

'The White Distance', a Novel

And

*Reframing the Past for the Present: Writing 'The
White Distance'*

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This Novel and Exegesis are submitted together in satisfaction of the requirements for
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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

'The White Distance', A Novel

'The White Distance' is a work of fiction set in Australia and Antarctica at the time of World War I. The story focuses on two lovers, Dora and Daniel, who are part of Australia's vigorous anti-war movement. Each of the lovers comes to the movement for different reasons. Dora's beloved brother has been killed in France; Daniel is a printer interested in the new left-wing ideas emerging in Europe, especially Russia.

Wanting to escape public pressure to join up and fight, Daniel takes a position with an Antarctic expedition and travels there with a small team from the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology to collect weather data. This was a time of major Antarctic exploration, with the Australian expedition led by Douglas Mawson taking place in 1913. In Antarctica, in the novel, the leader of Daniel's expedition suffers a nervous breakdown and becomes dangerously violent, believing his men are German spies. Daniel and his colleagues have to consider the possibility that the only way to stop their leader might be to kill him.

After Daniel leaves, Dora joins a more radical anti-war group led by the charismatic Malachy Mara. She is forced to reconsider what she believes when the group decides to place a pipe bomb in a railway station, which will kill many civilians. Worse for her, she is likely to be the one selected to put the bomb into position.

‘The White Distance’ is also a love story about two lovers who, after being very close, are separated by a great and unfathomable distance. Dora and Daniel struggle to keep their love alive by writing letters to one another, even though they cannot be posted, and keeping journals that will not be read until Daniel returns. Each confronts a deep personal crisis without the other there for support. They use their words to one another to draw the strength to hold on.

Although set in the past, the novel raises issues which are relevant to current international and national concerns such as the clash of ideals and personal morality, terrorism, public violence, war and pacifism, love and separation.

Exegesis

The accompanying exegesis, ‘Reframing the Past for the Present: Writing ‘The White Distance’’, examines the research material and creative influences behind the development of the novel, ‘The White Distance’. It considers the issues which I confronted in writing an historical work of fiction, and concludes by placing the novel in the wider context of current debates about Australian historical fiction.

The purpose of the exegesis is to open up for examination the process of writing a novel which seeks to incorporate the constraints of historical fact into the creative text. The exegesis considers how the major issues of the past world of the novel (the clash of ideals and personal morality, terrorism, public violence, war and pacifism, love and separation) can be given relevance for present readers.

THE WHITE DISTANCE

Susan Errington

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One

ON THE RED FIELD

Dora

After my brother was killed, I received a letter from his friend, Tom Holloway, about how Edgar died. For a long time, I carried this letter everywhere with me, in a bag or a pocket. I took it out every now and again in odd places and read it to myself. Afterwards, I would hold the letter, thinking and thinking, but I never understood what I was feeling. There was no word for it, that drilling into the chest, that pain. Over time the letter became stained and tattered. I was afraid of losing it altogether so I put it under the glass of my dressing table. I placed the letter so that it was open; that way, I could read it whenever I wanted to but it would still be protected. The story of my brother lay there, under the glass, captured at the moment between life and death.

This is that letter.

My Dear Dora,

Thank you for writing to me. I am sorry about the delay. It must be two or three months since you wrote to me. I have agonised for a long time about how to answer your letter. You have said that you want to know the truth about Edgar's death. I suppose you received the standard official lie: he died instantly with no pain etc. All the letters say that, of course. I am sure you have already guessed it.

To tell the truth, I was glad to get your letter. I have carried this terrible burden for a long time and, in a way, I was relieved when I read what you wanted. To tell this to another person is a great relief to me. I will not bother to try to dissuade you from

knowing what you want to know. Everyone should know this, every man, woman and child alive should know what I know.

Here it is:

We were outside the little French village of Pozieres, part of the Somme offensive. The fighting had been fierce. Lots of fire on both sides with no ground won or lost. It was about nine o'clock in the morning, I think. Edgar was killed by an exploding shell. It landed near his position. There was nowhere for him to get out of the way. Others were killed too in the narrowness of the trench but Edgar took the full impact of the fire. We tried to extinguish the flames with blankets. Buckets of water were pretty scarce. His whole body had burst into flames. The flesh burned as he died. Nothing was more terrible than his screams. I still hear them, in dreams, or in the distance when I am awake. I believe that I shall hear them forever.

I think that you will hate me now for what I have told you. Please forgive me. Please find it in your heart to one day forgive me.

Yours, Tom Holloway.

Sydney, September, 1917.

Louise

Extract of interview with Miss Dora Somerville, speaking on behalf of the Women's Pacifist League. As reported by Miss Louise Mottram for The Barricade, 23rd May, 1918.

"Please tell our readers about opposition to your work."

"In the beginning there was polite ridicule in the press, letters to the editor from parliamentarians and patriotic citizens, but condescension is not a weapon, only a barb. As the war went on, they became more afraid that we would be proven right, and things changed. As the casualties mounted, so did the ferocity of their criticism. One day some idiot politician got up and called for us to be stopped by whatever means possible. It was like a call to arms, a battle cry. The attacks started then, and they continued even though the Prime Minister condemned them. This is what war does, you understand, it gives license to forbidden behaviour."

"What happened that particular night?"

"They broke down the door, shouting 'Pacifist cows, Hun lovers, Kaiser kissers.' They laughed, shoving us down, leering over us, lifting our skirts as much as they dared. One of our members, Nellie Samuels, went out the kitchen window and ran for the police. We usually had someone sitting by the sink with the window open; we took it in turns. Our assailants ran around the room tipping over tables and chairs and scattering papers. We were afraid of fire, that they would start one, but thank God for summer, the fireplace was cold and empty. So they came with water instead, great buckets of it and drenched us

to the bone. We flailed about on the floor like fish in a net. We kept trying to get up but slipping on the combination of leather boots, skirt hems and water. Anyone who managed to rise to her feet was pushed down again. All the time they were laughing and shouting obscenities, calling us German whores. Then they were gone. Sitting up in our puddles, we could hear the motors starting up and, as if by magic, the police appeared after the event as they always did, with their notebooks and pencils and particulars, almost like a comical film really. We got to know the questions. We got to know that nothing would happen; that there would be no investigation."

"Who were they? What did they look like?"

"Our attackers? Their faces were well covered."

Daniel

He had taken the wrong turn by accident. Wanting to escape the parade of soldiers, he had turned back into their path and found himself hemmed in by the cheering crowd that lined the footpath. Men and women pressed hard at his back. He felt their separate breaths on his neck, their hands on his coat sleeves. He could not move. A tremendous noise was everywhere, the air smelled of excitement bordering on hysteria. Down the middle of Dalrymple Avenue, the marching band was pounding out a tune as if trying to compete with the crowd for loudness. Daniel Bone had no choice but to wait until the recruits had marched past. He was standing behind several rows of people and could see nothing. Next to him, a woman was frantically waving a small Union Jack and jumping up and down in order to see over the heads of those in front of her. Her face was red from her exertion and her hair was coming loose.

"My nephew's there," she kept saying between bounces, "he's joined up. He's joined up."

No-one appeared to be listening to her.

At last Daniel saw a chance for escape and pushed through the crowd. Someone spat on him as he elbowed his way out into a side street. He turned abruptly but could see no obvious assailant. Perhaps he had imagined it, just as he sometimes imagined he was being watched or that a soldier in uniform was following him. He would count ten steps and then turn about suddenly but there was never anyone there to catch out. He was angry with himself, at the way his mind could play such tricks on him, without his permission and beyond his control. Daniel stared down the empty street. In the distance the frantic playing of the marching band continued. He stood his ground for a moment

then carefully wiped the moisture off his cheek. He needed to get out of this suffocating city. The whole world seemed rank with war. In his printing shop, he had a device for flattening books where the papers were pressed between two steel plates that were gradually brought together by a winder on the top. He felt he was that book sometimes, he and all his generation, crushed from above until they complied with the wishes of old men. Daniel looked about himself. He had been planning to visit Dora, but decided to go home. As he walked away he could still hear the ridiculous woman shouting.

"He's joined up, he's joined up."

Two

LOVERS

1.

When Dora Somerville received the telegram telling her of the death of her brother Edgar, she laughed and laughed until she thought her lungs might burst and scatter into a thousand fleshy pieces. The boy knocked loudly on the door and she opened it full of dread, fearing what the message would be. She snatched the envelope from his hand and laughed hysterically when she read what was there. Her young face contorted violently like Indian rubber as she sucked in huge gulps of air and expelled them in great rolling peals until she seemed to be nothing but a mouth with endless teeth, her eyes shrinking to dark slits in her head. At last, Dora collapsed on the hallway rug. She lay on the floor until she was calm, feeling her heart pounding under her ribs. She put her hands over her face covering it completely as if to reshape her features into something more appropriate, like grief. Then she sat up and slowly got to her feet. She was alone; the telegram boy had already fled in horror.

Later, when she was quieter, Dora cried and for days after she was haunted by memories, not so much of her brother as a man but as a child. She would imagine that she saw him everywhere in the street, in shops, on trams. She pushed her way through crowds and stared into the faces of children just to be sure that it wasn't him. Dora was puzzled at first as to why she sought the child Edgar and not the man. But they had been closest as children and like branches from the same fork of the tree they had grown further apart as they reached adulthood. As Edgar grew up, he began to display a coldness in his character that she did not like. After the death of their father, he had managed all the financial affairs for herself and her mother and somehow this authority made him even

more distant from her. In the end they had quarrelled about the war but not enough to drive them completely apart. They had only each other in the world and perhaps that knowledge continued to bind them together.

As for her laughter over the telegram, it had always been like this for her, even when Dora was a little girl and had been scolded for giggling during funerals. The severest despair always made her laugh and she did not know why. She had never been able to tell anyone about this strange behaviour, not even Daniel Bone, the man she loved. Excess of joy weeps, excess of sorrow laughs, she had read those words somewhere.

2.

Dora was running, and her reckless, headlong pace carried her across the landing and straight down the stairs in an almost vertical flight. She would be late now, she realised, late for the weekly meeting of the Women's Pacifist League, late for the third week in a row. In her arms she carried her satchel and her hat so that she had no hands free to grip the polished banister. Instead she used the wall to steady herself, sticking out her left elbow for balance. Her feet found their own way; she had traversed these stairs all her life and she knew by memory the height of the each individual rise or where a step was loose or creaked loudly under the slightest weight.

But when she was almost at the bottom of the stairs, Dora stopped and for a moment it seemed as if she might turn around and go back up again, retreating, and closing doors behind her. Or at least it might have seemed that way to someone watching from the hallway shadows. Dora looked over the banister. There was no-one watching. She gathered her bundles and breathed deeply. She was a light-framed young woman, with a pale beauty, small and dainty as a sparrow. Ready. Dora jumped the last three steps. She landed softly by the umbrella stand. If she could have reached out her hands she would have been able to touch the front door and feel its painted wood.

The tram rattled away from the stop carrying her across the city. Dora rested her head against the window, staring out. The glass shuddered and she put her hand between her skull and the pane as a cushion. That summer, 1917 into 1918, was long and hot. The heat lay on the land like a blanket. Dark, humid clouds sometimes rolled about in the sky

but the wind blew them out to sea and they dropped their precious rainfall into the unfathomable vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

Alexandrina, the old city, squatted on the plains inland from the sea, its rolling suburbs pressed hard against the arc of the purple hills. Why do they call it the “old city”? Dora wondered. It isn't even one hundred years old yet. There were many, many places in the world, so much older than this colonial city; towns where the streets were worn down by the generations of feet that had passed over them. Compared to the ancient ground on which it stood, the city of Alexandrina was like the blink of an eye against the passage of time. But the city looked very old; dust storms had weathered the limestone and sandstone of its buildings, harsh summers had cracked and faded its streets. The centre of the city stood naked and treeless in the bright glare of the day and took its wounds from the sun.

That summer, the city of Alexandrina appeared even more decrepit. There were no breezes to freshen the air or showers to clear the dust which settled over time on the white stones of the buildings, turning them to muddy brown. The dust also settled on the white faces of the people, filling their throats and eyes and noses and tasting bitter on the tongue. People waited: waited for rain; waited for the war to end all wars to be finally over; waited for news from far away places; waited for a lover's kiss; waited for victory, by no means certain, for the great British Empire over the evil Hun.

Dora Somerville was waiting that summer too, but if you could have asked her what she was waiting for, she would have been unable to tell you. She would have liked to have known what it was because she felt the waiting pressing down inside her sometimes.

Waiting, Dora Somerville thought drowsily on the hot evening tram, what am I waiting for?

She held her satchel against her chest, resting it on her lap and wished she had room to read a book. Through the flaps of the bag she could feel the shape of the Kipling in its muslin overcoat. She had wrapped this book carefully at home, choosing the softest, sweetest piece of muslin from the cupboard and swathing the stiff pages and leather covers in its protective caul. When Edgar was killed, some cousins, too far away to visit, had sent her this beautiful copy of Kipling's poetry as a solace for her grief. But she had never been able to read it or even to open it. She had put the book away in the back corner of some drawer, to read later she had told herself, ceremoniously casting Mr Kipling into the darkness of waiting. Only her friend the printer Daniel Bone could have made her get this book out again. Only because she loved him so much, could she trust him to touch the pages with his hands. She shivered almost thinking of him holding it. Like her, he loved every part of a book. He was able to appreciate a book in the same way a great painting might be appreciated, not only for the genius of its creation but also for its craftsmanship. She imagined the book in Daniel's hands, how he would hold it carefully with his long fine fingers. Perhaps she had first fallen in love with his hands, Dora thought. He had the gentlest touch of any man.

A white swathe of muslin flew out in her memory and she could not stop her thoughts even though she wanted to. I have slept with a man who is not my husband. I have slept with Daniel Bone. She had not solved the problem of their relationship yet. Away from Daniel she conducted funny little arguments with herself, tried to think through her decision, listed out all the dangers she faced because of her behaviour. But when she was

with Daniel, love felt like dreaming or breathing. Intimacy was a space outside of self and time. She could find no arguments against it.

“Muddle head!” Edgar's adolescent taunt battered against her brain as the tram rumbled into a stop. What would Edgar say now, Dora wondered, if he knew how I lived, what I did? She imagined that he would despise her, even reject her. But the war has changed everything Dora might have said to Edgar and often thought to herself. It has not just devoured the bodies of young men, it has eaten the futures of many women. What else is there left for me, a righteous spinsterhood? A lifetime spent without love?

When the tram ceased moving, Dora stepped down onto the footpath and walked off slowly towards the meeting. The Women's Pacifist League met in the hall attached to the Quaker Meeting House on Ebenezer Street. The building was constructed of galvanised iron, both the walls and the roof, with a packed dirt floor. It was hot there, often unbearably so, and the members carried wide opera fans to cool themselves. Dora slipped in from the lean-to kitchen and sat quietly, almost entirely unnoticed except by the minute secretary, Elizabeth Pimm, who nodded caustically. *Miss Prim*, Dora called her behind her back to make the others laugh. Elizabeth worked in Barlow's haberdashery shop on Wednesdays and Thursdays and called this employment part of her war effort. Dora had been served by her, receiving change from her friend's warm hand, the skin scented by coins and notes. They all knew the truth but did not speak of it between themselves. Elizabeth's father had lost everything investing in Russian bonds before the war.

When Dora arrived, their chair woman was speaking; Isobel Adams was talking about the weather. She did not like the heat and she declared that there was something

decidedly unladylike about perspiration. Isobel had been in Dora's class at school but they had not been friends. They simply knew of one another, each aware of the other's existence until the war gave them something in common. Dora looked up at Isobel seeing her lips move but unable to absorb her words; her concentration was on the woman's gestures. With her right hand, Isobel fingered the mother of pearl buttons on her blouse, its blue silk pale as a winter's sky. Dora felt weary and sad. She turned her head away and stared across the meeting room, observing its plainness, its bareness that was meant to speak of spiritual simplicity. Around the table her fellow pacifists waved their fans in a slow rhythm. The strain of the heat showed on their familiar faces, other young women who had been to school with her, older women who had known her mother, many who had suffered losses in the war, who grieved and could not find solace except in the hollow promise of change. Why are we here? Dora wondered gloomily. What on earth can sheltered, comfortable women like us do to end this war? Isobel Adams moved to the items on the Agenda. Dora heard nothing. I am beyond listening, she thought.

A mosquito brushed past Dora's ear, so close she felt the touch of its delicate body and its buzzing sounded louder than an engine. She swept the insect away with her hand but it came back again, attacking more fiercely. Isobel had moved further with the business of the meeting, item four: a letter writing campaign to newspapers... The mosquito flew into her eye and Dora shuddered, flicking it out with her eyelashes. She dreaded being bitten. Her flesh crawled with imaginary pinpricks and with the memory of childhood attacks. She had suffered infected bites oozing puss under stinking ointments, and later a mosquito net over her bed like coarse gossamer in the moonlight.

Dora sat stiffly in her chair, the Minute papers rolled tightly in her hand. She was waiting for the mosquito to land near her; she was ready to strike. In the background, she could hear Isobel talking about an Agenda item: Alice Hepplewhite will give a report on the terrors of the Liddite Shells. More stories of dismembered bodies, of men badly injured, patched up and forced out to fight again, back in the trenches. These trench soldiers were dug in like animals; they died like animals in the mud. It was too dreadful to imagine. And they, the ladylike members of the Women's Pacifist League, they would sit there while Alice spoke, all of them listening impotently to a new litany of horror.

Isobel's voice became another irritation, buzzing like the mosquito in Dora's thoughts: Don't you understand? No-one is listening to us, Isobel. They only laugh at us. The truth is that all the banners and the marches and the speeches and the letters to the papers will never stop the war. There must be another means, another path, because no-one powerful is listening to our calls for peace. We're losing. Listen to this: WE'RE LOSING.

The minute papers slammed down and the mosquito was dead. A little blood marked the spot of its crushed remains, so she knew that it had at least bitten someone. The meeting was silenced by the sound of the blow and everyone was staring at her. Dora got up quickly, without apology or politeness and gathered her bag. She left so hurriedly that her hat was forgotten, left on the table near her seat. After she was gone, the members of the Ladies' Pacifist League stared at this fragment of her presence, as if hoping it could offer some explanation for her strange behaviour.

4.

Dora walked bareheaded down the road in the moonlight. The night was thick and humid and still terribly hot, even the pavement seemed to retain the burning touch of the sun. Inside her boots, Dora felt her sore feet were swollen. She longed to sit down, even in the gutter, and pull off her shoes and stockings. Then I might go barefoot down the road; for a moment she imagined herself like that, the bare skin of her feet collecting the dust and filth of the street and carrying this mess across the city back to her home in its respectable street where she lived along side respectable people. People who had waved and cheered when Edgar, when thousands of Edgars, had marched away. Dora felt a sadness that was like betrayal. Her own people she might have said. But decorum meant that she could not remove her shoes and stockings in public. Instead Dora reached up and undid her hair, letting it hang down her back so that her head felt lighter and cooler. Dora thought, if I had a pair of sewing scissors or a kitchen knife, I could cut this hair off here and now and leave it behind on the footpath. She lifted her hair up with both hands, shaking it free from the shape of its constriction, gripping the tresses as if she might pull them from her skull.

"What beautiful hair you have, Dora," Edgar said that last morning, standing in his uniform at the bottom of the garden. The air had smelled of frangipani from the old tree their mother planted when Dora was born. The sky was deep blue, the sun warming their backs as they stood there. The strangeness of Edgar's comment had stayed with her. They had been struggling with awkward goodbyes. She was against his going to war. Suddenly

he had paid her this compliment as if to break the tension between them and let them part as friends.

Dora walked on. The streets lay empty but the houses were opened up to let out the heat. It was very dark. From doorways, a few men called out to her as she passed, hatless and with her hair flowing about her, and mothers drew their children away from windows. From the blackness, she looked in on lighted rooms, into kitchens and parlours, family places. Dora saw that normal life continued in those places, the serving of food, the cleaning of floors, bedtime stories, and she wondered how these little islands could dare to keep going when the greater world had descended into madness. And into death. Or Death, I should say, Dora decided, Death with a full capital letter D. She had been measuring the time since Edgar died in months now. Sometimes, she would wake in the night, thinking about how the time had passed, and feeling the pain of every second.

In the garden, on that last day, Edgar kissed her lightly on the cheek and walked quickly to the gate. She was holding one of the small, perfect frangipani flowers. The scent of flowers hung in the air and she breathed deeply to hide her tears. At the gate, Edgar raised his arm for the last time; he was laughing, strong and brave on that beautiful morning. Dora lifted her hand to shield her eyes from the sun, watching Edgar hurry away. So eager, my brother, so eager.

At last Dora came to the place she had been looking for. She had not been wandering aimlessly but walking to another hall, another meeting. Another path, Dora wondered, another means? She had told Daniel that she wouldn't be coming to hear his friend speak, his earnest new friend that Dora had not yet met. Politics had always been a dark place

for her; to be deliberately avoided. But Daniel would be pleased she was there, Dora thought. Later we might go back together to his house.

At the front of the building, Dora could not tell what kind of building it was - a sign was posted advertising the speaker, Malachy Mara. The clever, new friend, Dora thought wryly. She moved closer to the sign and read in the pale light, *Sponsored by the International Society*. Dora wondered what the Society did, and amused, imagined chess tournaments and the flavours of strange cheeses, the waltzes of Strauss. She moved up the chipped marble steps; there was a strong smell of salt damp in the vestibule. Through another door, she could hear the voice of the speaker and she could see the backs of his audience.

"Yes Miss?"

A large, florid man was sitting on a flimsy bridge chair just inside the door. Dora had not seen him when she walked in. She jumped when he spoke to her. The man flung himself towards her, fists clenched, coming out from his dark corner like a boxer. Perhaps he was there in case the police arrived.

"I'm a friend of Daniel Bone," she said quietly, then cleared her throat to betray her nervousness.

The man stared; she had forgotten her appearance, she realised. Dora looked down demurely. After a moment, the man nodded and pointed her in.

"'S half over now" he said," but your friend's in there."

He sat down slowly and awkwardly on his rickety chair; his legs completely stiff as if his knees were locked in callipers. Perhaps they were, Dora thought, he might be returned.

It was a bare hall, ugly and dusty. The floorboards creaked and clattered beneath the boots of those gathered there, about fifty present in all. The humid, collective smell of their hot bodies hung in the air. Heads turned and looked at her when she came in. I must make rather a dishevelled sight, Dora thought. The watching eyes flickered steadily. Dora shrank a little under the stares. I suppose they think I'm some mad woman off the street. Dora pursed her mouth and tried to look composed.

At the front of the hall, on a low stage, the speaker continued, not noticing her entrance. Dora stood quietly at the back, wanting to listen. Malachy Mara was speaking; he was the leader of the International Society. Daniel's clever new friend, Dora thought again, somehow unable to banish that phrase as she listened to the speech. He had taken off his coat because of the heat and when he spoke he gestured with his muscular hands and his white shirtsleeves were like wings in the dim light. His black hair tumbled forward into his eyes. Dora thought how Isobel Adams would have scorned this man for his worker's hands and her heart skipped a little with the pleasure of disobedience.

"This is a war about capital and labour!" Malachy was shouting and from the floor there were murmurs of approval like the humming of bees in a hive. "Ten thousand dead, thirty thousand dead, all young working men. Who will take up their labour?" Malachy let the question hang for a moment. "Who will build this land without the strength of their arms?" Malachy lifted his own arms. "Yes friends, you know what will happen, what must happen if this war continues to kill our men. The yellow man will come and take our jobs and then he will take our country. This is why we must say no to imported labour! This is why we must say end this war now!"

Loud applause rushed up from the floor. Dora watched, the approving crowd shifting around her. She wondered how many in this room had lost someone in the fighting.

"The profiteering bosses are lining their pockets with gold while workers die!"

Malachy Mara was gesturing aggressively in the air and someone applauded briefly. The crowd shuffled, moving closer to the stage as if they half expected to be ordered onto the streets for immediate action. They looked quite ready for it, Dora observed, and she remembered the Pacifist League, their early, innocent days. We had not learnt then, she thought, the difference between possible and impossible plans.

For a while now, in the middle of all these leaping thoughts, she had been watching Daniel Bone from the corner of her eye as he moved across the room. Sidles rather, said Dora to herself, her whisper loud enough to make the woman in front glance back at her. Daniel was trying to walk lightly and silently but the wooden floor groaned under his great feet. His long limbs, moving against the rhythm of his body, distracted the eye. What a gangly man he is, Dora decided, almost as if he were a puppet pulled up by strings. She suppressed the desire to laugh out loud at her lover; an affectionate, loving laugh, but still a laugh. When Daniel reached her, he stood very close at Dora's back, touching her shoulder. Like a guard, Dora thought, half bemused, half cross. Perhaps it's my strange appearance, she wondered, smiling up at him. He either wants to protect me or evict me.

"In Russia, they have shown us the way!"

The crowd gave a rousing cheer and Malachy Mara put down his arms and shook his head spraying droplets of sweat. As soon as he finished his speech, he stepped down from the podium; there was the mundane shuffling of papers, bags, hats. Dora watched as

Malachy slowly put his coat back on. He moved gracefully, stretching his back. He seemed weary as if the speech had drawn much out of him. Daniel's hand moved to her elbow, guiding Dora forward until they were at the base of the stage with Malachy. Dora saw the man straighten up and reach out his hand to Daniel. His eyes travelled to her, her flowing hair. Dora could not tell what he was thinking but Malachy smiled at her, a smile without contempt or superiority. Dora smiled back. She felt too warm in the stuffy, closed up room. Malachy's eyes were upon her, startlingly blue. They were both stopped there for a moment, held by the briefest of smiles, the quick meeting of eyes. Malachy extended his hand, taking Dora by surprise so that she hesitated and then felt foolish. Perhaps that was what comrades did in Russia, Dora thought, they shook hands with women.

The three of them stood by the stage, talking. Malachy seemed a little disappointed that so few had come to hear him speak. They were mostly existing members of the International Society.

"We must recruit more supporters, Daniel." He said, frowning.

Daniel spoke reassuringly of the silent majority, of fears of arrest or other retribution. Dora did not say anything. It was late by then, after half past eleven and everyone else had gone. Daniel wanted to take Dora and Malachy out for a drink, to the backroom of the Earl of Zetland, he suggested. Malachy laughed and winked at Dora.

"You can't go like that," he said and waited to see what she would reply.

Dora had put the pins for her hair into her satchel. She pulled them out and pushed her hair back up as best she could. Daniel came and helped her, scooping up the thick hair from behind. His gentleness in such matters always surprised her. For all his angular

awkwardness, he had moments of great delicacy. He was like that with his printing press too, as Dora had witnessed, his long hands guiding the precise setting of the type. Perhaps that was where he learned such care. All the time Malachy watched them. Dora looked up once and caught his cool, reflective gaze. He stares at us in the same way a man looks at a painting of some intimate scene, Dora thought. When she was ready, Daniel offered her his arm and they walked out into the night.

At the hotel they were ushered into a room where the windows were all painted over and you could only get in if you knew *Long Way To Tipperary*. There were spidery lace table-cloths on the old tables; once they must have been white, Dora supposed, and there were candles stuck in empty beer bottles. Men and women could sit together at small tables. It was just like Italy, the publican told Dora reassuringly.

They sat down and Malachy ordered whiskies for himself and Daniel and a sherry for Dora. When the drinks came, Daniel and Malachy talked politics and then Daniel talked philosophy and Malachy disagreed with him. Cast as an observer, Dora grew bored with all their arguing and she began to look around at the other patrons, only four or five late drinkers in the room. In the candlelight, they all seemed to be men, darkly clad, in cloth caps, workers, probably. But as Dora watched, one of them turned so suddenly that the cap slipped off and she saw a thick twist of hair that could only belong to a woman. This woman was seated at a table with one other person, more obviously a man. He was silent, contemplating his drink and the woman had turned quickly, as if she was aware of other eyes on her. She was dressed in men's clothing, worker's clothing. Dora wondered if she might be one of Malachy's comrades, waiting for the revolution to begin, ready for the call in the appropriate clothing. Dora felt that she wanted urgently to talk to this woman,

to say the revolution does not matter; that we must stop this war first here and now. It must end, the madness must end. All the revolutions in the world can come afterwards. She felt herself reaching out to this woman in her mind and body. But as Dora leant forward in her imaginary approach, she knocked over her drink. There were a few moments of confusion at their table. Malachy got out a clean handkerchief and mopped up.

Daniel said, "I'll get you another drink."

Dora held onto his arm as he stood. "Don't," she said, "I've had enough anyway." Daniel insisted and went off to buy her another sherry. Dora looked back across the room, but the woman and her companion had gone. She almost laughed at her dramatic thoughts then. Perhaps the mysterious lady had been just someone rich in fancy dress, out with her lover and wanting to protect her reputation.

Dora was left alone with Malachy while they waited for Daniel to come back with the drink. At first, there was the inevitable silence across the table; the wariness that exists between strangers who are a man and a woman. Malachy lounged back in his seat, watching her. Evidently, he felt no obligation to speak, Dora thought, annoyed. He is waiting for me to play polite hostess. She refused to play and just sat there.

Malachy straightened in his chair, "Have you ever wondered, Miss Somerville, what the future will bring? I don't mean tomorrow, I mean in ten, twenty, one hundred years time?"

"Of course. I think about it all the time. The war makes me think about it."

"But beyond the war. Don't you every think about the future world? One way or another, this war must end or it will devour that future. It's urgent now. We must have a new world, a new order. Don't you agree?"

Dora eyed him. "I just want the war to stop and to stop right now."

"There's more at stake here than individual lives." Malachy's speech quickened. "The future is at stake; the shape of the world is at stake. Power is at stake. That power must come into the hands of the people so they can control their own destiny. Look around this room. All workers. Why should the circumstances in which they were born determine how they live and die? Under their clothes, they are all white men. What were you thinking when you came in here, Miss Somerville? Something like that? Or do you despise these people and think they deserve no better than their lot?"

Dora hesitated. She gave a furtive glance in the direction of the bar but there was no sign of Daniel being served his drinks. Malachy's political forcefulness made her uncomfortable; almost like bullying on the playground. Perhaps she wondered, would he punch her in the arm or give her a Chinese burn if she didn't agree with him? She saw with annoyance that Daniel was now talking to someone at the bar.

"Where do you come from, Mr Mara?" Dora said, breaking the silence between them. Malachy looked surprised at the directness of her question.

"I mean, were you born in Alexandrina? Are you an Australian native son?"

Malachy leant back in his chair and downed the last of his drink. "I'm from Melbourne originally. Via Kalgoorlie and a hundred other places."

He gave a short laugh. Dora did not know what to say,

“Gold,” Malachy explained, rubbing his finger and thumb together. “My father dragged us back and forward across this huge country, thousands and thousands of miles, searching for the fortune that never was. He died on his way to the West, to the last hope, the last field; there was only dust at the end, sand rolling in from the desert, almost covered him before he was in the ground. But I was born in Melbourne, and one day soon I plan to go back there. It’s where the political heart of this nation is. My parents were born there too, and their four parents came from the same Irish village in County Cork.”

“You could go back to Melbourne now,” said Dora, “They say it’s not too bad on the train these days.”

“Ah,” said Malachy and put his index finger along side his nose. “The weather’s a little too hot for me in Melbourne right at the moment. If you know what I mean, Miss Somerville.”

Dora had no idea what he really meant, except that perhaps the police were after him, she thought. Silence fell between them again. Malachy watched Dora, waiting for her to pick up the conversation again.

“So your family came here for the gold then, from Ireland I mean?” Dora almost sighed with the weary effort of talking.

Malachy shook his head. “No, my two grandfathers came out on the boat together. They were craftsmen; fine, talented carpenters. You should have seen their beautiful carving, Miss Somerville, I wish I had some here to show you. They set up business in the city and people flocked to buy their furniture. At first there were good times and plenty of money, but then the Chinese started to come into Melbourne from the gold fields. Some of them had skills in working wood that they brought from their own land. They started

making furniture and undercutting my grandfathers on price; and not just them, all the European craftsmen in the city started losing money to these yellow invaders. The Government allowed honest white men to put a stamp on their furniture saying it was made by European labour only, but it seemed to make little difference. By the time my father was a man, there was no business left for him to inherit.”

“So your father went to the gold fields?” Dora felt a spark of interest; here was the reason for Malachy’s passion.

Malachy nodded. “Yes, though the rush was nearly over by then. And he found them there again, those little yellow men, covering the goldfields of his country like rats over grain.”

Malachy leant towards her. “You know, Miss Somerville, my grandfathers died of broken hearts. Broken men, their fine skills were belittled by cheap labour. They were betrayed by their own race. The white bosses bought their furniture from the Chinks because all they cared about was money. That’s what capital does; it perverts people’s natural inclinations.”

Daniel came back at that moment and plonked the drinks down on the table.

“You two seemed to be getting on like a house on fire.” He said cheerfully.

Dora felt embarrassed in case she and Malachy might have seemed too intimate.

“Mr Mara was just telling me about his family.”

Daniel sat down next her. “Well that’s more than he’s ever told me.”

He put his arm around Dora’s shoulder. “Hands off, Mara,” he said with a grin. “This is my girl.”

5.

Later, well after midnight, Dora and Daniel walked back to his house, a narrow terrace leaning into the street. They held hands discreetly, their fingers lightly curled together, palms open. The city was deserted, sagging under the heat. In the darkness, Daniel squeezed her hand. Dora felt the pressure of his sticky, damp palm. A trickle of moisture wriggled down her back.

"God it's hot," she whispered. "I can't stand this humidity. I wish it would rain; rain and rain and wash all the summer's stink and grime away from the buildings and from the people too. Wash everything clean."

Dora took a few dancing steps along the pavement, as if her wished for rain were already falling into the gutters.

She waited under the verandah as Daniel searched for his key. They were both very quiet, afraid of disturbing the neighbours. Imagine creating a scandal, Dora thought mockingly, at once despising her own hypocrisy. Daniel struggled with the door which was warped and covered in knocks and dents. The wood was splintering around the frame where the police had broken it down. Daniel had been raided many times but his press had never been seized. He was too clever, Dora thought proudly. The police turned over his possessions but found nothing and went away sweating and grumbling.

At last Daniel opened the door and she stepped over the threshold. Daniel's house had three floors. The ground level was his printing shop. His father had worked in this business, and his grandfather; the bare wooden floor was stained with ink and the walls were splattered here and there. Dora breathed deeply as she went in, relishing the scent of

ink and paper. Beyond the counter, through a doorway, was a room full of tables scattered with various projects and commissions in progress. Times were hard with the war; no more parties, few lavish weddings, only pamphlets and posters. A harsh censorship was everywhere, even the pacifists had felt its rough hand. All in the name of victory, Dora thought. She walked through to the kitchen which was obscured by a cotton curtain across the lintel. Dora put her satchel down and took out her book of Kipling. She carefully unwrapped the top layer of cloth to check that the book had travelled safely. The book's cover was burnished red leather and the title lettering a deep gold leaf. Long, fine ribbons stuck out between the pages at the bottom, intended for the reader to mark her favourite verses. They were silk ribbons and Dora stroked them gently between her fingers. The book smelled strongly and sweetly of leather. Dora bent her head forward and breathed deeply, as if inhaling the words she had not read. After a moment she rewrapped the book in its muslin veil and carried it with her as she walked back into the print shop to find Daniel.

Daniel was standing at a small table, neater than the others and away in a corner all to itself. There was a single pile of papers in the centre and in one corner of the table some newspapers were sitting on scraps of brown paper and string as if they had just arrived in the post. It was the other Kipling, Daniel's Kipling as she thought of it, the stolen Kipling, and Dora's heart lightened when she saw it there. This Kipling was part of Daniel's grand plan. He obtained these poems from his contact overseas, a man whose name was Flanagan. When Flanagan had sent enough poems, Daniel would print them up into books. When the editions were ready, he would take them around to local bookshops and no-one would ask how he came by these little poems or whether Mr Kipling had

approved of them. Daniel was especially eager to have the books out before the war ended. War made people sentimental, especially in the colonies; there was a great longing for old certainties, old familiar names. Dora had come into this secret world soon after the project began and she thought of the grand plan as hers too. For her it was a delicious secret, the free running of the words, uncensored, unknown, like tasting stolen fruit.

They talked sometimes about what they would do with the money from the Kipling. Daniel wanted to go to Paris; Dora was undecided. For fun, they made grand plans involving mansions and servants. Dora wanted to eat at a famous restaurant every night or travel around the world on a huge luxury liner. They talked about America. They spoke often of leaving but never of marrying. They dreamt of living the life of poets. The Kipling money would take them there, Daniel said, after the war was over. It was a hare-brained scheme, Dora knew, 'half-baked' Edgar would have snorted- Dora could almost hear her brother- but they clung to their Kipling plan as an act of defiance.

"Here," Dora handed her book to Daniel, "Just as you ordered: the real Mr Kipling." Daniel took the book eagerly, gently feeling the quality of the cover and flicking through the pages.

"Of course I already have these poems and I prefer the newer ones in our edition, straight from the papers and magazines. But the layout of the print is exactly what I wanted to see." He closed the book and rewrapped it.

"Thank you, Dora." Daniel put his arms around her. "You don't mind if I keep it here do you? I know it was a gift after Edgar was killed."

Dora shook her head. "No. Please keep it here. It wasn't Edgar's own book and somehow, when I got it, it made me sad to think of all the books Edgar would never read."

Dora rested her head against Daniel's shoulder and he gently rubbed her back.

"I know, dearest. That's the worst part, isn't it, the things that might have been?"

Dora lifted up her head and smiled faintly.

"And how is *our* Mr Kipling going?"

Daniel said, "Come and have a look."

Dora bent over to the table and, without touching anything, began to read the top page:

Some die shouting in gas or fire

Some die silent by shell or shot

Some die desperate caught on the wire

Some die suddenly

This will not.

She bent closer over the newspaper, shifting the lamp to a better position. The clipping was from an old edition of the *English Morning Post*, from 1911. This poem about war was years old, she realised. But all wars are the same, Dora thought, or perhaps they are part of one long, continuous Great War, a hungry conflict whose flames die down now and again, but are never fully extinguished. The words of the poem swam in her hot brain. She felt the weight of all those who had died, as if their exhaled breaths were in the summer air.

Dora turned away from the poems and, looking down, saw on the floor a larger section of the discarded brown wrapper in which these poetic words had travelled all the way from the hand of Flanagan in England to the hand of Daniel Bone in Australia. She imagined the boat, no a ship, it must be a ship, traversing mine-starred seas and racing away from enemy convoys. At the top of the wrapper, Flanagan had written "Urgent

Medical Information" and there was the facsimile of a large red cross. She had known for some time that this was also part of their plan, Flanagan's and Daniel's, to ensure that the poems, cut with scissors from various newspapers and magazines, arrived safely. Before being packed, the clippings were concealed between two pieces of thin, brown board. On the board Flanagan always wrote the words: 'Instructions for the Treatment of Returned Victims of Shell Shock.' This too was part of the plan.

Dora had often imagined Flanagan's scissors cutting out the poems. She saw his strong, thick fingers grasping the metal and the woven sleeve of his jacket, his white shirt cuff protruding from the end. But she could go no further than the elbow. For some reason Flanagan's imaginary face eluded her. For Dora he was always just an arm, a hand, a pair of scissors. She half knelt down and picked up the brown paper, folding it neatly. You were conscious of these things now, in war time, how resources must be preserved.

Sometimes Daniel sent her to the post office to collect the regular parcel from Flanagan. She was always nervous about being challenged by one of the staff and she practised her story as she walked along Wallace Street to Albert Square and the great Victorian wedding cake that was the general post office. Of course her story was the story about the urgent medical information. Daniel was to print pamphlets for distribution to doctors. The pamphlets would speed the recovery of our brave young men injured at the front by horrors we could only imagine. In her mind, she went over this explanation, sometimes her lips moved as if speaking the words. Dora would see people looking at her; children laughed. At the post office no-one was ever interested in her. The old men were already thinking about morning tea and the young girls gossiped as they read their own letters from suitors far away in far more dangerous places.

Dora and Daniel liked to tell themselves that stealing the Kipling was only for money; the poems were trite, gushing, wholly without merit. They mocked his jingling patriotism and his vacillations about the war. Sometimes they read the poems out to one another so that they might laugh and sneer at the Victorian cadence. But there was a secret pleasure too, in the bell-like sound of the rhymed voices, in the rich, overripe images conjured up.

We shall go back to the boltless doors,

To the life unaltered our childhood knew-

To the naked feet on the cool dark floors,

He has entered our minds, Dora realised as she read the scraps of newspaper; this old Colonial Poet; this white Indian. When at our youthful age, we should be looking forward to new worlds, new ways of saying, somehow he has ensnared us. She was aware then that Daniel was watching her while she was reading the poems, not moving, not wanting to disturb her; she was in light, he in shadow. The Kipling brought stillness and order to their lives. Perhaps that was the real reason for their secret plan, it was a place that was outside the war; after and beyond the war; it was something they did for their future.

6.

"You don't believe in all that, do you?"

Dora was sitting with Daniel on the balcony at the back of his house. The balcony was small and dilapidated, the floor boards roughened with wear and the iron lace filthy and rusted where the paint had peeled. They were smoking and the door behind them into Daniel's bedroom was open, though there was barely enough of a breeze to move the blinds or blow their exhaled smoke across the night. In the bedroom, the sheets lay rumpled, the bedspread discarded in a heap; even the pillows lay scattered on the floor. Dora always resisted the instinct to make the bed. It would be like a judgment on their love-making she decided, a betrayal of their subversive act.

On the balcony, it was pitch black and stiflingly hot. No-one could see them and they kept their voices low. As Dora waited for Daniel to answer, she thought, I like this absolute darkness, it feels like freedom. When Daniel did not answer immediately, she wondered if he had heard her. Dora could see the tip of his cigarette, a small red light in the blackness. It was still in his mouth. He was facing the edge of the balcony. She saw the cigarette light move and heard his breath exhale and then his voice, finally.

"Believe in what?"

"In Malachy's revolution, in the uprising of the workers, the new dawn and the fair and just society that will reign forever."

Daniel laughed; through the darkness Dora felt, rather than saw, him shrug his shoulders.

"Malachy wants to change the world," he said slowly. "He has great plans, huge plans. And he is not the only one, in this country at least. There are growing numbers who feel like he does."

"The Industrial Workers of the World, you mean?"

"Others too...."

Dora heard Daniel sigh quietly and the cigarette, almost down to the butt, went back into his mouth. She put out her own cigarette in the ashtray which sat on the floor between them, an old chipped saucer. She went on staring at the embers until they died.

"And what about you? What do you believe?" Dora asked him.

She was still leaning over the arm of her chair, watching the ashtray. He won't answer, Dora thought. He will brush me off with some cynical remark. She heard Daniel shift in his chair but she stayed where she was, watching the cigarette extinguish. All fires go out in the same way, Dora thought, they die out to ashes.

Above her, Daniel's voice said cautiously, "I believe that this war should cease, that our country's involvement should cease and should never have begun, and that the cost in human lives on all sides has been too great no matter what is won in the end."

He hesitated, almost laughing a little, grimacing with embarrassment. "That's not much of a manifesto, is it? Not stuff for exciting speeches."

Daniel broke off speaking and Dora thought that he had finished. She straightened up.

She had nothing to reply but Daniel heard her moving and started to speak again. Perhaps he thought I was about to say something, Dora wondered, something better than his own words. Daniel tossed the remnant of his cigarette onto the ground where it smouldered for a while.

"What I believe," Daniel said softly to the dying cigarette. "I believe a man should not be sent out to kill another against his will, because his country has conscripted him or public hysteria has compelled him."

Dora sat back in her chair. Raindrops were falling on the iron roof of the balcony, huge tropical raindrops pounding down like mortars. The night air turned to steam and deep green perfumes rose out of the trees and plants around them. They both stared at the downpour as if unable to quite believe in it. Rain at last.

"We defeated conscription," Dora said. "The vote was against it."

Daniel reached across the void of darkness between them and squeezed her hand. "It's not over yet," he said.

After that the rain came down so heavily, they could no longer hear each other and they sat in silence, blind and deaf with their hands joined. Dora remembered that they sat like that for a long time.

7.

The first night that they made love, the first time ever that they made love, they were burgled. Dora heard the noise and came quietly down the stairs, her bare feet brushing the runner, feeling everything, every spilled crumb, every mark of wear on the old carpet. For some reason, perhaps to take the weight and sound from her feet or to make sure that she did not stumble in the darkness, she used the banister to steady herself, and with her other hand leant against the wall, her fingers tracing the uneven surface of the old plaster, dust under her nails and fine cracks standing out like canyons. At the bottom of the stairs, Dora stopped. The doorway to the kitchen was open and through it she could see him, the thief, loading up an old bag with food from the pantry. Dora watched in silence, unsure what to do. She felt certain that she could not raise the alarm for a man stealing food, even though it was Daniel's food and not hers to give away. When she had heard the noise of the thief, she had got up right away and put on Daniel's shirt. It was the only recognisable piece of clothing she could find in the dark bedroom. She had no plan in getting up like that, only to see who was making noise. At the bottom of the stairs she stopped, unsure, wearing only the shirt and otherwise naked. She was very aware of her nakedness.

