's household and one for themselves. The influx of British troops had swelled the population by thousands, increasing the demand for firewood more than ever, a burden on a town where the flatter areas were already stripped of most of the trees. The frugal Stromboms allowed only a fire in the kitchen for cooking. Fires in the parlour were considered an absolute luxury, to be kept for only the coldest of days.

Dinner, at least, was plentiful. Buttery fresh fish, boiled vegetables, and a spicy meat curry with bright yellow rice, which was novel to the Barnards. The colour, Mrs Strombom explained, came from infusing saffron in the rice water.

Mr Strombom ignored his wife's talk of spices and proceeded to speak over her as he raised his glass to the table: "Here's to the successful purchase of a coachman tomorrow."

"Surely you mean the purchase of a coach?" Anne interrupted him, unable to stop herself from pointing out his error. "You said coachman!"

"A coachman is exactly what I meant, Milady. Tomorrow I will attend the sale of a deceased estate and the coachman himself is one of the items for auction."

The colony was home to men, women and children who had been captured and sold. Some survived excruciating sea journeys, crammed into torturously small spaces on the ships that carried them from Batavia, the Eastern Islands of India, Madagascar and the coast of Guinea. Others were African slaves taken from the interior of the country, and some were the Hottentot people who inhabited the area long before the Europeans arrived. Once they were bought and paid for, their owners viewed them as a valuable commodity. Most households owned at least six people, but the richer families might have as many as a dozen slaves. There were far more slaves than owners in the Cape. The settlement had grown to about 6 000

residents, with all the children, as well as an endless stream of military men who passed through on the ships.

Although Anne thought it abhorrent to buy a person, she was careful not to show it. Just then, a young slave woman, at Mrs Strombom's instruction, returned from the kitchen with a few shrivelled red threads on a saucer. This was saffron, Mrs Strombom declared over her husband, who was still speaking. Anne felt torn as to whom she should listen to: Mr Strombom's talk about auctions, as if his purchase of a horse free of ailments was more interesting than the spice on display; or Mrs Strombom, whom she couldn't ignore.

That first dinner was an education for the Barnards. Every report of the Cape's undrinkable wine, they discovered, was entirely unfounded. Barnard's mood had slowly improved under the care of Dr Hazelton, not through any medical intervention but because, with unfailing regularity, he pushed back his chair and tottered around the table in a congenial way, topping up everyone's glasses.

"Let us drink on a good evening," he toasted again. Barnard raised his glass and declared that all he planned to drink in the future was this excellent Cape red.

"Like mother's milk!" Hazelton answered, his eyes shining as he took another furtive glance at Jane.

When Mr Strombom ceremoniously called for his hat and his pipe, it was to signal that dinner was over.

By the light of a flickering candle, Mrs Strombom led the Barnards through the dark, up a flight of perpendicularly steep stairs, telling them that all Cape stairs were built in this manner. After lighting the candles, placed in sconces in their room, she wished them good night and left. The room went quiet and Anne let the silence wash over her.

Off came her shoes and she sat herself down on the bed to check the mattress for comfort. It was covered in a chocolate-brown taffeta coverlet which appeared to match the

curtains. She pulled back the cover to find clean calico sheets and pillows stuffed with feathers. French paper covered the walls but, although the room was spacious enough, she could immediately see that it lacked a few conveniences. A chest of drawers and a dressing table would definitely be missed and the only mirror, heavily framed, hung in such a bad place she was not sure where she could sit to do her hair.

“Does it not surprise you that such prosperous people as the Stromboms, in a colony where the smallest luxury can add happiness and superiority, would choose to deny these things?” she asked Barnard.

“The place is queer, my Annie,” he said, tugging his shirt over his head and dropping the rest of his clothes to the floor, desperate to get into bed.

“Dundas was right, no luxury to be found here,” she added, not expecting any answer.

“Heavens!” Barnard jerked forward, slapping at his arm. “This room must have been empty for some time.”

Anne bent down to scratch her ankles. Barnard held the candle close to her leg. She had several pink insect bites. He examined the floor and within the small halo of light she could just make out the tiny black bugs. Fleas. Fleas hopping up from between the cracks in the floorboards. An exhausted Barnard gave a long, drawn-out sigh, “I shall put up with sleeping in a fleapit as long as they aren’t in the bed,” he said, his speech thick from his swollen cheek and a lot to drink.

Anne licked her finger to apply spit to her ankle bites. It was an itch impossible to ignore, even with the numbing effects from the wine that helped her to disassociate slightly from the predicament. She helped Barnard into bed and scratched hard at her ankles again. Barnard’s eyes closed immediately as sleep overtook him. Bone tired herself, she surveyed the alien room and considered the problem.

Mrs Hughes, she'd learnt during dinner, had been lodged with a neighbour – an inconvenience which meant Anne could either ignore the little blighters and tell Mrs Strombom about them in the morning, or attempt to deal with them herself. Another nip was so ferocious she realised she had to do something. Still in her clothes and armed with a candle, she took the ridiculous stairs one by one. She hoped she could find the kitchen and once there she'd look for a broom and flour.

The house was dark and still. The first door she tried was wrong. The kitchen was eerie in the dim light of her candle, with black shapes at the edges of the room. As she searched for shelves or a pantry, she had the oddest feeling she was not alone. One of the dark shapes started to move. Anne stood as tall as she could and spoke firmly to the figure: “Who are you? Show yourself!”

“Madam ... I ... I sorry ... is me, Fortune.”

Anne stepped forward and held her candle up to illuminate his face.

“Fortune!” She remembered him from earlier when he'd brought in the tea. “What are you doing in the kitchen?”

“I sleep here, Madam Barnard.”

Fortune kept his eyes and head down.

“In the kitchen?”

“Yes Mm.” And then, clarifying, “When it's hot, Fortune sleep outside.”

Fortune lit an oil lamp and showed Anne where to find flour and a grass broom. He did not follow her or offer to sweep up the fleas, Anne presumed, because his place was not in the bedrooms. With Barnard asleep, she preferred to attend to the task herself.

After dusting the floor with flour and a vigorous sweep of the floorboards, the fleas subsided enough for her to go to bed feeling reasonably sure they'd get some rest. She moved closer to Barnard to take some of his warmth and fell into a muddled sleep.

They were woken by a thunderous boom of a cannon on their first morning, and every morning after that.

“It’s the seven o’clock gun, my Annie,” Barnard said, burying himself deeper under the covers and pulling her towards him. How she loved the feel of his legs entwined around hers; she could have stayed that way for hours. Then she remembered the fleas and, before long, she was sure there was one near her feet. To sleep again was impossible.

Since they’d not yet seen the view from their window in the daylight, she tiptoed over the floorboards trying to avoid any more bites, to open the curtains.

What a sight for her tired, gritty eyes. A dignified Table Mountain rearing that regal top beyond a halo of clouds. The sunrise cast a pink colour on all the walls of the surrounding whitewashed houses. Directly across the street was a small church with a bell tower she hadn’t noticed the day before. A solitary old waggon stood near the church’s picket gate.

“We are finally here,” she said with satisfaction and returned to the comfort of Barnard in bed, stopping only to inspect the bottom of her feet.

After descending the steep stairs to prepare tea for Barnard, she found the breakfast table laden with sweet cakes and pastries, all made unappetizing by an onslaught of flies.

“Can you believe that fly season is over for now, but come summer, you will see plenty!” Mrs Strombom said, with an ineffectual wave of her hand over the table. The flies lifted off the cakes only to land straight back down again. It took the sound of children’s voices from the passage to remind Anne that Mrs Strombom wanted to introduce her family.

In a moment, two nannies came through the door with the children, whose noise and energy made the room feel small. The oldest boy hid behind his fist and his mother’s skirt. No more than three, he resisted being coaxed into any kind of greeting. Her second child, a little girl a few years older than her awkward brother, and rather plain, managed a little curtsy. But it was the third child that captivated Anne. She put her arms out inviting him to

leave the safety of his nanny. He gave an excited smile and used his soft, chubby legs to kick off from his nanny, stretching his arms out towards Anne, clearly unfazed at being held by a stranger.

Anne clasped his warm and solid little body to hers. He bounced with excitement, his fine, soft hair standing up in all directions, matching his mood. She patted him on the back and gave him a squeeze. It felt so natural to coddle a babe so close. Again, came the longing that was more like pain. I should commit to memory what it feels like to hold him, she told herself, just in case.

“Do you have children of your own, Lady Anne?” Mrs Strombom had no idea how Anne dreaded that question. She was the last person with whom Anne wanted to share her childlessness or troubles with her womb.

“Barnard has a boy called Henry and we can’t wait to see him again when our man, Mr Pawell, brings him from the ship.”

This was only half the story. Barnard, hoping Henry might regret the behaviour that had broken their hearts, had decided the boy would remain aboard for the time being.

Anne wanted only to escape this conversation and handed the baby back to his nanny, saying she needed to take Barnard some tea. On her way up the stairs, she tried to imagine what it felt like to be swollen with a baby in her belly and wondered why women like Mrs Strombom had managed to have three children, as if it were easy.

A few days later, Anne looked out of the bedroom window to see a group of men, solemn in their black clothing, moving slowly up the road. In the procession, each man held his hat and, at first, she thought it must be a funeral. Then, behind the men in black, she saw the officers in blue and red uniforms. It was a procession, first the Dutch in black and then the red of the British. They were on their way to the new governor’s residence in the company gardens for the ceremony to swear him and Barndard in.

How Barnard would manage to speak his oath clearly with that cheek, Anne couldn't be sure. After the ceremony, he returned to the Stromboms a happy man, proud of the new badge he displayed on his lapel, and bringing along Governor Macartney and an entourage.

The first man Barnard introduced to Anne was his under-secretary, Mr Hercules Ross. He was a young man, no older than 24, and dressed in regimentals that fitted him so awkwardly they looked as if they belonged to someone else. Anne studied his boyish feathers, thinking he might have been handsome if his hair weren't cut so badly. A whirl of further introductions followed until she found herself in the company of a barrel of a man with bushy eyebrows, the Admiral Pringle. He cornered Anne in the buzzing room.

Anne asked the admiral how she would like the Cape. He lifted his unkempt eyebrows and noisily cleared his throat: "Madam, your question can only be answered by another: Are you even-tempered, with enough resolve to be pleased despite all the things that might vex and inconvenience you? You may only moderately hate the Cape if you are patient, made of money, and can remain unemotional about the place."

"Admiral, I fear I've opened Pandora's box by putting my question to you," Anne said, feeling lightheaded with the man's severity.

"Are you laughing at me?" The admiral narrowed his eyes and looked sternly at Anne. "You think me an old cynic," he said with a shake of his head. "But wait and see. If you are used to all the pleasures of good society and the gaiety of life, you may soon think it a bad move to have left your house in Berkeley Square and come here."

Anne felt her hackles rise and interjected. "You are wrong, Admiral, to think of me as this or that type of woman. The one quality I can claim is my ability to fit myself to my circumstances."

“Hmph! Well, I am sure you speak the truth. Perhaps I’ve read you incorrectly and you’ll surprise us all and like the Cape, maybe only because you are resolved to do so. But …” the admiral pointed a finger at her, “you’ll be the only English person who does.”

“Admiral, let us not ruin this happy occasion. Tell me any small thing you like about the place.”

“How can I when we are ruined by everything being extravagantly dear? In the last two years, I’ve lived with the utmost economy, but still I’ve been forced to lay out more than eleven-hundred pounds beyond what I earn, just for mere necessities. And, in the second place, we are starved. Bad meat is made even worse by lousy cooking. Not even the eggs are fresh. Even if they are recently laid, they are far from fresh like that of an English hen. To my mind, Lady Anne, this project of the British is a poor use of taxpayer’s money.”

Anne did not want to listen to the man’s negativity any further and placed a hand on his arm to excuse herself. He’d stirred up enough apprehension within her to make it necessary for her to search the room for a familiar face. When she located Jane, she did not stop to converse with anyone until she’d reached her cousin’s side.

Jane was alone in the crowd. Her hair had come undone in places and her face was whiter than usual. Anne ushered her towards a table set up with teacups and unidentifiable cakes.

“Tea and something sweet are what we need,” she said to Jane, but she herself was growing weary of the perpetual talk of poverty and unhappiness in the Cape.

In the evening, seated around the dinner table, Dr Hazelton did his best to cheer Jane up: “Well, and how is Miss Barnard today?” and, “Miss Barnard, may we not drink to good evening?” By then, Jane’s spirits had been flattened to such an extent that she had stopped speaking.

Mr Strombom, on the other hand, had returned from the auction looking pleased with himself. His eyes twinkled in the candlelight and at every opportunity he asked Dr Hazelton to fill up his glass, for he had reason to celebrate. Not only had he purchased the coachman he wanted, but he'd also acquired a woman and her five young children. This was a bargain, he told the Barnards, since the children would be automatically vested as his property.

“Six for the price of one!” Mr Strombom said, raising his glass.

When Strombom made the signal for his hat and pipe, the Barnards left the table followed by Dr Hazelton, who wanted to examine Barnard's swollen cheek. As neither poultice nor patience had worked, it was Hazelton's verdict that the cheek should be lanced. Anne had never liked the sight of blood and left the two of them in the kitchen, where there were enough oil lamps to provide adequate light for the procedure.

She climbed the stairs with heavy limbs, her mind turning over the events of the day and snippets of conversation. It was premature, she knew, to jump to conclusions, but it filled her with a terrible fear that they would find themselves worse off in the Cape than if they'd stayed where they were in London.

Doldrums of a different sort

Anne had never known weather so erratic. The mountains ruled over the town through wild and unpredictable meteorological moods. It was local lore that you should expect all the seasons in a single day. A bright blue sky could be blanketed by thick grey cloud that rolled in like a wave over the mountain face. The wind would pick up and blow in from the sea, whipping down the streets, slamming doors, tearing leaves from the trees, and depositing any clothing not well secured on washing lines into someone else's yard.

A soggy rain had been falling for days. The drab weather reminded Anne of home. It waterlogged the garden, destroyed the surface of the dirt roads, making some of them utterly impassable, and made prisoners of Anne and Jane in the Stromboms' house.

Not for the first time since their arrival, Anne's optimism abandoned her. She wondered if she would ever get used to the strange smell that permeated the rooms. A pervasive acrid odour of sheep's fat, which the slaves rubbed into their skin, lingered in the house and mixed unpleasantly with the odours of cooking and cheap tallow candles.

Jane, also homesick, had withdrawn further into herself. She appeared for meals looking sullen while staring into her lap and proceeded to eat only a little. She gave one-word answers whenever anyone questioned her. Even chipper Dr Hazelton, with his silly toasts and the fastidious attention he paid to the level of everyone's wine glasses, was scarcely able to elicit a smile out of Jane.

Anne was unsure what to make of Jane's state of mind. Under normal circumstances, or had she been faced with the same state of mind back in London, she would have attempted to pull Jane from her melancholy. She might have suggested a walk in the park or a visit to the high street but, as it was, Anne was struggling with the adaptation to her new surroundings herself. There was no high street, no park either, and Barnard's work took him

out of the house for much of the day. It was new, for her, that everything was so rudimentary and unfinished. So far, Barnard had been unable to find them a property for rent they could afford. Anne longed for a house of her own in which to unpack their belongings and that might make them feel more at home.

To make matters worse, Mrs Strombom had become her primary companion. The woman talked endlessly, as though she'd been starved of female company for decades; if it wasn't gossiping about the neighbours, it was the flour shortage. Bread had become a luxury and almost as expensive as gold, all because the scrupulous stores of flour and barley, previously managed by the Dutch, had been plundered by Sir James Craig.

Craig, who'd served as the interim leader before the arrival of Governor Macartney, made startling decisions while in his acting position. One such decision was to ship to England multiple loads of flour and barley that had been carefully managed and stored to supply the town. Such amounts of grain were nothing but a trifle to a city the size of London but, for Cape Town, they amounted to a two-year supply. Craig had done it to show King George and his country how bountiful the Cape was. With this ludicrous short-sightedness, he never considered that the shipments would have exactly the opposite effect on the colony. The frugal Mrs Strombom frequently complained to Anne that she didn't know what the world was coming to when something as basic as flour for bread could not be found unless she was willing to pay through the nose.

Mostly, Mrs Strombom talked about her family, spurring Anne to conclude privately that there was nothing so dull as listening to a parent boast about their children. There was something about being in the presence of Mrs Strombom that left Anne feeling heavy in her limbs and foggy in her head. The woman was like a sedative and Anne would come away from the parlour in a fatigued state, wanting only to lie and rest.

Left predominantly to her own devices, it was the first time Anne truly experienced what it was to be a foreigner in a strange land. Even the smallest details took time to absorb. So much of what she'd been accustomed to was different: The fatty foods, that so quickly led to digestive troubles; all the coffee drinking, instead of tea; Mr Strombom's nightly post-dinner ritual, where he put on his hat to smoke his pipe. It was a world away from her old life, gathering after dinner for sherry and cards, or music and a poetry reading. Then, there was the discrepancy in making calculations in a currency – here the rixdollar or there the dollar, even the currency seemed to change, depending on who was quoting it.

Anne couldn't work out how expensive or reasonable anything was yet. Dundas's sombre predictions of life at the Cape returned to her with a frequency she dared not admit to Barnard. After all, this was his opportunity, but at a cost to herself she could not yet calculate.

The one silver lining in this unsettled time was that Henry appeared unfazed and, in fact, invigorated. Away from the ship, he was enjoying the space of the Stromboms' yard with its chickens and fruit trees, and he'd made friends with a few of the slave children in the streets, where he could roam more freely than he ever had back home.

A fixer-upper in the citadel

A cold front continued to blow in from a cheerless sea. Just as Anne prepared to go in search of her winter cloak and a pair of gloves, Mrs Strombom rustled into the parlour. Trailing behind her was Fortune, in his usual position, bearing logs and kindling in a beaten brass holder.

“Ah, Milady there you are! I’ve twisted his arm to grant us a fire early because, I told him, Mr Strombom, I said, ‘We can’t have her ladyship catching her death in this frightful weather,’ and he said he would make an exception because your ladyship must be comfortable and, the thing is, we never know where our next lot of firewood is coming from. Do you know, it is a wretched business, this shortage, but there aren’t enough trees, hence Mr Strombom insists we are economical with fires where the purpose is only to warm a room because, the thing is, most days he will not allow fires early in the front parlour. I can protest as much as I like, but he’ll insist it is not cold enough because, if we had to resort to purchasing wood, it’s gone up. Do you know, they were selling bundles at the market, but one bundle doesn’t last long and one fire can cost a whole pound, so we usually just bundle up warmly. One can achieve a lot of warmth when wearing layers but, ahhh, now I am glad Mr Strombom agreed that we make an exception.”

Anne tended to half-listen to Mrs Strombom, tuning in and out of her monologues, but the possibility of a fire grabbed her attention. She felt damp, and the cold made her knees sore and stiff. A warm blaze would cheer her up immensely. Fortune knelt in front of the hearth to stack logs and kindling in the fireplace. He held a candle from the kitchen to the kindling and straw. A feeble flame sprang up, then a lot of smoke, as if the wood was damp. He stayed at his post on his knees before the fire, blowing and fiddling to coerce a decent flame.

Fortune left the fire and returned with his arms outstretched, carrying a tea tray. He was a slight figure made even smaller by his silent presence. The only sound that gave him away as he moved through the house was the soft slapping of his bare feet on the clay tiles.

When Barnard flung the parlour door open, bringing with him the smell of rain and horses, the sight of him lifted Anne's state of mind immediately. She basked in the well-being and confidence he had begun to exude lately. It wasn't just that his face had healed, there was more to his new demeanour than his regained health. Anne identified what she now saw in him as confidence, the sort of confidence that comes from being connected to the source of power. Under the guidance of Macartney, Barnard's days were increasingly filled with the business of government. In his new position, he was one of the first to know of incidents, situations and decisions affecting the colony. It was a world away from his previous career as a lieutenant.

"Good afternoon, ladies," he said with a bow, pulling a chair closer to the fire.

"Let me get you some tea, Mr Barnard. I was just explaining to Lady Anne how lucky we are to even attempt a fire this early," said Mrs Strombom, taking no notice of the fire's small flame and displaying a shock of teeth as she grinned.

Anne saw that Barnard was fidgeting with his hat. "If it's not too much trouble, Madam," said Barnard, "I'd prefer to take a glass of Cape red."

Mrs Strombom rang a bell she kept on the mantelpiece to summon a servant. "Fortune, bring some wine for Mr Barnard. From the open cask in the kitchen."

Barnard held his hands towards the fire and its feeble blue flames. "Indeed, it has been an interesting day," he said, turning to face the women and rubbing his palms together.

"Macartney has decided he will take up residence in the new Government House at the Company's Garden. He's heard it's warmer in winter and more comfortable during the heat of summer. Now, we had to be sure of General Francis Dundas, the nephew of the War

minister who, as you know, is in the Cape at his uncle's bidding. But General Dundas has made it clear he will continue living in his current apartments in another building at the castle, for he finds those rooms better suited to his bachelor lifestyle. If he were to change his mind, he has proposed he'll look for a residence to rent from one of the wealthy burghers in Round-a-Bosch."

"Oh, that village has some excellent houses," Mrs Strombom chimed in.

"And, how far away is this Round-a-Bosch village?" Anne asked, doing her best to keep any anxiety out of her voice even though she was attuned to the slightest hint of intelligence that could help them find a place of their own.

"Oh, it's a few miles from town, but the road is smooth and level. A good road, as far as they go, and an easy journey by waggon or horseback. My Mr Strombom has business with some of the principal people there frequently. 'Tis a regret that I don't get out there more often, but this house keeps me busy. There is also Wynberg and Constantia, which are still further away, but we are of the opinion they are both too far out to reside permanently."

Barnard, who could never sit still for long, got up to stand with his back to the fire, looking pleased. "We may no longer need to concern ourselves with this, my Annie," he said, looking directly at Anne.

Outside the rain began falling again.

"Barnard, tell us your news!" she replied, seeing the look on his face which suggested that life was about to change. She could hardly wait to hear what he'd say next.

"I think this will please you, my Annie."

Fortune returned with a carafe of wine and a glass and set them down on the table. Barnard poured himself a drink, then lifted the glass to his lips, clearly enjoying his theatrics to build the tension for there was a saucy smile on his lips.

"Barnard – out with it now!" Anne said, picking up on his game.

When he spoke, his tone was earnest for, clearly, he knew what his news meant to Anne: “Lord Macartney has offered us some of the government’s rooms inside the castle.” By now Barnard was rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet from excitement. “Isn’t that a stroke of good fortune for the Barnards?”

Anne let out a gasp and her hands shook slightly as she set down her teacup. For the first time since her arrival, she felt a flicker of her old enthusiasm return. All would be well for them, better than she could ever have imagined, she just needed to keep the faith. Of course, she would need to inspect the premises for she knew the castle was not a new building.

“We can view the apartments tomorrow, if you can put up with an outing in this rain.”

Mrs Strombom made sure to have the last word, but not without kindness, urging them to use the cart and horses for the trip to see the accommodation on offer, and then excused herself to see about dinner.

It was still grey and drizzling and, where normally there was a mountain, there was just a blank wall of mist. Anne, Barnard and Jane set off in the Stromboms’ cart. Viewed from the outside, the castle was a forbidding presence, with its thick stone walls and cannons lined up along the ramparts, pointing their barrels at the bay. It was the most fortified place to live in the Cape. To reach the entrance, marked by heavy iron gates, they crossed over a wide ditch that ran around the perimeter of the building, perhaps meant as a moat. In the inclement weather, this feature had been reduced to a muddy pit. At the gates stood a sentinel with his face hidden in the collar of his coat. Beyond the first gate was another with its own sentinel, looking just as miserable and cold as the first.

Soon they found themselves in a shabby, flag-stoned courtyard, slippery and green with moss. It was as wide and cold as a church. The only sign of life was a few soldiers huddled under a lean-to in one corner. It was difficult to tell what they were up to other than

loitering in their bit of shelter. One or two of them appeared to be polishing their weapons with rags, while the others stood about smoking. Every now and then a ripple of laughter erupted from the group, a sound that echoed off the stone surfaces into the cold. They seemed intrigued by the arrival of the Barnards and were likely making jokes about them. Barnard told Anne and Jane to stay put and went off to speak with the men.

“We’ve come in through the wrong gate,” Barnard said, hurrying back. “Apparently we’ve come in the wrong entrance and should go back outside and try the south entrance.”

The second gate was, in fact, the main entrance, with a massive, heavy door of carved oak. This time, the blue-coated sentinel indicated he was expecting them. He tipped his hat and led them to the old Government House inside the walls. This building was the colour of mustard which, the Barnards would later learn, was used to combat the frightful glare from the walls had they been white.

Anne noted the good staircase that led up to the front entrance, even though the balustrade was rusty and could do with a coat of paint. It was a relief to step inside, out of the biting wind, into the first of many cavernous rooms, filled only with the knock of their footsteps echoing off grubby, whitewashed walls.

The floors were covered in clay tiles and every ceiling was painted a green so dark it could almost be mistaken for black. The old council chamber was the only room with any furniture. It was a long room with more than one fireplace down the length of it. Ancient yellow-and-white wallpaper peeled up at the edges, and pairs of olive-green curtains weighed down with dust framed the long row of windows. In the middle of this enormous room stood a long table covered with a cloth in the same olive shade as the curtains. Around the table were 18 cumbersome dark-wood chairs. A grubby chandelier with a broken arm and missing several candleholders, hung from the ceiling. The only decoration in the room was a bad portrait of the Prince and Princess of Orange that hung askew.

Beyond the olive-green room, through a doorway in a wall that was 11-foot thick, the Barnards found a suite of offices. These rooms were promising. They looked out over a square colonnade with a little fountain that, unbelievably, was still running. There was also a drawing room, with a vent to draw out the heat during summer, and three more rooms of a good size, with a dated water closet. Barnard was especially keen on these rooms since they had private access through the soldiers' courtyard. Ascending a different staircase, Anne said with a laugh, "This must be the best staircase in the Cape, they are not nearly so steep as those up to our bedroom at the Stromboms."

At the top of the stairs, they were plunged into absolute darkness in what they thought to be a corridor. Barnard felt his way along the wall until his hands found a door to throw open and let the light in. On that level, all the rooms led off the long corridor, much like a monastery. The floors were laid with the same cool clay tiles and the ceilings just as drab and dark, but perfectly suitable for bedrooms.

"I think this will be our room," Barnard said, wasting no time in selecting a large room with a view over the pond. "We could make it even more to our liking if we cordoned off a dressing room for me. And, with the addition of a doorway into the smaller room next door, you would have your own dressing chamber, Annie."

Anne looked about and tried to imagine what this plan would mean when it came to logistics.

"Surely we'd want to avoid all the difficulty of alterations? I'd find it equally acceptable to keep it the way it is. Or we could choose a different room?" she said, hoping to veer Barnard away from his scheme.

"Ah, 'tis no trouble at all. It is only a matter of a simple order to the Board of Works, and we can have the rooms fixed. They'll be needing to come in to paint and repair the place anyway, they might as well do this at the same time."

This was one of those times when she would have much preferred Barnard to keep things simple. It was obvious to her that any alterations would only delay their moving from the Stromboms and, as far as she was concerned, it couldn't happen soon enough.

Knowing that once he had a plan in his head it would be difficult to dissuade him, Anne decided, reluctantly, to accept his idea of the addition of dressing rooms.

In the meantime, Jane had gone back and forth, in and out of every room down the long corridor, trying the window latches, peering at the views and testing every handle on each door.

"Maybe this is the one, Anne, do you think? No, on second thoughts it won't do – too hot in summer, surely. How about this one – but it's so far away from yours, I'm sure I'd be frightened at night in this old place – it could have ghosts. This one is quite a bit smaller than the others ..."

As this was the most Jane had said in days, when she finally made a choice, neither Barnard nor Anne had the heart to point out to Jane the existence of a second door in the corner of the room. Jane had not seen Barnard unlock this door nor had she been present when Barnard and Anne discovered that it opened into a cramped and windowless anteroom in which there was barely enough space for them both because the room was far from empty. It was piled high with heaps of papers. Bundles tied with bits of string, some stacks held together with ribbons, and a mess of other documents. A closer inspection revealed that these were charts, accounts, trials, claims, calculations – all to do with the Dutch East India Company. Old documents so thick with dust they had probably not been looked at for decades. Furthermore, within the stuffy place was another kind of trapdoor. At first Barnard couldn't manage to lift it, the wood swollen shut. He reached for a knife he kept in his coat and worked it around the seal of the door and, when he tried again, the trapdoor opened. It led

to a dark and moist subterranean tunnel – a small secret passageway. There were probably many in the castle, he told Anne.

“Oh, I think we are going to have to convince Jane to take a different room,” Anne said, concerned that a young woman should sleep in a room with secret access.

“The surest way is just to show her what’s behind the door.”

Barnard’s pragmatic approach seemed the best idea. Instead, the room would be Henry’s, with the door firmly locked, of course.

The morning passed quickly and, by the time they left the dry but fatigued rooms in the castle, they could think of little else but lunch. Outside, the air was crisp and clean though everything still dripped from the rain. In the sodden, muddy street only a few loaded carts splashed through puddles, their occupants hurrying to complete their business before a fortress of black clouds building out at sea hit the shore.

Home improvements

The apartments in the castle needed work but they offered more space than the Barnards had ever imagined. Room for Henry, outbuildings for a doghouse and the option of stables, and even the great hall, where Anne could begin the task Henry Dundas had given to her, though how she would encourage unity amongst the disparate colonists in the Cape, she couldn't yet see. It was going to need a lot of painting and papering before the dreary place would be vaguely hospitable. It was also going to require every skill in diplomacy that Anne possessed, to bring the grumbling factions together.

Just recently, over coffee and a milk tart sent by his wife, in the Stromboms' parlour, Johan Isaac Rhenius, the receiver and treasurer general, had explained the political landscape. Even though Rhenius was Dutch, he welcomed the new regime. Between mouthfuls of sweet custard baked into a pastry shell, *Mynheer* Rhenius told of how he, personally, had grown weary of the oppressive Dutch East India Company and, in any case, he could see that it was on the decline. Of course, not all the colonists felt as he did and there were many who took the oath of allegiance to the English with not one ounce of enthusiasm for their new leaders or the king. There were others who believed that England's hold on the Cape would be so short-lived that they needn't take it seriously. Should they be proved correct, such an outcome would have consequences for the Barnards where it hurt most; Barnard's employment and their pockets. In these unstable circumstances, it worried Anne that the rooms at the castle were not ready, but she kept this concern to herself.

Progress at the castle was interminable. Anne made use of Strombom's cart and his recent acquisition of the coachman to check up on the work. But, on more than one occasion, she arrived without warning to find the regiment men assigned to the renovations asleep on a pile of sacks, their empty wine bottles discarded nearby. She knew that a contributing factor

to their laziness was that the men were paid by the day and it suited them to drag out the work. But these disappointing site visits left her wondering if they'd ever move on from the Stromboms.

Nevertheless, after several weeks, the rooms at the castle began to take shape. The peeling wallpaper had been stripped from the walls, dislodging nests of rats and mice, and the ceilings were transformed now they were clean and white instead of dingy green. The walls had been whitewashed, too, and Anne had personally requested the addition of a pale purple border.

"I want the place to feel just a little like an English country house," she explained to Hercules Ross, who had taken to visiting regularly. Anne was sure he came to see Jane and would have encouraged it, but his appearance continued to bother her. Here was a man, she was sure, obsessed with thrift. Surely he earned a reasonable wage, and yet, judging by the look of his jagged hair, which he obviously trimmed himself, as well as mending and patching his oversized coat, Hercules Ross received a pittance.

It was almost a relief that, once the painting and the glazing was complete, he would need to invent other reasons to visit the Barnards to see Jane. He was a pleasant enough young man, but she didn't want Jane to start her life with either a miser or a man so poverty-stricken.

On this particular morning, Ross stood in the doorway of the Stromboms' house, out of breath. He seemed anxious and impatient to deliver his message. Refusing to sit, he started to stutter the moment he set eyes on Anne, begging her pardon for the early hour, and twisting his hat. Then he looked almost wild and came right out with it: There was a problem and Lord Macartney wanted her to hear it from him before she heard it by some other means.

“His Excellency has recalled every article of furniture from the castle, Ma’am. Not that there was ever much to begin with, but the chairs, curtains, tables and the only looking glass.”

Even though it was no secret that the Barnard’s own furniture would never fill the cavernous rooms, Anne did her best to hide her disappointment. She was sure Macartney must have his reasons. Ross scratched his head, causing his hair to stand up in places, and then explained that the governor blamed the Campbells entirely.

“Lord Macartney says it was them that misled him. He should never have taken their word for it, that everything could be found in the Cape. Ever since he moved into the Government House in the Gardens, he’s barely had a chair to sit on. Now, he finds out, the Campbells brought all their own things from Europe.”

Anne had to swallow the bitter taste that rose in her throat. Those wretched people. It seemed they were destined to run into them again and again. She did her best to hide her anger when she saw Ross out and asked him only to pass on the message to Lord Macartney that he was most welcome to the furniture and, if he hadn’t taken the portrait of the Prince of Orange, she wished him to have that, too.

Through the window, she watched Ross mount his horse. She was not surprised that the Campbells were implicated with the removal of the furniture. But the rooms at the castle were going to feel dismal and not a place to host parties for the locals. She and Barnard would have to put their heads together and come up with a solution.

No new timber could be found. Other than the sparse line of trees over the lower mountain slopes, where it took the slaves an entire day to find the firewood bundles scavenged from the underbrush of silver trees, sourcing the kind of wood necessary to knock together simple furniture was proving a challenge.

Barnard rose early, leaving the chocolate-brown taffeta bed. With him gone, his side of the bed turned quickly cold, and Anne got up to dress. Renovations at the castle progressed at a glacial pace and Barnard, ever the man of schemes, decided to call in three ship carpenters to help. Their task was to build low stump bedsteads for the servants and enough lounging sofas to spread around the walls of the vacant reception rooms in the hope that these would make the rooms feel more hospitable.

From the moment her feet touched the cold wooden floor, which she checked again for fleas, Anne decided she could not face another day cooped up in the house. She would not take no for an answer; she'd like to do a bit of shopping in whatever form was possible in this backwater. She prepared to accompany Barnard to the market square, where Mrs Strombom had told her one could get just about anything from the slaves peddling their masters' wares.

The Cape made merchants out of everyone who lived there. The business of making money was a most important activity, to which every man and woman paid scrupulous attention. Dutch women were reckoned some of the most astute in trading. They had the knack for anticipating people's needs and desires, and they knew that nothing drove prices up faster than withholding goods from the marketplace in a world already known for its scarcity. Almost every house was open to take in paying guests fresh off the ships. Behind closed doors, private trading or bartering between the guests and their hosts was a favourite pastime. Porcelain, tea, coffee, spices, jars of pineapples, Chinese silks and Indian cotton or European alcohol, depending on which way the travellers were heading, were bought and sold. Every piece of furniture or household item was for sale at the right price.

At nine in the morning, Anne found the market square filled with carts circling a drinking water fountain in the centre. The market was small and sparse by London's standards, but at least the area was cobbled and Anne's shoes and the hem of her cloak would stay reasonably clean. The horses that had pulled the carts to market, grazed under trees on

the side. Piles of guavas, apples and other winter fruits and vegetables were on display from the gardens and farms that surrounded the town. There were sellers of second-hand kitchen implements, wax and candles and earthenware jars of honey. There were leather hides from the tannery and an odd assortment of bridles and belts, as well as a stall that sold wooden vats from a cooper. The market hummed with a cacophony of voices from the sellers, calling out their wares in the chilly winter air, and the children playing on the edges.

There were many women about and one made an entrance in her sedan chair. The chair was carried by slaves at the rear and in front. Both looked tired under their load. Setting down their poles, they stretched their backs. Their passenger opened the chair's door, fussing with her fan and her skirts as she climbed out. It was all quite antiquated, Anne decided, also noticing that many of the shoppers appeared to be *vrouws*, who'd succumbed to a stoutness of figure from a life of inactivity.

She watched them drift solidly between the carts, stopping to examine any article that caught their attention or to bargain with a stallholder. Most of these women had one thing in common; personal slaves who trailed behind them, carrying either a green silk umbrella or a wicker basket. As a newcomer, Anne didn't know that a personal slave was a marker of respectability and prosperity, and it was seen as improper not to have one in tow.

"Some of those slaves are children," she whispered to Barnard, shocked by how small they were. He squeezed her arm as they walked between the carts until Anne spied a stall offering a rarity, a few rolls of actual wallpaper.

"Might this not help our cause?" she asked, feeling the curled end of the paper between her fingers while looking over the other items on offer in the cart. Barnard stopped his browsing and came to her side.

"Now, 'tis a pity it is scarcely enough to cover one of those walls, my Annie, let alone an entire chamber. I think we must make do with whitewash and paint."

“Why, Mr B, you seldom like to make do,” she joked, expecting Barnard to laugh, but he stayed silent.

He had stopped looking at the wallpaper and, instead, his eyes and attention were on a young Malay woman. She stood behind baskets of eggs and a cage of live chickens, laughing with the stallholder next to her. Anne observed her black hair, glossy with coconut oil, twisted in coils around her head, and the vivid red shawl she wore draped around her shoulders, clothing which suggested she was cared for, unlike the slaves that went around in rags.