Dora stood watching, knowing that he would look up; it was only a matter of time. She wondered whether to turn and run. But nothing happened. The man did not look up; once he had emptied the pantry, he fled. Dora was left staring into the empty kitchen; she was filled with a strange sense of unreality, as if the man had been a dream. She walked

down into the room. The burglar had knocked over the flour canister and Dora found the broom and swept the mess. He had also left the back door open and from outside she could smell the night air, cooler than in the closed up house. Perhaps a little cooler, Dora decided. The cool air was drawn into the room, expelling the heat of the summer night. Dora closed her eyes for a moment, enjoying that freshness on her face, closed the door and then went back to bed. She was too alert now to return to sleep. The bed and the room felt hot so Dora lifted the blind and opened the window.

This was Daniel's house. Near the window was a chest of drawers, touched by the lightening sky. On top of its smooth surface Dora could see some galley pages for the Kipling. The paper was covered in Daniel's untidy handwriting and smudges of ink. Daniel's writing was a disgrace, Dora had once told him; Daniel had laughed at her schoolmarmish ways. He said that he was naturally left handed but was forced to use his right hand. Dora understood, remembering girls in her class who were similarly afflicted, their left arms bound behind them with the ties of their pinafores.

"Printing doesn't have a correct hand, "Daniel had said."Both are used. That's why I enjoy it and why I bother to be so precise. Mutual respect between machine and man."

In the bedroom, Dora picked up one of the galley proof pages from the desk:

Here where the senseless bullet fell,

And the barren shrapnel burst,

I will plant a tree,

I will dig a well,

Against the heat and the thirst.

Daniel muttered from under the sheet and Dora turned to him, the page still in her hand and glowing white in the morning rays. The sunlight had woken her lover; she went to him and kissed him on the lips.

Nothing in her own life had prepared her for the role of mistress. Everything Dora had learned was against such an existence, her upbringing, the demeanour of her home, its measured Protestantism. She would look at herself in the bathroom mirror some days and say "mistress" out loud to her reflection. The word sounded absurd, foreign. Before Daniel, she had thought only of the exotic, the mistresses of kings and of men with great wealth. Dora studied her reflection; she had always been told that she was beautiful, by her family, by strangers who would come up to her mother in the street. (What an exquisite child!) Being beautiful was a peculiar way to be, Dora decided. She felt uncomfortable when friends agonised over their appearance. (But of course you don't have to worry, Dora.) And just once she was attacked. Another student - Dora could not remember her name- had spat on her face in the playground. (You're too pretty!). The assault left no permanent mark but the girl was expelled. Dora remembered feeling guilty at the time.

In the bathroom, Dora tilted her head to one side, contemplating the reflection. In the mirror, she could see a section of pink and green tiles on the bathroom wall. There must be hundreds of bathrooms like this one, she thought. All over Australia, young women who are waiting for young men to come back, look into mirrors exactly like this, in bathrooms exactly like this. Dora drew back from the mirror and looked at herself one last time.

"Mistress," she said and smiled.

Almost from the beginning of their courtship, Dora had helped Daniel with the printing, acting as typesetter while he operated the press and proofed the pages. Over time, she became absorbed in this methodical work, enjoying the creation of words from the bones of their letters, placing them line by line in the composing stick until a page was made up. From their earliest months together, she was both his lover and his compositor.

In the cellar of his house, Daniel kept an old, hand-operated printing press. The entrance to the cellar was concealed under a battered, empty meat safe that had to be lifted away every time you went down into the depths. In this hidden place, pamphlets and posters were printed, for the Workers of the World, for the Bolsheviks, for the Pacifists, the Irish Nationalists and the International Society. On Sunday afternoons, Dora would go to Daniel's house and help him sort and bundle the different tracts. Underground, the air was cool and dry. They worked standing at a long, green marble slab that lined one wall and Daniel brought a lamp because the window had been roughly bricked up to avoid detection. As she worked, Dora's eyes picked up snatches of sentences from the papers. It was a great babble of words, she thought. All are against the war but all want to shape the world in their own image, their own paradise. That is why we cannot win. We are divided amongst ourselves. That is what makes our enemy so strong.

Daniel took on printing work for anyone. He did not ask about allegiances, or the niceties of politics; only opposition to the war was required. One day, in the cellar, they were binding the bundles of pamphlets with brown string; the cord was coarse and cheap

and it cut into Dora's fingers as she wound the knots. When she looked down after one especially painful cut, she saw that her hand was streaked with blood. Dora lifted it away from the papers and Daniel reached over with his white handkerchief. A small spray of blood had already marked some of the papers.

"I'm so sorry," Dora said, pressing Daniel's handkerchief to her cut. But Daniel shook his head,

"Don't worry. It's barely noticeable".

Tiny droplets of my blood will be there, Dora thought, when these parcels are opened and the pamphlets are handed out.

"Blood because of words," Dora murmured. Daniel heard her and grinned.

"That's very prophetic."

Dora shook her head. "Pessimistic," she said. "So many have already died because of over heated words."

Daniel did not comment.

"Would you take work from them?" she asked suddenly.

"Who from?"

"From the conscriptionists, the war-lovers, would you print up their tracts?"

Daniel continued to tie up bundles of paper.

"They don't need my help" he said. "The Government backs them."

"Would you take their money if they came here?" Dora leant back against the marble slab, feeling its blunt, cold edge pressing on her back. Daniel went on working, his face in shadow.

"Of course," he said slowly, concentrating on tying a knot. "But I would charge them double."

Dora could not stop herself smiling then. The smile crept out of her mouth, curling her lips, and she felt as if the whole room was filled with her smile. A smile like the pinprick shafts of sunlight that breached the sealed window of their cellar.

With the press, Dora was slow at first, her fingers clumsy and her eyes unable to find the letters and numbers in the type-case. Daniel was patient with her, expecting nothing, demanding nothing. She had noticed that too, at the very beginning of the courtship, how he did not take charge as she might have expected but left everything open. Searching to explain his behaviour, Dora decided that it was simply that Daniel had no desire to tell her what she might think and how she might live. So at first, when they were together, working or courting, Dora would experience a ticklish feeling she could only describe as a kind of vertigo.

8.

After her brother Edgar died, Dora Somerville had no money. No money and no relatives nearby. It was a strange experience, the bareness of life. For a week after she received the news of Edgar's death, Dora just sat at the kitchen table, waiting for the turmoil of grief to settle into life-long sadness. While she waited, she devoured books as if they were the food of life. As a balm for her pain, she retreated into the world of reading the familiar. She read constantly, returning to books she had always loved, the novels of the Bronte sisters, the poetry of Keats. These were old editions, hers since adolescence and aged even when she received them. They had been handed down to her from the libraries of ancient aunts and maiden teachers. Some were inscribed as prizes and gifts. She loved to touch them as much as to read them, to smell the scent of a thousand mellow perfumes which had erased, across time, the harsher odour of printers' ink and raw paper.

She had returned to a life-long love. Her childhood had been these twin pillars that held up the roof of her house: Edgar and reading. Edgar had been a boisterous little boy, with endless, tearing energy. There had been no time without him, no moment of intimacy with her mother when he was not present. There might have been a few snatched hours between mother and daughter perhaps, when Edgar started school in the year before Dora did, but even when he was absent her mother always spoke of him and

the day was guided by the course of his comings and goings. His presence for Dora had been as a giant and she wondered sometimes if his was in fact the first face she saw and recognised, peeping over the edge of her cradle.

She had read too much as a child, causing alarm to grandmothers on both sides and her young, dreamy mother had been prevailed upon to take action. So Dora had gone, when she was about eight or nine, with her mother to see Dr. Fergusson on Restormal Avenue. Dora had jumped up the marble steps in the sunlight, enjoying the sound of her new boots as the leather slapped down on the stone. The woman and the girl entered a gloomy lobby and climbed up a flight of dark cedar stairs to a landing where a stained glass window showed a brightly coloured cornucopia. Dora would have liked to look at the window but a starched nurse ushered them into a room almost too bright after the shadowed stairway. Dora found herself squinting as she entered the doctor's surgery. There she was sat on an uncomfortable chair and was made to read from a chart on the wall and from books with print of all sizes and styles. Dr. Fergusson had looked into her eyes with a funny little instrument and had taken her pulse. He had prescribed fresh air, moderate exercise and a restriction on reading.

"No more than one book a month, Mrs Somerville," the doctor said, his Scotsman's ginger moustache bristling and quivering so that Dora had to cover her mouth with her hand to prevent a laugh getting out.

"For it would be a great shame indeed," the doctor continued, "if so pretty a girl had to wear a pair of spectacles on her nose. Where would her marriage prospects be then, I ask you?"

After this visit there was a short time when reading was a secret activity for the child Dora, a time when she read her books lying under beds and tables, or hidden in the garden so that forever after she would associate certain stories with the sweet perfume of lavender and others with the smell of fresh cut grass. In the evenings, after dinner, Dora would sit with her father in his study, reading her book while he read his newspaper. Her father took no notice of her reading, a solicitor in the city, he was outside the daily world of the women and children in his family and the concerns of marriage prospects did not touch him. Her mother, who had always been deeply and only in love with Edgar, soon forgot these prescriptions for her daughter. But Dora never forgot the pleasure of hidden reading. During these childhood years she found sometimes that she needed a place apart from Edgar, a cubby-hole, even a dungeon, and she would return to her garden hides where she had first tasted the sweet nectars of secrecy and disobedience.

9.

One morning, some weeks after the news of Edgar's death, Dora woke up early. The summer air was hot and the sheet clung to her back, her palms were damp and she wiped them on the sides of her nightdress. Another beginning, Dora thought sleepily. She was filled with the usual feeling of having dreamed everything and that Edgar was not dead. When the news of his death first arrived, Dora had held the piece of paper in her hand and thought, this is a nightmare and in a minute, I will wake up. But waking up did not happen; her strange laughter had followed instead.

She lay on her back in bed, looking up at the white ceiling and hearing the clock ticking on the nightstand. It was only the sound in the room. There was at least another hour before the alarm would ring. She sat up and swung her legs over the side, touching the cool linoleum floor with her toes. A heavy, sickly feeling settled in Dora's stomach and she thought for a brief moment that she was not finished and might cry again. But nothing came, so she knew then that something had to be done.

Dora dressed and went down into the kitchen. She went to the sink and put an apron over her clothes. The sun was rising and, drawing up the blind, she could see its orb through the window, hazy with streaks of red and white cloud and blurred by the steamy sky. Dora dragged a bucket up to the tap and filled it with water and Borax and she set to work with the scrubbing brush on the kitchen table and counters.

The sun was higher up when she finished, sunlight filled the kitchen and already everything was dry. Dora sat down at the kitchen table and laid her palms on the smooth surface. It was time to think now. She closed her eyes and inhaled the caustic smell of the

scrubbed wood. This was the bareness of no money, no family, the empty table, Dora thought. If I do not act, I will sit here like this when I am an old lady. My life will be scrubbed as bare as this wood.

Dora got out her bank book and found a pen and a piece of paper and made some calculations. She had received what Edgar had saved from his army salary and she had a few savings of her own, small legacies from maiden aunts. The house had been left by their mother to both of them but now, with Edgar's death, it was Dora's. There wasn't much money, not enough to live on for very long. Dora scribbled on the paper for a while, then she closed her bank book, put on her hat and caught the tram into town.

Dora came home again with Mr Abbott in the stationer's cart. It was about midday. Through the dust, she saw office workers coming out for lunch; so many women now. She could see the white blouses and dark skirts standing out amongst the grey suits. A crowd of workers, laughing and talking, bustled across the road in front of them. Young women and old men, Dora felt sad as she watched. There were vacancies in every work place in the city. She could join them if she chose, live by the clock, she could have a salary in her pocket. It was an exciting idea, and fearful, such freedom and power. The road home was bumpy; potholes had increased with the rain and lack of repair. It was by inattention that we experience this war, Dora thought, through the things no longer done, those of us not in the firing line.

Beside her, the reins resting loosely in his leathered hands, Mr Abbott was talking about the war. What do I know about war? Dora thought bitterly. I am someone who has never even heard a shell fall in the distance, who is so far away from the mud of the trenches, such a person cannot speak for that violence. Here, we can only experience the

war as absence, as a great dark, swallowing hole. A war that is the whisper we cannot quite hear until the sudden blow falls, like a knife in the heart, and we receive the news of death on a foreign field, the unseen, unwitnessed death of the beloved. Dora rubbed her nose with her handkerchief, as if wanting to wipe away those thoughts and clear her mind. She looked back over her shoulder to ensure that her treasured purchase was safe. Mr Abbott continued talking about the war. He spoke in such a way that no response was required, only the occasional murmur of assent to his laconic monologue.

Dora remembered riding in this cart as a child, bursting with excitement to be out with her father. She had sat close to her father that day, her cheek brushing the rough wool of his jacket. Her father smelled of tobacco, soap, perhaps also liquorice. In his pocket, her special treat, a bag of allsorts. At home she would eat them slowly, removing each layer carefully with her teeth, dissecting the bright candy and the black squares. At home too there would be the negotiated sharing with Edgar. Her father had kept his arm around her as the horse clopped along, in case she fell off into the street. It was evening, early in the summer and the air was alive with fragrance and the sky with the dark shapes of birds. Mr Abbott drove them home that day as he drove Dora home now. They travelled back to the same house along the same streets. An old man, Dora had thought as a child, Mr Abbott was bald, sinewy and tanned. He looked no different now. It occurred to her that Mr Abbott had now attained the age that as a child she always imagined him to be.

At last they turned into Dora's street, Ramage Street. Soon they would be home. Ramage Street was long and straight, lined with neat brick bungalows and their perfect gardens. Some of the houses had tennis courts on their side block, others had orchards or vegetable gardens. From many of the fence poles and gateposts, small Union Jacks

fluttered. Dora could recite the names of all the residents now just as she could when she was a child and had gone with her mother, in hat and gloves, on formal visits. She had lived in Ramage Street all her life. In the bastion of the war lovers, Daniel had joked. Then I am a spy amongst them, Dora had retorted with a laugh. But something held her to Ramage Street, and not only memories. She had a secret affection for these stone houses and their neat, over-manicured gardens. How small the world is, Dora sighed, as Mr Abbott's cart clopped along so slowly that every neighbour had a chance to peek out the window and see her pass. But these days there were no more formal visits, you spoke to neighbours over the fence or when you saw them in the street. Even small worlds could be touched by wars and changes.

Mr Abbott was speaking about Edgar. Her brother's name caught Dora by surprise.

"A tragedy but he died bravely I heard. He did honour to your father and mother, made us all proud."

She waited then for the hackneyed rhetoric, feeling her face grow hot with anger, Now, Dora thought, I expect the shabby glories of Empire to be brought out and displayed like faded robes. But Mr Abbott fell silent and they sat as if listening to the sound of the horse's hooves and the creaking of its tack and harness. Dora wondered if Mr Abbott was expecting her to reply.

Dora murmured thank you, still thinking of the reference to Edgar.

She kept looking ahead. There was no acknowledgment from Mr Abbott and she thought he had not heard her.

At the house, Dora prepared to jump down from the cart, not wanting Mr Abbott's sweating hands, even lightly around her waist. As she moved forward, Mr Abbott

grabbed her arm. Dora looked back in surprise and saw the old man's face drenched in tears.

“Twenty-three thousand lost at Pozieres, five thousand men in a single night, all those lives gone forever.” Dora felt Mr Abbott's grip tighten. “Why, Miss Somerville? Why did they die? Is Empire enough to answer for them?”

Dora sat back in the cart and put her hand on Mr Abbott's bare arm. The grey hairs were coarse as wire. She looked into his face. Mr Abbott's eyes were soft, pale grey, a child's eyes full of terrors and questions.

“Don't cry,” Dora said quietly, wanting to sound kind. “The war will end soon, I promise. And the deaths will stop.”

Mr Abbott nodded. "I pray for it every day, Miss Somerville," he said, taking out a large checked handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his withered face.

Inside the house, Dora stared at her parcel, placed by Mr Abbott on the dining room table. She had offered him a cup a tea but, perhaps embarrassed she thought, he had left quickly. Dora wrapped her arms around her body; the old man's despair seemed to have chilled the whole house. She went to the table and undid her bundle, ripping away the string and brown paper, not caring for once about wastage. Some of the joy had gone out of her purchase with Mr Abbott's tears. Dora peeled away the last of the paper and examined her prize. Sitting down, she laid her hands delicately on the keys so that the web of strikers lifted only slightly from the bed. She stroked the black metal casing. After a few minutes she went and found some pieces of paper, stiff sheets once belonging to her mother, intended for her lady-like notes: *Thank you for your invitation, Please accept my condolences, I will be arriving on Wednesday....* Dora put the paper in the roller and

cautiously typed her name. The pressure of the keys reminded her of piano lessons as a child: Dora Somerville. She stared at the little, black letters, and felt like Cortez or Cook, looking in awe on a strange new land.

Dora made the dining room her workroom, intending to eat ever after in the kitchen. The Workers of the World would approve of that, Dora thought. I shall hold parties there too, with the gramophone on the ice chest and the guests will dance on the table. She enrolled for typing lessons at the Ladies' Institute on Carmichael Street, where classes were taught by the sombre Mrs Bentwick. They sat in rows like schoolgirls while Mrs Bentwick drilled them in the correct use of their machines. From the beginning, Dora decided that she did not care much for Mrs Bentwick, but could not think why. She would cringe when the teacher's shadow crossed her desk, always expecting the sharp reprimand that never came. From Mrs Bentwick's lips there was only a murmured, drill-like instruction. She would bend down close over her pupil, almost whispering in your ear, Dora thought. One evening, showing Dora how to place her fingers more accurately on the keys, Mrs Bentwick exhaled a great sigh. It smelled of defeat, Dora realised, absolute, miserable defeat. Mrs Bentwick was a war widow, somewhere in Africa a machine gun had blown away her happiness.

When Dora had learned to type, Mr Abbott allowed her to put a little notice up in the window of his shop. She put another notice in the front window of her house and then she sat in front of her typewriter and waited. Slowly, to her surprise, work came into her.

10.

Once she knew that Edgar was dead, Dora was no longer afraid of the doorbell. Before, she had hated it, always fearing bad news. Sometimes, she thought, I will cut that bell down. Her father had put it there years ago. He told his children that it was a ship's brass bell, and, as children, they had believed him, not realising that it was too small. Visitors delighted in pulling its red tassel. Then one day the bell rang and Edgar was killed and Dora was no longer afraid. Instead, in the muddled weeks after his death, whenever the bell rang, she imagined it was Edgar come home.

Malachy Mara first came to her up the garden path in a great swathe of sunlight, brushing against the lavenders and the rosemary so that his trousers, she realised, would be infused with their perfume. He had entered the garden slowly, having to stop first to open and then to close the gate, each time placing his burdens carefully on the ground. Dora was pleased to see him stop and close the gate properly. It showed a respect for her property which impressed her. Afterwards, a long time afterwards, she would think that there was something faintly ridiculous about his arrival. Perhaps, Dora thought, she had even laughed at the time. She had the pleasure of watching him walk up the path to the front door. He could not see her because she was inside her room, partly obscured by the curtain. Dora had the advantage. Her fingers rested lightly on the keys of her typewriter where she had been practising for want of anything else to do, having finished her last commission, Minutes of the Seaford Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club.

When he came in through the gate, Malachy was carrying two large, heavy boxes, full, she could see even from the window, of official-looking black books. He carried the

boxes, one under each arm with the ease of his strength. But he walked slowly, giving Dora the opportunity to observe him more closely than usual. At last he reached the front veranda and pulled the red tassel of the ship's bell. She was at the door at once, not caring if he noticed her eagerness. Through the screen door, Dora saw Malachy smiling his blue eyed smile, a white feather gleaming in his dark buttonhole.

"It's my badge of honour" he explained to her, after she had let him in. They were already in the dining-room by then. Dora caressed the feather gently, where it lay pinned to his coat. The feather was perfect; she had never seen one so white. It trembled, soft and delicate under her touch.

"It belongs on a beautiful and expensive hat," she murmured, "not on your scruffy coat."

"It belongs on a white bird," said Malachy, and he reached up and took her hand where it lay on the breast of his coat. Dora did not move to pull her hand away.

"I'll make a pot of tea," she said quietly.

He let her go, dropping her hand so suddenly that it slapped against her skirt.

"Yes, that would be nice. And then we can look at the Minutes for the International Society."

Dora looked at him; he was angry, she realised. For a moment she was stunned by her own conclusion and the half expectation that he would storm out the door. Retreating into the kitchen, Dora put on the kettle and got down the better cups and saucers, her hands trembling a little as she set the tray.

When Dora came back into the room, bearing the lacquer tray with tea and biscuits, Malachy had cleared the table of her papers and her typewriter, piling them up on the

floor under the window. She was annoyed that he had meddled with her possessions without asking her and set the tray down firmly in the middle of the table.

"What do you have in those boxes?"

She began to pour the tea.

Malachy continued to open them, a sly smile on his lips. "These are all minutes and papers of the International Society."

Dora flicked through some of the pages. "They're old," she said tentatively. "Why do you want them typed up?"

"For our manifesto."

Malachy laid the minute books carefully on the polished surface and Dora moved the tea to one side. She sat down next to him and he opened the books one by one, explaining their context and apologising for the crabbed handwriting of his revolutionary colleagues. The manifesto would bring their message to the world, Malachy told her. He sat back in his chair and stretched out his legs. From these minutes he would construct his great work on anarchy and society. She would help him to prepare his book, he would like that. But this would be later.

"I need someone intelligent, someone who thinks like I do."

"Thank you" murmured Dora, feeling both flattered and embarrassed at the same time.

Later, when they were sitting close together, their hair would touch sometimes as they bent their heads to read. Malachy talked quietly, wooing her with his subtle tenor. Dora shivered and wondered if it was with pleasure. This man would be prepared to make a space for her, Dora thought, in the plan of his life. If she wanted, she could travel with him as a handmaiden, and he would decide everything for her, the way her father and

later Edgar had done. How easy, she thought, to ride through life like that, to be the thing worn against, the pebble in the stream.

It was hot in the room, about three o'clock in the afternoon, the hottest time of day. Malachy was speaking but she could no longer concentrate on his words. Dora got up and opened the windows but the curtains hung limply. She turned to Malachy, smiling, and offered to make another cup of tea.

Where were they standing when he kissed her? She tried to recall it, after he had gone, leaving his great black books on the table. At first, she remembered it as being by the front door, but knew at once that this recollection was wrong. He was not leaving when they kissed. It was just a romantic notion. Dora laughed at herself. She wondered if she had read about such kissing or seen it in a film; in scenes of farewell as all kisses were in wartime. But Dora and Malachy did not kiss by the door. They kissed after they had finished their second cups of tea, and Malachy, she remembered, tasted of sugar and faintly of tobacco. They had been poring over the minutes and she had looked up at him, wanting to ask a question. He had leant forward, gripping her shoulders. The kiss had passed in a moment. Malachy winked at her and she had blushed. She was flustered by his attentions. He should not kiss her. He was Daniel's friend. She wanted him to say he was sorry.

“How beautiful you are,” Malachy said.

Dora did not know what to do. After a moment, they continued to talk again about minutes and manifestos.

11.

*A woman sits at an oak table. In front of her is a piece of paper, a telegram: **Killed in action.** The woman stares at the telegram. All the windows of this house are open. It is a hot, hot summer's day. The woman swoons, affected by the heat, by her broken heart. **I can't go on without him. My life is meaningless.** Delicately the woman touches her forehead with a lace handkerchief. As she does, the telegram falls to the floor. The woman kneels and snatches it up; reads the telegram again. She holds the paper for a moment and then violently tears it up, flinging the pieces away: **Curse this War! Curse the evil Hun!** Suddenly the curtains in the room are blown inwards as if by a mysterious gust of air. (At the base of the stage, the organist played light, gentle music; angelic music.) The woman gets up and goes to the window; she stares down the road. In the distance, there is a lone figure in uniform walking towards the house. The woman recognises who he is and is overjoyed: **The hero has returned.** Next the woman is running down the road, and the man runs towards her. They meet and embrace: **I thought you were dead.** The soldier pulls a small, mounted photograph from his breast pocket. It is a picture of the woman, in drapery, beside a potted palm. In the middle of the picture is a bullet stuck into the board: **Only your love kept me alive.** More chaste embracing. **The End.** (The organist played some grand music.)*

As the film ended, Dora laughed loudly and too long but could not stop herself. It was laughter without mirth, hollow laughter. Dora felt she was outside her body, watching her own absurd behaviour. The theatre was full and people all around were giving her the

eye, and going 'ssh' 'ssh'. Dora heard someone say, "Disgraceful," and another, "She was drunk when she came in."

Daniel was more amused than embarrassed.

"Go easy," he whispered.

Malachy was on her other side. He looked at her with his sly, sarcastic glance. When he winked at her, suddenly she found she was able to stop laughing and sank down deeper into her seat to avoid the stares.

They decided to stay and watch the newsreel. It was about the war. Of course, Dora thought, what else is there? We are all consumed by this monster. They watched as a jerky picture showed soldiers emerging from trenches, rifles in hand; in the distance, the dust of an explosion. The soldiers appeared to be conquering a muddy hillock. They had all seen this film before, only the captions were different. The Prime Minister appeared.

"Ah, the little grocer," whispered Malachy.

Mr Hughes was sombre in a dark suit and stern expression. As he spoke he waved his arms vigorously, attempting authority. He looked like a grey puppet. The captions summarised his words. *"Purification in the blood of sacrifice.... Our nation will be born out of struggle.... Soldiers, you will enter the temple of the immortals.... "*

He spoke of empire, solidarity and loyalty. To Dora, he seemed to have a whole armoury of these expressions. She had already heard him speak these words in his nasal high pitched voice on the wireless. It seemed as if Mr Hughes' voice and his body were never in the same place together. In London, in 1916, he had been feted and made to feel important. The British Prime Minister had asked him for 40,000 more troops.

After the newsreel, they went out into the street, none of them speaking. The old city reverberated with heat, thick with smells, some putrid, others fresh. It felt, Dora thought, as if a glass dome had come down on this place, trapping everything, echoing everything, sharpening the senses. Dora sighed, adding to the miasma, such weather, it made you want to weep with your particular sadness. She thought of the newsreel, the same soldiers charging the same little hill day after day, the invisible enemy, the explosion, all safely in the distance; those ghostly images, so far away and so absolutely unreachable. There was a sense of doom about it all. And they knew it, Dora thought. She believed they knew in their hearts, the three of them, everyone in the theatre, in the whole country. The war had gone on too long. In their exhaustion they felt the numb futility of it and nothing else.

"Nobody dies." Dora said, her voice loud against the low roof of the sky.

Malachy and Daniel stopped, turning to her in surprise.

"In the newsreels, nobody dies. Or at least we never see them die," she said. "They're always charging or rallying or something. We never see them die."

"But they do die," said Malachy, "thousands of them. They die horribly, like rats."

Daniel said, "Lucky then that they have the good manners to die out of view."

He put his arm around Dora's shoulders and she smiled, grateful for his attention.

They went to the Zetland and sat in their dark corner in their secret room. Hopelessness weighed on them and made them quiet. Dora looked at Daniel and Malachy; they sat as if they were alone. We've each retreated into our own thoughts, she observed. At last it was Malachy who spoke. He spoke of action to end the war, spoke urgently and loudly, and by the silence that fell amongst their fellow drinkers, Dora knew that others were listening too. And all this time Daniel remained silent. Dora looked at him; he seemed

unmoved, untouched as if the war was something that no longer concerned him. She felt as if his heart had turned to wood. Later she would say that it began then, a turning in her, a changing. She came to the decision without even really thinking the words. She went over to Malachy that evening, joining his cause.

Walking home, Daniel said to her, "You understand what they mean to do?"

Dora nodded slowly, "Yes, from the Minutes. Not directly, of course, such things shouldn't be written down, but by inference, you can tell what is intended."

Daniel was silent. They walked slowly back to Daniel's house; he did not offer her his arm and she did not seek out his hand. Somehow we have detached from one another, Dora thought, and I don't know why.

They did not speak of Malachy again until they reached Daniel's front door. Not speak of Malachy, Dora would remember everything in these terms, Malachy and Daniel, never the International Society and Daniel, never war and Daniel or Malachy and peace. Always for her it was these two balancing against one another, like a man with two heads, each facing a different path.

They were standing in the kitchen and Daniel was fumbling with the kettle. Dora stood by the kitchen table looking around, a house without a woman, both tidy and empty. Daniel moved to the sink, doling tea into the teapot.

"They mean to build a bomb," he said, his back to her, as if still doubting her understanding.

"Yes I do understand, Daniel," she said calmly, her fingernails unconsciously scratching the bare tabletop.

She did not move towards him or ask him to face her. It seemed easier to have this conversation with some barrier between them.

"Yes and to put that bomb in railway stations."

Against the window a fly was buzzing. Dora watched it over Daniel's head. The fly seemed huge, monstrous.

Daniel said calmly, "People might be killed."

The kettle whistled sharply, making Dora jump. Still Daniel did not turn around. He picked up the kettle from the stove and poured the water over the tealeaves in the pot. The boiling water fell from a great height. Dora saw some of it splashing out, scalding the dresser and the floor, Daniel too she supposed.

She said, "No-one will be killed. The bomb will explode at night. It is about civil disruption, a message to government. Ending the war and stopping deaths, not causing them."

"Did you read all this in the Minutes?"

"No. Malachy told me when he visited."

She went to the dresser then and took down some teacups and saucers. They did not look at one another. Daniel set the teapot down on the table.

"How often does Malachy visit?" he asked, turning at last to face her.

Dora put the china teacup to her lips and drank the sweet, toffee-coloured tea. It was very good. This skill too, she supposed, was what came of living in a house without a woman. She did not look at him.

"What time shall we meet tomorrow for the march?" Dora asked quietly.

12.

It felt like a carnival. Perhaps it was the beauty of the day. There was talk and laughter. Some people had brought their children. To Dora it seemed as if the whole world had come to march against the war. She was full of joyful energy. The banners flapped in the air like white sails at a regatta on the harbour. Dora waited quietly with Malachy and Daniel. The men talked about tactics, reactions. The police were there in force, Dora saw, all mounted. They waited, seemingly uninterested, at a short distance. As soon as the marchers assembled, the crowd began to walk slowly forward, banners were lifted, a few voices broke into song. There was a feeling of relief amongst the crowd as they set off. The mood of the marchers lightened and people smiled, Dora Somerville smiled, feeling safe in the great throng.

When the marchers had advanced little more than eight hundred yards, there was a sudden movement by the police. Dora heard, rather than saw this movement, the unmistakable clatter of hooves. She was not able to see past the taller bodies around her but she could hear the commentary of those who could see. The police horses split into two battalions, about twenty riders in each. One battalion galloped to the front of the crowd and formed a close line facing the marchers. The other battalion formed a similar wall at the back of the crowd. Foot policemen, appearing from nowhere, lined the road on either side. Slowly the horses advanced, compressing the marchers. The crowd stopped and fell into an uncertain silence. They could move neither forward or backwards. Dora looked around; somehow walking and thinking her own thoughts, dreaming as Edgar would have said, she had become separated from Malachy and Daniel.

Soon it was unbearably hot. The clouds had dissolved, leaving the sky harsh and bare. In the crowd Dora could hear nothing, see no-one distinctly. She felt as if she was inside the belly of a huge animal. Around her were the backs and shoulders of others, the mixed odour of bodies under her nose. They were all pressed together; cloth touched her face, a man's coat, scented with pipe tobacco. She could not even raise her arms without displacing another person. They were trapped like flies in the heat.

Then after a time, there was a stifled wave of movement, starting from the rear, like a giant's hand pushing them, and they all stumbled forward a few paces- but no more. It was a movement without purpose or direction. The air was buzzing with the voices of uncertainty. Dora turned to look behind her but confronted only another shirt face. They had been deliberately herded here like cattle; those at the back and at front must have been trapped by the police horses. It was only a matter of time now, she thought, before some woman fainted and the crowd parted to allow her medical aid. The police would move into that fissure and the crowd would be broken up and dispersed. There would be no march of protest. Dora wondered when that incident would happen. Her legs were aching. The pain ran up through her calves like an electric shock. They could not march; there was no point to this standing. But then the bomb erupted.

After the noise of the explosion reached her, Dora began shouting for Daniel. The explosion had erupted somewhere behind her, deep in the centre of the crowd. She had placed herself to the left of the front half in order to be with Malachy and Daniel. Around her were mostly men, the women seemed to be in the middle of the crowd, under the banner of the Pacifists.

The crowd rushed forward, as if propelled by the blast. At her back, Dora could hear shouting, screaming. Then the smell of fear reached her, laced with gunpowder. At the front, the horses must have pulled back. She was running, running because there was no choice. She could only run or be trampled. Her feet pounded down heavily on the road, as heavy as her heart beat. But her stride was trammelled by the narrowness of her long, heavy skirt. For a while she was half carried along by the men around her, swept up by the current of their bodies, as if she had fallen into a great river. She knew that her passage amongst them could not last and reached down to try to lift her skirt higher, to set free her legs. It was then that she fell, while simultaneously running and bending. She rolled in a kind of half somersault and landed flat on her face. The falling seemed to happen very slowly. She had plenty of time to see what was happening. Everything had slowed down just for her. Even the headlong course of the bodies around her was for a moment dreamlike and their voices were silenced to her ears. When she hit the ground, the pain brought her back to reality with a great blood red rush to the senses. At first, Dora was simply aware of the roughness of the ground, the dark bodies in the crowd moving above her, until she cried out sharply, a sound like the squeal of a dog, hardly recognisable as her own voice. Someone had stepped on her left hand and she drew it back, a wounded animal, under her waist. With this movement, all the pain in her body was released and Dora saw that she lying in a pool of red liquid. Blood was pouring from her nose and from a large gash on her forehead. Blood from her injured hand had stained the front of her white blouse. She could see the heel mark of a man's boot impressed into the flesh, the purple shade of a new bruise. She thought slowly, Get up. I must get up. Bodies rushed past, some leaping over her.

All along the sides of her body were pockets of pain where she had been kicked, the back of her head too. She put her hand there and could touch the cord of a welt. Dora rose, a quick burst of agony, with her arms around her head, bent over, and immediately she was pushed forward, her legs staggering to a run. The blood on her face ran into her eyes, blinding her. An elbow veered outwards, striking her on the cheek with such force that she was dazed.

Now I will fall again.

This fearful certainty shut out pain. Dora put her arms out in front of her, ready to fall. But as she did it seemed to her that a great, dark bird swept down and seized her right arm. She imagined this rescue as the act of an enormous winged creature. The bird pounced on her arm, the sleeve, she saw, was ripped to shreds and dark with mud and the soles of shoes. The bird lifted her from the crowd into the clean air. She felt gentle sunlight on her face. Then there was darkness.

Dora sat up. A man was sitting next to her on the grass, she vaguely recognised him; he handed her a small bottle.

"Here take this for the pain," he said.

Her whole body seemed to hurt; her head felt cracked and her limbs were so stiff she could hardly lift her hand to accept her companion's offering. All around there was quiet, warm sunlight, the reassuring murmur of other voices. After she had drunk from the bottle, Dora looked slowly about. She took in the scene carefully, noting specific details, in the same way, someone, woken from a nightmare, takes in the familiar setting of a bedroom. She was in a makeshift hospital, laid out on a wide verge of grass beside the road. An avenue of plane trees ran down the centre, casting a long band of shadow, a net

of leaves. We marched past here, Dora remembered. It might have been hundreds of years ago.

Around her, others of the walking wounded were laid on what seemed to be long pieces of white cloth while their carers bent over them, whispering comfort. Dora looked down and saw that she too was lying on a length of white material. Large black letters had been painted on it. Dora lifted up her legs and read: *Stop the War and Keep Australia White*. It was one of the banners, she realised. They were acting as stretchers for the injured. Reading had made her head ache and touching her scalp, Dora felt the taunt presence of a bandage.

"Not too tight, I hope?" said the man sitting next to her.

Numbly, Dora shook her head a little. "Thank you," she said, her voice loud to her ears.

"Thank you for coming to my rescue."

She turned to the man now, able at last to recall who it was. Her saviour smiled. It was David Marks, the chemist from Carmichael Street. Sometimes she went there, when she had a winter cold, to buy his family's special, patented cough medicine. When her mother was alive, Dora would have to pretend that the medicine came from Macalister's instead.

"They're Jews," her mother had said, objecting to being associated with the Marks.

"No, they're white Russians," Dora had been ladling out the cough mixture. "They were called Markov or something like that."

"Foreign people." And her mother had refused to open her mouth whatever the patent.

"What happened?" Dora saw that her hand was bandaged too.

"There was some kind of minor explosion." David Marks settled himself on the grass beside her. He was a lightly built young man with a smooth olive-coloured complexion

and bright brown eyes, like a squirrel, Dora thought. Although she had never actually seen a real squirrel; for her they were creatures in English children's books. David Marks was still speaking about the explosion.

"I didn't see it myself. No-one was hurt by the bang but a great many people have been trampled." He smiled gently. "Like you, Miss Somerville."

"Who did it? I mean, who was responsible for the explosion?" Dora was afraid for Daniel and Malachy.

Mr Marks shrugged. "Everyone's blaming the Workers of the World, including the police."

"Where's Daniel?"

Dora wanted Daniel to come. He should have been here, not this man. She put her hand up against the white bandage, wanting to tear it off. Her head was pounding. Marks did not answer; he opened his mouth and closed it again as if unable to think of any words.

"Where's Daniel?" She thought that she might hit him if he did not speak.

Marks sighed. "The police took him away, with Malachy Mara and others."

Dora sat in silence, her thoughts moving slowly, avoiding pain.

"What shall we do?"

Marks stood up and Dora was forced to lift her head, squinting in the harsh sunlight.

"I suppose I need to arrange some bail," said Marks and he strode off, offended and no longer bothering with her. Dora watched him, annoyed by his rudeness. Then when he was out of sight, she lay back on the banner under the hot sun and went immediately to sleep.

She was still asleep when Daniel found her.

All through the course of their love affair, there had been these riots and protests. When they first saw one another, Dora was in spinster's grey, standing with other women at the back of a temporary stage. The stage was an open forum for all the various groups against the war. They were queued up waiting to take their turn. At the front a man was reading out a long letter of support from Archbishop Mannix. It was part of a demonstration against conscription, just before the second referendum in 1915. Daniel was lost in those days, confused in his feelings. He was openly opposed to the war but one day went and stood in a recruiting line, only stepping away just before he reached the desk. After that he drifted from group to group amongst those opposed to the war, going from tent to tent as if he were at sideshow. All around him in daily life, the call to arms rang out from the wireless or looked out from posters in every shop window. Later he told Dora that he imagined himself being watched as he walked down a street where soldiers had just paraded on their way to battle.

Dora was standing on the very edge of the stage, one of her shoes partly over it, balancing in the air. Perhaps Daniel first noticed her because she looked so unsteady, as if she might fall off, and he was watching her idly amused, waiting to see what would happen. She could see him watching her, standing away from the rest of the crowd. He had a slightly foolish grin on his face. He wants to see me fall, Dora thought, annoyed and amused. Well I won't. The reader finished the Archbishop's letter and there was a smattering of polite applause from the crowd. When one of her pacifist comrades stepped

forward to speak, Dora wriggled discreetly along the platform, both feet at last planted on firm board. Her woman colleague was a fiery speaker and she seemed to rouse the sleepy crowd.

They came from behind the stage and even before Dora saw them, she saw the sunlight on the blades of their knives. Their faces were concealed behind woollen scarves or by kerchiefs; they looked almost comical. It might have been a joke by riotous schoolboys - except that the knives were out. Dora froze. She could see Daniel moving forward through the crowd like someone wading in water, shouting and waving his arms. But the crowd only turned and looked at him.

One of them started slashing the banners on the stage to pieces. Others jumped down into the crowd, twirling their knives like acrobats. Women and children were screaming; people were running. Daniel reached the platform and leaped up onto it. The fiery pacifist speaker was tussling with one of the attackers; she was trying to stop him, to restrain him, an impossible task for a woman against an armed man. Daniel moved forward quickly. Dora watched him, suddenly aware of the danger.

There was blood on the platform, blood on the woman's dress; blood had sprayed out onto the tattered banners. The woman had collapsed into the pool of her own blood and the knife man was nowhere to be seen. Daniel went to the injured woman. Dora was already kneeling beside her friend, trying desperately to stem the bleeding. There was a long gash, leaving a thick flap of skin, across the woman's right cheek. Dora's hands were covered in blood. Her companion, dazed and in pain, was crying softly. Daniel did not yet know that her name was Dora so he called her "miss" and drew from his pocket a

large white handkerchief which he wrapped around her friend's head, pulling it tight under the chin and tying a knot on top of her bedraggled hair.

At the hospital they sat together on a bench, waiting for news of her friend. A nurse brought cups of sweet tea and hospital biscuits. They had already been talking for some time, not about the war or even what had happened that day at the gathering. For some reason, they began to talk about books. Books had been consolation to both of them, a way through the mire of closer history. He told her that he was a printer but did not mention the Kipling. It was too early; he did not know her well enough. To Daniel's surprise, Dora mentioned Kipling instead.

"I have a beautiful, bound edition at home. I should show it to you. I'm sure a printer would appreciate it."

"But what about the poetry?" He asked her.

She blushed. "I haven't read it yet. It was a gift on a sad occasion so I put it away for later. I have read some Kipling. He is good but not I think immortal."

"I agree," he replied smiling.

They paused, each with their own shyness.

"I'm Dora Somerville," she said suddenly, in the middle of this conversation about poetry, as if she had suddenly remembered the text of her etiquette manual or lessons on good manners that she learned at school.

"I'm Daniel Bone."

And they nodded to one another in a slightly exaggerated way, like children.

She was not wearing gloves, he noticed. Her hands were delicate and soft. Small hands like the paws of a kitten.

Daniel was watching Dora sleep; she was stretched out on the banner, her hands folded lightly over her hips. She looked to be in repose, mocking death. Dora opened her eyes suddenly, fully awake as if her deep sleep had been a pretence. She looked at him and smiled.

"Daniel." The sun had moved far into the west. Dora sat up, holding her head.

"What time is it?"

"Half past five."

"I've been asleep."

"Yes. I was worried about you."

"David Marks was here. He helped me."

"He shouldn't have left you alone."

She grinned. "He went to bail you out."

"And he did."

"What happened to you?"

She studied him, searching for signs of interrogation, torn clothes, bruises to the face or hands; something tortured in his eyes. But he looked and seemed perfectly normal.

Daniel shrugged. "They were only interested in the source of the explosion. It was the same as it always is. We were brutally questioned and then curtly dismissed. 'Until next time' - the usual pompous rubbish. They kept the Wobblies, though. Those they managed to catch."

He picked a stick from the grass and threw it in the air. He was in shadow, his expression obscured.

Dora bit her lip. "I smelled the gun powder, when the explosion happened. Do you really think it was the Workers of the World?"

"Who knows? Any way, no-one was killed."

He seemed weary, as if he had been dealt too many questions for one day. She felt hot; Dora put the back of her hand against her cheek.

"I've caught the sun, I think."

Her arms were sunburnt too, through the great tears in her sleeves. Her hat must have fallen off during the stampede.

Daniel stood up. "I'll take you home now, if you like."

He helped her to her feet. She was sorer than she realised, leaning on his shoulder. He wrapped his arm around her and she felt comforted by his familiar strength, the pleasing closeness of their bodies.

In the morning, Dora eased her broken body out of bed and went into Edgar's bedroom. This room, it always pleased her to see, had remained unchanged since the day her brother left, but not because Dora harboured any false hope that her brother was still alive. She had made a kind of pact with herself. She would clear out the room when the war ended and not before. In the meantime she tidied and dusted and they both waited for the new day, the new leaf, the woman and the room together.

She opened the wardrobe and began to search through suits and tennis clothes. Hats tumbled onto her, smelling of mothballs. At the very back was Edgar's one overcoat, stiff on the hanger like a dark sentinel. Dora touched the collar: such a thick coat for this

climate. Too thick, she had always said. Was it cold when Edgar died? She sensed that it was, from the scraps of information that had come to her. Edgar hated the cold, but then he died in a fire, burned to death, screaming into death. She pulled her hand off the coat and turned away from the image.

At last Dora found what she was looking for, a pair of pale flannel pants. She laid them out on the bed. They were almost feminine with their soft colour and wide legs.

After a moment's consideration, she drew the blind and took off her skirt. The pants fitted surprisingly well, though of course they were too long. Dora marked the hem with a pin. When the pants were shortened she returned to the mirror and noted her alterations with approval. At a glance, she might just be wearing a skirt. Dora smiled with satisfaction at her work. She would never fall and be trampled again.