Anne found herself in a moment where her reality felt suddenly, unfailingly, altered. She had never seen that look on Barnard’s face before, at least not for anyone except herself. Now that she had seen it – Barnard’s desire for another woman – she didn’t know what to do with it. She wanted only to brush it off, like an unwelcome insect in her lap.

In the next moment, he would compose himself, and it would be as if it never happened. But she saw what he saw. It was impossible not to admire the young woman’s beauty, her skin polished with youth. Inadvertently, she had seen his lust for the kind of woman she could never be. She no longer had youth on her side, she was pale and tall compared to the slave.

She recalled a conversation in the weeks spent idle in the parlour, when Mrs Strombom explained how, in some households, there were slave mothers with babies fathered by their masters. Conceived under such circumstances, these children could almost be considered lucky, for there was an outside possibility of them being granted freedom.

Mrs Strombom did not approve, of course, and repeatedly said how her Mr Strombom never looked at slaves in that way. Anne had always wondered if Mrs Strombom protested his innocence just a little too much, but after seeing the look on Barnard’s face, she felt squarely put in her place.

Lost in thought, she hardly noticed the jar of honey and small barrel of wine Barnard had purchased until he steered her towards a man leaning against a pile of rough old planks.

“Are you alright, Annie?” Barnard asked, as if nothing had happened.

“Yes I ... I just felt a little dizzy.”

She forced herself back to the present and the display of uninteresting mounds of used nails, sorted according to size. Barnard picked up one of the planks and felt its weight. He held it against the height of his body to measure the length.

“Are there more where these came from?”

“Ja,” said the man through a cloud of blue pipe smoke. “Simonstown dockyard, *mynheer*, the old ships. If we are lucky, some also washes up from the wrecks.”

Barnard pulled out his purse and counted out the money for every plank available. This brought Anne to her senses. Was it wise to be spending that much on such poor quality wood, she asked.

“Don’t trouble yourself worrying about that, Annie. The carpenters will plane and sand them. They’ll know how to put it to good use.”

Before Anne could reply, she heard a woman calling her name from behind. It was Mrs Campbell who almost passed as friendly, gushing how happy she was to see them and demanding to hear all their news.

Just as Anne was beginning to think she’d misunderstood Mrs Campbell, the woman tutted disapproval after hearing that the Barnards were still at the Stromboms. Anne relished the opportunity to tell her that soon they’d have a new address and Mrs Campbell must pay a visit at the castle.

“Ah, Mrs Barnard, people say you are in Governor Macartney’s favour,” Mrs Campbell responded, “But, I hear de place needs a lot of work.”

New beginnings

Early one morning, Anne watched Barnard whistle while he shaved over a bowl of water. Although worry had kept her from sleeping well, she waited until he'd dried his face and splashed on his familiar scent before worrying him with her thoughts.

“It has kept me up most of the night, Barnard, but I want to ask that we make our next move. I don't feel entirely comfortable here, even though the Stromboms have been nothing but hospitable. I am certain our life here will really begin the moment we unpack. Can we end this foolish pause? The wooden bed frames and the lounging couches have been completed by the carpenters from those rough planks, and after several trips to the ship, our linen chests, carpets and other crates standing around in the castle call to me to be unpacked. Therefore, as soon as the dogs, the cow and what is left of my plants are delivered to the castle, I do not wish to be put off from being reunited with our belongings a moment longer.”

Barnard sat down heavily on the bed, which creaked under his weight.

“My Annie,” he pulled on one of his boots, “I confess, I'd like that very much, but as the renovations there are not complete, I have concerns this may prove difficult for you. You've been brave, coming here with me. I do not wish to make things any harder for you than they have to be.”

Despite his words, she sensed he would not resist too much if she persisted.

“I believe it is time for us to establish ourselves as best as we can. In fact, I imagine that the sooner we move in, the quicker we can get the work finished. I'm sure our permanent presence there would actually help matters along, never mind that I am certain it will lift all our spirits and, hopefully, integrate us somehow into daily life at the Cape. I do not think I

can continue this numbing and disconnected existence as somebody's houseguest for too much longer."

Barnard looked relieved. He leapt to his feet and kissed her. Yes, he could see how it might be best, and accelerate the work on the rooms. He would ask Ross to help them with the move. By the time he left for work, they had already decided that, with Ross and the help of Pawell and Mrs Hughes, they'd manage. Since the kitchen was still not ready, they agreed that, when they finally did move across to the castle, it would be prudent to depart after a decent dinner and spend their first night in their new abode without needing to make a meal.

Within a week, the Barnards bid farewell to Mr and Mrs Strombom, with full bellies, high hopes and renewed optimism for this next crucial step in settling down at the Cape.

Passing through the gates and chunky stone walls, the cannons on the ramparts loomed black and eerie in the dark. With it being as late as it was, the family intended merely to pass through the 11-foot wall and spend their first night there. Pawell had gone ahead and, by the time the family arrived, he'd trimmed all the candles and gone to great efforts to lay fires in the old fireplaces in the bedrooms. Unfortunately, the one in the Barnard's bedroom smoked so badly, he'd had to extinguish it. There would be no fire there until the chimney had been swept. But the rooms had been swept and mopped and the bedsteads placed in their corresponding bedrooms under the instruction of Mrs Hughes. She'd also made the beds and left hot water in the nightstands, which had long gone cold.

In the stables off the courtyard, Pawell had filled sacks with straw for the dogs. For the time being, even the cow would be housed there until a solution was found, as not a blade of grass grew in the place.

In the castle, Anne and Jane were fumbling down the long passage when a finger of icy air snuffed Jane's candle out.

"It's the ghost of Governor Sluisken," Jane giggled to Anne, speaking in a whisper.

Anne gasped and then laughed.

“Heavens, Jane, you had me for a moment! Governor Sluisken may have left all those documents in the little ante chamber, but I don’t want to think of him walking this hallway. That missing windowpane was surely the culprit.”

Anne went from room to room, inspecting the improved walls and the lovely, light ceilings and, although all of it felt different at night – somewhat too large and cold – she was buoyed by an intoxicating mix of fear and laughter with being at liberty in her own space. She did her best to ignore the pile of debris in the large hall, and that Barnard’s plan to create more space for dressing rooms remained a work in progress.

Without a fire, the Barnards’ bedchamber was chilly. It still lacked essential pieces of furniture and, as no curtains had yet been hung, the room was exposed to the elements. Barnard closed the shutters on the outside of the castle windows, affording them some privacy. It was late by the time they fell into a fitful sleep, clinging to each other for warmth and comfort. The castle creaked as much as a ship. No matter how incidental the noise, Anne woke with each sound. The most peculiar of all, that first night, was a high-pitched squeak that went on for a minute and faded as it moved further away. She told herself it was probably just a mouse but drew closer to Barnard, feeling safer in the crook of his arm. The warmth of his skin and steady breathing signalled that everything was, in fact, in order. She made a mental note to have Pawell set some traps then fell asleep again, wondering if they could acquire a cat to help with the rodents.

As is often the case with an unsettled night, she finally sank into the deepest sleep just as the sun started to rise. Next came the rude awakening of four slaves knocking at their door. They were there to cut the hole in the wall and make two rooms for Barnard’s dressing-room scheme. Anne’s eyes felt tired and gritty but, because any workmen at the Cape were far too precious to send away, she did her best to regain her previous night’s humour and asked only

for 15 minutes to get up and dressed so the work could begin. Just before she left her bare bedroom, Anne reflected on how much her life had changed. She'd gone from the sophistication of London society and high teas at Berkeley Square, carefully treating herself to the luxuries within her reach if she watched her budget, to the paired-down necessities of life in the colony. And yet, despite all the challenges, she would rather have the adventure than not.

Breakfast consisted of cups of black tea with slices of a lemon from a tree in a nearby garden. Neither Pawell nor Mrs Hughes was sure where to get any produce when the market wasn't in session. To make matters worse, the Barnards had hardly finished giving instructions to the workmen and slaves, when the still-dingy back parlour, with barely a chair to sit on, filled up with generals and aides-de-camp. Anne had no wish to see anyone until her house was ready; she had wanted at least one room to be complete and acceptable for entertaining guests.

Barnard refused to get rid of the men on the grounds that they were all friends and, therefore, there was no need to be concerned about the state of the place. More annoyingly, the men had traipsed through several of the rooms with mud on their boots. The atmosphere went from bad to worse when Barnard, unable to say no to the governor on anything, had foolishly agreed with Lord Macartney that he could join them for dinner in three days' time.

Anne was infuriated by Barnard. It baffled her that he would willingly agree to this level of disruption and difficulty. The old mansion was far from ready to receive guests, never mind host a dinner, especially such a distinguished person as the governor and leader of the Cape. Instead of having the luxury to take her time deciding where their belongings should go, she'd need to call the carpenters back to knock up tables and chairs. There wouldn't be time to sew cushions for the Windsor chairs, the windows still had no curtains, her Staffordshire dishware and the glasses must all be unpacked and washed, the silver

polished, and there wasn't a functioning kitchen ready to produce a meal. While she brooded on these details, she realised they still had not acquired a cook and she had no idea where to find one at such short notice.

Tempers flared and tensions ran high over the days leading up to the governor's visit. Barnard made himself scarce, leaving early for his office, but he did what he could to help in the evening when he returned. As much as Anne wanted to host Governor Macartney, she'd never imagined doing it under such duress and it left her conflicted as to how to forgive Barnard who had willingly put them under this much pressure. Barnard's attempts to explain that it should be obvious that he couldn't very well turn Macartney down, especially as the idea had come from the governor rather than himself, were unsuccessful. In any case, Barnard reminded Anne, the governor was in earnest when he said he did not mind one jot if it were still chaotic at the castle.

Captain Urmston, another visitor who popped in unannounced during those tumultuous three days, redeemed himself when he came to the rescue by providing a spare cook known as Revel from his crew to work for the Barnards. Other than the cook, Captain Urmston – clearly as much a merchant as a sea captain – offered Anne a pair of fine, rolled hams tied with string. The gammons were expensive. He'd procured them from a private seller, and they were, he promised, a culinary treat for any English table, especially as most Dutch households preferred red meat and fowl, and pork was surprisingly difficult to come by.

On the ground floor, the kitchen now had a working table, hooks and shelves on the walls for copper and iron pots. It had good access to the dining room and parlour by a narrow back staircase, and a trapdoor to a cellar to store wine and supplies.

Rising early on the morning of the day, a tired Anne looked out of the bedroom window. The sublime sight of Table Mountain rising high above the oaks soothed her nerves and she hoped she would never get to a stage where she took that view for granted.

Attempting to recover her equanimity, she reminded herself that, with a little effort, the dinner would be a success and she could count on Revel to cook a decent spread. Yesterday, he'd become quite talkative in the kitchen, describing the exquisite veal pie he was intent on baking, how he thought that, after boiling the gammons, they should be glazed with quince jelly and, since he'd been saving scraps and crusts of valuable bread, he could make a bread-and-butter pudding no Englishman worth a grain of salt would be able to eat without thinking longingly of home.

Pawell agreed to make a final trip to the market for casks of good local red wine, figs and plums for the table. He would also look out for fresh vegetables and potatoes, along with any other last-minute supplies. Again, Anne checked with Revel that he understood the importance of being prompt with dinner. He should have it on the table by six o'clock that evening. Even though she wrestled with her own moods over the upcoming event, it was still her wish that his excellency be kept happy and, knowing his preference for eating early, as going to bed on a full stomach often led to digestion problems, she wanted to do all she could to serve him a dinner the way he liked it.

Jane helped by setting the table with a white cloth and proper wax candles, which had come all the way from England, packed in a candle box with a supply of wax and moulds. This was an occasion that justified every attention. It was the way things should be done so that, should he choose, the governor could ask her not to go to so much trouble next time, rather than finding his first visit wanting. Barnard left his office a little earlier than usual, bringing wood for the fires. Then he spent some time going through crates and chests in search of the port he knew he'd packed for just such an evening. Anne ignored him and

fussed over the number of candles, remarking to Jane, who would one day have a house of her own to run, that a well-lit room was always best for entertaining. As a minimum, she wanted her guests to see what they were eating.

The chilly atmosphere between herself and Barnard set everyone's teeth on edge but the moment people started to arrive, the frost between the couple began to thaw. Or, at least, this was how it appeared from the outside. They were like actors in a play. Barnard was Mr B again and he would smile at her and call her Annie. Familiar with these roles, the two of them played at being the happy couple. No talk or agreement was necessary; they simply understood that not one tiny icicle of their chilly feelings for one another must be suspected by their guests. But the real magic in their performance was that, little by little, the reasons for their quarrel began to melt away, and the two of them would benefit from this most. By the time they looked across at each other and smiled an intimate and knowing smile, it wasn't just for show, they really meant it.

By then, the parlour had filled up with guests like Admiral Pringle, John Barrow and General Campbell and his wife, the nicer sister of Mrs Campbell from the sea journey.

By 6.15, Anne was sure that dinner would be announced at any moment. By 6.30, she could not stop the tapping of her foot as there was still no sign of it. By 7 pm, her attention was no longer on the conversation, which, under less vexatious circumstances, she would have been utterly exhilarated by. Barrow had the party rapt; all eyes were on him as he gave an account of his recent expedition to the top of Table Mountain.

“To look down from there, I tell you, the view is beyond description! All the buildings appear no larger than toys, and the carts moving up and down the streets look no bigger than ants. Far in the distance, the brilliance of the Hottentots Holland mountains beckons like the edge of a world that demands to be explored. Let us make up a small party and we'll climb it together.”

The very idea of a first grand expedition would have been thrilling but, at that moment, Anne was unable to even think about it. Her palms were clammy, and her cheeks felt flushed as her concern mounted over the no-show of Revel or their dinner.

When at last the hungry and well-lubricated guests seated themselves around the table in the dining room – still without curtains but, nevertheless, charming, illuminated by her extravagant lighting with the polished silver glinting in the candlelight, and the centrepiece of fruit suggesting abundance – Anne saw that the large hams had been boiled to atoms, and the veal pie’s crust overcooked so that, instead of a rich golden pastry, it looked distinctly black around the edges. During the meal, she excused herself and flew down the narrow staircase to the kitchen, where she found Revel hunched over a wine glass, slurring as he belaboured a point he was making to a visitor of his own – a French prisoner and recently appointed cook of General Campbell.

“Revel, you burnt the dinner and, not only that, but it was served embarrassingly late! Had you served it when you were supposed to, the food might have been edible.” Anne’s voice quivered with her anger as she stood in the kitchen, steadying herself on the back of a chair. The sight of unwashed pots piled up in a corner brought a lump to her throat. Her body was swollen with exhaustion and, instead of being able to remain angry, tears welled up in her eyes.

“Pah! There was something in the chimney. It caused a delay. But what was wrong with the dinner?” Revel asked, shifting about in his seat and then busying himself sweeping crumbs off the table with his hand.

“I am mortified to have given our guests those stringy gammons, never mind they cost as much as a week’s wages and were meant as a treat.”

“This is only the anger of an aristocrat,” the French cook muttered under his breath to Revel. “There are more important things in life than a bit of overcooked food,” he continued, as he poured more cheap wine into a cup.

His arrogance drained all the fight left in Anne and she realised she was too tired to retaliate. She wanted only to stretch out on the rug where two of the dogs lay sleeping next to the kitchen fire. Revel got up and shambled over to where the kettle hung. He spooned leaves into a teapot, added hot water and placed the tea down in front of her. Grateful for the tea, Anne took little sips and thought how it would be best if she never had to face the people upstairs again. By the time Barnard came looking for her, Macartney and most of the others were already milling in the entrance hall, putting on their hats and coats to leave. True to his word, Macartney had eaten his dinner without any fuss and was ready to head straight back to his lodgings. He bowed and thanked Anne, repeatedly insisting she shouldn’t go to all that trouble next time.

“His Excellency really didn’t notice, Annie. He looked as if he enjoyed his meal, said he hadn’t eaten gammon for so many months he’d almost forgotten how it tasted,” Barnard said as he led her back up the staircase to the bedroom. “But there was talk of how it would be right to give that cook a flogging so he learns his lesson.”

A silver moon shone through the bare windows of their bedroom. It was a small mercy she found the water in the washstand still hot and, after running a cloth over her face, she discarded her clothes in a heap and dragged a nightdress over her head.

“I saw how hard you had to work to make this evening possible. I’ve not done enough to show you my appreciation.” Barnard pulled back the coverlet and puffed up a pillow.

“I feel like a spent force,” Anne’s voice sounded thin, with none of her usual animation.

“ ’Tis that tendency of yours, my Annie, to want everything perfect. What a high standard you set for yourself. People here seem quite satisfied with a bit of drink, a hot meal and some good conversation.”

“You must be right, perfection isn’t possible, especially not here. It is a lesson I must heed.”

Just before she slipped into a dreamless sleep, she heard Barnard say from the doorway, “Good-night, Annie. There are candles to be snuffed and I’ll look in on Henry before coming to bed.”

Sorrow follows happiness

Anne liked to think she had a talent for giving advice. Since the sole reason for Jane coming to the Cape was to find a suitor, Anne imagined that, with the two of them living in such close quarters, Jane would confide in her. She saw herself in front of her table easel, paintbrush in hand while she worked on her latest watercolour, with Jane bent over her embroidery giggling as she relayed a juicy detail about one of the young men who came calling. Anne had looked forward to putting her wisdom and experience to good use, to ensure Jane chose a man that was right for her. It was disappointing for Anne, then, that Jane seldom gave anything away.

Hercules Ross, kind and exasperatingly scruffy, continued to find reasons to visit the castle. Even though she never said it, Anne was sure Jane did not care for him. On one of the rare occasions that she had been more communicative than usual, she said Ross reminded her of an eccentric uncle, a legend in her family. This uncle made his own cheese, large wheels which he ripened in a cool, dark cave near his house on the rugged and broody coast of Scotland. He had also been a dishevelled man and, due to the cheese, his clothes often gave off a pungent and unpleasant smell. Such an association did not bode well for Ross, though Anne never picked up any unpleasant odours about his person. Once, though, she had noticed a little brown dirt line on the inside of his cravat, reminding her always to be thankful that Barnard was so clean.

Jane had proved disappointing as a female companion. There were days when Anne longed, with an almost physical pain, for the easy company of Margaret. None of the strangers or acquaintances she entertained could make up for the presence of a truly familiar person. All those interactions lacked a certain closeness that was only possible through shared history and the kind of sweet intimate understanding that develops with time. With

Margaret, even when they'd spent years apart, as soon as they were reunited they simply picked up from where they'd left off.

How, Anne wondered, would she ever have survived Windham if it weren't for Margaret. What happened with Windham was years ago, long before she'd heard of the Cape, before Barnard had arrived on her doorstep.

How had she unwittingly stepped into that magic circle of obsessive love? How ironic that now she had Barnard, who most people thought was a poor match, but who was a lamb by comparison. She hoped for Jane's sake that she would never meet a Windham.

William Windham, impeccably dressed in polished boots and ruffled lace collars, had been, to Anne, a man as unpredictable as an English summer. So unnerving were his frequent changes of mind, he earned himself the nickname Weathercock Windham. Over a relationship that spanned several years, Windham blew as hot and cold as a tempest towards Anne, while she remained steadfast in her attraction to him. It had often seemed to her he'd been both attracted to and repelled by her. She was never sure, on any given day, which of the two Windhams she might be dealing with. Despite her Scottish accent, Anne knew how to converse with intelligence and humour, which Windham appeared to enjoy. And yet, sometimes, her unorthodox way of thinking, her freedom of spirit and what he called her "unfashionable clothing" drew from him a frenzied urge not only to be critical but to behave as if he wanted to inflict pain.

Although Anne had been on the receiving end of Windham's inner turbulence, she became accustomed to his severity and chose to overlook it. Her hopes for an eventual marriage were always fuelled by the whisperings around London society that she and Windham made an excellent match. And, on the face of it, they did. Windham was adept at being a charming and engaging man. Educated at Oxford, he could converse on any subject,

and possessed a wicked sense of humour. But he also had a scathing temper and the more Anne made herself available to him, the more Windham became his worst self. There were fleeting moments during which she glimpsed the reality of Windham, stepping briefly out of the magic circle to a perspective where she could view him objectively for the brute that he was. Whenever this occurred, Windham picked up on the scent of Anne's withdrawal straight away. Then he would pursue her relentlessly, for Windham could not stand to be abandoned. Pouring his attention on her like a warm morning sun, Anne would capitulate, Windham would grow complacent and then withdraw once it was clear she wanted him. What a vicious cycle it was.

Anne had made a last attempt to secure Windham's love, travelling over the narrow sea to Paris at the same time as a revolution tore its way through France. She'd grown so reckless from her feelings for Windham that she withstood her carriage being harassed by a mob outside Calais. A setback, but Anne had pressed on.

At last, she reached the city and the sanctuary of her hotel on the rue Saint-Honoré, feeling utterly relieved by the calm, palmed interior of her suite. Half an hour later, her beloved Windham swept through her doorway in a flash of jacket tails and silver buckles on his well-shod feet.

"My sweet A," Windham said into the kiss on her hand, bowing graciously and lifting his splendid hat with a flourish of its emerald-green ostrich feather. Anne's hopes flared, and her nerves were soothed after the ordeal with the mob. Windham offered brandy and fussed over her. He insisted on having a light supper brought to her suite and yet, within hours, Windham turned cold enough to sneer at Anne, telling her he thought her nothing but a foolish woman who should desist in her attempts to try and firm any further arrangements with him while she was in Paris.

The blood-stained streets of France appeared to bring out all Windham's cruelty as he took pleasure in whispering unkind words to Anne in public. Addled and upset from the sting of his jibes, she had to hide the hurt from other people. Finally, she confronted him.

"Why do you continue to see me when it seems you detest me?"

"I do not always detest you," Windham shouted back, pacing up and down the room.

"But what I sometimes feel, it is best you do not know."

"There is such cruelty in your words, especially since you know how I feel."

Windham stopped and slammed his hand on the table: "Don't be such a nag, woman, you know it riles me!"

Anne was as wrung out as an old floor rag. Usually so sure of herself, she was unable to find the words she longed to yell back at him. Instead, she sat down on the sofa to wring her hands and sob.

"What is this?" Windham said, enraged further. "A tired old trick women practice when they've failed to get their way. I cannot stand all this snivelling and weeping!"

Anne kept her head down while he stood over her, no longer a charming man but a menace. He frightened her when he was like this and, worse, she loathed herself for cowering. After she found enough courage to insist that he leave, she held her breath and watched him grab his cane and hat, then slam the door.

Like frost on a cold morning, a resentment settled over her. He had gone too far this time; she was through with him.

When next she saw Windham, back home in London, he had to beg her to see him. She agreed reluctantly on the condition that it was in the presence of others. In her sitting room, she watched him as if from a tremendous distance, almost outside of herself, as he sprawled on the sofa, this ridiculous, overdressed man, so full of his own importance.

Windham's power over her had finally broken. In private, at home in Berkeley Square, it was Margaret who gave freely and listened as Anne analysed what had happened. She would never let a man treat her that way again.

In the Cape, there were other problems unfolding behind the walls of her new household. Henry, just after landing at the Cape, had seemed awed by his new surroundings. His eyes widened with excitement when he saw the mountains, and all the strange people fascinated him. He was out of his depth enough that, for a while, his behaviour calmed down. The Barnards even dared to hope Henry might surprise them all and flourish in the Cape. But, once they were settled in the castle, the boy quickly reverted to his wild, unruly self.

Barnard came home furious after learning that Henry had been caught stealing eggs.

"Why would the little fella go and do something as foolish as that?" he complained to Anne.

Henry had crept into the garden of a neighbour and taken the eggs from the hens that foraged in the flowerbeds. The neighbour, a strict man who spoke no English, threatened to report Henry if he continued with his high jinks. It was only thanks to Pawell's Flemish, being close enough to Dutch, that the situation was made clear: Theft of any kind was a punishable offence.

Henry's behaviour kept the Barnards up at night. In another incident, Henry and a friend, whose slave mother worked within the citadel, discovered a few of the underground tunnels and secret passageways beneath the castle. For a lark, they locked up some of the dogs in one of these cellars. The boys found the ensuing search for the dogs entertaining. Although Henry never did confess to it, both Anne and Barnard had an awful feeling that he was responsible.

Next came the broken windowpanes from his catapult, which were costly and tedious to have repaired. With Barnard away at work, there was only Pawell to discipline the boy. A school had yet to be established in the Cape. Most families gave their children a basic, sketchy education at home. Those with money sent their sons to be educated in Europe when they reached a certain age. Something had to be done about Henry, but Barnard and Anne skirted the issue as if it wasn't happening. Barnard's attention was more on his duties and Anne's on her plans to act as first lady.

Naïvely, she assumed that once the house was ready, she could simply begin by offering to host anyone keen for a bit of a party, English or Dutch. She'd decided against cards and dice: gambling could go on at other residences but, at the castle, Anne envisaged hosting balls, a chance for people to kick up their heels, to dance and flirt. The enormous rooms were perfect for it and there was not much happening in the Cape for society. She aimed to change that. It was a shock then, that her first invitation to most of the prominent Dutch women was declined without so much as a word of apology.

Anne dispatched a note to her ally, *Mynheer* Rhenius. If anyone understood the people at the colony, he did, and she needed his advice. His cart clattered into the gates at the castle, loaded with firewood as a housewarming gift.

"A bit of warmth and something sweet is all we need in this life," Rhenius said by way of a greeting. Pleased to see his friendly face, Anne showed him into the grand room that was almost finished. He presented her with a box of plaited, syrupy delicacies he called *koeksisters* and took a leisurely seat against some noisy cushions that rustled under his weight. Anne explained she'd been snubbed after sending out her first invitation. Rhenius left his tea and *koeksister* to look out of the window.

"Women here are known to be picky," he said with as much tact as he could, looking down onto the courtyard with the little fountain.

Anne patted her hair and raised an eyebrow. “Why be picky when there is so little in the way of entertainment going on at all?”

“People, especially women, can be mysterious.” He chuckled softly at his own joke, perhaps hoping to lighten what came next. “The trouble is, Lady Anne, they see you as only the wife of the secretary. As you are not married to the governor, they do not understand why they should trouble themselves with such a visit. This is why your invitation was declined.”

Rhenius paused to reach into his pocket and pull out a pipe. Even though his words had stung, Anne did her best to appear calm. She picked up a bit of embroidery to add a stitch. The stitch was so bad she’d have to unpick it as soon as he was gone. She looked up to see him methodically push the tobacco into the pipe’s barrel and couldn’t help noticing his thumb was stained brown on the tip from his habit. She did wish he’d get to the point, for she sensed there was more to it than her husband’s rank.

“People have their suspicions. Of course, I know it is a delicate matter, and it is not for any man, or woman to judge, that is up to our Lord only, but ... well, they are aware that Secretary Barnard is much younger than your ladyship. It is unheard of here.”

The mention of their difference in age was like having a pail of cold water thrown over her. She never thought about it anymore. Barnard was just Barnard to her; he was neither young nor old in her eyes. Her only thoughts in relation to Barnard’s youth was that she hoped it rubbed off on her in some way. Especially when the skin on her hands appeared papery. There would soon be more greys in her hair than blonde, and there was also that stiffness in her limbs upon rising in the morning ... All these observations Anne preferred not to mention to her husband. She did not want to draw attention to the obvious. But the small-mindedness that Rhenius spoke of opened old wounds and left her feeling hopeless, knowing she would never get away from disapproval of her marriage.

Rhenius looked apologetic and all Anne could think to say was to offer him more tea.

“Once they make your acquaintance, they are sure to see the error in their ways,” he said, setting down the pipe and sitting forward in his chair. “It is my recommendation that you do exactly as the wife of the previous Dutch secretary did. There is nothing to be done about your husband’s status in terms of his rank, but I suggest you attempt to overcome the other problem by issuing formal invitations. Even use a crier rather than a card. As the natural tendency of people in the Cape is to value anything and everything that is scarce, my advice is only to hold these occasions very infrequently. It will make them desirable.”

At the end of his visit, Anne watched his cart and horses leave through the gates. She felt cold and tired. An occasional stiff, formal gala was the antithesis of what she’d had in mind. She trusted Rhenius but, if she listened to him, life would become even duller than it already was. Her plans to hold a dance on the first day of each month and to make Thursdays the day for tea and music seemed thoroughly inappropriate to her now, and all she could imagine doing was secluding herself in the castle.

An expedition

Horses stamped and snorted their steamy breath in the early morning outside the Barnards' residence in the castle courtyard. It was around seven in the morning as a jubilant climbing party prepared to begin their expedition. Anne had vacillated over what to wear for days. She'd completed walks on mountains in Scotland in her life before, but Table Mountain, with its flat top and perpendicular face, looked formidable. She couldn't see herself making it to the summit tripping over skirts or snaring her petticoats on the hard scrubby bushes.

On that morning, she exited the front door and down the steps onto the flagstones in the only clothing that made sense to her, even if others found it amusing. Wearing a pair of Barnard's old breeches, his stockings, and her own well-worn boots, she'd swept her hair off her neck under a hat and was almost unrecognisable. For once in her life, Anne understood what it felt like to dress as a man. It struck her how much easier it was to move about. She could take much wider steps, enjoying the lack of hindrance around her legs, and the ability to stride boosted her confidence in her own physical power. While others might have found her dress peculiar, she found favour immediately with two of their dogs that would accompany them. They licked her hand in recognition, unfazed by her clothing, and loped around excitedly, tails wagging as they sniffed at every basket or bundle standing on the flagstones waiting to be hauled up the mountain.

There was nothing unusual in Barnard's extravagance. He organised a dozen slaves to carry a tent, mattresses, blankets and a small writing table and camp stool up the mountain for Anne. There were also baskets of provisions for the climbing party. It was only as it should be, Barnard had declared in his excitement. At this rate of spending, Anne had her concerns that the Cape would not offer any chance to accumulate savings. And yet, she was caught up in the moment. They planned to watch the sun depart behind the Atlantic from up

high, then to spend the night cosily in a tent together and be up early the following morning to witness the sunrise over a hot breakfast. And, with the prospect of a table from which she could sketch the vistas in paint and ink, for the benefit of everyone back home, Anne chose not to think too long or hard about the cost of the expedition.

It was still quiet as they made their way through the suburbs of Cape Town to the start of the trail. The first mile took them up a winding path dotted with rocks on each side, between which grew silver trees, sugar bushes and proteas. The horses moved slowly. Like Barrow, Anne carried a sling with a tin case on her shoulders to collect plant samples. As the ascent turned steep at the foot of the mountain, they left the horses to be returned to the castle and began the scramble up rocks and through gullies that only a human on foot, or an antelope, could manage.

As the day grew warmer, the air carried the perfumed scent of the aromatic Cape geraniums, a smell that reminded her of the sticky resin from pine trees. They scrunched and rattled their way over water-worn pebbles, some as slippery as grease. The only evidence of those that had come before them on the rough path were discarded old heels and the soles of shoes; curious evidence of other people's presence. How strange, Anne brooded, that so many of the Dutch gentlemen she'd mentioned the ascent to had frowned at the prospect and issued dire warnings that few people ever climbed the treacherous mountain. It was better just to admire it from below.

"I think I was told more than a few fibs," she told Mentor, her slave guide, who knew the mountain well. What those gentlemen would gain by lying to her, she could not fathom.

Mentor laughed and replied, "*Mevrou* is brave and maybe the first white lady to climb it."

It was a relief when Mentor suggested they stop to rest, making use of a smooth, flat rock to sit upon. It was now so hot Anne had to open her umbrella for a bit of shade.

“I am sure I cannot be the first woman, and Mrs Hughes, who is with us, is also of pale skin. Tell me about that cave we passed and why it smelt so strongly of smoke. Were people there recently, sleeping and eating?”

“Probably runaway slaves, *Mevrou* Barnard,” said Mentor. “They hide in the caves on the mountain. Some will try and make it to Simonstown to board a ship and escape.”

Anne couldn't get the images of runaway slaves out of her mind for the next section of the climb. It was almost unimaginable to her, having to roam the mountains and forage to stay alive while trying to escape their owners.

It was a sight for her exhausted eyes, when the party eventually reached the top. Rocky and flat, the mountain top was like a strange land above the clouds. Down below was the sweep of the enormous blue ocean, dotted with ships that looked like paper boats, the rugged coastline softened by sea mist and what could have been a toy town laid out as clearly as a map.

Her legs and feet ached but, from such a vantage point, with the Cape spread out on either side, and the spine of mountain that she could now see continued towards Constantia, all the complexities of the colony seemed trivial and, if only for that one illusive moment, higher than a bird, the whole enterprise of coming to the Cape seemed worthwhile.

Homesick

The Barnards continued repairs to their apartments and weathered the usual spats and family tensions. So impossible had it been to find any suitable stuffing for pillows on the rough plank settees that lined the enormous castle rooms, Anne had resorted to using armfuls of fallen leaves. During *Mynheer* Rhenius's visit she'd noticed that they'd made a rustling sound when he leaned into them, but she decided there was nothing to be done about it.

Jane was increasingly surly and passive. She did everything in her power to avoid any task she considered too arduous, mooning about and sleeping late. She'd spend hours in her room and arrive late for breakfast. Then she'd push the bread on her plate around, and complain that she'd prefer something else, as if bread wasn't somewhat of a luxury. Anne had asked Jane for help in embroidering the sofa pillows with the leaf stuffing, but even this task seemed beyond Jane. Her behaviour annoyed Anne. She was sure Jane suffered from nothing more than laziness. The girl operated as though everything in the house was done by invisible elves, Anne complained to Barnard. Jane was only interested in dances and the few young men who came to call on her. Even Hercules Ross got more out of Jane in terms of conversation than Anne could. So far, none of these gentlemen callers had developed into any serious prospect for Jane's hand. The sooner she had her own household to attend to the better, was Anne's assumption. With Jane, she'd just about given up.

During what Anne liked to think of as the great unpack, she was satisfied to discover that every single item she and Barnard had brought with them was more valuable than they ever could have predicted. The large double-woven Scotch carpets on the tile floors warmed the rooms up dramatically and helped with any echoes. They slept better with the feel of familiar English linen on their beds and every rush-bottom chair could be used in the dining room.

Nevertheless, Anne missed the small things most: The absence of life's little luxuries; the baker who knew her name and her favourite sponge cake; window shopping in Piccadilly; easy afternoon teas with dear friends, people she had known for years – the sort of friends with whom she shared a history.

She pined for her sister Margaret. It was more than just her gentle company Anne missed. It was the shared understanding they had over the details of their lives. Anne sat for hours hunched over her writing table recording her experiences and her thoughts in the long letters she sent home. She wrote until her shoulders ached. All too often these letters went unanswered. Weeks would go by without even the shortest little note written in a rushed hand from her sister.

The less news Anne received from home, the longer and more detailed her own letters became as if, by writing more, she might elicit a satisfactory reply. Henry Dundas was the worst offender in this regard. She knew he must be busy, yet she'd taken such care to keep him informed and to render a picture of the Cape that the least he could have done was send her a reply.

Mornings were the best time for letter writing and every red wax seal she applied onto the envelopes gave her a sense of achievement. Next, she'd summon Revel. He never seemed to mind the errand of running her letters down to the postmaster at the dock.

Anne would never again take for granted the speed of correspondence she had known in London. An express could be dispatched and arrive at its destination in a matter of a morning within the city, or only a few days if it were bound for further afield. She would also never take for granted the stocked shelves in the haberdasheries, her favourite Twining's tea shop with its secluded tea garden and the fashionable ladies that frequented it. She missed good establishments where she might spend a morning browsing for books or scented soap.

Nothing like it existed in the Cape. At a pinch, she could arrange a visit from one of the Dutch women who supplied secondhand clothes. The arrival of anything new, even spices or coffee and sugar, never mind silks and china, was as sporadic and unpredictable as the vessels that carried these commodities.

Being far from home had a noticeable effect on Anne. In her previous genteel life, she seldom entered the kitchen in Berkeley Square, it being the territory of the servants. In the shadow of the mountain, Anne began to place more of her attention on domestic matters. She was drawn to the kitchen located on the ground floor of the castle. It felt cosier than many of the other rooms the Barnards inhabited. Warmed by an enormous hearth, the fire burnt all day to provide hot water, heated in large kettles that hung above the flames. Granted, the room was sometimes smoky, which stung her eyes, but, after a while, this no longer bothered her. The fire was essential for all the cooking and, in the winter, helped to warm the rooms directly above.

In one corner of the kitchen was the heavy trapdoor, under which old stone steps lead to a pantry underground. It was cold, dark and a good place to store sacks of grain and sugar, jams and preserves and jars of pickles, and a barrel of apples Barnard had obtained from a farm nearby. On the kitchen's walls, copper pots, jelly moulds and bread tins hung between strings of onions, garlic and bunches of drying herbs. In the kitchen, there was also usually a servant or a slave to talk to. Anne could drink her tea at the simple wooden table, the same one she'd wept at during her first disastrous dinner.

Since then, Revel had tried to make it up to the Barnards. It had not escaped him that his employers had opted not to have him punished with the whip. Such forward thinking was rare and so Revel did his best to keep the Barnards happy.

"Revel, have you ever noticed that there is hardly any event more agreeable here than a new ship arriving in the bay?" Anne asked him one morning.

“New arrivals are what this place is all about, Milady,” Revel answered while chopping onions and carrots.

“This past week I’ve waited every day for one that carries someone special,” she said absentmindedly, staring at the butcher’s diagram spread on the table in front of her.