13.

Daniel took her to the Lacquer Room for afternoon tea. Dora had never been there before.

"It's like eating and drinking inside a bauble," Dora laughed but the opulent room in red, gold and white cheered her. Such places existed to say the war did not exist, if only for a few hours. Daniel liked to hear about her work. He was impressed by her new commissions.

"Are we in competition?" he asked quizzically.

By now they were walking along Marchpane Street. It had rained earlier and the trees were laden with wet droplets, every now and then one released its load and, being without umbrellas, they were drenched.

"No, hardly," Dora replied, flustered, stepping over puddles. "I'm typing up documents that aren't suitable for printing, where printing wouldn't be worth the cost. Single notices, letters, minutes, that sort of thing."

"And will you take their work?" Daniel grinned at her.

He was maddening at times, Dora thought.

"Whose?"

He put his lips to her ear and she felt the touch of his breath.

"The war lovers," Daniel whispered.

Dora laughed but could not answer. An elderly woman had suddenly joined them, stepping out from a corner sweet shop. She was swathed in black lace, like an expensive

widow, Dora thought. Her face was severe, as if cut from stone. She said nothing to either of them but reached inside her copious sleeve and handed Daniel a white feather. Her look was triumphant as she pushed past, stepping heavily on Dora's toes. Dora yelped in pain but the woman did not stop. They watched her ample frame moving swiftly away until she entered a gleaming motor that immediately drove off. Daniel and Dora looked at one another, bemused. It was always like this. They emerged from doorways or came up behind you in a street. They dressed in the deepest mourning.

"Like Death." Dora said, "Death tapping you on the shoulder."

"The Grim Troopers, that's what they are." Daniel took the feather and twirled it between his fingers.

"Malachy wears one of those in his button hole," Dora said. "He keeps it for good luck."

"Does he? How do you know that?" His voice was without inflection.

Dora blushed. "He's become one of my commissions. Some minute papers for the International Society dating back ages."

"For the great manifesto, of course." Daniel lifted the feather over his head. He threw it high in the air. The feather fluttered on the hot breeze as if still a bird, part of a bird, it climbed and then it fell down into the street. Dora and Daniel watched as the feather landed. Feet trampled it; vehicles crushed its delicate structure. It crumpled into dust. Daniel saluted it in farewell and at once quoted from the Kipling.

"No proposition Euclid wrote,

No formula the textbooks know,

Will turn the bullet from your coat,

Or ward the tulwar's downward blow."

"A eulogy for the feather?" asked Dora, smiling.

But Daniel had started whistling. He grabbed her by the hand and they ran across Dalrymple Avenue, dodging motors and carts and mud holes. When they reached the other side, they were both breathless and laughing. Their clothes had been splashed with mud by the speed of their flight. Dora bent down to brush some of the flecks from her skirt.

"Ah, we should have been wearing our manifestos," said Daniel.

He was thinking of Malachy when he quoted from the poem, Dora realised, Malachy and his minute papers, all those words that cannot stop bullets.

They went and sat on one of the stone seats beneath a huge tree in the gardens of St Mary's Cathedral. A few passers-by glanced at them, glanced at me, Dora thought, as they sat back in the cool, dark shadow. The cathedral stood up tall and solid in the sunlight, its windows glinting like thousands of eyes.

Daniel said "I am going away," his face was creased with apprehension.

"Where?" Dora sat upright, shielding her eyes with her hand. For a terrible moment, she thought he intended to enlist. His words were completely unexpected.

"I've joined an Antarctic expedition, with the Commonwealth Weather Bureau."

"As a printer?" Dora imagined the careful setting of copious reports.

"As a cook, actually." He said it quite naturally, with ease that surprised her.

Dora laughed at the absurdity of it all: Daniel in a white apron before the stove. He sat pensively, watching her as if from a greater distance. Dora felt fear creeping up from her stomach.

"Why?" The sharpness of her own voice echoed in the shadow.

"Why are you doing this, Daniel? Is it the war? Instead of the war, I mean. You still feel you have to do something dangerous? Sacrifice yourself for nothing?"

Fear had moved to anger, Dora realised, at the stupidity of all masculine adventuring.

"It's got nothing to do with the war."

"What has it got to do with then?"

"I have to get away."

"From what?"

Daniel shook his head. He stood up and reached out his hand to help Dora up.

"I'm wrong. It is about the war," he said quietly. "I have to get away from not being at the war. I'm not like Malachy. I can't absolutely commit to some other cause. I need breathing space, time to think."

He shrugged and lifted his hands slightly, as if struggling to explain further. Dora looked at him. He was standing in shadow, his eyes obscured, unexpectedly a man she felt she did not know. Dora dug the toe of her shoe into the grass.

"When do you leave?" she asked bitterly, looking down, watching the mud stick to her sole.

"Next month, on the first." His voice was flat and artificial. "I signed up six weeks ago," he added, sheepishly.

Dora felt hot suddenly, the sun had emerged and scattered the clouds. She thought of the white feather. Anger and its burning tears strangled her throat. Suddenly all the anger that she had kept down inside her heart welled up, anger at Edgar for dying, anger at the Generals in charge of the war, anger at the cheering crowds.

"You're running away," she shouted, "You coward, you're running away."

Dora jumped up and walked off, back towards the tram stop. When she heard Daniel calling after her, she began to run, wiping the tears from her eyes.

14.

Dora had a long line of letters in the composing stick. They were together, working the secret press in Daniel's hidden cellar. They were both very quiet. They had made up after their argument, as they always did, not by expressed apologies and oaths of affection but by the resumption of their normal activities. Working together on the press was their way of mending. Not for much longer, Dora thought. Daniel will soon be gone to his cold country, taking the press with him. The cellar will be empty and I will not come here again, at least for a year until he returns.

Daniel said, "I suppose you'll have more time now, after I'm gone, I mean, more time for your typing work. You'll be freer to seek out new commissions"

"What?" She was startled by his words. Almost she felt they should not be talking here, today, the last day working together. They should be like gleaners, absorbed in their manual tasks.

"If you want to, of course," Daniel continued, "unless you will be too busy with Malachy?"

Dora did not know what to reply; she shrugged, hiding in an awkward silence that lasted minutes. She had never told Daniel about Malachy's kiss, not knowing how to explain it. It did not come from love, she might have said, but worried those words would not be sufficient. Instead the kiss had remained on the guilty edges of her thoughts, like a worm in the brain.

"Will you be busy with Malachy when I'm away?"

She had not expected him to take it further. But this was Daniel, he did not behave as expected. Dora stared hard at the composing stick.

"Well, he's invited me to a meeting of the International Society." This was a bad beginning, Dora thought, so she added, "to meet a woman called Louise."

"Yes, Louise Mottram, the journalist."

"Yes." Dora gripped the stick. "Malachy thinks we might like each other. And she might have some work for me." Dora exhaled; let that be enough, Daniel, she thought, let that be the end of it.

But Daniel went on speaking about Malachy. He did not look at her as he spoke, continuing with his work. His speech seemed in a rhythm with the action of the press. Dora wondered if he knew about the kiss. Perhaps Malachy had said something and now Daniel was waiting for her to tell him, giving her a chance. She did not know what to do. Why did the kiss matter? The kiss was part of the effect of the war. The war had changed things, the behaviour of people, old manners, old boundaries had been thrown down. Malachy had not behaved with propriety but neither had she. Once the kiss would have been an outrage, but now she wondered if the kiss meant anything at all. There was no love in it.

Dora put the composing stick down on the table. Some of the letters spilled out. Dora stared at them. She wished she had a stickful of words lined up in her brain as her explanation. She should have told him about the kiss as soon as it happened, now it was too late. Perhaps he would not be going away if he had known. There was nothing between her and Malachy, Dora decided; she did not care for him. It was just a kiss, a flirtation on her part. With Daniel, she was still in love. She could tell him about the kiss

and seek forgiveness - which meant take her chances. Or she could be silent. Is silence also a lie? Dora wondered. Sometimes lies can save. She decided what she would do. She would be silent and they would be happy together. It was her gift for Daniel. They could pick up their old lives again.

Sometimes, I think I have lived too much in certain books, Dora thought. Life is not grand drama; life is wetness after sex, stinking printers' ink, a dusty cellar floor not swept for years.

Three

Parting

1.

Dora bent forward into the afternoon sunlight. She wrote slowly in her diary taking pride in the neat, even pace of her hand-writing. She had arranged her desk carefully, as if for some ritual event. Her ink and blotter sat on a small silver tray and her pens and nibs were laid out carefully beside them.

The journal was given to her when she was thirteen, as a gift from her mother and when she gave it to Dora, wrapped in a green baize cloth and tied with a gold ribbon, her mother had also given her a knowing smile. It was not Dora's birthday, not Christmas, there was no special occasion. Dora remembered how her mother gave her the journal when they were sitting on the back verandah of their house, late one summer afternoon; no men were present. Dora held the soft covers between her hands. The covers, perhaps made of kid or soft leather, felt like another skin against her skin. This was her lady's journal; to be, Dora understood, the polite record of her days. Now the journal would contain her letters and writings to Daniel, written in his absence. He would read them when he came back from Antarctica.

"Today Daniel is leaving. I am reminded of course of the sad, terrible leaving I endured with Edgar, yet my feelings are totally different. With Edgar, I was afraid in the way that mothers are afraid when they send their children off into the great world, knowing they will face certain danger. With Daniel's leaving, I am in agony and most of it is for myself. Answer this question: Who will I be when I am not the woman walking out with Daniel Bone?"

She paused, thinking for a moment. Yesterday, in Melrose Park, they had stood in the shadow of the giant Moreton Bay figs and kissed. Daniel had pressed her back against the rough bark, their feet and legs planted between the giant, rising tentacles of the roots. Their bodies were obscured from passing view by the thick lower branches, covered in dark green leaves. It was like being in some secret childhood hide, cool and scented with the earth.

Vaguely, as she was writing all this, Dora was aware of a mournful noise in the garden below but tried to ignore it. In the garden, the noise grew louder. The sound was a call, almost human, but surely a bird. The cry continued, harsh and sharp; persistent. Dora was disturbed now and felt she must lift her head and look out of the window. She paused, as much to listen as to think what to write next.

"He has fallen in love with the idea of leaving. There are some people, I truly believe, who like farewells, because there is such an exquisite neatness about it. Memories, acts, feelings, even troubles, all may be left behind, firmly attached to some other place. In the printing workshop, I have seen the way a blade slices through a stack of white paper, cleanly, leaving a line straight and sharp enough to cut you until you bleed. Leaving does that to life, I believe, cutting a line between past and future."

Evening had surreptitiously entered Dora's bedroom, while she was sitting there, thinking about their farewell. She was surprised by the sudden fall of shadows. The calling bird had ceased. She shivered, although not cold; this was a time of day that she hated, the time of regret when all the wasted minutes and hours from the day rippled out like waves into the gathering darkness. Dora closed the diary, thinking that she would continue in the morning when there was sunlight to cheer her thoughts.

2.

The ship was called the Australis. All the morning, when men and goods were loading, she creaked against her ropes as if eager to be away. She sat low in the water, heavy and squat, an old rhinoceros of a boat. Dora imagined her ploughing through the ice floes, grinding her way south. Daniel, she saw, was in the thick of the preparations, helping with the loading or giving direction to others. She watched him; he was unconscious of her observation and the sad, resigned look he usually wore for her benefit was not in place. He looked excited. Dora shivered; that look of boyish excitement had marched past her many times on the faces of newly enlisted men. The look had terrified when she saw it. But then, they were cheerfully marching off to face death and Daniel was not. He was running away from her; and from the war, and from the daily struggle to hold their beliefs. He could no longer swim against the flow of the world's opinion; the current had been too strong for him. Dora rubbed her hand carefully across her midriff. There it was again, the strange unease she felt about Daniel's adventure, it fluttered about in her stomach and, after a while, it would form itself into a hard fist.

Daniel had said to her, "The work of the Weather Bureau is important. The weather in Antarctica affects our weather, and crops in Australia; it affects whaling and fishing and trade." He had seen the doubt in her face and added, "The money's pretty good too." On the dock, Dora felt the flutter tighten to a knot.

"The work of the Weather Bureau is important," Dora whispered. The knot was so tight that she thought she might be sick.

Daniel was taking the hand press with him, and Dora's anger at his decision surprised even herself. She was hurt that the Kipling was to be snatched away so unexpectedly.

"I can finish it here, prepare all the proofs. Why take the press with you? What can you do with it there?"

But Daniel had his excuses and explanations. The expeditioners had asked him to bring the press, and besides Dora had not had enough time to learn how to operate it properly. Dora would go on corresponding with Flanagan; she could finish the proof reading and make notes for his return.

"You will miss your chance to make money," Dora told him, pleading a little. She was not a woman who liked to beg, even from the man she loved. But Daniel would not change his mind; her pride had been sacrificed for nothing.

Dora had watched as he dismantled and carefully packed the press, wrapping its parts in innumerable layers to protect them from dampness and cold. It was impossible not to notice his meticulous arrangement of each piece. He did not ask her to help him. Dora was irritated by this tidiness, and his slowness in packing. For the shortest moment, Dora thought that she might scream at Daniel. There was such a tight band around her heart, but she stood very still, forcing herself not to speak.

On the wharf, the sea wind had increased; women clutched at hats and the last crates were loaded on. Soon it was time to say goodbye. A small girl with ringleted red hair had a parting gift for her father. For the child, it was a moment of great ceremony and solemnity. She presented her father with a little japanned box that she had decorated herself with dried flowers. When the father opened it, the box contained a peg doll painted and dressed by his daughter and laid carefully on muslin. His joy was rapturous

and his pleasure seemed to lighten everyone's heart for a moment. But they were all there with their tokens of farewell, some clutching small, paper-covered parcels, others with larger, flamboyantly wrapped gifts. What were they saying? Dora wondered. Remember me? Be safe? Be comforted? What can be contained in a book or a doll? Dora put her hand into her pocket, feeling for the shape of her own gift for Daniel. Her heart was so heavy that she could not bring herself to pull the package out. She saw Daniel turn, cast his eyes over the crowd, see her and wave.

When Daniel came over to her, their farewell was too full of propriety. There was an unfamiliar stiffness between them, kisses on the cheek. Dora, refusing to let this be their goodbye, put her arms around Daniel's neck and he bent his head towards her. They might have kissed then, and Malachy would have been erased as the shadow between them, but they were interrupted. On the edge of the wharf a senior scientist from the Commonwealth Weather Bureau climbed onto one of the smaller crates and began to make a speech which no-one could hear. His words were blown away by the strong, southern wind. Another time, Dora thought, loosening her arms from Daniel's embrace, there might be school children here to wave them off, even a band. The war had crushed such diversions; it had focussed the common mind like an eye against a peep-hole. Yet they were too far away to see the whole image. They had only glimpses of wickedness. After the speech, their moment was lost. Daniel kissed Dora's cheek again and wandered off.

Seeing him slip away, Dora decided to give Daniel her gift. By then he was standing with his new colleagues, everyone else having made their final farewells. She darted into the pack of men, seeking him out. Only he saw her move towards him; she was so small,

so slight that her presence was barely noticed. She thrust the parcel awkwardly towards him. Their hands joined across the stiff brown wrapping of her package as if it were a bridge between them. He stepped in to meet her and quickly tore away the paper to reveal an ancient wooden box.

"It was my father's." She was breathless from her dash.

Daniel lifted the lid, revealing an old compass, its silver gleaming in the sunlight. She had polished it just for him. He reached out and put his arms around her, holding her tightly against his heart as if to claim her from the world. The compass' box pressed into Dora's back but she did not move. Around them the meteorologists talked of their plans as if these two lovers were invisible to them.

A siren sounded and it was time to go. As the ship pulled away, the men waved from the deck, standing amongst the battened down crates. Faintly, the snow dogs could be heard barking.

Four

Ice

1.

Daniel watched her from the deck. She was waving and smiling with the other women. Their men returned the same gestures. Apart from him, they all had families, wives, children; such lawful appendages made departures less complicated. When his companions returned, a known life would be waiting for them to pick up again, to be neatly folded and tucked under one arm like a newspaper. He knew that he had no such certainties with Dora. Between them, there was only the promise to write to one another in journals or letters, letters that would never be posted, never received. Consequently they would lack the conversations of real correspondence. Even with Flanagan, he had discourses, arguments, which were the reactions to written words between them. When he and Dora met again, they would merely relive each other's disconnected year, like a film run backwards.

Daniel leant against the railing. The women and children were mere black specks now, vanishing into memory. Unexpectedly, one of Daniel's new companions came and stood beside him, looking out as Daniel was at the distant dock and the great expanse of sea between them. Daniel half turned in order to glimpse the man's face; he was young with a pale complexion and dark hair and eyes. Of course they had already been introduced, Daniel thought, but the man's name eluded him.

"All our sacred symbols are gone; there are no prophets left," murmured the young man, pensively watching the ocean.

"Sorry?" Daniel wondered if it was a poem.

The young man turned to Daniel and smiled.

"Hallo" he said. "I'm Peter Cole. We met before but of course you've probably forgotten with so many new names to remember. And we have the advantage of remembering exactly who you are."

They shook hands.

Daniel said, "Thanks. Just before, what you said, was that a poem or something?"

Cole shook his head. "A Psalm. Sorry you'll have to get used to it. I'm a Quaker. They just come out. Curse of a Biblical upbringing I'm afraid. No amount of thumping behind the bogs at school seemed to beat them out of me either."

Daniel laughed. "I can't object; being a printer. When I'm working on something the words go round and round in my head for days."

There was silence briefly. A deeper chill seemed to set in as the land disappeared. Both men pulled their coats closer, fumbling a little because of their thick gloves. The weight and layers of their Antarctic clothing were still unfamiliar to them.

Daniel squinted past Cole, across the deck. "Is that why you're here then on this trip? Because you're a Quaker."

Cole nodded cautiously. "Just couldn't stand it any more. All the fuss, the anger. When the meeting house was stoned...." He shrugged. "But this expedition came up at work. I mean, I'd been involved for a while, and was always intending to go, but the timing," he laughed sharply, a harsh sound back in his throat. "was Manna from heaven I guess."

Daniel was quiet and Cole had the courage to say, "What about you?"

"I fought against conscription, ran for a while with the pacifists, printed a lot of pamphlets, marched, shouted. Waved a few flags. Right now I'm with the International Society. Who you've never bloody heard of I'd bet."

"No. Sorry."

The wind was picking up and becoming much colder. Sea spray splattered their faces. Cole looked like a bizarre Neptune with the white foam in his dark hair.

Daniel said, "My girlfriend thinks I'm a coward."

"For not joining up?"

Daniel grimaced as if trying to smile. Why was he saying this to a stranger? This man Peter Cole, a psalm quoter, a religious wowsler probably. The desire for human contact is so powerful, Daniel thought, we even betray ourselves for it.

"No, for not staying to fight against the war."

Cole grinned. "Then we are both cowards. My brethren said as much to me." He stuffed his hands in his coat pocket.

"But I think," he said, "I believe, that tactical retreat is occasionally good for the soul."

"*We shall go back to the boltless door,*" Daniel said.

Cole nodded, "Kipling," he said. "I remember him from school." He glanced at Daniel,

"See it's not just the Psalms I know after all."

Daniel leant forward over the ocean, feeling the biting wind and spray. The land was far away. He felt unexpectedly happy. To have found a friend here, a like mind in this place of science, what an exceptional gift.

2.

After the first day at sea, Daniel found his desire to write to Dora was strong. Perhaps, he thought, writing was even an essential act of survival in the wilderness. But on the *Australis*, when he first began, he could not think of the words. He was dumbstruck, illiterate.

For hours, Daniel sat on his bunk, tapping the pen against his teeth. The bunk was the only space he could call his own. He shared a room with three others, with little privacy. On the *Australis*, even the physical act of writing was difficult, the ship rolled, ink smeared. He gritted his teeth. If there were room, he would have sat on the floor. There was no room either at the tiny camp table that fitted into one corner of his shared quarters. Its surface was permanently covered with someone or other's scientific papers. The table was dominated by a large oil lamp, the only light in the room, on which he, like everyone else, relied for reading or writing in the evenings.

At night, Daniel kept quiet while his colleagues talked of their science and they, apart from Peter Cole, treated him cautiously, a stranger amongst them. So he had a hunger for words and wanted to write if he could not speak. One night, listening on the bunk while the others talked, at last a few words came to him and he saved them up in his mind like pocket money until he could write to her in the next afternoon.

Daniel wrote to Dora about his companions, the meteorologists, describing them by manner and appearance and calling them the weathermen. For her, he had ceremoniously invented a collective title.

"These weathermen can read the meaning of clouds and predict rain. Today they have been watching the fall in barometric pressure and have forecast a storm. They are amazing," he wrote. "I believe I have fallen in with a conjuring troop. I have been listening to their conversations at night and feel as if I am in a foreign land with a strange tongue to learn. I listen and can pick up a few familiar words yet the thread of the dialogue is lost to me."

He was quick to mention Cole.

"But there is one man on board who has taken me under his wing as it were. His name is Peter Cole. He teaches me about Antarctica and at the same time talks about his family. They are Quakers, it seems, and objectors to the war and all violence. Peter Cole can recite the Psalms from memory; strength and comfort words as he calls these god poems and he wears them, these prayers, like protective garments. Of course, I have retaliated with the Kipling."

He found his writing running on quickly. Daniel described the ship and his tiny quarters. The pen scratched on the paper and Daniel paused, wondering about the politeness of this writing. What was he going to write about next? A description of the food, jokes from the mess? He worried that these were not the words of a lover. There was no flower to them. Still, Dora would want to know the details. She was not a woman who demanded expensive shows of love but Daniel felt that there must be some hint of intimacy. He could have written this same letter to his sister. Perhaps he should write about separation, or loneliness. Daniel put aside the pen. They had never said 'I love you', even in private. He should write it down, Daniel decided, as proof now that they were apart. But for a long moment, he did not pick up the pen he had laid aside so he could

think. Almost as a release, he heard shouting from the deck above, and the ferocious roar of water. The ink bottle spilled on the floor as Daniel stood up. They were in the grip of the storm that his weathermen had predicted the night before.

The deck was a scene of chaos, swell, rain and darkness. The ship, overburdened with stores and equipment, plunged in the waves. Daniel looked down and saw that the water on the deck was so high that it covered his ankles. He did not think of death by drowning, nor of his stove, nor the food supplies he was charged with. He only cared about the hand press. They had secured the deck a few hours earlier but he worried about the effects of salt water corrosion. Daniel waded slowly across, the wind driving against him until his clothes were saturated. Around him, other bodies, other voices swirled. He reached the press, relieved to see that its crate was still secured. He bent into the wind, crouching; the rain was blinding. Above him, Daniel heard a roaring louder than the roar of the sea, a sound like an explosion. There was no time to look or to move. He felt something brush against the top of his head, as if a hand had quickly swept his hair. Surprised, he put his own hand on his head, and looked up and behind him. A section of the bridge had been wrenched away by the storm and flung over his head and out to sea. His coat was covered in fine splinters of wood. No blood, he thought slowly. A face appeared in front of him, drenched, the hair plastered to the skull. It was Cole, he realised after a moment. Daniel could see Cole's lips moving but he could not hear his voice. Are you alright? He read the words on the lips. Yes, Daniel nodded and stood up slowly. Water ran from him in rivulets. He felt the water running between his clothes. His skin was as soaked as if he were naked. The storm roared, driving into his face with such force that the drops of water felt like needles. With the pain, his head was suddenly full of words to write to her,

but his pen and ink were stowed away and the hatches were tightly battened down to keep out the rush of water. Only later, after the storm, he would write to Dora passionately as a lover should, as if the drenching wetness had unlocked something inside of him.

The storm lasted for two days and afterwards, in the gentler sea wind, they all stood together, surveying the ravaged deck, and the calmness of the sea as it rolled out before them towards Macquarie Island. They had not slept since the storm began and exhaustion settled on them like a thick cloud. But the Captain sprang about his duties, his crew nonchalantly whistling as they swept the decks, sorting through the debris for equipment. Daniel watched the sailors, wondering how many times they had made this journey together. It is likely, he thought, that they had faced countless perils. Death had always been there in the swell, to be ridden out like the storm. And although no-one was injured or killed when the side of the bridge collapsed, it was a reminder of the dangers they faced. They believed fervently in luck, these sailors, in the chance hand of life or death.

On the fifth day, a day without a storm, during lunch, they were all called up onto the deck by the noise of someone shouting. When they emerged, they could see Richardson, one of the weathermen, standing, almost leaning over the prow, waving his arms and pointing. Richardson's words were dragged away by the fierce wind. They all struggled to the side of the boat, and stood squinting over the sea, their eyes watering with cold. Daniel looked out, as Richardson pointed across the waves. He saw a spray of water like a steam pipe shooting up into the air and then the body of ocean seemed to lift itself, grey and gleaming, in a solid curve. Whales, Richardson was shouting, whales travelling south with them.

The ship rolled towards Macquarie Island over the heaving breakers. Daniel wrote cautiously to Dora about the seasickness, the heaving stomachs of the land crew and how the monotony of the ocean made it worse, with nothing to distract the mind. They walked frequently around the deck, hoping the movement would improve the nausea. Daniel was walking with Cole and another weatherman, John Bryant, when he saw birds he had never seen before ride in the ship's wake.

He wrote to Dora: "Even the plainest gull would have lifted our spirits. Bryant said that they were whale birds and Mother Carey's chickens. I laughed at these names, thinking that I am coming to a strange land. Later, as we walked, Bryant pointed out to us mollymawks and finally a bird I could recognise, if only from pictures, the sooty albatross."

Successive storms raged over them; even eating became a challenge. In the galley, pots crashed down when the ship rolled unexpectedly. Plates slid across the table or sometimes, in the most violent weather were flung into adjacent rooms from which their contents were scraped up and rescued in order to be served again. Gradually the separateness Daniel felt between himself and his comrades began to break down, if only through being constantly together. At meals, they were all crammed onto two wooden benches and ate across a table so narrow that the tips of the forks touched when the setting was laid. Someone often mistakenly picked up the wrong glass of water or, when there was an unexpected rolling of the ship, food tumbled from one plate to another without touching the surface of the table. The weathermen talked to him more now, sharp questions like interrogations, more friendly but still sizing him up.

At last the Captain sighted the coastline of Macquarie Island. They would leave two men, Richardson and another weatherman, Mortimer, behind there, to carry out their experiments and be a relay radio base for the main party. The island was guarded by spiny reefs and rocks and the ship could not get close. Daniel was one of those commissioned to row the meteorologists ashore. The cutter was weighed down with their equipment. In the end, they all took up the oars. The boat weaved its way through the narrow inlet, until the entrance widened suddenly running into a sandy beach. Coming ashore, Daniel looked up and saw thousands of tiny black eyes surveying their landing. There was an appalling stench in the thick air. Royal penguins, so many they covered the cliff face with their rookeries and leapt out of the water beside the boat. As the men moved up the beach the tiny creatures rushed forward in a great mass of bodies, harmlessly pecking at human legs and squawking in outrage. Daniel was surprised by their futile ferocity. Richardson laughed, they were protecting their homes, he said. Daniel watched as more penguins slid down from the rocks. In their uniforms of black and white, their push was for him, both comical and horrible.

He wrote to Dora: "Richardson and Mortimer will operate a radio relay station from Macquarie Island and spend their days observing penguins and petrels and collecting various data brought by the wind and the sea currents. Everyone calls them the twins, though they are not brothers, but because they are always together. They are our Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the messengers between two kingdoms, our isolation and your civilisation."

There was already a hut on Macquarie Island, to serve as a residence, at the northern end of the long finger of the land. Like the hut they expected to find in Antarctica, this

hut was built by the scientists who visited the island only a few years earlier, in 1911. Mortimer and Richardson would also record their sightings of humpback whales, the depletion in whose numbers was causing so much alarm in the ballrooms and war rooms of Europe.

"Glycerine from whales," Cole explained, puffing up the beach with a heavy crate, "is used in making explosives."

Howard Drummer, the expedition leader, who had been looking over the island through field glasses, nodded in agreement.

"They can't say we're not doing our bit for the Empire's war effort," he said heartily. Nobody responded.

Daniel had already written to Dora about the expedition's chief scientist: "I cannot make out Howard Drummer. I think that knowing him will be a slow process. He is the leader of our little party and as such he is always wearing his mask of authority. He never relaxes with the men, even in the evenings when we play cards or tell a few stories. The others are always conscious of his presence and I think sometimes curb their speech. It is rather like being on holiday with the headmaster. There was only one time when I saw him soften and I know that you did too because I saw you watching. Do you remember? It was on the dockside. His wife and daughter had come to see him off. The daughter was very young, perhaps four or five years old. As Drummer was about to board the ship, the child ran forward and Drummer bent down to her. She gave him a small parcel, in a japanned box, and kissed his face. He opened the gift at once so that the child could see his appreciation. It was a little wooden peg doll arrayed in gingham, with dark wool for hair. The child must have made it herself. Drummer kissed his daughter goodbye and

hurried to join us on the deck, but we had all seen it, the expression on his face and how love had changed him for a moment."

3.

After Macquarie Island, there was the long, slow haul towards the ice floes and then the pack. The meteorologists spent their days looking at clouds and clouds of the most fantastic shapes filled the sky, fixed in the west, as if the ship were near to land. When they looked down from the sky, they saw that the sea too had changed and was crossed with great matted clumps of kelp, like roughly severed hair. Strands of kelp snagged on the ship and were pulled along in its wake. The kelp caught Daniel's eye sometimes, as he was on one of his perambulations. He stared at it, unable to avoid thinking that there was a swimmer in the water, the hair and the submerged shape, so like a body.

"I think of them as mermaids." said Daniel as he and Cole were walking.

"In another ocean," Cole told him, "kelp would be a sign of land."

But there was no land and these strange symbols retreated behind them, into the greyness.

At four pm on December 29, they saw the ice. It was off the starboard bow. Daniel heard the shout go up and raced onto the deck with the others; they were all talking and cheering, like excited children on holiday. For once, they were all equals; no-one ever having seen an iceberg before. They gaped in amazement as a large one came very near to them.

"The iceberg was like a piece of the purest white marble but where the sunlight hit it, it shows the colours of lilac or blue green, or in other places, yellow and ochre. I wish you could have seen it, Dora. We should have been afraid but instead we were amazed."

As they stared, one of the weatherman, Brian Macalister, was providing a scientific explanation.

"A classic example of an Antarctic iceberg," he said jovially. "Flat topped, sheer on all sides. About eighty feet high, I'd guess, quarter of a mile long."

As the ship rode slowly forward, more and more icebergs crowded them.

"Brash ice," said Macalister. "Just broken away. Note the texture."

They all grinned at one another. They called him the Professor because he claimed to have read and memorised everything on Antarctica. Now Macalister was to be their ice guide, it would seem. Daniel looked up. The sky had changed and was no longer the pale blue grey of the morning. Instead, it was white, as if it too were ice, or the glaring reflection of ice. The sky was painful to look at and Daniel found his eyes watering and the tears in their turn, becoming ice.

"Don't worry; it's ice blink," said Macalister, watching him and then he laughed with delight as he stretched out his arms under the alabaster canopy. The whole world was a ball of whiteness.

"We are travelling to the bottom of the world with a man who knows everything about ice. His name is Brian Macalister. Like all the others except myself, he works for the Commonwealth Weather Bureau. Like another man who is with us, John Bryant, Macalister has been in the war and was discharged through injury, having lost a leg. He has a wooden leg now which causes him to limp but at least he can move about. Macalister fought with distinction I am told, and yet, Dora, of all the subjects on which he claims authority, this is the one of which he never speaks."

It was in the ice that Daniel first saw her; Dora and not Dora. He had heard stories of such apparitions, but did not expect them here. The tales he knew came out of the war, always from the worst battlefields. He had read of the Angel of Mons guiding soldiers to

safety, or of whole battalions swallowed up by mysterious fogs and never seen again. The papers were full of these stories which he did not believe. But he saw Dora in an iceberg. There was a smaller one, hollowed out in places and pillared like a church. In its crevices, the iceberg was full of blue light. Perhaps it was the light that created the illusion of her figure standing there, between pillars. He could see her head turned towards him, her face recognisable even at a distance. Her eyes were the same blue as the light, Daniel remembered. She did not move and he knew it was only an ice trick but still felt strangely glad that she was there.

They sailed forward carefully between icebergs, ice islands and plates which were floating around them like giant chess pieces on a board. The captain barked out his orders to the bridge, port, starboard, port. They were fragments of the continent, Daniel realised, Antarctica coming out to greet to them, to draw them in, and perhaps to destroy them. Later he would understand that the whole landscape of this strange country was the same, continually changing, building up, breaking down. A world without land marks. Only the most massive of structures had any permanence and even they, in certain conditions, might break up or be swept away. The ship weaved her way forward through the pack ice and at last they sailed into Antarctica, only soundings telling them they had found the true landmass. This was the moment when Daniel would have liked most for Dora to be with him, on the threshold of a new world.

4.

They came ashore slowly, once solid land had been discovered and the hut sighted. But before that there had been one more terrible storm to live through. They knew it was coming. Bars of cirrus cloud in the sky, fog on the peaks of bergs. By midnight, wind-driven snow roared around them and left the ship blindly groping along the edge of an ice island. When the storm passed, they sighted land. Soundings were dropped to be sure. It was too easy to imagine that some of the larger bergs and floating islands were the mainland continent. After this, everything seemed simple. The pack had opened up for them and they rode through the ice-plated sea, leaving a great broken seam in their wake. It was Drummer who first sighted land, shouting that he could see the black rocks standing out against the whiteness. He was using his field glasses, having carried them night and day from the beginning.

When they arrived at the Hut, there was a written message waiting for them. It was laid out casually on the dining table, as if the occupants had merely stepped out for a moment. Drummer, as leader, opened the letter and read it aloud. It was a letter of welcome from the men who had been here between 1911 and 1913. They were two years, two winters in this ice world. For Daniel, it was a world, a way of thinking so far outside of his own, almost beyond understanding. .

Daniel had heard much about Douglas Mawson. When he returned to his home in Australia, his students had carried him through the city streets on their shoulders. He was a hero, the great explorer. Crowds cheered him with the enthusiasm that was usually

reserved for departing troops. The white man had conquered the white continent. Two of his companions were dead and Mawson had, for weeks, struggled on alone, only just surviving to reach the safety of the Hut. He had expected to find no-one there but they had sent the ship away and waited for him, his men, refusing to leave without their leader. They were heroes too, in this loyalty; their act of faith had cost them another year of life in the blizzard.

Later, Daniel wrote all of this into a letter to Dora, not knowing if she was familiar with the story.

"I must tell you about Mawson" he wrote, "It is not possible to speak of this place without mentioning him. I cannot say that it is his living spirit that we feel; scientists I think do not conjure up apparitions. Only there is some sharpness, as if the preciseness of his mind were here in this blizzard world which he somehow managed to contain within his map"

The hut had been left in impeccable order and to Daniel's relief the chimneys had been bagged so that they were clear and not full of snow. As soon as he could, he lit the stove and the others left their crates and boxes and gathered around to witness the fire taking hold. The sight of the flames made them smile. Cooker, heater, light giver, clothes dryer, flesh warmer, life sustainer, Daniel realised that this most humble of all their instruments was the most important. The men murmured with satisfaction as the flames rose. Daniel straightened up; he would add to his letter about Mawson, write and tell her that he felt like Prometheus.

5.

All day they brought their boxes and crates from the ship, using the motor launch to ferry goods from the *Australis* and then dogs and men dragged these burdens to the hut which had quickly been discovered to be two huts, a living quarters and a workroom and store, connected by a tunnel carved through the ice. When his hands were warm enough, Daniel scribbled a note to Dora. Since his arrival in Antarctica, he had taken to carrying a notebook with him, for 'conversations'.

"Everything we need to survive has been brought with us: food, fuel, medicines, tools and implements of every kind. We are such useless animals; we could not last a minute here without our imported supplies. Except for fresh water because this we have in abundance. It is merely the trick of dragging ice blocks, chiselled from the landscape outside, to the water drum in the hut; this is one of my duties. By the way, I have been told by Drummer that I am to share quarters with Brian Macalister."

The first night, in their tiny quarters, there was awkwardness as they prepared for sleep. Daniel, who had consciously chosen the top bunk, did not know what to do. He wondered if Macalister wanted him to leave the room while he removed his artificial leg but felt that he could not ask the other man such a question. Daniel climbed the ladder and sat down on his bed, contemplating the roof. Higher up, he saw a shelf made of a piece of crate wood, the nails roughly hammered into the wall; it seemed to lack the maniac precision with which the rest of the hut had been constructed, as if someone had

needed it urgently or intended for it only to be a temporary structure. On the shelf, Daniel saw some books, left behind by the previous inhabitants, not scientific works but popular novels and adventure stories. Perhaps the books were hidden because such stories were prohibited in this icy laboratory, Daniel wondered. He pulled one down without looking at the title and lay on his bunk, his back to his companion. He wanted to give Macalister as much time as he needed. The book was *Treasure Island*. Daniel opened a page at random and read the familiar voice of Jim Hawkins:

As I was waiting, a man came out of a side room and, at a glance, I was sure that he must be Long John. His left leg was cut off close to the hip, and under his left shoulder he carried a crutch....

When they were both in their beds, and he could hear the rhythmic rasping of Macalister's breathing, Daniel pulled out his notebook and wrote to Dora in the strange daylight night of the Antarctic.

"Macalister has a wooden leg and at night he hangs it up on the wall of our quarters, along with his various pieces of camera equipment of which he is justifiably proud. He asked my permission to hang the leg, and I did not object of course. He told me a sad thing: that his wife cannot bear it, the leg I mean. She refuses to stay in the room in the morning when he puts it on or at night when he takes it off. She does not like to touch it, even through his trousers."

In the morning Daniel and Macalister discovered that the room was a treasure chest of hidden nooks and crannies full of scraps of paper with tiny, metallic writing. Between the beds and the wall, low down, Macalister found another shelf of books, this time poetry.

Daniel was bemused to find a slim volume of Kipling. He opened it and found one poem with the words underlined:

We bring no store of ingots,

Of spice or precious stone.

But that we have gathered

With sweat and aching bones.

He imagined that Mawson, the expedition leader, the great scientist, had forbidden the reading of such words so the book had to be concealed on the low shelf. Daniel turned to the fly leaf, finding the owner's name in the same neat, metallic handwriting that was everywhere in the room, 'Douglas Mawson'. Daniel closed the book and held it between his hands. This narrow space had been the great scientist's room after all; the poetry books were his. Daniel grinned, surprised by awe.

6.

On the second day, he volunteered to go out with Peter Cole to assemble the weather station. After breakfast, Daniel went down the dark tunnel and climbed up the ladder to the trapdoor opening. He came out onto the roof and stood blinking in the harsh sunlight, the snowlight, he thought, his eyes watering with the double glare. Cole was already there and with some of the others was loading the sledge with the equipment. He straightened up and waved Daniel to join them. They might have spoken in some other place, called out greetings to one another, Daniel thought, but here the roar of the blizzard, the icy force of the wind suppressed words, snatching them away as they were uttered. Instead Daniel smiled and made his way carefully across the ice and snow. When they were face to face, almost lip to lip, then he would speak to Peter Cole, perhaps hear his psalm for the day and have some Kipling ready to trade in the exchange of words.

The sledge was almost too heavy for them as they dragged it along. Its fragile load slid precariously from side to side and they fumbled with the packages, their hands encased in their thick gloves and their bodies made slower and stouter by the layers of clothes. Their steps were laboured and leaden in their heavy reindeer skin boots. It was like being inside a second body, thought Daniel. The sun blazed down on the ice, and surprised him with its strength.

"Because it's the end of summer time," Cole said. "Even here there are seasons, perhaps more harsh and extreme than anywhere else."

"Only summer and winter," Daniel responded, trying his knowledge; he had been reading, quickly and widely, while they sailed. "No plants, so no spring and autumnn."

Cole shook his head. "They are still here," he explained." In the movement of marine creatures but most of all in the slow rising of the sun at the end of winter and the equally slow disappearance of the sun at the end of summer. Soon you'll see."

They dragged the various pieces of equipment behind them on the sledge until they reached the top of a hillock. The weather station was only a short distance from the Hut. It had not been worth taking the dogs. There were many crates to unpack. Cole was fastidious in his care of every piece of equipment. Daniel wondered if he himself were so devoted to the press. When they were unloading from the *Australis*, a small box had fallen over the side into the icy water. Cole had had to be physically restrained to prevent him jumping in after it. Bryant who was in the motor launch had fished it out with a net hastily constructed from a broom handle and some wire meshing.

Through the morning Daniel worked under Cole's direction, as usual the amateur, the apprentice as he thought of himself, but did not mind. In the company of the weathermen Daniel had rediscovered the pleasure of learning. He opened his mind to this new knowledge as a door is opened to receive sunlight in winter. He felt he was a child again, with a child's freedom to question.

They all took him out in their turn. His skills with the press, assembling and operating its various parts, meant that Daniel was quick to learn what was required with their special equipment with its strange names, the Dines Anemometer for measuring the force of the wind or Robinson's Anemometer for measuring the speed. Weather Screens and puffometres, Daniel had fallen in love with the poetry of their equipment, the names of which made him think of the adventures of Jules Verne. His favourite was the Sunshine Recorder and he first imagined it as a device for capturing the warmth and light of the

sun in the same way that tracks of music were laid down on a gramophone record. In the sunless months to come, they might open the box and release its contents, filling the Hut with the sun's rays. He kept such private jokes and imaginings to himself, thinking rightly that the weathermen would not approve. But for Dora, he wrote down everything.

On the first clear day, Daniel left the hut and stood with Dora's compass in his hand. He had brought it out at breakfast and the weathermen nodded their approval, seeming impressed by its age and excellent condition. But there had been something else as well. He caught a nod or a wink between them, half smiles and the hand on the chin. He could not work out why. Perhaps, Daniel thought, they mocked him for trespassing a little into their field. He climbed up the slope from the hut to a weathered hillock and stood on snow and mud and rock with the compass in his hands. The dial showed south. He turned a quarter to his left: south; and then a half turn: south. When he had come the full one hundred and eighty degrees, Daniel understood. It was always south in this place. He looked up and saw that his companions had come out to watch him. They were smiling broadly. Daniel laughed. When he came down from the hill, Macalister slapped him on the back.

"Only one direction here I'm afraid, son."

Daniel looked around at the faces of his colleagues; somehow, he realised, by making himself a fool, he had won acceptance to their ranks.

7.

At last he was standing. Daniel had been coming from the outdoor larder when he fell heavily onto the hard, icy ground. Instinctively he had not let go of the guide rope but gripped it even tighter as he went down, twisting his shoulder in order to hang on. A red flash of pain had shot down into the core of his back and he had dropped the frozen seal meat on his feet, cursing loudly because he knew no-one could hear him. But he did not let go of the rope.

When he had finally gathered up the slippery meat and struggled to his feet, Daniel Bone stood still, collecting his breath and his thoughts. The blizzard was growling and rumbling around him and in the midst of the storm there was little visibility. The whiteness made the land and sky seem as one. Then he saw them, and perhaps he had been waiting for them after all, a sight to lift his spirits after the ugly pain of the fall. The snow petrels flashed across the sky on silver wings, riding the ferocious wind with such ease and skill that he felt amazed and humbled by them. They were the life force of this forsaken world. They made him want to throw up his arms and cheer. He watched until they were out of view and turned towards the hut still feeling the shiver of joy that had gripped his heart, to fly like that, daring the wind. There was something about this lonely continent which gave significance to such things like the flight of a bird and the force of a storm.

Daniel struggled on against the wind, trudging towards the hut, lugging the seal meat. He leant forward into the blizzard until he thought it might lift him vertically and he

would fly back to Australia on its wake. Their hut was in the windiest spot on the windiest place on Earth – but that was why the weathermen had come here.

After several successful hunting trips, the weathermen had created a second store outside of the Hut, perhaps three hundred yards away, a rudimentary cave carved out of the ice. But this whole land is an ice chest, Daniel thought, anything could be frozen solid, even puddings. Retrieving your dinner was the real test of valour.

His shoulder was still hurting from the fall and the force of the storm was rapidly increasing. Daniel crouched down for a moment, keeping his hand on the guide rope but resting on his haunches; he had seen the dogs do that sometimes, getting their bearings as he was. He looked around out of human habit; there was nothing to see now but blizzard. He might have been a blind man, navigating through whiteness instead of blackness. Daniel stood up, shaking away the pile of snow that had already formed around him. If he sat any longer he would be engulfed, as the hut had been engulfed and was now invisible. He felt the comforting weight of the guide rope in his hand. The ropes had been hooked up earlier, linking the hut to other vital structures such as the supply cave and the weather station; black flags marked out the prominent sites. Daniel felt the force of the blizzard on his body. Macalister had told him that in Antarctica the wind always blew from the same direction; south of course. If a man got lost, he could find his way back to the hut by knowing its position in relation to the direction of the wind.