“And just who would that be, Milady?”

“Oh, you’ll find out once they arrive. I can’t decipher this butcher’s diagram.”

She’d carried the diagram all the way from England, after hearing that meat was cut differently in the Cape. Sure enough, they received great hunks of bloody meat neither she nor Revel could recognise. Whether it should be stewed or roasted, could be cut into steaks or would only the slowest cooking do justice to these slabs, neither of them knew. But the diagram was proving unhelpful and all she could think to do was hand these cuts of meat over to a proper butcher, once she could find one.

Revel wiped his hands on a rag and stirred the spicy mutton soup he was cooking for their supper. He threw a few handfuls of lentils into the pot and stirred the soup with a large wooden spoon. He whistled the same tune mindlessly while he moved around the kitchen.

Revel was well connected to the wily oral network that existed between servants and slaves, people whose lowly status frequently meant they were invisible to their owners, even though they were privy to every intimate detail of the lives of those they served. They knew when the women of the household were menstruating, they knew who was sick with an ailing bowel, they knew who drank too much and fell asleep in their chairs, they knew which husbands beat their wives and which of them were tempted to spread the legs of their female slaves. Connections between them hummed beneath the veneer of polite society. Words could be exchanged in passing on the streets, at the market, or while running errands. Every bit of news travelled faster along these channels than it ever could by a formal route.

Revel never failed to bring Anne updates from the port and, in some respects, especially during those early days, he became a lifeline to the outside world.

That evening, after the dinner of spicy lentil mutton soup, during which Barnard had barely spoken, Anne went to sit with him in front of the fire. The flickering flames cast shadows in the hollows of his cheeks and he looked older in the dim glow of the oil lamps. He seemed oblivious even of his loyal dogs that lay curled up near his feet. Nothing stirred outside in the courtyard except for an owl hooting in the distance. Barnard did not look away from the flames. This was going to be one of those evenings when his silence worked on Anne's nerves. It was more than just his not speaking. His ability to withdraw left a gaping emotional space between them that rendered any normal conversation impossible.

"A penny or three for your thoughts," Anne ventured, which elicited no response to begin with. Eventually, when he gave up staring into the fire to turn to Anne, he did not smile.

"I confess, I must be a lousy companion this evening," he said, at least acknowledging his demeanour. "There are events from today that trouble me greatly. What I know, I would rather you never did and, yet, I cannot keep it from you because, the way people talk here, you'll find out soon enough."

Anne could barely stand the tension and got up to close the gap in the curtains.

"Do you remember the lascar from China we met on the *Edward*, on the ship?"

Anne nodded on her way back to her chair, "That man who prepared soup with the shark's fin? Tsoa Toko?"

"Yes, that's him. It's dreadful, Annie, and there's no kind way to say this – he was sentenced to death today."

"But Toko is harmless, it must be a mistake! Where did you hear this?"

“To be sure, ’tis no mistake. He’s been found guilty of housebreaking and theft and no amount of effort on my part to intervene has been successful. They refuse to revoke his sentence, which means he will be executed at the gallows at the parade ground soon.”

“Surely Macartney could do something?”

“That we British have already outlawed torture he believes is as far as he can push it. He walks a fine line between the changes he can make, while not completely overriding the Dutch in order to avoid any uprising.”

For a moment the room spun, as if she’d drunk too much. When she’d seen those grim gallows, it never occurred to her she might know someone to hang from them. She closed her eyes and put her hands over her face. Toko and his lopsided grin, his excitement over the soup, the family he missed. Toko would be executed in front of a baying crowd. She didn’t care whether he’d committed the crime or not, he did not deserve to die.

Then it was Barnard who got to his feet as if, in sharing it with Anne, his own burden had been lifted. He pulled her to standing and wrapped his arms around her.

“Best of human beings, I fear I’ve failed in my duty to shield you from this. But you would have come to know eventually.”

Anne laid her head on his shoulder and insisted she was grateful to have heard it from Barnard rather than through some offhanded conversation with Revel or a stranger. They stood together, the dogs at their feet and the fire making an occasional crack into the silence. Anne was the first to pull away and took Barnard by the hand.

“There’s something else – this terrible fate for Toko has served to remind me of it. What shall we do with Henry? I fear for his future if he continues to be this obstreperous.”

Barnard nodded, but didn’t say anything, leaving Anne in fear that he would withdraw from her again. He knelt to pat one of the dogs. “Wouldn’t life be easier if children were as obedient as they are?”

“Well, I’m certainly no replacement for his mother,” Anne responded. It had been naïve to think that they would bond together as a family.

“I keep hoping a solution will present itself,” Barnard said, stroking one of the dog’s silky ears. “But, the truth is, Henry needs the firm hand of a good tutor and there are none to be found here. Let me pour us a brandy, I think we need it to settle our nerves.”

It was an uneasy night with broken sleep for both.

Throughout her life Anne had avoided public executions. She’d heard talk from those who enjoyed the thrill that came from the theatre of it all; the frisson that moved through the crowd of onlookers as they shouted and jeered. To Anne, it had always sounded like a gruesome kind of theatre to which some went to cheer for the victim, some went to watch in horror and pray for their souls, and some took pleasure in spitting and hurling objects at the victim; after all, they were lowly criminals. In London, these events also attracted hawkers selling their wares, just another day’s work to put coins in their pouches for a meal in their bellies. Then there were soldiers that marched and cannons to be fired. It was a pageantry of power, and a morbid form of entertainment Anne wanted no part of.

When Toko’s execution drew near, Anne made up her mind not to attend the gruesome event. This meant she also needed to stay well away from the castle ramparts, for they offered a view of the gallows at the parade ground. She would also see to it that Henry be confined to his room, fearful that his usual roaming may inadvertently cause him to witness the hanging.

Rather, she would light her best candles while the hanging took place and attempt to honour Toko by painting his portrait with only her memory as a reference.

As it happened, she met the hangman in the kitchen. Anne could not be sure of the origins of this tall, soft-spoken man. She knew he was what was called a free black; no longer a slave but rather employed by the government. She almost collided with him standing near

the back door in his blue-tailed regimentals with white trousers, a red cravat tied in a knot around his neck. The man had an air of respectability about him. His voice was soothing and his long fingers made gracious movements. He maintained a sense of calm as he waited for his wife, the scullery maid, to finish her work. The woman was not a patch on him and how the two of them had come to be together was a mystery to Anne. She found him so compelling that in a moment of enthusiasm she told him she'd like to draw him. He looked down at the floor and shook his head.

“Milady, I not a painter’s model,” was all he said, overcome by shyness.

Anne laughed, “Oh, fiddlesticks, let me be the judge of that.” The painting was, she explained, to add to her archive of sketches she was building of people she met in the Cape, and she would like to draw him for this reason.

The hangman wasn’t in a position to turn her down and returned the next day to pose for his portrait. While Anne set up her wooden box of watercolours and her table easel, he pulled a blue handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed the brass buttons on his uniform until they shone. After returning the handkerchief to his pocket, and pressing it back down, making sure to tuck the end in, he stood as rigid as a plank and asked what he should do.

“First, I encourage you to be your calm self,” Anne said, hoping to put him at ease. “Can you hold this rope in both your hands? No, that’s not quite right. Try standing with your left hand behind your back,” she suggested. “Yes, much better, and hold the rope in your right one.”

More than anything she wanted to capture the unhurried confidence she had seen as he waited in the kitchen, which was so at odds with what he did. Imagine taking the life of another to earn a living. She guided him to turn so the light was on his face. He came across as a man at peace with his destiny, as if he had made up his mind to be the best he could be, in his service to the government; the best they had as an executioner.

The hangman looked out the window thoughtfully as she set up her painting equipment. “Maybe a good hanging is also like your painting, *Mevrou*. Can I speak?”

“Of course, I want you to elaborate for me,” Anne answered, as she swilled her paintbrush around in a glass of water, the water clouding with the residue of paint from the brush.

“Every hanging comes with a big struggle,” he said, tensing up his shoulders at the thought and Anne realised he performed these duties not without burden.

“Please,” she said gently, “I would like you to explain but try not to change your position ...” She began to sketch lines on a sheet of paper, the charcoal blackening her fingers.

“Ja,” he said with a heavy sigh. “Everyone, no matter if they have faith in God or Allah, no matter the iron will they show beforehand, must be dragged to that noose. Even when their hands and ankles are tied, they fight and struggle. I want to be kind and I make sure the muslin bag is pulled well down over the people’s head. It is better if they no longer see what is happening. After that, the knot is the important thing. It must be right. It must be at the back of the neck, just under the ear.”

The hangman stopped talking and the only sound in the room was the scratching made by the charcoal on the surface of the paper. Anne’s eyes flicked back and forth between her drawing and her subject. She was glad to be sketching, it gave her something to do, kept her hands busy and allowed her to study his face while she listened in fascinated horror. His cheekbones were high and his nose straight and, even under those wild, sprouting eyebrows, his eyes were kind.

In the end, this was a profession for him. He was paid by the company, Anne reasoned. She could imagine how scarce work must be, that there was little choice. She

debated whether she should ask him to stop talking, fearful that he was speaking the unspeakable, and yet she wanted to hear, to understand.

Perhaps forgetting he was meant to be still, he fiddled with the rope, then quickly appeared to remember her instructions, and put his hand back into position. It may have been that just standing there in silence, while Anne studied him, made him self-conscious because when he resumed speaking, his composure returned.

“You see, I discover my skill to calculate the right length of the rope and the prisoner’s weight. If the drop is too short or too long, you will suffer. I know it is merciful that I get over with it fast as possible. I tell them: ‘Close your eyes and look for the light.’”

“You do?” Anne was amazed.

“It is all I know to say,” the hangman said as he cast his eyes down.

He also told Anne of his relief that the British had outlawed the old ways of torture and that one day he hoped he could leave the Cape and go inland, build a house, and raise cows instead.

When Anne stopped drawing to tell him about Toko, the hangman abandoned his pose and scratched his head. It was always easier for him when the people he executed were absolute strangers. All he could do was promise to do his best for Toko when the time came.

When the painting was done, she left the room for a moment and returned with a bundle. “It’s a mere token but do take this jar of spiced peaches for your time. I’ve also included a vial of rosewater. Pray, please sprinkle a few drops on the bag you must place over Toko’s head. Also, tell him Lady Anne Barnard will remember him always.”

The hangman looked uncomfortable, but his nod indicated his acceptance as he took the bundle.

Just as she would never forget Toko, she would never forget the hangman; the two of them had become inextricably linked. Both had touched her in their own unique ways. Their openness to share from their lives and their experiences without flattery or put-on airs.

From then onwards she never could think of one without the other.

Departures

An eager sun thrust a shaft of light through a gap in the curtains, waking Anne earlier than she would have liked. Lately, she was sleeping longer than usual, especially since confining herself to the castle. But on this day, upon hearing the bustle that went on within the castle walls, the blacksmith nearby clanging on metal and the hollow sound of horse hooves clip-clopping over the cobbles, Anne sat in front of her mirror and reminded the woman in the reflection that she was, after all, an earl's daughter. If they wouldn't come to her, she would visit the Dutch herself. After sending instructions to have Pawell arrange the horse and carriage, she dabbed a little rouge on her cheeks and took more care with her dress than usual. Let's keep the clothing conservative, she said to herself, we don't want to alarm these old-fashioned women with too much racy London dress.

In the sombre sitting room of one such lady, whose townhouse overlooked Strand Street, Anne extended a gracious, scented, lace-cuffed hand to the madam of the house when she came into the front room. She made enthusiastic noises at the offer of coffee even though she'd have preferred tea, and applauded the woman's exquisite decorating skills, pointing out the decorative settee and chairs upholstered in red. Her host must have found Anne amusing, in particular her challenges in finding what she needed, and how she'd stuffed her cushions with leaves, because she suggested they have coffee again. Anne leapt at the chance to explain that as she was bound by her own English customs and how she hoped the woman might reconsider coming to the castle to attend a tea or a ball. After several of these visits, it did not take long for Lady Anne to have her way.

The days grew long and warm, and the bright sun bathed the Cape landscape in a brilliant light Anne could not recall seeing back in England. She reminded herself to commit to memory the vision of a majestic Table Mountain against a cerulean blue sky. There were also days when the southeaster howled like a wild dog, filling the air with dust so thick the servants had to make sure every door and window was closed. Over tea and scones, the ladies clucked in their own tongue, “*Oh, mijn God, u heft geen wind gekend totdat u hier gewonde.*”

Anne was quick to agree. She had not known dust like it before she’d come to the Cape. It was a dust so insidious and fine, it worked its way into everything, spoiling piano keys, accumulating in a layer on the foliage and, although the eye could not see it, it turned the wallpaper brown. Even the watercarts did not help. Dust was a constant bind, erupting into the air from the parched summer streets. Each forceful gust of wind brought another dust shower. Even with all the doors and windows firmly shut, it worked its way through every gap. When the wind blew hard, her apartments felt more like a prison. Beyond the thick, stony walls, Anne could hear the cries of the seagulls flying around the ramparts and wondered what it must be like to own such freedom.

Then, in a flourish, she was caught up by a new arrival. During one of Anne’s Thursday teas at the castle, a man strode into the dining room trailing behind him two nabobs from Bengal, their heads wrapped in traditional white turbans. Women peered from behind their fans to size up this stranger, while the men who, up until that point, had maintained a steady murmured chatter, ceased their talk of the latest funerals, sales and acquisitions from the ships, and looked on impassively.

The man’s novel presence filled the room, a new face with an exotic entourage was, indeed, a curiosity. He gave the sort of bow that indicated he’d been doing it all his life thereby alerting his audience that he had the manners of a gentleman.

From the other side of the long room, Anne let out a shrill squeal. Gone was the softness from childhood, his face undoubtedly harder, more hammered by the sun than she remembered, but she would know that face anywhere. It was her brother, Hugh, in the flesh, in her dining room. Then, with every beady eye upon him, he crossed the grand room, moving past all three fireplaces spread along one long wall, almost leaping over Anne's sofas. He was already going through the motions of getting down on one knee when, muttering something about what the dickens was he doing, he stood back up and pulled Anne into an embrace.

"You are the best sight for my tired eyes," he said into the top of her head. She was so surprised she stood still, inhaling all the smells embedded in his coat from months at sea. Tobacco, sandalwood, and perspiration. Then she remembered they had an audience and pulled away from his embrace to say loudly, "There can scarcely be a greater occurrence than to have my younger brother, the Honourable Hugh Lindsay, standing in my Cape dining room! I cannot wait to hear everything. Your journey here, your time in Bombay and Madras and your service in the English East India Company."

Her explanation was enough to make the people at the tea return to their own conversations, leaving her to attend to Hugh. He had brought with him gifts of muslin, a string of pearls and a shadow in his eyes she'd never seen before, eyes that hinted at the darker things he must have witnessed.

"What about your men?" she asked at some point, indicating towards his nabobs who had shuffled to the perimeter of the room while keeping their eyes to the floor, clearly uncomfortable in such a situation as this afternoon tea.

"Do you require lodgings for them?"

"If you have space," he said, then looked around and grinned, "which it looks like you most certainly do. I think they'd just about sell their mothers for a bed without fleas. I say, it

is remarkable to see your lovely face on this strange continent rather than in England.

Imagine what our father would have thought, had he lived long enough to see his children flung so far across the globe.”

“Our mother doesn’t exactly approve, either. The fleas are atrocious, are they not? We were almost eaten alive the first night we spent here. We have so much catching up to do. Yes, I’m sure we can find beds for them, and I can’t wait for you to meet Barnard.”

Hugh and Barnard were almost the same age with Hugh, the earl’s fifth son, 15 years younger than his sister. As such, he had always been a baby brother to her, one she’d done her best to protect from their irritable mother. Seeing him as he was now, the captain of his own ship, she was going to have to adjust the way she’d always thought of him.

Hugh turned out to be both a welcome and disruptive presence in the household. He spent many long evenings with Anne and Barnard, telling them stories of life in India. They would talk late into the night, the wine flowing and the candles dripping wax onto the tablecloth. But there were also evenings when Hugh called for hot water to bathe, requested a light supper from Revel and slipped out through the side door of the kitchen. He never explained to Anne where he was going, and she thought it best not to ask, but she suspected that on some of these occasions he was visiting certain quarters in the slave lodge. This was where men went to pay for a woman.

One evening, Barnard left with Hugh. He was curious to keep Hugh company at a meeting with some of the Dutch traders. Anne wished them a good evening, thinking very little of it until she woke shortly before dawn to find his side of the bed still empty. She struggled to fall back asleep yet, when he finally entered the room, his movements heavy from too much drink, she lost her nerve to confront him and kept her eyes shut and her breathing even so that he would think she was still asleep.

The following morning, Barnard's nocturnal activities left him in a fragile state. Anne was both annoyed and sorry for him and told him in as gentle a voice as she could muster to sleep it off. Bending down to kiss his forehead, the smells of the night before were still in evidence: woodsmoke, spirits and sweat. But there was also some other faint, foreign odour on his person. She sniffed around him again, then chuckled at her own behaviour, reminding herself she was acting the way their dogs behaved when one from the pack returned after losing their usual pack smell.

Barnard stirred and startled Anne. She pulled away and watched him roll over and bring his arm up over his face. If Hugh had been visiting the slave quarters, had Barnard gone with him? The idea of him lying with another woman, a slave woman, worse, a prostitute, left a metallic taste in her mouth and a ferocious pain behind her eyes. This hurtful idea wasn't something she wanted to get to the bottom of and, so, she let the matter, and the man, rest.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Revel was standing over a pot of apricot jam, anxiously watching for it to reach the setting stage by ladling droplets onto a saucer. Hugh, who displayed a keen disposition for deciding arrangements, and despite his late night out, was deep in conversation with his nabobs. They made lists and discussed their plans with earnest faces. It was serious business calculating the necessary stock: water, wine, fruit, turkeys, and grains, that they would need to fortify the men on the next arduous leg of the journey.

Anne greeted her brother.

"Good morning, dearest sister. Are you well?" He looked in her direction briefly and then looked back at his list. Anne suspected he felt sheepish about whatever had taken place the previous evening. Sensing she was in the way in the crowded kitchen, Anne busied herself taking a pot of coffee up to wake Barnard instead. The bedroom was dark, the air stale. She flung open the curtains and pushed up both sash windows to let in some air. She

knew Barnard's head must throb, yet he still managed to smile and kiss her hand with gratitude for the coffee.

"What an evening the two of you must have had. I hope it was worth it," Anne said, keeping her tone light. She sat at her mirror and picked up her hairbrush to pull it through her hair.

"Do you mean apart from the headache I must endure for the day? There's nothing lily-livered about these seamen, I tell you. They can drink in one evening what I normally would in a week." Barnard had sat up in bed to drink his coffee. He put down the cup to clear the sleep from his eyes and rub the back of his neck.

"Did my brother lead you astray, dear husband? That is another thing these seamen are known for. The enjoyment of a woman in every port."

"Annie, not I! 'Tis true I went with him to the slave lodge, but I stayed out of doors under the stars in the lodge's inner courtyard. There were a couple of fiddlers playing and a man who'd fashioned his own instrument, a sort of xylophone from wood and rope, which I found interesting."

"And Hugh?"

"He disappeared for a while and then he joined me. But that's not what I want to talk about. We came to a conclusion about which I must tell you."

Anne felt a kind of dread, and Barnard took his time with his coffee before speaking again. "The thing is, with Henry having grown more difficult, Hugh has offered to take him back home and act as Henry's ward. The boy needs to be safely enrolled in a decent public school if he is to make anything of his life."

Anne dropped the hairbrush and it clattered on the tiled floor. She bent to pick it up and turned to face Barnard. "And when were you going to ask me about such an important decision?"

“It just happened, my Annie. We must see it as an act of kindness to Henry. More than anything, Henry needs an education as well as the discipline of a schoolmaster if he is to have any future.”

Anne stared at her hairbrush and then pulled loose the few fair hairs trapped by the bristles. An overwhelming tide of sorrow came over her. They had come to this conclusion without her, these two people who supposedly cared for her. She wasn't close to the boy, not as close as she would have liked to be, but sending Henry away was not only, in her mind, extreme, it would also shatter the last slim chance they had to be a family. Without Henry, her childless state would be much more obvious to the outside world and, here in the Cape, they were more focused on offspring than back home. Perhaps it had to do with being a colony, to have bred, to have made your contribution to the population, was held in high esteem. People always asked, and now she realised how grateful she was, at least, to be able to offer up Henry.

“You must reconsider. This is not just about Henry's future.”

“Surely that is all it is about?”

Although they tended to skirt the issue, Barnard was not unaware of how much she wanted a family. It was hard to believe he could be so insensitive, yet she found herself wanting to blame Hugh for encouraging Barnard to make this decision, it being always easier to blame one that is not the primary person she lived with.

Sitting in front of her mirror she was unable to own up to the truth that Henry was the kind of problem Anne tended to procrastinate over, putting off any resolution, hoping it might disappear. In the gaps and the quiet times, in between her writing, her sketching, and the people they must entertain, she feared she had not done enough for Henry. She struggled with her feelings of being inept and her inability to relate to this wild male child, after all he

was no baby. She had never dared to raise this with Barnard out of fear he might come up with the kind of plan he had just made.

Barnard placed his cup back on the tray, threw off the covers and put his feet on the floor. "I need to wash and then I shall speak to Henry. We've known we would have to address it at some stage. Having Hugh here has rushed matters along, but it's for the best."

In a matter of days, Hugh went on ahead to Simonstown. The Barnards followed a week later, unable to enjoy any of the new scenery they encountered on the way.

Once they'd passed Rondebosch, the good road petered out into a dirt track that eventually led over a mountain pass so treacherous, there was scarcely enough room for two carts to pass one another. When they reached the first house between Simonstown and Cape Town, appropriately called Halfway House, they were met by a thin, gruff man who'd retired from service as a Dutch soldier. His house was on a small farm that he rented, and he made his living as a sort of innkeeper, taking in travellers on their way to and from Cape Town. They were served a simple mutton and potato stew for supper. The beds and the wine were scarcely passable, all of which added to their fatigue and low moods. Anne inspected the sheets before getting into the bed, relieved that, at least, they looked reasonably clean. She was about to blow out her candle when she decided to approach Barnard on the subject one more time.

"What if we could find Henry a suitable tutor? Couldn't we try again?"

"Nanny, the decision has been made," he said, turning over, facing away from her. Nanny was his new term of endearment. It had come up one morning when she'd been fussing over straightening his cravat and the name had stuck.

She blew out the flame and asked quietly into the darkness, "Is it your decision to make?"

Barnard ignored the question and, after a while, patted her hand and wished her a good night's sleep.

In Simonstown, a cold wind rushed at the pier and stung Anne's already sore eyes. It felt like the wind was boxing her ears. Her throat ached as she held onto Hugh and Henry for the last time, unable to eliminate the thought that she may never see them again. An energy bounced off Hugh as he shouted orders and strode up and down the pier, evidently keen to get going. For once in his life, Henry was quiet. He looked younger than usual, more vulnerable, and when Barnard only extended a hand to shake his boy's hand, Anne wanted to flee from the scene.

Upon their return to the castle, the couple remained withdrawn and short with each other. In what Anne viewed as her failure with Henry, she had been robbed of the opportunity to right any of the wrongs of her own upbringing. She could never compensate for the sins of her own flawed and cold mother.

For Barnard it was different. Unable to express how he felt about the complex circumstances with his son, his sadness erupted inwards and grabbed hold of his health. The bilious attacks he had suffered in the military came back with a vengeance. They made his days intolerably long, causing him to drag himself out of bed to attend to Macartney and, once back home at the castle, to retire early.

It was hard to bear witness to the dark side of her marriage. Evenings filled with only the weight of hefty silence, and the nights when Barnard returned home late, bringing with him that altered smell of woodsmoke and spirits that Anne now associated with his nights away. They had reached a cold, dimly lit place, where both husband and wife seemed to have sunk into their lowest selves. Barnard spoke little to Anne but lavished affection on his dogs. She grew increasingly desperate, her self-confidence waning. This was evident in her

appearance. She stopped dabbing rouge on her lips or fussing over her hair. She approached him apologetically and, around others, she wore a wan and stiffly cheerful face.

Anne kept busy with her paintings, her balls, and the weekly teas, but they felt pointless, as pointless as her womb. Borne out of her desperation, she began a series of large panoramic scenes of the town. Driven by a desire to be of some use, at least she could try to capture everything she saw around her. For Dundas, for her country, for the people she missed.

The work on these panoramas kept her away from people; it seemed just about every woman on the street or at the market was either pregnant or held a baby in her arms. She was protected from further observations, which felt like cuts from a whip. Mothers being cruel to their children on one hand, or seeing the profound and intimate tenderness between a mother looking into the eyes of a baby. Unable to write her feelings down, she sketched slaves with babies at their breasts, like Madonnas, and spent hours on the ramparts of the castle.

The summer grew increasingly hot and Macartney must have noticed the stress they were under because he intervened. They could choose and loan one of three properties to use as a country retreat. It would give them a chance to reconnect as well as provide an escape from the heat.

Macartney's offer broke the back of the silence between them and, for a change, the Barnards talked late into the evening. On the day they were to start viewing these properties they got an early start, taking the road that led out of town, past the stone quarry and the kitchen gardens, heading towards the back of Table Mountain. The road became more overgrown until they found themselves on a track that was barely a road at all, but the sort of terrain that a strong horse might be able to navigate. It meandered lazily beneath the trees, between proteas and fynbos, up to a small government cottage that stood, somewhat forlornly, under the trees. The little house sagged under a tired thatched roof. Such was the

disrepair, it was obvious the rain would get in, and the timber beams were rotten. Barnard prodded the roof with a long stick he'd picked up on the walk up, and quickly hid his face to avoid the dust and spiders that rained down on him. The house and the road needed work, and the terms of the loan from Macartney stipulated they would have to build the road and fix and furnish the cottage at their own expense. The government would only repair any external problems.

Barnard tapped on a loose floorboard dubiously, "I still think we should see the other places before we commit. One of them is close to Camps Bay and ideal for swimming."

Anne didn't answer, her mind in conflict over what the repairs might cost and the appeal of getting away. The sound of running water made her forget about the expenses. It came from a fast-flowing stream beneath a clump of trees and it ran down the mountain, swirling around rocks. The water was a clean and clear colour of pale tea, tinted by the roots of the trees. From the moment she stepped into the small clearing among the dense trees, her shoulders felt lighter and the breeze rustling the leaves seemed to kiss her face.

"I agree, we should see the other two places Macartney offered," she said to Barnard once he caught up with her, but in her heart she already knew the place she would choose.

"All that little house needs is a roof of new reeds and a few sticks of furniture. Since it is so remote, it could be a real hideaway ..." she said, hopeful that Barnard would see its potential. For her, it was a place that lived up to its name, like an Eden. The dappled light, the fecund smell of rich damp earth, the orange and almond trees that had grown there for so long, their branches appeared to wrap themselves around the house. In the gaps between the foliage, she caught a glimpse of a sweeping view that stretched as far as the eye could see, all the way to the blue hazy Hottentots Holland mountain range, uninhabited and remote in the distance.

“Aye, private it would be,” agreed Barnard. “The only visitors we might expect would be monkeys and buck,” he added, looking amused.

“And the animals won’t ask uncomfortable questions about our children, or look embarrassed with the answer,” Anne couldn’t help quipping back.

“Ah, there, there, my Annie, Paradise will give us something else to put our minds to. Let’s agree to keep every bit of maintenance and repair as simple as possible.”

They returned to the castle feeling optimistic, with their country escape taking shape as they talked.

Mutiny

At the end of each day, Monday to Thursday, Macartney made the short trip from his residence at the Company's Garden down to the old castle that dominated and fortified the coastline. His visits were always the same. He'd first meet Barnard in his rooms, where Anne understood they discussed the business of the day and, inevitably, moved on to sharing the latest gossip. From there, Macartney would make a turn to the living room of Lady Anne and Jane. Even though Macartney was an old man, Jane always took the time to talk with him. On one such visit, Macartney lowered himself heavily into a chair and waited for Anne to serve him his drink.

"My dear lady," he said, pausing to study the amber whiskey in his glass, "I thought it only right to tell you in person."

Usually she enjoyed his visits but this time there was a thoughtfulness and concern in his demeanour that put her on edge. Fearful that whatever troubled Macartney had something to do with Barnard, she was glad to have her embroidery to keep her hands busy while she waited for him to speak. Macartney took his time, sipping his drink and studying the glass, as though it were an item of interest he'd just discovered in an archaeological dig. Then he narrowed his eyes in preparation to speak.

"The thing is, you see, we have to attend to a rather delicate matter."

Anne felt a pinch in her veins.

"A dozen or so of the Boers who farm near Stillingbosch have refused to take the oath of allegiance to our sovereign, King George. While only a few in number, they're a headstrong bunch whose obstinance is proving a concern for the Crown, especially now."

He cleared his throat loudly and set his glass down. “You’ve no doubt heard the talk of a mutiny that is festering within our navy?”

Another pause, then another sip of his drink and, while Anne still wasn’t sure where this was leading, she had heard the word mutiny bandied about. Lately it had seemed it was all Revel could talk of. Despite the friendly servant-to-mistress relationship she preferred they maintain, there were days when she wondered if Revel would rob them blind given half the chance.

“As it is my duty as the governor to ensure they do swear allegiance to the English monarch, you see, I must send your Mr Barnard up to Stillingbosch. If these men refuse, the next step we will take is to banish them to Batavia. A fine country in itself – in fact it does have a rather splendid town – but with a climate so dreaded by our Cape Dutch that they have, for the last hundred years or so, looked on such a sentence as a death warrant.

“We will use this to our advantage, you see. I tell you this as an apology that it is *your* husband who must go to Stillingbosch rather than Hercules Ross.”

Anne nodded, unconvinced by the idea of Barnard going away, especially at this time of strife.

Macartney continued: “The thing is, you see, not only does Mr Barnard completely understand my views, he has proved to have such a winning way about him, as you know, as a capable and able ambassador, because he never fails to listen to both sides of a dispute. Therefore, I believe, if anyone can convince the Boers, Barnard is our man.”

Macartney leaned back into his chair visibly relieved to have broached this with her. For a moment, she pushed the images of mutinies and Barnard going away without her to the back of her mind so that she could consider this illuminating nugget of information regarding her husband’s performance. To hear of Macartney’s confidence in Barnard was a gift. It confirmed what she’d always known: She had seen this potential in him. Not that she lived

her life needing the approval of others, but how nourishing it was now, to her, to have her judgement confirmed as sound, especially from someone as accomplished and esteemed as Macartney.

“I’m surprised, because I thought that in Mr Ross you would find a man more accustomed to business than Mr Barnard. Indeed, I have sometimes feared that Mr Barnard’s plain and straightforward abilities might be overshadowed by the abilities of his colleague, Mr Ross,” she said, hoping to encourage Macartney to further elaborate.

“Hah, fiddlesticks!” he said, with renewed colour high in his cheeks and a smile on his lips. “You underestimate your husband, dear woman. Let me tell you the difference between Mr Barnard and Mr Ross. Mr Ross will take half an hour, say, to write a proclamation. He will bring it to me in a flourish, but it usually requires a hundred alterations. The same proclamation might take Mr Barnard one hour to complete, and yet, once he has finished, he will get it so completely right that I can find no fault with his work at all.”

Macartney’s words had a curious effect on Anne, like a dam wall bursting. She felt so emotional, she had to dab her eyes. A wave of relief washed over her. Barnard was being seen, his good qualities acknowledged. She hadn’t realised what a burden she had carried all this time, that it felt as though she were the only one who truly saw him for who he was. She secured the needle of her embroidery into the stretched fabric and put her sewing down now there was no need for a shield.

“I know how happy he has been in your employ. We could not have asked for a greater mentor than he has had in this time here with you,” Anne said, reaching over to touch Macartney’s hand. “I am content, then, that he must do whatever you need for our king and country.”

Just as she felt herself elevated by Barnard's success, she was reminded that it came at a price. Deciding she had little choice in the matter, they would have to manage without him, even if a rebellion erupted.

Into the country

Barnard came home in the middle of the day, shouting at the women to pack. If Anne hadn't been concerned by the edge in his voice, she might have enjoyed her relief at being told to put down her paintbrush. She had not had a good morning. The panorama of Cape Town was proving much more challenging than she had expected. She had spent so many hours bent over her paper trying to get the perspective right. She regretted ever having started such an ambitious project, trying to record a 360-degree view in watercolours, because she was snared by duty to finish it. Barnard reached her, having taken two steps at a time to get to the upper ramparts, the only place in town to offer such an all-round view. His cravat was no longer tied, and he must have used a sweaty, dusty hand to push his hair out of his eyes because it stood up from his head. She seldom saw him unkempt and shaken.

“Nanny, 'tis bloody happening!”

“What is?” she asked as she followed him back down the steep steps as fast as she could without tripping on her skirts. In the courtyard, he stopped to turn and look at her.

“The mutiny has escalated, and the bay is seething with angry sailors holding their ships captive. The situation is tense out there and, if they don't step down, the navy will blow the lot of them right out of the water. We can't stay here; we must leave the castle immediately.”

“But is this not the safest place?”

“Nowhere is safe! And, should they be captured, every one of them will be held right here in the barracks until the whole lot of them are hanged. Do you want to be around for this?”

“No. But Revel talks about the rebels among the sailors, and the poor men whose dreams of joining the navy have amounted to nothing but cramped quarters and a shortage of bread. Barnard, I admit I feel sorry ...”

She was interrupted by the thunderous noise of cannon fire made louder by its ricocheting off mountain granite. It sounded dangerous, not like the regular noon gun. Anne began to run through an atmosphere that felt thick and foreboding. It had always been a society she never understood, she thought, as she threw clothes and linen onto the bed. The queer, old-fashioned ways of the Dutch, the outright ownership of people, the wretched and squalid conditions of the low-ranking soldiers living in the barracks in another section of the castle, not to mention the drink-swilling, tobacco-spitting seafarers; a rougher breed she had never met. She'd tried not to pay it too much attention before, but now it was suddenly, overwhelmingly, lawless. On this green earth, what had she been thinking, coming here when she could have remained at home?

Mrs Hughes and Pawell rushed about helping with the packing. Pawell pulled the waggon out front and readied the dogs. There was a violent banging on the kitchen door, which faced the alley. Revel snapped the bolts shut. The banging continued and then, just as suddenly, stopped. The sounds of running footsteps echoing across the cobbles, no longer innocent, carried with each thud, a possible threat. Gunshots fired in the distance put anxiety on every face while they all followed Barnard's orders.

Not until their waggon was some distance out of town, did they stop on the flats to look back. On a wide stretch of sandy, windswept pass, later to be known as Kuils Rivier, the Barnards' waggon joined several others. Some of them were pulled over to the side of the pass to give the oxen a break from their yokes. Their powerful jaws tore at the succulents sprouting from the sandy soil while Chops, their pointer, bounded back and forth from the waggon, oblivious to the dangers or the fears of his humans.

Out in the big blue bay, the speck of a flag flapped on a ship. No ordinary flag, it flew as a signal to the rebels. They had one hour to step down and then the navy would begin blasting at them with cannons. Anne found this threat of devastation, juxtaposed to the pastoral scene of the waggons, incomprehensible.

Stillingbosch

By the time they reached Stillingbosch, all their fears had been left on the road in the waggon's dust. They found a quaint Dutch town, still and orderly compared to the sump of the port. The main street was lined with massive oak trees and kept cool and clean with water furrows that ran with sparkling water from the river. This fecund valley appeared to support healthy and robust people, most of whom, they soon discovered, did not go out into public much. Anne found the village to have a prosperous, sleepy air, judging by the neat gardens and fine quality horses and cattle that grazed in the fields, or were tied up in the town. Neat and orderly vineyards, rows of orchards and plentiful kitchen gardens spread throughout the vale and on the lowest slopes.

On their first evening, they dined with the landdrost. He might as well have been king of the town, if Anne were to judge by his house, which was much more distinguished in its appearance than he was. Milky-white walls and majestic oak trees provided shade in front of the gabled building. Some of the trees measured at least 12 foot around their bases and, with a noble mountain rising behind it, the place felt grand and fruitful.

Despite the appeal of the landdrost's home, they declined his offer to spend the night there, aware that the women spoke neither English nor French. The Barnards had learnt it was more relaxing to stay in accommodation of their own. They'd borrowed a simple house from the town's fiscal where, while it was more rudimentary than the landdrost's estate, they could admire the stars at night and prepare breakfast on their own terms, without the draining, difficult conversations, where understanding is lost in the absence of translation.

The fiscal's house was a whitewashed cottage facing the broad main street. It was basic but comfortable. They inspected the property for fleas as soon as they arrived and celebrated their good fortune in finding it clean, with a nightcap of rum that had been

produced in the valley. The cottage was kept by the wife of the landdrost's coachman. She herself had a slave who was mother to eight little pikes that ran around the garden and rooms as naked as when they were born. Anne enjoyed their presence for a change; they reminded her of sprites.

In the room where the Barnards slept, the bed was unusually tall and required the use of a stool to climb into it. Like many of the houses in the town, it had a large, square kitchen garden. It could have done with the attention of a gardener as it had been overrun by a pumpkin plant. The big, orange pumpkins peeped out of the greenery, like bundles of wash cloths. There were also two quince trees, a table in a patch of shade made from an old waggon wheel and an empty chicken coop.