He gritted his teeth and pushed forward, almost there. At the entrance to the hut, he half slid through the hole they had cut near the roof and landed heavily in the frozen alcove in front of the door where Macalister was waiting to let him in. He paused for a moment to regain his balance and then strode into the common room, unloading the seal

meat onto the table where a bowl of penguin eggs already waited. There were a few murmurs of approval from some of the men but not much more. Daniel peeled off his outer layer and hung the stiff garments by the stove. Now, he thought decidedly, time to prepare dinner, seal stew and penguin egg omelettes.

In the early Antarctic weeks, they all fell into a pattern of quiet domesticity, seizing the routines of work, eating and sleeping as an antidote to the strangeness of their new world. Where there was no day or night, they created them from a timetable of their own invention. A large clock held place of honour in the common room and the men were rostered to wind it every day so that they kept time with the world they had left. After dinner in their evening, they would play cards or someone would read aloud. Macalister had brought a gramophone with him and played records from a collection so eclectic that Daniel thought it was like listening to the wireless. In the day time, they lived by their schedules. It was Drummer who set such timetables. There was a roster also for striking off the days on the calendar, for collecting ice, for the duties of night watchman, for bathing in the single iron tub, for cleaning the Hut.

If Daniel had let him, Drummer would have demanded set menus for every meal, stretching until the day they would leave, but Daniel skipped away from the team leader's forays. It was the one benefit of his separateness from the weathermen. At the end, there was no desk with Daniel's nameplate on it, waiting in some dark city building, over which Drummer had the power of conferral or denial. In the early months, the last of the summer months, Daniel practised a quiet and determined insubordination against Drummer's quest for control and order, and his companions, who were not so free, watched on with amusement and envy.

They used the air-cooled Arrol-Johnston motor car to drag the wireless poles up from the beach. Cole drove, with Bryant sitting next to him and Daniel sat on the backboard watching the load. They bumped along, Bryant wondering aloud, at the top of his voice to be heard over the wind, whether the motor had been worth all the trouble to load it onto the ship. It was only of use on the flat.

"Not like the dogs," Bryant said, "Dogs go anywhere."

Cole and Daniel exchanged amused looks. Bryant was the one who, from the beginning, had cared for the dogs, seeing to their food and shelter. He practised with them in the harness and sledge and often, after dinner, sat with them on the veranda of the hut as they settled down for sleep. He had been heard talking to them and these feral creatures, who snapped at any other man who came near, allowed him to lie down amongst them, resting their heads on various parts of his body. When one of them died, Bryant wept openly and dug a grave in the hard ground.

No-one complained about his affection for the dogs; his regular hunting trips with the sledge usually brought back fresh seal meat as a welcome treat for dinner and for freezing in preparation for winter. Macalister always accompanied Bryant on his excursions; Drummer had forbidden anyone to go out alone. The two men shared a strange, unacknowledged comradeship; both having been in the war and each discharged because of his injuries. Daniel wondered what the two men talked about when they were alone together, if they spoke to one another at all.

"There is one of us who cares for the dogs," Daniel had already written down for Dora. "I mean, he does not simply attend to their needs, he feels a certain sympathy for them. Whenever we are hit by a storm, something that is becoming more and more frequent,

this man is out on the deck to check their safety. For the rest of us, these dogs are like carhorses, no more than beasts of burden, living components of the sledges they pull. The dogs make no effort to win our favour, but snap and snarl when we come near. Only to this man do they show affection, wagging their tails, their great furry heads burrowing into him. His name is John Bryant and he is officially in charge of the dogs and sledges. But more importantly, from our perspective, he is the wireless operator. He will direct us in erecting the masts and the cables for this marvellous device that will carry our trembling messages to Macquarie Island."

"He was in the war," Drummer had said, his voice matter of fact and perhaps Daniel thought, annoyed at his asking about Bryant. "Saw a lot of action and caught some gas. Had a head injury too, I heard. Anyway, he got a discharge through some family connection or other; otherwise they wanted to send him back out. Now he's here, because of the radio expertise he picked up in the field. Not my type really; I don't like the quiet ones. You never know what's going on in here." Drummer pointed to his temple. "Anti-social, I call it."

At the Hut, Drummer and Macalister awaited the arrival of the poles. The men in the vehicle saw them as the motor drew closer; dark figures against the white landscape. The wind had died down considerably which gave them hope that the poles might be started on today. They worked hard to construct the heavy wooden totems and draw the thick supporting cables, but the erection of the wireless masts took several days and dealt out many cases of frost bite to hands and faces.

"We long for comfort of other human voices, even if they are only those of Richardson and Mortimer on Macquarie Island," Daniel wrote to Dora.

When their work was done, the men cheered and applauded one another. Daniel felt like the builder of some great cathedral. Inside the Hut, Bryant had set up the wireless equipment on a long bench down one wall of the workroom; its petrol motor and generator had been installed when they first arrived.

Later, they all stood around expectantly as Bryant struggled to make a connection. Slowly, fitfully over the days that followed, messages crackled back and forward between the two isolated huts. There were bursts of days when the transmission was very clear and then they could not say enough to their distant companions.

Daniel quoted the Kipling for Dora in his next letter.

Quick ere the gift escape us, out of the darkness we reach,

For a handful of week old papers, and a mouthful of human speech.

8.

In Antarctica, he dreamed about making love to her. A recurring dream, exposing the depth of his longing. There was no place to these dreams, only their bodies and desires. Their acts. Other times, he dreamed that she was in danger, men were attacking her in these dreams, violence, blood, rape and always he was restrained, unable to help. Such dreams ended with him awake, sitting up in the bunk, knowing that he had called out her name. None of his companions took much notice. Daniel lay back down. In a hour or two, his own sleep might be disturbed by another man waking suddenly, having called out the name of some other woman.

Daniel Bone was the youngest of the men who were part of the 1918 expedition to Antarctica, and the most able-bodied. But he had never been asked, even by Drummer, to explain his presence. Only Cole knew of his objections. Daniel had been waiting for the interrogation, about why he was not with the troops. He could not believe that even the weathermen were so oblivious. Instead he waited, rehearsing in his mind what he might say when the time came.

Daniel was washing the dishes, one evening after dinner when he had the sensation of being watched. Turning, Daniel found Bryant close at his back, staring at him. He stared back, wondering what was coming.

But Bryant spoke softly, almost embarrassed that the others who were still seated at the table would hear him. "I was wondering about you..."

"Yes?"

Bryant shuffled and suddenly picked up a tea-towel.

On the pretext of being some help, Daniel thought. Why bother to ask me then? He leant back against the sink and folded his arms across his chest.

Bryant said, fumbling the tea-towel. "Did you see any action?"

"No."

"Didn't enlist then?"

"No."

He thought that Bryant might back off but the older man leant forward and poked him in the chest.

"Big strong lad like you, should've thought you'd be dying to get over there."

Bryant poked him again. Daniel did not react.

"I'm against the War. I joined the fight against conscription instead. I think that this war has nothing to do with Australia."

"A Bolshevik?" It was Drummer's voice. They had all fallen silent at the table. Daniel could feel their eyes on him. They had been waiting for this.

He thought about Malachy and his manifesto, his new world order.

"No. Not a Bolshevik."

"A coward?" Drummer stood up. His greying moustache quivered. He was enjoying this confrontation, Daniel realised. He wanted to see a fight. It would be Bryant who would come off worse if that took place but no-one seemed to care. The others continued to stare, watching to see what would happen. Daniel wondered if they too, in their boredom, wanted a fight.

"No. He's a conscientious objector."

It was Cole who spoke. He did not stand but lounged back, tilting his chair as if their conversation were only a friendly debate.

"Like me." He added.

Bryant answered Cole over his shoulder. "Yours is a religious belief," he said dismissively.

"It's a belief in whether something is wrong or right," said Cole. "So it's the same thing really."

Bryant hesitated, uncertain, but Drummer remained standing, stiffly as if to attention.

"There's something else I believe too, about all this," said Cole.

"What?" Bryant seemed to be losing enthusiasm.

"If you fight Daniel Bone you'll get the biggest hiding of your life and there's no doctor here to fix you up whatever happens."

There was laughter at the table and from Bryant and Daniel.

Bless you Cole, thought Daniel. You are worthy of your faith.

Bryant moved back to his seat and the others at the table grunted whether with relief or disappointment at a missed fight Daniel could not tell.

But Drummer was still standing. He appeared as if he were about to address his men.

"Loyalty to a man's home and country is also a belief about right and wrong," he said, looking sternly around the table. "There are things more important than dogmas, things that are worth fighting for and dying for. If I were a younger man, nothing would have stopped me going over there. Look, I'll show you; this is what I would be prepared to do for my country."

Drummer reached inside his coat and pulled out a service revolver. He laid it on the table for all to see. There was a stunned silence from the men. He surveyed them all, turning his head in an arc and staring down each man individually.

"I love my country," said Drummer. He picked up the revolver and put it back into his coat pocket. "The Empire is my country," he said.

Then Drummer sat down stiffly, opened a book on wind velocity and began to read intently.

Daniel wrote to Dora about this incident. "It has chilled us; especially because the weapon was produced. We are not so lively now which is a bad thing as soon the sun will dip below the horizon and we will be always in night."

"Darkness is coming," he wrote to her a few days later. "It is descending upon us slowly as down a grand staircase."

9.

He fell forward, arms out-stretched, feeling the rush of blood, the tightness in his stomach. His hands hit the ground first and he immediately stiffened his back and legs and then his arms so that he was suspended like this above the floor, supported by his bent toes and stiff arms. Slowly he bent his arms outwards at the elbow, lowering his body towards the floor but not touching it. Then he lifted himself up again, to the full extension of his arms, then down again.

Daniel turned his head and saw that the others were moving with similar slowness. At the front, Drummer zealously pumped himself up and down, shouting instructions. Because he was immediately behind him, Daniel could see the taut form of the man's body, the line of muscle joining Drummer's legs and back to his head. If he could look around further, Daniel knew that he would see Macalister standing by the stove, no longer even pretending to attempt the impossible. Daniel finished his push ups and jumped to his feet, glad to feel the blood coursing back to his toes.

It was Drummer's idea, Drummer's orders, that they would follow the Sandow exercises. He surprised them one day by bringing out a heavy trunk which, when he opened it, they saw was full of small weights shaped like bones. Drummer called these the dumbbells. They were meant to be held in the hands as part of the regimen. Some of the men began to pick them up; the weights seemed to be of different heaviness. Daniel remembered his father printing some posters to advertise Eugene Sandow's tour of Australia. The gaudy image of the strongman came back to him, flexing his huge muscles

and clad in a thin, black gymnasium suit. To the boy Daniel, the strong man, with his handle bar moustache, had looked like a sideshow entertainer.

Daniel wrote to Dora, "In my time in Antarctica I have also learnt to be a circus performer."

They began their exercises under Drummer's instructions in the last weeks of the Antarctic summer. Attendance was compulsory.

"From the very beginning," Daniel wrote to Dora, wrote afterwards wanting to make a record of those events, "it was apparent that the exercises were too much for Macalister. The leg exercises were impossible for him and even working with the dumbbells placed too much stress on his balance, causing severe pains in his back and his remaining leg."

"For some reason, Drummer is intractable on this point. He insists that Macalister attempt to work with the weights and stays awake through the night trying to devise suitable exercises for him. Macalister for his part is obdurate, refusing to try anything. It has become a point of honour between them. Macalister thinks, I believe, that he has followed all the ridiculous orders he might ever desire to follow. Drummer sees it as a matter of command, a loss of face in front of his men. We have all been vocal in our support for Macalister. Too vocal, I think now. The closer we move towards the frozen darkness of winter, the more difficult the situation becomes."

The sun was gradually dipping in the sky, every day a little lower, and they tried not to look at it in case they lost their optimism and enthusiasm. The weathermen could not speak of their feelings, only their science; to do otherwise, Daniel thought as he wrote to Dora, seemed to them a betrayal of the reasons for their journey to this ice world. Everything can be understood, they seemed to say, and we are not afraid. There is

nothing to be afraid of in the natural world. Instead they explained the coming changes to him, even in the smallest detail, the ultimate disappearance of the sun, the coming months of darkness; in the same way, Daniel realised, parents reassure themselves when comforting a child.

The fading of the sun intensified his longing for Dora. The feel of the last light on his skin was like the touch of her hand; gentle, barely perceivable. Such small, delicate hands, part of her animal warmth. My mistress' eyes are exactly like the sun, Daniel lay on his bunk and smiled at the ceiling. Over the months apart, he had thought, not of returning to her, but of her coming to him. He imagined her in the Hut's kitchen beside the roaring stove or on one of the sledges, racing away with the dogs. He wanted to feel her breath on him as he slept. He missed the life within her.

As the darkness came, he was freer to work on the press. They had allowed him to set up the hand press in the workroom next to the Hut and there was much interest when he unpacked it. The weathermen jostled for position around the table, eager to help him get the press assembled; tools were brought out, the blocks of type were unwrapped and examined. Some wanted to learn to operate the press and asked if they could print a weekly news sheet. He felt the rush of their schoolboy enthusiasm. Suddenly Daniel too was a teacher.

10.

When the twenty-four hour darkness fell at last, they continued their work by lamplight, struggling out through the whirl of storm and darkness to check the force of the increasing wind, the variations in temperature. They walked, leaning into the fierce wind until their bodies seemed almost horizontal to the ground. It was the only way to avoid being blown over. Macalister carried a strong metal stick with a spiked end for gripping deep into the ground; his third leg he called it.

Nights were the worst. Daniel Bone turned over in his bed. The blizzard enclosed the hut like a giant fist, roaring ferociously. The sound might have been that of a wild animal; and there was, Daniel had always thought, some living quality to the blizzard, it seemed to claim a separate existence of its own. The noise kept him awake. He could hear Macalister snoring in his lower bunk. For some reason, Daniel had not become used to this perpetual force as his companions had. He had had time now, over the nights, to think why. No-one had warned him about the blizzard. He had expected Antarctica to be a land whose supreme qualities would be whiteness and silence, but where he had expected stillness, he found flux. Cole had said to him, There is a system of classifications for winds, called the Beaufort scale, ranging by velocity from calm to hurricane. But for Daniel there was only one Antarctic wind, the blizzard. The wind carries everything away; or around, Daniel thought, around this strange landscape as if were a planet unto itself.

Before he came to Antarctica, Daniel had imagined a world of crystal silences, of the white purity of ice and glacier. A diamond world, he thought, remembering the

illustrations in schoolboy anthologies where some loyal British subject did battle with dark foreign villains in a calm, snowy landscape suspiciously like Austria, if he had known then what Austria was like or where it was. Wherever it was, it was not this blizzard-shaped land. Sometimes it struck him as a strange kind of joke; God's joke, Cole would have said; perhaps he was right.

Daniel turned onto his other side, wanting desperately to sleep. As usual, he saw the light, a pale glow coming in from the common room. Drummer was awake, whether working on new exercises for poor Macalister or going over the day's readings and writing pages of notes. Every day it seemed Drummer would issue some new order invented in the night. Now, he carried out an inspection of each man's bunk every morning. To the roster, Drummer had added innumerable, small tasks that would have been done anyway as a matter of course. One particularly strange rostered duty he had included was to designate a man, on a weekly basis, to taste each meal before the others were allowed to eat. Daniel had protested, arguing violently with Drummer.

"It is not a personal matter concerning your cooking," Drummer had told him, highhandedly. "The food must be checked to ensure that it is cooked properly and free of contaminants."

"What contaminants?" Daniel struggled with his anger, with the desire to strike Drummer.

Drummer had seemed to ignore the question. He turned his back and went towards the workroom where Bryant was again doing battle with the radio.

"Insolence amongst the ranks will not be tolerated, Mr Bone," Drummer had said as he walked away.

What did he mean? Daniel wondered as the blizzard howled around the Hut. Daniel thought that he too might not sleep at all that night. He stared at the light coming from the common room. Drummer would be there in the morning, at the table, the lamp burning faintly as the oil ran out. Drummer had not slept since the darkness began. It was becoming a serious problem, Daniel realised, but an unacknowledged one. Drummer did not sleep at all and it was affecting his judgement. It was important, thought Daniel vaguely, but suddenly the grip of sleep was on him and it was too precious to let go.

In the morning, Drummer was waiting to conduct his inspection as soon as breakfast was finished. He seemed especially energetic this morning, almost springing about the Hut; "electrified", as Bryant described their leader when he was struck by these strange bursts of energy. Daniel knew what Bryant meant. They had stood on the roof of the Hut and watched the spectacular *Australis polaris* as its brilliant, coloured light fractured the Antarctic sky.

"Lightening without a storm," he had written to Dora, "nature's fireworks. The weathermen call it St Elmo's Fire. Only Bryant curses it because it disrupts the wireless."

Drummer began his inspection of the bunks and the men followed him, according to his instructions, as he went from quarters to quarters. Like a strange kind of hospital round, Daniel thought, only with no patients to observe. Peter Cole shared with John Bryant; Drummer was the only one to have very small but private accommodation. On Peter Cole's bed, a lower bunk, there was a square, white piece of paper. Drummer marched over and picked it up at once. It was part of a letter to Cole's family.

Drummer began to read it aloud. "My dearest Charity, winter is at last upon us in earnest...."

"Wait." Cole snatched the letter from Drummer's hand. "This is a private letter to my wife. You cannot read it, aloud or silently."

"Hand me that letter," thundered Drummer. "I must know what it is in it. That's an order, Mr Cole."

"What?" Bryant seemed to rouse himself; on the expedition he was second in seniority to Drummer. He had never exercised his authority before. "Leave it, Howard. It's just a letter to his wife; we all write them. You write them."

Drummer bristled. "I must know what is in that letter."

"Why?" Bryant and Drummer stood facing one another, both solid men, eye to eye. Confronted by Bryant, Drummer appeared to back away from the fight. His stern expression crumpled. He gripped Bryant by the shoulders as if to embrace him.

"You must know the reason, Jack," he whispered desperately to Bryant. "Eyes and ears are everywhere. Even in this place."

Then he turned and went back quickly to his own quarters. The men were left silently staring after him. Something must be done about Drummer, they all knew it, but nobody spoke.

For the rest of that day, they went about their duties, deliberately seeking work outside; finding the blizzard's company was preferable to being with Drummer. Daniel went with Bryant to take the temperature readings from the meteorological screen. Now that they were in winter, there was the constant problem of iced up instruments. Sometimes a device might be enclosed in a thick block of ice that had to be gently prised away. As the men worked, ice crystals clung to their faces and beards and cemented their burberry hats

to their heads. If a man were out too long, his whole face might be covered in an ice mask, risking frost bite.

The gramophone music was blaring from the Hut when Daniel and Bryant trudged home late in their artificial day. Cole and Macalister were already standing by the entrance. The blizzard had fallen into a brief lull, and the music seemed to fill the splinter of void that was created. On the verandah, they found the snow dogs whimpering but unhurt. Inside, the Hut had been turned over as if the hand of the blizzard had reached in and scattered everything. Papers lay on the floor with pots and pans and pieces of equipment and clothing. The fire had been extinguished and Daniel rushed to relight it. He almost laughed with relief to find the embers still hot. Cole lifted the arm of the gramophone and silence returned, or at least the sound of the blizzard as it gathered pace again. Bryant ran into the workroom but this had not been touched and the radio was safe. Drummer was gone.

"Dora, we searched everywhere, even under beds. We called out his name inside the Hut, as if playing some ludicrous child's game. Come out wherever you are! We could not believe, in the beginning, that he had actually gone out into the blizzard. Later when we saw that he had taken his clothing and then found that food supplies and a tent were missing, there was nothing else to do but conclude that Drummer had opened the door and walked out into the storm and the darkness. There is a horror in this kind of arrogant stupidity, like a man walking directly into machine gun fire. The next day we discovered that Drummer had also taken a rifle and some ammunition. God knows what he intends by this. There is no hunting to be done in the winter blizzard; nothing to hunt. John Bryant has assumed command and wants to go hunting for Drummer. Macalister, Cole

and I are against it. We argue that either Drummer is dead or he will come back on his own when he's ready. We're still arguing. Bryant says, 'The bastard's got a gun. Two guns.' But Cole says, 'If he wanted to shoot us, he had plenty of easy chances before he left.' Macalister mumbles that hunting would be a waste of time. I, Dora, I am as usual the outsider, the attendant footman, the spear carrier.

More than a little lonely

where the lessening tail-lights shine

No -not combatants-only

details guarding the line.

Five

Revolutionaries

1.

11th February, 1918.

"Dear Mr Flanagan,

Mr Daniel Bone has asked me to write to you concerning his temporary absence. He has joined an Antarctic expedition and will be away from Australia until the end of the year. I have been working with Mr Bone on his Kipling project and he has requested that I correspond with you while he is away."

Dora paused and sighed. What a dry piece of work. But then this was only the letter of introduction. She hoped she would be on warmer terms with Mr Flanagan in future letters. Future letters, Dora thought happily. She was surprised and pleased when Daniel asked her to write to his friend Mr Flanagan. She felt a childish delight at being invited to join this secret correspondence. Now the mysterious Mr Flanagan might also be her friend.

Later when she had carried the letter to the post box and pushed it through the slot, Dora hugged herself with glee. She felt as if she had been initiated into a clandestine society.

2.

The International Society met on Wednesday nights. They gathered in a small room above a chemist shop. The building was in a laneway, away from the main traffic and, Dora Somerville supposed, the patrols of the local police. The meeting was at eight o'clock in the evening. Afraid of stumbling in late, she had left the house early and rode the tram through the flickering streets. All day there had been the premonition of rain; the air was breathless and rank, and sticky flies clung to the face and any exposed skin. People complained and waited for relief but there was to be no deliverance this time. Now at evening, the over-burdened clouds sank down and suffocated the old city.

Dora had brought an umbrella. She kept it clutched tightly in her lap, her fingers tracing the dry coolness of the fabric as the tram rattled and swayed, clattering through oppressive streets. Windows on the tram were opened in a vain attempt to ease the heat. The voices inside the carriage and outside it seemed unnaturally loud, distorted and almost frightening. The city groaned with exhaustion and the passengers sighed collectively in their weariness. Only the faint odour of the sea, like old familiar perfume, refreshed and lifted hopes a little as the tram turned and descended. Someone, an old man, got on and sat down next to Dora. He smelled of Californian Poppy and mothballs and grumbled about her umbrella whose long shaft had lain across his seat.

"Rain's gone," he grunted, contemptuous of her inability to read the weather. "You won't need that thing, deary."

Unconsciously, Dora gripped the umbrella in her lap. It was Edgar's umbrella, large and dark with a smooth wooden handle; a man's umbrella, thick and heavy like a cudgel. Edgar had carried it lightly. Dora remembered him waving it above his head, testing the direction of the rain, sheltering them both under its wide verandah. She didn't know why she had brought it, having several of her own and her mother's at home. Perhaps she wanted Edgar's company on this journey. She wanted Edgar to see that she was fighting too.

The tram turned into Dalrymple Avenue. Dora was far too early. It occurred to her that she might be waiting for some time, and probably waiting alone on the street in front of a locked door. Men approached you more easily now, especially soldiers. They expected you to go with them. Perhaps as a duty, she wondered, or as an affirmation of the value of their sacrifice? It was impossible to say. Even those asking could not articulate it. A man, a soldier, had come up to Dora once in broad daylight; this was right at the start of the war. She had been waiting for Edgar outside a bakery in the city. Her brother was delayed. Dora realised later that the soldier must have been watching her for some time. He waited until the street had cleared a little and afternoon shadows had begun to encroach before he came up to her. When the soldier spoke to her, at first Dora did not understand. When he spoke bluntly, she recoiled, stepping back to the bakery wall. The soldier pursued her into the shadow, standing over her. Dora felt the rough stone of the bakery against her shoulders, she smelled the warm smell of the bread she was carrying in her arms and could not let go of. She felt her own lightness and smallness of body and the weight of the soldier's presence looming above. But Edgar had appeared suddenly, like a gallant knight, and saved her. She heard a few, hasty words, all Edgar's. The soldier

was gone and in his space, Dora saw her brother, the last rays of the sunset firing his blond hair. He looked like an angel, Dora thought.

"Are you alright?" Edgar put his arm around her. "Did he hurt you?"

She could not speak, only shook her head. Dora saw that she was still holding the bread. Her heart was pounding.

They had walked home quickly, the sound of their footsteps loud in the deserted street. Everywhere she imagined the soldier's presence. He seemed to slide along in the shadows of buildings, shouting his foul words only for her ears. Involuntarily, she brushed her hair with her hand. She wanted him erased, his image, his words, his breath upon her, his touch. When she got home, she had put down the bread and washed her hands and face, scrubbing him away.

Now, riding along Dalrymple Avenue, Dora was watching for the right stop. The tram was almost empty. The conductor dozed in a corner. When she pulled the bell, it sounded as if she had shattered glass. He had believed, that soldier, she could not stop thinking about him, he had believed in his entitlement to her, his right to her, because he was going off to die. His sacrifice required something in return of her or any woman. Such human ugliness, Dora thought as the tram brought her to the very street of her meeting in the chemist shop. War lets out such monsters from inside perfectly ordinary people.

The tram rattled away. Dora went down the short laneway and stood in front of the chemist shop, contemplating her situation. The shop was in darkness but the upper rooms were dimly lit. Tilting her head, Dora could see open windows. She wondered whether she should call out but feared to in case strangers were drawn to her instead, the room being empty. She was conscious of standing under the lamppost, the bright light on her.

In the distance, from the other direction, she could hear the approach of the return tram. If no-one comes, she thought, by the time the tram reaches this stop, I'll get on it and go home. She could hear the tram louder now. I will make a cup of tea and some toast, thought Dora, when I get home. She almost laughed aloud at her pompous domesticity. Dora took a few steps down the street, towards the stop, wanting the tram to come quickly and take her away. A feeling of foolishness was rapidly replacing fear.

The door of the chemist shop suddenly opened, like a theatre curtain. A neatly dressed man stepped out towards her; behind him Dora could see a pale light, perhaps a lamp and scattered papers. The man, as if conscious of his staged entrance, paused on the footpath, allowing her to observe him. Then he gave her a little bow and introduced himself. It was the chemist, David Marks. Dora remembered him at once from the protest march. But now he seemed changed in appearance, more gentlemanly, more dapper, Dora decided.

"Miss Somerville." He pressed her hand to his lips, an unexpected act. He continued to hold her hand, if lightly, after he had raised his head, smiling into her eyes. Dora slowly withdrew her fingers from his. Dora saw also that Mr Marks was older than she had first thought, against the dark hair, there was grey about the temples, across his olive complexion a patina of lines running out from his bright, squirrel eyes. About his hands too, there was a roughness, a dry thickness to his skin that contradicted his general smartness. He saw her studying him and quickly ushered her indoors with a sweep of his arm.

The shop was in near darkness, smelling pleasingly of all its potions and powders, soaps and creams. The only light was a thick, yellow candle whose faint, waxy odour

added to the other scents. Dora looked around and remembered, even in half darkness, how she had once come into this shop to purchase the Marks' patented cough mixture.

David Marks said, "Please excuse coming through the shop. But we prefer our gatherings to be as secret as possible."

"I've been to this shop before," Dora spoke out of her surprise, and regretted it almost as quickly. It must have been years ago that she came here, a long time ago, "when I had a cold. I came to buy cough medicine."

The chemist looked at her and smiled faintly; a superior smile, even condescending.

"My father started this business. We have been here for many years. Our special cough mixture is famous, you know. It would be a pleasure to have you as a regular customer." As he spoke, Marks leant over peering inquisitively into her face. Dora disliked him. Her hand tingled where he had pressed his cold lips.

"Yes." She pushed back her hair, damp with the humid night. "I came here for that, to buy some cough mixture. I'd completely forgotten what it looked like until I walked in; so strange to remember it now." She was gushing and desperately wanted to be silent. The chemist nodded thoughtfully, as if analysing her response, testing its veracity. He did not offer his own comment, only a faint smile and a nod.

Holding the candle over his head, Marks led Dora up a narrow set of wooden stairs. Wax on the candle glistened, some of it dripping on the stairs and the rest falling on the head of the chemist, mixing with his coating of pomade. He opened the door on a small sitting room unexpectedly crowded with men. Dora hung back, discomfited by the loud talk. It was Malachy who stepped forward to draw her into the room, and when he did she saw another woman, leaning against a wooden chair, talking earnestly to a man beside

her. From the minutes, Dora knew that this woman was the journalist, Louise Mottram. So here you are, Dora thought, at least there are two of us. But why should that matter to me? Dora wondered. Malachy made cursory introductions.

"We'll make sure you get a key," said Louise.

Dora realised that they must have seen her waiting in the street, and sent the chemist to fetch her. She glanced towards the window, open but ineffectual in cooling the shabby room. Their eyes unseen, would have been upon her, weighing her up as the chemist had done, deciding that she could be trusted.

Louise and all the men present shook Dora's hand. Again Dora felt the shadow of Europe in their foreign manners, despite their voices and faces. It was strange too, to be amongst so many men in time of war. But this is what we fought for, Dora reminded herself, against conscription, so that men like these could gather in this place and not be forced to kill against their will. She thought of Daniel in their company, circulating with ease, joining arguments and discussions. He would have taken the high ground, the thought ground she had called it one day, frustrated with his lack of pragmatism. She wondered if the International Society regretted his absence. Perhaps they were glad he was gone. The mention of his name raised wry or painful smiles. Ah, the great talker, there was a nodding of heads.

As she moved around the room, meeting people, she heard more of the names familiar to her from the Minutes which she had been painfully typing. Worst of all was deciphering the cramped, smudged hand of the secretary, George Ferris. He was a great, bluff, reddened man she saw now, his sandy hair like the bristles of a brush on his head. His manner too was hearty, even roughish, he winked and laughed and asked loudly

when the cakes would be served. After the whirl of introductions, Dora stood back in a corner looking for Malachy but could not see him. Beside her was a young, fair man, delicately pale; almost, she thought, with the look of an invalid. He was leaning back against the wall, hands in his pockets. He stared deeply into the room and made no effort to speak to other members or to her; not even an acknowledgment of her presence. Dora wondered who he was. He had arrived late, and they had not been introduced. She glanced at him, but he did not look at her, seemingly lost in his thoughts. She had time, standing there, to think about she would write for Daniel.

"Oh Daniel - the members of your International Society were not as I expected and I think I was a little disappointed. No cloth caps or workers' voices, no mad revolutionaries. They were sombre in appearance and earnest in speech, they might have been a gathering of school masters."

Wanting female solidarity, Louise Mottram soon sought Dora in the room and at once they began to talk about Daniel.

"So he has left us for a great adventure?" Louise was tall, almost mannish in her casual air. There was a tone in her voice that Dora could not interpret. Sharp-eyed too. A woman, Dora decided, who had spent long hours in the company of men, debated politics with them, who had stepped away from the expected displays of femininity and, with that act, forfeited the chance to be desirous in men's eyes.

"Yes. I went and waved him off at the ship. It was last week, so he'd still be sailing, not landed yet. The ship was a bit run down actually, rather slow moving, and any way he won't be able to tell me he's arrived safely. No post is possible. I imagine the ship's captain will be able to say that they are ashore when he returns to port."

Louise nodded with an air of understanding, or was it sadness? Dora wondered.

"We miss him here," Louise said. "I miss him. He brought to us, I don't really know, intelligent debate I think. He was never afraid to raise questions or to play devil's advocate. I wish he were here. I think we need him now more than ever."

They were both silent for a moment, words seeming to hang in the air as if, Dora felt, something further was required. Louise might have spoken more about Daniel but George Ferris was calling the meeting to order.

The fair young man Dora had seen earlier was called Nicholas Cossington. He stood in the centre of the room, preparing to address them. He looked boyish, Dora thought, the wise child. She knew from the Minutes what he would speak of. The child spoke of fashioning a pipe bomb and of lignum dynamite which was sawdust soaked in nitro-glycerine, how a timer might be made to attach to a fuse to give precision to the moment of the explosion. He told them all this without the aid of notes; showed no pictures or diagrams, but the easy rhythm of his words left no misunderstanding. There was no tremor in his voice as he spoke, either of fear or fanaticism, only quiet, scholarly authority. He imbued them all with his calmness, a golden boy speaking about destruction. Afterwards, the women, including Louise and Dora, went into a small kitchen to make tea and lay out cakes; there was alcohol too, beer and spirits, as if for a party, Dora noticed, unsettled a little by such levity.

Dora came back into the sitting room, bearing a tray of drinks. Louise carried plates with cakes and biscuits. The tray was a heavy old bakelite one and Dora struggled to carry it together with its weight of glasses. The liquid rolled about in the vessels, a little

of each drink slopping onto the surface of the tray. Dora tried not to look at it. When she went to Malachy, he lifted his drink lightly away.

"Thank you, my dear," he said graciously and toasted her.

Dora smiled weakly.

Malachy leant closer to her. "Daniel Bone is a very lucky man, you know," he whispered.

Malachy watched her as she went on about her duties with the tray. Whenever she looked over at him he would smile and wink at her. Once he blew her a kiss, making George Ferris, who was standing next to him, laugh and spill cake crumbs down the front of his vest. Dora gratefully retreated to the kitchen. She put the heavy tray down onto the table. There was a large puddle in the middle of the tray caused by all her spills. It carried a strange aroma of tea and alcohol. Dora straightened up and stretched. She saw Malachy watching her from across the room. He seemed to have positioned himself to look at her through the doorway. Dora composed herself and returned his stare. But to her disappointment, he was the not the first one to look away.

"What is it about your clever friend, Daniel? He has the greatest ability for throwing people off balance. Is that his revolutionary character? He is truly as deep as a well. I think I will never get to know the depth of him."

3.

After the meeting, Malachy insisted on walking Dora to the tram stop.

"Thank you," said Dora, "it's not very far. The stop's right here at the end of the lane."

But Malachy took her by the arm and waltzed her down the street, whistling as they spun around.

"Who knows what dangers might be lurking in the night," he said lightly. "A young lady might fall prey to any number of young men who can't dance as well as me."

Dora half laughed with pleasure and half sighed with the bad memory of the soldier.

"Look here it is, just arriving," she said as they reached the stop.

The tram rattled to a standstill and its doors slammed open. Still holding Dora by the arm, Malachy leapt up the stairs and dropped them both into a seat.

"Are you coming with me?" asked Dora, bemused.

"Looks like it." Malachy paid the conductor and settled back against the seat.

"Why?"

"Because I'm the kind of gentleman who likes to see a lady safely to her door."

Dora shook her head, grinning. Further serious conversation appeared hopeless.

When they left the tram, Malachy seized Dora's arm again and began to whistle loudly as they walked down Ramage Street, towards her house.

"Ssh, be quiet will you," Dora pleaded.

"Why?" Malachy stopped whistling.

From the corner of her eye, Dora saw a curtain flutter in a nearby front window.

"You're making a spectacle of yourself - and me. Besides, it's late. People are in bed."

Malachy smiled and gave her a funny little bow. But he remained silent until they reached Dora's front verandah. Dora got out her key to open the door.

"Here let me," said Malachy and in a moment he had the door open and sprang over her threshold. Like a cat, thought Dora, a sleek black cat waiting for its chance.

Malachy graciously held the door for her and bowed again as she entered.

What does he mean by all of this? Dora wondered, not annoyed but wearied now.

Malachy walked into the front room. "You know, I've been here so many times and you've only let me into your work room, your dining-room I mean. I've never been in here. You're not at all a good hostess, you know. I feel like a customer not a friend."

Dora followed him. He was standing by the window, peering out into the darkened street as if watching for someone.

Dora went over to him. "You *are* a customer," she said wryly, "and you have been here precisely three times, which doesn't qualify as 'many' at all."

Malachy turned to look at her. "But I am your friend I hope?" He said solemnly.

"Yes, of course." Dora felt a little flustered. Why was Malachy here?

The clock on the mantel chimed eleven, taking them both by surprise.

"Oh no, now you've missed the last tram," Dora sighed. "You'll have to walk miles to get home."

Malachy groaned and looked at Dora beseechingly. "If only I had a good friend I could stay with."

Dora folded her arms. "You can't stay here. What will people say?"

Malachy shoved his hands in his pockets. "But you used to stay at Daniel's. What did these mysterious people have to say about that?"

Dora blushed. Who had told him that? she wondered.

"Yes but that was Daniel's house, not mine."

Malachy shrugged. "Tell them I'm your cousin from the bush. Tell them I was gassed and can't get it up any more. What does it matter? Why do you care about the opinion of a few bourgeois crones? You said yourself: they're all in bed."

Malachy strode across the room and out into the hallway. As he went up the stairs, Dora scurried after him, speechless.

"You must have a spare room somewhere in this pile." Malachy opened the door to Edgar's room. "Whose is this? Your father's old room?"

He was standing in the middle of the rug, turning around slowly.

"Nice bedroom, very manly."

Malachy went over to the wardrobe and looked inside. He touched Edgar's coat gently.

"Does someone else live here?"

Dora spoke, her voice breaking a little. "This was my brother's room, Edgar's room."

Malachy nodded sympathetically. "What a waste of a life. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come in."

He ushered Dora out of her brother's room and she opened the next door, her parent's old bedroom. It had been cleaned out and tidied long ago. There were no painful memories in this place.

"Here. You can sleep in here."

"Thanks." Malachy looked around with approval.

Dora said, "I'll show you where the bathroom and kitchen are. Lavatory's down the back."

As they moved to the door, Malachy grabbed her hand and pulled her against him. He kissed her on the lips, wrapping his arms around her and briefly laying his head on her shoulder.

"Thanks friend." Malachy said, looking into her eyes and smiling his beautiful smile. Dora did not smile back. Slowly she rubbed her hand across her lips.

"I'll get the towels and sheets," she said quietly.

Malachy released her. Dora walked off, leaving Malachy in the room. She was not afraid of Malachy but she did not know quite what to do about him. In the morning, Dora decided, peering into the linen press, I will tell him that he has to find somewhere else to live.

4.

Malachy Mara left the house, whistling, just after nine. Dora waited until she heard the front door close before she cautiously went to the window to see where he was going. He was walking down Ramage Street towards the tram stop. Dora snatched her hat from the coat stand and slipped out of the door after him. Malachy was walking quickly and she almost had to run to keep up with him.

As she passed number 11, Mrs Preston called to out to her. "Dora! Dora my dear!" There was no choice but to stop. Dora sighed as she saw Malachy disappearing. Mrs Preston was tending to her roses and Mr Trembath at number 9 and Mr and Mrs Browning at number 13 were also busy with various plants and pruning saws and seedlings and cuttings. They all came over to their respective front fences when Dora stopped. Mr Trembath and Mr Browning put their worn, weathered hands onto the wooden fence posts. Dora could see the blue veins standing out like threads amongst the lines and grooves. Her neighbours stared at her, their eyes bright and inquisitive within the masks of old age. She almost saw the ghosts of her parents standing amongst them.

"Dora my dear." Mrs Preston was wearing an enormous wide brimmed hat with a fine net veil which gave her the curious appearance of a bee-keeper. "Who is that lovely young man staying at your house? Is he a friend of poor Edgar's?"

Dora glanced after Malachy. She could still see him. He had not turned towards the tram but had crossed Hawker Street into Cummins Street.

Dora's mind raced. "He's a cousin from the country. He's just returned in fact. He was injured, by a gas attack and shellshock. He's here to recuperate before going back,"

"What bravery," said Mrs Preston sweetly.

"Oh yes," the others chimed in, "real courage."

"You must take him around and introduce him," said Mr Trembath. "We'd all like to shake his hand."

Inwardly Dora groaned. "He can't. Not yet. Doctor's orders, I'm afraid. He's only to associate with family until his health improves."

"What a pity," sighed Mrs Browning.

"Excuse me. I'm late for an appointment." Dora hurried away. She could feel them watching her. They would be weighing up her words and discussing her guest amongst themselves. In the far distance she could see a figure she thought might be Malachy. He had walked the whole long straight length of Cummins Street.

Malachy Mara walked quickly down the road towards the sagging old boarding house. Dora who had been following him for almost an hour was glad to stop and hide behind a jacaranda tree. Her feet burned in her shoes and the backs of her legs ached. From the tree she could see the boarding house, Treflen, it was called. She wondered if it was some kind of puzzle or anagram. More than that, she was angry with Malachy. He had walked back to his home instead of taking the tram. He had been renting a room in Treflen from the owner, a widow named Mrs Creek, for the past two years. Malachy walked in the shadows of trees and buildings, his coat tightly wrapped around his body and his hat pulled down tight and low on his head. As he got closer to the boarding house, Malachy slowed his pace until he stopped under a large fig tree which overhung a high wall. Dora could see policemen standing on the front steps. Mrs Creek was there too, waving her hands and blustering like a great, stout handkerchief in the wind. Malachy stood back, as

if watching to see what would happen. The policemen took their leave and Mrs Creek stumped back up the steps into the house. Malachy turned and walked quickly away. He gave a strange little smile as he strode along. Dora had to stand very still behind the tree as he walked passed her. She crept after him.

At the tram stop, Malachy took a freshly rolled lit cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. He blew the smoke up into the air, staring in front of him as if deep in thought. Dora watched, uncertain of what to do now. They had argued that morning because she wanted him to leave, saying she was worried about her reputation. Malachy had told her not to worry. There, there, he seemed to say. Everything will be alright. As Dora watched from across the road, Malachy grimaced and threw his butt into the gutter. Immediately, he lit another cigarette, inhaling deeply and blowing out a great plume of smoke. He had begged Dora to be allowed to stay, calling on his friendship with Daniel, the grand plans of the International Society, and she had relented, almost worn down by his pleading. Now she was worried by the idea that the police were looking for him.

The tram pulled up at the stop with a shudder. She saw Malachy get on at the back, in the men only, smoking section. The conductor was waiting for him. Malachy took out his cigarette and was fishing in his pocket for the coins. He was going back to Ramage Street, she realised. Dora watched as the tram pulled away, unsure more than ever about what to do.

Later, Dora laid out Malachy's lunch on the table, corned beef left from earlier in the week. They had not spoken much; he seemed distracted by plans and Dora felt overwhelmed by her dilemma. As Dora put the plate down in front of him, Malachy reached up and pulled a jacaranda flower from her hair.

"Where have you been today?" he asked her, crushing the purple petals between his fingers.

5.

She wrote to Daniel, "Your comrade Malachy has come to stay and I do not know what to do with him. He has moved all his things here and filled my parents' old room with what seems like hundreds of books. None of them is a novel or poetry book but all are political tracts. He is very courteous around the house, helping with the washing up and carrying heavy parcels. He has said he will even cook me a meal, a Hungarian goulash, whatever that is...."

Dora stopped writing. She was not sitting at the small bureau in her bedroom where she usually wrote in her journal. She had merely been enjoying a brief rest from typing work when she decided to write to Daniel. Dora carried her journal with her these days, not out into the street (she kept a notebook in her handbag for writing on the run) but she carried it between her bedroom and workroom, the two writing rooms in the house as she thought of them now. Autumn had arrived suddenly this year, "a cold snap" she read in the newspaper and thought that this was an entirely appropriate description. Malachy had helped her carry the kerosene heater in from the shed. Its blue glow and bitter smell was something Dora found comforting. It carried her backwards into winters past that she had spent with Daniel Bone. Dora rested her pen on the page and thought about what else she might write for him. There was the problem of another kiss, or the problem of her silence over another kiss. She felt it was too hard to write about such things.

"Oh Daniel, why did you let me meet your clever, beautiful friend? Now I am in a dreadful mess and betraying you. You who have always been such an independent

person, you who are a man, cannot imagine how comforting it is for me to have a man in house again. But I'm scared too, about what is happening with your International Society. Malachy confides in me about his plans and then tells me that no-one must know where he is living. I feel as if I am living a double life. Your clever, beautiful friend has made me into a liar."

6.

11th May, 1918.

“Dear Mr Flanagan,

Thank you for the most recent clippings and your charming letter. I am sure Mr Bone will be delighted with these poems. Do you like Mr Kipling's verse? I do not believe you have ever told me and Mr Bone has never mentioned your preference. Sometimes I think that I despise Mr Kipling for his hackneyed rhymes and glib assertions but then he will say something so perfectly sublime that I am touched by his verse and cannot hate him after all.

Ultimate issues, primal springs,

Demands, abasements, penalties-

The imperishable plinth of things

Seen and unseen that touch our peace.

That is how my world is, you know, the imperishable cornerstone has not been shattered. The war is a distant aberration; even the post still gets delivered....”

7.

Alone in the bed at night, Dora ran her hands over her body. She had lost weight after Edgar died and now, losing more in the months since Daniel had left her, she felt that her body was taut and hard, as if she had been boiled down to her essence. In the darkness Dora raised her hands and traced her features. Lately it seemed to her that she looked different, too. In her face there were new expressions that she had never seen before, a kind of hard light in her eye, Dora decided, as if her very nature had changed.