The following morning, Barnard prepared to leave early to visit the obstinate Boers on their farms. He was armed only with Macartney's advice on how to get them to see things differently and was apprehensive of the task ahead. He'd slept restlessly in the tall bed which, in turn, meant Anne's night had been just as disturbed.

"I can only give these farmers until nine o'clock tomorrow, my Nanny, and after that, if they still refuse, it could mean the confiscation of their property, and the terrible possibility of banishment. 'Tis hard to be the messenger of such news but I've been given the opportunity and mustn't be lily-livered about it."

Anne had watched him spoon sugar into his tea and push the fried bread around on his plate rather than eating it. It was true, he had been making the most of this opportunity in the Cape and there, in the little cottage, she felt rather proud of him.

"You have a better chance than most of getting them to see reason. I heard this from the man himself," Anne said, hoping to quell his anxiety.

“If you mean Macartney, then I will be hopeful. Success could mean a lot for our future. I do worry that Macartney’s health is ailing, so I’ve no idea how much longer he will remain in the Cape, or what happens if he leaves.”

“As you once told me, let us focus on the sweet present for now. All you need think about today is the farmers you will visit.”

“Aye. What do you have in mind for your day?” Barnard seemed content to change the subject.

“Oh, don’t you worry about me, Mr Barnard. I am never without something to do and there is this village to explore,” Anne laughed as he gave her hand one final kiss and went outdoors. She had long ago mastered the womanly art of keeping herself amused.

As a child, she would slip away from the draughty old house and her bickering siblings to play in the fields that surrounded the Lindsay estate. In a copse of willows, hidden by their cascading branches, she could play her game of pretending she was someone else. Even though her form of amusements had changed, she was good at making her days feel useful because the idea of letting them slip away with no aim seemed an awful waste.

After Barnard had left, Anne took a walk accompanied by Jane – in high spirits lately – and a couple of slaves. Their little group did not escape the attention of the locals, some of whom appeared never to move from their stoeps. Anne wondered if her going for a walk was the most exciting thing that had happened in some time. It felt like their eyes were on her as the women sat, idly rocking in their chairs, squinting into the bright day, and watching each step they took. Occasionally, the rocking women were joined by men, who also did not move, except to puff on their pipes. And, always, a slave stood nearby, waiting to serve.

“I am glad to have you for company. This place feels like another country compared to what we left behind in Cape Town,” Anne said, looping her arm into Jane’s. “Pawell should come back soon with news of the mutiny.”

“No mutiny, nor even the looks of these villagers, can bother me,” Jane said, who had been full of cheer ever since a man by the name of Colonel James Crawford had begun visiting her.

On Sunday, after bitter coffee and rusks, an express letter from Macartney was delivered by messenger on horseback. The mutiny had ended for now, without bloodshed. Utterly relieved by this news, Barnard left early once again, leaving the women to dress for church. With news that the mutiny was over, it seemed appropriate to offer a prayer of thanks.

The church had a handsome steeple and was neat and whitewashed, just like the rest of the town. Inside, it was so dark, it took a moment for Anne’s eyes to adjust after the bright sunlight. They sat in a pew near the back, watching the women in black file in one door while the men came in via another. Many of the people were not only fat, but also had a swollen, shiny appearance that suggested they could be suffering from dropsy.

The service was long and earnest. The minister’s ears turned pink as he delivered his sermon in the guttural sounds of his mother tongue.

Twelve children from five mothers were also to be baptised that morning. Anne watched the women cosseting their babies and remembered the words of Mrs Campbell who, upon hearing that Anne had no children, said: “Oh, how miserable, how miserable for you!”

As each of the fat mothers went up to the altar, offering their babies for the holy water to be sprinkled over wisps of soft hair, the minister giving his blessing. Anne’s chin started to quiver, and tears pooled in the corner of her eyes. It was dark and the congregation’s attention was on the mothers, giving her the chance to weep freely for the empty space where a child would never be. Her eyes became so sore, to soothe them she would have liked to press them to the cold stone walls of the church, yet she felt nothing but relief once the service was over.

Back in the sunshine, the glare caused her to feel disorientated at first, but once she adjusted to the light, she felt quite different. She couldn't say whether it had come from being in a house of God but, after seeing the mothers and their restless babies, with their kicking legs and crying mouths, she realised that, perhaps, she liked the freedom of her life without such a dependency. She was ready to move on; it was enough to share her life with Barnard and their joint extended family, and their beloved pets.

With a new peace in her heart once again, Anne felt her strength. The next time she found herself being pitied by others because she had no children of her own, she might just fall back on her childhood game of pretending to be someone else, claiming half a dozen sons back home.

Paradise

After they returned from Stillingbosch, the Barnards left Revel in charge of the castle and went to stay in Paradise. They dragged several heavily laden carts up the rough dirt track. Anne failed to see much improvement to the road even though Barnard insisted they'd cleared a lot of boulders from it. But, once they were settled, rising with the sun, and smelling the fresh morning air – far away from Henry's empty room, the social bickering and gossip and the backbiting politics that stained their lives at the castle – she no longer cared about the inconvenience of the track.

At Paradise, they could walk barefoot and shed much of their clothing. On the hottest days, they cooled off in the stream and slept in the afternoons. They took walks on the pathways and contours of the mountain when the weather was cooler. Most days, after a slow breakfast on the reed-covered *stoep* that overlooked the overgrown garden, Anne let her chickens out of their coop and looked for eggs. Later, she might pick ripened fruit from the trees or write long, detailed letters to friends, or find her charcoal and attempt another sketch. Their only cow always needed milking, and there was cream to be salted and churned into butter. Every other day, there was bread to be shaped into loaves. The kitchen went through piles of wood. Most days, Barnard took care of this, dedicated to keeping the woodpile stocked. He'd remove his shirt and use the wide surface of an old tree stump to split the wood, the hollow sound as it connected with his axe echoing into the valley below. In his free time, he went riding or hunting and explored the lower slopes of the mountains.

During the week, Barnard left for work early, on horseback, while Anne stayed at Paradise. It gave her time to think. As a younger woman, she could never have imagined that providence would place her where she was – married to Barnard, childless, and forging a

connection with this wild, remote place. She venerated the simplicity of their existence in Paradise, as if now she understood the secret of the romantic age.

The mountain slope teemed with its own kind of life, revealing itself just as the sea had done during their journey. The longer she stayed, the less she needed people. It was enough to meet a lithe otter in the mountain stream, to glimpse a flash of brilliant green and orange on the throats of feeding sunbirds, or to sit quietly enough to watch a porcupine snuffle its way across the garden, undisturbed. Baboons came down from the mountain to raid the fruit trees, never failing to leave a mess of broken branches and half-eaten fruit until, one day, Barnard grabbed his gun and attempted to shoot one. But he was mortified by the animal's shrieks and, after that, they put up with the raids instead.

In her newly acquired acceptance of being childless, Anne was free to give all her love to their pets and the animals. She raised a little buck by hand and it followed her around like a dog, most content to sleep on her feet at night. One of their dogs gave birth to five puppies, which was a special event for the family. A basket of four kittens, found at the side of a pathway from town, were brought up to Paradise to be cared for. With no shortage of things to attend to, Anne's days became the most domestic she'd ever known. Granted, there were times she complained aloud over whether she'd ever be a lady of leisure again. But she had the help of April from Bengal and Titus from Mozambique. Titus had the whitest teeth she'd ever seen. Both were town slaves, on loan from the government. Even though there was too much work to do alone, especially on the weekends if Barnard invited friends up to Paradise, the slaves sometimes got on her nerves and she'd complain to Barnard that they were lazy and never learnt how to do things properly.

Toward the end of summer, a weekend invitation brought the familiar faces of the Sauls, the Stromboms and even the Campbells up to Paradise. People were always curious to visit the "little farm" but, to reach there, they had to be willing to drive the rocky and uneven

track, risking a wheel or an axle in the crevices. With the house too cramped to sit indoors, Paradise was good for lazy, slow lunches around a narrow, rough table in deep shade, a complete break from the formal events at the castle.

Anne stirred the pumpkin soup as it simmered on the coals in the hearth, admiring the rich orange flesh of the giant squash she'd brought back from Stillingbosch. Titus had the important job of keeping the coals going. The night before, he had struggled to get the fire burning as the wood was damp and now the morning was nearly over. The soup still had to be pushed through a strainer if they were going to serve it smooth, a task Anne found tiresome. She never managed to do it without it splattering everywhere. A decent piece of lamb had been cooking in a cast iron pot since early morning. It filled the smoky room with aromas of rosemary and wild mushrooms. The mushrooms were a gift from Barrow, who was now their neighbour, living at the brewery in Newlands. April had prepared pickled cod in turmeric and there were plenty of fresh vegetables and local wine to go around.

The sudden, familiar tone of a voice she recognised caught Anne off guard. It sounded like Mrs Strombom, outside in the driveway. But the guests weren't supposed to arrive yet. From the sound of it, she was fussing with Mr Strombom about the state of the road and possible damage to their cart's wheels. Anne was not dressed for company, her hair still pinned in ringlets from the night before, the morning's tasks having got the better of her. The Stromboms were more than an hour early.

"Why must they arrive so unseasonably early? It's inconsiderate, don't you think?" Anne grumbled to Barnard as she flung open the bedroom door, hoping to find him. Barnard was standing at a bureau yanking open one drawer after another.

"Can you intercept them?" she asked, uncoiling the strips of rags in her hair to reveal a tight ringlet.

"Of course, I just need a minute. Have you seen my water canteen?"

“*Mon Dieu!* It can only be where you left it. We’ll look later. Go now!”

“No need to fuss, my Nanny,” he said, giving her a quick pat on her behind. He had not touched her with the familiarity of a husband since Henry had left.

Barnard grabbed his hat from the back of the door, leaving Anne to dress. She could rely on him to keep them away from the house a little longer as he knew visitors always wanted to see the stream first.

It was one of those beautiful Cape afternoons, with a soft breeze and a golden light. The rustic cottage mellowed people as they lolled in the shade sipping wine and swapping stories. Chickens scratched in the dirt, the dogs slept in patches of sun and hardly stirred at noises in the undergrowth. Only the mosquitos proved tiresome. When the time came to clear the lunch plates, Mrs Campbell followed Anne into the kitchen with the offer of help, although she failed to carry anything. The women’s paths had crossed often in town and, over time, Anne had come to think that Mrs Campbell’s bark was worse than her bite. She presented as hostile yet, it seemed to Anne, the woman was simply incapable of hiding how she felt. At least with such a person, one knew exactly where one stood, unlike with those individuals who feigned friendliness only to speak badly of one as soon as one’s back was turned. But Mrs Campbell also had the unfortunate knack of ruining the moment just as soon as Anne felt kindly towards her.

Setting down the tray of plates in the kitchen Anne said, “April and Titus you may have the leftovers.”

Mrs Campbell cocked her head in Anne’s direction, her mouth puckered into a little raisin shape. Anne knew immediately it was her familiarity with the slaves that Mrs Campbell disapproved of. Anne had found the degrees of treatment of the slaves in the Cape perplexing. She’d seen a *vrou* hugging and kissing her slave woman’s babies as if they were her own, and she’d also seen slaves beaten and starved, treated worse than any stray dog.

“Vil Mr Barnard himself take them back to the slave lodge tonight? Vot a journey for him.” Mrs Campbell seemed keen to have the slaves gone. “Dis must be the reason for his visits there,” she added.

“His visits where?” asked Anne, who had given up thinking about the treatment of slaves to give her attention to the tray for coffee.

“I hear Mr Barnard has been seen at the slave lodge recently and I couldn’t think why dis would be the case, but now it occurs to me he has been seen about de place because he fetches and carries these two,” she waved her hand towards April.

Anne was momentarily confused by Mrs Campbell’s words. April and Titus slept in the outhouse near the back door and Barnard was not, as a rule, fetching and carrying them from town.

She knew Barnard had been at the slave lodge with Hugh. A fact she had chosen to push to the back of her mind in the aftermath of Hugh’s departure with Henry. She did wonder if Barnard still visited there occasionally but the last person she wanted to discuss this with was Mrs Campbell. What’s more, it rattled her that Mrs Campbell spoke so freely in front of April the slave, as if she were invisible. After all, Anne certainly did not want the servants to know her business. Wasn’t it just like Mrs Campbell to put her foot in it?

Anne ushered Mrs Campbell out of the kitchen hoping to change the subject.

“Come, Mrs Campbell, let us leave this hot and smoky room. This is no place for a woman such as yourself. Look at the glorious afternoon light, we must bask in it with coffee and pineapple cake,” she said, doing her best to hide the agitation that had settled in her heart from Mrs Campbell’s comments about Barnard’s whereabouts.

After they had seated themselves with the rest of the party at the table, Anne looked over at Barnard. His eye caught hers and he broke into a smile so full of feeling she was almost certain it would be best to dismiss what Mrs Campbell had said. But, despite all her

effort, she could no longer keep her attention on her guests, and she found herself willing them to leave. She wanted to be alone in the stillness of the mountain's shadow, to feel the cool, leafy ground with her bare feet and face up to the fact she could no longer ignore about Barnard: He was sleeping with other women at the slave lodge. Of this, she was certain.

At last, as soon as the sun dropped behind the mountain in the late afternoon, making it feel as if the sun set two hours sooner in Paradise, the visitors grew restless. Scared, in the face of the coming darkness, of driving the difficult track at night, they quickly gathered their belongings and clambered back into their carts, proffering thanks and promising their hosts they'd be extending reciprocal invitations soon.

When the last cart rumbled down the bumpy track, its occupants' voices fading into the distance, the forest around the little house settled into a thoughtful stillness, with only the chorus of frogs and mosquitoes to break the quiet. Anne gave April and Titus the night off and went early to bed to be alone. She told Barnard it was a headache.

Cape of storms

Early winter rains made a sieve of the Paradise thatch. Receptacles placed under every new leak created their own strange music of water droplets on tin. The dripping garden caked shoes with mud and, when nothing would dry in the incessant damp, it was time to return to the castle. Cats, dogs, chickens, and a pet buck to go, too.

Ever since the lunch reunion, Anne had tried to forget about Barnard's visits to the slave lodge. She tried to reason with herself that this was the nature of men. But the painful image of Barnard being intimate with a coloured woman refused to settle at the bottom of the lake of her consciousness. Instead, it bobbed to the surface at the strangest times. She had never been the sort of clinging wife who needed an account of her husband's movements; with his role as the secretary, she supposed there could be any number of reasons for his presence there. Investigations, complaints, and inspections were all part of what he did. Still, Anne was not ignorant to the liberties men took when it came to arresting their boredom with other women, especially if the woman was considered a whore. Her unease with confrontation meant she had avoided raising it with Barnard, but these painful suspicions made her pull away from him at night.

On their return to the castle, passing through the walls to their apartments, she noted with annoyance that a door still needed hanging in the entrance from her bedroom to the dressing room. The renovations never seemed to end and, after all, it was Barnard's idea for the dressing room. It frustrated her that he had the tendency to complicate things more than required. Now he had gone and complicated their lives with a mistress, or several.

The inclement weather brought a spate of colds and sore throats to the household. Anne stayed in her bed, taking a tincture of honey and lemon to soothe her burning throat. Barnard could scarcely eat when his bile and stomach pains returned. The pains kept him up at night and the only food he could face was broth, or a baked potato with the skin removed and a little salt. The pains also kept him at home, offering Anne some relief and allowing her to put his indiscretions down to a difficult phase. Barnard's suffering with stomach troubles were a direct response to the situation he faced in the offices of government.

Tired, sickly and with painful inflammation in his joints, Macartney's time had come to leave the Cape. While not an outright surprise for the Barnards, once it was confirmed as official, the reality of the change loomed large for the couple. They were going to lose their ally and a good friend. More than likely, Barnard would no longer be mentored and, with the political landscape of the place as fickle as it was, they found themselves facing an uncertain future.

Anne felt further betrayed by Henry Dundas who had outright ignored Macartney's suggestion that a council of three, which would have included Barnard, remain in his place until a suitable replacement be found. Instead, Dundas chose to appoint his nephew, General Francis Dundas, as the acting governor.

The Barnards didn't like Francis and the feelings were mutual. Dundas had never bothered to hide his attitude of superiority. He looked down his aristocratic nose at Mr Barnard and disapproved of the Barnards' marriage, believing Anne had married well below her station. Behind his back, the general often scoffed at the mention of Barnard, referring to him as "that so and so". Even if his time as the acting governor did not last too long, the Barnards had to face the reality that some other foolish, needy man of rank, whose fortune needed repairs, might be sent out to fill the position.

Between the rain and the fevers and the problem gut, the only good news was the progressing engagement of Jane to Colonel Crawford. It was good to the extent that Jane would marry soon, and the two of them appeared fond of one another, if not exactly smitten. But Anne had concerns about the colonel's small income, especially since Jane had a tendency toward laziness. Jane, of course, wouldn't hear of any of it. She was, like many youngsters, lacking in life experience and, yet, still certain she knew best. Anne was convinced Jane was in for a shock once she had to run her own household, and do so economically. To ease her into life as an adult, they agreed that the couple could continue to live with them until either party left the Cape.

When she felt well enough to return to the panorama painting, Anne set out her watercolours and rinsed her brushes, but her mind was far from her painting. Barnard had always treated her well and he still looked forward to getting home to her in the evening. They preferred each other's company above anyone else's, although lately it felt as if there was nothing to say. Seated together near the fire, she was at a loss for a topic of conversation. Something light, a little engaging, the kind of topics they used to talk about. She did not know why it had become so hard. Their physical intimacy had diminished as, approaching the age of 50, her need for bedroom activities waned.

Her knowledge of his slave lodge visits further exacerbated her feeling that she did not want him to touch her. But something else was amiss that she did not know how to articulate. When they were first together, they never found it difficult to talk openly. Why, then, had they lost this ability?

That night, Anne woke from a fitful sleep. She'd been dreaming of the market and Barnard. His eyes were on the young woman with the milky caramel skin. In the dream, he walked away from Anne to speak with the young woman. She tried to follow him, but her

legs remained rooted to their spot in the dirt, next to the cart selling a few rolls of wallpaper. She couldn't move and, even though she tried to speak, no sound came from her mouth.

Anne awoke, enjoying the relief that comes in that first moment of consciousness, when it is understood that it was only a dream, but this quickly turned to confusion. Something was wrong. A strange orange glow lit up her room instead of the usual darkness. She heard desperate shouting and noise in the courtyard and she couldn't get to the window fast enough. The sight of the fire, high and fierce, took her breath away. It looked like a towering inferno, illuminating everything around it. At ground level, several horses were being pulled away. They bucked and whinnied, adding to the mayhem. Then a man was being dragged away from the fire by the scruff of his coat and others beat at the flames with sacks, or hurled buckets of water. Barnard erupted into the bedroom, his face and clothes black with soot, his hair damp, his shirt torn.