These days she went regularly with Malachy to the meetings of the International Society. He always dressed for the gathering. Dora watched him preen before the mirror. Sometimes he wore a neat brown bowtie and she would tie it for him while he embraced her with his strong arms. She was the one who waited, idling before the door, swinging her umbrella back and forward as if to mark the time with a pendulum. From the passageway, this night as any other, she could see Malachy slicking down his hair. His clothes, she decided, were quite ordinary but they were not the clothes of a worker. He prefers to look the sympathetic intellectual, Dora thought. Trotsky, he's decided he's Trotsky. It was the puzzle of Malachy that intrigued her. He was a man she could not grasp, who slipped easily through her fingers.

They walked out together; as if we were a courting couple, Dora thought, or is this too part of Malachy's disguise? On dry, cold evenings in winter, they went down the avenue of plane trees to the Earl of Zetland and sat in the Lounge. Sometimes couples they knew

would be there and would join them at one of the larger round tables. Malachy would sit next to Dora, leaning back in his chair, his arm resting lightly on the back of her chair. If she chose to look into his face at such moments, Dora would see that feline look of satisfaction which she knew. He was displaying her before the eyes of those present, men and women, and taking his pleasure in their envy at her beauty. See what I have won, Malachy might have said if he had spoken his thoughts. Dora watched as if from a distance, without rancour. She was used to this, her mother had displayed her too. See what I have made, her mother might have said. What's beauty? Dora thought. What's it worth, a marriage prospect, perhaps? She might smile then, for Malachy, to see the enjoyment he took in the creature that she was.

Other times, when the old pub was quiet, Malachy would spy one of his male cronies and disappear into the front bar and Dora would sit alone, sipping her drink, glad of the solitude and reading the book she had brought with her. But if Louise joined her, the two women would talk cautiously, avoiding subjects that could not be discussed in public. Louise did not read, or not in the voracious way that Dora devoured books, so they could not talk much about reading. Louise was writing for a radical paper and sometimes she brought her articles with her for Dora to look at. The thick white sheets of proofs were laid out on the table between their glasses and Dora would read them carefully checking for spelling mistakes or dropped words, or making comments on the style but never on the politics. They might sit in silence after that and order another drink. Inevitably, they were drawn into a discussion of Daniel.

After closing time, Louise came back for tea. That night, there were no clouds and the stars were out. Dora looked up at them through the silvery branches of the plane trees.

The sky seemed to have cracked open like an old saucepan, showing the pathway to infinity. Malachy and Louise were speaking of the state of the world but Dora did not hear them. Her heart was full of longing for Daniel and his talk of books.

At the door of Ramage Street, Dora let Malachy and Louise into the house and they trundled down the hallway, still talking, and into the kitchen for their dinner. Dora put the door key back into her pocket, feeling its weight. Her key was still in her possession. She had not bothered to get a copy made for Malachy and he had not asked. But then, they never locked the door in the daytime and she only locked it at night because Malachy wanted her to. Dora went and lit the oven. She had made a steak and kidney pie earlier in the day and it waited in there for her to heat.

Malachy and Louise lounged on the kitchen chairs, watching her as Dora set out the plates.

"What's this?" Louise had picked up a brown paper package from the middle of the table. The package was open and various papers protruded from inside it. She turned the parcel over and looked at the address. "Oh, it's for Daniel."

"It's mine." Dora reached over and lightly pulled the parcel away. Louise threw her empty hands up into the air. She gave Dora her sharp-eyed look, feigning shock.

"Excuse me. I didn't mean to trespass. I thought the parcel belonged to Malachy." Louise folded her arms demurely in her lap and looked sweetly at Dora. Malachy looked on, amused.

Dora fumbled with the cutlery. "Daniel has asked me to look after some business things for him while he's away; to keep things going. He has to come back to some kind of work. I just help him out."

She rewrapped the parcel and placed it on the dresser. Dora gently smoothed down the paper. It was another package from Flanagan. She especially did not want them to see the letter. "My dear Miss Somerville...." Flanagan had written. Dora was enjoying this correspondence; it reminded her deliciously of her hidden reading as a child. Flanagan, she felt now, was her secret friend too; hers and Daniel's. It was for this reason, Dora supposed, that she had never said a word to Malachy about the Kipling, as if to even mention it would be against all propriety, like discussing an act of intimacy with an outsider, disloyal to both self and other. There are some betrayals, she thought, that cannot be borne even by the worst traitor.

8.

Dora sat in the near darkness, leaning forward over her writing. There was only an old oil lamp for her to see by. Outside, through the frosty window, the full moon provided a faint glow, obscured by the flywire. She sat with a shawl draped over her shoulders. Lately, she had been feeling an impenetrable sense of coldness that she could not shake no matter how thick her clothes or how hot the fire. Dora paused in her writing and looked up, watching the tiny, dusty moths that had gathered around the lamp. She knew that there was something untrue about all this, writing in darkness, a lamp, a shawl, a spinster; by rights she should have had a quill feather in her hand. Pretending to be Emily Bronte perhaps, Dora thought and could not help smiling then. Daniel would scorn such dramatics; he had loathing for the flamboyant in any guise. Dora stood up, shaking off the shawl, and put the light on.

Who will see me anyway? She thought and sat down to continue with the journal. She ran her hands through the burden of her hair, knowing there were ink stains on her fingers and not caring. She reread what she had already written and was perplexed. What had she been trying to tell him?

"How leaves moving in the wind cast a reflection like water! When I am lying in bed, I watch the pattern on the white sheet. Right now the wind is blowing and splattering the glass with a few drops of rain, but shall I open the window? Will the breeze be too cold for me? Will my hair be full of water? You always liked rain, Daniel; you would open

windows to let it in. Does it ever rain where you are now, I wonder? Or is there only snow falling and falling at the bottom of the world?

Sometimes when I am lying in bed, I am naked under the sheet. I do this to remind me of us. This is the strangest, best thing about love-making, this absolute nakedness. I wonder if it is the same for everybody? When I was a young girl, I remember how my grandmother made me take a bath in my nightgown so that I would not embarrass her or myself with the exposure of my bare flesh. She died soon after. I remember the hot, black dress I wore to her funeral. My mother was not so puritanical. I think my father might have been, though he hid it; it was his dour Presbyterian mother who bathed me in my nightdress. But my own mother had been born on the edge of the ocean and so she knew of the secret, wondrous pleasure of water on skin.

Once we had a bath together, do you remember Daniel? We were very drunk after a party and you struggled to light the chip heater, almost setting your own clothes alight. When the tub was full, we jumped in and then we couldn't stop laughing. We ended by splashing and dunking one another- we were too drunk for anything else. I remember that my hair was very wet and took ages to dry. "What beautiful hair you have, Dora." That was one of the last things Edgar said to me. For some reason, that phrase goes round and round in my head and I can't seem to stop it. I can't seem to silence it. What's the matter with me, Daniel?"

Dora stopped writing and closed her journal. She was already in her night-clothes and Malachy was out on his mysterious business. Some nights she lay awake thinking she could hear Malachy breathing in the next room. She could almost feel his animal presence, the warmth of his body. Once she woke up and thought he was in the room but

as her eyes adjusted to the darkness, the shape of a man she thought she saw had vanished. Do I want him to come to me? Dora thought, or am I just lonely, waiting for Daniel?

Dora lay down on her bed and fell into a dream at once. She dreamed of the Angel of Mons flying with his great wings over the battlefields of France, not saving soldiers but reaping with a great scythe the souls of those who had fallen. It seemed to Dora in her dream that she looked down upon the angel, and on the rising souls and the battlefield. Below, Dora could see that the ground was stained red with blood. They'll never get it out, Dora thought, even with borax.

9.

Malachy cornered her by the linen cupboard. Dora ducked but he was ready for her this time and put his arm down to block her escape. They were both used to this game. He enjoyed tormenting her, Dora decided. He only meant it as a kind of game, for his own amusement or to keep her on edge for some reason. Dora stood up straight and folded her arms across her chest. She tried to stare Malachy down but he laughed at her defiant display. He grabbed her in his great arms and held her for a moment, letting her feel the strength of his body. Then he kissed her lightly on the forehead, winked and went out whistling. She heard him slam the door. Dora pressed her hands to the sides of her face. “Come back,” she said, her voice hard in the empty house. “Come back, Daniel. Come back right now.”

In the evenings, Daniel, I sit with your clever friend, Malachy in the front room and sometimes we listen to the wireless or play music on the gramophone. It sounds like a scene of domestic bliss, doesn't it? Alas, it is not; Malachy is only interested in hearing the news reports and the music he likes to play is rather strident and Russian. He works away on his manifesto to the accompaniment of these raucous sounds. Now and again he pauses, puts down his pen and reads to me from what he has written, his plans for the new world order. I am his student he tells me, as well as his help-mate, and apparently I am in great need of re-education. He has given me a huge pile books which he wants me to read; every one is some kind of political tract or pamphlet. If he catches me reading something else, a novel or poetry, he becomes angry and I am lectured on the need to harden my mind and put away books that will make my mind weak and cowardly.

He is giving a great many more speeches these days, and not just to members of the Society. Discontent with the war is growing, especially amongst workers. Things are changing at the Society too. George Ferris does not laugh so much as he used to and Nicholas Cossington has moved more to the centre of things, standing or sitting beside Malachy as he addresses the group. We are smaller in number too; members have left us after the most violent arguments with Malachy, shouting and throwing of objects even. Malachy will tolerate no opposition to his rule, no contrary voice to his plans. We are down to the loyal core now, Malachy says. The true fighters.

10.

Some nights, Malachy brought women back to the house in Ramage Street. They came in very late but Dora heard them despite their efforts to be quiet. The floor boards groaned under their feet, and the front door was beginning to need oiling, so that it squeaked a little on its hinges. Lying in bed Dora thought she might go out one Friday and buy a small oil can at Farrady's. But she knew even as she lay there that it would sit unused in the laundry. She preferred to know the comings and goings under her own roof.

Sometimes, Malachy and his companion were more than a little drunk. They stumbled in the dark hallway and tripped going up the stairs. She heard their stifled laughter. In Dora's mind, this woman - these women were all Louise. In truth, she had no idea who they were, or even if they are one or many. But she wanted to imagine that it was Louise in Malachy's bed, partly because she had never understood the male preference for anonymous sex, and partly because the presence of this woman in bed with Malachy, strangely eased her longing for Daniel. When she heard the front door open, Dora closed her eyes tightly and imagined it was Daniel coming to her. She was transported; no longer in her own home but waiting in the bedroom of his narrow house. Breezes from the balcony moved the curtains in this room. Through the open doors, Dora could smell the rain coming. Daniel's footsteps were on the stairs, she could hear him drawing closer...

Daniel, I miss you so much that my body aches. I try not to write these words too often. I know that you will think that I am a weakling or worse. But these thoughts are always in

my mind and it would be false of me not to write them down. Please forgive me, Daniel, if these are not the words of the stalwart lover, patiently embroidering while she waits for her man to return. But for me such niceties were always borrowed finery. The agony of your absence has stripped me of them as this dreadful war has stripped so many of my companions. Now we huddle naked on the threshold of the past, waiting to leap forward into your arms.

Six

THE BOMB MAKERS' PARTY

1.

11th August, 1918

“Dear Mr Flanagan,

Thank you for your clippings. I was deeply moved by the beautiful poem, *Gethsemane*.

So at last the poet of the empire has understood and turned against the war. I hope that he can carry more influence than we do who live at the bottom of the world....”

Dora had a key to Daniel’s house. He had given it to her as he was leaving. She wore it on a ribbon around her neck because she did not want Malachy or anyone else to find it. She went there every day, wandering about in the rooms, sometimes waving a duster or pushing a broom. No-one questioned her presence; the neighbours smiled at her.

“Taking care of the place for him are you, love? You’re a good girl to help him out.”

There was coldness to Daniel’s house now that it was uninhabited. The stale smell of soot hung in the air from the disused fireplaces. As winter approached, the house became darker. Even in the daytime, the tall terrace seemed to cast a shadow over itself. Dora wandered amongst the long shadows, lay on Daniel’s bed or sat on the balcony. She preferred the balcony to anywhere else in the house. Here she could almost smell their last cigarettes, their last cups of tea, their warm, subdued bodies after love making.

I went to your house but you weren’t there, not even your ghost. Instead, I am the ghost, strolling aimlessly through the rooms and looking for you every where. For the briefest

second, I thought that I might banish Malachy to your tall tower. But I could not bear the thought of him in our bed. Anyway, I do think that he would come here. He told me last night that I was his best disguise. I do not want to be a disguise Daniel, I want to be your girl again.

2.

One Saturday night, there was a bomb-makers' party. They came to Dora's house and danced on the kitchen table while the gramophone played on the ice chest. Some brought their wives and girlfriends. Dora served drinks on her mother's best silver tray and wondered what these women knew. There was laughter, Dora remembered later, whether it was the laughter of not knowing or of forgetting, she could not say. Cossington, the beautiful boy, came alone. He spent the whole evening sipping a single sherry and watching everyone else dancing. What is he thinking? Dora wondered. That this is a world worth blowing away?

They ate dinner under the back verandah between the wash-house and the bougainvillea which was covered in purple flowers. It was late in winter, almost spring, and the women wore shawls over their dresses and that was enough. For a table, Malachy and George Ferris had carried out her father's long work bench from the garden shed. Dora covered it with a white linen quilt and thought that it looked like an altar even though she could only afford tallow candles and the flowers strewn down the centre came from her own plot of earth, the hibiscuses and geraniums and cuttings from the frangipani. Dora made a huge pot of rabbit stew and Louise a vat of potato soup. George Ferris, whose wife Susannah came from Hungary, brought European wine that was dark and heavy on the tongue. Cossington surprised everyone when he emerged from his silence at the end of the stew and produced a huge, thick trifle in a chipped, blue basin. He said that his mother had made it.

When the meal was finished, the women did not retire; they stayed with the men, drinking and smoking. Louise had demanded this; she got up on her chair and made a speech demanding they remain, demanding the death of such conventions which kept women from all that was important in the world. Her sisters cheered and they seemed to laugh more loudly and talk more boldly after this victory. Like children let out for the day, Dora thought, but realised that she thought it smiling, remembering her secret evenings with Daniel on his balcony. She looked up, still smiling, and saw Malachy, tall in the candlelight, standing at the end of the table, his hands raised as though he might confer a blessing on those assembled. It was late, Dora realised, long after midnight; it might even be close to dawn, the sky was so black and the air noticeably colder.

Malachy was speaking. He was standing at the head of the table, glass in hand and swaying a little because there was something, Dora decided sleepily, in that dark foreign wine that made the head delightfully airy so that you might float away light as a white feather and lodge in the bougainvillea or rise on up to the iridescent stars. Malachy too seemed to have entered this hypnotic state and, set free, he began to speak the words of his manifesto.

Malachy lifted his glass in a toast: "To the world wiped clean of the evils of usury and of capital," (general cheering), "an end to the oppression of workers and the murder of soldiers in the name of empire," (more cheering). Malachy grinned, warming up: "To the first day of the new era, to year zero, to the beginning of a new way of thinking, to a new, pure, white humanity," (more, louder cheers), "and to everlasting peace." There were roaring cheers now and everyone was standing, glasses high in the air: "Everlasting peace."

3.

The day after the party, Dora looked up from her typing, seeing the garden with its neat row of oleanders down the side and then the street beyond the fence. Both were deserted. The day was cold and the sunlight was gentle on the skin. Dora stretched her arms above her head and yawned; she had been sitting for too long she decided. The room was stuffy. She got up and opened the window, the air rushed in, carrying the scent of the winter sunlight. Sunlight is the best disinfectant her mother had once told her. Dora's eyes rested on the bright, bare garden and she remembered Malachy's words from the night before: the world wiped clean....

"My dearest Daniel, Every day now, there is only the bomb, and discussion of the bomb; we talk of nothing else. The subject consumes each meeting. It is as if everything that went before, our rallies and protests, were nothing, although there is still much talk of ending the war. We move forward to the day of the bomb, narrow and blind, as a bullet travels down the barrel of a gun."

4.

A few days later, one cold evening, Dora argued with Malachy as they walked to the Zetland. It was all about Isobel Adams and the Pacifists. It had begun to rain as they walked along and they ran and stood under a pine tree in someone's front garden, Malachy holding his coat over Dora's head. The shower was brief and as they stepped out they both saw something glistening on the footpath. Malachy bent down to pick up a handful of silver coins.

"Don't touch them." Dora frowned.

"Why not?" Malachy's fingers hovered over his prize. "This'll pay for our drinks tonight and tomorrow as well."

"You don't know who's dropped them." Dora felt squeamish. "They might have been in some dirty old Indian's pocket."

Malachy laughed. "Money's money," he said and scooped up the coins. "What a prude you are, Dora. Anyway there'll be no Indians here, no Chinas, no blackbirds, once we stop this war and the workers are free."

"But there is none here now." Dora was angry at Malachy's rebuke. She had not even been thinking when she spoke; they were just words she had often heard from her grandmother as a child.

"But they're waiting," Malachy counted the coins into his pocket. "The coloured hordes are waiting for their chance to overrun us; sliding down the map from their Asian hovels and bringing disease and anarchy."

Dora was quiet for a moment.

"Isobel Adams had a Chinese cook who seemed quite clean. He came with her aunt on a visit from Shanghai." Dora's thoughts were racing and tripping over each other.

"Anyway, getting out of the war is what matters; stopping the war and bringing peace."

Malachy laughed. "Isobel Adams! Don't tell me you still associate with that upper class bitch. What good do the Pacifists do? Make a bit of noise and no-one listens. Farting in the wind, that's all they're up for."

Malachy began to walk on but Dora remained behind, unmoving. His language made her shiver. Some words cannot be let go and forgotten, Dora decided. Not that word any way. Malachy turned when he realised she wasn't with him.

"Come on, Dora. George and Susannah will be waiting for us; Louise too."

Dora did not move. "She's not that, you know; Isobel I mean. They're not like that. The Pacifists believe in what they do. Some of them have lost contact with family and friends because of what they believe. There are no upper class garlands for going against the war. They're seen as traitors to their class."

Dora heard her voice as if it belonged to someone else and was surprised. She was defending Isobel Adams and with her the Women's Pacifist League; perhaps all pacifists, she thought.

"Isobel believes in what she does; she wants to stop the war as much as you and I do. And she's no coward. Once I saw her accost a policeman who was ripping down our posters. She kept hitting him with her umbrella and shouting that she was going to report him to the sergeant."

Dora gave a short laugh.

"In the end she was taken off to the station to be charged with assaulting a police officer."

Malachy was watching her intently, a street light illuminated him as if he were a character on a stage. "And then she went to gaol, did she?"

"No, her father's a judge and I suppose he said something to someone...." Dora's voice trailed away in the cold darkness of the night.

Malachy grunted. "It was a gesture, that's all. No help to anyone"

Dora looked down, still thinking. She walked over and joined Malachy so that she could speak more quietly. "Isn't that what you want with your bomb, a great gesture?" Malachy put his arm gently around her shoulder.

"No, nothing like it, in fact the very opposite of a gesture," he said. "I want the world to understand that we must change or die. And I want to be the means of that change, in this country at least."

Dora looked at him and saw that his eyes were burning as they sometimes did when he spoke of revolution. They burned she realised without seeing her or the world outside.

"Come on," she said. "Let's catch up with the others."

5.

"Daniel - The day of the bomb has been set for 11th October. The International Society meets almost every night now. There is much discussion about the architecture of common train stations and the time-tables of trains."

"What do the time tables matter?" Dora asked. She was sitting on the carpet watching Louise sort large bundles of paper. "Won't the bomb go off at midnight? All the services will be finished by then."

"The time of explosion has not been finally settled," said Malachy. He was deep in discussion with George Ferris and another member, Martin Shanks, but he still heard her and answered the question she had directed to Louise. As he spoke Dora felt the hair stand up on the back of her neck.

"We cannot kill people," she said. "That has been agreed already. No-one must be hurt by the bomb. It would be wrong to put lives at risk. Nothing's worth that."

The room was crowded with people. Everyone else stopped what they were doing and looked at Dora. Malachy's stare was the worst. Dora cringed in her seat.

"Go back to your pacifists," Malachy said. His voice was so quiet and controlled that Dora almost fainted. She returned his look, dumbfounded. Her mouth hung open a little, and she felt her lips drying out and her tongue curling.

"Go back to your pacifists," Malachy said again.

"What?" Dora could hardly get words out. She stood up.

"You heard me." Malachy began to raise his voice against her. "If you're not with us, Dora, then go. I don't want any simpering cowards working with me. No doubters, Dora.

I need the absolute loyalty of every man and woman in this room. I know that I have it from everyone else here tonight. What about you?"

There were murmurs from the others. Malachy came over and stood close to her; as if we might embrace, Dora thought. He picked up her hands and held them between his own.

"Look at me, Dora," he said. "Do I have your absolute loyalty?"

Everything and everyone in the room seemed frozen.

"And I said yes to him, Daniel. Yes, yes, Malachy; of course Malachy. Daniel, I am afraid. You are not here to hold me and I am so very afraid."

6.

In the room above the chemist shop, their plans gradually fell into place. Every detail was painstakingly considered. Of course they do not want to leave anything to chance, Dora realised, but also they wanted to make their mark count. The selection of the particular station, the time of the train, six o'clock in the evening, it was all aimed at Malachy's hated bourgeoisie, at the supporters of capital and empire.

"These are the men who sent your brother off to fight but were too cowardly to go themselves," Malachy had told her.

The placement of the bomb, the route to the station, what they would do after the bomb had exploded, Malachy's message to the newspapers; they had planned everything in the most minute detail.

They cannot afford to fail, Dora thought. They? She wondered. Why am I thinking of my friends as "they"?

At a meeting, late one Thursday, Malachy made an announcement. "We have decided that a woman will do it. A woman will carry the pipe bomb and place it in the designated area of the railway station. There will be less chance of detection. A woman carrying a large bag, wearing gloves, will not attract much attention. Dora, Louise, lots will be drawn to decide which one of you it is, but the draw will not take place until the night before."

It was towards the end of the meeting. Malachy spoke sitting in his chair, nursing a drink. He did not ennoble his decision by standing up and calling the meeting to

attention. He spoke in the same tones in which he had said, "This particular station has been selected" or "George will organise delivery of my letter to the press".

He spoke as if it were a practical decision. Perhaps for him, Dora hoped, that was all it was. Dora and Louise were sitting next to one another on the small settee under the window. They had been discussing Daniel but were silenced by this pronouncement, both lowering their eyes as if out of some modesty. Dora wondered what Louise had known about this. When she dared to look at the other woman, Dora saw the same pallor on Louise's skin as she felt on her own. Louise was staring at Malachy as if her eyes might bore right through him. Her mouth was drawn tight. She was angry, Dora realised, angry as well as afraid.

"But perhaps it was horror, not anger," Dora thought later, writing to Daniel, "the realisation that we who made the tea and laid out the cakes and did the washing up might also be given the dirtiest work. Neither of us had expected this."

Afterwards, in the kitchen and away from the men, Louise and Dora tried to talk, each unsure of the other's feelings, each ignorant as to whether the other already knew of their assignment. They were doing the washing up by then. Dora had boiled the kettle and poured it, steaming, over the plates and glasses which were already covered with cold water from the tank. The hot water scalded the plates and sent fragments of cake and biscuit spinning in the void of the sink. Dora watched as if mesmerised, her hands gripping the handle of the heavy kettle.

Louise said, "Should we wrap this sultana cake for next time?" She was holding the left over half of the cake on a plate, as if offering it to Dora.

Dora put the kettle down on the drain board and said, "Did you know? I mean before Malachy spoke this evening, did you know it would be one of us?"

Louise looked down at the plate for a moment. Then she walked over to the dustbin and threw in the sultana cake and the plate as well.

"Damn. Damn. Damn." Louise directed her words to the bin.

Dora watched her anxiously. "You didn't know, did you, Louise?"

Louise said, "This is not right; it's all wrong. I'm supposed to write about the explosion for my newspaper. Malachy and I talked about it; we agreed. I'm supposed to go to the scene afterwards. Someone might remember me if I'm there twice."

"Did you know who would carry the bomb, Louise?"

Louise shook her head. "Malachy doesn't share that sort of thing with me. We're not that close, you know. It's only politics we have in common."

Louise looked directly at Dora. "But I've had my bets any way; everyone has been speculating about who it would be. And actually Dora, if you want to know, I thought that it would be you who would carry the bomb and I thought you would do it gladly, perhaps even think of it as an honour. So there you are; shows how little we know each other, doesn't it?"

Louise started to walk out of the room.

"Please wait," Dora called.

Louise stopped at the door.

"Why?" Dora asked. "Why did you think that about me?"

Louise said, "Because of your brother. I thought you would want revenge for his death."

Louise walked out; Dora heard her say goodnight and the door slamming. Louise was right, Dora decided. She does not know me or I, her. We are like strangers to one another.

7.

In September 1918, the first month of spring, Dora Somerville found that she could no longer ride on trains. The sight of children amongst the passengers caused her unbearable pain. She could not stop her thoughts. "Will it be you?" she would whisper to the plaited curls and sailor suits. Tears would come into her eyes on those days. But of course there would be no children on the six o'clock evening train when the bomb went off. They would be home in bed. Dora knew this; it was all just drama and sentimentality. Malachy would have said that she was basking in self-indulgent pity. Dora wondered if this was true; there was a strange kind of comfort in her despair.

Dora walked briskly along Marchpane Street and entered Frederick's butcher shop. There was a large crowd of women and children and Dora found herself squashed up against the back wall of the premises with another wall of coats in front of her. She could hear the butcher shouting out the orders when they were ready but could not see the counter. The women gossiped and the children grizzled. Next to Dora, a small child was crying loudly. In the stuffy shop, she had worked herself into a fury of exhaustion. Dora watched the little girl pulling at her mother's arm, wanting her to leave. I suppose that it won't be you, grizzler, Dora thought, but perhaps it will be your father or grandfather, your uncle, perhaps a much older brother who will be on the train that evening. Apparently death or injury for them will not be as dreadful as it would be for you if you were the bomb's victim.

The mother tried to shush the child, softly humming a jerky little song. At last the girl stopped crying, worn out by her own agitation. Dora squeezed through to the counter.

The butcher was loading lamb chops onto the scales and calling out the weight to his customer. Strange, Dora thought, how different weight is given to different kinds of lives.

In the days before the bomb, Dora's dreams were confusing, a muddle of words and images which made no sense to her. One night, she woke up shouting. Malachy came in from the next room to see if she was alright. He brought her a cup of sweet tea and sat next to her on the bed while she told him about the dream. It was about a train waiting in a station, hissing steam. The platform was crowded with people desperately trying to get into the carriages. There was some urgency, the train was about to depart, the passengers were burdened with enormous suitcases and angrily jostled one another.

Dora sipped the tea. "What was I shouting?"

Malachy laughed. "All aboard," he said. "I think you were the guard. You were waving your arms as well as shouting."

Dora blushed. "Pretty ridiculous, I suppose."

Dora was quiet, drinking the tea. She was sitting on top of the blankets, her bare, white legs sticking out from under her nightdress. She had the legs of a foal, Daniel once said. Dora covered her legs with the sheet and put the tea cup on the washstand. She turned to Malachy

"This dream...."

"What about it?" Malachy stood up and stretched.

"I think it's got something to do with the bomb and me being the one to put it in the station. I mean, if I draw the short straw. I'm not sure if I can do it; I'm too scared."

Dora thought that Malachy would be angry with her, scorning her cowardice, but he was gentle.

Malachy nodded. "It's natural to be afraid," he said calmly. "You shouldn't worry about what will happen. It's fate that sorts these things out, who lives, who dies. It's beyond your control, like a battlefield."

"Like Edgar?" Dora did not know why she had mentioned her brother.

"Yes. Like all those poor devils forced into battle, not even seeing the enemy they're aiming at."

Malachy put his hand down and caressed her head. "Lie down now and get to sleep."

He was speaking to her as if she were a child, she realised. Dora wanted to talk more about Edgar; about soldiers and killing. She lay back on the pillow; it was damp with her own sweat. Exhaustion made the room spin. She thought again about Edgar. Had he killed others? He only sent her a few letters before he died; complaints about canteen food, bad weather cheerfully endured, thumbnail descriptions of the men in his battalion, the French countryside. He must have killed German soldiers, Dora decided. Her eyelids were very heavy and her head, ceasing to spin, had begun to ache. Yes, he must have killed soldiers, perhaps men he couldn't even see. And civilians die in war too. At the Pacifist Society, she had read the reports. Children were slaughtered; women were raped. This too was the work of soldiers. Malachy was right. For her it must be as it was in war; who stood or fell on the field of battle, amongst the common soldiers, was merely a question of luck, good or bad. It was the same for civilians. There was no divine hand.

"Civilians die in war, too," Dora said softly to Malachy. Then she was too tired for any more thought, and felt herself sliding into sleep's pit.

8.

Dora walked quickly along the station platform. The train was beside her, down on the rails. Resting, she thought, if a machine rests, this great, dirty, groaning, metal miracle, the Victorian inheritance of the people. Steam was being exhaled from valves at the train's side making a long hiss that seemed to her almost a voice, a knowing voice jeering in outrage. She strode along defiantly, in her dark blue suit, white hat and gloves. The sound of other, nearby train whistles made her heart jump. Incongruously, under her arm, Dora carried an old document bag that had belonged to her father. The bag was heavy and awkward so that she was forced to keep adjusting her grip. People looked at her; she was conspicuous. A man turned to her and Dora wondered, fearfully, if he would offer assistance but he only touched his hat. At last Dora reached the end of the platform and went up the stairs into the sunlight. The feeling of warmth on her face almost made her smile. She wanted to laugh, Malachy would have said that it was nerves but she knew it was relief, relief and despair. Her arm was aching and she sat down on a bench, placing her burden beside her. An elderly woman sitting nearby peeked in through the loosened flap and clicked her tongue loudly at the sight of old jam tins full of stones. But they had all been properly, carefully weighed, thought Dora, ignoring the old woman's reproach. They weighed what the pipe would weigh with all its contents. Dora looked down. Twenty minutes. She consulted her tiny marcasite watch and wiped her forehead with a handkerchief. She was surprised at how cold her face felt, like alabaster, she thought. Dora put her head into her hands. She was doing the thing that Malachy had absolutely forbidden; she was practising for the day of the bomb.

Louise must have been waiting in the tea shop for almost an hour when Dora arrived. She would probably be angry, perhaps she had even left, stalking away with her manly strides. Dora peeked in through the window. The waitress, courteous, smiling sweetly, was offering Louise little lemon cakes. When her offer was refused, the waitress's look became sullen and contemptuous. "Still waiting for your friend then?"

Louise had no choice but to nod patiently under the glare of the waitress' wrath.

The two women had been meeting in the teashop, on the corner near the west bound tram stop, for some weeks. Louise told Dora she had never been there before; she avoided such places.

"I abhor them," she told Dora the first time that she sat down at one of the dainty tables. Louise abhorred the chintz curtains that hung coyly in the box windows and equally she loathed the chintz women who came there with their polite talk of weddings and parties and respectability. She wondered aloud about Dora, whether she belonged there. If there had been no war, perhaps Dora would have sat by the chintz curtains displaying a small, tasteful engagement ring.

"Do you always speak your mind so decidedly?" Dora had asked, not offended but amused. Apparently Louise always did.

Dora took a deep breath and went into the teashop. The bell over the door announced her arrival. She had gone home first to dispose of her tin cans so Louise could not guess why she was so late.

Louise sighed loudly when she saw her. "Where have you been Dora?"

Dora smiled wanly. "Sorry Louise. I lost track of the time."

"It was you who suggested these meetings," Louise reminded her, looking about for the waitress who had seemingly vanished. "Your Dutch courage teas you call them. Does Malachy know of your fears and uncertainties, by the way, all these vacillations you seem to be having?"

"Yes. We often discuss them. He understands my feelings."

"Really?" Louise managed to attract the eye of the waitress while she was squeezing a party of four corseted matrons onto a table for two.

Dora looked over. "Oh we should have sat there at the table for two. Ours is a table for four."

Louise grinned and stretched her legs out into the space in front of her. "I know. I chose this table deliberately. Don't you take a wicked pleasure in anything, Dora? Must you always be Dora Do Good?"

The waitress came over. Louise observed her idly as the girl took their orders and went away.

"She looks like you, Dora," Louise said. "The same angelic, fresh face. Daniel once told me you were his Diana," Louise recalled.

"Louise, please, let's talk about more important things." Louise was angry with her, Dora decided.

The tea arrived at that moment, served in a small silver teapot with matching milk jug and sugar bowl and dainty china cups.

After they had drunk their tea and paid the bill, Louise grabbed Dora's arm.

"Come on. Let's go for a walk," she whispered. "I'm itching for a cigarette."

Dora and Louise crossed Dalrymple Avenue and walked along Curzon Street until they came to the Mitchell Bridge and the old steps that led down to the wide, wooded embankment of the River Robe. Louise took Dora's arm and guided her down the crumbling stone steps.

"Not here," Dora complained, "Our shoes will be ruined by the mud."

"Ground's too hard for mud," Louise said briskly. "Not enough rain."

She continued to lead Dora downwards towards the lapping water.

The two women walked along by the river, taking paths amongst trees where they would not be seen. Louise opened her bag, inhaling the smell of the hidden tobacco. A hot breeze blew on them and small insects caught in their hair and clothes. The river, low lying and shallow, seemed to increase the city's feeling of confinement. Drought had shrunk the waterway even further and it was now bordered by wide mud flats. The recession of the waters had revealed grey plains scattered with the detritus that had been thrown into the river over the years, bottles, tins, oddments of wood and occasionally even the skeleton of a horse. Dora stared across the muddy water. On the other bank, scavenger children hopped about amongst the debris. She would have liked to live in a city by the ocean, with fresh sea breezes and the smell of salt water to cleanse the air. Perhaps we will do that one day, she thought, Daniel and me, when the war is over, when the Kipling is over. We will have a little white washed house with windows that open to the sound of the waves. Louise lit her cigarette and offered one to Dora. Dora shook her head.

"I thought you smoked." Louise exhaled a long plume of smoke.

"Sometimes, not in the day usually, it gives me a headache for some reason. I think it's the fear of being seen."

Louise snorted a laugh. "You remind me of my sister, Adeline. She was always worrying about that sort of thing, although it didn't stop her. We used to lie on the summer grass behind our mother's laundry and practice blowing smoke rings into the air. One day two boys from the house behind climbed over the fence and asked to join us. Adeline was a bit mortified I think but they brought their own tobacco, or the half-empty boxes of cigars their father had received for Christmas presents."

Louise stretched her arms and back like a sleek cat.

"That was a nice summer, basking in a bit of brief male attention. You don't understand, Dora, what it's like."

"What's what like?" Dora was hot and tired. Louise was in a strange mood today.

"For ugly girls, how we have to savour every morsel we can get. You're just too beautiful."

Dora stopped walking and looked at Louise. "Louise, I'm definitely not, you know."

"Not what?" Louise threw her cigarette butt on the ground and began to look for another in her bag.

"I'm not after Malachy."

Louise lit another cigarette and winked at Dora. "Now who said anything about that?"

9.

When Dora got off the tram, just outside the laneway to the chemist's shop, there was little warmth in the air. Dora exhaled as she stepped down into the street and her icy breath was visible in the air. As if I am carrying my own personal winter inside me, Dora thought. It was an exceptionally cold start to the spring after a freezing winter. Only the almond trees were in blossom, yet they were well into September. She had trawled through old trunks in the cellar to find her mother's winter coat. Dora paused at the tram stop to shove her book back into her bag. She had given up reading on the tram; her mind wandered, she missed words as she read, forgot things; her mind could not make out each sentence, could not comprehend.

She trudged along the lane to the little workroom behind the Marks' chemist shop, now occupied by the International Society. It was a shabby place, peeling with paint and rust. From the outside, Dora could see how the windows had been boarded up by wooden planks hammered roughly into position. The doorway was narrow and deeply set. Dora knocked three times and heard the locks being drawn as the heavy door creaked open to reveal the pale and smiling face of Cossington.

"Dora, come in. I've been looking forward to your company."

Dora followed Cossington across the dirt floor of the bare room. In the centre was a large table borrowed from the pharmacy and covered with the workings for the bomb. The only light came from a huge oil lamp and it cast a large, brightly illuminated circle, like a boundary between two continents. Beyond the table the darkness was so deep that they

could barely see the outer walls. Sometimes they heard mice and small birds scuttling about in the corners. The workroom had a curious, but pleasant smell that at first Dora recognised but could not place. Opening a linen drawer at home, she caught the scent of dried lavender put there to keep away moths. The workroom, she knew, had once been used to dry flowers and herbs.

Dora had been coming regularly to the workroom, having volunteered to help Cossington. She felt an obscure need to know the monster he was creating and that she might carry close to her heart. Her assistance could only be of the humblest kind but the beautiful boy was indulgent with her, answering her questions and confusions, even allowing her to help him with some of the preparations for the timer.

"I made that trifle, you know." Cossington said looking up from the pipe he was examining. Dora was standing next to him, by the work table, waiting for instructions.

"What?" Dora felt the question reach down into her numbness of feeling. It was intensely bright under the light; the darkness around them seemed as solid as a wall.

"For your party, a few months back. I made the trifle myself. I like cooking. I like mixing things up."

"What about your mother?"

"She died when I was two, knocked down by a tram of all things. A child's firecracker had frightened the horses and the carriage lurched backwards, crushing her as she was crossing the track behind it. What a strange, violent death. I can't remember her at all. It's as if I never had a mother."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I can't remember so I can't miss her."

Dora put her hand on his arm; Cossington's own hands were still on the pipe.

"Your whole life is her absence," she said, quietly.

Cossington, the beautiful boy, half smiled, shook his head and did not answer.

In the afternoon Dora sat at her kitchen table, staring at the wall calendar. Buy Frederick's Meats, it said, The Best Cuts in Town. The picture for September was a large brown cow. Dora and Cossington had finished their early morning assignment and left the workshop together. Cossington worked at the Patents Office in Marchpane Street but he waited politely with her until the tram arrived. They did not speak much in the street for fear of saying something out of place and the bomb was really their only mutual topic of conversation. As the tram lurched off from the stop, Dora looked out of the window. Cossington waved and Dora waved back and nobody else even bothered to notice them.

Dora had come home and made a cup of tea. Sitting at the table, she found herself staring at the calendar. In her mind Dora carefully marked off the days to the bomb with a black cross. She used to fight with Edgar, as a child, to be the one to mark the calendar. Their mother could never remember whose turn it was. She would not allow them to institute a roster because she said rosters were for common workers. So they had fought and usually Edgar, bigger and stronger and more loved had won, holding the pencil above his sister's head where she could not reach it. Dora had brought her own pencil once, hidden in her pinafore pocket, and had jumped in under Edgar's raised arm, making dark lines. Edgar had laughed. She had loved him then, for his indulgence towards her, a younger sister, all this in the days when they looked forward to time passing.

She wrote to Daniel about the pipe bomb, sparing no details. She tried in her writing to be detached and scientific but found even this too difficult. As time moved closer and

closer to the moment when she or Louise would walk down a few steps into the dark coolness of the train station, carrying death in a dusty bag, she felt as if she were turning to ice.

"Daniel- we are all ghosts. Sometimes I wonder if I can bear to walk away and leave the pipe there. Perhaps I should rather sit down beside it. This is always a thought that comes to me at night. Sometimes, especially at night in the darkness, I think that no more nightmares might be better for me too. Funny isn't it? Books always seem to speak of night as enveloping; really it lays you bare to all your fears."

10.

11th September, 1918

"Dear Mr Flanagan,

This is probably the last letter I shall write to you. Perhaps Mr Bone will take up your correspondence again when he returns. I have left everything in order for him so he will be able to continue with his plans for publications. Thank you for your letters. They have meant a great deal to me, as has the poetry. I am sorry that they must now end...."

Dora sat at her writing desk, fingering the paper of her letter to Flanagan. Her last letter as she had told him. She would need to leave soon if she was to make the evening post. Dora stared at the letter. She could not go out, she could not bear to leave the house and walk even a few steps down the road, not even for Flanagan. Dora re-read the letter quickly, then she picked it up and walked downstairs and into the kitchen. She went to the sink and threw the letter in. Lighting a match, she burnt what she had written, watching as the paper curled and blackened.

11.

Her bedroom was very tidy and this pleased her. Everywhere here, Dora thought, there is order and control. She had spent some hours sweeping and cleaning throughout the day. Around her, long evening shadows patterned the wooden floor and the red rug, making narrow, dark fingers on the bare walls. A blackman's hand, Dora thought dreamily, watching the shadow flicker. Her father had once said to her: A blackman's hand. (She was six at the time.) A blackman's hand coming to carry you off and put you in his cooking pot. There was laughter between them in her bedroom on the cusp of a summer's evening. Father and daughter had both delighted in her fear and excitement. Dora closed her eyes. The evening was perfectly still. On nights such as this there might once have been the sound of a band playing in some nearby park or laughter floating up from a party in a neighbour's garden but with the war had come this empty silence.

Now, in the spring evening light, she was sitting quietly by the window as if waiting for something to happen, or perhaps waiting for someone to come in and interrupt her. There was no-one who would come but she indulged for a moment in the drama of their sudden arrival, the breaking down of the door. And then she bent her head, and in the light the blade of the knife in her hand glittered; it might have been a piece of jewellery that she was holding. Carefully, Dora made a mark like a long scratch, like a thin, red river from her hand to her elbow. Now, she thought, I must go deeper; deep as I can so it happens as quickly as possible. She sat there with the knife poised above her wrist. Perhaps something more is needed, Dora thought. Think of lives you'll be saving in exchange for your own life. Think how you will avoid the dreadful day when the straws

will be pulled from Malachy's fist. Think that you might even see Edgar again. But Dora's hand did not move to sink the sharp blade of the knife into her vein. She sat there; a minute passed and then another and another. Downstairs, the mantle clock began to strike the hour, chiming in mock solemnity. Dora threw the knife across the room; it clattered against the fireplace. She stared after it and then she laughed at it. Her laughter grew to a loud cackle in the little room. Soon she was laughing uncontrollably, her body shaking.

When at last the laughter subsided, Dora wiped her eyes with her hands and smoothed her hair. She got up from where she was sitting, picked up the knife and put it in her pocket. She rubbed her arm tenderly; the scratch was red and inflamed, like a long red ribbon in the flesh, Dora thought, like the streamers they throw out for soldiers, for those lucky ones who come home.

Seven

On The White Field

1.

At the Hut, the men awaited the slow return of the light with eager anticipation. Every day they climbed on to the roof to watch the extraordinary and gradual rising of the sun, radiating long streamers of golden light over the frozen ground and the sky as it climbed by fractions above the horizon. To the men, it seemed as if time itself had slowed down just to show them its workings.

Daniel wrote to Dora about this magnificent rebirth: "I have been present on the first day of creation... "

"Say something," said Cole. They were standing on the roof of the Hut watching the sun, perhaps standing here for the last time, Daniel thought, for the snow and ice will recede now and we will come and go through an ordinary door instead of our tunnel.

"What will I say?"

"I mean say something from your poet, from Mr Kipling," Cole replied.

Daniel grinned, "Does God have no words for this?"

Cole winked, "It's too obvious, that's all. Anyway, we have survived against something large and powerful from nature; that calls for the words of man."

Daniel said:

*Then did he leap to his place flaring from under
He the compeller, the Sun, bared to our wonder
Nay not a league from our eyes, blinded with gazing,
Cleared he the gate of the world, huge and amazing.*

"It sounds like a prayer, anyway," said Cole.

"It's a chantey," replied Daniel, grinning.

"A sea chantey? That's us, isn't it?" Bryant kicked away some of the snow piled around him. "We're like sailors in our little ship alone on a great big, frozen ocean."

"Now you must say something at least," said Macalister to Cole.

Bryant was looking out over the land, staring hard, his neck craning. His companions knew what was he looking for, who he was looking for. Bryant shuffled his cold feet, dislodging snow to reveal the dark shingle of the roof.

"We can go after him now," he said softly.

"He's dead," said Macalister sharply.

Bryant shoved his gloved hands in his pockets, still looking out over the snow.

"He knew what he was doing when he left. He took plenty of food - and a gun. He meant to survive, not destroy himself. "

Macalister shrugged. "He's dead. That was all weeks ago. Where's he been since? How's he stayed alive out there in the winter darkness with the blizzard raging and nothing to hunt?"

"He's out there." Bryant kicked at the snow.

Macalister sighed and spat on the ground. He got out his precious supply of cigarettes and lit one, biting angrily on the paper.

In the harshness of the silence between them, Cole said, "Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning."

"A psalm?" asked Macalister quietly and Cole nodded. Bryant led them back indoors.

"Dora - We have lost Drummer." Daniel had written to Dora over the last month of winter, worrying that the word sounded too casual, too strange. Lost had become a devalued word, Daniel thought. I have lost my hat. We lost the cricket match. It had been relegated to the mundane because it was a word to be feared. We lost the war, how much everyone, the entire country, dreaded that one day, they might have to say that.

"We have lost Drummer but he remains with us, entering every evening conversation. There is endless speculation as to what has become of him. We continue to live by the routines he had established for us, carrying out the work according to the schedule he set down on the first day of our arrival in this place. We cannot even tell the world what has happened. Our efforts to contact Macquarie Island have failed. I am told by Bryant that radio waves cannot travel easily over ice but now that the flows are breaking up we may have more luck. But even if we could speak to Richardson and Mortimer what could they do? We are stuck until the *Australis* returns. Bryant is absolutely set on hunting for Drummer. I expect he will drag us all into it in the end.

I think that Drummer had been sliding away for a while, since the beginning of the winter darkness, at least. He never slept; and we did nothing, not knowing what to do. Our attempts to discuss the problem between ourselves fumbled. Drummer had assumed so much authority that there was nothing left for anyone else. We needed a doctor desperately but had none. This was an accident. The medical officer hired to travel with us had pulled out on the day of departure. We sailed away, the weathermen saying it didn't matter. We wouldn't be gone that long. Drummer had a bit of medical knowledge, so he said, as part of some sort of infantry reserve training. Enough, he said, to set broken bones, tend to frost bite. He had looked after us in that way, tending to our ailments.

When he was dispensing ointment or applying plasters he liked to make a joke of it and say that he was our mother and father. Now it is Drummer who needs help. But we have lost him."

Daniel stopped his writing to draw some more ink from the well. Everyone else was asleep. He wondered if he had taken Drummer's place now as insomniac as well as his own role as outsider. Daniel paused, thinking about his words. Idly, he scribbled "insomniac" on the blotter. Unavoidably his printer's eye picked out the letters in the word- insomniac, like maniac, he thought, half amused; the two words were alike in their ending.

2.

Daniel stretched out his gangly legs and bony arms so that his whole lanky body was extended and his back was lifted clear of the seat of the armchair. He held this position, counting to one hundred before sinking back into the upholstery. Daniel sat for a moment looking about the darkened common room. The hands of the clock seemed frozen behind the glass face. He rubbed his eyes and, feeling tempted, glanced at the pile of books at his feet. He had set up his own routine for those nights when he was rostered as night watchman. Reading was only permitted in the first part of the watch, when he was less likely to fall asleep. In the second part, he tried to engage in some kind of soundless exercise born out of his imagination. He was conscious of not waking the others and even walking around the hut caused the floorboards to groan and creak horribly. Some nights he passed the time inventing new recipes or writing menus for weeks ahead. For amusement, he sometimes concocted strange creations, penguin egg soufflé with seal and canned pea pie or seagrass pudding. For some reason Daniel could not turn his mind to such tasks this particular night. He sat for a while scribbling drawings on a piece of paper before giving in to the desire to read.

Since coming to Antarctica he had been drawn back into the past stories of his childhood and youth. The Hut's small library contained works by Verne and Stevenson. Australian books too, a roughly bound volume of Henry Lawson's stories and a much thumbed and annotated *Such is Life* by Joseph Furphy. Even some novels by Mary Grant Bruce, books for girls, he would have scorned them as a boy but now Daniel liked to

open them, to read about hot winds and blue skies, see words like wattle and bullock and return by them to an archetypal outback Australia, he who had never been further out than the National Park on his city's fringe.

In these books, too, he found something of Dora, amongst the fierce, but proper maidens who the peopled the stories. They had courage, he realised, and a little to his surprise, so had Dora, suffering ridicule with her pacifists, wanting only to end the war and nothing else. Sitting back in his chair, fighting sleep, Daniel traced his finger around the illustration on the book's cover. Perhaps Dora was the bravest one of them all.

There were adult books too in the Hut's library, predominantly Dickens and some Shakespeare, and Mawson's copy of Kipling, a book Daniel carried on his person to keep him anchored to his life at home.

After a time, Daniel Bone fell asleep. He sprawled uncomfortably in the armchair, a book lying on his chest. His breathing was as deep in the sealed, airless Hut as if he had been anesthetized. The blizzard roared, shook the building and retreated a little. Daniel could not remember when questioned afterwards what it was that had woken him. He sometimes thought it was a shout intended deliberately to wake him up. Later he decided that it was the sound of the lamp falling to the ground and shattering. The light was extinguished and he was wrestling with a dark figure. The arms and back of the armchair constrained him and the other man had the advantage of bearing down on him from above. Daniel's heart was pounding and though his mouth was open he could not shout. His whole being was focussed on the man and on the man's right hand that held something long and solid like a piece of pipe or wood. He fought only to hold that arm away from him. At last Daniel exhaled a huge gasp of air. He had been holding his breath

without realising it. An inarticulate sound roared out of him and he pushed forward until he was standing upright, taller than his assailant. The man stumbled backwards and ran towards the tunnel door. Daniel heard him tripping over things in his path and then his attacker was gone. The others emerged from their bunks, all talking at once and adding to the chaos. Someone lit other lamps and stoked the fire. Outside the dogs barked and one of them yelped as it was struck by some object.

Daniel's nose was bleeding, a thick stream ran down his face into his mouth and onto his clothes. The others stared at him and he remembered that they did not know what had happened.

"Drummer," he said.

Before the word was completed Bryant had raced to the entrance and climbed out onto the roof. There was nothing to see, even in the pale spring light. Scuffed foot prints led away from the Hut but the trail soon vanished, either swept away by the blizzard or brushed by Drummer. Bryant stood on the roof and lifted his arms over his head as if in victory.

"He's alive!" Bryant shouted. "He's alive."

In the Hut, Cole repaired Daniel's nose and Macalister, minus his leg, hobbled about with a broomstick crutch, checking for damage. Nothing had been stolen and the only objects injured were those caught in the struggle between the two men.

"He didn't come to steal anything," said Bryant, shaking the snow from his jacket as he came back inside. "He came to get someone, one of us, to rough that person up, maybe to kill him, who knows?"

"Why?" Cole was putting on the kettle, and getting down cups.

Bryant saw him setting the table and grunted in disgust. He disappeared into his quarters and came back with a bottle from his secret stash of rum. He had brought this supply with him against Drummer's orders. The alcohol had been carefully decanted into stout, dark bottles marked *cough mixture*.

"Oh no," groaned Macalister when he saw him. "Not that rot gut again."

But Daniel held up his teacup; he wanted the numbness that would come with the liquor, both for his pain and his pounding heart. He took a drink and felt the rum burning a channel down his throat into his stomach.

Cole poured tea into Macalister's cup and repeated his question. "Why would Drummer want to kill Bone?"

"Because he hates us all," Bryant replied with confidence, "because some of us got to fight over there and because some of us chose not to. It doesn't matter which. He hates us all because he wanted to go and they said he was too old."

"I can't believe he wants to kill us for that," said Macalister, rubbing his good leg thoughtfully. "That's preposterous."

Bryant pointed to his temple. "Don't forget he's tuppence ha'penny short of a bloody quid."

Daniel grinned and raised his teacup to conceal the smile, but Bryant saw him.

"What's so amusing, Bone?"

Daniel declined to explain. Bryant came and stood over him.

"Got a problem with speaking as well as fighting?"

Daniel stood up, facing Bryant. "Drummer said much the same about you."

The response took Bryant by surprise. He looked away, towards the window.

"I had my trouble with the gas that's for sure," he said softly.

He turned back to the other men. "But I won't be blaming any of you. It's Jerry that did that to me. But Drummer tried to kill Bone. Now we've got no excuses for refusing to go after him."

"Dora - we have been embroiled in endless arguments about how best to pursue Drummer. We have moved beyond the question of whether to pursue him. It is clear that he poses some danger to us. Bryant wishes to organise a hunting party to go out with tents and supplies - weapons too naturally. The dogs would pull us on sledges, exactly where we would go Bryant has not decided. Fortunately my other colleagues are completely opposed to this hair-brained scheme and can argue against it with some authority. Last night finally Bryant conceded and our plan now is to set traps around the Hut waiting for Drummer to return, if he ever does. We will continue our work but only in pairs and armed. To placate Bryant, it has been agreed that he can go out on short hunting excursions but only within the known maps and within certain times.

We wait for Drummer at the Hut, our traps ready. At sleeping time the waiting is worst. We lie in our beds and listen for any sound that can be heard above the blizzard. Almost we long for him to come. Every conversation seems to turn to one subject, one man. After dinner we play cards as a distraction, racing at breakneck speed through tournaments. Two go to bed and two wait on the watch. We rotate through the night so that if Drummer attacks whoever is there will be fresh. Even at work in the day, all heads turn to Bryant when he comes back from one of his trips. We wait in anticipation that he will bring Drummer back or in our darker hearts we wait for him to say that he has found a body and that it is over."

3.

Daniel dealt; the cards flew out over the table. They were shiny in the light of the oil lamp and seemed like huge flat beetles scuttling out of the darker corners of the Hut. Macalister sat opposite him, his pipe clenched between his teeth. He picked up the cards one by one. At the other end of the table, Cole and Bryant watched on. They were also smoking pipes. The sweet, wooded smell of the tobacco was comforting and made Daniel feel drowsy. A fireside smell, he decided.

He finished dealing and put the rest of the pack face down on the table. Macalister studied his cards, squinting as he held his hand close to his face. Daniel picked up his cards slowly, in a casual sweep. Next to his elbow, he had a large pile of chocolate squares. Luck had been with him this round. Macalister had only a few pieces of chocolate left. Daniel fanned out his hand.

They would play like this for a few more hours, sometimes in pairs, sometimes as four, until they were exhausted. When they could not go on, the chocolate would be piled up and tipped back into the communal tin. They would go to their bunks or to the watch. Throughout the night, they would be unable to sleep. When their official morning came, chimed in by their absurd clock, it would be time once again to go on waiting for Drummer.

4.

Daniel picked up the pen and wrote to Dora: "Drummer had found Aladdin's cave."

They were dragged outside by Bryant's shouting, running and stumbling in the icy snow because they thought there was some emergency. Their breathing was painful and icy in the freezing air. But Bryant was laughing, down on his knees, bent over as if in pain but laughing, the sledge beside him in the snow. He had just returned from one of his excursions, hunting for Drummer. The dogs nuzzled against his back, a little disturbed by this strange behaviour. When the men reached Bryant they stood around him puffing and squinting in the light. The sky was pale ice blue and the sun, reflected on the snow was so dazzling that it almost made them feel warm, a beautiful spring day for Antarctica.

Bryant stood up, the wind whipped around his body but was not strong enough to push him over. The lower part of his heavy, outdoor trousers and his reindeer-hide boots were coated with snow. His thick, long beard, unshaven since their arrival, also carried particles of ice tangled in the hair. With his red face and wide grin, Daniel thought, Bryant might be Father Christmas.

"I've found him. It's about five miles from here." Bryant gasped out his words. He hugged himself in delight. "I've found the old bastard's hidey hole."

They went down carefully into the cave, seeing at once that it was a man-made structure and not a natural hollow cut by the blizzard. The walls were blocks of smooth

ice that showed the marks of tools and the angles of the rectangular room were shaped with precision. It was surprisingly warm, Daniel noticed, insulated, he guessed, by the snow piled high above it. There was a duffle bag in one corner of the room which, when they examined it, was found to contain food, provisions stolen from their own supply hut. An odd assortment of bits of clothing and cloth, including several black flags, seemed to hang in regimental rows from one wall without any pegs. Bryant knocked a flag down as he brushed against it. He picked it up at once, licked a corner of the cloth and stuck it back on the wall. Drummer had a few pots and pans and a brazier that he must have taken with him the night he left. A discarded benzine drum, also taken from the supply hut, served to hold melting ice for water.

Daniel stood in the centre of the room and turned slowly around. There was something about the careful order of this place that seemed familiar to him. He felt as if he had seen it before, not actually visited such a place but had been shown it, perhaps in a picture. Daniel shook his head, unable to think of the correct answer.

Cole stared about himself in amazement. "Drummer made this cave?"

"No of course not, you bloody fool." Bryant spluttered in frustration.

Macalister laughed, leaning on his third leg as if it were a shooting stick. "The men who were here in 1911 dug this out. They called it 'Aladdin's cave' in the published record. It was to serve as a resting place for the men who went out on the longer expeditions."

"And Drummer knew about this?" Daniel was looking in another bag he had found behind the duffle, once a flour sack, it contained books and papers.

"Yes," Macalister nodded. "When he was planning our expedition, he read everything he could get his hands on and filled up notebooks with notes and diagrams."

The books in the sack were Drummer's. Daniel began to flick through them.

"Where is he then?"

"He might have gone hunting," suggested Cole. "Remember he stole a rifle; and it's not here now."

Bryant snorted. "Old Drummer couldn't fire a gun to save his bloody life. He probably couldn't even load it."

"I thought he had some kind of reservist training?" asked Macalister.

Bryant shrugged. "So he always said."

Suddenly, the dogs began barking wildly, emitting fierce growls and yelps.

"Jesus Christ! He's back!" Bryant scrambled out of the exit, with Macalister hobbling behind and Cole calling out, "Wait he's armed."

Daniel did not rush after them. He went back to the flour sack and pulled out a few pieces of a paper, stuffing them in his coat pocket. He took a final look at the room and realised at last where he had seen something like it before. The room was set up as a battlefield HQ. He recalled images in newsreels and the carefully orchestrated photographs in the press. He smoothed out the papers in his pocket and went to find the others.

They were gathered together by the sledges. The dogs lolloped, now quiet and unconcerned. Over his comrades' shoulders, Daniel saw that black words had been cut into the hard snow with a charcoaled stick or rock. The message said, "Hun spies, you will all die."

"Bloody hell," said Bryant softly.

Daniel pulled the pages he taken from his pocket. He thrust them into Cole's hands so that everyone could see what was written there.

He wrote to her: "Our leader Drummer has lost his mind. He thinks we are German spies. He has become a very dangerous man and we are stunned by this revelation. We have set traps around the hut, some of which are permanent and others which must be assembled after dinner and dismantled after breakfast. These traps are all of Bryant's invention, or imagination I should say. They involve nets above entrances and ropes on pulleys. Strangest of all, he has dug a deep, narrow hole by the door which in the day is covered with a steel plate from the launch but at night or when we are all absent is merely covered with gauze. Apparently the intention is that Drummer will fall into the hole if he tries to enter the Hut. Bryant wanted to put a layer of sharp stones at the bottom of the hole, but the rest of us objected so vehemently that he has agreed not to do this.

Our situation is both comical and terrifying. We know that Drummer has been watching us through his field glasses, and recording our movements in minute detail. It is frightening to realise how close he has been to us at times, hidden in the winter darkness. This is what we found in Aladdin's cave, in a flour sack. Drummer had written out a full record of our days and from reading these notes we have come to learn what even the most innocent or ordinary act could signify in the mind of a madman."

5.

Bryant continued his attempts to contact Macquarie Island on the radio. Now and again there would be a brief crackle of words, seldom lasting beyond hallo.

"What could Richardson and Mortimer do any way?" Macalister said decidedly. "No ship could reach us. The sea's still partly frozen and choked by bergs."

"Someone else needs to know what is happening here," Bryant replied.

Cole was repairing a pair of oilskin pants. He sat hunched at the table, peering at the needle in the poor light.

"You mean in case Drummer succeeds in killing us all," he said, not looking up from his task.

Bryant nodded and they were all quiet, exhausted by their vigilance. The blizzard howled outside. Above it they heard a piercing sound like a volley of shots. Nobody moved.

"It's nothing," Bryant said after a moment, "just ice melting somewhere."

They were beginning to recognise the strange sounds of the Antarctic spring, like the loud crack made by the ice facings of glaciers as they melted, as loud as a rifle shot. On the sea, the icebergs groaned and whistled like giant white monsters rocking on the newly formed waves. They frequently crashed against one another, grinding and tearing themselves free from the accident. These dreadful noises haunted the men at first, but as they became familiar with the sounds, their tattered nerves recovered.

After they discovered Aladdin's cave, Bryant set up a new watchman's roster for catching Drummer. He wanted a guard at the cave as well as at the Hut.

"When we will get our work done?" Cole protested.

"Work will stop temporarily," explained Bryant. "If we put in a concerted effort over the next forty-eight hours I reckon we'll snare the bugger. Drummer can't stay outside indefinitely. He'll have to come to the Hut or the cave."

Daniel and Peter Cole were stationed in Aladdin's cave. They trekked the five miles distance without dogs, carrying their supplies in knapsacks on their backs. Bryant did not want them to attract Drummer's attention. At the cave, they entered cautiously, Daniel insisting on going down first. Cole had refused to carry a gun even after Drummer's attack. Daniel wondered what Cole would do if Drummer attacked again. He could not bring himself to raise this question. He did not care about his own safety, he feared that Cole would allow himself to be killed rather than break his pact with God.

The cave was empty. Daniel and Cole searched in vain for the rifle and the service revolver but could find neither. The tent too appeared to be missing. The two men settled themselves near the entrance but out of immediate sight should Drummer appear. They waited, talking a little but mostly staring at the opening.

"This is unbearable," said Daniel at last. "Let's find something to read."

They had brought nothing with them; there was just enough room in their packs for food and dry clothing. In a corner of the cave, Drummer had left the flour sack containing his books and papers. Most of these had been taken back to the Hut but two books remained. One was a scientific book on meteorology which Cole picked up. The other was Douglas Mawson's account of his own struggle in this frozen world. Daniel turned the book over in his hands, feeling the weight of the thick journal. The book was Drummer's personal copy; the covers were battered with much handling and the pages were marked by fingers

and curling at the corners. He flicked through the pages and saw that the text was heavily scoured with hand-written notes and comments.

Sitting by the doorway of Aladdin's Cave, Daniel plunged into the life of the great scientist and explorer. He decided not to read the story from page one but opened the book in different places as he chose, directed as much by Drummer's commentary as by the content's page. The margins of the pages were crammed with Drummer's hand-written notes; Daniel found much of the writing hard to decipher. Many of the notes were purely technical, written in a kind of scientific shorthand; but now again there would be personal comments. "Bravo" Drummer had written against the more robust acts of strength and valour in Mawson's account. "A true Briton" was scrawled in other places; "Cheers for the Empire" Drummer had written beside work's dedication to King George.

Daniel turned the pages quickly, skimming the words and concentrating only on the parts marked by Drummer. He was looking for any word which might explain the man's behaviour. At the chapter headed "*Alone*" he slowed down, finding himself drawn into the narrative of adventure, tragedy and final success. After his companion Ninnis had plunged into an ice-covered crevasse, falling into oblivion with all their food supplies and the best dogs, Mawson had written:

"We returned to the crevasse....At regular intervals we called down into those dark depths...but there was no response. All were dead swallowed up in an instance."

Unexpectedly, Daniel was gripped by the story of Mawson's lone struggle for survival in this harshest of worlds. He himself had fallen into a crevasse but dragged himself to safety.

"...I had already speculated many times on what the end would be like. So it happened that as I fell through into the crevasse the thought 'so this is the end' blazed up in my mind...."

Next to these words Drummer had written: *Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori*. Daniel traced the letters with his finger. *It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one's country*. Daniel was thinking and remembering. "The Empire is my country," Drummer had said that night when he put his service revolver down on the table. Not to threaten them as they had all thought but to show what he was prepared to do for his country. He did not want to be like Mawson and drag himself to safety by the force of his will. Drummer wanted to sacrifice himself. He wanted to play some deluded part in the war.

"Bone!" Cole's voice was barely audible but Daniel responded instantly. Drummer's book fell to the floor, the spine splitting as it landed. Neither man moved. Above the white noise of the blizzard, they could hear someone at the cave's entrance. Daniel wondered if they should rush out and make a surprise attack. He felt all his muscles tensing, the hair on his neck was standing up. He was like one of the snow dogs, ready to leap forward with his teeth bared. Daniel glanced at Cole. His companion's expression was calm and intent. Daniel realised that he didn't have the faintest idea what to expect from Cole. They should have spoken; he was angry with himself that they had not. He needed to know now whether Cole would be prepared to subdue Drummer by force. But the time to speak had passed. Slowly whoever was outside began to descend into the cave. They knew it must be Drummer. He came down very cautiously, feet first so that they could not see whether he was carrying anything in his hands. As the man drew

closer needles of ice dislodged by his boots fell against their faces. Daniel thought, it's now or never. I must act.

Daniel leapt up the rough cut steps, his feet sliding under him. He scrambled forward and grabbed Drummer's legs, pulling him over. Drummer twisted his body around and sat up. In his hands was the rifle.

"No." Cole's shout echoed in the ice chamber.

Surprised, Drummer swung around as he fired and the bullet skidded past Daniel's shoulder, lodging in the far wall. The sudden movement had thrown Drummer off balance and, struggling not to fall, he dropped his weapon.

Cole ran and picked it up at once. "Wait, wait I won't shoot you."

But Drummer had freed one leg from Daniel's grip. He lifted his boot and with a powerful kick sent Daniel tumbling down to the floor. Drummer scrambled up, was out of the cave and gone. Cole went over to Daniel who was sitting on the ground, dazed. He had a large imprint from Drummer's boot across his face.

"Are you alright?" Cole was still holding Drummer's gun.

Daniel jumped up. He pushed past Cole, grabbing his own gun and ammunition. He raced out of Aladdin's Cave, choosing to ignore Cole's calls of concern and protest.

Outside the blizzard had picked up and was roaring angrily over the fractured landscape, hurling snow. The spring day had been swallowed up by a hurricane of whiteness.

6.

He raised the gun, resting the butt of the rifle against his shoulder, taking aim at nothing. He had no idea where Drummer was or whether he was armed with his service revolver. Out of sheer habit, Daniel looked around. Everything was white, the air, the sky the ground. Only the growing chill in his feet told him he was standing upright.

Fortunately, he had not removed his outdoor clothes on arriving at Aladdin's cave. This was simply good luck, he decided. Bloody good luck. He began to move, afraid to stand still too long in the freezing air. Leaving the cave, he had run as hard as he could through the storm, falling several times, once onto concealed rock. His knee ached where he went down on it. He had been shouting too, calling out Drummer's name as he ran. All a waste of time, Daniel thought grimly. He trudged on until he saw something dark appearing out of the whiteness. He felt elated, it was a black flag. After the discovery of Aladdin's cave, Bryant had ordered the laying of a trail of numbered black flags between the Hut and the cave. The numbers would tell a man how far he was from either refuge. To everyone's surprise, Drummer had not attempted to remove the flags; perhaps, they speculated, he found them useful for his own excursions.

Daniel fingered the cloth. Drummer was probably far in the distance, back to wherever he had erected the tent he stole from the Hut. Daniel knew he should go back to the cave; it was dangerous out here. He grunted, shifting his weapon onto his shoulder, feeling the burden of its weight. He did not want to go back to the cave where Cole would no doubt speak of not killing Drummer, of reasoning with him. On their journey to the cave, Cole

had said, "We will make him understand that we are not Germans." Daniel did not want to go back and wait for Drummer. He wanted all of this agonising suspense, this waiting and waiting for attack, to be over. His knee ached where he had fallen. The pain made him angry with Drummer. He wanted to shoot Drummer dead because that was the only way Drummer would be stopped. If they took him alive, what would they do with him while they waited months for the ship to come back? Keep him as their prisoner? It would be impossible to let Drummer live. Drummer wanted to kill them. Drummer had tried to kill him twice. Daniel was still holding onto the black flag; suddenly he was chilled by the process of his angry thinking. No, he corrected himself, I will disable him somehow, wound him or restrain him. Cole was right. They would find a way to make Drummer come to his senses.

Daniel turned his head. Everywhere was white. He was blinded by this whiteness. As if the whole frozen continent had picked itself and shifted shape according to the wind. The cold was beginning to work its way through the thickness of his clothing. He could no longer feel his feet. He blinked. Frost was forming on his eyelashes. His eyes were burning with cold. Too dangerous to go on, he would turn back to the cave. Perhaps Drummer was dead, he thought, or nearly dead. The storm would kill him.

"Stand, you bastard."

Someone was shouting at him. Someone close behind him, Daniel realised. He swung around. It was Drummer. Somehow Drummer had circled him, stumbling about in the drift. He was only a few yards away.

"Stand still, you German bastard, so I can shoot you."

Dimly, he could see Drummer fumbling with his coat, looking for his revolver. Daniel's heart was pounding. Drummer should have died in the storm; he should have been obliterated by the suffocating whiteness, lost forever in his madness. Daniel struggled to focus his thoughts. The Empire is my country, Drummer had said. So this is the end, Mawson had written. *We have forsaken all things meet, we have forgotten the look of light, we have forgotten the scent of heat.* His numb lips were forming Kipling's words. You're running away, Dora's voice seemed to be whispering in his ear. He could sense her standing beside him. He could hear her breathing and the regular beating of her heart over the roar of the storm. .

Daniel raised his weapon. Antarctica was a spiral of whiteness. He did not fire immediately. He had not decided yet. Drummer was coming closer. There was nothing else in the world. Everything was swept away except this gun, this man, his decision to shoot or not, an endless moment while his finger pressed against the trigger. The bullet fired and Daniel seemed to ride with it, cutting through storm, through flesh and bone, and burrowing deep into Drummer's brain, that most human of human parts. The man spun under the force of the shot and collapsed to the ground. There was a great pool of blood, red against the white snow.

The sound of the shot seemed to echo above the blizzard even as Drummer lay dead. Daniel looked up and saw, to his surprise, dark figures emerging from the storm. Bryant and Macalister had come out to look for him. And Cole was with them. When had he left the cave and gone to the Hut? He must have passed right by them. Daniel felt afraid for Cole even though the danger had passed. They were stopped by Drummer. By the body, thought Daniel, the dead body of Drummer who had once been their companion, who had

sat around the table in the Hut, who had taken his turn at night watch, who had cared for their ailments and said half jokingly, I am your mother and father, that Drummer. Daniel realised that he forgotten the man's Christian name.

Daniel moved towards his companions and was relieved to hear welcoming barks as he drew near. They had brought the dogs which meant a more comfortable journey back to the Hut. His companions were gathered around the body on the snow as if already mourners at a grave. Drummer's hand was still in his pocket. Bryant pulled it out, looking for the revolver. Locked in the dead man's fingers was the peg doll that Drummer's daughter had given him on the dock before they sailed. My little talisman, he had once said. I carry her everywhere with me. They all stared at it in horror.

Drummer stared back up at them. He looked so surprised. Daniel bent down in the snow and closed Drummer's dead eyes and smoothed his hair. Unexpectedly, he remembered the beast. As a child, Daniel had been taken to see a pantomime called *Beauty and the Beast*. At the very end, when the monster lay dying in Beauty's arms, the actress removed his hideous headdress so that the man inside it was revealed. Drummer had become their beast, Daniel realised. In all their planning and setting traps and hunting him, they had forgotten about the man underneath. Death had taken off Drummer's mask. Daniel looked down at Drummer and felt no anger. He put his rifle down beside the body. He did not pick it up again. He knelt beside Drummer, looking into the dead man's face, at the white snow and the red blood until at last Cole came to him and put his hand down on his shoulder.

They buried Drummer near the Hut. The ground was too hard to dig a grave so they entombed him in the frozen, outdoor larder where they kept their hunting kills. Cole spoke the words of the twenty-third psalm.

"The Lord is my shepherd... though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death..." In the valley of whiteness, Daniel thought, in this strange country where men and places are reversed, where those who flee killing kill, where madness takes hold so easily, here in a landscape with no background, no perspective to align the eye and the mind.

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life," prayed Cole.

"Amen," they said together, their voices rasping in the wind.

Daniel was pleased that Cole still spoke to him; he thought after shooting Drummer that Cole might shun him, might see him as an unclean thing who had committed the unforgivable sin, but rather Cole was closer to him than ever. Daniel did not understand why but was grateful. Once, in some other, distant life, he had talked with Dora about what it might be like to be at the Front, to be forced to kill another. He would be full of rage, he had imagined, full of a hot, violent anger. He would rebel against his officers. He might even turn his weapon on himself. What would he say to Dora now? What he had done here was against their deepest beliefs.

They lingered at the grave after Cole had finished his prayer. The other men were looking at him. Daniel wondered if recrimination was about to flow instead of tears.

"We wondered," said Cole gently, "if you knew some Kipling appropriate for this moment. It would be good to say those words now."

Daniel swallowed. "It would not be good. It would be wrong, insulting to Drummer."

Bryant said "He means it would be good for you. We know," and he looked at Macalister, "we know how you feel, Bone."

Macalister nodded. "Come on," he said, "both my legs feel like wood in this cold." Daniel sighed; his mind was as empty of poetry as of comfort. The blizzard whirled and he shivered. At last a few scattered words came to him. He had no idea of their appropriateness.

Daniel cleared his throat but his voice still wavered.

*His place forgets him; other men
Have bought his ponies, guns and traps.
His fortune is the Great Perhaps,
And that cool rest-house down the glen.
.....
Yet may he meet with many a friend-
Shrewd shadows, lingering unseen
Among us when "God Save the Queen"
Shows even extras have an end.*

The others were silent.

"It's called 'Possibilities', Daniel explained warily.

Bryant nodded, "That was the right thing to say. Poor old Drummer, poor bastard, he wanted to be at the heart of the action in the war but he was just an extra."

Macalister grunted bitterly and took out a cigarette. He could not find a way to light it in the strong wind so he just clamped it between his teeth.

"We were all extras, you and I, everyone else, even over there. Every soldier is just an extra in the battles between nations."

"No," said Cole, angrily. "That's wrong. I cannot let you say that as if it were true. You demean serious loss of life. Soldiers matter too."

"Who to?" Macalister sneered. "To God? Bloody lot of good He did when the shells were falling, when I lay in that trench for two days with my leg smashed, waiting for them to get me out. What matters for an extra, a foot-soldier? Bullshit words like sacrifice?"

"Choice," Daniel said, thinking only that he wanted to turn Macalister's hostility from Cole.

"Eh?" Macalister bit harder on his cigarette. "What choice? Don't tell me you made a choice to shoot old Drummer. For all you knew, he could have had the revolver in his pocket."

"I still had a choice."

"To shoot or be shot?" Macalister snorted. "Funny kind of choice. A fool's choice, I'd say."

"A choice to shoot or not to shoot, that's what I mean." Daniel felt cold, a coldness beyond the freezing air around him. Macalister's face was red with anger. He limped hurriedly over to Daniel but as he reached him, Macalister lost his balance and fell heavily on the icy snow. Daniel helped him up, gripping Macalister's arm until the man could steady himself.

Macalister looked into Daniel's face. "See what that bloody war did to me. It took my manhood, took my dignity. Why did you make that choice, Bone? I want to know why."

"You mean not go to the war?"

"No, no. Why did you shoot him, old Drummer? Why did you make that choice?"

Macalister was steady now. Daniel let go of the man's arm. "I did it for you, and for Cole and Bryant, and to save myself. I did it so that we could survive and go home."

Macalister took out a fresh cigarette and bit it.

"Thank you, Bone," he said, quietly.

"Enough," said Bryant, his voice thick. "It's too cold to stay out here. Get back to the Hut."

Gratefully, the others followed his orders.

Eight

A Feather

1.

Dora woke up before the sun had yet risen. Although it was very dark, the October morning was without the hard coldness of previous weeks. The seasons have turned, Dora thought, summer is coming. She sat up in bed and reaching out, found her dressing gown. With this garment draped over her shoulders, she walked barefoot across the dark bedroom to her writing desk. She put the light on and sat down. She needed to say something to Daniel, to tell him that the day of the bomb had arrived and that sometime in the afternoon she would walk with Malachy to the chemist shop and draw lots with Louise.

"I can't do this." She was surprised to see what she had written. But it was true.

"Daniel, I can't do this. I cannot carry a bomb into a railway station and leave it there to explode. I cannot. I'm just too scared."

Dora sat back against her chair. She would tell Malachy this morning that she could not do it. It would have to be Louise. Louise would do it; she was not afraid like Dora. Dora remained at the desk. From her seat she could open the blind without getting up. She had always arranged her desks and tables by the window. She liked to look out from a room not back into it. The sun was rising. It must be about seven o'clock. Malachy would say that she was a coward for not carrying the bomb. He would be very angry and she dreaded their confrontation. She wondered if he would force her to do it anyway. Dora sighed. She looked down at the pages of her journal, thinking about what to write next. Daniel would say that she was a coward for letting someone else carry the bomb. He would be angry too.

I can't do it. I'm too scared.

Suddenly Dora was full of restless energy. She dressed quickly and walked barefoot along the passage to Malachy's room. The door was open and the room was empty. The bed, still neatly made, had not been slept in. Dora sat down on the bed. Malachy had been home for tea then he had gone out to visit George Ferris. For some reason, he had not come home. Dora ran her hand over the embossed bedspread. The pattern was a swirl of large leaves. She would go out looking for Malachy, she decided. She would tell him that she could not carry the bomb.

2.

Dora walked down Ramage Street and caught the tram towards the city. As she got on, her bag swung out and knocked off an old lady's hat. The woman was seated right by the door. She turned and glared at Dora.

"Be careful. You shouldn't bring a big thing like that on the tram. There's not the room."

"I'm sorry," Dora mumbled. "Excuse me."

She found an empty bench seat and put her bag down beside her. The bag was heavy as well as cumbersome, an old embroidered bag with a bone handle that her mother had used for holidays or going to hospital. She had wanted to bring her journal with her and this was the only bag in the house in which it could fit. She felt it was a way of having Daniel nearby, in the bag under her arms and against her heart.

Dora took out a book and began to read but her peace was soon broken.

"Dora, Dora!" A young woman, carrying a fat, restive baby, dropped into the spare aisle seat beside Dora, forcing her to move her heavy bag onto her lap and put away her book.

Dora sighed under her breath and forced a weak smile. Lucy Prior had been at school with Dora where she had been Lucy Blackwell. In those days, Dora remembered, Isobel Adams used to call Lucy 'horse face'. Dora stared at the squirming baby. Poor Lucy, it seemed like a thousand years ago, she thought, when we crossed the playground in gingham dresses and pinafores, a cruel world where horse faces and the attentions of young men were all that mattered.

Lucy Prior was out of breath. She laughed, "Lucky I saw you here, Dora. Are you going into town? I'm taking Albert to see my mother. She lives in Prosper Street now, you know. Goodness it must be ages since we last saw each other. Not since-" Lucy gulped; Albert wriggled in his mother's arms and arched his back.

Dora winced. There was nothing else she could say. "Thank you for coming to Edgar's memorial service, Lucy."

"Wasn't it conducted well by Rev Mower? Very appropriate I thought. Very tasteful mother said."

Dora did not pick up the thread of conversation and the two women sat in a brief silence. Dora stared at Albert who seemed determined to break free of his mother's grip. The baby's face was bright red. Dora thought of the Duchess's piglet in *Alice in Wonderland*.

"Ted's still at the bank, you know," said Lucy carefully, as if she thought mentioning her husband might be another embarrassment for Dora.

The words caught Dora's attention. "Does he catch the six o'clock train home?" she asked.

Lucy was taken aback. "Well sometimes, I suppose, it depends really. But not this week, he's been home with his bad chest and still is."

"Ted had a good friend working with him at the bank, didn't he?" Dora could remember going to a party at Lucy's home once. "What was his name? James? Gerald?"

"Geoffrey? He enlisted. He's over there right now. Ted was envious, of course, but they rejected him because of his chest."

"What about the other men? I think I met some at your house once?"

"Well, I'm not sure. More than a few have enlisted. The younger ones I mean. There's so many girls in the bank at the moment, not doing the senior work of course, but filling in."

"This is my stop." Dora stood up hurriedly, clambering over Lucy as she scrambled out of the seat. Her bag knocked against Albert and he began to wail. Dora ran down the steps onto the footpath. The tram pulled away and she sat down on the bench at the stop, hugging her bag and thinking.

I wanted to know someone who would be on the train, Dora thought. How stupid. I wanted to have some reason, however slight, to give to Malachy. She imagined herself going to Malachy and saying, I have a friend on the train, so I can't carry the bomb. What a coward I am, Dora chastised herself, I cannot even say that I am afraid. Anyway, such an excuse would not wash with Malachy. Friends can be enemies to our cause, he would say. Dora took out her journal and began to write to Daniel with the book resting on her lap.

"I had forgotten about the women workers. I wonder if many of them will be on the train. I hope that the hour will be later than they would finish work."

Now and again a shadow would fall across Dora's paper as she wrote. People came and went at the tram stop, some sitting down next to her, others positioning themselves behind in the hope of reading whatever it was she was writing so earnestly. Dora did not care what others read. She almost hoped someone might see what she had written and then they would not be able to go ahead with the bomb. She pictured herself going to George Ferris and saying our plans have been compromised by a man at the tram stop. But no-one spoke to Dora about what she was writing.

After a while the sun moved and she realised that the day was going forward without her consent. At midday Dora stopped writing and looked around herself. She had got off the tram at a stop behind the Marks' chemist stop. By walking a few streets, she could reach the workshop where Nicholas Cossington was working on the bomb. She had become close to Nicholas during the time she had assisted him. He did not always need her help but was happy for her to sit and read or watch him work if she arrived unexpectedly. Every now and then he would stop and rest from his labours. Dora would make a pot of tea for them to share. Neither of them spoke very much during those times and Dora was reminded of moments with Edgar. I have another brother, she sometimes felt. She told Cossington about Edgar; he had listened with solemnity, tears coming into his eyes at the end.

"My poor Dora," he had said and put his arms gently around her neck as if he were a child embracing his mother. "Please let me be your brother and you my sister. I cannot replace Edgar, but I should like to be a support for you when you are in distress."

Dora knocked tentatively on the door of the workshop. Cossington was not always there during the day. His paid employment at the Patents Office kept him very busy. Dora often thought about Cossington at work. When she was sitting at her table typing out her minutes and notices in the ordered stillness of her home, she thought of the beautiful boy amongst the clamour of his workplace, examining the inventions of others and applying his clever mind to their problems. The door of the workshop opened and Cossington stepped out.

"Dora! How lovely to see you. I was feeling like some company. Please come in."

Cossington kissed Dora on the cheek and she stepped into the darker work room. A bright light hung from the ceiling above the benches. Dora went over to look at a series of objects arranged on a table. She was surprised by what she saw, clay pipes of all different lengths and sizes, some with wires and pieces of gauze poking out of them.

"More pipes? I thought it was all over. I mean I thought you had finished everything to be ready for this evening."

Cossington wiped his hands on an old tea towel. "We are ready for tonight. These are just some further prototypes I've been working on for future outings. "

Dora let her bag slide to the floor. It landed with a thump.

"I don't understand," she said quietly. In a dark corner of the room a mouse scrambled across litter. "Are you just practising or experimenting with these?"

Cossington came and put his arm around her shoulder. "My dear sister, one bomb will not change the world, or even end the war. We have a long struggle ahead of us."

Dora looked at Cossington. His face was calm and his eyes were without the fanatical glow she sometimes saw in Malachy's. He had never spoken before about his commitment to Malachy's cause. From the moment she first heard Cossington speak in the room above the chemist's shop, Dora had assumed that his interest in their plans concerned the ingenious nature of the bomb, a dispassionate, scientific interest in how such a device might work. But he had thought beyond that, she realised, thought all the way through to the consequences of his invention and he had accepted them.

"Let me make you a cup of tea this time," Cossington was saying and he disappeared through a door that led to the chemist's shop. Dora sat down at a cleared end of the table. She had picked up her bag and opened it, retrieving her diary. By the time Cossington

returned with the tea, she was engrossed in her writing to Daniel. Not wanting to disturb her, he put the teacup down on the table and they both went quietly on with their work.

"Daniel, I saw the dynamite monsters he was creating. I thought of the people they were intended for. Tonight it will be the business men on the train. Louise or I will leave the pipe under the stairs coming down from the street. One of us will set the timer and leave. It will only take a few minutes. I imagine (although Louise disagrees with me) that no-one will notice whichever of us it is. That is why Malachy has chosen us for this dreadful task. We will be forgotten. The bomb will explode in a great ball of fire. They will all be taken by fire. I cannot get that fire from my mind, Daniel. I have been remembering my brother Edgar, how the exploding shell had burnt the skin from his body while he was still alive. Tom Holloway told me about his screams, how terrible they were. How he cannot forget them. Before, when I wrote to you this morning, I was feeling very afraid and I said 'I cannot do this'. Now I find that I must say that I cannot let this happen."

2.

At the police station the woman had been sitting on the wooden seat for too long. Her legs and back were beginning to ache and she would have liked very much to stand up and walk about. But the corridor where she sat so patiently was a very busy one and she was afraid that if she walked about she would embarrass herself by bumping into one of the many persons who seemed to be continually passing by.

Have I caused all this commotion? Dora wondered.

Nobody looked at her as they rushed past so she assumed that other urgent matters were driving them instead. She would like to stand up and at least stretch her limbs if she could not walk.

"Daniel, I went to the police. I went to the police station and sat on a hard bench in a cold corridor waiting to betray my friends, your friends."

Dora stood up and, as she did so, an officer came out of a nearby room.

"Miss Somerville?" He looked very young, Dora's own age even.

Dora was taken into a small room, equally cold and bare, a place for interrogation, she supposed. A more senior policeman sat at the table. Slowly Dora began to speak in response to his questions. The policeman spoke politely, but Dora's throat was dry and she seemed to choke out the words. The junior officer brought her a glass of water. As she drank it, all of it in a couple of thirsty gulps, the senior officer reassured her that she would not be charged, in recognition of her courage and patriotism.

My thirty pieces of silver, Dora thought grimly, and wiped a few drops of water from her chin with her handkerchief.

After she had told them all she knew, Dora waited while they typed her statement. She was allowed to stay in the interrogation room this time and the young officer brought her a cup of tea. Dora shivered. After leaving Cossington at the workshop, she had come straight here, lugging her huge bag. No-one had asked her what was in it and she was glad because she did not want anyone reading her journal. When she arrived at the police station's front counter, Dora had realised that she did not know who to ask for. She said that she had come to report a dangerous bomb plot and discovered then that there was a special squad established to deal with such things.

Dora waited in the interrogation room. The space seemed cavernous. She felt disconnected from the world outside. At last the policemen returned with pages of the statement for her to sign. Now I must put my name to my words, Dora thought as she picked up the pen. She held it between her fingers, poised over the paper, a man's pen thick and made of a cold metal like the blade of a knife or the barrel of a gun. It probably belonged to the senior police officer. Once she had signed, he would replace it snugly inside his lapel pocket. Dora had not understood that this signing would in fact be the hardest part.

"I am killing them all, Daniel, as surely as if I had fired a machine gun into their company."

When she was leaving, the senior police officer was courteous. A gentleman, he opened the door to usher Dora out. Well done, he kept saying, and in the corridor he suddenly seized her hand and shook it. Well done, his palm was sweaty as he crushed her fingers. As if I had won a prize at school, Dora thought but said nothing, wanting only to run away.

3.

Dora walked up the laneway to the chemist shop. She had her own key now and could let herself in through the laneway door. She moved through the dark shop, careful to avoid tables laden with bottles and jars, and climbed the steep wooden staircase to the meeting room. It occurred to her that the Marks family must have once lived in these rooms above the shop. But as their fortunes increased, they had moved into a much grander suburban establishment despite the loud grumblings of their affronted neighbours. Perhaps her mother had been right, Dora thought as she opened the meeting room door, the Marks were Jews after all. But what did it matter now? They would all burn the same on that train station platform, Jew and Gentile, man and woman.

There was an air of solemnity in the meeting room and Dora was glad of it. She had feared there might be excitement or, worse, levity, but unspoken amongst the group there seemed to be a strong understanding of what they were about to do. She was the last one to arrive. Louise was sitting on the couch talking to Susanna Ferris. Soon Malachy would call everyone to order and then she and Louise would draw lots. Whoever had the short straw would go with Malachy to the workshop and receive the last of their instructions from Nicholas Cossington. Dora looked around the room. She would have liked Nicholas to be there with her when the lots were drawn but he was nowhere to be seen. She guessed he was waiting with the invention in the workshop. She wondered if he hoped that she would be the one to carry the bomb; they were brother and sister as Cossington had said. Dora felt her heart tighten with sadness. She would like to warn him and give him a chance to get away. She had thought about how she might do this as she walked

from the police station to the meeting. But she did not know what the police would do or when they would strike. And Cossington had made the bomb; it had been born out of his mind. He was too clever not to know its consequences.

Malachy called everyone's attention and asked Louise and Dora to stand next to him. There was absolute silence in the room as they all looked at the two women. Malachy held up his fist. Two thick twigs of equal height poked out above his fingers. Louise and Dora looked at one another and smiled. They drew together, each pulling a stick from Malachy's grasp.

"Daniel - They broke down the door just as we were drawing the lots. The policemen rushed across the room, shouting, waving truncheons. It was almost comic; I wanted to laugh. But you know, Daniel, how grief and despair make me laugh. The thick bodies of the policemen pushed me aside like a blade of grass. When I saw Malachy again, after a few minutes, his face was bloody. He was close to me, kissing distance even. Two policemen held his arms but he struggled under their grip and one of his arms got free. I thought he might strike me, I wanted him to, but instead he reached for his button-hole and gave me the white feather he always carried. It belonged to me now, he shouted as they dragged him off, a white feather for the true coward. They dragged everyone away, except me. There was cursing and shouting, a scuffle of arms and legs but finally the room was empty and silent.