“My heavens, Barnard, what is happening? How did it start? Are you hurt?”

“I am alright, but the cavalry stables are burning! You should be safe here, Annie. I'm looking for my suede riding gloves, the thick ones, for my hands.” He disappeared through the unfinished doorway into the dressing room. Anne followed behind him, not bothering to find her slippers.

“When did it start?”

“No one knows. There is no time to talk now. I found only three men trying to rescue the horses when I got there.” Barnard flung open the doors to his closet and rifled beneath the hanging coats then on the floor among his boots.

“Look in the top drawer of your bureau,” Anne said, trying to be helpful. “I can't bear to stand by and witness such terrible destruction, Barnard. What can I do?”

As soon as Barnard had found the gloves in the drawer, he turned to look at her. His eyes make a quick sweep of her state, there in her nightgown, with her feet bare.

“This is not the time, Annie. I cannot consult with you on a matter of a public emergency.”

“Let me be of some use, at least,” she said tearfully, hating to feel so utterly obsolete.

“Don’t be like a woman who goes out on deck in a storm!”

His tone was sharp, even cruel. She stepped away from him, offended by his remark, until some part of her unfurled and grew very tall.

“Why is that, Barnard?” She was wide awake, her eyes shining and alert.

“Why shouldn’t you consult with a woman in a public emergency? Am I good for nothing? Nothing other than to stay in the home, to keep quiet, and to bear children? Except in my case, I have also been robbed of that last one.”

She knew, as she spoke, this was the worst time to confront him, but something in the chaos and destruction provided her a licence to say what she thought. Outside, sparks of fire had been blown by the wind and the fire had spread. A window frame and shutter on one of the storehouses began to burn.

“I think I hear the bluestocking in you.” Barnard said, trying to be dismissive. “You’ll do what you want anyway, you always do.”

“It’s always the same, Barnard! Fire or naught, I cannot reach you.”

“Drop the subject, woman! I must return to help the men.”

And then, as if to let her know that he had heard her and was briefly moved from his own reality to touch hers, said with some tenderness, “I know you wanted a child, and your happiness means everything to me. But since it makes me feel uncomfortable, I found it best not to think about it at all.”

“If we do not talk, we will grow distant.”

“We always agreed you could invent our children to stave off people’s judgements.”

Barnard stood in the doorway, gloves on and his body flexed to move.

“There is something else,” Anne said, taking a quick look out of the window, her eyes transfixed by the flames licking up the walls inside a storehouse building. “Why do you visit the slave lodge? For a woman?”

At long last she had asked the question and now it seemed irrelevant compared to what is going on around her.

“Where did you hear that?” Barnard snapped back as he held onto the doorframe and Anne thought his face had gone pale even beneath the soot.

“Mrs Campbell mentioned it.”

“That odious woman! How can you take anything she says seriously?”

“She’s not all bad. You haven’t answered my question.”

“There is nothing to tell you. My presence there is for the administration. What an outrageous suggestion.”

“I have smelt your sin on your skin.”

She felt sorry for him before she’d said it. After all, he had so much more energy left than she did, she looked down at her pale, bare feet where even her toenails had begun to change their shape as age crept over her. She was tired and dried out. Then she felt hungry.

In the courtyard, they dragged four heavy old fire engines to the fire to stem the blaze. How small we are against nature, she thought. What of the losses unfolding: the horses, the tea from China, bricks, porcelain and spices and other small articles. Her perspective shifted back, outside of herself.

“You’d better go,” she ushered Barnard out the door. He paused to look at her with relief in his eyes and she saw she had set him free. Maybe now they could be open with each other. Then he started to run.

Beyond the bustle in the courtyard another layer of sound became apparent. It had started to rain. Hungry and clear-headed, Anne took a candle and made her way down the

wide staircase into the kitchen. A hunk of bread and some honey was all she could think of. She must make the best of things. She must make the best of Barnard, despite his flaws. That was what she'd learnt as a child. She bit into the bread, the honey from the mountain tasting deep and floral.

When a minor infidelity takes place, she agreed with herself as she spread a thick layer of butter onto another slice of bread, I choose not to know. Yes, she had decided. Rather than, she said to the shelves and the pots, licking honey from the knife; I would rather choose not to know than for Barnard to endure the mortification of his candid and affectionate wife's forgiveness.

In this decision she was aware she had brought about a change even though, in and of itself, nothing was different.

Winds of change

The last time Anne saw Macartney, he was bundled into a carriage bound for port and the ship that would carry him home. Tired and pale, he fussed irritably over a pair of king protea plants he insisted he keep on his lap. The proteas were a gift for his wife back home and, because specimens of plants and animals often died on those sea journeys, Macartney wanted to keep his eye on them.

Anne had gone to see him off. She bore a gift of her own for Macartney's wife: two jars of pineapple slices, preserved in their own syrup; and three beautiful ostrich eggs, large and pale, like the moon. She remembered Macartney, on their arrival, complaining that he'd brought so little he barely had a stick of furniture or a chair to sit on, and noted that this was certainly no longer the case. On the seat next to him were a pair of bright-green loeries in a cage. Behind the carriage, the last cartload of his belongings was packed. A grubby canvas tarpaulin was tied over a stack of yellowwood furniture and several crates of blue-and-white crockery, all imported by the Company, to be loaded onto the ship.

Before his departure, Macartney had made it known that he disliked goodbyes. With all the years he'd spent on foreign soil, the endless farewells had worn him down. These days, especially being a lot older, he found them sad and uncomfortable since he was well aware that he may never see whomever it was again. For this reason, they had agreed beforehand to part with as much lightness as possible. A short embrace, a promise to write often, and a God willing they would see each other soon.

Anne kept to their agreed script, but sadness made her throat ache. She watched Macartney's carriage clatter down to the port and decided she didn't care much for this colony life. People blew in overnight and then blew out just as quickly. It was the only thing one could count on, the stream of arrivals and departures. How many more goodbyes would

she have to endure in the Cape, and when would it be her turn to leave? She had hated seeing Henry who, at the last minute in Simonstown, had a change of heart and had to be plucked from his father's side by Hugh. Or Barrow, who was always departing on one or other of his excursions into the interior. Now, with Macartney gone, their lives were about to change. No more gossip over brandy in the evening and what of her duties as first lady, might they come to an end soon? And how was Barnard to keep his wits about him, working for the sour, interim governor when it was clear the new governor intended to shut Barnard out from anything important and bestow on him only menial tasks. The Cape they'd only just come to grips with, was about to change.

Hope in the Vineyard

It was one of those still mornings, filled with the smell of the ocean. Kelp and tiny shells and creatures washed up onto the sand. Bathed in light from an early sun, all the edges of the mountains and the town appeared softened.

Anne waited on the steps at the front of their apartments, fiddling with the ribbons on the hat she carried in preparation for the hottest part of the day. Above her, seagulls swooped and squabbled over bits of food on the walls of the castle, and the ringing sound of metal from the blacksmith's forge confirmed that, in another part of the citadel, people were at work.

Exactly how long they might continue to live there, the Barnards didn't know. There were rumours that the government would take back the apartments they had made their home and, with their diminished influence, there was nothing much they could do about it.

She heard the carriage on the cobbles before she saw it. Barnard steered it around the corner with the reins in his control. He wanted to drive. He made the jump easily from the driver's seat, ignoring the step, and gave both horses a stroke as he passed by the front of them.

"Isn't this exciting?" he offered his hand to help her climb up onto the worn leather seat on the passenger side.

"Certainly, Barnard, your enthusiasm is contagious."

Anne tried to sound enthusiastic even though any excitement about the outing escaped her.

"I'm sure you will think the place is beautiful!" Barnard declared as soon as the carriage had passed the last storehouse on the edge of town.

The day was going to be a hot one and Anne sat back in her seat securing her hat with the ribbons and tried to just take in the countryside. Their destination was a good way out of town, situated in the new lands below Paradise, about 90 minutes away by carriage.

On the spur of the moment in celebration of his declining debts back home, Barnard had purchased a parcel of land. He hadn't paid a lot for it but, privately, Anne wished it were closer to London. What such a property would do for them in the long run she really couldn't think. Had it been her own money, she would have held onto it rather than spend it in the colony. With the mounting uncertainty of their future in the Cape, the new acquisition might become nothing more than some out-of-the-way property in a distant colony that Barnard could bequeath to Henry in the future.

None of this bothered Barnard, of course, who was as excited about it as Anne might have been had it been a baby girl. He talked about his plans for the house, what they could do to establish a garden, and that they might even consider setting down vines for a vineyard or two. Once they had turned off the good dirt road that continued all the way around the mountain towards Muizenberg, the track became pitted and slow. It was entirely rural, with no other neighbours apart from some scattered vineyards and the low, thatched building that stood under some trees and next to a stream. It was known as the brewery, and it produced a popular and especially drinkable ale, which people believed was down to the fine water from the stream.

Barnard stopped the carriage in a clearing of silver and sugar trees. "We're almost there, Annie! I can't wait for you to see all of it. I thought we could call it the Vineyard – what do you think?"

It was, Anne had to admit, a pretty piece of ground, which sloped, gently at first, and then more steeply once it approached the nimble river that flowed through the bottom of the plot. The view of the mountain through the trees was as fine a view as she'd ever seen. It

occurred to her that, with Paradise falling further into disrepair over the recent winter, its walls more crumbling than ever with too much water in its cracks, and the dire condition of the roof, this would be a good time to let it go back to the government rather than making more repairs when they couldn't be sure how much longer they could use it.

Barnard had wasted no time on his latest project. Foundations were already being laid on the property and because it was what they had always dreamed of, the house would be in the style of an English country house rather than the gabled architecture so common at the Cape.

“It'll give us space, my Annie, which we know we will need if Jane and Captain Crawford continue living with us until one of us leaves.”

Anne looked down at the fresh clay foundations and traced along the edges of them with her foot, feeling the pebbles mixed in the amalgamated surface push through her shoes.

“Let me show you where the veranda will be.”

Barnard took her by the hand to another section of foundation. Anne tried to imagine what it might be like to sit there once it was finished, looking out at the noble mountain, dark green against those bluest Cape skies. The unchanging crags and cliffs of the mountain offered a stability that was in short supply with everything so uncertain.

“Yes,” Anne let go of the breath it felt she'd held onto for far too long. The place might be worth the trouble. After the night of the fire, they had become softer with one another because there were no more secrets. Just like the new shoots of green that spring up out of the burn on a blackened hillside, tender new shoots of understanding had emerged between them. A sort of unspoken pact. They could not meet every one of the other's needs, but they could give each other acceptance, not only of their good qualities but also their flaws. A few good things beckoned in the future. Jane would lie in for nine months soon, giving Anne the chance to be an aunt or a grandmother.

She looked around, smiling at the untamed landscape of the Vineyard, and declared:
“I see it now, Barnard. This could be a chance for a new beginning.”

Epilogue

1809

Icy frost lay on the bone-cold ground in Berkeley Square, the trees black silhouettes against the leaden sky. The River Thames was seldom that frozen, and the best place for anyone to be was indoors near an open fire, with a rug rolled up to keep from the draft coming under the door. It suited Lady Anne, whose joints ached when she felt chilled and whose eyesight was no longer as good as it had been.

Lately, she tended to think that the best thing about going out, was the pleasure she felt arriving home. By her own admittance, she'd gotten into the habit of living in other days, reflecting on her past and looking back on where she might have erred.

In the parlour next to the blaze sat a young girl, Anne's ward and companion. Christina was draped over a tapestry footstool, looking at a watercolour she had spread out on the floor in front of her which showed an attractive country house, its windows flanked by shutters and with a generous veranda.

On the brink of puberty, the girl's dusky skin glowed with health, her hair tied into small bows around her head. The watercolour's paper had begun to curl at the edges, and she smoothed the corners flat with a rhythmic motion, as if to preserve it for as long as possible. She may only have been 12, but Christina understood the importance of preserving memory.

"Nana, tell me about my father and the Vineyard again, please."

Anne looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece and brought her hand up to the back of her head. She maintained her old habit of patting her hair.

"Perhaps we have a little time before your tutor gets here. In this weather, he could be late. Alright then. Your beloved father, my Barnard, built the house you see in that painting. Goodness, the more I see it, the more of an amateur painting it looks to me."

Christina laughed, "It's so much better than I could ever do, Nana!"

"Well, anyway ... He found that parcel of land right next to an amber-coloured river, where only a grove of silver trees were the neighbours. Then there was the race to complete the building of the house before the winter rain began. He wanted to ensure the foundations were solid. Houses, like people, require good foundations, if they are to last. Your father often had a scheme up his sleeve and that house was one of his better ones. We lived there for three good years, a time that I've come to think of as some of the best years of my life.

"But when our life in the Cape was coming to its end, I chose to make the long voyage back on my own. I thought that, if I returned home first, I could help Barnard find another position. So pressed were we with the uncertainty of our future, it never occurred to me that, by doing so, I was leaving Barnard as if he were a widower, while he finished out the year.

"There are two days in my life, Christina, that I can never forget. The first is the day I received the letter which carried news of your father's death. It was such a shock. I thought a mistake had been made. That is how impossible it was for me to imagine that Barnard had died. It seemed an especially cruel joke when I always believed I would go first. I could not sleep, and I did not eat. I stayed here with the bolts drawn on the doors and the drapes closed. I felt I would never make peace with the way he had died, alone in an unknown farmhouse, while on an errand for the government. I was not there to comfort him.

"They thought it had something to do with the stomach pains and fever that had always troubled him, and which grew worse whenever his mind was taken up with problems. As the time passed, I began to fret that I would forget him. His image and his smile were fading in my memory. When Lord Caledon wrote telling me of your existence, that, in an unguarded moment, Barnard had fathered you, I decided it was my duty to give you the best life, the most solid foundation that I could."

“Was I born at the Vineyard?”

It was not the first time Christina had asked this question and it seemed to Anne that Christina needed to ask her the same questions to make sense of where she had come from.

“From what I know, you were born on a farm on the outskirts of Cape Town. Your mother I only know as Rachel van der Caap. She belonged to the Douglas family, had, in fact, been a slave for this family, working in the kitchen and looking after the hens. Mr Barnard must have been lonely, and I am certain your mother was good to him. Lord Caledon told me your father knew about you and wanted to provide for you. As soon as I learnt about you, I knew I had to act, and I wrote to Lord Caledon requesting that he ask your mother to send you to me on the next suitable ship.”

Christina listened with her head cocked to one side. She was seldom still and rocked on the footstool. Anne experienced another of those fleeting moments when she was sure she saw Barnard in Christina. As his daughter, she had his physical energy and that same easy way about her, which meant she never spoke ill of anyone.

“Life can come at you with loss, Christina. It has taken its fair share from me, and yet, as long as I kept my heart open to it, it has surprised me with love from extraordinary places.”

At the time of her death, in her own bed in Berkeley Square, Lady Anne Barnard had reached the age of 75, outliving Barnard by 18 years. She bequeathed all her estate to her nephews and Barnard’s children Christina and Henry. Christina went on to marry an Englishman and a farmer, Mr Mark Sloper, with whom she had seven children and 14 grandchildren.

About the life of Rachel de Caap, Christina’s mother, no records exist except as a slave in the household of the Douglas family.



Acknowledgements and References

The impetus to write *A Secretary's Wife* came after a walk in Cape Town's Newlands Forest. On that warm day, our chosen route led us past some dilapidated ruins under a canopy of trees. The ruins aren't very dramatic, just a few remnants of a crumbling wall and a slab of foundation. The only thing to identify them was a rusty sign board which offered the following explanation for the spot:

Paradise was an outpost of the Dutch East India Company. Built in the early decades of the eighteenth century, it housed the Master woodcutter – the Company official responsible for protecting the valuable timber resources of Table Mountain. Apart from the Woodcutter's own family and slave, a small garrison of soldiers was also based here, occupying the outbuilding further down the slope. At the very end of the eighteenth century, the house was used briefly by Lady Anne Barnard and her husband Andrew. Because of Anne Barnard's descriptions of Paradise in her diary, the site has become known, rather inappropriately, as 'Lady Anne Barnard's Cottage'

I knew nothing of Lady Anne Barnard and immediately felt compelled to find out more about her on the internet. Through the fragments of Anne Barnard's journals and letters I found online, Anne began to intrigue me. Her writings are some of the earliest records of a British woman's life at the Cape, yet they remain virtually untapped, other than in Stephen Taylor's recent biography: *Defiance: The extraordinary life of Lady Anne Barnard* (2017), or the South African academics who have written articles and published a few versions of her papers.

For an 18th-century woman, Anne Barnard was surprisingly independent and unafraid to make her own choices, often against the grain of her society. It was unusual for a woman of her status to marry a younger man late in life, to then follow him to an outpost of the empire and last, but certainly not least, take on his love child for her own.

At the start of this project, my goal was simply to make Anne Barnard's story known through a work of historical biographical fiction. The further I got, the more complex the relationship between history and fiction became. The workings of her relationship with

Barnard, their courtship, her response to being barren, her coming to terms with the Cape, Barnard's being led astray by Hugh, and the betrayal of the decision concerning Henry have all been fictionalised for the purposes of this narrative, but the text does draw from actual events, for example the fact that Hugh did visit the Cape and that Henry was sent back to Britain with him.

I have, however, tried to remain true to places, people and, sometimes, but not always, her impressions. For the purposes of this narrative, I brought Barnard's death forward. In fact, he returned to England with Anne after their time of living at the Vineyard. When, after several years of looking for another position closer to home, he again came up short, Barnard took up another position at the Cape, this time under Lord Caledon. He travelled alone, since Anne felt she was too old to repeat the journey, and he died within less than a year. Christina was conceived probably during Anne's last year in the Cape.

Each character is based on someone Anne mentions in her diaries, with the following exceptions, who are all partially or entirely made up: The character of Tsoa Toko is based on the real person by that name, who was sentenced and executed for theft at the Cape 20 years before Anne Barnard arrived; the woman at the market who catches Barnard's eye; and the two slaves, April and Titus, who work in the cottage at Paradise.

To keep within the period in which the story is set, historical accuracy was vital. I could not put a newspaper into the hands of Henry Dundas without first being sure that a publication like a newspaper existed in the late 1790s in Britain. To maintain historical accuracy, I researched avidly. My research stretched from what it was like to cook in an 18th-century kitchen, to academic papers on obstetrics and what doctors did to encourage a pregnancy in a patient. I read John Barrow's *Travels into the Interior* and any other account of the Cape at that time I could lay my hands on. With the advent of Covid, and libraries being closed for 2020 and some of 2021, most of this research would not have been possible without the internet and to include a list of every website or blog I visited is not possible. I was fortunate to visit the Cape Castle, the Vineyard and Koopman's De Wet House Museum in Strand Street Cape Town in 2020.

I also do wish to acknowledge the following texts listed in order of importance in researching *A Secretary's Wife*:

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