I stood alone in the room, still holding the feather. As I stood there, the room seemed to grow darker, the feather seemed whiter in the fading light. I looked up at the walls and saw our banners arrayed overhead like flags in some great Cathedral. The faces in the

posters seemed turned to me, accusing me. The war would go on, I thought. The world would not be changed. I have kept the feather. I think of it as my service medal."

Dora walked slowly down the stairs into the chemist shop. Policemen were everywhere but they ignored her. She walked between them like a ghost. Dora went to the back of the shop and out through the door that led across the chemist's yard to the workshop. She was looking for Cossington, hoping that he had not yet been taken away. There was a great deal of commotion in the lane and a police cart was positioned so that no-one could enter the workroom. The horses snorted and eyed her suspiciously. Beyond the cart, Dora could see an ambulance. Stretcher bearers were loading a covered body into the back. Dora's heart went cold. A policeman came out of the workshop and crossed the yard.

Dora ran to him. "Please, please tell me what has happened?"

The man hesitated.

Dora said, "My friend - my brother was inside. What has happened? Please tell me." Dora looked up into the man's face and saw that it was the young policeman from the interrogation. They both recognised each other at once.

"Miss Somerville. I'm sorry, the man inside has been killed."

"Was he shot? Did the bomb explode?" Dora's stomach was churning. She could not gather her thoughts.

"No. He was your brother you said?"

"A close family friend, I mean. Please tell me."

"He tried to escape by climbing up an inspection ladder onto the roof of this shed. Then he ran along the roof and jumped across onto the lean-to of the shop. He started to climb up the fire ladder on the outside of the chemist shop until he got to the first floor.

God knows where he thought he was going. Of all things, he was trying to open a first floor window as if he wanted to get inside, not run away. But he slipped and fell into the yard, cracking his head on something on the way down. Just over there he landed."

The young policeman cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry, he was killed in the fall."

"Oh," said Dora, "Thank you, officer. Thank you for telling me."

"I'm very sorry for you, Miss. If it's a comfort, he was probably unconscious when he hit the ground."

Dora thought of the letters written to the families of dead soldiers telling how they died painlessly.

The young policeman continued talking. "Do you know of any reason he would have climbed up onto the roof like that? Why would he be trying to get in the window?"

"I think it was because of me," said Dora softly, "he was coming to warn me."

Dora looked down at her hands. In one hand she held both the white feather and the stick she had drawn from the lots. Dora opened her hand and saw that she held the long straw. She would not have been the one to carry the bomb.

"I have lost another brother, killed my brother. I have killed someone I love so that countless strangers might live. The senior policeman has told me that I am a heroine. Is that enough, Daniel? Is it?"

Dora walked down Ramage Street towards her house. The young policeman had driven her home in a shiny police motor car. She had asked to be dropped at the top of the road preferring to come home quietly and not attract the attention of her neighbours. Dora opened the door and closed it behind her. The old house echoed with the sounds of its

only occupant. Dora did not know what was wrong with her. She could neither cry nor laugh. She went down to the kitchen and stood in the middle of the room. Her head was pounding, her mouth parched and sore, and then, as she was standing there, all the fear and the grief came up out of her. She spent the night at the bottom of the garden in the outside lavatory. She could not stop vomiting, even when her stomach was empty and there was only bile to come up out of her body.

"I often wonder, because I have a lot of time for wondering and for questioning at the moment, what would I have done if you were going to be arrested, Daniel? I cannot say but I hope we would have come to the same conclusion and gone to the police station together. In fact, I know that is what we would have done. Yes, I know it."

Nine

Armistice

"The war is over. The war is over: the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. There is dancing in the streets. There are women weeping and children laughing. Flags are waving. 'Armistice', what a funny word, you would like it, Daniel. It's one of those words that have to be looked up in a dictionary. We are told that it means a cessation of hostilities. The war has been ended by agreement between the parties. It sounds so civilised doesn't it? The Kaiser has fled, the Hun is crushed, Europe is in ruins and many of its poor people are starving and homeless. In Australia we experience all this as we have experienced the entire war, from a great distance. We read the paper over breakfast, listen to the radio after dinner and go to the pictures on Saturday afternoons. There is only one thing that really concerns us. Soon the soldiers will return, some of them, the survivors will return."

Dora watched as the Australis laboured through the waves, rocking and tilting under the wind. The ship seemed to emerge little by little through a veil of spray, its details becoming sharper as it approached the wharf. When the ship was still some way away, the spray and mist were scattered by the wind and the November sun came out, already hot with its promise of the long summer ahead. The sunlight fell on the old, ice-battered ship and made her seem grander and more noble than she was.

Dora's arm was aching and she put her bag down on the dock. She was still carrying the large embroidered bag with the bone handle so that she could bring her journal with

her to greet the ship. She had the Kipling crammed in there as well, all the correspondence from Flanagan. Dora thought of all the words waiting on paper and in hearts, words that needed to be shared and soon, perhaps, would be. But for this moment, between those waiting on the wharf and those watching on the ship, there was only the immensity of a great and beautiful silence.

*Reframing the Past for the Present: Writing 'The
White Distance'*

By Susan Errington

1. Introduction

The purpose of this exegesis is to examine the process of writing a novel which incorporates historical fact into the creative text. The exegesis considers how the past world of the novel can be given relevance for present readers by using the metaphor of cropping and reframing. This metaphor is drawn from the work of the Dutch cultural theorist, Mieke Bal, and in particular her essay, 'Memories in the Museum: Preposterous Histories for Today' (1999).

The exegesis begins by describing how the kernel of an idea develops into an actual draft story. This section deals with the use of historical texts, including primary and secondary sources, biography and family history. The work then describes the influences of other modern novels with historical settings, particularly Michael Ondaatje's novel The English Patient (1992), set at the end of World War II.

The metaphor of cropping and reframing is examined in detail in a separate section with reference to Bal's essay, and describes how Bal's original theory about artistic practice in painting can be applied to a literary work. Here Michael Ondaatje's novel The English Patient provides a valuable example of this writing technique, and the use of historical data through containment, or to follow the metaphor, cropping and reframing. Examples from 'The White Distance' are also measured against the metaphor. Bal's metaphor is then compared to the metaphor of the 'prism of stories' as discussed by the Australian cultural historian Paula Hamilton in her essay 'Memory Studies and Cultural History' (2003).

Language both in the narrative and in dialogue have been consciously presented in a particular way to highlight the novel's historical resonances. In the exegesis, the use of language and the rendering of speech spoken ninety years ago is discussed, as well as the role that memory plays in the way in which certain terms and words are used. The writing style chosen for rendering language in 'The White Distance' is compared to the style used in other recent, historical novels, Kate Grenville's The Secret River (2006), for example. The poetry of Rudyard Kipling is used throughout the novel and plays both an overt role in the plot as well as a role in setting the tone and giving historical perspective.

Visual images, painted and photographed, played two important roles in the writing of 'The White Distance'. The first was as an historical record and guide; the second was to provide insight into the artistic and cultural sensitivities of the early twentieth century. Many images were used and their importance in the development of the novel is discussed. The images referred to are reproduced in the Appendix.

The balance of the exegesis takes a wider view, discussing the current debate about historical fiction, with particular reference to historian Inga Clendinnen's response to Grenville's The Secret River. Against the background of this debate, the exegesis looks at the role played by empathy and ethics in writing an historical novel.

2. Inside The Ideas Factory: Eggs, Chickens and Pipe Bombs.

Many literary influences were important to me when writing my novel, 'The White Distance'. But before Mawson, Ondaatje and Woolf, there was an *idea* that from the outset directed all of my research. The idea was this: that sometimes we are confronted by real situations which test our public ideals and find them wanting and we need to look inside for strength. From experience, I knew that to be in this situation was to be in a lonely place. So I imagined a real lonely place and thought of Antarctica. But the choice of Antarctica as a location was also more than this. It offered a place where a human being, in this case Daniel Bone, would be in a situation of *extremis* on a personal scale in the same way that war, on a much larger scale, places soldiers, civilians and nations also in a situation of *extremis*. At a technical level, the isolation of Antarctica provided a means of containment that allowed for the exploration of the novel's important themes more closely through individual characters. This technique, of using a smaller stage to examine large ideas, is not new in English literature and I cannot claim a literary breakthrough in using it here. The literary work which most influenced me as I wrote the Antarctic sections of the novel was R C Sherriff's 1929 play, Journey's End where the horrors of World War I are revealed from the perspective of a small, dark dugout on the front line.

Thinking about Antarctica led me to think about Douglas Mawson (1882-1958), the rudiments of whose story I already knew from childhood visits to the South Australian Museum. I began reading Mawson's popular account of his 1911-1913 expedition to Antarctica called The Home of the Blizzard (1915), and thinking about

the notion of the hero and, partly because of the timing of Mawson's story, about war and in this case, World War I. For me, time of war seemed another one of those lonely places where cherished ideals are put to the test, if not the sword. As well as Mawson's The Home of the Blizzard, I looked for various primary and secondary works about the civilian experience of World War I. I did this, taking copious notes as I went along, to stimulate my imaginative thinking about the how the novel would develop.

With Mawson's writing in particular I wanted to make imaginative contact with the mind of a man who had not only known the harshness of Antarctica in the early twentieth century but also reflected deeply on his experience there. Mawson's thoughts about Antarctica were more important to me than the facts surrounding his expedition. For this reason too, I decided *not* to visit Antarctica during the course of writing the novel because the real, factual, physical Antarctica of the twenty-first century was not the place where Mawson was in 1913 and not the place where my character Daniel Bone confronts his demons in 1918. More than that, in visiting or, more likely, flying over the continent, I would simply be viewing a landscape without context or meaning. I was influenced in my decision to trust Mawson's words by Peter Carey's Oscar and Lucinda (1988). In this novel the early life of Oscar is based very closely on the early life of nineteenth century writer Edmund Gosse as described in Gosse's autobiography Father and Son (1907), which I had also read. It seemed to me that listening to literary voices from a time in which a work of fiction was to be set could be of as much benefit to a creative writer as poring over historical records and text books.

I kept particularly detailed notes from my reading of Mawson, wanting to know what he thought of every sighting, every impression, every taste and smell. I also sought out the writing of another Antarctic explorer, Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922). My research focused on two aspects of their accounts. The first was their various and detailed descriptions of the Antarctic environment; here I preferred Mawson to Shackleton. Mawson expressed a natural wonder for the ice world he saw around him. He was an astute observer of nature and able to reflect upon the greater consequences of what he saw. He was deeply concerned about the unchecked hunting of humpback whales and called for restrictions on the activities of whalers lest this species be driven to extinction. He was erudite; his writing is full of quotes from poetry and scripture and he had a keen sense of humour. He was an Australian and without any sense of Imperial deference. Though he hoisted the Union Jack on Antarctica, Mawson wrote, thought and acted as if everything he did was for Australia. If he served another god, it was the international science community of which he rightly thought himself a member. Here is Mawson writing about an observation of the Aurora Polaris:

Powerless, one was in the spell of an all-enfolding wonder. The vast, solitary snow-land, cold-white under the sparkling star-gems; lustrous in the rays of the southern lights; furrowed beneath the sweep of the wind. We had come to probe its mystery, we had hoped to reduce it to terms of science, but there was always the "indefinable" which held us aloof yet riveted our souls (The Home of the Blizzard, p.107).

My second area of research was into meteorological work in Antarctica at the time of my novel. I looked to Shackleton largely for information about the type of weather

recording equipment used, as meteorological surveys seemed to play a greater role in his two missions than in Mawson's. What follows is an example of Shackleton's writing in this area:

The greatest difficulty that was experienced was due to the accumulation of rime on the instruments. In low temperatures everything became covered with ice crystals, deposited from the air, which eventually grew into huge blocks.... The rime collected on the thermometers, the glass bowl of the sunshine recorder and the bearings of the anemometer, necessitating the frequent use of a brush to remove it, and sometimes effectively preventing the instruments from recording at all (South: The Endurance Expedition, 1919, p. 387).

A number of modern literary works have directly addressed the nature of Antarctic exploration by examining the experience through the form of fiction. The more prominent ones include Douglas Stewart's 1941 play Fire on the Snow, Thomas Keneally's novel A Victim of the Aurora (1977) and Beryl Bainbridge's novel The Birthday Boys (1991). Stewart and Bainbridge both deal with Scott's doomed expedition in 1911. Bainbridge's work was, for my purposes, the one of greater interest. Her novel consists of five different accounts of the expedition by five different members of the team, including Scott himself. These five stories differ greatly from one another in their accounts of what happened but Bainbridge makes no authorial judgment about who is telling the truth; this is left to the reader to decide for him or herself. Taking Bainbridge's use of a multiple, layered accounts, it could be argued history is not undifferentiated mass of data, but rather a question of perspective and analysis. This is a point which I further explore in my exegesis

through the writings of the Australian historian, Inga Clendinnen (Exegesis, chapters 3 and 7).

Keneally's novel, set in 1909 and told as a first-person narration, is at its heart a murder mystery, with the murder taking place amongst the members of an Antarctic expedition and the efforts by the expedition leader to cover up the crime. This novel is a more plot-driven, less literary work than Bainbridge's. A Victim of the Aurora provides a model for the balancing of plot and character against the evocation of a harsh, almost overwhelming landscape. It offers two other interesting links to 'The White Distance' as well. One is the so-called 'Forbes-Chalmers Effect' which, in Keneally's novel, concerns the story that two men (Forbes and Chalmers) from a previous expedition did not die as reported but lived in the Antarctic, in a kind of ice cave, as wild or mad men. (p. 62)

The other link is the final, extreme action taken by the leader of Keneally's expedition in executing one of his own men to save his and the expedition's reputation (p. 220).

Soon I was drafting scenes for the Antarctic parts of the novel and sketching out characters. I started to look around for Australian sources for the city-based sections of the novel and for details about the anti-war movement. One of the most valuable text's I read was Janet Morice's Six Bob A Day Tourist (1985). This work contains the diary entries of a young, female anti-conscriptionist, Mabel Gardner, and the letters sent home to her by her brother, Tom, fighting in France. Morice provided, through her research, an excellent insight into the pacifist movement and her work helped shaped many of the characters and events of the novel. Small details in the letters and diary notes found their way, usually in mutated form, into 'The White

Distance.’ Daniel Bone’s character owes more than a little to Mabel’s pacifist husband, Will, a scholarly, literary socialist and Esperanto enthusiast. Will and Mabel campaigned together against conscription. Tom’s letters from the battlefields of France, particularly as regards shelling at Fromelles, formed the basis of Edgar’s letter to Dora which opens ‘The White Distance.’

Donald Horne’s wonderful short account of the life and times of Billy Hughes (2000) was valuable for its account of the anti-conscription movement and provided hard, factual information about the political and social tensions alive at this time.

One text, which complimented Morice’s account of the pacifist movement, was Ian Turner’s Sydney’s Burning (1967). Turner provides an historical account of the activities of the Australian Branch of the International Workers of the World during World War I. The IWW, or Wobblies, as its members were called, was fundamentally opposed to Australia’s involvement in the war which they saw as a bosses’ war over profits. Their wider goal was to bring about social and political reform through the spread of socialism. The Wobblies were not opposed to violent action to prove their point and their activities included attempting to burn down public buildings using cotton trash soaked in homemade nitro-glycerine. Not surprisingly, the Wobblies were dealt with harshly by the authorities. From this research, I came up with many of my ideas about the activities of the International Society and the character of Malachy Mara. I had originally planned for my characters to follow the Wobblies’ procedure for making explosives for my characters’ attack on the railway station when, as part of further research, I came across Christy Campbell’s Fenian Fire (2003). This work provided a history of the early activities of the IRA and concerned an attempt by

members of the British Parliament to assassinate Queen Victoria. From this text, I learned about how to build a pipe bomb at home and that these early pipe bombs frequently used timers to determine the moment of detonation. I immediately decided that this would be the method used by my characters not only because it would have greater effectiveness within the plot but also because it would have greater resonance for modern readers living in a world where the personal bomb in a crowded place is a favourite tool of terrorists.

Another valuable, though not Australian, work for me with regard to wartime civilian background was Hermione Lee's biography of Virginia Woolf (1997) with its great slabs of text from the letters and diaries of Woolf and her contemporaries during World War I. Lee covers her subject in the finest detail, providing access to the minds of thinkers and idealists, who suggested models for my Australian characters, though with many differences in the end. The ideas and manners of the Bloomsbury Group as well as the designs of the Arts and Crafts Movement seemed to fit perfectly into my plans for the novel. I found this book to be a valuable technical resource as well. Lee goes into great detail describing the operation of the hand-press that was initially used by the Woolfs to start the Hogarth Press.

I took the opportunity to revisit a work I once reviewed, Lesbia Harford's The Invaluable Mystery, set amongst the Australian anti-war movement at the time of World War I. Harford's work, written around 1924, had lain undiscovered until its publication in 1987. I also rediscovered a book I had read long ago, Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Honour, another story about the conflict between ideals and reality in war-time.

Lesbia Harford (1891 – 1927) proved a particularly fruitful literary acquaintance. Her own character and some of the events of her life were instrumental in the shaping of both Dora and Louise in ‘The White Distance’ and even, to a more minor extent, that of Malachy Mara. Harford was an outspoken anti-conscriptionist, and member of International Workers of the World (IWW), writing for their paper, *Direct Action*. She had been born into a comfortable, middle-class, Catholic family in Melbourne but their fortunes failed and, following his bankruptcy, her father deserted the family and fled to the Western Australian Gold fields. Harford’s mother was forced into paid work to support her children. As an adult, Harford worked to pay her way through her legal studies at university. As well as her life-long commitment to socialism, she was a believer in free-love and feminism, having lovers of both sexes. Yet her personality was such that she felt uncomfortable in structured, disciplined political organisations. Her physical health was very poor, often limiting her ability to participate in political action. Harford suffered from a congenital heart defect and, later, tuberculosis. She preferred more direct and immediate activities, perhaps driven by a sense of urgency that her life might be shorter than most. Nor was Harford unique as a radical woman at this time; she had a number of like-minded, Australian contemporaries including Kate Lush, Elizabeth Ahern, Doris Blackburn, Sarah Jane Baines and Jean Beadle to name a few.

By contrast, the greater part of fiction written by women at the time of World War I supported the war effort. For my research in this area, I am grateful to the scholar Jan Bassett for her article ‘Preserving the White Race’: Some Australian Women’s

Literary Responses to the Great War.’ This article surveys and analyses poetry and fiction published by women during and about the war and concludes:

Many similarities can be seen among the Australian women who published works about the Great War....Most came from upper and middle classes....Their political views were conservative and a number openly supported conscription. Most were committed, in their actions and words, to Australia’s involvement in the war. (p. 226.)

It is beyond the boundaries of this exegesis to examine each of the literary works identified by Bassett, but I do agree with her conclusion that these works, both in terms of poetry and fiction, are “generally of much greater historical influence than literary.’ (p223.) For this reason, real historical figures, like Lesbia Harford, were more relevant in the creation of the characters of Dora, Louise and Malachy, than the fictional characters in these contemporary works.

Bassett’s article also explores the current of racism which flowed through both sides of politics at this time. Referring to Australian women fiction writers, she comments:

‘Preserving the white race’ was a major preoccupation for a number of these writers. Many of them (at times in contradiction to their stated support for it) saw the war as causing, or revealing, numerous threats to their class and race. Fear was held for the family. White Australia was glorified. Many concerns were felt about the future of the British Empire. (p.226)

In ‘The White Distance’, the International Society, and particularly Malachy Mara, is motivated by racism in its campaign against the war. Soon after they meet, Malachy tells Dora the story of how his father’s furniture-making business was undercut and

finally closed down by cheaper Chinese craftsmen. When she comes to after being trampled during the protest march, Dora finds she is lying on a banner which says 'Stop the War and Keep Australia White.' As Bassett points out, the slogan 'Preserve the White Race' was taken from an anti-conscription pamphlet, authorised by Jennie Baines and published by the Anti-Conscription Committee, Trades Hall, Melbourne.

One Australian writer who was closer to the action of World War I than most of her contemporaries was Henry Handel Richardson, living in London and other parts of England for the duration of the conflict. Richardson felt a great love for Germany, its culture and its people, and her letters show that the outbreak of war caused her some distress (Letter to Mary Kernot', 8 August 1914). Her familiarity with all things German made her response to the war more sophisticated than many of her Australian contemporaries at home. In this regard, Richardson and her correspondents offer a more thoughtful insight into war time experience and into Australian intellectual life at the time.

And both my husband and I have always been in close touch with Germany – the real Germany – not this hideous Prussian militarism what has threatened to swamp all that was best in German life and thought. (Letter to Mary Kernot, 5 September, 1914)

Yet in her surviving letters after the outbreak of the war, she begins to use the word 'Hun' rather than German and 'Hunland' instead of Germany.

Richardson's war-time experience was also more immediate than those of her Australian contemporaries, being in Dorset during a Zeppelin raid, for example, and

experienced air raids while living in London. She wrote to her friend, Mary Kernot in Australia in January, 1918:

Yes, I do envy you, you lucky beings out there in the peace and sunshine....

But I do envy you your warmth and peace – we are decidedly too much in the firing-line to be pleasant at times.

But Richardson was not without understanding of the different kind of suffering imposed by great distance. Writing of the death of Mary Kernot's nephew in the same letter, she said: I am so sorry about your sister's boy. It is dreadful for mothers who are so far away.

By October 1918, Richardson was writing more hopefully to Mary Kernot about the possible end of the war.

I have bought two flags, a Union Jack and the Australian flag; at present they hang modestly in the passage; but they are there, all ready for the day... (5 October, 1918)

Richardson's sense of her Australian identity was undiminished by her time in England. The novel she wrote during the war was her trilogy The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney, an immigrant's story and a story about the European history of her country. Did she have some premonition that World War I would bring about a significant change in Australian national identity? It is an interesting thought to entertain but there is some support for this idea in the surviving letters. In her letter to Mary Kernot of October, 1918, Richardson wrote of her intentions for the trilogy.

Lately, I have thought – this is in strict confidence and for you alone, for I never speak of my plans in advance – that I might even add a fourth (book),

leading up to and ending with Gallipoli. This seems to me Australia's supreme outstanding deed of merit – and would make a good rounding off of the whole.

In March, 1919, Mary Kernot replied:

Your program appeals to me – yes, with Gallipoli Australia seems to have grown up....(3 March, 1919).

But the fourth volume was never written and the trilogy ends with personal disintegration of its central character.

The Australian novelist Martin Boyd (1893 – 1972), in his 1946 novel, Lucinda Brayford, revisited some of his own experience as a soldier in World War I. Boyd himself, had initially been reluctant to enlist, claiming to be a pacifist. He later succumbed to the enormous public pressure placed on so many young men, and joined up.

Much of the action of Lucinda Brayford, particularly as regards World War I, takes place in England, where the heroine, Lucinda, has gone to live with her aristocratic English husband, Hugo. Hugo, initially arrogant and pompous, suffers a severe facial disfigurement in battle and becomes a bitter recluse, living in a few rooms of the house, a stranger even to his son. With Hugo's sinister decline during and after the war, there is a general decline in life in England, at least for the upper class to which the principal characters belong. By contrast the Australian characters become more confident, more comfortable with themselves. Lucinda, as the link between these two nations, begins to think fondly of her homeland and can admire its virtues without the slightest cringe. When her sister, Lydia, and brother-in-law, Roger, travel to England after the war, Lucinda goes to greet them:

Roger laughed and said to Lucinda, 'She's (Lydia's) worth her weight in gold.' It was years since Lucinda had heard a man say anything nice to his wife in public, and she found it very moving. (p.296)

Speaking from a creative and technical perspective, there was one final work which was especially important to me from the beginning and for the writing of 'The White Distance' as a whole. This was Michael Ondaatje's novel The English Patient (1992). I first turned to the novel because it had some broad similarities with what I proposed for 'The White Distance'. It describes a war coming to an end and a group of people isolated from the main battle action yet profoundly affected by it. But the benefits I derived from this work turned out to be far greater. I came to use this novel as a sort of crib book to see how a writer writes about a past he has not personally experienced. The admirable thing about Ondaatje's work is his lightness of touch. Looking over his notes and acknowledgments at the end of the novel, there is no doubt that his historical research was extensive but the weight of this background work does not lie heavily on the body of the story. Ondaatje does not appear to feel the need to disgorge his research to establish an imaginative link with the past. Instead Ondaatje achieves a careful balancing between a sense of authenticity and creativity. It may also be that Ondaatje's lightness of touch is drawn from his skills as a poet. He has learned the art of expressing much through suggestion and the poetic formulation of words. An example of Ondaatje's skill can be seen in the passage below where one of the characters, a man named Caravaggio, is resting on a bridge across the River Arno just as it is blown up by the retreating Germans:

As he lay there, the mined bridge exploded and he was flung upwards and then down as part of the end of the world. He opened his eyes and there was a giant

head beside him. He breathed in and his chest filled with water. He was underwater. There was a bearded head beside him in the shallow waters of the Arno. He reached towards it but couldn't even nudge it. He swam up to the surface, parts of which were on fire. (The English Patient, p.60)

What impressed me about this description was the tightness and control of the perspective. Here we have a major event focussed on the immediate experience of one man, yet also something greater, connecting all human experience: "part of the end of the world." This particular quotation is a pertinent example of the use of a cropping and reframing technique for writing about the past.

3. Preposterous Histories: Cropping and Reframing the Past

The argument that the process of writing historical fiction involves a process of cropping and reframing derives from the work of the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal in her essay called 'Memories in the Museum: Preposterous Histories for Today' (1999). Although ostensibly about an exhibition by the contemporary American artist Ken Aptekar, Bal's essay explores the relationship between memory, and the past and the present in art.

In this exhibition, entitled 'Talking to Pictures', Aptekar reproduced in detail a number of famous, pre-industrial European and American works from the Corcoran Museum in Washington. He then wrote brief autobiographical prose pieces on glass squares which were placed over the top of the works. The reproduced works had been altered in other ways too. Some had been cut up and reassembled, a telephone wire with birds sitting on it had been added to a sixteenth century landscape, the eyes in the portrait of the commissioner for Indian affairs had been changed from the arrogant eyes of an oppressor to the sad eyes of his victims. In this particular picture, the reproduced portrait was only two-thirds in Aptekar's painting and the viewer could see part of the original's frame and the blank wall beside it.

The first 'painting' in the exhibition was an empty frame which hung beside a beach scene in exactly the same frame. For both Bal and Aptekar, the frame was not an arbitrary appendage of the painting, but had life and purpose of its own. It provided boundaries and contexts and, when isolated and duplicated in this way, becomes part of a new, different, larger work in the present. By analogy, I would argue the modern

historical novel is a frame for the factual past it interpolates, rereading and recreating that past. It frames and reframes experience and superimposes upon that past a new meaning for and in the present. What Aptekar did with his old masters, at once capturing, interpreting and questioning the past, was also what the historical novelist does in setting down his or her story. Bal writes, "Humbly Aptekar copies; boldly he reframes; self-confidently he pulls cultural memories out of the shadow.

Authoritatively he tells us what matters for now" (p.183).

Some of Aptekar's reproductions were cropped portions of larger works focussing on details relevant to the painter and linked to the overwritten words. Bal says, "Cropping we can now redefine as framing" (p.185), an idea which I found linked up with my process in writing from history. I found myself exercising a kind of cropping over the historical material that I had been researching. This cropping is evident in the creation of specific characters who naturally narrow the viewpoint of the novel.

Literary cropping of history can be evident in the scenes chosen or places or politics of the novel. For me this process as it took shape, was not a question of disregarding the truth of the facts, but of choosing to emphasize particular aspects that are then framed within the novel. Writing 'The White Distance' became, in this sense, an act of cropping from a wider historical canvas.

A historical novel can be like Aptekar's work in another way: works from the past are over-written with passages of autobiography which are contemporary but also linked to the much older originals which Aptekar has reproduced. Similarly, the writer of historical fiction interprets facts in a way that links the past and the present. If we apply Bal's interpretation here, the creative writer both engages in the cropping and

framing of the historical landscape and also overwrites it with an interpretation, a new meaning even, from the present which links past and present and creates a new piece of art.

Another example of the cropping and reframing technique can be seen in Ondaatje's The English Patient when Kip, a central character, hears by radio about the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan:

One bomb. Then another. Hiroshima. Nagasaki.

He swerves the rifle towards the alcove. The hawk in the valley air seems to float intentionally into the V sight. If he closes his eyes, he sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air.

This tremor of Western wisdom. (p.284)

Examining this passage, we can see how personalisation of a major world event, by registering it through the perceptions of one character, is one means of cropping and framing the past.

In 'The White Distance' I employed the cropping and framing technique for several different purposes. One such purpose was to convey the terrible nature of the World War I without showing panoramic battle scenes or having soldier characters. For this reason, the novel opens with Tom Holloway's letter to Dora, telling her about the horrific death of her brother. Thus the letter plays a part in the atmosphere and plot of the novel, and as a device, conveys the sense of distance between my characters in Australia and the action of a war which nonetheless has a profound effect on their lives. The letter is about both a personal and a public event. Notably, for Dora it is

also a link to her brother and she preserves the letter open, under the glass of her dressing table so that she can relive this tragic past event whenever she wants to:

After my brother was killed, I received a letter from his friend, Tom Holloway, about how Edgar died. For a long time, I carried this letter everywhere with me, in a bag or a pocket. I took it out every now and again in odd places and read it to myself. Afterwards, I would hold the letter, thinking and thinking, but I never understood what I was feeling. There was no word for it, that drilling into the chest, that pain. Over time the letter became stained and tattered. I was afraid of losing it altogether so I put it under the glass of my dressing table. I placed the letter so that it was open; that way, I could read it whenever I wanted to but it would still be protected. The story of my brother lay there, under the glass, captured at the moment between life and death.

In the Antarctic parts of the novel, the characters are literally contained, cropped and framed by their environment, and this situation permits an intense focus on their relationships with one another. The emphasis on their isolation in an extreme environment is intended to make the strange events between them credible to the reader.

Although the reason for my characters' presence in Antarctica is a scientific expedition, I did not want the novel to become a treatise on early twentieth century meteorology, nor did I wish the reader to become distracted by long passages of scientific explanation. The scientific content of the novel is cropped by using the perspective of the Daniel, a non-scientist, to describe scientific tasks and equipment:

They all took him out in their turn. His skills with the press, assembling and operating its various parts, meant that Daniel was quick to learn what was required with their special equipment with its strange names, the Dines Anemometer for measuring the force of the wind or Robinson's Anemometer for measuring the speed. Weather Screens and puffometres, Daniel had fallen in love with the poetry of their equipment, the names of which made him think of the adventures of Jules Verne. His favourite was the Sunshine Recorder and he first imagined it as a device for capturing the warmth and light of the sun in the same way that tracks of music were laid down on a gramophone record. In the sunless months to come, they might open the box and release its contents, filling the Hut with the sun's rays. He kept such private jokes and imaginings to himself, thinking rightly that the weathermen would not approve. But for Dora, he wrote down everything.

From these varied examples, it can be seen that cropping and reframing from the broader canvas of the past can be approached through a variety of devices, character, environment, and perspective. By "broader canvas", I do not mean to argue that history is some kind of undifferentiated mass of data. Historians make choices too, not about the facts or events of past action but rather the perspective from which that action will be considered and the interpretations that can be given to it. An interesting example of such a choice by an historian is demonstrated by Inga Clendinnen in her 1999 Boyer Lecture, 'Incident on a Beach'. Clendinnen recounts the story of an encounter on the South Western Australian coast, between a group of French scientists and an Aboriginal woman in 1801. The woman was subject to a short, physical examination by the men who believed they had done her no harm. The

“available record”, the written record, is that provided by the Frenchmen. In her lecture, Clendinnen imagines what the historical account might be like from the woman’s perspective. Clendinnen’s point here and in her larger work, ‘The History Question’ (1996) is that history does not consist of a single narrative from a single point of view but rather, it is ‘lumpy’ and many stranded. For Clendinnen, history inevitably leaves things out. As the Clendinnen writes:

God-historians hovering somewhere up and beyond the texts win no knee-bobs nowadays. We are increasingly ready to admit that a human hand pushes the pen or taps the keys of the word processor, that there is a needle “I” between the past and the reader through which everything passes. (‘The History Question’)

Clendinnen’s fellow historian, Mark McKenna, in his 2005 published lecture Writing the Past: History, Literature and the Public Sphere in Australia agrees with this perspective, rejecting the style of historical writing where: the history almost appears on the page as if it just dropped from the sky, as if it comes from nowhere and that’s a lie. (p.8)

‘Lie’ is a very powerful word. Not all historians agree with this perspective, but further examination of these complex historical arguments is beyond the scope of this Exegesis. The larger point for my purposes is that an appreciation of history, like fiction, is subject to what Clendinnen, following the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, calls the ‘narrative imagination’, the ability to make unobvious connections between sequences of human actions and to recognise their likely consequences (Incident on a Beach).

4. Memoirs in the Museum: A Personal Prism

When I was a little girl, my paternal grandmother used to take me to the South Australian Museum. I remember especially the stuffed elephant, which seemed to press its huge tusks against the glass of its case as if it might come charging out, and the enormous whales hanging, suspended in air as if in water, in the front windows. Upstairs there was a Pacific Islands exhibit with a cabinet of shrunken heads. As far as I can recall, my grandmother and I did not speak to one another during these excursions, unless it was about what books I was reading. It was fortunate that I liked to read and was therefore able to preserve the natural bond between us. We only ever went to the Museum.

In fact, we were a family of museum-goers. Holidaying in various country towns around the State, a visit to the local museum and other historical sights was always a priority. If there was no museum, we went to cemeteries, churches and antique shops. In the gloomy, walled cemetery at Moonta in the mid north of South Australia, I rode in a horse-drawn hearse and saw the hundreds of unmarked graves of babies killed in a diphtheria epidemic. In those days, especially in country museums, it was still possible to touch historic objects. I remember turning on ancient bath taps in Martindale Hall and sitting on one hundred year old upholstery in Walta Walta, both historic houses in the Clare Valley. In some old houses, the people who ran the museum were the descendants of the original inhabitants and so they, and their stories and explanations, were like a living part of the museum. “Cultural living in its bare bones is talk,” writes the Australian ethnographer Greg Denning in Performances

(1996). "(T)alk translated into all sorts of symbols. That's its realism". (p.34); this was certainly true of many of the museums we visited in our holidays.

Writing 'The White Distance' and researching its historical setting provided me with an opportunity to reflect on these excursions and what lay behind them. I do not believe that they arose from a ghoulish desire to know the dead; rather they came from a desire to touch the past, sometimes literally, but most often metaphysically. We did not seek to do this because the past was unknown and unowned by us but for exactly the reverse reason. The museums and other historical places were a conduit through which we reached a past to which the present had always been connected.

In her essay, 'Memory Studies and Cultural History' (2003), the Australian cultural historian Paula Hamilton has written about how things, especially the personal things we tend to think of as memorabilia, connect not only the past to the present but the personal to the public, creating a modern, memorial culture through a sense of shared experience. "This memorial culture is characterised by the dominance of memory and commemoration as the prism through which we negotiate the past" (p.83). The idea of the memorial culture reflects a situation where members of the public have collectively taken possession of the past in an active way with "large numbers of people now doing the work of mourning and remembering themselves, rather than leaving it to others" (p 83), or rather than leaving it to officialdom. In this way individuals claim a familiarity with and a unique, private ownership of the past in the same way as my family did when visiting or perhaps the word is 'experiencing' museums and their collections.

The metaphor of the 'prism' referred to by Hamilton and her comment that the past is something that we must negotiate in the present provide interesting parallels to the cropping and framing metaphor proposed by Mieke Bal. Just as, first, the prism collects light and then breaks it down into its separate colours, so the writer of historical fiction could be said to take the facts of the past and break them up into stories. In the same way, the white light going into the prism is the undifferentiated record of the past while the colours refracted out are the result of the present's negotiation with that past. Yet the different bands of light have the same source. They are all the part of the same beam of light.

The prism metaphor also provides an effective way for considering the operation of the past inside 'The White Distance'. In the novel, the past and the present are strongly connected and, like the light through the prism, the past, as I revisit it, is broken down into different meanings. For example, Dora memorialises the life of her brother Edgar in the preservation of his room.

This room, it always pleased her to see, had remained unchanged since the day her brother left, but not because Dora harboured any false hope that her brother was still alive. She had made a kind of pact with herself. She would clear out the room when the war ended and not before. In the meantime she tidied and dusted and they both waited for the new day, the new leaf, the woman and the room together.

She opened the wardrobe and began to search through suits and tennis clothes. Hats tumbled onto her, smelling of mothballs. At the very back was Edgar's one overcoat, stiff on the hanger like a dark sentinel. Dora touched the collar: such a thick coat for this climate. Too thick, she had always said. Was

it cold when Edgar died? She sensed that it was, from the scraps of information that had come to her. Edgar hated the cold, but then he died in a fire, burned to death, screaming into death. She pulled her hand off the coat and turned away from the image.

But Dora's purpose is not simply to create a museum to her brother's existence; she intends to sort the room out once the war ends. Rather Dora uses objects, such as Edgar's overcoat and later his umbrella, to form a link with her brother and bring him into her present.

In the edition of Kipling's poems, given to Dora as a gift in her bereavement, she carries with her even the future that her brother can no longer share.

"Thank you, Dora." Daniel put his arms around her. "You don't mind if I keep it here do you? I know it was a gift after Edgar was killed."

Dora shook her head. "No. Please keep it here. It wasn't Edgar's own book and somehow, when I got it, it made me sad to think of all the books Edgar would never read."

For another character in 'The White Distance', the bomb-maker Nicholas Cossington, the absence of memory and connection to a tragedy in the personal past leave him emotionally damaged:

"I made that trifle, you know," Cossington said, looking up from the pipe he was examining. Dora was standing next to him, by the work table, waiting for instructions.

"What?" Dora felt the question reach down into her numbness of feeling. It was intensely bright under the light; the darkness around them seemed as solid as a wall.

"For your party, a few months back. I made the trifle myself. I like cooking. I like mixing things up."

"What about your mother?"

"She died when I was two, knocked down by a tram of all things. A child's firecracker had frightened the horses and the carriage lurched backwards, crushing her as she was crossing the track behind it. What a strange, violent death. I can't remember her at all. It's as if I never had a mother."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I can't remember so I can't miss her."

Dora put her hand on his arm; Cossington's own hands were still on the pipe.

"Your whole life is her absence," she said, quietly.

Cossington, the beautiful boy, half smiled, shook his head and did not answer.

Thus there is a 'past' of stories within the novel itself. These stories help the characters and, in another way, the reader make sense of the novel's past in the novel's present. Greg Dening writes in Performances (1996): "We all make histories endlessly..... We tell stories about it. We interpret the meaning of gestures made, of words spoken, of actions done. We make a narrative of the past in our mind, in our conversations". (p.35)

5. **The Tongue Set Free: Language and Memory in ‘The White Distance’ and Other Places**

While I was researching and writing ‘The White Distance’, I presented a paper to a group of peers at another university. One of the questions I was asked and the subsequent discussion that followed concerned how I dealt with dialogue in the novel. Most interest was generated by questions and discussions about how I rendered accurately the speech of persons living ninety years ago. I had to confess to my colleagues that my research into this area had been circumspect but then, deliberately so.

Throughout the drafting process for ‘The White Distance,’ I found that dialogue in a novel was most effective when it mirrored the type of language used in the prose of the novel so that both formed a harmonious whole. This particular approach is supported by Debra Adelaide in her essay ‘The Voice of the Text’ (2007). Adelaide writes that the separate language of the text is the means by which the work defines itself and asserts its unique voice. For Adelaide, every text should have its own internal voice as part of the “truth of the text.” Expanding on this theory, she examines the work of the Australian author Gerald Murnane and the idea of the “embodied voice”. Of Murnane, she writes: “He creates the voice of the work by allowing the sentences on the page to reflect as near as possible those running through his head.” Adelaide’s examination of Murnane’s work also suggests the important role played by the language of the text in cropping and reframing:

‘Stream System’, which I call a ‘piece’ as it seems to be equally memoir *and* story...is almost a very sophisticated form of word association, building a

picture of an obsessive imagination.... In this sense 'Stream System', like much of Murnane's work, is a map of the mind.

Adelaide writes of the voice of the text as the "embodied voice" by which she means "a voice which complements narrative voice" as opposed to the author's overt choice of a viewpoint:

Therefore, on a simple structural level (because the piece is narrated from a particular viewpoint, which represents a clear choice by the author) and from a not so clear other level - for which there may not be a word, but which represents a combination of romantic, individualistic, expressive and possibly other, mysterious views about authorship - the work defines itself, asserts its distinctive voice, the voice of the text.

Considering this argument, the "embodied voice" could also be called the 'embedded voice', the pattern of language which is carved into the text and is that text, or as Adelaide calls it, "the grain of the voice".

Intrinsic to Adelaide's theory on the importance of the voice of the text is the role of the reader in the "creation of narrative". There are of course a number of readers of any text, including the author, his or her teachers, friends, editors and peers, and each may respond differently to its voice. But Adelaide is specifically thinking of that unknown reader, the ultimate audience of the published novel, when she speaks of the reader who steps in to complete the voice of the text by allowing his or her own imagination to fill in gaps and reflect on utterances and actions. Adelaide's theory can perhaps be compared to the experience when the reader who still thinks about the characters and wonders what they are doing now after the novel has been read and finished with. The idea of this interaction between reader and text again suggests

another version of the cropping and reframing metaphor. Adelaide concludes that for the reader: "the text is only ever a palimpsest, a draft, a black-and-white outline, for the readers to superimpose their imagination. The reader is talking the text."

To return to the question of dialogue specifically in an historical novel, I found as I worked through various drafts that forcing dialogue in the novel was inherently dangerous because any false ring could immediately lose the reader's credence. Thinking and theorising too much about how a piece should sound can lead to the death of an authentic voice through self-consciousness, according to Debra Adelaide. Reviewing Nick Drake's historical crime novel Nefertiti: The Book of the Dead, for example, the English critic Peter Millar praises the manner in which Drake "manages to make the dialogue work with a spare style and subtly avoiding too much anachronistic speech" while savagely criticising others in the genre for their misuse of "olde worlde" language (2006).

Consequently I was a little concerned when reading the transcript of Ramona Koval's 2006 interview with Kate Grenville about Grenville's historical novel The Secret River (2006). Speaking about the language of the novel, Grenville said "What I ended up with was something that was fairly plain...."

I found myself in agreement with this comment.

But Grenville went on "but I hope by arranging quite plain words in perhaps slightly unusual ways, I would get a slightly antique feeling and also a plausible voice for this Thames bargeman.... Every now and again I drop a slightly antique word like 'britches' or 'vittels'...."

Grenville's technique of randomly selecting "antique words" seemed to me to be unsatisfactory. From a drafting perspective, it seemed to force words into the text and, stylistically, ran the risk of those words going against the language of the novel as a whole. In these circumstances, the antique words could act as a false note in the ear of the reader. As part of my own research for the language of 'The White Distance', I selected fictional works from the early twentieth century in order to obtain an overview of the language, and especially the flow or rhythm of words, dialogue and prose, at this time in history. In particular, I reread Lesbia Harford's The Invaluable Mystery (1987) and Joyce's Ulysses (1922). In addition, and from the perspective of non-fiction or life writing, Mawson's prose was, as ever, a useful guide.

I had another linguistic link with this era as well which proved fruitful in the language of 'The White Distance'. All of my grandparents had been either children or young adolescents at the time of World War I and through their long lives they brought the language of the time with them into my present. So when Dora puts the kettle down onto the drainboard or Macalister describes Drummer as twopence halfpenny short of a quid it is the remembered voices of my grandparents that I am relying on rather than my formal research or a need to make my language suitably 'antique'. Their remembered voices acted a sounding board for testing my dialogue in 'The White Distance.' Memory, I discovered, was yet another way of cropping and reframing the past. In addition, my memory connection permitted me as author to make a small identification with that past. Reflecting on what this personal link might mean for my relationship with my novel led me to consider the question of identity and imaginative power as an aspect of historical fiction more generally.

The White Indian - Why use Kipling's Poetry?

There were a number of things about Rudyard Kipling which made him perfectly suitable to play a part in 'The White Distance'. He was a colonial, a white native of a black land and a child of the British Empire, facts he had in common with my characters. He occupied a place in the world that was similar to theirs. His poetry reflects the similar tensions of belonging and insecurity to those that have haunted Australian society since settlement. I sometimes thought, during my research, that Kipling might have agreed with my character Howard Drummer and said "The Empire is my country." As a poet, Kipling was a populist, sentimental and patriotic. His rhyming couplets grace public monuments and, just as he entered surreptitiously into the hearts of Dora and Daniel, he has entered modern speech with phrases like "old as the hills" and "we have served our day" so that we occasionally speak his verse without knowing it.

Kipling, as the last in a particular kind of tradition in English poetry, the last before modernism, suffered the strange fate of being an artist who lived beyond his age and could not adapt to the new, literary world that was emerging around him. The point is well made by M.M Kaye in the introduction to Rudyard Kipling: The Complete Verse (2002). Kaye writes:

Kipling had come uncomfortably close to death once before, in the early months of 1899.... Kipling was then at the height of his fame, and if he had died then he would have gone out in a blaze of glory.... Kipling recovered and thirty seven years later, when he died in a London hospital, his death was to go almost unnoticed. (p. xvii)

But in the course of my research, I made discoveries that changed the way in which I thought about Kipling's poetry. These discoveries made an impact on the way his poetry is presented in the novel in that Daniel's contempt for the poet softens over his time in Antarctica. My deepened understanding of the man and his work allowed Kipling's verse to play a more complete role in the plot of the novel, and fittingly his poetry forms Drummer's epitaph. Here with this changed use of Kipling, I made a slight adjustment to my framing of the historical picture in 'The White Distance'.

I discovered that Kipling was by no means the puppet of empire when writing about World War I. Although he began as a supporter of Britain's involvement, he changed his mind after the death in combat of his son Jack. His subsequent investigation into the conduct of the war further qualified his position. Kipling's verse, particularly after this time, does not glorify war; yet he never resiled from his admiration for the bravery and sacrifice of the young soldiers. While he might decry the incompetence of their commanders he never called the soldiers fools for deciding to join up. He saw them instead as "mine angry and defrauded young" ('A Dead Statesman', Complete Verse, p.311).

With the decision to include Kipling in 'The White Distance' came the idea that Daniel and Dora would produce a contraband book of his latest poems. Daniel particularly sees this as a commercial venture, trading on wartime sentimentality for an idealised, lost past, Kipling's "boltless door" ('Song of the Wise Children', Complete Verse, p.37). Daniel has no scruple in publishing Kipling's work without the poet's permission because he and Dora see Kipling as the representative of a

world that is ending and they belong to the new order. They intend to use the money they make to get out of Australia and away from their colonial origins. What they find in the course of the novel is that the past, like the rhyme of Mr Kipling, is not so easy to escape from.

6. **That Eye the Mind: Photographic and Other Visual Images in the Writing of 'The White Distance'**

Photographic, painted and other images were an integral part of the research for 'The White Distance'. This research has a very practical application in an historical novel. Photographs showed me the things unsaid, the things that were too obvious to mention in first hand accounts and thought too minor to mention in secondary sources. These things included the details of clothing, what they were and how they were worn, small objects and artefacts or the way people held themselves when sitting, standing and walking. I sought out photographs of machines in particular, trains, trams, boats and motor cars which would appear in my novel, and visited museums such as the National Railway Museum, Port Adelaide, South Australia and National Motor Museum, Birdwood, in the Adelaide Hills to see these beasts in the flesh.

The work of the Arts and Crafts Movement opened up a palette of colours and an alternative means of recording the people and objects of the time. Three works in particular became important to me. One by Malcolm Drummond, titled *At The Piano* (1912, Art Gallery of South Australia, Appendix no.1), shows two women at a piano in a domestic interior. The red and dull orange colours, the primitive flower motif on the piano cover and the simply furnished room point to a relaxed modernism free of the elaborate artifice of earlier Victorian portraits. The two women, one seated at the piano, the other standing behind her, do not look at the painter and seem as if they are unaware they are being painted, as might happen when a photograph is taken. The

second painting is Vanessa Bell's *Bedroom, Gordon Square* (1912, Art Gallery of South Australia, Appendix no.2). Here the figure of a nude girl sits on a bed in a simply furnished room with a red screen behind her. The figure is featureless, almost a blob of flesh, yet she sits tensely upright as if embarrassed by her nakedness, not at all the relaxed, sensuous, classical nude. The third painting is *The Green House, St John's Wood* (c.1918-1919, Art Gallery of South Australia, Appendix no.3) by Robert Bevan. A large, plain house of three storeys looms over the cul-de-sac of a small street dotted with featureless human figures, a horse and cart and two motor cars. The scene is sparse and unromantic. The figures are tiny, the two closest to the viewer are walking away with their dog on a lead. They have their backs to us as if to say this is the modern world now; nobody poses.

There was another image, relevant to the urban, Australian part of the novel, which I was also seeking through this area of my research but without initially knowing what I might find. Ultimately, I was looking for Dora, and one day, by happy chance, I found her in a photograph while carrying out some research at the National Railway Museum (Appendix no.4). The photograph, enlarged to about half life size on four panels, shows the steam train that formerly covered the route from the city centre of Adelaide to the seaside suburb of Glenelg, now taken by a tram. The photograph was taken in 1914, the last year of the train's operation before it was replaced by the tram. The train is at the Adelaide city terminus in Victoria Square and some of the buildings in the background are recognisable as still standing today. In the foreground of the photograph, there is a well dressed young woman. When I saw her, I thought at once, there's Dora.

There were aspects of this photograph which were important to my research from an historical perspective. Firstly, the woman is young but obviously out alone. She is walking briskly, almost striding as far as her long, narrow skirt will let her. As this woman crosses in front of the train, you can see her thighs straining against the fabric. I referred to this image again when writing about Dora's flight through the stampeding crowd of anti-war protestors, her steps "trammelled" by her long skirt. There is an air of determination about this woman in the photograph but no-one else in the picture, all train commuters alighting from the carriages, is looking at her as if her behaviour is inappropriate or out of the ordinary. She is wearing a dark suit, white hat and gloves and carrying a large parcel under her arm. Of course, I thought when I saw it: it's Dora practising for the day of the bomb.

There was also a painting that was important to me with regards to the image of Dora. This work was *In a Strange Land* by Dod Proctor painted in 1919 (Appendix no.5). It appeared in 2006 on a poster advertising an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. The poster shows a particular detail from the larger work. The three-quarter image of a young woman dressed in a pale green top and dark skirt struck me as particularly modern. The young woman's lack of jewellery, unadorned clothes and long hair pulled simply back give her a contemporary look; she could walk around now and not draw any attention. The woman sits on a cliff top overlooking a stylised landscape of cultivated field, cliffs and the sea. Her back is to this scene. She has a forlorn expression as if deeply troubled. When I looked at the picture I wondered if the 'strange land' in which she found herself was not the relatively simple landscape behind her but the beginning of the modern post-war world, the world in which Dora and Daniel find themselves in 'The White Distance'. This conjecture is reinforced by

the fact that Proctor was in her native, post-war England when she painted this work and had never, at any time in her career, been a painter living in exile.

When I first saw this poster, the woman's sad face looked at me from café, shop and theatre windows but as the exhibition was current no-one felt able to give me their copy. At last I saw one pinned to a community notice board in a deserted shopping arcade. As there was no glass protecting the board, I was easily able to remove the pins and steal the poster for myself. The image hung above my desk while I wrote the urban sections of the novel.

Photography has a special place in the history of Antarctica thanks in no small part to the Australian photographer, Frank Hurley. I had seen several exhibitions of Hurley's Antarctic photography over the years, all staged by the South Australian Museum, including one in colour. Hurley's blue and white landscapes are magnificent but in researching material for 'The White Distance' I gradually found myself drawn more towards Hurley's photographs of people in Antarctica. Mawson had the greatest respect for Hurley and saw the value in keeping a photographic record of the 1913 expedition, so there are quite intimate portraits of the men inside the hut, shaving or eating or reading. During the long dark winter, the men often had parties celebrating every birthday and other anniversary they could think of. There is a picture of them on one such occasion sitting at their party table, the hut festooned with Union Jacks for decoration (Hurley, 'Midwinter Dinner,' Australian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1913, Appendix no.6).

But it was Hurley's photographs of the men out in the freezing landscape that I found the most compelling, the dark figures bending into the fierce, white wind struggling to walk a single step. One man uses an ice pick to anchor himself to the ground so that he won't be blown away (Appendix no.7). There are photos of faces completely hidden by masks of ice and the sorry effects of frost bite (Appendix no.8). There are happy photos too, of the men with their dogs, or of some of them sitting in their motor car (Appendix no. 9). But in many of the photos the human figures are small, presumably so that the viewer can get an idea of the landscape and place a scene in context but I also like to think that such a technique emphasizes the enormity of the men's struggle to survive in so harsh a wilderness. For the purposes of 'The White Distance', the Antarctic blizzard came to form a neat parallel with the twentieth century battlefield and the struggle against a largely unseen foe. This comparison was not lost on contemporaries either. Ernest Shackleton dedicated South: The Endurance Expedition (1919) "to my comrades who fell in the white warfare of the South and on the red fields of France and Flanders."

7. Another Country: How Shall We Write About the Past?

How shall we write about the past? In conceiving a novel set in the past, and especially in a past that the writer has not personally experienced, a writer will necessarily make decisions about the nature of his or her creative engagement with the available historical material. Otherwise, a reader might ask, what was the point of deciding to set the novel in a particular time? In her essay, 'Fiction Writing: Theft or Weft?' (2005), the Australian novelist Gay Lynch examines her engagement with the history of her husband's Irish settler family in order to write her historical novel:

I am interested in the mythic and literary antecedents which might affect the conscious and unconscious view of my characters. And I am interested in the political, economic and social reasons why a family might leave their country, and how this impacts upon their psyche.

This comment seems at first to be straightforward. Lynch will use her research into historic events, myths and literary works to illuminate the past world she seeks to recreate in her novel. However, in the same essay, Lynch says:

A novel is not an interpretive centre, a snapshot of a place and time. It is not about buttons and sound effects, but about creating a disturbance that will help me see and feel and understand- and hopefully a reader too.

Here Lynch seems to be saying something a little different about the nature of her engagement with the past. She wants to create "a disturbance" that will touch her modern consciousness and that of her readers.

In seeking to reconcile these two ideas, it is helpful to look at an interview with the writer David Malouf where, I would argue, Malouf is making a similar point about the

fiction writer's engagement with the past. The interview, in 1996, was about one of his novels with an historical setting, The Conversations at Curlow Creek (1996). The interviewer, Helen Daniel, asked Malouf:

I'm struck by the idea of both Remembering Babylon and Curlow Creek taking their place in a kind of rival history, a fictive history collectively being written by contemporary writers now. Are you conscious of this fictive history, a history being collectively written by today's writers - and for some readers a serious competitor with 'real' history?

Malouf replied:

That's all work which is bound to come into existence in Australia, because our only way of grasping our history -- and by history I really mean what has happened to us, and what determines what we are now and where we are now -- the only way of really coming to terms with that is by people's entering into it in their imagination, not by the world of facts, but by being there. And the only thing really which puts you there in that kind of way is fiction.... Of course it's not the real world, it's not the way it was in 1827, it's a way that 1827 appears in the significance it has in 1996. The readers are then able to take all of that into their consciousness and their imaginations so that it's moved out of the world of fact into something like the world of experience -- but more like dream experience than real experience.... That's the extent to which it's a different history: it's a dream history, a myth history, a history of experience in the imagination. And I keep wanting to say societies can only become whole, can only know fully what they are when they have relived history in that kind of way.

Malouf's response shifts and qualifies. He does not clarify what he means by 'myth history' or 'dream history'. Just when he appears about to encapsulate an idea about the engagement between the creative writer and the historical past, he lets it slip through his fingers. Malouf may have been thinking on his feet at the time or he may have been suggesting the complexity of his own practice or that of other imaginative writers engaged in historical fiction. Perhaps the best way to interpret Malouf's words is to say that historical fiction is not only about the facts of the past; it is about a community having stories or myths for the past in order to belong to a particular place.

I would argue that the "significance" referred to by Malouf and the "disturbance" referred to by Lynch might be answered by a return to the proposition of cutting and reframing put forward by Mieke Bal. It could be argued that much contemporary historical fiction is like Aptekar's work in the way in which the works are over-written with passages of autobiography that are both contemporary but also seek to interpret a pre-existing, older original. Similarly, the writer of historical fiction engages with archives, memories and other traces in a way that reinvents the past for the present. I think that this is perhaps what David Malouf meant when he said to Helen Daniel: "it's not the way it was in 1827, it's a way that 1827 appears in the significance it has in 1996." If we apply Bal's interpretation here, the creative writer engages in the cropping and framing of the historically prescribed landscape and overwrites it with meanings for the present - Malouf's "significance" and Lynch's "disturbance" - which link past and present and creates a new piece of art. This, it could argued, is the reason why Malouf speaks of a society "reliving", *not* "living" its history in fiction: "And I keep wanting to say societies can only become whole, can

only know fully what they are when they have *relived history* in that kind of way" (italics mine).

But the idea that history can be accessed through fiction concerns among historians. Most notable is Inga Clendinnen, particularly in her criticism of Kate Grenville's The Secret River: In 'The History Question' (2006), Clendinnen writes:

Novelists writing on historical topics and historians writing history used to jog along their adjacent paths reasonably companionably. More recently... novelists have been doing their best to bump historians off the track. It seems that they have decided it is for them to write the history of this country, and to admonish and nurture its soul. (p.16)

In this essay, Clendinnen observes that historians have a particular responsibility as "custodians and interpreters of the past". (p.15) The suggestion is that fiction writers might offer a version of Australian history, what Malouf calls myth history, and that readers will mistake fictional histories for an account of what actually happened. This worries historians. Yet I would argue that the nature of the engagement which a fiction writer has with the past is different from that of an historian. I would also want to allow that a work of fiction can arrive at an understanding (be it "disturbance" or "significance") about the events of the past and their meaning for the present.

Elsewhere, Clendinnen praises the historical fiction of novelists Hilary Mantel, Bernhard Schlink and Penelope Fitzgerald in her collection of essays, Agamemnon's Kiss (2006). In the first part of 'The History Question', she describes the story of Anzac Day as having enough "plasticity- the openness to personal readings and

elaborations- to be constantly renewed"(p.9). This seems very close to Malouf's reference to "a history of experience in the imagination" and to Bal's ideas about reframing the past for the present. Clendinnen sees the legend and the rituals of Anzac Day as *part* of the history, lying parallel to the facts of what actually happened, but having a kind of history of their own. She changed her mind about the young backpackers who now include Gallipoli on their travel itinerary when she read their own words about their motives, experiences and their uncorroborated memories, noting that "an historian had taken the trouble to ask them, and to record what they said..." (pp. 13-14). She concludes:

Other Australian historians have done fine work on Anzac Day, lovingly retrieving the history of what happened, then tracing how that history was worked upon by a range of interest groups to be made into something else. Given that legends are attempts not only to memorialise a moment from the past, but also to stimulate and direct emotions now, that is a valuable exercise.

Yet Clendinnen's arguments challenge the practices of a writer of historical fiction such as myself. Significantly she raises concerns about the idea that the historical fictional can contribute to an understanding of the past. She suggests that the historical content in a novel is purely for entertainment and that a fiction writer cannot be a historian (pp 30-31). In a recent debate on the topic of 'Making a Fiction of History', at the Sydney Writers' Festival, Clendinnen remained firm on the point that "There is no middle ground between fiction and history. They are mutually enriching; they are also conflicting" (Hope, 2007).

Kate Grenville has recently denied that in The Secret River she has written a work of history (Hope, 2007). Yet, like Malouf grasping but not quite grasping the point, she has spoken of her feeling that “until we are prepared to look at all those slightly hidden, slightly secret places in our history, we can’t actually make much progress into the future” (Koval, 2006). Her comments call to mind once again Mieke Bal’s theorising of how an artist might crop and reframe the past in order to carry a message to the present.

In A Glossary of Literary Terms (1971, pp. 46-47), M. H. Abrams defines empathy (literally ‘feeling into’) as “an experience in which one identifies himself with an object of perception, and seems to participate in its physical sensations, especially in sensations of bodily posture and motion.” He distinguishes it from ‘sympathy’ which he describes as “fellow feeling- not a feeling into, but a feeling along with the state of mind and emotions of another human being....” Abrams then gives an example of watching a nervous performer on stage where we sympathise with the performer's emotional fears and empathise with his stuttering speech and trembling hands.

Referring to her negotiation with the past, author Gay Lynch writes: “I mull - hot whisky, cloves, brown sugar, Spanish lemon - the Irish psyche.” Kate Grenville speaks similarly of how she approaches her characters in The Secret River:

The historians are doing their thing, but let me as a novelist come to it in a different way, which is the way of empathising and imaginative understanding of those difficult events. Basically to think, well, what would I have done in that situation, and what sort of person would that make me? (Koval, 2002)

This sort of empathy in relation to characters in historical fiction troubles historians. Clendinnen is sceptical of such claims for empathy between the contemporary novelist and historical characters. She argues that the passage of time, “(t)hat massive change of circumstances alone renders the hope of ‘empathy’ a fiction”(p.16). Yet empathy may not be the sole or essential basis for the creation of fictional characters. Patrick White in Voss (1957), Randolph Stow in To The Islands (1958, 1981) and Roger McDonald in Mr Darwin's Shooter (1998) offer examples of all kinds of compelling historical imaginings: men, women, old, young, whites, blacks, children and so on. Here is an example in David Malouf's description of the Aboriginal characters' first encounter with the white castaway Gemmy Fairley in the novel Remembering Babylon (1993):

The mob of naked women and gleaming, big-eyed children who found him washed up at low tide in their bay, stood with one foot set upon the other and clenched their brows.

What was it? A sea creature of a kind they had never seen before from the depths behind the reef? A spirit, a feeble one, come back from the dead and only half reborn? (p.22)

This passage wonderfully evokes the scene of first meeting, with an allusion to The Tempest as much as to historical fact. But what has this to do with empathy for the white or black characters? Or with the specific life experiences of the author, for that matter? The text has its own voice of imaginative vision.

Much as I rather like them, Dora Somerville and Daniel Bone do not exist as separate beings from their creator of whose imagination they are a projection. Consequently,

empathy with them is not a term I would want to use. Nor did I seek or feel any empathy with Douglas Mawson or any other real, historical character whose own writings formed part of my research. It was their intellectual rigour, the record of their observations and their skill as writers that I sought. If, as a writer, I was seeking emotional rapport with anyone it was with a potential reader in the hope that the text might be the bridge between us. I want my reader to feel some connection, empathy even, with Dora and Daniel and everything that happens to them. To return to paintings again, I do not believe anyone looks at a painting of the crucifixion and thinks "Oh dear that poor fellow. Even though I've never been crucified myself, I can imagine how much it must hurt to have nails driven into one's flesh." Instead, my experience has been that most people think something along the lines of: "How brilliantly the painter has captured the idea of this kind of suffering. Even though I know that this work is not a contemporary record of the event, it speaks powerfully to me about what such suffering might mean, past, present and future, and causes me to think more deeply about it." The crucifixion is a useful image in this context as it is one of the few images in Western art to be constantly reproduced and reinterpreted and yet able to retain a constant meaning over many centuries. Some of the more modern, controversial images include Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1989) which has the crucified figure displayed in a bottle of the artist's urine and Leon Ferrari's *Western Christian Civilisation* (1965) which had the crucified figure nailed to a toy model of a United States' jet fighter. But when we see these artworks, we still recognise the historical event that the artist is interpreting.

For certain cultures, particularly those with colonial origins as in Australia, the question of empathy in historical fiction seems to be sometimes confused with the

question of provenance when writing about Indigenous characters. This exegesis does not propose to examine the provenance issue other than where it is confused with empathy. Some white Australian authors, such as Kate Grenville, seem deeply troubled by perceived difficulties when writing about European civilisation's long history of exploration and territorial expansion. When asked by interviewer Ramona Koval (2006) on ABC Radio why she did not tell any part of her story in The Secret River from an Aboriginal perspective although she has Aboriginal characters, Grenville replied that she could not possibly imagine what an Indigenous person in the early days of settlement might be thinking. Yet she has no difficulty imagining what might be going on inside the head of a nineteenth-century Englishman transported for forgery and assigned as convict labour to his free wife. I would argue that Grenville's concern is with provenance, not empathy. All her characters, whatever their origins, are strictly speaking, products of her imagination. Inga Clendinnen observes:

Grenville might reasonably complain that she acknowledged empathy to be culture-bound by her refusal to try to penetrate the otherness of Aborigines.

But she felt no such inhibition about claiming to penetrate the minds of British convict-keepers, convicts and settlers of 200 years ago....Are we seduced into an illusion of understanding through the accident of a shared language? (p.23)

But perhaps the sharing of a language can help a writer to reframe the past and create new and different understanding where none existed previously.

For Clendinnen, empathy concerns the ability to analyse historical experience from the different perspectives of those involved. This point is made clear in her 1999 Boyer Lecture 'Incident on a Beach'. Clendinnen speculates on what the Aboriginal

woman might have felt in the presence of the Frenchmen but she does not claim an ability to “feel into” the woman’s experience. Her final reaction is one more akin to sympathy, “fellow feeling” through ‘narrative imagination’. The idea of ‘narrative imagination, shared by both history and fiction, may yet provide the means to resolve this difficult argument between fiction and history.

The debate in Australia, about the role of historical fiction is large and currently very volatile. A full examination of all the arguments is probably beyond the scope of this Exegesis, other than where it directly touches on my writing of the ‘White Distance.’ Nor is this debate finished; in the words of Inga Clendinnen and Deborah Hope, ‘Stay tuned.’

8. The Real Inspector Vogelsang: A Contract with the Past?

“It will be obvious to informed readers that the character Judas Griffin Vaneleigh almost duplicates the infamous and inscrutable Thomas Griffiths Wainewright,” writes Hal Porter in the brief introduction to his novel The Tilted Cross (1961). So similar are the real and fictional persons that Porter asks the reader: “Why not then simply call the character Thomas Griffiths Wainewright?” His answer is that he has taken rumours about the long dead Wainewright and presented them as fact and the character therefore “crosses the line into fiction”. For Porter there was a clear distinction between history and fiction, and recognising that dividing line was a matter of professional honour. If he was going to call his character ‘Wainewright’ then it had to be the historically accurate Wainewright. Since Porter wrote these words in 1961, the infamous Wainewright has been the subject of a kind of fictional autobiography by the poet Andrew Motion (2000) which contains a ‘confession’ by Wainewright to the crimes he is alleged to have committed. Motion's work is but one example of more experimental techniques in writing historical fiction; Peter Carey’s True History of the Kelly Gang (2000) with its use of the Jerilderie letter, could claim to be another. Other examples include Richard Flanagan’s Gould’s Book of Fish (2001) and Michael Ondaatje’s Coming Through Slaughter (1976). These works fall into a category which the literary critic Linda Hutcheon has labelled ‘historiographical metafiction.’ In this light, how relevant is Porter's comment today?

I have always found Porter's long ago statement intriguing because it suggests that there should be a kind of moral contract at work in the writing of historical fiction, that the author should feel some obligation to the past. Rereading this statement again, I still found it impossible to tell whether Porter was writing from the point of personal practice or proposing some rule for all writers. I have always tended to believe it was the former. Early on, when 'The White Distance' was little more than a handful of pages and mostly resided in my head, I considered the possibility of having Douglas Mawson lead my little expedition of weather men. Had I done this, I would have had to consider the possibility of having Mawson take Drummer's role, thereby attributing to Mawson the nature and events which are given to Drummer. Alternatively, I could have retained the character of Drummer, perhaps as second in command, with Mawson leading the expedition. Very quickly, I rejected the idea of using Mawson at all. Reflecting on my decision, I cannot truly say that I was motivated by a need to honour the actual events of the past or, as much as I respect him, Douglas Mawson. Rather it seemed to me that the name 'Douglas Mawson' carried with it expectations and understandings that together had a particular meaning in the world outside my novel. If I used the name, I would be drawing that meaning into the novel and if I chose to subvert it for no good reason, I would risk losing contact with my reader and the suspension of disbelief necessary in the reading of any novel would collapse.

Is there a code of conduct for writers of historical fiction? Inga Clendinnen suggests that as regards history and fiction, "there are different moral contracts between writer, reader and subject in the two genres" ('The History Question' p.35). She illustrates her point by examining one of Australia's literary hoaxes, the Demidenko affair, where the author claimed to have written a work of fiction based on crimes committed

by her own people in World War II. When the author's words were found not to have “come directly out of her own authentic experience,...they instantly lost their power to compel”, according to Clendinnen. Demidenko was guilty of betraying her readers, it is true. But her work fell into a strange category, promoted as *faction*, and later remarketed as fiction but never as history.

Fiction writers do frequently acknowledge their debt to history and let the reader know when they have detoured from the facts. Many writers do this with the aid of notes and appendices at the conclusion of their novels. Ross King, for example, in the ‘Author's Note’ at the end of his novel Domino (1995) explains the ‘historical ‘he has taken in his work of fiction (p.438). Others offer a brief thank you to the dead at the start. Peter Carey acknowledges his debt to Edmund Gosse in a few lines at the beginning of Oscar and Lucinda (1988). Nicholas Jose’s novel The Custodians (1997) carries the author’s own disclaimer that he was responsible “for the fictional reinterpretation given to details”. Speaking about The Custodians at the conference Challenging Australian History (2000), Jose referred to his decision to change the name of the actual Lake Mungo to fictional Lake Moorna and to move the fictional lake to a different location.

Lake Mungo is major historic and archaeological sit in Australia. It is also a key symbolic site.... For this book, a novel, I wanted to be able to think about some of those things in an imaginative way...and I did not want to appropriate or implicate the specific realities of one place with my own personal imagined and no doubt simplified version.

Perhaps what motivates a writer to include these varied attachments and disclaimers to literary works which profess to be fiction has nothing to do with concerns over

historical accuracy in the abstract, rather they are motivated by a desire to keep faith with the reader by attempting historical accuracy and, equally, in order not to import into the text any outside meanings or to falsify those meanings. For the writer of historical fiction, then it would seem that there is a two-way contract: with the past *and* with the reader.

In the paper she gave at Challenging Australian History, before The Secret River was written, Kate Grenville spoke about one of her earlier historical works, Lillian's Story (1986), which is based on stories about the life of Sydney eccentric Bea Miles:

All I had to do, as a novelist, was to take some of those stories and extrapolate from them, turning them to my own purposes. Those purposes probably didn't have much to do with the 'real' Bea Miles.

Presumably, for this reason, the principal character in this work, 'Lillian,' is not called Bea Miles. But not all writers take this view and sometimes a decision not to reckon with the significance of using actual names and places can be problematic for an author. The author Peter Carey was publicly confronted with the nature of this problem one cold winter evening in Adelaide when he stood up to address an audience about his novel, My Life As A Fake (2003). The novel's plot is loosely based on another of Australia's infamous literary hoaxes, the Ern Malley affair, where two poets created "modernist" poetry by combining random sentences and had them published in a magazine, creating at the same time a tragically dead young poet called Ern Malley as the author.

Carey entertained the audience with readings and talking about his new work. But at question time, the literary mood was shattered. A member of the audience (also a

local journalist), stood up and announced that he represented the Vogelsang family and it was clear that he had come not to praise Carey but to bury him.

The late Inspector Vogelsang was the police officer who brought obscenity charges against Max Harris, the editor of the magazine Angry Penguins, following the publication of Ern Malley's poems. In Carey's novel all the names of the characters originally involved with Ern Malley had been changed, except that of Inspector Vogelsang. The Vogelsang family, according to their representative, was angry about the way the father had been portrayed. Carey hesitated. Caught off guard by this ambush, he tumbled out a reply or perhaps a series of replies. He assured the representative that his character was fictional and not intended to be a portrait of the real Inspector Vogelsang. When asked why the inspector's name was not changed, Carey replied that Vogelsang's beautiful Austrian name was simply irresistible to him as it would be to any other writer. Then the representative asked the question that had been waiting to be asked all along. Is it right for authors to do this? He meant of course, is it appropriate for the historical reputation of a respectable man to be tainted by association with a fictional character bearing his name and living through similar experiences? But beyond this particularity was the greater question of what is the responsibility of authors of fiction when dealing with past events and people? In his response, Carey asserted his right to creative licence: this is what writers do because they are writers; I made it up.

Carey's defence of 'I made it up' in the writing of historical fiction has been defended by Inga Clendinnen commenting on Carey's novel True History of the Kelly Gang

(‘The History Question.’ p.32). Carey was apparently under siege at a writers' festival regarding the accuracy of some of his historical facts. Clendinnen says of Carey:

His interrogators were insisting that he had written history. He knew he had written fiction. Carey whose inventive powers are uninhibited, who aims at transformation, not replication of the past or reformation of the present, and who is so confident of his footing on his edge of the ravine to caper on it, put the matter crisply back in 1997: “it doesn’t matter what is out in the real world: this is art and you are making it to suit your needs.”

Reading these lines, it would be interesting to know what Inga Clendinnen means by ‘transformation’. She may be merely referring to the kind of pact that the fiction writer has with the reader, or she may mean the taking of various historical facts and incorporating them into art which makes its own meaning in its own way. But ‘transformation’ could also be a description of the writing of historical fiction if we consider it in terms of Bal’s cutting and reframing theory. It could be argued that what Ken Apter achieves with his altered and overwritten old masters is the transformation of history so that it can be reinterpreted and “relived” (Malouf’s word) in the present.

In her article, ‘Faking it: History and Creative Writing’ (2007), Australian writer and academic Camilla Nelson examines the current issues besieging writers of historical fiction as regards the invention of history. Nelson’s approach is interesting. She perceives of the problem in terms of what constitutes ‘reality’ in fiction. Nelson comments:

One of the problems with critical approaches to the historical novel relates to a broader problem in literary criticism generally, that being the way in which realism...a term basically evolved as a period description (ie: the classic nineteenth century novel) has been extended well beyond any meaningful application to encompass any kind of fiction not written in an experimental mode. (p.6)

Nelson goes on to criticise Clendinnen and McKenna for their attack on Kate Grenville and The Secret River, arguing that Clendinnen's acceptance of Carey's confession 'I made it up' is not sufficient explanation nor is comment about Carey's 'transformation of the past' adequate to prefer him while debunking Grenville, (p.7). Nelson goes straight to the heart of her argument:

What Clendinnen seems to suggest is that Carey's work is acceptable because he is not interested in 'reformation of the present' (by which I assume she means politics) or 'replication of the past' (by which I assume she means history).

For Nelson, historians like Clendinnen and McKenna reject writers like Grenville because they fear an erosion of historical authority. This point is particularly true for McKenna who sees the current volatility between historians and novelists as a kind of fight to the death from which only one can group can emerge victorious (McKenna, 2005). For McKenna, this battle is also a political one, with the villains being not just novelists but politicians of all shades as well. For McKenna, the prize is no less than the right to tell the national story. ('Patriot Act' p.3)

As regards 'The White Distance', I must say with Carey that 'I made it up.' There were no meteorological expeditions to Antarctica during World War I, no ship called the *Australis*, no other group who stayed in Mawson's hut, no commander called Drummer who went mad and so on. It *was* art and I *was* making it up to suit my needs to some extent. Having confessed to creating art and not writing history, I would still argue, with Camilla Nelson, that a creative examination of a chosen strand of the historical past can offer meaning, perhaps even enlightenment to a reader. If I could return to my example of paintings of the crucifixion, (Exegesis, p. 56), we know that there was no painter present at the actual event to record what happened and that what we see today comprises art created across the centuries, often incorporating dress styles and other details, not to mention painting techniques, from the painter's own time. But that does not mean the viewer of such works can obtain some meaning about the significance of the event from the painting.

Camilla Nelson, in her conclusion, believes the solution lies in finding a new literary and greater meaning for reality. She concludes:

'the bogus or counterfeit might present us with a way of intervening in the discourses of reality – of questioning the discourses (like history) through which reality constructs itself.' (p.9)

In the end, perhaps there is a better word than 'contract' to describe the two-pronged obligation the writer owes to the past and to the reader. That word could be 'pact', as used by Claire Woods in her essay 'Lives and the Writer's Pact' (2004), a pact which she describes as essentially based on trust. Gay Lynch too seems to take a more flexible, more constructive, more open approach. Although she describes her research

as a series of thefts from personal and public history, it is clear that she feels a sense of custodianship for the lives she investigates, wanting to bring to them and their name, and to show her readers, "a warty kind of honour."

‘Pact’, then, may be a better word to describe this literary ménage-a-trois of past, reader and writer because it suggests a three-way mutuality, an equal agreement instead of an obligation owed by the writer. This makes it rather more like a secret, shared and understood, than a contract.

9. In Conclusion : Reframing the Past for the Present

The purpose of this exegesis has been to consider the writing and development of my novel, 'The White Distance', both on its own terms and as part of a wider body of Australian historical fiction. The exegesis has sought to examine the way in which a large and diverse mass of historical material can be shaped into a literary work, able to speak to present lives. Central to this examination has been the metaphor of cropping and reframing as discussed by Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal. This metaphor, applied by Bal to the art of painting and history, finds support in literary terms in the metaphor of a 'prism' of historical stories, employed by Australian cultural historian Paula Hamilton.

Literary material also formed an important part of the research for the novel. This research was important to the writing of 'The White Distance' from a technical perspective, adopting the cropping and reframing metaphor as it applies to Michael Ondaatje's practice in his novel The English Patient. This novel acted as a useful guide for the contained treatment and judicious application of historical material in a creative work which seeks to communicate with the present. Modern novels about Antarctica such as A Victim of the Aurora and The Birthday Boys provided immediate insight into how to create fiction from the relevant historical material.

Other literary works played a linguistic role in the development of the novel and one of the historical references, Douglas Mawson's The Home of the Blizzard (1915), was an important factual, linguistic and intellectual reference, as was, in a different way, Henry Handel Richardson's letters and Hermione Lee's biography of Virginia Woolf.

Personal memory and personal experience had an overt part in the writing of 'The White Distance' through the memory of my grandparent's language and the experience of engaging with the past through museums, historic homes, even cemeteries. Historical works like Boyd's Lucinda Brayford and Harford's The Invaluable Mystery provided insight in language, lives, politics and a hundred other historical nuances. Lesbia Harford herself provided a valuable model for some of the characters.

More broadly, the exegesis examines the question of how a fiction writer could write about the past and if so what such creative work might mean. From fiction writers, such as Kate Grenville, David Malouf, Camilla Nelson and Gay Lynch, there were claims on the fiction writer's ability to give meaning to the past. Historians, notably Inga Clendinnen and Mark McKenna, expressed concern about what they saw as invasion by fiction of their forensic world of facts and a challenge to their role as history's custodians. The question of ethics, and indeed whether writers are subject to some kind of code of behaviour, in the last chapter of the exegesis, also remains an open question. For contemporary writers it may be that the idea of the pact, stressing mutuality over obligation is the better model.

The exegesis charts the evolution of a story which fundamentally began with an idea. When I was writing 'The White Distance' the idea I was seeking to communicate was the gap that lies between ideals and reality. The path I chose was one taken through my characters. It was also a path taken through a period of my country's history deliberately chosen because of the way that war, and particularly World War I, challenged cherished ideals and long standing ways of thinking and being. I was

cropping and reframing the past to communicate this understanding. I was also, in the words of David Malouf "reliving" (rather than living) that past and creating a new, separate work of art.

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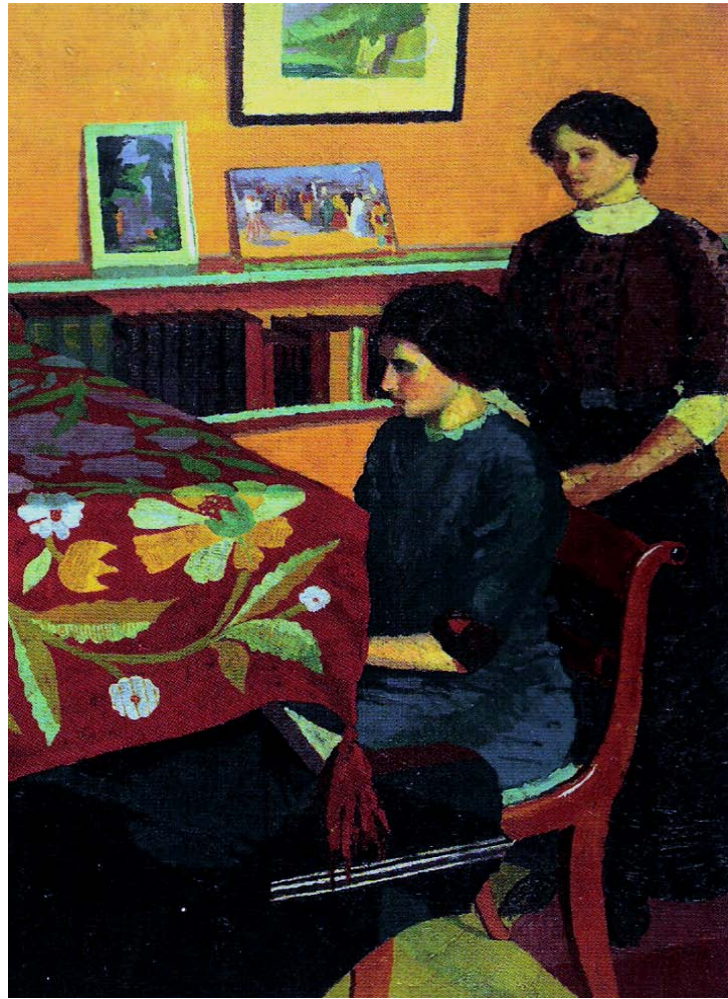
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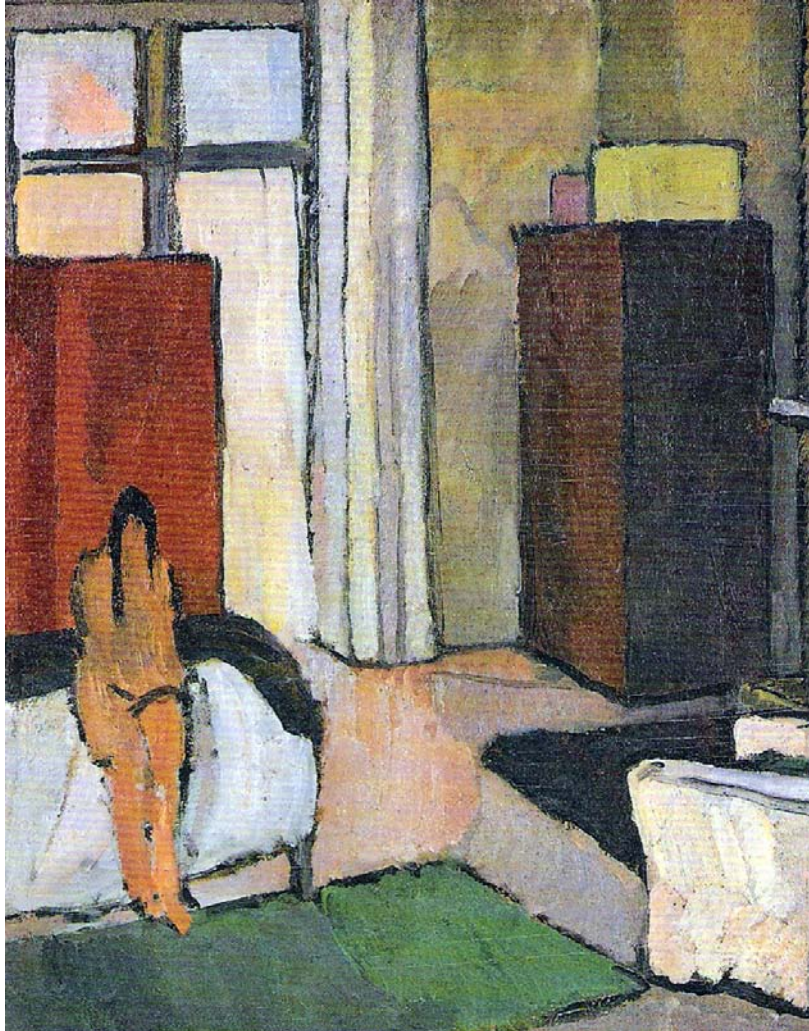
Appendix

Image One



Drummond, Malcolm, Great Britain, *At the Piano*, c.1912, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Image Two



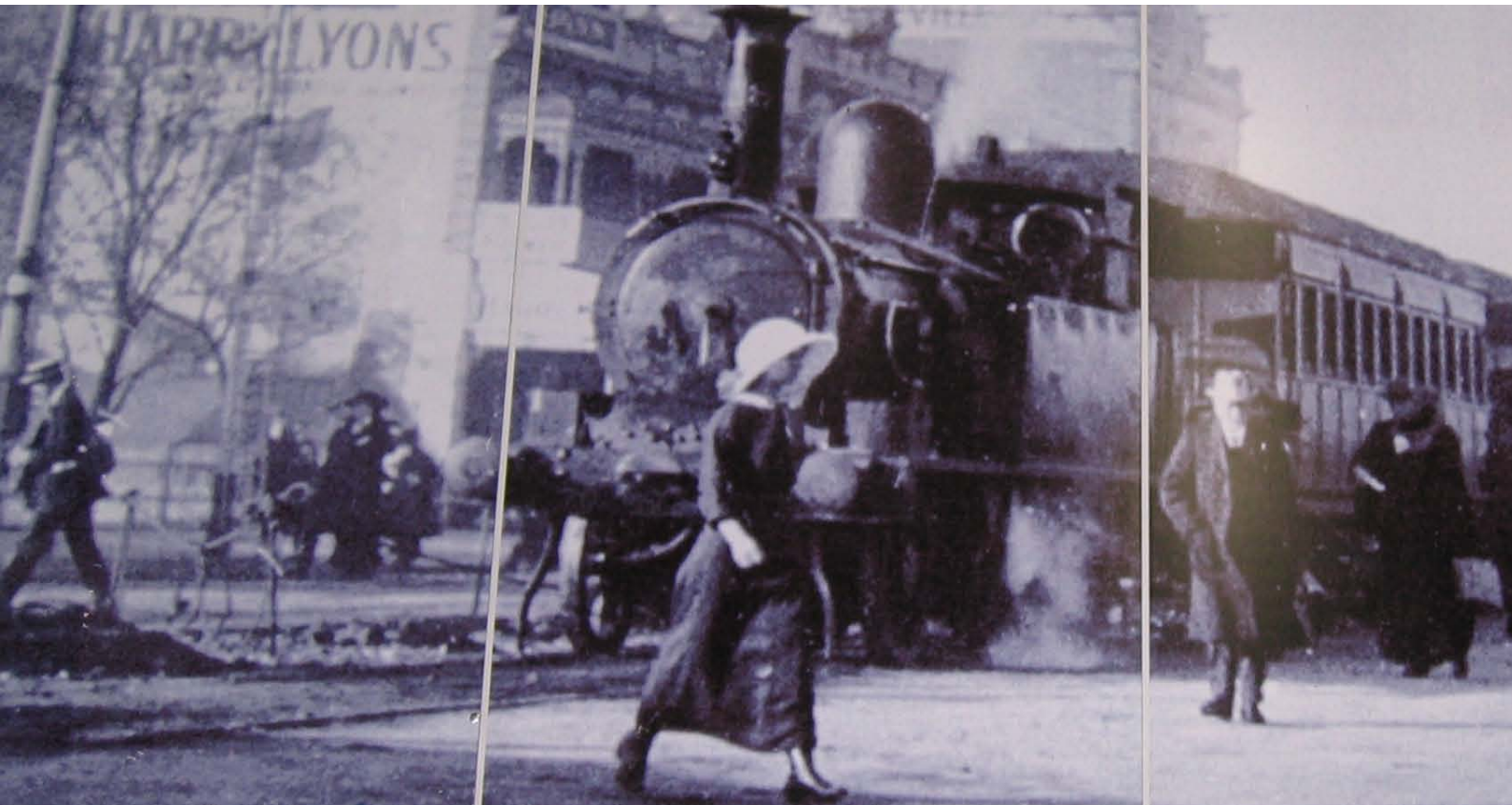
Bell, Vanessa, Great Britain, *Bedroom, Gordon Square*, 1912, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Image Three



Bevan, Robert, Great Britain, *The Green House, St John's Wood*, c1918-19, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Image Four



Unknown Photographer, Australia, *Glenelg Train Line, Victoria Square, 1914, Last Year of Operation*, National Railway Museum, Port Adelaide, South Australia.

Image Five



Proctor, Dod, Great Britain, *In A Strange Land*, 1919 (detail), poster for NGV Sounds, British Soul Design, National Gallery of Victoria, 2006.

Image Six



Hurley, Frank, Australia, *Mid-winter Dinner, Adelie Land*, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914, reproduced in Mawson, Douglas, *The Home of the Blizzard*, *op.cit.*

Images Seven



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Image Eight



Hurley, Frank, Australia, *Three Men with Partial Ice Masks*, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914, reproduced in Mawson, Douglas, *Home of the Blizzard*, *op. cit*

Image Nine



Mawson, Sir Douglas, Australia, *The Motor Hauls Stores for a Depot*, British Antarctic Expedition, 1907-1904, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, The Mawson Collection, Permanent Exhibition.